

Testimony in favor of a New York City Council resolution commemorating the 350th anniversary of the Flushing Remonstrance.

The village of Flushing was first settled by English settlers who accepted an offer from the Dutch and came down from New England to settle on this small piece of New Amsterdam. Seeking better economic opportunities and more religious freedom available in Massachusetts, they demanded from the Dutch and were given a great deal in their 1645 patent, including religious freedom to the extent that it was practiced in Holland, then the most liberal religious state in Europe.

Unfortunately for these first settlers Peter Stuyvestant became the governor of New Amsterdam the following year. An intolerant man, he had no respect for the idea of religious freedom and regarded the first citizens of Flushing as a bunch of troublemakers. Things came to a head in 1657 when Stuyvestant heard that some people in Jamaica and Flushing were allowing Quakers, the religious group that Stuyvestant hated the most, to meet in their homes. He had placards posted throughout the area threatening citizens with fines and possible deportation if they assisted the Quakers.

This angered the people of Flushing because it clearly violated the rights they were granted by their patent. They met at the blacksmith shop of Michael Milner on December 27, 1657, and there the town clerk Edward Hart read them a document he probably wrote based on the feelings of his fellow citizens. The key point of the doctrine is that how an individual man or woman worships god is a private matter between the person and god and not the business of the state. This was possibly the first public statement about freedom of religion or separation of church and state in American history.

It must be remembered that these 29 citizens were not statesmen but ordinary people, mostly small farmers and shopkeepers, who were on the whole not well educated. Some couldn't even write and had to sign the Remonstrance with their mark. It must also be remembered that they were not Quakers (although some did eventually join the society) and that they were not asking for religious freedom for themselves but for all men and women and for all time.

The Queens Historical Society urges the City Council to pass this resolution celebrating the 350th Anniversary of the Flushing Remonstrance and encourages all to visit Flushing during this time of celebration and see its wonderful historic sites, particularly 1695 Quaker Meeting House, the home of the original meeting which brought about the Flushing Remonstrance.

James Driscoll
President of the Queens Historical Society



New-York
Historical
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Making
History for
200 Years

**NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
TESTIMONY BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL
AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS**

Laura Washington, Vice President for Communications

Good afternoon, members of the City Council and staff. I am testifying today on behalf of Louise Mirrer, president and CEO of the New-York Historical Society.

We are extremely pleased to be able to thank you for your generous support over the past two years, which has enabled us to tell hundreds of thousands of students, teachers and members of the general public the story of how enslaved African Americans contributed so mightily to the history and vitality of this great City.

Thousands of visitors continue to come through our doors, as we complete this landmark initiative. We had record-breaking attendance by student visitors last year and expect this year's numbers to be high as well. How do we do it? We start with our amazing collections. The key is building awareness among teachers of that collection and of how easy and effective it is to bring their students here.

- We invite teachers to attend professional development workshops conducted by our highly skilled and enthusiastic staff. Last year, 5,000 teachers participated; so far, more than 4,000 teachers have attended our workshops this year. In fact, as we speak, about 200 teachers who are passionate about history are gathered at the New-York Historical Society for workshops focusing on the American Revolution and our upcoming fall exhibition *French Founding Father: Lafayette's Return to Washington's America*, which opens November 13.
- We make the collections accessible outside the building. For example, the traveling panel version of the *Slavery in New York* exhibition has been to libraries and historical societies in all the boroughs and is traveling outside New York City. Our walking tours "Hidden Sites of Slavery and Freedom" allow people to access information about historical figures and places in New York City via cell phone. Even after our exhibitions close, they live on through our Web sites. Our last three major exhibitions--*Alexander Hamilton*, *Slavery in New York*, and *New York Divided*---all have dedicated Web sites.

- We get creative. Our American Musicals Project (AMP) is a collaboration between the New-York Historical Society and the New York City Department of Education that ignites a love of history and language in 7th and 8th grade students by using the power and emotional energy of American musical theater masterworks together with primary sources from the museum's collections. In the eight years since its conception, AMP has trained over 2,000 teachers and has been adopted as part of the Social Studies and English Language Arts curriculum by more than 500 schools. More than 20,000 public school students benefit from AMP's approach to learning each year, and more and more schools and districts become a part of this exciting program every day.

How can the city improve children's access to historical resources? This year, the New-York Historical Society expects to serve 60,000 public school students who visit our exhibitions on school visits; overall, we will have more than 100,000 school visitors this year. Our goal is to double that number by 2010. We hope to accomplish this by reaching all 4,000 social studies and history teachers annually. The city can help by:

- Offering more professional development opportunities in history. Teachers learn strategies for bringing history alive in classrooms during these sessions.
- Holding curriculum planning sessions at the New-York Historical Society to help build awareness of available resources.
- Partnering with National History Day fairs inviting families to visit historical museums and sites together.
- Producing a permanent and vital Web site of historical resources for teachers.
- Starting an annual History Hunt contest posted on a central interactive city Web site where students can research and analyze.

History has the power to change lives. We thank you for your efforts to create more excitement and knowledge of history.

Thank you.