

The Boston Tea Party

By Edward M. Cair

Bro Edward Cair is a member of Southern California Research Lodge. He presents the story of "The Boston Tea Party" in an extremely readable format. It is also factual! So many stories about the "Tea Party" have been told that it is sometimes hard to separate fact from fiction. But in these pages the story is told as accurately as known facts will allow! – Editor

Amazingly, no one knew who dumped the tea!

Two thousand people stood on Griffin's Wharf and watched the Boston Tea Party. The crowd was silent as sixty men dumped 340 chests of tea into the salt water. Some of them put lampblack or paint on their faces. Some came wrapped in blankets. They called themselves "Mohawks". (Most of the participants actually were not disguised.)

The crews of the tea ships were ordered below. No resistance was made. Some of the crew even helped unload the tea.

The Governor's Cadet Corps were guarding the tea ships. They never lifted a musket and stood away from the crowd because these people had not forgotten the Boston Massacre.

It took three hours and all done in silence and order. No damage was done to the ships. The decks were swept clean. No "Mohawk" would keep any of the tea.

The three tea ships were in range of a 60-gun British warship. The entire Tea Party could have been blown out of the water. It would have meant firing on the crowd as well as the people in buildings near the wharf. No shot was fired.

The British Admiral watched from the upstairs window of a house nearby. When the "Mohawks" had completed their task they marched under his window. The Admiral opened the window and shouted, "Tomorrow you'll still have to pay the piper!"

No trial of the "Mohawks" was ever made in Boston. One man in the crowd said he would be a witness provided they would take him to London 3,000 miles away. He was never taken to London. Governor Hutchinson said that if he held a trial in Boston the members of the jury would turn out to be the "Mohawks" or their friends.

After the Tea Party, Governor Hutchinson himself was withdrawn to London "for consultation". He never returned. Instead the King and Ministry sent General Gage as a new military Governor and gave him full discretion to find evidence for a trial of those responsible for the Boston Tea Party. Parliament closed down the port of Boston, cut off the trade, and sent in 10,000 troops to occupy a town of 20,000 people. The new military Governor with his full discretion never found sufficient evidence in Boston and the Ministers to the King in London never pressed charges.

Benjamin Franklin, a Grand Master of Masons in Pennsylvania, was in London at the time. He called the Boston Tea Party "an act of violent injustice". A group of London merchants wanted to pay twice the value of the tea in order to keep trade open. Franklin offered to pay for the tea himself or raise the money in Boston.

"Though the mischief was the act of persons unknown, yet as probably they cannot be found, or brought to answer for it, there seems to be some reasonable claim on the society at large in which it happened."

Once Parliament closed down the port of Boston no one ever paid for the tea. Parliament took the tax off tea, but the East India Tea Company was never able to sell tea in America. The Tea Act that had given them a monopoly could not protect them.

Many years later, Sir Winston Churchill – Prime Minister, Historian and Freemason – commented on the Tea Act of Parliament that had given the East India Company a monopoly on tea. Brother Churchill called it "a fatal blunder".

The Tea Act put a small tax on the East India Tea. It was actually cheap tea that had been stored in warehouses in England. However, the East India Tea Company was bankrupt, so Parliament gave them a monopoly. Tea was to be sold by the Consignees (tea agents) of the one company. This gave the Consignees a tea monopoly in their area. Keeping the small tax on tea would just prove that Parliament still had the power to tax. But ... it didn't work!

In New York, Philadelphia and Charleston, the Consignees for the tea resigned their Commissions at the request of the Sons of Liberty. With no Consignees to pay the tax and sign for the tea, the East India Company tea ships had to turn around and sail back to England with their cheap tea.

But Boston was different! The Consignees would not resign. Two sons of the Governor and a son-in-law were Consignees. When the Governor's family is in the tea business the ships cannot leave the harbor.

The Tea Act stated that tea "remaining twenty days unloaded" was subject to seizure by the Customs House and sold for nonpayment of duties. Once the tea was in the Governor's hands, he could dispose of it secretly to local merchants. When Governor Hutchinson again refused to let the tea ships go on the night before December 17th, (the 16th was the end of the 20 day limit

for unloading), the "Mohawks" seated in the balcony at the Old South Meeting Hall took matters into their own hands.

There never would have been a Tea Party if the ships could have left before December 17th. Several of the Brothers of the St. Andrews Lodge did their part in trying to turn the tea ships around.

Brother William Molineux acted as spokesman for the Sons of Liberty. He and Brother Joseph Warren led a crowd of 300 from the Liberty Tree to the Customs House to confront the Consignees. Would these tea agents resign and send the tea ships back to England? The Governor's sons refused and moved to Fort William under military protection. Just three years before Brother Molineux and Brother James Otis (St. John's Lodge) had led a crowd of a thousand patriots to confront the Governor's sons who were importing tea and hiding it in a warehouse against the non-importation agreements. In that tea business, the Hutchinsons surrendered the tea and the money for the tea they had already sold. Brother James Otis was the Mason who gave us the saying "Taxation without representation is Tyranny!".

Brother John Hancock was the Colonel for the Governor's Cadet Corps who guarded the tea ships. The night before the Tea Party he was aboard the tea ships inspecting his troops. Both he and Brother Joseph Warren had served as Orators at the Commemoration of those who had died at the Boston Massacre.

Brother John Hancock was the richest merchant in New England. He served as Moderator for a mass Town Meeting of 5,000 who voted to turn the tea ships around. He was a member of the Committee of Selectmen, who were the leading tradesmen of Boston, who met with the Governor and the tea Consignees to try to convince them to let the ships go.

Brother John Rowe was the owner of one of the tea ships, the Eleanor. He was also a Selectman and promised to use his influence with the Governor to return the tea ships and the tea to England. Brother Rowe was the Grand Master of the St. John's Grand Lodge of Massachusetts (Moderns). In his diary he called the dumping of the tea "a disastrous affair".

On the day before the Tea Party, Brother Joseph Warren met with Brother John Rowe in a concern for his "ship and cargo". Brother Warren was the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge (Ancients) Brother Warren also went to the Customs House with the owner of the tea ship, Dartmouth. All exits to the harbor were blocked. By law the Customs Officials cannot release the ship unless the Consignees unloaded the tea and paid the tax. The next day the Customs Officials were to seize the tea according to law.

In the final appeal to the Governor by the Selectmen, Governor Hutchinson offered to give the tea ship Dartmouth military escort to Castle Island and Fort William where his sons, as Consignees, would unload the tea and pay the tax. The owner of the Dartmouth did not want to move his ship with the help of a 60-gun warship.

During the 19 days prior to the Tea Party, Brother Paul Revere served with the North End Caucus Guard, who prevented the Consignees from unloading the tea, wanting it instead returned to England. The Consignees blamed the guard for not unloading; the tea and the guard blamed the Consignees for not returning the tea to England.

After the Tea Party, Brother Paul Revere mounted his horse and carried the news to New York. When a tea ship arrived there, the Consignees resigned and the tea ship returned to England. The news was taken to Philadelphia and beyond. There were no more Consignees for the East India Tea Company

The English said that the Americans lost their taste for tea because they had a peculiar way of mixing it with salt water.

Order tea and you were a Tory. Order coffee and you were a Patriot!

America has been drinking coffee ever since.

STB - April 1991