

The Significance of the Old Groton Meeting House By Declan Lowney

As the years pass, the former colonial identity of Groton, Massachusetts is fading into the horizon of history. Groton is no longer the tight-knit, religiously devout, agrarian community we were a quarter of a millennium ago, and although most Groton residents are likely satisfied with modern life, an important question is raised: What are we? Are we just another small suburb west of Boston, a destination for couples to settle down and raise a family? Or are we more? Well, the answers lie in our actions moving forward. For us to preserve the sanct Old Groton Meeting House, a symbol of freedom, resilience, and unity - the town's center for the movement towards American Independence, the historical central gathering place for Groton's religious community, and a site for unifying community events to this day - would keep the flame of Groton's soul burning strong. Commemoration of this building, which has carried Grotoners through triumph and tribulation, will ensure that we may forge a strong and virtuous future.

Perhaps the Old Groton Meeting House's most well known contribution to our identity was its role in Groton's movement towards American Independence. From outrage over the Stamp Act in 1765 to the official declaration of Independence in 1776, the Old Meeting House harbored discussion concerning measures to be taken against Great Britain's aggressions. Resentment intensified, and in May 1776, residents of Groton met to discuss the question of independence: "That the inhabitant of each Town in this Colony ought ... declare themselves Independent of the Kingdom of Great Britain, they, the said inhabitants will solemnly engage, with their Lives and Fortunes, to support them in this Measure." Grotonians would vote to support independence, and truly lay their "Lives and Fortunes" on the line-- twelve Groton men would lose their lives during the Battle of Bunker Hill the coming June. The time of fruition arrived in late July when the Declaration of Independence was proudly proclaimed in this building. One can only imagine the emotions a Groton resident must have experienced during this event when they recognized "the words as their own, the grievances expressed as the trials they experienced, the liberties assessed as their birthright."

As being Groton's epicenter of the movement towards independence, the Old Meeting House has been the token of Groton's identity through historical change through supporting religious and secular gatherings. During the Sunday service the minister asks to "pray the prayers of our heart as we listen to the sounds of morning in this sacred old house". By saying this listeners connect with the souls of Groton's past worshippers, and realize that the obstacles we encountered long ago may be similar in nature to the ones currently bearing over us. Today is not the first time the future of the Old Groton Meeting House has stood at a crossroads: In 1825, at the peak of the Second Great Awakening, a division between followers of the status quo orthodox faith

and those drifting towards unitarianism resulted in a polarizing split. The majority Unitarians would retain ownership of the Meeting House, rebranding it as the First Parish Church, while those maintaining orthodox beliefs established the Union Church of Christ. This milestone shift in the town's belief system threatened to weaken the spine of Groton's identity, but in actuality, made it stronger. Because what matters most about a community's identity is not race, religion, or social class - but how its citizens overcome adversity. The Old Groton Meeting House, consistently maintaining a unifying role in an ever changing town, serves as a testament to Groton's identity of unity and resilience.

The road in front of us is dark and winding, with no way of telling what wars, depressions, or political movements lay ahead. Our only guide is history; For Groton, the Old Meeting House is our compass, the stars holding the goals we strive to achieve, and its spire pointing us in the right direction. Through all the turmoil, division, and uncertainty this edifice has supported us through, it would be an insult to our forefathers to allow the Old Groton Meeting House to fall to neglect. After all, a traveler with no compass is sure to get lost.

Sources

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