

The End of the Revolution and the Beginning of Independence

Social Upheaval in Colonial America - 1774-1775
from Farmers to Patriots

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John Adams to Jefferson

August 24, 1815.

"...As to the history of the revolution, my ideas may be peculiar, perhaps singular. What do we mean by revolution? The war? That was no part of the revolution' it was only an effect and consequence of it. The revolution was in the minds of the people, and this was effected from 1760 to 1775, in the course of fifteen years, before a drop of blood was drawn at Lexington. The records of the thirteen legislatures, the pamphlets, newspapers in all the colonies ought to be consulted during that period, to ascertain the steps by which the public opinion was enlightened and informed concerning the authority of parliament over the colonies".

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We most often define the Revolution as the War of Independence from rule by Great Britain. We also suppose that the Revolution began with the British efforts to seize gunpowder and cannon from the stores at Concord, Massachusetts. We also define the beginning of the Revolution as a battle that ensued when the British were resisted in their attempt to secure those guns and powder.

From a political standpoint, we look at the Stamp Act, Tea Tax, and the Massachusetts Port Act as the elements that provoked the actions at Lexington and Concord, on April 19, 1775.

There were, however, a number of events, both political and rebellious, that predate the battle on Lexington Green. These events fall well within the period that John Adams defines as the Revolution -- that period in which the public was "enlightened and informed concerning the authority of parliament over the colonies".

The Political Environment

Let us look at some of the forgotten events that were, for all intents and purposes, the end of the Revolution, and, the precursor to the War of Independence.

Though it took many weeks to arrive in the Colonies, the **Massachusetts Port Act** was approved by the parliament on March 31 1774. "[A]n act to discontinue, in such manner, and for such time as are therein

mentioned, the landing and discharging, loading or shipping, of goods, wares, and merchandise, at the town, and within the harbor, of Boston, in the province of Massachusetts Bay, in North America." The act, essentially, embargoed Boston and restricted that necessary flow of goods to that city. It also included housing and feeding 3000 British soldiers, which increased the demand on available goods.

Seldom mentioned, however, was the **Massachusetts Governments Act** (see Appendix), approved by parliament nearly two months later, on May 20, 1774.

This legislation was described as, "*an act for the better regulating the governments of the province of the Massachusetts Bay, in New England*". This act had a devastating effect on the existing governments in the Massachusetts colony. It removed the selection of the governor from the general courts or assemblies of the colony and vested that authority in the Crown. It further provided that all counselors, judges, commissioners, the attorney general, provosts, marshals, and justices of the peace, would be appointed by the Governor and approved by his Majesty. The final indignation came when the act required that all agenda items from town meetings had to have approval of the royal Governor, and that only the annual town meetings, in March and May, may be held, without permission of the Governor. Business as usual was no longer an option.

The impact of this second act, the Massachusetts Government Act, was felt more severely in the rural communities outside of Boston. The people of Boston were preoccupied with the occupation by the British troops, and though their governments had been suspended, their concerns were other than those of the farmers.

Suddenly, these small communities were unable to conduct the business of keeping their government functioning.

Within the small communities, there were those with wealth and family. These "crafty" men managed to hold the more powerful positions in the communities. Whether merchants or lenders, there were many who owed them for goods, services, or money.

Increases in taxes, because of the French - Indian wars, had reduced the available amounts of money to almost nonexistent -- making it impossible to repay their obligations.

Those who had wealth and power tended to be "Tories" and loyal to the crown. They were also influential in the judicial system, which often seized property, livestock, or land, in repayment of debts.

Therefore, in 1773, committees were forming throughout the countryside. By December 1773, when news of the Boston tea party had reached the country, committees began communicating in earnest.

The town of Worcester, in Worcester County, issued a resolve, stating, in part:

to have these who are to judge, and Determin, on our lives, property, paid by a foreign State, immediately Destroy the national dependence which ought to Subsist between a people, and their officers, and of consequence, destructive of liberty; For which reason, we are of the opinion, that we are not in the least bound in duty to Submit, to the ordering in Determining of Such officers as not dependent on the Grants of this people for their pay.

This resolution outraged local Tories.

A local blacksmith, Timothy Bigelow, was elected leader of the Town Council, for the first time displacing the wealth and power that had ruled before.

The superior court was scheduled to open on April 19, 1774. Four of the five superior court judges had already refused "the bribe offered them by the crown", leaving only one judge to serve on the court.

Just a month before, the Massachusetts house of representatives had impeached Chief Justice Peter Oliver. Before the council could try Oliver, Governor Thomas Hutchinson dissolved the general court. The impeachment was not completed.

Oliver was scheduled at the April 19 Worcester County superior court, however, the Whigs refused to serve as grand jurors -- effectively nullifying the court. Oliver, wisely, refused to appear at Worcester County - for fear of his life.

The Tory faction recorded the "Redmond Dissent" of the recent Whig activities. Only 52 of the nearly 250 eligible voters in Worcester County signed this dissent. Clearly, the Whigs were gaining control.

In May 1774, word of the Boston Port Act arrived in the Colonies. Along with the act came a newly appointed a Royal Governor, General Thomas Gage. Essentially, this was the end of civil government in Massachusetts. During the next 11 months, many changes were going to occur in Massachusetts.

John Adams, reflecting the mood of the countryside, while staying at a Shrewsbury inn, recorded an indication of things to come:

[A]s I was cold and wet, I sat down to the good fire in the bar room to dry great coat and saddlebags tell a fire could be made in my chamber. Their presently came in, one after another, half a dozen, or half the score, substantial yeoman of the neighborhood, who, sitting down to the fire after lighting their pipes, began a lively conversation upon politics. As I believed I was unknown to all of them, I sat in total silence to hear them.

One said, "The people of Boston are distracted!"

Another answered, "No wonder the people of Boston are distracted. Oppression will make wise men mad."

A third said, "what would you say, if a fellow should come to your house and tell you he has come to take a list of your cattle, that parliament might tax you for them at so much ahead? And how should you feel, if he was to go and break open your barn, to take down your oxen, cows, horses, and sheep?"

"What I should say," replied the first; "I would knock him in the head."

" Well," said a fourth, "if parliament can take away Mr. Hancock's wharf and Mr. Rowe's wharf, they can take away your barn and my house".

After much more reasoning in this style, a fifth, who had as yet been silent, broke out, "Well, it is high time for us to rebel; we must rebel some time or other, and we had better rebel now than at any time to come. If we put off for 10 or 20 years, and let them go on as they have begun, they will get a strong party among us, and plague us a great deal more than they can now."

On June 6, 1774, the Massachusetts Government Act was published in the Boston Gazette. From this point on, nearly every position of competence, within any level of government, would be subject to appointment by the royal governor. Even agenda items for town meetings were subject to his approval. Except in Boston, only town council members would be elected by the people.

On August 6, 1774, the Massachusetts Government Act went into effect. The king had selected 36 men to sit on the council --"mandamus counselors" --of which only three had been elected to the council by the people. The crown was repudiating the electoral process established by the 1691 charter.

On Sunday, August 7, General Gage, ignoring the Sabbath, sent messages to the newly appointed counselors and summoned them to Salem the following morning. Only 11 of the 36 showed up to take their oaths on Monday. Of the remainder, three accepted their appointments but were not sworn in, two declined their appointments, and the remaining four chose to "take time to consider of it". The remainder, living at a distance from Salem, could not be notified in time.

On August 9, 1774, 52 men from 22 towns in the county met at Mary Stearns' tavern in Worcester to establish a committee.

Among the resolutions written and adopted that day, we find the following:

Resolved, That we bear all true allegiance to his majesty King George the third, and that we will, to the utmost of our power, defend his person, crown, and dignity, but at the same time, we disclaim any jurisdiction in the commons of Great Britain over his majesty's subjects in America.

Resolved, that an attempt to vacate said charter [1691 Massachusetts Charter], by either party, without the consent of the other, has a tendency to dissolve the union between Great Britain and this province, to destroy the allegiance we owed to the king, and to set aside the sacred obligations he is under to his subjects here.

Resolved, that it is the indisputable duty of every American, and more especially in this province, to unite in every virtuous opposition that can be devised, in order to save ourselves and posterity from inevitable ruin.

Voted, that we most earnestly recommend it to the several towns in this county, (and if it should not be thought to arrogant,) to every town in the province, to meet and adopt some wise, prudent, and spirited measures, in order to prevent the execution of those most alarming acts of parliament, respecting our constitution.

The Social Upheaval

Berkshire County, Massachusetts - August 16, 1774

The Inferior Court of Common Pleas for a Berkshire County was scheduled to meet on August 16, 1774, in Great Barrington. Great Barrington was a three-day ride from Boston, and the suits are the first to be heard by officials appointed under the Massachusetts Government Act.

In opposition to the Whigs, local Tories, including several justices of the peace and the county sheriff, had tried to prevent a meeting of the Whigs. In that meeting, the local Whigs had developed a "Solemn League and Covenant". The Covenant provided that any trader or shop-keeper in the county would have only 48 hours to sign the agreement, if he wanted to avoid a boycott of his store.

On July 16, David Ingersoll, the most outspoken of the Tories, and leader of an effort to stop the solicitation of signatures for the Covenant, was kidnapped, along with his servants, and taken across the Connecticut border to Canaan, Connecticut. There, he was accused of crimes, including his support for the Massachusetts Government Act and opposition to the Berkshire Covenant. Though he refused to sign an oath that the Whigs had prepared, he did prepare and sign a statement, in good faith. Though no bodily damage was inflicted, Ingersoll was covered with grease ("for want of tar") and feathers, put down an empty well, and kept there overnight.

Meanwhile, the Whigs sent a letter, dated July 25, from their Committee to the Boston Committee, explaining that, "[W]e are persuaded that no business can be transacted at said court [meaning the August 16 opening]. We expect to get it adjourned unless we should hear from you. We thought it highly expedient to know your Thoughts on so interesting an Occasion."

On July 31, the Boston committee responded: "We acknowledge ourselves deeply indebted to your wisdom... Nothing in our opinion could be better concerted than the measures come by your County to prevent the Courts sitting."

On August 15, the Berkshire committee prepared a petition, to wit:

To the Honorable His Majesty's Justices of the Inferior Court of Common Pleas for the County of Berkshire:

... We view it of the greatest importance to the well-being of this Province, that the people of it utterly refuse the least submission to the said acts, and on no consideration to yield obedience to them; or directly or indirectly to countenance the taking place of those acts amongst us, but resist them to the last extremity.

In order in the safest manner to avoid this threatening calamity, it is, in our opinion, highly necessary that no business be transacted in the law, but that the courts of justice immediately cease, and the people of this Province fall into a state of nature until our grievances are fully redressed by a final repeal of those injurious, oppressive, and unconstitutional acts... We do therefore remonstrate against the holding any courts in this county until those acts shall be repealed; and we hope your honors will not be of a different opinion from the good people in this county.

