



STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF TOURIST DEVELOPMENT
WILLIAM SNODGRASS/TENNESSEE TOWER BUILDING
13TH FLOOR, 312 ROSA L. PARKS AVENUE
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243
(615) 741-9001

MARK EZELL
COMMISSIONER

BILL LEE
GOVERNOR

December 20, 2022

Tennessee Commission on the United States Semiquincentennial
Via Email

Dear Commission Members,

The Department of Tourist Development respectfully submits this report in accordance with Public Chapter 384, passed in 2019, relative to the Tennessee Commission on the United States Semiquincentennial Commission's accomplishments in 2022.

Consistent with the enabling legislation, in November 2022, the Commission chose Ashley Howell, Executive Director of the Tennessee State Museum, to serve as Chair for the next two years, 2023-2024. Commissioner Ezell and Commissioner Howell also requested that State Historian Dr. Carroll Van West be named Chair Emeritus. The Commission voted in favor and Dr. West accepted.

In 2022, the Tennessee 250th Commission held a productive set of planning sessions to meet the goals and mandates of Public Chapter 384. We focused our activities on the commission's two overriding responsibilities:

- Plan, coordinate, and implement a program to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States in the year 2026, specifically highlighting the role of Tennessee and Tennesseans in, and the events succeeding, the historic event; and,
- Coordinate with federal, state, and local agencies on infrastructural improvements and projects to welcome regional, national, and international tourists.

To improve the visibility and communications for the commission, we established a preliminary program website, tn250.com. The website will be enhanced and developed in 2023. The commission chair has continued to participate in America 250 Foundation meetings to discuss the foundation's programs and initiatives and share developments in Tennessee.

The Tennessee Department of Tourist Development has discussed with America 250 the use and development of logos to promote programs and activities within the state. Tennessee also participated in meetings with other southern commissions, looking at regional programs and projects.

To meet the legislative mandate, *to solicit the input of citizens throughout the state in developing programs for the semiquincentennial*, the commission chair held and participated in three additional public meetings about the program. These meetings occurred:

- Knoxville (a special address and discussion at the East Tennessee Historical Society, streamed by Facebook Live and attracting 60 attendees)
- Franklin (the annual convention of the Tennessee Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, attracting 200 attendees)
- Memphis (a joint meeting hosted by the Shelby County Historian of West Tennessee chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution and Sons of American Revolution, attracting 60 attendees)

Commission members Dockter, Robinson, and Underdown also participated in the September *Gathering* event at Sycamore Shoals State Park to commemorate the *Overmountain Men at Sycamore Shoals* prior to the Battle of King's Mountain in 1780.

Recommendations from public input meetings remained consistent with the priorities of Tennessee organizations and communities expressed in 2021:

- Statewide focus on Tennesseans and Tennessee events that have shaped American democracy from the Revolutionary era to the present
- Tennessee 250th Trail with Interpretive Markers
- Educational programs, workshops, and educator materials
- Robust website and social media tools
- Taking an international focus
- Adequate state funding, staffing, and a grants program

While the recommendations for state involvement covered a large range, most often the public requested: commission staff be available and located at the Department; restoration projects were necessary for National Register listed properties and state-owned historic properties and/or public sites or museums; funding for a trail system; need for comprehensive databases of cemeteries where Tennessee patriots are buried and assessment of those cemeteries that need restoration and/or repair; creation of a Tennessee 250th Passport that residents and visitors can take to places and events across Tennessee and have the passport stamped; funding for digitizing primary sources and under-utilized archival collections so students, teachers, and researchers could better access invaluable documents; and funding for the restoration of valuable community objects such as the Liberty Bell replica from Memphis' bicentennial

celebrations.

The Commission will continue to build on its momentum in 2023 and will begin looking toward necessary funding requests as more concrete plans and activities are developed.

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If there should be any questions concerning the 2022 accomplishments of the Tennessee Commission on the United States Semiquincentennial Commission, please do not hesitate to contact me.

We appreciate your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark F. Ezell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mark" and last name "Ezell" clearly distinguishable.

Mark Ezell, Commissioner

cc: The Honorable Bill Lee, Governor
 The Honorable Randy McNally, Lt. Governor & Speaker of the Senate
 Honorable Members, Tennessee General Assembly
 Dr. Carroll Van West, Chairman, Tennessee Commission on the United States
 Semiquincentennial

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