



Dear America,

Happy 250th birthday from St. Charles County, Missouri—a community that has helped shape your story for more than two centuries and remains committed to helping build your future.

St. Charles County's history has always been shaped by water. Bordered by two of America's great rivers—the Mississippi and the Missouri—our community developed along waterways that carried people, ideas and commerce across a growing nation.

Long before our cities, roads and businesses were established, these rivers sustained Indigenous peoples and connected communities throughout the continent. Later, they carried French traders, Spanish officials, American explorers, settlers and entrepreneurs. The Mississippi connected the region to communities and markets to the east and south, while the Missouri became a pathway into the American West.

Around 1769, French Canadian fur trader Louis Blanchette established a settlement along the Missouri River known as *Les Petites Côtes*—"The Little Hills." During Spanish rule, the settlement was renamed *San Carlos*. Following the Louisiana Purchase and the transfer of the territory to the United States in 1804, its name was anglicized to St. Charles.

The names changed as nations claimed the land, but the community's importance endured. Its strategic position along the Missouri River made it a center of trade and a natural gateway to the West.

In 1799, Daniel Boone and members of his extended family settled in the Femme Osage Valley of what is now St. Charles County. Already one of America's best-known frontiersmen, Boone became a local magistrate and community leader during the region's territorial period. He and his family helped establish settlements, farms and pathways that supported America's movement westward.

The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 transformed both St. Charles and the United States. The acquisition nearly doubled the size of the young nation, and when the territory formally became part of the United States in 1804, St. Charles stood at the entrance to a vast new American frontier.

That same year, members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition gathered in St. Charles, purchased supplies, recruited members and collected information before beginning their historic journey up the Missouri River. From our riverfront, the Corps of Discovery set out to explore the newly acquired territory and seek a route to the Pacific.

In the years that followed, St. Charles became an important point of departure for settlers, merchants and entrepreneurs traveling west. The Boone's Lick Road carried people and commerce from St. Charles into central Missouri, while the Missouri and Mississippi rivers connected emerging communities to a growing nation.

St. Charles later served as Missouri's first state capital, helping transform territory acquired through the Louisiana Purchase into the nation's 24th state. From exploration and settlement to commerce and statehood, St. Charles County stood at the intersection of many forces shaping America's growth.

As the community grew, St. Charles also helped advance education on the American frontier. In 1818, French missionary and educator Rose Philippine Duchesne established the Academy of the Sacred Heart in St. Charles. It was the first Sacred Heart school in North America and the first free school west of the Mississippi River.

Duchesne devoted her life to education, faith and service, establishing schools that extended her influence far beyond St. Charles. She was canonized as a saint in 1988, and her shrine and final resting place remain on the Academy's campus. More than two centuries after its founding, the Academy continues educating students—an enduring legacy of one woman's determination to bring learning and opportunity to the American frontier.

Yet America's expansion also carried contradictions that cannot be overlooked. While the nation extended its boundaries and created new opportunities, it had not extended its promise of freedom to everyone.

Archer Alexander, who was enslaved in St. Charles County, became part of the struggle to change that. During the Civil War, Alexander risked his life to warn Union forces about a plot by Confederate sympathizers to destroy the Peruque Creek railroad bridge. His warning helped save the strategically important bridge, but his courageous act forced him to flee enslavement and seek freedom.

Alexander's likeness was later used for the figure of the formerly enslaved man in the Emancipation Memorial in Washington, D.C. His journey from slavery to self-liberation became part of our national history and a lasting reminder that freedom has often advanced because individuals were willing to risk everything to claim it.

Daniel Boone, Rose Philippine Duchesne and Archer Alexander represent different but equally meaningful chapters in the American story. Boone helped open America's physical frontier, encouraging settlement and opportunity west of the Mississippi. Duchesne brought education and service to a growing frontier community. Alexander helped expand America's moral frontier, pushing our nation closer to fulfilling its promise of liberty.

