

# The American Orator Book Signing Coming to Priestley House

In February Friends of Joseph Priestley House Board Member Craig Specht published *The American Orator: 1776-2026*, just in time to join the celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.



A graduate of Susquehanna University, Craig has taught in the Shikellamy School District since 2008. He holds a Master's Degree in school counseling from Bloomsburg University, now Commonwealth University, and currently teaches eighth-grade American history and coaches forensics. He is also currently serving on the National Constitution Center's

Teacher Advisory Board.

According to Craig, "In the early United States, students and citizens learned the principles of liberty through speeches collected in books known as civic readers. Those words were studied, repeated, and remembered, helping to shape how citizens understood their role in a republic." The *American Orator* is written to follow in that tradition.

The speakers from American history, past and present, included in *The American Orator* repeatedly return to the founding words that define the principles of the American revolution: natural rights, consent of the governed and popular sovereignty, rule of law and constitutionalism, virtue and governance through the pursuit of happiness, and liberty of conscience and freedom from tyranny.

These orations, writes Craig, offer "readers an opportunity to reflect on where the country has been, the voices that shaped its course, and what its principles continue to demand of each generation." Joseph Priestley addresses similar principles in his publication *An Essay on the First Principles of Government and on the Nature of Political, Civil, and Religious Liberty*, a publication Thomas Jefferson owned and frequently recommended to others. Priestley supported the ideals of the American Revolution and was outspoken in his support of colonial rights.



As the 2026 Museum Season progresses, Priestley House Museum will be highlighting Dr. Priestley's connections to the American Revolution and to America's Founding Fathers. A book signing event for Craig's book is planned, allowing the museum to highlight Dr. Priestley's support of America's first principles, his political thoughts and writings, and his connections to men like Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, and George Washington.

Check the [joseph-priestley-house.org](http://joseph-priestley-house.org) website for details on upcoming events, including the book signing. If you would like event information delivered to your in-box, sign up on the website for the digital newsletter, distributed monthly.

**PENNSYLVANIA**  
THE GREAT AMERICAN GETAWAY



JOSEPH PRIESTLEY HOUSE  
P.O. Box 226  
NORTHUMBERLAND, PA. 17857



# Postings from Priestley House

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF JOSEPH PRIESTLEY HOUSE

Number 90, Spring 2026

[www.joseph-priestley-house.org](http://www.joseph-priestley-house.org)

570-473-9474

## SPECIAL DATES

### 2026 SEASON

#### APRIL 15

America 250PA  
Mobile Museum  
Priestley House Museum  
10 am - 5 pm

#### MAY 16

Native Plant Faire  
Museum Grounds  
9 am - 4 pm

#### NEW DATE

#### JUNE 8, 9 & 10

History Camp  
Priestley House Museum  
9 am - Noon

#### JUNE 29-JULY 3

Pineknotters Days  
King Street Park

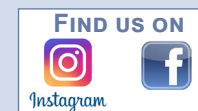
#### TBA

Book Signing Event  
Priestley House Museum

#### AUGUST 2

Oxygen Day in the Garden  
Priestley House Museum  
1-4 pm

Check local papers, Facebook, or [joseph-priestley-house.org](http://joseph-priestley-house.org) for additional details as event days draw closer.



In addition to our webpage you can Like us on Facebook (Joseph Priestley House Museum) to keep abreast of special Joseph Priestley House Museum events or follow us on Instagram (jphmuseum).

Also, you can donate to the Priestley House via Amazon Smile! Go to [www.smile.amazon.com](http://www.smile.amazon.com) and select "Friends of Joseph Priestley" as your charity. Everytime you shop at Amazon Smile, a portion of the purchase will be donated to the Priestley House!

## Priestley and the American Revolution: America250PA Is Coming to Priestley House

April 15th. Tax Day. A seemingly appropriate day to visit history related to the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the lead up to the American Revolution, particularly if you remember the story of the Boston Tea Party.

And, although people do not associate Dr. Joseph Priestley with the American Revolution, there is more to Dr. Priestley than his discovery of oxygen. He had friendships and correspondence with Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Rush, and George Washington, our Founding Fathers. He published *An Essay on the First Principles of Government, and on the Nature of Political, Civil, and Religious Liberty*, a publication which made its way into the hands of Thomas Jefferson by 1773.

