**HISTORY OF THE BOSTON TEA PARTY**

Tensions in Boston

The ever-increasing demands from the British infuriated the American patriots especially those who belonged to the Sons of Liberty organization. The Boston Massacre arose from the resentment of Boston colonists towards the British. This violent incident resulted in the death of 5 colonists.

The Tea Act stirred up all of the old feelings of resentment towards the British. Although various taxes had been repealed the Tea Tax was not. However, the colonists would get their tea at a cost lower than ever before - so the British thought that there would not be a problem.

The Colonies were not represented in Parliament, so they saw the Tea Act as unconstitutional. Committees of Correspondence rallied opposition on the common causes of the Patriots. The famous cry of "No taxation without representation!" had not been forgotten.

Events leading to the Boston Tea Party

In September and October 1773, 7 ships carrying East India Company tea were sent to the American colonies. Four ships were bound for Boston and one each for New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston. The colonists learned the details of the consignments while the ships were en route. The Committees of Correspondence rallied opposition amongst the colonists. Details of the ships and their consignments of tea were well publicized and protests and actions against the British were agreed.

Action by the Colonists

The American colonists in the ports of Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Charleston had time to consider the action they could take, before the ships laden with tea arrived in their harbors. They had time to plan their responses and actions:

* Circulars were printed and distributed
* Public demonstrations against the British government were organized
* The colonists decided they would continue to boycott tea from the British
* The Non-importation Agreements not to purchase British goods were enforced
* Anyone who aided in “unloading, receiving, or vending” the tea would be seen as an enemy to his country
* The colonists agreed that the Consignees, who were supposed to receive the tea, should “resign their appointment”
* Colonists resolved to prevent the landing and sale of the teas - they wanted the tea to be sent back to England.

The Ships Arrive

The ships arrive in New York, Philadelphia, Charleston and Boston. The consignees in Charleston, New York, and Philadelphia refused to accept the shipments and allowed the tea to be returned. But the consignees in Boston would not agree to this action. The chosen consignees in Boston were two sons of the Governor, Thomas Hutchinson and his nephew, Richard Clarke. They were not going to give in to the demands of the colonists.

Three ships arrived in Boston. There were to be 4 ships, but the William ran aground off Cape Cod on December 10, 1773, in a terrible storm and never arrived. The remaining ships arrived at different times. The names of the Boston Tea Party Ships were the Dartmouth, the Beaver and the Eleanor.

* *The William* ran aground off Cape Cod on December 10, 1773 and never arrived in Boston

* *The Dartmouth* ship, carried 114 chests of tea and was the first to arrive in Boston Harbor on Sunday, November 28th

* *The Eleanor* ship, carried 114 chests of tea and arrived in Boston Harbor on Thursday, December 2nd

* *The Beaver* ship, carried 114 chests of tea, docked in Boston Harbor on Wednesday, December 15th. The Beaver was delayed due to an outbreak of smallpox, and was held in quarantine for 2 weeks in the outer harbor of Boston.

Each of the three ships were about 80 feet long each had a crew of 8-12 men, who, aside from the captain, slept in the cargo hold. They were docked at Griffin’s Wharf, a few blocks away from the Old South Meeting House in Boston

Why couldn’t the ships leave?

Behind the tea ships, British Admiral John Montagu brought a squadron of warships to prevent the colonists from forcing the ships back out to sea before they were unloaded. This put the captains (and the ships' owners) in a bind. If the tea wasn't unloaded, customs weren't paid. And if the ships tried to sail back out of port, Montagu would stop them and charge them with failing to pay customs on their cargo that was due, according to him, because they had already entered port.

After a few days, the colonists had the ships come in close to Griffin's Wharf. The Sons of Liberty organized a continuous watch of the vessels. Twenty-five men on each shift ensured that the ships were not unloaded under the cover of darkness, or at least to sound an alarm if there was an attempt. The ships' captains came ashore and left the mates on board. The situation remained the same for more than two weeks.

The Tax Deadline

The tax on the tea had to be paid the moment the tea was unloaded. An armed guard of patriots was posted at the wharf to prevent the cargo coming ashore. The absolute deadline for payment of the Tea Tax was 20 days after the arrival of the consignment. If the tax was not paid within the 20 days the cargo would be seized by authorities.

For the 20 days following the arrival of the *Dartmouth*, meetings occurred on a daily basis throughout Boston to discuss what was to be done about the shipments of “detested tea”. On November 5, 1773 Samuel Adams called a town meeting at Faneuil Hall in response to the “tea crisis” and declared anyone who aids or abets the “unloading receiving or vending the tea is an enemy to America!”

