

Norwich Town Meeting Records 1778 +  
Supplement: Interesting Topics, and  
Using the Records in Conjunction with  
Manuscripts in the Archival Boxes  
and Other Collections  
In the Town Clerk's Vault.

## Part One

### Interesting Topics in Norwich Town Meeting Records 1788+

**N.B.** Page references are to computer generated numbers. These appear in the upper right corner, counting the entire document from beginning to end. Searching by computer for words should be broadened by the reader, scanning the surrounding material to be sure that there is not related information.

There is in the Town Clerk's office vault a series of archival boxes labeled as manuscript resources. There are in the office several yellow-covered guides to the material in the boxes. For almost any topic one wants to investigate, and to learn more about the proceedings in the 1778+ volume, these guides, and the accompanying boxes, should be checked.

#### Bridges Across the Connecticut

This applies only to the bridge spanning the river between Hanover (Dresden) and Norwich.

Page references: 65, 120, 121, 121, 169

The following references pertain to the county road from bridge to the Chelsea courthouse: 185, 187, 188, 189, 190, 193

John King Lord's A History of Dartmouth College, 1815 - 1909 with its chapter on "The River: Dams, Locks, and Bridges" is useful for additional information.

#### Burying Ground

Page references: 41

The page reference is to the gift of land for a burial ground. A follow-up to this may be a document which is included in one of the archival boxes in the Town Clerk's vault. In Box 1, Folder 7, is an 1840 document which reads "that many years since a grant was made by gift to said town of a piece of land a little west of the village for a public burial ground, and your petitioners and others are desirous of building a tomb within the limits of said granted premises, and for this purpose would respectfully ask the inhabitants of sd town to give them and their advocates, a deed of sufficient land within said burying ground for the purpose of building said tomb. To wit, eighteen feet square, near the southwest corner of the same, in the bank on the northeasterly side of the road leading from the

plain to Pierce Burton's this place being suitable for this purpose, but useless on account of the steepness of the bank for any other. . . . . voted that the petitioners have 18 feet square so long as they keep in repair."

Cemetery. See Burying ground

#### Ear Marks

Farm animals grazed together on the town green. In order to tell one person's animals from others, various designs of trimming and notching of the ears were used. The marks were often transferred from one owner to another, sometimes more than once.

Page references: 5 -15, 289 - 301, 303 -313

#### Farm Animals

Because these animals grazed together on the green and were largely unfenced, stray animals were a problem. Rams were a particular problem, depending on the season. Throughout the record one can find the settlers coping with the situation, establishing pounds and creating rules to be followed and penalties for infractions. Early in the records the town voted that hogs and sheep should not run on the common. Finally a committee drafted byelaws for the purpose of restraining horses, hogs, mules, and sheep from roaming at large through the summer and fall. In 1800 the various rulings were organized into a set of byelaws which were adopted and renewed annually for over twelve years.

Page references: 144, 148 - 150.

#### Ferry

The ferry referred to in the 1778+ volume is the one where John Sergeant had a tavern and operated the ferry. It would be approximately where the Ledyard Bridge abuts the Norwich side of the Connecticut River. There were other ferry operators to follow Sergeant but he was well known for his encounters with Eleazar Wheelock because of his tavern which provided liquor to the college students.

Page references: 25, 33, 41, 42, 51, 65, 72, 120, and 127 (rope ferry)

The Goddard - Partridge A History of Norwich, Vermont has the following (p. 60, fn.): "Two ferries were supported in early times between Norwich and Hanover, north of the site of Hanover Bridge. One, called the Rope Ferry, was located just below the island in the river near Mr. Samuel Hutchinson's, connecting there with a public highway which entered the

main street of the village of Hanover through what is now known as 'Faculty Avenue.' [Probably 'Faculty Row' the northern part of Main Street with large faculty homes] Another, which was in use till about 1840, was about a mile north of the mouth of the Pompanoosuc River. A third, in operation as early as 1796, and near the north line of the town, was called Rogers' Ferry, probably from Ensign John Rogers, who settled very early in that part of the town." See John King Lord's A History of Dartmouth College 1815 - 1909 (1913), 647 - 650, for a useful account.

