

Twelfth Night Returns: A Traditional Event in a Renewed Setting

There was a special excitement in the air as Priestley House hosted its first event of 2026 in the newly restored first floor of the Priestley house. Sixty visitors came out to enjoy the festivities and mark the conclusion of the Christmas season. Even the house seemed happy to have laughter and music fill its rooms after an extended period of restoration that barred visitors from the house's interior.

For the evening of January 4th visitors and volunteers alike stepped back to 1799. Dr. Priestley, portrayed by Priestley reenactor Ron Blatchley, conducted experiments in the Pond Building. Costumed docents greeted visitors in each of the first floor rooms. Violinists Beverley Conrad, Sophie Hackenberg, and Cora Kline provided instrumental music interchangeably with an a capella choir positioned

on the landing leading to the second floor. In the Visitors Center, Priestley House volunteers provided refreshments of hot cider, a variation of Three Kings Cake, and Christmas cookies for the enjoyment of the Priestley House guests.

The evening's decorations and festivities took their cue from the Epiphany celebrations in favor, particularly in British households, in the late 1700s. Lanterns lit the walkways leading to the house and the Pond Building, and candles could be seen at the house windows. The fireplace mantels in the kitchen, drawing room, and library boasted traditional greens and pinecones, a nod to the holiday décor of the late eighteenth century. And for those who found a surprise hidden in their slice of Three Kings Cake, there was either a crown or a jester's hat.



PENNSYLVANIA
THE GREAT AMERICAN GETAWAY



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



Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission

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Postings from Priestley House

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF JOSEPH PRIESTLEY HOUSE

Number 89, Winter 2026

www.joseph-priestley-house.org

570-473-9474

SPECIAL DATES

2026 SEASON

FEBRUARY 22
Priestley Tea Fundraiser
Helix Hall, Mifflinburg
February 22
1-5 pm

MARCH 7
Grand Re-Opening
Special Event for
Members & Descendants
10am- Noon
Special Event
Free to the General Public
1-4 pm

MARCH 8
Charter Day
Free to the General Public
1-4 pm

APRIL 15
America 250PA
Priestley House
Museum Grounds

MAY 16
Native Plant Faire
Museum Grounds
9-4 pm

JUNE 1, 2 & 3
History Camp
Priestley House Museum
9 am-Noon

Check local papers, Facebook,
or joseph-priestley-house.org
for additional details as



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 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!

It's Finally Here! We're Having a Grand Re-Opening!

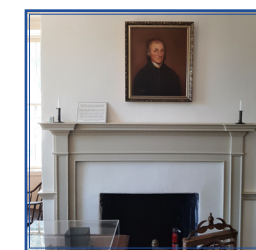


The date is set. The schedule is in place. And the final details are in the works. On March 7th Priestley House will be hosting guests interested in learning about the history of the house and the renovations that kept the museum closed during much of 2025. This issue's insert provides a detailed history and timeline involving the land and buildings that currently comprise the Joseph Priestley House Museum, hopefully inspiring an interest in learning more.

The morning of March 7th is reserved for a special Members and Descendants Event, including speakers, a ribbon cutting, and house tours with docents available to answer questions. Invitations to this special event will be going out in February. Please, note that registration for this event is required.

Beginning at 1 o'clock the house will be open, at no charge, to anyone interested in seeing the newly renovated house prior to Charter Day on March 8th, the regular season opening for the museum. The transformation is amazing, taking visitors one step closer to the house as Dr. Priestley and his family experienced it.

It has been 100 years since the dedication of the Priestley House as a museum. The ribbon cutting on September 5, 1926, coincided with the 50th Anniversary meeting of the American Chemical Society and launched the site as a museum commemorating Dr. Joseph Priestley. Although presentation and interpretation of house museums began as early as the 1850s with Mt. Vernon, it would not be until the early 20th century that research-based preservation and historical interpretation would become a part of the presentation and interpretation process of house museums. Over the past 100 years Priestley House has benefited from archival research as well as archeological research performed on site. Each new discovery has led to change in interpretation or in presentation or both. On March 7th we will be celebrating another milestone in that journey at Joseph Priestley House Museum.



