

AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

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American Philosophical Society Receives IMLS National Leadership Grant for *Revolutionary City: A Portal to the Nation's Founding*

Philadelphia, PA, September 4, 2020 – With an eye towards the 250th anniversary of our nation's founding in 2026, the American Philosophical Society (APS), in partnership with the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), and the Library Company of Philadelphia (LCP), will lay the groundwork for the development of an innovative digital portal that will uncover hidden stories from Philadelphia's revolutionary past.

Thanks to a National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), these three Philadelphia institutions will create a shared online portal of digitized archival material related to the American Revolution. This portal will break down the institutional barriers between these archives, allowing users to discover stories that had previously been obscured by the physical separation of collections. Both the APS and LCP, founded by Benjamin Franklin, and the HSP, founded to celebrate the memory of the Revolution, hold large and invaluable collections related to the American Revolution and the early national period. But whereas the stories of founders like Franklin and Jefferson are well known, the scattered nature of the records of lesser-known actors has made those lives less accessible to wide audiences. *Revolutionary City* seeks to remedy that by highlighting the lives of a more diverse Philadelphia.

Some examples of stories waiting to be told, according to HSP Interim President and CEO Charles Cullen are, "Sarah Wister's journal and Elizabeth Drinker's diaries, manuscripts containing estimates of damage done by the British occupation, foot-soldier Aaron Norcross, and rich collections of papers of Revolutionary women."

The project has the backing of America250, the federal commission overseeing the 250th anniversary of 1776.

"America 250's goal is to educate, engage, and unite all Americans in a commemoration that is of, by, and for the people. The American Philosophical Society's receipt of the IMLS National Leadership Grant to pursue this innovative and engaging initiative is an important step forward," said Frank Giordano, Executive Director of the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission ([America 250](#)). "I am confident that the commitment made by these three institutions to bring together the diverse perspectives of educators, public historians, and digital humanists will shed light on untold American stories, promote greater historical

education, and encourage broader conversations about the meaning and promise of the United States not only among Philadelphians, but across the country.”

Michael Barsanti, Director of the Library Company, agreed.

“Most histories of Philadelphia in the revolution focus on the work of the founders and the drafting of Declaration of Independence,” says Barsanti, “This project will allow people to see how it was experienced by ordinary Philadelphians, and will reflect the extraordinary diversity that characterized us even then. It is also a remarkable opportunity for three of Philadelphia’s great historical organizations to work together on a project that brings their collections to the world.”

Aside from its compelling content, the project promises to yield important technological innovations for libraries and archives and become a model for institutional collaboration.

“Our goal is to create a unified digital repository shared between three institutions,” Patrick Spero, Librarian of the American Philosophical Society noted, “To do that, we need to create ways for our separate systems to talk to one another. If we’re successful, we hope to expand the scale of this project to include other partners from around the region and perhaps country to create as complete a record of the American Revolution in Philadelphia as possible.”

This one-year pilot grant will fund the planning phase of *Revolutionary City* and support the APS, HSP, and LCP as they focus on material related to Philadelphia, establishing the foundation for a portal that has the potential to expand to include sources on the Revolution from archives from around the country. Together, the APS, HSP, and LCP see the long-term vision of the portal as a one-stop-shop for students, teachers, scholars, and other lovers of history seeking to access materials related to the Revolutionary War and founding of the United States.

About the American Philosophical Society

The American Philosophical Society, established in 1743 by Benjamin Franklin for the purpose of “promoting useful knowledge,” is the nation’s oldest learned society. An intellectual bedrock of the early United States, the APS counts nearly all of the nation’s founders as Members of the Society. Election to Membership honors those who have made exceptionally significant contributions to science, the arts and humanities, and public life. The Society promotes scholarly research through its Library, including 40 fellowships each year, and through its research grant program. The Society sustains an informed citizenry through twice-yearly meetings and topical conferences and symposia. Public programs and

museum exhibitions, which often draw close to 200,000 visitors annually, are inspired by the APS Library & Museum collections, which include 14 million pages of manuscripts, 275,000 books, and approximately 3,000 artifacts and fine art objects. The collection is strongest in early American history, Native American history and culture, and the history of science. APS publications are dedicated to publishing research that reflects a broad range of useful knowledge and is the oldest continuously operating scholarly press in the country.

About the Historical Society of Pennsylvania

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, founded in 1824, is one of the nation's largest archives of historical documents, second only to The Library of Congress in its collections of early American documents. As a leader in archival practices, HSP has set an industry standard through the creation of protocols for surveying and assessing collections. These activities, in turn, enable the telling of meaningful stories to a wide range of audiences. In addition to printed collections of Pennsylvania and regional history covering the 17th-, 18th-, 19th-, and 20th- centuries, the holdings of the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies were added in 2002, enriching the collection by providing previously neglected aspects of American history. The collections of the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania were added in 2006, enhancing yet another dimension to the services provided by HSP. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania serves more than 4,000 onsite researchers annually and millions more around the globe through its online resources. Scholars, teachers, students, genealogists, and amateur historians can find valuable facets of history within HSP.

About the Library Company of Philadelphia

The Library Company of Philadelphia is an independent research library concentrating on American society and culture from the 17th through the 19th centuries. Free and open to the public, the Library Company houses an extensive non-circulating collection of rare books, manuscripts, broadsides, ephemera, prints, photographs, and works of art. Our mission is to foster scholarship in and increase public understanding of American history before 1900 by preserving and interpreting the valuable materials in our care. The Library Company connects with thousands of visitors annually, ensuring that the lessons of the past will continue to amaze, instruct, and inspire future generations. We serve a diverse constituency throughout Philadelphia and the nation, offering comprehensive reader services, an internationally renowned fellowship program, online catalogs, and regular exhibitions and public programs.