

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

Treasonous Tea: The Edenton Tea Party of 1774

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TREASONOUS TEA: THE EDENTON TEA PARTY OF 1774

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## **Introduction: Rebellious Women and Revolutionary America**

When studying the onset of the American Revolution, popular aspects of the period include the Sons of Liberty, the Boston Massacre, and the Boston Tea Party. The one thing that they have in common is that they are located in New England. Not only was the South omitted from the discussion, but so were minorities. A forgotten aspect of the Revolutionary era in today's study of history is the Edenton Tea Party.

In the midst of the Revolutionary fervor, fifty-one women from Edenton, North Carolina stood up to British policies, specifically the Tea and Coercive Acts. According to the traditional narrative, on October 24, 1774, these women gathered at the home of Elizabeth King under the leadership and direction of Penelope Barker. They signed their names to a petition that outlined their disagreement with British policies and their duty to publicly announce their position. This petition was then circulated in newspapers throughout the colonies and London.

In order to understand the conditions for which a female political event was deemed necessary, it is important to understand the geography of eastern North Carolina, the political and economic influences on the town, and the lives of the women involved. Edenton, located within proximity of Jamestown and Roanoke Island, was a prominent port town and plantation society that became a hotbed of political activity during the eighteenth century. Many of the families in and surrounding Edenton were planters, merchants, lawyers and politicians. This afforded the women of the Edenton Tea Party higher socio-economic status than other regions and, therefore, potentially a perceived sense of freedom in regards to political demonstration.

While it is easy to assume that the women banded together for the Revolutionary and feminist causes due to their gender and socio-economic statuses, a deeper analysis of the petition shows

that the petition was gender-neutral and was influenced by the earlier North Carolina Provincial Congress, which consisted of prominent Edentonians. Incidentally, it was Penelope Barker, the supposed ring-leader of the Edenton Tea Party, who sent a fiery letter along with the petition to London that spurred most of the controversy surrounding the women. While the paper refers to feminism in regards to the petition and Barker's letter, it is important to note that it does not refer to the future more liberal Feminist movement, but to the fact that it involved women taking a step outside of their expected gender roles.

The most critical of responses to the Edenton Tea Party came from London, where Barker's letter was published. A cartoon of the women that satirized them as disfigured and socially inept circulated throughout London and the colonies. James Iredell, a prominent Edentonian, received a letter from his brother in London inquiring about the women of Edenton and mocking their stand. While there were critical responses, there were also those who took a stand in light of the Edenton Tea Party. Women in Wilmington, another port town in North Carolina, publicly burned tea in protest to British policy less than five months after the petition was signed. Also, men of Edenton, including relatives of the petition signers, took an oath at St. Paul's Episcopal Church less than two years after the Edenton Tea Party declaring their allegiance to the Patriot cause despite their Episcopalian affiliations.

Through an analysis of Edenton, the signers of the petition, the details surrounding the event, and the response to the petition and letter, this paper demonstrates the importance of the Edenton Tea Party in a discussion of the build-up to the Revolution. Though this was not their intent, their legacy provided a foundation for the future Feminist movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They stood up for what they perceived as threats to their liberty even though it was not socially appropriate.

By the end of the eighteenth century, a social revolution began that transformed the world. Men stood up for their religious and political rights to challenge the authority of existing authorities, such as established churches and absolute monarchical governments, while gaining social and fiscal capital. At the same time, women remained in the same position as they had for centuries.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the colonies, white males aged twenty-one and over who owned property enjoyed the right to vote. Property requirements varied throughout the colonies in regards to the amount of property or the value of property owned. Historian Ed Crews addresses the dilemma of voting restrictions within the colonies, particularly the role of women and minorities:

“Colonial Voting restrictions reflected eighteenth-century English notions about gender, race, prudence, and financial success, as well as vested interest. Arguments for a white, male-only electorate focused on what the men of the era conceived of as the delicate nature of women and their inability to deal with the coarse realities of politics, as well as convictions about race and religion.”<sup>2</sup>

Incidentally, not only did men consider women inferior, but women often thought of themselves as inferior too.<sup>3</sup>

Expectations placed upon women included marriage and bearing children, which led to a short lifespan, and refraining from trivial matters such as politics.<sup>4</sup> Because of financial factors, marriage often was necessary for survival not only for the woman herself but for her family’s future.<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that men did not marry for advancement, but that women despite their

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa L. Moore and Joana Brooks, “Introduction,” in *Transatlantic Feminisms in the Age of Revolutions*, eds. Lisa L. Moore, Joana Brooks, and Caroline Wigginton, 3-34 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 16.

<sup>2</sup> Ed Crews, “Voting in Early America,” *Colonial Williamsburg Journal* (Spring 2007), accessed December 9, 2015, <http://www.history.org/foundation/journal/spring07/elections.cfm>.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), xiv.

<sup>4</sup> Moore and Brooks, “Introduction,” 17.

<sup>5</sup> Moore and Brooks, “Introduction,” 18.

socioeconomic status and ethnicity consistently dealt with these challenges. While women during the colonial era occasionally held an occupation, “it should be remember that most women in the colonial era had husbands to support them. Marriages were early, nearly every one did marry, and in case of widowhood remarriage was frequent.”<sup>6</sup>

By the eighteenth century, women gained access to an avenue that improved their political influence—education. With the widespread advent of printing, education was no longer out of reach for the middle and lower classes. For the most part, middle and upper class women received an education from home while many lower-class women taught themselves.<sup>7</sup> With basic literacy, women communicated more successfully and accessed the latest papers which influenced their desire to gain influence in a world once restricted to only men. While it was not easy, some women challenged the societal norms and rallied others to the cause to challenge the bondage of these norms that regarded women as passive citizens incapable of politics and only fit for marriage and childbearing.

When England colonized the New World, the settlers set up their own governments, which taxed the colonists, not Parliament. Typically the only elected colonial office was that of the lower house of the legislature, which had the power of taxation.<sup>8</sup> Not only did the colonists form legislatures based off of Parliament’s example and English tradition, but they advanced British political rights to include more direct participation and representation almost accidentally. As the colonies grew, so did the number of property owners which created a large electorate of white men who previously did not have the right to vote before immigrating to the New World.

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<sup>6</sup> Elisabeth Anthony Dexter, *Colonial Women of Affairs; Women in Business and the Professions in America Before 1776*, (New York: A.M. Kelley, 1972), 181.

<sup>7</sup> Moore and Brooks, “Introduction,” 24.

<sup>8</sup> Crews, “Voting in Early America.”



For American colonists, their fight to keep, or for some men and women to gain, these extraordinary American political rights began at the end of the French and Indian War. During this war, Great Britain promised the American colonists that if they fought with them against the French that they would be able to settle into conquered French territory. However, the British government took on considerable debt in order to pay for this war which led them not only to go back on their promises with the Proclamation of 1763, but to raise taxes on various goods and leave British troops in the colonies. In effect, the British elite ended the period of salutary neglect, which gave the British colonists considerable leeway in governing their local affairs within the larger empire.

After the Proclamation of 1763, Parliament enacted various acts in order to raise funds to pay for the debt from the French and Indian War. Until 1764, colonial legislatures controlled the power of taxation in British North America. The first of these acts of taxation by Parliament was the Sugar Act:

“Whereas it is expedient that new provisions and regulations should be established for improving the revenue of this kingdom, and for extending and securing the navigation and commerce between Great Britain and your Majesty’s dominions in America, which, by the peace, have been so happily enlarged: and whereas it is just and necessary, that a revenue be raised, in your Majesty’s said dominions in America, for defraying the expences of defending, protecting, and securing the same....”<sup>9</sup>

With the failure of the Sugar Act, Parliament enacted the Stamp Act of 1765 that was also intended to defray “the expences of defending, protecting, and securing, the British colonies and plantations in America” by placing a “stamp duty” upon pieces of paper.<sup>10</sup> Prior to the famous

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<sup>9</sup> “Great Britain: Parliament - The Sugar Act, 1764,” The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy, accessed December 8, 2015, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/sugar\\_act\\_1764.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/sugar_act_1764.asp).

<sup>10</sup> “Great Britain: Parliament - The Stamp Act, March 22, 1765,” The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy, accessed December 8, 2015, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/stamp\\_act\\_1765.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/stamp_act_1765.asp).

Tea Act, Britain enacted, and thereafter rescinded or amended due to protests, the following acts: the Quartering Act, the Declaratory Act, and the Townshend Duties. The colonists considered these acts as violations of their rights as Englishmen because they were taxed without proper representation in Parliament and consistently challenged each act put forth by the British.

The Tea Act of 1773 only intensified tension in the colonies as it was added to the long list of previous British grievances, mostly taxes approved without colonial representation, in the wake of the French and Indian War. It also became a popular motivation for colonists to rise up and defend their rights as Englishmen. Not only did the Tea Act infringe upon their rights, but it included a form of taxation through custom duties: “...and which shall be exported from this kingdom, as merchandise, to any of the British colonies or plantations in America, were to extend to the whole of the said duties of customs payable upon the importation of such teas...”<sup>11</sup> With the Tea Act, Parliament created a monopoly on tea for the British government’s East India Trading Company, and imposed yet another usurpation of power upon the colonists even if it did not technically raise the price of tea within the American colonies.

These threats to colonial self-government led to violent and non-violent widespread revolts. While forsaking tea in one form or another was the chosen form of protest by most colonists, it was not an easy thing for them to do. According to historian Richard Carney, drinking tea was a “long-standing social English tradition,” the colonists’ “[s]ocial gatherings were defined by the amount and quality of tea provided.”<sup>12</sup> By choosing to engage in the boycotts of the Tea Act, the colonists gave up a product which was a part of their daily lives.

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<sup>11</sup> “The Tea Act of 1773,” In *All About Tea*, ed. William H. Ukers, Vol. I, 52-3, (New York: The Tea and Coffee Trade Journal Company, 1935), 52.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Carney, “Edenton Tea Party,” *North Carolina History Project* (Raleigh, NC: John Locke Foundation, 2013), <http://www.northcarolinahistory.org/commentary/50/entry> (accessed April 16, 2013).

While tea was not easy to give up, they understood that it was more important to protect their rights and liberties as Englishmen.

Of all of the tea protest, the most famous is the Boston Tea Party. One of the aspects that made the Boston Tea Party unique was that it occurred in a port city where the East India Trading Company's tea was set to arrive. Providing insight on the protest which was a catalyst for other colonial protests against the Tea Act, the account of Bostonian George Hewes tells why the event occurred and what happened.

According to Hewes, he “dressed [himself] in the costume of an Indian, equipped with a small hatchet” along with his companions before they went to the port where they took “out all the chests of tea and throw them overboard.”<sup>13</sup> Hewes shows that the Bostonians desired to dispose of the tea as a sign of protest against the Tea Act before the ships containing the East India Trading Company's tea could dock and unload it. While the Boston Tea Party was violent, many of the protests which followed contained little or no violence.

Men, and eventually women, gathered together to stage public and private boycotts of tea, following the example of the Boston Tea Party. Tea parties occurred in more places than just Boston; other port cities throughout the colonies also hosted tea parties include Philadelphia, Charleston, South Carolina, New York City, Annapolis, Maryland, and many others. Each tea party was of significant political importance because it showed that the colonists refused to sit by and allow Britain to continue to supersede colonial legislatures without representation in

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<sup>13</sup> George Hewes, “An Account of the Boston Tea Party,” Boston Tea Party Historical Society, <http://www.boston-tea-party.org/account-george-hewes.html> (accessed April 16, 2013).

Parliament. Not only did men stand up for their rights as Englishmen through tea parties, “women saw the... boycotts as a chance to stand alongside men and assert their patriotism.”<sup>14</sup>

The ladies of Edenton, North Carolina were no exception and more than willing to join in and protest. In Edenton, North Carolina, a port town on the Albemarle Sound, on October 25, 1774 women gathered together to publicly boycott tea and other British products. Unlike the Boston Tea Party, there was no a physical dumping of tea into the Albemarle Sound or violence at what is now known as the Edenton Tea Party. Not only did these women publicly stand against social norms in their own town, but they also sent it to multiple newspapers in other colonies and Britain for publication so that their voices would be heard. However, many people have never heard of this contribution of these brave women who paved the way for other women to stand up for their right to be heard in the public sphere, particularly in politics.

It would be a mistake not to mention other women’s activity who furthered the patriotic cause during the American Revolution when discussing the Edenton Tea Party. In a similar manner to the women of Edenton’s objections of British taxes, the Daughters of Liberty emulated the Sons of Liberty by protesting the British’s usurpation of the colonist’s rights by boycotting British goods.<sup>15</sup> During the Revolution, women stepped up to subtly influence the political arena—Abigail Adams<sup>16</sup>—and by disguising themselves to fight on the warfront—Deborah Sampson.<sup>17</sup> Other women traditionally applauded for their role in the Revolution are

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<sup>14</sup> Joseph Cummins, *Ten Tea Parties: Patriotic Protests That History Forgot*, (Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2012), 164.

<sup>15</sup> “Sons and Daughters of Liberty,” E Pluribus Unum, accessed April 30, 2015, <http://www.ushistory.org/us/10b.asp>.

<sup>16</sup> Abigail Adams was the wife of prominent Revolutionary leader and the second President of the United States, John Adams. Many believe that she influenced her husband’s political decisions during this tumultuous time.

<sup>17</sup> Deborah Sampson is known for dressing as a man in order to fight in the Continental Army during the Revolution.

Betsy Ross and Molly Pitcher. However, these women's legacies are more romanticized than what history tells. There is little evidence of Betsy Ross sewing what is known today as the American flag, and Molly Pitcher is symbolic of the women who carried water to the troops, a Rosie the Riveter of the American Revolution.<sup>18</sup> Even with all of the support given to the patriot cause during the Revolution, American women's stance in society did not improve to the point for them to formally engage in politics.

Despite the advances in political thinking during the Age of Enlightenment, most believed that these rights were only guaranteed to men. Documents underlying the American Revolution did not specify, nor did the writers intend to, extend these rights to women.<sup>19</sup> One in particular is the Declaration of Independence. Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1776 that "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."<sup>20</sup> While it has been argued that the word "he" in the Declaration was meant to be unisex, the way that it was interpreted during the document's inception and the over 100 years afterwards was meant in regards to political participation for only men. While women could assemble for political purposes, women were not universally given the right to vote until the early twentieth century. However, it is important to note that during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that "[i]n some places, propertied women, free blacks, and Native

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<sup>18</sup> Carol Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence*, (New York: First Vintage Books, 2004), xi.

<sup>19</sup> Moore and Brooks, "Introduction," 14.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Jefferson, "The Declaration of Independence," *Charters of Freedom*, [http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html).

Americans could vote, but those exceptions were just that. They were not signs of a popular belief in universal suffrage.”<sup>21</sup>

Ironically, after the Revolution, some patriots championed the concept of Republican Motherhood designed to target “the maternal role but with the entire moral reach of domesticity: the education of sons, the refinement of ale manners, [and] the promotion of national virtue.”<sup>22</sup> And for the most part, the historiographical nature of history written on the women of the Revolution focus on this concept of Republican Motherhood and usually briefly mentioning the Edenton Tea Party. Unlike the predominantly military and white male focused works on the American Revolution, the women’s, and pretty much any minority’s, side of this period did not become a major topic until around the time of the Civil War and then was not heavily written about until the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Revolution in the 1970’s. Throughout the historiography of the Edenton Tea Party and women in the Revolution, one can see that the works on these topics often have political motivations.

