

Hon. Aimee K. Jorjani  
Chairman

Leonard A. Forsman  
Vice Chairman

John M. Fowler  
Executive Director



*Preserving America's Heritage*

November 20, 2019

Mr. Daniel M. DiLella, Chairman  
United States Semiquincentennial Commission  
1156 15th Street NW, Suite 900  
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Mr. DiLella:

I recently had the pleasure of speaking with Jim Campi and Tony Rucci regarding America 250 and the work of the United States Semiquincentennial Commission (Commission). The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) is an independent federal agency that promotes the preservation, enhancement, and sustainable use of the nation's diverse historic resources, and advises the President and Congress on national historic preservation policy. Our unique capabilities allow us to collaborate and engage with the highest levels of government as well as the tribal, state, and local levels focusing solely on historic and heritage preservation. Toward that end, the ACHP is eager to collaborate with the Commission. Historic properties are tangible representations of the past 250 years of American history, and they should play a central role in the Semiquincentennial commemoration. Likewise, this important initiative affords an opportunity to promote the continued preservation and interpretation of historic places.

Mr. Campi and Mr. Rucci recommended that the ACHP provide initial comments and recommendations at this time in order for them to be considered as the Commission finalizes its upcoming report to the President. The ACHP appreciates this opportunity and offers the attached observations and recommendations for the Commission's consideration.

I would like to convey my personal sense of excitement regarding America 250 and the role that the ACHP could play in the commemoration as well as the task force on "parks, preservation, and public places." The ACHP appreciates the opportunity to provide these comments and recommendations and looks forward to supporting the work of the United States Semiquincentennial Commission. We would be happy to discuss these further with you and your staff as your work progresses.

Sincerely,

Aimee K. Jorjani  
Chairman

Attachment

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## **Observations and Recommendations to the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission Regarding the America 250 Initiative**

**Interest in Task Force Participation.** The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) applauds the Commission's proposed creation of a task force on "parks, preservation, and public places," to advise on place-based aspects of the commemoration. The ACHP would welcome being asked to serve on the task force and is willing to chair or co-chair the group. The makeup of the ACHP-24 statutorily designated members representing federal agencies, Indian tribes, local and state governments, the public, and historic preservation experts and organizations—provides unique expertise and capabilities in collaborating with a wide range of parties regarding historic preservation. We encourage the Commission to ensure that the task force membership reflects a broad range of groups and perspectives.

**Support for America 250 Themes.** The ACHP strongly supports a number of the key ideas and purposes espoused by the Commission. Inclusiveness of all Americans is critically important. Toward that end, the Commission wisely recognizes that there are negative as well as positive aspects to the American story that must be addressed if the initiative is to be truly inclusive. The Commission's focus on education and on outreach through arts and entertainment media can help to address this issue as part of the larger goal of enhancing public understanding of American history and civics. For several years, the ACHP has made building a more inclusive preservation program a key objective of its work. As an example, the ACHP worked with the National Park Service (NPS) and the National Trust for Historic Preservation to develop the program "Touching History: Preservation in Practice." The program provides African American young professionals from Historically Black Colleges and Universities hands-on exposure to historic preservation and related career paths. The ACHP also is engaged in a partnership to use its expertise to help train and advise the next generation of tribal preservationists. These kinds of initiatives can help engage all Americans in America 250, and the ACHP would be delighted to discuss these and other ideas with the Commission.

**Opportunity for Preservation Legacy Initiatives.** The year 2026 also will be the 60th anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the foundational legislation that created the national historic preservation program. Its passage in 1966 was a watershed event that launched a transformation of the federal government from an agent of indifference—frequently responsible for needless loss of historic resources—to a facilitator, an agent of thoughtful change, and a responsible steward of historic properties for future generations. The ACHP would like to explore policy opportunities with the Commission regarding the potential for building upon the NHPA through major legacy preservation initiatives tied to America 250. The Semiquincentennial could be a catalyst for exploring a variety of ideas, such as implementing enhancements to the national historic preservation program and maximizing current authorizations, addressing the critical need for historic preservation trades training, or establishing new federal funding streams for historic preservation, as it also will be the 50th anniversary of the Historic Preservation Fund.

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**Native American Participation.** The ACHP would like to reiterate the importance of America 250 acknowledging the painful chapters in the history of the past 250 years. This is notably important in addressing Native American participation in the Commission's work. American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians hold a unique position in their relationship to the Semiquincentennial. Their experience in the history of the nation will be a challenge to properly interpret and commemorate, but telling it must include their perspective. The ACHP could assist the Commission in including them in this initiative. The membership of the ACHP includes several Indian tribal members and the Chairman of the National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers. The ACHP also has extensive experience in consultation with Indian tribes regarding federal projects and programs. The ACHP would be happy to provide advice to the Commission on whom to consult in Indian Country to explore tribal views on participating in the commemoration.

**Preservation Partnership Programs of the National Park Service.** Beyond being a steward for our National Parks, the NPS manages preservation partnership programs whereby the agency documents and interprets historic places, develops preservation standards and guidelines, and provides financial and technical assistance to Indian tribes, states, and local communities. A number of these programs are obvious candidates to contribute to the upcoming commemoration, including Teaching with Historic Places and Discover Our Shared Heritage Travel Itineraries. The ACHP would welcome the opportunity to explore partnerships with the NPS and the Commission regarding how such programs can support America 250 through existing and new themes and other interpretive programs.

**Funding Opportunity of the Preserve America Grant Program.** Starting in 2003, the ACHP coordinated a federal initiative called Preserve America to encourage and support community efforts to preserve historic places and promote economic vitality through heritage tourism and rehabilitation of historic properties. The initiative included the Preserve America Grant program, administered by NPS in consultation with the ACHP. The Preserve America Grant program has permanent congressional authorization, and funds were appropriated for the program from 2006 to 2010. The ACHP would like to bring this existing program to the attention of the Commission to rekindle interest in the program in preparation for the 250th anniversary. While funded, the grant program was designed to provide funds to states, tribes, and communities for heritage tourism, education, and planning projects, the very types of projects that will be important to the America 250 commemoration.

**Place-Based Programs to Promote National Participation.** It will be important that the Commission actively engage people throughout the country, but some people may view the commemoration as relevant only to the 13 original colonies. A place-based focus, however, could help to prevent this problem. The ACHP suggests that the Commission consider two place-based initiatives: 1) a program to encourage communities outside of the original colonies to identify and commemorate what was happening locally in 1776; and 2) a branded commemorative program that would allow communities throughout the country to recognize the historic places that they believe embody themes central to the past 250 years of American history. The ACHP would be happy to advise the Commission on the development of such programs.