Early on the morning of August 16, 1774, as the judges were powdering their wigs and preparing to open the courts, they found that 1500 unarmed men had "filled the Court-House and Avenues to the Seat of Justice, so full, that no Passage could be found for the Justices to take their places. The Sheriff commanded them to make way for the courts; but they gave him to understand that they knew no court on any other establishment than the ancient laws and usages of their country, & to none other would they submit or give way on any terms."

The Court did not open, and would never open, again, under British rule.

David Ingersoll "repaired to the Wilderness" to spend the night. Meanwhile, his house and office were broken into and "his Yard fences, his Garden ... House, papers, &c." were badly damaged."

Berkshire was the first county to close its courts.

Meanwhile, on August 16, Thomas Gage had boasted that he had gotten twenty-four of the thirty-six "mandamus counselors" signed on. This was, however, soon to change.

Taunton, Massachusetts - August 22, 1774

Daniel Leonard, one of the "mandamus counselors", returned to Taunton on August 20. "[U]pwards of 2000 men met on the green in that town, and but for the expostulations of Leonard's father (who disapproved of his son's being a counselor, and promised to use his influence with them that he should resign) would have pulled his house down."

In a letter to Governor Gage, Leonard explained what had occurred:

On Sunday noon I received intelligence that the People were much exasperated at me, and the Town of Taunton, with the neighboring towns, were to assemble the next day to *deal with me* (that was the expression) for accepting a Seat at the Board, that it was expected that they would begin with remonstrances and entreaty, and if that proved sufficient to obtain an engagement on my part to resign my Seat, all would be well, if not, that a number had determined to precede to violence. Such was the intelligence I received and could depend on. Many things rendered impractical for me to make any resistance in my own house, one of which I beg leave to mention, the situation of my wife, who was pregnant.

I accordingly came as far as Stoughton that date, and the next to Boston, supposing that the People would disperse without giving my family any trouble, when it should be known that I was absent. But I was mistaken: on the next day which was the 22d Instant, about five hundred persons assembled, many of them Freeholders and some of them Officers in the Militia, and formed themselves into a battalion before my house; they had then no Fire-arms, but generally had clubs. Some of the principal persons came to my house with a message that the people were much incensed at my accepting the Seat at the Board, and begged I would resign it. Upon being informed I was not at home, they returned to the main Body, who dispersed before night, after having been treated with rum by their Principals.

My family supposing all would remain quiet, went to bed at their usual hour; at 11:00 o'Clock in the evening a Party fired upon the house with small arms and run off; how many they consisted of is uncertain, I suppose not many; four bullets and some Swan-shot entered the house at the windows, part in a lower room and part in the chamber above, where one Capt. Job Williams lodged...

Capt. Williams at whom the firing seems to have directed, was the person that furnished me with the intelligence that the people were to assemble, and to pull down and tore in pieces a written notification that was fixed on the Meeting House for the People to assemble; wherefore I conclude it probable that the attack upon the house was principally designed for him. However that may be, my family were exposed by it, and I have received repeated advices from my friends at Taunton, since I arrived at Boston, that my life will be in danger if I return.

Leonard remained on the Council, and in Boston.

Hardwick, Massachusetts - August 26, 1774

Timothy Ruggles, another "mandamus counselor", was accepted into the court on August 16. On his way to Boston, he had to bypass Worcester, where "a Number of People collected... to stop him."

On August 19, Daniel Oliver, the justice of the peace in Hardwick, wrote to Ruggles, "There are those here, who I am satisfied thirst for your blood, and they have influence enough over the others to put them up to spilling it". Ruggles, instead of going directly home, went to Dartmouth.

On August 25, the Boston evening post published the following letter:

We hear that a Brigadier Ruggles, one of the new made Counselors, being at Col. Toby's at Dartmouth, the People assembled there one Day this Week, and ordered him to depart forthwith; upon which the Colonel promised them he would go the next Morning by Sun an Hour high; but before that time the Brigadier's Horse had his mane and tail cut off, and his body painted all over.

There were also reports from Hardwick that a crowd of 2000 to 3000 was expected to assemble to force the resignation of the local sheriff, and, "such is the Spirit of this County - -they seem to be quite awake, and to have awoke in a passion. It is more dangerous being a Tory here than in Boston, even if no troops were there."

Lancaster, Massachusetts - August 25, 1774

Abijah Willard, an accepted counselor from Lancaster, instead of going home from Boston, went to Union, Connecticut. The patriots in Union captured Willard, made him spend a night in jail, and then returned him to Brimfield, Massachusetts, where he was placed in the hands of 400 patriots. According to accounts, the local patriots " called a council of themselves, and Condemned Colonel Willard to Newgate Prison, in Symsbury; and a number set off and carried him six miles on the way thither. Colonel Willard then submitted to take the oath..., on which they dismissed him. One Captain Davis of Brimfield was present, who showing resentment, and treating the people with bad language, was stripped, and honored with the new fashion dress of tar and feathers; a proof this, that the act for tarring and feathering is not repealed."

Willard's resignation was published in the Boston papers:

Whereas I, Abijah Willard of Lancaster, have been appointed by a Mandamus a Counsellor for this Province, and having without due Consideration taken the Oath, I do now freely and solemnly declare that I am sorry that I have taken the said oath, and do hereby solemnly and in good faith, promise and engage them I will not sit or act in said Council,... And do hereby ask forgiveness of all honest, and worthy gentlemen that I have offended.

Worcester, Massachusetts - August 27, 1774

The 52 dissenters from Worcester (see The Political Environment), as a result of a town meeting with Whigs in charge, were instructed to recant their "Redmond Dissent". Most of the 52 gathered at Mary Stearns' tavern on August 22, and professed their willingness to recant. They were told that they must prepare a formal declaration that would be printed in the Boston papers. The instructions for the declaration included a provision that the signers would declare that the people of Worcester were not acting as a mob. Forty-seven of those signed the declaration, which sought forgiveness from the people of Worcester.

The town meeting then directed the clerk to obliterate the recorded "Redmond Dissent". The clerk complied and drew lines and squiggles through the recorded dissent, completely obliterating it from the record.

The patriots of Worcester still had to deal with three "mandamus counselors", Timothy Ruggles, Timothy Paine, and John Murray.

On Friday, August 26, riders fanned out from Worcester to alert the surrounding towns of the impending action. In Leicester, Spencer, Brookfield, Rutland, Westborough, Shrewsbury, Grafton, Sutton, Oxford, and other areas, farmers mustered quickly and prepared to travel to Worcester. Although Worcester town contained less than 350 adult Males, a crowd estimated at between fifteen hundred to three thousand gathered on the Worcester common, on the morning of August 27.

The crowd selected a committee of five to meet with Timothy Paine. Paine's resignation read as follows:

GENTLEMEN, As you have waited upon me as a Committee chosen by a large body of People now assembled on the Common at Worcester, desiring that I now resign my Seat at the Council Board; my Appointment was without sollicitation, and am very sorry I accepted, and thereby given any uneasiness to the People of the County, from whom I have received many favors, and take this opportunity to thank them: and I do hereby assure you that I will not take a Seat at the Board unless it is agreeable to the Charter of this Province.

The gathered crowd, not fully satisfied with the resignation, required that Paine remove his hat and walk amongst the crowd, formed in two lines, reading the resignation, over and over, so that all had the opportunity to hear it from his own mouth.

Paine, apparently impressed by the showing, wrote to General Gage. He concluded his letter with the following:

Thus Sir you see an open opposition has taken place to the Acts of the British Parliament. I dread the consequence of enforcing them by military Power; people's spirits are so raised they seemed determined to risque their lives and everything dear to them in the opposition, and prevent any person from executing any commission he may receive under the present administration. They give out that Brigadier Ruggles shall not sit as a Judge in our County Court, and that the Court shall not be held here.

Rumor had it that General Gage had contemplated sending troops to assure that the courts opened on September 6. If true, it is possible that Paine's letter discouraged this action, fearing that shots would be fired.

Next, about 500 men who had visited Paine went to the home of Thomas Murray, in Rutland, 15 miles away. About 1000 more joined them as they traveled. Finding that Murray was not home, they pierced his portrait with a bayonet, and left. They then prepared a letter, which was published in the Boston papers on September 5:

To John Murray, Esq.

Sir,

As you have proved yourself to be an open Enemy to this Province, by your Conduct in general, and in particular in accepting of the late Appointment as an unconstitutional Counsellor, In Consequence whereof, a large Number of Men from several Towns are assembled, who are fully determined to prevent your holding said Office as Counsellor, at the Risque of our Lives and Fortunes; and not finding you at Home, think proper to propose to your serious consideration: the following viz:

That you make an immediate Resignation of your Office, as a Counsellor

Your compliance as above, published in each of the Boston News Prints by the Tenth Day of September next, will save the People of this County the Trouble of waiting on you immediately afterwards.

In the Name and Behalf of the whole Assembly now present,
Willard Moore

Murray refused to sign, however, he never did return to Redmond. Brigadier Timothy Ruggles, likewise, never returned home.

Faneuil Hall, Boston - August 26 & 27, 1774

Worcester County has asked that all of the countryside committees meet with the Boston committee to discuss what action should be taken, if General Gage sent troops to open the courts on September 6. Realization that one county could not stand against the British troops required that the counties, and Boston, should all work together to stand against the Massachusetts Government Act. On the 26th, a committee was appointed to discuss "what Measures are necessary to be taken respecting our novel and unconstitutional Courts of Justice".

The final report of that committee was the beginning of a cooperative agreement to organize against the royal impositions. It read, in part, "No power on earth, hath a right without the consent of this Province to alter the minutest title of its Charter." It asserted that the citizens of Massachusetts were "intitled to life, liberty, and the means of sustenance by the grace of Heaven and without the King's leave". It asked to all of the counties to oppose the openings of the courts. It called for the convening of the Provincial Congress. Finally, it called for the people to learn "the Military Art according to the Norfolk Plan... as necessary means to secure their Liberties against the design of the Enemies whether Foreign or Domestick."

A confederation of counties had agreed to support each other, and, to resist, by whatever means necessary, the imposition of the Massachusetts Government Act.

Roxbury, Massachusetts - August 29, 1774

In the words of Joshua Loring, in a letter to General Gage, dated August 30, 1774:

At 12 o'Clock in the night of the 29th instant I was awaked by a very hard knocking at my door; immediately I jumped out of bed and threw up the window, when I saw five men disguised, their faces black'd, hatts flap'd, with cutlasses in their hands. I ask them who they were, they answered they came from a Mob. I then asked them what they wanted; they told me they came to know if I would resign my Seat at the Board. I answer'd I would not, and went into some discourse with them, asking what right they had to make such a demand on me or any other man. The told me they did not come to talk, they came to act, and that they wanted my answer: I replied that they had got it already. They then told me they would give me till tomorrow night to consider of it, and then the speaker gave orders to a large party who were in the road, to discharge their pieces, which the accordingly did, and which I took to be pistols. They then told me my house should be safe till tomorrow night, and went off in number about 60.

