

## **The Association (Continental Association)**

Throughout the mid-1700s, the colonists had become increasingly angry with British Parliament. To pay for foreign wars, Parliament had passed a series of laws that negatively impacted those in the colonies.

Colonists felt that these laws were unjust, as they did not have direct representation in the distant British Parliament, and thus had no opportunity to defend their position.

Tensions came to a head in late 1773 when a band of patriots dressed as Native Americans boarded East India Company ships docked in Boston Harbor and threw overboard 242 chests of tea. This act of defiance and vandalism sparked an intense reaction from the British Parliament.

“The Intolerable Acts” was the nickname the colonists gave to the harsh laws that Parliament enacted in the wake of the Boston Tea Party. They were designed to suppress the patriot movement in Massachusetts by massively curbing the rights of people living there.

The Intolerable Acts, among other changes, closed off the Boston Port and rescinded the Massachusetts Charter, bringing the colony under more direct British control.

Across North America, colonists rose in solidarity with the people of Massachusetts. Goods arrived in Massachusetts from as far south as Georgia, and by late spring 1774, nine of the colonies called for a continental congress.

Virginia’s Committee of Correspondence is largely credited with originating the invitation.

The First Continental Congress convened in Carpenters’ Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, between September 5 and October 26, 1774.

Delegates from twelve of Britain’s thirteen American colonies met to discuss America’s future under growing British aggression. The list of delegates included many prominent colonial leaders, such as Samuel Adams of Massachusetts, and two future presidents of the United States, George Washington and John Adams.

Delegates discussed boycotting British goods to establish the rights of Americans. They promptly began drafting and discussing the Continental Association. This would become their most important policy outcome.

The Association called for an end to British imports starting in December 1774 and an end to exporting goods to Britain in September 1775.

This policy would be enforced by local and colony-wide committees of inspection. These committees would check ships that arrived in ports, force colonists to sign documents pledging loyalty to the Continental Association, and suppress mob violence.

The committees of inspection even enforced frugality, going so far as to end lavish funeral services and parties. Many colonial leaders hoped these efforts would bond the colonies together economically.



T H E

# ASSOCIATION, &c.

**W**E, his Majesty's most loyal subjects, the Delegates of the several Colonies of New Hampshire, Massachusetts-Bay, Rhode-Island, Connecticut, New-York, New-Jersey, Pennsylvania, the Three Lower Counties of Newcastle, Kent, and Suffex, on Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North-Carolina, and South-Carolina, deputed to represent them in a continental Congress, held in the city of Philadelphia, on the fifth day of September, 1774, avowing our allegiance to his Majesty, our affection and regard for our fellow-subjects in Great-Britain and elsewhere, affected with the deepest anxiety, and most alarming apprehensions at those grievances and distresses, with which his Majesty's American subjects are oppressed, and having taken under our most serious deliberation, the state of the whole continent, find, that the present unhappy situation of our affairs, is occasioned by a ruinous system of colony administration adopted by the British Ministry

A n i s t r y

Virginia secured the Continental Association's delay in ending exports to Britain. Before the Continental Congress, Virginia had passed its own association that delayed ending exports to avoid hurting farmers with a sudden change in policy. The delegates from Virginia showed up to the Continental Congress united, and refused to waiver on the issue of delaying the ban on exports to Britain.

The idea of using non-importation as leverage was neither new nor unexpected. Prior to the Continental Congress, eight colonies had already endorsed the measure and merchants had been warned against placing any orders with Britain, as a ban on importation was likely to pass.

Some colonies had already created their own associations to ban importation and, in some cases, exportation. The Virginia Association had passed at the Virginia Convention with George Washington in attendance.

Washington's support of using non-importation as leverage against the British can be traced back as far as 1769 in letters between him and George Mason.

When the colonies first started publicly supporting non-importation, Bryan Fairfax, a longtime friend of Washington's, wrote to him urging him to not support the Continental Association and to instead petition Parliament.

Washington dismissed this suggestion, writing "we have already Petitioned his Majesty in as humble, & dutiful a manner as Subjects could do."

Washington, like many delegates at the First Continental Congress, no longer saw petitioning as a useful tool in changing Parliament's ways.

Many delegates felt that using the Continental Association as leverage would be impractical without explicit demands and a plan of redress. However, Congress struggled to come up with a list of rights, grievances, and demands.

Furthermore, to only repeal laws that were unfavorable to the delegates without a list of rights would be a temporary fix to the larger issue of continued British abuse. To address these issues, Congress formed a Grand Committee. (National Archives)

The delegates of the First Continental Congress were careful not to criticize the king, but express their unhappiness at the current state of affairs. The Congress used the Virginia Association, which wished to increase cooperation between the colonies, as its template.

The document was signed on October 20, 1774 by 53 delegates, including George Washington, John Adams, and Peyton Rudolph, who was President of the First Congress.

Clauses within the document announced

- a ban of the slave trade

"That we will neither import nor purchase any Slave imported after the first Day of December next, after which Time we will wholly discontinue the Slave Trade, and will neither be concerned in it ourselves, nor will we hire our Vessels, nor sell our Commodities or Manufactures, to those who are concerned in it."

- it prohibited import, consumption, and export of goods with England

“That from and after the first Day of December next we will not import into British America, from Great Britain or Ireland, any Goods, Wares, or Merchandise whatsoever, or from any other Place, any such Goods, Wares or Merchandise, as shall have been exported from Great Britain”

- severance of all economic ties with Britain

“Such as are Merchants, and use the British and Irish Trade, will give Orders, as soon as possible, to their Factors, Agents, and Correspondents, in Great Britain and Ireland, not to ship any Goods to them, on any Pretence whatsoever, as they cannot be received in America”

- the desire to improve agriculture and industry with the colonies

“That we will, in our several Stations, encourage Frugality Economy, and Industry; and promote Agriculture, Arts, and the Manufactures of this Country”

- to provide manufacture for colonists at a reasonable price

“That all Manufactures of [this country be sold at reason]able Prices, so that no undue Advantage [be taken of a future scarcity of] Goods.”

There was also provision for the correct conduct for colonists to undertake during the boycott: no “cock fighting, exhibitions of shews, plays, and other expensive diversions and entertainments,” and no purchasing of expensive mourning clothes after the death of a relative.

The boycott was relatively successful while it lasted, and succeeded in damaging the British economy. The Crown responded in 1775 with the New England Restraining Act which failed to rein in the colonists and facilitated the start of the Revolutionary War. (National Archives Foundation)

Information here is primarily from National Archives; National Archives Foundation; Massachusetts Historical Society

In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the American Revolution, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young