



Volume 42, Issue Two, November 2025

<https://www.cranburyhistory.org/blog>

## *Cranbury in the American Revolution: The Village in Wartime*

*A Review by Kathy Jani*

Imagine Cranbury (then known as Cranberry), beginning in 1775, a village of perhaps a few hundred people and surrounded by farms, experiencing the impact of a revolutionary war.

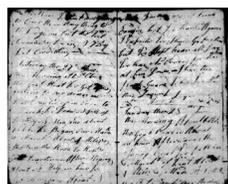
Cranbury resident and longtime active Cranbury Historical and Preservation Society (CHPS) member Dr. John W. Chambers has just published his latest CHPS booklet. Richly illustrated and 78 pages in length, *Cranbury in the American Revolution: The Village in Wartime* is an engaging and enlightening work that brings to life what occurred in Cranbury during that crucial period. Dr. Chambers, a retired Distinguished Professor of History from Rutgers University and author of several books including *Cranbury: A New Jersey Town from the Colonial Era to the Present*, adds many new historical sources including letters, diaries and government records he recently uncovered.

Because of its important location as a crossroads in central New Jersey, the village became a meeting and overnight location in June 1778 first for Major General Lafayette, advised by Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Hamilton, and second and separately for General George Washington. The booklet is filled with stories that teach, entertain and solidify the significance of our town's historical heritage.

During the winter of 1776-1777, nearly 200 militia men camped in Cranbury while the town served as the Militia Post for southern Middlesex County. Though the exact site of their camp remains unknown, it was likely near one of Cranbury's freshwater sources. That same winter, 10,000 British and Hessian troops were stationed in New Brunswick. A Loyalist deserter provided vital information about defenses of the camp of the notorious Loyalist Richard W. ("Double Dick") Stockton, and his troops at Bennet's Island (now Edgeboro Landfill) on the Raritan near New Brunswick. A surprise dawn raid was planned, and 150 Patriots from the Cranbury militia camp, marched 15 miles through a cold snowy night to reach their objective. The dramatic raid resulted in the capture of Stockton and his men.



Four Soldiers Print by  
Anne S.K. Browne  
Military Collection,  
Providence, RI



Wild Journal, end of June 26th  
and all of 27th 1778

An important new aspect of this handsome booklet is an entry in the diary of a Massachusetts regiment soldier, Sargent Wild, which confirms that Washington and his troops stayed overnight in Cranbury on June 26, 1778, leaving well after dawn the next morning. Wild was one of the 8,000 men in Washington's troops camping overnight in and around the village. (Cont'd on Page 3.)

In the heading above are Cranbury's four historical buildings under CHPS care. From left to right: the Elizabeth M. Wagner History Center, the 1713 East Jersey Cottage, the Cranbury Museum and the Parsonage Barn.

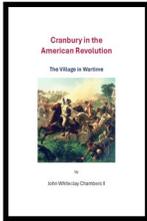
## President's Message



Dear CHPS Members,

Cranbury Historical & Preservation Society has had a busy summer and fall with many special events, as well as our regular volunteer efforts. We are fortunate to have our Museum, Elizabeth M. Wagner History Center, Parsonage Barn and 1713 East Jersey Cottage volunteers. Museum programs and exhibits have been excellent in conveying our history. Our most recent event, Whispers from the Grave, was very well attended and could not have been the success that it was without the planning committee, Karen Kelley, John Chambers, Linda Schilling, Jean Golisano, Eileen McGillan, Purba Lahiri, Kellie Lavery, Louise Palagyi, Bobbie Marlow and all those who took part in the event.

We appreciate Bob Dreyling's excellent work as our Treasurer for several years. Bob has retired as our Treasurer, but will continue to chair the Finance Committee. We welcome Sharon Pulz as our new Treasurer.



A special thank you to member, Dr. John Whiteclay Chambers II who recently wrote the booklet, *Cranbury in the American Revolution: The Village in Wartime*. If you do not already have a copy or would like more to give as gifts, you can purchase one at the History Center, 6 S. Main Street, open Thursday, 10 am to 1 pm.

I hope you will enjoy our newsletter! You are invited to volunteer to help in what ever interests you. Please join the Society. If you are not already a member, visit our website: [cranburyhistory.org](http://cranburyhistory.org) for membership information and the latest news.

