

Pre-Revolutionary Action by Orange County Men

In the years preceding the Revolutionary War, Virginia was a hotbed of activism. This narrative from Historian William H.B. Thomas's "Patriots of the Upcountry" records the events in Virginia and shows how Orange County supported the cause for independence within the context of Virginia history. This is a companion piece to "Orange County Men Fight in the Revolution" and "The British in Orange County during the Revolution".

The House of Burgesses, December 1764:

At this last session of the Burgesses for the year, Virginia Governor Francis Fauquier thanked the representatives for their "filial Respect and Duty to his Majesty". However, a few days earlier the burgesses had unanimously adopted an address to the British king, a memorial [legal abstract] to the House of Lords and a grievance to the House of Commons in response to a proposal to charge stamp duties for American colonists. In their memorial to the Lords, the burgesses reminded them of one of Britain's Constitutional principles: "... the People are not subject to any Taxes but such as are laid on them by their own Consent, or by those who are legally appointed to represent them."¹ It was reaffirmation from the Virginia colony that there should be no taxation without representation.

Nevertheless and in spite of the plea from their Virginia subjects, the British enacted the Stamp Act three months later on **March 22, 1765.**²

The House of Burgesses in Williamsburg, May 1, 1765:

The business of this session was accomplished quickly as many county representatives wanted to leave early to look after their affairs at home. On May 29th, as the legislators stood in small groups waiting for the session to begin, the British Stamp Act was on their minds. **In attendance during this session were the two Orange County burgesses--James Taylor and James Walker.** Also in attendance were John Robinson, the Speaker; General Peyton Randolph, "Mr. Attorney"; Richard Bland, a scholarly lawyer; George Wythe, lawyer and teacher of Thomas Jefferson; James Barbour and John Field of Culpeper; Dr. Thomas Walker and Henry Fry of Albemarle; and Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry of Louisa. On this day routine matters were quickly disposed of and business turned to the Stamp Act which had become law. The burgesses knew that a response of defiance towards the British King and Parliament would be dangerous.³

House members from the Tidewater were considered to be the Old Guard while Taylor, Walker and representatives from Culpeper, Louisa, Albemarle and lands beyond the Blue Ridge were from the Upcountry and not members of the inner circle. Nevertheless, the Upcountry men were eager to participate in shaping the government and looking for a leader. When 29 year old

¹ William H.B. Thomas, "Patriots of the Upcountry" (Orange, Virginia: Orange County Bicentennial Commission, 1976), 3.

² Mr. Thomas's original text did not contain bold dates or references. They were added for emphasis to this document.

³ *Ibid.*, 4.

Patrick Henry, a member of the House of Burgesses for only nine days, rose to speak during this session, he became that Upcountry leader. He said, “Caesar had his Brutus, Charles the First his Cromwell, and George the Third—”when, it is reported, voices cried out, ‘Treason! treason!’ “—and George the Third may profit by their example! If this be treason make the most of it.”⁴ Henry then proposed seven resolutions, five of which passed by a slim majority. The five resolutions that passed are summarized as follows:

1. All men of Britain in the colony, whether wandering or settling, should be treated as if they were born within England’s realm and should be treated with the same freedom and rights.
2. All people in the colony should be treated as if they were born within England’s realm.
3. No unbearable tax should be imposed on anybody. Burdensome taxation would make the colony hard to manage.
4. Virginians shouldn’t be imposed with a tax that was not passed by a body that had not gained their consent.
5. The Virginia General Assembly is the only one to have the right to lay taxes on people in the colony.⁵

Most opposition to the “Virginia Resolves” came from the conservative Tidewater area. However, the significance of the Resolves was reflected in the Boston press: “A week later the *Boston-Gazette*, and *Country Journal* carried the Virginia resolves, as did other papers, as though all had been approved and were the official position of the Old Dominion. What was assumed to be Virginia’s dramatic bold stand fired all the colonies into increased resistance to Great Britain.”⁶

