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## LOYALISM IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA

by Marshall Stopher Kiker

Any tourist who visits Alexandria today would have trouble missing the fact that George Washington considered this city his home. He is, without a doubt, the town's favorite son. Numerous historic sites and monuments revere his life and interpret the history of that period. He was also the model for patriotism in the new Republic, holding such positions as General of the Continental Army and as the first President of the United States. Since Alexandria was the home of the most recognizable Patriot, one might overlook the existence of Loyalism in the town. Many historians have assumed that there were no Loyalists in Alexandria, and, even if there were, what would be the point of studying them in a town where the sentiment was so obviously Patriot?

Although it is indeed true that no organized Loyalist movement materialized in Alexandria, there were a number of men who viewed the patriots as too radical. Relatively few primary sources exist to document the

thoughts and actions of the Loyalists in Alexandria, but the sources that have survived tell us a great deal about whom these people were, and why the Patriots felt that it was necessary to suppress them. Two prominent Loyalists were Nicholas Cresswell and Bryan Fairfax. Nicholas Cresswell arrived in Alexandria from England in 1774, planning only to stay long enough to make some money and return home. He wrote about his experience in his journal, and frequently expressed his opinion about the political turmoil that had engulfed the town in which he settled. Cresswell's loyalties remained with his homeland, since like most immigrants, he had not yet developed a sufficient attachment to the colonies to feel a connection with other colonists. George Washington's good friend and neighbor, Bryan Fairfax, expressed his loyalties to the king in his correspondence with Washington. Fairfax was born in Virginia, and came from one of the most prominent families

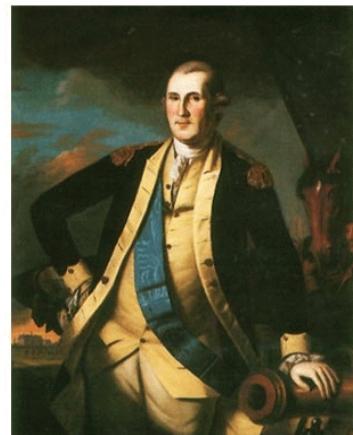
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in Alexandria, yet he felt Washington and the town's patriots were too radical. Cresswell and Fairfax both referred to several others who agreed with their political opinions. Other Alexandrians suspected of loyalist sentiments can be discovered through evidence of inquisition proceedings against loyalist properties, although the Fairfax County Court records for most of the 1770s are missing. The British Public Record Office files indicate the Virginia loyalists who applied for support from the British government after they left Virginia. This evidence, taken together, shows that a significant number of loyalists lived in Alexandria during the 1770s.

The lack of ample evidence of concerning Loyalist feeling suggests that Patriots suppressed Loyalism. The political environment was such that Loyalists were scared to express their views publicly and privately. The town was so fervently anti-Loyalist that few people whose opinions put them in the minority felt comfortable voicing their views. When they did express their opinion, the Patriots silenced them. The evidence shows that the leading men of the town, like George Washington and George Mason, suppressed Loyalist feeling and activity in Alexandria with their strong presence and influence.

A brief history of the town of Alexandria is helpful in understanding the events of the 1770s. On July 13, 1749, a public auction of the half-acre lots of a sixty-acre tract of land marked the beginning of Alexandria's existence. Merchants and planters had petitioned the Virginia House of Burgesses in

Williamsburg for the establishment of this town because its location on the banks of the Potomac River made it ideal for trading and navigation. The sixty-acre lot that became Alexandria belonged to Philip Alexander, John Alexander, and Hugh West before the Assembly declared that it be surveyed, divided into street blocks, cut into half-acre lots, and auctioned off for development.



*"Portrait of George Washington," Charles Willson Peale, 1780, oil on canvas, Philadelphia.  
Collection of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association.*

Eleven of the chief petitioners were appointed to serve as the first trustees of the town, and their responsibility was to oversee the design and building of the town. The trustees included: Thomas Lord Fairfax, William Fairfax, George William Fairfax, Lawrence Washington (George's brother), Richard Osbourne, John Carlyle, John Pagan, William Ramsay, Gerard Alexander, Philip Alexander, and Hugh West. The majority of these men purchased town lots at the public auction, in addition to others, like George Mason and Colonel William Fitzhugh. These men and their

families factored prominently in the development of the town, and they steered the town through the tumultuous events of the 1770s.

Parliament's passage of the Stamp Act on March 22, 1765 marked the onset of Alexandria's opposition to British policies. The act required that almost every kind of paper document (i.e. newspapers, court orders, deeds, wills, cards) had to have a revenue stamp, the proceeds of which went to the British government. The colonists reacted to this act with civil disobedience and a refusal to accept the revenue stamps. Virginia was the first colony to officially oppose the Stamp Act, when its House of Burgesses agreed upon the Stamp Act Resolves in June of 1765. According to Thomas Pressier, "all indications are that the merchant community of Alexandria solidly endorsed the movement to defeat the act." The Stamp Act crisis motivated Alexandria resident George Mason to take an active role. Mason realized that since the courts were closed, landlords would be unable to take tenants to court for nonpayment of land rentals. On December 23, 1765, Mason drafted and sent to George Washington, Alexandria's delegate to the House of Burgesses, a "Scheme for Replevying Goods and Distress for Rent," which provided landlords with a way to collect rent from tenants without using a stamped legal document. After the repeal of the Stamp Act on March 4, 1766, Mason's scheme became unnecessary, but it serves as evidence that Mason was active in early resistance to British policy. After the repeal, it was clear in the minds of most Virginians and other colonists

that Parliament could not tax them without their consent.