Samuel Adams, John Hancock and Paul Revere organized another meeting on November 29, 1773, the day after the *Dartmouth* arrived, at Faneuil Hall to discuss the situation. Over 5000 people showed up, so the meeting had to be moved to the Old South Meeting House to accommodate the thousands of Boston citizens.

The meeting decided to demand that the tea be sent back to England with the tax unpaid. The attendees told Francis Rotch, the owner of the *Dartmouth* ship, to ask Governor Hutchinson for permission to sail out of Boston and back to England.

On December 16, 1773 yet another large meeting at the Old South Church in Boston was called. During this meeting the patriots were told that Governor Thomas Hutchinson had refused their demands. The people of Boston and the Sons of Liberty agreed that their only course of action was to destroy the cargo. The scene was set for the Boston Tea Party...

Why did the Governor fail to act?

Thomas Hutchinson, the royal governor of colonial Massachusetts, clearly understood that the colonists were angry, but he did not anticipate that they would damage the cargo. He was counting on the fact that after 20 days without having paid customs, the customs authorities—with the assistance of British sailors and soldiers—could legally impound the tea from the ships, and then, disburse it in small amounts to a few merchants who could resell it. This would circumvent the colonists' effort to make sure that the tea did not enter Massachusetts. Hutchinson and the tea merchants who were willing to receive the tea were waiting with the troops in fort Castle William.

Boston was not under martial law, so soldiers were not policing the city, although Hutchinson could have brought a detachment of soldiers in, had he known beforehand the particulars of a threat. He did not post a military guard at the wharf, however, perhaps to avoid provoking a confrontation with the crowds keeping watch there.

The Incident at the wharf

Just after six o'clock on the night of December 16, 1773, a group of about 60 men daubed their faces with burnt cork, coal dust, or donned other makeshift disguises, armed themselves with hatchets, and formed a raiding party. Some of them styled themselves "Indians."

They made their way to the wharf. The Sons of Liberty's watch was already there, and still others joined them, either to assist or simply to see what was happening. The raiding party formed three groups of 50 each, and boarded all of the nearly deserted ships at about the same time. They met no resistance.

Lendall Pitts, the commander of the group that boarded the Brig *Beaver*,

*"sent a man to the mate, who was on board, in his cabin, with a message, politely requesting the use of a few lights, and the keys—so that as little damage as possible might be done to the vessel;—and such was the case. The mate acted the part of a gentleman altogether. He handed over the keys without hesitation, and without saying a single word, and sent his cabin-boy for a bunch of candles, to be immediately put in use."*

The moon shone brightly too, so their work was well lit. The night was very quiet and neither the crowd on the wharf nor the raiding party spoke much. Onlookers at the wharf, as well as the men on some of the closer British ships, however, quite distinctly heard the sounds of the chests being staved in.

The party quickly brought the 342 chests of tea (a total of 90,000 lbs.) onto the deck. They split them open and threw the tea and the chests overboard into the harbor. The party took care that no other property on board the ships was harmed, and that none of the raiders took away any of the tea. They even swept the decks clean of loose tea when they were done. They worked quickly, apprehensive of a possible attack from Admiral Montagu's squadron, part of which was only a quarter of a mile away.

Montagu watched the affair from the fleet, but he took no action because of the cargo ships' position next to the wharf.

"I could easily have prevented the Execution of this Plan," he wrote the following day in a report, "but must have endangered the Lives of many innocent People by firing upon the Town."

Instead, he rowed ashore and watched from a building nearby, even briefly exchanging taunts with the Indians.

The tea party lasted three hours, finishing around nine o'clock. The raiding party then formed in rank and file by the wharf, and, shouldering their hatchets, marched, accompanied by a fifer, back into town, dispersed, and went home.

The next morning a large, winding mound of loose tea still floated in the harbor, and a party of colonists rowed out in boats and sank it down into the waters with their oars. The British fleet witnessed this, too, but did not interfere.

The disguised men's identities were kept secret by their fellow Bostonians, and Governor Hutchinson was unable to charge the members of the raiding party, but Parliament responded five months later (news traveled back and forth across the ocean very slowly then) with a series of measures meant to force Boston to heel.

Why Was the Boston Tea Party Not Stopped by British Troops?

The tea was on three privately owned merchant ships. One hundred and fourteen chests were on board the *Dartmouth*, the first ship to arrive in port. The other two ships, the *Eleanor* and the *Brig Beaver* carried 228 chests between them, along with other cargo. As the ships sailed into Boston Harbor, they each passed by fort Castle William to the south, which was under the command of a British officer and had upwards of a hundred cannon. When the ships came into the harbor, but before they docked, port officials boarded them. That meant that they had officially reached port and that their movements were now under the command of port officials instead of their ship captains.