The "Edenton Tea Party" [1]

By Kelly Agan, N.C. Government & Heritage Library, 2018

Two months after North Carolina's First Provincial Congress [2] organized and adopted resolutions opposing the actions of Parliament, a group of North Carolina women made their own revolutionary political statement. It is one of the earliest examples in America of women organizing to influence laws, regulations, or customs. At the time, politics was considered a sphere for men only, and participation by women was considered improper.

On October 25, 1774, fifty-one women in Edenton resolved to stop buying English imports and pledged to support the actions and resolutions of North Carolina's Provincial Congress. Their resolves were an historic step for colonists, who relied on tea, cloth and other goods that came from British trade. A few weeks later, their statement was printed in the November 3 edition of The Virginia Gazette, the local paper published in Williamsburg, Virginia. The names of the fifty-one women were published below their statement. And it did not take long for news of the event to reach a wider audience in London: in January of 1775, the statement published in the Gazette appeared in a London paper, the Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser. And shortly after that, a London engraver created a cartoon satirizing the women for their patriotic action.

Historians credit one of the women, Penelope Barker [3], as a significant coordinator of the women's effort. Her husband, Thomas Barker [4], was an Edenton Lawyer and at one time a member of the Colonial Assembly.

In the late 19th century, a local Edenton historian re-invented the actions of the Edenton women as a "tea party". Since then it has remained known as the "Edenton Tea Party," although it very likely did not involve tea or a party. It was a bold demonstration of patriotism and a unique example of political organization by colonial women.

See the transcription of this statement by the women of Edenton, published in the November 3, 1774 edition of The Virginia Gazette below.

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.

Abagail 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 Littledle
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 Beasly

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Penelope Barker [3]

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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 duty which we owe, not only to our own and dear Countrymen, who have concurred in them, but to ourselves, who are essentially interested in their Welfare, to do everything as far as in our Power to satisfy our Means Adherence to the same; and do therefore accordingly resolve this Paper, as a Warrant of our solemn Determination to do so.

A. BARKER
F. JOHNSON
S. C. REESE
M. B. DAVIS
J. BR. CLAY
T. S. HALL
M. J. HALL
M. K. K. HALL
M. L. HALIL
M. R. H. HALL
M. R. C. HALL
S. S. R. HALL
J. M. S. HALL
J. S. S. HALL
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