

The
**Robert
Nittolo**
Collection Acquisition

THE CASE FOR SUPPORT



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Our country is struggling with political, social, and cultural division. What divides us runs far deeper than disagreement over policy. Many people now question the idea that there is any “truth” at all.

A recent survey by the Pew Research Center found that two-thirds of U.S. adults believe that made-up news and disinformation “causes a great deal of confusion about the basic facts,” and feel that they “have trouble distinguishing truth from falsehood.” [1] Researchers also report that a major cause of the current polarization is a stunning level of historical illiteracy. [2]

At the heart of the struggle is one, vital question: *Who are we as a culture and nation?* At Fort Ticonderoga, we believe that answering this question, as well as imagining—or reimagining—our future, requires understanding our past. The history of the United States of America is our collective experience, shaped by values, aspirations, shortcomings, and triumphs. Just as this history reflects the lives of a diverse population, so it joins everyone together in the complex story that is *America*.

Civic Education and Patriotic History

To teach the American story, families, schools, and various organizations provide civic education, especially to our children. The goal of this instruction has always been to impart an understanding of the values, conventions, and laws that shape this nation. More than that, civic education

encourages citizens to develop an attachment to their national life. Such a connection demands some measure of patriotism, a word with Latin and Greek roots meaning “to respect and serve a way of life passed down across the generations.” Patriotism is a passion to embrace ideals such as liberty, human rights, democracy, and equality before the law. This passion celebrates the best of our values, just as it motivates us to address ways in which we fall short.



Students from the Conservatory Lab Charter School in Boston, Mass., explore how Fort Ticonderoga’s collections inform the historic tailoring program. Through the historic trades program, we recreate the daily lives of soldiers at Ticonderoga during the Revolution, imparting a deeper appreciation of the sacrifices made to create our nation today.

Is the Job Being Done?

Survey research shows us that, in a real sense, our population has lost touch with its national past and the basics of civic education. In one study, just two out of five of our fellow citizens could identify our nation’s three branches of government. Another study found that two-thirds of Americans could not pass the current U.S. citizenship text.

These findings point to the conclusion that the job of civic education is not being done well. At the same time, popular culture has become harshly critical of America's past and present. Not surprisingly, perhaps, a recent survey found that just 39 percent of U.S. adults said they were generally proud of their country; half said they were ashamed. [3]

Part of the problem is that civic education is disconnected from history. Just nine states require students in secondary school to take a year of U.S. government or civics. Thirty-one states require half a year; nine states do not require a single civics course. [4] At the same time, civics has become disconnected from history as the focus of courses shifts toward encouraging students to become engaged in controversial political issues. [4]

The same retreat from U.S. history is evident in higher education. Over the last decade, the number of college and university students majoring in that field has declined by 30 percent—the largest decline of any field of study. Only five in 1,000 four-year college students graduate with a major in history. To make matters worse, in most institutions, including the most selective schools, even a history major is not required to take a single course in American history. Clearly, colleges and universities are not teaching our young people the story of their own country.

Does this pattern mean that Americans simply have no interest in their own history? Our experience here at Ticonderoga suggests that interest in our nation's history is keen, indeed. More than 75,000 people of all ages visit the Fort every year, and tens of thousands more connect with Fort Ticonderoga through online presentations.

People come here to experience *real history*. They come to see the sites of early battles that set the course for the emergence of the new nation. They come to learn how soldiers and their families lived, to understand the skills they developed, to sample the food they ate, to see the clothing they wore, and to investigate the weapons and other technology that supported them. Most importantly, they come to learn the stories—to understand how the most powerful nations in the world came together at Ticonderoga to shape the future of North America. People travel here to understand the aspirations and fears of those who risked everything in pursuit of their dream.

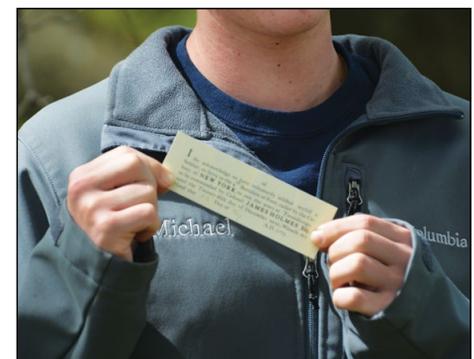
In short, they come to learn the *real history* that is no longer readily available in the academic world. At Ticonderoga, visitors find



A high school student studies the reconstruction of a cannon wheel based on Fort Ticonderoga's archaeology collections in the museum's "The Last Argument of Kings" exhibition.



