



Celebrating 250 Years

It's the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence! All across the country there will be celebrations. Here in Rush County, usual events will follow the semiquincentennial theme with some additions.

At the Gowdy House Museum, a semiquincentennial tree was placed on display for the Festival of Trees in December, 2025. The tree will remain up through December of 2026. It has a variety of adornments representing historic events.

The Love Community Center (LLC) will host a traveling exhibition from the Smithsonian Institute. The exhibit is titled *Voices and Votes: Democracy in America*. The Love Center applied for this opportunity and is one of only 7 Indiana communities selected. The display will feature photos, videos, multimedia interactivities, plus historical objects that have shaped our democracy. The exhibit will run from July 8-August 16, 2026.

A co-exhibit dedicated to Wendall Willkie will also be at the Love Center in the Rushville Library. Artifacts will be on loan from the Rush County Historical Society.

The Rushville Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution are bringing the Global War on Terrorism and Cost of Freedom Tribute to Rushville on September 9-13 at the Rush County Fairgrounds.

For those willing to travel a bit out of town, Indiana University has a campus-wide "civic festival" planned during the spring and summer semesters. The highlight will be a special exhibit of the "Dunlap Broadside," a copy of the declaration produced on the evening of July 4, 1776. Only 26 are known to exist and IU owns one of only 3 west of the Alleghenies. The exhibit will be in the Lilly Library at the Bloomington campus February to July 2026.



Rush County Historical Society Board Members

Kristen Hass President, Julie Newhouse V. President, Barb Drake Secretary, Maria Bridges Treasurer

Ron Jarman, Carol Holzback, Charlie Fields, Carol Yager, David Thompson

Many thanks to Lou Starkey and Bob Bridges for their years of service. They retired from the board in December, 2025.

Corporate Sponsors

Please extend your appreciation to these corporate sponsors of Rush County Historical Society.

Pizza King of Rushville	Hoosier Pallet	
Citizens State Bank	Moster Mortuary	Custer Electric
Yaryan Eye Center	Rushville Elks	Douglas Body Shop
Rushville Automotive	Gettinger Meats	Top Dog Kennel
	Hoel Roofing	Rushville Eagles

Calendar Events

April 9	Spring Member Dinner, 6 p.m.
May 3	Open House, 2-4 p.m.
May 16	Work Day at museum, 9 a.m.-noon
June 7	Open House, 2-4 p.m.
June 28-July 4	Rush County Fair RCHS booth open 5-9 p.m. in Community Bldg.
July 4	Open House, after parade
Aug. 2	Open House, 2-4 p.m.
Aug. 15	Work Day at museum, 9 a.m.-noon

Rushville's Colonial House Hotel

Historic Artifact Returns to Rushville

A beautiful old 18th century dresser from the Colonial Hotel has returned to Rushville. Last December the Museum received an e-mail asking if we would be interested in the historic dresser; and of course we were very interested. Now in Rushville, most of us are familiar with the Durbin Hotel and its history of being the National Campaign Headquarters for the Willkie Presidential Run. But we were not familiar with the Colonial Hotel and after some research, we found it in the 1939 Business Directory. The hotel was located at 332 N. Morgan Street which is just North of the old city library. The hotel was owned by two sisters Elsie Pittman and Jennie Worthington. Jennie's husband, John, worked at the Post Office and was also a florist. Ed Pittman, Elsie's husband, owned the old Pittman Pharmacy in downtown Rushville.



The marble-top dresser now sits upstairs in our Newby Room. It was donated by Betsy Hiller of Wheaton, Illinois and belonged to her Grandmother, Elsie Pitman, and her Aunt Jennie Worthington. It remained in the family all these years until it was gifted to the Museum in December. Oh, and by the way, if you had wanted to call the Colonial Hotel and make a reservation in 1939 the phone number was 2603.

