



**America250 Wisconsin Commission
2022 Annual Report**



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LETTER OF CONVEYANCE FROM THE CHAIR

December 5, 2022

The Honorable Tony Evers
Office of the Governor
115 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53702

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos
217 West, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53708

Senate President Chris Kapenga
220 South, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Governor Evers, Assembly Speaker Vos, and Senate President Kapenga:

It is my privilege to transmit the first Annual Report of the Wisconsin Commission for the United States Semiquincentennial Commission (America250 Wisconsin Commission). I was honored to be appointed to the Commission and even more honored to be elected to serve as its Chair.

In 2026, only three and a half years from now, communities across this country will recognize, commemorate, and celebrate the 250th birthday of our nation. The year prior marks the 250th birthday of the U.S. military and the creation of the U.S. Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. These anniversaries offer a chance to honor these legacies and reflect on what it means to be a Wisconsinite and an American. We look forward to educational events, community celebrations, respectful dialogues, challenging conversations, and meaningful engagement across the state.

Here in Wisconsin, we are eager to lead those efforts while at the same time noting that our commemorations should not solely concentrate on the anniversary of the country's founding in 1776. During these America250 commemorations, we are not just celebrating anniversaries of historical dates from 250 years ago; we recognize everything that has happened since then that has made us who we are today.

While the America250 Wisconsin Commission is in its infancy, with the enthusiasm of my fellow commissioners and the supporting staff, combined with the coordinating work already underway, we have a strong foundation on which to build.

With the signing of the Grant Agreement, we are proud to be recognized as the State of Wisconsin's official state partner for the national America250 Commission. This allows us to not only receive funding as outlined in the Agreement, but also affords us the opportunity to officially partner with fellow state commissions across the country and coordinate at the regional and national level.

As Chair of the Commission, I look forward to working with my fellow commissioners and partners around the state to seize the opportunities we have on our horizon.

On Wisconsin, and, as ever, Forward!

Sincerely,



Christopher L. Kolakowski, Chair
Wisconsin Commission for the United States Semiquincentennial Commission

AMERICA250 AND WISCONSIN

Two and a half centuries ago, beginning in 1775, the United States formed an Army, a Navy, and a Marine Corps, and began to take shape in the struggle to achieve independence from Great Britain. Starting then and going forward to this day, Americans have sought to define and structure this nation, and move toward what the Constitution called “a more perfect Union.”

When independence was won in 1783, the territory, which is now Wisconsin, became part of the United States. Descendants of Founders and other Revolutionary War veterans moved to Wisconsin Territory and the State of Wisconsin, many of whom are buried in Wisconsin. The principles that define Wisconsin and its government are based on those enshrined in America’s founding documents.

Wisconsin has a great opportunity to explore our state’s story and connect Wisconsinites with America’s founding principles. The upcoming Semiquincentennial (250th) anniversaries of the Declaration of Independence, the American Revolutionary War, and other important events in our nation’s founding, present incredible opportunities for institutions and organizations around the country to engage and educate their communities. A national commission, *America250*, “aims to deepen understanding of our history, democratic process, and each other through education, increase engagement in our communities and governing affairs, and foster unity that includes the ‘many’ Americans in our ‘one’ nation.”

America250 seeks to help place states and territories in a strong position to elevate their identity, drive economic activity, and increase community engagement during and leading up to the Semiquincentennial. As a state-level partner with the national *America250 Commission*, the *America250 Wisconsin Commission* shares these same goals. This milestone also provides an unparalleled opportunity to remind all Wisconsinites what this State and nation have done over our histories, and what we collectively stand for.

While the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence will occur on July 4, 2026, the anniversaries of Paul Revere’s ride, first battles of the American Revolutionary War, formation of the American military, convening of the Second Continental Congress, and more, will occur in 2025, only two years hence. Starting the *America250 Wisconsin Commission*’s work now allows partners around the state adequate time to properly plan, prepare, publicize, and carry out events and programming by the beginning of 2025.

PROGRESS SUMMARY AND STEPS TAKEN

The *Wisconsin Commission for the United States Semiquincentennial Commission* was established on December 3, 2021, with the enactment of 2021 Wisconsin Act 95, and is administratively assigned to the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA).

To facilitate the functions of the *Wisconsin Commission for the United States Semiquincentennial Commission* (America250 Wisconsin Commission), WDVA formed an internal workgroup in January 2022. (See Appendix D). Previous state commissions for similar commemorations, such as the Wisconsin WWI Centennial Commission (2015-2018), Wisconsin Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission (2010-2015), and the Wisconsin State Sesquicentennial Commission (1994-1998), were used to establish the workgroup's structure, planning, and timeline of potential community planning event opportunities.

