



On July 4, 2026, our nation will commemorate and celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Illinois' contributions to the American story began long before 1776 and will continue well beyond this anniversary. Residents of Illinois have brought the ideals of the Declaration of Independence to life. Illinois became a state in 1818, 42 years after the formation of the United States of America, and after thousands of years of Native communities and peoples inhabiting the land.

Illinois played a significant role in the expansion of the United States, serving as the backdrop for extensive French and British exploration and early economic development through the fur trade. It was also a key state in the American Civil War and the first to ratify the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery. All people who call Illinois home—regardless of their age, abilities, or backgrounds—have the opportunity to see themselves in the complex history of the nation's Semiquincentennial and to envision the future of Illinois over the next 250 years.

The *Illinois America 250 Commission* was established to “develop, encourage, and execute an inclusive commemoration and observance of the founding of the United States of America, and Illinois' imperative role in the nation's history.” The celebration is organized into four themes (1) American Revolution, (2) We the People, (3) Power of Place, and (4) Doing History. Each of Illinois' 102 counties has stories worth discovering. Explore the themes above by visiting enjoyillinois.com. Below is a small sampling of the people to honor and the places to visit.

American Revolution

Although Illinois was not yet a state when the Declaration was signed, it is home to many historic sites with direct ties to the Revolutionary War and the years that followed.

- **Fort Kaskaskia** (Ellis Grove) - Fort Kaskaskia State Historic Site is on a blufftop overlooking the Mississippi River, commemorates the vanished frontier town of Old Kaskaskia, and the support it gave to George Rogers Clark in the American Revolution.
- **Fort Massac State Park** (Metropolis) - Originally a French fort (1750s) on the Ohio River, rebuilt by Americans in the 1790s. During the Revolution, it served as a strategic site for river navigation and troop movement in the region.

We the People

Famous and everyday Illinoisans alike have shaped American culture in countless ways—through contributions in architecture, agriculture, art, music, literature, and more. Their creativity and innovation continue to influence and inspire generations across the nation, showcasing the cultural legacy rooted in communities throughout Illinois.

- **Frank Lloyd Wright Home & Studio** (Oak Park) - This iconic building was Frank Lloyd Wright's home and studio from 1889 to 1909. He used it as a place to experiment with design ideas. Oak Park features 25 Wright-designed buildings, making it an outdoor museum of architecture.
- **John Deere Historic Site** (Grand Detour) - The original John Deere home, built in 1836, offers a glimpse of pioneer life and a working blacksmith shop that helped develop farming equipment. You can also visit *John Deere Pavilion* in Moline to explore farming history.
- **Jane Addams Hull House Museum** (Chicago) - Honoring Jane Addams' legacy, the museum explores immigration, labor rights, and social reform, as well as her efforts to support marginalized communities.

Power of Place

For thousands of years before statehood or the Declaration of Independence, Native peoples lived in and shaped Illinois. Despite forced removals, many remain. Explore state-wide sites honoring Indigenous histories, contributions, and ongoing impact.

- **Cahokia Mounds** (Collinsville) - Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and an important reminder of the civilizations that existed in North America long before European colonization.
- **Grand Village of the Illinois** (Utica) - A major Native American settlement and cultural center along the Illinois River, home to the Illinois Confederation, featuring mounds, dwellings, and community life.

The Pursuit of Happiness, as cited in the Declaration of Independence, comes to life in Illinois' abundant natural landscapes. You can reflect on these ideals while exploring the state's many parks, forests, rivers, lakes, and sites dedicated to recreation, education, and conservation.

- **I&M Canal** (Channahon) - The I&M Canal Trail offers 61 miles of hiking and biking trails that follow the historic route of the I&M Canal from Channahon to LaSalle.
- **Starved Rock State Park** (Utica) - Starved Rock is famous for sandstone canyons, waterfalls, and scenic overlooks where you can learn about Native American history and French colonial exploration.

Doing History

Discover sites honoring the people and movements—artistic, civil rights, and beyond—that reflect how Illinoisans have strived to uphold the ideals of the Declaration of Independence, championing freedom, equality, and justice throughout the state's rich and diverse history.

- **Bronzeville Walk of Fame** (Chicago) - Civil rights activist Ida B. Wells, poet Gwendolyn Brooks, and astronaut Robert H. Lawrence Jr. are among over 100 notable neighborhood residents honored for their lasting impact and inspiring legacies.
- **Illinois Holocaust Museum** (Skokie) - Recognized as the third-largest Holocaust Museum globally, this powerful institution offers educational exhibits, survivor testimonies, and meaningful programs that preserve history and promote tolerance, remembrance, and understanding.
- **Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum** (Springfield) - Immersive exhibits explore the life and times of the 16th U.S. president from his early years to the White House, the Civil War, and his enduring legacy.

QUESTIONS

1. Circle any of the historic sites or museums that you have visited. What did you learn from one of your visits? _____

2. Identify one place from the list above or by visiting enjoyillinois.com that you would like to see and why? _____