

## Dunmore's Proclamation Dates in Historic Area November 15-21, 2004

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### 1775 Newsline

March 25

The second Virginia Convention meets in St. John's Church, Richmond, to avoid interference by British forces. Patrick Henry delivers his "Give me liberty or give me death" speech on March 23 in support of a resolution to put the colony "into a posture of defense."

April 21

Acting under Dunmore's orders, 20 sailors led by Lt. Henry Collins of HMS *Magdalen* take 15 half-barrels of powder from the Williamsburg magazine during the early morning hours. Drums beating the alarm bring most of the population to the market square, but Peyton Randolph, Robert Carter Nicholas and Mayor John Dixon persuade the crowd to send a delegation to the Governor's Palace to protest peacefully. The next day the enraged governor publicly threatens to arm the slaves, but peace prevails.

April 29

In response to a call from Hugh Mercer, commander of the volunteer company in Fredericksburg, about 600 men rendezvous there to march on Williamsburg. The night before, news of the battles of Lexington and Concord had arrived. By morning, three horsemen arrive back in Fredericksburg bringing a plea from Peyton Randolph to avoid violence. After a 102-man executive committee debate the issue all day, the men reluctantly disband. At news of the meeting, Lady Dunmore and her children seek refuge on board HMS *Fowey* at Yorktown. They return to the Governor's Palace after the threat of violence subsides.

May 10

The second Continental Congress convenes in Philadelphia. Peyton Randolph again is elected president but is succeeded by John Hancock on May 24 when Randolph returns to Williamsburg to preside over the Virginia General Assembly.

June 1-2

The first session of the General Assembly since May 1774 meets in Williamsburg. Dunmore summons it in response to news of Lord North's conciliatory proposal of February 27, which promised not to tax the colonists if they would agree to tax themselves.

June 3-4

Several young men break into the powder magazine in Williamsburg late Saturday or early Sunday to be greeted by the blast of a shotgun triggered by a spring. Two are slightly wounded. An outraged public condemns Dunmore as a would-be assassin, and on Monday another mob storms the magazine. The governor and assembly exchange recriminations over the incident.

June 8

Although appearing to be on the verge of apologizing to the assembly for the spring-gun incident, Dunmore slips out of town with his family about 2 A.M. and goes aboard HMS *Fowey* at Yorktown. After transferring to the *Magdalen*, Lady Dunmore and her children sail to England on June 29, while Dunmore takes up quarters on board ship near Norfolk.

June 10

The Virginia General Assembly rejects Lord North's conciliatory proposal. The Continental Congress takes similar action on July 31.

June 15

George Washington is unanimously selected by Congress to be commander in chief of the Continental Army. He accepts the next day, and on June 23 he leaves Philadelphia for Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he arrives on July 2.

July 17-August 26

The third Virginia Convention, meeting in St. John's Church, Richmond, provides for the annual election of its delegates and local county committees and establishes an 11-member Committee of Safety under the chairmanship of

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# AMERICANS *Becoming* TODAY

NO. 1 IN COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG

## Dunmore Offers Freedom to Slaves of "Rebel Masters"!!!



By His Excellency the Right Honorable JOHN Earl of DUNMORE, His MAJESTY'S Lieutenant and Governor General of the Colony and Dominion of Virginia and Vice Admiral of the same.

A PROCLAMATION.

AS I have ever entertained Hopes, that an Accommodation might have taken Place between GREAT-BRITAIN and this Colony, without being compelled by my Duty to this most disagreeable but now absolutely necessary Step, rendered so by a Body of armed men unlawfully assembled, firing on His MAJESTY'S Tenders, and the formation of an Army, and that Army now on their March to attack His MAJESTY'S Troops and destroy the well disposed Subjects of this Colony. To defeat such reasonable Purposes, and that all such Traitors, and their Abettors, may be brought to Justice, and that the Peace, and good Order of this Colony may be again restored, which the ordinary Course of the Civil Law is unable to effect; I have thought fit to issue this my Proclamation, hereby declaring, that until the aforesaid good Purposes be obtained, I do in Virtue of the Power and Authority to ME given, by his MAJESTY, determine to execute Martial Law, and cause the same to be executed throughout this Colony: and to the end that Peace and good Order may the sooner be restored, I do require every Person capable of bearing Arms, to resort to His MAJESTY'S STANDARD, or be looked upon as Traitors to His MAJESTY'S Crown and Government, and thereby become liable to the Penalty the Law inflicts upon such Offences; such as forfeiture of Life, confiscation of Lands, &c. &c. And I do hereby further declare all indented Servants, Negroes, or others, (appertaining to Rebels,) free that are able and willing to bear Arms, they joining His MAJESTY'S Troops as soon as may be, for the more speedily reducing this Colony to a proper Sense of their Duty, to His MAJESTY'S Crown and Dignity. I do further order, and require, all His MAJESTY'S Liege Subjects, to retain their Quitrents, or any other Taxes due or that may become due, in their own Custody, till such Time as Peace may be again restored to this at present most unhappy Country, or demanded of them for their former salutary Purposes, by Officers properly authorised to receive the same.

