



THE ESCAPE OF JOHN CHAMPE



Guidon of the U.S. Light Dragoons



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# THE CIPHER

## SGT MAJ JOHN CHAMPE CHAPTER

VIRGINIA SOCIETY SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

### FEBRUARY 2026

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#### PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Highlights for February were the Virginia Society Annual Meeting at Glen Allen, VA February 6-7 and the George Washington birthday parade in Alexandria. on February 14. The George Washington parade will be featured in an article later in this newsletter. There are two take away's from the annual meeting I want to bring to the attention of our Compatriots. First is our very own Kenneth Bonner Jr. was installed as 1st Vice President. That means he will be the Virginia Society president starting in February 2027. Second, Virginia Society President Darrin Schmidt published his "Presidential Initiatives" in a video viewable at: <https://www.virginiasar.org/presidents-message> You must log-in the Virginia SAR website to view the video. His initiatives include: **"Conduct a Declaration of Independence event – reading, etc.. Bonus points for coordinating an SAR marker about the Declaration, a site where it was read, its impact, etc.."** Our chapter is coordinating the purchase, installation and dedication of a plaque commemorating the 1st public reading of the Declaration in Virginia on August 12, 1776. Our event will be held on Saturday August 15. In addition, we have multiple readings of the Declaration on our Calendar. We are going to be busy.

# VIRGINIA SAR PRESIDENTIAL INITIATIVES

**President Darrin Schmidt, FEB 2026-FEB 2027**

## WITNESS TO HISTORY

This initiative calls each compatriot to recognize that we are living through a defining moment in America's story — a moment that invites us not only to remember the past, but to actively preserve it, interpret it, and share it with the generations who will follow. Through expanded historical engagement, strengthened community partnerships, and a revitalized focus on education and public service, “**Witness to History**” challenges the Virginia Society to stand as visible, credible stewards of the American Revolution's enduring ideals.

### Witness to History Initiative #1: Engage the Community

- Advertise to and invite members of the community (outside of SAR, DAR, and C.A.R.) to attend SAR events – social media, newspapers, flyers, TV. Be Creative!!
- Make an impression on those that attend your events. Educate them on the mission of the SAR and the purpose of the event.
- Publicize the impact of your event – publish awards and results of contests in the same media outlets.
- Communicate to [sarwitnessstohistory@gmail.com](mailto:sarwitnessstohistory@gmail.com). pictures, description, and impact of the event outside of the SAR/DAR/C.A.R

### Witness to History Initiative #2: Support America 250 Events

- Conduct a Declaration of Independence event – reading, etc.. Bonus points for coordinating an SAR marker about the Declaration, a site where it was read, its impact, etc..
- Complete Virginia's Road to Revolution by attending the Battle of Gwynn's Island
- Commemorate the Anniversary of the signing of the Virginia Declaration of Rights

### Witness to History Initiative #3: Historic Endview Event

- Details are TBD, but support the dedication of an interpretive sign at Endview Plantation in Newport News
- Make plans for enjoying some time at a place that was literally a Witness To History

## President's Community Challenge

- Use outreach awards and events as recruitment and public relations,
- Present awards in front of the recipient's peer group! Use school assemblies to recognize youth and teacher awardees, Scout Courts of Honor to recognize Eagle Scouts,
- Your audience may not be familiar with SAR - Use the opportunity to educate!
- 

### President's Challenge Awards for:

- External Collaboration with Community Participants
- Exceptional Media Efforts
- New initiatives
- Quality Programming
- 

### Recognition for broad community participation! Engage!

View the President's video message at: <https://www.virginiasar.org/presidents-message>

You must log-in to the Virginia SAR website to view the message.

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS MARCH-MAY 2026

### Changes noted in RED

**March 22, SMJC Chapter Meeting.** 2:00pm, Loudoun Museum, 16 Loudoun Street, SW, Leesburg. Guest speaker Chris Yohn: "History of the Revolution on the Pennsylvania frontier"

**March 28, Commemoration of Patriot John Orr** 10:30am. SMJC Color Guard presents colors in support of Lanes Mill Chapter DAR. St. John's Episcopal Church Cemetery, 5649 mt. Gilead Road, Centreville, VA

**March 28. "Revolutionary Stories: Female Patriots of Loudoun County" by Sherryl Belinsky.** 2:00pm Loudoun Museum, 16 Loudoun Street SE, Leesburg.