Their experiences reveal both the ambition and the unfinished work of the American experiment. Boone's story reflects exploration, resilience and the pursuit of opportunity. Duchesne's reflects faith, perseverance and the transformative power of education. Alexander's reflects courage, self-determination and the continuing struggle to make freedom real. Together, they remind us that America has grown not only by reaching new places, but also by expanding knowledge, serving others and moving closer to its highest ideals.

To those who may read this letter many years from now, let us also tell you about St. Charles County in 2026.

Today, nearly 415,000 people call our county home, making it one of Missouri's largest and fastest-growing counties. Our historic river communities have been joined by thriving cities, growing neighborhoods and expanding business districts. Farms and vineyards remain part of our landscape, even as new homes, advanced manufacturing facilities, technology centers, healthcare campuses and commercial developments rise around them.

Our economy is connected to the nation and the world. St. Charles County is home to major employers in automotive manufacturing, financial services, technology, aerospace, healthcare and logistics. General Motors builds vehicles in Wentzville. Mastercard and Citi connect people and businesses through a rapidly changing global financial system. Manufacturers, family farms, wineries and technology companies produce goods and ideas that travel far beyond our county.

But large employers tell only part of our story. Much of our community's character and economic strength comes from small businesses—the restaurants, shops, contractors, professional firms, manufacturers and family-owned companies whose owners invest their savings, take risks, employ their neighbors and support local causes.

In 2026, the St. Charles Regional Chamber represents more than 1,400 businesses and organizations. We work to create connections, strengthen regional partnerships, advocate for the business community and expand opportunities for those who live and work here. We believe strong businesses help create strong communities and that our future depends upon working together across municipal and county boundaries.

Our schools, colleges and universities prepare students for careers that earlier generations could not have imagined. Our healthcare professionals care for a growing and aging population. Our first responders protect our neighborhoods. Our nonprofit organizations serve those facing hardship, and our civic leaders work to manage the opportunities and responsibilities that accompany continued growth.

Technology is changing nearly every aspect of how we live and work. Artificial intelligence, automation and digital communication are transforming businesses and creating both excitement and uncertainty. Employers are searching for skilled workers, while communities across America compete to attract and retain talented people.

Like many growing communities in 2026, we face important questions. How do we create enough attainable housing for working families? How do we maintain roads, bridges and other infrastructure as our population grows? How do we prepare people for jobs that are changing rapidly? How do we preserve our farmland, natural resources and historic places while welcoming new investment and opportunity?

We do not yet have every answer. But we continue to believe that progress is possible when businesses, governments, schools, nonprofit organizations and residents work together. We believe regional cooperation matters because economic opportunities and community challenges do not stop at a city or county boundary.

America, your story has always been one of progress—sometimes inspiring, sometimes difficult and always unfinished. The history we celebrate includes remarkable achievements, but it also challenges us to keep working toward the promise of liberty and opportunity for every American.

As you begin your next 250 years, my hope is that we remain willing to explore new possibilities without forgetting the lessons of our past; that we continue to value courage, education, service and individual initiative; and that we recognize our greatest accomplishments are possible when people and communities move forward together.

From *Les Petites Côtes* and Daniel Boone's frontier home to the Louisiana Purchase, the departure of Lewis and Clark, Missouri's first state capital, Rose Philippine Duchesne's pioneering work in education and Archer Alexander's courageous pursuit of freedom, St. Charles County has helped write the American story.

From the waters of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, that story flowed through St. Charles County and continued westward. Those rivers still remind us that no community's story exists alone. What begins locally can travel outward, connect people and help shape a nation.

We are proud of the role our community has played in your first 250 years—and even more excited about the contribution we can make to your future.

Happy birthday, America. Like the two great rivers that define our home, may your journey continue forward - carrying the enduring promise of freedom, opportunity and a better future for generations yet to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Scott Tate", written in a cursive style.

Scott Tate
President & CEO
St. Charles Regional Chamber