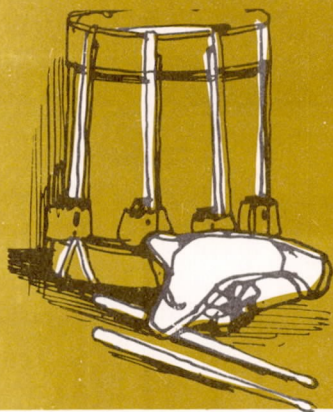


“These Boisterous Times...”  
THE WEEK IN '76



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

APRIL 1976

April 18-24, 1976



PAMPHLET FILE

April 19, 1776

Mr. Purdie,

The impositions and exactions on the publick by the TAVERN-KEEPERS in this colony in general, as well as in Williamsburg, is so exorbitant, as to call for some mode of redress by those to whom that power belongs. No colony on this continent is allowed greater profit on vending and retailing provision than this, but that does not satisfy the voracious publican. By the law, the courts settle the rates of provision, etc. which is to be put up in the tavern. This is neglected, the better to facilitate the design; and, countenanced by those whose duty it is to detect such proceedings, by paying every unjust charge in the tavern-keeper's bill (from a mistaken notion that it is below the dignity of a gentleman to contest small accounts) they go on with impunity. It is hoped, therefore, that all tavern-keepers will immediately put up the rates allowed by the court in the most conspicuous part of the tavern, or be punished for such neglect.

I am, sir,  
An ENEMY to IMPOSITIONS

Colonial law required county courts to fix annually prices of "liquors, diet, lodging, provender, stablage, fodder, and pasturage" that ordinary- or tavern-keepers could charge. The law required ordinary-keepers to obtain copies of the rates "which shall be openly set up in the publick entertaining room." Occasionally the law was disregarded.

The complaint of the "Enemy to Impositions" probably resulted from the fact that the York County Court did not fix ordinary rates in March 1776 as was the usual practice. The justices of York County evidently thought that the colonial law no longer applied, and they did not set rates again until 1780 after a new law was passed.

April 25-30, 1976

April 26, 1776

April 26.

Mr. Purdie,

In these distressed times, in which our American rights, both civil and religious, are invaded, it is well to adopt that late maxim among politicians, "United we stand, divided we fall." To this end, the dissenters (equally attached to America's liberty) ought to petition their rulers for the removal of that yoke, that in these scarce times is become more grievous, in paying the established clergy, and being still obliged to have the solemnization of matrimony by them. A word to the wise is enough.

A Dissenter from the Church of England.

Even though dissenters from the Established Church in Virginia were allowed to attend their own services, the colonial government required them to pay taxes for the maintenance of the Established Church. In December the Assembly passed an act to exempt dissenters from contributing to the support of the Church of England. It was offered as a compromise after Jefferson's proposal to disestablish the church completely. Ten years later Jefferson's famous Bill for Religious Freedom finally became law in Virginia.

On April 26, 1776, John Page, vice-president of the Virginia Committee of Safety, wrote Thomas Jefferson:

Would you believe it, that we have not yet erected one Powder Mill at the public Expence . . . and I have not been able to procure the least Assistance from the Committee for Bucktrout's hand-Mill, except their selling him about 400 lb. of Salt-petre . . . although his Mill is an elegant Machine and 2 Men can work it with ease, beating with 6 Pestles weighing 60 lbs. each in Mortars containing 20 lbs. of Paste, and he has actually beat 120 lb. of Powder in them and grained 40 lb. which has been used in proving Cannon etc. and which was found to be strong and good under every disadvantage of want of Sieves and being made with bad Sulphur and Nitre. And he has been at great pains in erecting his Mill and Apparatus for it, and for a Salt-petre work with it, yet the Committee of Safety refused any Motion to allow him 30 or 40 pounds as a Reward for his public Spirit and Ingenuity and to enable him to go on with his Plan.

Benjamin Bucktrout, an enterprising cabinetmaker, lived on Francis Street and engaged in a variety of businesses. He not only worked as a cabinetmaker but also as a paper hanger, retail merchant, and during the Revolution he was purveyor for the State Military Hospital in Williamsburg. Bucktrout's versatility was not unusual among Virginia craftsmen. Because of the scarcity of skilled workers in colonial Virginia, most craftsmen worked in every field in which they had some talents. The demands of the public did not allow them to specialize. Some craftsmen, too ambitious, became over-extended, but others were better managers and accumulated substantial estates.

Although he engaged in a variety of businesses, Bucktrout was a successful manager. Characteristically, he saw that gunpowder would be in short supply because trade with Britain was cut off and he set out to construct a powder mill in Williamsburg. The state government did not support his mill and because it was difficult to obtain sulfur and saltpeter, his mill probably did not prosper.



Colonial Williamsburg Foundation