

“These Boisterous Times...”*

THE WEEK IN '76

*Alexander Purdie, Virginia Gazette, January 1, 1776



February 15-21, 1976

February 17, 1776

The announcement of the death of Mrs. Catherine Rathell of Williamsburg appeared in Dixon and Hunter's Virginia Gazette on February 7.

Some letters by [a brig from London] advise, that the Peggy, Fisher, from Virginia, was cast away on the 26th November last, in sight of Liverpool, and that only the Captain, and part of the crew, were saved. Mrs. Rathell, of this city, went passenger in the above vessel, and was one of the unfortunate persons that perished.

Mrs. Rathell, a milliner, arrived in Virginia in 1765 with a letter of introduction to Robert Carter from John Morton Jordan, a London tobacco merchant. Mrs. Rathell first settled in Fredericksburg and usually visited Williamsburg with a stock of merchandise during the meetings of the General Assembly. She later moved to Williamsburg and opened a millinery shop near the Capitol "where Mr. Aschough lately lived." Within a few months she moved her shop to Duke of Gloucester Street "opposite the Raleigh Tavern."

In April 1775 Mrs. Rathell announced in the Virginia Gazette: As I purpose going to England as soon as I dispose of my goods, and remain there until liberty of importation is allowed, puts me under the necessity of not parting with a single shillings worth, without the cash; and I request, as a favour, that all who are indebted to me will pay off their accounts this meeting, and any person who has any demands against me are desired to apply directly.

In October Mrs. Rathell sailed for England in the Peggy, leaving her remaining unsold merchandise and store fixtures in the hands of another milliner, M. Brodie, to be sold. Unfortunately, the Peggy sank within three miles of Liverpool and Mrs. Rathell, along with nine others, drowned.

February 22-28, 1976

February 28, 1776

On February 13 the Continental Congress appointed Patrick Henry colonel of the "First Battalion of Virginia Forces in the Army of the United Colonies." When the Committee of Safety offered Henry the commission on the 28th, he refused to accept it. The Virginia Gazette reported on March 1:

Yesterday morning the troops in this city being informed that Patrick Henry, esq., commander in chief of the Virginia forces, was about to leave them, the whole went into deep mourning, and being under arms, waited on him at his lodgings, when they addressed him in the following manner:

To PATRICK HENRY, jun. esquire. Deeply impressed with a grateful sense of the obligations we lie under to you, for the polite, humane, and tender treatment manifested to us throughout the whole of your conduct, while we had the honour of being under your command, permit us to offer you our sincere thanks, as the only tribute we have in our power to pay to your real merits. Notwithstanding your withdrawing yourself from the service fills us with the most poignant sorrow, as it at once deprives us of our father and general, yet, as gentlemen, we are



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compelled to applaud your spirited resentment to the most glaring indignity. May your merit shine as conspicuous to the world in general as it that done to us, and may Heaven shower its choicest blessings upon you.

Henry had hoped to be promoted to brigadier general in command of all Virginia forces, and he was stunned by the action of Congress. On August 5, 1775, the Virginia Convention had elected Henry colonel of the 1st Virginia Regiment and commander in chief of all Virginia forces. With the new appointment Henry found himself under the command of officers who had been his subordinates.

Most of his friends believed that Henry would be an unsuccessful military commander because of his lack of experience. Edmund Pendleton was worried: "The unlucky step of calling that gentleman from our councils, where he was useful, into the field, in an important station, the duties of which he must, in the nature of things, be an entire stranger to, has given me many an anxious and uneasy moment." George Washington expressed the feeling that his "countrymen made a capital mistake, when they took Henry out of the Senate to place him in the field; and pity it is that he does not see this, and remove every difficulty by a voluntary resignation."

Henry felt slighted by the action of Congress. He immediately resigned and returned to civilian life convinced that he had been done out of a brilliant military career.