Very little, if anything, was written on women in the Revolution or the Edenton Tea Party prior to the Civil War. However, Elizabeth Ellet’s *Women of the Revolution* was written just ten years before the Civil War. To no real surprise, Ellet states that “the apparent dearth of information was at first almost disheartening.”<sup>23</sup> Ellet was one of the first to write on the subject and wrote before information from this time period was more accessible. She wrote on just under fifty women who were a part of the Revolution, but did not include the women of Edenton.<sup>24</sup> It is

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<sup>21</sup> Crews, “Voting in Early America.”

<sup>22</sup> Sarah Knott, “Benjamin Rush’s Ferment: Enlightenment Medicine and Female Citizenship in Revolutionary America,” in *Women, Gender, and Enlightenment*, eds. Barbara Taylor and Sarah Knott (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 658.

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution*, (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1850), x.

<sup>24</sup> Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution*, x-xi.

presumable that the rising tensions between the North and the South inspired her work, as many people during this time period drew upon the unity of the patriots during the American Revolution to prevent a civil war.

It was not until 1892 that the Edenton Tea Party would be featured in a publication of its own.<sup>25</sup> Richard Dillard decided to publish this information after noticing that these women did not receive proper recognition in history:

“Even in this practical, speculative age, there seems to be a tendency all over this country to exhume from oblivion the events and traditions of our past. This growing reference for American history is an evidence of national pride, intelligence and dignity... Unfortunately for North Carolina, many of her most beautiful traditions have been allowed to pass unnoticed, and her glorious deeds regarded as mere ephemera to perish with the actors.”<sup>26</sup>

Dillard was also the first person to refer to this incident as a tea party.<sup>27</sup> In declaring this the Edenton Tea Party, it is evident that Dillard recognized the importance of female patriotism and of preserving the history of women who contributed to the creation of the United States for a nation with deep divisions that needed unity more than ever.<sup>28</sup>

With America transforming into an industrial powerhouse and women still not having the right to formally participate in politics, women in the late nineteenth century and their supporters used the Edenton Tea Party to push their agenda of receiving the right to vote. Although

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<sup>25</sup> A state historian in North Carolina wrote on the Edenton Tea Party in an encyclopedia article on North Carolina history before 1892, but it was only a few lines that did not accurately describe the Edenton Tea Party.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Dillard, *The Historic Tea Party of Edenton, 1774: Incident in North Carolina Connected with Taxation*, (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1892), 4-5.

<sup>27</sup> Cynthia Kierner, “The Edenton Ladies: Women, Tea, and Politics in Revolutionary North Carolina,” in *North Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times*, (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2014), 21.

<sup>28</sup> Dillard, *The Historic Tea Party of Edenton*, 6.

unavailable today, it is important to mention two women, Lottie Barnes<sup>29</sup> at Greensboro Female College and Katherine McCormick,<sup>30</sup> who wrote on the Edenton Tea Party and the influence of tea on the Revolution during this time period. McCormick's work covered the early history of tea, as well as three Colonial American tea parties.

Two of the more prominent articles on the Edenton Tea Party from this period were produced by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). In 1907, Mary Dawes Staples published an article, "The Edenton Tea Party" that recognized that the Edenton Tea Party is hardly mentioned in American history.<sup>31</sup> She went on to emphasize that "...that our foremothers, in North Carolina, at least, were made of the stuff of which patriots were made, the Edenton Tea Party proved."<sup>32</sup> (356) However, another article from the DAR shortly after women earned the right to vote in the 1920's that shows that men also supported women in this cause using the Edenton Tea Party. Fred Olds, a historian, newspaper editor, and lecturer who greatly contributed to the preservation of North Carolina history, in this article claimed that the Edenton Tea Party was "...apparently the first declaration by women of America of their patriotism and desire to aid their country."<sup>33</sup> Not only did the DAR celebrate the achievements and legacy of the Edenton Tea Party, but they used it to show that women are capable of participating in politics.

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<sup>29</sup> Lottie Barnes, *The Edenton Tea Party*, (Greensboro, NC: Literary Societies of Greensboro Female College, 1903).

<sup>30</sup> Katherine Reynolds McCormick, *Tea, Its Part in Peace and War*, (Baltimore: McCormick & Co., 1917).

<sup>31</sup> Mary Dawes Staples, "The Edenton Tea Party," *American Monthly Magazine* XXXI, no. 2 (August 1907), 357.

<sup>32</sup> Staples, *The Edenton Tea Party*, 356.

<sup>33</sup> Beth G. Crabtree, "Fred A. Olds," in Documenting the American South, University of Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, accessed December 8, 2015 <http://docsouth.unc.edu/wwi/olds/bio.html>.

Fred A. Olds, "The Celebrated Edenton, N.C. Tea Party," *Daughters of the American Revolution* 56, no. 6 (June 1922), 326.



It was the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American Revolution that revived interest in the Edenton Tea Party and the women of the Revolution after almost fifty years. It was also around this time that social history rose in prominence, along with the interest in women's history. In a similar style to Ellet, Sally Smith Booth wrote *Women of '76* to recognize the women who contributed to the Revolution while identifying the Edenton Tea Party as the “most famous of these campaigns” organized by women in the boycotts of British goods.<sup>34</sup> In the following decades, women continued to build upon Booth's work and expanding upon concepts of the role of women in the Revolution, specifically the idea of Republican Motherhood.

Linda Kerber, in her book *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, coined the term “Republican Motherhood” to describe the patriotism of women coupled with their societal expectations, specifically that of caring for their family, throughout her examination of women's role in the American Revolution.<sup>35</sup> Although she briefly mentioned the Edenton Tea Party, she noted how the infamous caricature of the Edenton Tea Party women represents how men viewed politically active women in this time period, as neglecting their domestic duties.<sup>36</sup> Like Kerber, Mary Beth Norton with *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women* focuses on the familial realm while expanding her focus to include African Americans and Native Americans.<sup>37</sup> She also briefly

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<sup>34</sup> Sally Smith Booth, *Women of '76*, (New York: Hastings House, 1973), 12.

<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “Reviewed Work: *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* by Linda K. Kerber,” *The Journal of American History* 68.1 (Jun., 1981): 119-121.

<sup>36</sup> Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 280.

<sup>37</sup> Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, xiii.

focused on the Edenton Tea Party and their significance by emphasizing their role in creating a voice for women in public policy.<sup>38</sup>

Robert J. Dinkin in 1995 built upon prior work to focus on the women who involved themselves in politics from the colonial era to before 1920. Like the others, he briefly mentioned the women of Edenton, but instead of just praising them he recognized their acts as “a more formal method of female political activity” for their use of a petition.<sup>39</sup> Just a year later, Carol Berkin built upon Kerber’s work, but took her prominent phrase “Republican Motherhood” and re-coined it as “Republican womanhood.”<sup>40</sup> In her mention of the Edenton Tea Party, she notes how economic decision making by women for their families may have influenced the “declaration of political sentiments” from the women of Edenton.<sup>41</sup> Finally, at the end of the 90’s, Margaret Supplee Smith and Emily Herring Wilson compiled the “first ever history of North Carolina women” that fills gap in early North Carolina women’s history.<sup>42</sup> The Edenton Tea Party was mentioned throughout the book first as an “act of defiance” and then as a favorite subject for organized patriotic women, such as the DAR.<sup>43</sup>

Interest in women in the Revolution, with mentions of the Edenton Tea Party continued throughout the 2000’s with works such as Gail Collins’ popular history on *America’s Women*:

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<sup>38</sup> Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, 161.

<sup>39</sup> Robert J. Dinkin, *Before Equal Suffrage: Women in Partisan Politics from Colonial Times to 1920*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 11-2.

<sup>40</sup> Carol Berkin, *First Generations: Women of Colonial America*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 201.

<sup>41</sup> Berkin, *First Generations*, 174-5.

<sup>42</sup> Margaret Supplee Smith and Emily Herring Wilson, *North Carolina Women: Making History*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), xvii.

<sup>43</sup> Smith and Wilson, *North Carolina Women*, 49 and 194.

*Four Hundred Years of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates, and Heroines*,<sup>44</sup> Dorothy Mays' *Women in Early America: Struggle, Survival, and Freedom in a New World*,<sup>45</sup> and Berkins' second work, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence*.<sup>46</sup> However, it would be in the past five years that Edenton and its Tea Party would become the focus of publications again for the first time since the beginning of the twentieth century.

In 2013, *The King's Troublemaker's: Edenton's Role in Creating a Nation and State* by Troy Kickler not only brought Edenton into the academic sphere, but provided a background for the Edenton Tea Party and the political activity involving Edenton thereafter.<sup>47</sup> Through a careful analysis of Edentonians during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, he drew the conclusion that Edenton was an intellectual hub due to the number of political thinkers who called the town home.<sup>48</sup> Although he only dedicated a few pages to the tea party, his work provides a valuable context to the political activity surrounding the petition and a Revolutionary history of Edenton, a town that is often forgotten about in the study of the Revolution when the discussion usually involves New England instead of the South.

In 2014, as a part of a collection of essays about North Carolina women, Cynthia Kierner pioneered the first detailed expository work on the Edenton Tea Party that did more than simply restate the traditional tale given about the fifty-one women who signed a petition in October of

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<sup>44</sup> Gail Collins, *America's Women: Four Hundred Years of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates, and Heroines*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 79.

<sup>45</sup> Dorothy A. Mays, *Women in Early America: Struggle, Survival, and Freedom in a New World*, (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004).

<sup>46</sup> Carol Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence*, (New York: First Vintage Books, 2004).

<sup>47</sup> Troy Kickler, *The King's Troublemaker's: Edenton's Role in Creating a Nation and State*, (Edenton, NC: Edenton Historical Commission, 2013).

<sup>48</sup> Kickler, *The King's Troublemaker's*, viii.

1774.<sup>49</sup> Although it is a relatively short work in the collection, it is the first truly critical analysis of the Edenton Tea Party. Not only does she insist that the women of Edenton signed a petition to intentionally support their men and country, she challenges most of the traditional narrative, such as the location of the tea party through a detailed examination of primary and secondary sources.<sup>50</sup>

Most publications on Edenton Tea Party or those who mention it, often tell about how the women of Edenton gathered in 1774 to sign a petition at the home of Elizabeth King. However, there is very little evidence to corroborate the specific details of this story. The only definite aspects of the Edenton Tea Party come from information gleaned from the petition, as well as newspapers and correspondences mentioning the event. However, the Edenton women not only participated within the movement towards the American Revolution, but their activity inspired further participation within their spheres of influence. These women's middling and elite socio-economic statuses provided the platform to pull off, a so-called radical, political act of signing a petition challenging the authority of the British government and endure the ridicule that followed. Through examining the location, women involved, the petition, and the documented reaction to the Edenton Tea Party, one can begin to understand how and why such a remarkable event inspires women and men for hundreds of years afterwards to remember their brave, yet potentially treasonous work.

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<sup>49</sup> Cynthia Kierner, "The Edenton Ladies: Women, Tea, and Politics in Revolutionary North Carolina," in *North Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times*, (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2014), 19-22.

<sup>50</sup> Kierner, "The Edenton Ladies," 12.

## Chapter One: Edenton: A Hotbed of Commerce and Politics

One of the most important aspects to colonial settlement was local access to open and deep water in order to transport commercial goods. Edenton, located between Jamestown and Roanoke settlements, grew due to its location on the Albemarle Sound, which provided access to ships for the transport of goods to and from England. The land surrounding Edenton was also well suited for planting. Because of these influences, Edenton's location led to its future political position thanks to the wealth generated from British mercantilism.

Before the Revolution, Edenton was the capitol of North Carolina and also had deep political ties to the governorship and England. It was even said that Edenton rivaled Williamsburg in political activity and style prior to the Revolution. This provided the people of Edenton, both men and women, the luxury of being in vogue in regards to political knowledge. Not only did Edentonians participate in vital colonial politics due to their economic freedom, such as the first North Carolina Provincial Province, but they inspired the women of Edenton to sign a petition that expressed their disagreement with British policy publicly. However to understand the influence of Edenton's location on the Edenton Tea Party, one must begin with initial English colonial settlement.

It was not until the mid-1500s that England desired colonial settlement in the Americas—a few decades after Spain, Portugal, and France who had already colonized most of the Americas. The only land available to the English fell between the well-established colonies of the French and Spanish. This land was named Virginia in honor of Queen Elizabeth I, the virgin queen who granted permission to Sir Walter Raleigh to begin explorations of this land with the intent of colonial settlement in 1587 with a royal charter granting him permission to govern and “to discover, search, finde out, and view such remote, heathen and barbarous lands, countries,

and territories, not actually possessed of any Christian Prince, nor inhabited by Christian People....”<sup>51</sup> The only caveat was that the Crown was entitled to a “fift part” of the gold and silver found as a result of this charter.<sup>52</sup>

This area surrounding the Albemarle Sound was the hub of early English colonial settlement due to its positioning between French and Spanish territory. The first English attempts at settlement occurred at Roanoke, near modern day Manteo, North Carolina, with the Albemarle Sound to the west and the Atlantic Ocean to the east. There was only one real attempt at colonial settlement, in regards to a familial style of settlement, in 1587 since the first trips to Roanoke were either for exploration or military purposes. This attempt was led by John White, an artist, and is known today as the Lost Colony. Shortly after reaching Roanoke, White became the grandfather of Virginia Dare, the first English child born in the Americas, but needed to return to England in order to get more supplies for the colony. The Spanish Armada delayed his return trip for 3 years and when he eventually got back to Roanoke in 1590 there was no sign of the colonists or any sign of struggle. The only clue left for him was the word CROATAN written on a tree.

Because of the writing on the tree, many suspected that the settlers were either attacked or integrated into a Native American tribe, the Croatans. However, there was no evidence to indicate either way until recently. In 2015, archeologists announced the results of a search at a site near Edenton on the Albemarle Sound where they discovered artifacts which they believed

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<sup>51</sup> Queen Elizabeth I, “Charter to Sir Walter Raleigh: 1584,” in *The Federal and State Constitutions Colonial Charters, and Other Organic Laws of the States, Territories, and Colonies Now or Heretofore Forming the United States of America*, ed. Francis Newton Thorpe, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1909). [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/16th\\_century/raleigh.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/16th_century/raleigh.asp) (Accessed September 5, 2015).

<sup>52</sup> Queen Elizabeth I, “Charter to Sir Walter Raleigh.”

may have belonged to the Lost Colonists.<sup>53</sup> This discovery affirms the suggestion that these colonists integrated with Native Americans, but it also challenges the preconceived notions that Edenton was settled by transplants from the Jamestown settlement in the early 1600s.

Although the first attempts at colonial settlement failed at Roanoke, Jamestown—approximately 150 miles north east of the Roanoke settlement site— flourished despite initial setbacks. As a part of the London Company, a joint-stock operation, the English embarked upon another attempt of settlement in 1607 at Jamestown. At first, the settlers struggled to survive due to various circumstances, such as poor relations with their Native American neighbors, drought, and inability to grow food or hunt. During this time, known as the Starving Times, most of the colonists died and the survivors almost deserted the settlement until they saw a ship coming up the James River with supplies and more men. Not long afterward, John Rolfe introduced the cash crop of tobacco that kept the colony afloat.

With Jamestown on its feet, the colonists began spreading out in search of land to call their own. It is believed that these adventurers left from Jamestown and initially settled the natural harbor that today is known as Edenton. From in the mid-1600s to the early 1700s, colonists flocked to the north-eastern region of North Carolina for a chance to own land and acquire wealth.<sup>54</sup> Royal Governor Charles Eden, who lived in the region, appropriated land to

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<sup>53</sup> Andrew Lawler, “We Finally Have Clues to How America's Lost Colony Vanished,” *National Geographic*, August 7, 2015, Accessed September 9, 2015, <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/08/150807-lost-colony-roanoke-hatteras-outer-banks-archaeology/>.

