

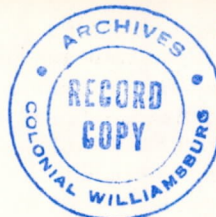
“These Boisterous Times...”\*

# THE WEEK IN '76

Alexander Purdie, *Virginia Gazette*,  
January 1, 1776

**DECEMBER 1976**

**December 1-4, 1976**



PAMPHLET FILE



**December 4, 1776**

On this day Nicholas Cresswell, an Englishman touring Virginia, recorded in his journal while in Leesburg:

A Dutch mob of about 40 horsemen went through the town to-day on their way to Alexandria to search for Salt. If they find any they will take it by force. All of them armed with swords or large clubs. This article is exceeding scarce, if none comes in the people will revolt. They cannot possibly subsist without a considerable quantity of this article. The people in general live on Salt meat in the Summer. The excessive heat renders the keeping of fresh meat very difficult, even for a day, and the thinness of inhabitants and markets prevents them killing little else but young hogs and fowls. They likewise give Salt to their Horses, Cattle, Hogs and Sheep almost every day in the Summer. The cattle are exceedingly fond of it, so much that they will follow you anywhere for a lick of it and it is so essentially necessary that they will not thrive without it.

Cresswell certainly did not overstate the need for salt. The authorities in Virginia realized that an emergency would exist if normal sources of salt were cut off, and by the summer of 1776 they had established at least seven public salt works in the state and offered bounties to private producers of salt.

In an effort to discourage people from hoarding salt, the General Assembly resolved on December 19, 1776:

Resolved, that if any persons within this commonwealth shall purchase salt imported, or to be imported, into the same, than he hath occasion for the use of his family for one year, and shall refuse to sell the surplus, or demand a greater price than will be sufficient to reimburse him the first cost, on the purchase from the importer, and charges, and 15 per centum loss of measure, every person so offending shall be held and deemed an enemy to this state.

**December 5-11, 1976**

**December 5, 1776**

On December 5 the House of Delegates adopted an act to exempt dissenters from contributing to the support of the established church in Virginia. The bill resulted from a compromise after Jefferson proposed to disestablish the church completely. Another ten years passed before the General Assembly finally accepted Jefferson's famous Bill for Religious Freedom.

December 5, 1776, also saw the founding at the College of William and Mary of the first Greek-letter fraternity in the United States, the Phi Beta Kappa Society. The opening paragraph of the Society's minutes relates:

On Thursday, the 4th of December, in the year of our Lord God one thousand seven hundred and seventy-six and the first of the Commonwealth, a happy spirit and resolution of attaining the important ends of Society entering the minds of John Heath, Thomas Smith, Richard Booker, Armstd Smith, and John Jones, and afterwards seconded by others, prevailed, and was accordingly ratified.

The Society held its monthly meetings at the Raleigh Tavern, and John Heath of Northumberland County was elected its first president. In 1779 the William and Mary Chapter chartered a second chapter at Harvard University.

#### **December 6, 1776**

The *Virginia Gazette* reported on **December 6**: Last Saturday Edmund Randolph esq. was chosen mayor of this city, Joseph Prentis, esq. one of the court of aldermen, and mr. Edward Charlton a common councilman.

The city government of Williamsburg, outlined in the Charter of 1722, consisted of a mayor, recorder, six aldermen, and twelve common councilmen. The charter named the mayor, recorder, and aldermen who chose the common council from "the most sufficient of the Inhabitants of the said City." To perpetuate the succession, the mayor, recorder, aldermen, and common council met on the Feast Day of Saint Andrew and elected the mayor from among the aldermen. Vacancies among the aldermen were filled by election from the common council. The mayor, recorder, and aldermen filled vacancies on the common council by election from the "Inhabitants and Freeholders of the said City," in order to maintain the number of common councilmen at twelve.

The charter provided that the mayor, recorder, and aldermen "be Justices of the Peace within the said City, the Precincts and Liberties thereof, and Directors of the Buildings and Streets" and with the common council "make, order, and appoint such By Laws, Rules and Ordinances for the Regulation and good Government of the Trade and other Matters, Exigencies and Things within the said City."

#### **December 12-18, 1776**

#### **December 14, 1776**

The House of Delegates enacted a bill to establish a Court of Admiralty, a pressing need because of the frequent capture of enemy ships as war prizes. This bill was one of several proposed by Jefferson to reconstitute the judiciary. The other proposals were put aside until the 1778 session of the General Assembly.

#### **December 18, 1776**

The House of Delegates instructed the governor and Council to order natives of Great Britain who were partners or agents of British merchants to depart the state as soon after January 1777 as possible, except for those who "heretofore uniformly manifested a friendly disposition to the American cause, or are attached to this country by having wives or children here." Numbers of Scottish and English merchants left the state the following year.

*Compiled by Harold B. Gill, Jr.*



The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation