



Colonial Government | Democracy in Dutchess

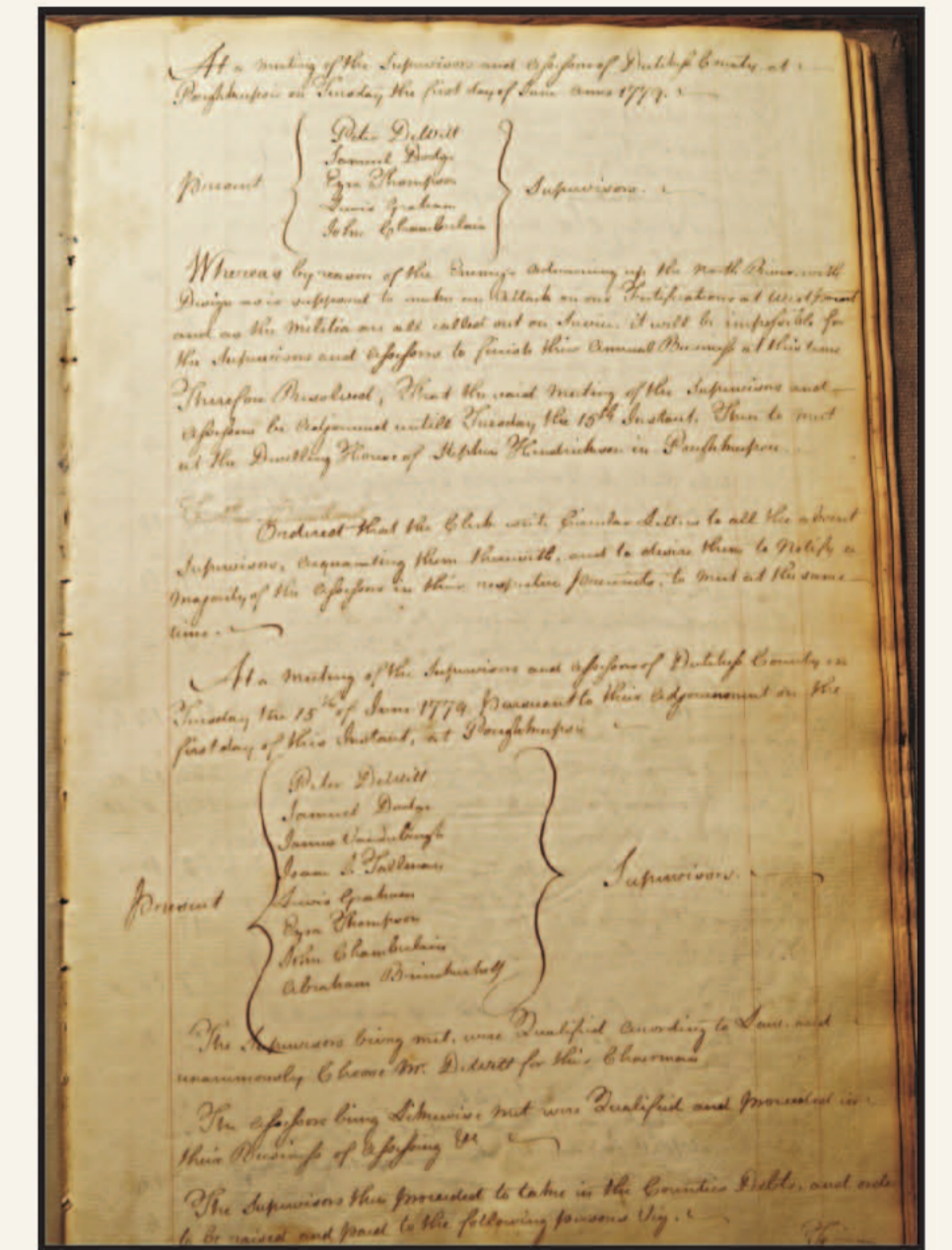
Although the colonial assembly granted permission for the county to elect its own government in 1713, Dutchess was administered by a single supervisor wielding executive authority until 1719. On June 24th of that year, the assembly passed an act dividing Dutchess into three wards, with each electing its own supervisor. The board of supervisors, which would serve the county until 1967, was born. The board continued to discharge the same duties as the single supervisor had before 1719, reviewing the county's accounts and sanctioning payments and reimbursements from the county treasury. The American Revolution provoked a complete turn-over in the Board's membership, bringing revolutionaries to power. Among these new leaders was Melancton Smith, who went on to play a pivotal role in New York's ratification of the US Constitution. The War for Independence also drove the development of local government, with each municipality creating committees to gather supplies for the Continental Army, collect new taxes to fund the war effort, and maintain law and order in the county.