GIVEN under my Hand on board the Ship WILLIAM, off NORFOLK, the 7th Day of November, in the SIXTEENTH Year of His MAJESTY'S Reign.

DUNMORE  
(GOD save the KING.)

Source: Woody Holton, "'Rebel Against Rebel': Enslaved Virginians and the Coming of the American Revolution," in *Virginia Reconsidered: New Histories of the Old Dominion*, ed. Kevin R. Hardwick and Warren R. Hofstra (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 183.



Slaves captured attempting to join Lord Dunmore were often held at the Public Gaol in Williamsburg.

## Freedom Sounds Good! [What are the risks?]

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### COLONIAL LEADERS USE THE PRESS TO DISCOURAGE SLAVES

The following excerpts from John Pinkney's *Virginia Gazette* indicate that the colony's leaders used the newspaper to deter slaves from joining the British.

Lord Dunmore's cruel policy begins at length to be discovered by the blacks, who have lately deserted from him to a considerable number. When his lordship first went down to Norfolk he gave great encouragement to unwary negroes, but, such was his baseness, some of them, it is confidently said, he sent to the West Indies, where these unfortunate creatures were disposed of to defray his lordship's expences; and others, such as he took any dislike to, he delivered up to their masters, to be punished. Since the troops under colonel Woodford's command began their march, lord Dunmore issued a proclamation inviting the [ ] of rebels, as he is pleased to say, to repair to [ ]dard. A considerable number at first went to him, but upon their masters taking the oath of allegiance, they were immediately told they must return. Some runaways, however, remained, but these were kept constantly employed in digging entrenchments in wet ground, till at length the severity of their labour forced many of them to fly. Those that were left behind have made several attempts to get off, but such is the barbarous policy of this cruel man, he keeps these unhappy creatures not only against their will, but intends to place them in the front of the battle, to prevent their flying, in case of an engagement, which, from their utter ignorance of fire arms, he knows they will do.

*Virginia Gazette* (Pinkney),  
November 30, 1775.

An honest negro (Caesar, the famous barber of York) being asked what he thought of lord Dunmore's setting negroes free, said, that he did not know any one foolish enough to believe him, for if he intended to do so, he ought first to set his own free.

*Virginia Gazette* (Pinkney),  
December 9, 1775.

December 1775—ACT VII. *An ordinance for establishing a mode of punishment for the enemies to America in this colony.*

And be it farther ordained, That if any slave, or slaves, shall be hereafter taken in arms against this colony, or in the possession of an enemy, through their own choice, the committee of safety shall have full power and authority to transport such slave, or slaves, to any of the foreign West India islands, there to be disposed of by sale, and the money arising from such sale to be laid out in the purchase of arms and ammunition, or otherwise applied to the use of this colony, as the committee of safety shall judge most proper; and in case such slaves, so taken in arms, or in the possession of an enemy, cannot be transported with convenience to this colony, the same shall be disposed of for the use of this colony, or returned to the owner or owners of such slaves, or otherwise dealt with according to an act of assembly for punishing slaves committing capital offences, as the committee of safety may judge most proper.

Provided always, and be it farther ordained, That the owner, or owners, of such slaves, shall be paid, by the treasurer of this colony for the time being, the full amount of such sale, or value of such slaves, after deducting the expences and charge of transportation; which said valuation shall be made by the commissioners in each county aforesaid, and certified to the committee of safety, who shall thereupon grant their warrant, directed to the treasurer for payment of the value of such slave as aforesaid.

William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large* (Richmond, Va., 1819-1823), 9:101, 106.

## FORUM

Africans saw immediate opportunities for freedom in revolution that the British quickly exploited. In 1775 Virginia's governor, Lord Dunmore, offered freedom to slaves who would support the British cause. Dunmore intended to undermine planter support, not to abolish slavery, so that Africans remained pawns in revolutionary politics. But freedom was freedom, especially after three to five generations inside slavery, and Dunmore and the British induced almost a thousand Africans to win it by deserting their masters and joining an "Ethiopian Brigade" despite overwhelming planter control of the countryside. Boston slaves audaciously delivered three petitions for freedom to General William Gage. Slaves rebelled in St. Andrew Parish in Georgia in 1774, killing several whites before they were captured and burned alive. The South Carolina Provincial Congress created three troop regiments "to keep those mistaken creatures in awe as well as to oppose any Troops that may be sent among us with coercive Orders."

