



Deepening crisis in the British Empire cast doubt upon anyone's accustomed power, influence, or promotion. The participation of ordinary folk in protests against proprietary rule had begun to change the game of politics. Earlier, in 1766, deadlock between house and council over the question of who should salary the upper chamber's clerk had prevented passage of an act to pay people to whom the province owed money—many of them soldiers and small military suppliers. Thomas Cresap and a body of deerskin-clad friends with long rifles had spoken of marching on Annapolis to impose reason on the councillors. Anger over Eden's fee proclamation led to public displays attended by nonvoters, debtors, and others who enjoyed baiting the powerful. The "minds of a certain Rank of men," someone wrote in the *Maryland Gazette*, had been "poisoned to such a Degree, that far from being ashamed of resisting subordinate Authority, they even glory in their audacious Insults of Government itself."³⁷

Just as during the Stamp Act crisis, a few audacious men with political influence tried to ride the horse of rising anger. Among the daring were John Hall and Matthias and Rezin Hammond, longtime members of the country party with homes in Annapolis and Anne Arundel County. After the 1773 assembly elections they split with leaders of the new popular party in formulating a tobacco inspection and fees bill. Chase, Paca, and Johnson—perhaps hoping not unduly to offend the governor, who planned consultations in London—drew up a recommended list of fees; Hall and the Hammonds attacked it as too generous. Playing on the sentiment against proprietary officers (also reflecting sharp differences between Matthias Hammond and the Carrolls over their adjoining property bounds in the county), the radical Hall-Hammond faction sent the fee schedule down to defeat. Then, in May 1774, the Boston committee of correspondence called for resistance to the British coercive acts by closing all trade with the Mother Country. Carroll's friends and the Hall-Hammond group fought for leadership of the Annapolis meeting that considered the Boston call, each side outdoing the other as stalwart spokesmen for American rights. The emotional gathering concluded with a statement demanding that no Maryland lawyer prosecute any debt owed to a British creditor as long as the Boston Port Act remained in force.

It proved difficult to keep a lid on growing unrest. The Annapolis resolves, also favoring nonimportation and nonexportation, appealed to Maryland planters because of the economic misfortune that frustrated them once again. Improved wheat harvests in the south of Europe in 1770 lowered the price of that staple, which merchants had relied upon, and then the next year tobacco and lumber prices also fell. European depression in 1772 had severe repercussions in the Chesapeake. Poor Marylanders suspected factors of foul practices. Familiar cries about debts and down markets resounded at

county meetings, where smaller planters finally dominated talk of the Annapolis resolves. British firms complained to no avail of the no-collection policy. During the early summer of 1774 public meetings at Charles Hungerford's tavern in the lower district of Frederick County, at Frederick Town, and in Jonathan Hager's Elizabeth Town all took a firm stand against the coercion of Boston. In June an Annapolis meeting sent friends of the Carrolls—Chase, Johnson, and Paca from the Western Shore, Matthew Tilghman and Robert Goldsborough from the Eastern—to the Continental Congress, which first met in Philadelphia that September. At home the Hall-Hammond radicals found a suitably explosive issue in the October arrival of the brigantine *Peggy Stewart*. Belonging to a critic of debt renunciation, Anthony Stewart, the vessel entered Annapolis harbor loaded with two thousand pounds of tea on which Stewart had paid the detested duties. Hall and Hammond circulated handbills calling for a public meeting on the nineteenth of the month.

