

Episode 3 – *Coercion to Convention: Organizing Resistance*

[00:00:00] **Announcer:** Welcome to Revolution Revisited, your crash course in the American Revolution. As the 250th anniversary of America's independence approaches, dive into the stories of Virginia's rebels, rule breakers, and rabble rousers who shaped a nation. This podcast is brought to you by the Virginia Museum of History & Culture and made possible by William & Karen Fralin.

[00:00:34] **Maggie Creech:** Welcome back to Revolution Revisited. I'm your host, Maggie Creech. Today we're looking at 1774, a wild year in the Virginia colony, full of drama from public events to secret tavern meetings. We will see how 1774 laid the groundwork for rebellion in Virginia.

This was the year the colonies began turning outrage into action. The Coercive Acts, Britain's punishment for the Boston Tea Party, rippled far beyond Massachusetts, waking up colonies like Virginia to the precariousness of their own autonomy. But Virginia's leaders didn't reach for muskets right away. They responded first with resolutions, fasting, and a daring convention that challenged British authority without formally breaking from the crown. To help us unpack this moment, we're joined by Cathy Hellier.

[00:01:24] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** I'm Cathy Hellier. I'm a Senior Historian at Colonial Williamsburg, and that means we support the historic area in their programming and do research in order to do that.

[00:01:37] **Maggie Creech:** Cathy is a true expert on this era, and her insights will help us understand the nuances of Virginia's defiance.

It's 1774. The Boston Tea Party had just rocked the colonies, sending shockwaves through the entire population. Britain wasn't about to let that slide, so they hit back hard with the Coercive Acts. Basically, their way of making an example out of Massachusetts. We have to imagine the king was not impressed when all of this private property was destroyed in what he thought were these unruly colonies.

The Coercive Acts, or as many colonists called them, the Intolerable Acts, were a set of four laws. The Boston Port Act, the Massachusetts Government Act, the Administration of Justice Act, and the Quartering Act. The Boston Port Act shut down Boston's harbor until the East India Company was compensated for its lost tea.

But as Cathy Hellier explains, these acts weren't just about punishing Boston, they were about reasserting control.

[00:02:39] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** The Boston Tea Party, as we call it now, they didn't really call it that then. That destruction of East India Company tea was really destruction of private property. So, the idea was, A, we need to calm the Bostonians down, and B, somebody needs to pay for the tea.

So the Boston Port Act was designed to say, we're closing your port until you guys pay for the tea. And that sent shockwaves through all of the colonies, because they're all coastal colonies, most of

them, not all of them, but most of them. They're along the eastern seaboard. And so, Virginians were like, it'd be easy to close Chesapeake Bay. It would be easy to close New York Harbor. You know, they're all thinking: this could happen to us. So they rally behind Boston in that timeframe in different ways.

[00:03:39] **Maggie Creech:** Think about it. Closing the Boston Harbor was more than just an inconvenience. The city's entire economy ground to a halt. People's livelihoods were suddenly at risk, and the message to other colonies was clear: if Parliament could crush Boston's economy with the stroke of a pen, they could do it to any of them. Virginia's leaders understood these stakes, but their response wasn't immediate rebellion. Instead, they reached for something both symbolic and subversive.

Rather than pass an overtly rebellious resolution, they called for a public day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer to show solidarity with Massachusetts. This move was provocative because only the royal governor, Lord Dunmore in this case, had the authority to declare such a day. Keep in mind, there was no separation of church and state in 18th century England.

[00:04:32] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** Humiliation in that time period meant to humble yourself before God, ask some internal questions. So you're praying and you're fasting and you're being humble before God. One of the things that was a problem with the day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer was that the House of Burgesses didn't really have the right to do it, to declare a day of fasting. That actually belongs to the head of the church.

They have a state church, which is the Episcopal Church, right? That also pertains to the state. So, it's the governor who's the head of the church in Virginia. So, here we go. The House of Burgesses says: we're going to declare a day of fasting. It's not just like, oh, I'm going to go in my closet and do this.

