MARX ROOM RECOMMENDS. . .

(COPY OF) MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE OF OBSERVATION AND INSPECTION OF NORTHAMPTON COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA DECEMBER 21, 1774 TO AUGUST 14, 1777

In 2026, when we want to communicate any kind of message quickly whether it be personal or business related, we rely on our electronic devices. In the 1770's, a vastly different kind of information network was being used, it was known as the Committee of Correspondence.

The Committee of Correspondence can trace part of its beginnings to the Gaspee Affair of 1772. In February of 1772, HMS (His Majesty's Ship) Gaspee, is sent from England to patrol Narragansett Bay in Rhode Island. During this time period, Rhode Island was an area of suspected trading gone wild, especially with items such as molasses(used to make rum) and tea. The HMS Gaspee was sent to Rhode Island to enforce 17th century created laws known as the Navigation Acts. The Navigation Acts prohibited British colonies from trading with foreign countries except in very limited circumstances and to only trade with the British empire or other British colonies. Without enforcement of the Navigation Acts, early American colonies generated much needed revenue while in turn, Britain lost revenue.

June of 1772 is said to have been the actual beginning of the Revolutionary War. On June 9, 1772, a small boat called the Hannah lured the Gaspee into shallow waters. The Gaspee chased the Hannah and the Gaspee ended up running aground. The Hannah continued its journey to Providence but the Gaspee ended up stranded. Later that day, local men in the area attacked the Gaspee. The local men removed the Gaspee crew from the ship and then destroyed the ship by fire.

A second area where the Committee of Correspondence can trace its roots is known as the Salary Controversy of 1772. The Massachusetts local assembly paid the salaries of officials whereby maintaining leverage over their government. British officials stepped in and changed the form of payment to be strictly from Great Britain. This action made the officials in Massachusetts accountable to the Crown and not to the local colonists.

In November of 1772, Samuel Adams was motivated by both of the events that had occurred – the Gaspee Affair and the Salary Controversy to create a Committee of Correspondence. The first Committee of Correspondence consisted of twenty-one members. The initial assignment of the committee was to outline the colonist's rights and Parliament's infringement upon those rights. The reports were put together and became the Boston Pamphlet. This pamphlet served as the year 1772's version of being similar to a mass email in today's world and was then sent to other colonies to gain support against the British Parliament.

But how did Northampton County get involved with creating its own Committee of Correspondence? In 1774, tensions among colonists in Pennsylvania increased with the passing of the British Parliament's Boston Port Act that closed the Boston Harbor as punishment for the Boston Tea Party. Northampton County's Committee of Correspondence consisted of George Taylor, Lewis Gordon, Peter Kachlein, Jacob Arndt, John Oakley, Henry Kooken.

Committees of Correspondence expanded across the colonies and eventually formed into the First Continental Congress in 1774. The purpose of the First Continental Congress was to create a unified colonial response to mounting taxation and punitive laws by Great Britain. One of the major outcomes of this meeting was the Articles of Association that formed a boycott against receiving British goods and a plan to halt sending goods from the colonies to Britain. In order to enforce the Articles of Association, the Committee of Observation and Inspection was created. It was requested of each county to elect members to the Committee of Observation and Inspection in order to inspect local commerce and ensure compliance.

Northampton County's Committee of Observation & Inspection formed on December 21, 1774, and met until August 14, 1777. The elected members of the committee were as follows: Lewis Gordon, Peter Kachlein, Jacob Arndt, Michael Messinger, Melchoir Hay, George Taylor, John Hays, Jr., John Oakley, Anthony Lerch, Jacob Morry, John Wetzel, Andrew Engelman, John Geesemar, Henry Kooken, David Deshler, Casper Doll, Joseph Gaston, Philip Droom, Yost Dreisenbach, Daniel Knause, Thomas Everet, Michael Ohl, John Hartman, Nicholas Depui, Manuel Gonsales, and Abraham Westbrook. The members covered nearly one member from each township in Northampton County.

The May 22, 1775, meeting of Northampton County's Observation & Inspection several regulations were outlined and those items were to be published in the English and German newspapers. Among the regulations defined was that all Freemen be equipped with necessary arms & ammunition & muster to make themselves expert in Military Art. Storekeepers needed consent of the Observation & Inspection Committee in order to sell any arms or ammunition. The committee clearly defined residents as either associators or non-associators. If you rejected the regulations as defined by the committee, you were a non-associator and would be considered an enemy of the county.

Non-associators were completely disarmed which included no arms for even hunting purposes. Non-associators who refused to surrender their firearms faced fines, prison, and shame from their fellow residents.

With the formation of the newly formed Pennsylvania government, the Northampton County's Committees of Correspondence, Observation & Inspection were ended in 1777. **There is more to uncover so be sure to visit the Marx Room and read the minutes of the actual meetings held by these committees.**