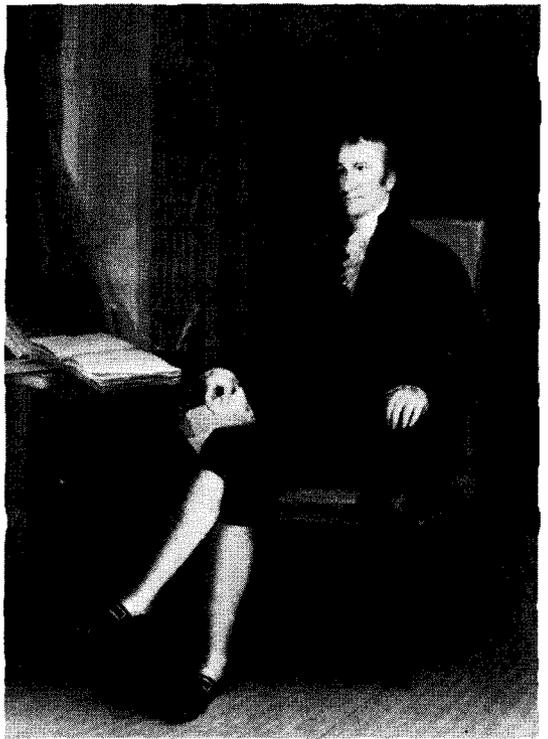
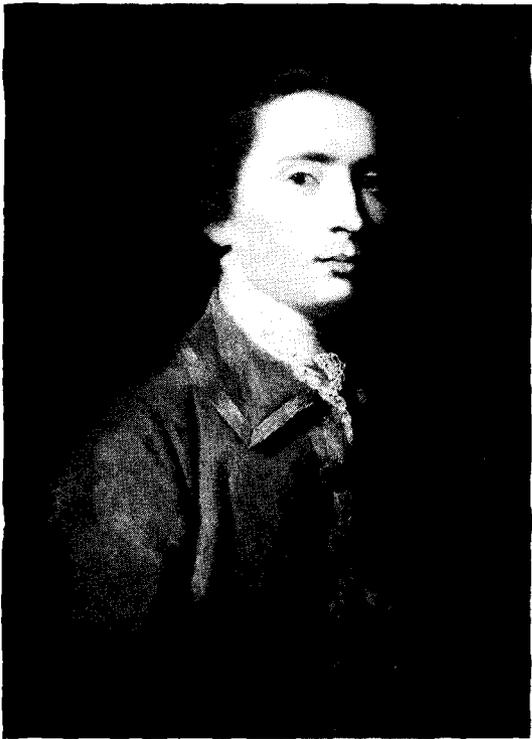
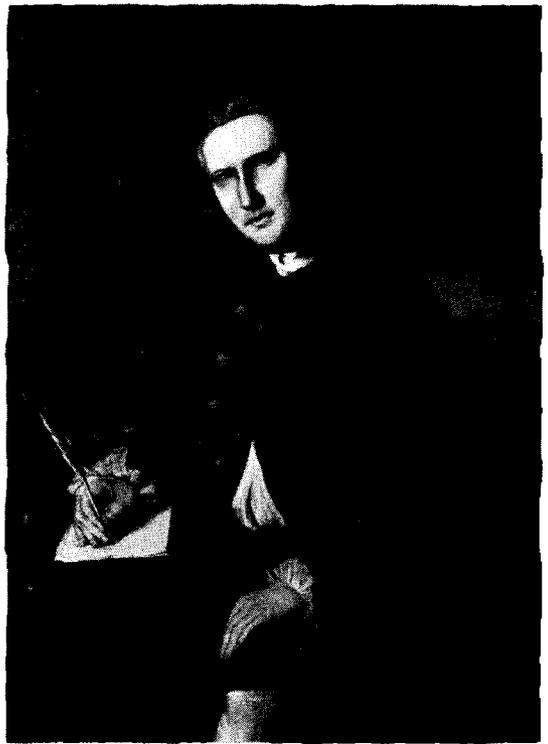
Accounts differ as to what happened next. Leaders of the crowd—Rezin Hammond, Charles Ridgely, two young Anne Arundel physicians, Charles Warfield and Ephraim Howard, and firebrands from Elk Ridge and Baltimore—entertained motions to tar and feather Stewart and burn his vessel. Hammond and Ridgely escorted Stewart to the ship while on shore Chase, home briefly from Philadelphia, and Charles Carroll the Barrister won the crowd's approval of a lesser punishment—burning of the tea only. Clamor for destruction nonetheless won out, and the *Peggy Stewart* went to the torch by its owner's hands. A few bystanders watched the fiery ritual terrified at its implications. "If this is Liberty, If this is Justice," wrote John Galloway to his father at Tulip Hill, "they certainly must have a new code of Laws on Elk Ridge." The infamous and rascally affair, he went on, "makes all men of property reflect with horror on their present Situation[;] to have their lives and propertys at the disposal & mercy of a Mob is Shocking indeed."³⁸