<sup>54</sup> Jonathan Martin, “Chowan County (1681),” *North Carolina History Project*, (Raleigh, NC: John Locke Foundation, 2015), Accessed September 10, 2015, <http://www.northcarolinahistory.org/encyclopedia/627/entry/>.

William Branch, who resided in the region as early as 1695 and hosted the Court for Chowan Precinct in his home in 1716 and 1717, near Edenton on the “Matehacomack Creek” on April 17, 1717.<sup>55</sup> Due to the growth of this region, North Carolina’s government began to pay attention to the importance of this natural harbor. The unincorporated town called Queen Anne’s Creek was renamed Edenton after Governor Charles Eden’s death in 1722.<sup>56</sup> Due to Edenton’s geographical



“Chart of his Majesties Province of North Carolina, 1738.”

Image courtesy of *State Archives of North Carolina*.

Red blocks indicate the location of Edenton and Roanoke Island within the province.

<sup>55</sup> “Land Sale to William Branch from Charles Eden (1717),” in Edenton (N.C.) Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

John Bennett Boddie, *Southside Virginia Families*, vol. I (Redwood, CA: Clearfield, 1956), 48.

In the transfer of land, Eden misspelled Mattercommack Creek as Matehacomack Creek. The creek has changed names throughout the course of Edenton’s history, such as Queen Anne’s Creek. Today, it is known as Little Creek.

<sup>56</sup> John H. Wheeler, *Historical Sketches of North Carolina from 1584 to 1851*, (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1851), 88.



position on the Albemarle Sound and the fertile land in the region, most of the occupations of men in the town revolved around planting and the shipping industry at the port.

Because of the abundance of land in the northeastern region of North Carolina, planting was a popular choice of occupation inspired by the success of tobacco culture around the Chesapeake over the course of a century. This abundance of land fueled rapid expansion for planters in Edenton. In 1719, Samuel Pagett, a physician and planter, owned 300 acres of farm land in Edenton.<sup>57</sup> Although there is no direct statement of the amount of land he held, John Hodgson, a planter and prominent lawyer in Edenton, owned twenty-five African slaves.<sup>58</sup> During this time period, it was rare for someone to own so many slaves for housework. Also, the amount of slaves that Hodgson owned points to his wealth, which allowed him the opportunity to engage in political activity, such as serving as an assemblyman to the North Carolina assembly, Attorney General for the Colony of North Carolina, and other government positions.<sup>59</sup>

Due to its natural harbor, as well as its abundance of land and plantations, Edenton enhanced the shipping and trading industries of North Carolina by serving as a complimentary port to Wilmington during the eighteenth century. Because of the resources in the land surrounding Edenton, the town exported items such as tar, pitch, turpentine, Indian corn, pork, beans, black eyed peas, hog's lard, deer skins, timber, and tobacco.<sup>60</sup> Not only did these exports

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<sup>57</sup> "Samuel Pagett Survey (1719)," in Edenton (N.C.) Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

<sup>58</sup> "A Division of the Negroes Belonging to the Estate of John Hodgson (19 April 1752)," in Edenton (N.C.) Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

<sup>59</sup> "Deposition of James Durham Concerning Sectional Dispute Over the Location of the North Carolina General Assembly Sessions (1746)," in Colonial and State Records of North Carolina, Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

<sup>60</sup> "Produce of North Carolina (1770)," in Johnston Family Papers, in the Hayes Collection, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

improve Edenton and North Carolina's economy, the imports afforded by living in a port town raised the standard of living for many families in Edenton. These families, and fellow North Carolinians, imported items such as cheese, brandy, coffee, chocolate, Chinese black tea, iron, molasses, and sugar, in addition to luxury items from Britain and around the world.<sup>61</sup>

Many of Edenton's citizens were traders and merchants who benefitted, not just materially but financially, from Edenton's role in these industries. John Horniblow owned an inn, the King's Arms, in Edenton that presumably hosted visiting merchants and politicians.<sup>62</sup> Another Edenton resident, Joseph Hewes, was also a merchant whose business afforded him the opportunity to engage in politics as well, even eventually signing the Declaration of Independence.<sup>63</sup> Political activism during colonial America was afforded only to the affluent of that time due to the cost of traveling since it could mean a loss of income and additional expenses one would not accrue otherwise.

With the increase in wealth, it is no surprise that "Edenton and Chowan County comprised a political hub and an intellectual capital of the early United States" due to the free time that wealth provides.<sup>64</sup> Important Edentonians in the founding of the United States, such as Joseph Hewes, signer of the Declaration of Independence, and James Iredell, a future United States Supreme Court Justice, often wrote about and discussed politics, particularly the ideas of

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<sup>61</sup> "A Scheme of Goods Suitable for North Carolina (1770)," in Johnston Family Papers, in the Hayes Collection, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

<sup>62</sup> "Oil portrait of John Horniblow of Edenton (1770)," in Division of Archives and History Photograph Collection, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC.

<sup>63</sup> Wheeler, *Historical Sketches of North Carolina*, 94.

<sup>64</sup> Troy Kicker, *The King's Troublemakers: Edenton's Role in Creating a Nation and State*, (Edenton, NC: Edenton Historical Commission, 2013), viii.

the Enlightenment as the Revolution approached. In a sense, Edenton was a hotbed of commerce and politics. Not only did Edenton have a thriving economy, but it was a central player in North Carolina politics. Beginning with settlement, the region had strong ties to several royal governors. From its incorporation, Edenton was the capitol of North Carolina until 1743. With all of these connections to colonial politics, it came as no surprise that Edenton's citizens would become so politically active.

Edenton's tie to the royal governorship was more than just a namesake. It was the home to three of them. One of the earliest governors of North Carolina Seth Sothel resided in Chowan County beginning in 1683.<sup>65</sup> As seen with previously mentioned land transactions, Eden also lived in the region. Eden and Sothel lived in the area before the capitol moved to Edenton, but Governor Gabriel Johnston did not reside there until his governorship began once he arrived from Scotland in 1734.<sup>66</sup> However, these men would not be the last recognizable politicians to call Edenton home.

Men from across the colony travelled to Edenton when the assembly was in session and stayed for weeks at a time. One of the acts that passed during the assembly's time in Edenton involved the tremendous growth of the region; the assembly passed an act that the land to "the west of the Chowan River" and Edenton become a separate precinct, and eventually its own county, because "the inhabitants, which are growing very numerous, cannot, without too great inconviency [*sic*], be continued as a part of Chowan."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Wheeler, *Historical Sketches of North Carolina*, 89.

Edenton is the government seat of Chowan County.

<sup>66</sup> William S. Powell, *North Carolina: A History*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 26.

<sup>67</sup> North Carolina, "A Collection of All the Public Acts Of Assembly, Of the Province Of North-Carolina," Evans Collection, in *America's Historical Imprints*, accessed September 8, 2015, <http://goo.gl/FRvBLx>.

Although Edenton's time as the capitol of colonial North Carolina was brief, ending in 1743 when the capitol was moved to New Bern, it did not hinder the men of Edenton from engaging in political activity. Hodgson and Hewes are only two examples of the many men who participated in politics. Not only was James Craven a merchant and a planter, he served in many aspects of North Carolina's colonial government beginning as the clerk of Edenton in 1740 and then serving as an assemblyman for the colonial legislature and then secretary to the royal council until his death in 1755.<sup>68</sup>

However, there were also men who devoted their careers to politics and law in Edenton. One of the most prominent of those lawyers in the eighteenth century was Thomas Barker. Barker established himself as a political leader while an attorney in Edenton. He even settled the estate of John Hodgson after his passing.<sup>69</sup> Barker's pupil, Samuel Johnston, who was a relative of Royal Governor Gabriel Johnston and would go on to become governor himself one day, actually prepared Barker's will for him while Barker was in Great Britain as an agent for the governor.<sup>70</sup> Incidentally, Johnston would have a student, James Iredell, Sr., one of the leading Federalists and a future judge for the first Supreme Court of the United States.<sup>71</sup>

With the economic growth surrounding Edenton, it comes as no surprise that Edenton was a hub of revolutionary sentiment. As the cries for independence stirred in the air following

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<sup>68</sup> William S. Price, Jr., *NCpedia*, State Library of North Carolina (Raleigh, NC: State Library of North Carolina, 1979), s.v. "Craven James," accessed September 10, 2015, <http://ncpedia.org/biography/craven-james>.

<sup>69</sup> "Estate Settlement of John Hodgson (1764)," in Edenton (N.C.) Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

<sup>70</sup> "A Letter to Thomas Barker from Samuel Johnston (n.d.)," in Edenton (N.C.) Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

<sup>71</sup> "James Iredell, Sr. (1751-1799)," *North Carolina History Project*, (Raleigh, NC: John Locke Foundation, 2015), accessed September 7, 2015, <http://www.northcarolinahistory.org/commentary/105/entry>.

the French and Indian Wars, Edenton's men did not stand idly by. In a town where many men possess enough wealth and leisure to actively engage in politics, it should come as no surprise that these outcries of fellow colonists spurred them into action.

Prominent lawyers and politicians from Edenton, including Samuel Johnston, Thomas Oldham, Thomas Benbury, Thomas Jones, Luke Sumner and Jacob Hunter, attended an "assembly of the people adverse to the royal authority" at the First Provincial Congress in New Bern on the August 25<sup>th</sup>, 1774 in an act of colonial solidarity with Boston in response to the Intolerable Acts.<sup>72</sup> By taking a stand against the Crown's policies towards the colonies in such a public manner, these men were the first gathering in the colonies that defied British law. Together, men from across the colony composed a document that was sent to the King in light of recent British transgressions:

"We his Majesty's most dutiful and Loyal Subjects, the deputies from the several Counties and Towns, of the Province of North Carolina, impressed with the most sacred respect for the British Constitution, and resolved to maintain the succession of the House of Hanover, as by law Established, and avowing our inviolable and unshaken Fidelity to our sovereign, and entertaining a sincere regard for our fellow subjects in Great Britain viewing with the utmost abhorrence every attempt which may tend to disturb the peace and good order of this Colony, or to shake the fidelity of his Majesty's subjects resident here, but at the same time conceiving it a duty which we owe to ourselves and to posterity, in the present alarming state of British America, when our most essential rights are invaded by powers unwarrantably assumed by the Parliament of Great Britain to declare our sentiments in the most public manner, lest silence should be construed as acquiescence, and that we patiently submit to the Burdens which they have thought fit to impose upon us."<sup>73</sup>

In itself, this opening for the resolutions is powerful in signifying their allegiance to the Crown while adamantly insisting that their rights as Englishmen are not honored through the usurpation of power committed through Parliament's acts and decrees. However, the true significance of

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<sup>72</sup> Wheeler, *Historical Sketches of North Carolina*, 90.

<sup>73</sup> First Provincial Congress of North Carolina, "Resolutions of the First Continental Congress," LearnNC, accessed December 9, 2015, <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-revolution/4332>.

this document lies in the similarities of the Edenton Tea Party petition written exactly two months later. The Resolutions' insistence of duty and emphasis on declaring their sentiments publicly are echoed within the text of the Edenton Tea Party petition with similarities in order, style, and wording.

The document goes on to elaborate on the specific transgressions regarding the colonist's rights as Englishmen. It even included specific consequences that mostly involved trade for the British if these grievances were not addressed by the beginning of 1775. Despite the severity of the consequences, the Congress closes the document with a sincere attempt at reconciliation with the Crown: "That they concur with the Deputies or Delegates from the other Colonies, in such regulation, address or remonstrance, as may be deemed most probable to restore a lasting harmony, and good understanding with Great Britain, a circumstance we most sincerely and ardently desire and that they agree with a majority of them in all necessary measures, for promoting a redress of such grievances as may come under their consideration."<sup>74</sup>

Incidentally, just three days before the First Provincial Congress approved these resolves, freeholders, men who owned property and were eligible to vote, from Chowan County gathered at the courthouse in Edenton to pledge allegiance to the Crown while airing their grievances about British policy, including condemning the Coercive Acts enforced upon Boston. These Edentonians also chose Samuel Johnston, Thomas Oldham, Thomas Jones, Thomas Benbury, Thomas Hunter and Joseph Hewes to represent them at the First Provincial Congress at this meeting and "[r]esolved, That we will faithfully observe and endeavor to carry into execution, all

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<sup>74</sup> First Provincial Congress of North Carolina, "First Provincial Congress Resolutions."

Orders and Resolutions entered into by the Delegates, both in the Provincial and General Congress (saving our allegiance to his Majesty).”<sup>75</sup>

In 1774, Edenton was home to 600 inhabitants so the news of this assembly had the capability to spread quickly. Exactly two months later, fifty one women from Edenton gathered to sign a petition to denounce the use of British goods in response to the Crown’s transgressions.<sup>76</sup> While one can assume that these women followed in the steps of these prominent men due to the similar wording between the Edenton Tea Party petition and the First Provincial Congress Resolutions, their actions also raise the question of why these women dared to engage in a potentially treasonous act—as women. Perhaps this question is answered best by learning about the women who dared to sign this petition.

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<sup>75</sup> Daniel Earl, “Resolutions by inhabitants of Chowan County concerning resistance to Parliamentary taxation and the Provincial Congress of North Carolina,” in Documenting the American South, Colonial and State Records of North Carolina, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, accessed December 9, 2015, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr09-0300>.

<sup>76</sup> Dorothy A. Mays, *Women in Early America: Struggle, Survival, and Freedom in a New World*, (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 51.

## Chapter Two: The Women of the Edenton Tea Party

During the eighteenth-century, despite the political progression of colonial America, institutionalized female participation in politics was not universally accepted, both formally through political office and informally through participation in political conversations or elections.<sup>77</sup> However, the women of Edenton found themselves in a situation where they had the economic freedom and access to politics in 1774. Not only did many of the women of the Edenton Tea Party experience a more privileged socio-economic status, but many of their husbands were active in the North Carolina political circuit. Not only is it incredibly likely that the women spoke with their husbands regarding politics, but they also could overhear information discussed by their husbands and colleagues within their home. Their access to economic and political resources positioned them to intentionally address their grievances with the British. Incidentally, their role of caring for their home positioned them to more effectively reinforce their resolutions.

One of the most important ways that women voiced their opinion was through their purse strings. During the colonial era, "...there was nothing in the social or economic code of the times to prevent a woman's supporting herself and her family in whatever way she best could."<sup>78</sup> Although few women turned to outside work, women often oversaw the spending for their homes since they were the primary caretakers for their household.<sup>79</sup> Not only did this mean that

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<sup>77</sup> Robert J. Dinkin, *Before Equal Suffrage: Women in Partisan Politics from Colonial Times to 1920*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 10.

<sup>78</sup> Elisabeth Anthony Dexter, *Colonial Women of Affairs; Women in Business and the Professions in America Before 1776*, (New York: A.M. Kelley, 1972), 182.

<sup>79</sup> Margaret Supplee Smith and Emily Herring Wilson, *North Carolina Women: Making History*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), ix.



they were active participants in what T.H. Breen referred to as the “commercial revolution,” but it set women up at the forefront of the onset of the American Revolution due to the British taxes on household goods.<sup>80</sup>

Edenton’s women were no different. In response to continued taxation, the women in Edenton took a stand in a tangible way. By signing a petition, these women protested British policies towards the colonies in the wake of the French and Indian War. There were fifty-one women who signed their names to this petition in order to address the King of his trespasses against the colonies in the form of illegal taxation and Parliament’s usurpation of power. It is important to note that this was not a just a document about taxation without representation, but it showed that women believed they were entitled to the same rights as male British citizens, as analyzed in the next chapter:

“As we cannot be indifferent on any occasion that appears nearly to affect the peace and happiness of our country, and as it has been thought necessary, for the public good, to enter into several particular resolves by a meeting of Members deputed from the whole Province, it is a duty which we owe, not only to our near and dear connections who have concurred in them, but to ourselves who are essentially interested in their welfare, to do every thing as far as lies in our power to testify our sincere adherence to the same; and we do therefore accordingly subscribe this paper, as a witness of our fixed intention and solemn determination to do so.”<sup>81</sup>

Below is a list of all fifty-one women who affixed their name to the petition in October 1774 as found in a letter sent to newspapers in London that published the petition three months later:<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Dexter, *Colonial Women of Affairs*, 190.

