



#1 1995

The Sons Of Liberty & Committees Of Correspondence

The year was 1765. Parliament was debating whether to pass what would prove to be the first direct tax upon American goods ~ the Stamp Act. The Stamp Act was designed to raise at least £60,000 of the £350,000 required annually to maintain the standing army in America by placing a tax upon any and all types of printed materials. The Act specified that stamped paper would have to be used for the printing of broadsides, newspapers, almanacs, legal papers of all sorts, liquor licenses, ships' clearance documents and even playing cards and dice.

The American colonists protested against the passage of the Act. It would appear that the crux of the dispute the American colonists had with the Stamp Act was their disagreement that Parliament should have the *right* to impose any tax upon them without their consent. Isaac Barré, a Member of Parliament in 1765, did not necessarily oppose the Parliament's *right* to impose such a tax. He, like a number of other Members, opposed the manner in which the tax should be imposed upon the colonists. In his statements to the assembly, Barré referred to the Americans as *Sons Of Liberty*, whose ancestors had fled from tyranny in the British Isles, and who might not accept the Act willingly. The name stuck.

It is human nature, especially the nature of those who are striving against some threat, real or imagined, to rally around some banner, some emblem, some symbol of unity. Remove the symbols and banners of unity between fledgling revolutionaries and their life force will be somewhat depleted because their credibility will somehow be damaged. Two synonyms for the word *identity* are the words *oneness* and *sameness*. A large portion of the identity of any group (social, political, etc) is the recognition of the oneness or sameness of its members. The name that a group accepts for itself is often one which affirms that group's beliefs and objectives. The name of a group, especially of a revolutionary one, may often do more than simply give it a title, it may serve to define the aims and intentions of the group. A name, used as a banner, may very well empower the group with authorities and prerogatives it might not have known previously existed. It, like the warming sensation of liquor, might imbue the members of the group with a drunken sense of power. Throughout the American colonies in the 1760s groups of men may have felt that sense of power at the thought of being a son of liberty.

It would be a false assumption to presume that the American colonists, as a whole, were spoiling for a fight~to~the~death with the mother country at the very beginning. Despite the various Acts the Parliament passed which affected the American Colonies, many, perhaps a majority, of the colonists were not in favor of causing an overt rift between themselves and Britain. Each Act tended to affect only a certain segment of the population in the North American colonies. It must be remembered that each colony or province was fiercely loyal only to itself. In 1765, and even up to the point when the first shots rang out at Lexington, most of the colonies were concerned only with their own welfare. They were not considering the effect that problems in their neighboring sister colonies might have upon them. There were some regional loyalties: the colonies to the north of New York (*i.e. New England*) tended to consider themselves akin; New York, Pennsylvania,

Delaware, New Jersey and Maryland (*i.e. the Middle Colonies*) were united by the bonds of commerce; and the colonies south of Maryland (*i.e. the Southern Colonies*) tended to view ties to each other because of their shared concept of agriculture. There was therefore not all that much concern in a southern colony such as Georgia, if Massachusetts would be compelled to pay a tariff on fishing rights because Georgia's ability to continue her own way of life was not directly threatened.

Not long after Colonel Barré uttered the name, the title of *Sons Of Liberty* became vested on an actual group of individuals. The passage of the Stamp Act by Parliament caused a great amount of agitation among the colonists. The Act would directly affect the well-being and livelihoods of merchants, printers, lawyers, shipowners, tavern keepers and land speculators among others. In the taverns and public meeting houses of towns throughout the colonies groups of concerned citizens began to meet to decide on how they would respond to the new Act. As newspapers published advertisements by those groups requesting others citizens to support non-compliance with the Act, the name *Sons Of Liberty* was sometimes used, and more and more individuals saw the banner they were looking for. In some cases the groups, in the name of the Sons Of Liberty, called for the peaceful resignation of stamp agents from their posts. Some others, such as the group which confronted Andrew Oliver in Boston, threatened the stamp agent with harm if he did not resign his post. The leaders of the group which identified themselves as Sons Of Liberty in Boston took credit for their actions under the name of *The Loyal Nine*. The Loyal Nine arranged for a day of public demonstration against the Stamp Act on 14 August, 1765. They organized a mock stamp office under effigies of Andrew Oliver and the Devil, which were hung from "Liberty Trees". The crowd that gathered were led to a brick building that Mr. Oliver was in the process of constructing and leveled it. They then marched on Mr. Oliver's house and caused minor damage to it. The house and library of Thomas Hutchinson, Comptroller of the Currency in Boston, were looted and ransacked by the Sons Of Liberty twelve days later. The scenes of mob violence were repeated in other cities throughout the colonies. The curious thing about the Sons Of Liberty phenomenon is that when the Stamp Act was finally repealed on 18 March, 1766, the movement virtually dissipated into nothing. The members of the groups, though, tended to reappear in later incarnations of radical activist groups.

It might seem curious to us living at this time, that such *revolutionary* groups would just disappear after the Stamp Act was repealed. The thing that must be recalled is that the Stamp Act affected the lives of people throughout the different colonies. When the threat to their personal livelihoods was removed, the people resumed their regional prejudices. It was not until certain individuals published essays and treatises in the attempt to alert the various colonies of the dangers of their apparent isolationist positions that passions were aroused toward the need of a *national* unity to confront the actions of the British Parliament. John Dickinson published his *Letters From A Farmer in Pennsylvania To The Inhabitants Of The British Colonies* in 1767 in which he questioned (and by extension, urged the other "Inhabitants Of The British Colonies" to question) the right of Parliament to tax the colonies to raise revenue.

The Tea Act of 1773 was the means Parliament devised to save the East India Company (and the nation) from bankruptcy. Despite the fact that the price of the tea was lowered, an importation tax would be charged in the colonies, and the East India Company would have the right to choose which merchants it sold the tea directly to. The Boston Tea Party resulted and the Parliament passed of the Coercive Acts in an attempt to punish the people of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The nature of the Coercive Acts was unprecedented. Through them, the British government attempted to gain a stronger control on the provincial governments ~ control which had been lost by ineffective royal governors over the years. It wasn't too difficult for the colonists to see what Parliament was trying to do, and they did not like the thought of Parliament revoking their charters and restructuring their governments. They began to realize that they had to put aside their regional disagreements and work together.

An interesting phenomenon was occurring in the colonies during the early 1770s. In some colonies the royal governors so much as dissolved the legislatures in order to dissuade them from discussing the affairs taking place in the other colonies. If the legislative bodies could not meet, they would not be able to contemplate the actions of their sister colonies, and they would not be able to take legal action themselves. The members of the provincial legislative bodies, in some of the colonies, ignored the governors' attempts to gag them; they congregated in impromptu meetings and continued to conduct their business. In such an *extra-legal* state of affairs, the members no doubt felt a greater ease of conducting their business the way they wished to, rather than the way they believed the royal governor would wish them to. Although records do not indicate it, the members of the

county courts probably followed the example being set by the members of the provincial assemblies and held informal discussions at the local inn, where their opinions could flow freely, rather than at the court house, where their thoughts might be censured.

It is interesting to contemplate on the manner that the legislative assemblies, sworn to uphold the dictates of the King, changed and, seemingly overnight, forswore those prior allegiances. One must know something about the nature of British politics which, of course, were likewise American politics at the time. The legislative bodies were called into existence by the King and dissolved by the King. During the hiatus between Parliaments, the Members of Parliament went back to their farms and estates. Legal proceedings were suspended until the next Parliament was called. When the royal governors dissolved or suspended the provincial assemblies, the belief would have been that the members of the legislative body, whether it be the House of Burgesses in Virginia or the Provincial Assembly of Pennsylvania, would simply go back to their homes and wait for the next official directive to be received from the King.

The Americans chose to deviate from the status quo of Eighteenth Century political custom. Men like Thomas Paine were publishing essays that declared that each man was entitled to his own beliefs. Paine's *Common Sense*, *Rights Of Man*, and *Age Of Reason* were not necessarily the thoughts of one man. Paine was simply one of those individuals who comes along every so often who is capable of elucidating the ideas and sentiments that many others around him are feeling.

Samuel Adams, in September of 1771, proposed that a network of corresponding societies be established. In response to his suggestion, the Boston Committee of Correspondence was created. The committee was created during a "town meeting" and drew its authority from the fact that, traditionally, any type of committee could be created that a majority of the town's residents saw fit to create. The members of the committee, chosen by the populace, included many members of the General Assembly. With the formation of Committees of Correspondence in at least fifty-eight other towns in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, a network was created. Issues brought up and discussed at various of the town meetings would be drafted in the form of letters by the local Committee, and would then be sent to the Boston Committee to be published in the newspapers and to be printed up as broadsides and pamphlets. In March, 1773 the Virginia House of Burgesses sent out a request for all the other colonies to follow Massachusetts Bay's example ~ which they did. The sons of liberty now had a forum through which to express and share their ideas.

