



Traitors or Patriots?

By Dominique De Cleer

In April 1607, after a journey of almost four months across the Atlantic Ocean, three ships of the *Virginia Company of London* - the *Susan Constant*, the *Goodspeed* and the *Discovery* - cast anchor on the coast of Virginia to establish a British colony. Under the command of Captain Christopher Newport, the 105 pioneers who survived the crossing settled at the mouth of the James River and founded the colony of Jamestown. The same year, the *Virginia Company of Plymouth* created a settlement in Maine. Twenty-three years earlier, Sir Humphrey Gilbert and Sir Walter Raleigh had set up a colony named Virginia in the actual State of North Carolina, but it rapidly declined and vanished after a few years.

In 1619, the first black people disembarked from a Dutch warship. Originating from Western Africa, they would help the colonists in their most arduous work. However, their contract foresaw that they would be freed after five years if they respected the terms of their agreement. They would then be considered equal to the other citizens and be allowed to acquire lands along the river. The arrival of 1,200 additional colonists raised the population to 3,000 people including 90 young ladies, old enough to be married.

On November 11, 1620, 102 immigrants who had fled religious persecutions and exiled to the city of Leyde in Holland, disembarked from the merchant ship *Mayflower* in the bay of Cape Cod. Ten days later, the families' householders signed on board the

vessel a community pact based on the Church principles and known as the *Mayflower Compact*. It set the rules of life in the colony they were about to establish and name Plymouth. At the autumn of 1621, the pilgrims thanked God who guided them to these lands and helped them overcome the difficulties of their new life. The rejoicings lasted for several days and the feast was in line with the celebrations. Aside from corn, oysters, vegetables, fruits and berries, meat was also on the menu. Geese and roe were brought by the Wampanoags Indians as a gift but also strange poultry called *turkey* by the settlers. In 1627, not less than 1,500 orphans from the poor quarters of London were abducted and sent to the colonies to serve as farm aids. These abductions were a consequence of the Royal Ordinance of 1619 signed by King James I, ordering that the workless orphans be sent to the colonies. In 1630, a new wave of Puritans from England settled in the Shawmut peninsula, in the colony of the Bay of Massachusetts. The town they founded would be called Boston, after a British city in Lincolnshire. On September 7, Governor John Winthrop signed the official birth certificate of the new city which would also be the seat of the government of Massachusetts. In 1635, the same Winthrop, who was from Massachusetts, received a mandate to create a new colony at the mouth of the Connecticut River. It was composed of 12 settlements that were unified in 1662 when Winthrop went to London and received a charter signed by King Charles II. The next year, the colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations was created.

In 1651, the British Parliament voted the Navigation Act, a protectionist law aimed at financing the development of the navy and weakening the colonies of Barbados, Bermuda and Virginia to ensure the monopoly of maritime commerce. The terms of this act stipulated that all merchandise imported to England or destined to one of its colonies should be transported by British ships, of which half of the crew had to be of British nationality.

During the second half of the 17th century, new colonies were created in Maryland, New York, Carolina - which would be split into two distinctive provinces in 1691, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New Hampshire - which, in 1679, would become the *Royal Province*. As from 1664, Delaware that was mostly inhabited by Dutch and Swedish emigrants fell under British rule. William Penn was put in charge of the tutorship of what was then called the *Low Counties of Delaware*. From 1662 to 1701, the governor of Pennsylvania ensured the administration of his province as well as of Delaware until the Low Counties submitted a colonial petition of independence, which was later granted. However, the governor of Pennsylvania maintained his power on both provinces until 1776. The last region to join the British colonies was Georgia of which the charter was granted on April 21, 1732, to General James Oglethorpe, a member of the London Parliament and a reformer of penitentiary conditions. Except for the Low Counties of Delaware, Pennsylvania and Maryland that were landowner's provinces because the lands were granted by the King to notables, the other colonies were said *of the Crown*. All Thirteen Colonies developed a limited system of autonomous administration. The local and provincial representatives were elected by the people who seated in the local courts. The royal governor was the authority representing the King in the colonies and reported directly to the Parliament in London.

With less than 2,000 souls in 1625, the population of the British colonies increased to 275,000 inhabitants in 1700. During that same period of time, 21,000 black people were brought to the colonial provinces. Slavery was a common practice and didn't hurt the feelings of the puritan burgesses of Massachusetts. The Negroes ensured domestic work

or labored in farms. In Virginia and Maryland, they worked in tobacco plantations; in Carolina, they harvested rice or indigo. Boston was the first slave port in the colonies. Ships sailed to the Antilles with local merchandise that was sold to buy rum used as exchange money for slaves from Western Africa. Back to the Antilles, the *merchandise* was sold to American planters who transferred it on other vessels. The ships that left Boston entered the port with empty holds and were never caught while smuggling. Fifty years later, the population of the New World reached 1,000,000 inhabitants. This demographic growth was mainly due to the increase of immigration but also to the availability of natural resources that allowed the population to subside without too much trouble, to the numerous early marriages that bred an important birthrate and finally, because of the wide expanse of territory that limited the spread of epidemics.

In 1713, the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht brought an end to the Spanish War of Succession and resulted in an increase of the possessions of Great Britain to the detriment of France, its hereditary enemy. The ownership of the territories of Hudson Bay and Newfoundland was confirmed to England. France had to cede a huge chunk of Acadia. Furthermore, the Iroquois territories of the Valley of the Ohio became part of a British protectorate, having been until then administrated by France. From 1756 until 1763, the Seven Years War opposed both countries again. Victorious Great Britain considerably increased its possessions in North America. It also gained New France as well as all the islands off Canada, except St. Pierre et Miquelon. Henceforth, all the territories east of the Mississippi River belonged to the British Crown.