With appreciation and Happy Thanksgiving,

Audrey Smith

\*\*\*\*\*

### Family Ties to Freedom: Tracing Roots to A Revolutionary War Ancestor

By Kelly McGillan

On Saturday, October 11, CHPS organized "Whispers from the Grave" which told the stories of 17 patriots who are buried in Brainerd Cemetery's Revolutionary War section. One of the patriots whose story came to life that day was Private William Mershon of the 3rd Regiment of the Middlesex County Militia. William is the fourth great grandfather of my mother, Eileen Griggs McGillan, corresponding secretary of the Society, a Trustee, Acquisitions Co-chairperson of the Society, and weekly History Center volunteer.

William, a lifelong resident of Cranbury and the fourth son of Thomas and Susannah Stockton Mershon, was born on March 20, 1761. His great-grandfather, Henri Marchand, emigrated to the New Jersey colony from Normandy, France in about 1685 and settled in what is now known as Lawrenceville. It was Thomas and Susannah who put down roots in Cranbury, purchasing a 500-acre tract of land, which was located in what is now known as the Scott's Corner area of Plainsboro Township. Notably, Susannah was a cousin to Richard Stockton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence.



Glenn Shulte as William Mershon

Photo by Eileen McGillan

William was only 16 years old when he enlisted in the militia. His older brother, Robert, also served with him as a lieutenant. As was customary at the time, they served in alternating months to ensure one of them was always at home tending to the family's farm. They served under Captain Aaron Longstreet for over two years, serving from 1777 through 1779.

After the conclusion of the Revolution, William met Eleanor Bross from Princeton. They married on February 3, 1785; William was 24 and Eleanor was just 18 years old. They had nine children together, and he worked on the family farm until his death on May 22, 1834 at the age of 73. Eleanor passed away two years later in 1836 at the age of 69.

Interestingly, William and Eleanor's sixth child, Dominic, purchased 4 Park Place East in Cranbury as his family's home. Today that home is the location of the Cranbury Historical Museum. Dominic and his wife Gertrude Snedeker Mershon's daughter Sarah married David C. Griggs in 1858 thus creating the direct line of succession from William Mershon to my mother, Eileen Griggs McGillan.

Finally, in December of 2010, after decades of family folklore as well as on-and-off again research, my mother was able to use historical documentation of a receipt dated June 10, 1784 for payment of William's depreciated pay as a Middlesex County Militia Private to prove our lineage and gain acceptance into the Daughters of the American Revolution, commonly known as the DAR. My family is proud to have such long and deep roots in Cranbury, and we are grateful to William for his service and contribution to America's fight for freedom.

## ***Cranbury in the American Revolution: The Village in Wartime (Cont'd from Page 1)***

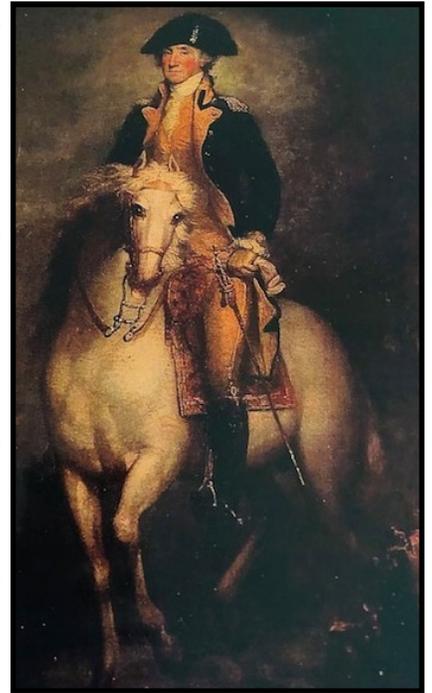
While in Cranbury, the troops slept on the wet ground. Their tents remained in Kingston, where they had spent the previous night, with the rest of their supplies. When they left Kingston to make their way to Monmouth Court House (today Freehold) the weather was extremely hot and it periodically rained torrentially.

General George Washington came to Cranbury on Friday, June 26, 1778, at around 9 a.m. riding in on a white stallion recently presented to him by New Jersey Governor Livingston. His headquarters and overnight quarters were at the Stites' House, then located at 53 South Main Street. Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Hamilton and Major General Lafayette also previously used the Stites' House as a headquarters. Lafayette overnighted there on June 25 and 26, 1778 before heading out with his infantry. Hamilton left the previous night to ride ahead.