As a result of this and other outcries from colonists, the Stamp Act was repealed in **1766** mostly because of colonial opposition; however, the Stamp Act was followed by the passage of the Townshend Acts of **1767** which imposed duties on a variety of items such as paper, lead, glass, paint, and “fatefully” on tea.⁷ In **1768** Virginians again protested to the King and Parliament. **Members of the General Assembly that year were Orange County burgesses James Walker and Zachariah Burnley.** “They opposed the Townshend levies as taxes clearly ‘to raise a Revenue, or in plainer Words to compel the Colonists to part with their Money against their inclinations’.”⁸

“A year later, in May **1769**, the governor, Lord Botetourt, dissolved the House of Burgesses for its strong resolutions on colonial rights. On the 18th some of the members and other ‘principal gentlemen’ of the colony gathered at the house of Anthony Hay--the well-known Raleigh Tavern--in Williamsburg. **Orange County burgesses James Walker and Thomas Barbour were on hand**, along with those Old Guard conservations Peyton Randolph and Richard Bland

⁴ Author Unknown, “Today in History--May 29.” *Library of Congress*, Google, Accessed May 26, 2021, <https://www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history/may-29>

⁵ Author Unknown. “Virginia Resolves.” *Totally History*, Google, Accessed May 25, 2021, <https://totallyhistory.com/virginia-resolves/>

⁶ Thomas, 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸ *Ibid.*

and men such as George Washington, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, and Richard Henry Lee. They were concerned, and seriously concerned, about what they saw as a continuing scheme of ministerial 'tyranny.' They entered into an agreement--an 'Association'--which, as a form of economic reprisal, listed items not to be imported from Great Britain until the duties on tea, paper, glass, and so forth were repealed. Foreseeing difficult times, they sought to promote industry and frugality and to discourage luxury and extravagance. Peyton Randolph, Bland, Washington, Henry, Jefferson, Richard Henry Lee, and both Orange County burgesses, **James Walker and Thomas Barbour, were among those who subscribed to the Association...**" ⁹

The repeal of the Townshend Act (except for the tax on tea) occurred on the day of the Boston Massacre, March 5, **1770**. Parliament had once again conceded to pressure from the colonists. Three months later on June 22, 1770, members of the House of Burgesses entered into another Association, joined by many merchants from the Williamsburg area. The burgesses pointed out they were loyal subjects, but...they were apprehensive of any attempts to raise revenue without the consent of the People's representatives.¹⁰ Again, the Association sought to prohibit a lengthy list of merchandise including looking glasses, carriages, clothing, watches, etc. **Among the first 35 of the 160 burgesses and merchants who subscribed to this Association were James Walker and Thomas Barbour of Orange County** along with Peyton Randolph, Richard Bland, Edmund Pendleton, Richard Henry Lee, Jefferson and Washington.¹¹

In December **1773**, Patriots tossed tea into Boston Harbor rather than pay the duty. Within six months, Parliament enacted the Intolerable or Coercive acts to punish Massachusetts and Boston--but these were a warning to other colonies, one that was heeded by the Virginians.

On May 24, **1774** Virginia's House of Burgesses declared June 1 to be a day of fasting in prayer in support of the citizens of Boston. After the House had adjourned in April, a call went out to representatives to meet at a convention in Williamsburg on August 1. During June and July a series of resolutions went out in counties, some of which were printed and some not. **Among these were resolutions from Orange County but unfortunately they were not preserved.**¹² A resolution from Culpeper insisted "We will at all times, at the risk of our lives and fortunes, oppose any act imposing such taxes or duties, unless we are legally represented."¹³ The Freeholders of Culpeper called for an Association of all colonists against importation of goods from Britain.

"On August 6, [1774] the Virginia Convention, gathered at Williamsburg, adopted an Association against importation and exportation. This would be more effectual than similar such efforts in the past; it would be a model for the Continental Association promulgated by the First Continental Congress two months later. **Among those present at the Virginia Convention and signing the Association was Thomas Barbour of Orange.**

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 10.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 11.