This affair gave the popular party an air of comparative moderation, and at the Continental Congress its leaders gained the same reputation. The Maryland delegation played a prominent part in locating the middle ground between radicals and conservatives, between the urgent pleas of New England and the practical needs of the northern commercial and southern planting colonies. Marylanders voted against a plan of colonial union that Joseph Galloway of Pennsylvania proposed as a conservative device. Chase, Paca, and Johnson developed friendships with John Adams, who hoped for radical action. Adams grumbled that his Chesapeake colleagues too readily recognized Parliament's power to govern imperial commerce. Yet he praised Johnson's "extensive" knowledge of trade; he wrote of Paca's skills as a deliberator and Chase's warmth as a speaker. At the same time James Duane, an especially conservative New Yorker, believed that the commercial interests that his colony and Maryland shared made them fast allies. They also agreed on the British right to regulate trade. "The Maryland arguments in which

you had so great a share on this essential point were unanswerable," Duane later wrote Chase, "—they never were attempted to be answered, yet unhappily they produced no conviction." Along with Virginia and North Carolina delegates, the Marylanders wanted to delay nonexportation long enough to ship at least one tobacco crop and begin the climb out of debt. Johnson served on the committee that proposed a compromise Congress adopted: nonimportation after 1 December 1774, nonexportation a year later.³⁹

In November, the Continental Congress then adjourned, Maryland patriots faced another balancing act. The congressional agenda of enforcing nonimportation required local action. In taking it, defenders of colonial rights—except for the *Hall-Hammond* men—hoped to keep "the common sort" under control; since the burning of the *Peggy Stewart*, a Scottish trader wrote home, those people "seem to think they may commit any outrage they please." Popular party leaders called elections that sent delegates to a Maryland convention in Annapolis. Though by its nature a revolutionary body—it presumed to rule in place of proprietor, governor, and assembly and claimed to draw its powers from the people—the convention still tried to tread the *path of resistance lightly*. To broaden its support it acted on the problem of indebtedness, though moderately: it set up barriers making it difficult for merchants who violated the nonimportation policy to collect debts in court. Members elected the radical John Hall to a standing committee of correspondence. Joining Chase, Paca, Johnson, and Tilghman in that group were two more of the original "First Citizen" circle—Carroll the Barrister and Carroll of Carrollton himself. Moderation paid dividends from the proprietary elite; late in 1774 Major Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer joined the resistance after losing favor with Eden, who rightly suspected the receiver-general of being a secret correspondent with Carroll of Carrollton's father. The convention assured compliance with the policy of nonimportation by establishing committees of observation made up of local leaders like the western Marylanders John Hanson, Henry Griffith, Baker Johnson, and Jonathan Hager, who had cast their lot for resistance. Struggling against the British plan "to enslave America," patriot leaders appealed for a union of "all ranks of men" and recommended "that all former differences about religion or politics and all private animosities and quarrels of every kind from henceforth cease and be forever buried in oblivion."⁴⁰

Despite this wish, outside events and extralegal measures badly divided Marylanders. In late March 1775 members of the Bush River, Harford County, committee of observation issued resolves urging independence and pledging themselves, in memorable words, "to Each Other & to our Country . . . at the Risque of Our Lives & fortunes." About two weeks later, when word reached Maryland of the bloodshed at Lexington and Concord, patriot feeling of an ethnic cast stirred up the Baltimore Irish, who in gangs went looking for Englishmen. Under convention authority, militia units organized in many counties, watchful of rumored British invasion from both the west and

