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The Influence of the Stamp Act on the Revolutionary Movement

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THE INFLUENCE OF THE STAMP ACT

ON THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

BY

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Introduction

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the English colonies founded homes in the New World. The colonists brought with them a part of their cultural heritage, political ideals and traditions. The adage "Once an Englishman always an Englishman" was very much of a reality to the early settler.

With this particular thought they adjusted themselves as best they could to their new environment. The task was arduous. At this period of colonizing the colonists had no time for political speculation or for any type of novel political ideals or political institutions.

By the eighteenth century the plight of the colonist had eased a little. His early life had been one of struggle for existence and now it is fast becoming one of stability. The artisan and the professional men began to specialize each in his own calling and thus the problem of regulating the affairs of the American communities became more difficult.

The successful and fortunate termination of the war with France in 1763 raised the British Empire to a distinguished plane of national glory. Unbounded prospects of navigation, commerce and wealth presented themselves to the British
and the American people. Had Great Britain been favored with some genius capable of discerning her complicated problems and of adopting a benevolent plan of administration consistent with the ideals and rights of the colonies, it is not easy to ascertain to what point of greatness and splendor the British empire might have risen.

As one generation followed another the children of the pioneers had come to view their government as agencies, which were created for service, not by the wish of the king but by the desire of the colonists. Royal instructions that proved unworkable were likely to be disregarded or modified to fit the needs of the colonists. Under pressure from local conditions the old ideas regarding political institutions were passing away and a definite attitude regarding Parliamentary acts was taking root in the minds of the colonists. As time went on there grew deep and very sincere loyalties to the colonial system and these loyalties were ready to resist encroachments from beyond the sea. However, the reader must remember there was a big difference between the desire of independence of the crown and independence of certain points of general regulation. John Adams notes this in one of his letters when he writes:

There existed a great ambiguity in the expression that there existed in the colonies a desire of independence. It is true there always existed in the colonies a desire of independence of Parliament, in the acts of internal taxation and internal policy ... but there never existed a desire of independence of the crown .... 1

1. J. Colburn, American Independence, D. Clapp & Sons, Boston, 1876, 43
It is a noted fact that the desire of independence of the crown grew in many of the colonies and it is the purpose of this paper to present for the consideration of the reader the influence of the Stamp Act in bringing out more noticeably the desire for complete independence.

There is no question that the leaders of the people who professed to be bitterly opposed to the Stamp Act were in reality opposed to all types of supervision employed by the British government. Charles Lincoln says, "It is beginning to be recognized, even by those who have not specialized in colonial history, that taxation without representation was not the cause of the American Revolution. It was only an effective cry by which the hostile forces of Great Britain might be united." Moses Tyler remarks:

It is not logical for students to refer to the passage of the Stamp Act as the initial event in a famous series of events which became long and tragic. It would be difficult to account for the seeming suddenness with which the American people sprang up from an assumed previous condition of profound colonial content into one of universal alarm and anger, as well as clearly defined and highly matured Constitutional opposition.

At times it will be difficult to separate the opposition to the Stamp Act from opposition in general. The Stamp Act admittedly brought about a closer unity. The Act was ex-

tremely valuable to the propagandists of the Revolutionary period. Lincoln says: "The conflict over the Stamp Act was of international importance, because it showed the substantial unity of Americans regarding their relations to British Parliament."4

The material presented in this paper will be taken as much as possible from primary sources. This will be difficult at times, however, because many of the early records of the American Revolution have been mislaid or destroyed. John Adams says: "The papers of Sam Adams fell into the hands of a Mr. Avery but cannot say where they are now."5 John Adams further states that a Mr. Austin undertook to write the life of Sam Adams but "... found that the papers had been so garbled that the truth could not be discovered ...."6 Adams again states: "It is not without reason that I wrote to Mr. Niles of Baltimore, that the true history of the revolution is lost forever."7 John Adams' statements regarding the lost historical material of the Revolutionary period is perhaps a trifle strong for he himself; an actor in the drama of the Revolutionary period was a graphic writer and we have in his large correspondence and other papers pictures of the revolution and the stirring time before it which have a vividness and a

4. Lincoln, 134
5. John Adams, James Otis, Samuel Adams and John Hancock, Movers of the Revolution, (Old South Leaflets) Boston, 1817, 15
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 16
value historically speaking which cannot be surpassed by any similar writings relating to the period.