### Freemen

As one goes through the record of meetings one finds phrases like "admitted and sworn as freemen," March 1792. Page 302; "At a legal meeting of the freemen and other inhabitants of the town of Norwich," April 10, 1782, Page 52; "at a freemen's meeting," March 1<sup>st</sup> 1803, Page 163.

The freemen were the ones who could vote for state officers from Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Council, Treasurer, and Representative to Congress.

The Vermont Constitution of 1786 - July 4, 1786 - defines a freeman thusly: Chapter 2, Article XVIII. "Every man, of the full age of twenty-one years, having resided in this State for the space of one whole year, next before the election of representatives, and is of a Quiet and peaceable behaviour, and will take the following oath, (or affirmation) shall be entitled to all the privileges of a freeman of this State.

You solemnly swear, (or affirm) that whenever you give your vote or suffrage, touching any matter that concerns the State of Vermont, you will do it so as in your conscience you shall judge will most conduce to the best good of the same, by the Constitution, without fear or favour of any man. " [Taking the freeman's oath continues today, though there have been changes in the text, as, for example, changing the word "man" to "person" after passage of the 19th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.]

There is available online, as well as in other places, the text of the 1786 Constitution cited above; the freemen are mentioned throughout it. The online source is produced by The Avalon Project at Yale Law School. First comes the historical background of the Constitution, then the text itself. This is in two chapters. Chapter 1 is "A Declaration of the Rights of the Inhabitants of the State of Vermont". It is from Chapter 2, "Plan or Frame of Government," that the above quoted material comes.

In Box 2 of the archival records there are several lists of freemen who voted for Representatives to Congress. There is also a list of individuals covering years from 1782 - 1800 who "have been legally admitted & sworn as is by the Constitution of said state directed."

The Grants. See The New Hampshire Grants

Great Britain and Its Former Colonies - Norwich's Reactions

A long discourse presented at a town meeting on June 18, 1812, lets us look at the town's reaction to events and to Britain's actions. Coincidentally, war was declared by the United States on June 18, 1812. (One wonders about the identical date in an age where there was no instant communications.) The whole piece is worth reading but the end of it is especially so and in some respects the same sentiments can be seen in our present day. Following is an excerpt near the conclusion:

"Fourthly Resolved that we consider many of our citizens who differ from us in politics to be honest good men who have the good of this country at heart but for want of correct information error in judgement - - to such we can cheerfully extend the hand of charity and believe when they are better informed they will walk with us in any measures which are calculated to retrieve the honour and interest of our country  
# (written in margin "not passed from this mark") but such as are secretly to calumniate and bring into disrespect the constituted authorities of the general government insidiously seeming defiant opposing every measure of Congress adopted to obtain redress of the many wrongs we have rec<sup>d</sup> from G Britain and endeavoring under spurious names under the covert of seeming to desire by falsehood many honest & ignorant men all such as appear under this dress with the dagger of treason concealed under the garb of hypocrisy we consider enemies to their country --"

Page references: 246 -251

Highways/Roads

The matter of highways/roads was a concern from the moment the settlers began planning the settlement of the township. There does exist in the Town Clerk's Office a transcription of the "Survey of the Highways in the Township of Norwich" which begins with an entry for 1768 and goes to 1845. There are also a collection of road petitions and road surveys in manuscript form. The subject of Highways/Roads is really so

ubiquitous that it demands that anyone interested in it do his/her own searching.

Inoculation. See Smallpox

### Meeting House

In the earliest days before a meeting house was built, the settlers met in homes. When a meeting house was built it served a town hall purpose as well as a church house. Everyone in town presumably belonged to the same religious persuasion. [See Religious Certificates for a different development.]

October 30, 1773, is the date of the report of the "Locating Committee," by non-Norwich persons who were selected to make recommendations. On July 5, 1780, a committee was to "lay out the subscriptions raised toward finishing the Meeting House," and it was ordered to finish the outside of the building. On September 27th, 1781, there was discussion of building the pews, how they would be purchased, and how laid out. There was much discussion of how many families should be in each pew, and depending upon location. Ultimately the number of families in each had to be increased in order to accommodate all residents. The names of persons, and what each head of family paid, is all given. There is much discussion of settling accounts, collecting monies due, and seeing that those responsible for overseeing the procedures did that. The gallery layout gets much attention as does the need for everyone to pay bills.

The work of completing the building, finishing exterior and interior, completing the pews, all went on over a long period. In September 1785 the voters discussed how to defray expenses of the building so that it could become town property. And in 1785 the Vermont legislature met in Norwich. At this time some work still remained. The Meeting House continued to be a matter for discussion in town meeting records up to 1791.

Construction of the building was really "a work in progress." Even so, in February 1799 the settlers were asked to vote on a tax to repair it. Page references: 28, 33, 44, 45, 46, 60, 63, 64, 72, 73, 74, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 107

### New Hampshire Grants

The Vermont Encyclopedia (2003) notes on page 116 that "By 1764, after the French and Indian War, [Benning Wentworth] had granted

138 townships totaling 3 million acres in what was to become Vermont. With the end of the war with France, settlers began to move in earnest into the New Hampshire grants lands west of the Connecticut River, soon attracting the attention of the New York governors who claimed the land as New York's, issued conflicting land grants, and made efforts to force New Hampshire settlers to leave the land or to purchase title confirmations from New York. Settlers and speculators west of the Green Mountains instead resisted New York's attempts to dispossess them . . . ."

Page references: 24, 26, 34, 36, 37, 51

#### Poor/Indigent/Paupers

One of the elected officials of the town was the Overseer of the Poor. At town meetings one of the articles voted on was that to raise money to support the poor. In 1791 a child of 2 & 1/2 years was indentured until he was 21. Children and adults were "farmed out" to the highest bidder. (Examples: Page 153 - March 1801. "To see who will take the town poor in said town and provide for them for the least sum."; Page 156 - 1801. "Humphrey Ball agreed to take Mrs Ladd one of the town poor at one dollar and twenty-five cents a week furnishing her only food and washing."); . Then (Page 231 - March 1811 there was a vote "To see if the town will build or hire a workhouse or place of residence." The question was "referred to the discretion of the selectmen." (Page 234) But there is a Poor Farm Road in the town

One can then turn to the guides to the series of archival boxes in the vault of the Town Clerk's office and check those marked as Town Records - Boxes 1 & 2 and find recorded in Folder 2 of Box 1 "Report of Committee to Purchase Poor Farm, March 1837." The report put off purchase until the Fall and then it was further delayed until March 16, 1841, when the recommendation of the agent to purchase a farm was accepted.

#### Proprietors of Norwich

The town's charter, issued on July 4, 1761, listed fifty-three proprietors, or grantees, among whom were several friends of Benning Wentworth, who retained 500 acres in the northeast corner of the six-square mile town. To grant land to his friends as well as to himself was common practice for the royal governor of the Province of New Hampshire.

The other proprietors came from Mansfield and several surrounding towns in Connecticut. They were generally older, established, men; although some of them journeyed north into the wilderness, more likely the pioneers were sons and younger members of the families. The first meeting of the proprietors was in Mansfield, Connecticut, and meetings continued to be held there until 1768 when the first meeting in present Norwich was held on July 1768.

The charter laid out the obligations of the proprietors to settle their grant in the wilderness and it was no easy task to find individuals and families willing to trek into the unsettled lands inhabited by wild animals, Indians, and unknown conditions. Beyond Charlestown, New Hampshire, with its fort, was the wilderness.

Page references: 16, 47, 118, 119, 122, 123, 124, 182, 185, 186, 190, 222, 224

#### Religious Certificates

The established church at the time these certificates were written was the First Religious Society (North Church) whose meeting house was located near the top of Union Village Road where only a cemetery now exists. The first meeting house, built between 1778 and 1785, was eventually taken down; the society was dissolved in 1854. In the meantime, in 1817, the meeting house of the South Religious Society was built. The religious certificates date from the time of the North Church.

