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CALL FOR A CONGRESS!

August 1-7, 1774

A Colonial Williamsburg
program, August 1-7, 2005

From August 1 through August 6, 1774, the first Virginia Convention met in Williamsburg. The convention was made up of former members of the House of Burgesses who returned to Williamsburg to intensify their protest of the Boston Port Bill and what we now call the Intolerable Acts. They drafted an association that forbade the importation of British goods and slaves after November 1, 1774, and the exportation of goods to Great Britain after August 1, 1775. They also elected delegates to the 1st Continental Congress, held in Philadelphia during September and October for the purpose of unifying American resistance to British policies.

During the week of August 2-7, the events of the 1st Convention will come back to life throughout Colonial Williamsburg's Historic Area. At the Capitol, the characters of George Wythe, Robert Carter Nicholas, Richard Henry Lee, Peyton Randolph, and Patrick Henry will discuss and debate different measures of protest. They will conduct the convention's business, drafting instructions for delegates to the congress.

Members of Williamsburg's enslaved community will gather at different locations, revealing their thoughts about these events and the impact on their lives. Stories about this revolutionary time in Williamsburg and the people who lived them will be related at a variety of Historic Area sites.

By participating in these events, guests will learn about the summer of 1774, the determination of Virginia's political leadership to coerce the British government to restore rights and civil liberties to the people of Massachusetts and cease its threats of the same treatment toward its other North American colonies. Guests will also learn about Virginia's leadership role in uniting the other colonies in that cause.

VIRGINIA TODAY SNAPSHOT

Virginia's Growing Debt



By 1776 Virginia's debt had
grown to £1,400,000

"just a little under half of
all the debts by North
American colonists to
British creditors"

Warren M. Billings, John E. Selby
and Thad W. Tate, *Colonial Virginia:
A History* (White Plains, N.Y.: KTO
Press, 1986), 322.

AMERICANS *Becoming* TODAY

NO. 1 IN COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG

CONVENTION TO CONGRESS: ONLY THE SHADOW KNOWS

Williamsburg: News has just been received that 89 members of the late House of Burgesses came together in this capital city to deliberate the most effectual means of assuring Virginians their rights as freeborn Englishmen. Will this colonial shadow government foreshadow a continental shadow government? READ ON.

The delegates, after convening from August 1 through August 6, made their way home with stories to tell. So, what was accomplished by this erstwhile "shadow" convention with no legal authority to legislate or even convene as elected representatives of the populace?

Dudley Diggs, delegate from York County, might relate to his fellow residents stories of the sweeping agreement to eschew importation and use of near to all British goods by November 1, 1774—an age old and time honored tradition of protest. BUT WAIT! THERE'S MORE! The delegates have gone one step further and dared

to agree to withhold exports to the Mother Country after August 1, 1775! Wait until the tobacco planters get a load of this—even though they can ship their crops this year what are they to do with their crops in the coming year and the year after that? They don't grow the "golden weed" for entertainment! The same can be said for those exporting meat, timber, staves, or any number of like commodities.

The delegate from James City County, Robert Carter Nicholas, to the great relief of many Virginians including his constituents, who fear an insurrection by their slaves, was able to report the actions of the convention. To wit "we will neither ourselves import, nor purchase, any Slave, or Slaves, imported by any Person, after the first day of November next." It is further resolved, as regards to stoppage of British goods, "that the Merchants and other Venders of Goods and Merchandises within this Colony ought not to take advantage of Scarcity of Goods . . . but ought to sell the same at the rates they have been accustomed to for twelve months last past." (Convention Association, August 6, 1774)

This convention elected Peyton Randolph, Richard Henry Lee, George Washington, Patrick Henry, Richard Bland, Benjamin Harrison, and Edmund Pendleton as deputies to a General Congress that will meet in Philadelphia in September.