<sup>81</sup> “Edenton Tea Party Petition,” in *Ten Tea Parties: Patriotic Protests That History Forgot*, ed. Joseph Cummins (Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2012), 169.

<sup>82</sup> “Extract of a letter from North Carolina, Oct. 27,” *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, January 31, 1775, Reprinted by the Edenton Woman's Club in *Historic Edenton and Countryside* (The Chowan Herald, 1959), 3–4, in Eastern North Carolina Digital Library at East Carolina University, Greenville, NC.

“Abigail Charlton  
Mary Blount  
F. Johnstone  
Elizabeth Creacy  
Margaret Cathcart  
Elizabeth Patterson  
Anne Johnstone  
Jane Wellwood  
Margaret Pearson  
Mary Woolard  
Penelope Dawson  
Sarah Beasley  
Jean Blair  
Susannah Vail  
Grace Clayton  
Elizabeth Vail  
Frances Hall

Elizabeth Vail  
Mary Jones  
Mary Creacy  
Anne Hall  
Mary Creacy  
Rebecca Bondfield  
Ruth Benbury  
Sarah Littlejohn  
Sarah Howcott  
Penelope Barker  
Sarah Hoskins  
Elizabeth P. Ormond  
Mary Littlele  
M. Payne  
Sarah Valentine  
Elizabeth Johnston  
Elizabeth Cricket

Mary Bonner  
Elizabeth Green  
Lydia Bonner  
Mary Ramsay  
Sarah Howe  
Anne Horniblow  
Lydia Bennet  
Mary Hunter  
Marion Wells  
Tresia Cunningham  
Anne Anderson  
Elizabeth Roberts  
Sarah Mathews  
Elizabeth Roberts  
Anne Haughton  
Elizabeth Roberts  
Elizabeth Beasley.”

But, in order to understand why these women willingly risked treason and ostracizing themselves in their communities, one must look at their lives leading up to, and sometimes after, the Edenton Tea Party.

Although Edenton was a thriving port city in the eighteenth-century, Chowan County’s population was fairly sparse due to the amount and size of neighboring plantations, which means it was “very probable that fifty-one names compromised most of the ladies living in and around Edenton then.”<sup>83</sup> Due to the lack of records from this period, there were only twelve women who left sufficient records to form a detailed analysis. However, there is enough information to provide insight for all of the women of the Edenton Tea Party. This is particularly true given that the women of the Edenton Tea Party consisted of elite and middling sorts, not the lower classes.<sup>84</sup> Still, rural women made up the majority of signers of the petition, which is shocking

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<sup>83</sup> Richard Dillard, *The Historic Tea Party of Edenton, 1774: Incident in North Carolina Connected with Taxation*, (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1892), 5.

<sup>84</sup> Cynthia Kierner, “The Edenton Ladies: Women, Tea, and Politics in Revolutionary North Carolina,” in *North Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times*, (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2014), 22.

due to the predominantly urban nature of colonial resistance to British taxation.<sup>85</sup> Because many of these women were the wives of planters, this meant that many of the signers were slaveholders despite their varying socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>86</sup>

The lives of these women point towards the factors that led the Edenton Tea Party to be one of, if not the first, women's organized political activities in America with the signing of this petition on October 25, 1774. Examining the lives of twelve of these women show a cross-section of the entire group and uncovers the reasons all fifty-one women from Edenton committed such a rebellious, and potentially treasonous act.

Mary Blount, one of the signers of the Edenton Tea Party petition, was the first wife of Charles Pettigrew, who was a prominent figure in Edenton. Pettigrew started out in Edenton as the local schoolmaster, and after converting to the Anglicanism he became the rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church.<sup>87</sup> Not only was he a well-educated and religious man, he was also a planter with "two plantations in North Carolina, eight hundred acres of land in Tennessee, thirty-four slaves, a chapel, and a good house that he built."<sup>88</sup> Due to their wealth and his roles within the community, Mary Blount was probably also well-known within Edenton and Chowan County.

Anne Horniblow was also well-known throughout Edenton due to her husband, John Horniblow. He owned an inn, the King's Arms, in Edenton that presumably hosted visiting

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<sup>85</sup> Kierner, "The Edenton Ladies," 19.

<sup>86</sup> Kierner, "The Edenton Ladies," 21.

<sup>87</sup> Meredith Malburne-Wade, "Charles Pettigrew, 1744-1807 Last Advice of the Rev. Charles Pettigrew to His Sons, 1797 Summary," in Documenting the American South, University of Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, accessed April 10, 2015 <http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/pettigrew/summary.html>.

<sup>88</sup> Malburne-Wade, "Charles Pettigrew."

merchants and politicians.<sup>89</sup> Together, Anne and John had five sons, three daughters, and owned seven slaves.<sup>90</sup> The number of slaves owned by the Horniblow is surprising though. It seems as if they possibly owned a small farm in addition to the inn as this number is more than what was typical for household or urban slaves used in a small inn.

Elizabeth Beasley, the sister to fellow signer Mary Blount, was married to John Beasley.<sup>91</sup> As of the 1790 Census, the Beasley's had two slaves to their name.<sup>92</sup> At the time of John's death in 1806, he left the family in debt but his belongings indicated they lived a modest farmer's life with seventy-one hogs, twenty-seven heads of cattle, three ploughs and domestic goods including six teaspoons and one table cloth.<sup>93</sup> Unlike many of the women who married attorneys, Mrs. Beasley was an example of a signer from the middling sorts.

Sarah Littlejohn, Elizabeth Ormond, and Ruth Benbury only have some records that shed light towards their lives prior to the Edenton Tea Party. Sarah Littlejohn, married attorney William Littlejohn. Not only was Sarah engaged in politics, she was well-known for caring for the sick and poor, so much so that the *Edenton Gazette* wrote of her virtue following her death in 1807.<sup>94</sup> Elizabeth Ormond was the wife of attorney Wyriot Ormond, who worked closely with

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<sup>89</sup> "Oil portrait of John Horniblow of Edenton (1770)," in Division of Archives and History Photograph Collection, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC.

<sup>90</sup> "Chowan County Census of 1790," in Documenting the American South, University of Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, accessed April 3, 2015, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr26-0011>.

<sup>91</sup> Sarah McCulloh Lemmon, *NCPedia* (Raleigh, NC: State Library of North Carolina, 1979), s.v. "Beasley, Frederic," accessed October 20, 2015, <http://ncpedia.org/biography/beasley-frederic>.

<sup>92</sup> "Chowan County Census of 1790."

<sup>93</sup> "The Estate of John Beasley," in Edenton District Court: Estate Records, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC.

<sup>94</sup> Guion Griffis Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937), 699.

Thomas Barker in the North Carolina General Assembly in New Bern during 1749.<sup>95</sup> Finally, Ruth Benbury, according to the Census of 1790, had five free white women and ten slaves in her household.<sup>96</sup> Although she had the same last name as Thomas Benbury, planter and sheriff of Chowan County, they were of no relation.<sup>97</sup>

Two of the signers, Margaret Cathcart and Penelope Dawson, had familial connection to the Johnston family, Royal Governor Gabriel Johnston resided in Edenton with his daughter Penelope Dawson, as well as his nephew Samuel Johnston.<sup>98</sup> Margaret Cathcart was Samuel Johnston's cousin and often wrote to him. One letter in particular—written a year after the Edenton Tea Party—thanked him for his gift after her “misfortune to be deprived of my Dear Father.”<sup>99</sup> Penelope Dawson not only was the Royal Governor's daughter, but she was also the mother to William Johnston Dawson, who served in the U.S. Congress.<sup>100</sup> Not only did she take a public political stance by signing the petition, she also remained involved in politics following the Edenton Tea Party. In November 1775, Penelope wrote to a friend about the naval “skirmish

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<sup>95</sup> “Deposition of Wyriot Ormond and Thomas Barker concerning copies of acts of the North Carolina General Assembly,” in Documenting the American South, University of Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, accessed October 3, 2015, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr04-0397>.

<sup>96</sup> Walter Clark, William Laurence Saunders, and Stephen Beauregard Weeks, eds., *Census 1790*, vol. XXVI of *The State Records of North Carolina* (Goldsboro, NC: Nash Brothers Book and Job Printers, 1905), 3-4.

<sup>97</sup> Elmer D. Johnson, *NCPedia*, (Raleigh, NC: State Library of North Carolina, 1979), s.v. “Benbury, Thomas,” accessed October 20, 2015, <http://ncpedia.org/biography/benbury-thomas>.

<sup>98</sup> Kierner, “The Edenton Ladies,” 13.

Samuel Johnston also studied law under Thomas Barker, the third husband of Penelope Barker, presumed leader of the Edenton Tea Party, and later became a member of the Continental Congress, U.S. Senator, and Governor of North Carolina.

<sup>99</sup> Margaret Cathcart to Samuel Johnston, Edenton, September 29, 1775, in Cathcart Family Papers, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC.

<sup>100</sup> James Elliot Moore, *NCPedia*, (Raleigh, NC: State Library of North Carolina, 1986), s.v. “Dawson, William Johnston,” accessed October 20, 2015, <http://ncpedia.org/biography/dawson-william-johnston>.

at Hampton with the week” emphasizing the “spirit of our country men” while praying that “God in his goodness put a stop to these terrible doings, & restore to us Peace once more for indeed it is beyond description shocking to see or hear of friends and fellow subjects destroying one another.”<sup>101</sup>

Finally, two of the signers, Sarah (Winfried) Hoskins and Penelope Barker, were the presumed leaders of the Edenton Tea Party with Sarah as the Secretary of the meeting and Penelope leading it.<sup>102</sup> Sarah Hoskins was the wife of Richard Hoskins and they lived just outside of Edenton on a farm named “Paradise.”<sup>103</sup> She was known for her spinning, sewing, and weaving.<sup>104</sup> Together, Sarah and John had eight sons, eight daughter, and twenty slaves.<sup>105</sup> Not only did Sarah’s participation in the Edenton Tea Party make the Hoskins patriots, but she tended the farm during the Revolution while Richard joined “the American army at the first sound to arms [and] served with signal bravery and courage until its close.”<sup>106</sup>

When discussing Penelope Barker’s role in the Edenton Tea Party, it is important to understand her past and how that empowered her to spearhead such a rebellious act. She was born in Edenton in 1728 to a Dr. Samuel Pagett and his wife of gentry background.<sup>107</sup> She also

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<sup>101</sup> Penelope Dawson to Mrs. Lee, November 2, 1775, in British Records, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC.

<sup>102</sup> Fred A. Olds, “The Celebrated Edenton, N.C. Tea Party,” *Daughters of the American Revolution* 56, no. 6 (June 1922), 328.

<sup>103</sup> Dillard, *The Historic Tea Party of Edenton*, 14.

<sup>104</sup> Dillard, *The Historic Tea Party of Edenton*, 14.

<sup>105</sup> “Chowan County Census of 1790.”

<sup>106</sup> Dillard, *The Historic Edenton Tea Party*, 13.

<sup>107</sup> Joseph Cummins, *Ten Tea Parties: Patriotic Protests That History Forgot* (Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2012), 165.

grew up alongside the Blount family just outside of Edenton.<sup>108</sup> After her sister's death, Penelope married her brother-in-law, John Hodgson, to care for her sister's children at the age of sixteen. During her marriage to John, she petitioned for the division of her father's estate in 1747.<sup>109</sup> Just a few years later in 1752, John passed away leaving Penelope with three step-children, Isabella, John and Robert, and her children, Samuel and Thomas.<sup>110</sup> At the time of John Hodgson's death, he owned twenty-five slaves: five men, seven boys, eight women, and five girls between the ages of forty-five and one.<sup>111</sup>

In typical eighteenth-century fashion, Penelope quickly remarried. This time, she married James Craven, a merchant, planter, and a well-known politician.<sup>112</sup> While married to James, she managed her household by selling spices such as nutmeg, cinnamon, and sugar, and a pack of cards, as well as renting her slaves.<sup>113</sup> When James passed away in 1756, he left Penelope as the wealthiest woman in North Carolina.<sup>114</sup>

Penelope remarried for a third time to Thomas Barker. Not only had he prepared her first husband's estate, but he established himself as a prominent lawyer in eastern North Carolina and

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<sup>108</sup> "Map of Land," in Edenton (N.C.) Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

<sup>109</sup> "Petition of Division of Samuel Paget's Estate," in Edenton (N.C.) Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

<sup>110</sup> "August 1752 Apportionment of the Estate of John Hodgson," in Edenton (N.C.) Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

<sup>111</sup> "1752 Division of Negroes Belonging to the Estate of John Hodgson," in Edenton (N.C.) Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

<sup>112</sup> William S. Price, Jr., *NCPedia*, State Library of North Carolina (Raleigh, NC: State Library of North Carolina, 1979), s.v. "Craven James," accessed September 10, 2015, <http://ncpedia.org/biography/craven-james>.

<sup>113</sup> "Mrs. Penelope Craven to William Sorother & Company," in Edenton (N.C.) Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

<sup>114</sup> Cummins, *Ten Tea Parties*, 165.

tutored Samuel Johnston.<sup>115</sup> He was also a public servant who served the colony of North Carolina at home and abroad.<sup>116</sup> At this point in her life, Penelope continued managing her household by purchasing luxury items, such as chocolate, sugar, rum, salt, and molasses.<sup>117</sup> During the Revolution, Thomas was out of the country on matters of state in Britain and France as a representative of the North Carolina's assembly to the board of trade.<sup>118</sup> While he was away, Penelope defended their property from the British:

“Being informed by a servant that some British soldiers were taking her carriage horses from her stables, she snatched her husband's sword from the wall, went out and with a single blow severed the reins in the officer's hands, and drove her horses back into the stables. The British officer declared, that for such exhibition of bravery, she should be allowed to keep her horses, and she was never afterwards molested....”<sup>119</sup>

Shortly after the Revolution ended, Thomas passed away in 1788 leaving Penelope with twenty-five slaves and the plantation, as well as items that identified the Barker's as an upper-class family, such as thirty-three chairs, four large tables, four tea tables, a mahogany plate tray, twelve pewter dishes, twelve pair of pillow cases, two tea kettles, two tea boxes, twenty-six damask table cloths, five kitchen tables, and three large china punch bowls.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Dillard, *The Historic Edenton Tea Party*, 12.

<sup>116</sup> “Dr. Thomas Barker Esq. Public Treasurer in Account with the Public of North Carolina as Settled by the Committee of Accounts April 1762,” in Edenton (N.C.) Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

<sup>117</sup> “Account of Thomas Barker Esq. in 1764,” in Edenton (N.C.) Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

<sup>118</sup> “French Account for Thomas Barker in 1782,” in Edenton (N.C.) Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

<sup>119</sup> Dillard, *The Historic Edenton Tea Party*, 13.

<sup>120</sup> “Inventory of Sundries Taken this 1<sup>st</sup> Day of January 1788 Belonging to the Estate of Thomas Barker Esq. Deceased,” in Edenton (N.C.) Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.



Throughout her life, Penelope overcame difficult obstacles due to life's circumstances. She was remembered as "one of those lofty, intrepid, high-born women peculiarly fitted by nature to lead; fear formed no part of her composition. Her face bears the expression of sternness without harshness, which a cheap novelist would describe as hauteur. She was a brilliant conversationalist, and a society leader of her day."<sup>121</sup> It was a combination of her socio-economic status, personality, and life experience that positioned her to challenge the status-quo, not just regarding female political participation but against Britain's increased taxation policies towards the colonies.

These women's lives afforded them the opportunity to take a stand for their families and their countries.<sup>122</sup> Because of their influence in the community and socio-economic statuses, it was a fitting choice for women to utilize their socially inherent impact of purchasing power to boycott British goods in the face of increased taxation.<sup>123</sup> As historian Carol Berkin notes, "Women and girls were partners with their husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons in the public demonstrations against the new British policies and, if they were absent from the halls of the colonial legislatures, their presence was crucial in the most effective protest strategy of all: the boycott of British manufactured goods."<sup>124</sup>

While committing a political act of signing a petition, the Edenton women vocalized their disdain by relating British policy to a predominantly feminine area of influence. Through these

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<sup>121</sup> Dillard, *The Historic Edenton Tea Party*, 12.

<sup>122</sup> Kierner, "The Ladies of Edenton," 12.

<sup>123</sup> Dorothy A. Mays, *Women in Early America: Struggle, Survival, and Freedom in a New World*, (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 51.

<sup>124</sup> Carol Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence* (New York: First Vintage Books, 2004), xv.

boycotts, “the politicization of the household economy marked the beginning of the use of a political language that explicitly included women.”<sup>125</sup> It would be the combination of these factors that created a perfect storm of sorts in Edenton for the first organized women’s political activity.

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<sup>125</sup> Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 41.

### Chapter Three: Uncovering the Events of October 24, 1776

An intentional gathering of women who were economically and geographically situated for a bold statement on colonial politics occurred on October 25, 1774 with fifty-one women in Edenton, North Carolina. Infuriated by the slew of taxes implemented upon the colonists, the women of Edenton gathered to sign a petition against purchasing British goods, including tea. Despite facing adversity and potential charges of treason, these women flexed their political muscles and joined the Revolutionary cause through an event that garnered colonial and European attention. While this was a female dominated political action, the petition itself was gender neutral and was not a direct call for women to rise up in protest. It was the letter that Penelope Barker attached to the petitions she sent to London that emphasized gender and specific grievances.

Unfortunately, there is very little primary evidence recording the events of October 25, 1774. However, there are narratives that retell the story although they vary in some of the details. By examining the general narrative and comparing the varying details, it is evident that not only was the Edenton Tea Party an intentional political action, but that the traditional tale is not necessarily the most accurate.

The timing of the Edenton Tea Party shows that the women were politically informed on the North Carolina Provincial Congress and the Continental Congress proceedings, especially regarding trade.<sup>126</sup> Delegates from Edenton participated in the First North Carolina Provincial Congress in New Bern on the August 25, 1774 that approved a resolution for a potential trade

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<sup>126</sup> Cynthia Kierner, "The Edenton Ladies: Women, Tea, and Politics in Revolutionary North Carolina," in *North Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times*, (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2014), 16.

boycott against the British in response to the continued imposition on colonial autonomy.<sup>127</sup> This shows how the Edenton Tea Party was purposeful in their intentions and not spontaneous, since it occurred exactly two months after this decision and had similar wording and concepts. Also, one should not discount the influence of the Tea Act of 1773 on these women: “Tea was, of course, a very important battleground. It was an extremely popular drink in colonial America—half of all homes had tea sets.”<sup>128</sup> Therefore, it should come as no surprise that this was the most contentious of the British policy towards the colonies. After the Boston Tea Party tangibly protested the Tea Act in December 1773, the British responded with the Coercive Acts in 1774 that tightened the reigns on the colonists in Boston. In support of Boston, tea parties and boycotts of British goods ensued in full force to protest British taxation and policies. In this vein, the Edenton Tea Party was an intentional act of protest against the British in response to the Tea and Coercive Acts. However, unlike the Boston Tea Party, the women of Edenton did not actually dump tea or resort to violence in their protests.

In accordance with the traditional narrative, the Edenton Tea Party occurred on October 25, 1774 at the home of Elizabeth King in Edenton, North Carolina.<sup>129</sup> Penelope Barker presided for this meeting that she called on October 23<sup>rd</sup> with Winifred Hoskins as the secretary for the meeting.<sup>130</sup> Not only did all fifty-one women attend the meeting in King’s home and thereafter sign the petition to boycott British goods, Barker supposedly said directly after the meeting that

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<sup>127</sup> John H. Wheeler, *Historical Sketches of North Carolina from 1584 to 1851*, (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1851), 90.

<sup>128</sup> Gail Collins, *America’s Women: Four Hundred Years of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates, and Heroines*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 78.

<sup>129</sup> Fred A. Olds, “The Celebrated Edenton, N.C. Tea Party,” *Daughters of the American Revolution* 56, no. 6 (June 1922), 328.

<sup>130</sup> Olds, “The Celebrated Edenton, N.C. Tea Party,” 328.

“[m]aybe it has only been men who have protested the king up to now. That only means we women have taken too long to let our voices be heard. We are signing our names to a document, not hiding ourselves behind costumes like the men in Boston did at their tea party. The British will know who we are.”<sup>131</sup> Barker’s passion in this statement, as the presumed leader of the tea party, showed the passion of the Edenton women and their desire to express their political beliefs through the signing of a petition.

One thing that is definitively known about the Edenton Tea Party based on primary evidence is that there was a petition either signed or created on October 24, 1774. It is this petition that makes the Edenton Tea Party an intentional political action as these ladies placed their name on a document that went against traditional gender roles for that period. The petition states:

“As we cannot be indifferent on any occasion that appears nearly to affect the peace and happiness of our country, and as it has been thought necessary, for the public good, to enter into several particular resolves by a meeting of Members deputed from the whole Province, it is a duty which we owe, not only to our near and dear connections who have concurred in them, but to ourselves who are essentially interested in their welfare, to do every thing as far as lies in our power to testify our sincere adherence to the same; and we do therefore accordingly subscribe this paper, as a witness of our fixed intention and solemn determination to do so.”<sup>132</sup>

The introduction of the petition alludes to the North Carolina Provincial Congress, which occurred two weeks earlier, and how the women were following in their fellow Edentonians’ footsteps in taking a stand against British policy.<sup>133</sup> They also insisted that this petition was their

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<sup>131</sup> National Women’s History Museum, “Penelope Barker (1728-1796),” Education & Resources, <http://www.nwhm.org/education-resources/biography/biographies/penelope-barker/> (accessed April 15, 2013).

<sup>132</sup> “Extract of a letter from North Carolina, Oct. 27,” *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, January 31, 1775, Reprinted by the Edenton Woman's Club in *Historic Edenton and Countryside* (The Chowan Herald, 1959), 3–4, in Eastern North Carolina Digital Library at East Carolina University, Greenville, NC.

<sup>133</sup> “Extract of a letter from North Carolina, Oct. 27,” *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 3-4.

duty not only to themselves, but to their family, friends, and their colony.<sup>134</sup> Not only did they sign this petition to boycott tea and British goods, their last sentence insists that they did not want their political activity and opposition to British policy to be private, but to be public and permanent for all to see.<sup>135</sup> Not only was this simply a document for the ladies of Edenton to express their political opinion, it showed that women assumed their ungiven rights as Englishmen, despite the fact that society deemed women unfit to engage in politics.

The petition was framed very much like the First Provincial Congress Resolutions—just without a list of resolutions. Both documents addressed a sense of duty and call to publicly declare their protests to British policy in similar wording and style. The women also carefully remained gender-neutral throughout the petition. By doing so, they strengthened their argument by claiming the same rights as Englishmen without asking for them or appealing to other women. In a sense, they built upon the momentum of the First Provincial Congress reinforcing the ideals and boycotts established by the men. However, the Edenton Tea Party, unlike the Resolutions, provides support from the consumers of British goods and those who hold the purse strings within the family units.

Another important aspect to note about the petition is there was no mention of tea. Prior tea parties involved either the boycott or destruction of tea. While boycotts are implied within the petition, the First Provincial Congress Resolutions did not target just tea, but almost all British goods. Therefore, the title of this activity as a tea party is not fitting. Perhaps it is more appropriate to call this event the Edenton Resolves, but at the same time Dillard calling it the Edenton Tea Party provided more notoriety and allure than a set of resolves.

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<sup>134</sup> “Extract of a letter from North Carolina, Oct. 27,” *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 3-4.

<sup>135</sup> “Extract of a letter from North Carolina, Oct. 27,” *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 3-4.

Most importantly, the petition did not stay in Edenton but travelled throughout the colonies and abroad. The Edenton Tea Party was an international affair. One of the signers, Penelope Dawson, supposedly sent the petition to the Virginia Gazette, a popular colonial newspaper, due to her ties not only to Williamsburg but to colonial politics since she was the daughter of Governor Johnston.<sup>136</sup> As with any petition, it did no good to sit in Edenton. It needed a public audience, including that of the government it targeted.

Another definitive aspect to the Edenton Tea Party is that Penelope Barker sent the petition to England. In order to add momentum behind the petition, Barker attached a letter from herself to the king along with the petition from the Edenton Tea Party sent to the newspapers, the *London Advertiser* and the *Morning Chronicle*:

“The Provincial Deputies of North Carolina having resolved not to drink any more tea, nor wear any more British cloth, etc. many ladies of this Province have determined to give a memorable proof of their patriotism, and have accordingly entered into the following honourable and spirited association. I send it to you, to shew your fair countrywomen, how zealously and faithfully American ladies follow the laudable example of their husbands, and what opposition your Ministers may expect to receive from a people thus firmly united against them....”<sup>137</sup>

The beginning of the letter provided the context for the purpose of the petition that not only did they give up tea and British goods, including clothing, in accordance with the First Provincial Congress Resolutions, but that they wanted to make it known through this petition.<sup>138</sup> Not only did Barker emphasize the ladies of Edenton’s opposition to the Tea Act, the letter also was a

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<sup>136</sup> Kierner, “The Edenton Ladies,” 13.

<sup>137</sup>Penelope Barker, “Extract of a letter from North Carolina, Oct. 27,” In *The North Carolina Experience: An Interpretive and Documentary History*, ed. Lindley S. Butler and Alan D. Watson, 136-137, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 136.

<sup>138</sup> Barker, “Extract of a letter,” 136.

statement of intended action against the British government. Barker's letter was the only mention of tea within the Edenton Tea Party.

She continues with a statement that "American ladies follow the laudable example of their husbands...."<sup>139</sup> Because the women of the Edenton Tea Party followed in the example of their politically active husbands, Barker inferred that other women would do so, presumable due to her limited sphere. Unlike the petition, Barker's letter was very partial in regards to gender. It was almost a call for other women to rise up against British policy. However, it is important to note that while there would be sporadic examples of female political activity, this was not the norm as her letter portrayed.

Finally, she closes with a challenge to the British government with rebellion.<sup>140</sup> This was a threat of treason. While it was unacceptable for a male to make such statements, it was shocking to hear it form a woman. The bluntness of the letter, along with the petition, garnered tremendous criticism from the British and was considered radical for the time. While the petition eventually became more of a debacle than a political statement in England due to Barker's letter, the message was clear even if it was not taken seriously.

When analyzing the Edenton Tea Party, it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of both the petition and the letter. Because of its gender neutrality, it is highly likely that the women of Edenton intended the petition to supplement the impact of North Carolina's First Provincial Congress on the political discussion regarding colonial taxation. On the other hand, Barker's letter was more provocative as its content was overtly feminine. This begs the question of whether or not Barker intended to sabotage the petition with her letter. However, because she

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<sup>139</sup> Barker, "Extract of a letter," 136.

<sup>140</sup> Barker, "Extract of a Letter," 136.



signed the petition, it would not be logical for her not to sabotage something she had a stake in. More than likely, she wanted to draw attention to the petition, but did not realize the adverse effect it had on the petition, as seen through the famous cartoon of the Edenton women and the Iredell letter.

Because the petition and the letter Penelope attached to the petition sent to England are the only definitive sources that support the existence of the Edenton Tea Party, there is reasonable doubt in regards to the other details of the traditional narrative that must be addressed. Not only were there no records besides these of the event, but the sources subsequently uncovered over the decades contradicted one another. The three most notable details that must be challenged involve the location, its leader, and the use of a petition.

The first of these challenges is determining who actually led the Edenton Tea Party. As Fred Olds mentioned in his work and as it is traditionally assumed, Penelope Barker is the presumed ringleader of the Edenton Tea Party. However, it seems that the only evidence that indicated this is a painting of the Edenton Tea Party, which is now lost.<sup>141</sup> Not only is the painting no longer known, but the petition indicates that Barker may not have led the event after all. Typically, the first signature on a petition indicates who led the event. Even the Declaration of Independence, although their signatures were not in an organized fashion, had John Hancock, the President of the Continental Congress, sign first.<sup>142</sup> The first signer of the Edenton Tea Party's petition was Abigail Charlton.<sup>143</sup> However, as noted in the previous chapter, there was

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<sup>141</sup> Mary Dawes Staples, "The Edenton Tea Party," *American Monthly Magazine* XXXI, no. 2 (August 1907), 360.

This portrait at one point did return to Edenton, but by the twentieth-century was lost again to history.

<sup>143</sup> "Extract of a letter from North Carolina, Oct. 27," *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 3–4.

no information on Charlton, but Barker was well-known throughout Edenton and one of the most notable of the signers, which makes the assumption of her leadership compelling in the traditional narrative.

With the accepted assumption of Barker's leadership within the Edenton Tea Party, it is important to address the implications of her leadership. When examining the petition alone, the Edenton Tea Party was fairly harmless as there were no direct mentions of boycotts but just general condemnation of British policy. However, Barker's letter changes everything if she was the leader of the tea party. By signing their name to the petition under her leadership, the women of Edenton indirectly agreed with Barker's stance within her letter. If Barker was not the leader of the tea party, then she was acting alone and her actions and words do not reflect those of the other women.

Another important detail of the accepted narrative to challenge is the location of the Edenton Tea Party. Tradition holds that it was held in the home of Elizabeth King. However, this is quite unlikely. Her home served as a boarding house and was not listed in taxes in 1774.<sup>144</sup> Because of these factors, it is doubtful if fifty-one women could fit inside of a boarding house or one that may not have existed at that point in time. Another location suggestion in the historiography of the Edenton Tea Party is that it occurred at the home of Penelope Barker.<sup>145</sup> Even though she was a member of the elite with a larger home, fifty-one women could not fit easily into an Edenton home.<sup>146</sup> Because of these factors, it is highly unlikely that there was a stationary signing that occurred on October 24, 1774.

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<sup>144</sup> Kierner, "The Edenton Ladies," 20.

<sup>145</sup> Mary Dawes Staples, "The Edenton Tea Party," *American Monthly Magazine* XXXI, no. 2 (August 1907), 358.

<sup>146</sup> Kierner, "The Edenton Ladies," 19.

More than likely the women passed the petition around town instead of signing it in one place. Although it is missing, the painting of the Edenton Tea Party that shows Penelope Barker presiding also only shows fifteen women.<sup>147</sup> However, this corroborates Kierner's hypothesis that moves towards the Edenton Tea Party being a true petition instead of a stationary signing. In addition, the women of Edenton supposedly associated themselves as the Edenton's Ladies Patriotic Guild.<sup>148</sup> By having an organized association of political women, it could have been easier for the women of Edenton to disseminate information and support for a petition, even if it were not stationary.

No matter how the petition was signed, it still marked an important political event that set a precedent for all other women since it was "the first recorded case in which a group of women asserted their political principles in writing and in their own names... [marking a] pivotal moment in the history of women's relationship to public life."<sup>149</sup> This petition marked the beginning of a process where women participated in politics instead of refraining from addressing their concerns.<sup>150</sup> While the petition did influence women to organize in its immediate aftermath, specifically with the Wilmington Tea Party where women gathered in Wilmington, North Carolina to burn tea in the streets a few months after the Edenton Tea Party, most female

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<sup>147</sup> Olds, "The Celebrated Edenton, N.C. Tea Party," 332.

<sup>148</sup> Joseph Cummins, *Ten Tea Parties: Patriotic Protests That History Forgot* (Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2012), 168.

<sup>149</sup> Kierner, "The Edenton Ladies," 12.

<sup>150</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 161.

petitions during the American Revolution were actually individual acts in regards to financial aid or familial matters instead of politics.<sup>151</sup>

Because the Edenton Tea Party was the first true organized political action and movement for women, it paved the way for petitions to become a familiar political device in the early nineteenth-century, especially with female antislavery societies.<sup>152</sup> One such nineteenth-century female anti-slavery society was the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (PFAAS) formed in 1833 since women could not join the American Anti-Slavery Society. PFAAS was interracial from the beginning supporting the Underground Railroad financially and physically. They also circulated petitions for abolition and boycotts of goods in order to support their anti-slavery cause<sup>153</sup>.

Unfortunately, today petitions have lost their usefulness for post-nineteenth century civic action. Many also consider petitions to be a platform to resurrect a favorite television show that was cancelled, or just simply a waste of time. But for the women of Edenton, signing a petition was a big deal. These women performed a bold and potentially treasonous action when stepping outside of their role to participate in politics because they felt it was their duty.<sup>154</sup> They willingly affixed their names to a document that challenged the authority of Great Britain during a time when women were not universally allowed to participate in politics. The reason why it was

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<sup>151</sup> Robert J. Dinkin, *Before Equal Suffrage: Women in Partisan Politics from Colonial Times to 1920* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 12.

<sup>152</sup> Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 41.

<sup>153</sup> Historical Society of Philadelphia, "Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society," Accessed November 20, 2015, <https://hsp.org/sites/default/files/philadelphiafemaleanti-slaverysociety.pdf>.

<sup>154</sup> Troy Kickler, *The King's Troublemaker's: Edenton's Role in Creating a Nation and State* (Edenton, NC: Edenton Historical Commission, 2013), 18.

potentially treasonous is because they not only challenged British authority, but that they threatened action against Great Britain for failing to address their grievances.

Despite the unknowns and speculation surrounding the Edenton Tea Party, these women faced insults and criticism, and encouraged more women to stand up for themselves and their country unknowingly creating one of America's first women's organized political movement.

When discussing Revolutionary women's political movements, it is important to differentiate the Edenton Tea Party from the Daughters of Liberty, a female version of the Sons of Liberty. While the Daughters of Liberty were a significant force made up of women during the American Revolution, the Edenton Tea Party influenced other independent tea parties. The Daughters of Liberty, however, did not influence independent but similar events, but instead recruited women for their own organization. The women of Edenton however did not recognize how their tea party would influence others, or the criticism they would receive, within the colonies and throughout Britain. Nor did they recognize the fact that Barker's letter would become more influential in public opinion than the actual petition they signed.

## Chapter Four: Responses to the Edenton Tea Party

While the exact details of the Edenton Tea Party may be in question, it is undeniable that the petition, and more importantly Penelope Barker's letter, caused quite a stir within the colonies and Great Britain. Instead of effectively aiding reconciliation in London, the petition and accompanying letter seemed "to conservative men to signal the same social anarchy as the Boston Tea Party's destruction of private property."<sup>155</sup> This event was interpreted a violation of the established gender roles as they involved themselves in matters of state were only for men.<sup>156</sup> By crossing this line of established gender roles, the women of Edenton subjected themselves to hostility and ridicule, as seen through the cartoon distributed throughout Britain and the colonies, for knowingly signing their names to the petition calling for action against British policies.<sup>157</sup> However, despite the amount of ridicule the women of Edenton received it set off a chain reaction for other women to take a stand against British policies.

Arguably, the most recognizable aspect of the Edenton Tea Party is the famous cartoon of the women that pokes fun of women engaging in the male dominated sphere of politics. The cartoon is a wood-etch produced by an Englishman in response to the Edenton Tea Party petition and letter sent to London by Penelope Barker that was later reproduced in newspapers. He drew

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<sup>155</sup> Carol Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence* (New York: First Vintage Books, 2004), 22.

<sup>156</sup> Robert J. Dinkin, *Before Equal Suffrage: Women in Partisan Politics from Colonial Times to 1920* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 10.

<sup>157</sup> Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 279.

the women in this picture to intentionally look disfigured and resemble men. Not only were they disfigured, but the women in the cartoon were drawn with a condescending flare, and so were their actions.

They were portrayed as unfit mothers as shown with the child playing unattended underneath the table. One of the women signing the petition is entertaining a male suitor that is presumably not her husband, thus portraying the women as promiscuous. The women in the back is drawn drinking from a bowl and ignoring proper societal norms. The dough-faced slave in the picture is not shown as serving but fraternizing with the ladies. Finally, in the bottom right corner of the cartoon, there is a dog urinating on one of the ladies in a blatant sign of British disrespect for the ladies of Edenton.



"Political Cartoon of Edenton Tea Party."  
Image courtesy of *Learn NC*.

The cartoon also simplified Barker's letter, not the petition, to a resolution that stated "[w]e the ladies of Edenton do hereby solemnly engage not to conform to ye pernicious Custom of Drinking Tea or that we, the aforesaid Ladies, will not promote ye wear of any manufacture from England, until such time that all Acts which tend to enslave this our Native Country shall be repealed."<sup>158</sup> This resolution within the cartoon demonstrates that Barker's letter was more offensive than the petition itself. Creating the women to look imprudent had just as much to do

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<sup>158</sup> Edenton's Ladies Patriotic Guild, "Edenton Tea Party Petition," In *Ten Tea Parties: Patriotic Protests That History Forgot*, ed. Joseph Cummins, 169, (Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2012), 169.

with the fact that the British were unsympathetic to the colonial cause, particularly the Edenton Tea Party, as it did with the fact that the signers of the petition were women.

However, it was not just the British who made humor of the Edenton Tea Party, but also fellow Edentonians who were involved in politics and in Britain during this time. At the beginning of the year 1775, Arthur Iredell, who was sixteen at the time and eventually became a rector and overseer of a Jamaican plantation, sent a letter from London to his brother James Iredell, an Edenton resident who later became the first North Carolinian to serve on the United States Supreme Court, concerning the Edenton Tea Party. In his letter, Arthur told James that:

“I see, by the News Papers, the Edenton Ladies have signaled themselves, by their protest against Tea Drinking. The name Johnston among others; are any of my mister’s relations patriotic heroines? Is there a Female Congress at Edenton too? I hope not, for we Englishmen are afraid of the male Congress, but if the ladies, who have ever, since the Amazonian era, been esteemed the most formidable enemies, if they, I say, should attack us, the most fatal consequences to be dreaded. So dexterous in the handling of dart, each wound they give is mortal; whilst we, so unhappily formed by nature, the more we strive to conquer them, the more are conquered! The Edenton ladies, conscious, I suppose, of this superiority on their side, by former experience, are willing I imagine, to crush us into atoms, by their omnipotency; the only security, on our side, to prevent the impending ruin, that I can perceive, is the probability that there are but few places in America which possess so much female artillery as Edenton. Pray let me know all the particulars when you favor me with a letter.”<sup>159</sup>

During the Edenton Tea Party and the publication of the petition and Barker’s letter, Arthur Iredell was in England and witnessed the hostility and reactions to the Edenton Tea Party petition and Barker’s letter. His mention of tea drinking indicates that Barker’s letter was influential in developing his opinion, and therefore the general public’s opinion, towards the Edenton Tea Party. While the letter did not focus solely on the Edenton Tea Party, the section that discussed it contained sarcasm, as he simply responded the same way most of the British responded.

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<sup>159</sup> James Iredell, *The Papers of James Iredell*, ed. Don Higginbotham, Vol. I., (Raleigh, NC: Division of Archives and History Department of Cultural Resources, 1976), 282.



However, it is important to note that this letter's undertones show symptoms of the tension between the Patriot and Loyalist cause within families that became more evident as the hostilities broke out.<sup>160</sup> Iredell's letter demonstrates that "he dismissed the first stirrings of political awareness among American women as a joke, refusing to recognize the ways in which their concept of their role was changing."<sup>161</sup> While this is clearly a demonstration of his assertion of gender roles, there is also the possibility that class interests played a role in his response since the Edenton Tea Party was from not just elite but middling sorts as well.<sup>162</sup> It would not be proper for elite women to openly defy gender roles, and he illustrated his disdain for this actions when comparing the Edenton Tea Party to the Amazonian era. While many colonists, such as Arthur Iredell, disapproved of the Edenton Tea Party, there was another group of women inspired by the women's stand for liberty in Edenton.

Over a year after the Edenton Tea Party, another group of North Carolina women followed the example of the women in Edenton and took a political stand in Wilmington. The best glimpse into what the Wilmington Tea Party consisted of is through the journal of a traveler from Europe, Janet Schaw, who recorded the events of her journey to visit relatives in North Carolina, specifically Wilmington. When she first arrived into what was then "Wilmington" in the latter part of 1775, she attended a ball which she described as miserable: "[I was] dressed out in all my British airs with a high head and a hoop and trudging thro' the unpaved streets in embroidered shoes by the light of a lanthorn [sic] carried by a black wench half naked. No chair,

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<sup>160</sup> Sally Smith Booth, *Women of '76* (New York: Hastings House, 1973), 12.

<sup>161</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 163.

<sup>162</sup> Margaret Supplee Smith and Emily Herring Wilson, *North Carolina Women: Making History* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 50-1.

no carriage--good leather shoes need none. The ridicule was the silk shoes in such a place.”<sup>163</sup>

While she did not like the barbaric feel of the ball, particularly her walk to the ball, she did find acquaintance with a few of the women in Wilmington. Little did she know at the time, those same women were not as proper, in the British sense, as she had assumed.

While Schaw believed that she had gotten to know the women of Wilmington during the ball, she witnessed the exact opposite of cordiality and propriety when she observed the Wilmington Tea Party. In her journal, she wrote that “[t]he Ladies have burnt their tea in a solemn procession, but they had delayed however till the sacrifice was not very considerable, as I do not think any one offered above a quarter of a pound.”<sup>164</sup> Even though the women of Wilmington did not write a petition to King George, their motivations were to stand against the Tea Act of 1773. By choosing to burn tea in a public square at an unknown date sometime between late March and early April of 1775, around five months after the Edenton Tea Party, the ladies of Wilmington took a political stance against the king and his parliament’s legislation.<sup>165</sup> The Wilmington Tea Party was more similar in deed to the Boston Tea Party with a more physical representation of their grievances, yet more similar in intent to the ladies in Edenton.

Edenton and Wilmington were more conducive to political action as a result of these towns’ economic background. The socioeconomic differences between Edenton and Wilmington show the differing tendencies toward political violence. Edenton was a more established and wealthier city than Wilmington. Not only was Wilmington poorer, it was “a magnet for the

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<sup>163</sup> Janet Schaw, *Journal of a Lady of Quality: Being the Narrative of a Journey from Scotland to the West Indies, North Carolina, and Portugal, in the Years 1774 to 1776*, ed. Evangeline Walker Andrews, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1921), 153-4.

<sup>164</sup> Schaw, *Journal of a Lady of Quality*, 155.

<sup>165</sup> Joseph Cummins, *Ten Tea Parties: Patriotic Protests That History Forgot*, (Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2012), 176.

transplanted and dispossessed.”<sup>166</sup> The socioeconomic differences also point to more political instability in Wilmington in comparison to Edenton. Unlike Edenton, Wilmington was involved in boycotts and British protests since the Stamp Act in 1765.<sup>167</sup> Because of their past acts of violence in boycotts and protests, it is no surprise that the women of Wilmington actually burned their tea instead of the more peaceful approach that the women of Edenton took.

While the women of Wilmington chose a tad more violent route for their tea party, its ideological roots were in Edenton. Not only were the tea parties within a year of each other, the cities are located less than 200 miles apart. Edenton, a popular port town during the colonial era, is located in the north-eastern part of North Carolina, along the Albemarle Sound. Wilmington, which is another port town, is located in the south-eastern portion of North Carolina a few miles from the South Carolina border and directly on the coast. Because both towns are coastal port cities in North Carolina with female tea parties just five months apart, it is easy to speculate that the ladies of Wilmington were inspired by the women of Edenton due to the nature of the Revolutionary era and the fact that popular colonial newspapers, such as the *Virginia Gazette*, published the Edenton Tea Party petition. It is also begs the question of whether or not Barker’s letter was published throughout the colonies since her letter was more of a call to action towards women than the petition. Although there is not any evidence available today that demonstrates this, this leaves an opportunity for future research to find definitive connections between these tea parties.

It is important to note that it was not just women who the Edenton Tea Party influenced, but also men. And, even more so within their own town. Whether or not one agreed with such a

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<sup>166</sup> Cummins, *Ten Tea Parties*, 173.

<sup>167</sup> Cummins, *Ten Tea Parties*, 174-5.

bold political statement from women, it is undeniable that this courage was contagious. Many towns throughout the thirteen colonies were split between Patriots and Loyalists. However, Edenton did not completely fall within the status-quo as it became a stronghold for the Patriots.

Just two years after the Edenton Tea Party, the Battles of Lexington and Concord were fought and the colonies were on the cusp of declaring independence from Britain at the Second Continental Congress. It was during this tumultuous time that Edenton's men stood up in support of the Patriot cause both in Edenton and in North Carolina's legislative assembly.

The first of these actions was an oath of loyalty to the crown by the men of Edenton, some who were husbands to the women of the Edenton Tea Party, signed at St. Paul's Episcopal Church Vestry on June 19, 1776, just shy of two years after the Edenton Tea Party. While the first half of the oath was in regards to the minutes of their meeting, the other half outlined their allegiance to the Patriot cause despite their religious affiliations:

“We, the Subscribers, professing our Allegiance to the King and acknowledging the Constitutional executive power of Government do solemnly profess, testify and declare that we do absolutely believe that neither the Parliament of Great Britain nor any Member or constituent Branch thereof have a right to impose Taxes upon these Colonies to regulate the internal Policy thereof; and that all attempts by Fraud or Force to establish and exercise such claims & Powers are Violations of the Peace and Security of the People and ought to be resisted to the utmost, and that the People of this Province, singly and collectively, are bound by the Acts and Resolutions of the Continental and the Provincial Congresses because in both they are freely represented by persons chosen by themselves, and we do Solemnly and Sincerely promise and engage under the Sanction of Virtue, Honor and the Sacred Love of Liberty and our Country, to Maintain & Support all and every, the Acts, Resolutions & Regulations of the said Continental & Provincial Congresses to the utmost of our power and ability. In Testimony whereof we have hereto set our hands, this 19th of June, 1776.

RICHd HOSKINS  
DAVID RICE  
AARON HILL  
PELATIAH WALTON  
Wm HINTON  
THOS. BONNER  
Wm BOYD

THOS. BENBURY  
JACOB HUNTER  
JOHN BEASLEY  
WILLm BENNETT  
WILLIAM ROBERTS.”<sup>168</sup>

While this was an oath, its text resembles more of a resolution. The men emphasized that Great Britain did not have the right to tax the colonies because there was not colonial representation in Parliament. At this time, these men were a part of the Church of England of which the King was the Head of the Church. Therefore, this oath indirectly challenged the Head of the Church by supporting the Continental and Provincial Congresses’ actions. They willingly risked excommunication from the Church in the name of the Patriot cause, in addition to charges of treason.

While there is no direct evidence of a connection between this oath and the Edenton Tea Party petition, it is hard to deny that these men did not have recollection of the actions of their wives, mothers, sisters, cousins, and friends. Both of these documents took bold action against the Crown in a public way that threatened the status-quo. As women were not allowed within the political realm, by signing this oath, these men placed their political beliefs over that of their religious practices.

Five months after the men of Edenton signed this petition at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Edenton men participated in the Patriot cause on a larger scale. With the completion of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, the colonies moved away from British rule after years of increased taxation and erosion of autonomy.<sup>169</sup> North Carolina not only saw its need for

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<sup>168</sup> St. Paul's Episcopal Church Vestry, “Minutes of the Vestry of St. Paul's Parish, Chowan County,” in Documenting the American South, University of Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, accessed April 3, 2015, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr10-0263>.

<sup>169</sup> One Edentonian, Joseph Hewes, was a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

independence but also its need to create a new structure of government. On November 12, 1776 during the Congress at Halifax, the state constitution of North Carolina was formed declaring North Carolina's independence from Britain with the help of delegates from Edenton: James Blount, Thomas Benbury, Thomas Jones, Luke Sumner, and Jacob Hunter.<sup>170</sup> Two of these delegates, Mr. Benbury and Mr. Hunter, also signed the petition at St. Paul's Episcopal Church. As would be expected Edenton continued to play a critical role in the new state's political climate just as it had during the colonial period.

Despite the ridicule and insults garnered from their political action, the women of Edenton's influence is clearly seen within the first two years of signing their petition. Not only did other North Carolina women stand up in response to British offenses, but the men of Edenton did as well as the American Revolution began in 1776 through swearing their allegiance to the Patriot cause at St. Paul's Episcopal Church and participating in the Halifax Congress which declared North Carolina's independence. While most of the influence of the Edenton Tea Party remained within the era of the American Revolution, one should not discount the affect the fifty-one women of Edenton, who signed the petition taking a stand against British policy, would have on future generations of women.

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<sup>170</sup> John H. Wheeler, *Historical Sketches of North Carolina from 1584 to 1851*, (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1851), 90.

## **Conclusion: The Courage, Loyalty, and Sacrifice of the Edenton Tea Party**

Since the eighteenth-century, the Edenton Tea Party became obscure and typically only a brief mention in books regarding the role of women in the Revolution. However, these women deserve to be remembered for their impact not only on the Revolution, but for their unbeknownst impact on the feminism, too. On October 25, 1774, fifty-one women gathered to publicly boycott tea and other British products as a result of their common belief in Britain's taxation policies and ignorance of colonial autonomy in light of North Carolina's First Provincial Congress Resolutions. The Edenton Tea Party was not isolated, nor did it happen spontaneously like it is often assumed. This event was an intentional action that inspired other events and was a result of the influence of their town, families, and colony.

Edenton was a thriving port town due to its location on the Albemarle Sound. It was also a hotbed of colonial politics that served as one of North Carolina's capitals. Because of this, there were families of political and economic means that not only influenced local policy, but colonial and eventually national policy as well. It is no surprise that the Edenton Tea Party occurred in such a prominent area. In the aftermath of the Tea Party, the petition was sent to Britain and internationalized the event leading to public ridicule, but also inspiration for future acts of Patriotism within North Carolina among women and men. Through the examination of the location, women involved, petition, and documented reaction to the Edenton Tea Party, one can understand how and why such a remarkable event that inspires women and men for hundreds of years afterwards to remember their brave, yet treasonous work.

Edenton's influence on the Edenton Tea Party was more than just geographical.

However, geography played a large role in influencing the Edenton Tea Party. Edenton is located

on the Albemarle Sound and within proximity of early American settlements, including the Lost Roanoke Colony and Jamestown. From the beginning, Edenton was situated for political involvement and historical remembrance. Because of its location, Edenton's economy flourished as it was one of North Carolina's port towns and dotted with plantations throughout the area due to the fertile land in the region. These factors led to Edenton eventually becoming a capital of North Carolina for a brief period of time, specifically 1722-1743, before it moved to New Bern. It was also the home to several prominent political families, including the Eden family and Johnston family.<sup>171</sup> Leading up to the American Revolution, many of the men in Edenton were politically active in colonial politics, including Thomas Barker, the third husband of the traditionally accepted leader of the Edenton Tea Party, Penelope Barker.

The men of Edenton clearly influenced the women of Edenton through their connections as husbands, brothers, cousins, and friends. Many of the men in the lives of the fifty-one signers were politically active or had influence as merchants or planters who were directly affected by British taxation policies. These socio-economic influences should not be discounted as it provided the women of Edenton with more social capital to pull off such an event. Although only twelve of the signers have records that provide biographical information, this sampling provides insight to these socio-economic influences. One signer, Mary Blount, was married to the rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, who was also a wealthy planter with multiple plantations. Another signer, Anne Horniblow, was married to the owner of an inn within Edenton that provided an audience with merchants and politicians regularly. Elizabeth Beasley was married to a farmer of middling sorts. Two of the signers had familial connection to the Johnston family,

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<sup>171</sup> Both families included men who were colonial governors of North Carolina, such as Charles Eden and Gabriel Johnston.



Margaret Cathcart and Penelope Dawson. Three other signers, Sarah Littlejohn, Elizabeth Ormond, and Ruth Benbury, did not have much information available but were married to either plantation owners, attorneys, or known for their charitable work throughout the community. Winifred Hoskins, another signer and presumably the secretary was married to a plantation owner and Penelope Barker was the daughter of a plantation owner and married three different times to attorneys and plantation owners.

These connections show that the socio-economic factors not only afforded the opportunity for these women to engage in politics, but for the men in their lives to as well. Without financial stability, men could not engage in such a leisurely activity, such as politics, which required them to leave their plantations or work for varying periods of time. One such example of political activity was when men from Edenton, including, Samuel Johnston, Thomas Oldham, Thomas Benbury, Thomas Jones, Luke Sumner and Jacob Hunter, attended an “assembly of the people adverse to the royal authority” in New Bern on the August 25<sup>th</sup>, 1774 in response to the Tea and Coercive Acts forced by Britain upon the colonies without their consent, otherwise known as the First Provincial Congress.<sup>172</sup> It is highly likely that this event influenced the fifty-one women of the Edenton Tea Party as the petition was signed just two months later and included incredibly similar wording.

The Edenton Tea Party’s petition included a mention of the sense of duty and importance of making a public declaration in a similar sentiment, style, and wording as the Provincial Congress Resolutions. However, the petition did not include a list of resolutions that included grievances and consequences for not addressing them. The petition did not even mention tea.

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<sup>172</sup> John H. Wheeler, *Historical Sketches of North Carolina from 1584 to 1851*, (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1851), 90.

Also, it is important to note that the petition itself was gender neutral in nature commanding more respectability than Barker's covertly feminist charged letter attached to the petitions sent to Great Britain. Barker's letter directly addressed the boycotted items, including tea, and indirectly called women to join the boycott through her assertion that her fellow countrywomen were standing with their husbands in the protest of British usurpations of colonial rights and privileges.

The women of Edenton's courageous act of signing a petition and then sending it throughout the colonies, via the *Virginia Gazette*, and then Britain, via the *London Advertiser* and the *Morning Chronicle*, not only warranted criticism due to their intentional participation in the male-dominated sphere of politics, but also potentially inspired other men and women in North Carolina to the Patriot cause.

The most notable demonstration of critique was the famous cartoon from London that depicts the women as men and satirizes their political action. However, the resolution within the cartoon demonstrates that Barker's letter was potentially more influential in public perception of the Edenton Tea Party than the petition itself. Another critique was found through a letter to fellow Edentonian, James Iredell. Arthur Iredell, James' brother who lived in London at the time of the petition's British publication, wrote a letter to James that sarcastically addressed the Edenton Tea Party while inquiring for more details regarding the event.

However, despite these criticisms and ridicule, the women of Edenton potentially inspired others to political action against British policies. Within a year of the Edenton Tea Party, the Wilmington Tea Party occurred with a group of women in one of North Carolina's other port towns where they set fire to tea in the middle of the town in demonstration of the Tea Act. Within two years of the Edenton Tea Party and in two separate occasions, the men of

Edenton publicly stood against the British first at St. Paul's Episcopal Church and second as delegates to the congress that drew up the North Carolina state constitution.

One of the greatest accomplishments of the Enlightenment era was the American Revolution, where the colonists stood up to the British government in demand of their rights as influenced by these thinkers. However, most believed that these rights were only guaranteed to men. Even the documents underlying the American Revolution did not specify, nor did the writers intend to, extend these rights to women.<sup>173</sup>

Not only was the Edenton Tea Party was a part of the Revolutionary cause, it was during the American Revolution that women increasingly took a political stance that evolved towards the women's liberation movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. Women stepped up throughout the Revolution to aid the Patriot cause through their vocal and physical support and proved "themselves capable of political commitment, of patriotic action, and, in the nonconsumption of British goods, of political morality in eschewing luxury and abandoning frivolity."<sup>174</sup> Women, who owned property, in some states during this period could vote; however, this did not last for long and was quickly rescinded.

These women who took a political stance during the Revolution were continuously reminded that they were not caring for their families by doing so.<sup>175</sup> Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the concept of "Republican Motherhood" would be introduced as a middle-ground of sorts for women in the wake of the American Revolution.

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<sup>173</sup> Lisa L. Moore and Joana Brooks, "Introduction," in *Transatlantic Feminisms in the Age of Revolutions*, eds. Lisa L. Moore, Joana Brooks, and Caroline Wigginton, 3-34 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 14.

<sup>174</sup> Carol Berkin, *First Generations: Women of Colonial America*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 198.

<sup>175</sup> Robert J. Dinkin, *Before Equal Suffrage: Women in Partisan Politics from Colonial Times to 1920*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 5.

The women of Edenton did not fit into this new postwar identity that continually emphasized the importance of men in the realm of politics while intentionally excluding women.<sup>176</sup> Despite the Revolution being a political experience for women, men intentionally created the concept of Republic Motherhood to keep women in the home while creating a false sense of political participation.<sup>177</sup> American men championed the concept of Republican Motherhood designed to target “the maternal role but with the entire moral reach of domesticity: the education of sons, the refinement of ale manners, [and] the promotion of national virtue.”<sup>178</sup> Instead of granting women the ability to participate in politics, they exploited one of their traditional roles as a mother who stays at home to raise her children as good citizens for the sake of American politics. It would not be until the twentieth century that women were allowed to actively participate in politics in in America with the right to vote. However, women in America continued, although without realizing it at times, the legacy of the fifty-one women from Edenton in pursuit of equality.

These women of Edenton were the ideal definition of a Patriot, despite their gender.<sup>179</sup> Not only did they emanate the values of the American Revolution, but also the future Feminist movement through their courage, loyalty, and sacrifice. These women demonstrated courage as they gathered to sign a petition that not only defied the societal norms in regards to politics, but also the British government knowing that their actions could be considered treasonous. The

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<sup>176</sup> Cynthia Kierner, “The Edenton Ladies: Women, Tea, and Politics in Revolutionary North Carolina,” in *North Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times*, (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2014), 25.

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<sup>178</sup> Sarah Knott, “Benjamin Rush’s Ferment: Enlightenment Medicine and Female Citizenship in Revolutionary America,” in *Women, Gender, and Enlightenment*, eds. Barbara Taylor and Sarah Knott (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 658.

<sup>179</sup> Mary Dawes Staples, “The Edenton Tea Party,” *American Monthly Magazine* XXXI, no. 2 (August 1907), 356.

Edenton Tea Party demonstrated loyalty, not only to their colony, but to the women they stood together with by signing their names and associating themselves together with the petition. Ultimately, sacrifice is found in the actions of the Edenton Tea Party by their recognition that their actions could isolate them from their families, friends, and community due to stepping across the political boundaries set in place by society. It was through the fifty-one women of Edenton's courage, loyalty, and sacrifice that the groundwork was laid for feminism and gender equality.<sup>180</sup> It is because of these character traits that the Edenton Tea Party should be remembered throughout generations.

The Edenton Tea Party also demonstrates the importance of Edenton in the discussion of the American Revolution. Typically, the study of the Revolution focuses on New England cities of Boston and Philadelphia, and occasionally on Charlestown. However, there were more Southern cities than Charleston who were active in the Revolution, including Edenton. Not only was Edenton in the heart of colonial settlement, it was an intellectual, political, and economic hub for North Carolina and one of the largest cities until the Revolution in the colony. Not only was the Edenton Tea Party a product of Edenton's influence, but so were James Iredell, the first North Carolinian to serve on the United States Supreme Court, and Joseph Hewes, a signer of the Declaration Independence.

Growing up in North Carolina meant that Civil War and Revolutionary history was always around the corner. However, it was a visit to Edenton that led to this recognition of the town's importance. Today, Edenton is a small retirement town on the Albemarle Sound that is like a trip to the past. On almost every street in the downtown area, there is at least one building that predates the Revolution and is beautifully preserved. As a child, I remember my mother

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<sup>180</sup> Margaret Supplee Smith and Emily Herring Wilson, *North Carolina Women: Making History*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), x.

insisting on a detour to Edenton on a trip to the Outer Banks. I remember riding through the streets of Edenton and thinking about how beautiful the town was as my mother told me about the Edenton Tea Party and Penelope Barker. Recently, I revisited Edenton for research and took more time to explore the important sites that involve the Edenton Tea Party or its signers: the Barker House, the Cupola House, and the tea pot that marks the location of Elizabeth King's home. Not only are these locations beautifully preserved and commemorated, they serve as a reminder of the importance of utilizing public history to preserve the past and accent scholarly history. It is through public history that the public gains easy access to historical events and people. In Edenton, the preservation of these locations not only spark interests in a somewhat forgotten event, such as the Edenton Tea Party.

## Appendix

“Resolutions by inhabitants of Chowan County concerning resistance to Parliamentary taxation and the Provincial Congress of North Carolina”

Proceedings of Freeholders in Chowan County, 22nd August, 1774.

At a very respectable and numerous Meeting of the Freeholders of the County of Chowan and Town of Edenton, and other Inhabitants of the said County and Town, at the Court House in Edenton on the 22nd day of August in the year of our Lord 1774 the Revd Mr Daniel Earl in the chair.

We profess and testify our allegiance to his most sacred Majesty King George the third, our most gracious Sovereign whom we will at all times support in the just & legal exercise of the powers vested in him by the British Constitution, for the good of his people to the utmost of our Power.

Resolved, That it is the natural right of mankind to enjoy and possess the property acquired by their labour and industry, until they consent to part from it, that this right is amply secured to every British Subject by the Fundamental Laws and Constitution of Great Britain; and that the Inhabitants of this Province are intitled to all Liberties, Franchises and Privileges of his Majesty's British Subjects.

Resolved, That all Acts of the British Parliament imposing Taxes or Duties, for the purpose of raising a revenue, to be paid by the Inhabitants of this, or any other of His Majesty's Colonies in America, are arbitrary and unjust, tending to create unhappy jealousies between his Majesty's British and American Subjects, and to destroy our natural rights and privileges, confirmed and guaranteed, by Royal Charter to our Ancestors and their Posterity.

