

The Boston Tea Party 250th Anniversary – 1773-2023 - Paul Jehle

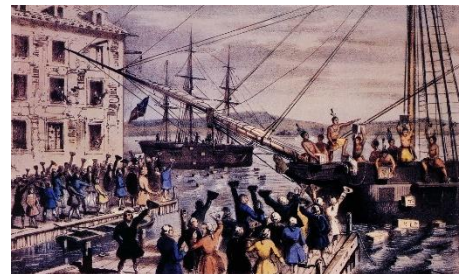


The events of December 16, 1773, called the Boston Tea Party, was the result of colonists implementing the ideas of liberty they had embraced. When the *Dartmouth*, an East India ship carrying 342 chests of tea, arrived in Boston on November 28, the Selectmen of Boston voted unanimously not to land it. Why?

In the eyes of Boston, the “Tea Party” was a lawful boycott of an unjust tax. Resistance was thus the price of freedom. The civil leaders agreed, but the consignees, responsible for levying the internal tax, disagreed. In Philadelphia and Charleston, the consignees resigned. Philadelphia had written, “*All we fear is that you will shrink at Boston. May God give you virtue enough to save the liberties of your country.*”

After Parliament repealed the taxes on paper, painter’s colors and glass, they left a small tax on tea (30 cents a year), to “*try the principle in America.*” The British believed that Boston’s love of tea would overshadow their loyalty to their written charter that only their local assembly could tax them. Though there was no written appeal process against an unjust tax, there was an established precedent which they followed meticulously.

First, they kept the tea in port for 20 days to give the owner of the ship a chance to leave. Second, they protected the owner and his property (no one could take any tea). Third, they conducted a popular demonstration against the tax. Finally, since the tea was liable for seizure after 20 days and the British promised to land it at the point of a bayonet, their only lawful recourse was to destroy it completely.



John Scollay, one of the selectmen from Boston, wrote that, “*We do console ourselves that we have acted constitutionally.*” This was not a riot. Everyone heard the chests of tea breaking. No one was injured and the owner of the *Beaver* was protected. Anyone found with tea was fully prosecuted. Benjamin Franklin had offered to pay for the tea, but not the tax. He wrote; “*They (the British) have no idea that any people can act from any other principle but that of interest; and they believe that three pence on a pound of tea, of which one does not perhaps drink ten pounds in a year, is sufficient to overcome all the patriotism of an American.*” Commitment to principle and standing for the written law was the price of freedom.