We wish "them to observe . . . our faith and true allegiance to his majesty King George III . . . to support him in the legal



The Alternative to Williamsburg, attributed to Philip Dawe, black and white mezzotint, England, February 16, 1775. Virginia loyalists are being forced to sign either the Association or the resolutions drawn up by the Williamsburg Convention of August 1774. The alternative is to be tarred and feathered.

exercise of all his just Rights and Prerogatives . . . that British subjects in America are entitled to the same rights and privileges as their Fellow Subjects in Britain. And therefore that the Power assumed by the British Parliament to bind America by their Statutes in all Cases whatsoever is unconstitutional. . . . The original Constitution of the American Colonies possesses their Assemblies with the sole Right of directing their internal Polity . . . but it is our Desire that you cordially co-operate with our Sister Colonies in General Congress . . . for the Accomplishment of valuable Ends." (Instructions for the [Virginia] Deputies appointed to meet in General Congress, August 6, 1774)

Mr. Jefferson, from Albemarle County, who could not attend the convention because of illness, sent some lengthy notes that he desired to be included in the deputies' instructions. Alas, alack, the tenor of Mr. Jefferson's comments proved inflammatory to the extreme and his document was tabled by the delegates.

So next month these seven Virginians will go off to the city of Brotherly Love. As we know from their instructions, there will be ample expression of faith and allegiance to our sovereign coupled with a deep and abiding conviction of our rights as freeborn Englishmen. **God save the king and give wisdom to our Deputies to the general congress!**

[Submitted by Phil Shultz and Nancy Milton]

THE DYE IS CAST

"By 1774 the leading colonists, including Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, were arguing that only the separate American legislatures were sovereign in America. According to this argument, Parliament had no final authority over America, and the colonies were connected to the empire only through the king. The most the colonists would concede was that Parliament had the right to regulate their external commerce only "from the necessity of the case, and a regard to the mutual interests of both countries," as the Declarations

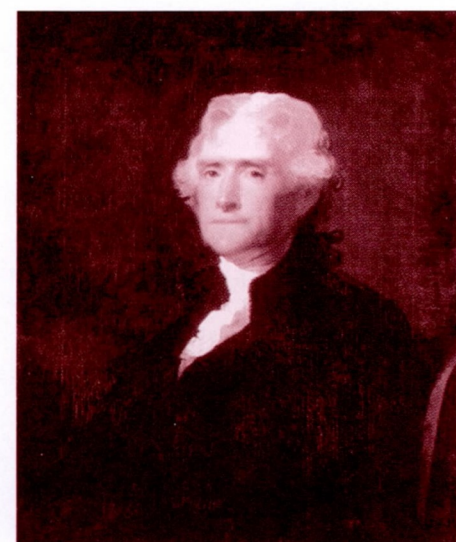
and Resolves of the First Continental Congress put it. But the British government remained committed to parliamentary sovereignty embodied in the Declaratory Act, which no American leader could any longer take seriously.

It was now only a matter of time before these irreconcilable positions led to armed conflict."

Gordon S. Wood, *The American Revolution: A History*, A Modern Library Chronicles Book, The Modern Library, New York, 2002.



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JEFFERSON'S SUMMARY VIEW

But for a case of dysentery on a hot summer day, citizens of Williamsburg, and eventually the rest of the colonies and, indeed, even England herself might have been deprived of one of Thomas Jefferson's most incendiary texts that served to fan the flames of discontent growing stronger and hotter with the passing months.

History is replete with instances of major events hinging on seemingly insignificant trifles. One such example of particular interest is Mr. Jefferson's *Summary View of the Rights of British America*. This document was a draft of instructions he intended to present to the Virginia delegates to the Continental Congress with the intent that the resolutions contained therein would be used as a basis for what he called "an humble and dutiful address" to George III.



The so-called humble resolutions contained in what became a 23-page pamphlet were anything but humble. In this bold document, Jefferson laid out a series of complaints that begin with reminders of common Saxon ancestry and end with a call to "Open your breast, Sire, to liberal and expanded thought. Let not the name of George the Third be a blot on the page of history."