**March 29, 1:00pm, SMJC CHAPTER SIGNATURE EVENT:** National Vietnam Day Commemoration at Loudoun County Courthouse Vietnam Memorial. Partner with VFW-1177 and American Legion Memorial Post 2001

**APRIL 18, 11:00am SMJC SIGNATURE EVENT** Commemoration of John Champe at the Champe Farm Memorial Obelisk, also Commemoration of the Battle of Lexington & Concord

**May 16, 11:00am. SMJC Chapter Meeting.** Commemoration of the Accomplishments of the 5<sup>th</sup> Virginia Convention + **250<sup>th</sup> anniversary** of the start of the drafting of the Declaration of Independence. Loudoun County Courthouse

**May 23, Saturday, all day. The Road to Independence Historical Encampment at Franklin Regional Park**

## HISTORIAN'S CORNER



### **Why Did America Invade Canada in 1775?**

**By: David Welker, SMJC Historian**

By March 1776, 250 years ago this month, the United States' first major offensive military operation was over and it had been a spectacular failure. But why did Congress direct American forces to invade Canada in the first place?

Long before the July 4, 1776 Declaration of Independence was even been conceived, the Continental Congress had sought to boldly build on both April 1775's first victory over British forces at Concord and Benedict Arnold and Ethan Allen's bloodless seizure of formerly British Fort Ticonderoga and its vital cannon. With Washington holding British forces under General Gage bottled up in Boston, Congress on June 27, 1775 authorized invading British-controlled Canada.

Congress' plan directed New York's Major General Philip J. Schuyler, commanding the Northern Department, and his second-in-command Brigadier General Richard Montgomery to lead their forces north to "take possession of St. John [Saint Jean], Montreal, and any other parts of the country" if "it will not be disagreeable to the Canadians."

General Washington supported this plan but detached a force from his own command before Boston to improve Schuyler's chances for success, directing a second American strike, on nearby Quebec City. To lead this force Washington selected the proven leader and fighter Brigadier General Benedict Arnold, who would direct his light command overland and up rivers through the rough wilderness of what today is the State of Maine. Joining Arnold were the Virginians of Captain Daniel Morgan and his rifle company.

Despite a slow start, following a

+ 48-day siege Schuyler and Montgomery took Canada's Saint Jean on November 3, 1775 and 10 days later marched unopposed into Montreal. This left only Quebec City in British hands.

Unfortunately, Arnold's advance over the longer wilderness route was plagued by misjudgment, bad luck, and suffering that had whittled his 1,100-man force nearly in half by the time it crossed the St. Lawrence River to approach Quebec City on November 13. Joined by 300 Patriot reinforcements under Montgomery, marching from Montreal, the attack on December 31, 1775 unraveled almost at once. Inaccurate intelligence led Arnold and Montgomery to attack the strongest part of the British fortifications, which cost Montgomery his life and left Arnold wounded. Virginia's Daniel Morgan assumed command, but the die was cast and amidst a snowstorm they surrendered. Those Patriots not captured retreated with Arnold and sat freezing on the nearby Plains of Abraham. After losing more men to smallpox, poor supplies, and desertion, and with a British attack looming, in mid-June 1776 General Arnold began the retreat to Patriot-controlled Ft. Ticonderoga.



Although the Canadian Campaign ended in 1776 in failure, it had been conceived in mid-1776 with solid, reasonable goals in mind.

First, at that time it seemed likely French-speaking Habitants were interested in their own independence from the crown. From May to June 1775 Congress had dispatched letters in both English and French to Britain's other North American colonies, hoping they would join the Patriot cause. French-speaking Quebec, in particular, seemed ripe for this because Habitant tenant farmers by then realized that the 1774 Quebec Act had in truth restored them to a feudal state of near-slavery, in order to buy the support of their social "betters" who owned the land. Moreover, intelligence reports from Quebec suggested the timing was right, reporting that the Habitants were anxiously awaiting an American military incursion to spark their own rebellion to the British crown. The prospect of adding Quebec as a "14<sup>th</sup> Colony" in the new American Union had great appeal to Congress.

Secondly, additional intelligence suggested that Quebec's Royal Governor General Sir Guy Carlton was planning to attack the American northern frontier and was massing troops and ships at Saint Jean on the Richelieu River—the water gateway to New York's Lake Champlain—for this purpose. Striking Carlton's force first made good operational military sense.

Finally, attacking Canada made strategic military sense. Denying the British control of Quebec would frustrate, if not prevent, their staging troops in the province before moving south down Lake Champlain to access the North (Hudson) River, a corridor down which British attackers could move south to split the northern colonies in two. Making Quebec, instead of Massachusetts, a battlefield would also buy the rebellious colonies time to organize, equip, and train their new, still-forming military forces. Key to such Patriot military gains was moving quickly, exploiting Royal Governor Carlton's small number of troops before British enforcements—already at sea—could arrive.

Despite such well-thought-out, clear objectives, Patriot inexperience, misjudgments, and bad luck had resulted in the Canada Campaign's failure. Even so, Patriots at all levels—Congress, Washington and his subordinate officers, even the men in ranks—had learned much from this effort. In particular, it was obvious that the price of independence was going to be costly and that it would take perseverance to secure the freedom they sought.

