

ECHOES

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The October Meeting will be Tuesday, October 27, 2026, 3:00 pm at the McMillan Museum. Don Sales will be speaking.



THOMAS E. MCMILLAN
MUSEUM-ALABAMA ROOM

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SURRENDER AT YORKTOWN



The Siege That Decided a War

On October 19, 1781, British General Lord Cornwallis surrendered more than 7,000 troops at Yorktown, Virginia, effectively ending major fighting in the American Revolution.

Cornwallis had camped on the Chesapeake, expecting the Royal Navy to rescue or resupply him. Instead, a French fleet under Admiral de Grasse blocked the bay, while George Washington and the Comte de Rochambeau marched a combined American and French army south. Trapped by land and sea, Cornwallis endured weeks of bombardment before giving up.

Cornwallis, claiming illness, did not attend the surrender ceremony, sending his deputy, General Charles O'Hara, to present his sword. Washington's second-in-command, General Benjamin Lincoln, accepted it. Legend says the British band played "The World Turned Upside Down" as soldiers marched out to lay down their arms.

When news reached London, Prime Minister Lord North reportedly cried, "Oh God, it is all over."

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Flomaton Scout Troop 31 came out Saturday, October 17, 2026 to Pollard Cemetery to help clean up Hurricane Isaisas. Pollard Cemetery was heavily damaged with several large trees toppled and graves damaged. Both the girls and boys from Troop 31 came out and joined adult volunteers to removing tree debris from the cemetery.



THE DUTCH CONNECTION:

HOW A SMALL REPUBLIC HELPED WIN AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

A Salute Heard Round the Atlantic

On November 16, 1776, the American brig Andrew Doria sailed into the harbor of Sint Eustatius, a tiny Dutch island in the Caribbean, flying the colors of the rebellious colonies. The fort's guns fired a salute in reply. It was one of the first official acknowledgments of the American flag by a foreign power. Britain was furious.

Nicknamed the "Golden Rock," Sint Eustatius was a free port through which flowed goods of every kind. For American rebels, it was a lifeline for gunpowder, muskets and supplies that British blockades and trade laws made hard to obtain elsewhere. Dutch merchants were not acting out of ideology, but out of long habit: they traded with anyone who would pay.

Britain Strikes Back

London's patience ran out in 1780. In September, a British warship captured Henry Laurens, a former president of the Continental Congress, on his way to the Netherlands. His papers included a draft commercial treaty between Amsterdam merchants and the American cause. Britain declared war on the Dutch Republic that December, beginning the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War.

The Dutch were poorly prepared. Their navy had shrunk, and their politics were divided between the Orangist faction and the Patriots. In February 1781, British Admiral George Rodney seized Sint Eustatius, confiscating its warehouses and expelling much of its merchant community.

Ideas and Inspiration

The influence ran in both directions. The Dutch had their own revolt against Spanish rule, and the 1581 Act of Abjuration is often cited as a precedent for the American Declaration of Independence. In turn, American example energized the Dutch Patriot movement. Joan Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol, a leading Patriot, openly admired the American cause and urged his countrymen toward reform and popular sovereignty.

Adams in the Netherlands

The Netherlands' most lasting contribution may have been diplomatic and financial. John Adams arrived in 1780, first as a commercial agent and then as the Congress's envoy. After persistent lobbying, the States General formally recognized the United States on April 19, 1782, making the Dutch Republic one of the earliest foreign governments to do so. A treaty of amity and commerce followed that October.

Adams also won something just as valuable: money. Dutch bankers, extended loans to the cash-starved American government, totaling millions of guilders over the following years. The loans helped keep the young nation afloat and later helped it manage its war debts. Adams even purchased a house in The Hague, widely regarded as the first American-owned diplomatic property abroad.

The Price of Friendship

For the Dutch, the war was costly. The peace settlement that ended it forced concessions to Britain, including the loss of the trading post of Negapatnam in India and British navigation rights in the Dutch East Indies. The conflict exposed the weakness of the Republic and deepened the political divisions that would erupt in the following years.

Even so, the Dutch contribution to American independence is easy to overlook. A Caribbean trading port, a handful of bankers and a patient diplomat in The Hague helped keep the Revolution supplied, funded and recognized.

THE TREATY THAT MADE A NATION OFFICIAL

October 19 marked 245 years since Lord Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown. It was the military turning point of the American Revolution, but it didn't end the war on paper. That took nearly two more years of diplomacy and the Treaty of Paris, signed on September 3, 1783.

