



During the Thetford Town Meeting at the Thetford Academy, residents cast ballots on whether President Nixon should be impeached. Although the Vermont area is normally Republican territory, the resolution passed. Associated Press

Vermont Town Favors Impeachment of Nixon

By JOHN KIFNER

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THETFORD, Vt., March 5 — The first week in March is Town Meeting time in much of New England. In the little towns on the farmlands and coastlines of Maine and Massachusetts, and along the rivers and mountain valleys of New Hampshire and Vermont, the citizens — as they have done since Colonial times — come together to vote on their taxes, town regulations and other issues of mutual concern.

But this year there is a difference. A coalition of liberal Democrats has succeeded in putting the issue of President Nixon's impeachment on the agenda in a number of Vermont towns.

Early this morning, residents of this small cluster of rural villages near the Connecticut River, about 40 miles southeast of Barre, voted at their annual town meeting for the impeachment of Mr. Nixon.

Problems and Changes

The vote was close — 160 to 130 — but somewhat startling in this normally Republican territory. It reflected not only the President's problems, but also changes that are occurring throughout the state.

Last night, residents of Springfield, a larger and more industrial Connecticut Valley town about 40 miles south of Thetford, voted 135 to 108 for an impeachment resolution. But in Essex, a suburb of Burlington, a resolution citing "the pattern of abusive power" failed by a vote of 130 to 53.

This afternoon, the nearby town of Norwich voted for impeachment, 254 to 39. Bpt in Woodstock, a resort town

about 25 miles east of Rutland, a motion to vote on an impeachment resolution was tabled and killed. Impeachment votes were also scheduled in other Vermont towns.

Cars and pickup trucks, muddy with spring thaw, filled the parking lot and lined the streets outside of Thetford Academy's Anderson Hall last night. Inside, the moderator, Matthew I. Wiencke, a classics professor at nearby Dartmouth College who likes to think of town meetings as "sort of like old Athens," read the town warrants — the order of business — in a voice made even quieter than normal by a bout of laryngitis.

On one section of the bleachers, bright lights and network television cameras were set up. Periodically, the town's three Selectmen asked the technicians to turn the lights off as the voters debated for three and a half hours such matters as the installation of a memorial plaque in the Town Hall in honor of Winston G. Colton, a recently deceased Selectman; the continuation of an ambulance service contract with the neighboring town, and the stabilizing of taxes at \$50 a year for an old one-room schoolhouse so that it could be a meeting place for the Cub Scout pack.

Thetford, which was founded in 1761, is a far cry today from its peak population in 1830 of 2,113, when dozens of mills lined the Ompompanoosuc River and blacksmiths and tavern keepers plied their trades.

After a period of decline, followed by 50 years in which the population stabilized at slightly more than 1,000, Thetford is now one of the fastest-growing communities

in the state, with population increasing from 1,049 to 1,422 between 1960 and 1970.

The influx of "new people" — many of them young refugees from the cities, some of them wealthy retired persons and some affiliated with Dartmouth, just across the Connecticut in Hanover, N.H. — has begun to change the town's political character. And here, as elsewhere in Vermont, protection of the land and the dangers of expansion are common concerns.

Thetford's voters have favored Mr. Nixon in his three Presidential campaigns, but his 1972 margin over Senator George McGovern, 350 to 254, was his smallest yet.

Half-Hour Debate

At 10:57, Article 14 — the motion asking the meeting to call on Congress and Vermont's single United States Representative, Richard W. Mallery — was brought to the floor. The debate lasted less than a half hour.

Mrs. Jacqueline Lucy, the 29-year-old mother of two who is the Democratic town chairman and organizer of the impeachment movement, said the act was in the tradition of New England town meetings.

Her voice rising with emotion, Mrs. Lucy, who has lived here for two years, said: "We are citizens exercising the most fundamental of our rights. Democracy starts here."

The strongest opposition came from Robert White, a Republican who teaches high school courses in vocational English and "the psychology of nonprint media" in White River Junction. He contended that a vote at the meeting

would lump all the residents together unfairly. Then, looking at Mrs. Lucy, he said:

"There's another New England tradition — which I'm not necessarily advocating — where radicals and troublemakers were tarred and feathered and ridden out of town. And women believed to be possessed had the Devil turned out of them at the stake."

A few minutes later, Edward C. Kirkland, a stooped, white-haired retired professor of American economic history who was wearing a red plaid shirt and a ray suit, stood up and said in an indignant voice:

"If there is anything I dislike, it's a joke that isn't true. No woman had the Devil turned out of her in New England — not ever."

He sat down amid applause and cheers.

"They hanged them," the professor later confided.

As the voters lined up to cast their paper ballots, Edward C. LaMontagne, a short man who wore a Lion's Club pin and a small gold badge on his maroon blazer, leaned protectively over the box. He was the town's administrative officer, part-time constable, dog catcher, tax collector and surveyor.

Then, a few minutes after midnight, he announced the vote. There was applause and shaking of heads. A final motion, by an impeachment supporter, paid tribute to Senator George D. Aiken, a Republican and dean of the Senate, who is retiring this year. The Cub Scout mothers packed up their coffee pots. And Mrs. Lucy went triumphantly home to her baby sitter.