

AFT NO. 1

PULLED THE AMERICAN FREEDOM TRAIN FOR THE US BICENTENNIAL



BALTIMORE & OHIO
RAILROAD MUSEUM

JANUARY 12, 2026



American Freedom Train No. 1

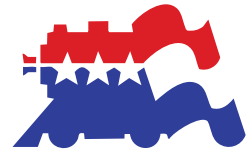
An American Icon



Ross E. Rowland, Jr. with crew for steam engine #1.

American Freedom Train No. 1 (AFT No. 1) was a moving emblem of unity, pride, and shared history—bringing America’s story directly to millions of people across the country.

Originally built in 1923 and later rebuilt for heavy mainline service, the locomotive was selected in 1975 to become one of three steam engines entrusted with pulling the American Freedom Train during the U.S. Bicentennial. Renumbered and dramatically repainted in red, white, and blue, AFT No. 1 emerged as an instantly recognizable icon of the celebration.

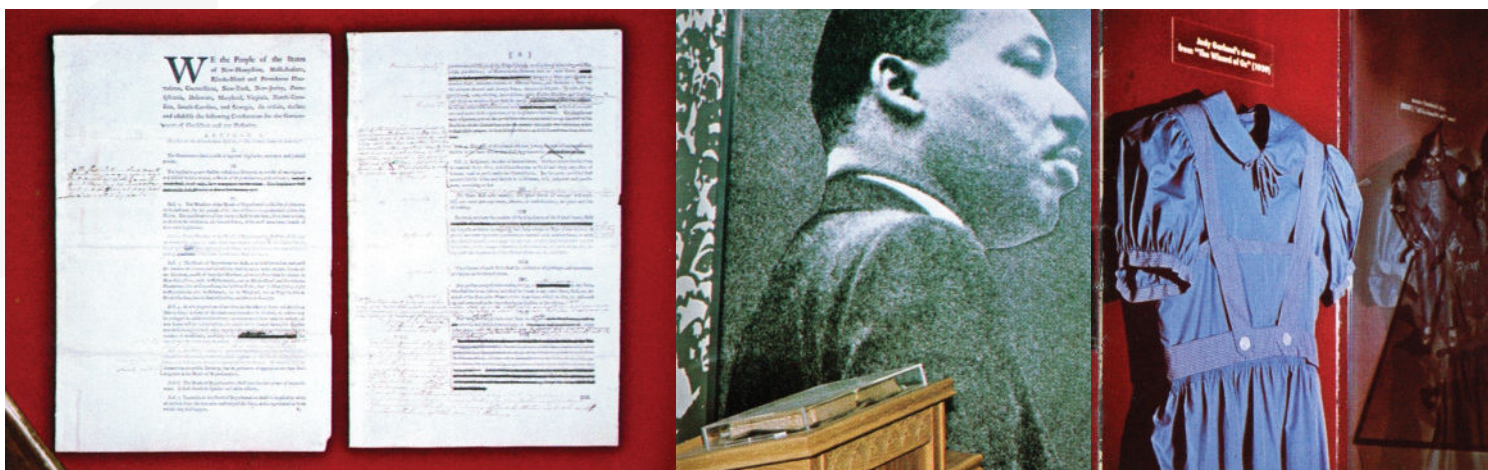


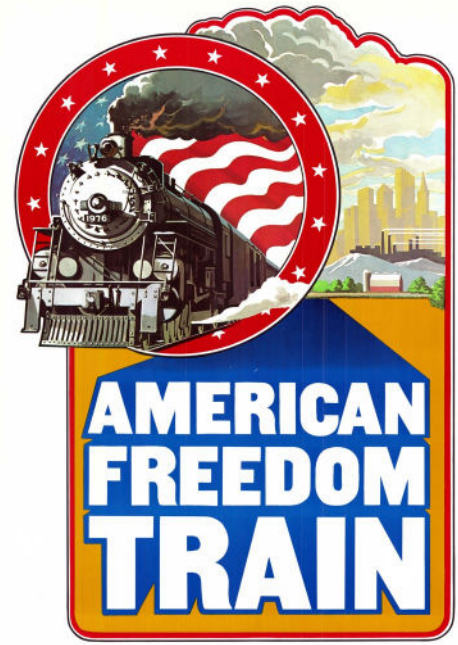
The American Freedom Train

From April 1975 through December 1976, the American Freedom Train operated as a mobile museum. Traveling to all 48 contiguous states and 138 cities over a 21-month journey, the train was designed to bring American history directly to communities large and small—many of which had never hosted a major museum exhibition.