Leadership is an essential element in promoting any type of revolution. Many times people agree with each other in their miseries but it becomes a question of profound thought when the term, revolution, is used. The required leadership did arise, however, and in Chapter One we will view the movement into prominent places of these leaders as a result of the Stamp Act. We shall also note that some came into public service as an indirect result of the Stamp Act. The formation of the necessary societies and committees will be discussed in Chapter Two. The press and the Stamp Act will be treated in Chapter Three.
CHAPTER ONE

Rise of Early Radical Leaders

During a century and a half from their first migration the early colonists were left more or less to tax themselves. Any exception to this rule is too small to be worthy of our notice. Great Britain did regulate and restrain the trade of the colonies. She named ports and nations to which the rapidly growing colonies might send their merchandise and with whom they were to trade. She obliged them to carry to England all of the raw material which might be used to her advantage. She also prohibited the manufacturing of any article which the colonies would find themselves to be in need. This was enforced in order that her own manufacturing mills and extensive commerce might not be injured. She forbade their procuring of any manufactured products from any part of the globe or even to attempt to purchase articles or produce from any countries that were unfriendly to her.

Notwithstanding the numerous oppressions which the early colonists had experienced under the British government, "they were generally disposed to submit to them."1 Beard says,

1. J. Morse, Annals of the American Revolution, D. Cooke, & Sons, Hartford, Conn., 1824, 40
"It was generally acknowledged that the parent of the colonies had power to exercise a dominion over the whole empire."\(^2\)

The Revolution began when the history of the colonies began. It was not, as some have tried to believe, an event that chanced to happen when it did, one that might have been avoided. It was not a semi-accidental breach, a mere family quarrel, which a small increase of good will on both sides might have permanently settled. The American Revolution was the culminating point of a long and slow evolution. For generations, certain forces had been working under certain conditions toward an end which could not have been fundamentally different from the one we know. It is folly to regard the cause of the Revolution as the fault of one or two misguided statesmen. The Stamp Act was most influential from the propagandist viewpoint regardless of the fact that mention was not made of it in most of the thirteen assemblies. Taxation brought about a great deal of resistance on the part of the colonies and fostered the basis upon which radical colonists became leaders of the people.

It was at this point that James Otis, a radical leader, came to the attention of the public in general. It is the intention of the writer to stress the influence of the Stamp

Act in creating radical leaders; but in order that the reader will have a clear-cut picture of the condition of the colonial mind just prior to the passage of the Stamp Act it will be necessary that the work of James Otis be reviewed at this time.

The Writs of Assistance were passed in 1761, just four years previous to the enactment of the Stamp Act. In an effort to enforce the Trade Acts the customs officials found themselves helpless in the face of universal sympathy with the smugglers. Juries refused to convict on the plainest evidence and the British government resorted to Admiralty courts where the trials of the smugglers were held without juries. However, it was very difficult to arrest the offenders for in most cases they were hidden by neighbors and friends. Even those who knew the location of the smugglers did not dare betray this knowledge to competent authority for fear of their own lives. To overcome this difficulty, Writs of Assistance were issued giving the officers holding them authority to board ships lying in the harbor or to enter warehouses and cellars and search garrets for dutiable goods. This search might take place any time in the day or night. Concerning the Writs of Assistance John Adams says:

... nothing more was ever said in court concerning Writs of Assistance; but it was generally reported and understood that the court clandestinely granted them, and the custom officers had them in their pockets, though I never knew of one instant where they dared produce them.3

3. John Adams, 5
The father of James Otis was a staunch supporter of the royal crown and governor. His support was singular as the leading reactionary of Massachusetts Bay. It would indeed prove strange that the son of such a man would become the first real radical to foster any type of resistance, complete or partial, against the royal crown. History states that it was because Otis saw the great political "plum" on which his father set his heart snatched from his hands by Thomas Hutchinson that he (Otis) took to politics so avidly. The office referred to above was an appointment to the Supreme Judicial Court. The enemies of Otis, in order to undermine his great popularity with the colonists declared him to be a patriot only because Hutchinson was appointed Chief Justice. Otis stoutly denied this, saying: "Because a son felt the ungrateful treatment of a father, real or imaginary, ought it to be presumed that every part of his conduct flows from foul sources of envy or disappointed ambition?"  