All taxpayers were, according to law, required to pay for the building of the meeting houses whatever their religious sentiments, unless they filed these certificates with the town clerk. The content and format were the same, with a few variations in wording. They included the date, and the name of the individuals making them. For example, "I do not agree in religions opinion with a majority of the inhabitants of this town or parish as the case may be ---"

Page references: 264 - 267, 278 - 284; 264 has list of persons signing the statements

Roads and Highways. See Highways/Roads

#### School Districts

This topic is limited to the creation of the school districts and the altering of them. Schools are discussed throughout the volume in other respects, such as number of pupils by district and monies appropriated for them.

Page references: 62, 76, 77, 117, 121, 126, 128, 129, 131, 133, 134, 135, 137, 138, 148, 155, 206, 208, 231, 235, 236, 237, 238, 245

### Smallpox and Inoculation

Smallpox was a scourge of the late 18th and early 19th century. In Hanover and at Dartmouth College at the same time that Norwich was coping with it, ~~106~~

Page references:: ~~107~~, 124, 125, 138, 159, 160, 162

### Vermonters, No Longer Nutmeggers

The settlers brought with them the governmental practices of their Connecticut home. Meeting the challenges of settlement and different circumstances brought change. One sees it in such expressions as: "Whereas the situation of political affairs on these grants is very broken and uncertain and thereby the exercise of old and necessary authority is almost entirely neglected and diseased by which means many and great inconveniences and irregularities are daily creeping in upon us. . . . and the said officers are to adhere to the laws of Connecticut as they were enforced in the aforementioned year for the rule of their conduct in the execution of their said offices to take cognizance of such breaches of peace and other offences as were cognizable by the laws of said Connecticut and transact every other matter which appertains to the offices aforesaid so far the circumstances of s<sup>d</sup> town can possibly admit . . . ." (1779). In March 1780: "Voted to give in lists at the time usual in Connecticut." Then, on February 1, 1781: "Whereas it is found by experience that, that part of an agreement made at a town meeting on the 9<sup>th</sup> March 1779 - which directed lists to be given in as was equal in Connecticut is not suitably proportioned to the circumstances we are under, Wherefore, Voted that it is reconsidered - and that in the future. . . ."

Page references: 26, 31, 37 - 38

### Warnings Out

Norwich's collection of Warnings Out is substantial. In the Norwich Town Meeting Records 1778+ there are many of them. In the vault there is a collection which adds several years to the record and has been bound. Warnings Out existed in some form in all the New England states. The introductory pages of Volume 2 of Alden M. Rollins, Vermont Warnings Out (2 v., 1995 - 1997) notes, on Page xii, that "In 1802

Guilford issued a warnings warrant whose preface is a small statement of philosophy: 'Whereas by a Statute Law of the State Passed the 6th day of November AD 1801 it is maid the duty of the Selectmen at their discretion to warn Such Persons as they think are likely to be Chargeable to their Town who have moved into said Town since the Passing of Said act to depart Said town . . . . "' This seems to have been the philosophy on which Norwich operated.

The usual procedure was for the selectmen of the town to give instructions to the constables to serve notice and order the individuals and families out of town, or to the place from which they had come. Norwich did not want to be responsible for their upkeep.

Page references 192, 193, 208, 209, 211, 212, 214, 215, 220, 256 - 264, 267-278, 285-288

An interesting turn-about on the warnings out procedure was the case of Sarah and Rufus Welch: "Voted the selectmen be directed to let Sarah and Rufus Welch become inhabitants of this town in case Asahel Lewis will come forward and give sufficient security to the town to indemnify and save the town from any expense which the said Sarah and Rufus might bring upon the town by reason of their age and disability to support themselves -- ." Page reference: 155

In addition to the warnings out in the 1778+ volume, a bound manuscript volume in the Town Clerk's vault has these documents from 1812 -1829. The paging for the warnings out run from 5 - 79. Pages 80 - 81 give the total of scholars by district for 1828 and 1829. Then follows several blank pages and at the back (pages 83 - 95) of the volume comes an alphabetical listing of persons warned.