The workgroup began to lay the groundwork for organizing, planning, implementing, and anticipating the Commission's administrative and program needs, and the preliminary development of educational programs.

The workgroup established communication channels with the national *America250 Commission* and other state commissions and workgroups across the country. Partner organizations and groups within Wisconsin continue to be identified. Coordinating discussions were initiated with several key partners within the State, including the Wisconsin Historical Society and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

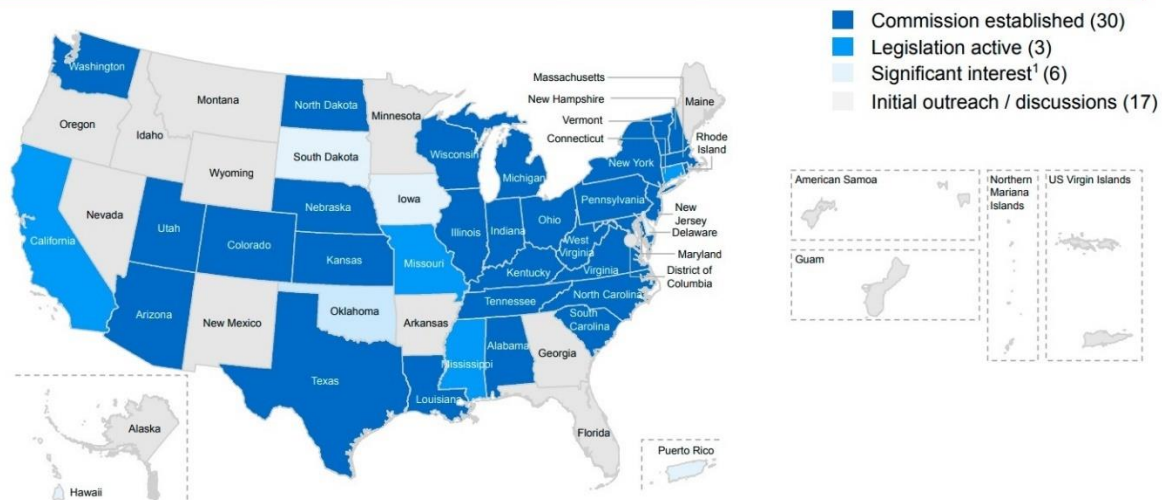
The America250 Wisconsin Commission held its first public meeting on Monday, November 28, 2022. In their first order of business, the commissioners unanimously elected Christopher Kolakowski, Director of the Wisconsin Veterans Museum, to serve as the Chair of the Commission, and Christian Øverland, Director of the Wisconsin Historical Society, to serve as the Vice Chair of the Commission.

The commissioners authorized the Commission Chair to sign the Grant Agreement offered from the national America250 Foundation, in which the Agreement recognizes the *Wisconsin Commission for the United States Semiquincentennial Commission* as the sole state partner representing the State of Wisconsin at the national level. In other business, the commissioners discussed the Commission's future goals (as charged in Act 95), discussed the possible designation of special sub-committees, and approved the Commission's draft 2022 Annual Report for submission to the Governor and Legislature by the date specified in Act 95. The commissioners also established a preliminary meeting schedule to meet at least quarterly.

WISCONSIN'S AMERICA250 COMMISSION AT THE NATIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVELS

On behalf of the America250 Wisconsin Commission, the workgroup began engaging in coordinating meetings and discussions at the national and regional level. Partner states, whose foundational history is intrinsically tied to the thirteen original colonies, have laid substantial groundwork for commemorations, outreach, and awareness over the last two years. As the nation moves closer to the 2026 commemoration, additional states have begun forming commissions and taking steps to plan commemorations in their own states and regions.

1. 30 states have established commissions, creating a local organizing body for activities



1. Defined as interest at level of state government, with meaningful conversations about establishing an official commission through legislation or governor's office

The national A250 Foundation facilitates regional coordination and has assigned the America250 Wisconsin Commission to the Great Lakes Regional coordinating group. Within the region, Wisconsin's commission joins those of Michigan and Ohio as leading in the development and organization of our respective commissions. It is expected that Illinois, Indiana, and Minnesota will join the regional group once their commissions are established and further developed. Through the coordinating work that has been completed and underway, Wisconsin has an opportunity to be a leader in the region.