Resolved, That the Act for stopping up the Port of Boston is highly unjust, oppressive and unworthy the British Legislature in as much as it must have been obtained from misinformation, and from suggestions, if not altogether groundless, highly exaggerated. That the act for the better regulating the government of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay in North America, is an attempt to dissolve a Contract most solemnly entered into by the present Ancestors of the Massachusetts Bay with their Sovereign; a contract wch ought to be held inviolable, without the mutual consent of King and People; That if the King and Parliament continue to exercise this power, none of the Colonies may expect to enjoy their rights and Privileges longer than they approve themselves obsequious to the Dependants on Administration. That the Act for the impartial Administration of justice in the cases of Persons questioned for any Acts done by them in their execution of the Laws, or for the suppression of Riots and Tumults in the Province of the Massachusetts Bay, in New England, puts it in the power of a cruel and despotic Governor, wantonly to sport with the lives of His Majesty's subjects in that Province with impunity.

Resolved, That the above Acts are a dreadful presage of what we have to apprehend from a Legislature which claims a power of making Statutes to bind the Inhabitants of the Colonies in all cases whatsoever.

Resolved, That the most probable means of defeating the baneful purposes intended to be carried into execution under the above Acts is, to promote and encourage the Manufactures of this Country by wearing them ourselves and using them in our families, and to avoid, as much as possible, the purchase of any British or India Wares or Manufactures.

Resolved, That Samuel Johnston, Thomas Oldham, Thomas Jones, Thomas Benbury, Thomas Hunter and Joseph Hewes Esqrs be appointed to represent this County and Town at the meeting of the Delegates from the several Counties in this Province at Newbern the 25th instant to deliberate on the most effectual means of providing against the evils which threaten our Constitution, and to appoint Delegates to represent this Province at a General Congress of Deputies from all the American Colonies at Philadelphia.

Resolved, That we will faithfully observe and endeavor to carry into execution, all Orders and Resolutions entered into by the Delegates, both in the Provincial and General Congress (saving our allegiance to his Majesty).



## “The First Provincial Congress of North Carolina Resolutions”

We his Majesty’s most dutiful and Loyal Subjects, the deputies from the several Counties and Towns, of the Province of North Carolina, impressed with the most sacred respect for the British Constitution, and resolved to maintain the succession of the House of Hanover, as by law Established, and avowing our inviolable and unshaken Fidelity to our sovereign, and entertaining a sincere regard for our fellow subjects in Great Britain viewing with the utmost abhorrence every attempt which may tend to disturb the peace and good order of this Colony, or to shake the fidelity of his Majesty’s subjects resident here, but at the same time conceiving it a duty which we owe to ourselves and to posterity, in the present alarming state of British America, when our most essential rights are invaded by powers unwarrantably assumed by the Parliament of Great Britain to declare our sentiments in the most public manner, lest silence should be construed as acquiescence, and that we patiently submit to the Burdens which they have thought fit to impose upon us.

Resolved, That His Majesty George the third is lawful and rightful King of Great Britain, and the dominions thereunto belonging, and of this province as part thereof, and that we do bear faithful and true allegiance unto him as our lawful sovereign, that we will to the utmost of our power, maintain and defend the succession of the House of Hanover as by law established against the open or private attempts of any person or persons whatsoever.

Resolved, That we claim no more than the rights of Englishmen, without diminution or abridgement, that it is our indispensable duty and will be our constant endeavour, to maintain those rights to the utmost of our power consistently with the loyalty which we owe our sovereign, and sacred regard for the British Constitution.

Resolved, That it is the very essence of the British Constitution that no subject should be taxed but by his own consent, freely given by himself in person or by his legal representatives, and that any other than such a taxation is highly derogatory to the rights of a subject and a gross violation of the grand charter of our liberties.

Resolved, That as the British subjects resident in North America, have nor can have any representation in the Parliament of Great Britain, Therefore any act of Parliament imposing a tax is illegal and unconstitutional, That our Provincial Assemblies, the King by his governors constituting one branch thereof, solely and exclusively possess that right.

Resolved, That the duties imposed by several acts of the British Parliament, upon Tea and other articles consumed in America for the purpose of raising a revenue, are highly illegal and oppressive, and that the late Exportation of tea by the East India Company to different parts of America was intended to give effect to one of the said Acts and thereby establish a precedent highly dishonorable to America and to obtain an implied assent to the powers which Great Britain had unwarrantably assumed of levying a tax upon us without our consent.

Resolved, That the inhabitants of the Massachusetts province have distinguished themselves in a manly support of the rights of America in general and that the cause in which they suffer is the

Cause of every honest American who deserves the Blessings which the Constitution holds forth to them....

The act of Parliament commonly called the Boston Port Act, as it tends to shut up the Port of Boston and thereby effectually destroy its Trade and deprive the Merchants and Manufacturers of a subsistence which they have hitherto procured by an honest industry, as it takes away the Wharves, Quays and other property of many individuals, by rendering it useless to them, and as the duration of this Act depends upon Circumstances founded merely in opinion, and in their nature indeterminate, and thereby may make the miseries it carries with it even perpetual,

Resolved therefore that it is the most cruel infringement of the rights and privileges of the people of Boston, both as men, and members of the British Government.

Resolved, That the late Act of Parliament for regulating the Police of that province is an infringement of the Charter right granted them by their Majesties, King William and Queen Mary, and tends to lessen that sacred confidence which ought to be placed in the Acts of Kings.

Resolved, That trial by Juries of the vicinity is the only lawful inquest that can pass upon the life of a British subject and that it is a right handed down to us from the earliest stages confirmed and sanctified by Magna Charta itself that no freeman shall be taken and imprisoned or dispossessed of his free tenement and Liberties or outlawed or banished or otherwise hurt or injured unless by the legal judgment of his peers or by the law of the Land, and therefore all who suffer otherwise are not victims to public justice but fall a sacrifice to the powers of Tyranny and highhanded oppression.

Resolved, That the Bill for altering the administration of justice in certain criminal cases, within the province of Massachusetts Bay as it empowers the Governors thereof to send to Great Britain for trial all persons who in aid of his Majestys officers shall commit any capital offence is fraught with the highest injustice and partiality and will tend to produce frequent bloodshed of its inhabitants, as this act furnishes an opportunity to commit the most atrocious Crimes with the Greatest probability of impunity.

Resolved, That we will not directly or indirectly after the first day of January 1775 import from Great Britain any East India Goods, or any merchandize whatever, medicines excepted, nor will we after that day import from the West Indies or elsewhere any East India or British Goods or Manufactures, nor will we purchase any such articles so imported of any person or persons whatsoever, except such as are now in the Country or may arrive on or before the first day of January 1775.

Resolved, That unless American Grievances are redressed before the first day of October 1775, We will not after that day directly or indirectly export Tobacco, Pitch, Tar, Turpentine, or any other article whatsoever, to Great Britain, nor will we sell any such articles as we think can be exported to Great Britain, with a prospect of Gain to any Person or Persons whatever with a design of putting it in his or their power to export the same to Great Britain either on our own, his, or their account.

Resolved, That we will not import any slave or slaves, nor purchase any slave or slaves imported or brought into this province by others from any part of the world after the first day of November next.

Resolved, That we will not use nor suffer East India Tea to be used in our Families after the tenth day of September next, and that we will consider all persons in this province not complying with this resolve to be enemies to their Country.

Resolved, That the Venders of Merchandize within this province ought not to take advantage of the Resolves relating to non importation in this province or elsewhere but ought to sell their Goods or Merchandize which they have or may hereafter import, at the same rates they have been accustomed to sell them within three months last past.

Resolved, That the people of this province will break off all trade, Commerce, and dealings, and will not maintain any, the least trade, dealing or Commercial intercourse, with any Colony on this Continent, or with any city or town, or with any individual in such Colony, City or town, which shall refuse, decline, or neglect to adopt and carry into execution such General plan, as shall be agreed to in the Continental Congress.

Resolved, That we approve of the proposal of a General Congress to be held in the City of Philadelphia, on the 20th of September next, then and there to deliberate upon the present state of British America and to take such measures as they may deem prudent to effect the purpose of describing with certainty the Rights of Americans, repairing the breaches made in those rights and for guarding them for the future from any such violations done under the sanction of public authority.

Resolved, That William Hooper, Joseph Hewes and Richard Caswell Esquires, and every of them be Deputies to attend such Congress, and they are hereby invested with such powers as may make any Act done by them or consent given in behalf of this province Obligatory in honor upon every inhabitant thereof who is not an alien to his Country's good and an apostate to the liberties of America....

Resolved, That every future provincial meeting when any division shall happen the method to be observed shall be to vote by the Counties and Towns (having a right to send members to Assembly) that shall be represented at every such meeting; and it is recommended to the deputies of the several Counties, That a Committee of five persons be chosen in each County by such persons as accede to this association to take effectual care that these Resolves be properly observed and to correspond occasionally with the Provincial Committee of Correspondence of this province.

Resolved, That each and every County in this Province raise as speedily as possible the sum of twenty pounds Proclamation money and pay the same into the hands of Richard Caswell Esquire to be by him equally divided among the Deputies appointed to attend the General Congress at Philadelphia as a recompense for their trouble and expense in attending the said Congress.

Resolved, That the moderator of this meeting and in case of his death Samuel Johnston Esquire be impowered on any future occasion that may in his opinion require it to convene the several deputies of this province which now are or hereafter shall be chosen, at such time and place as he shall think proper, or in case of the death or absence of any deputy it is recommended that another be chosen in his stead.

Resolved, That the following instructions for the deputies appointed to meet in General Congress on the part of this Colony to wit: That they express their most sincere attachment to our most gracious sovereign King George the third, and our determined resolution to support his Lawful authority in this Province, at the same time we cannot depart from a steady adherence to the first law of Nature, a firm and resolute defence of our persons and properties against all unconstitutional encroachments whatever....

That they concur with the Deputies or Delegates from the other Colonies, in such regulation, address or remonstrance, as may be deemed most probable to restore a lasting harmony, and good understanding with Great Britain, a circumstance we most sincerely and ardently desire and that they agree with a majority of them in all necessary measures, for promoting a redress of such grievances as may come under their consideration.

Resolved, That the thanks of this meeting be given to the Hon. John Harvey Esquire Moderator for his faithful exercise of that office and the services he has thereby rendered to this Province and the Friends of America in General.

JOHN HARVY, Moderator.

Richard Cogdell  
Wm Thomson  
Solomon Perkins  
Nathan Joyner  
Sam. Jarvis  
Sam. Johnston  
Thos. Benbury  
Thos. Jones  
Thos. Oldham  
Thos. Hunter  
Ferqd Campbell  
M. Hunt  
Nick Long  
Benj. Williams  
William Hooper  
Wm Cray  
Thos. Harvey  
Edward Everigin  
Edward Salter  
Sam. Young  
Joseph Spruil  
Joseph Hewes  
John Geddy

Sam Spencer  
Wm Thomas  
Roger Ormond  
Thos. Respass, Jr  
Wm Salter  
Walter Gibson  
Wm Person  
Green Hill  
R. Howe  
John Campbell  
James Coor  
Sam. Smith  
Willie Jones  
Benj. Patten  
Allen Jones  
Benj. Harvey  
J. Whedbee  
Joseph Reading  
Wm Kennon  
David Jenkins  
Abner Nash  
Francis Clayton  
Edward Smythwick  
Lemuel Hatch  
Thomas Rutherford  
R. Caswell  
Wm McKinnie  
Geo. Miller  
Simon Bright  
Thos Gray  
Thos Hicks  
James Kenan  
William Dickson  
Thos. Person  
Rothias Latham  
Needham Bryan  
John Ashe  
Thomas Hart  
Andrew Knox  
Joseph Jones  
John Simpson  
Moses Winslow  
Robert Alexander  
I. Edwards  
William Brown  
Jeremiah Frasier

“Extract of a letter from North Carolina, Oct. 27 and Edenton Tea Party Petition”

The Provincial Deputies of North Carolina having resolved not to drink any more tea, nor wear any more British cloth, &c. many ladies of this Province have determined to give a memorable proof of their patriotism, and have accordingly entered into the following honourable and spirited association. I send it to you, to shew your fair countrywomen, how zealously and faithfully American ladies follow the laudable example of their husbands, and what opposition your Ministers may expect to receive from a people thus firmly united against them:

Edenton, North Carolina, Oct. 25, 1774.

As we cannot be indifferent on any occasion that appears nearly to affect the peace and happiness of our country, and as it has been thought necessary, for the public good, to enter into several particular resolves by a meeting of Members deputed from the whole Province, it is a duty which we owe, not only to our near and dear connections who have concurred in them, but to ourselves who are essentially interested in their welfare, to do every thing as far as lies in our power to testify our sincere adherence to the same; and we do therefore accordingly subscribe this paper, as a witness of our fixed intention and solemn determination to do so.

Abigail Charlton  
Mary Blount  
F. Johnstone  
Elizabeth Creacy  
Margaret Cathcart  
Elizabeth Patterson  
Anne Johnstone  
Jane Wellwood  
Margaret Pearson  
Mary Woolard  
Penelope Dawson  
Sarah Beasley  
Jean Blair  
Susannah Vail  
Grace Clayton  
Elizabeth Vail  
Frances Hall  
Elizabeth Vail  
Mary Jones  
Mary Creacy  
Anne Hall  
Mary Creacy  
Rebecca Bondfield  
Ruth Benbury  
Sarah Littlejohn  
Sarah Howcott

Penelope Barker  
Sarah Hoskins  
Elizabeth P. Ormond  
Mary Littlele  
M. Payne  
Sarah Valentine  
Elizabeth Johnston  
Elizabeth Cricket  
Mary Bonner  
Elizabeth Green  
Lydia Bonner  
Mary Ramsay  
Sarah Howe  
Anne Horniblow  
Lydia Bennet  
Mary Hunter  
Marion Wells  
Tresia Cunningham  
Anne Anderson  
Elizabeth Roberts  
Sarah Mathews  
Elizabeth Roberts  
Anne Haughton  
Elizabeth Roberts  
Elizabeth Beasley

“Minutes of the Vestry of St. Paul's Parish, Chowan County, June 19, 1776”

Proceedings of a Vestry meeting in St. Paul's Parish on 19th June, 1776.

Be it remembered that the Freeholders of St. Paul's Parish met the Sheriff at the Court House in Edenton on Monday the 8th of April, then & there pursuant to an Act of Assembly did Elect the following Persons to serve as Vestry men for one year (agreeable to resolve of the Provincial Congress held at Halifax the 2d April and Qualified agreeable thereto) Vizt: Thomas Bonner, Wm Boyd, Thomas Benbury, Jacob Hunter, John Beasley, Wm Bennett, Wm Roberts, Richd Hoskins, David Rice, Aaron Hill, Pelatiah Walton, WmHinton.

We, the Subscribers, professing our Allegiance to the King and acknowledging the Constitutional executive power of Government do solemnly profess, testify and declare that we do absolutely believe that neither the Parliament of Great Britain nor any Member or constituent Branch thereof have a right to impose Taxes upon these Colonies to regulate the internal Policy thereof; and that all attempts by Fraud or Force to establish and exercise such claims & Powers are Violations of the Peace and Security of the People and ought to be resisted to the utmost, and that the People of this Province, singly and collectively, are bound by the Acts and Resolutions of the Continental and the Provincial Congresses because in both they are freely represented by persons chosen by themselves, and we do Solemnly and Sincerely promise and engage under the Sanction of Virtue, Honor and the Sacred Love of Liberty and our Country, to Maintain & Support all and every, the Acts, Resolutions & Regulations of the said Continental & Provincial Congresses to the utmost of our power and ability. In Testimony whereof we have hereto set our hands, this 19th of June, 1776.

RICHd HOSKINS  
DAVID RICE  
AARON HILL  
PELATIAH WALTON  
Wm HINTON  
THOS. BONNER  
Wm BOYD  
THOS. BENBURY  
JACOB HUNTER  
JOHN BEASLEY  
WILLm BENNETT  
WILLIAM ROBERTS.



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