Inside its display cars, visitors encountered more than 500 historic artifacts representing 200 years of American progress and culture. These included George Washington's copy of the U.S. Constitution, Benjamin Franklin's handwritten draft of the Articles of Confederation, the original Louisiana Purchase document, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s robes, and Judy Garland's dress from *The Wizard of Oz*. Together, these objects told a shared national story at a moment when Americans were reflecting on their past and future.

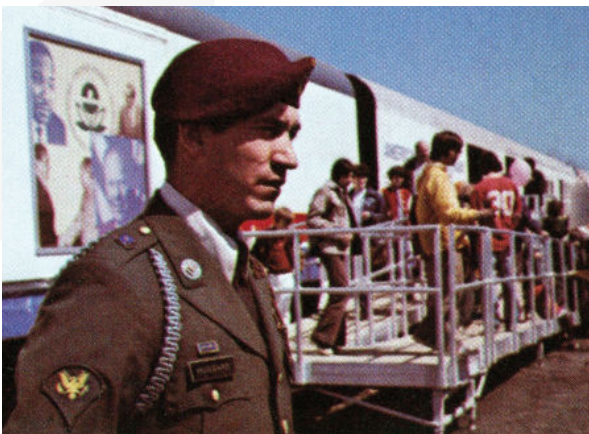




A National Phenomenon

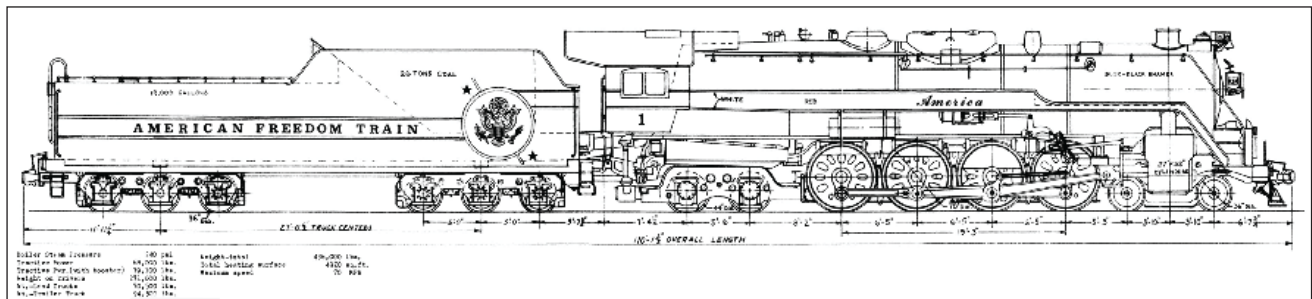
The public response to the American Freedom Train was extraordinary. More than seven million people visited the train during its tour, while countless others gathered along tracks to watch it pass through their towns. For many Americans, seeing AFT No. 1 in person became a lasting memory of the Bicentennial era.

Steam locomotives were deliberately chosen for the tour because of their emotional and historical resonance. AFT No. 1 was responsible for pulling the Freedom Train during portions of the tour, particularly in the northeastern United States, where dense crowds and historic rail corridors amplified its impact.



Why American Freedom Train No. 1 Is Unique

Of the three steam locomotives that powered the Freedom Train, American Freedom Train No. 1 holds a singular distinction: it is the only one preserved in its authentic Bicentennial identity. While the other locomotives survive today, they no longer reflect their Freedom Train appearance.



With its bold patriotic striping and hand-painted eagle emblem, AFT No. 1 became a visual shorthand for the Bicentennial itself. Over time, it has come to represent not just the train it pulled, but the spirit of national reflection and unity that defined the 1975-76 celebration.





Stewardship and Legacy

Today, American Freedom Train No. 1 resides at the B&O Railroad Museum in Baltimore, Maryland—the birthplace of American railroading. The Museum serves as the locomotive’s permanent home and steward, preserving it as part of the nation’s rail and cultural heritage.



The locomotive’s restoration and interpretation connect two milestone anniversaries: the 250th anniversary of the United States in 2026 and the 200th anniversary of American railroading in 2027. The AFT No. 1 provides a tangible link between past national celebrations and those yet to come.

Enduring Significance

The American Freedom Train No. 1 endures because it represents a rare moment when history, technology, and civic pride converged on a national scale. It demonstrates how railroads once served not only as engines of commerce, but as vehicles for shared experience and cultural connection.

As one of the most widely seen artifacts of the Bicentennial era, AFT No. 1 remains a reminder of how Americans chose to tell their story—together, on rails.



Acknowledgments

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