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DEDICATION OF EDENTON BICENTENNIAL PARK
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Edenton is one of a handful of towns in North Carolina which can claim historical involvement in the events our whole nation now celebrates at its bicentennial. The vestrymen of Saint Paul's Church in Edenton were among the earliest of those who made their own declaration, long before Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence.

But before that, and even before the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, the women of Edenton carried out the Edenton Tea Party. The women signed a covenant among themselves, agreeing not to buy any household article taxed by the English Crown.

Now, the significance of this is that the women were ready to go to war on a economic issue, and that is a significant side of the American Revolution which should be more often noted. It should be noted because it is again important, today.

What the women of Edenton were doing, back in 1774, was to protest more than the issue of "taxation without representation." That slogan was a rallying cry, and a political argument.

But the greater issue being protested by the ladies of Edenton and the people of the thirteen colonies was that Americans were being restricted economically in the first place, and being denied due process in the second.

The economic battle the American colonist were fighting was that their government in England was regulating their commerce in a very restrictive way. Colonist were denied the right to open new lands to the west, and to manufacture and sell their goods in a free market. The laws of the day were written to favor commercial interests in the old country. A series of regulations kept enterprising Americans from trading as they will.

In some cases local manufacture was forbidden outright, so that manufacturers in England could have, in America, a monopoly on the sale of important goods.

In the second place, Americans felt they were being denied reasonable process of law, being governed by agents

of a distant capital and not by their peers. Laws were made by men not of the people's choosing, and laws were administered by the King's agents, whose powers could not be examined and checked by local authority.

The government was 3,000 miles away, and demonstrated -- to the greatest degree in the economic sphere -- that it did not care for local needs and local initiatives. Therefore, the Edenton economic boycott went right to the heart of the matter.

The two most important results of the American revolution were the establishment of a large degree of economic freedom, and the establishment of the principle of due process.

Now, Thomas Jefferson said once that he thought the tree of liberty would have to be nourished with the blood of renewed revolution every twenty years. I am sure he wished he'd never said that, because I know how politician's offhand comments get blown out of proportion.

But he did say it, and the most interesting thing about it was that he has been wrong. Americans proved so good at self-government that the political system he and his colleagues founded has become the wonder of a world in which the collapse of governments is the rule.

I hope Jefferson continues to be proved wrong. In my mind, we are once again facing a crisis of economic liberty, and a crisis of due process. We are faced with repression

once again, from federal agencies which composed of unelected "lawmakers," whose agents can impose levies and sieze property without even the finding of probable cause.

We are once again faced with government regulations drawn at a distance, which are completely unreasonable when applied at the local level. And we are once again faced with economic limitations caused by the drag and weight of federal spending policies.

I feel we can get through this crisis. The great American issue for the bicentennial and for years to come is going to be the control of that octopus in Washington.

Historically, it has taken Americans years to battle

out the great issues which beset them, but that genius for self-government will once again prevail. Slowly, the message about excessive government spending is beginning to seep in Washington, even among some liberals. But it will take time for that growing distaste for the economic limitations of taxation to be turned into economic fact.

But that fact will come, and the people will prevail.

And maybe, just maybe, it can be done without the good ladies of Edenton having to stage another Tea Party.