The specter of slaves running away to freedom terrified Virginia planters, particularly when they were employing metaphors about the "slavery" of America to Parliament and king. Edmund Pendleton heard rumors that "slaves flock to [Dunmore] in abundance" and hoped that the rumors were "magnified." The planter Landon Carter resolved deep fears about Africans in his reveries. In July 1776 he dreamed about "runaway people . . . most wretchedly meager and wan" who hid in a cave and then returned to seek Carter's pardon. Carter's actual runaways never returned, however much he dreamed they would. Better to starve free and die in the wilderness than submit again to planter captivity. Nor were Carter's slaves alone. By the end of the Revolution, several thousand slaves had fled from the colonies, some taking refuge in Canada, some escaping to the northern states, a few heading for the wilderness and life among the Indians. Most faced uncertain futures. But they were free.

Jon Butler, *Becoming America: The Revolution before 1776* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 239–240.



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Lewis Miller's "Miss Fillis and child, and Bill, Sold at publick Sale." Virginia, 1853. (1978-301.1, 49)

## LORD DUNMORE'S SLAVES

Dunmore's opinion that slaves were property can also be seen in the proclamation he issued in November 1775. The governor carefully worded his proclamation to offer freedom only to those slaves who belonged to his political opponents and who were able-bodied. Under the terms of the proclamation, Dunmore's own slaves could not join his "Ethiopian Regiment." An entry in Purdie's January 12, 1776 issue of the *Virginia Gazette* noted that Dunmore's slaves at his Berkeley County plantation did not know about the proclamation:

NOTWITHSTANDING lord Dunmore's late proclamation for emancipating such slaves as should repair to his standard, we are informed, by a correspondent, that two of his own negroes, with an overseer, passed through Fredericksburg, one day last week, on their way to his Berkeley plantation; so that it should seem his lordship has not been so very generous to his own bondmen as he wished to be to those who were the property of others, but whom neither he, nor even his august master, have the smallest right to intermeddle with.

However, it is known that at least five of Dunmore's slaves ran away in 1775. It is possible that Robin took advantage of the turmoil caused by the Gunpowder Incident in April 1775 to run in August of the same year. William Mitchell described him as "a likely negro man named ROBIN, 5 feet 7 inches high, slender made, has on an osnabrug shirt, blue breeches, and a blue jacket, and says he ran away from the palace at Williamsburg." The account of Robin's clothing indicates that he worked in the fields at one of Dunmore's plantations.

In December 1775 John Pendleton "Ordered that Colonel [Patrick] Henry be at Liberty to give direction to the Keeper of the public Gaol for the discharge of James a Mulatto slave belonging to Lord Dunmore." It is not known if James ran to join Dunmore or not. Entries in the Black Loyalist Directory indicate that three of the governor's slaves were evacuated with the British from New York in 1783. Sarah stated that she left the Palace in 1776. Roger Scott claimed that Dunmore freed him before he left Williamsburg and Catherine Scott did not note when she left the governor.

Purdie's July 14, 1775 issue of the *Virginia Gazette* noted that "All his Lordship's domesticks have now left the palace, and are gone, bag and baggage, to his farm at Porto Bello, about six miles from town." The rest of Dunmore's slaves were at the Palace in early January 1776 when the colony's leaders moved to secure the property that he left at the Governor's Palace. They decided "that no person be allowed to make reprisal on the property of lord Dunmore, in this colony, for their property seized by him, or the navy, without the order of this Convention." On February 22, 1776, Benjamin Powell, Richard Morris and Lieutenant Goodrich Crump received an appointment to "examine the several Effects in the Palace, contained in the Inventory formerly ret'd, and report to this comm'ee whether any or what part are missing." Powell and James Southall viewed and appraised "such articles of furniture at the palace as the General [Lee] may want (which will be considered purchased by him) and make report to the comm'ee" on April 2nd of that year.

*Enslaving Virginia Resource Book* (Williamsburg, Va.: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1998), 358; see also 356–359.

## SLAVES AT THE PUBLIC GAOL

December 4, 1775

The Negroes we have divers quarters found going over to the Governor and secured, are become too numerous as our Gaol [Hampton] is at present very insufficient; We therefore wish they may be sent for—there are 14 in Confinement.

December 13, 1775

Ordered, that the Slaves taken and confined at the Town of Hampton be sent to the publick Gaol in the City of Williamsburg.

December 14, 1775

Ordered, that the slaves taken and confined at the Town of Hampton be sent to the publick Gaol in the City of Williamsburg.

Ordered, that the Committee of Safety do cause so many of the Captive Slaves as they shall think necessary to be employed in working in the lead Mines.