An additional source of these warnings is in Box 9, one of a series of boxes (with guides) in the Town Clerk's office.

## Part Two

**N.B.** The page numbers are the computer - produced numbers which appear in the upper right corner of each page.

As a result of working over the text of the Norwich Town Meeting Records, 1778+ many times I have come to the conclusion that it is a copied work. That is, much of it, if not all, was taken from the material now in the archival boxes in the Town Clerk's vault. They are the original

working documents. Unfortunately, there are large gaps in these originals. One can only speculate why, but a beginning can be made by reading a report, dated 1838, which is to be found in Box 1, in Folder 3. The then Town Clerk writes: "When he received the papers & pamphlets belonging to said town in March last from his predecessor in office, they were delivered to him promiscuously crowded into a flour barrel & a basket, in a most sorrowful condition, having apparently lain there for some years." Further in the report, we read "I also called on Jacob Burton Esq. in relation to the statutes & the charter and was informed that the said statutes were not delivered to him by his predecessor, & that the charter was delivered to his successor, [Deac. ?] Partridge, that some years or two since while said Partridge was at the legislature he received a request from John A. Pratt of Woodstock requesting that he would send him said charter, that he went to the Clerk's Office, found the charter & sent it to said Pratt & that it has never been returned."

The next year, 1839, the Town Clerk reported that the copy of the charter had been returned by Pratt "who, after having been twice called on for the same. at length found it as he informed me in the office of Mr. Hubbard at Windsor."

The text in the 1778+ volume, judging from comparisons with the original (if there is one) in the archival boxes, does not always match the way it was originally written. The Town Clerk, in several instances, actually indicated the he was copying a piece of paper given to him. The difference could be a significant one.

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**How can the Norwich Town Meeting Records 1778+ be used in conjunction with the archival documents contained in the boxes in the Town Clerk's vault, and other collections such as the Land Records?**

1. For specific information
2. As a jumping off point for tracking and filling out topics mentioned in the 1778+ volume
3. For the study of words. As, for example, where words have become obsolete and are no longer used. Or where they are no longer used in the same sense that they once were. In the Constitution of 1786 the word

"occult" appears. Thinking of the word in terms of magic and astrology, the use of the term in the Constitution needs explanation. Among the definitions in dictionaries are "obsolete" or "rare." The Oxford English Dictionary (the O. E. D.) says this: "Not disclosed or divulged; kept secret; communicated only to the initiated." Here is the section from the Constitution; the intent of the text may still be difficult to understand in 2007.

"Chapter 2, Article XXII. As every freeman, to preserve his independence, (if without a sufficient estate) Occult to have some profession, calling, trade, or farm, whereby he may honestly subsist, there can be no necessity for, nor use in establishing offices of profit, the usual effects of which are dependence and servility, unbecoming freemen, in the possessors or expectants, faction, contention, corruption and disorder among the people. But if any man is called into public service, to the prejudice of his private affairs, he has a right to a reasonable compensation: and whenever an office, through increase of fees or otherwise, becomes so profitable as to occasion many to apply for it, the profits ought to be lessened by the legislature. And if any officer shall take greater or other fees than the laws allow him, either directly or indirectly, it shall ever after disqualify him from holding any office in this State."

Probably many questions are more easily figured out than the "occult" example. The text of the 1778+ volume uses words which, at first, are not clear. Repeated instances of use, and a dictionary check, usually will clarify what is meant. Even so, Article XXII is not the easiest thing to understand. It is a good example of how the late 18th century mind worked.

4. Various town government positions were voted on at the annual meetings: moderator, selectmen, treasurer, constable, listers,--the usual ones -- but others not so well known: leather sealer, tithingmen, surveyors of highways, sealer of weights and measures, fence viewer, pound keeper, hayward; a few of those -- fence viewer, for example -- some towns still retain, though they are more symbolic gestures to history than demanding tasks.

5. Over a period of time one sees the use of the English pound and shilling gives way to dollars and cents. This, and other developments in daily life, presumably would be occurring in the surrounding towns on

both sides of the Connecticut River as the years advanced and changes in society came.