1778 SUPERVISORS' MEETING PROCEEDINGS

Courtesy of the Dutchess County Clerk

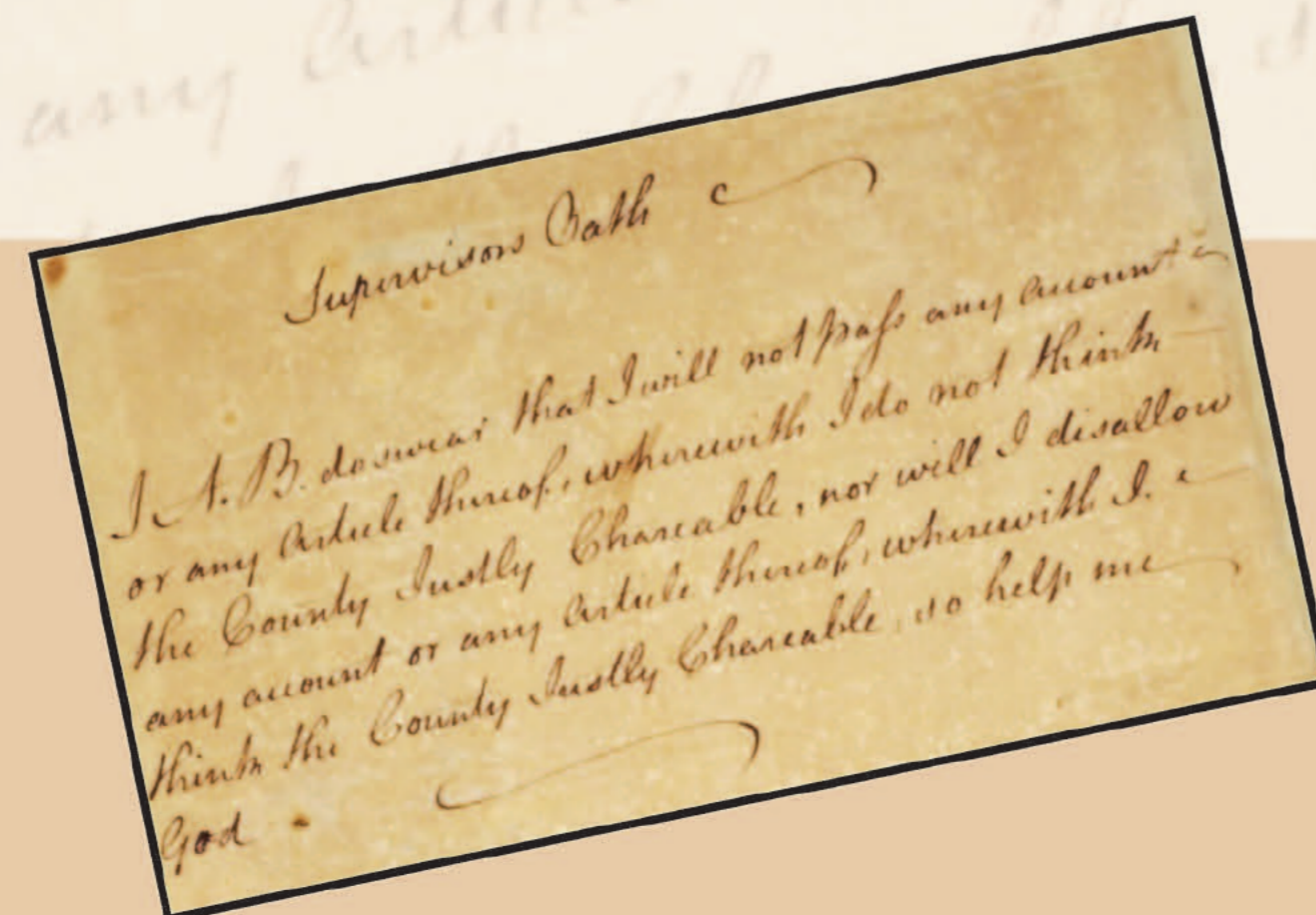
This page from the 1778 board of supervisors' meeting shows the impact of the Revolutionary War on county government. The reimbursements paid to the committees of the various towns reflected the growth of local government. Payments to Melancton Smith, at this time Sheriff of Dutchess County, to distribute to widows of Continental Army soldiers demonstrated the county's commitment to supporting the war effort.



ENEMY ACTION DISRUPTS THE 1779 SUPERVISORS' MEETING

Courtesy of the Dutchess County Clerk

The advance of British forces up the Hudson River from occupied New York City disrupted the board of supervisors' meeting in 1779. While the expedition stopped short of Peekskill, the supervisors' adjournment testifies to their central role in the militia and the effects of hostilities on county government.



SUPERVISORS' OATH OF OFFICE

Courtesy of the Dutchess County Clerk

Prior to the start of each meeting, the newly-elected supervisors swore an oath to dutifully review the county's accounts. For much of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, the board served in this fiscal role, instead of generating policy for the county as the supervisors did in later years.



THE VAN WYCK HOUSE AND THE FISHKILL SUPPLY DEPOT

Courtesy of the Dutchess County Historian

Constructed in the 1730s, the Van Wyck House served as the headquarters of the Continental Army's Fishkill Supply Depot from 1776-1783. The depot was the primary supply point for the Northern Department of the Continental Army and included workshops, barracks, a hospital, a prison, and a burial ground. General George Washington, General Israel Putnam, and Colonel Alexander Hamilton visited here. Many of the supplies gathered for the army in Dutchess went to the depot.