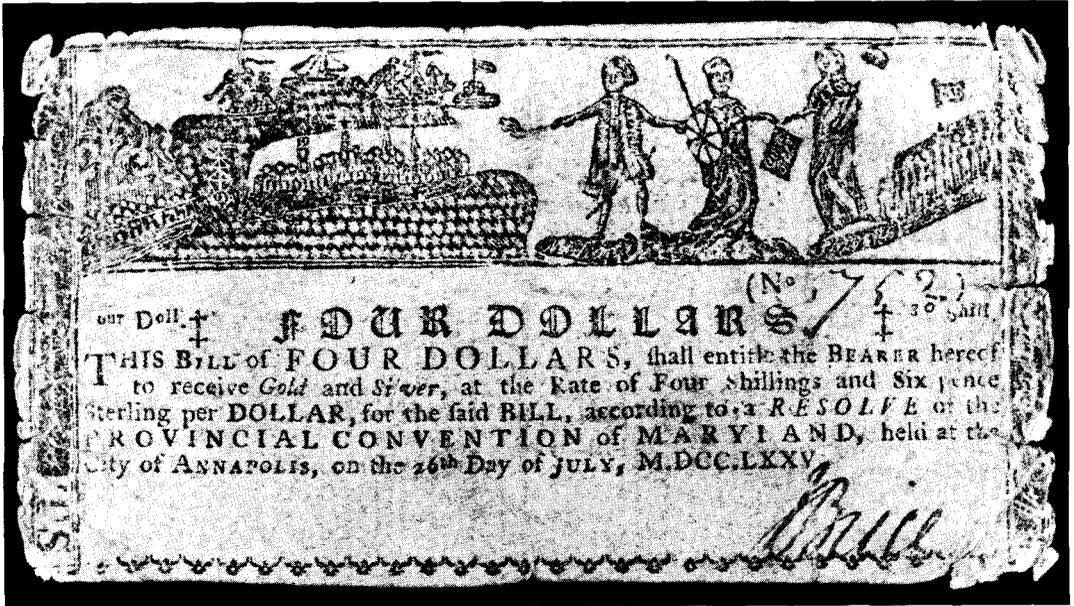


A gallery of revolutionary-period statesmen. *Top left*, William Paca (1740-99) by Charles Willson Peale, 1772, MHS. *Top right*, Samuel Chase (1741-1811) by Charles Willson Peale, c. 1773, MHS. *Lower left*, Charles Carroll of Carrollton (1737-1832) by Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1763, Yale Center for British Art. *Lower right*, Thomas Stone (1743-87) by John Beale Bordley, 1835, Maryland Commission on Artistic Properties.

the Chesapeake. "Every province is learning the life of arms," an Annapolis merchant wrote to London; "you may depend that we will die before we give up our liberties and have our property at the disposal of a damn lot of rascally ministers." In July 1775 the *Totness*, carrying a cargo of boycotted goods, ran aground on a sand bar in the mouth of the West River. Annapolis area radicals quickly burned the vessel, repeating the *Peggy Stewart* assault on property. Late that month the provincial convention, issuing a printed and signed proclamation as the "Association of the Freemen of Maryland," recommended a state of defense and formed a council of safety—an executive arm made up of eight patriots from each shore and headed by Jenifer. "All power is getting fast into the hands of the very lowest people," Governor Eden wrote in the fall of 1775. "Those who first encouraged the opposition to government and set these on this licentious behavior will probably be amongs't the first to repent thereof."⁴¹

Truly the times tried men's souls. Many people felt confused. Extralegal committees of observation duplicated the powers of justices of the peace, whom Eden tried and failed to keep on his side. "Voluntary contributions" (placing heavy pressure on slackers) supplied the early militia companies. Those units did not always bring comfort to men of property, who noted that they lacked discipline and elected their officers. With war broken out in New England and familiar law and order breaking down at home, some members of the colonial elite voiced their loyalty to the Crown. They clung to the established order; place in the proprietary structure, dependence on the British government, commitment to the Anglican church, and family ties in England—all played a part in one's choice. Though families naturally weighed the wealth that rebellion risked, at bottom anxiety about disorder decided most elite Loyalists. The Reverend Boucher feared tenant rebellion, convict uprisings, and slave conspiracies. The "laboring classes," he warned, "instead of regarding the rich as their guardians, patrons, and benefactors, now look on them as so many overgrown colossuses, whom it is no demerit in them to wrong." Boucher spoke for many other loyal subjects in Maryland in claiming that king and Parliament ruled with "parental tenderness." Before leaving Annapolis for England in 1775 he placed two loaded pistols on the pulpit cushion at St. Anne's and delivered a farewell sermon. "As long as I live," he concluded defiantly, "yea, while I have my being, will I proclaim 'God save the King!'"⁴²