Until 1764, the colonists had no specific reason to complain about their living conditions under the Crown. Those conditions were relatively decent and the army of His Majesty kept an open eye on the security of the population. The colonies ignored the mother country while London didn't care much about them. British laws on commerce were applied offhandedly, which suited the merchants well because the colonies were a part of the international commerce system. The end of the conflict brought peace to Great Britain, which they had not enjoyed since almost fifty years. Finally, the political power of London would find time to look after the administration of its empire. The war had cost a colossal amount of money. The country's debt which was 75 million pounds in 1753 jumped to 133 million pounds ten years later.¹

Thenceforth, the government of King George III felt constrained and entitled to assert authority on its colonies while the Americans were used to administrate their provinces by themselves. The people's representatives of the colonial assemblies regarded the London government and its royal clerks with contempt. The Americans deemed that their institutions were sovereign and that the Parliament of London could not limit their competences. They considered that the right to raise taxes was their sole prerogative.

In April 1764, the British government supported by Prime Minister George Grenville approved a tax on sugar and prohibited the import of French wine and rum from abroad. The *American Revenue Act* aroused anger amongst the colonists because the commerce of those commodities was an important source of income. In Boston, attorney James Otis vigorously accused the Parliament of imposing taxes to the colonies which had no legal representation. He also denounced the *Currency Act* that had been decreed on the 19th of the same month and which forbade the provinces to print their own paper money. The Boston merchants argued that the slave trade was linked to the commerce of rum

¹ Today's value: 15,150,000,000 to 24,738,000,000 £.

and sugar, which should have been protected instead of being sanctioned. In May, the *Boston Evening Post* sided with the colonists and denounced the trade policy of London. In August, they put an end to the trade of luxury goods imported from Great Britain. New York merchants joined Massachusetts' movement and boycott.

Hoping to recover at least half of the costs generated by the British expedition during the Pontiac Rebellion of 1763-1764 and the French and Indian War, in addition to the *Sugar Act*, the Lords voted the *Stamp Act* on March 22, 1765, a tax imposed on all printed document or legal paper used in the colonies: newspapers, pamphlets, birth or death certificates, real estate contracts, commercial licenses, cards and dice. At the House of Lords, Colonel Isaac Barré who had fought in Louisbourg and Quebec didn't vote this *act* and cautioned the members by saying: "*There are gentlemen in this House from the West Indies, but there are very few who know the circumstances of North America [...].*"² Speaking about the colonists, Charles Townsend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer who presented the plan of the Stamp Bill to Benjamin Franklin and to the other American agents, replied: "*And now will these Americans, children planted by our care, nourished up by our indulgence until they are grown to a degree of strength and opulence, and protected by our arms [...].*" Barré retorted: "*They planted by your care? No! Your oppressions planted them in America. They fled from your tyranny to a then uncultivated and inhospitable country [...]. They nourished up by your indulgence? They grew by your neglect of them as soon as you began to care about them, that care was exercised in sending persons to rule over them, in one department and another, who were perhaps the deputies of deputies to some member of this House and sent to spy out their liberty, to misrepresent their actions and to prey upon them; men whose behavior on many occasions has caused the blood of those sons of liberty to recoil within them; men promoted to the highest seats of justice, some, who to my knowledge were glad by going to a foreign country to escape being brought to the bar of a court of justice in their own. [...] They protected by your arms? They have nobly taken up arms in your defense [...] what I deliver are the genuine sentiments of my heart [...] The people I believe are as truly loyal as any subjects the King has, but a people jealous of their liberties and who will vindicate them, if ever they should be violated, but the subject is too delicate - I say no more.*"³ For the first time, the term *Sons of Liberty* was used and would soon become the symbol of resistance against the British in the American colonies. When the bill was passed, Benjamin Franklin who was still in London wrote to Charles Thompson in Philadelphia: "*The sun of liberty is set; you must light up the candles of industry and economy, to what Mr. Thompson replied: I fear other lights may become necessary.*"⁴

To enforce the law, the government offered 300 pounds to the clerks responsible for the collection of the stamp rights. In Boston and in other towns, riots broke out and the tax collectors were threatened and forced to abandon their duty. Some were tarred and feathered by the angry population. Effigies of Prime Minister Grenville were hanged or burnt in public. This wave of protests forced the loyalists to hide and stay home until the situation was back to normal. The opposition against the Crown and the policy led by the London Parliament became harsher. The question about the legitimacy of the government imposing taxes while the colonies had no representation in Parliament was

² J. Brooke: *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1754-1790* – Ed. L. Namier, 1964.

³ *A Complete History of the United States of America embracing the whole period from the Discovery of North America down to the Year 1820* – Vol III, Hartford, 1821, p. 15-16.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 16.

clearly asked. In June, James Otis suggested a meeting of all the colonies and the Assembly of Massachusetts invited the delegates to meet in New York. On October 7, a congress was held in New York with representatives coming from Massachusetts, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island and Maryland.

On August 14, the effigy of Andrew Oliver - a brother-in-law of Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson⁵ - who was appointed to administer the *Stamp Act* in the province of Massachusetts Bay - was hanged from Boston's *Liberty Tree*. The following night, his house and offices were ransacked by an angry crowd. Three days later, he was forced to resign his commission. Twelve days later, on August 26, a mob looted and destroyed the mansion of Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson; the silverware, furniture and other valuable items were stolen. The next morning, the rumor spread that these acts were committed by a group of colonists opposed to the *Stamp Act* and the British policy. They called themselves *The Sons of Liberty*, after the sentence pronounced by Isaac Barré during a debate with Prime Minister Grenville. This clandestine organization had already established branches in other cities of the colonies. The most active one was in Boston, issued from the amalgamation of existing secret societies such as the *Loyal Nine* and the *Boston Caucus Club*. The leader of *The Sons of Liberty* was Samuel Adams. Born in Boston on September 27, 1722, Adams was the son of a merchant and brewer. At the age of 18, he graduated from Harvard College. With funds borrowed from his father, he created a brewery but rapidly proved to be an unsuccessful businessman albeit an excellent politician. When his father died, he squandered his inheritance and became a tax collector. In 1765, he was elected to the Massachusetts Assembly.