The next night being the 30th I thought it was prudent to leave my house, and my son went out to it to receive the Mob. He informs me as follows: -- that in the evening about ½ past 8 o'Clock his mother came home much affrighted, and told him that at or near Liberty Tree in Roxbury, she saw about fifty

men assembled, who immediately on knowing the carriage began to huzza scream and whistle, and called out to the Coachman to stop, but he continued on, and they followed the carriage in this manner for near a mile, and were then close at hand.

About 9 o'Clock he heard their noise, and in a few minutes they were up to the house, and immediately knocked at the door; he went to it and found five men disguised, their faces black'd and cutlasses in their hands: they order'd the candle to be put out, and then ask for the Commodore [Joshua Loring], they said they came for his answer. He told them he was gone to Boston, and then endeavored to reason with them against their demand, but to no purpose; they said this was the second time they had come, and to beware of the third, that if he would publish in the Thursdays News Paper a Recantation, it would be well, if not, he must abide by the consequences, which would be very severe, that his house would be leveled to the ground, and many other of the like threats; and then these five who seem to have the direction, I can't say command, of the Mob who were at the gate, retired to them, and during all this time they kept laying on the board fence with clubs, and crying out Don't fire, for God's sake don't fire, keep back, keep back: but the People did not seem to mind them, and continued their hallowing and knocking on the fence with their clubs: all of which was designed to intimidate.

They soon went off, and, as he was informed, to the house of Mr. Pepperell, who not being home, they returned again within the space of half an hour, and in the same tumultuous manner halted in the road opposite the house, and all at once were very silent, occasioned, as he was informed, by some friends speaking to them; a few minutes after they set up their hallowing &c again, and went off. And as it was a very dark night he could not judge of their numbers, but was told there were about two hundred.

Plymouth, Massachusetts - August 30, 1774

On August 28, 1774, George Watson, mandamus counselor from Plymouth, Massachusetts, went to church as usual. The Boston evening post reported what happened:

When he came into the house of publick Worship, a great number of the principal Inhabitants of that town left the meeting house, immediately upon his entering it; "being determined not to worship and fellowship with one, who was sworn to support that change of our constitution, which professedly establishes despotism among us".

On August 30, George Watson sent his resignation to General Gage, to wit:

By my accepting all of this Appointment, I find that I have rendered myself very obnoxious, not only to the inhabitants of this place, but also to those of the neighboring towns. On my business as a Merchant I depend, for the support of myself and Family, and of this I must be entirely deprived, in short, I am reduced to the alternative of resigning my Seat at the Council Board, or quitting this, the place of my Nativity, which will be attended with the most fatal Consequences to myself, and my family. Necessity therefore obliges me to ask Permission of your Excellency to resign my Seat at the Board, and I Trust, that when your Excellency considers my Situation, I shall not be censured.

Massachusetts - August 30, 1774

Thomas Hutchinson, Jr., son of the late governor of Massachusetts, also resigned, to wit:

It would be exceedingly inconvenient for me to change the place of my residence, or submit to any kind of restraint upon my person, being the only one of Governor Hutchinson's family now in the country, and having the care of his affairs here, as well of those of the late Lieut. Governor Oliver, both of which I apprehend will suffer greatly by my being under any personal restraint. I am sensible these reasons are of a private nature, but as they relate to the concerns of others more than my own, I hope your Excellency will find them sufficient to induce you to accept the Resignation of my trust as one of his Majesty's Council for this Province.

By the end of August, the mandamus counselors commanded no authority outside of Boston.

Next would come the opening of the courts. The Governor and Commander-in-Chief, General Thomas Gage, had promised to send troops to protect the courts in Worcester. The patriots had vowed that the courts would never sit under the authority of the Massachusetts Governments Act. Who would give?

The Courts

Salem, Massachusetts - August 20, 1774

On Saturday, August 20, the Salem (the Provincial Capitol) Committee, not the town's selectmen, as was normally the case, posted notices calling for a meeting of the townspeople:

The committee of correspondence desire the merchants, freeholders and other inhabitants of this town to meet at the town house chamber next Wednesday, at nine o'Clock in the morning to appoint five or more deputies, to meet at Ipswich, on the sixth of September next, with the deputies which shall be appointed by the other towns in this county, to consider of and determine on such measures as the late acts of parliament and our other grievances render necessary and expedient.

On Tuesday, the day before the meeting, Governor Gage issued a proclamation:

Whereas by a late Act of Parliament, all Town-Meetings called without the consent of the Governor (except the annual meetings, in the Months of March and May) are illegal, I do hereby strictly prohibit all Persons from attending ... any Meeting not warranted by law, as they will be chargeable with all the all consequences that may follow thereon, and answer the same At their utmost Peril.

General Gage, anticipating disobedience to his proclamation, went to Salem with two companies of the 59th regiment, who stopped at the entrance to town and loaded their guns. The soldiers then continued court the courthouse, "equipped as if for battle"

Cage then summoned the leaders of the Salem Committee to meet with them, at 9:00, the same time as the committee meeting. They thought that, absent leadership, the committee meeting would be to no avail.

The patriots out smarted General Gage, and, though the leaders attended the meeting with Gage, the Committee went about its business and selected six representatives to the county convention.

General Gage retaliated by ordering Judge Peter Frye to issue warrants for the Committee members who had called the meeting, charging them with "seditiously and unlawfully causing the town to be assembled by those notifications, without leave from the governor, in open contempt of the laws, against the peace, and the late statute."

The first to patriots brought into custody posted bail, but the next five refused, defiantly telling General Gage "if the ninetieth part of a farthing would be taken as bail, they would not give it." They then responded to the Governor's threat: "if he committed them, *then he must abide by the consequences.*"

As reported by John Andrews, "there was upwards of three thousand men assembled there from the adjacent towns, with full determination to rescue the Committee if they should be sent to prison, even if they were obliged to repel force with force, being sufficiently provided for such a purpose; as indeed they are all through the county -- every male above the age of 16 possessing a firelock with double the quantity of powder and ball injoin'd by law."

So, here, nearly eight months before the bloody showdown at Lexington Green, patriots stood, armed, against British soldiers, testing the resolve of each side.

Springfield, Massachusetts - August 30, 1774

On Friday, August 26, delegates from the 25 towns in Hampshire County assembled in Hadley, home of a 130-foot Liberty Pole. Their options included petitioning the judges to adjourn; disrupting the court physically; or, trying to convince the judges to meet under the authority of the old Charter instead of the Massachusetts Government Act. They decided to ask the judges themselves under what authority did they hold their offices.

By Monday, August 29, the judges, justices of the peace, of lawyers, and various officials with business before the court had arrived in Springfield.

Early Tuesday morning, they heard the tolling of the West Springfield bell -- the signal for patriots to gather. Between two and four thousand men, many carrying staves, mustered about the courthouse, where they hoisted a black flag to threaten the judges away.

The judges and justices bypassed the courthouse and convened at a public house nearby, where they received a committee of delegates from the demonstrators. The delegates ask them, how did they hold their authority, by the Charter or by the Act? The judges responded, "We consider and judge ourselves to hold our offices ... by virtue and force of the Charter". They then claimed that the late Act of Parliament had not made a significant alteration in their authority.

The delegates took the justices reply outside where it was read three times to the people assembled. The people talked, discussed, debated, and finally concluded, by a vote, that the answer was not satisfactory. They then decided that the court would not sit. The delegates returned to the justices and told them that they would not set contrary to the minds of the people.

The justices signed a petition, to wit:

"We, the subscribers, do severally promise and solemnly engage to all people now assembled, in the county of Hampshire, on the 30th Day of August 1774, that we will never take, hold, execute, or exercise any Commission, Office, or Employment whatsoever, under, or in Virtue of or in any Manner derived from any Authority, or pretended or attempted to be given by a late Act of Parliament, entitled 'An Act for better regulating the Government of the Province of Massachusetts-Bay, in New England'.

The petition was signed by eighteen judges and justices.

Concord, Massachusetts - August 30, 1774

On August 30, over 150 delegates from every town and district of Middlesex County gathered at Concord to consult on measures to be taken. First, the Massachusetts Government Act was read in its entirety. The convention then chose nine members to draft an appropriate response. It reads, in part:

It is evident to every attentive mind, that this province is in a very dangerous and alarming situation. We are obliged to say, however painful it may be to us, that the question now is, whether, by a submission to some late acts of the parliament of Great Britain, we are contented to be the most abject slaves, and entail that slavery on posterity after us, or by a manly, joint, and virtuous opposition, and support our freedom. There is a mode of conduct, which in our very critical circumstances, we would wish to adopt; a conduct, on the one hand, never to tamely submissive to tyranny and oppression, on the other, never degenerating into rage, passion, and confusion. This is a spirit which we revere, as we find it exhibited in former ages, and will command applause to the latest posterity.

The report continued, providing instructions not to recognize any aspect of the Massachusetts Government Act, to continue to conduct local business as has always been done, and, all acts by the people must be justified by God and the world.

The stage was set for the September 13 court opening.

Worcester, Massachusetts - August 30, 1774

In preparation for dealing with the court closures, 130 men attended the Worcester convention. The next morning, in what can be described as a democratically spirited proceeding, the following was approved:

Voted, that every person who speaks in this meeting shall rise up, and, after he is done speaking, shall sit down, and not speak more than twice on the same subject, without obtaining leave, and shall not speak irreverently.

Their first resolution stated their purpose, "that it is the indispensable duty of the inhabitants of this county, by the best ways and means, to prevent the sitting of the respective courts." They then "recommended to the inhabitants of this county, to attend, in person," the court sessions, and to maintain order, and then "recommended to the several towns, that they choose proper and suitable officers, and a sufficient number, to regulate the movements of each town, and prevent any disorder which might otherwise happen". They were determined not to be perceived as a "Mob".

Since "the ordinary course of justice may be stayed", they encouraged that each individual should "pay his just debts as soon as may be possible, without any disputes or litigation."

The final point addressed was in anticipation of what had been threatened, previously, by General Gage:

That whereas, it is generally expected, that the governor will send one or more regiments to enforce the execution of the acts of parliament, on the 6th of September, that it is recommended to the inhabitants of this county, if there is intelligence, that troops are on the march to Worcester, to attend, properly armed, in order to repel any hostile force which may be employed for that purpose.

Concerned that only Worcester was to be protected, the delegates' final resolution, to wit:

That if there is an invasion, or danger of invasion, in any town in this county, then such town as is invaded, or being in danger thereof, shall, by their committee of correspondence, or some other proper person, send letters, by express post, immediately, to the committees of the adjoining towns, who shall send to other committees in the towns adjoining them, that they all come properly armed and accoutred to protect and defend the place invaded.

Finally, they resolved:

Voted, That it be recommended to each town of the county, to retain in their own hands, what moneys may be due from them severally to the province treasury...

Voted, That each member will purchase at least two pounds of powder in addition to any he may have on hand, and will use all his exertions to supply his neighbor fully.

Voted, That the members and delegates endeavor to ascertain what number of guns are deficient to arm the people in case of invasion.

There is no doubt that the citizens of Worcester were prepared to defend their constitutional rights and their Charter. There is also no doubt that General Gage was aware of what was happening in the countryside. On August 27, he had written to Lord Dartmouth:

In Worcester, they keep no Terms, openly threaten Resistance by Arms, have been purchasing Arms, preparing them, casting Ball, and providing Powder, and threaten to attack any Troops who dare to oppose them. Mr. Ruggles of the new Council is afraid to take his Seat as Judge of the inferior Court, which sits at Worcester on the 7th [actually, the 6th] of next Month, and I apprehend that I shall soon be obliged to march a Body of Troops into that Township, and perhaps into others, as occasion happens, to preserve the Peace.

Boston, Massachusetts - August 30, 1774

General Gage attended the Superior Court of the Judicature in Boston, Suffolk County -- the only place that the Court could be safely opened. As the Boston Gazette reported, on September 5:

Last Tuesday being the day the Superior Court was to be holden here, the Chief Justice, Peter Oliver, Esq., and the other Justices of said Court, together with a number of gentlemen of the bar, attended by the High and Deputy Sheriffs, walked in procession from the state-house to the court-house, in Queen-street. When the Court were seated and the usual proclamations made, a list of names of the gentleman returned to serve as Grand Jurors, was presented to them, and the court appointed Mr. Ebenezer Hancock, Foreman.

However, when Ebenezer Hancock rose to be sworn in, he declined. The remaining 22 grand jurors also refused to take the oath. When ask why they refuse to take the oath, they referred to previously prepared document, which made the case that Peter Oliver, sitting as Chief Justice, was against the Charter.

The superior court continued to meet through Friday, conducting "such business as is usually transacted, without the juries". General Gage, at least, could show that some functions of government were still proceeding.

On Wednesday, August 31, General Gage tried to convene his council. Three days later, Gage wrote to Dartmouth, "I ordered a council to assemble, but upon their representation, that they should be watched, stopped, and insulted on the road to Salem, they desire to be assembled here in Boston". Only 15 of the original 36 attended.

General Gage presented to them, for their vote, the pressing decision he had to make within a week:

... Whether they would advise to the sending of any troops into the County of Worcester, or any other County in the Province, for the protection of the Judges and other Officers of the Courts of Justice. Whereupon several Gentlemen of the Council expressed their Opinions, that insomuch as the opposition to the execution of any part of the late Acts of Parliament relating to this Province, was so general, they apprehended it would not be for His Majesty's service to send any Troops into the interior parts of the Province, but that the main body continue in the Town of Boston, which might be strengthened by the addition of all other Troops, to be improved as circumstances may occur, and be a place of safe retreat for all those who may find it necessary to remove thither.

On September 2, General Gage, again, wrote to Dartmouth:

I came here [to Boston] to attend the superior Court, and in the Intention to send a Body of Troops to Worcester, to protect the Courts there, and if wanted to send Parties to the Houses of some of the Counsellors who dwell in that County, but [I heard] from undoubted Authorities, that the Flames of Sedition had spread universally throughout the Country beyond Conception, the Counsellors already drove away, and that no Courts could proceed on Business...

The Council was of Opinion that it was very improper to weaken the Troops here by any Detachments whatever, as they could not be of any Use to the Courts, as no Jurors wou'd appear, and by that Means defeat their Proceedings, and that Disturbance among so general, and not confined to any particular spot, there was no knowing where to send them to be of Use.

Cambridge, Massachusetts - September 2, 1774

On the evening of August 31, Boston patriots noticed significant troop movement, in and around Boston. Concerned that they might be going to Salem to arrest the Committee members, word was sent to Salem.

The Salem Committee responded that they were ready "to receive any attack they might be exposed to for acting in pursuance to the laws and interest of their country, as became men and christians".

The Boston Evening-Post (September 5) tells us the purpose of the troop movements :

On Thursday Morning, half after four, about 260 Troops embarked on 13 boats at the Long Wharf, and proceeded up Mystic River to Temple's Farm, where they landed, and went to the Powder-House on Quarry Hill, in Charleston Bounds, where they took 212 Half Barrels of Powder, the whole store there, and conveyed it to Castle Williams. A detachment from this corps went to Cambridge and brought off two field pieces.

General Gage had been notified that the patriots had begun seizing powder from various stores, and sought to head them off, at least, where it could be safely accomplished.

These events, however, had an impact on the patriot side. On Friday morning (September 2), by 8 O'clock, over 3,000 farmers had arrived at Cambridge Common, and, "more were on the way." They had

left their firearms, but most were equipped with "large sticks"(Later reports indicate that between 1/4 and 1/2 of the patriots were armed). They wanted to show their strength, but they did not want to confront the British.

In Boston, word spread that tens of thousands of country people were on their way to Boston. John Andrew wrote:

Four or five expresses have come down to Charlestown and here [Boston], to acquaint us, that between Sudbury and this, above ten thousand men are in arms and are continually coming down from the country back: that their determination is to collect about forty or fifty thousand by night (which they are sure of accomplishing) when they intend to bring in about fifteen thousand by way of the Neck, and as many more over the ferry: when once got possession, to come in like locusts and rid the town of every soldier.

In an effort to ward of an open confrontation, the Cambridge Committee contacted Lieutenant Governor Thomas Oliver, as described by Oliver:

Early in the morning a number of the inhabitants of Charlestown called at my house to acquaint me that a large body of people from several towns in the county were on their way coming down to Cambridge; that they were afraid some bad consequences might ensue, and begged I would go out to meet them, and endeavor to prevail on them to return. In a very short time, before I could prepare myself to go, they appeared in sight. I went out to them, and asked the reason of their appearance in that manner; they respectfully answered, they "came peaceably to inquire into their grievances, not with design to hurt any man." I perceived they were landholders of the neighboring towns, and was thoroughly persuaded they would do no harm. I was desired to speak to them; I accordingly did, in such a manner as I thought best calculated to their minds. They thanked me for my advice, said they were no mob, but sober, orderly people, who would commit no disorder; and then proceeded on their way. I returned to my house

Soon after they had arrived on the Common at Cambridge, a report arose that the troops were on their march from Boston; I was desired to go and intercede with his Excellency to prevent their coming. From principles of humanity to the country, from a general love of mankind, and from persuasions that they were orderly people, I readily undertook it; and is there a man on earth, who, placed in my circumstances, could have refused it?... As I passed the people I told them, of my own accord, I would return and let them know the event of my application.

Still concerned, the Cambridge Committee sent dispatches to Charlestown and Boston. Joseph Warren, of the Boston Committee, wrote:

A billet was brought, requesting me to take some steps in order to prevent the people from coming to immediate acts of violence, as incredible numbers were in arms, and lined the roads from Sudbury to Cambridge. I summoned the committee of correspondence; but, as care had been taken to caution every man who passed the ferry from alarming Boston, I judged it best not to inform the person who warned the committee of the business they were to meet upon. They, therefore, made no great haste to get together. After waiting some time, I took as many of the members as came in my way to Charlestown, fearing that something amiss might take place. I saw the gentleman at Charlestown, who begged us to move forward to Cambridge. On our way, we met the Lieutenant-governor Oliver. He said he was going to the general, to desire him not to march his troops out of Boston. We thought this precaution good, and proceeded to Cambridge.

Later, while awaiting word of General Gage's intentions, the Boston Committee met with delegates from the country towns. The meeting was held at Captain Steadman's inn. The Boston committee members were surprised that the delegates had been selected, that day, for that purpose. Boston had leaders who would drink ale and decide what the crowds would do. The country people, however, were participatory, and the leaders were selected, for each circumstance, and only for that particular event. Unlike what had been occurring in Boston, these events were truly of the people.

General Gage, at Oliver's request, decided not to march the troops. Gage, after having obtained as much information as possible, determined that the crowd was "not a Boston rabble but the freeholders and farmers of the country".

Even though Oliver had aided the patriots in avoiding a confrontation, he was, later that afternoon, forced to resign his appointment as Lieutenant Governor. His resignation effectively destroyed the government implemented by the Massachusetts Government Act.

The people, as a whole -- not through the leaders in Boston -- had gained the initiative and control in the revolution, which would, in eight more months, result in a War of Independence.

The Powder Alarm, New England - September 2, 1774

As word spread, throughout the northern colonies, of the the events in Cambridge, Charlestown and Boston, farmers and merchants dropped their work and picked up their arms. They began a massive march toward the Massachusetts Bay. Their alarm was supported by rumors, gaining momentum as the stories of what was transpiring traveled out and away from the more organized negotiations in Boston and Cambridge.

Though estimates vary on the number of those who went to Cambridge, as well as those on the march toward what rumor had provided for, they range from a minimum of twenty thousand to a maximum of "near one hundred thousand".

As far as the distance to which the rumors carried, and caused alarm, an account by Mr. McNeil, from Litchfield, Connecticut, as given to the Reverend Ezra Stiles, is as follows:

[McNeil] went to bed without hearing any Thing. But about midnight or perhaps one o'Clock he was suddenly waked up, somebody violently rapping up the Landlord, telling the doleful Story that the Powder was taken, six men killed, & all the people between there & Boston arming & marching down to the Relief of their Brethren at Boston; and within a qr. or half an hour he judges fifty men were collected at the Tavern tho' now deep in Night, equipping themselves & sending off Posts every Way to the neighboring Towns. They called up McNeil to tell the Story of the Springfield Affair which was News - he said he had to repeat and tell the story over & over again to New Comers till day; so he had no more Rest that night. The Men set off as fast as they were equipt.

In the Morning, being fryday Sept. 2, Mr. McNeil rode forward & passed thro' the whole at the very Time of the Convulsion. He said he never saw such a Scene before - all along were armed Men rushing forward some on foot some on horseback, at every house Women & Children making Cartridges, running Bullets, making Wallets, baking Biscuit, crying & bemoaning & at the same time animating their Husbands & Sons to fight for their Liberties, tho' not knowing whether they should ever see them again. I asked whether the Men were Cowards or disheartened or appeared to want Courage? No. Whether the tender Distresses of weeping Wives & Children softened effeminated & overcome the Men and set them Weeping to? No - nothing of this - but a firm and intrepid Ardor, hardy eager & courageous Spirit of Enterprize, a Spirit for revenging the Blood of their Brethren &

rescue our Liberties, all this & an Activity corresponding with such Emotions appeared all along the whole Tract of above fourty Miles from Shrewsbury to Boston.

