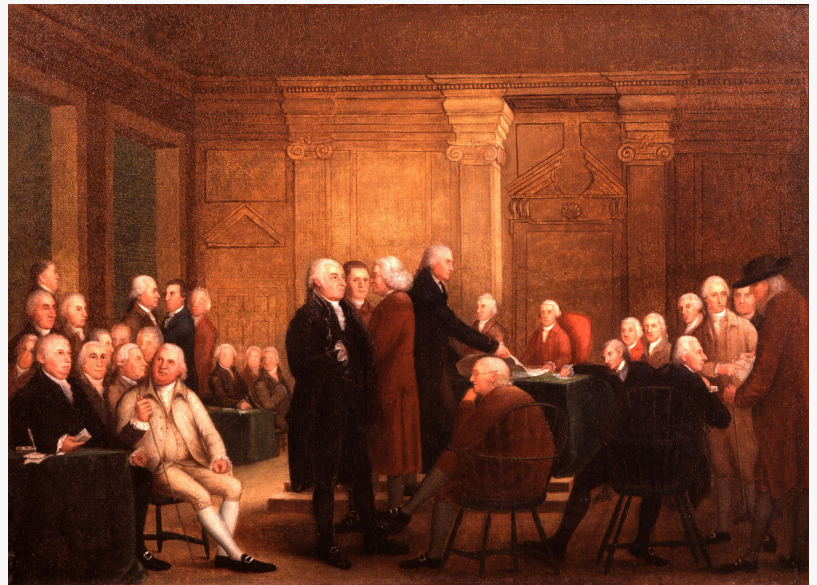


Five Independent Souls: The Signers from New Jersey opens Sunday, May 3

Over 100 extraordinary historic artifacts linked to the signers of the Declaration of Independence will be on display at Morven Museum & Garden

PRINCETON, NJ, UNITED STATES, April 27, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- 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.



Congress Voting Independence, 1796-1817, Probably Edward Savage after Robert Edge Pine: Purchase, Historical Society of Pennsylvania / Atwater Kent Collection, Drexel University.

“

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

Rhonda DiMascio, Executive Director

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.

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.

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