

## July 4th: the Declaration Through the Years

### 1776 – Serious Business and Big Dreams

On Tuesday, July 2, 1776, the Second Continental Congress voted for total independence from Britain. We celebrate the 4th, the day they finalized the wording of the Declaration of Independence. For many prominent Patriots, it was just a legal document required for doing business as an independent nation. For others, it was also a powerful assertion of a new ideal of universal human dignity, equality, and "unalienable rights." That second aspect has been at the heart of major struggles ever since.

### 50th in 1826 – Federalists and Republicans

The new Constitution created a strong union, but many feared it went too far. In the first session of Congress (1789) Madison proposed 19 amendments setting limits to Federal power. Of these, 17 made it to the Senate, which sent 12 to the states for ratification. Ten amendments won ratification by 1791. In New England, only Rhode Island and New Hampshire had voted for what we now call the Bill of Rights.

The Federalists (e.g. John Adams, Alexander Hamilton) were ardent supporters of the new Constitution and a strong central government. Dominant in New England and in the coastal cities further south, they were leery of "democracy," and in favor of trade, commerce, order, and peace. Government, in their view, belonged in the hands of 'the better sort' of people, not 'the mob.'

They were opposed by a group led by Jefferson and Madison that began to call themselves "Republicans." Modern historians call them "Democratic-Republicans" to avoid confusion with the later very different party of that name. They favored a weak central government, a broad franchise, and a legal and economic system dedicated expressly to the benefit of farmers—their ideal of "the common man." They viewed merchants and bankers as parasites.

The political polarization between these two parties was as great as any in American history. Each thought the other traitors to America.

The Democratic-Republicans made much of July 4th and the egalitarian promise of the Declaration's language. Federalists tended to down-play the Declaration, and celebrated the ratification of the Constitution as the true founding of the nation. After his death in 1799, Federalists made Washington's birthday a major celebration. (Washington would never have allowed it.) To Democratic-Republicans, this smacked of British celebrations of the Royal Birthday.



Philadelphia Exposition, 1926

Some bad decisions by prominent Federalists late in the War of 1812 ruined the party's reputation outside New England. It disappeared from the national stage, and faded from New England soon after. By the 50th anniversary of the Declaration the Democratic - Republicans were unopposed—and splitting into factions. The main branch would soon change its name to the "Democratic Party."

The most remarkable occurrence of July 4, 1826 was that John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, both members of the committee to

draft the Declaration, had died within hours of each other that very day. They had been bitter enemies, but had reconciled around 1812 and been in regular correspondence since. The fact of their reconciliation and the almost mystical alignment of the passing of two heroes of the Revolution did much to bury the bitter animosity of the Federalist/Republican split, and relegate it to the past.

### 100th in 1876 -- Hooray for the Future!

Abraham Lincoln had taken the stirring words of the Declaration to heart, and instilled in others the courage to stand by them in some very dark hours.

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*The mission of the  
Old Lyme Historical Society  
is to collect, preserve, interpret  
and promote the rich history  
of Old Lyme and its environs  
for the benefit of residents and visitors.*

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## From the Co-Chairs



*Revolution in the Lymes* by Jim Lampos & Michaelle Pearson  
Photograph by James Meehan

Dear Members,

Summer in Old Lyme always brings an abundance of events, concerts, and gatherings, but this year is even more special as we celebrate America's 250th Anniversary. The Society unveiled new 1776, 1876, 1976 exhibits at 55 Lyme Street, and our lecture series drew capacity crowds. In May, James Meehan presented *History of the Stars and Stripes*. June featured Eric Lehman's *Benedict Arnold & the Burning of New London* and *Revolution in the Lymes* by Jim Lampos & Michaelle Pearson. In July, Richard Franklin Donohue performed *Musick of Connecticut's Revolution*. The Society also supported the town's America 250 events by hosting a Quilting Tea, lending school bells from our archive for the July 4th bell ringing, and helping to plan the townwide picnic.

At our Annual Meeting in June, the Society welcomed former Trustee Katie Balocca back to the board and inducted new Trustees Mary Jo Nosal, Leslie Rawlings Slezak, and Keith Urbowicz. Ann Marie Jewett received the James B. Noyes Award for her dedicated years of service as Treasurer.

