

Then & Now - Princeton Town Meeting American Revolutions Actions

March 2026 by Harry A Pape

“ . . . in his Majesties Name you are Required forthwith to warn & give notice to all the freeholders & other inhabitants Qualified by Law to Vote in Town affairs to meet & assemble at the Meeting house . . . ”

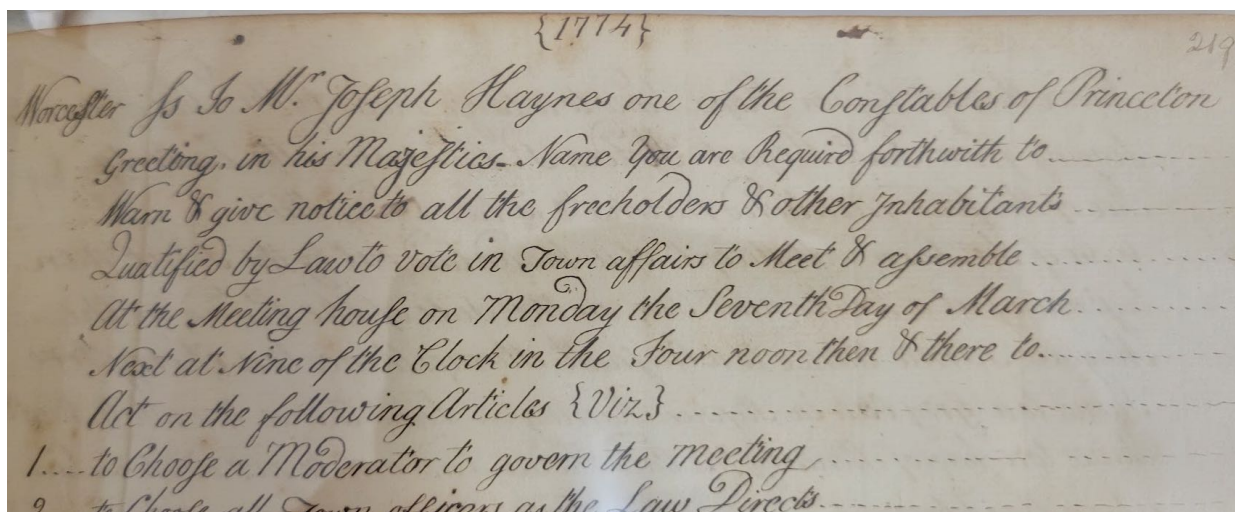
Most of us are very familiar with the “Town Meeting” form of local government peculiar to New England. Each year, we gather in the late Spring to elect town officers (yes: the Annual Town Election is actually a part of the Annual Town Meeting and was an article on the warrant; usually right after the vote to choose a Moderator!) and vote on budgets, bylaws, zoning, capital projects and other items important to the functioning of our town through its governing bodies. Citizens can also petition to address an issue not otherwise of interest to the Select Board.

We are summoned to these gatherings through the posting of a Warrant. Traditionally, and still today, this document is literally “posted” in three public places: Town Hall, the school and the Post Office. Up until this 21st century, it was also mailed to each home. Now rather, it is also “posted” on the internet (websites, social media, emailing lists).

The Warrant begins: “In the name of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts . . . “

Why am I harping on these details?

Having spent some time in the vault at Town Hall; examining the original handwritten records of the earliest Town Meetings, I found it interesting to see how the opening wording changed during the tumultuous times of 1774-1776.

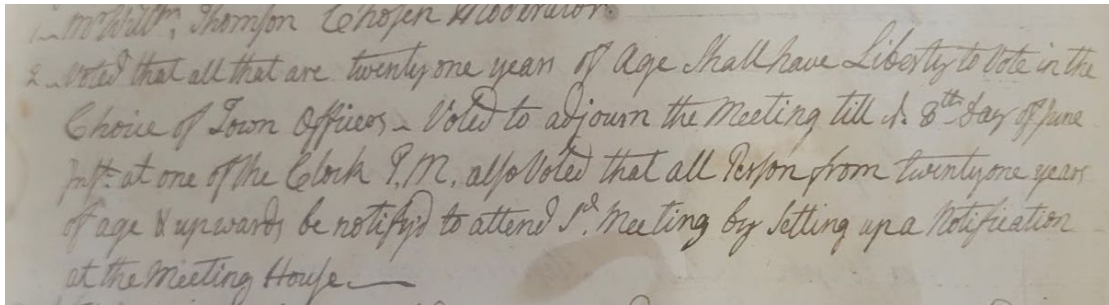


1774 219

Whereafter Is to M. Joseph Haynes one of the Constables of Princeton
Greeting, in his Majesties Name you are Required forthwith to
Warn & give notice to all the freeholders & other inhabitants
Qualified by Law to vote in Town affairs to Meet & assemble
At the Meeting house on Monday the Seventh Day of March
Next at Nine of the Clock in the Four noon then & there to
Act on the following Articles {Viz}
1. to Choose a Moderator to govern the meeting
2. to Choose all Town officers as the Law Directs

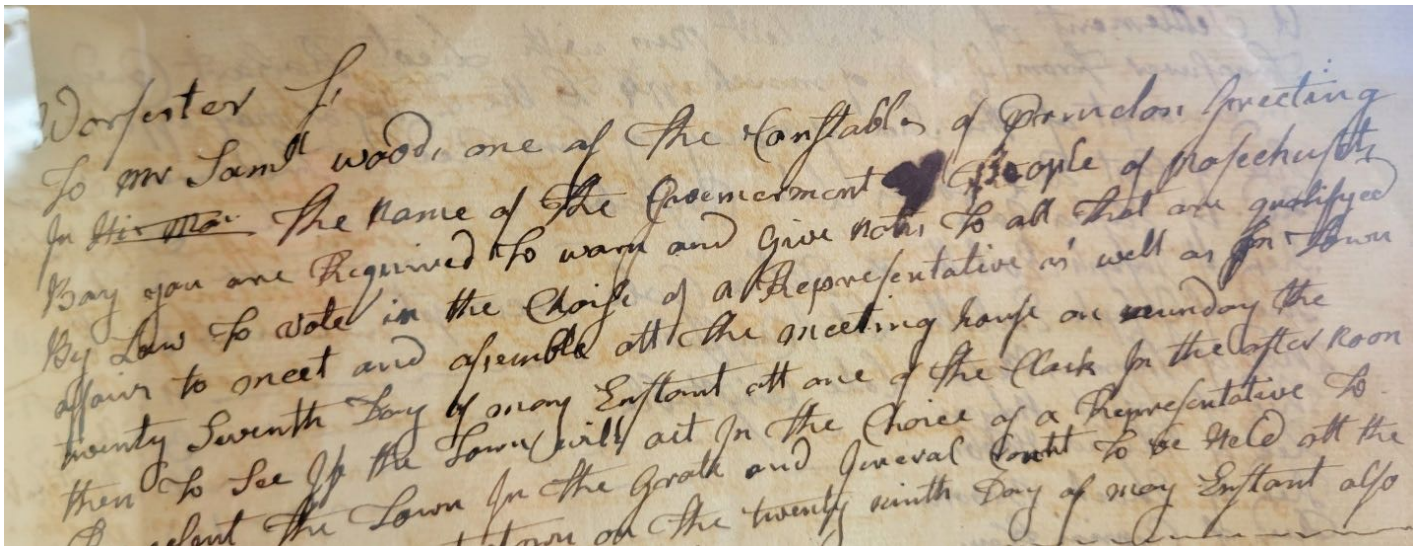
This is in 1774 when Princeton was part of a British colony. “Freeholders” were those who, by virtue of real property ownership (“freehold”), had the right to vote. Since only males could legally own property, all “Freeholders” were men.

At a Town Meeting in May 1775 it was voted that those males who had attained the age of twenty-one could now elect Town officers; regardless of land ownership.



Mr. Will^m Thompson chosen Moderator
Voted that all that are twenty one years of Age shall have Liberty to vote in the
Choice of Town Officers, & Voted to adjourn the Meeting till the 3rd Day of June
next at one of the Clock P.M. also Voted that all Person from twenty one years
of age & upwards be notified to attend s^d. Meeting by setting up a Notification
at the Meeting House

By the Spring of 1776, enough revolutionary spirit had been kindled that Clerk James Mirick boldly modified the traditional wording in his May 13th Warrant; he started to write, then crossed out “*In His Maj*” and continued “*In the name of the government and people of Massachusetts Bay*”



Dorchester
To our Sam^l Wood, one of the Constables of Dorchester Meeting
In His Maj^{ty} the name of the Government of the People of Massachusetts
Bay you are Required to warn and give notice to all that are qualified
By Law to vote in the Choice of a Representative in well as for Town
affair to meet and assemble at the meeting house on Sunday the
twenty Seventh Day of May Instant at one of the Clock in the after Noon
then to see if the Town will sit in the Choice of a Representative to
represent the Town in the Great and General Court to be held at the
Boston on the twenty ninth Day of May Instant also

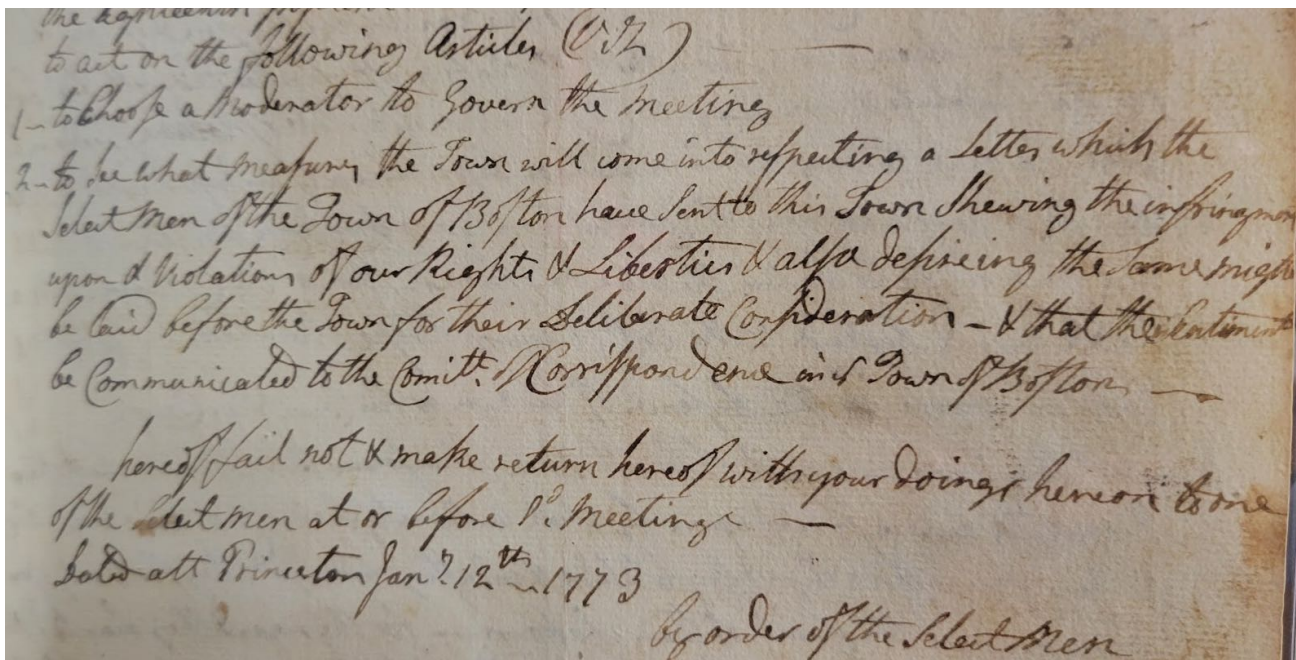
This change in the “warning” language of the Warrant is a reflection of the unrest in every town caused by the various acts of oppression visited on the colonies by the Crown. As well, it shows this unrest had matured to the point where fealty to the King was replaced by the notion that the province stood on its own; independent . . .

Princeton & Committees of Correspondence

As we will see, during the years leading up to a declaration of independence and onset of the armed conflict of the Revolutionary War, New England town meetings played a pivotal role in reinforcing **local** governance and **community** decision-making. These gatherings allowed residents to openly debate issues, vote on local matters, and express their views on colonial resistance to British rule. Town meetings became forums for discussing revolutionary ideas and organizing boycotts. Alongside the tradition of New England town meetings, “Committees of Correspondence” emerged as a crucial mechanism for colonial unity and resistance.

In response to rumors that the British Parliament was about to muck around with the court system in Boston, local debate there prompted Samuel Adams to propose the creation of a “corresponding society” to gauge the sentiments of other Massachusetts towns. On 2 November 1772, a committee was born when the Boston selectmen voted to establish a twenty-one-member Committee of Correspondence.

In Princeton, just 11 weeks later, a town meeting was called for January 18, 1773 “to see what measures the Town will come into respecting a letter which the Selectmen of the Town of Boston have sent to this Town showing the infringement upon & violation of our Rights & Liberties & after defining the same might be laid before the Town for their deliberate consideration & that their sentiments be communicated to the Committee of Correspondence in the Town of Boston”.



the agreement
to act on the following Articles (1773)

- 1- to choose a Moderator to Govern the meeting
- 2- to see what measures the Town will come into respecting a letter which the Selectmen of the Town of Boston have sent to this Town showing the infringement upon & violation of our Rights & Liberties & also defining the same might be laid before the Town for their deliberate consideration - & that the same be communicated to the Comitt. of Correspondence in the Town of Boston

heresof said not to make return heresof with your doings heresof to me
of the select men at or before P. meeting
held at Princeton Jan 21st 1773
by order of the select men

The inhabitants assembled at the Meetinghouse at one o'clock Monday the 18th, selected Lt. Boaz Moore as Moderator and promptly adjourned! (Recall that a "meetinghouse" in those times served both the town and the church. In 1773 Princeton, it was on Mountain Road across from the cemetery.) It seems that a venue more conducive to profound deliberations was needed. One half hour later, the meeting reconvened at the home of Joseph Sargent. We can only speculate as to the accommodations (libations?) made available by the hospitable Mr. Sargent . . .

Now, the voters were in a much improved humor to take the "*letter of Correspondence into Consideration*" and voted to "*choose a committee for the same purpose & to report a draft of some votes as they may think proper for the town to come into in the present unhappy state of affairs*" & "*whereupon the following gentlemen were made choice of*": Ephraim Wolfson, Lt, Boaz Moore, Col Ebenezer Jones, Charles Brooks and Joseph Phelps. Meeting adjourned.

The inhabitants being assembled at time & Place & the meeting being opened
the following votes were passed (viz)
1. Lt. Boaz Moore chosen Moderator
2. Voted to adjourn the meeting to the house of Mr. Joseph Sargent for half an hour
the meeting being opened upon its adjournment it was voted to take the letter of
Correspondence into consideration. also voted to choose a committee for the same
purpose & to report a draft of some votes as they may think proper for the
town to come into in the present unhappy state of affairs whereupon the following
gentlemen were made choice of, viz

Ephraim Wolfson	} Committee of Correspondence
Lt. Boaz Moore	
Col Ebenezer Jones	
Charles Brooks	
Joseph Phelps	

also voted to adjourn the meeting to a meeting ^{to be held} on Monday next at one of the
clock in the afternoon to hear & consider the Report of the Com^{tee}

This committee was given a week to prepare said votes and reported to the reconvened meeting the following Monday at the Meetinghouse:

“1- That the Connection between the Mother Country & these Colonies is of great Consequence to both, if mutually kept up, but when digressions are made from establishd compacts, that Connection begins to lessen & of course creates an alienation, the effects of which must be attended with and consequent for the Resolute Man in a just cause, while in a state of freedom never will consent to any abridgements or deprivation of his just Rights, & disdanes any threats or any measures of compulsion to a submission thereto _ not like the dog the more he is beaten the more he fawns _ but on the contrary with a noble mind defends to the last, & every stripe stimulates his efforts & endeavours in the defence of his own or his countries cause

2- That this town as a part of this Province, whenscever their Rights Liberties & Properties are infringed upon by what authority scever, that they, in honour to their forefathers by whose fortitude & industry under God they for many years have enjoyed the fruits of their Labour _ for the regard they bear to Posterity _ as friend to their Country, have good rights to complane & manifest their uneasiness att such proceedings _

3- That the repeated attempts to make the People of this Province subject to unjust taxations, & absolute dependency upon the Crown, to them appear subversive of & inconsistent with the Constitution of a free People _

4- that such measures are unconstitutional & demand the attention of all well disposed People, & a mutual Connection & joint adhearence in proper means for redress that thereby the Rights & Liberties civil and religius which have been transmitted to us from our illustrious ancestors, might be kept inviolate by us their Posterity _

5- that they shall always be ready to concur in all just & proper means that this Province & the neighbouring Colonies may come into for Common good & in conjunction with friends to Liberty shall bear testimony against all invasions upon our Rights & Liberties _

6- that this Report be put upon the Town Record that Posterity may know that they had a sense of their invaluable Rights & Liberties & were not willing to part with them but by their own consent & that they determined to vindicate & support them as times & occasions may call for _”

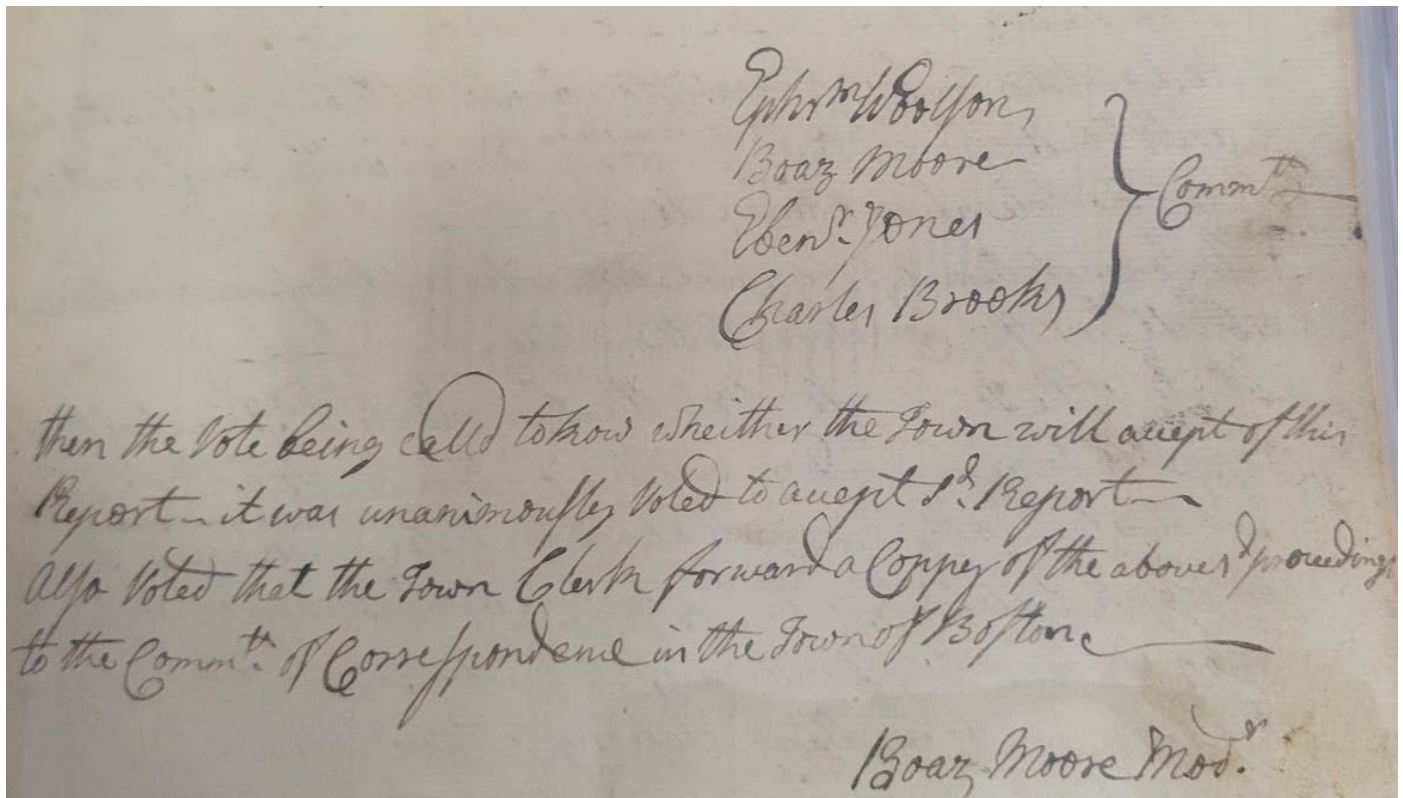
1- that the Connection between the Mother Country & these Colonies is of great Consequence to both, if mutually kept up, but when Discrepancies are made from Established Compacts, that Connection begins to lessen & of Course creates an Alienation, the effects of which must be attended with bad Consequences for the Resolute Man in a just Cause, while in a State of ~~Native~~ Freedom never will consent to any abridgements or Seprivation of his just Rights, & if danger threaten or any measure of Compulsion to an admission thereto, not like the Dog the more he is beaten the more he fawns - but on the contrary with a Noble mind defend to the last, & every Stroke stimulates his efforts & Endeavour ⁱⁿ the defence of his own or his Countries Cause

2- that this Town as a part of this Province, whensoever their Rights Liberties & Properties are infringed upon by what Authority soever, that ~~then~~ they, in honour to their forefathers by whose Sobriety & Industry, under God they for many years have enjoyed the fruits of their Labour - for the regard they bear to Posterity - as friends to their Country, have good right to complain & manifest their uneasiness at such proceedings -