The Women kept on making Cartridges, & after equipping their Husbands, bro't them out to the Soldiers which in Crowds passed along & gave them out in handfuls to one and another as they were deficient, mixing Exhortation & Tears & Prayers & spiring the Men in such an uneffeminate Manner as even would make Cowards fight. He tho't if anything the Women surpassed the Men for Eagerness & Spirit in the Defence of Liberty by Arms. For they had no Tho'ts of the Men returning but from Battle, for they all believed the Action commenced between the Kings Troops & the Provincials. The Women under this Assurance gave up their Husbands Sons &c to Battle & bid them fight courageously & manfully & behave themselves bravely for Liberty - commanding them to behave like Men & not like Cowards to be of good Courage & play the men for our people & for the Cities of our God - & the Lord do as seemeth him good. They expected a bloody Scene, but they doubted not Success & Victory.

McNeil never saw any Thing like this in his Life: - he said, they scarcely left half a dozen Men in a Town, unless old and decrepid, and in one town the Landlord told him that himself was the only Man left."

Worcester, Massachusetts - September 6, 1774

If General Gage were to keep his word and use troops to assure that the courts would open, in Worcester County, on September 6, the patriots, especially after the excitement and commitment during the Powder Alarm, were ready to assure that the courts would not open. The lines were drawn, and the stakes were high.

Many of the people who were to be in Worcester must have left their homes on the 4th, to assure that they would be present on the 6th. They came from as far away as 35 miles (Royalston), and they came on foot.

By Tuesday morning (September 6), 4, 622 men had arrived in Worcester. Ebenezer Parkman's diary provides the following accounting:

Worcester	260	Harvard	103	Westminster	120
Uxbridge	156	Hubbardston	55	Oxford Troop	40
Westborough	200	Lunenburg	40	N. Shrewsbury	100
Rutland	150	Western	100	S. Shrewsbury	135
Athol	51	Winchendon	45	Northboro	85
Royalston	39	Southboro	35	Oxford	80
New Braintry	140	Chauxitt	200	Oakham	50
Brookfield	216	Leicester	180	Petersham	70
Duglass	130	Spencer	164	Paxton	80
Grafton	210	Sturbridge	150	Upton	100
Holden	100	Bolton	100	Templeton	120
Hardwick	220	Palmer	38		
Princeton	60	Sutton	500		

Though most of the participants had left home with their firearms, when word came that General Gage was not sending his troops (Gage only had 3,000 troops in garrison), most of the rifles were stored at homes outside of Worcester, or with homes or businesses in town. Staves became the weapon of choice, and music was played by fife and drum. Only a few men still had arms.

Most of the men from Worcester and Spencer had barricaded themselves inside of the courthouse, by 10 O'clock, to prevent the judges and other officials from entering.

Representatives from each of the various town Committees met at the home of Timothy Bigelow, to coordinate the activities of the day. Their first decision, however, was "to attend the body of the people" outside, leaving the decisions not to the leaders, but to the people, themselves.

Meanwhile, a local merchant did a phenomenal business -- "more than ever before". On Sunday, he took in £173, for "Powder &c.", Monday was £97, and, on Tuesday, £300, as thousands of militiamen prepared for what might come.

The officers of the court (3 judges of the Inferior Court; 18 justices of the peace, 2 attorneys; and, the Sheriffs), having been locked out of the courthouse, had taken up at Daniel Heywood's tavern, to await communication from the committee. Their first effort at a statement used the term, "would endeavor &c.", was too weak for those who had travelled so far. The second document, signed by all twenty-five officers, follows:

GENTLEMEN: -- You having desired, and even insisted upon it, that all judicial proceedings be stayed by the justices of the court appointed this day, by law, to be held at Worcester, on account of the unconstitutional act of the British parliament, respecting the administration of justice in this province, which, if effected, will reduce the inhabitants thereof to mere arbitrary power; we do assure you, that we will stay all such judicial proceedings of said courts, and will not endeavor to put said act into execution.

Sufficient to satisfy those who had attend to see the courts remain closed, the next act was to require all of the justices to walk the line, between all of those gathered, with hats in hand, reading, over and over (some estimates were that the statement was read, by each, thirty times), their statement -- so that all could hear. And, as a final affront to the Tories, all known Tories in town were required to march with the justices.

The British troops had stayed away, no blood had been shed, and, all of the goals of the patriots had been achieved. There was no doubt as to who was in control of Worcester County.

Worcester, Massachusetts - September 7, 1774

Having dealt with the problem of the judges and the court, the people of Worcester were left without a formal government, nor with a way to deal with problems that might arise.

A Provincial convention had been called for on the second Tuesday of October, less than two months away. In the meantime, an interim government was needed.

The County Convention that had convened to deal with not allowing the seating of the courts, took matters into their own hand (defiant of any British objections to the contrary). They recalled the justices of the peace who were in office under the original Charter, with the exception of those who had proven inimical to their cause. They allowed them to sit as single judges, though not sit as a court, and, they were only to deal with criminal, not civil cases. The coroners, sheriffs, and probate judges would also continue in office.

The most significant authority presumed by the Convention was to require resignations from all of the militia officers. Often, however, if the old officer was a patriot, he would be returned to duty. They procured at least one field piece, with mount and fitted for use and sufficient ammunition for same.

They were preparing to defend what they had gained.

Boston, Massachusetts - September 6-12, 1774

General Gage, having seen the strength of the patriots by the closure of courts; the resignations; the failure to stop the town meeting in Salem; and, the resignation of his Lieutenant Government, Thomas Oliver, was determined to regain control in the colony.

His first step was to fortify the Boston Neck (a narrow piece of land connecting Boston to the mainland). He had only 3,000 soldiers, and the patriots' forces outnumbered them, substantially. He had to protect his garrison.

According to John Andrew:

The alarm caus'd by the movement of the country has induc'd the Governor to order a number of field pieces up to the neck guard, and this morning has got a number of workmen there, to build blockhouses and otherways repair the fortification. It was reported that he was going to cut a canal across and break off the communication with the country other than by bridge; in consequence of which the Select men waited upon him. He assur'd them he had no intention to break ground, but was only about securing the entrance into the Town, that the inhabitants as well as the soldiers may not be expos'd to inroads from the country.

The patriots in Boston were worried that General Gage was going to make a garrison of the whole town. They were also concerned that the guarding of the neck, and passively detaining the few who went from country to town, might discourage the flow of goods necessary, from the country, to sustain life in Boston (under embargo because of the Port Bill).

Andrews also provided some insight into the additional precautions that General Gage was making to avoid being attacked by the patriots who outnumbered his forces.

Andrews gave a running account of General Gage's efforts at fortification and the response of local patriots:

September 6th... The townspeople are in general very uneasy and dissatisfied with the Governor's fortifying the entrance; so much so, they cant get any one workman to assist 'em. They've got an engineer from New York, who is trying what he can do with a number of carpenters and masons out of the army. They talk of sending to New York for a number of mechanics to affect it: It is my opinion, if they are wise, they wont come....

September 8th.... Yesterday, between one and two o'clock P.M., the General, with a large parade of attendants, took a survey of the skirts of the town; more particularly that part opposite the country shore. 'Tis suppos'd they intend to erect Batteries there to prevent any incursions of the country people from that quarter, having effectually secur'd the Neck by the disposition of the field pieces; and their caution extends so far as to have a guard patrol Roxbury streets at all hours of the night, as well as another posted at Charlestown ferry every night, after the evening gun fires

September 9th [N]otwithstanding the six field pieces planted at ye Neck, they have brought twelve cannon from the Castle, some nine and some four pounders, which they have dispos'd about the entrance of the town. And this is not the only proof of their fear; for I am well inform'd that they keep so many and such strict guards of nights, that the soldiers don't get but one undisturb'd night's sleep out of four.

September 10th. They have drawn off the whole of the troops from Salem, and the Board of Commissioners, with the Governor's family and furniture, are all arriv'd here, not thinking themselves secure in a town surrounded by the country as that is....

September 12th.... The General has set about two hundred soldiers to work upon the fortifications this morning.... Many of the inhabitants are serious about leaving the town, as they are in general apprehensive that when the Governor has sufficiently fortified it, *military Law* will be declar'd, and no one suffer'd to go out but by his permission, notwithstanding what he may have said to the contrary. There is no knowing, Bill, what may take place with us. For my own part, I endeavor to make myself as easy as I can; but if they should come to disarming the inhabitants, the matter is settled with the town at once; for *blood* and *carnage* must inevitably ensue - which God forbid! should ever take place.'

Charlestown, Massachusetts - September 15, 1774

Again, John Andrews provides some insight into the patriots' efforts to assure that they were well armed:

Ever since ye cannon were taken away from Charlestown, the General has order'd a double guard to ye new and old gun houses, where ye brass field pieces belonging to our militia are lodg'd: notwithstanding which, the vigilance and temerity of our people has entirely disconcerted him, for We'n'sday evening, or rather night, they took these from the Old house (by opening the side of the house) and carried away through Frank Johnnot's Garden. Upon which he gave it in orders the next day to the officer on guard to remove those from the New house (which stands directly opposite the encampment of the 4th Regiment and in the middle of the street near the large Elm tree), sometime the next night into the camp; and to place a guard at each end, or rather at both doors, till then. At the fixed hour the Officer went with a number of Mattresses to execute his orders, but behold, the guns were gone! He swore the *Devil* must have help'd them to get away. However, they went to work, and brought off the carriages, harness, utensils, &ca., which they repositd in the Camps. Its amazing to me how our people manag'd to carry off the guns, as they weigh near seven hundred weight apiece; more especially that they should do it, and not alarm the guards.

There is little doubt that the patriots were preparing for war. Their deeds were not light. Their preparations -- were for War.

General Gage was becoming very concerned over these events. In a letter to Lord Dartmouth:

Nothing less than Conquest of almost all the New England Provinces will procure Obedience to the late Acts of Parliament for regulating the Government of the Massachusetts Bay... The Country People are exercising in Arms in this Province, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, and getting Magazines of Arms and Ammunition in the Country, and such Artillery, as they can procure good and bad. They threaten to attack the Troops in Boston, and are very angry at the Work throwing up at the entrance of the Town...

Had the Measures for regulating this Government been adopted seven Years ago, they would have been easier executed, but the executive Parts of Government have gradually been growing weaker from about that period, and the People more lawless and seditious... My first Object was to give it

Force, in which I hoped to have made some Progress, when the Arrival of the late Acts overset the whole, and the Flame blazed out in all Parts at once beyond the conception of every Body.

The well-laid plans of the British Empire had been put aside by the patriots that believed that government has an obligation to abide by its contract with the people.

And, for those who continued to support the Crown, Andrews explains:

The present temper of the People throughout the Province is such, that they wont suffer a *tory* to remain any where among 'em without making an ample recantation of his principles; and those who presume to be so obstinate as not to comply, are oblig'd to take up their residence in this city [Boston] of refuge.

Braintree, Massachusetts - September 14, 1774

Abigail Adams (wife of John Adams) reports, "The church parson thought they were coming after him, and run up garret they say, an other jumped out of his window and hid among the corn whilst a third crept under his bord fence, and told his beads."

Weston, Massachusetts - September 14, 1774

Colonel Elisha Jones, 65-year-old father of 14 sons, was humiliated by 300 men who "made his Mightiness walk through their Ranks with his Hat off and express his Sorrow for past Offenses, and promise not to be Guilty of the like for the future."

