

Delaware Historical Society: 'America's 250th: For All, For Once'

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Learning from our history has never been more important than it is today. The Delaware Historical Society (DHS) promotes and amplifies relevant and inclusive histories that inspire deep engagement with the entirety of our past. Viewing contemporary issues through the lens of history reveals complexities, reminds us of important lessons, and helps us explore different perspectives resulting in greater capacity for compassion and understanding.



At DHS, we don't just preserve the past; we learn from it. Our work examines Delaware history through new lenses, uncovers untold stories of real Delawareans, and advances important conversations that build community and shape future generations.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BRANDYWINE SCHOOL DISTRICT.

As we approach the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, it is important that we draw on new interpretations

and new tools to make interconnected stories that comprise the founding of our nation more relevant and personally meaningful to a broader and more diverse audience.

The Delaware Historical Society (DHS) was founded in 1864, primarily as the repository for historic materials and documents of wealthy and influential citizens of Delaware and the surrounding region. A lot has changed since then; along with the study of well-known Delaware historical figures and events, we have a heightened focus on learning and sharing the stories of those individuals and groups whose voices were (or continue to be) seldom heard or muted at different points in history.

We address Delaware's underrepresentation and misrepresentation of marginalized communities with diligence and care, eagerly exploring the histories of everyday Delawareans and pioneering innovative ways to advance important conversations among members of our many intersecting communities.



DHS is committed to advancing innovative programs that explore Delaware's stories from all perspectives, like this year's inaugural Oral History Bus Tour. Created in collaboration with DHS Trustee Karen Ingram, the tour visited four historic sites in the Wilmington area related to the landmark Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court ruling.

PHOTO CREDIT: WILLIAM G. TUDOR.

We partner with learning communities, families, other cultural institutions, scholars, and artists to coauthor meaning and deepen our collective understanding of the many circumstances, world views and events that have shaped the First State. Whether it is a new, student-led walking tour highlighting the lives and residences of Black families and neighbors from the 19th to early 20th centuries in Old New Castle; a hands-on exploration of the medicinal plants of the Lenape; a community-curated window display celebrating the Lunar New Year; an educational seminar about LGBTQ+ histories and experiences; or a book talk celebrating Delawareans' service in the WWII era and Wilmington's designation as a WWII Heritage City; we are working hard to respond to community interests, needs and requests with the understanding that service to all learners is our priority.

In the 160 years since our founding, DHS has acquired nine historic buildings related to Delaware's past and an extraordinary collection of more than 3 million objects, books, documents, photographs, and maps. We are the only private nonprofit organization with the mission to serve as the statewide organization exploring, preserving, promoting, and sharing Delaware history, heritage, and culture to educate, inspire, and empower people and communities.



Overlooking the Delaware River in Historic New Castle, the National Historic Landmark George Read II House, completed in 1804 for the son of one of Delaware's signers of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution, draws visitors for its architecture, history, and formal gardens.

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DHS' **Jane and Littleton Mitchell Center for African American Heritage** offers an expansive exploration of the African American experience in Delaware from 1639 to the present. Through artifacts, oral history interviews, music, and art, it sheds light on diverse perspectives related to African Americans' struggle for freedom and dignity. The center's permanent exhibition, *Journey to Freedom*, delves into Delaware's African American history, covering topics such as faith, placemaking, equality, selfhood, and resistance to slavery.

The impact and relevance of DHS reaches far beyond the walls of our historically significant museums and facilities. Teachers and educators around the state and across the country regularly access and share our free, downloadable educational resources covering various topics tying Delaware to national and international histories. Others connect with us by engaging their students as contestants or serving as judges for the National History Day contests we host each spring.



At DHS, we know studying the past informs the present and shapes the future. We proudly support the next generation of historians through National History Day in Delaware and the development of field trips, teacher workshops, lesson plans, and primary source materials.

Through discovering new evidence or inviting new perspectives on the facts as we know them, we are growing into an institution whose work is a true reflection of the many ideas and ideals that comprise Delaware history.

At DHS, we tell Delaware's unique and often surprising stories like no other organization can or does. We approach the commemoration of the Semiquincentennial with a firm commitment to examine what terms like liberty, freedom, patriotism, and loyalty mean to Delawareans, and how the definition of "we the people" has evolved.



Researchers, historians, students, family genealogists, and more rely on the Research Library and DHS' vast collection of more than 3 million items related to the unique history of Delaware and its people.

As we join together as a state to commemorate the country's 250th anniversary, I invite you to connect with DHS and our wide range of programming, resources, and events. Visit the **Delaware History Museum**, the **Mitchell Center for African American Heritage**, and the **Read House & Gardens**; visit historic **Old Town Hall** as you consider rental venues for a special event; or get answers to your Delaware history questions at our **Research Library**. Your engagement with DHS and your unique voice and perspective are invaluable as we continue to learn from our history and offer new experiences in the spaces we steward.

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