It must be noted that the single most significant event which instigated all the activity was the passage of the Coercive Acts by Parliament. Not all of the various colonial and provincial assemblies were inclined to rush headlong into a trade boycott against Great Britain ~ which is something the merchants of Boston requested in letters to the merchants of the other major port cities. But the assemblies of practically all of the colonies were of the opinion that a meeting to discuss the state of affairs should be held. The congress was intended to achieve three objectives. The delegates planned to 1.) compose a statement of the rights the colonists felt they were entitled to, 2.) identify the Acts of Parliament which had violated those rights, and 3.) propose actions which would result in the repeal of the Acts. During the spring and summer of 1774 every colony except Georgia had elected delegates to attend a *grand congress* (i.e. conference) to be held at Philadelphia. The delegates met in Philadelphia during September of 1774.

Although the objectives of the First Continental Congress were not fully met, one of the things that came out of the discussions was a plan known as the *Continental Association*. The Association called upon all the colonies to participate in a trade boycott ~ to endorse non-importation of British goods and to not export any American manufactures to any British port. The Association also suggested that all town and county judiciaries throughout all of the colonies establish Committee of Inspection and Observation. These Committees would be charged with enforcing the trade boycott. The Committees of Inspection would, in effect, function as a *quasi*-governmental system to take the place of the judiciaries which had been suspended. By April, 1775 Committees were active in all of the colonies, albeit to varying extents. The New York delegates to the First Continental Congress refused to endorse the Association and so on the local level in that province there was not much endorsement. The other colonies and provinces were more supportive of the Association than New York, and Pennsylvania was included among them.

Between the 12th of July, 1774 and the 16th of May, 1775 various counties throughout the Province of Pennsylvania set up Committees. A Committee of Observation was set up in the county of Berks on 05 December, 1774. A Committee of Observation was established in the county of Chester on 20 December, 1774. Cumberland County formed a Committee of Observation on 12 July, 1774. A Committee of Observation was established in Northampton County on 21 December, 1774. Washington County's Committee of Observation was set up on 16 May, 1775. Westmoreland

County's Committee of Inspection resolved to support the Association on 16 May, 1775. A Committee of Observation was chosen in York County at a general meeting of the inhabitants on 16 December, 1774.

Our own Bedford County established a Committee of Observation on 09 May, 1775. Although it was not the first county in the Province of Pennsylvania to declare its support of the Association by establishing a Committee of Inspection and Observation, it certainly was not the last one to do so. There were five members chosen to be part of that Committee: Samuel Davidson, David Espy, George Funk, Thomas Smith and George Woods. Those five men were not necessarily the only ones residing in Bedford County who supported the Association. Over the next few years, many men would make their way to the Bedford County Court House to sign Oaths of Allegiance and join the militia. They were all *Sons Of Liberty*.

★ ★ ★ *Washington's Birthday Dinner ~ 1995* ★ ★ ★

The observance of George Washington's birthday will be hosted this year by the Colonel John Proctor Chapter of the DAR. The date has been set for February 11, 1995. The dinner will be held at the Altoona Ramada Inn.

The menu for this event has not been determined at this time. A price for the event, therefore, cannot be given here. Any SAR compatriots who are interested in attending the dinner, and desire more information may contact Margaret Horner at 2907 Ivyside Drive, Altoona, PA 16601 (telephone: 944-6036). Anyone interested in attending the dinner are requested to contact Mrs. Horner before February 4, 1995 to let her know how many will be in your party.

1995 Meeting Schedule ~ Blair County Chapter

The first quarterly meeting of the Blair County Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution will be held at the Waffle King at Altoona on January 21, 1995.

The following is a listing of meeting dates for this year:

January 21	1 st Quarterly Meeting	12:00 noon	Waffle King Restaurant
February 11	George Washington's Birthday	12:00 noon	Altoona Ramada (DAR)
April 15	2 nd Quarterly Meeting	12:00 noon	(location to be announced)
July 8	3 rd Quarterly Meeting	12:00 noon	(location to be announced)
September 16	Constitution Day Dinner	12:00 noon	(location to be announced)
October 28	4 th Quarterly Meeting	12:00 noon	(location to be announced)
December 9	Annual Meeting	12:00 noon	(location to be announced)

DUES NOTICE

The 1995 Membership Dues are due to be submitted to the PASSAR by January 31, 1995. The majority of the compatriot members of the Blair County Chapter have already submitted their annual dues. As the chapter treasurer, I wish to thank each and every one who has paid their dues. But I also want to encourage the six members who have not yet submitted their dues to please do so soon. It would be very nice if the Blair County Chapter could claim 100% compliance with the submission of dues prior to the deadline this year.