As of May, the House of Burgesses⁶ in Williamsburg, Virginia, met in a climate of confrontations and violence. At the stand, young attorney Patrick Henry voiced a series of resolutions condemning the taxation policy of Great Britain. In his speech when he said "*Caesar had his Brutus, Charles the First had his Cromwell, George the Third*", he was interrupted by shouts of *treason*. Not impressed, the lawyer added: "*and George the Third may profit by their example! If this be treason, make the most of it.*"⁷

In New York, the delegates of the 9 provinces who were assembled to denounce the abuses of power of the British Parliament wrote a document in which they reported the grievances of their members and of the non-right to tax the colonies since they were not represented. John Dickinson, a politician of Pennsylvania was in charge of writing the text which was moderated by the attorney James Otis who tempered the verbal excesses of extremists like Patrick Henry, the representative of Virginia.

At the same time the *Stamp Act* was signed by the King, another law was adopted by Parliament: the *Quartering Act*. This decree constrained the population to provide accommodation in vacant houses, barns and inns for the soldiers of His Majesty and feed them. Because of the refusal of the colonists to answer positively to General Thomas Gage's request to provide shelter for his men, the commander-in-chief resorted to request Parliament to legislate and enact this measure.

⁵ In 1771, when Hutchinson became governor of Massachusetts, Andrew Oliver was commissioned lieutenant governor. He died on March 13, 1774 at the age of 67 and was followed by Thomas Oliver.

⁶ The House of Burgesses was established by the Virginia Company and was the first assembly of elected citizens in the colonies.

⁷ Digital collections: *Today in history - May 29* – Library of Congress (www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history).

In London, during debates related to the *Stamp Act*, British merchants complained about the negative effect on the boycott of their merchandise. On February 11, the Court of Justice of Virginia declared the *Stamp Act* illegal and two days later, Benjamin Franklin, the colonies agent to England, addressed the Lords, stating that the *Stamp Act* was unfair and would generate a revolution. Fifteen days later, under the pressure of merchants and the concerns of the stock exchange after the cessation of exports of British products to the colonies, Parliament abrogated the *Stamp Act* by 250 votes for and 122 against. When the news reached the Americans, the church bells rang loudly. In Boston, the *Liberty Tree*⁸ was decorated with banners and streamers; the population lit fireworks and threw firecrackers in the streets. In December, in New York, since the city refused to accommodate and feed the army, General Gage ordered its assembly to cease its activities and to dissolve. Every request to accommodate the soldiers was rejected under the pretext that the city had no means to ensure the subsistence of the troops. Irritated by the clashes between the colonists - including the Sons of Liberty - and his men, Gage called upon regiments encamped west of the town to restore order. However, with little response from the assembly Gage had no other choice than to dissolve it. Finally, on June 6, 1767, the city of New York voted an allocation of 3,000 pounds for quartering the army. By doing so, it hoped to obtain the revocation from London of the dissolution of its assembly ordered six months earlier.

Under the government of William Pitt, Charles Townshend was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer. In England, bloody social conflicts had shaken the country after the increase of the price of grain. This price escalation had generated a serious lack of income for the Treasury, the lowering of duty resulting in a loss of 500,000 pounds. Therefore, the raising of taxes in the colonies would help to reduce the budget deficit. Benjamin Franklin reminded the members of Parliament that although the Americans were against internal taxation, in principle, they were not opposed to external duties. In consequence, Townshend decided to raise new levies. Several custom taxes in addition to the opening of a custom office and the *Vice Admiralty Court Act* that created three new maritime courts in Boston, Philadelphia and Charleston to judge those who broke the law, were imposed on the colonies. A de-taxation of tea would allow repression against the smuggling of Dutch tea and would improve the trade of the British Company of the Eastern Indies. Besides, Townshend's *Restraining Act* confirmed the dissolution of New York's assembly until it accepted the *Quartering Act*. In the colonies, all of Townshend's Acts were rejected and James Otis' cry "*No taxation without representation*" became a familiar slogan. The Provincial Assembly of Massachusetts sent a letter to the assemblies of the other provinces, urging them to reject the acts. The newly appointed Secretary to the Colonies, Lord Hillsborough asked the Massachusetts Assembly to rebuff its letter, which the members refused to do. The provincial Governor, Francis Bernard then proceeded to dissolve it, which resulted in stirring up tensions between the Americans and the British. In Philadelphia, the attorney and landowner John Dickinson wrote a pamphlet in which he denounced the *Townshend Acts* and declared them as anti-constitutional as the *Stamp Act*. Dickinson clearly asked the question whether the assemblies had to submit to the uncompromising authority of the Crown as New York had been forced to the previous year. Parliament had requested that the colonies provide accommodation and food to the troops. In the future, will they also have to pay for the uniforms and armament of the soldiers? All those questions

⁸ The *Liberty Tree* stood at Hanover Square, the most public part of Boston (sic) - Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum (www.bostonteatpartyships.com).

brought the author to plea the assemblies to stand together against these unfair measures.

In February 1768 in Boston, the Assembly member Samuel Adams had a letter printed that was moderated in less radical terms by his friend and *Son of Liberty* James Otis. In this memorandum given by Adams to his fellows members of the Provincial Assembly, he denounced the *Townshend Acts*. The terms he used left no doubts about his will to break away from British authority and begin an independence process. The letter reminded that there could not be taxation without the colonies being represented at the London Parliament, exactly as Dickinson had said the year before. In April, Lord Hillsborough, who in the meantime had become chairman of the Board of Trade, requested that the governors prevent Adams' letter from being considered by the provincial assemblies. Connecticut, New Jersey and New Hampshire endorsed the document while Virginia drafted its own letter of protests. The Assembly of Massachusetts refused to abrogate Adams's document. In Boston, this refusal was considered a first victory by the Sons of Liberty. To celebrate the event, they ordered a silver bowl from jeweler Paul Revere, which would be engraved in recollection of the Assembly's opposition.