The daylong event is open to the public free of charge. The house will open beginning at 10 am for visits. The day will include learning sites created by local organizations like the Northumberland County Historical Society and the Priestley-Forsyth Library, as well as presentations on historical figures connected both to Joseph Priestley and the American Revolution.

The centerpiece of the day from 11-4 pm will be an America250PA Mobile Museum, designed to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Signing of the American Declaration of Independence. According to [america250pa.org](http://america250pa.org), the America250PA Mobile Unit, "powered by Penske and produced in partnership with Visit Pennsylvania – The Great American Getaway, is a custom-built experience on wheels designed to bring the Semiquincentennial directly to Pennsylvania."

The unit contains three interactive exhibits: Pennsylvania Pursuit, Keystone Quest, and The Commonwealth Chronicles. Pennsylvania Pursuit is a trivia game "that challenges visitors with questions about Pennsylvania History and civics questions from the US citizenship test." Keystone Quest is "a retro-style video game" that takes players on a Pennsylvania adventure. And The Commonwealth Chronicles is "a digital storytelling booth where visitors can record and share personal stories about their lives, histories, and hopes for the future."

The Mobile Museum will be on location in front of the Joseph Priestley House from 11am-4 pm on April 15th. And should you not be able to attend the Northumberland Event, you can also visit the museum at the following sites:

- April 18<sup>th</sup> Pike County Lily Pond in Pike County Park (8am-Noon)
- April 25<sup>th</sup> Huntington County Huntington Presbyterian Church (10am-3pm)
- April 28<sup>th</sup> Monroe County Pocono Mountain E. Junior High School (5-7:30 pm)
- April 29<sup>th</sup> Monroe County 155 Firehouse Drive, Nazareth PA (6-10 pm)
- May 2<sup>nd</sup> Montour County 253 Mill Street, Danville PA (10am-3pm)



## PHMC's Volunteer of the Year at Priestley House



The 2025 PHMC Volunteer of the Year at Priestley House is Colleen Epler-Ruths. Colleen's leadership role with the Priestley House dates back to the early 2000s when she briefly served on the Friends of Joseph Priestley House Board. She would reprise that role in 2018 and move into the Board Presidency in 2020, when then Board President Pat Martino left the area for a teaching position in North Carolina. Colleen would continue as president for the remaining four years of her term.

During her tenure on the FJPH Board, Colleen brought to Priestley House her expertise as a Master Gardener, serving on the Garden Committee and being actively involved in the expansion of gardens on the grounds of the museum, noting in an August 4, 2022, news article that "Priestley would have had, at least according to the plans that we have, 20 plus plots on site." Colleen also brought Board meetings into the digital age with virtual meetings and helped to launch the Herb and Native Plant Faire in 2023, an event that became so popular it is returning for its fourth season in 2026.

A lifelong resident of Point Township, Colleen "recalls visiting the Joseph Priestley House when she attended Second Street School." Since 2015 she has volunteered as a docent, dressing in period costume during special event days at the museum. "To me, the Priestley House is a vibrant place where we can touch the past to see how much things have changed and yet how much has stayed the same," she said during an interview for the Fall 2018 edition of *Postings*.

Colleen, along with volunteers PHMC Site Volunteers from across the state, will be honored on April 25<sup>th</sup> at a special PHMC Event.

## America250PA Podcast Will Feature Priestley House

On March 31 FJPH Board Member Craig Specht and Dr. Priestley Reenactor Ron Blatchley traveled to Harrisburg to record an America250PA podcast that will air in May.

Sydney Harris-White hosted the podcast in which Craig and Ron discussed everything from Joseph Priestley's experiments to his friendships with Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. The podcast will also touch on Priestley's role in the Enlightenment and his various contributions to science, religion, and politics.

The "Start Here, America Did" Series focuses on "telling the unique stories that make up the diverse fabric of Pennsylvania." The podcasts are available on Apple Podcasts, Podbean, Spotify, Amazon Music, and iHeart, and as of March 31st 61 episodes are available to download.