The passage of the Townsend Duties by Britain in 1767 again pushed Alexandrians into action. The Townsend Duties placed taxes on various goods imported to the colonies from Britain, like lead, paint, paper, and tea. The colonies responded with resistance, and began to set up Non-Importation Associations, spurred on by Samuel Adams' circular letter in 1768. Alexandria followed suit and sent George Washington to the meeting of the House of Burgesses with the Fairfax County Resolves, which promised the non-importation of British goods. George Mason and George Washington played a major role in the creation of the Resolves. They both received copies of the Non-Importation Associations declarations that were drafted in Philadelphia and Annapolis in early 1769. On April 5, 1769, the two men exchanged letters regarding the Associations. Mason sent Washington some changes to the Associations on April 23, 1769, and Washington added the changes to the draft that he took with him to Williamsburg. Before Washington could present the draft, Governor Botetourt dissolved the House of Burgesses, but the men unofficially continued the meeting at Raleigh Tavern. Washington served on the committee to draft the agreement, which closely resembled the draft he and Mason had developed. Alexandria had taken a firm stance of resistance, by agreeing not to import British goods until the situation changed. George Mason and George Washington asserted their role as leaders of Alexandria's political involvement.

The acceptance and enforcement of the non-importation agreement was mixed. Harry Piper, an Alexandria merchant, showed in his letter book that the first attempt to stop importation of British goods was not taken seriously in Alexandria. On May 12, 1770, he wrote: "I perceive all the stores on this side [of the Potomac] have imported goods as usual, & hitherto no notice has been taken of them." Although the 1769 Non-Importation Association was not enforced and failed to make a difference, an effort was made to reestablish it on June 22, 1770, when the delegates again met in Williamsburg. The 1770 Association was printed as a broadside bearing 164 signatures, including those of John Carlyle, William Ramsay, and George Mason, men who had been active in Alexandria's establishment. The Association of men agreed to publish the names of those who violated the pact, and those merchants who refused to honor the agreement were to be boycotted.

George Mason played an important role in the acceptance of this new Association, as he had done with the first one. In a letter to Richard Henry Lee on June 7, 1770, he called for a stricter Association: "the Sense of Shame & the Fear of Reproach must be inculcated, & enforced in the strongest Manner." The language used in the 1770 Association was remarkably similar to Mason's letter to Lee. Donald Sweig, the historian of Fairfax County, concluded that "there can be no question that the letter inspired the resolution." No organizations had been created to enforce the 1769 Association, but the 1770 Association set up inquisition committees, and published the

names of violators, as Mason had suggested to Lee.

The Non-Importation Associations of 1770 were effective at the beginning, according to Harry Piper, an Alexandria merchant. On August 2, 1770, he confirmed that the articles of the Association have generally been signed and that "the persons who ship the [outlawed] Goods, as well as the Importers are exposed in Print by the Committees of Inspection." The Association seemed to be working, and the Fairfax County Committee of Inspection demonstrated its vigilance.



*George Mason, 1811*  
*Dominic w. Bouhet (American, ?-1845) Oil on canvas.*  
*Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond.*  
*Gift of David K. E. Bruce*

On April 16, 1771, the five committee members, George Mason, George Washington, John Dalton, Peter Wagener, and John West, investigated two shipments of goods from Glasgow to Alexander Henderson of Colchester and William Balmain of Alexandria. Both men, who were cleared of violating the Association, complained about the loose enforcement of the

agreement in the colonies. The committee agreed that the pact was being violated outside Fairfax County, and it made the situation difficult for Fairfax County merchants. Alexandria enforced the rules, but it seems that the rest of Virginia was not as strict. In other colonial cities, like Philadelphia and New York, however, the Associations were very effective and coercive, occasionally enacting violent punishments.

As time passed, the Committee in Alexandria relaxed its enforcement of the Association. Other colonies abandoned their Associations, and Harry Piper wrote on May 17, 1771, "Virginia is now the only colony with an Association nominally in force." By June, Piper noticed that "there seems to be little or no regard paid to the Association." The issue's importance faded during the summer of 1771, and by August, the Association was officially repealed. Fairfax County's experiments with non-importation agreements demonstrated that in order for an agreement of this sort to work, it had to be strictly and universally enforced.

After the summer of 1771, pre-Revolutionary activity in Fairfax County lapsed for a few years. This trend is reflected in the correspondence of Washington and Mason, which, as Donald Sweig noted, "contains no further reference to non-importation, ministerial conspiracy, or the rights of Englishmen until the late spring of 1774." Up until 1771, Washington and Mason had been active in the conflict between the colonies and Britain, and provided political leadership in Fairfax County. They did not entertain the idea of separating from Britain, and they were mostly concerned about trade, commerce and property rights. When Mason

entered the conflict with his scheme of 1765, he made no plea grounded in the rights of man. He simply wanted to help his fellow townspeople to collect their rents.

Washington's brief comments on the Stamp Act, his lack of comments on the Townsend duties, and his views of the non-importation agreements demonstrate that he was primarily concerned with trade and commerce. He mentioned no violations of natural law or infringements on the rights of man; he simply addresses his economic concerns with British taxation. Both Washington and Mason, living at their estates, Mount Vernon and Gunston Hall, respectively, were plantation owners, and their main concern was planting crops and trading them.

Their attitude quickly changed, however, with the onset of events that occurred in Boston in 1773 and 1774. On the night of December 16, 1773, a group of Boston Patriots disguised as Indians threw 340 chests of tea that belonged to the British East India Company into Boston Harbor. The British Parliament retaliated by passing the Boston Port Act on March 31, 1774, which closed the port of Boston and threatened to ruin the local economy. Williamsburg heard the news in May, and Fairfax County reacted during July. The Virginia Gazette reported that on July 5th, the residents of Fairfax County had collected money, barrels of flour, and bushels of wheat "for the benefit and relief of those (the industrious poor of the town of Boston) who by the last cruel act of Parliament are deprived of their daily labour and bread." Nine days later, on July 14, George Washington and Charles Broadwater were chosen as Fairfax County's

representatives to the convention in August 1774 of the dissolved House of Burgesses.

