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Real Stories

From My Time

# THE BOSTON TEA PARTY

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# What Was the Boston Tea Party?

December 16, 1773. As day broke in Boston, thick clouds covered the city. A bone-chilling rain kept many of its sixteen thousand residents huddled under wool blankets in their houses. One by one they rose, stoking the coals in their fireplaces to stir up a bit of heat. Soon they'd put the kettles on for cups of . . . something warm.

What they really wanted was a cup of tea. Throughout the thirteen **colonies**, or the

original thirteen states, the belly-warming brew was a favorite drink. And not just on cold winter mornings—on hot summer afternoons, too, and crisp fall evenings, and rainy spring days. Anytime was teatime for the colonists of the New World. In fact, they consumed up to one million pounds a year.

At least, they did until all the trouble started brewing. In those days, the American colonies belonged to Britain, so they had to live by King George III's rules, which wasn't so bad at first. But then Britain started running out of money, so King George decided to impose all sorts of **taxes** on the colonists. The money the tax agents collected would go to Britain.

But instead of giving in to King George's demands, many colonists decided to fight back. Still, other colonists remained loyal

British subjects. These people were called “friends of government.”

Many **Patriots**, who were people against British control of the colonies, lived in the city of Boston. Patriots there often led loud marches protesting King George’s taxes. One tax in particular made the Patriots really angry: the tea tax. This was an extra fee the colonists had to pay for all tea shipped in from England.

Many Patriots decided to **boycott** English tea, which means that they refused to buy it. Others made threats against the tax agents whose job it was to collect the tax added on to the cost of the tea.

But tea from England kept coming, including a huge shipment that crossed the Atlantic Ocean in the fall of 1773. Three ships, packed with crates of tea, sat off the docks in Boston Harbor. Because of the

fight over the tea tax, no one would unload the shipment.

All over the city, **handbills** were posted to trees and buildings that read, “Friends! Brethren! Countrymen! That worst of plagues, the detested TEA . . . is now arrived in this harbor.” For three weeks, Patriot leaders asked the ships’ captains to turn around and sail back to Britain. But the British captains wouldn’t budge.

December 16, 1773, was the deadline. If the ships remained in the harbor, the colonists would have no choice but to pay the tea taxes—or be **fin**ed or thrown in jail. Yet the Patriots refused to back down. They believed the freedom of the colonies was at stake.

“If we give in to this unfair tax from King George, more injustices will surely follow,” angry Patriots warned.

As the people of Boston emerged from

their houses that frigid December morning, and looked at the tea-laden ships looming in the harbor, little did they know that the events of the day, which would come to be known as the Boston Tea Party, would lead to the birth of the United States of America.