



The New York Public Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

Boston Committee of Correspondence records

1772-1784

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Compiled by Casey Babcock and Susan P. Waide, 2015

Summary

Creator: Boston Committee of Correspondence

Title: Boston Committee of Correspondence records

Date: 1772-1784

Size: 2.4 linear feet (8 boxes, 1 oversized folder)

Source: Purchased by the Lenox Library from the estate of George Bancroft, 1893

Abstract: The Boston Committee of Correspondence was formed at the Boston Town Meeting of November 2, 1772 in response to the British government's decision to pay the governor and Superior Court judges of Massachusetts with Crown stipends, thereby making them dependent on the Crown rather than the people in assembly. With the participation of Samuel Adams and others, the Committee prepared statements of the colonists' rights and the violation of those rights by Great Britain, and sent them to other Massachusetts towns in pamphlet form, asking for their support and advice. In response to what became known as the Boston Pamphlet, similar committees formed in towns across Massachusetts and in other American colonies, helping to create a network of colonial communication ultimately leading to independence from Great Britain. The Boston Committee of Correspondence records, dated 1772-1784, document the Committee's initiatives in colonial political action in Massachusetts, from the writing of the Boston Pamphlet in November 1772 through the early months of war with Great Britain in 1775, as well as the Committee's contact with other colonies. The records also document its continued work as the Committee of Correspondence, Inspection and Safety, 1777-1784, largely concerned with investigating suspected enemies of the American cause.

Access: Advance notice required.

Alternative Form Available: Available on microfilm; New York Public Library; *ZL-231

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Creator History

The Boston Committee of Correspondence was formed at the Boston Town Meeting of November 2, 1772 in response to the British government's decision to pay the governor and Superior Court judges of Massachusetts with Crown stipends, thereby making them dependent on the Crown rather than the people in assembly. With the participation of Samuel Adams and others, among them James Otis, Josiah Quincy, Joseph Warren, Thomas Young and Benjamin Church, the Committee prepared statements of the colonists' constitutional rights and the infringements and violations of those rights by Great Britain, with particular reference to events in Massachusetts. These were accompanied by a letter opening correspondence with other Massachusetts towns, asking for their support and advice. The report was approved on November 20th and distributed to the towns in pamphlet form. In response to what became known as the Boston Pamphlet, similar committees formed in towns across Massachusetts and in other American colonies, helping to create a network of colonial communication ultimately leading to independence from Great Britain.

Communities responded with news of the reception of the pamphlet, sending copies of the proceedings of their town meetings with their votes and resolutions, often noting agreement with the grievances outlined by the Committee while stating their own views. Under a growing system of mutual advisement, the Committee informed towns and other colonies of British actions in Boston, notably the arrival of East India Company tea shipments in Boston in 1773 and the impact of Britain's punitive Coercive Acts in 1774, especially the closing of the Boston's harbor. The Committee also sought ways to relieve Boston's poor. As military action seemed increasingly likely, the Committee tried to prevent colonists from aiding the British army with their labor, skills or supplies, and asked nearby towns to monitor British military manoeuvres, while local militias prepared to be called.

With the gradual establishment of self-government and the evacuation of the British from Boston in March 1776, the Committee of Correspondence attended to public safety activities in the Boston area until the end of the Revolutionary War. The Committee monitored the actions of Loyalists and others, while continuing its communication with other towns to strengthen American interests. Now known as the Committee of Correspondence, Inspection and Safety, its meetings during this period were usually chaired by Nathaniel Barber. William Cooper, Town Clerk of Boston, was clerk of the Committee throughout its existence.

Custodial History

The papers were originally held by Samuel Adams. They were passed on to Adams' grandson, Samuel Adams Wells. Wells later transferred the collection to historian George Bancroft.

