



Abram's Altar & Military Preparedness; The "Injuries & Usurpations" of George III; Whigs & Tories; Patrick Henry's Resolutions at the Virginia Convention

NOTE: See visual: "Events Leading up to the Second Virginia Convention, March 20-24, 1775"

VI. Events Leading-up to the Second Virginia Convention, March 20-24, 1775:

- 1-Two previous wars had increased the national debt of Great Britain and the government resolved to compel the American colonists to share in a more direct degree than they had yet done.
- 2-One of King George the Third's incompetents was Lord George Grenville. His idea to raise funds was known as the Stamp Act of 1765.
- 3-The Colonists' resident agent in London was Benjamin Franklin. He argued that such a tax was not necessary. All the crown had to do was ask the colonies in the traditional way and they would respond.
- 4-In the past the colonies were presented with a decree from the king expressing his "royal desire for funds." The provincial legislature would consider the request and as always make a generous grant.
- 5-Franklin inquired as to how much was desired from the colonies and was told by Grenville that the hoped to raise 1 -point-8 million dollars.
- 6-Franklin assured him much more money could be raised with far less disturbance if he would just approach the colonies in the long accepted manner.
- 7-He soon learned that Grenville was mainly interested in showing the colonies that Britain could tax them in any way it saw fit.
- 8-The Americans quickly challenged the idea once made public.
- 9-Grenville persisted. He introduced the bill in the House of Commons early in 1765. Here is a representative list of the things that were to bear a stamp to be legal:

Animal skins, vellum, parchment, or paper if they have been engrossed, written, or printed upon including: legal documents of all kinds, mortgages, transfers of property, land document of all kinds, mortgages, transfers of property, land grants, wills, testaments, marriage licenses, liquor licenses, preachers' licenses, diplomas, appointment to public office, customs receipts, newspapers, handbills, advertisements, calendars, almanacs, pamphlets, publications, decks of cards, and pairs of dice.

- 10- Few in the House chose to debate the qualities of the proposal. One who did was Colonel Isaac Barrè who served as an aide to General James Wolfe.
- 11- Member of Parliament Charles Townshend rebutted the colonel with the following high and mighty bloviations:

And now will these Americans—children planted by our care, nourished by our indulgence until they are grown up to a high degree of strength and opulence and protected by our arms—will they now grudge to contribute their mite to relieve us from the heavy weight of that burden which we lie under?

Colonel Barrè's reply was both forceful and prophetic:

"They planted by your care!" No, your oppressions planted them in America. They fled from your tyranny to a then uncultivated and inhospitable country.



"They nourished by your indulgence!" They grew by your neglect of them. As soon as you began to care for them, that care was exercised in sending persons to rule them in one department or another, to spy out their liberties, to misrepresent their actions, and to prey upon them; men whose behavior on many occasions has caused the blood of these sons of liberty to recoil within them.

"They protected by your armies!" They have nobly taken up arms in your defense and have exerted a shining valor amidst their constant and laborious industry for the defense of a country whose frontier was drenched in blood while its interior parts yielded all their life's savings for your advantage.

The people, I believe, are as truly loyal as any subjects the king has but a people jealous of their liberties. And believe me—remember, I this day told you so—that the same spirit of freedom which actuated that people at first will accompany them still.

- 12- Petitions of protest arrived from the colonies but they were ignored by the House. The bill was passed by the House by a five-to-one margin. It was quickly approved by the House of Lords and signed by the king on March 2, 1765.
- 13- A centuries-old law, the Navigation Act, had been made more strict the year before (1764) by Parliament. It compelled the Colonies to restrict their trade to England alone or to such foreign ports as England directed.
- 14- Good could only be shipped on English- or Colony-built ships.
- 15- Parliament passed amendments forbidding the Colonists from making their own woolen cloth, beaver hats, and iron furnaces.
- 16- The Stamp Tax was later repealed but this did nothing to lessen British pressure on the Colonies. Over the next ten years a number of other "illegal taxes" were imposed on the Americans.