Otis stepped forth as a champion of the liberties of the people in spite of the planned attacks against his character. It was James Otis, who as the Tories said, "... first broke down the barriers of the government to let the Hydra of vicious rebellion in by attacking the Writs of Assistance."  

Otis set himself up in Boston as a politician declaring many

5. J. C. Miller, Sam Adams, Pioneer Propagandist, Little Brown and Company, Boston, 1936, 32
radical things and among them "... to set the province in a flame."6 He proclaimed himself, "Chief director, counsellor at the bar, Haranger and assembly orator of the popular or smugglers party in the colony."7

In the beginning of his political career, James Otis was very popular. He made such violent attacks on Hutchinson that: "He convinced the people of Boston that he was the proper one to represent them."8 In May Otis was elected to the house of representatives by an almost unanimous vote. In speaking of this particular election of Otis, John Adams says:

You have no idea of the consternation among the government people. Chief Justice Ruggles, at dinner at Chandlers on that day, said that out of this election will rise a faction that will shake the province to its foundation. That election has shaken two continents and will shake all four.9

During the next decade Otis proved that his loyal devotion to his conception of natural rights and real principles was actuated by higher motives than a grudge against an enemy, Hutchinson, for stealing a political job. Again John Adams says of Otis:

For ten years Mr. Otis at the head of his country's cause, conducted the town of Boston,... with a prudence and fortitude, at every sacrifice of personal interest and amid unceasing persecution....10

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6. Ibid., 32
8. Mandit, 66
10. John Adams, 5
It would seem as the life of Otis unfolds that he had the interest of the colonies at heart.

Mr. Otis had been the composer of most of the messages, resolves and other acts of the House of Representatives for three or four years past. He always admitted the Parliament of Great Britain to be the supreme legislature of the whole empire, and every act made to respect all parts of the empire to be equally obligatory upon every part, whether represented or not.

Otis did not seem to always take the side of the radicals for Miller states that when the Virginia Resolves were announced, "Otis was at first shocked at the radicalism of the Virginia Resolves and then pronounced them treason." Otis, according to Miller, had the spirit to follow the dictates of his conscience but he was very easily influenced by excellent speakers and patriot demonstrations for shortly after making the above statement concerning the Virginia Resolves he joined Sam Adams in praise of Virginia's stand against British tyranny and "Lamented that Massachusetts's protest had been written in milk and water."

Otis also produced a remarkable burst of patriotism in clubs and secret societies which were prevalent in Boston at that time. The Merchants' Club gave him valuable assistance in opposing the Writs of Assistance. John Adams says of his ora-

12. Miller, 56
13. Ibid.
... everyone appeared to go away as I did, ready to take up arms against the Writs of Assistance. Then and there was the first scene of the first act of opposition to the arbitrary claims of Great Britain." Adams again remarks that:

But Otis was a flame of fire with a promptitude of classical allusions, a depth of research, a rapid summary of historical events and dates, a profusion of legal authorities, a prophetic glance of his eye into futurity, and a torrent of impetuous eloquence, he hurried away everything before him. American independence was then and there born.  

From the above statements it would appear that the Stamp Act was far from being the spark that caused the first desire of independence of regulation of the colonists. It can be noted that the spirit of independence was not born out of the idea of no taxation without representation.

Although Otis became a leader in Boston, it cannot be said that it was a result of the Stamp Act. At the time of the Stamp Act he had already played his part in the Revolutionary movement and was on the road to general decline.