Scope and Content Note

The Boston Committee of Correspondence records, dated 1772-1784, document the Committee's initiatives in colonial political action in Massachusetts under the leadership of Samuel Adams and others, from the writing of the Boston Pamphlet in November 1772 through the early months of war with Great Britain in 1775, as well as the Committee's contact with other colonies. The records also document its continued work as the Committee of Correspondence, Inspection and Safety, 1777-1784, largely concerned with investigating suspected enemies of the American cause. Materials consist of the Committee's meeting minutes, correspondence with town and provincial committees of correspondence and transcripts of their proceedings, miscellaneous letters and documents, and legal communications

regarding suspects and records of their interrogation.

Minutes, 1772-1774, 1777-1784 and index are mainly in the hand of William Cooper, the Committee's clerk. In addition to meeting minutes, the volumes transcribe certain incoming and outgoing letters and proceedings of towns and other bodies designated for recording. Date spans for volumes 1-12 identify the first and last entry in the volume; due to the nature of the content, interior dates may precede or even follow those dates.

The bulk of the collection consists of correspondence and transcripts of proceedings sent to the Boston Committee from Massachusetts towns and other colonies, notably Connecticut, along with copies of the Committee's outgoing correspondence to them. Massachusetts towns include communities now part of Maine. For the period 1772-1775, the collection documents the Committee's efforts to connect patriot leadership in Boston to town governments in Massachusetts and committees in other colonies, in order to advise them of the impact of British imperial policies on Boston's citizens and the actions of the British military force stationed there, and to learn of political and other developments in their area. Records from 1777 to 1784 for the Committee chiefly concern its role of monitoring and investigating suspected enemies, many of them Loyalists returning to Massachusetts from Halifax and other points, contrary to law. Communications with towns generally concern public safety issues, with committees advising of suspect activities and requesting advice. Other matters discussed include the state's 1777 Act to Prevent Monopoly and Oppression, establishing a system of price controls, and the use of legal means to prevent the return of Loyalist refugees at the end of the war.

Miscellaneous letters and documents, 1772-1783, in chronological order, are closely related to the correspondence with town and other committees. Materials consist of the Committee's circular letters addressed to more than one town, advising of the state of affairs or calling for attendance at a meeting; letters sent or drafted, resolutions, and other documents written by Committee members not pertaining to individual towns; copies of documents created by other Massachusetts bodies, such as the Provincial Congress or House of Representatives; and incoming letters addressed to individual members of the Committee, including Samuel Adams, James Otis and others, or to the Committee at large. A copied letter dated 1776 May 2 from the committee of Salem to the Massachusetts House of Representatives concerns the sighting of a British troop transport at sea, and 1783 letters are correspondence between private individuals, possibly held for evidence. Notable content includes records of the Boston Town Hall Meeting of November 20, 1772, especially its rough minutes, and the Committee's manuscript report drafted by multiple authors, forming the substance of the Boston Pamphlet.

The remaining folders in the collection concern the Committee's public safety duties. These contain minutes documenting the examination (interrogation) of suspects or persons providing information about them, and legal communications with Massachusetts state government and local authorities requesting the apprehension, holding or prosecution of suspects. Documents include warrants, complaints, evidence and correspondence, as well as a few letters and statements from individuals concerning their own actions or the disloyal behavior of others.

Key Terms

Subjects

American loyalists

Geographic Names

Massachusetts -- History -- Colonial period, ca. 1600-1775

Massachusetts -- History -- Revolution, 1775-1783

Massachusetts -- Politics and government -- 1775-1783
Massachusetts -- Politics and government -- To 1775
United States -- History -- Colonial period, ca. 1600-1775
United States -- History -- Revolution, 1775-1783
United States -- History -- Revolution, 1775-1783 -- Causes
United States -- History -- Revolution, 1775-1783 -- Committees of correspondence