Why did Washington and the main body of his army end up in Cranbury? Chambers explains because of the weather conditions, Washington decided to end the day's march and to stay in Cranbury. The residents of the village and surrounding farms had little notice or time to prepare for the 8,000 tired, hot and hungry troops whose column, many miles long, headed toward Cranbury's town and fields.

Chambers describes the daily life of the average soldiers of Washington's army, most of whom were White. The author cites the latest historical information not only on them but also on the contributions of Black and Native American soldiers. Most Blacks were integrated with Whites, in the infantry. Native Americans often served as scouts.

Relatively new social history tells us the "military community" included several hundred women and children. Washington did not want them to travel with the troops and requested that they stay in the back with the baggage. Some women would not comply, but instead walked with or near their men when the troops were on the march.



George Washington on Horseback (c. 1830) on white horse as he had in Cranbury. Painted by Rembrandt Peale. Credit: Mt. Vernon Ladies' Association.



Rare contemporary sketch of two women, one with a baby, in a wagon accompanying Washington's army on campaign in 1777 by du Simitere. Credit: Museum of the American Revolution, gift of Judith Hernstadt

The 1713 East New Jersey Cottage, a CHPS property located on Old Trenton Road in Millstone Park, features in this history. The farmhouse was the home of Vincent Bodine and his son James, a member of the Patriot militia. Based on Bodine family oral history, Lafayette may have visited the Bodine house during his brief visit. Vincent Bodine was the descendant of the renowned Jean Bodin, a leading 16<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher, who was well known to the French general.

Fifteen, well-chosen illustrations in the booklet provide vivid visual support to these stories, bringing Cranbury's Revolutionary-era past to life. Cranbury's rich history has been expanded and made easily accessible through Dr. Chambers' meticulous research, engaging writing and fascinating location of local events within larger state and national frameworks. *Cranbury in the American Revolution: The Village in Wartime* is part of CHPS's celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution, beginning this year.

Copies are available for purchase at the History Center Gift Shop (open Thursdays, 10 am to 1 pm and from 10 am to 2 pm on December 6 and 13.)

## Whispers From the Grave

By Karen Kelley

“Ready to stand my post,” was overheard on a misty Saturday morning, October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025, at the Brainerd Cemetery. Seventeen actors dressed in colonial costumes, assembled at the cemetery and the Cranbury Inn to participate in *Whispers From the Grave*, a memorial dedicated to Cranbury’s Revolutionary War Soldiers and Patriots. Presented by CHPS and its 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the American Revolution Committee and sponsored by Preservation New Jersey, this special event was also a celebration of the upcoming 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the American Revolution.

With support from the Cranbury Presbyterian Church, the committee planned the educational and fund-raising event since January. Originally presented by the Society in 2003, the 250<sup>th</sup> Committee members, including Louise Palagy, Jean Golisano, Linda Shilling, Dr. John Chambers, Eileen McGillan, Anupurba Lahiri, Bobbie Marlowe, Kellie Lavery and Chair Karen Kelley, reviewed the previous event and then researched and compiled 17 profiles of Cranbury patriots. Committee members created, borrowed from the Society’s collection, bought or donated costumes. Volunteer actors were recruited, including Matt Holland, Lynn Lakner, Tim Brennan, Gabe Lederman, Paul Venanzi, Wayne Wittman, Stephen Ayres, James Golubieski, Bill Palagy, Jean Golisano, Michael Golisano, Delpha Georges, Milton Georges, Bob Dreyling, Greg Pulz, Bob Rogers and Glen Schulte. The actors embraced their roles, quickly learned their lines, and enthusiastically shared their stories at the gravesite of a soldier or patriot in Brainerd Cemetery. The Cub Scouts provided color guard at the opening while Boy Scouts volunteered and assisted during the event. Graphics were coordinated by Louise Palagy, Joyce Rittenhouse and Jennifer Suttmeier.



Ken and Terri  
Photo by  
Robert Zurfluh

Two soldiers were posted at the Cranbury Inn porch: Dr. Charles McKnight, who was buried at Trinity Church in Manhattan and Col. David Chambers, who was buried in Cranbury’s Westminster Cemetery. The Cranbury Inn provided refreshments in their front lobby while Ken Mayberg and Terri Morrow provided a background of colonial music. There was also an exhibit table, displaying items and photos connected to the story of Cranbury and the American Revolution. A children’s table provided activities for young visitors.

