



FEBRUARY 2026

NORTHERN NECK HISTORY CULTURE HAPPENINGS

# The American Revolution & Varied Lenses of Liberty

*The Revolution was not a single struggle. It was a tangle of choices shaped by fear, hope, coercion, circumstance, and courage.*

When the American Revolution erupted, white Virginians were not imagining liberty for all. Their fight was about freeing themselves from under the boot heel of Britain—not dismantling slavery so all could live free.

Even as white Virginians yearned for liberty, their slaves were still viewed as property, listed alongside livestock and tools on their plantation inventories.

That is why 1775 was an unnerving year for Virginia slaveholders.

That November, Virginia's last royal governor, Lord Dunmore sent shockwaves through plantations. He declared that any enslaved person owned by a rebel who escaped to British lines and took up arms would earn their freedom.

For slaveholders, this was a nightmare turned reality.

George Washington and other Patriots were staunchly opposed to allowing enslaved men to fight. They had no intention of asking for their service—much less arming them.

Dunmore's offer threatened the labor force underpinning their wealth and stoked long-held fears that slaves, once armed, might turn their barrels on the colonists. Fears of insurrection loomed large.

But as the war drug on, reality hit the Patriots again: they also needed men. Reluctantly, they allowed Black participation too.



Painting: Jersey Museum Art Gallery

Other Black men—some free—chose to fight for the Patriots, as service could also be rewarding for freeman.

William Rich of Richmond County, a free Black man, served three years in the Virginia Line and fought in major battles. Although Rich wasn't spared discrimination, he received a 100-acres in Callao for his service.

In some cases, the choice was more of an ultimatum than an invitation. came with a brutal price.

James Causey and his son, William, provide an example. They were enslaved in Northumberland and their master gave

them a choice— fight for the Patriots or their family would be sold. They boarded the *Dragon*, a Patriot vessel, and terrified but determined, they served.

For men like the Causeys, the fight was not political one or even a personal one. They fought for the hope of preserving their family and securing a future beyond bondage.

These stories—of flight, of coercion, of voluntary service—remind us that the Revolution was not a single narrative.

There were many overlapping struggles and motives associated with fighting for freedom.

**Explore more Northern Neck Stories in the videos featuring Dr. Karen E. Sutton as well as Desyree Hooper and Garfield Parker of Holley Graded School Museum at nnk250.us**



Photo By: Eric Kirk / Symmetry Photo Art

## Liberty & Driving Forces

For some, Dunmore's Proclamation offered a chance at liberty worth any risk. That freedom offer alone prompted many to flee from plantations hoping to reach British lines.

The National Historic Landmark Menokin— aka Francis Lightfoot Lee House— shared the story of Bristol, who fled from Lancaster with others attempting to reach Dunmore's fleet at Gwynn's Island.

They were among those captured by Patriot forces. But thousands succeeded with as many as 20,000 Black Loyalists believed to have fled to the British.

## Explore & Visit

In February 2025, the James Monroe Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution unveiled a monument in Warsaw dedicated to Black Revolutionary War Patriots from the Northern Neck.

The monument honors the service of 74 Black Patriots from the region's five counties, a list that took 8 years to compile.

This monument is located in the Square at 101 Courthouse Circle, a space provided by Richmond County to provide convenient access.



## March Muster NNNK

### March 2

Authors' Evening presented by Reedville Fishermen's Museum will feature book talks on:

- *Menhaden: A Biologist's Thirty-Two Year Journey with the Fish and the Fishery* by Joseph W. Smith
- *War on the Inland Sea* by Thomas Briggs
- *ABCs of Oystering on the Chesapeake Bay* by Susan Swift (author) and Heather Cockrell (illustrator).

This free event will feature discussions and signings, starts at 6:30 p.m. and will be held at Fairfield's Volunteer Fire Department, 119 Main St., Reedville.

### March 5



Historic Christ Church & Museum will host a special showing of *The American Miracle: Our Nation is No Accident at Compass* Entertainment Complex in Irvington at 4 p.m.

This film is a journey through significant events in America's birth and includes scenes shot at the Northern Neck's very own Historic Christ Church.

For tickets, visit: [christchurch1735.org](http://christchurch1735.org)

### March 15

Stratford Hall will host the inaugural meeting of its new Fossil Club at 12:30 p.m. in the Jessie Ball DuPont Memorial Library. Meet the paleo volunteers, share treasures, solve mysteries, and hatch a plan for prehistoric pursuits. Stay for a mystery lecture at 2 p.m.



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