APPENDIX A

State of Wisconsin



2021 Assembly Bill 388

Date of enactment: **December 3, 2021**
Date of publication*: **December 4, 2021**

2021 WISCONSIN ACT 95

AN ACT *to create* 13.625 (11), 15.495, 19.56 (3) (g), 44.015 (8), 44.02 (29) and 45.13 of the statutes; **relating to:** establishing the Wisconsin commission for the United States semiquincentennial commission to coordinate the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States.

The people of the state of Wisconsin, represented in senate and assembly, do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. 13.625 (11) of the statutes is created to read: 13.625 (11) This section does not apply to the solicitation, acceptance, or furnishing of anything of pecuniary value by the Wisconsin commission for the U.S. semiquincentennial commission, or to a principal furnishing anything of pecuniary value to the Wisconsin commission for the U.S. semiquincentennial commission, under s. 19.56 (3) (g) for the activity specified in s. 19.56 (3) (g).

SECTION 2. 15.495 of the statutes is created to read:

15.495 Same; attached commission. (1) WISCONSIN COMMISSION FOR THE UNITED STATES SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL COMMISSION. There is created a Wisconsin commission for the U.S. semiquincentennial commission, which is attached to the department of veterans affairs. A commission member, once installed, is a permanent member of the commission, and shall retain his or her role even if the commission member no longer retains his or her status that qualified him or her for membership, unless the commission member voluntarily steps down from the commission. Notwithstanding s. 15.01 (2), the commission shall be composed of the following members:

- (a) The speaker of the assembly, or his or her designee.
 - (b) The senate president, or his or her designee.
 - (c) The senate majority leader, or his or her designee.
 - (d) The senate minority leader, or his or her designee.
 - (e) The assembly majority leader, or his or her designee.
 - (f) The assembly minority leader, or his or her designee.
 - (g) The governor, or his or her designee.
 - (h) The chief justice of the supreme court, or his or her designee.
 - (i) The director of the state historical society.
 - (j) The director of the Wisconsin Veterans Museum.
 - (k) The director of the Tourism Federation of Wisconsin.
 - (L) A member of a federally recognized American Indian tribe or band in this state.
 - (m) A member of the Wisconsin Society Daughters of the American Revolution.
 - (n) A member of the Wisconsin Society Sons of the American Revolution.
- SECTION 3.** 19.56 (3) (g) of the statutes is created to read:
19.56 (3) (g) A state public official who is a member of the Wisconsin commission for the U.S. semiquincentennial commission.

* Section 991.11, WISCONSIN STATUTES: Effective date of acts. "Every act and every portion of an act enacted by the legislature over the governor's partial veto which does not expressly prescribe the time when it takes effect shall take effect on the day after its date of publication."

ennial commission may solicit, receive, and retain on behalf of the state anything of value for the purposes specified under s. 45.13.

SECTION 4. 44.015 (8) of the statutes is created to read:

44.015 (8) Contract with the Wisconsin Historical Foundation, Inc., for the purpose of providing support to the Wisconsin commission for the U.S. semiquincentennial commission under s. 45.13 (4) in performance of the commission's functions of accepting donations, making procurements, expending funds, and entering into contracts, leases, or other agreements.

SECTION 5. 44.02 (29) of the statutes is created to read: 44.02 (29) Support the Wisconsin commission for the U.S. semiquincentennial commission as provided for in s. 45.13 (4).

SECTION 6. 45.13 of the statutes is created to read:

45.13 Wisconsin commission for the United States semiquincentennial commission. (1) (a) The Wisconsin commission for the U.S. semiquincentennial commission shall plan, coordinate, and implement a program to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States and specifically highlight the role of Wisconsin in that event and the impact of its people on the nation's past, present, and future.

(b) The commission shall hold public meetings to solicit the input of citizens throughout the state in developing programs for the semiquincentennial.

(c) The program is subject to the support of a majority of the commission, and a majority of the members constitutes a quorum.

(d) Members may be reimbursed for travel expenses incurred when performing functions under this section.

(2) The commission shall coordinate with federal, state, local, and private agencies on infrastructural improvements and on projects to welcome regional, national, and international tourists.

(3) (a) The commission shall plan and prepare educational events and opportunities relating to the semiquincentennial for use by public, private, and tribal elementary and secondary schools throughout the state. The commission shall provide informational materials about events and opportunities planned and prepared under this paragraph to the department of public instruction for distribution to public, private, and tribal elementary and secondary schools.

(b) Each public elementary or secondary school, including each charter school, shall provide at least one event or educational opportunity under par. (a) to pupils in the 2025–26 school year.

