

Kentucky Sestercentennial Commission Meeting Minutes – October 2, 2025

Commissioners Present: Ed Clark (Chair), John Fox (Friends of Boone Trace), Craig Potts (Kentucky Heritage Council), Scott Alvey (Kentucky Historical Society), Tressa Brown (Kentucky Heritage Council), John Ernst (Kentucky Humanities Council).

Staff and guests: Ashley Spenneberg-Perkins (KHS), Stuart Sanders (KHS), Mike Conway (guest), Leah Craig (KHS).

Chair Ed Clark called the meeting to order at the Thomas D. Clark Center for Kentucky History at 2:00 pm.

Clark moved to approve the minutes from the June 13, 2025 meeting. John Fox provided a correction to the agenda. When asked the project timeline by Sanders in the June 13 meeting, the minutes read the previous Boone Trace bicycle trail project (US Bike Route 21) took four years. Fox asked the minutes to be amended to make clear the Boone Trace Project would not take four years but could be completed by spring of 2026.

Minutes approved by acclamation with the correction.

Scott Alvey provided a budget update reporting that he and fellow commissioner Lindy Casebier have been meeting with Frankfort groups to build momentum for July 4th and to create a cohesive celebration between the commission, the city of Frankfort, and the state. Ideas consist of fireworks behind the capitol building, and musical performances. The idea for live streaming community celebrations across the state in Frankfort was mentioned.

Fox expressed disappointment about the lack of awareness and excitement for the 250th. Fox also mentioned the America250KY website was difficult to navigate. Fox also expressed a desire for a sixth America250KY theme concerning the entirety of the project and the future of the 250th.

Stuart Sanders mentioned once 2026 is nearer, excitement and involvement with the 250th will become more apparent. Sanders reported that Louisville just recently formed their 250 commission.

To address Fox's desire for a sixth theme, Clark said the proposed sixth theme was implied with the current grant projects the commission has invested in. Sanders mentioned the Legacy theme and how it addressed the proposed sixth theme.

John Ernst said the 250th celebrations are coming at a good time to bring the country together.

Fox said we should make a political statement about the division in the country. Clark suggested that the commission avoid political statements. Craig Potts mentioned the

commission's projects and mission includes all history. Alvey mentioned that the themes and tone for America250KY was developed over a six-year process with thought given to a memorable and meaningful commemoration. Alvey also mentioned how much the Kentucky Commission is accomplishing when compared to other state commissions. Alvey also mentioned that while the national 250 narrative is differing, we are navigating the differences well by sticking to our mission and themes.

Ernst mentioned seeing an America250KY presence on KET.

Alvey reported that the Kentucky Historical Society was asked by the state for a budget reduction of up to \$321,000. Alvey reported that the Girl Scouts and the American Association for State and Local History have pulled their partnerships with the America250 national commission as a result from their differing narrative. State commissions are continuing as normal with their own projects with no hope of federal funding. Alvey reported looking into sponsorships for funding sources.

Sanders provided the commission with updates asking Potts and Tressa Brown for updates to the Heritage Council grants. Potts reported their first round of grants ended and their second round recently closed with 28 applicants. The Heritage Council received \$500,000 in grant funds for the first and second round. Potts reported applications were well done and the Heritage Council prioritized specific themes for their grants. The first round sought the following themes of transportation, civics, architecture and design, civil rights, building trades, history of faith, agriculture, community building, early settlement, and state government. The second round included the following themes of military history, women's history, music, tourism and travel, immigration, coal and workers, federal involvement in Kentucky, and sports history. Craig mentioned they have good representation from organizations across the state.

Brown reported for the African American commission. Grant applications were a broad range with all applications received from Lexington. Many applications were for brick-and-mortar projects. For the Native American Heritage commission, Brown reported the funds were administered out of the Heritage Council's office and supported an exhibit at the Kentucky State Fair. The exhibit included two large murals, one before European settlement depicting a Shawnee settlement and family, the second showing Daniel Boone entering Kentucky and looking at the Shawnee settlement area. Educational materials were also developed. Grant funds were also used for Living Archaeology Weekend and supported bringing members of the United Keetoowah Cherokee to the event in Slade, KY. Funds also supported a speaker series at the Filson Historical Society about Native history from early 1700 to early 1800 and addresses contemporary peoples.

Ashley Spenneberg-Perkins gave an update about America250KY grants. A total of \$466,984.04 has been granted out over two years to 86 non-profits across Kentucky meeting the themes and objectives of the commission.

Sanders gave a report on the Kentucky State Parks grants. These grants focused on the legacy portion of the 250th with long term improvements to Kentucky state historic sites focused on the early history of the state, including the conservation of artifacts, purchasing archival storage materials, collections care, cemetery preservation, staff educational training, and new exhibits.

Sanders also gave an update on the Arts Council grants which funded 27 projects last grant cycle and another 30 during the current grant cycle.

Sanders also mentioned the partnership with KET and the series of short digital videos on Kentucky origin stories that will be released in November of 2025. Two animated videos for 2026 will also be released. America250KY has also partnered with KET for the showing of the Ken Burns Documentary around the state beginning in 2026.

Sanders provided an update for the Kentucky Tourism grants mentioning the African American Heritage Trail that opened earlier this year. A total of 50 sites are included. Kentucky tourism also ran several ad campaigns in print and digital formats celebrating Kentucky's role in shaping United States history, highlighting iconic Kentucky landmarks, traditions, and values.

Sanders also reported on America250KY attending community events, media appearances, and various programs hosted by America250KY. Sanders also mentioned the national initiatives America250KY will be taking part in in 2026 as well as the programming and events for 2026.

Spenneberg-Perkins reminded the commission about the River Roots Festival and the VIP invitation extended to the commission as sponsors of the festival.

Fox addressed an op-ed in the Louisville Courier Journal about the State Fair and the Wilderness Road. The article incorrectly associates Boone with the Wilderness Road.

Fox asked about plans for the Boone Trace Trail. Mike Conway read an excerpt from Jim Mallory of the Lewis and Clark Trail on the importance of the Boone Trace Trail to education, tourism, and economic developments in Kentucky as well as the legacy of the 250th.

Clark suggested finding financial support from another organization. Sanders asked if the Lewis and Clark trail or the Kentucky Department of Transportation could help with funding.

Because of the need to fund a statewide signature event, the Commission recommended using their \$400,000 in commission funding and \$300,000 in wayfinding signage to fund an official state July 4 event in Frankfort.

Conway mentioned the legislation concerning the commission and the mention of a trail. Fox read the legislation which encourages the creation of a trail and is directed towards the Department of Transportation. There was discussion on Transportation Department grants with suggestions about who to contact.

Meeting dates for 2026 were discussed with the suggestion to meet more often around July 4.

Meeting adjourned at 3:30 pm by acclamation.