Not all Loyalists belonged to the rich or well-placed, however, and not all Marylanders of meaner circumstances approved the *Peggy Stewart* and *Totness* riots. Humble people could either go ahead faster than the rich and well-born popular party leaders, hoping to move them out of their usual orbits and thereby gain advantage. Or they might look upon the revolutionary movement with a debtor's dislike for a creditor. More than a few humble Marylanders resisted the resistance. Defying the Association of Freemen, they became known as "nonassociators." One of them, Robert Davis of Anne



A Maryland four-dollar note (printed in Annapolis by Frederick Green in July 1775, with woodcuts by Thomas Sparrow) circulated a crude but doubtless effective picture of Mother England and King George III as abusive parents. *MHS*

Arundel County, spoke disrespectfully of the local committee leaders and threatened to shoot the militiamen who came to arrest him as “damned rebel sons of bitches.” Out fishing, a Dorchester County wheelwright told an inquirer that he would never muster for the patriot militia. “The gentlemen,” he said according to a report, intended “to make us fight for their lands and negroes, and then said damn them (meaning the gentlemen)”; if some of them were killed “we should have the best of the land to tend and besides could get money enough.” Poverty aside, conversion to Methodism accounted for especially conservative sentiment among the people on the lower Eastern Shore. An Anglican reform movement that John Wesley directed from Britain, Methodism stressed heartfelt involvement in the spiritual life, a piety that meant it. Circuit-riding preachers, raising their voices against the emptiness of rote liturgy, carried the Methodist good news to every remote settlement on the Shore. Emotional faith and scorn for vanity, making the Methodists natural opponents of the high-and-mighty planters, now estranged them from the cause of the Tilghmans, Goldsboroughs, and others.⁴³

Eden thought one British regiment would quash resistance. His belief at least reflected the caution of Maryland convention leaders, many of whom rested content with their commanding position over Lord Baltimore. They hardly approached revolution in haste. On 12 January 1776 they instructed



Jonathan Boucher (1738–1804), who believed the colonies should remain loyal children. Engraving by P. Conde after original painting by W. J. Thomson. *MHS*

delegates in Congress to agree to nothing declaring the colonies independent “without the previous knowledge and approbation of the Convention of this province.” Later in the month Tilghman, Johnson, and Jenifer, holding discussions with Eden, left him with the impression that they were “so far from desiring an independency that if the establishment of it were left to their choice, they would reject it with abhorrence.” In April the convention’s executive body, the council of safety, stiffly reprimanded two Baltimore patriots for moving too quickly and exceeding the bounds of good taste. Samuel Purviance, chairman of the committee of safety there, and Samuel Smith, John Smith’s seagoing son and an early volunteer in the Baltimore Independent Cadets, had seen a report that Governor Eden planned to depart Annapolis. Smith led a body of men to the capital in a nearly successful effort to capture him. Administering the tongue-lashing, Jenifer may silently have thanked the radicals, whose excesses reflected well on the moderation he believed to be of future political importance. The episode illustrated what

Richard Henry Lee of Virginia called “namby pamby” hesitation among both Marylanders and Virginians. On 21 May the Annapolis convention unanimously renewed its hesitant instructions to the delegation in Congress. As that body considered declaring independence, Thomas Stone, who along with John Beale Bordley had declined to serve on the first council of safety, darkly referred to developments in Philadelphia as giving a “fatal stab” to any future colonial-British tie. “Thus alas! are we proceeding by degrees to that crisis we so much deprecate,” moaned James Hollyday. In June another council of safety member, Benjamin Rumsey, wrote that he had taken care “so as not to fall into Independence,” though he admitted a willingness to prepare for it as an “absolute Necessity.”⁴⁴

