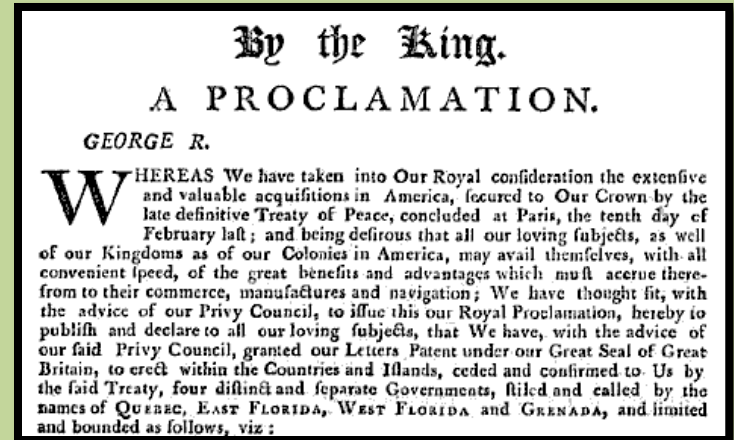


Boston Tea Party: Point of No Return

Americans love to remember that we colonists revolted against British taxes; threw British tea into Boston Harbor; then went to war for our freedoms.

Part of that patriotic story is correct; but, as usual with history, there is much more to the story. The famous “tea party” of 1773 was a reaction to the Tea Act, which actually made tea cost less!!! More importantly it was one of many dramatic confrontations between the British and her American colonies—starting with the end of the French Indian War.



This is a partial online image of the preamble to the Proclamation of 1763 which prohibited Americans from moving westward. Most Americans celebrated the victory over France, but were angry at the Proclamation—in only 13 years that anger would become a revolt. National Archives of Canada. 1999. May 2010. Online image.
<<http://www.canadianheritage.ca/reproductions/23005.htm>>

British and American Background

To understand the Boston Tea Party, first review what we have already learned about England, her Empire, and the American colonies.

American Background:

1607-1763—over 150 years

- *Constant Western Expansion
- * Strong Local Assemblies
- *Extensive tradition of personal freedoms based on British laws
- *Tradition of ignoring British controls on trade
- *Strong Volunteer Militia
- *Never faced a permanent British troop force in America
- * An attitude that American troops won the war against the French

British Background:

- *Strong foreign rules of trade since 1660 (Navigation Acts).
- *Huge national Debt
- *High local taxes in England
- *Lack of Knowledge of local colonial affairs
- *Mistrust of colonials after the French war and an attitude that British forces & British “Gold” won the war against the French



The taxes begin!

Sugar Act, 1764—increased duties on non-British goods for the purpose of raising revenue to support the royal offices. Most colonists objected to this strenuously since previous taxes were lower and used to regulate trade—not to pay salaries.

Currency Act, 1764—prohibited Colonies from issuing their own paper currency. Most colonists also objected to this act as it hampered their trade and they saw it as an ominous grab for power. Many colonies began informal non-importation agreements against British goods. Quartering Act, 1765—demanded that the colonies provide supplies and barracks to British troops. The act even listed expected supplies such as bedding, firewood, beer, & candles. This act is a prime example of how out of touch the British Parliament was with the Americas. Some members of parliament feared the British Treasury could not afford to pay all of the North American troops, but if they were kept busy in the colonies and supplied there, the budget issue would be mitigated. Many colonial assemblies, most notably New York where large numbers of troops were stationed, refused to fund the soldiers needs; the crisis passed but deep bitterness remained between the soldiers and citizens in America.



Stamp Act Crisis...

Stamp Act, 1765—The first direct tax on the colonies.

Used to raise funds for British oversight, it called on colonists to buy a stamp for legal and other documents.

Angry colonists formed local Sons of Liberty

organizations to harass stamp tax collectors. The Massachusetts Assembly called for a Stamp Act Congress to meet—nine colonial representatives did so and passed a Declaration of Rights noting that American citizens were British citizens and in that right they deserved direct representation before taxes were levied. Earlier non-importation efforts now re-doubled. Repeal of the Stamp Act, 1766—because no taxes could be raised and because some MPs agreed with the Americans it was repealed. But the same day, Parliament passed the Declaratory Act, 1766 stating that Britain had the right to pass binding laws on the colonies. The British King looked for other ways to fund British troops in North America.