During the summer of 1774, George Washington expressed his opinions about the colonial conflict with Britain in a letter to Bryan Fairfax, his longtime friend and neighbor. On July 4, 1774, he questioned Fairfax, "Does it not appear, as clear as the sun in its meridian brightness, that there is a regular systematic plan formed to fix the right and practice of taxation upon us?" Washington believed that the colonies had exhausted all other avenues of resolution of the situation, and that those efforts had failed. The colonies had to stand up for what they felt was right. Washington's political views, by the summer of 1774, had become much more radical, and represent a major change from his previous attitude. He had been primarily concerned with the economic well-being of his fellow colonists, but in July, 1774, he showed that he had begun to see the problems with Britain as a matter of principle.

On July 17, 1774, Mason rode to Mount Vernon to meet with Washington. A meeting of freeholders was scheduled for the next day at the Alexandria courthouse, for the purpose of approving what would later be called the Fairfax Resolves. Legend has it that Mason and Washington wrote the Resolves together at Mount Vernon that night, but Donald Sweig dismissed this as a myth in his article, "A New-Found Washington Letter of 1774 and the Fairfax Resolves." According to Sweig, the Resolves that were adopted by the freeholders of Alexandria on the 18th, and taken to the Virginia convention in Williamsburg, were the result of the work of an entire committee of men, not just Mason and Washington.

Attributing the Resolves to only Mason and Washington, Sweig argued, "would suggest that the radical sentiments the document expressed were primarily those of only one or two members of Fairfax County's ruling elite-later endorsed by their social inferiors-rather than the feelings of an aroused populace."



*Written on July 17, 1774, the Fairfax County Resolves were both a bold statement of fundamental constitutional rights and a revolutionary call for an association of colonies to protest British anti-American actions. Library of Congress*

The patriotic sentiment expressed in the Resolves represented the opinion of the majority of the freeholders in Alexandria in 1774. Mason and Washington exerted a great deal of influence on the drafting of the Resolves, but the freeholders collectively voted for them. No documented minutes of the meeting have survived, making it impossible to know what actually transpired, and whether or not any opposition was expressed. The evidence will show that prominent members of the town actively suppressed any opposition. Alexandria's Fairfax Resolves have been generally regarded by historians, as Sweig noted

in his article, as the “most far-reaching and radical of any presented to the convention.” They called for a continental congress, for the prohibition of importation, and for means of enforcing non-importation. The majority of Alexandria’s citizens exhibited their radical view of the conflict with Britain by supporting the Fairfax Resolves. It is impossible to know how fervent this support was, however, because they could have supported it only to appease the town elites.

One example of an individual opposed to the Resolves was Nicholas Cresswell. Cresswell was born in Edale, a parish of Derbyshire, England in December 1750. His father was a local landowner and sheep farmer. On March 1st, 1774, Cresswell recorded his decision to leave England for the colonies to make a living as a farmer: “I have been studying and deliberating for a long time how to shape my course in the world, and am this day come to a determined resolution to go into America, be the consequence what it will.” When he was twenty-four years old, Cresswell left England on a ship from Liverpool in April, 1774, and arrived at Urbana, Rappahannock River, Virginia thirty-eight days later. His ultimate destination was Alexandria.

According to Cresswell, the people he encountered in Virginia were hospitable, but talked of nothing “but the Blockade of Boston Harbour. The people seem much exasperated at the proceedings of the Ministry and talk as if they were determined to dispute the matter with the sword.” When he finally arrived in Alexandria on July 11th, 1774, he presented his letters to a family friend, Mr. Kirk, also from Edale, Derbyshire. Mr. Kirk offered to let

Cresswell stay at his home and Cresswell accepted. The journal he kept throughout his experience in Virginia offers many insights into the events that unfolded in Alexandria in 1774.

Cresswell’s journal unequivocally reveals a man who objected to the colonists’ reaction to British taxation. Like other recent British immigrants, Cresswell fell into a category of Loyalists described by Mary Beth Norton as those who have not yet “developed a sufficient attachment to the colonies to feel a unity with other Americans.” Cresswell viewed Alexandria’s rebellious stance as a nuisance that obstructed his plan to earn a living as a farmer. On October 19th, 1774, he reported: “Everything here is in the utmost confusion. Committees are appointed to inspect into the Characters and Conduct of every tradesman, to prevent them selling Tea or buying British Manufactures . . . All trade is almost at a stand.” Cresswell considered returning home because of the difficult economic situation, but decided against it because he believed that the conflict would be resolved by the spring. He was “determined not to return till I can do it with credit, without those rascals do persuade the Colonies into a Rebellion.”

Cresswell recorded his opinions in his journal about the radical events taking place in Alexandria during 1774. Although he failed to remark on the approval of the Fairfax Resolves in Alexandria on July 18th, 1774 (most likely because he was extremely ill, and preparing to travel to Barbados at the time), he does remark on the proceedings of the Continental Congress in November of 1774. “This evening went to the Tavern to hear the Resolves of the Continental Congress,” he wrote. They “read a petition to

the throne and an address to the people of Great Britain. Both of them full of duplicity and false representation. I look upon them as insults to the understanding and dignity of the British Sovereign and People. Am in hopes their petition will never be granted.” Cresswell was clear in his abhorrence of the colonial resistance.

