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Commemorating Two Lights for Tomorrow

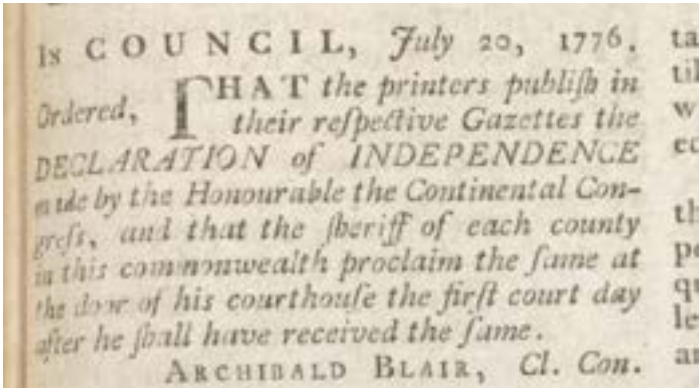
BY RACHEL BAYLER

A nationwide commemoration known as Two Lights for Tomorrow is underway. On Friday, communities, historic sites and local governments across the country will display two lights in recognition of the 250th anniversary of Paul Revere’s April 18, 1775, ride through the Massachusetts countryside.

The initiative’s title refers to the two lights placed in the tower of Boston’s Christ Church on the orders of Revere as a warning of British military movements ahead of the Battles of Lexington and Concord.

In Virginia, Two Lights for Tomorrow is being celebrated between April 11 and 22, commemorating the 250th anniversary of the Gunpowder Incident, in which Lord Dunmore removed public gunpowder from the Magazine in Williamsburg on April 21, 1775, causing an uproar that led to revolution.

After the Gunpowder Incident, revolutionaries in Virginia became more convinced of the need for independence from Britain. On April 26, 1775, a statement by the Committee



PHOTO/VIRGINIA GAZETTE

The July 20, 1776 Virginia Gazette reports on the Declaration of Independence.

of Henrico County in the Virginia Gazette asserted that removing the gunpowder was a “determined step, tending towards establishing that tyranny we so much dread.”

During 1775 and 1776, the colonists of Virginia made determined steps toward independence. On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee, a Virginia delegate to the Second Continental Congress, proposed that a declaration of independence be made by the Congress. Lee’s proposal was accepted on July 2, and the Second Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 4.

The Declaration echoed

throughout the Commonwealth. On July 20, the House of Burgesses ordered that “the sheriff of each county in this commonwealth proclaim the [Declaration of Independence] at the door of his courthouse the first court day after he shall have received the same.”

The Virginia Gazette reported on July 26, 1776, that The Declaration of Independence: was “proclaimed at the Capitol, the Courthouse and the Palace,” in Williamsburg to cheers from the audience, the firing of cannon and the marching of Continental soldiers.

Records of public readings of the Declaration of Independence in Alexandria in 1776

are not available. Later sources reveal that the Declaration continued to be read and celebrated locally long after the American Revolution.

According to a July 6, 1812, report in the Alexandria Gazette, local leader and Gazette publisher John D. Simms read the Declaration of Independence on July 4 as part of the “usual manner” of the town’s ceremonies, which included parades by the Washington Society, militia marches, music, sermons at the Presbyterian Meeting House and private parties.

Two Lights For Tomorrow offers an opportunity to continue to commemorate the legacy of the American Revolution in Alexandria, the state of Virginia and the United States. In the spirit of independence, celebrate the anniversaries of Paul Revere’s ride and the Gunpowder Incident locally by checking out Gadsby Tavern Museum’s lights display in the Public Dining Room on April 18 and 19, or by displaying two lights of your own.

Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.