Concord, Massachusetts - September 19, 1774

Joseph Lee, a Concord physician, had sought to carry warning to the government, on September 1, as the locals prepared to march to Cambridge. Though the force used to elicit the following letter is unknown, on September 19, he signed (though probably did not write) the following:

Whereas I, Joseph Lee, of Concord, Physician, on the Evening of the 1st ult, did rashly and without Consideration, make a private and precipitate journey from Concord to Cambridge, to inform judge Lee, that the Country was assembling to come down... that he & others concern'd might prepare themselves for the Event, and with an avowed Intention to deceive the People; by which the Parties assembling might have been exposed to the brutal Rage of the Soldiery, who had timely Notice to have waylaid the Roads and fired on them while unarmed and Defenceless in the dark.

By which imprudent Conduct, I might have prevented the salutary Designs of my Countrymen, whose innocent intentions were only to request certain Gentlemen, sworn into Office on the new system of Government, to resign their Offices, in order to prevent the Operation of that (so much detested) Act of the British Parliament for regulating the Civil Government of the Massachusetts Bay: By all of which I have justly drawn upon me the displeasure of my Country.

When I coolly reflect on my own imprudence, it fills my Mind with the deepest Anxiety.

I deprecate the resentment of my injured Country, humbly confess my Errors, and implore the Forgiveness of a generous and free People. Solemnly declaring that the future, never to convey any intelligence to any of the Court Party, whether directly or indirectly, by which the design of the People may be frustrated in opposing the barbarous Policy, of an arbitrary, wicked and corrupt Administration.

Joseph Lee

Essex County, Massachusetts - September 6 - 7, 1774

The Essex County Convention resolved:

[T]hat the judges, justices, and other civil officers in this county [which included the colonial capitol of Salem], appointed agreeably to the charter and the laws of the province, are the only civil officers in the county whom we may lawfully obey; that no authority whatever, can remove these officers, except that which is constituted pursuant to the charter and those laws; that it is the duty of these officers to continue in the execution of their respective trusts, as if the aforementioned act [Massachusetts Government Act] of parliament had never been made; and, that while they thus continue untainted by any official conduct in conformity to that act, we will vigorously support them therein, to the utmost of our power, indemnify them in their persons and property, and to their lawful doings a ready obedience.

Essex had determined to allow officers to sit, but only in accordance with the Charter. The convention, however, made clear their position by further resolving, "that all civil officers in the province, as well as private persons, who shall dare to conduct in conformity to the aforementioned act... are unfit for civil society; their lands ought not be tilled by the labor of any American, nor their family supplied with clothing or food".

They concluded their convention with this statement of the determination of their convictions:

[T]hough we are deeply anxious to restore and preserve harmony with our brethren in Great Britain; yet, if the despotism and violence of our enemies should finally reduce us to the sad necessity, we, undaunted, are ready to appeal to the last resort of states; and will, in support of our rights, encounter even death. Sensible that he can never die too soon, who lays down his life in support of the laws and liberties of his country.

Essex County was endeavoring to continue the Charter government and denounced and refused to serve those who were not. They did, however, allow that, should the progression of events require, they would lay down their lives to retain that which was theirs.

Suffolk County, Massachusetts - September 6 – 9, 1774

Suffolk County (which included Boston) was not controlled by the patriots, unlike most of the other counties in Massachusetts. Nevertheless, in Dedham and Milton, the two towns where the convention was to be held, they had quite a bit of influence.

Though that influence was not sufficient to close the courts, it was sufficient to approve what became known as the Suffolk Resolves:

Whereas, the power, but not the justice; the vengeance, but not the wisdom of Great Britain, which of old persecuted, scourged, and exiled our fugitive parents from their native shores, now pursues us, their guiltless children, with unrelenting severity: and whereas this, then savage and uncultivated desert, was purchased by the toil and treasure, or acquired by the valor and blood of those, our venerable progenitors, who bequeathed to us the dear bought inheritance, who consigned it to our care and protection; the most sacred obligations are upon us to transmit the glorious purchase, unfettered by power, unclogged with shackles, to our innocent and beloved offspring.

Ultimately, the Resolves contained provisions that:

- They opposed both the Massachusetts Government Act and the Boston Port Bill, stating that "no obedience is due from this province, to either or any part of the acts above mentioned; but that they should be rejected as the attempts of a wicked administration to enslave America."
- Although they did not have the power to close the courts, they recommended that "no regard ought to be paid to them by the people of this county," and that officers of the court or jurors who refused to serve would receive their support.
- They recommended that taxes not be paid to the officers of the established government "until the civil government of the province is placed upon a constitutional basis."
- They demanded resignations from all "mandamus counsellors"; those who failed to comply by September 20 would "be considered by this county as obstinate and incorrigible enemies to this colony."
- They opposed the fortification of the Boston Neck and appointed a committee to carry their protest to Governor Gage.
- They objected to the Quebec Act, claiming that the legalization of the Catholic Church in Canada was "dangerous in an extreme degree, to the protestant religion, and to the civil liberties of all America."
- They recommended "to take away all commissions from the officers of the militia, and that new officers be elected by the people.
- The Resolves were sent to the Continental Congress, where they arrived on September 16, and were approved and encouraged by a unanimous vote of the Congress
- They advocated yet another nonconsumption agreement against "British merchandize and manufactures."
- Like the other conventions, they endorsed a convening of a Provincial Congress in October.
- They promised to "pay all due respect" to the Continental Congress sitting in Philadelphia, and to submit to their decisions.

Finally, as was characteristic of all the county conventions, they opposed "all routs, riots, or licentious attacks upon the property of any persons whatsoever." They held that "in a contest so important, in a cause so solemn, our conduct shall be such as to merit the approbation of the wise, and the admiration of the brave and free of every age and of every country."

Plymouth, Massachusetts - September 26 - 27, 1774

The Plymouth County Committee met in the Plymouth courthouse, the week before the courts were scheduled to open. Though their resolutions were similar to those of other counties, they also planned the mobilization for October 4, when the courts were supposed to open.

On that day (October 4), between two and four thousand men "stiling themselves the body of the people, took possession of the court-house and the avenues leading up to it, and presented the courts of General Sessions of the peace and court of common pleas from sitting or proceeding to business." Accordingly, they presented the justices with the resolution from the convention, to which the justices replied:

That we do not now, nor will, at any time hereafter, hold or exercise our Commission in any other Way than what is prescribed by our Charter and well-known Constitution; and that we will not in any Way countenance, aid or support the Execution of the late Acts of Parliament for altering the Charter and Government of the Province.

To the patriots, this pledge was insufficient. They told the justices that it was "inexpedient" for the courts to open. The justices responded, "We will not open, set, act or do, or adjourn either of said Courts, 'till the Determination of the Continental Congress is known.

The justices had acquiesced to the decision to be forthcoming from an illegal body, which was acting without any recognized authority except that of the people.

The patriots, still not fully satisfied, required that known Tories, or, any who has signed addresses to Hutchinson and General Gage, would also recant, resign, and give up any military commission they might hold – which they did, for fear of their lives.

Worcester, Massachusetts - September 20 - 21, 1774

The Worcester County Convention met to discuss filling the void created by the absence of the royal government. Nobody was surprised that General Gage had not ordered the courts to open. After all, Worcester was the hotbed of the resistance to the Acts of Parliament.

The Convention ordered the Sheriff, though unnecessarily, to "adjourn the superior court appointed by law to be held this day, and then got on to their appointed business.

First, they had to deal with debt. They called upon the farmers (struggling under heavy debt burdens), for:

Every inhabitant of this county to pay his just debts, as soon as possible, without any dispute or litigation, and if any disputes concerning debts or trespass should arise, which cannot be settled by the parties, we recommend it to them to submit all such cases to arbitration; and if the parties, or either of them, shall refuse to do so, they ought to be considered as co-operating with the enemies of the country.

They then proceeded, since they were able to influence the justices of the peace to do so, to "liberate any persons confined in jail for debts, who are entitled to such liberation by the laws of the province".

They then began preparations for the inevitable; they reorganized the militia into seven new regiments. There was no legal authority for them to do so, but they did it, anyway -- necessity and anticipation of the coming conflict overriding the law, even under the Charter.

They called for each of the towns in the county to arm itself "with one or more field pieces. Mounted and fitted for use."

They proceeded to arrange for all of the towns in the county to call for conventions, as necessary, "to prepare matters to lay before this body at their several meetings". They had, essentially, created the first, independent of British control, county government in the United States.

Worcester County, Massachusetts - October 4, 1774

Timothy Bigelow was appointed as a delegate for Worcester County, at the soon to be held Provincial Congress. He was provided instructions, by the Convention, to carry to that Congress:

If all infractions of our rights, by acts of the British Parliament, be not redressed, and we restored to the full enjoyment of all our privileges, contained in the charter of this province, issued by their late majesties, King William and Queen Mary, *to a punctillo*; before the day of your meeting [October 5, the next day], then, and in that case, you are to consider the people of this province absolved, on their part, from the obligation therein contained, and to all intents and purposes reduced to a state of nature;

and you are to exert yourself in devising ways and means to raise from the dissolution of the old constitution, as from the ashes of the Phenix, a new form, wherein all officers shall be dependent on the suffrage of the people for their existence as such, whatever unfavorable constructions our enemies may put upon such procedure. The exigency of our public affairs leaves us no alternative from a state of anarchy or slavery.

Though far from the poetic words penned by Thomas Jefferson, twenty months later, none the less, a declaration of independence.

The Provincial Congress

Salem, Massachusetts - October 5, 1774

Ninety men, who had been elected by their towns, met in the Salem courthouse -- as the General Court. They were waiting for General Gage to appear, though most knew, already, that he would not show up. He had already dissolved his court. The ninety, however, wished to demonstrate their willingness to work with the Crown, though, as far as they were concerned, they were there under the Charter. Most had felt that this act was necessary to demonstrate their willingness to act under the Charter, as well as, to justify resorting to an alternate, illegal, government -- understanding that civil government was both desirable, and, necessary for the function of their communities.

The next day, all of the delegates resolved themselves into a Provincial Congress. No governor had sworn them in; no official body had sanctioned their authority. Their authority had, for the first time, been sanctioned solely by the people who had sent them there.

Their first business was to elect officers. John Hancock and Benjamin Lincoln were elected president and clerk, respectively. They then adjourned to the second Tuesday in October -- the date previously designated for that purpose.

Concord, Massachusetts - October 11 - 29, 1774

On 10:00 O'clock, Tuesday morning, October 11, the ninety delegates from the General court, along with 200 other delegates, selected by the various towns and counties, met at the Concord courthouse and reconvened the Provincial Congress. Of the 260 towns then in Massachusetts, 209 had sent delegates. This was a far greater participation than the General Court, even under the Charter, had ever inspired in Massachusetts. The following week, the Congress moved to Cambridge, where the infrastructure was more able to accommodate this extremely large gathering.