As we approach the cooler days of Autumn, there are many more events to look forward to. Mark your calendars! On September 26th, John "Ned" Pfeiffer will speak about *Lyme's Native American fighters of the Revolution*, and on October 22nd, Kevin Johnson will portray *Jordan Freeman of Lyme*.

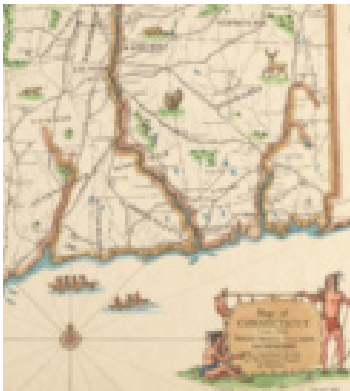
The Oral History Project will start up again in September. If you would like to help, or have a candidate you think we should interview, please let us know.

The Calendar Committee has begun working on the 2027 *Now & Then* Calendar, which will debut on November 12th, and our annual Holiday Market featuring the Lyme Artisans Guild will take place on November 27th and 28th. We will close out this festive year with a performance of *Nine Centuries of Christmas Music* by Richard Franklin Donohue.

Please keep an eye on our webpage and social media. There's a lot going on at 55 Lyme Street, and new members are always welcome. Join Us!

*Michaelle Pearson & Mark Terwilliger, Co-Chairs*

## Upcoming Events



**Saturday,  
September 26th  
6:00 p.m.**

***Lyme's Native American Fighters  
of the Revolution*  
by John Pfeiffer**

The indigenous Nehantic people who lived in Lyme long before European settlement were exceptional warriors who joined the Patriot cause during the American Revolution. Nehantics served at Bunker Hill, Ticonderoga, and Saratoga. They sailed on the Essex-built warship Oliver Cromwell, were at the retreat of New York, and imprisoned on the death ships at Wallabout Bay, Brooklyn. Nehantic men gave their lives for American freedom, but over the past 250 years their names, sacrifice, and contributions to America were forgotten. The 250th celebration will be the start of their remembrance.



**Thursday,  
October 22nd  
6:30 p.m.**

***Kevin Johnson  
as Jordan Freeman  
of Lyme, Connecticut***

Jordan Freeman was an actual person, and although he did not enlist himself, he witnessed key events of the war for independence while with Col. Ledyard. Historians estimate the number of Black soldiers in this war to have been about 5,000, serving in militias, seagoing services, and support activities, including nearly 500 from Connecticut. Some enlisted because they felt it was their duty; others because they were offered their freedom in return for satisfactory completion of a set period of service. This presentation is based on extensive research in the collections of the Connecticut State Library and the Museum of Connecticut History.

**Thursday,  
December 3rd  
6:00 p.m.**

***Nine Centuries  
of Christmas music*  
by Richard Franklin Donohue**

Gregorian chant from the 10th century to music from the height of the Victorian era. Mr. Donohue accompanies himself with several musical instruments including a medieval hand drum, baroque recorders, and a spinet harpsichord.



*All events will be held at the Old Lyme Historical Society,  
55 Lyme Street, Old Lyme, CT*

## In Memoriam



**Arthur "Skip" Beebe  
1947–2026**

It is with sadness that we report the passing of Arthur (Skip) Beebe. Skip served on the Old Lyme Historical Society's Board of Trustees for nine years, and continued to volunteer after he left the Board. He was a member of the Building Committee, and of our Tuesday Morning Work Crew (TMWC) from its inception in 2014.

This crew has been responsible for virtually all the major renovations and many improvements to the Society's home at 55 Lyme Street. With Skip's knowledge and professional experience as a builder, the TMWC was able to accomplish many necessary and important projects. The most notable of these were the creation of our climate-controlled Archives Room, the Archives Office, and our ADA Lift (which involved the complete rearrangement of the basement and hallway structure). These, and many other projects too numerous to mention, were all completed with the help and expertise of our dear friend, Skip.