(c) For each public elementary or secondary school in a school district, the school board of the school district and, for each charter school established under s. 118.40 (2r) or (2x), the operator of the charter school shall report

to the department of public instruction the event or educational opportunity that the school held to satisfy the requirement under par. (b). By no later than September 1, 2026, the department of public instruction shall compile and submit to the commission the information the department of public instruction received under this paragraph.

(4) (a) The department and the state historical society shall work together to support the commission in the performance of its functions.

(b) The state historical society shall, upon request of the commission, in accordance with its powers as described in s. 44.015 (8), contract with the Wisconsin Historical Foundation, Inc., for the purpose of providing support to the commission in performance of its functions of accepting donations, making procurements, expending funds, and entering into contracts, leases, or other agreements.

(c) Upon request of the commission, any state agencies, as defined in s. 20.001 (1), shall cooperate with the commission in the performance of its functions.

(5) The commission may do any of the following:

(a) Accept donations, make procurements, and expend funds.

(b) Designate special committees with representatives from federal, state, local, and private groups to plan, develop, and coordinate specific activities.

(c) Enter into contracts, leases, or other agreements.

(d) Assume such other functions authorized by law as may be necessary to carry out the purposes of this section.

(e) Appoint such committees as may be required to carry out its functions.

(6) (a) No later than one year after the effective date of this paragraph [LRB inserts date], and annually thereafter until 2027, the commission shall submit a report to the governor and the legislature under s. 13.172 (2) that contains all of the following:

1. The commission's recommendations to comply with this section.

2. A detailed timeline through 2027 of the plans for all events.

3. An accounting of all expenses incurred per year, all funds expended per year, and all donations, grants, or other moneys received per year by the commission in developing the program.

4. Any recommendations for legislation necessary to implement any aspect of the program.

5. A report on all activities and events that occurred each year.

6. Information received from the department of public instruction under sub. (3) (c).

(b) No later than January 1, 2027, the commission shall complete its duties and submit a final report to the

2021 Assembly Bill 388

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2021 Wisconsin Act 95

governor and the legislature under s. 13.172 (2). The final report shall contain an accounting of all funds expended and received and all activities and events. The

commission shall cease to exist on January 1, 2027, and shall disburse any of its property to federal, state, local, and private entities.

APPENDIX B

Commissioners

<u>Position</u> (s. 15.495, Wis. Stats.)	<u>Commissioner Name & Title</u>
Director of the Wisconsin Veterans Museum	Christopher Kolakowski, Commission Chair Director of the Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Director of the Wisconsin Historical Society	Christian Øverland, Commission Vice Chair Director of the Wisconsin Historical Society
Assembly Speaker	Amy Loudenbeck Designee of the Assembly Speaker
Senate President	Kathleen Bernier Designee of the Senate President
Senate Majority Leader	Joan Ballweg Designee of the Senate Majority Leader
Senate Minority Leader	Janet Bewley Designee of the Senate Minority Leader
Assembly Majority Leader	Ariana Beno Designee of the Assembly Majority Leader
Assembly Minority Leader	Don Vruwink Designee of the Assembly Minority Leader
Governor	Zach Madden Designee of the Governor
Chief Justice of the Supreme Court	Randy Koschnick Designee of the Chief Justice
Director of the Tourism Federation of Wisconsin	Julia Hertel Administrator of the Tourism Federation of Wisconsin
Member of a Federally Recognized American Indian tribe or band	Shannon Holsey President of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians
Member of the Wisconsin Society Daughters of the American Revolution	Charlene Backus Chair of the Wisconsin DAR 250
Member of the Wisconsin Society Sons of the American Revolution	Robert Haglund Chair of the Wisconsin SAR 250

APPENDIX C

WDVA Workgroup

In accordance with s. 15.495 (1), Wis. Stats., as enacted by 2021 Wisconsin Act 95, the Wisconsin Commission for the United States Semiquincentennial Commission is administratively assigned to the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs.

To assist with the implementation of the Commission's functions as provided for in s. 45.13 (4) (a), Wis. Stats., WDVA established a workgroup, consisting of the WDVA staff listed below. The workgroup is responsible for providing administrative and technical support to the Commission, to include organization of communications, meetings, events, and the development of this report.

Kathy Still, Assistant Deputy Secretary, Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs

Chris Kolakowski, Director, Wisconsin Veterans Museum

Kevin Hampton, Curator of History, Wisconsin Veterans Museum

Scott Sussman, Deputy Chief Legal Counsel, Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs

Mindy Allen, Office of the Secretary, Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs