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MORVEN

MUSEUM & GARDEN

New Historic Artifacts on View in
Five Independent Souls: The Signers from New Jersey

Less than 3 months left to see the special exhibition examining
New Jersey's Signers of the Declaration of Independence

PRINCETON, NJ (October 29, 2026) — In June 1776, the provincial congress of New Jersey sent five replacement delegates to Philadelphia with instructions to vote for independence from Great Britain. In a letter, John Adams confidently referred to them as “independent souls.” ***Five Independent Souls: The Signers from New Jersey*** examines the lives, ideals, and contradictions of the Declaration's New Jersey Signers—**Abraham Clark, John Hart, Francis Hopkinson, Richard Stockton, and John Witherspoon**—through over 100 extraordinary historic artifacts, including **items from private collections not usually on display to the public.**

The exhibition opened on May 3, 2026. Due to the fragile nature of some objects, recently some items have come off display and **exciting new objects are now on view.** These include:

- *Stamp Act*, re-printed by James Parker in New Jersey in 1765 on a press owned by Benjamin Franklin
- a deeply patriotic 1776 letter from Richard Stockton to fellow Signer Abraham Clark, pleading for stockings and shoes for the Continental Army
- a highly detailed facsimile of one of the 26 original surviving copies of the Declaration of Independence printed in Philadelphia by John Dunlap on July 4/5, 1776
- a 1781 funeral sermon on the death of the Richard Stockton, Signer of the Declaration
- a British Order of Protection for William Reed, signed by N. Cox (similar to one Stockton would have received after becoming a prisoner of war and swearing an oath to King George, securing his release from prison)

The exhibition asks what the Signers were like before, during, and after the Revolution and confronts a confounding actuality: while risking their lives for liberty, freedom, and equality, they denied these rights to the people they enslaved. Visitors can learn about these subjugated men, women, and children, as well as the impact of American independence on New Jersey's indigenous population.

“This is the first exhibition to examine the lives of New Jersey's five Signers of the Declaration of Independence. We are excited to present a more holistic look

at these lesser-known founding fathers whose earlier biographies are often romanticized and mythologized.”

—Elizabeth Allan, Deputy Director & Curator

In addition, ***Five Independent Souls*** highlights that the decision to separate from Great Britain was not a foregone conclusion, and that the resulting conflict was also a civil war. It illustrates New Jersey’s vital role in passing the resolution for American independence, and Princeton’s central role in achieving victory.

“During this extraordinary anniversary, Morven is proud to stand where American independence began—and to share these stories with new generations.”

—Rhonda DiMascio, Executive Director

On display are manuscripts, paintings, furniture, and personal objects on loan from the collections of: the American Antiquarian Society; the American Philosophical Society; Historical Society of Pennsylvania/Atwater Kent Collection at Drexel University; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Historical Society of Princeton; the Hopewell Museum; Independence National Historical Park; Museum of the American Revolution; the National Gallery of Art; Presbyterian Historical Society; Princeton University Art Museum; Princeton University Library; The Rosenbach Museum & Library; The New York Public Library; The U.S. Naval Academy Museum; Yale University Art Gallery; and numerous private lenders.

“In the exhibition galleries, visitors will see historical treasures hailing from an impressive array of institutional and private collections, as well as some special items from Morven’s own collection. We were pleased to be able to find a breadth of objects to give light to New Jersey’s Signers, in addition to being able to borrow significant works to tell the story of the vote for independence.”

—Jesse Gordon Simons, Curator & Registrar

Some of the **many unusual and interesting pieces** include a lock of John Hart’s hair; John Witherspoon’s tall case clock c.1760; the first American Bible dedicated "to the Readers" instead of "King James;" a flirtatious letter from George Washington to Annis Boudinot Stockton (widow of Signer Richard Stockton); and three shillings bills signed by John Hart.

In addition, on view are **original works by renowned Colonial and Revolutionary-era artists: Robert Edge Pine (1730-1788), Matthew Pratt (1734-1805), Joseph Dunkerly (1752-1806), John Trumbull (1756-1843), Charles Willson Peale (1741-1827), Edward Savage (1761-1817), plus original work by Rembrandt Peale (1778-1860), Hiram Powers (1805-1873), Henry Bryan Hall (1808-1884) and America’s leading silversmith (known as the “modern Paul Revere”) George Christian Gebelein (1878-1945).**

The exhibition unfolds beginning with the summer of 1776, setting the stage for the vote at Independence Hall. Visitors learn context on the indigenous Lenni-Lenape (“Original People”), and that the British Fleet have already arrived off Staten Island, raising tensions. The dramatic story of the vote and signing of the Declaration of Independence is revealed. 41 of the 56 Signers enslaved people in their lifetime, and an antislavery stance did not necessarily mean a belief in equality. The deleted clauses of the Declaration and debates around slavery are examined, addressing why the “unalienable Rights” of “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” were deemed to apply solely to white landowning men.

From there, a gallery is devoted to each of the five New Jersey Signers—**Abraham Clark, John Hart, Francis Hopkinson, Richard Stockton, and John Witherspoon**. The exhibition explores their lives before, during, and after the Revolution, which includes their families and important relationships. The interpretation shares research uncovering details on the people they enslaved, like Marcus Marsh (b. 1765) who fought yellow fever alongside Benjamin Rush after he was manumitted; Jack, who self-emancipated from John Hart; and Rose, with her sons Peter and Tobe, who lived in war-ravaged Elizabethtown.

As an American Revolutionary site, the museum itself uniquely plays a role in the exhibition. **Built for Founding Father Richard Stockton in the 1750s, Morven was briefly occupied by the British after Stockton became a POW.**

Five Independent Souls: The Signers from New Jersey will be on view at Morven **Wednesday-Sunday from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. through January 17, 2027**. Concurrently on view are the permanent exhibition *Historic Morven: A Window into America’s Past*, the special exhibition *Northern Family, Southern Ties* (through 2028), and the special exhibition *Voices in Print: New Jersey Black Women Printmakers Shaping the American Narrative* (through February 28, 2027).

Morven’s 2026 programs in conversation with *Five Independent Souls: The Signers From New Jersey* delve into the diverse stories of America’s founding, offering many **experiences both in-person and online**, and later available in **Morven’s FREE virtual program archive on YouTube (@morvenmuseum)**. Highlights include:

- **Generation Declaration:** an illustrated speaker series featuring writers and historians reflecting on the creation and many interpretations of the Declaration of Independence.
- **Signer’s Stories:** a series of interactive programs, including musical performances, walking tours, and other activities exploring the complex lives and contributions of the Signers of the Declaration representing New Jersey.
- **Behind-the-Scenes Opportunities:** inviting visitors behind-the-scenes with Morven’s curatorial team, featuring “Meet the Curator” tours of new exhibitions, and virtual “Curator Corner” talks delving into new acquisitions and research.

Funding for this exhibition has been provided, in part, by Liza and Schuyler Morehouse; Carol Hanson; Eileen and Robert O'Neil; Experience Princeton; Princeton Theological Seminary; J. Richard and E. Barbara Pierce; the General Society of Colonial Wars upon the recommendation of the Society of Colonial Wars in the State of New Jersey; Glenmede Trust; Nassau Inn; Palmer Square Management; Lear & Pannepacker, LLP; and NJM Insurance Group.

Morven Museum & Garden received a project grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of State.

Curation and research is by Elizabeth Allan and Jesse Gordon Simons. Curatorial assistance provided by Emily Marturano and Stephanie Wang. Research assistance from Sharece Blakney.

Exhibit design by OOOOAAAA. Graphics by Full Point Graphics.

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CALENDAR LISTINGS

SPECIAL EXHIBITION

Five Independent Souls: The Signers from New Jersey

The first exhibition to examine the lives of Abraham Clark, John Hart, Francis Hopkinson, Richard Stockton, and John Witherspoon, *Five Independent Souls: The Signers from New Jersey* displays over 100 extraordinary historic objects, including items not usually on public display.