Cresswell attended church at the Presbyterian Meeting House in Alexandria, and his response supports the claims of historians that the church was an important center for Revolutionary activity. Cresswell was frustrated with the church’s lack of religious priority. On November 6th, 1774, he wrote: “Went to a Presbyterian meeting. These are a set of rebellious scoundrels, nothing but political discourses instead of religious lectures,” and a week later he went again, but decides he “won’t go anymore to hear their Political Sermons.” Cresswell involved himself in community life, despite his anti-Patriot stance. In addition to attending church, he mentioned attending the ball celebrating the election of George Washington and Major Broadwater as delegates, and he frequently dined in taverns where he engaged in fiery political discussions.

Cresswell’s constant presence in town life, and the fact that he appeared to have trouble keeping his opinions to himself quickly became a serious problem with the so-called “rebellious scoundrels.” He first mentioned the negative reaction towards him on February 18th, 1775 when he remarked:

“I understand the Committee are going to take me up as a Spy. I will save them

the trouble by decamping immediately. The Committees act as Justices. If any person is found to be inimical to the liberties of America, they give them over to the mobility to punish as they think proper, and it is seldom they come off without tarring and feathering. It is as much as a person’s life is worth to speak disrespectfully of the Congress. The people are arming and training in every place. They are all liberty mad.”

Cresswell’s remarks demonstrated the town’s vigilance against Loyalist feeling. The Committee he referred to in the quotation was the town’s Committee of Safety, which was responsible for investigating suspected Loyalists. The Committee singled him out, and he felt sure that they opened his letters before they reached England. The colonists in Alexandria, according to Cresswell’s account, were capable of taking someone’s life if they spoke against the Continental Congress. According to Cresswell, Alexandria was certainly not an enjoyable place to live for those who remained loyal to the British government. The radical colonists in Alexandria would do whatever they felt necessary to drive out those that refused to embrace the colonial cause. They were, as Cresswell called them, “liberty mad.”

Cresswell felt so unwelcome that he made several attempts to leave Alexandria. His first attempt consisted of accepting a job as a surveyor to Illinois, beginning his journey in April of 1775. The expedition accomplished little, and even failed to reach Illinois. He returned to Alexandria in October of 1775, and

he found the town obsessed with war preparations against Britain. Cresswell's situation is precarious in October of 1775:

"I am now in a disagreeable situation, if I enter into any sort of business I must be obliged to enter into the service of these rascals and fight against my Friends and Country if called upon. On the other hand, I am not permitted to depart the Continent and have nothing if I am fortunate enough to escape the jail. I will live as cheap as I can and hope for better times."

It was impossible to do any business in the town without declaring one's allegiance to the Revolution. The leading merchants in the town were men like John Carlyle, who had signed the Fairfax Resolves in 1774. Their patriotic sentiments combined with their economic power made Alexandria a difficult place for a man like Cresswell to live. Cresswell feared for his economic and personal well-being.

During the fall of 1775, Cresswell felt he was being closely watched, and he reinitiated his plans to leave. He reported on October 31st, 1775 that he is "suspected of being what they call a Tory (that is a friend to my country) and am threatened with Tar and Feathers, Imprisonment and the D---l knows what." These remarks further prove the extraordinary means that Alexandria Patriots took to stamp out Loyalism. He began to fear political discussions with the townspeople, for they might have ulterior motives. On the night of November 9th, 1775, he mentioned having dinner with Doctor Jackson, and engaging in a

long dispute with him about the present political situation. He suspected that the Doctor "was employed to draw me into a political dispute. I proceed with great caution and temerity." Cresswell had not kept his political sentiments a secret before this incident, but he proceeded with caution in the future.

In order to avoid imprisonment by the Committee of Safety, Cresswell was aided by Thomson Mason on October 21st, 1775. Mason, of Raspberry Plain, Loudon County, and brother of leading Alexandria Patriot, George Mason, took an interest in Cresswell's situation, and agreed to post bond for him with the condition that Cresswell would not leave the country for six months without the consent of the Committee. Cresswell did not take matters very seriously, since he resolved two days later to "get on board the King's Ship as soon as possible," but after that attempt was unsuccessful, he realized that there was "no prospect of getting home this winter" because he was "very narrowly watched." He resigned to live quietly, and "wait with patience till summer and then risk a passage."

Mason helped Cresswell again during the summer of 1776, when he gave him letters of recommendation to Francis Lightfoot Lee, Thomas Stone, Thomas Jefferson, and John Rogers, all members of the Continental Congress, asking that Cresswell be allowed to leave on a ship bound for England. Cresswell set out for Philadelphia with his letters, and met with Lee and Jefferson, "who behaved with the greatest complaisance and politeness," and gave him a pass permitting him to travel wherever he pleased. Cresswell went to New York to board a ship, but there he ran into a man from

Alexandria who knew of his Loyalist opinions and ordered him to go back to Virginia or be thrown in prison. Back in Virginia, he was constantly in fear of being imprisoned for his political opinions, and looked for any opportunity to escape. Thomson Mason continually helped keep him out of jail through further negotiations with the Committee.

In the spring of 1777, Cresswell and his friend and fellow Loyalist, Colin Keir, made plans to escape from Virginia, although Cresswell had been denied permission to leave by the Governor of Virginia. They hired a boat ostensibly to take them to Gloucester, but their real intention was to commandeer the boat and search for the British fleet. They encountered the British ship, H.M.S. Phoenix, which helped them get to New York. Keir joined the British army, but Cresswell, in an interview with General Howe, declined to join because of a promise he made to Thomson Mason. Howe approved of this “honourable resolution,” and decided to aide Cresswell in his departure from the colonies. Finally, after many failed attempts, Cresswell secured passage on the “Edward” and set sail for England on July 23, 1777, arriving in England about a month later. He reflected back on the changes Virginia had gone through in the three years since his arrival in 1774. What was such a beautiful and happy country had “become the theatre of War, the country of distraction, and the seat of slavery, confusion, and lawless oppression.”

