

# **National Humanities Center**

## **My Neighbor, My Enemy: How American Colonists Became Patriots and Loyalists**

### **Proceedings of the Westmoreland County Committee, November 8 and 29, 1774**

These texts provide insight into how a committee established by the Association actually enforced its will on the community. David Wardrobe, a young, impoverished school teacher, wrote a letter to friends in Scotland, never thinking that it might become a public document which would create a crisis in a small Virginia village.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why would the committee members be offended by Wardrobe's letter?
2. What does his letter suggest about support for the patriot cause?
3. What does Wardrobe's letter suggest about the functioning of royal government in Westmoreland County?
4. What does his letter suggest about the merchants' attitude toward the Association and their support of the patriot's cause?
5. In Wardrobe's view, what effect will non-importation have upon the people of Westmoreland County?

*The Committees of Safety of  
Westmoreland and Fincastle*

Proceedings of the  
County Committees  
1774-1776

*Edited by*

RICHARD BARKSDALE HARWELL

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
WESTMORELAND COUNTY COMMITTEE

June 22, 1774<sup>1</sup>

At a respectable Meeting of the Freeholders and other Inhabitants of the County of Westmoreland, assembled, on due Notice, at the Courthouse of the said County, on Wednesday, the 22d of June 1774, the Reverend Mr. Thomas Smith, being first unanimously chosen Moderator, several Papers, containing the Proceedings of the late House of Burgesses of this Colony, and the subsequent Determinations of the late Representatives after the House was dissolved, together with Extracts of several Resolves of the Provinces of Massachusetts Bay, Maryland, &c. being read, the Meeting proceeded seriously to consider the present dangerous and truly alarming Crisis, when Ruin is threatened to the ancient constitutional Rights of North America, and came to the following Resolves:

1st. That to be taxed solely in our provincial Assemblies, by Representatives freely chosen by the People, is a Right, that British Subjects in America are entitled to, from natural Justice, from the English Constitution, from Charters, and

1. This account appeared in Purdie and Dixon's *Virginia Gazette* for June 30, 1774. The report in Rind's *Virginia Gazette* of the same date differs only in details of capitalization and punctuation. The account was reprinted in *American Archives*, Ser. IV, I, cols. 437-38. Appended to the report in the Purdie and Dixon paper is the following:

"The Business of the Day being finished, the Company repaired to the Tavern, where a Dinner had been provided, and the following patriotick and loyal Toasts were drank, viz.

"1st. God bless the King; may he long reign the King of a free and happy People.—2d. The Queen and the Royal Family.—3d. The English Constitution.—4th. American Liberty.—5th. May the brave and virtuous People of

from a Confirmation of these by Usage, since the first Establishment of these Colonies.

2d. That an Endeavour to force Submission from one Colony, to the Payment of Taxes not so imposed, is a dangerous Attack on the Liberty and Property of British America, and renders it indispensably necessary that all should firmly unite to resist the common Danger.

3d. It is the Opinion of this Meeting, that the Town of Boston, in our Sister Colony of Massachusetts Bay, is now suffering in the common Cause of North America, by having its Harbour blocked up, its Commerce destroyed, and the Property of many of its Inhabitants violently taken from them, until they submit to Taxes not imposed by their Consent; and therefore this Meeting resolve,

4th. That the Inhabitants of this County will most cordially and firmly join with the other Counties in this Colony, and the other Colonies on this Continent, or the Majority of them, after a short Day, hereafter to be agreed on, to stop all Exports to Great Britain and the West Indies, and all Imports from thence, until as well the Act of Parliament, entitled "An Act to discontinue, in such Manner and for such time as are therein mentioned, the landing and discharging, lading or shipping of Goods, Wares, and Merchandise, at the Town and within the Harbour of

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Boston be quickly relieved from their present Distress.—6th. Union of Great Britain and the Colonies.—7th. Lord Chatham.—8th. Lord Cambden. 9th. Marquis of Rockingham.—10th. Lord Shelburne.—11th. Bishop of St. Asaph. 12th. All Friends of America.