December 1775

Ordered that Colonel [Patrick] Henry be at Liberty to give direction to the Keeper of the public Gaol for the discharge of James a Mulatto slave belonging to Lord Dunmore.

December 24, 1775

Mr. Edmund Ruffin [Jr.] appeared [before the Committee of Safety] & claimed a negro man named Joe, now in the public Jail, who with 5 others belonging to himself & father went off in a boat to go to Lord Dunmore, but before they reached him, this Slave as he declared repented of the expedition & found means to make his escape leaving the others at Mulberry Island, & was soon after taken up on land & brought to this City; Mr. Ruffin thinks him

Sincerely penitent & wishes to have him restored, which the Committee allow of upon his paying charges of Imprisonment. Mr. Ruffin also claims another negro man in the public Jail named Dick, but as he appears incorrigible the Committee cannot consent to his being delivered at present, & as Mr. Ruffin does not desire him to be delivered, he is to remain in the public Jail till further orders.

Note: According to Ruffin, the Committee of Safety "refused to discharge" Dick, "intending as a Terrour to others to send the said Slave to the West Indies or Lead Mines." That design was frustrated by the death of Dick "before such Step was taken."

Robert L. Scribner and Brent Tarter, eds., *Revolutionary Virginia: The Road to Independence*. Vol. 5, *The Clash of Arms and the Fourth Convention, 1775–1776*, *A Documentary Record* (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia for the Virginia Independence Bicentennial Commission, 1973–1983), 46, 127, 140, 144, 239, 240.

December 29, 1775

Last Monday night arrived in town, from Hampton, under a strong guard 33 black and white prisoners, coupled together, who were committed to the publick jail; since which a vessel was drove ashore near Hampton, in the late snow storm, going on a pirating voyage to the Eastern Shore for provisions, which had on board 14 whites and two black.

*Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), supplement.

## NEWS

George Washington's cousin Lund managed Mount Vernon between 1764 and 1785. Early in December 1775, Lund wrote to Washington about Dunmore's Proclamation and speculated that the plantation's slaves would be secure unless white laborers gave them ideas about escaping. While he acknowledged that "Liberty is sweet," he could not envision slaves seeking their liberty without instigation from white men.

*Enslaving Virginia Resource Book*, 168.

1775—Lund Washington's Response to Dunmore's Proclamation

Our Dunmore has at length Published his much dreaded proclamation—declare Freedom to All Indented Servts & Slaves (the Property of Rebels) that will repair to his majestys Standard—being able to bear Arms—What effect it will have upon those sort of people I cannot tell—I think if there was no white Servts in this family I should be under no apprehension about the Slaves, however I am determind, that if any of them Create any confusion to make & [an] example of him, Sears who is at work here says there is not a man of them, but woud leave us, if they believed they could make their Escape—Tom Spears Excepted—& yet they have no fault to find[.] Liberty is sweet.

W. W. Abbot, et al., eds., *The Papers of George Washington. Revolutionary War Series*, vol. 2 (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1987), 479–480.

## Newsline

Cont. from page 1

Edmund Pendleton to act as an executive body between sessions.

August 23

King George III proclaims the American colonies in rebellion and calls on loyal subjects to help suppress the insurrection. Alexander Purdie's *Virginia Gazette* prints the proclamation on November 10.

September 30

A squad of men from HMS *Otter* seizes the press of printer John Holt of Norfolk. Dunmore uses the press to publish his own *Virginia Gazette* until spring.

October 12–21

After a series of raids, the British sally out again in the vicinity of Norfolk and conduct additional raids on October 20 and 21.

October 24

Determined to move against Dunmore, the Committee of Safety decides to send Col. William Woodford's Second Virginia Regiment into action instead of Patrick Henry's First Virginia Regiment, largely because of Henry's military inexperience.

October 25–27

Encouraged by the success of his recent raids, Dunmore sends Capt. Matthew Squire with five ships to burn Hampton. A barricade of sunken vessels before the town delays them long enough to allow reinforcements from Williamsburg to arrive and drive off the attackers.

November 15

Dunmore and his army defeat several hundred militia at Kemp's Landing.

November 16

Lord Dunmore's proclamation offers freedom to slaves willing to desert owners who are in rebellion against the crown and to fight for the king; about 800 in Virginia accept the offer in late 1775 and 1776.

December 13

In an attempt to stop slaves from deserting their owners, the Virginia Convention promises to pardon all slaves who return to their masters within 10 days.

December 31

Gen. George Washington, revising an earlier decision, orders recruiting officers to accept free Negroes in the American army.

Source: John E. Selby, *A Chronology of Virginia and the War of Independence 1763–1783* (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1973), 17–25.