It must be stressed that this impassioned treatise was a draft, far from being a final copy, and Jefferson, aware of the inaccuracies and intemperate language, never intended its publication. In fact, he was not even aware of its publication by Williamsburg printer Clementina Rind. The published instructions quickly found their way into George Washington's hands. By September the draft had been reprinted in Philadelphia, and by early November copies were circulating in London.

How did this work-in-progress come to be seen by so many? Stopped in his tracks, as it were, by "the bloody flux," Jefferson sent two copies of the document ahead,

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NEWS

JEFFERSON'S
SUMMARY VIEW

Continued from page 1

one to Peyton Randolph and one to Patrick Henry. Henry's copy has been lost, but the other was taken to Randolph's home and was read to a large audience.

Many of the resolutions were met with hearty applause, but were not officially adopted due to the extreme, bold nature of the language. According to Meriwether Jones in a letter written 30 years after the fact, Edmund Randolph, Peyton's nephew, claimed that "himself, and some other young patriots were so captivated with [the resolutions'] point and elegance, that they procured their publication by subscription."

After a lengthy introduction, which comprises one third of the document, Jefferson sets the tone by reciting the indignities borne by the colonies at the hands of previous reigns.

He devotes the rest of the tract to listing "that rapid and bold succession of injuries which is likely to distinguish the present from all other periods of American history." He explores a "series of oppressions," which he describes as "a deliberate, systematical plan of reducing [the colonies] to slavery." Among these are acts limiting free trade, restricting commerce, and imposing duties. He gives special mention to the act entitled "An act for suspending the legislature of New York" as "a phenomenon unknown in nature." His evaluation of the act that closed the port of Boston is particularly passionate as he describes the act, its repercussions, its afterlife, and the hardships endured by those immediately affected.

In his final paragraph of this evaluation, he concludes, "If the pulse of [the king's] people shall beat calmly under this experiment, another and another will be tried till the measurement of despotism be filled up."

The last section of the essay focuses on what Jefferson calls "the conduct of His Majesty, as holding the executive powers of the laws of these States, and mark out his deviations from the line of duty." Jefferson briefly traces the history of the king's veto right, its passing into disuse, and George III's resurrection and implementation of it.

He continues with an attack on His Majesty's inattention to the confirmation or negation of laws that render the judicial process passive and toothless. Other similar transgressions are analyzed and dissected until finally, at the end of 23 pages, Jefferson ends with what reads as almost respectful: "This, Sire, is our... determined resolution... that you will be pleased... to procure redress of these... grievances, to quiet the minds of your subjects... against any apprehensions of future encroachment, to establish fraternal love and harmony through... all British America."

[Submitted by Todd Norris]

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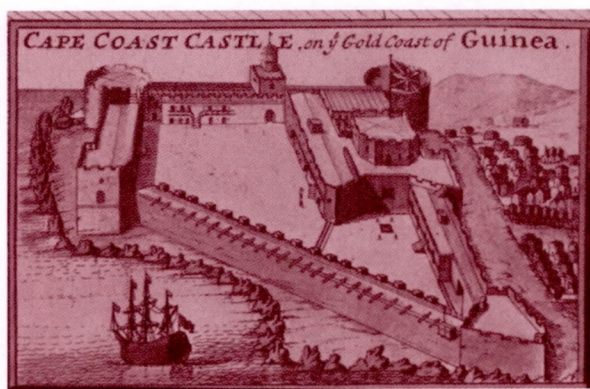
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Many enslaved Africans were shipped to the Western Hemisphere from Cape Coast, an English outpost on the Gold Coast of West Africa. Above is a detail from Africa, a hand-colored engraving by John Bowles, London, ca. 1740.

END THE SLAVE TRADE!

ADDRESS TO THE KING

On April 1, 1772, the House of Burgesses resolved to present the following address to King George III through the auspices of Lord Dunmore. The legislators implored the king to enable representative assemblies in the colonies to restrict the importation of slaves if desired.