3. That the repeated attempts ~~which are made~~ to make the People of this Province
Subject to unjust Taxations, & Absolute Dependancy upon the Crown, to them
appear Subversive of & Inconsistent with the Constitution of a free People
4. That such Measures are unconstitutional & demand the attention of all well
disposed People, & a mutual Connection & joint adherence in proper means
for redress, that thereby the Rights & Liberties civil & religious which
have been transmitted to us from our illustrious Ancestors, might be kept
Ex Inviolate by us their Posterity
5. That they shall always be ready to concur ~~with~~ ⁱⁿ all just & proper means
that this Province & the Neighbouring Colonies may come into for Common
good & in Conjunction with friends to Liberty shall bear Testimony against
all Invasions upon our Right & Liberties
6. That this Report be put upon the Town Record that Posterity may know
that they had a sense of their Invaluable Rights & Liberties & were not
willing to part with them but by their own Consent & that they are determined
to vindicate & Support them as times & Occasions may call for

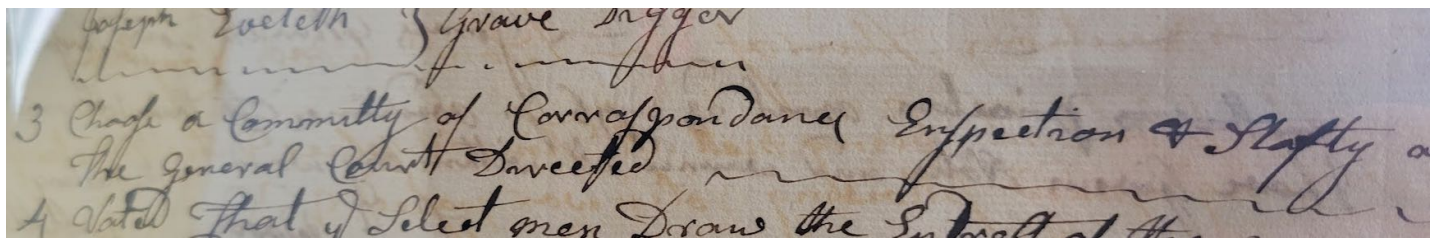
That last part makes it clear these engaged citizens wanted us, today, to know they were of clear mind and fervent heart; that they understood and held dear their rights to self-determination; unfettered by an overlord they had no voice in choosing. Furthermore, they were clear that Posterity (us, today) would know their firm resolve to act as necessary to defend their Rights & Liberties.

This report, signed by the four Committee members, was unanimously accepted by the Town Meeting; which then voted to forward it to the Committee in Boston.



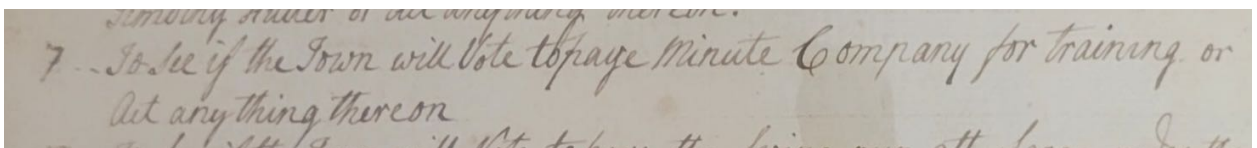
In colonial Massachusetts, Committees of Correspondence (est. 1772) and Committees of Safety (est. 1774-1775) were both essential, interconnected, and, over time, blended Patriot, shadow-government organizations. While Correspondence focused on political propaganda and ideological unity, Safety acted as an executive body managing military readiness and logistical, hands-on resistance against British authorities.

Whereas Princeton had acted at Town Meeting to “Choose a Committy of Correspondance Inspection & Safety as the General Court Directed”,

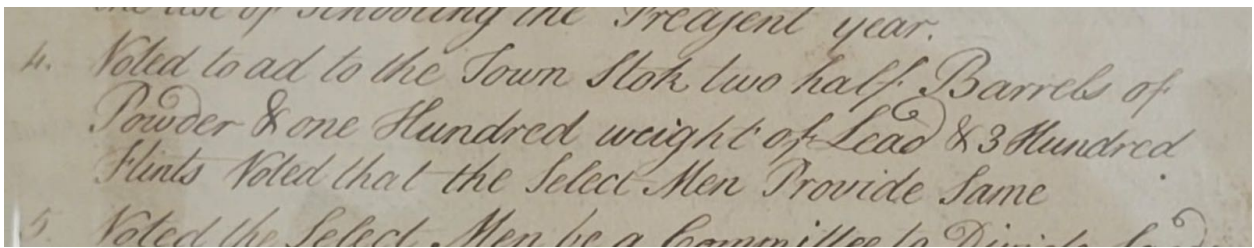


subsequent Town Meetings addressed requests to:

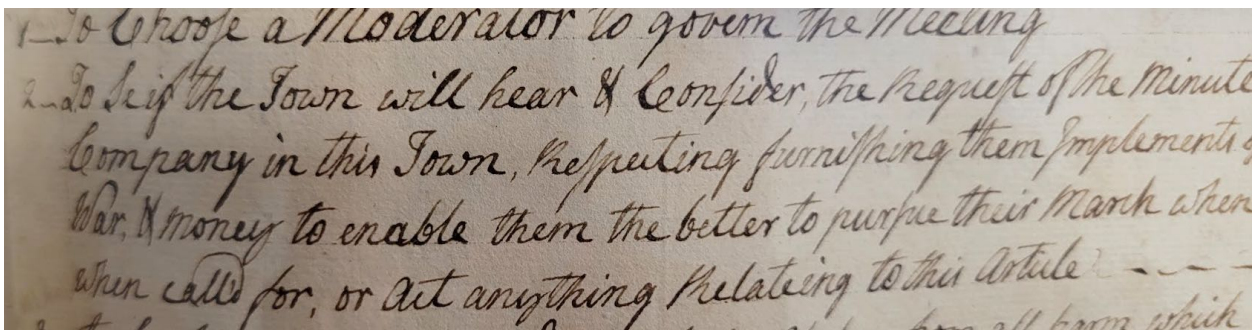
- pay for training of the Minute Company:



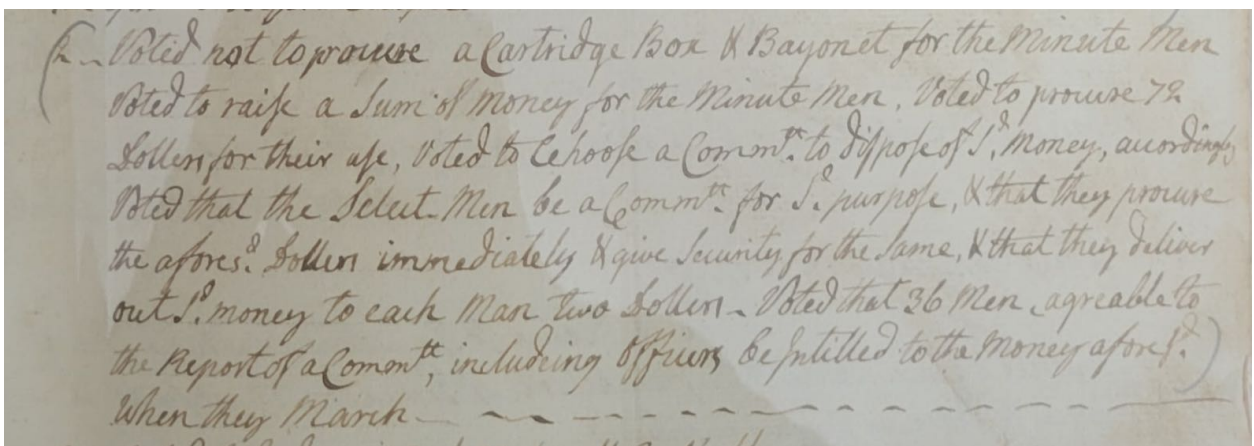
- "Voted to ad to the Town Stok two half Barrels of Powder & one Hundred wight of Lead & 3 Hundred Flints"



- "To se if the Town will hear & consider the Request of the Minute Company in this Town, respecting furnishing them Implements of War, & money to enable them the better to pursue their March when when call'd for . . ."

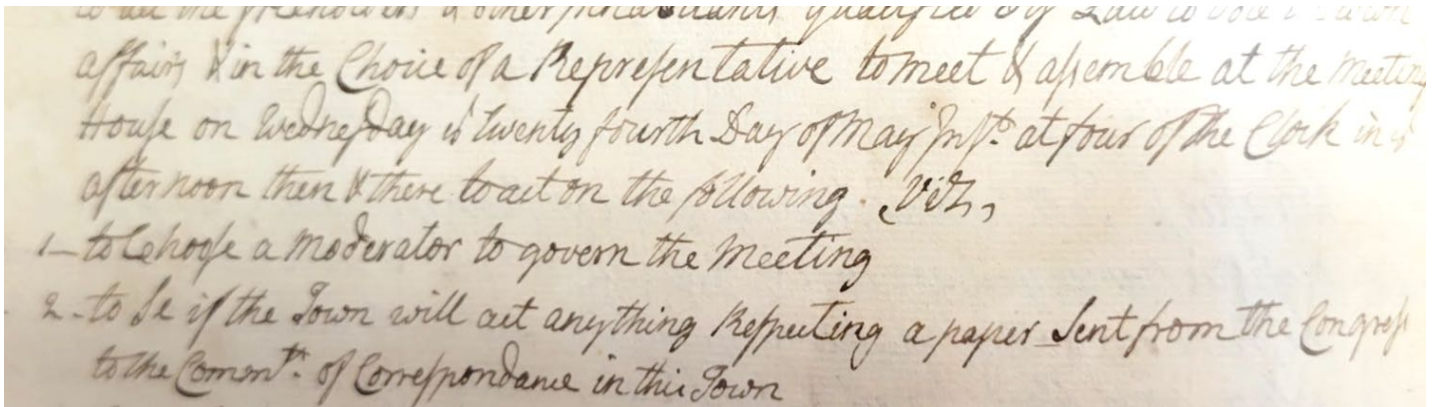


- Did NOT approve procurement of "a Cartridge Box & Bayonet for the Minute Men" but DID approve raising \$72 "that 36 Men, agreeable to the Report of a Commtt, including Officers be Intitled to" . . . "When they March _"



By networking towns and provinces, these various committees enabled colonists to share grievances, organize collective action, and amplify their demands for self-governance. Across the colonies, Committees of Correspondence thus played a pivotal role in

transforming individual frustrations into a *broader* movement for American unity. They helped organize boycotts, spread revolutionary ideas, and ultimately laid the groundwork for the Continental Congress, where representatives from different colonies began to speak with one voice against British rule.