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Minute books

Occupations

Politicians

Statesmen

Names

Adams, Samuel, 1722-1803

Church, Benjamin, 1734-1778

Cooper, William, 1720-1809

Otis, James, 1725-1783

Quincy, Josiah, 1744-1775

Warren, Joseph, 1741-1775

Young, Thomas, 1732-1777

Container List

Minutes 1772-1774, 1777-1784

- b. 1 f. 1 Volume 1 1772 November-1773 January 12 (pages 1-90)
See Miscellaneous letters and documents for rough minutes of November 20, 1772 town meeting.
- b. 1 f. 2 Volume 2 1773 January 12-26 (pages 91-180)
- b. 1 f. 3 Volume 3 1773 February 2-November 19 (pages 181-267)
- b. 1 f. 4 Volume 4 1773 November 19 (pages 267 [i.e. 268]-359)
- b. 1 f. 5 Volume 5 1773 November 19 (pages 360-451)
- b. 1 f. 6 Volume 6 1773 November 22-1774 January 13 (pages 452-543)
- b. 1 f. 7 Volume 7 1774 January (pages 544-635)
- b. 1 f. 8 Volume 8 1773 December-1774 May 31 (pages 636-715)
- b. 1 f. 9 Volume 9 1774 January 11-September 27 (pages 716-795)
- b. 1 f. 10 Volume 10 1774 May 21-October 10 (pages 796-852)
- b. 1 f. 11 Volume 11 1774 September 27-December 20 (pages 853-870)
- b. 2 f. 1 Volume 12 1774 May (pages 871-876)
- b. 2 f. 2 Index to volumes 1-12 undated
Alphabetical index for Massachusetts towns, other provinces and personal names, with Minute book page number, for recorded proceedings and letters sent and received.
- b. 2 f. 3 1777 November 17-1779 March 2
- b. 2 f. 4 1779 March 8-1781 March 6
- b. 2 f. 5 1781 March 12-1784 March 2

Correspondence and proceedings 1772-1783

Massachusetts

- b. 3 f. 1 Abington 1773-1775
- b. 3 f. 2 Acton 1773-1774
- b. 3 f. 3 Amherst 1774 May 4
- b. 3 f. 4 Andover 1773 June 1
- b. 3 f. 5 Ashburnham 1774 September 22
- b. 3 f. 6 Ashby 1773 December 6
- b. 3 f. 7 Athol 1774 July
- b. 3 f. 8 Attleborough 1773 January 18
- b. 3 f. 9 Barnstable 1773
- b. 3 f. 10 Bedford 1774 March 8
- Bellingham
- b. 3 f. 11 1773 May 19
- b. 3 f. 12 1778 April 8
- b. 3 f. 13 Berkshire 1774
- b. 3 f. 14 Bernardston 1774
- b. 3 f. 15 Berwick 1773-1774
- Beverly
- b. 3 f. 16 1773-1774

Correspondence and proceedings (cont.)
Massachusetts (cont.)
Beverly (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 17 1783 May 16
- b. 3 f. 18 Billerica 1774-1775
- b. 3 f. 19 Bolton 1773-1774
- Boxford
- b. 3 f. 20 1773 December 20
- b. 3 f. 21 1777 May 29
- b. 3 f. 22 Bradford 1773 February 2
- b. 3 f. 23 Braintree 1773-1774
- b. 3 f. 24 Brimfield 1773-1774
- Bristol
- b. 3 f. 25 1773 March 9
- b. 3 f. 26 1780-1783
- b. 3 f. 27 Brookfield 1774 May 18
- b. 3 f. 28 Brookline 1773
- Cambridge
- b. 3 f. 29 1772-1774
- b. 3 f. 30 1777-1783
- b. 3 f. 31 Cape Elizabeth 1772-1774
- b. 3 f. 32 Charlemont 1774 July 9
- b. 3 f. 33 Charlestown 1772-1774
- b. 3 f. 34 Chatham 1772-1774
- Chelsea
- b. 3 f. 35 1774
- b. 3 f. 36 1783 May 21
- b. 3 f. 37 Colrain 1774
- b. 3 f. 38 Concord 1773-1775
- b. 3 f. 39 Conway 1774 August 10
- Danvers
- b. 3 f. 40 1773
- b. 3 f. 41 1783 May 14
- Dartmouth
- b. 3 f. 42 1774 July 29
- b. 3 f. 43 1777 April 17
- b. 3 f. 44 Dedham 1772-1773
- b. 3 f. 45 Dorchester 1773-1774
- b. 3 f. 46 Douglas 1774
- b. 3 f. 47 Dudley 1775
- b. 3 f. 48 Duxborough 1773
- b. 3 f. 49 Eastham 1773-1774
- Falmouth
- b. 3 f. 50 1773-1774

