

On June 18, 1807, the U.S.S. Chesapeake sailed 10-12 miles off the coast of Norfolk, Virginia, with its decks full of cargo. She was overtaken by the British Warship H.M. S. Leopard that demanded to board and search for British Navy deserters. That day, the United States Navy drew a line in the sand and said no foreign governments would force their way onto our ships without a fight. However, on this refusal of the Chesapeake, the Leopard opened fire at point blank range, killing four seamen and injuring 18 others. The British then proceeded to board the Chesapeake and carry-off four seamen, including one British citizen and three others, a white man and two people of color. This was by no means an isolated incident, as the British for years had stopped American merchant ships on the seas with the ruse of searching for deserters. Impressments of American seaman into the British Navy were estimated to be in the thousands.

The outrage over this incident known as the Chesapeake-Leopard Affair was swift and immediate, but nowhere greater than in Virginia. In the courthouses, taverns, and streets, the cry for war was overwhelming. A few Virginia counties, including Fauquier, decided to hold public meetings for everyone to be heard and, ultimately, to send demands of action to President Jefferson.

The following is a transcript of the meeting held at Fauquier Courthouse.

Ron Turner

At a meeting of a number of the citizens of the county of Fauquier convened at the courthouse on the 13th day of July in the year 1807 for the purpose of taking into consideration the measures, it behooves us to adopt at this momentous crisis in our affairs. On motion of Capt. Hancock Lee, Genl. John Blackwell was unanimously appointed chairman and Hugh R. Campbell secretary to the meeting; when a committee was appointed consisting of the following gentlemen to wit John Love, John Scott, Hancock Lee, William Beale, Robert Randolph, Thomas Chilton, Gustavous B. Horner, Philip Harrison, James Wright, Thornton Buckner, William Edmonds, Joseph Blackwell Jun. and Augustine Jennings to draw up and report such resolutions as the said committee might think proper should be adopted, who after retiring for a short time returned the following report and resolutions which were unanimously adopted.

The injuries which the neutral rights of the people of America have long been subjected to from the government of Great Britain by the frequent invasions of our tranquility within our own jurisdictions and on our own shores.

The murder of an American citizen while navigating his vessel on our own coast. Yet unatoned for; and the promotion by his government, of the officer who dared the commission of a wanton and cowardly assassination on an innocent defenseless fellow citizen.

The known refusal on the part of Great Britain to guarantee by treaty the future observance of our national rights, the security and maintenance of which involves no less than the independence and sovereignty of the American people.

The late daring and dastardly attack made by one of the ships of war of Great Britain, on the United States ship the Chesapeake, in conformity as we believe, to that spirit of their government which would prostrate at the foot of their maritime power the rights and liberties of the free born American, and the consequent murder and dismemberment of many of our fellow citizens. This insolent violation of our domestic rights by seizing searching and detaining vessels sailing within our territorial limits and from port to port within our waters.

And lately the intelligence lately received among us that the British Squadron within the capes of Virginia continues to wear the aspect of hostility towards us: That they have disregarded and continued the authority of our government by refusing to depart from our territories, when required by the proclamation of the President of the United States. That they continue to vex and harass us by their attempts to take by force or clandestinely, supplies for their fleet in defiance of the inhibitions of the aforesaid proclamation, and of the aroused indignation of our fellow citizens, so unanimously expressed throughout the union; supplies from our insulted land for that fleet which has so recently murdered in cold blood our countrymen & from that spot too which has been the scene of those crimes, and where our fellow citizens still bleed with the wounds the treachery of Britons has inflicted.

Those and many more which we might add to the catalogue of enormity when taken into deliberate review. All seem too truly to forebode, that the relations of possessed amity between the government of Great Britain and the United States, on our part indeed sincere, (and for the preservation of which the most unremitting efforts have been used by our government) must we long be dissolved; and that after a peace preserved for nearly five and twenty years at the expense on our part of a privation or

suspension of many of our rights acknowledged or uncontroverted by the laws of nations, the crisis seems near at hand when again for our defence as an independent nation of the earth, we must with arms assert our sovereignty. Nor have we thus deliberately made the estimate of our present situation, without a regard to the superior advantages of a state of peace, of that prosperity which never fails to await the country, which finds the pursuit of a pacific policy practicable. We shall indeed rejoice in the present pleasure of our hearts we shall rejoice) if it shall be in the power of our public servants, in whose exertions, we have the utmost confidence, to procure the just reparation for our injuries, and to preserve to us an honorable peace yet when to sustain our honor as a nation, to defend our sacred rights as citizens of a free government, to protect our country against insults and outrage, a sacrifice even of the acknowledged blessings of peace is required, the duty we owe to our fathers, who with their blood have sealed our independence, who with their swords have achieved our liberty, and the obligation which posterity of right will claim of us, to transmit to them the invaluable inheritance pure and undiminished, forbid us to hesitate.

And although we have heretofore been content with the usual expression of that indignation, which we have felt in common, with our fellow citizens of the union, at the late conduct of the Commander of the British squadron within our capes; and our high admiration of the spirited and patriotic conduct of our fellow citizens of Norfolk and others in the vicinity of those scenes, which have been so imitating to freemen, and degrading to our sovereignty; yet it seems now to have become proper that the military part of the community in particular, and the citizens in general, should with that order and determination which becomes a people who acknowledge none but the government of their choice, prepare for its defense when it shall be required.

Resolved therefore that we will stand ready to obey the call of our country when ever it shall be found expedient to advance in defense of its sacred rights.

That we will stand prepared to yield to our Brethren who are exposed to the attacks of our enemies the most prompt and immediate assistance, and when they shall find it necessary to uplift the arm of war, we will also be ready to strike.

Resolved that it be recommended to our young men to form themselves into volunteer companies, and to endeavour at this momentous crisis, to perfect themselves in the military discipline so essential to the honorable service they may be engaged in, and so necessary to the support of the rights and liberties our forefathers, have bled, and died for.

Resolved that a copy of these proceedings be transmitted to the president of the United States to the Governor of this state and that a copy be published in the enquirer printed in the city of Richmond, and also that captains of militia in the county be requested to read them at the head of their several companies.

John Blackwell Jun. Chairman

Hugh R. Campbell, Secretary