Following this account of the meeting is a letter "To Mr. Purdie" by "A Lover of the Constitution" which reads in part:

"Sir,

"Being present at the patriotick Meeting in Westmorland, I was much pleased to see the Order and Decorum with which their Business was conducted, and to find that they had desired their Proceedings to be published; because it

Boston, in the Province of Massachusetts Bay, in North America," as the several Acts laying Duties on America for the Purpose of raising a Revenue, and all the Acts of the British Legislature made against our Brothers of Massachusetts Bay, in Consequence of their just Opposition to the said Revenue Acts, are repealed; and it is the Opinion of this Meeting, that such a non-importing and non-exporting Plan should be quickly entered upon, as well on the evident Principle of Self-Preservation, as to relieve our suffering Countrymen and Fellow-Subjects in Boston, and to restore between Great Britain and America that Harmony so beneficial to the whole Empire, and so ardently desired by all America.

5th. Resolved, it is the Opinion of this Meeting that the Gentlemen of the Law should not (so long as the Non-exportation Agreement subsists) bring any Writ for the Recovery of Debt, or to push to a Conclusion any such Suit already brought, it being utterly inconsistent with a Non-exportation Plan that Judgment should be given against those who are deprived of the Means of paying.

6th. It is resolved, that, so soon as the Non-exportation Agreement begins, we will, every Man of us, keep our Produce, whether Tobacco, Corn, Wheat, or any Thing else, unsold, on our own respective Plantations; and not carry, or suffer them to be carried, to any publick Warehouse or

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seems quite proper that the generous Struggles of *each*, for the common Liberty, may be known *to all*. From hence, most probably, may result a System of Defence which no Cunning of a Tyrant Minister can overcome. . . . When the Ministry practise the wicked Advice of Machiavel, and constantly endeavour to divide us, let us follow the wise Counsel of old Micipia, and unite most firmly. Let us, on this great Occasion, recur to the first Principles and Practices of the Constitution, by informing the People in every County of their truly critical Situation, and take their Sense of what is fittest to be done for the publick Security. The Representative Body will thus be possessed of the Opinions and Desires of their Constituents, in pursuing which they need not fear to be bravely and firmly supported."

Landing Place, except of Grain, where the same be so done, on Oath being first made that such Grain is for the Use or consumption of this or any other Colony in North America, and not for Exportation from the Continent whilst the said Agreement subsists. And this is the more necessary, to prevent a few designing Persons from engrossing and buying up our Tobacco, Grain, &c. when they are low in Value, in Order to avail themselves of the very high Price that those Articles must bear when the Ports are open, and foreign Markets empty.

7th. This meeting do heartily concur with the late Representative Body of this Country to disuse TEA, and not purchase any other Commodity of the East Indies except Saltpetre,<sup>2</sup> until the Grievances of America are redressed.

8th. We do most heartily concur in these preceding Resolves, and will, to the utmost of our Power, take Care that they are carried into Execution; and that we will regard every Man as infamous who now agrees to and shall hereafter make a Breach of all or any of them, subject, however, to such future Alterations as shall be judged expedient, at a general Meeting of Deputies from the several Parts of this Colony, or a general Congress of all the Colonies.

2. Saltpetre was excepted because of its importance in the manufacture of gunpowder. It was in critical shortage in the Colony, and there were repeated efforts to increase its supply from local sources. In a letter to Richard Henry Lee December 27, 1774 General Adam Stephen commented: "Saltpetre may be made in Virginia and Maryland sufficient to supply the Empire. Pray take it under consideration next Assembly; give a premium—nay, I wish every person who has a tobacco house were obliged to make some. Jeremiah Brown's process is very easy, and there is great quantity of Earth richly impregnated with Saltpetre over the great Mountains, so that on the North side of a hill you can sweep up half a bushel of Saltpetre in one place." "Selections and Excerpts from the Lee Papers," *The Southern Literary Messenger*, XXVII (1858), 435.

9th. We do appoint Richard Henry Lee, and Richard Lee, Esquires, the late Representatives of this County, to attend the general Meeting of Deputies from all the Counties; and we desire, that they do exert their best Abilities to get these our earnest Desires, for the Security of publick Liberty, assented to.

10th. And as it may happen that the Assembly now called to meet on the 11th of August may be prorogued to a future Day and many of the Deputies appointed to meet on the first of August, trusting to the Certainty of meeting in Assembly on the 11th, may fail to attend on the first, by which Means decisive Injury may arise to the common Cause of Liberty, by the general Sense of the country not being early known at this dangerous Crisis of American Freedom, we do therefore direct that our Deputies now chosen fail not to attend at Williamsburg on the said 1st of August; and it is our earnest Wish that the Deputies from other Counties be directed to do the same, for the Reasons above assigned.<sup>3</sup>

11th. Resolved, that the Clerk do forthwith transmit the Proceedings of this Day to the Press, and request the Printers to publish them without Delay. (By Order of the Meeting.)