## Special Gifts & Donations to Priestley House

Gifts to the Joseph Priestley House  
Daniel & Judith Holjes  
Len & Jo Ann Long

In Memory of our parents by  
Eric & Barbara Schmidt

Tom Bresenhan by  
Richard & Susan Brook

Special Donations to Upcoming  
Museum Events

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In Honor of The Priestley House Volunteers  
by Susan Hegberg

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Walk-in Visitors or visitors with reservations are welcome during museum hours. For tour reservations go to our web site <https://joseph-priestley-house.org>

The reservations link is available on both the home page and tour page. Reservations will be confirmed by e-mail.

**Tours will begin at 1pm, 2pm, 3pm.**

**Admission prices are listed on the tour page.**

**Special Assistance**  
Individuals who need special assistance or accommodation to visit The Joseph Priestley House should contact us in advance to discuss their needs.

To join the Friends of Priestley House call 570-473-9497 or visit [www.joseph-priestley-house.org](http://www.joseph-priestley-house.org)

## Grand Reopening Celebration Kicked Off the 2026 Season Beautifully



From 10 am until NOON on March 7<sup>th</sup> members, descendants, volunteers, and special guests gathered for an invitation-only event, beginning in the Pond Building, to launch a celebration of PHMC's most recent on-site restoration project and allow those most closely involved with the museum a preview of the site before the 1-4 pm Open House. Following the formalities in the Pond Building, attendees made their way to the front of the museum for an official ribbon cutting before entering Priestley House, where costumed docents were available to speak to visitors, answer questions, and tell the story of Dr. Priestley and his family during their time in Northumberland.

PHMC employees Melissa Mann, the Bureau of Historic Sites & Museums, and Richard (Rick) Rolinski, the Preservation Construction Specialist from the Division of Architecture and Preservation who oversaw the Priestley House restoration, kicked off the morning event as guest speakers and shared information about the restoration project and the changes visitors would see when they entered the museum. A 17-year veteran of PHMC, Rick was particularly enthusiastic about the discoveries uncovered during the restoration process, discoveries that allowed the restoration company to match the original paint colors used on the woodwork and trim in the late 1700s. He described the process as an interior archeological excavation.

Also on-site for the festivities were Pennsylvania State Senator Lynda Schlegel Culver, who serves the 27<sup>th</sup> District, and Pennsylvania State Representative Michael Stender, who serves the 108<sup>th</sup> Legislative District. Senator Culver was also among the morning's guest speakers.

As an added treat visitors and guests had access to free coffee provided by Lydia Burkholder and Rachel Weaver's Sister Brewed Coffee Truck, free cold beverages, and a bag lunch provided by On-A-Roll of Northumberland.

The festivities continued into the afternoon when the house opened to the general public, bringing over a hundred visitors on-site, many of whom had not visited the museum for a decade or more, and creating an enthusiastic launch for the 2026 Museum Season.



## 2026 Museum Season Opened at Priestley House

PHMC celebrated Charter Day on March 8<sup>th</sup> at its museum sites across the Commonwealth. Joseph Priestley House celebrated Charter Day with a continuing celebration of the museum's restoration and reopening and with a birthday party.

Anyone who is a student of Dr. Joseph Priestley knows that Dr. Priestley was born on March 13, 1733 (March 24 following the 1752 calendar correction in Britain to bring the calendar in alignment with the solar year). And so, each Charter Day at Priestley House, we celebrate Dr. Priestley's birthday with refreshments and a cake. This year the magic number is 293!

In addition to the birthday celebration and refreshments, Dr. Priestley, portrayed by Docent Ron Blatchley, performed science experiments in the Pond Building and visitors were able to tour the museum at no charge. Sister Brewed Coffee Truck returned to the museum parking lot for the event as well, offering visitors warm beverages in addition to the cold beverages available in the Pond Building.

Charter Day marks the beginning of the museum season in Pennsylvania. But it also marks Pennsylvania's 345<sup>th</sup> Birthday. Pennsylvania was created when England's King Charles II granted a charter to William Penn in March 1681, often referred to as Pennsylvania's birth certificate." The original document is written on parchment and is preserved by the Pennsylvania State Archives in a high-security vault. To learn more visit [paheritage.org](http://paheritage.org).