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THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION INSTITUTE

News, Events, and Commentary  
from the American Revolution Institute  
of the Society of the Cincinnati

today

April 1, 2024

[Calendar of Events](#)

### *Our Featured Story - An Artillery Officer's Legacy*



One of the most recent gifts for the Institute's collections is an extraordinary series of objects related to William Perkins of Boston, Massachusetts, an artillery officer during the Revolutionary War and original member of the Society of the Cincinnati. The collection has been generously donated by John F. Perkins, who currently represents his ancestor in the Massachusetts Society. William Perkins (1741-1802) trained as an artillery officer before the Revolution as a member of the artillery unit of the Boston militia, known as Paddock's Artillery Company. Perkins joined the revolutionary cause in May 1775 as a lieutenant in Richard Gridley's regiment of Massachusetts artillery and, just a month later, fought in the Battle of Bunker Hill. By New Year's Day of 1776, Perkins was commissioned a captain in the Continental Artillery Regiment commanded by Col. Henry Knox and, later that year, participated in the unsuccessful defense of New York City. Captain Perkins spent the winter of 1777-1778 at Valley Forge with the Third Continental Artillery Regiment. After participating in the Rhode Island campaign in 1778, Perkins was promoted to major and given command of the army's

military stores at Providence. He was posted at West Point when the war ended.

The collection features a portrait of William Perkins in uniform dated "Boston 1778," the year he was promoted to major, and three items related to his membership in the Society of the Cincinnati. His Society Eagle insignia was made by Nicolas Jean Francastel and Claude Jean Autran Duval in Paris, France, in 1784 as one of 140 Eagles that Pierre L'Enfant commissioned on speculation to sell when he returned to the U.S.—and is the first example of this Eagle type to join our collections. Perkins' parchment diploma of membership in the Society, dated May 5, 1784, was signed by President General George Washington and Secretary General Henry Knox. And an early Federal-period sword and scabbard are inscribed as presented to Major Perkins from the Society.

We appreciate the respect shown for historic preservation by John F. Perkins, both for his generous gift-

in-kind of these rare items as well as for the generations of safekeeping that he and his ancestors gave to this special collection. The family have been fine stewards for the memory of Major William Perkins.

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## ***This Month in Revolutionary History - The Battle of the Saintes***



"We are enveloped in darkness; and no man, I believe can foretell all the consequences which will result from the naval action." A despondent George Washington wrote these words after receiving the news of the French defeat at the Battle of the Saintes on April 12, 1782.

By the early spring of 1782, Admiral François Joseph Paul, comte de Grasse, was riding high following the previous year's stirring successes at the Battle of the Chesapeake and the Siege of Yorktown. Back in the Caribbean and now in command of 35 ships of the line and 6,500 soldiers, de Grasse planned to sail to Hispaniola to link up with a Spanish force of 12 ships of the line and 15,000 soldiers to strike Britain's most valuable Caribbean possession, Jamaica.

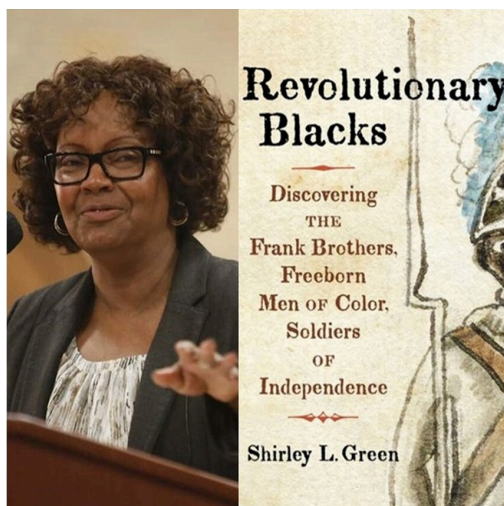
On April 12, in an area of open ocean north of Dominica and southwest of the Îles de Saintes, Admiral Sir George Brydges Rodney, commanding a British fleet of thirty-six ships, forced de Grasse and the French into action. At just past nine o'clock that morning, a change in the wind caused the French ships to fall out of formation and gaps to form in their line. Rodney seized the opportunity and had his flagship, *Formidable*, make for such a gap. Five British ships followed their admiral and, along the French line, additional British ships mirrored this strategy causing the French forces to be fractured into three pieces.

