

PATRICK HENRY

May 29, 1736 – June 6, 1799

Patrick Henry was one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. He was a gifted speaker known for his rousing speeches and strong support for revolution against the British.

He was born in the American colony of Virginia (Hanover County) on May 29, 1736. His father, John Henry, was a tobacco farmer and judge. Patrick had ten brothers and sisters. As a child, Patrick liked to hunt and fish. He attended the local one-room school and was tutored by his father.

When Patrick was just 16 years old he opened a local store with his brother William. The store was a failure, however, and the boys soon had to close it. A few years later Patrick married Sarah Shelton and started his own farm. Patrick wasn't much good as a farmer either. When his farmhouse burned down in a fire, Patrick and Sarah moved in with her parents at the Hanover Tavern.

Living in town, Patrick realized that he liked to talk and argue politics and law. He studied law and through examination by prominent Virginia lawyers became a licensed attorney in 1760. Patrick was a very successful lawyer handling hundreds of cases. He had finally found his career.

Although Patrick Henry is best known for his "give me liberty or give me death" speech delivered at Richmond's St. John's Church in 1775, his great oratory skills and patriotic fervor were first recognized when he argued damages for the defense in the famous **Parson's Cause**. On December 1st, 1763, he was called to the Courthouse adjacent to **Hanover Tavern** to argue this famous challenge to royal authority that helped to spark the American Revolution. The case touched on fundamental issues in the colonial struggle. Colonists were required to pay clergymen of the Anglican Church in tobacco. Following a poor harvest in 1758, the price of tobacco rose, artificially inflating clerical salaries. To protect themselves from financial ruin, the colonists enacted the **Two Penny Act**, which allowed ministers' salaries to be paid in currency at two pence per pound. An enraged clergy thought the act an attempt to undermine their authority. They appealed to the King who promptly vetoed the act. The colonists saw the King's action as a breach of their legislative authority. They were at an impasse. When the clergy sued for back pay, the court ruled the claim valid. All that remained was a determination of damages.

In a stunning speech, Patrick Henry electrified his audience with these words:

- *"The Two Penny Act of 1758 had every characteristic of a good law. It was a law of general utility, and could not be annulled if we are consistent with what the King called the original compact between himself and the people, stipulating protection on the one hand and obedience on the other."*
- *"A King, by disallowing Acts of this salutary nature, from being the father of his people, degenerates into a Tyrant and forfeits all right to his subjects' obedience... This cause means more to all of us in the Colony than the question of a Clergyman's pay... it touches our religions and political freedom."*

He won the case and made a name for himself. The clergymen received one penny in damages. The award effectively nullified the King's veto in a victory that signaled the growing revolutionary spirit in America.

In 1765 Henry became a member of the **Virginia House of Burgesses**. This was the same year the British introduced the Stamp Act. Henry argued against the Stamp Act and helped to get the Virginia Stamp Act Resolutions against the Stamp Act passed.

Patrick Henry lived at **Scotchtown** from 1771 to 1778 and conceived his most influential revolutionary ideas at the home, including his famous "Liberty or Death" speech. It is the only original standing home of Patrick Henry currently open to the public.

Henry was elected to the **First Continental Congress** in 1774. On March 23, 1775, Henry gave a famous speech arguing that the Congress should mobilize an army against the British. It was in this speech that he uttered the memorable phrase "Give me liberty, or give me death!"

Henry later served as a **Colonel in the 1st Virginia Regiment** where he led the militia against the Royal governor of Virginia, Lord Dunmore. When Lord Dunmore tried to remove some gunpowder supplies from Williamsburg, Henry led a small group of militiamen to stop him. It later became known as the Gunpowder Incident.

Henry was elected the **Governor of Virginia in 1776**. He served a number of one-year terms as governor and also served on the Virginia state legislature.

After the **Revolutionary War**, Henry again served as governor for Virginia and on the state legislature. He argued against the initial version of the US Constitution. He did not want it passed without the Bill of Rights. Through his arguments the Bill of Rights were amended to the Constitution.

In 1794, due to poor health, Patrick Henry **retired** to Red Hill, his 520-acre plantation near Brookneal, Virginia (Charlotte County). He died of stomach cancer in 1799.

Famous Patrick Henry Quotes

- "I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!"
- "I know of no way of judging the future but by the past."
- "I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience."



Patrick Henry by George Bagby Matthews



Patrick Henry arguing the Parson's Cause. Hanover Tavern can be seen through the open window. (Painting by George Cooke)

- "If this be treason, make the most of it!"

