

and lakes, etc., must become a great country, populous and mighty; and will, in a less time than is generally conceived, be able to shake off any shackles that may be imposed on her, and perhaps place them on the imposers. In the meantime, every act of oppression will sour their tempers, lessen greatly, if not annihilate, the profits of your commerce with them, and hasten their final revolt; for the seeds of liberty are universally sown there, and nothing can eradicate them.

Benjamin Franklin to Lord Kames, April 11, 1767, Abercainny Collection, Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh.

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A Tea Party

Resistance to the Stamp Act brought about its repeal. But other unpopular measures remained, and new ones were added. The British found how hard it is to impose authority on an unwilling people. The colonists were moving down the road from resistance to revolution. In Boston, on March 5, 1770, a crowd gathered to confront British troops guarding the customhouse. Snowballs flew in the air and the soldiers panicked. An order to fire was shouted, no one knows by whom, and five Bostonians fell dead, with many more wounded. This was the Bos-

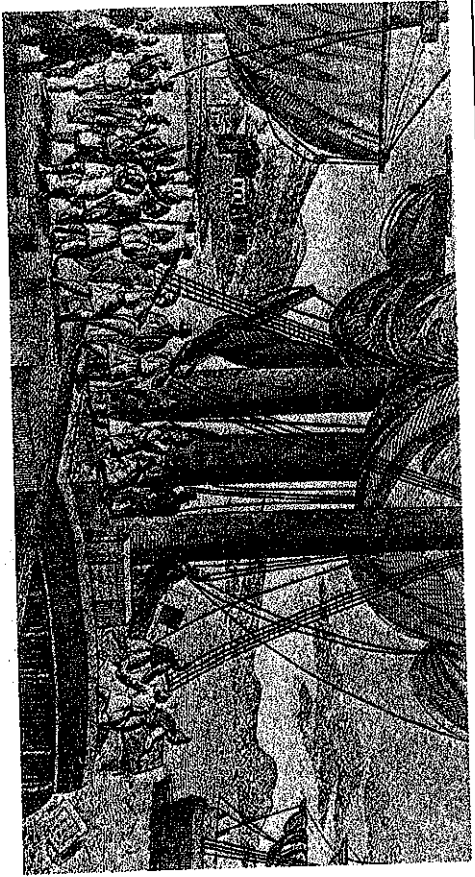
ton Massacre. Radicals used the incident as a dramatic example of British threat to liberty and the danger of a standing army in peacetime. The soldiers involved were acquitted by a jury—packed by the Crown-appointed sheriff, it was said.

Petitions from the colonies to settle their grievances poured into London but were rejected. The colonials became convinced the entire British government—George III as well as Parliament—was ready to deny the colonists their liberties. What other measures could the colonists take?

Cool Samuel Adams was always ready with another idea. Now in his late forties, he was a great power in Massachusetts politics. He had no wealth or position, nor did he look impressive. A stout man with a nervous palsy, he lacked skill as orator or writer. But with the Stamp Act crisis he showed his great talent as one of America's first politicians. He understood the ebb and flow of public opinion and knew how to plot and promote actions that might bring about a break with Britain and lead to independence.

It was Sam Adams' idea to get the Boston town meeting to set up a Committee of Correspondence. Many other towns and colonies quickly did the same. It became a network for exchanging information and developing common action.

The network came in handy when the colonists took to boycotting British tea in protest against the duty they had to pay on it. Philadelphia and New York refused the East India Company's tea, and the ships sailed back



An old engraving depicts the most famous tea party in history. It was a costume party too, for many of the Bostonians disguised themselves as Mohawk Indians when they boarded the tea ships and threw 342 tea chests overboard.

to London with their cargoes. In Boston three tea ships docked at Griffin's wharf in December 1773. When the ships refused to depart with their tea, Sam Adams stood up at the town meeting and said, in a resigned voice, "This meeting can do nothing more to save the country." It was a signal. War whoops sounded from the balcony. What happened next was recalled long after by an eyewitness, Robert Sessions:

I WAS LIVING IN BOSTON at the time, in the family of a Mr. Davis, a lumber merchant, as a common laborer. On that eventful evening, when Mr. Davis came in from the town meeting, I asked him what was to be done with the tea.

"They are now throwing it overboard," he replied. Receiving permission, I went immediately to the spot. Everything was as light as day, by the means of lamps and torches—a pin might be seen lying on the wharf. I went on board where they were at work, and took hold with my own hands.

I was not one of those appointed to destroy the tea, and who disguised themselves as Indians, but was a volunteer, the disguised men being largely men of family and position in Boston, while I was a young man whose home and relations were in Connecticut. The appointed and disguised party proving too small for the quick work necessary, other young men, similarly circumstanced with myself, joined them in their labors.

The chests were drawn up by a tackle—one man bringing them forward in the hold, another putting a rope around them, and others hoisting them to the deck and carrying them to the vessel's side. The chests were then opened, the tea emptied over the side, and the chests thrown overboard.

Perfect regularity prevailed during the whole transaction. Although there were many people on the wharf, entire silence prevailed—no clamor, no talking. Nothing was meddled with but the teas on board.

After having emptied the hold, the deck was swept clean, and everything put in its proper place. An officer on board was requested to come up from the cabin and see that no damage was done except to the tea.

From *The Night the Revolution Began*, Wesley S. Griswald, 1972.