

Museum Notes

for the week of May 24 – 30, 2026

by Bridget Van Beckum, assistant curator

Next week on Tuesday, June 2, we will be holding an America@250 Community Conversation at the Vernon County Museum and History Center at 6:30PM. This event was designed by PBS Wisconsin as a way to involve community members in celebrating our country's 250th anniversary. Since it's so different from our usual monthly programs, we thought we would use this opportunity to answer a few possible questions that you might have, such as...

What is it?

The Community Conversation is a free program designed to help members of the community connect with each other and reflect on our country's history. We will start by watching a short clip from Ken Burns' documentary, *The American Revolution*. We will then break into guided, small-group discussions to talk about the ideas and concepts that have shaped America in the past 250 years, and what it means to be an American.

Who are the facilitators?

Our two facilitators are Jennifer Morales of the Driftless Writing Center, and Brian Ekern, Vice President of the Vernon County Historical Society. Both have ample expertise and with their guidance, the discussions are sure to be informative and meaningful for everyone.

How long will it be?

PBS suggests a length of about two hours for this event, but that's only an estimate. The video clip we will be watching is roughly 25 minutes long, but the rest of the program is somewhat flexible. We will be sure to not go over two hours, and if the conversation comes to a natural stopping point before that, the program may end a little earlier.

If I don't know much about the Revolution, can I still come?

Yes! This event is open to anyone. The questions and topics we will be discussing are fairly broad and open-ended, so you don't need to have any preexisting knowledge on the subject. The video clip will provide a basic groundwork for the discussion. This is not a historical lecture or a political debate, but simply an opportunity to get to know other members of the community, listen to their perspectives, and share your own.

Can I come and just observe/listen? I'm interested but don't really want to talk.

Yes. Everyone will be encouraged to participate because your thoughts and opinions are valuable, but you won't be forced to speak if you don't feel comfortable doing so. The conversation is simply about listening to and connecting with your neighbors on our shared experiences of living in present-day America – something we all should be able to relate to.

Do I have to sign up in advance?

No, but it would be helpful for us to know how many people are coming, especially because we plan to provide popcorn and want to make sure there will be enough for everyone! If you plan on attending and would like to RSVP, you may let us know by phone, email, or by clicking "going" on our Facebook event. However, it is by no means required. Even if you didn't RSVP, you are still more than welcome to come!

Will it be recorded?

No – PBS advises against recording this program as it relies entirely on community participation. If we were to record the discussion, it may make participants feel more self-aware

and less willing to speak up. This is a one-time only event, so you'll have to make sure you attend if you don't want to miss it!

Hopefully this has helped to clear up any questions or concerns you may have had about this event. Now that you know more about what to expect, we hope to see you there! Or, if you'd prefer a more traditional program about the 250th, be sure to join us on July 21 at 6PM to hear Prof. Daniel Kapust present on "The Idea of America and the Constitutional Debates."