Correspondence and proceedings (cont.)
Massachusetts (cont.)
Falmouth (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 51 1777
- b. 3 f. 52 Fitchburgh 1773 December 18
Framingham
- b. 3 f. 53 1773-1774
- b. 3 f. 54 1783 May 29
- b. 3 f. 55 Fryeburg 1783 June 18
- b. 4 f. 1 Gardnerston 1773
- b. 4 f. 2 Georgetown 1773
- b. 4 f. 3 Gloucester 1773-1774
- b. 4 f. 4 Gorham 1773-1774
- b. 4 f. 5 Grafton 1774 January 24
- b. 4 f. 6 Granby 1774 July 11
- b. 4 f. 7 Granville 1774
- b. 4 f. 8 Groton 1773-1774
- b. 4 f. 9 Hadley 1774 January 24
- b. 4 f. 10 Harpswell 1773-1774
- b. 4 f. 11 Harvard 1773-1774
- b. 4 f. 12 Hatfield 1773
- b. 4 f. 13 Haverhill 1774 August 4
Hingham
- b. 4 f. 14 1773-1774
- b. 4 f. 15 1777 April 14
- b. 4 f. 16 Holden 1773 May 20
- b. 4 f. 17 Holliston 1773 March 6
- b. 4 f. 18 Hopkinton 1774 March
- b. 4 f. 19 Hull 1774 March
 - o. 1 Ipswich 1772-1773
- b. 4 f. 20 Kingston 1773 February 4
- b. 4 f. 21 Kittery 1773
- b. 4 f. 22 Lancaster 1773-1774
Leicester
- b. 4 f. 23 1773
- b. 4 f. 24 1777 April 11
- b. 4 f. 25 Lenox 1773 January 4
- b. 4 f. 26 Leverett 1783 May 14
Lexington
- b. 4 f. 27 1773-1774
- b. 4 f. 28 1783 May 22
- b. 4 f. 29 Lincoln 1773-1774
- b. 4 f. 30 Littleton 1772-1773
- b. 4 f. 31 Lunenburg 1773-1774

Correspondence and proceedings (cont.)
Massachusetts (cont.)

- b. 4 f. 32 Lynn 1773
- b. 4 f. 33 Machias 1778-1783
- Malden
- b. 4 f. 34 1773
- b. 4 f. 35 1777
- b. 4 f. 36 Manchester 1774
- Marblehead
- b. 4 f. 37 1772-1775
- b. 4 f. 38 1780-1783
- b. 4 f. 39 Marlborough 1773-1774
- b. 5 f. 1 Medfield 1773
- b. 5 f. 2 Medford 1772-1773
- Meduncook
- b. 5 f. 3 1773 September 1
- b. 5 f. 4 1783 June 5
- Medway
- b. 5 f. 5 1773
- b. 5 f. 6 1777 April 4
- b. 5 f. 7 Mendon 1773 March 1
- Middleborough
- b. 5 f. 8 1774 October 17
- b. 5 f. 9 1777 August 26
- Milton
- b. 5 f. 10 1774-1775
- b. 5 f. 11 1777 April 4
- b. 5 f. 12 Montague 1773-1774
- b. 5 f. 13 Murrayfield 1774 July 28
- b. 5 f. 14 New Braintree 1773 June
- b. 5 f. 15 Newbury 1773-1774
- Newburyport
- b. 5 f. 16 1773-1774
- b. 5 f. 17 1777
- b. 5 f. 18 New Salem 1773
- b. 5 f. 19 Newton 1773-1774
- b. 5 f. 20 North Yarmouth 1773-1774
- b. 5 f. 21 Northbridge 1774 August 17
- Northampton
- b. 5 f. 22 1774 June 29
- b. 5 f. 23 1777 April 7
- b. 5 f. 24 Norton 1773 April
- Palmer