James Davenport, Clerk

3. There was general doubt in the Colony of the certainty of convening the Assembly on August 11 and some confusion as to whether delegates were elected to the extra-legal meeting called for the first or to the Colonial Assembly called for the eleventh. The deputies were named as representatives at either or both meetings, but Lord Dunmore did prorogue the Assembly, and they acted only in the people's meeting.

November 8, 1774<sup>4</sup>

AT a meeting of the committee for the county of Westmoreland, for seeing the association duly executed, November 8, 1774. Before them a certain David Wardrobe came, and being examined concerning a letter, false, scandalous, and inimical to America, published in the Glasgow Journal August 18, 1774, said to be written by a gentleman from Westmoreland county, in Virginia, June 30, 1774, and charged to be written by said Wardrobe; the committee, on hearing the said Wardrobe acknowledge to have written the greatest part of said letter, and equivocating extremely concerning the rest of it, and seriously considering the fatal consequences that will infallibly be derived to the dearest rights and just liberties of America, if such enemies are suffered to proceed in this manner, of giving false and mischievous accounts to Great Britain, tending to misrepresent this country, and to deceive Great Britain, have come to the following resolutions, which they do most earnestly recommend to all those who regard the peace, the liberty, and the rights of their country:

1. Resolved, that the vestry of Cople parish be desired no longer to furnish the said Wardrobe with the use of the vestryhouse for his keeping school therein.

2dly. That all persons who have sent their children to school to the said Wardrobe do immediately take them away, and that he be regarded as a wicked enemy to America, and be treated as such.

4. This account was published in Pinkney's *Virginia Gazette* February 9, 1775. Publication there included as one news story the items here divided as the proceedings for November 8 and November 29, 1774. This material is available in *American Archives*, Ser. IV, I (1837), cols. 970-72.

3dly. That the said Wardrobe do forthwith write and publish a letter in the gazettes, expressing to the world his remorse for having traduced the people here, and misrepresented their proceedings in manner as in the said letter is done.

4thly. That the said Wardrobe be charged to appear at Westmoreland courthouse, on the 29th day of this instant, to be dealt with further as the committee shall direct, to which time and place they do adjourn themselves.<sup>4</sup>

November 29, 1774

AT a meeting of the committee at the courthouse of Westmoreland county the 29th day of November, 1774, agreeable to adjournment, the foregoing proceedings, and the letter mentioned therein, being read, and it appearing to the committee that the said David Wardrobe was summoned, agreeable to the fourth resolve, to appear on this day, and he failing to make his appearance accordingly, but having wrote a letter to the said committee, excusing himself for non-attendance, rather insulting than exculpatory, it is

Resolved, That the proceedings of the former committee be confirmed, and that the letter mentioned therein, together with the whole of these proceedings, be transmitted by the clerk to the printer, to be published in the gazette.

Signed by order of the committee,

James Davenport, clerk.

N. B. Since the aforesaid determination of the committee, the said David Wardrobe came to Westmoreland courthouse, and, in the presence of a considerable number of

people, made and signed the following concession and acknowledgment:

“Deeply affected with remorse for having traduced the good people of Virginia, in a letter I wrote to Archibald Provan, of Glasgow, dated the 30th of June, 1774, which has been since printed in the Glasgow Journal of the 18th August, in the same year, said to be written by a gentleman in Westmoreland county to his friend in Glasgow, containing falsehoods and misrepresentations, which may be of fatal consequence to the rights and liberty of America; in order to make every recompence to the community in my power for so gross an offence, I do, most heartily and willingly, on my knees, implore the forgiveness of this country for so ungrateful a return made for the advantages I have received from it, and the bread I have earned in it, and hope, from this contrition for my offence, I shall be at least admitted to subsist amongst the people I greatly esteem, and desire that this may be printed in the Virginia gazette.

David Wardrobe.”

[The following is a copy of the Letter referred to in the foregoing Proceedings:]

“As the present situation of affairs in this country is alarming, I make no doubt some account of them will be agreeable to you.