Cresswell’s journal gives historians a detailed description of what it was like to be a Loyalist in Alexandria. The Patriots, who fought for human rights and claimed to be protectors of virtue, quickly discarded those principles when

it came to dealing with Loyalists. As Cresswell explained, “to cheat him [a Loyalist] is lawful, to steal from him is serving the cause and Country.” Cresswell’s journal unequivocally confirms a Loyalist presence in Alexandria. Through his journal, we can see why few sources exist to document Loyalist activity: those suspected faced imprisonment, and found that their private papers would be confiscated. Not only was it dangerous to discuss one’s political opinions in public, as Cresswell found out after he talked too freely with leading Patriots in the town taverns, but it was also dangerous to write about one’s opinions privately. Alexandria’s Committee of Safety rigorously investigated Loyalists and made their punishments known.



Cresswell stayed at Gadsby's Tavern for some time.

*In his diary he complained about the loss of his overcoat, for which tavern keeper Mary Hawkins had generously offered to reimburse him. When he came to collect, however, she had apparently changed her mind; Cresswell wrote that “the D—d Jade tells me that I am a Tory and she won’t pay me a Farthing.”*

*Reprinted with permission from the 1992 Historic Alexandria Antique Show Catalogue.*

While Cresswell’s journal proves that there was at least one Loyalist living in Alexandria, the question of whether he was the

only one logically arises. His journal, replete with references to his Loyalist friends, provides the answer to this question. Cresswell, having never owned property in Virginia, constantly stayed at the houses of friends and acquaintances. On January 5, 1777, Cresswell wrote about how he celebrated joint birthdays with a Mr. Neilson in Loudon County: “We spent it as happily as our situation would permit. We are of the same opinion in political matters.” Cresswell made friends easily, even with those who disagreed with him. His family friend, Mr. Kirk, a Patriot, remained hospitable to Cresswell, even though association with him put him in a precarious position with the town. Cresswell managed to create a network of friends, both Patriot and Loyalist, and avoided imprisonment.

Cresswell’s journal shows that Loyalism existed in Alexandria through its description of a network of Loyalists living in and around Alexandria. Cresswell was not the only Loyalist in Alexandria; he worked together with other Loyalists to escape from his inhospitable environment. He and Colin Keir made plans to help a group of Loyalists escape the Alexandria jail. They provided arms and ammunition to the prisoners, and agreed to meet them at Cedar Point on the Potomac after the breakout. Cresswell referred to the incident, when he met with one of the men who managed to escape. Cresswell and Keir had been unable to keep their promise of meeting at Cedar Point because they encountered bad weather at sea. On June 19, 1777, Cresswell wrote that John Dodd reported to him that “they all got off safe, but Davis their guide, and a Scotch Sergeant who was so much dispirited at not finding us at

Cedar Point agreeable to our promise that they immediately returned, and delivered themselves to the mercy of the rebels.” The others, who remained resolute in their plans, continued on their journey, “by traveling in the night and through the Woods at night they got to Delaware Bay, where they seized a boat and got aboard the Roebuck, Man of War.” John Dodd, who told Cresswell this information, was obviously among those who eluded capture.

The examination of other sources helps to explain the incident that Cresswell referred to in this passage. A notice from Alexandria dated April 16, 1777 appeared in the Virginia Gazette confirmed the escape:

“One hundred dollars reward for apprehending the following prisoners of war, who made their escape last night about 11o’clock, and it is supposed went down the River Potowmack, vis. James Parker, George Blair, William Cunningham, John Rothery, Josias Rogers, John Todd, William Nichols, and John Dunker.”

The ‘Josias Rogers’ was most likely the ‘Mr. Rogers’ Cresswell referred to in his journal, and the ‘John Todd’ was most likely the ‘John Dodd,’ with whom Cresswell mentioned meeting. The Virginia Gazette and Cresswell’s journal prove the existence of a Loyalist conspiracy in Alexandria. Loyalists joined together, and planned an escape from the jail. They were able to communicate with other Loyalists, like Cresswell and Keir, who were not in jail, to help them with their escape.

Another passage in Cresswell’s journal identified a second group of Loyalists in Alexandria. Scotch Sergeant Davis, who Cresswell identified as the guide for the escapees, and among those who returned to

Alexandria after they abandoned their plan to escape, impeached a number of Loyalists. Cresswell reported: "Davis has impeached Mr. Wales, that is Mr. Keir's uncle, Mr. George Muir, Mr. Chisum, Mr. Kilpatrick, Mr. Hepburn and Mr. Murdo, that they were all sent to Williamsburg Jail and had their trials on the 30th. Of May." The journal of Ebenezer Hazard, a surveyor of the post office who was passing through Fairfax County during the midst of these events, confirmed the information in Cresswell's journal. Hazard wrote on May 22, 1777 that "some Tories lately formed a Plan for burning Alexandria & murdering the Inhabitants...but their plan was discovered, & they are now in Gaol here." Hazard's report identified a plot to burn Alexandria as the reason these men were put in jail. Hazard's entry on May 23 confirmed the identity of the men named in Cresswell's journal: "The Tories who intended to destroy Alexandria are sent off today, in irons, to Williamsburgh to be tried. Two of them whose names are Wales and Hepburn, are Men of some Property:— there are seven in all; -- no Americans among them." The Virginia Gazette also documented the incident on May 30: "On Wednesday last, Thomas Davis and some other persons were brought down and committed to the public jail, being accused of facilitating the escape of some prisoners of war from Alexandria, and other treasonable practices." This description blamed the Loyalists' arrest on helping prisoners escape from jail, but does not mention the plot to burn Alexandria that Hazard mentioned. It is possible that Hazard was simply repeating a rumor. Cresswell's account also makes no reference to a plot to burn the town, and the information in

his journal connected the arrest of Davis and the others to the escape plot. Cresswell's information about the arrest and trial of the men was followed by a notice of a reward for Cresswell and Keir's apprehension for their role in aiding the escape. Regardless of whether or not a plot to burn the town existed, it is clear from these primary sources that Cresswell was not the only Loyalist living in Alexandria. He was a member of a network of men, who conspired to free jailed Loyalists and engineered an escape to England.

