

Town List of Town Officers 1807 Town Meeting

The following document describes the second annual town meeting of the Town of DeKalb, March 3, 1807. The minutes of the DeKalb Town Meeting illustrate the functioning of a town government during the early frontier days of the St. Lawrence Valley. A detailed list of officers elected offers some insight into the functioning of such a frontier community. From the establishment of the State of New York until the 1890's, New York's town business was conducted through an annual town meeting of the voting populace. This form of direct democracy continues to the present today in much of New England. The Town Meeting Minutes are from the DeKalb Town Clerk's office, Meeting Book One.

Suggested Lessons:

Disciplines: Social Studies, and Language Arts.

Grade Levels: 4-8

Time Frame: 1 class period

Materials Needed: - Copy of 1807 Town Meeting Minutes (provided)
 *(Must be printed on 8.5 by 14 paper).
 - Transcription of meeting notes (provided)
 - Worksheet (provided)

Learning Objectives: The students will:

1. Gather information about the Town Meeting of 1807 from meeting notes.
2. Identify the responsibilities of the various town officers elected in 1807.
3. Calculate the percentage of the total voting population who held public office in 1807.
4. Compare and contrast the jobs done by town officials today with those done by town officials in 1807.

Procedures

Lesson one

1. Distribute copies of worksheet, and the Town Meeting minutes. (Have transcriptions available for students who have difficulty reading the script.)
2. Identify and define any unfamiliar terminology. You may have to contact your Town Clerk to determine how many officers are elected in your town today. (DeKalb had 6 officials elected in 2003.)

3. Direct the students to complete worksheet by analyzing the document.
4. Explain to the class what direct democracy is. Discuss with the class how it would feel to be in the middle of a town meeting with all the voters in the town present. Compare the situation to having a discussion with everyone at an athletic event. (At one point in DeKalb history, a town meeting issue was so contentious that the final vote was taken by having the different sides divide in the street.)
5. Life on the frontier was largely agrarian. This is why the only law enacted in 1807 was about the keeping of hogs. Guide the children to see that laws are passed about what is important to a society at that particular time.
6. Further discussion could center on differences in spelling from modern conventions and the archaic use of fs for the double ss.

Follow Up Activities:

- Arrange a field trip to your local town offices.
- Have a local government official visit the class to discuss their duties today.
- Look up the elected officials from these minutes on the 1810 DeKalb Census. Identify their ages, nationalities and occupations. Are there any patterns?
- Read a book such as:
The New England Town meeting: Democracy In Action by Joseph F. Zimmerman.
- Play a computer simulation such as:
Our Town Meeting (Computer simulation) by Tom Snyder, Watertown, MA

NYS Social Studies Standards correlation:

Standard 1: Key Idea 4

- Consider different interpretations of key events and /or issues in history and understand the differences in these accounts.
- Explore different experiences, beliefs motives, and traditions of people living in their neighborhoods, communities, and State.
- View historic events through the eyes of those who were there, as shown in their art, writings, music and artifacts.

Intermediate

- Consider the sources of historic documents, narratives, or artifacts and evaluate their reliability
- Describe historic events through the eyes and experiences of those who were there.

Standard 5: Key Idea 4

-Explain the role that civility plays in promoting effective citizenship in preserving democracy.