A young visitor intently questions a Fort Ticonderoga staff member portraying an American artilleryman holding the line for liberty at Ticonderoga in 1776.



A Boy Scout holds an enlistment paper based on a document in our collection. Several hundred Boy Scouts "enlisted" in the Continental Army during a recent Scout Camporee. They learned how to march and drill, and discovered the struggles and sacrifices of the soldiers who put the words of independence into action. All of Fort Ticonderoga's programs are rooted in the museum collections, which inform the program content.

“Without history, there is no civic education, and without civic education there are no citizens. Without citizens, there is no free republic. The stakes, in other words, could not be higher.”

—Eliot Cohen, Dean of Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies and member of Fort Ticonderoga’s board of directors



Parents and students from across America participate in an immersive Home School Day program to gain a deeper appreciation of our nation’s founding history.



Fort Ticonderoga presents numerous annual academic conferences that highlight the latest scholarship on the 18th century, including the Seven Years’ War and the American War for Independence. Scholars share their research, often informed by Fort Ticonderoga’s museum collections, with attendees who immerse themselves in an active discussion about the past and its connection to the world today.

history that educates and also inspires. The lessons of our past have value to the extent that they inform our present, providing us with examples of great leaders, valiant efforts, and difficult challenges that were overcome.

Fort Ticonderoga Guides the Future of America

Fort Ticonderoga is a national historic site committed to the preservation of our past, the interpretation of its meaning and importance, and the education of citizens—especially students and teachers—in U.S. history. The foundation of our educational work at Fort Ticonderoga is the site itself and the collection of artifacts, including weapons, clothing, books, journals, paintings, and countless items that supported the everyday life of the people who lived here centuries ago. Our professional staff stands among the best-trained scholars in the nation, and they are deeply committed to the task of expanding historical literacy.

Taken together, the site, the collection, and the staff provide an unparalleled resource for the education of K-12 and university students, interns, secondary school teachers, university faculty, and scholars of history.

We are committed to the study of our nation’s past, and we proudly lead the way toward reversing the decline of civic education and patriotic history. For us, the study of our past is guided not by some activist agenda, but by the diligent investigation of actual artifacts and written records.

Our goal is to empower students to complete their formal education with a thorough understanding of the history of the United States, including an appreciation of sacrifices made by those who came before us, respect for their achievements, as well as an awareness of their shortcomings.

To the extent that we succeed in this mission, our citizens will become trustworthy stewards of a democratic republic, schooled in virtue, and capable and willing to exercise civic responsibility.

A Call to Action!

Fort Ticonderoga has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to acquire the Robert Nittolo Collection. More than 3,000 artifacts in this collection will allow our staff to bring our nation’s founding to life through stories of inspiration and sacrifice, tragedy and triumph.

With the addition of the Robert Nittolo Collection, Fort Ticonderoga will have unmatched resources for historical education. To secure these rare artifacts, we need your help.

Your generous donation for the acquisition of this collection will fuel an even grander mission—the teaching and learning of *real history*. Artifacts, brought to life by a well-trained and highly motivated staff, will allow Fort Ticonderoga to guide the civic education of future generations.

Containing more than 3,000 individual objects spanning the 17th and 18th centuries, the Robert Nittolo Collection is the most comprehensive private collection of militaria in North America. Rarely does such a compilation survive intact. Fort Ticonderoga has made a commitment to acquire and preserve this singular collection that will transform our museum experience, create an unparalleled research institute, and contribute to both on-site, remote, and digital education programs for people across the nation and the world.

Real History Comes Alive!

The larger purpose of our collection and the goal of our staff is to advance the teaching of real history in classrooms throughout the United States.

The Rowan University Collaboration

One example of our efforts to bring real history to life is Rowan University’s program to provide their history majors with an immersion weekend at Fort Ticonderoga. Donning gloves, students handle 250-year-old objects used during the Revolutionary War as they receive instruction from staff members. Rowan students learn about the struggle for independence and the sacrifices made to provide the liberty we enjoy today.