The first orders of business included: procuring arms; raising money to pay for them; establishing civil government; and, establishing a military structure to support their resistance to the imposition of Parliament on their rights under the Charter.

On October 20, a committee "to consider what is necessary to be now done for the defence and safety of the province" was appointed, and met behind closed doors -- to preserve military secrecy.

On October 24, another committee was appointed to determine "the most proper time for this province to provide a stock of powder, ordinance, and ordinance stores" for the Province. Later, that day, their report was returned to the Congress -- "Now was the proper time".

On October 26, the military committee came back with their report. The Congress, then, approved the following:

16 field pieces, 3 pounders, with carriages, irons, &c.; wheels for ditto, irons, sponges, ladles, &c.,	@ £ 30	£480 0 0
4 ditto, 6 pounders, with ditto,	@ £ 38	£152 0 0
Carriages, irons, &c., for 12 battering cannon,	@ £ 30	£360 0 0
4 mortars, and appurtenances, viz: 2 8-inch and 2 13-inch,	@ £ 20	£80 0 0
20 tons grape and round shot, from 3 to 24 lb.,	@ £15	£300 0 0
10 tons bomb-shells,	@ £ 20	£200 0 0
5 tons lead balls,	@ £ 33	£ 165 0 0
1,000 barrels of powder,	@ £8	£8,000 0 0
5,000 arms and bayonets,	@ £2	£10,000 0 0
And 75,000 flints		£ 100 0 0
Contingent charges		<u>£ 1,000 0 0</u>
In the whole		£20,837 0 0

The Congress had already suggested to the towns that any money due the government should be held. On October 28, they appointed Henry Gardiner as Receiver-General, and directed the towns to remit any collected money to him. It also encouraged all of the inhabitants to pay any taxes due, and all future taxes to be paid to Gardiner.

The Provincial Congress established a Committee of Safety with the power to "alarm, muster, and cause to be assembled" the militia, when necessary. This Committee was also empowered to appoint new militia commanders, while the men of each militia company were encouraged to elect new officers, if they had not already done so.

Finally, they directed all of the militia to "hold themselves in readiness, on the shortest notice from the said committee of safety, to march to the place of rendezvous".

The Congress adjourned on October 29. The Committee of Safety was instructed to sit in Cambridge, where it could keep an eye on the movement of the British troops.

Boston, Massachusetts - November 14, 1774

On October 3, General Gage wrote, "I don't find that the Spirit abates any where, for it is kept up with great Industry... I don't suppose People were ever more possessed with Zeal and Enthusiasm."

General Gage had been trying to have quarters built for his troops, and found that, "This refusal of all Assistance has thrown us into Difficulties, but I hope to get through them, and to be able to put the Troops under Cover, tho' not so comfortably as I cou'd wish". Neither Boston carpenters, nor those from New York, would hire out to the British. Boston, out of self-preservation, those from New York out of fear, if they should oppose the desires of the patriots who had taken over nearly the entire Province.

On October 17, General Gage was concerned over some rumors that had reached Boston:

There are various Reports spread abroad of the Motions made at the Provincial Congress, whilst at Concord, some, it's said, moved to attack the Troops in Boston immediately, other to value the Estates in the Town, in order to pay the Proprietors the Loss they might sustain, and to set the Town on Fire.

By October 30, General Gage was extremely alarmed. In his State of the Province report, he said:

Nobody here or at home could have conceived, that the Acts made for the Massachusetts's Bay, could have created such a Ferment throughout the Continent, and united the whole in one common Cause, or that the Country People could have been raised to such a pitch of Phrenzy... If Force is to be used at length, it must be a considerable one, and Foreign Troops must be hired, for to begin with Small Numbers will encourage Resistance and not terrify; and will in the End cost more Blood and Treasure. An Army of Such a Service should be large enough to make considerable Detachments to disarm and take in the Counties...

Many of their Leaders I apprehend mean to bully and terrify, and others to push Matters to extremity, puffed up by Hopes of Assistance from the whole Continent, and Certainty of the immediate Aid of the four New-England Provinces, which they flatter themselves are alone sufficient to withstand all the Force of Great Britain. The People are told that the present Acts only lead to others which are to divide their Lands into Lordships, and tax them at so much Pr Acre...

I am concerned that Affairs are gone to so great a Length that Great Britain cannot yield without giving up all her Authority over this Country, unless some Submission is Shewn on the part of the Colonies which I have tried at here tho' hetherto without Effect. And Affaires are at such a Pitch thro' a general union of the whole. That I am obliged to use more caution than could otherwise be necessary, least all the Continent should unite in hostile Proceedings against us.

On November 2, he wrote, "I shall not be surprized, as the Provincial Congress seems to proceed higher and higher in their Determinations, if Persons should be Authorized by them to grant Commissions and Assume every Power of a legal Government, for their Edicts are implicitly obeyed throughout the Country."

On November 14, General Gage was so frustrated at the inability to raise revenues (the counties and towns had deferred payment, and transferred the money to the Provincial Congress). That he published this broadside, and had it published in the Boston newspapers:

PROVINCE of MASSACHUSETTS BAY
By the GOVERNOR
A PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS a Number of Persons unlawfully assembled at Cambridge, in the month of October last, calling themselves a Provincial Congress, did in the most open and daring Terms, assume to themselves the Powers and Authority of Government, independent of, and repugnant to his Majesty's Government legally and constitutionally established within this Province, and tending utterly to subvert the same; and did amongst other unlawful Proceedings, take upon themselves to Resolve and direct, a new and unconstitutional Regulation of the Militia, in high Derogation of his Majesty's royal Prerogative; and also to elect and appoint Henry Gardner Esq. of Stow, to be Receiver General, in the room of HARRISON GRAY Esq., then and still legally holding and executing that office; and also to order and direct the Monies granted to his Majesty to be paid into the Hands of the said Henry Gardner, and not to the said Harrison Gray Esqr., and further, earnestly to recommend to the Inhabitants of the province to oblige and compel the several Constables and collectors to comply with

and execute the said Directions of the Law: all which Proceedings have a most dangerous Tendency to ensnare his Majesty's Subjects, the inhabitants of this Province, and draw them into Perjuries, Riots, Sedition, Treason, and Rebellion.

For the Prevention of which Evils, and the calamitous Consequences thereof;

I have thought it my Duty to issue this Proclamation, hereby earnestly exhorting, and, in His Majesty's Name strictly prohibiting all his liege Subjects within this Province, from complying, in any Degree, with the said Requisitions, Recommendations, Directions or resolves of the aforesaid unlawful assembly, as they regard his Majesty's highest Displeasure, and wou'd avoid the Pains and Penalties of the Law. And I do hereby charge and command all justices of the Peace, Sheriffs, Constables, Collectors and other officers, in their several Departments, to be vigilant and faithful in the Execution and Discharge of their Duty in their respective offices, agreeable to the well known established Laws of the Land; and, to the utmost of their Power, by all lawful Ways and Means, to discountenance, discourage and prevent a Compliance with such dangerous Resolves of the above-mentioned, or any other unlawful Assembly whatever.

GIVEN at Boston this 10th Day of November in the Fifteenth year of the Reign of his Majesty, George the Third, by the Grace of God of Great Britain, France and Ireland, King Defender of the Faith, &c. Annoque Domini 1774.

THOs. GAGE By His Excellency's Command,
Tho. FLUCKER, Secretary
GOD Save The KING

Brooklyne, Massachusetts - December 13, 1774

General Gage, becoming desperate to find a solution, made is next move on December 13. John Andrews described the activity:

This morning the Welch fusiliers, together with a detachment from another regiment, form'd a body of 400 men, and equip'd with knapsacks &ca., march out of town as far as the punch bowl in Brooklyne, when they return'd again. What this manoeuvre can be for, I cant imagine, other than to give the men an airing, or with a view to make frequent feints of the kind in order to familiarize the people to it, whereby in [the] future they may make an interruption into the country without creating any suspicion of their design, or possibly to make the Soldiers acquainted with the different roads near town.

On December 21, Andrews again reports, "two or three regiments continue to go out of town every day, sometimes to Cambridge, and other times to Dedham."

Though General Gage's intentions are unknown, if his desire was to pose a threat to the colonists, it had the reverse effect. Resentment was building because of these unwarranted trespasses into the countryside.

Fort William and Mary, New Hampshire - December 14 - 15, 1774

On December 13, the Boston Committee of Safety directed Paul Revere to ride to Portsmouth, New Hampshire to advise the local patriots that the British were sending ships to Fort William and Mary to take arms, ammunition, and powder that was stored there. At that time, there were only six soldiers at the fort.

On December 14, four hundred patriots overwhelmed the guard and made off with one hundred barrels of gunpowder. The next day, an even larger crowd seized all of the muskets and sixteen cannon. By the time the British ships arrived, all of the guns and powder had been taken and secreted in the countryside.

Boston, Massachusetts - February 24, 1775

On February 24, General Gage received an intelligence report. That report provides insight into what Gage had to contend with, with regard to the activity in opposition to the royal government.

Committee of safety appointed by the Congress consisting of Hancock, Warren, Church, Heath and Gearey, these are to observe the motions of the Army, and if they attempt to penetrate into the Country, imediatly to communicate the intelligence to Colo. Ward, Colo. Bigelow, and Colo. Henshaw, who live in or near the Towns of Worcester, and Leicester. Colo. Warren of Plymouth and Colo. Lee of Marblehead, they are to send express's round the Country to collect the Minute Men who are to oppose the troops. These Minute Men amount to about 15,000 and are the picked Men of the whole body of Militia, and all properly armed.

There are in the Country thirty-eight Field pieces and Nineteen Companies of Artillery most of which are at Worcester, a few at Concord, and a few at Watertown.

There whole Magazine of Powder consisting of between Ninety and an Hundred Barrells is at Concord.

There are eight Field pieces in an old Store or Barn, near the landing place at Salem, they are to be removed in a few days, the Seizure of them would greatly disconcert their schemes.

Colo. Lee, Colo. Brine, Mr. Devons, Mr. Chever, Mr. Watson, and Moses Gill, are appointed a Committee of supply, who are to purchase all military stores, to be deposited at Concord and Worcester.

This intelligence made General Gage realize that he had better begin acting, before the situation got completely out of hand. He had to begin asserting himself.

Salem, Massachusetts - February 26, 1775

Determined to forestall an appearance of submission to the activities of the patriots, General Gage opted to take a positive action. He sent troops, by ship, to Marblehead, where they disembarked and began an overland march to Salem. Their purpose was to seize the stores that the February 24 report indicated to be in Salem.

William Gavett, a Salem resident, provides a description of what transpired:

Colonel David Mason had received tidings of the approach of the British troops and ran into the North Church ... during service in the afternoon, and cried out, at the top of his voice, "The British reg'lars are coming after the guns and are now near Malloon's Mills." One David Boyce, a Quaker who lived near the church, was instantly out with his team to assist in carrying the guns out of the reach of the troops....