Although Americans today celebrate 1776 as a glorious year of independence, the reality of the Canadian Campaign's results show just how much the new nation had to overcome to reach that point.

# YOUTH & Education PROGRAMS

## February 24, Middle School Brochure Contest Awards

Willard Middle School in Aldie submitted 114 brochures for this year’s Contest. Selection of top brochures was difficult because the quality of brochures was outstanding. First place went to Ineya Zaman. She received a check for \$150 and a certificate. Her Brochure was entered in the VASSAR contest. Second place went to Fiori Helebo. She received a check for \$100 and a certificate. Third place went to Abigail Mayberry. She received a \$75 check and a certificate.

**Elementary School Poster Contest.** SMJC partnered with the George Washington Chapter to select a poster we will submit to the VASSAR Poster Contest. Balls Bluff Elementary School students created the posters. Judging of posters for the VASSAR Contest will be in late June 2026. Awards will be presented in June.

**High School ESSAY Contest.** This year SMJC Chapter received two essays. We selected the essay submitted by a student from Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology as our winner. An awards presentation is pending. The second place winner, Saadya Bojja from Stone Bridge High School elected to have her certificate mailed rather than have it presented in person.

# SUPPORT OF DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

## February 21, George Washington Birthday Luncheon, Richmond, VA

Ken Bonner accompanied his wife, Anita to a luncheon commemorating the birthday of George Washington, First President of the United States, and Commander in Chief of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War.



1st place: Ineya Zaman with Barry Schwoerer



2nd place: Fiori Helebo with Barry Schwoerer



3rd Place: Abigail Mayberry with Barry Schwoerer

## VETERAN SUPPORT

### March 2, Martinsburg Veterans Medical Center, Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service Committee

Barry Schwoerer, Martin Gainey, and Karla Gainey attended the quarterly Committee meeting at the VA Medical Center in Martinsburg, WV. More information forthcoming on these items of interest:

- Toys for Tots in October. Donations encouraged.
- Sweats for Vets-Collection of sweat shirts and sweat pants for veterans. Donations encouraged.
- May 24 National Veterans Awareness Motorcycle Ride ending at the VA Medical Center with a lunch and visit with veterans
- Donations for the annual Christmas needs list.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

### February 14, George Washington Birthday parade

Chapter Compatriots Ken Bonner, Mark Sink, Warner Workman and Steve Van Deusen participated in the parade in old town Alexandria. Warner Workman's float decorated with Multiple graphics involving George Washington was entered. Ken Bonner marched with the SAR Color Guard carrying the SAR 250 flag. Grand Marshalls were National SAR President General Michael Elston and National DAR President General Jennie Sebastian Storage. Both Elston and Storage are members of chapters in Virginia.



## EVENTS SPONSORED BY OTHER CHAPTERS

### February 24, Commemoration of the Unknown Rev War Soldier

Ken Bonner and Mark Sink participated in the annual commemoration of the Unknown Revolutionary War Soldier at the Old Presbyterian meeting House in Alexandria, VA. Mark Sink presented the Chapter wreath, and both Bonner and Sink participated in color Guard. The Kate Waller Chapter Daughters of the American Revolution and George Washington Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution co-sponsored the commemoration. The Soldier was discovered when work was being done at a different church in 1826. He was re-buried with full military honors and now rests under a memorial dedicated in 1929.



## OTHER EVENTS

### February 28. Chartering of a new VASSAR Chapter

On Saturday, February 28, The Virginia Society Sons of the American Revolution chartered Chapter #31 at a ceremony in the Yorktown Museum of the American Revolution. The Abraham Brown Chapter is named after free African American Patriot Abraham Brown who lived in Charles City County, Virginia during the Revolution. Patriot Brown provided supplies to the Continental Army.

Abraham Brown's 5th Great Grandson, Kevin Brown, was installed as the first President of the new Chapter. Kevin's sons Adam and Lamont are charter members. President Brown took an emotional step by obtaining a Memorial Membership in SAR for his Father Algenon Brown. A memorial membership is available for deceased relatives of SAR members for the same patriot ancestor.

Patriot Abraham Brown was a farmer in Charles City County. He was born about 1745 in Virginia. He married Sarah, maiden name unknown, and had at least two sons, John and Abraham Jr. Patriot Brown died in Charles City County, VA before June 17, 1790.

The Abraham Brown chapter is the first Virginia SAR Chapter named for an African-American Patriot. The Chapter will serve Charles City County and Ken County.