“Nearly a half century later John Adams, an old man then, his years in the Presidency over, recalled the revolutionary era in which he was both observer and participant. He gave an assessment of that time for his own and succeeding generations. The fifteen years before the opening shots at Lexington and Concord--from 1760 to 1775--were the years of what Adams called ‘the real American Revolution,’ a revolution ‘in the minds and hearts of the people,’ he said and, as it turned out, a revolution that would lead to independence. These were the years fateful for the American colonists and perilous to England’s architects of empire at home. **And these were years during which Orange County burgesses--James Taylor and James Walker, Zachariah Burnley, and Thomas Barbour--were among those of a new, rising and strong group which, from the May 1765 session of the House of Burgesses on, shared in guiding Virginia’s political destiny.**

“The Continental Association, patterned after that adopted by the Virginia Convention in August {1774}, included provisions for non-importation and non-exportation to Great Britain; non-consumption of various items, particularly tea; and prohibition of ‘every species of extravagance and dissipation, especially all horse-racing, and all kinds of gaming, cock-fighting’....The Association further stipulated that a county or town committee be formed to enforce those provisions. But it was not long before the committees extended their role beyond that of seeing that the Association was carried out; as royal administration of Virginia began to break down, they [the Association] took over many of the functions of local government as well. Indeed, members were often already involved as justices of the county courts.”¹⁴

“On December 22, 1774 the freeholders of Orange met to elect a county committee. Its members, prominent in county affairs, were **James Madison, Sr. [father of President], James Taylor, William Bell, Thomas Barbour, Zachariah Burnley, Rowland Thomas, William Moore, Johnny Scott, James Walker, William Pannill, Francis Moore, James Madison, Jr. [later the President], Lawrence Taliaferro, Thomas Bell, and Vivian Daniel.**”¹⁵ Early the next year, the committee chose James Madison, Sr., as its chairman and Francis Taylor as its clerk. They met at the second Orange courthouse, then a quarter of a century old. It was built of wood, had brick chimneys and shuttered windows, and it stood on a “public lot”. That “public lot” extended along the south side of Main Street from the corner of what used to be the National Bank and Trust down to and across the railroad tracks.

“There was little else at the county seat--Orange Court House--in those years. Adjacent to the courthouse in the public lot was the usual set of dependencies: Clerk’s Office, jail, whipping post, stocks, pillory, and for scolds (women of coarse or abusive speech), a ducking stool. There were one or more ordinaries or taverns convenient to this center of activity, but only a handful of dwellings...”¹⁶

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Over time the Orange County committee, like others, assumed more and more power, serious in their duty to enforce the Association even though it might involve family or friends. For example, Francis Moore, Jr., son of an Orange committee member, was brought before the Association on charges of gambling. The committee also zealously investigated disloyalty to the Patriot cause--to watch the conduct of every inhabitant, to interrogate offenders and to stigmatize transgressors. In the spring of **1775** the Reverend John Wingate, rector of St. Thomas in Orange, possessed several pamphlets that contained "obnoxious reflections" on the Continental Congress and their proceedings. On Saturday, March 25, the committee assembled at the courthouse and requested the pamphlets be turned over. Wingate declined, indicating they belonged to someone else. The committee then "peremptorily demanded" the pamphlets, and the rector complied. On Monday the committee determined the pamphlets were printed by the notorious Tory publisher, James Rivington of New York. The zealous Patriots with righteous wrath demanded the pamphlets be burnt. Shortly thereafter the Reverend Wingate left the county.¹⁷

Only days before Orange disposed of the Reverend Wingate [spring 1775], a second Virginia Convention was called at St. John's Church in Richmond, a site chosen because it was beyond the reach of the Royal Governor, Lord Dunmore, in Williamsburg. **Delegates Thomas Barbour and James Taylor of Orange attended for the county.** On March 23, the firebrand Patrick Henry (Hanover County) offered a resolution that the Virginia colony "be immediately put into a posture of defence" as he felt war was inevitable. To defend his actions and with incomparable eloquence he gave his most famous speech: "...give me liberty, or give me death." Silence followed Henry's speech before Richard Henry Lee seconded his resolution. Thomas Jefferson, a man of rising importance, spoke on behalf of the resolution which was adopted and which put the colony in a state of defense.¹⁸