The aggressive British tactics won the day, and five French ships including the flagship, *Ville de Paris*, had been captured, while no British ships were lost. Conservative estimates put the French casualties at approximately three thousand sailors and men; the British, one third that. Rodney had foiled the Franco-Spanish plan to seize Jamaica and, in doing so, showed that the British were still a formidable force. Consequently, the British were able to negotiate more preferable terms than would have been expected in the wake of the Yorktown surrender.

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## **EVENTS**

### ***Exploring Black Participation in the American Revolution***



Join us on Tuesday, April 16 at 6:30 p.m. for an author's talk featuring Shirley Green, adjunct professor of history at the University of Toledo and Bowling Green State University, discussing her recent book, *Revolutionary Blacks: Discovering the Frank Brothers, Freeborn Men of Color, Soldiers of Independence*.

Through the experiences of William and Benjamin Frank, who enlisted in the Second Rhode Island Regiment of the Continental Army during the American Revolution, Dr. Green focuses our attention on the Black experience during the American Revolution by underscoring the significant distinction between free Blacks in military service and those who had been enslaved, and how they responded in different ways to the harsh realities of racism. Drawing from her book

that explores the experiences of the Frank brothers, this talk presents a complex account of Black life during the revolutionary era to demonstrate that free men of color shared with white soldiers the desire to improve their condition of life and to maintain their families safely in post-colonial North America.

The talk will be held in-person at Anderson House and last approximately 45 minutes. Registration is requested and virtual options are available.

[Learn more and register](#)

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## EDUCATION

### *Fete Lafayette in the Classroom!*



The life and work of Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert Du Motier, marquis de Lafayette, was a testimony to the realization of Enlightenment principles in light of the legacy and achievements of the American Revolution: national independence, the establishment of a republic dedicated to the interests of ordinary people, a national identity based upon a collective narrative, and a free society founded upon the basis of law and the ideals of liberty, equality, natural and civil rights, and responsible citizenship. To celebrate his role in the revolutionary generation and the anniversary of his thirteen-month farewell tour of the United States in 1824-1825, we are pleased to share a collection of lesson plans exploring various aspects of Lafayette's life.

[Browse the lessons](#)

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## EVENTS

### *An English Lord in America*



Thomas Fairfax, 6th Lord Fairfax of Cameron, played an influential role in George Washington's life. Having been introduced to Washington shortly after settling in Belvoir, Virginia, in 1747, Fairfax became Washington's first employer when he hired the sixteen-year-old Virginian to survey his lands west of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Although a professed Loyalist throughout the American Revolution, Fairfax was quiet about his sentiments and remained a close friend of Washington until Fairfax's death in 1781.

Join us on Wednesday, April 24 at 6:30 p.m. for a lecture featuring Nicholas Fairfax, 14th Lord Fairfax of Cameron and descendant of Thomas Fairfax, discussing the early history of the Fairfax family in America and the relationship between the Fairfax and Washington families before and after the

Revolution.

The lecture will be held in-person at Anderson House and last approximately 45 minutes. Registration is requested and virtual options are available.

[Learn more and register](#)

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## Who We Are, What We Do



Please join us in welcoming the Institute's new library director, Thomas G. Lannon! Thomas graduated from Bard College and holds a Master of Library and Information Science degree from Pratt Institute in New York. He spent much of his career at the New York Public Library where he served as a curator and assistant director, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books. He was part of a project that digitized over fifty thousand pages of early American manuscript material, and also worked closely with research fellows who pursued original research. Most recently, Thomas was director of special collections & archives at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania, where he helped expand the historic collections regarding the marquis de Lafayette. He was raised in Exeter, N.H., and fondly recalls childhood visits to the Ladd-Gilman House.

We are looking forward to all the great work that Thomas will do as library director while leading the research library to new heights with its outreach and fellowship programs!

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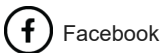


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*The American Revolution secured our independence, created our republic, established our national identity, and expressed ideals of liberty, equality, natural and civil rights, and responsible citizenship that have defined our history and will define our future. The American Revolution Institute of the Society of the Cincinnati promotes knowledge and appreciation of those achievements, fulfilling the aim of the Continental Army officers who founded the Society of the Cincinnati in 1783 to perpetuate the memory of that vast event. The Institute supports advanced study, presents exhibitions and other public programs, advocates effective classroom instruction, and provides resources to teachers and students to enrich understanding of the American Revolution and the principles of the men and women who secured the liberty of the American people.*



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