Ken Bonner Jr. and Barry Schwoerer are charter members of the new Chapter. As Charter members they will provide experience and advise as the new Chapter gets up and running



**L-R: Ken Bonner, Kevin Brown, Barry Schwoerer**

## **February 28, Commemoration of James Armistead Lafayette**

James Armistead Lafayette and many patriots of the Tidewater region of Virginia were commemorated as part of Black History month at the museum of the American Revolution in Yorktown. Four branches of descendants of the Patriot gave their stories about how they discovered their ancestry to famous patriot James Armistead Lafayette. Re-enactor Steven Seals gave a short talk about the Patriot.

James Armistead Lafayette was an enslaved African American who was taught to read and write by his owner. When the Revolutionary War broke out and Virginia Royal Governor Dunmore offered emancipation to slaves who served for the British Army, James volunteered to serve in the Continental Army under the Marquis de Lafayette. He became a double agent, posing as a runaway slave and befriendng traitor Benedict Arnold during Arnold's Virginia Campaign. He gathered critical intelligence about British plans, troop numbers, troop movements and locations of supplies. This information was delivered to Lafayette. James was so impressed by the young Frenchman he added Lafayette to his name.

Research continues to identify African American Patriots who fought in the Revolutionary War. In the counties in and around Yorktown. James Armistead Lafayette was one of thirty-four African American Patriots in New Kent County, thirty-five African American patriots from Charles City County, Eleven African American Patriots from James City County, nineteen African American Patriots from York County, twenty-one African American Patriots from King William County, and, Seven African American Patriots were from Gloucester County.

SMJC Compatriots Ken Bonner and Barry Schwoerer attended the commemoration.



**Re-enactor Steven Sills as James Armistead Lafayette**

## **Registrar's Corner, J. Mike Watson**



Two new members were registered in February. Please welcome Benjamin Beasley and junior member Landon Mertel. We continue to add prospective new members to our portfolio. It appears there is growing interest in joining SAR with this year being the 250th anniversary of the United States of America.

# WHAT DO WE DO?

The Virginia Society of the Sons of the American Revolution (Virginia SAR) is dedicated to preserving the legacy of the American Revolution, honoring our patriots, and inspiring future generations through education and community outreach.

- **Preserve History:** safeguarding monuments, archives, and stories of our nation's founding
- **Educate Youth:** scholarships, contests, and classroom resources that bring history to life
- **Honor Patriots:** ceremonies and memorials that recognize the sacrifices of those who fought for independence



## FLAG PROGRAMS

### FLAG RETIREMENT

The chapter participates in Flag Retirement programs by donating flags to organizations that hold formal flag retirement events. Our flag is retired when it is worn, torn or soiled. If the flag is made of natural fiber (cotton) it is burned. If it is made of synthetic fiber the canton (Field of stars) is removed and the stripes cut into pieces. The remnants may then be disposed of as trash.

Compatriots who participate in a flag retirement receive a certificate.

On Flag Day, June 14, our chapter joins the Reverend John Marks Society Children of The American Revolution to formally retire flags. Our chapter donates large bags of flags to the event. If you have a flag to be retired you may bring it to a chapter meeting or event. Any of our officers will take the flag and add it to the collection of flags to be retired. Or, you may come to the Flag Retirement on June 14.

**FLAG RECOGNITION** If a business, school, Government Building, or citizen properly displays and cares for the Flag of the United States they are eligible for a Flag Certificate. Proper display means the flag is flown only between dawn and dusk, or is illuminated at night. Proper care of the flag means it is replaced when worn, torn, or soiled. We present a Certificate and hold a short ceremony when we recognize proper display and care of our flag. If you identify a candidate for award of a Flag certificate notify any of our chapter officers. If you properly display and maintain the Flag, let us know so we can present a Flag Certificate, take photographs, and highlight the presentation in an article in a local newspaper.

*We need a compatriot to be our Flag Program Chairman*

**FLAG PROTOCOL.** One of the jobs of our color Guard Commander, and all Color Guard members, is the proper display and carriage of the Flag of the United States. Our flag takes precedence over every other flag at an event. It is always carried and displayed higher than other flags, is always first in a line of flags, and is displayed on the left when viewed by an audience. Our Color Guard attends training sessions called "COLOR GUARD WORKSHOPS" where Flag Protocol is part of the training.

## **SMJC Chapter highlighted in SAR Magazine**

### **SAR Magazine, Winter 2025-2026, Vol.120. No.3, pg. 46**

Please view the chapter's article on our participation in the National Navy-USMC 250th Birthday parade in Philadelphia on October 13, 2025.

In the Williamsburg Chapter article, chapter President Schwoerer is pictured as part of a Color Guard for the reinterment of President James Monroe's daughter, Eliza at Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond,

On page 45, for the Col. James Wood II Chapter, SMJC Compatriot Steve Van Deuesen is pictured as part of the color guard for the marking of the grave for Patriot Col. Meredith Helm.

The Chapter is encouraged to submit articles to SAR Magazine, SAR Colorguardsman Magazine, and the Virginia SAR Blog.