People were going to be processing to church in the middle of town up the street to Bruton Parish Church. This is very public. The sermon will ideally be tailored to this event. So, it's a very public thing, and they really didn't have the right to do it.

[00:05:41] **Maggie Creech:** Now, here's the thing. The British government isn't working off a written constitution like we think of today, where you can just point to a clause and say, see, that's allowed, or nope, it says right here you can't do that.

Instead, it was all about precedent. What's been done before? What's been established? And the Burgesses, they got pretty creative with their mental gymnastics, digging into the archives of history to justify their right to declare this day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer.

[00:06:07] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** Precedent is everything in a constitution that's not written, and the British constitution isn't a written constitution.

It's hard for Americans to imagine that. Because our constitution is written, we go back to the piece of paper and we say, this is constitutional or it's unconstitutional. In the 18th century, the British constitution had written parts. There were acts and things that were part of it, but the constitution

was really kind of like, the government is presently constituted, or this is what we're doing right now.

So, if they decided to change that, that could be called unconstitutional because it's different. It didn't necessarily mean it was illegal, it was just different. So, setting a precedent is really important. The House of Burgesses, who cooked up this scheme, as they called it, for a day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer, went up to the council chamber in the capital at Williamsburg and were looking for a precedent.

And they had to find one in the 17th century, when England didn't have a king, between Charles the 1st, who was beheaded, and Charles the 2nd. So during that Commonwealth period, it was really Parliament that was in charge. And so, they said, well, there's a precedent. Parliament declared fast days back then. It was pretty shaky logic, and the governor didn't buy it.

So he dissolved the House of Burgesses in May for doing that when he got a hold of the copy of the broadside that they published for this. They were being pretty cheeky to do what they were doing.

[00:07:52] **Maggie Creech:** You know, this might not seem like a big deal to us today. Sounds a lot like thoughts and prayers, right? A group of guys wanted to express solidarity with Boston, have a day of reflection, and maybe pray for a better outcome.

What's it even really doing? But to the royal governor, Lord Dunmore, in 1774, it felt like a direct challenge to his power, and that's why he dissolves the House of Burgesses.

[00:08:14] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** One of the most famous loyalists at the time was John Randolph. John is the Attorney General, and he's a loyalist, and he writes a pamphlet in the summer of '74. He wants moderation, and he's pretty contemptuous of the day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer. Kind of like, oh, you put off your dinner, big deal.

[00:08:37] **Maggie Creech:** This call for fasting and prayer was as much a political statement as it was a religious act, and this wasn't just symbolic. The act sent a clear message to Britain that Virginia, one of the largest and most influential colonies, wasn't going to sit quietly by while Boston was punished.

If you zoom out, you can see how this echoes the tension brewing across the colonies. Just as Boston's resistance was seen as undermining the Crown's authority, Virginia's actions here sent a message. Local leaders were starting to take matters into their own hands. These were the early rumblings of a bigger discontent that would eventually reshape the entire relationship between the colonies and Britain.

So, when Dunmore dissolved the House of Burgesses on May 26, 1774, it meant that group was done meeting as a body.

[00:09:28] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** It's not unconstitutional for the governor to dissolve the House. He has the right. He can prorogue them, which means he can change the meeting time to later. He can dissolve them, which means you have to have new elections.

[00:09:43] **Maggie Creech:** Those dissolved burgesses weren't going quietly, though. The Coercive Acts had them in crisis mode. As Virginia's elected assembly, they were the voice of the people in the colony. The next day, May 27th, 1774, most of the former Burgesses gathered in the Apollo Room of Williamsburg's Raleigh Tavern to strategize their next move.

Eighty-nine members showed up, and the mood was very much a "what do we do now?" kind of moment. They knew they wanted to support Boston, they knew they wanted to act, but what exactly should that look like? Ultimately, they decided to go back to something they'd done before. They decided to form a non-importation association, which meant Colonial Virginians agreed not to import British goods.