Two months earlier, the *Liberty*, a sloop belonging to John Hancock, which transported wine from Madeira, was inspected by a customs agent. As soon as he boarded the ship, the crew restrained him and kept him prisoner. When released, he immediately reported to his superior and the customs seized the ship. This was considered as a declaration of war by the Bostonian merchants who became so enflamed that all the British officials took shelter in the bastions of the port. Accused of smuggling, John Hancock was defended by John Adams, future President of the United States and cousin of Samuel Adams. The case was closed without further ado.

On October 1, 1768, General Gage arrived in Boston from New York to supervise the disembarkation of his troops. To prevent a possible uprising of the population and maintain order in the city, he had brought with him the 14th and 29th Infantry Regiments that had sailed in Royal Navy ships from Halifax, Nova Scotia. Despite a rumor that the *Sons of Liberty* would cause some trouble, the landing of the soldiers proceeded normally and no incident was reported. The two units would soon be joined by the 64th and 65th Infantry Regiments. Castle Williams, the fort of Boston, could easily accommodate the regiments but at the Governor's request, Gage encamped his troops in the city court of justice, in Faneuil Hall and on the Boston common. The arrival of the soldiers was welcomed with joy by the British officials and loyalists who hoped that the climate of anarchy that prevailed in the town would abate.

In May 1769, the Board of Trade announced to the governors that the *Townshend Acts* would be reconsidered. At the same time in Virginia, the delegates of the Assembly of Notables, which had been dissolved by the Governor, organized the Association of Virginia, which forbade the import of goods from England until the *Townshend Acts* were definitely repealed. In July, South Carolina adopted the same resolution as Virginia.

In January 1770, British troops seized the city of New York. Two days later, when the military authorities requested that the *Quartering Act* be complied with, bloody riots broke out between the Sons of Liberty under the leadership of Alexander McDougall and British soldiers. Several activists on both sides were severely wounded. On

March 5, in Boston, the inevitable happened: in front of the State House⁹, the troop fired on the crowd. A young man of the city who pretended having been knocked down by the butt of his musket, shouted at a sentry of the 29th Regiment. After sharing insults, both men started to brawl. Captain Thomas Preston who had witnessed the scene gathered a platoon and hurried to the front of the building where the incident had taken place. In the meantime, a considerable crowd had formed. People spitted and threw stones and snowballs at the soldiers. One of them was hit and knocked down, dropping his musket. When he recovered and picked up his weapon, without any given order, he fired a shot. Minutes later, other shots rang. Three Bostonians were killed; eight others were injured of which two of them died of their wounds. The acting Governor, Thomas Hutchinson promised an immediate investigation that was abandoned the next morning. In late October, Captain Preston was acquitted when the jury was convinced that he didn't give the order to fire. The trial of the soldiers took place on November 27; all but two were acquitted. The defendants were found guilty of manslaughter and condemned to be iron branded on the hand. They had been defended by John Adams. Although a moderated Son of Liberty, after his pleadings Adams declared: "*Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.*"¹⁰

In New York, relations between patriots and British authorities became increasingly tensed and clashes more violent. Alexander Mc Dougall who had been indicted after the riots of January was released on bail, to the great deception of the military. He only had to plead not guilty to recover his freedom. Most of the magistrates felt sympathy for the Sons of Liberty and consequently offered very little help to the military authorities.

In London, Lord North, the new Prime Minister, had raised taxes on imports from the colonies except on tea, declaring that the tea tax was legitimate as well as a mean of demonstrating the supremacy of Parliament over the colonies.¹¹ However, many Members of Parliament agreed to cancel this tax if it could help avoiding new troubles.

Thomas Hutchinson, who was commissioned Royal Governor in March 1771 by approval of the King, announced in June 1772 that his salary would, from now on, be paid by the Crown instead of the Assembly. He added that the same would apply to the magistrates who, thenceforth, would be more independent from the executive power of the colonies. Fearing that the colonial institutions would pass under British control, Samuel Adams and James Otis created a *Committee of Correspondence* that collected and informed the population of any case of interference or encroachment of the Crown of England in the colonies. By mail, Dr. Benjamin Church invited the other towns to set up similar committees. In the following months, 119 towns had followed Church's recommendation. The Governor was furious and did not hesitate to describe the committee as "*the most venomous serpent ever issued from the egg of sedition.*"¹²

In Boston, John Hancock had organized the boycott of Chinese tea being sold by the East India Company. The previous sales of 320,000 pounds had fallen to 520 pounds. In May 1773, King George III approved a rescue plan for the company and the *Tea Act* allowed it to export tea directly to the colonies, without being submitted to taxes. Instead of selling tea to middlemen, the company appointed merchants who had to bring the tea into consignment. In London, Lord North decided to maintain the custom duties,

⁹ Today known as the Old State House.

¹⁰ *Adams' Arguments for the Defense: 3-4 December 1770* – National Archives.

¹¹ University of Groningen – www.rug.nl/usa/biographies/lord-north.

¹² Daily almanac of Massachusetts history – www.massmoments.org.

