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MORVEN

MUSEUM & GARDEN

Five Independent Souls: The Signers from New Jersey **opens Sunday, May 3**

Over 100 extraordinary historic artifacts linked to the signers of the Declaration of Independence will be on display

PRINCETON, NJ (April 27, 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 historic artifacts, including **items not usually on display to the public.**

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.

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

We've been preparing to make the 250th unforgettable, and we can't wait to welcome visitors of all ages from around the world to Morven."

—**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; and the August 1776 London magazine containing the full text of the Declaration, announcing the news to British readers.

Plus, original artwork by **Charles Willson Peale, Rembrandt Peale**, and other renowned Revolutionary artists.

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 beginning before, during, and after the Revolution, their families and important relationships, and research uncovering details on the people they enslaved.

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*** and the special exhibition ***Northern Family, Southern Ties*** (through 2028).

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 new 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.

CALENDAR LISTINGS

NEW 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.

Dates/Times: May 3, 2026 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: \$12 for adults; \$10 for seniors (ages 60+), youth ages 7-18, students with ID, and active military or veterans with ID. Free for ages 6 & younger.

Reserve tickets at <https://www.morven.org/visit>

PROGRAM: SIGNER'S STORIES SERIES

The Ingenious Mr. Hopkinson - A Life in Words & Musick

A unique musical evening exploring the life and works of a signer of the Declaration of Independence from New Jersey, polymath Francis Hopkinson, credited as the first native composer of the United States. The lecture and performance is led by The Practitioners of Musick's John Burkhalter.

Date/Time: Wednesday, April 29, 6:30 pm. Light refreshments will be served.

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

Tickets: \$35 per person (or two tickets for \$60)

Register at <https://www.morven.org/events>

Presented in partnership with the Historical Society of Princeton.

PROGRAM

New Jersey Women's Revolutionary Experiences

Historian Lucia McMahon presents an illustrated talk on the varied experiences of New Jersey women during the era of the American Revolution.

Date/Time: Thursday, May 14, 6:30 pm.

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

In-person tickets: \$20 general admission, \$15 Morven member, \$10 student

Virtual tickets: \$10 virtual, \$5 Morven member, \$5 student

Register at [morven.org/events](https://www.morven.org/events)

Presented in partnership with the William Trent House Museum.

PROGRAM: GENERATION DECLARATION SERIES

Slavery and the Declaration of Independence: The Deleted Clauses

OAH (Organization of American Historians) Distinguished Lecturer Holly Brewer discusses the deleted clauses of the Declaration, and why those condemning the actions of the English king related to slavery were removed.

Date/Time: Sunday, May 17, 2 pm.

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

In-person tickets: \$20 general admission, \$15 Morven member, \$10 student

Virtual tickets: \$10 virtual, \$5 Morven member, \$5 student

Register at <https://www.morven.org/events>

SPECIAL EVENT

Fourth of July Festival 2026

Commemorate America's 250th birthday at Morven, the former home of Richard Stockton—a signer of the Declaration of Independence. This free event offers family-friendly activities, music, museum admission, and more!

Date/Time: Saturday, July 4, 2026, 12-3 pm

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

Learn more at <https://www.morven.org/signature/fourth-of-july>

SPECIAL EVENT

Princeton 1776 Fest

This one-of-a-kind event brings 1776 to life with live music, living history interpreters, craftspeople, and food and drink. Presented in partnership with the Historical Society of Princeton, Princeton Battlefield Society, and Daughters of the American Revolution.

Date/Time: Saturday, October 3, 2026, 11 am-4 pm; rain date: Sunday, October 4, 2026

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

Learn more at <https://www.morven.org/events/princeton-1776-fest>

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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

Facebook: [@morvenmuseum](https://www.facebook.com/morvenmuseum)

Instagram: [@morvenmuseum](https://www.instagram.com/morvenmuseum)

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