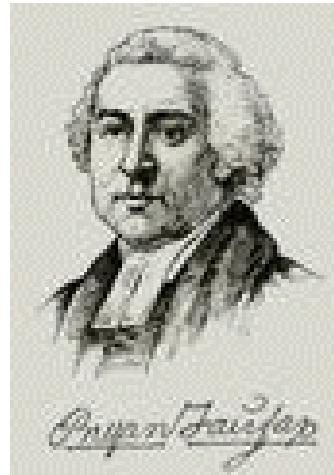
Bryan Fairfax is an example of another Loyalist in Alexandria. While the journals of Nicholas Cresswell, Ebenezer Hazard, and the Virginia Gazette prove that Loyalism existed in Alexandria, none of the Loyalists identified thus far were born in America. All of them were born in Britain and made attempts to return to their homeland. In order to make a strong case for the existence of Loyalism in Alexandria, American Loyalists also need to be identified. It is logical for a recent immigrant to still feel connected to his homeland, but it is more daring for someone who was fully connected to a colonial community from birth to disagree with the majority of his fellow townspeople. Bryan Fairfax is an example of a Loyalist who was born in the colonies. His family was one of the most powerful families in Fairfax County, which was their namesake. The Fairfax family's estate, Belvoir, was located on the land next to Lawrence Washington's estate, Mount Vernon. Bryan Fairfax was born in 1736, making him four years younger than Lawrence's son George. Bryan Fairfax and George Washington grew up together as neighbors, and developed a deep friendship maintained by a long correspondence

that began in 1754 and lasted until Washington's death in 1799.

A number of the letters they exchanged have been preserved and published by Fairfax County, and they reveal a friendship that endured a major difference in political opinion. Washington's elucidation of the colonial cause against the tyranny of Britain centered on the colonists' right not to be taxed without their consent: "I think the Parliament of Great Britain hath no more right to put their hands into my pocket, without my consent, then I have to put my hands into yours for money." Fairfax did not agree with his friend's radical position against British policy. He favored a more moderate approach. In a letter to Washington in July 17 of 1774, he presented his position against the adoption of Fairfax Resolves, which was scheduled for the next day at the Alexandria courthouse. He advocated further petitioning to Parliament, instead of the drafting of resolutions: "I ardently wish that no Resolves had been now entered into. . . No conditional resolutions, which may be formed at the time, should be published until it is known that the Petition has no effect." Fairfax's letter proves that not every leading community member in Alexandria approved of the Fairfax Resolves, which the freeholders voted to send to the convention in Williamsburg as representative of the town's position against Britain.

In this same letter, Fairfax wrote out his objections to specific Resolves, and asked Washington to read his objections at the freeholders meeting. He presented his objections when he wrote: "I come now to consider a Resolve which ought to be the most objected to, as tending more to widen the breach

and prevent a Reconciliation than any other. I mean that wherein the Authority of Parliament is almost in every instance denied." Fairfax respected the authority of Parliament over the colonies, and believed reconciliation should be orchestrated. Fairfax's knowledge of the Fairfax Resolves on the 17th proved Donald Sweig's assertion that the Resolves were not written by Mason and Washington at Mount Vernon on the night of the 17th. Fairfax obviously had a copy of the Resolves on the 17th because he referred to them by number. While they probably did not compose the Resolves alone on the 17th, Mason and Washington exerted a great deal of influence in the drafting, which is evident in the letters between Mason and Washington. Fairfax's letter also demonstrated Washington's participation in the drafting of the Resolves because it was Washington that Fairfax wrote with his objections.



Bryan Fairfax, oil on canvas, M. Minnegerode Andrews, after a miniature by an unknown artist.  
Date unknown.

Fairfax recognized the power that Washington had over the freeholders who would approve the Resolves on July 18th. He asked Washington to read his letter of objections to

the Resolves at the meeting of the freeholders: “Thus, Sir, I have made some Objections as it appeared on me to do, and hope that you will cause this Letter to be read as containing my Sentiments on this important occasion.” The response to Fairfax’s request from Washington reveals a great deal about the way things operated in Alexandria. Washington did not read Fairfax’s letter at the meeting, and he offered many excuses for this rebuff. Washington acknowledged that he received the letter, but that it “was not presented to me till after the resolutions had been revised, altered, and corrected by the Committee.” Upon receipt of the letter, he “hastily run it over, and handed it around to the gentlemen on the bench . . . but as no person seemed in the least disposed to adopt your sentiments.” Washington claimed that everyone at the meeting supported the adoption of the resolutions, “except for Mr. Williamson, who was for adopting your advice literally, without obtaining a second voice on his side,” and the other gentlemen who had seen the letter, advised Washington “not to have it read, as it was not like to make a convert, and repugnant . . . to the very principle we were contending for.” As Washington told it, almost no one present at the meeting agreed with Fairfax, so the letter went unread. Fairfax’s response to Washington’s explanation reported a different view of the proceedings at the freeholders meeting. While Fairfax accepted Washington’s reasons for not reading the letter, he had heard from those that attended the meeting that there were men present who agreed with his objections. He wrote on August 5th: “Mr. Williamson told me the other day that he found afterwards that there were a great many

of his opinion in the Court House who did not care to speak because they thought it would be no purpose.” Many men, who felt they were in the minority, “secretly object to some of the Resolves but could not speak his mind.” It is fair to assume that these men felt intimidated by George Washington and other leading Patriots.