Priestley Tea Fundraiser: New Format, New Venue

If you have attended one of the previous Priestley Tea Fundraisers hosted by the Friends of Joseph Priestley House, you might consider making reservations for this year's event. This 2026 fundraiser sponsored by Friends of Joseph Priestley House is being coordinated by Gable House of Mifflinburg and is being held at Helix Hall at 6 North 4th Street in Mifflinburg from 1-5 pm on February 22nd.

Hosted by Dr. and Mrs. Priestley, who will make an appearance at some point during the afternoon's festivities, participants can enjoy the delicacies for which Gable House is famous, as well a music, photo opportunities, and a five-minute program.

Reservations for sittings are available on-line at joseph-priestley-house.org along with additional information relevant to the event. The cost is \$45.00 per person, but a group of four or more may enter TEAFOR4 at checkout to receive a \$15 discount. All proceeds will benefit the Joseph Priestley House Museum.



Annual Dinner for Members and Volunteers

Once again Whispering Oaks was the backdrop for the Friends of Joseph Priestley House's Annual Member and Volunteer Dinner. The event opened with introductions, including President Dee Casteel's introduction of the new Priestley House Museum Operations Manager, Michael Moyer. Mike would then go on to MC the evening's events.

Following the opening prayer, sung by Dee Casteel, and the catered meal, attendees listened to guest speaker Harry Lewis, share highlights from the 2024 FJPH Tour through England that he arranged in honor of the 250th Anniversary Celebration of Dr. Priestley's discovery of Oxygen at Bowood House. Also present at the annual dinner were Steve and Katie Mertz, who had traveled with Harry on the Priestley Tour.

Before the evening ended, Mike also presented some special awards to deserving volunteers. Ginger Aurand and Steve Klinger each received a Volunteer Award for their respective roles in managing access to the Priestley House during the restoration, and Deborah Bernhisel was awarded the 2025 Priestley House Volunteer of the Year Award for taking on several of the Operations Manager's responsibilities during the transition from Murrrie Zlotziver to Mike Moyer as well as for helping Mike to transition into his role as Operations Manager.



As the meeting drew to a close, Mike outlined some of the big events that will mark 2026 at Priestley House, including a Grand Re-Opening on March 7th following a nearly year-long house restoration project and a special America250PA event on April 15th in celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

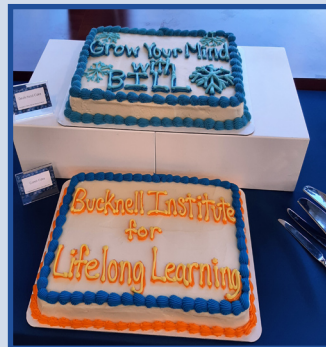
Classes on Joseph Priestley: Theologian, Educator, Natural Philosopher, and Political Rabble-Rouser



Once again Priestley House Museum partnered with the Bucknell Institute for Lifelong Learning (BILL) to teach a course on Dr. Joseph Priestley, for like BILL Priestley House believes in the power to "Grow Your Mind." Dr. Priestley's sojourn in Northumberland is often described as the area's best kept secret, but for the 19 students enrolled in BILL 665 during the fall semester, his presence in Northumberland is no longer a secret. Volunteer docents at the Priestley House introduced students to Dr. Priestley through a visit to his house

and sessions on his life in England, his science, his connections to the various members of the Lunar Society, and his legacy to Northumberland and the surrounding area through his descendants. The Priestley Chapel introduced students to Unitarianism and the Priestley Chapel, a legacy built by Dr. Priestley's grandson and maintained by his descendants until the early 20th century.

The six-session program has become a popular part of BILL's Fall Course Schedule. In fact one student wrote in an evaluation, "[I]t was everything I had hoped for and more! What I enjoyed most in this course was the enthusiasm and the passion that the presenters bring to 'all things Joseph Priestley.'"