Dr. John Chambers’ latest booklet, *Cranbury in the American Revolution: The Village in Wartime* was available for purchase at the event. The Society’s 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary tee shirts were also sold. These items are now available at the History Center, on Thursdays, 10 am to 1 pm.

The event was considered a success! One hundred and thirty tickets were sold. Many participants declared that they were pleased to learn about Cranbury’s history in the American Revolution. CHPS thanks the Cranbury Presbyterian Church, Cranbury Inn, Ken and Terri, the Scouts and the entire cast of reenactors and volunteers for their support. More photos of the event are available to view online at [www.cranburyhistory.org](http://www.cranburyhistory.org).

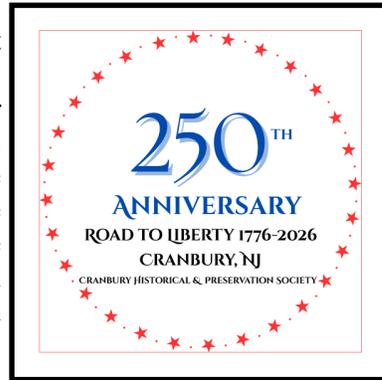


Whispers Reenactors and Volunteers

Photo by Anjan Lahiri

## 250th Anniversary Logo

A very special shout out and thank you to CHPS member Louise Palagyi for designing the Society's logo to commemorate the 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution. The logo will be used for all CHPS events through 2026.



## Preservation New Jersey's

### Homeowner's Guide to Historic Preservation Materials

#### HPC Roundtable

By Karen Kelley

Thirty-five people from as far as Burlington and Morris Counties attended the informative presentation, *Preservation New Jersey's Homeowner's Guide to Historic Preservation Materials – HPC Roundtable* at the Cranbury Museum on Saturday, September 20. The event was sponsored by Preservation NJ in collaboration with Middlesex County Division of History & Historic Preservation and the Cranbury Historical & Preservation Society. Ms. Margaret Hickey, AIA of Connolly & Hickey Historical Architects, addressed common problems faced by owners of historic homes. From wood and masonry care to window restoration and breathable finishes, the session offered practical guidance on appropriate preservation materials and techniques.



Margaret Hickey  
Photo by  
Karen Kelley

Discussion with lively audience participation followed. As a result, Preservation NJ agreed to develop a list of contractors and related resources for homeowners, historic preservation organizations, and consultants.

A tour of the exterior of the 1713 East Jersey Cottage followed the lecture and refreshments. Linda Schilling and Karen Kelley served as hosts for the event.

Through their Cemetery Stewardship Series, Preservation NJ was also a sponsor of the CHPS event, *Whispers From the Grave* at Brainerd Cemetery and the Cranbury Inn held on October 11, 2025. More than 125 people attended that event, which was in commemoration of the upcoming 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution.

## Junior Historians Program

By Delpha Georges

Inspired by Cranbury's agricultural heritage, a rainbow-colored Barn Quilt mural was conceived by Delpha Georges in collaboration with artist Noël Kinney to serve as the visual centerpiece of the outdoor classroom currently in development at the Cranbury School.



Barn Quilts and quilt blocks were chosen not only for their deep local and historical roots but, also for their multicultural and cross-disciplinary significance. Lesson plans that use quilt blocks as a creative lens to explore art, math, history, and more have been shared with the school, ensuring the mural becomes both a joyful focal point and an integrated part of student learning.

CHPS joins the Township Environmental Commission, as well as the Cranbury School PTO, in support of this outdoor teaching space that aims to foster a deeper connection to the town we call home and plant a seed for the next generation to grow into historical and environmental stewards.



Photos by Delpha Georges

## In Memoriam

The Society notes with sadness the passing of longtime member, Richard Kallan on October 1, 2025.

## Cranbury Museum

### Curator's Corner

By Karen Kelley

The exhibit, *Hear Our Voices-Sharing Cranbury Stories*, which had a steady flow of visitors during the summer and Fall, closed on October 26th. The next exhibit, focusing on the 1776 Christmas Campaign of the American Revolution, will open on Sunday, November 16th.

