

The Fort Gower Resolves

By Chris Matheney

But what do we mean by the American Revolution? Do we mean the American war? The Revolution was effected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people, a change in their religious sentiments, of their duties and obligations... This radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments and affections of the people was the real American Revolution.

-John Adams, writing in 1818 on
the founding of the United States

Early October 1774
Southern shore of the Ohio River
opposite the Hocking River.

Captain William Crawford studied the far shore of the Ohio River once again through his spyglass. He had been ordered by [Lord Dunmore](#), Royal Governor of the colony of Virginia, to build a stockade on the southern or Virginia side of the river. The forest on the north side of the river seemed to come right down to the riverbank, a seemingly impenetrable wall of vegetation. He also had the sensation that he and his command were being watched by unseen eyes as he considered a different option, one that might place him in violation of his Lordship's orders. Taking a deep breath, he peered again through his spyglass and noted the point of land jutting out from the north shore. Satisfied that it was the right decision, he closed his spyglass and began issuing orders...

The period between 1763 – 1775 was a time of revolutionary stirrings in the thirteen original colonies. Growing disaffection between the colonists and England resulted in a series of acts from the Crown to curb colonial protests. The British called these measures the Coercive Acts, but the colonists labeled them the [Intolerable Acts](#).

On June 22, 1774, King George III signed into law the [Quebec Act](#), which extended the Canadian province of Quebec all the way down into the Ohio Valley. Meant to mollify the French Canadians after their loss during the French and Indian War, it had the opposite effect on the colonists, especially those who lived on the frontier of western Pennsylvania and northwestern Virginia. They considered the Ohio Country to be their own by right of conquest.

Of even greater consideration were the many Ohio tribes of Native Americans who were living in the Ohio Country. American Indians have been living in the land we call Ohio for over 15,000

years. And even though the French ceded their claims in the Ohio Country to the British at the close of the French and Indian War; the Ohio tribes continued to fight for their lands. Two hundred and fifty years ago, during the spring, summer and fall of 1774, the Ohio Country was the scene of intense violence and frontier warfare. [Lord Dunmore's War](#) is a designation that is applied to a series of bloody hostilities between the frontier population of Pennsylvania and Virginia, and the Native Americans living in the Ohio Country-specifically the Shawnee and Ohio Senecas and Cayuga's in the year 1774.

Attacks and atrocities were committed by both sides in a back-and-forth manner that literally kept the frontier in flames. Largely responsible for the violence was Lord Dunmore himself who appointed agitators to important posts in the Ohio Country. The policies of these bad-actors resulted in continuous suspicion and violence between the Ohio Tribes and the frontier population of settlers and hunters.

During the summer of 1774, Lord Dunmore raised an army of Virginians to carry the war deep into the Ohio Country. On October 1st of that year, he dispatched an expeditionary force of 500 men under the command of Captain William Crawford to begin constructing a fortification for a supply depot as well as for defense. Ordered to build the fortification on the south side of the Ohio River, Crawford instead ordered his command to cross the river and construct the post on the north side.

Historians still debate why Crawford made this decision. It was a bold move considering it was a violation of orders, not to mention that the river provided a barrier between his command on one side and the Ohio Tribes on the other. One source notes that the north side had more natural defenses as compared to the Virginia side. The point of land had water on two sides, requiring only a clearing of the trees (needed for the stockade anyway) on the land side to give a good field of fire should they be attacked.

This fort, built at the confluence of the Hocking and Ohio Rivers (today's Hockingport, Ohio) was small by fortification standards containing a single blockhouse surrounded by a wooden palisade. When Lord Dunmore arrived during the second week of October, he named it Fort Gower in honor of his friend [Granville Leveson-Gower, 2nd Earl Gower, Marquis of Stafford](#).

In just a few days' time, Dunmore would lead his 1500-man army up the Hocking River to threaten the Shawnee villages along the Scioto River. Working in concert with Lord Dunmore was another army of Virginians under the command of [Colonel Andrew Lewis](#), consisting of 1000 men.

This force moved north from Virginia along the Kanawha River Valley to the Ohio River, where they intended to cross and join up with Lord Dunmore's army in the Ohio Valley. Together, these forces would march on the Shawnee Towns. While Dunmore was preparing to march out of Fort Gower, the Shawnee Chief Cornstalk (Hokolesqua) leading a large force of Shawnee warriors along with a smaller number of [Wyandots](#), [Miami's](#), [Delawares](#), and [Seneca-Cayuga's](#), attacked Lewis' command.

This combined force of Ohio Tribes attacked Colonel Lewis' encampment at Point Pleasant in the early morning of October 10, 1774. In a battle that lasted several hours, Cornstalk's force destroyed one-fifth of Lewis' army before retreating across the Ohio River. In the meanwhile, Lord Dunmore had sent word to Lewis to meet him near Cornstalk's Town on the Scioto River (near present day Circleville, Ohio). Colonel Lewis, having received the dispatch from Lord Dunmore, reformed his decimated troops and headed north behind the retreating warriors. Dunmore and his army encamped within three miles of Cornstalk's Town and established Camp Charlotte. In this location he immediately began peace negotiations with Cornstalk and several other Native American leaders. A successful peace known as the Treaty of Camp Charlotte was signed on October 20, 1774, effectively bringing an end to the conflict for a time.