Events were now serious. By mid-April the Royal governors of Massachusetts and Virginia moved to seize arms and ammunition stored by the colonists. Specifically in Virginia Lord Dunmore responded by sending royal marines into Williamsburg during the night of April 20-21 to seize kegs of gunpowder from the public magazine kept for the colony's defense. Virginians became furious, and approximately a thousand soldiers rendezvoused at Fredericksburg to march to Williamsburg in protest. Governor Dunmore warned all Virginians to come to his rescue or be considered in a "state of rebellion". Colonial leaders like Peyton Randolph, Edmund Pendleton, George Washington and Richard Henry Lee persuaded the troops at Fredericksburg to disband, but they cautioned the populace "to be in readiness, at a moment's warning, to reassemble, and by force of arms to defend the laws, the liberty, and rights of this or any sister Colony, from unjust and wicked invasion." The crowd cheered at their closing supplication: "God save the liberties of America"--instead of the traditional ending of "God save the King".¹⁹

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

On April 19, 1775 British regulars and American militiamen and volunteers clashed at Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts. Word was immediately rushed southward, and the Virginia *Gazette* published the warning, "The sword is now drawn, and God knows when it will be sheathed."²⁰

Patrick Henry, ever the activist, mustered Hanover County volunteers two weeks later on May 2, and threatened to march on the capital if no compensation for the gunpowder seized by Lord Dunmore was not forthcoming. **Young James Madison [future President] and one of his brothers prepared to head east to join Henry.** They were joined by men from Albemarle. Others too were on the move. Governor Dunmore ordered Henry to turn back. He didn't. Confrontation with royal authority seemed imminent. Dunmore finally relented and ordered compensation for the gunpowder be made. Even though the threat posed by Henry's march was over, Dunmore issued a proclamation and censured "Patrick Henry....and a Number of his deluded Followers" for "exciting the People to join these outrageous and rebellious Practices." Dunmore charged "all Persons..to oppose them and their Designs by every Means."²¹

On Tuesday, May 9, the **Orange County committee met and adopted the following resolutions which appeared in the Virginia Gazette on May 19th:**

The committee for ORANGE county, met on Tuesday the 9th of May, taking into their consideration the removal of the powder from the publick magazine, and the compensation obtained by the Independent company of Hanover; and observing also, that the receipt given by Capt. Patrick Henry, to his Majesty's Receiver General, refers the final disposal of the money to the next Colony Convention, came into the following resolutions:

- 1. That the Governor's removal of the powder lodged in the magazine, and set apart for the defence of the country, was fraudulent, unnecessary, and extremely provoking to the people of this colony.*
- 2. That the resentment shown by the Hanover volunteers, and the reprisal they have made on the King's property, highly merit the approbation of the publick [sic], and the thanks of this committee.*
- 3. That if any attempt should be made at the ensuing Convention to have the money returned to his Majesty's Receiver General, our delegates be, and they are hereby instructed, to exert all their influence in opposing such attempt, and in having the money laid out in gunpowder for the use of the colony.*
- 4. That the following address be presented to Capt. PATRICK HENRY, and the Gentlemen Independents of Hanover.*

GENTLEMEN,

We the committee for the county of Orange, having been fully informed of your seasonable and spirited proceedings in procuring a

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

compensation for the powder fraudulently taken from the country magazine, by command of Lord Dunmore, and which it evidently appears his Lordship, notwithstanding his assurances, had no intention to restore, entreat you to accept their cordial thanks for this testimony of your zeal for the honour and interest of your country. We take this occasion also to give it as our opinion, that the blow struck in the Massachusetts government is a hostile attack on this and every other colony, and a sufficient warrant to use violence and reprisal, in all cases where it may be expedient for our security and welfare.