They'd done this type of thing before in 1769 and in 1770. That day, the agreement was finalized and everyone signed it. Interestingly, later that same day, they held a ball for Lady Dunmore, the governor's wife, highlighting the strange coexistence of resistance and formality in colonial politics. But also, Virginians, they love a party.

[00:10:49] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** That night, they had already planned to host a ball for Lady Dunmore because she had arrived in the colony a few months before, they weren't in session then, so they go ahead with this ball. Lord Dunmore dissolved them the day before that he and Lady Dunmore attend. If I could go back in time...

Maggie Creech: That what you would want (unclear)

[00:11:10] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** ... that is one event I would love to go see.

How were they talking with each other? How did this all work out?

[00:11:20] **Maggie Creech:** After the Raleigh Tavern meeting, Peyton Randolph, an elite Virginia planter and former Speaker of the House of Burgesses, received a letter from Boston urging united resistance.

[00:11:31] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** A couple days go by, and Peyton Randolph, who's the Speaker of the House of Burgesses, gets a letter from Boston that says: we have to resist this, and we need the help of everyone else, and what we're proposing is non-importation and non-exportation. This was written mid-month before the House of Burgesses had done their association. They, of course, it takes a long time for news to travel, so they wouldn't have known about it.

Peyton Randolph gets the letter, I think, on the 29th. Well, by then most of the Burgesses have gone home. They've been dissolved. Let's try to call in some of the Burgesses from the local counties,

people who are nearby, and see what we can do. So the next day, there were about 25 of them that they could manage to muster together to discuss this letter from Boston.

And they decided there weren't enough of them. They couldn't speak for the whole colony.

[00:12:29] **Maggie Creech:** The Burgesses knew this couldn't be handled by the 25 former Burgesses still in the area. They needed a colony-wide response and called for what becomes known as the First Virginia Convention, where elected delegates would meet to chart a course forward.

[00:12:43] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** So they decide that they'll call for a convention. The Burgesses will come back in August and meet and discuss this letter from Boston. So that was the reason for the first Virginia Convention. And that's what it was meant to do originally. That was pretty cheeky too, because it's an extralegal body.

They just kind of decided they're going to meet whether the governor says they're going to meet or not. They feel that this is a crisis. They don't know the rest of the coercive slash Intolerable Acts yet, but they really feel that the closing of the Port of Boston is a crisis, and they really want to rally. They know they all could be in the same position. They're planning a course of action, but they're still not rebelling. They're very careful through all of this to state their loyalty to the king. They really want them to understand that they're just trying to solve a problem. They're not disloyal.

[00:13:51] **Maggie Creech:** Let's take a second to zoom out a little bit. In order to fully understand why Virginia and the other colonies reacted so strongly to the Coercive Acts, we need to look at a fundamental difference in how the colonies and Britain view power and rights.

[00:14:06] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** I think it's important to understand that colonies are under the executive branch, and the king's the head of the executive branch. That's why they're always looking to the king. And for Virginia, it's a royal colony. He owns the colony. So they have a lot of feeling for the king. At this point, they're still saying, it's Parliament they have an argument with. Ever since the Stamp Act, they've been saying, we don't have any representatives in Parliament. They have no legal way to tax us because we have not approved that. And to be fair, aside from trade regulations and a few other things, like a postal system and things like that that are empirical, they have always taxed themselves. The House of Burgesses has been their vehicle for taxation and they are represented there—of course, the men are. Men of property are the people who can vote and the people who can be there. The property requirements are not terribly high, but the idea is that you have a stake in society and therefore you have a vote. You're a part of the government in that way.

[00:15:16] **Maggie Creech:** The colonists believed that their rights were derived from their charters and the British Constitution, a mix of written laws and unwritten customs.

The British Constitution isn't a single written document. It's a mix of acts, traditions, and the current government structure. This difference came to a head over the issue of sovereignty. Colonists saw their legislatures, like the House of Burgesses, as the proper place to make decisions about taxation and governance.