November 5, 1774

Fort Gower

Twilight

The sentry pacing along the walls of Fort Gower had witnessed the redness of a beautiful sunset reflected in the currents of the Hocking River. He had earlier watched as Lord Dunmore and his entourage departed for far off Fort Pitt, leaving his army to disband and follow at their own pace. Now as the shadows grew across the parade ground, his attention was drawn to the sounds of banter and discussion coming from the blockhouse. A meeting of all the officers had been called, and they were now crowded within discussing an issue of great consequence.

Although the Shawnee had retreated from the field at Point Pleasant, the Virginians couldn't quite claim a decisive victory. They did, however, dictate the terms of peace, so the campaign was considered successful.

Upon their return to Fort Gower on November 5, 1774, they received important and stirring news about the decisions of the first Continental Congress, which had concluded its deliberations in Philadelphia. Congress had made a declaration demanding the repeal of the Intolerable Acts and had declared a boycott on British goods. These delegates to the Continental Congress had also agreed to meet again in a year's time to assess London's response to the actions of the colonies.

The officers of Dunmore's army then made their own assertion of rights and addressed the King in what has become known as the [Fort Gower Resolves](#). These resolutions or resolves were an expression of defiance to Crown rule as the American Revolution was about to begin.

Meeting of Officers under Earl of Dunmore

"At a meeting of the Officers, under the command of his Excellency the Right Honorable the Earl of Dunmore, convened at Fort Gower, November 5, 1774, for the purpose of considering grievances of British America, an Officer present addressed the meeting in the following words: 'Gentlemen: Having now concluded the campaign, by the assistance Providence, with Honour

and advantage to the Colony and ourselves, it only remains that we should give our country the strongest assurance that we are ready, at all times, to the utmost of our power, to maintain and defend her just rights and privileges. We have lived about three months in the woods without any intelligence from Boston, or from the delegates at Philadelphia. It is possible, from the groundless reports of designing men, that our countrymen may be jealous of the use such a body would make of arms in their hands at this critical juncture. That we are a respectable body is certain, when it is considered that we can live weeks without bread or salt; that we can sleep in the open air without any covering but that of the canopy of heaven; and that our men can march and shoot with any in the known world. Blessed with these talents, let us solemnly engage to one another, and our country in particular, that we will use them to no purpose but for the honour and advantage of America in general, and of Virginia in particular. It behooves us then, for the satisfaction of our country, that we should give them our real sentiments, by way of resolves, at this very alarming crisis.’ Whereupon the meeting made choice of a Committee to draw up and prepare Resolves for their consideration, who immediately withdrew; and after some time spent therein, reported that they had agreed to and prepared the following Resolves, which were read, maturely considered, and agreed to, nemine contradicente, (“without a dissenting vote”), by the meeting and ordered to be published in the Virginia Gazette:

“Resolved, that we will bear the most faithful Allegiance to his Majesty King George III, whilst his Majesty delights to reign over a brave and free people; that we will, at the Expense of Life, and every thing dear and valuable, exert ourselves in Support of the Honour of his Crown and the Dignity of the British empire. But as the Love of Liberty, and Attachment to the real Interests and just Rights of America outweigh every other consideration, we resolve that we will exert every Power within us for the Defense of American Liberty, and for the Support of her just Rights and Privileges; not in any precipitate, riotous, or tumultuous Manner, but when regularly called forth by the unanimous Voice of our Countrymen.

Resolved, that we entertain the greatest Respect for his Excellency the Right Honourable Lord Dunmore, who commanded the Expedition against the Shawnee; and who, we are confident, underwent the great Fatigue of this singular Campaign from no other motive than the true interest of this Country.”

-Signed by Order, and in behalf of the whole corps,
Benjamin Ashby, Clerk.

A list of the officers and participants of this event in Ohio history would read like a Who’s who of the frontier. Many of them would go on to play a larger role in the American Revolution.

Figures like [George Rogers Clark](#) and [Daniel Morgan](#), both stalwart frontiersmen who would ply their craft in different theaters of the war. [William Crawford](#), who made the decision to put Fort Gower in the Ohio Country, would meet his fate on the Sandusky in less than a decade. [Chief Cornstalk](#) and his sister Nonhelema-both leaders of Shawnee villages on the Pickaway Plains who became peacemakers with the Americans and accompanied Lord Dunmore’s army to Fort Gower. [Chief John Logan](#), whose family was massacred by Daniel Greathouse and his hunting party, delivered his most eloquent speech on October 26, 1774, to two of Dunmore’s scouts: Simon Girty and Simon Kenton.

The Fort Gower Resolves appeared in the December 22, 1774, issue of the Virginia Gazette, published by Alexander Purdie and John Dixon. Further, the Resolves were read and entered into the records of the House of Lords in London. The Resolves were written almost six months before Lexington and Concord, and a year and a half before the Declaration of Independence. One of the first instances of the American Revolution-at a frontier fort in the Ohio Country.

-Chris Matheney is the Historic Site Manager of the Ohio Statehouse. This article contains excerpts from a forthcoming publication on the founding of Ohio that has been made possible by a generous grant from the Revolution 250-Ohio Commission.