

Marking our region's resolve

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In England, the 5th of November, or Guy Fawkes Day, is remembered by setting off fireworks and burning effigies of the plotter who tried to blow up the Houses of Parliament in 1605.

Virginians have a much better reason to remember Nov. 5: As the anniversary of their 1774 Fort Gower Resolves of defiance to King George III.

In early November 1774, an army of Virginians led by their governor, Lord Dunmore, arrived back at the point of land formed by confluence of the Ohio and Hocking rivers (about 15 miles down river from Parkersburg, W.Va.) and to the makeshift base camp they had established several weeks earlier named Fort Gower (after Earl Gower, a prominent English statesman whose wife was sister to Dunmore's wife, Charlotte). In the interim, the army had been west in Ohio Indian territory. There, it had made war on the Shawnees and imposed on them the treaty of Camp Charlotte.

Arriving back at Fort Gower, Dunmore's officers received anxiously awaited news from the First Continental Congress, which had concluded in

Philadelphia only 10 days earlier. They were electrified by what they heard. Congress had made strongly worded declarations asserting the rights of British Americans and called for addresses to the king.

Responding to this news, as a letter written by the great rifle leader Daniel Morgan tells us, the officers of the army asserted their American rights in Resolves addressed to the king. Among the men who adopted the Resolves were many western Virginians who would go on to achieve fame during the Revolution and become leaders in the new nation. At Fort Gower, in addition to Morgan, were Gen. Andrew Lewis (of present day Salem), George Rogers Clark (hero of the Northwest Territory), future American generals William Russell, Adam Stephen and William Campbell (of then-Montgomery County and the hero of King's Mountain) and future governors James Wood (Virginia), Isaac Shelby (Kentucky) and George Matthews (Georgia). They were a distinguished band of brothers.

In part, the officers: "Resolved, that we will bear the most faithful Alle-

giance 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 Defence of American Liberty ..."

In their preamble, they wrote: "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."

The Fort Gower Resolves was the first published statement by Virginians that they were prepared to fight the king. Richmond historian Harry Ward wrote, "The document exudes the officers' confidence in their military ability and their sense of fraternal pride." Ward says further that what

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happened at Fort Gower marks the very moment of birth of the United States Army.

Published in the Virginia Gazette on Dec. 22, 1774, the Resolves rapidly became widely known throughout the Virginia colony and beyond. They received prominence in England when they were read out loud during a debate in the House of Lords in March 1775.

Sadly, in the shadow of the American Revolution, the Resolves are today largely forgotten. Almost no one, including Ohio historians, celebrates them. Nonetheless, they were consequential and significant. Their influence was seen almost immediately in the adoption of resolutions and assertions of rights by the Virginia frontier counties of Augusta, Botetourt and Fincastle, and by their impact on Revolutionary Virginia leaders, such as Richard Henry Lee and George Mason. Lee enthused over the fighting abilities of the hunting-shirt wearing, western Virginia riflemen, boasting in early 1775 that such Americans could beat the British.

So we should remember with gratitude the events of Nov. 5, 1774 as a key step taken by the revolutionary generation of western Virginians as they forged their way to independence and blazed a path for eastern Virginians to follow.