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**Freedom of Religion in America to be Celebrated: A Call for the
Descendants of the Signers of the Flushing Remonstrance, Peter
Stuyvesant, Too**

On December 27, 1657, thirty townspeople of Flushing, Queens signed a “remonstrance” addressed to Peter Stuyvesant, the director general of the Dutch colony, New Netherland. The two-page letter, set down by a local cleric, protested Stuyvesant’s ban on the rights of Quakers to assemble and worship in the colony. Significantly, it further demanded that all people—regardless of religion or ethnic background—be given “free egress and regress unto our Town, and houses, as God shall persuade our consciences.”

Stuyvesant ignored the Flushing Remonstrance, as it came to be known, but its principles were later tested by John Bowne, an English immigrant and prosperous landowner in Flushing. Although not a Quaker himself, Bowne was married to Quaker minister Hannah Feake Bowne. In defiance of Stuyvesant’s ban, Bowne allowed people of her faith to meet and worship in their Flushing farmhouse. For this “crime,” Stuyvesant imprisoned Bowne in 1662 and banished him to Holland. Refusing to capitulate, Bowne argued his case before the Dutch West India Company. In 1663, the company revoked Stuyvesant’s ban, and ordered him “to allow everyone to have his own belief, as long as he behaves quietly.”

The men who signed the Flushing Remonstrance, and John Bowne, risked their lives and their livelihoods by challenging Stuyvesant. Their heroic stand is widely acknowledged as having contributed to the principles codified more than a century later, in 1791, in the

First Amendment of the Bill of Rights, which guarantees religious and political freedom to all citizens.

In honor of the 350th anniversary of the Flushing Remonstrance, the Bowne House Historical Society is seeking descendants of the men who signed the Flushing Remonstrance.

The signers were:

Nicolas Blackford

William Noble

George Clere

Nick Colas Parsell

Elias Doughtie

William Pidgion

Edward Farrington

Henry Semtell

Tobias Feake

Richard Stocton

Antonie Feild

John Store

Robert Field, Sr.

Edward Tarne

Robert Field, Jr.

William Thorne, Sr.

John Foard

William Thorne, Jr.

Edward Griffine

John Townesend

Edward Hart

Henry Townsend

Nathaniel Hefferd

Nathaniel Tue

Benjamin Hubbard

Micah Tue

John Mastine

Phillip Udall

Michael Milner

George Wright

Please note that the spellings of the above surnames are “old style,” and that modern spellings may be different. For example, descendants of the signer Richard Stocton may spell the name “Stockton.”

The Committee is also interested in finding descendants of Peter Stuyvesant and his sheriff Resolved Waldron.

Descendants should send their information to **Flushing Remonstrance c/o Bowne House Historical Society, 37-01 Bowne Street, Flushing, New York, 11354** or by email to **dcartelli@bownehouse.org**. Please include mailing address, email address, and phone number, along with the name of the signer, and the line of descent.

The search for the descendants of the men who signed the Flushing Remonstrance is part of The Office of the President of the Borough of Queens initiative to celebrate the 350th anniversary of the document. The Borough President’s Office created the Education Committee of the Flushing Remonstrance, whose mission is to increase public awareness, to establish a special public school curriculum in 2007-2008, and to organize a major event to commemorate the importance of the document to the Constitution of the United States. The Flushing Remonstrance, which resides in the New York State Archives, is widely acknowledged as the foundation for the principles codified in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights, which guarantees religious and political freedom to all citizens.

In addition to Bowne House Historical Society, the Committee is represented by the New York City Board of Education, Queens Museum, Queens Public Library, and Queens Historical Society, among others. To learn more about the Flushing Remonstrance, please visit the website of the Bowne House Historical Society, www.bownehouse.org.

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The Bowne House Historical Society is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization, which owns and operates the Bowne House 37-01 Bowne Street, Flushing, New York 11354. The Society's mission includes the preservation of the house, its collections and grounds for its historical and educational interest, for its significance to the history of New York City and for its importance in the establishment of the fundamental principles of freedom of conscience and religious liberty. Bowne House was built in 1661 by John Bowne, whose courageous stand in defense of religious freedom, resulting in his arrest and imprisonment by Governor Peter Stuyvesant, helped establish the principles later codified in the Bill of Rights.

The Bowne House and its message are unique in America. Few house museums date from the seventeenth century. The house itself is the best-preserved example of Anglo-Dutch residential architecture in the country and it continues to occupy its original site. The museum is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is a designated New York City Landmark.

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