The Tea Tax:

1. In 1767 Parliament enacted a law compelling the Americans to pay taxes on a number of imports, i.e., glass, paper, and tea. The colonists boycotted these items. In 1770, Parliament decided to drop the taxes on glass and paper but left the one on tea in force.
2. There were two stated reasons: (1) They wanted the Colonists to know they still had the power to tax and (2) tea was chosen because a major English company, the Great East India Tea Company was facing bankruptcy.
3. Taxing tea sent to the Colonies kept the badly mismanaged company in business. The Colonists resolved not to buy tea at any price.
4. On December 16, 1773, Samuel Adams organized a raid known as the Boston Tea Party, dumping chests of taxable tea into the Boston harbor. Under the cover of darkness and disguised poorly as Indians, they destroyed a shipment of tea owned by the East India Company.
5. Over a period of months, Parliament responded to the Boston Tea Party with what became known as the Intolerable Acts.

The Intolerable Acts:

1. Four punitive measures enacted by parliament in retaliation for the Boston Tea were so severe the Colonists nicknamed them "Intolerable."



The Boston Port Act: Closed the harbor to all trade until repayment was made for the destroyed tea.

The Massachusetts Government Act: Canceled the colonies charter of 1691, reducing it to the level of crown colony status. It substituted a military government under the supervision of General Thomas Gage.

The Administration of Justice Act: Protected British officials charged with capital offenses by allowing them to go to England or another colony for trial.

The Quartering Act: Made arrangements for housing British troops in American houses. It was a renewal of a similar quartering act which had expired in 1770.

2. Later a fifth was passed that precipitated in the colonists calling the First Continental Congress. It was called the Quebec Act. It declared all land north of the Ohio River and east of the Mississippi to be a part of Canada.
3. This area included the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and East Minnesota.
4. This act had a dual effect, one economic, and the other religious. Economically the seized area became off limits to the colonies for fur trade, trapping, and hunting all of which was big business in America.
5. The religious effect was that the area came under French civil law and the Roman Catholic Church. This, of course, was really intolerable for the protestant colonists.

17- **The First Continental Congress:**

1. Rather than separating Massachusetts Bay colony from the other colonies, the Intolerable Acts became the American's justification for the First Continental Congress.
2. It met in Philadelphia on September 5, 1774. Fifty-six delegates represented all the colonies except Georgia.
3. Delegates included names that would become famous in American history: Patrick Henry and George Washington of Virginia; John and Samuel Adams of Massachusetts Bay; John Jay of New York and co-author of *The Federalist Papers*. Also included were John Dickinson of Pennsylvania and Peyton Randolph of Virginia who served as its President.
4. The Congress rejected a plan for reconciling British authority with colonial freedom. Instead it adopted a declaration of personal rights including life, liberty, property, assembly, and trial by jury.
5. It denounced taxation without representation and the maintenance of the British Army in the colonies without colonial consent.
6. Parliamentary regulation of American commerce however was willingly accepted. However, it petitioned Parliament for a redress of grievances and wrongs done since 1764.
7. This referred back to the Navigation Laws which compelled the colonies to restrict their trade to England alone or to such foreign ports as England directed.



8. Finally they voted to boycott British goods until Parliament complied.
- 18- On November 30, 1774, George the Third responded to the Congress' petition before a meeting of Parliament:

I have taken the measures which I decree most effectual for executing the laws passed by the last parliament for protecting commerce and preserving peace and order in Massachusetts Bay.
- 19- It should be noted that without international communications the knowledge of events on either side of the Atlantic was slow to arrive. The colonists had petitioned the Crown in September of 1774. King George's response was not made known to the colonies until February of 1775 although he did so in the November previous.
- 20- In January 1775, Patrick Henry of Virginia received a letter from a fellow member of the Continental Congress, Silas Deane of Connecticut. He wrote that he felt Massachusetts Bay would stand firm on the Congress' petition but needed help from the other colonies. He proposed a confederation of colonies in opposition to the British:

