



AMELIA COUNTY COMMITTEE FOR THE 250TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION (AMREV250) ~ c/o P.O. BOX 113, AMELIA C.H., VIRGINIA 23002

Amelia Revolution 250 – Spring 1774: Revolution on Our Doorstep

-By Michael F. Whitaker

Note: This article begins a series of history pieces about Amelia County 250 years ago, in local commemoration of the Semi-quincentennial Anniversary of the American Revolution (1770-1789). The series reflects research by members of the Amelia and Nottoway American Revolution Commemoration (AmRev250) Committees. Nottoway separated from Amelia County in 1788 and became a place of separate political record the following year. This first piece draws mainly from the volumes, Liberty! The American Revolution (1997) by Thomas Fleming, and Historical Notes on Amelia County, Virginia, (1982) by the then Amelia County Historical Committee, Kathleen H. Hadfield and W. Cary McConnaughey, Editors.

Two hundred and fifty years ago, June 1, 1774, marks a time when the march to war between England and her thirteen North American colonies extending from New England and New York through the mid-Atlantic to the Carolinas and Georgia became irreversible. Britain’s King George III, along with his “unprepossessing but skilled (and likeable)” Prime Minister, Frederick Lord North, and stout “anti-American” factions in Parliament, had passed a series of “Coercive Acts” in response to the December 16, 1773, “Boston Tea Party.” The punitive legislation came at a time when a general if imperfect colonial boycott of English goods had been in place for several years.

Parliament promulgated the Acts under several names, but combined they seemed to many Americans as a portent of impending martial law. Their key features included the following policies: 1) closure of the port of Boston until the “seditious” Tea Party perpetrators replaced the tea which they had ruined; 2) a drastic overhaul of the Massachusetts Bay Charter of 1691 that gave strict control of the colony to the Crown, including the elimination of democratic practices in the colonial legislative assembly; 3) the transfer of British officers, officials, and colonials accused of felonies from colonial to Royal jurisdiction; and 4) the dispatch of four Royal Army regiments to Boston to accompany the two already in place, along with

naval vessels. British officers received authorization to quarter troops in private homes and all Royal interests were placed under the authority of General Thomas Gage, the existing commander of British forces in North America, now promoted to Governor-General of Massachusetts (a compound political-military position).



King George III
of Gt. Britain & Ireland

A further ordinance that truly showed the colonials their place as subjects of the Empire came in the form of The Quebec Act, which finally set up the government of that conquered possession a decade after the British gained it from the defeated French. Among other things, it set new boundaries for the eponymous Canadian colony south to the Ohio River and west to the Mississippi. This effectively nullified longstanding territorial claims of Virginia and several other British American colonies and threatened the expansion or creation of personal wealth for many influential colonists.

The new laws came on the heels of the personal humiliation of Benjamin Franklin, the very popular agent of Massachusetts in London, who also represented the views of the other American colonies. In January 1774, he became the target of demeaning tirades from members of the British Privy Council. His oral excoriation occurred over a colonial petition to dismiss the royal governor in Boston, but the heated hearing more readily gave

vent to the King's, and the English aristocracy's, irritation at growing "radical" American notions that were thorns in the side of British worldwide imperial policy. More specifically, the Council's lead speaker railed at the audacity of the revolutionary idea that the "King should dismiss his highest representative" [i.e., the governor of Massachusetts] because the latter "had lost the confidence of the *people*."

Franklin, who had harbored misgivings about English autocratic impulses ever since the 1765 Stamp Act ("taxation without representation") and the felling of five of his countrymen in 1770 by a British Royal Army squad in the "Boston Massacre," suffered the nearly hourlong harangue in silence, but from thenceforth ceased to be an important, if not the best, American conduit of reasoned political amicability with Parliament and the Crown. It is said that "as he left the proceedings shoulder to shoulder with [his inquisitional adversary at council]," he



Lord Dunmore

whispered, "I will make your master a little king for this."

"That quotation likely was apocryphal." However, history records that General Gage returned to Boston in April and "the port was sealed on June first." This was the same

day that the Virginia House of Burgesses, meeting in Williamsburg with George Washington in attendance, had previously declared as a day of fasting and prayer to ask the Almighty to preserve Virginia liberties from a similar "military occupation" and "to avoid the evils of civil war." The Commonwealth's new Royal Governor, John Murray, Fourth Earl of Dunmore, responded to the vote by dismissing the assembly. "Washington and his fellow delegates reconvened at nearby Raleigh Tavern where they soon resolved that 'an attack on one of our sister colonies, to compel submission to arbitrary taxes, is an attack on all British America.'