James Madison, chairman, James Taylor, Thomas Barbour, Zachariah Burnley, Rowland Thomas, James Madison, jun., William Moore, James Walker, Lawrence Taliaferro, Henry Scott, Thomas Bill [Bell].

*--Resolutions of Orange County Committee
From the Virginia Gazette, May 19, 1775.²²*

These resolutions were presented to Patrick Henry before they were printed by the *Gazette*. Apparently they were carried to Port Royal in Caroline County by Young James Madison as Henry headed to the Second Continental Congress. Before resuming his journey, Henry replied to the chairman of the Orange Committee in a note dated May 11:²³

Sir

I think myself & the Volunteers of Hanover peculiarly happy to find, that the Reprizal [sic] we have made for the purpose of compensating the Colony for the Loss of the Powder from the Magazine, had met with the Approbation of your Committee. Give me leave to assure you Sir, that nothing called us forth upon that Occasion, but Zeal for the public Good.

I can discover nothing improper for the public Eye in the several Votes & Resolutions sent me. The Gentm. who now so kind as to escort me, wish it (together with similar Votes of three other Cotys recd. today) to be printed.

Be pleased to present my best Compliments to the Committee & believe me to be Sir yr. mo. obedt. sert.

P. Henry Jr.

James Madison Esqr.²⁴

At the time Madison presented the resolutions to Henry, he requested that Henry carry a personal letter to Philadelphia to his friend William Bradford. "Writing on May 9, the day the Orange committee met, he commented to Bradford that Henry's conduct 'had gained him great

²² *Ibid.*, 19-20.

²³ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

honor in the most spirited parts of the Country'... One of those 'most spirited parts' was Orange County." ²⁵

"Even before the gunpowder episode, Orange had begun to prepare for whatever might come. 'We are very busy at present,' James Madison, Jr. reported at the end of January, 'in raising men and procuring the necessaries for defending ourselves and our friends in case of sudden Invasion.' Indeed, as the winter of 1775 passed into spring and summer and following Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts and Dunmore's intemperate action in Virginia, the raising of troops and the gathering of military stores and supplies were on the minds of most Virginians. These were matters high on the agenda of the Third Virginia Convention which met in Richmond on July 17 [July 17 to August 26, 1775] . Only two days later a resolution was brought and adopted that 'a sufficient armed force be immediately raised and adopted, under proper officers, for the defence and protection of this colony.' **Among the delegates preoccupied with this problem was Thomas Barbour of Orange County.**" ²⁶

The men at the convention worked from 7:00 a.m. until nine or ten at night. George Mason observed, "This was hard duty." ²⁷ Officers were appointed to raise regular forces for the defense of the colony: Patrick Henry was named colonel for First Regiment and William Woodford, colonel for the Second. On August 17 the convention named Edmund Pendleton to head the Committee of Safety and gave it extraordinary powers: "appointment of officers and of contractors to supply the armed forces; control and disposition of arms, ammunition, and stores; ordering the militia and minutemen into active service; directing all troop movements; requisitioning public funds to carry on war; and, generally, executing all ordinances and resolutions of the Convention." ²⁸

A draft proposal for Virginia's military forces was adopted on August 21 "...for the better protection of the country in times of imminent danger, portions of the militia were to be trained as minutemen", or as John Randolph later remarked, "the minutemen were raised in a minute, armed in a minute, fought in a minute, and vanquished in a minute".²⁹ To organize the troops, the colony was divided into sixteen districts usually composed of several counties. Orange, Culpeper and Fauquier constituted a district.