Correspondence and proceedings (cont.)
Massachusetts (cont.)
Palmer (cont.)

- b. 5 f. 25 1774 August 8
- b. 5 f. 26 1783 May 7
- b. 5 f. 27 Pearsontown 1773-1774
- b. 5 f. 28 Pelham 1773 November 16
- b. 5 f. 29 Pembroke 1772-1774
- b. 5 f. 30 Pepperell 1773-1774
- b. 5 f. 31 Penobscot 1783
- b. 5 f. 32 Petersham 1773
- b. 5 f. 33 Pittsfield 1774-1775
- b. 5 f. 34 Plymouth 1772-1775
- b. 5 f. 35 Princeton 1773 January 25
- Reading
- b. 5 f. 36 1774 July 11
- b. 5 f. 37 1783 June 9
- b. 5 f. 38 Rehoboth 1773-1774
- b. 5 f. 39 Rochester 1773-1774
- b. 5 f. 40 Rowley 1773
- Roxbury
- b. 5 f. 41 1773-1774
- b. 5 f. 42 1783 June 2
- b. 5 f. 43 Royalston 1773 May 26
- Rutland
- b. 5 f. 44 1773
- b. 5 f. 45 1780
- Salem
- b. 5 f. 46 1774
- b. 5 f. 47 1777-1778
- b. 5 f. 48 Salisbury 1773 January
- b. 5 f. 49 Sandisfield 1773 January 12
- b. 5 f. 50 Sandwich 1773-1774
- Scarborough
- b. 5 f. 51 1773-1774
- b. 5 f. 52 1783 May 22
- b. 6 f. 1 Sheffield 1773-1774
- b. 6 f. 2 Sherburne 1773-1774
- b. 6 f. 3 Shirley 1773-1774
- b. 6 f. 4 Shrewsbury 1773-1774
- South Hadley
- b. 6 f. 5 1773-1774
- b. 6 f. 6 1783 May 14
- b. 6 f. 7 Southampton 1774 July 8

Correspondence and proceedings (cont.)
Massachusetts (cont.)

- b. 6 f. 8 Springfield 1774
- b. 6 f. 9 Stockbridge 1773
- b. 6 f. 10 Stoneham 1773
Stoughtonham
- b. 6 f. 11 1773-1774
- b. 6 f. 12 1777 June 1
- b. 6 f. 13 Stow 1773 February 8
- b. 6 f. 14 Sturbridge 1773 January 19
- b. 6 f. 15 Sudbury 1773-1774
- b. 6 f. 16 Sutton 1774 July 4
- b. 6 f. 17 Taunton 1773 September 20
- b. 6 f. 18 Tewksbury 1773-1774
- b. 6 f. 19 Topsfield 1773-1774
Townshend
- b. 6 f. 20 1773-1774
- b. 6 f. 21 1777 April 1
- b. 6 f. 22 Truro 1773-1774
- b. 6 f. 23 Tyringham 1783 May 16
- b. 6 f. 24 Upton 1773 March 1
- b. 6 f. 25 Walpole 1773-1774
- b. 6 f. 26 Warwick 1774 September
- b. 6 f. 27 Watertown 1773-1774
- b. 6 f. 28 Wellfleet 1774
- b. 6 f. 29 Wells 1774
- b. 6 f. 30 Wenham 1773
Westborough
- b. 6 f. 31 1773-1774
- b. 6 f. 32 1783 June 2
- b. 6 f. 33 Westfield 1774 June 13
- b. 6 f. 34 Westford 1773-1774
- b. 6 f. 35 Westhampton 1783 May 15
Westminster
- b. 6 f. 36 1773 February 11
- b. 6 f. 37 1780 April 25
- b. 6 f. 38 Weston 1773-1774
- b. 6 f. 39 West Springfield 1774 June 17
Weymouth
- b. 6 f. 40 1773-1774
- b. 6 f. 41 1777 April 7
- b. 6 f. 42 Whately 1773
- b. 6 f. 43 Wilbraham 1773-1774

Correspondence and proceedings (cont.)
Massachusetts (cont.)

- b. 6 f. 44 Williamsburgh 1774 August 25
- b. 6 f. 45 Wilmington 1773
- b. 6 f. 46 Winchendon 1773
- b. 6 f. 47 Winthrop 1773 January 12
- b. 6 f. 48 Woburn 1773 April 24
- b. 6 f. 49 Woolwich 1773 May 3
- b. 6 f. 50 Worcester 1773-1774
- b. 6 f. 51 Wrentham 1773-1774
- York
- b. 6 f. 52 1772-1774
- b. 6 f. 53 1783 May 26
- b. 6 f. 54 Multiple towns 1782-1783
- Connecticut
- b. 7 f. 1 Ashford 1774 August 25
- b. 7 f. 2 Brooklyn 1774
See also Pomfret.
- b. 7 f. 3 East Haddam 1774
- b. 7 f. 4 Farmington 1774
- b. 7 f. 5 Glassenbury 1774
- b. 7 f. 6 Groton 1774 June 20
- b. 7 f. 7 Hartford 1774
- b. 7 f. 8 Lyme, Middletown and New Haven 1774
- b. 7 f. 9 Norwich 1774
- b. 7 f. 10 Pomfret and Preston 1774-1775
Pomfret, 1774-1775; Preston, 1774. Town of Pomfret includes parish of Brooklyn (see above).
- b. 7 f. 11 Salisbury and Stonington 1774
- b. 7 f. 12 Suffield 1774
- b. 7 f. 13 Weathersfield 1774
- b. 7 f. 14 Windham and Woodstock 1774
- b. 7 f. 15 Delaware 1774
- b. 7 f. 16 Georgia 1774 July 16
Savannah
- b. 7 f. 17 Maryland 1774
- New Hampshire
- b. 7 f. 18 1773-1774
- b. 7 f. 19 1777 August 14
- b. 7 f. 20 New Jersey 1774
- New York
- New York City and Albany
- b. 7 f. 21 1773-1774
- b. 7 f. 22 1778 May 27
- b. 7 f. 23 North Carolina 1774

Correspondence and proceedings (cont.)

b. 7 f. 24 Pennsylvania 1773-1774
Philadelphia

b. 7 f. 25 Rhode Island 1774

b. 7 f. 26 South Carolina 1774
Charles Town

b. 7 f. 27 Virginia 1774-1775

Miscellaneous letters and documents

1772

b. 8 f. 1 Warrant to Boston town constables 1772 November 16

b. 8 f. 2 Boston town constables' response to warrant 1772 November 19

b. 8 f. 3 Rough minutes of Boston town meeting 1772 November 20

b. 8 f. 4 Committee's report to Boston town meeting 1772 November 20

b. 8 f. 5 1773

b. 8 f. 6 1774

b. 8 f. 7 1775

b. 8 f. 8 1776 May 2

b. 8 f. 9 1782

b. 8 f. 10 Minutes of examinations of suspects 1777-1783

Legal communications with local authorities and others

b. 8 f. 11 1777-1778

b. 8 f. 12 1779-1783

b. 8 f. 13 Legal communications with Massachusetts state government 1777-1783

b. 8 f. 14 Fragments undated