Enslaving Virginia Source Book

Most Gracious Sovereign,

... The many Instances of your Majesty's benevolent intentions and most gracious Disposition to promote the Prosperity and Happiness of your Subjects in the Colonies, encourage us to look up to the Throne, and implore your Majesty's paternal Assistance in averting a Calamity of a most alarming Nature.

The Importation of Slaves into the Colonies from the Coast of Africa hath long been consid-

ered as a Trade of great Inhumanity, and, under its present Encouragement, we have too much Reason to fear will endanger the very Existence of your Majesty's American Dominions.

We are sensible that some of your Majesty's Subjects in Great-Britain may reap Emoluments from this Sort of Traffic, but when we consider that it greatly retards the Settlement of the Colonies, with more useful Inhabitants, and may, in Time, have the most destructive Influence, we presume to hope that the Interest of a few will be disregarded when placed in Competition with the Security and Happiness of such Numbers of your Majesty's dutiful and loyal Subjects.

H. R. McIlwaine, et al., eds., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1770-1772* (Richmond, Va.: The Colonial Press, 1906), 283-284.

POLITICS DOES MAKE . . .

Virginia's burgesses have by 1772 come to the conclusion that it would be wise and prudent to end the African slave trade. Support for this comes from an unexpected corner.

Lord Dunmore, royal governor of Virginia, supported the petitions and desires of the burgesses on three separate occasions. First, in May of 1772, his lordship sent a strong and vigorous message to Lord Hillsborough imploring that the colonial secretary persuade the king to agree to the additional and restrictive import duty upon African slaves that the Virginians were requesting in their petition. Thus, the crown would be granting the wish "of a country whose loyalty and affection have allway been conspicuous" (Virginia: Official Correspondence, Bancroft Transcripts). Lord Dunmore sent this entreaty to London nearly three weeks BEFORE dispatching the laws enacted in the session of 1772.

His next attempt came in 1773 after Lord Dartmouth had become colonial secretary. This time Lord Dunmore posited that the duties that the assembly wished to impose were no more than had been permitted

up until 1771, and they "could not be supposed to be intended as a prohibition or to obstruct the Slave trade" (Bancroft Transcripts).

With this plea making no effect, a final effort was made in 1774 when the royal governor noted to Lord Dartmouth that disallowances of the Virginians' laws could not "fail of renewing the uneasiness which they often express at finding the representation of a set of self-interested merchants" (Bancroft Transcripts).

He seems to come at this issue on two heads. He is well aware that countermanding the wishes of the Virginians in lieu of the wants of London merchants will continue to enflame tensions between the colony and the crown, and he has a real fear of what will happen when (not if) the Virginia slaves are armed by the French or Spanish. Regardless of his arguments about the ever-increasing number of slaves in Virginia, it will be left to the colonists themselves to stop the trade in August of 1774.

[Submitted by Phil Shultz]

FORUM

WHAT HAVE THEY
WROUGHT?

By the fall of 1774 Virginians had traveled a long road over the decade just passed, perhaps none more so than the group of established leaders of the colony who had held power when it began and who remained for the most part in positions of prominence. Had the demands of pursuing opposition to the most recent round of British measures permitted, or had they been more introspective men than they were, they might have been startled to compare the beginning and ending of the decade. In 1764 they had sat down to frame a series of addresses to the king, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons couched in all the old forms of humble supplication and intended to accommodate their opposition to the proposed Stamp Act within traditional modes of imperial politics. When that effort failed, they had initially betrayed a sense of uncertainty and hesitation. Now in recent months they had formulated trade embargoes (and thereby advanced efforts at the economic independence they had once spurned), had advocated and joined in the formation of an extralegal intercontinental congress, and had deliberately shut down their own courts of law in an area of critical jurisdiction. Perhaps they would have confessed their amazement, but they might also have responded that they contended for much the same broad objective in 1774 as they had in 1764, or for that matter in the early 1750s: to block imperial efforts to restrict their own control of what they would have termed their "internal polity," for that and nothing more.

Warren M. Billings, John E. Selby
and Thad W. Tate, *Colonial Virginia:
A History* (White Plains, N.Y.:
KTO Press, 1986), 333-335.