No student of the American Revolution can have failed to notice how, from beginning to end, its several stages unfolded themselves and succeeded one another with something of a logical sequence ... and in this drama, James Otis was a very great actor. His mighty part, however, was played and completed in earlier acts. At the

14. John Adams, 4
15. Ibid.
outset, no one is so prominent and predominant. He even speaks the prologue. It is he who rushes up on the front of the stage in the first scene, in the second, in the third... his flashing eyes, his passionate words, his gestures of anger or of supplication, his imperious personality, seeming to direct the course of events, and to mark him a hero of the whole plot... James Otis had no real part in the Revolutionary after 1769.16

His enemies sneered at him and proclaimed him insane and from some of his emotional outbursts it can safely be assumed that there was a certain amount of truth in the statement that he was not stable. Even his friends were forced to admit that, "He was disconcertingly eccentric."17 He changed his attitude so often in regard to court decisions and political leaders that people in general lost confidence in his ability to lead them. He was not consistently a radical leader. He was radical only when a measure passed did not meet with his approval. He did much to further the desire of the colonists for independence of regulation. At the time of the Stamp Act itself other leaders had outstripped Otis in influence. The only direct influence Otis had in regard to the question of the Stamp Act was his introduction to the public of Samuel Adams. Adams was the right hand man of Otis during his difficulties with the officials over the Writs of Assistance. Adams proved to be the "Chief newspaper agitator in keeping the flame lighted up by the Writs of Assistance burning bright in the colonies."18

16. Tyler, 31
17. Miller, 96
18. Ibid. 35
As a propagandist Samuel Adams had no equal. It is a difficult task working under the most perfect conditions to incite any nation or group of people, other than savages, to a state of revolution. Adams possessed indefatigable zeal when there was a question of creating resentment against England. In order to appreciate fully the work of Adams and his part in the Revolutionary movement it will be necessary to give a short sketch of his life and to see how his failures in early endeavors were quietly but very surely leading to a life in politics.

He attended Harvard and received his Bachelor's degree in 1740. Harlow notes that according to W. V. Wells, the great-grandson of Adams, "He was fifth in his class of twenty-two students when a student's position was determined by the social standing of his parents." Harlow also notes that it was at this period that, "He became familiar with the works of John Locke." As a young student he gave evidence of great ability for leadership in political discussions. His writings, ideas, and speeches were satiated with the doctrines of Locke. Miller says, "He read deeply of Locke, Harrington and Rufenford." Upon receiving his Master's degree he undertook as his project a debate taking the affirmative of the question

20. Ibid.
21. Miller, 16
"Whether it be law to resist the Supreme Magistrate if the commonwealth cannot otherwise be preserved." 22

Upon the completion of his studies at Harvard it became necessary for Adams to seek a profession. Davidson says of Adams:

He read theology and abandoned the ministry, he read law and abandoned the bar, he entered business and lost a thousand pounds. Having tried his ability at three professions and having been a success at none he turned his attention to the only profession for which he had any real talent, politics. 23

Miller says, "... the Whig party in the colonies was so well provided with lawyers during the American Revolution that Adams's lack of legal training was not missed: he was indeed far more valuable to the Whigs as a popularizer of political ideals." 24 John Adams sums up the value of Samuel Adams by saying:

Adams, I believe, has the most thorough understanding of liberty and her resources in the temper and character of the people; though not in law and constitution: as well as the most habitual, radical love of it. 25

George Grenville, author of the Stamp Act, helped Adams to discover himself. Harlow seems to feel that Samuel Adams was not a leader of radicals until the passage of the Stamp Act for he says: "The Stamp Act... was destined to in-

22. Ibid.
23. P. Davidson, Propaganda and the American Revolution 1763--1783, University Press, North Carolina, 1941, 3
24. Miller, 17
25. Writings of John Adams, II, 163
introduce Adams to Massachusetts, to make this hitherto unknown politician a conspicuous leader of radical forces.\(^26\) Great Britain with its plan for an enforced colonial policy, gave to Adams the political opportunity he had been waiting for. He rode into power on the wave of this political and economic unrest. The crown was endeavoring to make the colonial control more effective and at the same time they desired to raise a revenue. During the first half of the eighteenth century the development of the colonies economically and politically had grown steadily almost unhindered by Great Britain. As a result the Continental provinces were so very independent that they could claim right of almost complete self government.

