

TOWN BOARD MINUTES

Volume III

Record Series Description

December 28, 1904 - February 10, 1934

Volume III of the Town Board minutes is sewn and glued, with leather binding in fair condition. There are 600 pages with printed numbers and no index. Pages 540 - 600 are blank. The records are in good condition, with no tears, but some browning of the paper.

Entries are handwritten, with variations in ink. There is fading of the ink, in some cases significant. There are smudges, stains, erasures and corrections; in some parts they are very common. Some Town Clerks' handwriting is not very legible. There are a few typed and handwritten inserts, some glued in and some loose.

Organization of Volume III of the Town Board minutes is by chronological order of recording date, which usually coincides with the chronological order of events. Town Board meetings were irregular, though more frequent than in previous time periods. For some years, there were meetings nearly every month, and frequently two or more in the same month, as Town business needed to be addressed. Some special meetings occurred at a regular time of year, such as a meeting in January for new officials to take office, in November as a Board of Canvassers to certify election results and as a Board of Auditors to pay bills, and at the end of December for examining the Supervisor's accounts. Most recordings now result from the business of meetings, rather than documents presented to the Town Clerk.

A notation on November 7, 1905 calls the meeting "the 4th biennial Town meeting at the general election." While annual meetings originally were held in March or April for the election of Town officials, the system apparently changed in 1899 (there are no records for the period of 1896 - 1904) to biennial elections at the time of the November general elections. Elected officials would take office in January of the following year for a two year term. (The practice continues through 1993, with Town officials elected on odd years, and most State and Federal officials elected on even years.)

STRUCTURE:

The meetings recorded in the Town Board minutes now have an established format. The location (Town Clerk's office), date and names of officials present were recorded. When the Supervisor was absent, a Chairman was appointed. The purpose of the meeting was noted either before or after the list of officials. The minutes of the last meeting were read and approved, or read for information. From 1914 on, the minutes were approved as read prior to adjournment. Petitions and requests were heard and acted upon. By 1925, it was routine for the Town Board to audit and pay bills on a regular basis, listing them by name of claimant, nature of claim, amount of claim and amount allowed (Prior to this time, bills were audited annually in November after elections, at which time election inspectors were paid.). Some reports (mostly fiscal) were recorded, which offer some detail of activities. Following adjournment, the minutes were signed by the 4 Justices of the Peace and Supervisor (original version of the 5 member Town Board), as well as the Town Clerk.

The contents of the minutes vary in detail according to the habits of the particular Town Clerk, but reflect an increasing complexity in the amount and type of business for which the Town Board held responsibility. There is little discussion of issues. Resolutions are noted by motion made and motion carried, with no names or roll call votes. Correspondence is occasionally copied into the record.

Personal notes, such as expressions of gratitude, sometimes appear. Memorials to deceased Town officials are entered. In 1915, there is notation that the Town Highway Superintendent entertained the Town Board at the Barrytown Hotel, when they met to consider a change in the highway at Barrytown Corners.

National historic events are occasionally reflected. There is a listing of names of soldiers and sailors to be placed on a memorial tablet after WW I.

CONTENT:

DOG CONTROL: There is mention of dog taxes and dogs killing sheep; the Supervisor maintains a Dog Fund. The Town appoints a dog enumerator.

ELECTIONS: Elections remain an important item of Town Board business. The Town Board designates and pays for polling places, and appoints and pays election inspectors (2 Republican and 2 Democratic per election district). A sixth election district is added in 1919.

Acting as a Board of Canvassers, the Town Board certifies election results, though only local results are recorded. Vote tallies are not always recorded, but the list of officials elected and their positions, terms of office, date of taking the oath of office or expense oath, and date of filing bond are recorded.

In 1907 there is a petition for ballot on the option of the Liquor Tax law, and discussion of the Poll Tax, which is retained.

HIGHWAYS: Another predominant area of Town business is highways. The Town Board inspects road conditions, approves expenditures for improvements, and settles claims for damages. Orders for laying out highways and descriptions of them are infrequent.

In the election of 1905, voters approve a Taxpayers' petition to change the system of taxation for highways from a working system of taxation to a money system of taxation, and also approved the Highway Commissioner's request for funds. Road Districts and District Commissioners are no longer mentioned, as the need for them is eliminated by the use of taxation to provide improvements.

By 1910, the Highway Commissioner becomes a Highway Superintendent. He submits an estimate for the expenditures for the coming year, which is approved by the Town Board, usually in November. In the first quarter of the next year, a Determination and Agreement for the expenditure of highway monies is made between the Highway Superintendent and the Town Board, and forwarded for the approval of the County Highway Superintendent.

Highway safety becomes an issue. In 1907, there is a petition for restricting the speed of automobiles, and the Town places 3 signs for 10 MPH speed limits.

In many cases, details are included of the amounts to be spent and the projects to be done on various roads, which begin to be listed by a road name, instead of property owners' or place names. Purchases of highway equipment (a stone crusher, steam roller, road grader) are recorded, and in 1913 the Town purchases a building to house it. By 1931 the Town Board is setting the wages for highway laborers and the Highway Superintendent.

SCHOOLS: The Town Board continues a limited responsibility for schools. It appoints or certifies election of School Directors, and in 1905 begins appointing and paying truant or attendance officers.

PUBLIC WELFARE: The Town maintains a Poor Fund and appoints Overseers of the Poor. It purchases and maintains a cemetery plot for the poor, and occasionally approves payment for a burial. In 1915, the Town Board endorses the establishment of a County Board of Child Welfare. There is note that the Town paid to send a family to Hoboken.

Monies from the Poor Fund were transferred for other uses, particularly highway, a practice declared illegal by the State in 1912, but continued anyway, at least through 1917. By 1923, the Poor Fund is no longer mentioned.

PUBLIC SAFETY: The Town Board regularly appoints Constables. There is mention of a report on the lock-up in the Village of Red Hook.

In 1917, the Town Board begins to appoint Fire Wardens, and in 1929 consents to the formation of the Red Hook Fire Company.

COURTS: In 1914 ,1917 and 1933 ,the Supervisor, Town Clerk and 3 assessors met to draw up a list of jurors, which is recorded with names, addresses and occupations. The list was for 3 years, but there is no explanation of why other years do not show this record.

TAXATION: The record notes in 1916 that \$32,762.72 is to be collected in taxes. By 1924, the Town Board is setting annually the amount to be collected in taxes.

PUBLIC HEALTH: Public Health matters continue to be an important Town responsibility. In 1910 the Town Board establishes the appointed position of a Physician to the Poor and asks doctors to submit bids for their services. By 1913, the Town Health Officer is reporting to the Town Board, and the Town Board begins to deal with issues such as violations of State Board of Health regulations, ordering closure of school districts during an epidemic and authorizing the Supervisor to secure a house for a contagious hospital.

A Consolidated Health District (the Town plus the two Villages) is formed in 1917 and by 1919 the Town Board is approving payments for rent and expenses for a Nursing Association, as well as receiving reports from a Town Nurse.

FISCAL ACCOUNTABILITY: As fiscal responsibilities increase so does the need for fiscal accounting. Notations of filing of bonds for Town officials continues. By 1904 the annual auditing of accounts includes the Highway Commissioner and sometimes Justices of the Peace, as well as the Supervisor (usually done in December). The Supervisor's accounts include the Poor Fund, Dog Fund and School Fund, with later additions of the Highway Fund, Machinery Fund, Bridge Fund, General Fund, Nursing Fund and Miscellaneous Fund.

FISCAL INFORMATION: The increase of Town responsibilities is reflected in increased fiscal content of the Town Board minutes. By 1914, the Town has need to issue a certificate of indebtedness. The record notes amounts to be levied in taxes, amounts of approved purchases and bills to be paid, amounts in Supervisors' accounts and amounts to be spent on highways. Insurance is now a necessary item of expense.

FRANCHISES: Improvements in the quality of life become a business of the Town Board, as they grant franchises for electric power and gas (1905), as well as telephones (1910). Rate increases become a Town Board issue.

The increased Town Board business of this time period offers many glimpses into the life of Town residents. Names of claimants for bills give indications of business activity within the Town. Petitions for Town Board action reflect concerns of citizens. Though discussion and reasons are not very detailed, the names, fiscal information and variety of issues addressed in this time period provide much historical information.

END OF VOLUME III RECORD SERIES DESCRIPTION