If a reconciliation with Great Britain takes place, it will be obtained on the best terms if the colonies are united. If no peace is to be had, without a confederation we are ruined. United we stand, divided we fall!
- 21- Shortly after Henry received this communiqué the Port of Boston was closed by Great Britain and the city was garrisoned and liberties suspended.
- 22- The military governor of Massachusetts Bay, General Thomas Gage, pronounced it high treason for the people to assemble and to petition for redress of grievances. Such were subject to immediate arrest.
- 23- Fourteen regiments of British troops were on station in Boston with several British war ships cruising the harbor.
- 24- At the Virginia Convention in August 1774, provision was made for Peyton Randolph, also the President of this group, to call another convention when he thought it advisable.
- 25- In February he did so and set the date for March 20 at St. John's Church in Richmond.
- 26- It was thought that Randolph was troubled by the existence of British troops in Boston and that defenses for the Virginia colony would be the important item on the agenda.
- 27- St. John's Church had just recently been expanded and had enough seats for the 120 convention delegates plus about fifty spectators.
- 28- Even in those days there were conservative and liberal factions among the leaders. They were known as:

Whigs & Tories:

1. Conservatives are those who politically hold to certain absolutes regarding order and justice.
2. Conservatives subscribe to the proverb of French philosopher Joseph Joubert, "Justice and righteousness rule the world; justice till righteousness is ready."



3. They recognize the reality of the total depravity of man and that therefore he must be ruled by laws and not of men.
4. The conservative believes that once a person subscribes to a set of basic standards he is then free to go in many directions: anywhere his ideas, talents, abilities, and desires may take him.
5. The conservative believes that civilization to be ordered requires a class structure in society.
6. They believe that freedom to be true freedom must be inseparably linked to ownership of property.
7. A conservative distrusts those who would change society or alter law in opposition to these basic absolutes.
8. The conservative recognizes that change does not necessarily mean improvement.
9. They accept the testimony of history that those things that are tried and true remain true if tried and that those who would venture into uncharted waters for the sake of change do so at the risk of disordering society.
10. On the other hand there is the liberal mind. Liberals generally hold to the tenet of the perfectibility of man. The means of achieving this end comes through education, legislation, and improved environment.
11. Conversely they do not accept the premise that man has a tendency toward violence and a trend to sin.
12. Liberals have contempt for tradition. The wisdom of the ancients is not to be given precedence over one's own reason, impulse, and expediency.
13. An ordered, *i.e.*, an authoritarian society, is condemned and the privileges of the upper classes are either exploited or demeaned.
14. Instead there is the idealistic imposition of democracy into government. This of course requires centralization and consolidation of government.
15. There is also the idea of equalitarian economics where all property is a collective oneness.
16. The conservative then believes in a society whose foundation consists of certain absolute standards. As long as one remains inflexible to these standards then he is free to exploit all opportunities and see where his instincts take him.
17. The liberal believes in an absolute but theirs is at the other end of the spectrum. Their absolute is future: an Utopian society. And if man is left free to pursue it he will ultimately attain it, if he is not burdened by absolutes in his quest.
18. Put simply: The conservative through inflexible means pursues flexible ends. The liberal through flexible means pursues inflexible ends.
19. The distinction in Colonial America was recognized by the terms Whig and Tory.
20. A Whig is comparable to today's conservative who supports States' Rights and a decentralized national government.



