

Reading of the Declaration of Independence and Creation of the Huntington Liberty Flag (July 22, 1776) *Village Green, Huntington*

The July 22, 1776 reading of the Declaration of Independence on Huntington's Village Green, and the creation of the Huntington Liberty Flag that occurred later that day, are rightfully celebrated as significant milestones in Huntington's participation in the American Revolution. However, it is important to view this day's events in the larger context of the Town's progressive movement toward revolution.

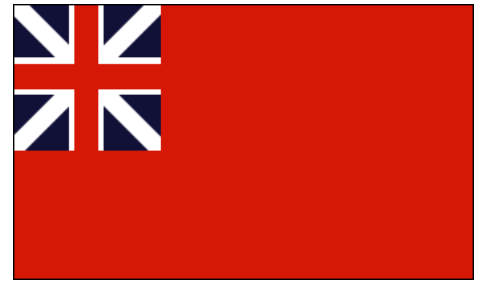
As was typical throughout the American colonies, most Huntingtonian's did not at first wish to end their allegiance to the British King. On June 21, 1774 a general Town meeting was held, presided over by Israel Wood, then President of the Town's Board of Trustees. The resolutions passed at that meeting have come to be known as Huntington's Declaration of Rights. First among these rights was "that every freeman's property is absolutely his own, and no man has a right to take it from him without his consent, expressed either by himself or his representative." Thus the levying of taxes by a Parliament in which the American colonies were not represented was seen as an unjust seizure of property and "a violation of the most essential rights of British subjects." However, despite these grievances, it was equally clear that those adopting this document still thought themselves to be loyal British subjects. Emblematic of this delicate balance between loyalty and liberty, was Huntington's modification of the British Red Ensign that also occurred in 1774. On one side of the ensign, the word "LIBERTY" was added in white block letters, while simultaneously "George III" (the British King) was sewn on the reverse.

However, by July 22, 1776 these delicately balanced feelings had clearly changed for most Town residents. As news of the Declaration of Independence reached Huntington, a hasty notice went out to inhabitants calling for a gathering on the Village Green. A public reading of the Declaration was followed by lowering of the modified British Red Ensign. The British Union Jack in the upper left corner was removed from the flag, as was the name "George III," creating what is now known as the Huntington Liberty Flag – a simple red ensign with the word "LIBERTY" in white letters on one side. The discarded flag elements were then stuffed into an effigy of King George III that was hung on a gallows and burned. All five companies of the Suffolk County Militia, numbering some 300 able-bodied troops, paraded past its officers, Lieutenant Colonel Gilbert Potter and Major Jesse Brush, and the assembled residents. There was little doubt as to the revolutionary intent of the majority of the Town's residents.

Unfortunately, the original Huntington Liberty Flag would have a short life. On the 30th of June, 1776, a British fleet of 130 ships landed an army of 10,000 on Staten Island, commanding New York harbor. By August 1st, the army had grown to 31,000 seasoned troops. The American army of only 28,000, both poorly trained and inadequately equipped, had prepared defensive positions in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and the nearby Jersey shore. In early August the Suffolk County Militia, carrying the Huntington Liberty Flag, mustered on the Village Green, drew an issue of gunpowder from the Arsenal (Job Sammis House) at its southern end, and marched to Brooklyn to augment the Continental Army. Early on the morning of August 22nd, 15,000 British and Hessian soliders and 40 pieces of artillery were landed on Long Island. The Battle of Long Island was fought from the 22nd to the 29th of August, 1776, resulting in a defeat for the Americans who effected a miraculous escape across the East River to Manhattan. During the battle, Hessian troops managed to capture the Huntington Liberty Flag. On September 1, 1776 British troops occupied Huntington, where they would remain until March 1783. In 1975, almost 200 years after it was created, the Huntington Liberty Flag was designated as the official flag of the Town of Huntington.

Portions excerpted from an essay by Reginald Metcalf, Sr.

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The British Red Ensign



Huntington's modified British Red Ensign (1774)



Modified British Red Ensign (reverse) (1774)



The Huntington Liberty Flag (1776)