

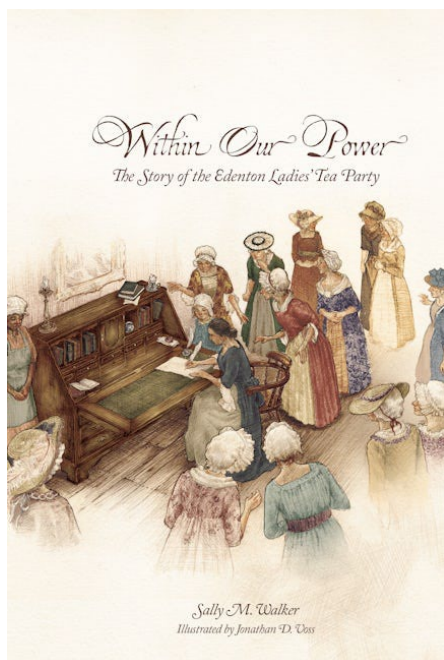


October 2024 Book of the Month

Within Our Power: The Story of the Edenton Ladies' Tea Party
Written by Sally Walker and illustrated by Jonathan D. Voss
(North Carolina Office of Archives and History, October 2024)

In 1774, many people in thirteen of Great Britain's North American colonies were angry. They had been ordered to pay money—taxes—to the government. However, they had no governmental representatives in faraway England to say how they wanted their money spent. The colonists rallied around the cry "Taxation Without Representation." They boycotted tea, cloth, and other British products. Fearing punishment for protesting the unfair practice, some disguised themselves to avoid recognition, specifically when dumping tea in a harbor. Others wrote about it but hid their identity by using an alias.

A group of fifty-one women in Edenton, North Carolina, strongly opposed taxation without representation. At that time, women could not serve in the government, nor were they permitted to vote. But the Edenton ladies knew that their beliefs mattered. They decided they would make a difference. Like others, they would boycott British products. Unlike others, they shunned anonymity.



Using a "tea party" of a different sort, Edenton's courageous women powerfully expressed their belief in a very public way. One that spread their belief and commitment not only throughout the North American colonies, but also across the Atlantic Ocean. The Edenton ladies' courage still resonates today. They show us that people can join together and create a strong voice that stands firm against injustice.

Grade Level: 3-5

Available from:

- [Amazon](#)
- [Bookshop](#)
- [NC Cardinal](#)
- [UNC Press](#)

Historical Overview:

When we think of the American Revolution, many remember Patrick Henry’s statement, “Give me liberty or give me death,” the Boston Massacre, and of course, the Boston Tea Party. These milestones are important, but it’s also crucial to understand that choices about tea and taxes, conversations about loyalty and freedom, and decisions to act or respond were held by many people throughout the British colonies in America and beyond. The information and perspectives varied—enslaved people, American Indian communities, free people of color, and women generally had insights that reflected their own situations and communities.

In the years before the Declaration of Independence was drafted, many groups penned resolves, declarations, and statements. These groups included townspeople, soldiers, trade organizations, committees of safety, and—in Edenton, North Carolina—51 women. Their resolve to support North Carolina’s First Provincial Congress (a group of men meeting outside the acknowledged royal government) in boycotting British goods was unique in that it listed the women’s names, a bold statement for the time. Penelope Barker, the wealthy woman and enslaver who most likely led this effort, is well known. Research regarding the other women who signed their names to the document is ongoing.

Primary Sources:

Primary sources are created at the time of an event or later by someone who witnessed or experienced something firsthand. We often think of primary sources as old letters, diaries, and documents—and that’s right! But other things are primary sources too! Buildings, shoes, portraits, objects, and more are also primary sources, and part of our job at the North Carolina Museum of History is to collect those objects and take care of them.



Beyond the Exhibits
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Item: 2003.76.1, Tea Caddy



Tea arrived in Europe and England in the 1600s from China. An expensive luxury item, tea often was sold in Chinese porcelain containers that held about 600 grams, a Chinese pound or “catty.” Over time, tea cannisters and caddies varied in design—some could be locked to keep the expensive contents secure. Others were decorative pieces. This caddy belonged to the Bonner family in Edenton. Both Mary Bonner and her daughter Lydia signed the Edenton Resolves. An empty tea caddy signaled their support of the boycott against England.

Item: 1916.68.1, Kettle



Remember the Boston Tea Party, when tea was dumped overboard because of the tax on it? In Edenton, 51 women agreed not to purchase tea because of the tax. Why, then, is a teakettle part of Revolutionary War general Francis Nash’s gear? Soldiers still craved warm drinks. While General Nash’s supplies were carried on a wagon, regular soldiers had to walk carrying most of their supplies. Often, kettles and other heavy items were thrown out to lighten the men’s loads. Soldiers used what they had—tea, coffee, roots, or leaves—then boiled water in what they could find and drank!

Vocabulary:

- Parliament—the lawmaking group of Great Britain. Parliament consists of two groups: the House of Lords and the House of Commons. At the time they met in the Palace of Westminster in London.
- Right—something to which one has a just claim
- Taxes—money that people must pay to the government
- Taxation without Representation—when people are required to pay taxes to a government without having any say in that government’s policies
- Ruined—destroyed, made incapable of use
- Power—the legal or official ability to do something

Discussion Questions:

1. What surprised you about this book? Why?
2. Have you protested? Why? How?
3. How do you think the women felt when they saw their resolves published in a British newspaper?
4. Why do you think they chose a boycott to protest the tax on tea?

Activity: Make Your Own Tea Bag!

Today, many people make tea using individual bags filled with tea leaves.

Supplies:

- Coffee filters
- Scissors
- Loose tea leaves
- Teaspoon
- Stapler
- Embroidery thread and needle
- Paper for tags
- Optional: Spices (pumpkin pie spice, cinnamon, ground ginger, etc.)

Process:

- Cut two coffee filters into a rectangle. Cutting off the ridges works.
- Stitch the two rectangular filters together on three sides with the embroidery thread and needle, leaving one of the smaller sides open.
- Fill the teabag with one to two teaspoons of loose tea leaves. Add a bit of spice if desired.



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- Stitch the top of the tea bag closed. The tea bag's four sides should all be stitched.
- Fold down two corners of the tea bag and place a three- or four-inch piece of embroidery thread under one of the flaps.
- Fold down the tip of the tea bag and staple it shut.
- Create paper tags and staple them to the end of the embroidery thread.
- For your cup of tea, steep tea bag in a cup of hot water for three to five minutes and enjoy!

Adapted from A Beautiful Mess, abeautifulmess.com/loose-leaf-tea-make-your-own-tea-bags/

Extension: Watch *Artifact Chitchat*!

A key, a cannonball, a tea caddy—learn about North Carolina's role in the American Revolution through the, um, eyes of some . . . uh, artifacts that were actually there! Watch *Artifact Chitchat*. 7 minutes.
ncmuseumofhistory.org/artifact-chitchat-form