21. A Tory was much like today's liberal who promotes federal control of the States and a strong centralized government.
22. The Whigs who gathered in Richmond included such famous names as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Richard Henry Lee, Peyton Randolph, and Patrick Henry.
23. The Tories who were delegates to the Virginia Convention included Edmund Pendleton, Benjamin Harrison, Carter Braxton, Robert Carter Nicholas, and Archibald Cary.
- 29- It should be noted that throughout the entire Colonial experience up to this time, no one even considered independence as a valid idea. All the Americans desired was that England—the Crown and Parliament—would simply govern the colonies under the constitution.
- 30- All the petitions, the resolutions, and the messengers were asking was that past wrongs be righted, that unjust laws be repealed, and that the relationship return to the way it was.
- 31- Those who might have suggested the idea of independence were accused of treason. The reason the resultant was called the Revolutionary War was because British people both in England and in America were so loyal to the Crown that even the subject of independence was considered an act of revolution.
- 32- However, the last then years had tightened the screws on the colonists to such a degree that the idea was gaining support although in hushed tones. Independence was simply a last-ditch option.
- 33- Those who ultimately bought the idea did so reluctantly and made the choice on biblical rationales following the formula: **integrity plus loyalty equals honor:**
- Integrity** is a system of thought based on an absolute scale of values.
- Loyalty** is faithfulness to that system of thought under pressure.
- Honor** is the application of these standards to experience.
- 34- George the Third and Parliament had consistently for ten years strayed from the inflexible standards of just government.
- 35- These standards demanded the citizen's loyalty.
- 36- Honor requires that the patriot remain loyal to the law of the land rather than to the leader of the land when the two are at odds.
- 37- Though there were both opinions present at Richmond, independence had not been voiced by anyone.
- 38- What happened in that church over the next few days would change that division. One man with a flare for the dramatic and a talent for oratory would succeed in melding both Tory and Whig into one category: patriots all in defense of a just cause.

VII. The Virginia Convention, March 23, 1775:

A. The Resolutions of the Gentleman from Hanover.

- 1- There were 120 delegates to the convention of the Virginia House of Burgesses which met in St. John's Church, Richmond from March 20-24, 1775.



- 2- There were Tories and there were Whigs of differing opinions but patriots all; men who were loyal to the Crown and to Parliament but who were frustrated and bewildered by the slow but steady erosion of their freedoms over the past decade.
- 3- On every occasion of governmental encroachment they, along with the members of other Colonial governments, had petitioned the government for redress of grievances.
- 4- On Thursday, March 23, 1775, at 10 A.M., Peyton Randolph brought the forth session of the Convention to order.
- 5- The first to gain the floor was a Tory from Caroline County, Edmund Pendleton. He spoke in very gentlemanly phrases about the “unhappy contest between Great Britain and her colonies.” He referred to a resolution passed in December of 1774 by the Jamaican Assembly which supported the colonies’ claims on constitutional grounds.
- 6- Pendleton then expressed the wish that the colony of Virginia might “see a speedy return to those halcyon days when we lived as a free and happy people.”
- 7- The resolution referred to by the Jamaican Assembly was in response to Parliament’s decree to “bind the colonies in all cases whatsoever.”
- 8- Under colonial charter, any British colony had the right to enact local legislation except when the laws were disallowed by the king. Most of the colonial petitions for the last ten years had been directed toward the king to act as mediator between the parliament and colonies.
- 9- With troops in Boston, Henry had had enough. He rose and sought the floor from Peyton Randolph, President of the Convention:

Lecky, Robert, Jr. The Proceedings of the Virginia Convention: In the Town of Richmond on the 23rd of March 1775. (Richmond: St. John’s Church, 1927), 8, 10-13:

President Randolph: The gentleman from Hanover.

Patrick Henry: I could but unite in the vote of thanks for the truly patriotic address of the Legislature of Jamaica. That address was noble and inspiring, but, in my opinion, it is absurd to rest quietly expecting a return to the halcyon days of old. I beg to offer the following resolutions:

“Resolved, That a well-regulated militia is the natural strength and only security of a free government;

“That the establishment of such a militia is, at this time, peculiarly necessary for the protection and defense of the country, and that the known remissness of the government in calling us together in legislative capacity renders it too insecure in this time of danger and distress to rely that any provision will be made to secure our inestimable rights and liberties from those further violations with which they are threatened.

