



ON THE ROAD TO REVOLUTION

Revolutionary roots?



STEPHANIE ZOLLSHAN — THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE

Curious to find out if you have ancestors who fought in the American Revolution? Berkshire County Historical Society's six-week genealogy workshop could lead you to an ancestor who was on the battlefield as a member of the Continental Army, portrayed here by reenactors who gathered at the Bidwell House Museum in Monterey in 2023 for a reenactment of the Army Campaign of 1777.

Berkshires250 events kick off with genealogy workshop

By MATT MARTINEZ >> *The Berkshire Eagle*

PITTSFIELD

When the Berkshire County Historical Society's genealogy workshop kicks off 2 to 3:30 p.m. Jan. 25, attendees will start their probing at a "gold mine" at the Berkshire Athenaeum.

That's how Lesley Herzberg, executive director at the Berkshire County Historical Society, described the local history room at the 1 Wendell Ave. library. That's where attendees will begin the six-week genealogy workshop, led by Lisa Swigert, a genealogist working with the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at Berkshire Community College; the next five consecutive Saturday sessions will be held over Zoom.

While Swigert will lead prospective researchers in learning the tricks of the trade, Herzberg said the genealogy workshop is also meant to form a community among its participants, allowing for discussion and inquiry, as they fill out their respective family trees.

"It may or may not link to a Revolutionary War ancestor — it certainly doesn't have to," Herzberg said. "It's just an idea that was born out of ... [talking about] how we relate ourselves to the Revolutionary War. Do you have ancestors? Do you want to find out? That's kind of where the genealogy workshop comes in."

The workshop is the first event this year for "Berkshires250, On the Road to Revolution," a program leading up to the 250th anniversary of the signing of Declaration of Independence, being com-

memorated July 4, 2026. In the run-up to that date, Berkshire County residents will have opportunities to meet the Marquis de Lafayette, hear period music performed live and view original copies of the founding documents at local libraries.

Multiple organizations have been meeting monthly since February 2024 to get the events arranged, Herzberg said. Exact dates for many Berkshires250 events are still up in the air — some will occur in the next year, while others will happen closer to the actual anniversary in 2026.

The upcoming Berkshires250 programming will range from the educational to the potable: a Zoom lecture from author and historian Sarah Vowell on the influential Marquis de Lafayette in March will be followed by a French wine tasting inspired by the same historical figure at Herman Melville's Arrowhead in June. Lafayette, 19, when he was appointed a volunteer major general in the Continental Army, visited Pittsfield in June 1824 during his tour of the 24 existing U.S. states. Lafayette was the last surviving major general of the American Revolution at the time of his tour.

A concert will also be held at Arrowhead on June 25 where a musical duo will perform songs of the era with multiple instruments and offer anecdotes and history of the Revolutionary War; the same duo will have an encore performance at the Bidwell House Museum, in Monterey, on June 26.

On the subject of libation, Herzberg said Berkshire Cider Project, in North

Adams, and Hot Plate Brewing Co., in Pittsfield, will both be concocting antique beverages as part of the series. Berkshire Cider will use a traditional recipe for its process, Herzberg said, and Hot Plate will brew an ale befitting a colonial tavern.

Lafayette reenactors will make several appearances over the week of June 9 — first, at local middle and high schools, then at a special event at Park Square on June 13. If all goes to plan, Herzberg said the reenactor, who will give speeches in downtown Pittsfield, will ride into town on a carriage.

"I'm working on the carriage," Herzberg said. "I have the reenactor, I don't have a carriage yet."

Some will take place in the great outdoors: a series of guided hikes and celebrations will be held throughout South County starting in January 2026 to celebrate the Knox Trail, named for General Henry Knox, who passed through the area on his famed artillery march from Crown Point, N.Y. to military camps near Boston. The Daughters of the American Revolution and the Sons of the American Revolution will host guided cemetery tours with a focus on the graves of Revolutionary War veterans.

Others will happen in curated settings: the Chapin Library at Williams College will showcase its collection of founding documents, including its original copies of the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution and the 1783 Treaty of Paris, which ended the Revolutionary War. The Berkshire Mu-

seum will have a dedicated exhibit from June to August 2026.

And still others won't be events at all, but projects: Herzberg plans to enlist the help of woodshop students at Taconic High School to create "liberty poles" or "liberty trees" which will be displayed in towns throughout the county. Herzberg is working on a list of towns that had liberty poles in them to ensure that they get one in the upcoming iteration.

During the American Revolution, liberty poles — some as tall as 72 feet — were used to rally community members to plot "revolutionary reactions" with special flags to signal it was time to meet. In some cases, the poles were topped with a Phrygian cap, a red stocking hat that became closely associated with liberty due to its significance in the American and French revolutions.

Herzberg hopes to have area students design their own flags as part of the exercise.

While the poles that Herzberg plans to erect won't be 72 feet tall, she still feels its important to recognize this real, tangible way that folks in the Berkshires played their part in the war.

"So many people obviously associate The Revolution with Lexington and Concord and Boston," Herzberg said, "So, what was really happening in the Berkshires? And the answer is kind of a lot — I mean, they were removed geographically but it's really important to find how they found ways to participate in dissent toward the crown."

Matt Martinez can be reached at mmartinez@berkshireeagle.com.



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