Submitted by Lou Starkey

Life 250 Years Ago-Cities

PHILADELPHIA

In 1776, Philadelphia was the most populated city in the colonies, with an estimated 30,000 residents. As part of William Penn's colony, the promise of religious freedom attracted a variety of people. Situated between the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers, the ports of Philadelphia secured the city as a global trading hub. The taxation policies which hurt Boston and New York had little impact on Philadelphia as its main exports were grains and wheat. Nonetheless, thinkers such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine increased the city's opposition against the British. In 1774, Philadelphia would host the First Continental Congress and in 1776 the Declaration of Independence would be signed in the city.



NEW YORK

By 1770, New York had a population of around 18,000 residents. The city had a diverse population of Europeans which included Irish, French, and German residents. The city was primarily situated on present-day Manhattan Island. Aside from its vibrant shipping ports, the city was also home to many artisans and free thinkers. Following the economic recession after the Seven Year's War, taxation acts from the British Parliament further exacerbated New York's economy. Having successfully protested and repealed the Stamp Act in 1766, the city became a frequent hotbed for continued protests before the Revolution.

BOSTON

Boston had an estimated population of 16,000 residents in 1770. As the largest city in New England, it was known for its trade, shipbuilding, and rope manufacturing industries. By the mid-18th century, Harvard College was known as a leading producer of Boston's politicians and businessmen. Leading up to the Revolution, however, Boston would find itself in poorer economic conditions than New York and Philadelphia. After the Boston Tea Party in 1773, the British Parliament passed the Coercive (or Intolerable) Acts, which included a commercial blockade in Boston's harbor and [limitations on self-governance](#).

CHARLESTON

Charleston had a population of around 11,000 residents and was the largest city in the Southern colonies. Charleston's ports relied heavily on the Transatlantic Slave Trade and by 1770 half of its population was comprised of enslaved Black people. Uprisings from enslaved populations were a concern for Charleston's white population. As the wealthiest city following Philadelphia, the port city prospered from the shipping of rice and indigo cultivated on surrounding plantations. Leading up to 1776, Charleston held its own protest against Britain's tea tax just nine days before Boston in 1773.

Life 250 Years Ago-Food & News

FOOD

Cultural beliefs and traditions influenced what the day-to-day diet would consist of for someone living in the colonies. The cuisine of Indigenous populations who still resided in these regions would have been impacted by the entrance of new crops and livestock such as sheep and wheat. However, they retained a strong connection to the traditional recipes and ingredients that had been passed down for generations. For example, the tribes of the Haudenosaunee/Iroquois Confederacy relied on the “Three Sisters” which consisted of corn, beans, and squash. These three crops were planted together due to their symbiotic relationship which resulted in high yields.



European immigrants brought their own traditional recipes from various countries across the continent.

For example, German settlers in South Carolina had developed a palette for sweet-and-sour flavors that were similar to the recipes from home. By 1776, they had created a mustard-based barbecue sauce that continues to be one of the most popular in the state. After nearly 250 years, it can be easy to take for granted the contributions of so many groups who were present that brought their cuisines while also mixing together to create new recipes and what many today simply overlook as “American” cuisine.



NEWSPAPERS

By 1775, there were roughly 35 newspapers in the colonies. These papers served as a centralized form of communication for people to exchange announcements, poems, and essays. Newspapers were also produced in German given the size of their immigrant communities.

Most papers published on a weekly or fortnightly basis. The process of making a newspaper was time-consuming and, on average, would take up to 25 hours to typeset a four-page issue. Papers had tightly-placed columns and headings. Prior to the Revolutionary War, newspapers had an average circulation of 600-700 copies per issue. However, during the events of the Revolutionary War, many newspapers increased their circulation to an average 2500 copies per issue.

Nearby Metamora

The town of Metamora was named after the popular 1829 play, *Metamora*, or *The Last of the Wampanoags*. It takes place in Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1677 and tells a fictionalized version of the story of Metacom (called King Philip by the colonists), leader of the local Wampanoag tribe.

