

[Alexandria 1780 5 27, Church 1242P, Record Group 78, The Library of Virginia]

To the Honble, the House of Delegates and Senate of Virginia, in General Assembly now sitting

The Petition and Remonstrance of the Subscribers, Subjects of the State, and Adventurers in Trade to Foreign Countries by Sea, most humbly sheweth that your Petitioners hath seen, and with due attention considered, an Act of the Legislature passed in October Session 1779, for raising a Supply of Money for the Service of the United States. And that it is with anxiety and concern they find by that Law the Traders of this States laid under such contribution, and embarrassments as will most certainly give a Fatal check to the increase of the Trade of this Country, and like a Law that in times past threw the West India Business of the Virginia Merchants into the hands of those of Maryland and Pennsylvania, we fear it will give an advantage to Maryland & Carolina, so as to enable them to undersell your importers and destroy the trade of the Commonwealth. It is with equal concern that we find the Trade is not only Taxed, but Retrospectively and unequally so. The Law has retrospect in as much as it lays a burthen upon Business, Transacted, done and finished Many months before the Act itself was promulgated, or even existed, and if it has Retrospect, it is dangerous, and to be dreaded as a President, for if a Posterior Law is to take in trie and burthen an Anterior Transaction, no Man can know what he may do, or shall not do, nor when he is safe in Life or Property. It is unequal if we view it only in the light of taking $\frac{1}{2}$ percent more from the Trader than the Land holder, but we conceive it to be grievously so when ~~when~~ we consider that the Merchants are taxed $2\frac{1}{2}$ pcent upon all that their Goods does actually sell for, or is worth, and therefore pays upon the full and instrinsick value of that part of their Estate, whilst the Landed Interest is only taxed 2 pct upon lands valued very often at not half their worth. And further we find the Landed Estate taxed with 2 pct but once a Year, whilst the Trader, tho' worth but as much in Money as his neighbour is in Land, is taxed $2\frac{1}{2}$ percent for every time he turns his money over – which is more than the Landed Interest pays, by as many times as the Trader lays out his Money above and in a Year. These things may it please your Honors we view as grievances, and with all due difference and duty, Pray that they may be so alter'd and amended, as to put both Merchant and Landholder on a safe and equal footing. Your Petitioners further beg leave to represent to your Honors that they have reason to fear and apprehend, a Petition will be prrefer'd to the General Assem-bly by some of the Traders of this State, and Particularly those in the retale Business, who to obtain a repeal & get rid of the burthen of the above recited Act, are forming a plan, as we are informed, to shift the greatest part of it

upon your good Subjects, the importing Traders of the Commonwealth, by offering as a Substitute to that law, a general assessment on the whole Trade of this State.

As far as Justice and reason would warrant, we have petitioned for the relief of the retailers – And as far as Propriety and Duty points out, we must appear against them – We sincerely lament that the exigencies and Funds of the Publick are such as to oblige the legislature to burthen the Trade of this Country in any shape, but if Money from Taxes upon Trade must be raised, we most humbly hope it may be taken from the Inland Traders, dealing in Foreign Goods, who seem most Numerous whose Business is most safe, whose gains have been greater, and who, in our Judgement and belief, are less valuable members of Society than the importers. The exorbitant Prices of Foreign Goods cannot be chargeable to the importers, for at the Commencement of this War considering the risk and expense of their voyages, they sold on reasonable Terms, but then soon after stepped in between them and the Consumer, a Set of Men that raised all imported Goods, especially the necessarys of Life, to such an unjustifiable pitch as to oblige the Planters and Farmers to seek relief in the high sales of the produce of their land, Articles by which alone the importer could import, and by which means from time to time they have been obliged to ask new prices upon every new importation. This we know to be truth, and we humbly conceive it proves that we have too few importers, and too many inland Traders--To Tax your importers will be a means of lessening the Number, to give them a free Trade will most certainly encrease them – If you Tax them you must also Tax Foreigners, or you give them such an advantage over your own Subjects as to take the trade from this Country, and become your carriers – If you Tax Foreigners they will trade to other States, where they probably will meet with no embarrassments & burthens on trade; and besides, their country will retaliate. To Tax the inland Trader, and have the importer free, will incline him to become an importer, and a useful Man – for whilst this war Continues we cannot have too many importers, nor too few retailers, as while our importations are so contracted, the importers can with ease vend their cargoes, in retale to the consumers, and so long as they do this, they shut a door against Speculation and imposition. These may it please your Honors are reasons, that we most humbly presume to offer, why in Justice and good policy no part of the Tax can be shifted from the Retailers upon us, your inoffensive, Dutiful & usefull Subjects. And we further, most humbly observe that, by a general assessment ~~be~~ there is every--reason to fear that, considering the risks and precarious State that the property of your importers from their very nature must ~~be~~ constantly be in & liable to, they would seldom be assessed as low and often above what strict Justice

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on a true investigation of the worth of their Estates would Warrant – And that, even after laying the heaviest hand that retalirs can wish upon your importers you never can by assessment raise that Sum of Money for the Commonwealth or do that impartial Justice to the Individual, as you can by the law as it now stands, exceptionable as ~~it~~ many parts of it may be. With a firm reliance on the Justice & Wisdom of your Honors, and in full persuasion of the Truth and righteousness of what we have stated, we emlore the assistance and Protection of your Power, and as in Duty bound we shall ever Pray.

Hooe & Harrison
Richard Conway
John Harper

[reverse]
Alexandria Petition
May 27th 1780
Referred to Ways & Means