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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

FJPH Represented on Semiquincentennial Locomotive's Maiden Voyage



On December 22nd the North Shore Railroad unveiled NSHR 2238. This Semiquincentennial locomotive was completely hand-painted by local artist Pedro Reyes, of Sunbury. His work brought to life a vision conceived by North Shore employees Diana Williams and Loni Martz Briner. It includes scenes of George Washington Crossing the Delaware, the Declaration of Independence, the Liberty Bell, a bald eagle, the American flag, the Statue of Liberty, Paul Revere's lantern, fireworks, the Mayham Tower, and so much more.

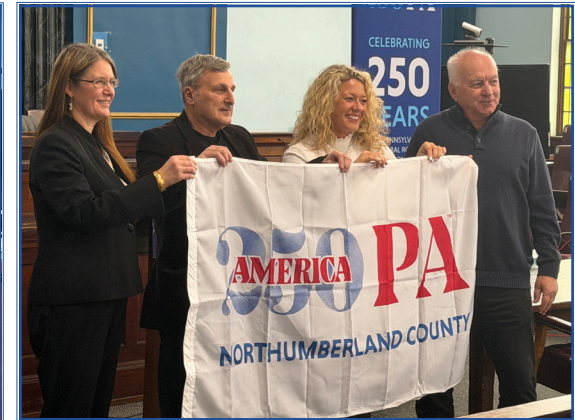
Operations Manager Mike Moyer was among the dignitaries who traveled on NSHR 2238's maiden voyage to Danville. Throughout 2026 train spotters and history buffs alike are encouraged to watch for opportunities to witness and photograph the locomotive at work as it passes by the Priestley House.

America 250PA Northumberland Kick-Off Event at Courthouse

Joseph Priestley was a strong supporter of the American Revolution. His publication *Essay on the First Principles of Government* appeared in American homes, including Thomas Jefferson's, as the conflict between Britain and her colonies began to ignite. It seems only fitting then that Joseph Priestley House should sponsor the January 21st Northumberland County Kick-Off Event for America250PA.

Dignitaries and community members gathered in Courtroom #2 of the Northumberland County Courthouse to learn more about the celebrations planned throughout the Commonwealth during the months leading up to July 4, 2026. There were speeches. There was food. There was swag. And there was an opportunity to talk to the people both locally and across the state involved in planning the celebrations and events occurring locally. America250PA Executive Director Cassandra Coleman, PA Senator Linda Schlegel-Culver, and PA Representative Michael Stender all spoke during the event, highlighting the rich history of Northumberland County, emphasizing the important role Pennsylvania played in the events of 1776, and celebrating community involvement in the special events planned statewide.

One of those events will occur in the Borough of Northumberland on the campus of the Joseph Priestley House. On April 15th a America250PA Mobile Museum will be on site at Priestley House. The museum will also be open to visitors that day with living history displays throughout the house linking Priestley with people and ideals directly connected to the American Revolution. And to round out the day, the Northumberland County Historical Society will be on-site in the Pond Building sharing information about Northumberland County's involvement in the events of 1776.



Special Gifts & Donations to Priestley House

Dee Casteel
 Rev. Carl Eisenhart
 Alan & Mary Hacknberg
 Joseph Leverich
 Charles & Melissa Mahler
 Carla Mulford
 Robert & Neta Sacks
 Eric & Barbara Schmidt
 Margaret Weirick
 Bill Widing

Research Library Approved

The FJPH Board, at their November meeting, approved the creation of a Research Library on the second floor of the museum. Currently used for storage, the room also contains files and books relevant to Joseph Priestley and to the museum.

Work has begun to remove non-library related materials from the room and to shift research related materials and filing cabinets from other areas of the museum into the Research Library.

The project itself is broken into multiple phases and is expected to take several years to complete. It will include cataloging all of the on-site research materials in the Joseph Priestley House collection as well as building an on-line searchable archive for researchers who are unable to complete in-person research.