justifying his decision since the subsidies granted to the company would allow the selling of tea at a lower price than smuggling it and would serve to pay the salaries of the governors and judges in the colonies. Once more, it was the principle of taxation that opposed the colonies and the government of London. Seven ships were sent to the colonies with tea produced by the East India Company, of which four were destined to Boston. The other three vessels set sail to New York, Philadelphia and Charleston. On November 28, the *Dartmouth* arrived at Griffin's wharf in the port of Boston but the ship's owner, Mr. Rotch was forbidden to unload his tea. Thomas Mifflin¹³, a Philadelphia merchant who was present asked the Sons of Liberty: "*Will you resist the landing of this tea? If you will, I will be answerable for Philadelphia.*"¹⁴ The citizens of Philadelphia went to the consignees who were appointed to receive and sell the tea, and asked them to resign immediately, which was promptly done. A correspondence network was set up between Philadelphia and Boston, calling for mutual assistance and resistance. In New York, similar actions were taken by the Sons of Liberty. The next day, Samuel Adams called for a meeting at Faneuil Hall. Since thousands of people arrived, it was decided to hold the meeting at the larger Old South Meeting House. On Adams's proposal, an ordinance was proposed to the crowd, concerning the vessels that were not being unloaded of their cargo. The Sons of Liberty put pressure on the captain to sail back without paying the custom duties. Governor Hutchinson refused to let the ship leave without paying the taxes. Adams insisted that the Governor and the tea consignees - among whom two of Hutchinson's sons and a nephew - accept this agreement but they refused. On December 2, the *Eleanor* arrived and on December 15, a third ship, the *Beaver* dropped anchor in Boston; the fourth ship, the *William* was stranded in Cape Cod and never arrived at her final destination. In New York, Philadelphia and Charleston, the ships weighed anchor and sailed back with their cargo unloaded. British law foresaw that the tea be unloaded within 20 days after arrival or it could be seized by the custom agents. On the last day of the deadline for the *Dartmouth*, 5,000 people gathered at the Old South Meeting House where Sam Adams informed the crowd about the Governor's firm and final negative consideration. He ended his speech saying: "*This meeting can do nothing more to save the country.*" At dawn, a hundred of Sons of Liberty disguised as Mohawk Indians assembled and moved to the port where the ships lay at anchor. John Andrew who witnessed the event later recounted: "*They were clothed in blankets, with their heads muffled and copper colored faces. Each was armed with a hatchet or axe or pair of pistols. Nor was their dialect different from what I imagine the real Indians to speak, as their jargon was nonsense to all but themselves.*"¹⁵ Without molesting the crews, the Sons boarded the ships and, for almost three hours, they emptied the ships, throwing 340 chests of tea - 90,000 pounds - into the waters of Boston harbor. Four months later, another tea party¹⁶ was held in Boston. The *Fortune* held a cargo of only 30 chests of tea which were thrown overboard by a group of 60 patriots. Being of less importance, this act did not receive the same echoes as the one of December 16. Other *Tea Parties* followed and looked alike. In October 1774, patriots of Annapolis, Maryland, burned the *Peggy Stewart*, a British ship loaded

¹³ Thomas Mifflin later became a member of the First Continental Congress, the first governor of Pennsylvania and Quartermaster general of the Continental Army.

¹⁴ *A Complete History of the United States of America embracing the whole period from the Discovery of North America down to the Year 1820* – Vol III, Hartford, 1821, p. 61.

¹⁵ Boston Tea Party Historical Society: *Accounts by John Andrew*.

¹⁶ The term *Tea Party* was not in use at the time of the events.

with tea. As had done the Bostonians, New Yorkers disguised as natives dumped its tea cargo in the East River. Virginia, too, acted in a similar way.

On January 20, 1774, news of the Boston incidents reached London, which turned the public opinion against the colonies. They bitterly irritated Prime Minister North who addressed the House of Lords on the measures to be taken by the government against the colonies: “*The Americans have tarred and feathered your subjects, plundered your merchants, burnt your ships, denied all obedience to your laws and authority; yet so clement and so long forbearing has our conduct been that it is incumbent on us now to take a different course. Whatever may be the consequences, we must risk something; if we do not, all is over.*”¹⁷ In Parliament, Charles Van said he “*agreed to the flagitiousness of the offence in the Americans, and therefore was of opinion, that the town of Boston ought to be knocked about their ears, and destroyed. Delenda est Carthago!*”¹⁸ *I am of opinion you will never meet with the proper obedience of the laws of this country, until you have destroyed that nest of locusts.*”¹⁹

After what happened to the ships in Boston harbor, the government decided to impose its authority and decreed the *Coercive Acts* that were called the *Intolerable Acts* by the colonists. Almost immediately, Prime Minister North became the most hated man in America. A visitor to Alexandria, Virginia, recorded in his journal: “*The effigy of Lord North was shot at then carried in great parade through the town and burnt.*”²⁰ The *Coercive Acts* comprised four parts:

- The *Boston Port Act* by which the port of Boston was closed to all maritime traffic until the price of the tea cargo was reimbursed, i.e. 9,659 British pounds²¹, until the custom duties were paid and until it pleased His Majesty to lift the act.
- The *Massachusetts Government Act* removed the charter granted to the province and placed its institution under the control of the government. All the provincial resolutions would be taken by the governor, the Parliament or the King. Furthermore, the Provincial Council would meet only once a year or upon request of the Governor.
- The *Administration of Justice Act* foresaw that a British official could be sued in justice for any kind of crime, in Great Britain or in any other colony of the empire, if it was considered that the accused would not be subject to a fair trial in Massachusetts. George Washington, a planter and member of the Provincial Council of Virginia did not hesitate to call it the *Murder Act*. He was convinced that it would allow British officials to harass Americans and then escape justice. Many colonists considered that this act was totally unjustified; after the Boston massacre, the British soldiers were subject to a perfectly fair trial.
- The last act was a new *Quartering Act* which applied to the entire colony.

Those *Intolerable Acts* resulted in the generation of a wind of sympathy for Massachusetts. In response to the *Coercive Acts*, the First Continental Congress was held in Philadelphia, from September 5 to October 26, 1774. Twelve of the Thirteen Colonies were represented by 56 delegates; Georgia was not represented at the meetings. Not all members shared the same ideology. In contrast to the radical ideas of the delegates of Massachusetts, of the Adams cousins, of Robert Treat Paine and Thomas Cushing, Pennsylvania pleaded for a union with Great Britain. This motion was

¹⁷ *The Parliamentary History of England from the earliest period to the year 1803* – London 1813 – Vol XVII, p. 1280.

¹⁸ Oratorical phrase of Marcus Porcius Cato the Elder: *Carthage must be destroyed.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 1178.

