

Sheriff's Office

History

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 943

Commending Virginia's sheriffs on the occasion of their 375th anniversary.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 20, 2009

Agreed to by the Senate, February 25, 2009

WHEREAS, in 1634 the Virginia House of Burgesses, following the form of local government prevalent in England at the time, created by statute the eight original shires of Virginia—Accomac Shire, Charles City Shire (now Charles City County), Charles River Shire (now York County), Elizabeth City Shire, Henrico Shire (now Henrico County), James City Shire (now James City County), Warwick River Shire, and Warrosquyoake Shire (now Isle of Wight County); and

WHEREAS, adhering to the system introduced by the Saxons, dating as early as the 7th century, and continued after the Norman Conquest of 1066, the principal officer created to administer the shires under this form of government was the "shire reeve" or "sheriff"; and

WHEREAS, William Stone became the first sworn sheriff in America when he was appointed the Sheriff of the County of Accomac, serving two consecutive terms in 1634 and 1635, going on to serve as County Administrator, and in 1648, after a distinguished career of public service in a variety of Virginia offices, moving to the Colony of Maryland, where he was appointed Governor by Sir George Calvert, Lord Baltimore; and

WHEREAS, by proclamation of the House of Burgesses, dated March 13, 1651, each county was required to choose a sheriff, and in an interesting departure from the previous appointment process, which would prove to be the prevailing custom over time, the Commissioners of Northampton County asked their inhabitants to elect their sheriff; and

WHEREAS, as recorded in the Northampton County record of 1651, "Lieutenant William Waters, a gentleman, according to the instructions directed to ye Commissions & Inhabitants of this County by plurality of voices was nominated & made choice to be High Sheriff of Northampton Counties from this present day during ye accustomed time," thereby establishing William Waters of Northampton as the first elected sheriff in America; and

WHEREAS, as the population of Virginia grew and spread out to the West, and the distance between the settlers and the provincial capital at Jamestown made communication difficult and time-consuming, making it increasingly difficult for the Governor to administer the affairs of the distant shires directly, the sheriffs were required to assume ever-expanding duties and responsibilities in addition to being the

ranking police and financial officer, to include serving warrants, making arrests, operating jails, and most notably, collecting taxes; and

WHEREAS, by 1676, the sheriffs had assumed a plurality of indispensable duties and roles such that they evolved into the Crown's principal representative in each Virginia shire or county; and

WHEREAS, today, over 375 years since the first sheriffs took office in Virginia, they continue to proudly protect and serve the citizens of the Commonwealth in their principal roles of law enforcement, court security, service of legal process, apprehension of fugitives, prisoner transport, and jail administration; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend and congratulate the sheriffs of the Commonwealth of Virginia on the occasion of their 375th anniversary; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the President and Board of Directors of the Virginia Sheriffs' Association as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for the loyal and dedicated service of Virginia sheriffs.