“Resolved, therefore, That this Colony be immediately put into a state of defense and that a committee be named by the Convention to prepare a plan for embodying, arming and disciplining such a number of men as may be sufficient for that purpose.” (p. 8)

- 10- Henry’s resolutions were immediately debated by the gentlemen in attendance, some in support, some in opposition. One who spoke out against them was Edmund Pendleton of Caroline:



Mr. Pendleton: I hope this Convention will proceed slowly before rushing the country into war. Are we ready for war? Where are our stores—where our arms—where our soldiers—where our money, the sinews of war? They are nowhere to be found in sufficient force or abundance to give us reasonable hope of successful resistance. In truth, we are poor and defenseless, and should strike when it becomes absolutely necessary—not before. And yet the gentlemen in favor of this resolution talk of assuming the front of war, of assuming it, too, against a nation one of the most formidable in the world. A nation ready and armed at all points; her navy riding in triumph in every sea; her armies never marching but to certain victory. For God's sake, Mr. President, let us be patient—let us allow all reasonable delay, and then if the worse comes to the worst, we will have no feelings of blame. (p. 10)

- 11- After several speeches were debating his resolutions, President Randolph recognized Patrick Henry. Henry was a lawyer from Hanover County who had come to prominence as an orator in 1765 when he delivered an impassioned speech before the Virginia House of Burgesses in opposition to the Stamp Act.
- 12- He ended that speech with the famous statement, “Caesar had his Brutus; Charles the First his Cromwell; and George the Third ...”
- 13- He was then interrupted by shouts of “Treason! Treason!” after which Henry continued with the phrase “... may profit by their example.”
- 14- Henry had immediately distinguished himself as an orator and his reputation had become even more pronounced over the course of the decade to follow. He rarely wrote any of his speeches preferring to commit them to memory. Thus when he spoke he was able to add dramatic flare to his presentations. He became known as the “Trumpet of the Revolution.”
- 15- His response to the arguments expressed by Mr. Pendleton and others is the height of oratory and, more importantly, motivated the Colony of Virginia to organize an army headed by George Washington. This later put him in position to become the commanding general of the Continental Army that ultimately won the final victory at Yorktown over the British and Gen. Charles Cornwallis.
- 16- Oratory is a rare talent today and few have the rhetorical skills let alone the vocabulary to pull it off effectively. Consequently, the skill needs to be defined.

B. Principles of Oratory.

- 1- **Oration:** A formal speech intended to inspire listeners to some action. Carefully prepared and eloquently delivered, the oration carries its greatest power in the union of rational thought with emotional appeal.
- 2- Rufus Choate, an American lawyer of the 1800s said of true oratory:

It embodies and utters not merely the individual genius and character of the speaker, but a national consciousness in which you listen to the spoken history of the time.
- 3- The purpose of the orator is persuasion. He attempts to change human behavior.
- 4- Through an eloquently presented system of rationales he seeks to strengthen convictions and attitudes.
- 5- He uses argument, lines of reasoning, appeals, and anecdotes.
- 6- In the presentation there is an appeal to the motives and habits of the audience.



- 7- If the speaker simply presents facts without an appeal to action then he has failed as an orator.
- 8- If the speaker simply appeals to the audience for action without presenting facts he also fails.
- 9- The true orator presents a well-thought-out rationale and course of action and follows that with a very emotional appeal to join him in that action.
- 10- When people possess absolute principles in their souls they will individually respond in unison when those principles are challenged.
- 11- A people without absolutes do not live on principle. When challenged their individual responses differ.
- 12- Oratory can be divided into four parts:
 1. **Exordium:** The introduction to an oration.
 2. **Statement:** The presentation of facts or opinions.
 3. **Argument:** The presentation of rationales from which conclusions are drawn.
 4. **Peroration:** The conclusion.
- 13- Now we are ready to analyze Patrick Henry's most famous speech, often called his "Liberty or Death" speech.