²⁰ *The Alexandria Chronicle*, Summer 2015 – Alexandria Historical Society, Inc.

²¹ 1,700,000 US\$ in today's money.

approved by the majority and rejected by only one vote. Whilst this Congress was held, John Hancock sent Paul Revere to Philadelphia to inform the delegates of the provinces that Massachusetts had established the first autonomous government of the colonies. The discussions during this Congress centered on different economical possibilities, including the boycott of trade with Great Britain, the rights and grieves and the writing of a petition to the King. In this letter, besides a long series of complaints, a request for equal rights and the abrogation of the taxes imposed by the government to the colonies, the Congress asked the King to revoke the *Coercive Acts*. Lord North submitted the petition to the House of Commons and to the House of Lords but the document was presented at the same time as other administration acts and received but poor attention. King George III ignored the petition and never bothered to answer.

Before the tea incidents in Boston, the Provincial Assembly had sent a letter to the Board of Trade asking the removal of Hutchinson from office. Having requested a leave to sail to England to defend himself, Hutchinson's demand was granted. On May 13, 1774, he was replaced by new Governor General Thomas Gage. On June 1, 1774, Hutchinson left Boston for London where he was granted an audience with the King and Lord North. His reputation was still the object of criticism in Massachusetts but his forced exile made it impossible for him to defend himself. He died in London on June 3, 1780 at the age of 68.

In a letter dated August 27, the Royal Governor had been alerted by William Bratten - who, in the late 1760's, had sympathy for the Sons of Liberty and was a supporter of the revolutionary cause but later became a major general of the Militia of Great Britain in Massachusetts and never took a firm position on which side he stood - that the towns had removed their stock of gunpowder and that the only remaining powder barrels in the magazine were the provincial ones. On August 31, Gage sent Middlesex County Sheriff David Phips to William Bratten to obtain the key of the powder house and remove the King's powder. The same day, Gage lost (or intentionally dropped) Bratten's letter. Its content was widely spread amongst the population and patriots. The next day at dawn, General Gage sent a detachment of 260 men under Lieutenant Colonel Maddison of the 4th Foot "King's Own" Regiment to seize the provincial gunpowder from the powder house near Charleston. In the greatest secrecy, the troops embarked on 13 longboats and rowed from Boston harbor up the Mystic River to Temple's Farm on Winter Hill²². From there, they marched about a mile to the powder magazine where Sheriff Phips passed over the key to the soldiers. After sunrise, all the powder barrels were removed and brought by the British soldiers the same way back to Boston. However, a small detachment was sent to Cambridge to remove two brass field guns and bring them to Boston through the Long Bridge and Boston Neck. Both powder barrels and cannons were then brought to Castle Williams. General Gage was entirely satisfied of the perfect execution of the mission. The gunpowder and the guns were secured and had been brought to town without a shot fired.

As a result of the Regulars' expedition to seize the powder and the guns, alarm and rumors spread like wildfire: "*the gunpowder had been stolen, people had been killed, war is at hand, Boston was bombarded by the British Navy.*" From everywhere in New England, armed people marched toward Boston. On August 2, McNeill, a young revolutionary was on his way to Boston. He wrote later that "*he never saw such a scene*

²² Now Somerville

before. All along [the road] were armed men rushing forward - some on foot, some on horseback. At every house women and children [were] making cartridges, running bullets, making wallets [pouches of food], baking biscuits, crying and bemoaning and at the same time animating their husbands and sons to fight for their liberties, though not knowing whether they should ever see them again. [...] They left scarcely half a dozen men in a town, unless old and decrepit, and in one town the landlord told him that himself was the only man left²³." The same day in Cambridge, about 4,000 men surrounded William Bratten's house and forced him and other Loyalists to flee and find protection in Boston. Sheriff Phips was forced to sign a document in which he stated that he would never enforce the *Coercive Acts*. The crowd went to Lieutenant Governor Thomas Oliver's mansion and forced him to resign his commission. He wrote on a piece of paper: "My house at Cambridge being surrounded by about four thousand people, in compliance with their command I sign my name²⁴." Later, when news proved that the rumors were false, the mob disbanded and all returned home. Messengers were sent out on the roads to stop patriots arriving from other towns and send them back home.

General Gage was surprised by the size of the crowd that gathered after the removal of the government's powder and decided to delay and eventually cancel an expedition to remove the powder from the Worcester magazine. He decided to bring more troops from other provinces, Halifax and New Foundland to Boston. He requested reinforcements from the London government and the temporarily suspension of the *Coercive Acts* until more troops were sent to the colonies. His demand of 20,000 men was absurd as the British army was only 12,000 men strong. Eventually, 400 Marines under the command of Major John Pitcairn were sent to Boston.

On December 12, Paul Revere received intelligence that the Regulars planned an expedition to remove the gunpowder from the storehouse of Fort William and Mary in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The next day, he rode to alert patriots of the imminent arrival of British soldiers. On the 17, British ships arrived in Portsmouth but the powder had been removed three days earlier. Militia powder was also removed from storehouses in Rhode Island and Connecticut and immediately after the battles of Lexington and Concord, from the powder magazine of Williamsburg, Virginia.

After the *Powder Alarm* a new militia system was created on September 21, 1774, during the Worcester convention. Officers had to resign and publish their resignation in the Boston newspapers. They then voted "that it be recommended to the several towns in this county, to choose proper military officers, and a sufficient number for each town, and that the captains, lieutenants, and ensigns, who are chosen by the people in each regiment, do convene, on or before the tenth day of October next, at some convenient place in each regiment, and choose their field officers to command the militia until they be constitutionally appointed, and that it be recommended to the officers in each town of the county, to enlist one third of the men of their respective towns, between sixteen and sixty years of age, to be ready to act at a minute's warning; and that it be recommended to each town in the county, to choose a sufficient number of men as a committee to supply and support those troops that shall move on any emergency."²⁵ The success of the convention led to the creation of *Minute Men* units in other towns and eventually led to the creation of the Continental Army.