IMPORTATION OF SLAVES INTO VIRGINIA 1772-74

The importation of slaves from Africa into Virginia dropped off dramatically six months after the General Assembly had instructed Lord Dunmore on April 1, 1772, to deliver their address to His Majesty asking for an end to the slave trade.

From May through September 24, 1772, 1,560 "Negroes" were listed as imported into Virginia from Africa, Angola, and the Windward and Gold Coasts. After September 1772, there are no listings of slaves being imported into Virginia directly from Africa. The trade now shifts from Africa to the Caribbean islands with a much smaller number of slaves. For 1772, 155 slaves arrived from Grenada, St. Vincent, Bermuda, Antigua, Barbados, Tobago and St. Christopher. In 1773, 3 slaves arrived from the islands while 52 slaves arrived in Virginia with incomplete records of place of origin. In 1774, only 36 slaves arrived in Virginia. Without the king's approval, Virginians had effectively ended their own trade and were prepared for the association's call for an end to the slave trade.

[Submitted by Anne Willis]

DATE OF ENTRY	VESSEL	MASTER	NEGROES	FROM	PORT OF ENTRY
1772					
February 28	Brig <i>Fanny</i>	William Westcott	21 new Negroes	Grenada	Hampton
March 4	Sloop <i>Smithfield</i>	Alexander Cochane	20 new Negroes	St. Vincent	Hampton
May	Ship <i>Polly</i>	Thomas Duncombe	430	Angola	James
July 9	Snow <i>Nancy</i>	James E. Colly	250	Windward and Gold Coasts	James
July 30	Snow <i>Thomas</i>	Thomas Lewis	200	Africa	James
August 20	Ship <i>Union</i>	Charles Pole	280	Gold Coast	James
September 24	Ship <i>Prince of Wales</i>	James Bivins	400	Africa	Lower James
October 5	<i>Fredericksburg</i>	John Sinclair	3	Grenada	Rappahannock
October 12	Brig <i>Fanny</i>	William Westcott	7	Grenada	Hampton
October 12	Sloop <i>Black Prince</i>	Walter Gray	7	Grenada	Hampton
October 13	Sloop <i>Success</i>	John Williams	20	Bermuda	Hampton
October 14	Brig <i>Charlotte</i>	Wilson R. Bailey	15 seasoned	Barbados	Hampton
October 19	Schooner <i>Commerce</i>	John Wood	22	Antigua and St. Martin's	Hampton
October 20	Brig <i>Betsy</i>		4	Barbados	Hampton
November 3	Brig <i>Porter</i>	Richard Kelsick	3	St. Vincent	Hampton
November 5	Ship <i>Unity</i>	John Knight	5	Grenada	Hampton
November 6	Brig <i>Liberty</i>	William Rysam	27	Barbados	Hampton
November 23	Schooner <i>Thomas</i>	Wright Brickle	1	Antigua	Hampton
November 25	Schooner <i>Smithfield</i>	Alexander Cochane	12	St. Christopher	Hampton
December 21	Brig <i>John and Willis</i>	Samuel Wilson	8	Tobago	Hampton
December 24	Sloop <i>Little Molly</i>	Thomas Burrows	4	Antigua	Hampton
1773					
[no date]	Brig <i>Othello</i>	John Duncan	52		
November 5	Brig <i>Francis</i>	Joseph Outerbridge	1	Bermuda	Hampton
December 2	Sloop <i>Hope</i>	Duncan Campbell	4	Tobago	Hampton
1774					
January 24	Sloop <i>Grace and Sally</i>	Christopher Wilson	1	Antigua	Hampton
February 10	Sloop <i>Phoenix</i>	William Westcott	30	Antigua	Hampton
August 22	<i>Live Oak</i>	John Eve	5	Grenada	Hampton

Walter Minchinton, Celia King and Peter Waite, eds., *Virginia Slave-Trade Statistics 1698-1775* (Richmond, Va.: Virginia State Library, 1984), 183-189.