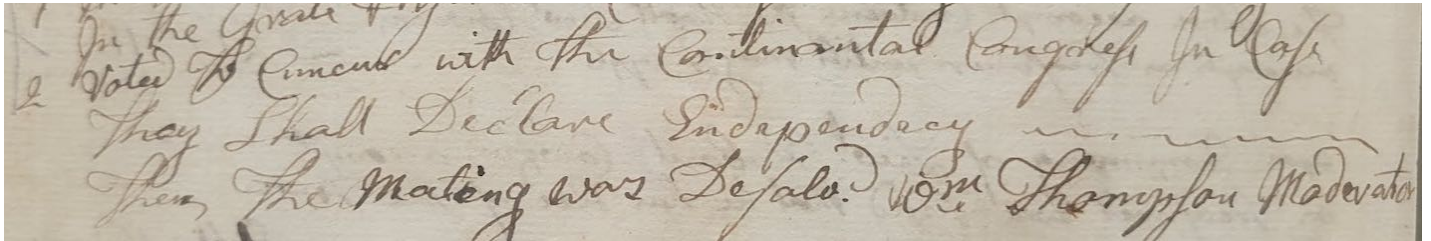


“In response to encouragement from the Continental Congress (in Article 2 of the Warrant above), town meeting solicited and received complaints *“against anyone suspected to be unfriendly to their country”*. Specifically, the Reverend Timothy Fuller was cited for *“refusing to call a fast last year for his publick discourses to the Minute Company at the last fast; as tending to discourager people in defending their Rights & Liberties & for taking cattle suspected to be Col Jones property”*. For his part, Caleb Mirick (who built the house Wendy and I inhabit) was cited for *“taking cattle suspected to be Col Jones & for entertaining Tories at sundary times”*. Town Meeting voted for these two *“to be inquired of”*.

Ultimately, the Rev. Fuller was run out of town, but Lt. Mirick was rehabilitated and served in various capacities; including Moderator.

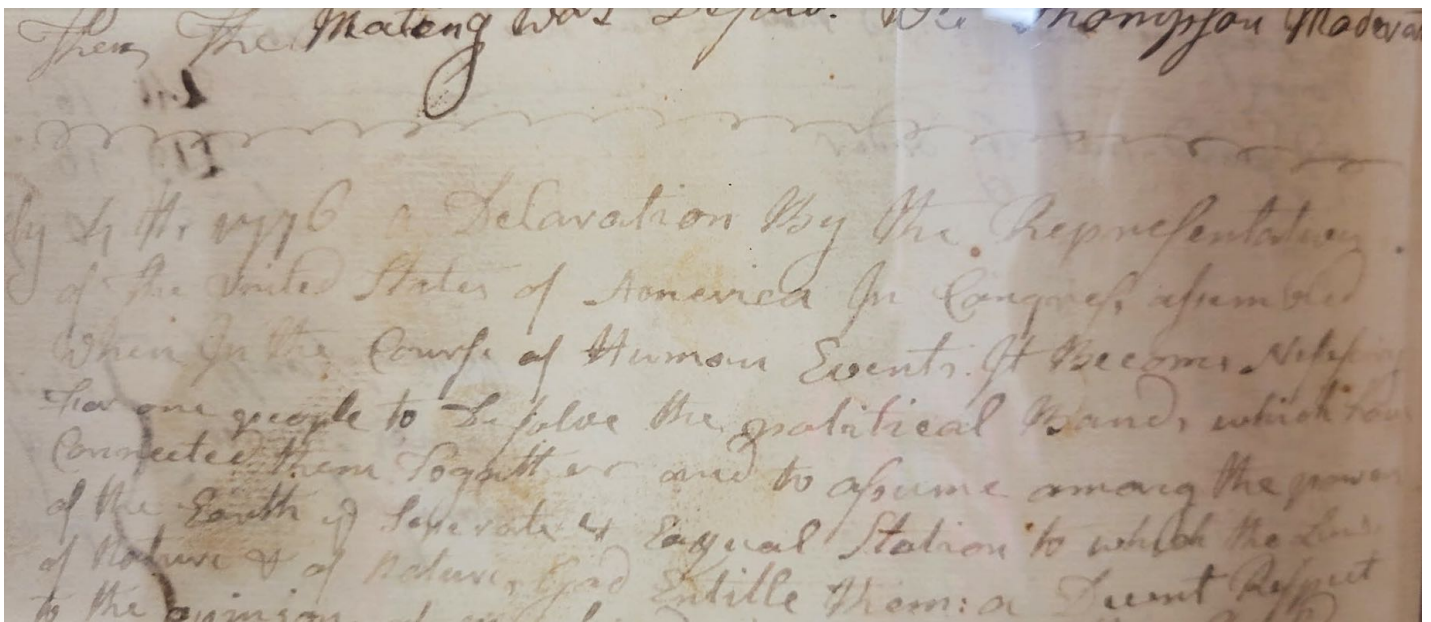
250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence

So, we can see that our little town of Princeton, (with its then ~700 inhabitants) was actively engaged in the activities leading up to the fateful “Declaration of Independence”. At a Town Meeting June 14th, 1776 (where the warrant language stopped invoking His Majesty as the convening authority) the Town voted to “*Concur with the Continental Congress in Case they Shall Declare Independency . . .*”

A photograph of a handwritten document in cursive script. The text reads: "In the Year 1776
Voted to Concur with the Continental Congress in Case
they Shall Declare Independency
then the Meeting was Defald. Wm Thompson Moderator".

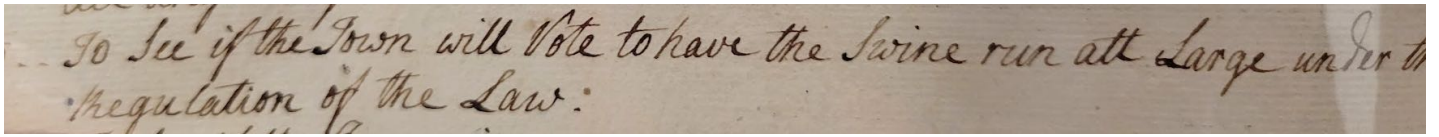
There follows in the Town Records and full text transcription of the Declaration of Independence that had been signed in Philadelphia by John Hancock and the rest of the delegates.

“ July 4th 1776 A Declaration By the Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled . . . ”

A photograph of a handwritten document in cursive script, showing the beginning of the Declaration of Independence. The text reads: "then the Meeting was Defald. Wm Thompson Moderator
By the 1776 a Declaration By the Representatives
of the United States of America in Congress assembled
When in the Course of Human Events, it becomes necessary
for one people to dissolve the political Bands which have
connected them together, and to assume among the powers
of the Earth, separate & equal Station to which the Laws
of Nature & of Nature's God Entitle them: a decent Respect
to the opinions of mankind, that all Men are born free & equal in Rights & Liberty - That they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty & the pursuit of Happiness - That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to change it, and to institute a new Government, laying its Foundation on such Principles, and organizing its Powers in such Manner, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness - Prudence in the long Course of human Events, has ever been looked upon as a Necessity, which gives a solemn Attitude to the People, who are ever ready to support the best & most sacred of all Laws, the Laws of God & of Men - We therefore the Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, do hereby declare that the United States are, and of Right ought to be, free & independent States - That they are absolved from all Allegiance to Great Britain, and that all political Connections with Great Britain, and all Jurisdiction, Claims, Rights & Pretensions of Great Britain, are hereby totally dissolved - That the Union, now between Great Britain & the United States, is hereby declared null & void - That the Declaration of Independence of the United States is hereby affirmed, and that the same is hereby declared to be the only true & lawful Declaration of Independence of the United States - In Witness whereof, we have hereunto set our Hands and Seals, at Philadelphia, the fourth Day of July, 1776." The image shows the beginning of this text, starting with "then the Meeting was Defald. Wm Thompson Moderator" and "By the 1776 a Declaration By the Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled".

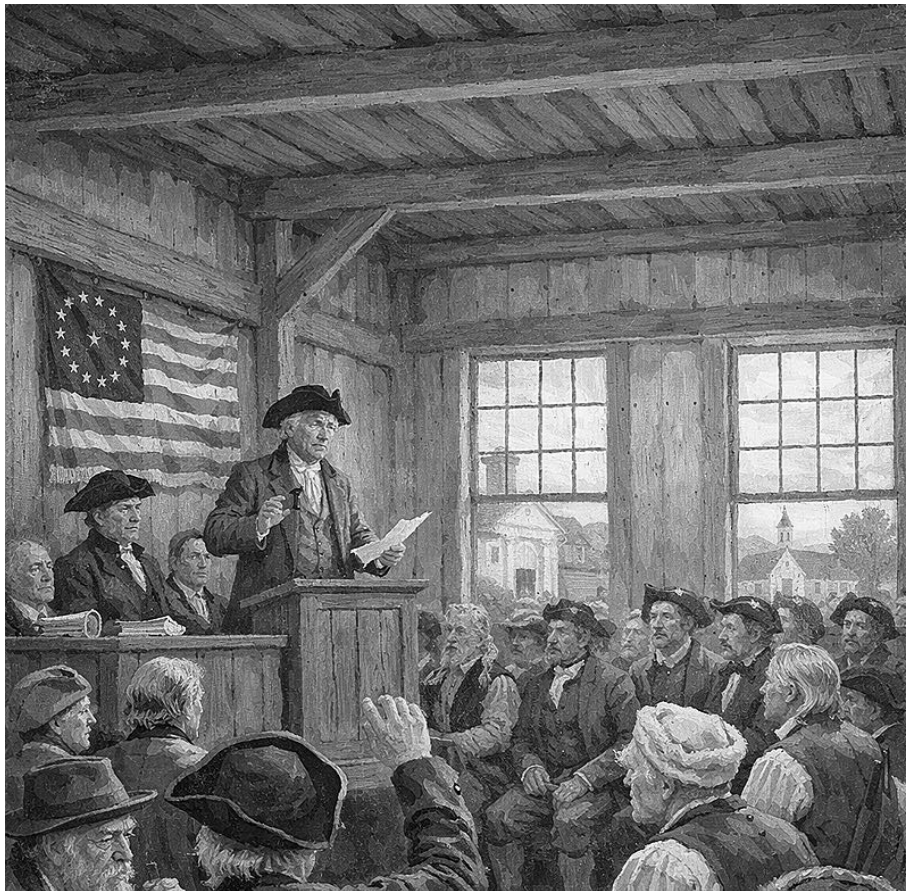
“*New England Town Meeting*” This tradition of participatory democracy was fundamental in fostering and reinforcing a sense of independence and the power of collective action; contributing to the broader movement leading to American self-government. We are blessed in Princeton to have preserved the original, hand-written Town Records. We can

readily see how the institution of Town Meeting, even as it is still practiced today, handled both the mundane matters of building roads, dealing with pecuniary matters of taxation and expenditures, but also the much more weighty matters of self-governance, collective federal democracy and sovereign independence. (We even voted in the distant past “*to have the Swine run att Large under the Regulation of the Law*”)



So See if the Town will Vote to have the Swine run att Large under the Regulation of the Law.

Please watch for more information on a live performance [“Declaring Independence: Then & Now”](#) presented by the Freedom’s Way National Heritage Area, Saturday, May 16th at 4:30 pm in the Congregational Church. Co-sponsored by the Princeton Historical Society and Princeton Historical Commission.



Being that photography wasn’t invented yet in 1775, we asked AI to create an image of a 1775 town meeting in a rural New England farming community.