Interesting Facts About Patrick Henry

- Patrick's first wife Sarah died in 1775. They had six children together before she died in 1775. He married Dorothea Dandridge, cousin of Martha Washington, in 1777. They had eleven children together.
- The Hanover County Courthouse where Patrick Henry argued the Parson's Case is still an active courthouse. It's the third oldest active courthouse in the United States.
- Although he called slavery "an abominable practice, destructive to liberty", he still owned over sixty slaves on his plantation.
- He was against the Constitution because he was concerned that the office of the president would become a monarchy.
- He was elected governor of Virginia again in 1796, but declined.

HISTORIC HANOVER TAVERN

For nearly three centuries, the Hanover Tavern has been a part of events that transformed America from an English colony to an independent nation; where rebellion threatened that new nation and Civil War tore it asunder. The owners, guests, and inhabitants of the Tavern have shaped the history of Hanover County, the Commonwealth of Virginia and, indeed, the United States.

A license for a tavern at Hanover Courthouse was issued in 1733. When William Parks, editor of the Virginia Gazette, purchased Hanover Tavern in 1743, it was part of a 550 acre plantation at the courthouse. Today, Hanover Tavern occupies a site consisting of 3.5 acres.

The Tavern was built in five stages and includes more than 12,000 square feet on three levels, 27 rooms, 97 windows, and 16 exterior doors. The earliest surviving section of the present Tavern was built in 1791. The disposition of the earlier tavern is unknown, but fire was a constant hazard in such buildings.

The Tavern is one of only a few surviving colonial era taverns in the United States. It has hosted such historic figures as George Washington, Lord Cornwallis, and the Marquis de Lafayette. The tavern is mentioned in several travel accounts, including the memoirs of the Marquis de Chastellux, the diaries of George Washington and Dr. Robert Honyman, and the travel account by Benson Lossing, among others.



Patrick Henry was well-acquainted with life at Hanover Tavern. One of its earliest owners, John and Eleanor Parks Shelton, the parents of Patrick's first wife, Sarah, owned the Tavern from 1750-1764. Patrick Henry lived and worked at the Tavern where he served guests, tended bar, and entertained with his fiddle playing. Patrick Henry lived at the Tavern for several years after his marriage to Sarah Shelton. He went on to become the first elected governor of Virginia in 1776 and served five terms as governor during the next 10 years.

For almost two centuries the Tavern provided meals and lodging to those having business before the Hanover County courts. The Tavern served as post office for the area from the 1790s until 1911. Until Rural Free Delivery was introduced early in the 20th century residents from miles around viewed the Tavern as a community center as they came to the Tavern to pick up their mail and hear the neighborhood gossip.

Several slaves from the Tavern complex participated in Gabriel's Great Slave Rebellion in August of 1800. Gabriel was the property of Thomas Prosser, whose plantation was just off nearby Brook Road. In his early twenties, Gabriel was skilled as a blacksmith and was able to read. He was known for his strong intellect and passionate nature. His interactions with white business owners, indentured servants, other bonded men, and the slaves on his own plantation created a deep resentment of slavery and a burning desire for freedom for all people. Inspired by the Bible and a successful slave insurrection in Haiti, Gabriel used religious meetings to convince others to rise up and take the freedom they had been denied.

Hundreds of slaves, including several from Hanover Tavern: Dick, Randolph, George, Scipio, and Thornton, used the spring and summer of 1800 to formulate a plan. They made and stockpiled crude weapons. They planned the attack for August 30th; participants were to kill slave-holding whites, burn Richmond, and take Governor James Monroe hostage. But, on the night of the planned insurrection, torrential rains slowed those headed for Richmond. Slaves on nearby Meadow Farm Plantation, not wanting to see their owners harmed, reported what was happening. The militia intercepted the slaves, ending the revolt. Although Thilman, the tavern owner, asked for the return of his slaves, numerous participants were put to death. The incident inflamed abolitionists, and created a great fear amongst the slaveholders. Stern laws quickly followed, limiting the movement and gatherings of slaves as well as increasing punishments.

During the Civil War, both Union and Confederate troops used the Tavern on their way to and from the battlefields. This part of Virginia saw the terrible Seven Days' Battles of the 1862 Peninsula Campaign waged by Union General George McClellan. General Grant's army ravaged this countryside again, during the final march to Richmond in 1864.

By 1953, the tavern building was well-worn and possibly on its last legs. A group of young actors from New York bought the building and 3.5 acres with the intention of starting a dinner theater. They repaired the building to operate as their home and business, actually beginning the preservation of the old structure. Barksdale Theatre (now Virginia Repertory Theatre) was born and remains today a valuable part of the history of Hanover Tavern.

Hanover Tavern Foundation, a 501 (c) (3) non profit organization, bought the Tavern in 1990 with the mission to restore, preserve, and utilize Hanover Tavern as an historical, educational, community and cultural resource center. The Foundation raised over \$5 million, stabilizing and restoring the historic building, added a wing for restrooms, a restaurant quality kitchen, new mechanical systems, and refurbished the theater. The building returned to public use in 2005.