The Whitewater Canal running through Metamora was built in the 1830's, opening the Whitewater River valley for commerce and industry. The canal provided access to markets for agricultural products and supplied hydraulic power for mills and factories that made flour, lumber, paper, and more.

While canals were intended to enhance transportation and economic growth, they ultimately contributed to the state's financial decline. The high cost of construction and flooding contributed to the end of commercial boat traffic by the 1860's.

A major step has been taken toward restoring and preserving the Whitewater Canal State Historic Site, with the Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites announcing it has secured a \$7 million matching grant through the state's Regional Economic and Acceleration Development Initiative (READI) 2.0 program. This grant pairs with \$7 million in state-allocated funds to create a \$14 million investment. Work will focus on the Duck Creek Aqueduct, the Laurel Feeder Dam, Lock 24, and the canal corridor connecting those structures.

Duck Creek Aqueduct is the nation's only surviving wooden aqueduct. Duck Creek Aqueduct carries the Whitewater Canal over Duck Creek in Metamora. The aqueduct, built in 1846, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places and designated a National Historic Landmark in 2014.



Dues are Due

All renewals are due in January of each calendar year. Individual reminders will not be sent. Please renew your membership and ask a friend to join.

There are different levels of family membership in the Rush County Historical Society:

Laughlin Family Level \$25 - Subscription to the newsletter & discounts on programming fees.

William B. Laughlin was the founding father of Rushville who donated 75 acres of land that would become Rushville, the county seat.

Newby Family Level \$50 - Subscription to the newsletter & discounts on programming fees.

Sarah Newby was from an early Ripley Township Quaker family whose home was on the underground railroad. Upon her death, Sarah donated her personal property to the Historical Society. Proceeds from the sale of her farm provided an endowment for the Society.

Arnold Family Level \$100 - All of the above plus one complimentary ticket to the fall membership dinner.

Dr. John Arnold was the first settler to purchase land in what would become Rush County. He also developed and chronicled the early history of the county.

Gowdy Family Level \$250 - All of the prior level benefits plus two complimentary tickets to the annual fall and spring membership dinners.

John Gowdy was appointed by President McKinley to serve as Consul-General to Paris. The Gowdy house was donated and became the home of the Rush County Museum.

Kennedy Family Level \$350 - All prior level benefits plus two complimentary tickets to the annual fall and spring membership dinners.

The **Kennedy** family of bridge builders lived, died, and are buried in Rush County. The Kennedy family constructed more than 50 bridges throughout the Midwest. There are six original and/or rebuilt Kennedy bridges that remain in Rush County.

Willkie Family Level \$500 - All prior level subscriptions, invitations and dinner tickets.

Wendell L. Willkie was the Republican dark horse candidate for President in 1940. Willkie named Rushville as his national campaign headquarters

Your check should be made payable to the Rush County Historical Society.

Send to: Rush County Historical Society Museum, P.O. Box 302, Rushville, Indiana 46173

Name: _____ [] Laughlin Family Level \$25
[] Newby Family Level \$50
Address: _____ [] Arnold Family Level \$100
[] Gowdy Family Level \$250
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ [] Kennedy Family Level \$350
[] Willkie Family Level \$500
Phone: (____) _____ - _____ E-mail: _____

The Rush County Historical Society is a 501(c)3 organization, and all gifts are deductible in the United States as allowed by law.



Gowdy House Museum Hours



The Gowdy House Museum is open every Monday and Thursday morning from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. Open Houses are scheduled the first Sunday of each month from May through November from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. Tours, meetings, and other special times can be requested by contacting the museum at (765) 932-2492



Rush County Historical Society

Gowdy House Museum

P.O. Box 302
619 N. Perkins St.
Rushville, IN 46173
(765) 932-2492

“Come – be a part of history!”

Web Page: www.rushcountyhistory.org

Email Address: rushhistorical@gmail.com