By examining both accounts of this incident, we can clearly understand what most likely went on at the meeting. Washington passed the letters around to his Patriot friends, who disagreed with it and encouraged him not to read it. If the letter had been read, perhaps those who were reluctant to speak out against the radical nature of the Resolves would have felt that they were not alone, and would have voiced their opinions. It is interesting to wonder what would have happened at the meeting if Bryan Fairfax had attended, and expressed his concerns about the radical Resolves. There were men present at the meeting who agreed with him, but since no one spoke out against the Resolves, each of those men assumed they were the only ones who felt that way. A leader was needed to be the voice of moderation and restraint, but Bryan Fairfax declined to be that person. While he managed to express his views to the leading Patriot, George Washington, he failed to attend this momentous meeting to object in person. He gave no explanation for his absence, saying only that he had business to attend to at home. From his letters, it is clear that Fairfax did not want to assume any sort of leadership role for the Loyalists in Alexandria. He shied away from it on many occasions. Washington asked him to be a candidate in the election of town delegates along with Washington, but Fairfax declined the

proposition: “As it would give me pleasure to serve with You, I have thought it very unlucky that it should happen at this time. I have been forced to decline it chiefly because I thought I could not give Satisfaction in general upon this occasion. For I should think Myself bound to oppose violent measures now.” He declined to be a representative of Alexandria to the convention because he knew his opinions were not in the majority. Most people who strongly believed in something would have jumped at the opportunity to have a powerful position to push their views, but Fairfax did not.

Through a careful reading of the letters exchanged between Washington and Fairfax, it is easy to see why one man became the first President of the United States, while the other could never decide what to do with his life. Both men had the same resources available to them, but the difference lies in the way Washington and Fairfax conducted themselves. Washington was forthright and resolute in his opposition to British policy. He believed strongly in his principles and assumed a major leadership role in Alexandria’s Patriot actions. Fairfax, on the other hand, wavered constantly. He entered the ministry, becoming rector of the Fairfax Parish in 1790, but he second-guessed his religious faith and resigned the post in 1792. While he wrote forcefully in his opinion that more petitioning should be entered into instead of Resolutions, he wavered on these political points also. In the August 5th letter to Washington, Fairfax remarked: “You have no Reason Sir to doubt your opinion; It is that I have Reason to doubt mine when so many Men of superior Understanding think otherwise.” His lack of self-confidence is evident in this

passage. He considered changing his mind because many more men, smarter than him, disagreed with him. In the prologue of the book of letters, Donald Sweig wrote about Bryan’s lack of conviction in his opinions. Sweig pointed out that Fairfax “shied away from political office or public conflict. He rose no higher than a justice of the county court. His actions reflected in nearly every letter show insecurity, timidity, and a lack of resolve about his feelings.” Fairfax was more concerned with keeping Washington as one of his friends, than stirring up political debate. If Fairfax had been a different type of person, and strongly supported his opinions at the meeting of the freeholders, perhaps the Fairfax Resolves would have been debated, and the final draft less radical. With no one willing to stand up for the less radical perspective, Washington, Mason, and the other radicals faced no solid opposition to their views.

Nicholas Cresswell and Bryan Fairfax were examples of two different types of Loyalists: Cresswell was the recent British immigrant who regarded the colonists as scoundrels; Fairfax was the Alexandrian who spoke of moderation. Harry Piper represented yet another category. He was a Patriot in public, but he worried about the effects of non-importation associations that Alexandria adopted. His letters show a man who was more concerned with his economic well-being, than with the colonial cause. As discussed earlier in the paper, Piper recorded the failure of the Non-Importation Association in Alexandria. Piper was one of the principal tobacco buyers in Alexandria, but he found it extremely difficult to do business in the late 1760s and 1770s. He

went along with the leading men of the town by signing the Non-Importation Association of 1770, which meant he agreed with the Patriots, publicly, at least, but his letters were not full of Patriot rhetoric like Washington's or Mason's. On September 12, 1768 he wrote: "Indeed my friend I almost tired of this country, I have been here a long time to very little purpose, truly so little that I don't know which way I shall live if I go home."

Tobacco was the main crop in Alexandria up until the 1770s, but because of the decline of its price, planters were producing less of it. It was at this time that the price of wheat increased, and many planters switched to the production of wheat and flour. Tobacco merchants like Piper faced a difficult situation. The period leading up to the Revolution tested the merchants' loyalty, and local Patriot groups watched their response to the non-importation agreements closely. Thomas Pressier explained the merchants' problems in his 1977 dissertation: "It seems clear that many of the Alexandria merchants privately viewed with distaste the positions taken by the town Whigs. This dislike for what some of the merchants characterized as extremism must have been widespread by the 1770s, as the trade disruptions of those years left few merchants unscathed." Although they faced economic hardships, no leading merchants expressed their opposition publicly. There is little evidence to explain how much the Revolution affected the economy in Alexandria, but Pressier concluded that "the more prominent and politically active merchants remained in Virginia, while many of the factors of British firms probably emigrated." Harry Piper is an example of a tobacco

merchant who struggled with his ability to make money during the Revolutionary crisis, but never in his letters does he appear as a Loyalist. Pressier's assessment of the merchants' predicament seems accurate.