Fort Ticonderoga Teacher Institute

Another one of our education programs is the **Fort Ticonderoga Teacher Institute**. Teachers representing schools in all 50 states spend a week or more at Fort Ticonderoga engaged in the study of “Exploration, Empire, and Revolution: American Origins, 1609—1815.” These teachers explore the European exploration and colonization of this continent, track the events that led to the American Revolution, and become familiar with our national life during the Early Republic. They make use of Fort Ticonderoga’s world-class collection of objects, images, and manuscripts, and benefit from the instruction of Fort Ticonderoga’s museum staff, expanding their ability to bring early American history to life in their own classrooms.



Rowan University students dig deep into our history and rich collections. Students discuss objects that were on display in the “Great Wars” Exhibition contrasting objects from the Seven Years’ War and World War I.

“Thank you for a wonderful series of webinars for teachers. I found the historians engaging, the connections to Fort Ticonderoga’s collections fascinating, and the pedagogical exploration of documents and objects useful. I look forward to sharing what I’ve learned with my students.”

—Teacher, Ohio



Ticonderoga Tuesdays, along with numerous other virtual and in-person programs such as the Ticonderoga Teacher Institute, engages teachers from all 50 states. Educators develop historical literacy skills and gain a deeper appreciation for our nation’s history through the use of documents and objects



Through the Center for Digital History, we are reaching beyond the historic grounds of Fort Ticonderoga to bring real history, award-winning educational programs, and our rich museum collections into homes and classrooms across the country and around the world.

Ticonderoga Tuesdays, A Webinar Series

The Fort’s mission to “educate and provoke active discussion about the past and its importance to present and future generations” is not limited to on-site programs. In recent years, Fort Ticonderoga has established an online presence that makes our *real history* programs available to teachers from Maine to California, from Mississippi to Montana.

The Ticonderoga Tuesdays Webinar Series introduces educators to a significant topic in three steps. First, a visiting expert provides an overview of a topic, such as “Rethinking Benedict Arnold” or “Women and the American Revolution.” Next, Fort Ticonderoga’s Curator, Dr. Matthew Keagle, deepens understanding using artifacts from the Fort’s collection. Finally, our Director of Academic Programs, Rich Strum, offers strategies for using document analysis and object-based inquiry in the classroom.

Center for Digital History

Based on the historic grounds of Fort Ticonderoga, our Center for Digital History transmits award-winning educational programs into homes and classrooms throughout the country and around the world. For example, our “Soldier’s Life” program makes use of real artifacts from the past to educate elementary school students about the daily lives of the soldiers who fought for the liberty we cherish today.

Through the **Center for Digital History**, visitors can learn from thousands of museum artifacts, engaging videos, and other educational resources.

Through these programs, Fort Ticonderoga has become recognized as the premier center for the study of the military experience that defines the Early Modern Era (c.1609-1815).

Will You Join Us?

If you share our passion for teaching real history, please consider making a leadership gift in support of Fort Ticonderoga's acquisition of the Robert Nittolo Collection and the enrichment of our educational programs.

The time is now

As we approach the 250th anniversary of our country, we must decide how we shall answer the question: *Who are we as a nation?*

Fort Ticonderoga can make this happen

Much of the early history of our nation took place here. We have the site, the staff, the educational resources, and the determination to succeed. With the addition of the Robert Nittolo Collection, America's Fort will become the nation's leading source of *real history*.

Become a charter member of the Fort Forty

Your tax-deductible gift of at least \$100,000 will provide membership in the Fort Forty, a small, leadership group sharing the belief that we must take action to ensure the teaching of real history and advance the historical literacy of countless generations to come.

Fort Ticonderoga is a 501(c)3 non-profit educational organization, museum, and historic site whose mission is to "*preserve, educate and provoke an active discussion about the past and its importance to present and future generations.*"

Notes

1. Pew Research Center. 2019. "Americans' Struggles with Truth, Accuracy, and Accountability." (July 22). <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/07/22/americans-struggles-with-truth-accuracy-and-accountability/>
2. Currie, Rachael DiCario. 2017. "How Historical Illiteracy Fuels Political Polarization." American Council of Trustees and Alumni. (February 27). https://www.goacta.org/news-item/how_historical_illiteracy_fuels_political_polarization/
3. Silver, Laura, Moira Fagan, Aidan Connaughton, and Mara Mordecai. 2021. "National Pride and Shame." (May 5). <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2021/05/05/5-national-pride-and-shame/>
4. Center for American Progress. 2018. "The State of Civics Education." <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2018/02/21/446857/state-civics-education/>



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