“The Virginians (and indeed most of the colonies) look upon the late act of parliament for blocking up the harbour of Boston, and new modelling their Charter, as a thing that may one day or other happen to themselves; they therefore resolved to stand the friends, and espouse the interest of the Bostonians, as far as lies in their power, and for that purpose they are forming associations not to

import any commodities from Great Britain, nor to export any of their own, until such time as the said act is repealed. There is great clamour here against the ministry at home: In the county of Richmond, about ten days ago, I saw an elegant effigy of Lord North hanged and burned in the midst of a vast concourse of people. I was particularly attentive to the countenances of the spectators, and was really pleased to see so very few express any outward signs of approbation on the occasion; there were, indeed, a few gentlemen who seemed to enjoy an ill-natured satisfaction at it, which they expressed by a loud huzza, and plenty of d---s. Then Parker,<sup>5</sup> who is the king's attorney for the county of Westmoreland, mounted on an eminence, and harangued the people, acquainting them of the efforts parliament had made to abridge them of their liberties, and many more that would be made if they were not now unanimous and steady in their resolves of breaking off all commercial connexions with Great Britain until the said act of parliament be repealed, and the right they have assumed for taxing America be given up, and American freedom ascertained and settled upon a permanent and constitutional foundation. Yesterday we had a meeting of the freeholders of this county at our courthouse, where there were some of the greatest men in the colony encouraging the common people to a like steady adherence to the aforesaid plan. These late meetings have been only to feel how the pulse of the common people beat; the grand meetings for signing the association will not be until August, and then it will be four or five months more before the commencement of a discontinuation of exportation and importation.

5. Richard Parker, as will be seen, was elected to the Westmoreland Committee January 31, 1775.

"If every merchant in the colony would fall upon the same scheme that four eminent merchants of this county this day resolved upon, I do not know whether there would need be such a bustle about importing and exporting. Their resolves are, that, as the courts of justice are discontinued, they think it prudent and necessary not to sell any thing but for ready money, or the ready produce of the country; they have therefore publicly advertised that no person need apply to them for any thing, without they come furnished with one or the other of these materials. Credit is a thing so very common here, that there is not one person in a hundred who pays the ready money for the goods he takes up to a store, and consequently they will be beginning to feel the ill effects before the day of signing. I forgot to tell you they have put a stop to the courts of justice, in order that none need be under any apprehension of distress by the merchants during their non-importation.

"It is true they always had the good fortune as yet to have a repeal of any thing that has been against them, even upon the very first mention of their resolves; but you may believe me, if the present act should be continued, their resolutions will soon fail them, for I am convinced that the disadvantage they must labour under by adopting such a plan will be so great that had it been imposed upon them they would think it the greatest evil that ever befel them since they were a colony."

In the Glasgow Journal of August 18, 1774, the above is said to be an "extract of a letter from a gentleman in Westmoreland County (Virginia) to his friend in Glasgow, dated June 30."

January 31, 1775<sup>6</sup>

At a meeting of the Freeholders, after due notice, at Westmoreland courthouse, on Tuesday the 31st day of January, 1775, Richard Henry Lee and Richard Lee, esquires, were unanimously chosen delegates, to represent this county in colony convention, at the town of Richmond, in Henrico county, on the 20th day of March next.<sup>7</sup> After they were chosen, the following Instructions were publicly read to them by the desire of the people:

To Richard Henry Lee and Richard Lee, esquires:

The Freeholders of Westmoreland county having often experienced your fidelity, abilities, and firm attachment to the cause of liberty, have now appointed you to represent them in a colony convention, proposed to be held at the town of Richmond, on the 20th of March next; and as we are convinced, from maturest deliberation, that the safety and happiness of North America depend on the united wisdom of its councils, we have no doubt you will comply, on your parts, with the recommendation of the late continental congress, to appoint deputies from this Colony to meet in Philadelphia on the 10th day of May next, unless the redress of American grievances be obtained before that time; and as it is our firm determination to stand or fall with the liberties of our country, we desire that you may consider the people of Westmoreland as ready

6. Published first in Pinkney's *Virginia Gazette* February 9, 1775 these proceedings are also in print in *American Archives*, Ser. IV, I, cols. 203-04.

7. The following public notice, dated Williamsburg, January 20, 1775, and signed by Peyton Randolph as "Moderator" appeared in Dixon and Hunter's *Virginia Gazette* January 28 and was reprinted in succeeding issues:

"The several Counties and Corporations in this Colony are requested to elect Delegates to represent them in Convention, who are desired to meet in the Town of Richmond, in the County of Henrico, on Monday the 20th of March next."