But Parliament, bolstered by its victory in the Glorious Revolution of 1688, claimed ultimate authority over their entire empire.

[00:15:51] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** In the 18th century, in 1774, leading up to the American Revolution, we have big questions about sovereignty, because in Britain, they feel, and actually stated in 1766, that Parliament has the right to legislate for the colonies in all cases whatsoever.

And the colonies are going: We have a legislative body, and this is how this has gone, and for us, this is constitutional. So parliamentary sovereignty is a big deal, because it's how Britain keeps tyranny at bay. They feel that this is what keeps the rights of the people safe. They're just not going to give that up and say: Well, you colonial legislatures, you can have part of our sovereignty.

[00:16:45] **Maggie Creech:** Parliament also leaned on the concept of virtual representation. They argued that every member of Parliament represented the interests of all British subjects, even those who didn't vote for them. But as Cathy explains, the colonies weren't buying it.

[00:17:00] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** When we talk about the American side, we often don't look at what's happening in Britain.

We really don't look at what's happening over there and what their viewpoint is. I mean, their ideas of representation are completely different than ours as well. They're fine with something that they called virtual representation. Their idea was that, for instance, Parliament passes laws, and they have to live with the results of those laws.

So, there are some parts of Britain that don't actually have representatives in Parliament. There are certain cities and a few districts, but they share interest with other people in similar regions that are represented. So, those people who aren't directly electing members of Parliament are virtually represented.

[00:17:49] **Maggie Creech:** Essentially, they argued that members of Parliament represented the interests of the entire British Empire, even if the people in the colonies didn't get to vote for them directly. From Britain's perspective, Parliament was looking out for the colonies' best interests, even if the colonies themselves didn't see it that way.

[00:18:06] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** Americans, who have always, particularly Virginia here, have always had representation based on geography, based on where I live, my vicinage, I am here. They just go: Uh-uh, that's not how this works. Because we're not represented in Parliament, and our interests are completely different than yours, and they're completely opposite.

Those of you who are passing these laws in Parliament don't have to live with the consequences that we in the colonies have to live with.

So, I mean, it's very different if you're producing raw goods and sending them to England, what your interest is. And the merchant who is producing manufactured goods and sending them to the colonies, those two interests are quite different.

So yeah, virtual representation, Americans aren't having it. Britons are quite comfortable with it. That isn't to say that there aren't people in Britain who are sympathizing with America and who are speaking out in Parliament for American interests.

[00:19:12] **Maggie Creech:** This concept of virtual representation, where Parliament claimed to represent people thousands of miles away with completely different concerns, was incomprehensible to many in the colonies.

They felt that Parliament was imposing laws without any accountability. It wasn't that these colonists wanted to tear down every British institution. In many ways, they still respected British law and order. But they were beginning to see that British governance didn't work for them in the same way that it worked for people in other parts of the Empire.

They wanted direct representation, local control, and the right to make decisions about their own lives without interference from across the Atlantic. So it's this clash over who had the right to govern, the colonies themselves or Parliament, that was the center of the conflict. The Coercive Acts weren't just punitive. They were a reminder that in Britain's eyes, ultimate power rested with Parliament, not colonial assemblies.

Back to the action in the Virginia Colony and the call for convention. This was a remarkable moment of grassroots democracy. Representatives from counties across Virginia convened to elect delegates who would represent their views in Williamsburg and decide what thoughts and plans Virginia should put forward to address the crisis at the larger intercolonial meeting.

[00:20:31] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** And what's really interesting is that this whole call for a convention starts people really thinking in all of the counties. And this is a really democratic process. Originally it's just calling the Burgesses back, so free holders, property holders, people who - who have the right to vote - men - are meeting in the various counties and they're forming committees that put forth various resolutions that they want to send with their delegates for what they want to happen during this convention.