The northern leaf of the draw was hoisted when the troops approached the bridge, which prevented them from going any further. Their commander, Col. Leslie.... then remarked to Capt. Felt, or in his hearing, that he should be obliged to fire upon the people on the northern side of the bridge if they did not lower the leaf. Captain Felt told him if the troops did fire they would all be dead men, or words to that effect. It was understood afterwards that if the troops fired upon the people, Felt intended to grapple with Col. Leslie and jump into the river, for, he said, "I would willingly be drowned myself to be the death of one Englishman ...

The people soon began scuttling two gondolas which lay on the western side of the bridge, and the troops also got into them to prevent it. One Joseph Whicher, the foreman in Col. Sprague's distillery, was at work scuttling the colonel's

gondola, and the soldiers ordered him to desist, and threatened to stab him with their bayonets if he did not -- whereupon he opened his breast and dared them to strike. They pricked his breast so as to draw blood....

It was a very cold day, and the soldiers were without overcoats, and shivered excessively and shewed signs of being cold. Many of the inhabitants climbed upon the leaf of the draw and blackguarded the troops. Among them was a man who cried out as loud as possible, "Soldiers, red-jackets, lobster-coats, cowards, damnation to your government!"

...

Colonel Leslie ... said, "I will get over this bridge before I return to Boston, if I stay here till next autumn.... By God! I will not be defeated"; to which Captain Felt replied, "You must acknowledge you have already been baffled."

in the course of the debate between Colonel Leslie and the inhabitants, the colonel remarked that he was upon the King's Highway and would not be prevented passing over the bridge.

Old Mr. James Barr, an Englishman and a man of much nerve, then replied to him: "It is not the King's Highway; it is a road built by the owners of the lots on the other side, and no king, country or town has anything to do with it." ...

Then the colonel asked Captain Felt if he had any authority to order the leaf of the draw to be lowered, and Captain Felt replied there was no authority in the case, but there might be some influence. Colonel Leslie then promised, if they would allow him to pass over the bridge, he would march but fifty rods and return immediately, without troubling or disturbing anything. Captain Felt was at first unwilling to allow the troops to pass over on any terms, but at length consented, and requested to have the leaf lowered down. The troops then passed over and marched the distance agreed upon without violating their pledge, then wheeled and marched back again, and continued their march through North Street, in the direction of Marblehead.

A nurse named Sarah Tarrant, in one of the houses near the termination of their route, in Northfields, placed herself at the open window and called out to them: "Go home and tell your master he has sent you on a fool's errand and broken the peace of our Sabbath. What," said she, "do you think we were born in the woods, to be frightened by owls?" One of the soldiers pointed his musket at her, and she exclaimed, "Fire if you have the courage, but I doubt it.

Failing in their effort to seize the stores in Salem, the troops returned to Boston.

Boston, Massachusetts - April 12, 1775

General Gage had continued seeking intelligence on the activity of the patriots. John Howe, a 22-year-old spy, provides us:

On April 5, 1775, General Gage called on me to go as a spy to Worcester to examine the roads, bridges and fording places, and to see which was the best route to Worcester to take an army to destroy the military stores deposited there. Accordingly Col. Smith and myself dressed ourselves as countrymen with gray coats, leather breeches, and blue mixed stockings, with silk flagg handkerchiefs round our necks, with a small bundle tied up in a homespun checked handkerchief in one hand, and a walking stick in the other. Thus equipped we set out like countrymen to find work,

At one point, he noticed what he described as "the largest tree I ever saw. He asked a local what kind of tree it was. The response:

He said buttonwood, and further said that the people were going to cut it down to stop the regulars from crossing with their cannon. I asked him how they would know when the regulars were coming in time enough to cut the tree down. He said they had men all the time at Cambridge and Charlestown looking out. This tree would completely blockade the road should they do it.

He continues:

The general said, "John, we have examined your journal; you are well deserving the name of a good soldier and a lucky and expert spy. How large an army will it take to go to Worcester and destroy the stores and return safe?" By answering that question I must stand or fall, but I was determined to give my opinion in full, turn as it would. I said, if they should march 10,000 regulars and a train of artillery to Worcester, which is forty-eight miles from this place, the roads very crooked, stony and hilly, the inhabitants generally determined to be free or die, that not one of them

would get back alive... The general asked me what I thought of destroying the stores at Concord, only eighteen miles. I stated that I thought 500 mounted men might go to Concord in the night and destroy the stores and return safe; but to go with 1000 foot to destroy the stores the country would be alarmed; that the greater part of them would get killed or taken.

If Howe's recollection of his advice to General Gage is accurate, we probably have Gage to thank for not heeding it. Had he gone with the "500 mounted men", only God knows how history would have been recorded.

Boston, Massachusetts - April 14, 1775

General Gage received correspondence from Lord Dartmouth, which informed him that 700 marines, three infantry regiments, one regiment of light dragoons, and, financial support for the existing force in Boston, were on the way. He went on, "It is hoped... that this large Reinforcement to your Army will enable you to take a more active & determined part.... The King's Dignity, & the Honor and Safety of the Empire, require, that... Force should be repelled by Force."

This letter, in no uncertain terms, required that General Gage begin acting in an aggressive capacity to quash the growing movement. With the additional forces, he should be able to overcome the previous limitations -- for want of troops.

With this encouragement, and veiled threat, General Gage would have to act. He opted to send one thousand men, on foot, to destroy, or capture, the stores at Concord. Thus, the course of history was set.

Concord, Massachusetts - April 19, 1775

Just eight months after the farmers in Worcester began thwarting the imposition of the Massachusetts Government Act, events, that evolved far more from the activities of the countrymen, outside of Boston, than from the words of those within that besieged city, culminated in the end of the Revolution and the beginning of the War of Independence.

The End of the Revolution

When the infamous "Stamp Act" was imposed upon the colonists, in 1775, there began an era of oppression and retaliation. The oppression came in various forms, primarily, through Acts of the Parliament.

The retaliation came in a constantly escalating endeavor by the colonists to impede the effect of the Acts of Parliament.

Initially, the retaliation took the form of "non-consumption". Items that were taxed, to repay the debt incurred by the French-Indian War, were not purchased. Occasionally, more aggressive retaliation came in the form of tarring and feathering tax collectors. This activity did result in the death of an occasional tax collector, and, often tax collectors homes and offices would be torn down., though this 'violence' was nothing, compared to what was to come.

It wasn't until the Boston Tea Party that overt acts of violence, though the violence was strictly limited to only the tea and the chests that it was stored in, were committed.

Our textbook history pretty much limits explanations of overt acts to the Tea Party, until April 19, 1775.

As you have seen, however, that threats of violence, or even death, and frequent destruction of private property, was rampant, in those months leading up to the end of the Revolution.

History, after all, does have very much to teach us.

[Note: Much of the information in the foregoing article is contained in "The First American Revolution", by Ray Raphael (ISBN 1-56584-730-X). Documentation for quoted portions may be found in that book.]

APPENDIX

Massachusetts Government Act

[pertinent parts]

May 20, 1774

AN ACT for the better regulating the government of the province of the Massachusetts Bay, *in* New England.

WHEREAS the method of electing such counsellors or assistants, to be vested with the several powers, authorities, and privileges, therein mentioned, ... in which the appointment of the respective governors had been vested in the general courts or assemblies of the said colonies, hash, by repeated experience, been found to be extremely ill adapted to the plan of government established in the province of the Massachusetts Bay ... , *and hath ... for or some time past, been such as had the most manifest tendency to obstruct, and, in great measure, defeat, the execution of the laws; to weaken the attachment of his Majesty's well disposed subjects in the said province to his Majesty's government, and to encourage the ill disposed among them to proceed even to acts of direct resistance to, and defiance of, his Majesty's authority: And it hath accordingly happened, that an open resistance to the execution of the laws hath actually taken place in the town of Boston, and the neighbourhood thereof, within the said Province: And whereas it is, under these circumstances, become absolutely necessary, ... that the said method of annually electing the counsellors or assistants of the said Province should no longer be suffered to continue, but that the appointment of the said counsellors or assistants should henceforth be put upon the like footing as is established in such other of his Majesty's colonies or plantations in America, the governors whereof are appointed by his Majesty's commission, under the great seal of Great Britain: Be it therefore enacted ...*, that from and after August 1, 1774, so much of the charter ... [of 1691] ... which relates to the time and manner of electing the assistants or counsellors for the said province, be revoked, ... and that the offices of all counsellors and assistants, elected and appointed in pursuance thereof, shall from thenceforth cease and determine: And that, from and after the said August 1, 17 74, the council, or court of assistants of the said province for the time being, shall be composed of such of the inhabitants or proprietors of lands within the same as shall be thereunto nominated and appointed by his Majesty . . . , provided, that the number of the said assistants or counsellors shall not, at any one time, exceed thirty six, nor be less than twelve.

II

And it is hereby further enacted, That the said assistants or counsellors, so to be appointed as aforesaid, shall hold their offices respectively, for and during the pleasure of his Majesty....

III

And be it further enacted ..., That from and after July 1, 1774, it shall and may be lawful for his Majesty's governor for the time being of the said province, or, in his absence, for the lieutenant governor, to nominate and appoint, under the seal of the province, from time to time, and also to remove, without the consent of the council, all judges of the inferior courts of common pleas, commissioners of Oyer and Terminer, the attorney general, provosts, marshals, justices of the peace, and other officers to the council or courts of justice belong....

VI

And be it further enacted ..., That, upon every vacancy of the offices of chief justice and judges of the superior court of the said province, from and after July 1, 1774, the governor for the time being, or, in his absence, the

lieutenant governor, without the consent of the council, shall have full power and authority to nominate and appoint the persons to succeed to the said offices, who shall hold their commissions during the pleasure of his Majesty ...;

VII

And whereas, by several acts of the general court, ... the freeholders and inhabitants of the several townships, districts, and precincts, qualified, as is therein expressed, are authorized to assemble together, annually, or occasionally, upon notice given, in such manner as the said acts direct, for the choice of selectmen, constables, and other officers, and for or the making and agreeing upon such necessary rules, orders, and byelaws, for the directing, managing, and ordering, the prudential affairs of such townships, districts, and precincts, and for other purposes: and whereas a great abuse has been made of the power of calling such meetings, and the inhabitants have, contrary to the design of their institution, been misled to treat upon matters of the most general concern, and to pass many dangerous and unwarrantable resolves: for remedy whereof, be it enacted, that from and after August 1, 1774, no meeting shall be called by the select men, or at the request of any number of freeholders of any township, district, or precinct, without the leave of the governor, or, in his absence, of the lieutenant governor, in writing, expressing the special business of the said meeting, except the annual meeting in the months of March or May, for the choice of select men, constables, and other officers, or except for the choice of persons to fill up the offices aforesaid, on the death or removal of any of the persons first elected to such offices, and also, except any meeting for the election of a representative or representatives in the general court; and that no other matter shall be treated of at such meetings...