The organizational plan included the following details:

- Each district was to raise a battalion of 500 men from age 16-50; each battalion would be divided into ten companies of 50 men each. Colonels commanded the battalions; Lieutenant Colonels and Majors were field officers; a quartermaster, chaplain, surgeon, 2 surgeon's mates, and a sergeant-major composed the battalion staff. Each company would consist of a captain, lieutenant, ensign, two sergeants, a drummer and fifer. Captains were responsible for enlisting men for the company.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

- Minutemen were to be furnished with arms at the public expense, but until that could be provided, each man was responsible for bringing with him his “best” gun. If he brought a rifle, a man would be compensated 20 shillings a year for its use.
- Training service was directed by law. For Orange-Culpeper-Fauquier, each battalion was to be trained for 20 successive days; individual companies mustered monthly with 4 successive days of training (except December, January, and February). Twice a year the companies were to be brought together for battalion service--for the Culpeper-Orange-Fauquier district battalion training would begin on May 10 and October 24 annually.³⁰

Even though the colonists were organizing, the men at the Virginia Convention used the words “defence and protection” of the colony as many men still thought to preserve their rights as British subjects, not armed rebels. The convention delegates continued to affirm their allegiance to George III and the Mother County but were determined to defend their lives and property and maintain their just rights.³¹

Young James Madison in a letter to his friend William Bradford wrote, “The Strength of this Colony will lie chiefly in the rifle-men of the Upland Counties...You would be astonished at the perfection this art is brought to. The most inexpert hands reckon it an indifferent shot to miss the bigness of a man’s face at the dstrance of 100 yards.”³² When more than the required quota of men volunteered for rifle companies, contests were held to pick the best shots.

By September 1775 the Culpeper Minutemen numbered about 300 men. Among the companies first recruited were two companies of minutemen from Orange County: one commanded by Captains Joseph Spencer and John Williams and one comprising regulars under Captain William Taliaferro. Eventually the Culpeper [Orange-Fauquier] Minutemen would become “the largest of the minute battalions and the best known as well.”³³ The Committee of Safety named field officers Colonel Lawrence Taliaferro of Orange County; Lieutenant Colonel Edward Stevesn of Culpeper County and Major Thomas Marshall of Fauquier.³⁴

By September relations with Lord Dunmore deteriorated when he left Williamsburg with his family and boarded an armed schooner, the *H.M.S. Fowey*, which lay off Yorktown. He indicated that the government of Virginia would be conducted from there. Colonel Patrick Henry, commander of Virginia’s military forces, ordered Colonel Taliaferro and the Culpeper Minutemen (which included Orange and Fauquier troops) to march to Williamsburg. Colonel Taliaferro sent out a call for various companies of his battalion to assemble near Culpeper Court House. **“In Orange County, Captain Joseph Spencer mustered his company. His rendezvous was at what a contemporary called ‘Porters Old Court House,’ actually the first Orange County Courthouse.** This building, completed about 1738, had been vacated when the county seat was

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

moved to its present site in 1749 It stood slightly east of the U.S. Highway 522 of today about half a mile before it crosses the Rapidan into Culpeper County, and in 1775 was owned by Charles Porter. From there Spencer marched his company to the vicinity of Culpeper Court House, joining the rest of the battalion at Philip Clayton's farm on the west side of what is now the town. There, 'in Clayton's old field' as young diarist Philip Slaughter put it, the men went into camp."³⁵

Among Spencer's men, who were busy drilling and enduring the routine of camp, were Ambrose Atkins, Edward Atkins, Phillip Ballard, Benjamin Bohon, Sergeant William Burton, John Price, Reuben Stivers, and Francis Taylor. Either Garland Burnley or Ambrose Madison may have been the lieutenant of Spencer's company as both served with the Culpeper battalion. The average age of the minutemen was 20, and John Price was the youngest at 16. Later Sergeant Burton became a lieutenant, Burnley a captain, Madison a major and Francis Taylor a colonel.³⁶ In mid-October Col. Lawrence Taliaferro gave the order to break camp and amid the cheers of enthusiastic onlookers, the Culpeper Minutemen (including Orange and Fauquier) began their march to Williamsburg by way of Orange Court House. "Word of their coming spread and people lined the narrow road to welcome them. Men in ranks waved to family and friends, often stepping out of file to kiss their wives or sweethearts. Young boys and eager dogs dashed excitedly in and out of the long column... Pushing on past the small cluster of buildings that was Orange Court House, Colonel Taliaferro halted the battalion where the road--at present, the old Gordonsville road--crossed Tomahawk Creek. There, something over a mile beyond the Court House, the troops went into camp."³⁷

By October 20 the Culpeper battalion was nearing Williamsburg and "caused a stir" as reported by Slaughter, the young diarist: "Many people hearing we were from the backwoods...and seeing our dress, were as much afraid of us for a few days as if we had been Indians..." Before long Williamsburg residents began to appreciate them. Slaughter wrote, "We took great pride in demeaning ourselves as patriots and gentlemen."³⁸ Residents also appreciated their guarding the colony's public gunpowder magazine which Dunmore had pilfered the previous spring.