How do they want to support Boston? What would a non-importation and non-exportation agreement look like? So they're sending all of these things with their delegates. It's a really democratic process. It's really very interesting. Whole bunches of counties do it, and a lot of them survive.

[00:21:26] **Maggie Creech:** The convention met in August 1774. They chose to meet in Williamsburg because it was the colonial capital. But instead of convening in the Raleigh Tavern, one of the wildest parts of this story is the fact that the men actually met in the capitol building that they were formally dissolved from in May. That's right. They met in the building they were kicked out of only a few months earlier.

Lord Dunmore himself was away in the western portion of Virginia waging a war that would become known as Lord Dunmore's War in July 1774. So, he wasn't around when all of this was happening.

[00:22:02] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** So, Lord Dunmore decides to leave in July and go out and prosecute this war. So, the cat's away, right? Mice are gonna play. They don't mess around. They're not hiding. They meet right at the Capitol.

[00:22:18] **Maggie Creech:** The convention was attended by prominent leaders, including Peyton Randolph, who led the convention, and Patrick Henry, whose passion and fiery speeches would make him a revolutionary icon. Thomas Jefferson didn't attend, but he sent along his famous document, "A Summary View of the Rights of British America," which we will learn more about in our next episode.

[00:22:40] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** Not only are these various delegations, you know, within the counties, sending their instructions. Thomas Jefferson decides he wants to have a hand in this conversation. He especially wants to have a hand in the conversation about what the delegates to Congress should do. So, he writes all of this, and he starts out from Monticello, and gets dysentery. So, he has to go back to Monticello. He can't actually come to the convention, but he still feels that what he has to say is very important. And so he actually, he keeps a memorandum book with all of his expenses. And he sends Jupiter, his enslaved waiting man, to Williamsburg, apparently with two copies of his notes, what he has written about what he wants to have happen.

He sends one to Patrick Henry, which Jefferson later says, I don't think he even read it. And the other one he sends to Peyton Randolph, who is the moderator, the speaker. It's really radical what Jefferson wants to do at this point. I mean, he's basically saying: we need to say that Parliament has no right to legislate for us at all.

They're not ready to go there in the convention. They're just saying that they don't have any right to legislate for us in terms of our taxation and so on. They can still take care of trade and all of those things that they've done in the past. But they kind of still like what Jefferson says, even though it's a little too radical. So they kind of get up a GoFundMe sort of thing and have it printed, without his consent. He doesn't know it's being printed, apparently. It gets published in Williamsburg as "A Summary View of the Rights of British America." It goes to London, it gets published everywhere, and because of that, I think they think in London that the Americans are really a little more radical than they already are.

But I think, in a way, sending that out for publication was kind of like a threat. Like, this is what could happen. This is our maybe next step if things don't happen.

[00:24:56] **Maggie Creech:** So, in "A Summary View of the Rights of British America," Jefferson argues that Parliament had no right to legislate for the colonies at all.

Clearly, he's pushing the more radical end of this conversation, and while not everyone is as extreme, there was still some debate during the meeting about what Virginia should actually do.

[00:25:17] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** I don't think that there were too many people involved that were like, we don't want to do anything. Certainly, there were plenty of loyalists who just wanted things to be the way they were, but I don't think you're finding them participating very much in the convention.

There's no surviving journal, and even if there were, we probably wouldn't know what the debates are. The House of Burgesses - their journal does not record that sort of thing. How the sausage is made kind of stays behind closed doors. And what ends up in the journal is what the petition is, what somebody wants to have happen that moves through committee. But again, not the debates, really. It's just like what happens at the end of each of those processes. And then if it's passed or not. And then, you know, if the governor signs it or not, that's how the House of Burgesses has worked. So we assume it's pretty much the same.

[00:26:06] **Maggie Creech:** While we can't go back and read the debates, we do know the convention tackled three major issues. Non-importation and non-exportation, choosing Virginia's delegates to the Continental Congress, and then deciding what they should say when they actually got there. If we know anything about politics, we could guess that not everyone was going to be on the same page here and that there was a lot to figure out, but in a crazy, impressive move, they managed to nail it all down in just six days.

