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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 906

Offered February 13, 2007

Commemorating the signing of the Leedstown Resolves.

Patron—Wittman

WHEREAS, the *Leedstown Resolves*, a document declaring the early dissatisfaction of Virginia colonists with the Stamp Act was drafted by Richard Henry Lee and signed by citizens of Westmoreland County at Leedstown on February 27, 1766; and

WHEREAS, Leedstown was the small village home of King Passassack and the Rappahannock Indian tribe, and in 1608 when Captain John Smith and a small party explored the Rappahannock River, settlers were attacked by the Indians and one of the men, Richard Featherstone, was killed and buried on the south side of the Rappahannock River, a few miles below Leedstown; and

WHEREAS, Leedstown was located in historic Westmoreland County, the boyhood home of George Washington, and by 1678 Edward Bray had built a brick church, a tavern ordinary, a ferry, and a wharf at what was then known as the village of Rappahannock named after the river; the town went through several names, including Bray's Wharf, Bray's Church, and Leeds; and

WHEREAS, Leedstown became a thriving colonial port and was officially established by an Act of the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1742, but the town is best known for the resolutions that were drafted there in 1766 when a very early spark of revolution was ignited by Westmoreland's prominent and influential planters; and

WHEREAS, in 1765 the Stamp Act, which laid a stamp duty on all papers used for legal documents, liquor licenses, academic degrees, newspapers, pamphlets and almanacs, was imposed on the colonists by the British Parliament to raise revenue for King George III of England; the Act greatly angered the colonists, who considered it "taxation without representation"; and

WHEREAS, Arthur Ritchie, a Tappahannock merchant, announced that he possessed stamped paper he planned to use to clear his own cargo ship bound for the West Indies; and

WHEREAS, Thomas Ludwell Lee invited his neighbors to meet at Leedstown to make plans to stop Mr. Ritchie from acting on his own, and 115 patriots signed the resolutions drafted in Leedstown petitioning King George III to do away with the hated Stamp Act; and

WHEREAS, the *Leedstown Resolves* were discussed and signed by the impassioned patriots, who met in the town church or the tavern built by Robert Bray—it is not entirely clear which one, on February 27, 1766; and

WHEREAS, the historic signing of the *Leedstown Resolves* is immortalized with a tablet on a wall of the Westmoreland County courthouse at Montross, and a Northern Neck historian recorded that "here in the clerk's office are recorded writings of ancestors of more statesmen that we can find in all county clerk's offices of any state outside of Virginia. On the walls of the courtroom hang portraits of more men of national fame—native sons of the county—than we can find at any other county seat in America"; and

WHEREAS, the original *Leedstown Resolves* manuscript is believed to be in Richard Henry Lee's handwriting and is preserved by the Virginia Historical Society; remnants of the historic buildings where the patriots met remained until around 1932; and

WHEREAS, the *Leedstown Resolves* preceded similar documents of the Mecklenburg and Tyron Resolves, allegedly signed in 1775 in North Carolina, by more than nine years; and it preceded the drafting of America's Declaration of Independence, signed on July 4, 1776, by more than 10 years; and

WHEREAS, following the American Revolutionary War, shipping at Leedstown began to decline as settlers moved west, and in less than 100 years from its origin, the colonial port had all but vanished; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly commemorate the signing of the historic *Leedstown Resolves* over 240 years ago on February 27, 1766; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the Northern Neck Historical Society as an expression of the General Assembly's appreciation of the significance of the drafting and signing of the remarkable *Leedstown Resolves* to the proud history of the Commonwealth.

INTRODUCED

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