One Penny Sheet Stamp for legal documents. George Mason University, 1995. May 2010. Online image. <<http://chnm.gmu.edu/fairfaxtah/lessons/documents/StampsAndTeapot.pdf>>



From Townshend to Tea...

Townshend Acts, 1767—new direct taxes on many colonial goods such as glass and paint. Colonial protests and reactions are swift. Non-importation is used again. John Dickinson, wrote a series of 14 letters titled Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania bluntly arguing that Britain had no right to tax the colonies, and his letters hint at the possibility of force. Then John Adams publishes the Massachusetts Circular Letter in, 1768. In retaliation the British Governor of Massachusetts dissolves the Massachusetts Assembly. British troops are sent to Boston. The Virginia Assembly approves the Virginia Resolves which re-states the belief that only the Virginia Assembly can tax Virginians; only to see the royal Governor of Virginia dissolve the Virginia Assembly. But non-importation was a strong weapon and the British merchants began to feel the lost revenues. In 1770, most Townshend duties were repealed—except the tax on tea.



What Would be Next...?

On March 5, 1770 the Boston Massacre occurred highlighting the bitterness between soldiers and citizens. Then another incident raised the specter of violence when Rhode Island members of the Sons of Liberty boarded and torched a British revenue ship, the *HMS Gaspee* on June 9, 1772. Royal officials threatened to send those responsible back to England for trial, but no arrests were made. Nearly one-third of colonial newspapers carried stories of the Pennsylvania Farmer, the Circular Letter, the Virginia Resolves, the Boston Massacre, and burning of the Gaspee. Committees of Correspondence now became active to keep colonists alert.

For the previous nine years the Monarch and the Colonies had been pushing each other, but avoiding war. The Stamp Act and the Townshend Acts were repealed. After both repeals, colonial non-importation pressure was eased.



The Tea Act...

On May 10, 1773 Parliament adopted the Tea Act. The act was devised to save the East India Company which had tons of unsold tea and faced bankruptcy thanks to problems in India and over-extension. Prior to the act the East India Company had to sell to British merchants in England, and pay a fee. This fee or tax was then passed on to customers, including those in the Americas. By selling directly to colonial merchants the price of tea was to go down, the East India Company could sell its surplus and everyone would be happy. But the act also stipulated that the tea be sold through British merchants in America—thus cutting out American dealers. Quickly and uniformly Americans hated the Tea Act. First, they thought it was but a scheme to get the Americans to accept the notion of a British tax, even if smaller. And secondly, they were outraged that American dealers would not profit. Protests arose throughout the colonies. The port of Charleston left tea on the docks to rot. Other ports simply did not unload the tea.



The Boston Tea Party...

Boston Tea Party, 1773– On Thursday December 16, 1773 posters went up around Boston warning that the “dreaded” tea cargo had arrived. This was the signal, and 116 people gathered on Griffin’s Wharf by 7pm. Nearly 5,000 would attend a meeting that same evening at the Old South Meeting House. The three newly arrived ships, the *Dartmouth*, the *Beaver*, and the *Eleanor* were soon boarded. The patriots included many teenagers, some as young as 16; and only a handful of men over 40. They dumped 342 chest of tea, or nearly 40 tons, into the harbor. The cost was 10,000 pounds sterling, or over one million dollars in today’s rates.

The Boston Gazette reported the incident as one of an “inquiry” into to why the ships had not been returned to England. As word reached England, Parliament was fighting mad.



What do we make of this?

England was shocked at the purposeful destruction of valuable tea. In 1774 Parliament retaliated with five Coercive Acts (or Intolerable Acts). The Boston Port Act closed the port of Boston. The Massachusetts Government Act abolished the local assembly. The Administration of Justice act allowed British citizens to seek trials in England. The (new) Quartering Act allowed royal Governors to order quarters for troops. The unrelated Quebec Act merely re-drew some Canadian borders, but colonists saw it as part of a conspiracy.

Think of a child's seesaw, and you can expect the reactions of colonists. The First Continental Congress was appointed in 1774 with 56 delegates, and formalized the non-importation agreements. They began to raise funds for the militias,. In April, 1775 the first shots were fired at Lexington and Concord. And on May 10, 1775, it created the Continental Army.

The Boston Tea Party was a brazen act of violence and property destruction—one the British could not ignore.