"Gentlemen

The spirited conduct which the people of Boston have maintained, in a time of oppression, and their great perseverance in the cause of American liberty, has justly entitled them to the assistance of their fellow-subjects in the other Colonies. Actuated by this principle, the inhabitants of Amelia and Dinwiddie Counties, have sent them a small contribution of grain, to alleviate, in some degree, the sufferings which the exclusion of commerce and want of employment have occasioned among your laboring people. Sensible of the confidence

They also called [as had Massachusetts and others] for the a gathering of a Continental Congress."



Geo. Washington

Washington, with his friend George Mason, soon prepared their audacious "Fairfax Resolves," a proposed course of action for their home county's jurisdiction. They would take those resolutions as proposals with the Virginia delegation to the Congress set for the first week of September in Philadelphia.

Meanwhile, similar calls to action and resistance echoed throughout The Old Dominion, including Amelia. Numerous county resolutions in support of Boston ensued, and many jurisdictions chose delegates to attend a Virginia Convention (first held in August 1774 at Raleigh Tavern) to discuss boycotts of British imports and the suspension of exports. The Amelia delegates to this body were its longtime burgess, John Tabb, and from the southern section of the county (Nottoway Parish), John Winn.

Amelia County, comprising Raleigh and Nottoway Parishes, on the eve of the Revolution was one of Virginia's most heavily populated counties. Research of taxable lists from 1773 showed that some 15,000-30,000 persons, black and white, resided there. Blacks composed 50-60 percent of the population. "Amelia was a prosperous county and [its] citizens were eager to share from their abundance for the relief of the citizens of Boston."

The text of a December 16, 1774, letter from three local representatives of the House of Burgesses (each of whom was a large landowner in Amelia County) to "Sam. [Samuel] and Jno. [John] Adams, Esqrs. [Esquires or lawyers] at Boston," illustrates the point. It read as follows:

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reposed in you by your country, and uninformed of any particular Committee to whom we address this donation, we have taken the liberty to desire you would order it into such a channel as that it may be productive of the end proposed.

We are, Gentlemen, with the greatest respect, your most obedient servants,

John Tabb, *of Amelia*

Rob't Bolling, *of Dinwiddie*

Jno. Bannister, *of Dinwiddie*

To Sam. and Jno. Adams, Esqurs. at Boston"

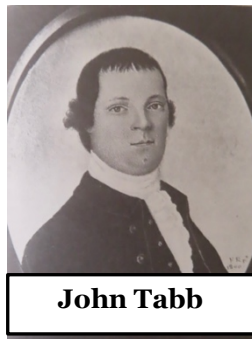
The signers of this letter were on or aware of the dismissed legislature's Committee of Correspondence, part of an inter-colonial network of relatively rapid political communications that not only kept increasingly rebellious Patriot groups informed up and down the eastern seaboard, but also inherently united the colonies into a common cause. The three men each further served in at least the first Virginia Convention, were aligned through family marriages, and either farmed, milled, or sold the foodstuffs they sent north.

John Tabb, scion of "Colonel" Thomas Tabb (1719-1769, "The Wealthiest Man in Virginia," -both men of Clay Hill Plantation), actually served Amelia County in all five of the Virginia Conventions. The first one at Williamsburg wrote with at least formal respect for the King while disparaging the perceived despotism of Parliament. Its members drafted procedures to enforce import and export directives in further boycott of the imperial economy. They also authored strictures against fellow Virginians who would ignore their intent. The first Convention also selected the Virginia delegates to the pending Continental Congress.

"A year later, Tabb was one of eleven members that formed the Virginia Colonial Committee of Safety, which assumed responsibility for governance of the Colony for some months." It, too, was an instrument of communication and coordination among the colonies.

Virginia's County Committees, which periodically met at their courthouses, and especially after the

skirmishes in April 1775 at Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts, generally fell under the Committee of Safety. Their committeemen directed county citizens and assets in the creation and expansion of local internal security measures. The chairmanship of the committee varied by meeting, with each session passing resolves, usually directed through sub-committees. The sub-chairmen focused on such actions as raising, structuring, and directing units of the "Militia and its Officers;" obtaining through "voluntary donations" and "purchase through delegated persons" lead and gunpowder; mandating that all committee members be armed and ready; and the warehousing of ammunition and other military stores at central and convenient points.



Amelia's "Gentlemen Justices" who made up the County Committee included among others, not only John Tabb and John Winn, but also Everard Meade (who eventually became a general in the Revolutionary War), William Archer (soon to be "Colonel"), Edmund Booker, John Booker, Gabriel Fowlkes, Peter Lamkin, Thomas G. Peachy, John Pride (Committee Clerk), James Scott, Samuel Sherwin, Thomas Williams, and Lawrence Wills. Their early resolutions helped to supply the twenty or so Amelia militia companies chosen and led by local officers throughout the war. The justices and other committeemen also interacted with Virginia political bodies and officials through petitions and the receipt of war directives. Their duties often put them at odds with local Anglican Church officials (and other Loyalists) that formed part of the soon-to-fade British colonial political infrastructure.

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