The major available sources that demonstrate a Loyalist presence in Alexandria have been presented. The journal of Nicholas Cresswell, and the letters of Bryan Fairfax and Harry Piper are the most comprehensive sources for Loyalist feeling and activity, but the examination of other smaller pieces of evidence can identify other possible Loyalists. Enoch Hawksworth's application for British support is one example. The British Public Record Office files recorded the applications of men who escaped America and asked for help from the British government when they arrived in Britain. Parliament passed an act in July of 1783 that established a commission to "enquire into the losses and services of all such persons who have suffered in the Rights, Properties, and Professions, during the late unhappy dissensions in America, in consequence of their loyalty to His Majesty and attachment to the British Government." The act helped escaped Loyalists receive compensation for property and other things they lost because of their loyalty. Only one man from Alexandria applied for help from the British Government, and his name was Enoch Hawksworth. In October 1783, Hawksworth wrote the Commissioners, and explained the history of his loyalty, recounted his trials and tribulations, and pled for "such aid or relief as his losses and services may found to deserve." Hawksworth was a native of England and immigrated in America in 1764. He operated a store on North Fairfax Street in

Alexandria that adjoined John Carlyle's house. He left Alexandria in 1775 after he sold his goods, closed his store, and made "the best Provision the unhappy times would permit for his Child, a young and motherless daughter." The town was such an uncomfortable place for Loyalists like Hawksworth that he fled hurriedly without taking his daughter with him. The townspeople called him a Tory, and he realized "the certainty of falling into much trouble and distress by adhering to . . . his allegiance." He feared for his safety if he remained in Alexandria. No evidence in the British files indicated whether or not Hawksworth received compensation.

Although Hawksworth was the only Alexandrian to apply for support from the British Government, the British Public Record Office files documented the applications of men who were involved in the network of Loyalists operating in Alexandria. James Parker applied for aid, and he described his escape from prison with other Loyalists in Virginia. This must be the same James Parker named in the Virginia Gazette as an escapee of the Alexandria jail. John Cunningham, another of those involved in the escape plot and listed in the Virginia Gazette, also applied for support from the British Government. His application stated that he boarded the Roebuck, a British man-of-war. This is the same ship that Nicholas Cresswell reported in his journal as the ship that the men who successfully escaped from the Alexandria jail boarded, which suggests he was the same John Cunningham. The files also show that a George Muir, who was from Scotland and lived as a merchant in Virginia during the years before the Revolution, applied for aid from the British Government. It is most likely that this

was the same George Muir whose name appeared in the Virginia Gazette as being impeached for Loyalism by Scotch Sergeant Davis in Alexandria, and acquitted in his trial in Williamsburg. The applications of these four men that appeared in the British Public Record Files, plus the facts that tie them to Alexandria, are further evidence that Loyalists lived in Alexandria, and fled to escape imprisonment.

Another way to single out more possible Loyalists in Alexandria is through the examination of the inquisition proceedings of the Committee of Safety in Alexandria. A law passed in Virginia on May 29, 1779 ordered all Loyalists' estates be sequestered by the Commonwealth and sold at public auction. Historians face a major problem in researching the proceedings of the courts in Alexandria and Williamsburg, however, because the Court Order and Minute Books from Fairfax County during 1775-1782, 1793-1796, and 1798 are lost. Williamsburg's court records, which would also tell historians about the Loyalists who were brought to trial there, were burned in 1863 during the Civil War. Marian Van Landingham tried to piece together the actions of the Alexandria Committee of Safety by looking at the letters of William Ramsay, one of the town's founding citizens. Van Landingham claimed that the Committee of Safety investigated the property of several men suspected of being Loyalists, specifically, John Connell, William Hicks, James Lowrie, and Harry Piper. The case of Piper, who had left Alexandria in 1775 and then died in Britain, showed the difficulty that Committee had in proving someone's loyalty. There were many reasons to visit England, and then be unable to return. The case against Piper was never proved because William Ramsay was

able to purchase Piper's property from his heir. If the case had been proved, his property would have been sold at auction by the state.

Although there are some obvious gaps in the evidence that exists to prove the presence of Loyalists in Alexandria, the available evidence is substantial enough to make the case that Alexandria was not entirely Patriot. The journal of Nicholas Cresswell provides first-hand knowledge of a Loyalist's experience in Alexandria during the Revolution, and sheds light on the network of Loyalists that operated in the town. Bryan Fairfax's letters to George Washington demonstrate that there were people who did not agree with the radical actions taken by the town. Harry Piper's letter book exemplified the cautious feelings of the town's leading merchants. The British Public Record Office files identified still more Loyalists. No organized Loyalist movement materialized in Alexandria, but that does not mean that Loyalists did not exist. There is no evidence of any public expression of Loyalist activity, which suggests that the Loyalists were afraid to come forward. The political sentiment in the town was staunchly Patriot, and it was not an environment where Loyalists were encouraged to express themselves. As we have seen from Cresswell's journal and Bryan Fairfax's letters, among other sources, the Patriots actively suppressed Loyalist activity. Alexandria, led by radicals like George Washington and George Mason, strongly endorsed the colonial cause against British policy.

Alexandria was in some ways typical of the rest of Virginia during the political struggles of the 1770s. The presence of George Washington, and the other members of the powerful Board of Trustees, however, made Alexandria different from anywhere else. These men possessed strong leadership qualities, and

they knew how to eloquently voice their opinions. George Washington became the symbol for liberty in the early republic, and was the obvious choice to become the first president of the newly formed United States of America. Alexandria is the only place that can claim to be the hometown of this national hero. To this day in Alexandria, George Washington's birthday is celebrated with elaborate town festivities. He inspired people to fight for their principles in the 1770s, just like he continues to do today. Nicholas Cresswell best described the way Alexandrians worshipped Washington when he wrote: "Washington's name is extolled in the clouds. Alexander, Pompey and Hannibal were but pigmy Generals, in comparison to the magnanimous Washington." The evidence suggests that he was able to use his status in Alexandria to shape local political opinion. He, along with the other leading men of the town, helped to create an environment in which people with non-Patriot tendencies were scared to publicly express their beliefs. It is safe to assume that the Loyalists living in Alexandria would have organized some sort of local opposition to the Patriot cause if the town's political leaders had not been so overpowering.

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