Prodding from Congress had much effect. On 7 June Lee submitted independence resolutions, while Jefferson, John Adams, and others grew short with New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland delegates. “Maryland hung heavily on our backs,” Jefferson later testified. Except for Matthew Tilghman, Chase, and Paca, Adams recalled, “neither the state of Maryland nor [any] of their Delegates were very early in their conviction of the necessity of independence, nor very forward in promoting it.” In the middle of June, Chase and the rest left for Annapolis, hoping to return with support for independence and a French alliance. Governor Eden sensed the tilt and departed, the convention and council of safety seeing him off in friendly fashion on 21 June and even sending Virginia a request for his safe conduct. “I presume Maryland soon will join company,” Adams wrote Chase impatiently; “if not, she must be left alone.”⁴⁵

Leaders more hesitant than Chase and the Hammonds may have realized with Carroll of Carrollton, who had just returned from a diplomatic mission to Canada, that the war forced Maryland to choose between independence and total dependence. During the week following Eden’s departure, the convention debated these unappealing alternatives. Outdoors the elements that daunted Loyalists clamored for action. Patriot petitions arrived from Western Shore county committees, militia units eager for a decision, and the Baltimore Sons of Liberty—whom the governor had thought the most “pronounced rebellious and mischievous” people in the province. Even at the eleventh hour many convention members may have agreed with Eden’s assessment. Arguments over independence left pieces of the old leadership lying about in odd places. Former proprietary men like George Plater III of St. Mary’s joined Jenifer in supporting revolution. Earlier spokesmen for colonial rights—Robert Alexander, a Baltimore merchant who also served on the council of safety, and James Tilghman of Talbot—chose loyalism, as quietly did Daniel Dulany. Colonel Richard Lloyd, firm for independence, pulled the doubtful Robert Goldsborough “by the Nose” toward a break with the Mother Country. Finally voting by members instead of county blocs, the convention on 28 June directed Maryland delegates in Congress to concur with their colleagues “in declaring the United Colonies free and independent

states."⁴⁶ On 3 July the convention formally made that declaration on its own and then set elections for an August meeting that would write a state constitution. Shorn of proprietor and Britain alike, some Marylanders (and some more bravely than others) completed the shift in mind that Tom Paine spoke of in *Common Sense*. Paine asked whether it was in the interests of a man to be a boy all his life.



Revolutionary leaders in Maryland hoped next to minimize revolutionary change—to control the constitutional convention so as not to lose their standing and to manage the war so that it did little to upset the old order. Again they walked a fine line. Military necessity forced a calling out of as many of the able-bodied as possible; the requests of the powerful for sacrifice invited pleas among contributors for political change and social equality. Although the provincial convention had lifted some restrictions on voting in the late summer of 1775—allowing immigrants, Catholics, Quakers, and freeholders with less than fifty acres of land to vote for delegates to the de facto provincial government—many Marylanders of lesser station remained disqualified. In July 1776 convention members, leaving no doubt as to their conservative bent, decreed that all persons voting for delegates to the constitutional convention had to meet all the old colonial property requirements.

Common people and their friends groused disgustedly. Demonstrations against election judges occurred at polling places on both shores—in Queen Anne's and Worcester, and in the lower district of Frederick that plans called for making into a new county. Freemen gathered at the Prince George's County election point and declared that "every taxpayer bearing arms" should have the vote "at this time of public calamity." They dispersed the convention-appointed election judges and installed men who did not quibble over one's landholdings or visible wealth. In Kent County election officials managed to close the polls before a similar disturbance took place. John McClure of Baltimore County believed that only the "clever" candidates, appealing to the people, succeeded in winning seats, and where lay the difference, he asked the young merchant Mordecai Gist, "between being disqualified to vote or having a vote when these men are to represent you?" The precaution of denying the suffrage to soldiers on active service and of forbidding militia musters on election day backfired on the council of safety in Annapolis, where Maryland troops belonging to the "Flying Camp" of Continental light infantry had stopped on their way to duty in New Jersey. One of the soldiers approached the poll and was told that he did not qualify. Quickly other troops surrounded the judges, shouting that if they could fight they could surely vote, and threatening the life of Captain Thomas Watkins, who had questioned the soldier's property holdings. Persuaded to reassemble on Gallows Hill outside the town, the troops listened as some speakers ar-