Dates/Times: Now through January 17, 2027, open Wednesday-Sunday from 10 a.m.-4 p. m. Closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day.

Location: Morven Museum & Garden, 55 Stockton Street, Princeton, NJ 08540

Tickets: Included with museum admission: \$15 for adults; \$12 for seniors (ages 60+), \$10 youth ages 7-18, students with ID, and active military or veterans with ID. Free for ages 6 & younger.

Reservations: morven.org/visit

PROGRAM

Meet the Curators Tour of Five Independent Souls

Take a behind-the-scenes, after-hours tour of the museum's landmark exhibition for America's 250th with Morven's curators Beth Allan and Jesse Gordon Simons. Hear stories about the exhibition's development, learn more about the extraordinary objects, and get your questions answered by the experts!

Date/Time: Wednesday, November 4, 6:30-7:30 pm

Location: Morven Museum & Garden, 55 Stockton Street, Princeton, NJ 08540

Tickets: \$15 general admission; \$10 for students

Registration: morven.org/events/november-meet-the-curators-tour--five-independent-souls

PROGRAM: GENERATION DECLARATION SERIES

“Tyrants and Rogues”: Understanding the Declaration of Independence

Go beyond the Declaration’s famous opening statement and get to understand the heart of the document. Organization of American Historians Distinguished Lecturer Robert G. Parkinson explores the 27 specific grievances leveled against King George III and British officials in the Declaration of Independence.

Date/Time: Thursday, November 5, 6:30-7:30 pm

Location: Virtual; Zoom link provided at registration

Tickets: \$5 general admission; FREE for students

Registration: <https://www.morven.org/events/tyrantsandrogues>

PROGRAM

City Tavern: The Founding Table

Food writer, librarian, and historian Becky Libourel Diamond shares the lost history of one of the most important social and political meeting places of the American Revolution—City Tavern in Philadelphia. At this free program, she draws from her new book *City Tavern: The Founding Table – Colonial Dining, Revolutionary History, and the Restaurant at the Center of it All*.

The talk is held in partnership with the Princeton Public Library, the Historical Society of Princeton, and Morven.

Dates/Times: Monday, November 9, 6-7 pm

Location: Princeton Public Library

Tickets: FREE (pre-registration required)

Registration: morven.org/events/city-tavern--the-founding-table

PROGRAM: SIGNER’S STORIES SERIES

Richard Stockton: Myth and Reality

Was Richard Stockton a patriot or traitor? He was a Signer of the Declaration who became a British Prisoner of War, and then swore an oath to King George to secure his release from a notoriously harsh prison. Morven’s curators, along with educator and author John Baxter, dive into his disputed and complicated past, sharing newly uncovered research and perspectives.

This is a hybrid program offering in-person and virtual registration. In-person tickets include discounted, after-hours admission to *Five Independent Souls: The Signers from New Jersey* from 5-6 pm prior to the talk.

The event is sponsored by Princeton Federal Credit Union.

Date/Time: Thursday, November 19, 6:30-7:30 pm

Location: Hybrid: Morven Museum & Garden, 55 Stockton Street, Princeton, NJ 08540; also available online- Zoom link provided at registration.

Tickets: \$5 general admission in-person; FREE for Students and Morven Members; FREE virtual tickets

Registration: morven.org/events/richard-stockton--myth-and-reality

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About Morven Museum & Garden:

Located steps from downtown Princeton, NJ, Morven is the only extant house of a New Jersey Signer of the Declaration of Independence that is open to the public.

Built in the 1750s for Richard Stockton and his wife, Annis Boudinot Stockton, an early published poet, Morven was home to five generations of the Stockton family and generations of enslaved men and women, as well as immigrant servants. It later became home to the innovative industrialist and humanitarian Robert Wood Johnson, Jr. and served as the state's first governor's mansion before becoming a museum in 2004.

Today, we welcome visitors to explore this layered history through permanent and special exhibitions; cultural and educational programs; community events; and historic gardens, the bounty of which is donated to a local mobile food pantry. The museum is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The gardens are open daily from dawn until dusk.

Learn more about Morven:

www.morven.org

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