So, let's start with what they're non importing and non exporting.

[00:26:37] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** So they don't agree on necessarily what they're not going to import and not - what they're not going to export. Part of the reason for that is, you know, we have this kind of myth that Americans produced all the stuff that they needed. That couldn't be farther from the truth. They were so dependent on imports, especially things like cloth and books. Not that a few weren't produced in the colonies, but they were not manufacturing a lot here. And in fact, that was part of the whole agreement and the whole idea of colonies is that you would send us raw goods, we would send you manufactured goods.

That's oversimplifying a little bit, but the fact is they were very, very dependent on manufactured goods from England. So this is a hard question, you know, what are we not going to import? When the Burgesses were first dissolved, they excluded saltpeter and spices, saltpeter obviously for manufacture of gunpowder, spices because you can't get that stuff anywhere else, and food's pretty bad, and you know, and some of the things you need for preservation and things like that.

There's a lot of disagreement among the counties about what kinds of things can we exempt. You can only assume that that's what a lot of the debates were about.

[00:28:02] **Maggie Creech:** Now, let's look to the Continental Congress. At the convention, Virginia's leaders drafted resolutions denouncing the Coercive Acts and pledging support to Massachusetts. They agreed to participate in the Continental Congress and appointed delegates to attend, ultimately deciding to send seven people to the Continental Congress, but we'll dig more into that in a few episodes. Virginia starts to position itself as a leader in the colonies' struggle, and they are really laying the groundwork here for a united colonial front. They weren't really too concerned with backlash from the royal governor at all.

[00:28:39] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** I don't get the sense that they're terribly worried. They're already sending a delegation to the Congress. They've done what they set out to do. They've made provision for if we need another convention, Peyton Randolph will call one.

They don't seem terribly frightened by what they've done. I'm sure there were some people who were more apprehensive than others, but it's very interesting that the delegation that they choose when they get to the Continental Congress, people there write home to their loved ones in their own colonies and say: Wow, these guys from Virginia, they're really radical. They're really on top of it. They're going to get things done here. So those guys were committed, for sure.

[00:29:35] **Maggie Creech:** Attention is pretty quickly shifted from the meeting in Virginia to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. Virginia's delegates selected to attend had to make moves to get up to Philly by September 5th, since the Virginia convention wrapped up on August 6th. It's truly wild how quickly everyone was moving in the summer of '74.

[00:29:55] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** I think what they're looking at right now is what's going to happen at the First Continental Congress. And so they've got the delegation going up there, they send their instructions with them, but they're kind of also open instructions too in a way because they know that there's going to be a lot of discussion up there from the various colonies and they're giving them some room for that.

They send seven guys up there, including Peyton Randolph, who ends up being the president of the Continental Congress. So they have a lot of influence. And so a lot of things happen in the first Continental Congress, but ultimately there's a Continental Association that comes out of Fairfax County's resolutions.

That's the one that Virginia mostly based their association on, and then the Continental Association mostly bases theirs on Virginia. So it becomes non-import, non-export. They change the dates a little bit from Virginia's, but it's essentially Virginia's with a few modifications. And what this means is that beginning a few months later, the Continental Association, they're not going to import. And then the following year, we're not going to export either.

[00:31:14] **Maggie Creech:** As we can see, non-import and non-export are really where the colonies see they have an opportunity to push back in a meaningful way. They had real economic and social consequences, both in the colonies and in Britain.

Non-importation and exportation also hits merchants back in England. Many relied on colonial trade to sustain their own businesses. In Britain, these merchants petitioned Parliament, arguing that the boycotts were hurting their bottom line as well. Some businesses that relied heavily on American markets even faced bankruptcy. Facing pressure at home and abroad, Parliament initially dismisses these concerns, but the pressure builds up over time.