One sees similar phrases occur in the 1778+ volume.

(Page 246) " her [Great Britain] ecclesiastical regulations for which reason our forefathers were driven into this **howling wilderness.**"

(Page 248) "the right of trial by jury was suspended or taken away in certain cases from the colonies and the most abject submissions were required -- ships of war and armies of men were sent over from Britain to [secure] the obedience and homage of the Americans - but the good people of the states were not intimidated into submission but with manly fortitude made their appeal to God and sword determining to **live free or die** -- " What is now the motto of New Hampshire did not become so until 1945.

(Page 176 - 177) " Truth candor and just principles can never want the [sereneness] of [secrecy] nor the [convenience] of darkness unless when vice and wickedness triumph over virtue or a tyrannical and oppressive government armed with power is deaf to the voice of reason and seeks to satiate with arbitrary calls with victims of innocence -- private party meetings termed caucuses are therefore fit instruments only for the destruction of such government -- how different is our own -- free in our choice and [in such times ?] the people themselves know our legislature composed of persons [as aforesaid?] elected by the several towns to deliberate for the general good ought to meet **like a band of brothers** -- In the consideration & decisions of the several matters within their province each member has a just claim to know and hear all the reasons and arguments which are to influence a decision and as they who debate are also to decide those decisions should be had without prepossession & bias of mind which is always derived from a partial consideration or argument upon the subject -- Members of the legislature will also remember that they are elected to discharge the duties assigned them by the Constitution which the people have formed as the chart by which they are to be guided and by that chart they will perceive that they are not elected for the purpose of influencing our elections -- therefore voted as the sense of the freemen of this meeting that the gentleman who shall represent us in the Legislature cannot attend any meeting or caucus held to discuss subjects that are to come before the Legislature or to make any agreement concerning the same nor for the nomination

of candidates for office to be elected by the people without acting derogat[ory] of that high character confirmed [?] by our choice and violating the primary principles of our government- "

The manner in which the same phrases occur in the towns along the Connecticut River valley suggests that there was more communicating occurring than our present generation realizes. Something in the air? The lengthy political, philosophical discussions, of which the above excerpts are examples, are worth reading in their entirety. The suggestion in it that members of the Legislature were acting inappropriately would make further investigation both interesting and useful.

At least a portion of the following article, presented at a town meeting, is applicable to today's circumstances:

(Page 251 - 252) "Fourthly Resolved that we consider many of our citizens who differ from us in politics to be honest good men who have the good of this country at heart but for want of correct information error in judgement -- to such we can cheerfully extend the hand of charity and believe when they are better informed they will walk with us in any measures which are calculated to retrieve the honour and interest of our country

# (written in margin "not passed from this mark") but such as are secretly to calumniate and bring into disrespect the constituted authorities of the general government insidiously seeming defiant opposing every measure of Congress adopted to obtain redress of the many wrongs we have rec<sup>d</sup> from G Britain and endeavoring under spurious names under the covert of seeming to desire by falsehood many honest & ignorant men all such as appear under this dress with the dagger of treason concealed under the garb of hypocrisy we consider enemies to their country -- this last resolution from this note # was amended by striking out which amendment was carried in opposition to a number --"

Finally, one should really immerse himself/herself in the reading of Norwich Town Meeting Records 1778 + beginning with the first meeting . There is much repetition in the warnings of meetings, the meetings themselves, and, sometimes even the sense that pages are being reread. The result, however, is more understanding of the language, how the settlers thought about politics, what their values were, and how they conducted their everyday life. Only about half of the volume needs to be read with concentration. The long section on Marriages, Births, and

Deaths is available as a separate index in the Town Clerk's office and does not occur in the present transcription. The remainder of the volume does not take the same kind of careful reading. It is composed of religious certificates, earmarks (continued from the front of the book), warnings out, etc.

There are other topics such as the controversial - at- times laying out of county roads through the township. Equally interesting is the way in which town officials had to account for money spent. They have not been covered in this booklet. There is plenty of opportunity for more research.

March 2007