

153 DUNMORE, LORD – [JOHN MURRAY, FOURTH EARL DUNMORE]

Publisher

Norfolk

Publisher of the *Virginia Gazette*, printed "by Authority" off Norfolk in 1775-1776.

Lord Dunmore was an unlikely publisher, being a colonial governor, but was brought to that state by events of the early days of the American Revolution in Virginia. He began his adult life in the British army, perhaps as a demonstration of his family's renewed loyalty to England's Hanoverian kings after his father's participation in the Jacobite Rebellion of the 1740s. He then served as a peer in the British House of Lords following his father's death in 1756. That service gave Dunmore entrée with the members of the Board of Trade in London, the administrators of Britain's overseas colonies. In 1770, he gained an appointment as governor of the royal colony of New York and set out to take up residence in New York City. However, his tenure there was brief. Shortly before his arrival in America, Virginia's royal governor, Norborne Berkeley, Lord Botetourt, died in Williamsburg, and the Lords in London decided to reassign Dunmore to Virginia.

When he arrived in the Old Dominion in September 1771, Dunmore found an immediate acceptance among the planter elite as a result of his purposeful relaxation of a prohibition on land grants west of the ridge of the Appalachian Mountains, the so-called Proclamation Line of 1763. He evidently thought that such new grants would assuage fears about larger imperial policies that had led to wide-spread resistance in the colony to the Stamp Act of 1765 and the Townshend Acts of 1767. Indeed, the 1770 Boston Massacre, a product of the Townshend protests, was fresh in everyone's mind then, and Dunmore was determined to avoid similar problems in Virginia. But in issuing those new grants, he also stirred up native resistance to Euro-American expansion into territory that was supposedly protected by the Proclamation Line. By 1773, Dunmore faced open warfare with the Shawnee and Delaware peoples of the Ohio River valley.

That conflict became his primary focus, even as Virginians began to form committees of correspondence to coordinate continent-wide resistance to new imperial directives issuing from London. He dissolved the General Assembly in both 1773 and 1774 in response to such planning for future resistance, but then expected, and received, fiscal support from those same legislators for a military campaign against the natives of the Ohio country – later called Dunmore's War. By the time that he returned his attention to the political situation in the east in the winter of 1774-75, Dunmore seems to have already been marginalized. When orders arrived to interdict any potential militia supplies in early 1775, he removed the munitions from the public stores in Williamsburg to naval vessels in the York River. Incensed Virginians were prevailed upon by their elected leaders to forego violence as a response, but Dunmore soon forced the issue inadvertently. His dispatches to London were regularly intercepted and his most recent ones were soon published in the *Virginia Gazette* of John Pinckney (325). Therein Dunmore outlined plans to crush further resistance in the colony by burning the riverside estates of Virginia's principal opposition leaders. Recognizing that his personal safety was now at stake, he abandoned Williamsburg in May 1775 and took up residence on board a British man-o-war, effectively giving the colony its independence.

Over the next year, Dunmore contested control of Virginia from a fleet of Loyalist vessels in the Chesapeake, often at anchor off Norfolk. That town was seen by both sides as crucial to control of Virginia: Dunmore saw supporters among its Scottish merchants; patriot leaders saw sustenance in its extensive commerce; both saw a populace opposed to their ongoing efforts and so feared them. In Dunmore's view, there was a particularly vocal element opposing him there, the *Virginia Gazette and Norfolk Intelligencer* of John Hunter Holt (223). Holt spent much of the spring and summer of 1775 savaging Dunmore and his subordinates in print, with a key point in his scurrilous commentaries being the known "treason" of Dunmore's father, which had now reappeared in the son, as evinced by the governor's seaborne assaults on the British citizens of Virginia. By the end of September, Dunmore had tired of the weekly criticisms in Holt's paper and ordered a detail of marines to go ashore into Norfolk, seize the press, its supplies, and any workers found there, and return them to his custody off shore. The detail captured all those items excepting Holt.

The result was that Dunmore now had the capability of producing his own newspaper and other imprints; he was no longer dependent on "rebel" printers like Holt. So he employed this new-found capability to publish a journal that would report current events from his "official" perspective, a true *Virginia Gazette* printed "by Authority" of the crown. His paper issued only intermittently between November 1775 and February 1776, as the press was used primarily to produce the forms and bills needed by his displaced administration. The most noteworthy of those items was his proclamation of rebellion dated November 7th. The broadside was a legally-mandated response to rebellion in the empire, a declaration requiring all loyal subjects of the crown to rally to their sovereign's standard in order to suppress the rebellion. But in this case, Dunmore added the unique provision that if any enslaved Africans in Virginia heeded his call to arms, they would be given their freedom – a promise that prompted several thousand slaves to flee their masters in succeeding months.

However, Dunmore found that he could not rule Virginia from his Loyalist fleet, nor could he regain a defensible land base. So in August 1776, after the Declaration of Independence was issued by the Continental Congress, Dunmore sailed for British-controlled New York City, taking the seized press and its two journeyman printers – Alexander Cameron (076) and Donald McDonald (286) – with him. There they were rewarded by being designated as the official printers to the British forces in North America by their new commander, Sir William Howe, at Dunmore's express recommendation. The deposed royal governor then sailed on to England and an investigation into his conduct.

Dunmore was found to have acted appropriately and so retained the title and salary of his Virginia assignment until 1783 when the Treaty of Paris recognized American independence. That same treaty awarded Britain title over the Bahamas in exchange for their evacuation of the Floridas, a process which landed several thousand American Loyalists in those islands. In 1786, Dunmore was named governor of the Bahamas, and so is often styled the first British governor there, even though those same islands were an English colony in the seventeenth century. There he was reunited with Alexander Cameron, one of his shipboard journeymen, for a few months in 1789; Cameron now served as the colony's crown printer and publisher of Dunmore's official newspaper; however he died in Nassau that fall, still in the governor's

employ, never having returned to his ancestral home.

Dunmore did get that opportunity, returning to Scotland at the end of his service in the Bahamas. He retired to his home near Falkirk in Stirlingshire in 1796, though he died at his house on the Kent seashore in 1809.

NB: Dunmore's full formal name was: John Murray, Earl Dunmore, Viscount of Fincastle, and Lord Murray of Blair Moulin and Tillemot, all inherited on his father's death in 1756.

Personal Data

Born: in 1730 Taymouth, Perthshire, Scotland.
Married Feb. 21 1759 Lady Charlotte Stewart @ Scotland.
Died: Feb. 25 1809 Ramsgate, Kent, England.
Children: George Murray, 5th Earl Dunmore (b. 1762), Lady Augusta Murray (b. 1768), Lady Susan Murray (b. 1771).

Sources: Imprints; Brigham; Selby, *Dunmore*; Rawson, "Guardians," chap. 4.