From the *H.M.S. Fowey*, Lord Dunmore soon began harassing coastal counties and sent ashore raiding parties to plunder and attempt to steal away slaves from plantations. On November 7, 1775, Dunmore issued a proclamation of martial law which required every person capable of bearing arms to rally to His Majesty's cause or be deemed a traitor. In addition, all slaves and indentured servants able and willing to bear arms for the King were to be freed. Dunmore also ordered a stockaded fort (he called Fort Murray) be built at Great Bridge which was over the southern branch of the Elisabeth River and over swampland. The Great Bridge was strategically important when approaching Norfolk.³⁹ The Committee of Safety ordered Colonel William Woodford of the Second Regiment to take Norfolk. Woodford had his own regiment plus five

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

companies of the Culpeper Minute Battalion including **Captain Joseph Spencer's company of Orange County**. The remainder of the Culpeper battalion was discharged to return home including Colonel Taliaferro, their battalion commander.

Colonel Woodford immediately ordered his troops to Hampton to guard the port against attack and sent other troops to Great Bridge. In early December, Woodford with some of his regulars and five of the Culpeper minute companies joined the forces at Great Bridge, which included **Captain Joseph Spencer's Orange County company**.⁴⁰

A few shots were exchanged daily but before dawn on December 9 , 1775, an assault was launched by the British at the twenty-five Virginians stationed at the breastworks protecting the Great Bridge. Woodford sent reinforcements including **Spencer's Orange County minutemen** and others from the Culpeper battalion. The British infantry marched to the beat of drums onto the bridge where the Virginians opened fire. A captain and twelve grenadiers were killed. Nineteen others were wounded. The British fell back. It was over in 30 minutes.⁴¹ One minuteman was wounded slightly and one of Woodford's men was struck in the leg. The British buried their dead, abandoned Camp Murray, and retreated to Norfolk. When Woodford followed, they found that the British had retired to the protection of Lord Dunmore's ships.

For the rest of December, there was little action but on the first day of the new year, January 1, **1776**, Lord Dunmore ordered fire on Norfolk in a heavy cannonade that lasted from mid-afternoon until the following morning when the British forces landed. The British were driven off, but fires were set and soon much of Norfolk burned...but remained in American hands. By the end of the month the Royal governor ordered his ships to weigh anchor and sail up the Chesapeake Bay.

The outcome of the battle of the Great Bridge--the first fought on Virginia soil in the Revolution--saw little-trained and inexperienced American troops stand firm against the British, much like what happened at Bunker Hill. The battle encouraged Virginia Patriots and discouraged Virginia Loyalists.⁴²

The Virginia Convention commended Colonel Woodford, and the Committee of Safety dispatched its thanks to the Culpeper Minute Battalion in February 1776. Shortly thereafter, the battalion was discharged and the men marched home where they were warmly received. Most of the Culpeper minutemen were back in service before long, either in the Continental Line units or in the local militia, and continued to serve until the end of the war. By mid-March Captain Joseph Spencer of Orange County was actively recruiting for a company for regular service. Francis Taylor, one of Spencer's volunteers, was appointed captain by the Orange County committee and raised a company. A third officer, Captain George Stubblefield, was also looking for Orange County men to fill his quota. On May 8th Captain Spender's company ranks were full and the company was accepted for service along with other companies. Young James

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 32.

Madison's words rang true as during this period of history, Orange was one of the "most spirited parts of the Country."⁴³

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 33.