The curator applied for a traveling exhibit, *Revolutionary Lives: Living the American Experience*, offered by Revolution NJ and the request was accepted. This exhibit will open in March 2026.



Mark your calendar! **The Christmas Tea** is scheduled for Sunday, December 7, 1 - 4 pm. The museum rooms will be decorated for the season. Come join the music and caroling and enjoy an appearance by *Cloud Nine*.

Recently retired Pastor Anthony Godlefski, has volunteered to play Christmas carols on the museum melodeon during the Christmas Tea on December 7th.

Refreshments, including our famous Christmas Tea, will be provided. Everyone is welcomed to this festive event!



Pastor Anthony practicing for the tea

### Great Grant News

By Karen Kelley

The Middlesex County Board of County Commissioners has awarded a grant commemorating the 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution to the Cranbury Historical Society.

The Society will use the funding for signage at the 1713 East Jersey Cottage. Dr. David Martin will present a lecture on the American Revolution at a dedication ceremony at the East Jersey Cottage on May 17, 2026.

## Acquisitions

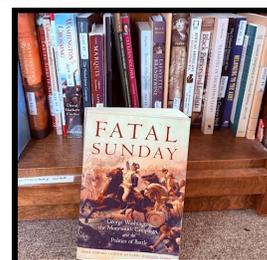
The Society gratefully acknowledges the following donations:

A 19th Century wooden bonnet cradle donated by the Ryan-Ziegler Family will be placed in the 1713 East Jersey Cottage when the cottage interior is completed.



Late 19th Century wicker rocking horse donated by Diane Jondahl is now placed in children's room in the Museum.

Dr. John Chambers donated over 20 books and several boxes of reference materials he used to write his latest booklet, *Cranbury in the American Revolution: The Village in Wartime*.



Photos by Karen Kelley

### VOLUNTEER DOCENTS NEEDED FOR THE CRANBURY MUSEUM

Share your love of History and Cranbury!

Volunteer one Sunday a month at our historic gem, the Cranbury Museum, conducting tours for visitors. Training and manual provided.

The Cranbury Museum, located at 4 Park Place East, Cranbury, is open on Sundays from 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm.

For information, contact Karen Kelley at [historycenter@comcast.net](mailto:historycenter@comcast.net)

### CHPS Mission Statement:

*Committed to the History and Future of Cranbury, we are a society of volunteers who support and encourage the preservation of Cranbury Township's land, historic buildings, sites and landmarks through education, stewardship, outreach, research and restoration.*

## The 1713 East Jersey Cottage

By Steven Golisano



Interior work to repair and restore the brick nogging and fireplace has begun in preparation for a plaster base coat. A wall will be constructed on the first floor in its original

location to divide the kitchen/hall, and study. Additionally, a volunteer session will be organized in the upcoming weeks to continue work on the rain garden.

\*\*\*\*\*

## The History Center

By Linda Schilling

The History Center continues to be busy on Thursdays with visitors and volunteers. The History Center received a needed paint job this summer and a new sign. We are so happy with our bright and clean appearance. The History Center volunteers spent a lot of time this summer and



Newly-painted outhouse behind History Center

early fall researching Cranbury patriots and putting together costumes for Whispers from the Grave. We continue working on our Cranbury African American project and cataloging new acquisitions and donations to the Society.

\*\*\*\*\*

## The Parsonage Barn

By Audrey Smith

The Parsonage Barn was the setting for a wedding in May and for three Yoga classes in October and two Yoga classes in November. The class on Saturday, October 4 was a fundraiser for Cranbury School PTO and those on October 5 and 9 and November 1 and 9 were fundraisers for CHPS. We are thankful for those who organized these fundraisers and for member, Chris Scarpa who checks the barn regularly.