Winning the peace

After Yorktown, the British government of Lord North collapsed, and a new ministry under Lord Shelburne was willing to talk. The American delegation in Paris was a formidable trio: Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and John Jay. (Henry Laurens, captured at sea earlier in the war, joined the preliminary talks late.) Britain's chief negotiator was David Hartley.

The Americans made a bold, risky choice. Congress had instructed them to follow the guidance of France, their wartime ally. But Jay and Adams distrusted French motives, since France had its own interests and its own deals with Spain. The delegation negotiated directly with the British and signed preliminary articles in November 1782 without consulting Versailles first. Franklin smoothed things over with the French foreign minister, and the gamble paid off with remarkably generous terms.

What the treaty said

The agreement opened with a simple, enormous statement: Britain acknowledged the thirteen states as free, sovereign, and independent. Beyond that, the key provisions were:

- **Borders:** The new nation stretched west to the Mississippi River, north to the Great Lakes region, and south to the northern boundary of Spanish Florida.
- **Fishing rights:** American fishermen kept access to the rich waters off Newfoundland, a big deal for New England's economy.
- **Mississippi navigation:** Both American and British subjects could use the river.
- **Debts:** Creditors on both sides could collect what they were owed, a sore point for many Americans.
- **Loyalists:** Congress would urge the states to restore confiscated Loyalist property and stop further persecution. Congress couldn't compel the states, so many Loyalists never got relief, and thousands left for Canada and Britain

Not the only treaty that day

Britain signed separate agreements with France and Spain on the same day, and a settlement with the Dutch Republic followed in 1784. Spain regained Florida and Minorca, while France largely gained strategic and commercial standing rather than territory. Together these deals closed out a conflict that had become a global war.

From signature to reality

Signing was only the beginning. Congress, meeting in Annapolis, ratified the treaty on January 14, 1784, and ratified copies were exchanged in Paris that May. British troops didn't leave New York City until November 25, 1783, a date New Yorkers celebrated as Evacuation Day for generations.

Several promises proved shaky. Britain kept garrisons in forts across the Northwest, citing unpaid American debts and the unresolved Loyalist question, until the Jay Treaty of 1794. The weakness of the Confederation Congress in enforcing the treaty on the states was also one of the arguments for a stronger federal government, which arrived with the Constitution a few years later.

Why it still matters

The Treaty of Paris turned a rebellion into a recognized country. It gave the United States a vast territory to grow into, and it showed that a young republic could hold its own at the negotiating table against a world power. Its borders set the stage for westward expansion and for the disputes, with Native nations, Spain, and Britain

COASTAL ALABAMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Dinner on the Run

On September 24, members of the Coastal Alabama Historical Society had a night out on the Town! Thanks to the support of community partners, students toured three historic sites and organizations and enjoyed a portion of the Thomas E. McMillan Museum. They began the evening with appetizers hosted by Mr. Lamar Morris and his team at the 22nd State Bank. Housed in one of Brewton's historic downtown businesses, the 22nd State Bank serves the local community. Mr. Morris provided a tour of the facility and offered a fascinating presentation on the history of the building.

After leaving downtown, they headed to see Mr. Jeff Kirkland and the friendly folks at Southern Pine Electric Cooperative for the main entree. He shared the history of Southern Pine and traced its roots to the Franklin Roosevelt administration during the Great Depression. He concluded with a time for questions and answers and fielded several questions from the students.

After the entree, they headed to the historic community of Pollard, Alabama. In Pollard, they visited Pollard Global Methodist Church, where Mrs. Sally Finlay shared with the students the rich history of the congregation, its beautiful sanctuary, and surrounding property. Following the presentation, the congregation served a bountiful array of desserts for a sweet ending to a beautiful evening.



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THE NEWSLETTER FOR
THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

251-809-1528 or
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Wildflowers of The Conecuh/Escambia		
River Basin CD	\$10.00	\$16.00
History of Brewton and E. Brewton (SC)	\$40.00	\$47.00
Flomaton Centennial Scrapbook	\$30.00	\$37.00

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ECHOES, The newsletter for the Escambia County Historical Society, a 501 (c) (3) corporation, is published monthly except November and December. Comments are welcome. You may email the Society at escambiahistoricalociety@gmail.com or call 251-809-1528.

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