



It Happened Near Me:

The Coming of the American Revolution

County: Loudoun

Date: 1774

Background: Since the end of the French and Indian War, the American colonies had doubled its population in just ten years. We had also been arguing with the government of the nation in London over their increased effort at taxation and control over the colonies. The 1773 Tea Act had ended in disaster, with Americans refusing to buy tea, or even unload it. In Boston, there was violence. The destruction of the tea at the docks was called the Boston Tea Party. In England, Parliament responded furiously with the “Coercive Acts” which closed down Boston port, closed the Massachusetts legislature, and sent in 3,000 soldiers to occupy the town. Two weeks later, Loudouners met on the courthouse lawn in Leesburg and drew up the following “Resolutions” which they sent to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia as well as to London. This is what they wrote:

"AT A MEETING of the Freeholders and other inhabitants of the County of Loudoun ... the 14th of June, 1774 ... to consider the most effectual method to preserve the rights and liberties of North America, and relieve our brethren of Boston, suffering under the most oppressive and tyrannical Act of the British Parliament, made in the 14th year of his present Majesty's reign...-

"Resolved, That it is beneath the dignity of freemen to submit to any tax not imposed on them in the usual manner, by representatives of their own choosing.

"Resolved, That the Act of the British Parliament, above mentioned, is utterly repugnant to the fundamental laws of justice, in punishing persons without even the form of a trial; but a despotic exertion of unconstitutional power designedly calculated to enslave a free and loyal people.

“Resolved, that ... enforcing [this] Act of Parliament by a military power, must have a necessary tendency to raise a civil war, and that we will, with our lives and fortunes, assist and support our suffering brethren of Boston, and every part of North America that may fall under the immediate hand of oppression, until a redress of all our grievances shall be procured, and our common liberties established on a permanent foundation.

"Resolved, That the East India Company, by exporting their tea from England to America, whilst subject to a tax imposed thereon by the British Parliament, have evidently designed to fix on the Americans those chains forged for them by a venal ministry, and have thereby rendered themselves ...detestable throughout all America. It is, therefore, the unanimous opinion of this meeting not to purchase any tea ... imported after the first of this Month.

"Resolved, That we will have no commercial intercourse [trade] with Great Britain until the above mentioned act of Parliament shall be totally repealed, and the right of regulating the internal policy of North America by a British Parliament shall be absolutely ... given up ...

Making Sense of Evidence from the Past (thinking like a Virginia Colonist):

1. What are "Freeholders"? Who are they? What is meant by "other inhabitants of ... Loudoun," who evidently also thronged the courthouse lawn for this meeting?
2. Do Virginians have "representatives of their own choosing" in Parliament? How are Virginians represented in Parliament?
3. Notice that the Resolves speak of Parliament's actions as being "calculated" to "enslave a free and loyal people." Given that Virginia already had slavery—were there slaves there on the courthouse lawn that night?—what was meant by this?
4. Notice also that the Resolves speak of enforcing the closing of Boston by "a military power" [the British Army and Navy] must have a "necessary tendency to raise a civil war." What do they mean by that—North against South, or what?
5. It seems these colonists see the British East India Company as in cahoots with "a venal ministry. What does venal mean? Who do they mean by the "ministry"?
6. These colonists want Parliament to give up "the right of regulating internal policy in North America"—including Virginia, of course. What does that mean?

The current Loudoun County Courthouse of 1894 stands in the middle of Leesburg right where the simple brick courthouse stood on the warm evening of June 14, 1774 when colonial Loudouners gathered to draw up the Loudoun Resolves. During the Revolutionary War, soldiers trained in front of the Courthouse.

