

250th Anniversary Of The First Provincial Congress & The Committees Of Safety

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In this, another in the series of articles from the SAR and DAR leading up to America's 250th birthday, we learn about North Carolina taking its first steps toward self-government.

Two hundred and fifty years ago, North Carolina took the first steps towards self-government. An early series of resolves in North Carolina date from the summer of 1774, when county Committees of Safety were selecting delegates to the First Provincial Congress, held in New Bern from 25-27 August. The North Carolina “resolves” of 1774 affirmed loyalty to the Crown while also declaring that the colonists could not be taxed without their consent or the consent of their elected representatives. Most of these documents specified that the colonial Assembly, not Parliament, had the right to tax them, that the colonists should have the same rights as British citizens, that recent Parliamentary acts to punish Boston for radical activities were cruel and unlawful, that the colonies should unite to resist unfair British policies, and that a boycott of British goods by the colonies should be imposed if Parliament did not institute more favorable policies. Each set of the surviving 1774 county resolves also named delegates to the upcoming Provincial Congress. The resolutions passed by the First Provincial Congress closely echoed the resolves enacted by the counties.

These “Resolution” events were:

31 May 1775 - New Bern Resolves: The New Bern Committee of Safety passed a strongly worded set of resolves calling for support for the armed struggle against England, because the "British Ministry mean no longer to receive

the peaceable addresses of the much injured people of America”

31 May 1775 - Mecklenburg Resolves: The Mecklenburg County Committee of Safety met in Charlotte and passed the Mecklenburg Resolves. Far more radical than the New Bern document, the Mecklenburg Resolves denied the authority of Parliament and specifically rejected the authority of the king-the first time any colonial committee had done so. The document declared all laws passed under royal authority to be void, condemned all holders of royal commissions as enemies, and called for a temporary local government to run affairs until a Provincial Congress could meet and pass new laws.

19 June 1775 - New Hanover Association: The New Hanover County Committee of Safety drew up an "association" that was "unanimously agreed to, by the inhabitants". Although holding out hope for "a reconciliation" with Britain, the New Hanover committee stated that "under our present circumstances, we shall be justified . . . in resisting force by force."

30 June 1775 - Cumberland County Resolves: 54 men signed a similar document at Liberty Point, using wording much like that of the New Hanover Association.

1 July 1775 - Pitt County Resolves: The Pitt County Committee of Safety produced a set of resolves at Martinborough. This committee still professed loyalty to the Crown but pledged to follow the directives of the Continental Congress to resist "the several arbitrary Illegale acts of Parliament."

14 August 1775 - Tryon Resolves: In these Resolves, the county representatives vowed resistance to the increasingly coercive actions being enacted by the government of Great Britain.

12 April 1776 - Halifax Resolves: Signed by the delegates of the Fourth Provincial Congress, ended the series of resolves with a bold call for independence not only for North Carolina but also for all of the American colonies.

BELOW: (Left) Photograph of the memorial plaque commemorating the Tryon Resolves. Tryon County was dissolved and became Lincoln County with some sections becoming Gaston and Catawba County as well as York County, SC. (Right) Close-up of the plaque on the stone.