**OBJECTIVE** Explain the importance of the Edenton Tea Party in North Carolina.

(NC Curriculum Objective 4.2)

When Parliament passed the Sugar Act in 1764, North Carolina's Assembly was outraged. It informed the governor that it saw "new Taxes and impositions laid on us without ... our Consent" as a violation of their rights and "privilege of imposing our own Taxes."

The Stamp Act and later the Townsend Acts further angered many people. In Wilmington, Patriots forced the stamp agent to resign. At Brunswick on the Cape Fear River, Patriots prevented a British ship from unloading the hated stamped paper.

In 1767, the Assembly urged George III to repeal the Townsend Acts, which taxed imported goods. "Free men," it declared, "cannot legally be taxed except by themselves or their representatives." Two years later, the Assembly quickly agreed to a nonimportation agreement like the ones that other colonists had drawn up. In it, they agreed not to buy any goods taxed by the Townsend Acts. Through actions and words, colonists protested what they saw as Parliament's violation of their rights as British citizens.

**Response to the Boston Tea Party**

In December 1773, North Carolinians heard about the Boston Tea Party from the Committees of Correspondence. They had been set up to pass along just such news. The next year, colonists were outraged to learn that Parliament was punishing Boston with the "Intolerable Acts." The port of Boston was closed and its citizens had to house British soldiers. Tar Heels rallied to help the "distressed inhabitants of Boston." They shipped corn, pork, peas, and other supplies to Massachusetts.

In response to Parliament's harsh new laws, Patriots called for a Continental Congress to be held in Philadelphia in September 1774. Each colonial assembly would elect its own delegates.

North Carolina's governor, Josiah Martin, refused to call a meeting of the Assembly, hoping to keep it from choosing delegates. Patriots side-stepped the governor by calling their own meeting, known as the First Provincial Congress. It met in New Bern on August 25, 1774. William Hooper, Joseph Hewes, and Richard Caswell were chosen to represent North Carolina in Philadelphia.

**Edenton Women Speak Out**

Penelope Barker, a native of Edenton, must have followed all this news with interest. Her husband was in England, where he served as North Carolina's agent. During his long absence, she looked after her family and managed her plantations. Barker was a strong woman who had survived many losses. She had been widowed twice and had seen three of her children die in infancy.

On October 25, 1774, Barker and 50 other patriotic women joined the growing protests. They met at the Edenton home of Elizabeth King. Penelope Barker presided. The 51 women burned tea from their kitchens and stated their support for the protests. They declared that "we cannot be indifferent on any occasion that appears to affect the peace and happiness of our country." The women noted that at the meeting of the Provincial
Congress two months before, the delegates had agreed not to drink tea or wear British-made cloth. The Edenton women decided to do the same.

"[I]t is a duty that we owe not only to our near and dear relations and connections, but to ourselves, who are essentially interested in their welfare, to do everything as far as lies in our power to testify our sincere adherence [support] to the same; and we do therefore accordingly subscribe this paper as a witness of our fixed intention and solemn determination to do so."

The women then signed a document pledging:

"We the ladies of Edenton do hereby solemnly engage not to conform to the pernicious [harmful] Custom of Drinking Tea or that we . . . will not promote the wear of any manufacture from England, until such time that all Acts which tend to enslave this our Native Country shall be repealed."

The event soon became known as the Edenton Tea Party. The protest was a fairly minor, peaceful one. But the women had taken an unusual step. They claimed the right, and even a duty, to take part in political actions. Such a claim was shocking at the time. The event was widely reported.

★ ANALYZING A POLITICAL CARTOON
A London newspaper printed this political cartoon about the Edenton Tea Party. Study the cartoon to determine the artist's point of view.

1. What adjectives do you think the artist might have used to describe the Edenton women?
2. What is the attitude of the artist toward the women of Edenton?
3. How does the artist reveal his point of view?

★ CRITICAL THINKING
Recognizing Bias Londoner Arthur Iredell wrote to a relative in Edenton: "Is there a female Congress at Edenton too? I hope not for we Englishmen are afraid of the male Congress [in Philadelphia], but if the ladies attack us, the consequence is to be dreaded." What does Arthur Iredell think of the Edenton Tea Party? How can you tell?

Comparing Do you think the Boston Tea Party and Edenton Tea Party have any similarities? Explain your answer.

Drawing Conclusions Why did the Edenton women feel it was their duty to support the protests of the Provincial Congress against Britain? Would an action like theirs be considered radical today? Why or why not?

★ ENRICHMENT
Connections With Art Draw a cartoon for a colonial newspaper showing the Edenton Tea Party from the Patriot point of view.