



250 HITS THE ROAD

How communities are using AHA's Road Scholars to consider America at 250

As 2026 dawned, the city of Pelham — like so many others — was eager to engage its residents in commemorations of America's Semiquincentennial. Mayor Rick Walsh challenged city departments to come up with new events that would emphasize learning, history, and community connection, and that would appeal to all ages.

Melanie Carden, MLIS, supervisor of the Pelham Public Library, says her thoughts immediately turned to AHA's Road Scholars Speakers Bureau.

"The Speakers Bureau was instrumental in helping us develop a meaningful America at 250 series," she says. "It gave us access to expert speakers and storytellers and helped us build a well-rounded series."

In the spring, Carden applied for, and received, an AHA grant to bring three Road Scholars to Pelham. She scheduled the speakers over three months, leading up to the Fourth of July.

Author Mike Bunn, director of Historic Blakeley State Park, talked about the Gulf South's forgotten role during the Revolutionary War. Michael Burger, Ph.D., a professor of history at Auburn University at Montgomery, highlighted how the U.S. Constitution draws on some medieval inspiration. And actress-storyteller Dolores Hydock capped things off with a presentation on one of the most iconic (and French!) symbols of American democracy, the Statue of Liberty.

"Each program resonated with our audiences because the speakers shared subjects they clearly cared about and knew well," Carden says. "Their passion and ability to make history relevant generated some meaningful conversations. They really helped our audiences connect more deeply with the stories and ideas explored throughout the series."

Of course, Pelham has been far from alone in availing itself of these new talks. At the Old Monroe County Courthouse Museum, author and director Mollie Smith Waters highlighted some of the final resting spots of Revolutionary War soldiers in Alabama. Christine E. Sears, Ph.D., chair of history at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, spoke at Arlington Historic House in Birmingham and — tongue firmly in cheek — shared about some audacious "female threats" to America's early republic.

And there's plenty more ahead. You can hear folklorist Joyce Cauthen talk about Alabama fiddlers in the 1800s, the state's first "pop musicians." Gary Furr, a retired pastor and professor, examines the shape of our First Amendment when it comes to religious freedom, church, and state in America. And Tom Osborne dives into the Yazoo Land Scandal to discover what just may be the origin story of Alabama politics.

To learn more about AHA's full lineup of Road Scholars, 250 and beyond, visit alabamahumanities.org/road-scholars.