²³ *Paul Revere's Ride*, Chap. 3, p. 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *The Minute Men*, p. 51, 52.

On April 7, 1775, when military activities suggested that troops were ready to march, Dr. Joseph Warren, a member of the Sons of Liberty asked Paul Revere to ride to Concord where the Provincial Council of Massachusetts held a meeting, and warn them of the movements of British troops. It was in that city that the military supplies of the Continental Army were hidden and stockpiled. A week later, General Gage received instructions from Secretary of State William Legge to go to Concord, seize and destroy the hidden equipment and arrest Samuel Adams and John Hancock, the leaders of the insurrection. Gage appointed Lieutenant Colonel Francis Smith to execute the mission in greatest secrecy and he recommended not embarking on retaliation measures against the civilian population or tolerating any plundering. The General was careful not put his orders in writing, fearing that they would provoke an uprising if found. In the evening of June 18, Warren warned Revere and William Dawes, another Son of Liberty that 800 soldiers were gathered at the Boston Common and that boats for troop transportation were ready for a possible embarkation. Revere had previously agreed with Robert Newman, the sacristan of the Old North Church, to use a code to report when the Redcoats were about to start their movement. The clergyman was to climb to the top of the steeple of the church and light one or two lanterns. *“One if by land, two if by sea!”* Assisted by Captain John Pulling Jr., Newman performed as ordered and lit two lanterns. Paul Revere then joined his friends Tom Richardson and Joshua Bentley who helped him cross the mouth of the Charles River by rowboat to Charlestown from where he rode to Lexington. In Charlestown, Revere was warned that British soldiers had been seen on the road to Cambridge and Concord. On the way, he warned patriots who in turn warned other patriots. Not less than forty riders crisscrossed the roads of the Middlesex County to sound the alert. However, this had to be done in great secrecy since the country was patrolled by British military detachments and most of the colonists were of British origin, still considering themselves British citizens.

Once Paul Revere had left Boston, William Dawes departed the city by the Boston Neck, the narrow peninsula that connects the town to the mainland. His mission was also to warn Adams and Hancock of the imminence of the arrival of the army. About midnight, Revere arrived in Lexington at Reverent Jonas Clark’s house where he met Adams and Hancock. Dawes arrived some 30 minutes later. Adams and Hancock were convinced that the marching forces were too numerous to capture and further believed that their main objective was Concord. From Lexington, other riders were sent to the cities in the area to raise the alarm. Revere and Dawes made their way back to Concord, accompanied by Dr. Samuel Prescott who had spent the evening with his fiancée. When they reached Lincoln, they were stopped at a roadblock by a patrol. Prescott on his horse jumped over a wall and managed to escape. Dawes escaped too but fell off his mount a little further; he wouldn’t reach Concord. Revere was taken prisoner and questioned by the soldiers. He told them that the army would be in danger when reaching Lexington because an important force of armed militia was gathering there. Together with other captives, the patrol went eastward to Lexington. Arriving less than a mile from the town, the sound of a gunshot was heard in the night. When the officer who accompanied the prisoners asked what this was about, Revere answered that it was an alarm signal. Approaching Lexington, the church bells started ringing. One of the patriots told the soldiers: *“This is the bell ringing. The town is warned, you are all dead men!”* The officers consulted for a brief moment and decided not to go to Lexington, to abandon the captives and to warn their superiors. Paul Revere’s horse was confiscated to allow a soldier to inform the marching columns. Revere walked to Reverent Clark’s

home and met again with Sam Adams and John Hancock with whom he escaped when the battle of Lexington began. Revere, Dawes and Prescott's ride had allowed the creation of a very efficient alarm system and mustering arrangement. Whilst Lieutenant Colonel Smith's troops were still disembarking in Cambridge, the patriots had already been alerted twenty five miles further.

Soon before sunrise, six companies under Major Pitcairn entered in Lexington and met with a small force of Minutemen. Since these colonists were outnumbered, the British officer asked them to surrender. At the same moment, a shot was fired and a skirmish started. The patriots lost 8 men whilst the British suffered fewer casualties. The column found its way back to Concord where it broke up into companies searching for the supplies and equipment of the Continentals. Having previously been alerted, they had plenty of time to remove them and to put them in a safe place. About 11 AM, at North Bridge on the Concord River, 400 Minutemen attacked 100 Redcoats. Being clearly outnumbered, the British had no other choice than to retreat and join the main body of troops in the city. Since they didn't find any arms, ammunitions, powder or other supplies, Smith and his men marched back to Boston, exchanging shots with the patriots all day long. More and more Minutemen arrived and when Smith's troops reached Lexington, they owed their salvation to the arrival of reinforcements under the command of Brigadier General Hugh Percy. With a force of only 1,700 men, the column was forced to operate a strategic retreat and marched back to Boston. Speaking of those fights, Lieutenant John Baker of the 4th Regiment wrote: "[...] *their numbers increasing from all parts, while ours was reduced by deaths, wounds and fatigue; and we were totally surrounded with such an incessant fire as it's impossible to conceive; our ammunition was likewise near expended.*"²⁶ The British losses amounted to 73 killed or missing and more than 200 wounded, including Colonel Smith and Major Pitcairn, whilst the patriots counted 49 dead, 39 wounded and 5 missing. Victorious, the Continentals begun the siege of Boston and Charlestown on April 19, 1775.

On May 10, almost three weeks after the battles of Lexington and Concord, the Second Continental Congress gathered at Philadelphia. The delegates worked on the possibility of increasing the war effort and developing the road to independence. Again twelve colonies took part in this congress; Georgia delegates would arrive in Philadelphia on July 20. Amongst the new delegates, Benjamin Franklin joined as representative for Pennsylvania, Thomas Jefferson replaced Peyton Randolph for Virginia and John Hancock joined for Massachusetts. On May 24, the latter was elected president of the Second Continental Congress. On July 5, the *Olive Branch Petition* was adopted and signed by Congress. Being written by Thomas Jefferson, it was reviewed by John Dickinson in less radical terms than those used by the Virginian. The petition was a last attempt to avoid a total war and affirmed loyalty to Great Britain. The signers asked that commerce between the colonies and England and taxes be negotiated. The next day, another document, the *Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking up Arms* followed the petition. The Government of London rejected the petition and King George III refused to read it.

