

AMERICA'S 250TH SOUTH DAKOTA COMMISSION MINUTES

Jay Vogt Education Room, Cultural Heritage Center

Pierre, South Dakota

August 6, 2025

1. Call to Order:

A meeting of the South Dakota America's 250th Commission was called to order at 3:02 p.m. by Commission Chairman Benjamin Jones. A quorum was present.

Commissioners present in the Jay Vogt Education Room:

Benjamin F. Jones, David Grabitske, Catherine Forsch, Mike Derby

Commissioners present via TEAMS Conference Call:

Peggy Besch, Caleb Finck, Kurt Hackemer, Doug Knust, Tim Reed, Kevin Robling, George Seamon, Algin Young

Commissioners absent:

Julie Breu, James Hagen, Marshall Michels, Shane Penfield, Tyler Tordsen, Jeremiah Schneider

Others Present in the Jay Vogt Education Room:

Braeden Kluver (SDSHS), Nick Harrington (GF&P)

Others Present via TEAMS Conference Call:

SDPB, Kevin Larsen (SDSHS)

2. Adoption of the Agenda:

- **A motion was made by Robling to adopt the agenda. Besch seconded the motion.** The motion passed unanimously.

3. Approval of Board Minutes:

- **Forsch made a motion to approve the June 4, 2025. Seamon seconded the motion.** The motion passed unanimously.

4. Public Comment: (SDCL 1-25-1):

None.

5. Updates

- **State & Territory convening:**
 - Chairman Jones updated the commission on the State and Territory convening that the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission hosted in Washington, D.C., which he and Commissioner Tordsen attended. During the convening Jones & Tordsen heard updates from the Semiquincentennial Commission and the White House Task Force on Celebrating America's 250th on a variety of topics. Six children chose Mount

Rushmore as their destination for winning America's Field Trip contest. The Our American Story airstream trailer has begun its journey around the nation to record oral histories (more information can be found on the america250.org website). There are many grant opportunities for America 250 related events available through NEA and NEH. The National Archives has indicated they are amenable to loaning relevant documents to states to put on display. A Freedom Plane is being planned for 2026. The Semiquincentennial Commission continues to plan for its mandated time capsule, and Jones anticipates they will reach out for items soon. Finally, each state's representative at the convening was given 3 minutes to share some of their efforts to celebrate America's 250th. Utah and Hawaii were highlighted for the National Potluck and the simultaneous nationwide reading of the Declaration of Independence, respectively.

- **SD-10 Rifle Fundraiser:**
 - The ParkWest Rifle fundraiser is underway. As of August 6th, 31 tickets had been sold. The drawing will take place on November 2nd. Commissioners were given a QR code to allow them to direct interested members of the public to the Foundation's website to purchase a ticket.
- **Declaration of Independence Reading (July 8, 2026):**
 - Covered during State and Territory convening update
- **Liberty Bell:**
 - Commissioner Grabitske informed the commission that the Liberty Bell located outside the Soldiers & Sailors Memorial Building is a part of the South Dakota State Historical Society's collection, and as such, Buildings and Grounds will not be worked on. Museum staff will refurbish the bell before any planned ringing.
- **Merchandising Agreement:**
 - Chairman Jones has been in contact with the South Dakota Craft Brewers Guild to create a specialty beer to celebrate America 250. A brewery is interested in taking the lead on creating a recipe and signing a merchandising agreement with the Commission and SDHSF. This will provide the commission a new revenue stream and could serve as a model for other businesses around the state.
- **Municipalities League Article:**
 - No additional comments
- **State Time Capsules:**
 - Commissioner Grabitske and Nick Harrington met to discuss State time capsules. GF&P agreed to buy five time capsules to be placed in parks in the four corners of the state and one along the river. The public will be asked to submit items, which will then be reviewed by museum curators to determine the survivability of the items. In

September of 2026, Grabitske and Harrington will travel around the state to bury the time capsules. Commissioner Derby inquired about a time capsule being placed in the Hall of Records at Mount Rushmore.

- **Liberty Tree:**

- Grabitske has been in contact with the President of the South Dakota Landscape Association. They are willing to donate a tree to commemorate America 250. Location to be determined. Upkeep will also be needed after planting. If any cities or schools are interested in their own Liberty Tree or Time Capsule, Commissioner Grabitske has been working on a write-up to distribute.

- **SD Stars & Stripes Tourism Passport**

- Chairman Jones updated the commission on South Dakota Tourism's Stars & Stripes passport to celebrate America's 250th. It includes over 40 locations around the state. It is currently available to use and has seen 949 downloads and 2215 location check-ins as of July 31st.

- **South Dakota State Fair:**

- Commissioner Besch updated the commission on some of the 250 kickoff events planned for this year's Fair. Events include a 250-car classic, a DIY in USA event, a campsite judging contest, an animal call competition, Dakota Liberty brew, and various food-eating competitions.
- Chairman Jones also highlighted the Come Declare Your Independence event on the 28th, which will allow school-age children an opportunity to sign their names under a copy of the Declaration of Independence.

- **Additional comments:**

- Read 250
 - So far, 87 people have signed up to participate in Read 250 and complete 1776 minutes of reading by July 4th of next year. The South Dakota Department of Education is working on a press release.
- Walk 250
 - America's Grasslands has proposed a special challenge for Walk 250- 46.9 for the Grasslands. That number represents the 46.9 million acres of grassland that were present in the state 250 years ago. Individuals are encouraged to log miles for the 250 challenge in the Grasslands. 58 folks have so far participated and even had a few complete the 250 miles.
- Commissioner Young expressed interest in the Department of Tribal Relations and the America's 250th South Dakota Commission hosting an event at Sica Hallow. Harrington agreed to follow up with Commissioner Young.
- Commissioner Derby asked for clarification on the Commission's name and expressed a desire to show the Commission a logo with Mount Rushmore on it.
- Chairman Jones urged commissioners to reach out to local organizations to become partners.

6. Next Meeting:

- The next meeting will be held on October 1st at 3:00 pm Central Time in the Jay Vogt Education Room.

7. Adjournment:

- **Forsch made the motion for Adjournment. Derby seconded the motion.** The motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 3:46 p.m.

I, Benjamin F. Jones, Director of the South Dakota State Historical Society, declare that these minutes are true and an accurate reflection of the business conducted at the August 6, 2025, meeting of the America's 250th South Dakota Commission.

Benjamin F. Jones, Ph.D.

State Historian and Director

South Dakota State Historical Society

Braeden Kluver

Assistant to the State Historian

South Dakota State Historical Society