



*I have no idea of selling the land.
I view it in some degree as a public trust, and would on no
consideration permit the bridge to be injured, defaced
or masked from the public view.*

— THOMAS JEFFERSON TO WILLIAM CARUTHERS,
MARCH 15, 1815.

*Visitors and residents alike are awed by the
significant geological wonder and the economic impact
Natural Bridge State Park has in our community.*

— JEAN CLARK
*former tourism director, Lexington and
Rockbridge Area Tourism*

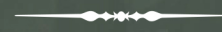


**Special thanks to the many partners who
made this event possible, especially:**

Virginia American Revolution 250 Commission
Rockbridge Historical Society
Lexington & Rockbridge Area Tourism
Rockbridge County
Friends of Natural Bridge State Park

NATURAL BRIDGE STATE PARK

Friday, July 5, 2024 • 11 a.m



*A Bridge to Revolution:
Celebrating the 250th Anniversary of
Thomas Jefferson's Purchase of the Natural Bridge*

History of today's Natural Bridge State Park

In 1767, Thomas Jefferson made his first visit to the Natural Bridge and left in awe of what he had seen, describing it as “the most sublime of Nature’s works.”



Wanting to conserve the Bridge in its natural state, Jefferson purchased it for 20 shillings, or \$200 today, on July 5, 1774. Forty years later, he wrote to a friend that he viewed the land as a “public trust and would on no consideration permit the Bridge to be injured, defaced or masked from the public view.”

After his death, the Bridge was purchased and sold to a variety of owners over the following centuries, eventually being named as a National Historic Landmark and becoming a Virginia State Park.

In 2023, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) became the owner of the Natural Bridge, with support from Virginia Conservation Legacy Fund, Trust for Public Land, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, Virginia Resources Authority, Friends of Natural Bridge, volunteers and community members.

The final transfer of ownership to DCR has ensured the historic Natural Bridge will be protected in perpetuity for all to enjoy.

Front: *Thomas Jefferson at Natural Bridge* by Caleb Boyle (active 1800 – 1822), c. 1801. Oil on canvas, 92 by 60 inches. Lafayette College, Easton, Pennsylvania, Kirby Collection of Historical Paintings.

Back: *Natural Bridge, Virginia* by David Johnson (1827 – 1908), 1860. Initialed and dated “D. J./ 1860,” at lower right. Oil on canvas, 14. by 22. inches. Reynolda House Museum of American Art, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, gift of Philip Hanes Jr. in honor of Charles H. Babcock Sr.

Above: *The Natural Bridge, Virginia* by Frederic Edwin Church (1826 – 1900), 1852. Signed and dated “f church/ 1852” on rock at bottom center. Oil on canvas, 38 by 33 inches. Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, gift of Thomas Fortune Ryan.

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WELCOME

SPEAKERS

Jim Jones

Park Manager, Natural Bridge State Park

Eric Wilson

Executive Director, Rockbridge Historical Society

Matthew S. Wells

Director, Department of Conservation and Recreation

Honorable Terry Austin

Delegate, 37th House District, & VA250 Commission Chair

LUNCH AT CEDAR CREEK PAVILION

SPECIAL PROGRAMS: SLIDESHOWS & CONVERSATION

(Interactive classroom, visitor center)

1-1:45 p.m.: “A Public Trust: Thomas Jefferson and Conservation.”

Brandon Dillard, *Director of Historic Interpretation, Monticello*

2-2:45 p.m.: “Virginia Arcadia: The Natural Bridge in American Art.”

Christopher Oliver, *Curator, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts*

3-3:45 p.m.: “Four Centuries of Tourism at Natural Bridge.”

Eric Wilson, *Executive Director, Rockbridge Historical Society*