At the end of May, 4,000 British soldiers arrived in Boston and reinforced Gage's army as well as three of the best generals who received a command under the commander-in-chief: William Howe, a veteran of the French-Indian War, and Henry

²⁶ *Diary of Lt John Baker of the 4th Regiment*, published in the Atlantic Monthly, 1877, republished as *The British in Boston*, 1924.

Clinton and John Burgoyne, both veterans of the Seven Years' War and politicians who sat in the House of Commons.

On June 17, the British army led by General Howe won a Pyrrhic victory at Charlestown during the Battle of Bunker Hill. His soldiers launched three assaults to beat an army that General Gage called "*a horde of angry farmers, met with wholesale failure.*"²⁷ The British losses were 226 dead - including Major Pitcairn who had been shot in the chest - and 828 wounded for 140 dead and 310 wounded on the Continentals' side. Three days before, the Provincial Congress had promoted Dr. Joseph Warren to brigadier general. Being a Son of Liberty, he was also the President of the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts. His promotion was not yet effective and he died as a soldier on the slopes of Breed's Hill.

The *Safety Committee of Massachusetts* sent to England a report on the battles of Lexington and Concord. Unfortunately, it didn't reach its destination before General Gage sent his dispatch on the battle of Bunker Hill to Lord Dartmouth, the Secretary of State for North America. However, the written stories of the victories of the colonists provoked high tensions between the Whigs and the Tories in London. The number of victims alerted the military authorities and forced them to rethink the presence of the army in the colonies. Three days after the arrival of Thomas Gage's report, he was dismissed from his functions and replaced by General William Howe. On October 11, Gage set sail to Great Britain. While on board of the vessel bringing him back to England, he wrote a second dispatch to Dartmouth stating: "*I am convinced that the promoters of the rebellion have no real desire of peace, unless they have a carte blanche. Their whole conduct has been one scene of fallacy, duplicity and dissimulation, by which they have duped many well inclined people.*"²⁸ The hardening of the King's position towards the colonies was possibly the reason for not responding to the *Olive Branch Petition*. As a response to the news of the Battle of Bunker Hill, on August 23, 1775, the colonies were officially declared in rebellion by *A Proclamation for Suppressing Rebellion and Sedition*.

On June 14, 1775, the Second Continental Congress voted the creation of a continental army from militia units of Massachusetts and elected George Washington of Virginia as its commanding general. The next day, Washington accepted this commission. On July 3 in Cambridge, he took command of the new army of which he said "[...] *that the colonists in the New England regiments had poor discipline and were exceedingly dirty and nasty.*"²⁹

The siege of Boston that started after the Battle of Bunker Hill ended on March 17, 1776. On March 26, whilst the militias were rejoicing loudly, General Sir William Howe together with his 9,000 soldiers and about 1,000 loyalist families embarked in the port of Boston on board 125 ships bound for Halifax, Nova Scotia, where he would reorganize his army. Continental troops had retaken the heights of Dorchester overlooking Boston, from where they could bombard the city with impunity. Howe had the choice of trying to retake the hill from the patriots at the cost of heavy casualties or to abandon the town. Boston being of low strategic importance, he preferred to leave the place.

²⁷ Garry Shattuck: *Thomas Gage Reconsidered: When Law Interferes With War* - Journal of the American Revolution, August 26, 2015.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Eric H. Boehm: *America, History and Life* – Clio Press 2001 – Vol 38, p. 78.

In June, Thomas Jefferson wrote a Declaration of Independence that was revised and corrected by Benjamin Franklin and John Adams so it could be unanimously accepted by the 55 delegates of the Continental Congress. After three days of debates, Congress accepted Jefferson's text. Of the Thirteen Colonies, only New York abstained. From now on, the colonies would be free as independent States. They would no longer be subject to any allegiance to the British Crown. Every political link between them and Great Britain was broken. The first person to sign the Declaration of Independence was the President of the Congress John Hancock. Thomas Jefferson, John Adams and Samuel Adams were amongst the other 56 signatories of the document.

After victories and defeats, George Washington's Continental Army won the decisive Battle of Yorktown in October 1781. On November 25, when he heard the news of the disastrous defeat and the surrender of General Earl Cornwallis, British Prime Minister Lord North cried out: "*Oh God! It is all over!*"³⁰ At the end of 1782, peace talks were held in Paris with Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and John Jay sitting at the table of negotiations. On September 3, 1783, the Treaty of Paris brought an end to eight years of war and ascertained the independence of the United States of America.

If one asks if the Sons of Liberty were traitors or patriots, the answer seems obvious. Were they traitors? In some way, they were. There is no doubt that the Crown of England as well as the Government of London had little or absolutely no consideration for the colonies. Can people who are oppressed by those who are supposed to protect and help them be blamed when they stand up to defend their rights? The Sons of Liberty were well aware that they risked being arrested and tried for treason. But the freedom of the colonists was worth the risks. Were they patriots? Of course they were. Even today, there is no absolute reference as to who the Founding Fathers of the United States of America really were, so each and every Son of Liberty deserves to be named *True Father of the Country*.

In the 1790's, during the Whiskey Rebellion, Samuel Adams was asked why he wasn't a staunch defender of the Western Pennsylvania farmers who were shooting Federal Revenue agents rather than paying taxes imposed by the government on the corn to be distilled. Adams found the question relatively irritating and replied: "*Revolt against a king and parliament bent on excluding colonists from government was necessary. But any citizen of a democratic government who took up arms against that government ought to be hanged.*"³¹

* * *

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