## CRANBURY HISTORICAL & PRESERVATION SOCIETY

### EXECUTIVE BOARD AND TRUSTEES

#### OFFICERS

President	Audrey Smith
VP/Program Chairperson	Linda Morgan
Recording Secretary	<b>Open Position</b>
Corresponding Secretary	Eileen McGillan
Treasurer	Bob Dreyling
Museum Curator	Karen Kelley

#### TRUSTEES

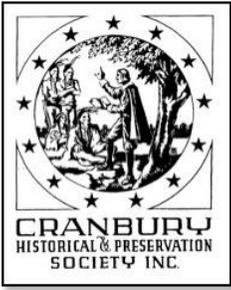
2023-2025	2024-2026	2025-2027
Kathy Jani	Anupurba Lahiri	Steven Golisano
Michaele Kehrt	Eileen McGillan	Karen Kelley
Linda Schilling	Tim Brennan	Bobbie Marlowe
George Smith	Jay Taylor	Cheryl Clarke
Bonnie Wagman	Heather Keltz Scott	Joan Weidner

#### HONORARY TRUSTEES

Jan Wagner	John Chambers
Jerry Pevahouse	Ginny Swanagan

#### COMMITTEES & CHAIRPERSONS

<b>Acquisitions</b>	Karen Kelley, Eileen McGillan, Michaele Kehrt, Linda Schilling
<b>Buildings and Grounds</b>	
Museum:	Ed Kelley
History Center:	<b>Open Position</b>
1713 East Jersey Cottage:	John Chambers, Bob Dreyling, Steven Golisano, Karen Kelley, Bobbie Marlowe, Audrey Smith
Docents	Sue Saravelli
Education	Delpha Georges
Exhibits	Karen Kelley
Finance	Bob Dreyling, Kathy Jani, Jay Taylor, George Smith, Steve Silverman, Audrey Smith, Linda Schilling, Karen Kelley
Fundraising	Committee
Gardens	Cheryl Clarke, Karen Kelley, Linda Morgan, Delpha Georges
History Center Director	Linda Schilling
Historic Preservation	Mark Berkowsky
Membership	Audrey Smith, Michaele Kehrt
Museum Inspectors	George Smith
Nominating Committee	Karen Kelley
Parsonage Barn	Audrey Smith
Publicity/Media	Jennifer Suttmeier
Newsletter Editors	Anupurba Lahiri, Jean Golisano
Website/Social Media	Heather Keltz Scott



NONPROFIT  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
TRENTON, NJ  
PERMIT NO. 961

**Cranbury Historical & Preservation Society  
6 South Main Street**

**Cranbury Museum**  
4 Park Place East  
Open Sundays 1 pm to 4 pm & by appt.  
Tel: 609-655-2611

**Cranbury History Center**  
6 South Main Street  
Open Thursdays 10 am to 12:30 pm & by appt.  
Tel: 609-860-1889

Email: [historycenter@comcast.net](mailto:historycenter@comcast.net)  
Website: [www.cranburyhistory.org](http://www.cranburyhistory.org)  
X: [@cranburyhistory](#)  
Facebook: Cranbury Historical and Preservation Society  
Instagram: [Cranbury\\_1700s\\_house](#)

**UPCOMING CHPS EVENTS**

**November 16** - The Christmas Campaign/Ten Crucial Days opens at the Cranbury Museum, 1 to 4 pm.

**November 21 to December 12** - Holiday Auction. Details will be live soon. Stay tuned!

**December 6 and December 13** - The History Center Gift Shop, 6 S. Main Street, will be open both Saturdays from 10 am - 2 pm. Please stop in for refreshments and see some new **Cranbury-themed and seasonal items.**

**December 7** - Annual Christmas Tea at the Cranbury Museum, 4 Park Place West, from 1-4pm. Visit the Museum and see it decorated for the holidays, enjoy music, refreshments and the exhibit, "The Christmas Campaign of the American Revolution".

**January to December 2026** - 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution

**January 26, 2026** - You are invited to attend the CHPS Annual Meeting at 7 pm at Cranbury Public Library.

**March 2026** - Revolutionary Lives: Living the American Experience at the Cranbury Museum, Sundays, 1 - 4 pm.

**May 17, 2026** - 1713 East Jersey Cottage Sign Dedication & Lecture at Millstone Park, 11 am.

**2025 - 2026 Museum Closing Dates**

Thanksgiving Weekend - November 30  
Christmas Weekend—December 28  
New Year's Day - January 4  
Martin Luther King Weekend - January 18  
Presidents' Weekend - February 15  
Easter - April 5  
Mother's Day - May 10  
Dedication at 1713 EJ Cottage - May 17  
Memorial Day Parade - May 25  
Father's Day - June 21

**History Center Closing Dates**

Christmas - December 25  
New Year's Day - January 1