[00:31:59] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** The merchants over there do petition and say, you know, this is hurting us. And the ministry says we're doing more trade than we ever did in other parts of the world, you know, because their empire is not just us.

The ministry downplays how much it affects them. A lot of the merchants in Britain say it does affect them. A little hard to say, you know, statistics weren't kept the same way that we do now, but it kind of depends on who you talk to in terms of how effective this was over in Britain.

[00:32:34] **Maggie Creech:** And this wasn't just a matter of profits.

It was a political tool. By coordinating their efforts, colonies like Virginia sent a clear message to London. They were willing to sacrifice to make their voices heard. But not everyone in the colonies supported these measures. Loyalists, merchants, and others who depended on British goods often faced backlash.

[00:32:54] **Dr. Cathy Hellier:** They also say things like, we need to be frugal, we need to raise sheep, we need to start manufacturing, we need to cut down on frivolity. We had merchants here who ended up leaving, and they were able to hang on until early 1775, but we had people who left. One was a milliner, a woman named Catherine Rathel in Williamsburg.

She also had a store in Fredericksburg. She imported all of her goods. Milliners dealt in accessories and little luxury items and so on. She ended up going back in April. And sadly, it was then reported in the Gazette that her ship went down within sight of Liverpool, and she drowned. She lost her life because she was unable to make a living in the colonies because of the Continental Association.

There were several loyalists who left. There was another merchant who'd been in Williamsburg since 1749. In 1775, he left because his position was untenable. One of the things that the Continental Association provided for was local committees who would oversee that this was being maintained, that you weren't importing and you weren't exporting.

Some of them became pretty zealous, so there were merchants who said, you know, I can't make a living, and I'm being persecuted. So, they left. There was one named Robert Miller in Williamsburg. He'd been there since 1749. In 1775, he said, it's just unbearable, and he went back to England. It actually affected people's lives in a lot of ways. And of course, by 1775 in April, we're then involved in a shooting war, and it just progresses from there. But the Continental Association really did affect the economy.

[00:34:45] **Maggie Creech:** Non-importation wasn't perfect. But it demonstrated the colonies' ability to organize and cooperate on a large scale, an essential skill they would need as the revolution unfolded.

So, there you have it. Virginia's path from fasting to rebellion wasn't just about lofty ideals. It was about grassroots action, economic sacrifice, and an unwavering belief in their right to self-governance. Virginia's actions in 1774 were part of a broader awakening across the colonies. The Coercive Acts didn't just punish Massachusetts, they galvanized resistance.

But even at this point, most Virginians weren't ready to abandon their ties to Britain entirely. They were still trying to reconcile. They didn't see themselves as disloyal. They saw Parliament's actions as

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The Road to Revolution

unconstitutional. They had long taxed themselves through the House of Burgesses, and they wanted to maintain that system.

Exploring the events of 1774 really helps us understand that the revolution wasn't about one group of people being right, and another group being wrong, and one group having their rights infringed on, and another group taking those rights away. It's about two groups of people coming from wildly different contexts and just having different interpretations of what rights they have to hold and have to give.

And that doesn't necessarily make one right or wrong. It just means they've come to an impasse that they cannot move forth from. Viewing history in that way is much more interesting and exciting than just saying, well, they taxed us, we didn't like it, and so we started a war.

That's it for today's episode of *Revolution Revisited*. In our next episode, we will explore in more detail Thomas Jefferson's 1774 "Summary View of the Rights of British America," as well as how the power of print starts to impact this revolution. A special thank you to Cathy Hellier for sharing her expertise. If you enjoyed this episode, be sure to subscribe, leave a review, and share it with your friends.

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[00:34:22] **Announcer:** Thanks for listening to *Revolution Revisited*. The American Revolution was not an ending. But a beginning. The stories continue to unfold.

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[00:34:42] **Maggie Creech:** *Revolution Revisited* is a production of the Virginia Museum of History & Culture. Our production staff includes Hailey Fenner, Maggie Creech, Nicole Martorana, and Tracy Schneider.

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