He was a kind person and always ready to help, as can be attested by many local organizations, including the OLFD and the Lyme Grange. He will be sorely missed by the Old Lyme Historical Society and its friends, and especially by his fellow members of the Tuesday Morning Work Crew.

*Kevin Cole, Ted Freeman, & Ellis Jewett*

## July 4th: the Declaration Through the Years

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The main celebration was held in Philadelphia. The Centennial Exposition was a giant display of American and international domestic and industrial arts. Twenty-six of the 37 US states built pavilions on site. Over 35 nations (or colonies) were represented. In its six-month run, the Exposition had over 10 million visitors. Impressive in a nation of 45 million.

There were many technical debuts: Bell's telephone, the electric dynamo, the typewriter (Remington #1), new types of mass-produced sewing machines and a host of other then-new products, including Heinz Ketchup and Hires root beer. The emphasis was on the bright future being built by a creative, forward-looking, and business-minded population.

### **150th in 1926 -- Americanism**

Technology was once again the theme in many fairs. The 1926 Philadelphia Exposition featured a giant 6-story replica of the Liberty Bell hanging above Broad Street supported by plinths. The bell was covered with 26,000 15 watt light bulbs, with six 200 watt flood lights to illuminate the clapper. A permanent rotatable ladder shaped to match the bell's outside curve facilitated the frequent replacement of bulbs.

The 150th was slightly schizophrenic. On the one hand, many larger events (Philadelphia, Los Angeles, etc.) included a "parade of nationalities" ostensibly celebrating the diverse peoples who had chosen to cast their lot with the United States and build their future here. At the same time, the central theme was "Americanism," the amalgamation of all these diverse groups into one united nation. Exhibits, tableaux, and reenactments of life in colonial times emphasized that the 'real America' had its roots right here. These displays promoted a fashion for "colonial" homes and furnishings that would last well into the 1950s.

In 1924 the US had passed laws to severely limit immigration, particularly from southern and eastern Europe. Immigration from Asia was effectively stopped. Immigration from the Americas remained unrestricted, primarily to accommodate farmers' need for agricultural workers. About one in nine Americans was foreign-born.

And yet, and yet.... President Calvin Coolidge made a speech in Philadelphia on July 5, 1926 that strongly reaffirmed the centrality of the Declaration's assertion of universal equality and natural rights, not just for America, but for humanity.

"If all men are created equal, that is final. If they are endowed with inalienable rights, that is final. If governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, that is final. No advance, no progress can be made beyond these propositions. If anyone wishes to deny their truth or their soundness, the only direction in which he can proceed historically is not forward, but backward toward the time when there was no equality, no rights of the individual, no rule of the people. Those who wish to proceed in that direction can not lay claim to progress. They are reactionary. Their ideas are not more modern, but more ancient, than those of the Revolutionary fathers."

### **200th in 1976 -- America Triumphant**

The Bicentennial basked in the disco after-glow of the 1960s. A temporary lull in the struggles over civil rights and an end to a divisive foreign war allowed the nation a moment's respite and a chance to simply celebrate our shared good fortune. America was rich, powerful, and (for the most part) at peace. We praised ourselves by remembering and praising our storied past. Perhaps it was shallow, but anything would seem so after the deeply earnest 1950s and 1960s. We were fine with that.

### **250th in 2026 -- Are We Still Us?**

This year's 250th has been fun, as it is meant to be, but deepening political divisions cast a chill on it all. The extreme left of the Democrats and the extreme right of the Republicans have each declared in their own way that "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others." Though only the most radical overtly deny the central assertions of the Declaration, both parties seem anxious to accommodate those radicals rather than make an open break with them. In such conditions, the center is the hardest position to hold, defend, or advance.

The progress we made on civil rights was founded on the widely accepted view that my freedom depends on allowing you to have your freedom. "Live and let live" no longer seems a widely shared ideal. We have been here before, more than once. Sometimes it ended very badly. At other times we escaped with a relatively whole skin. In my own view, remembering that "us" includes *all of us* is an important start to any positive end.

Happy birthday America! Long may you thrive!

*—Mark Terwilliger*