As the designs of the British crown to tax and enforce gradually unfolded, a noticeable change occurred in the American mind. There is no doubt that the British policy aroused bitter opposition but the two factors in question, tax and enforcement, were not alone sufficient to account for the revolution. The factor in bridging the gap between tax or enforcement was a person or group of persons. It would be difficult for any one to assert that the Revolutionary movement was a direct result of the Stamp Act for as Harlow says: "The Revolution was not a spontaneous movement, the result of a genuine popular uprising, but rather the product of something not so very different from agitation and propaganda."\(^27\)

\(^{26}\) Harlow, 42  
\(^{27}\) Ibid. 25
As was mentioned above, leaders were needed to incite the people against enforcement, and leaders were born into being in 1765 when the Stamp Act was passed. The Stamp Act received the royal assent on March 22, 1765 and it was to come into operation on November 1. The delay between March and November had been granted by the crown in hopes that the colonies might designate a substitute as valuable, but Lecky says: "This long delay which had been granted in the hope that it might lead to some proposal of compromise from America had been sedulously employed by skillful agitators in stimulating excitement."28

Adams discovered he had the knack of: "... dressing up popular theories in very fine style and he soon learned if he did not know it already how easy it is to manufacture public opinion with a pen."29

Hutchinson mentions that:

Mr. Adams had for several years been an active man in the town of Boston, always on the side of liberty, and was the reputed author of many of the publications in favor of it. These resolves and the answer to the governor's speech carry the marks of his composition. They are agreeable to his professed principles, which he owned, without reserve, in private discourse, to be independency: and from time to time he made advances toward it in public as far as would serve the great purpose of attaining to it. To his influence may be attributed the great advance made in this session.30

He was a genius with his pen and far into the night his candle burned, as he condemned his enemies and the enemies of his

29. Harlow, 37
30. Hutchinson, 133--134
country in essay and pamphlet. Adams led the fight against the crown with a few helpers whom we shall cover later on in the chapter. Concerning Adams and his activities, Andrews is of the opinion that:

Thousands of the colonists never passed beyond the point of objecting to these acts because they seemed contrary to the fundamental laws of reason and justice but agitators and propagandists, such as Samuel Adams, Christopher Godsden and others, who were searching for reason wherewith to justify resistance, pushed the argument to its logical conclusion and often were able to use the results of their reasoning with telling effects upon a people already aggrieved and fearful of worse things to come.31 He fanned the entire New England section into a flame.

The Stamp Act was heavy upon the men who published pamphlets and papers. Lawyers were also affected. John Adams remarks that he had not drawn a writ since the first of November, "Debtors grow insolent; creditors grow angry ... this long interval of indolence and idleness will make a large chasm in my affairs, if not reduce me to distress."32

In Boston there was a feeling that there was a great need for a man of Adams' temperament. He was outstanding in the eyes of the people for his great zeal for liberty. Adams did not have to wait till England passed an obnoxious act to create a wave of rebellion; he created it when certain acts were in the minds of Crown. Otis had to have something very definite to work up his temper. John Adams says:

31. Hutchinson, 136
32. John Adams, 154--155
James Otis, Samuel Adams and John Hancock were the three most essential characters; and Great Britain knew it, though America did not. Great and important and excellent characters, aroused and excited by these, arose in Pennsylvania, Virginia, New York, South Carolina, and in all other states, but these were the first movers, the most constant, steady, persevering springs, agents, and most disinterested sufferers and firmest pillars of the whole Revolution.33

In 1765 Adams was appointed to draw up instructions for the guidance of the Boston representatives in the General Court. Samuel Adams compares his notes with those of John Adams, and after reading John's notes, made a few changes in his in order to strengthen it. In the final draft he observes:

It fills us with great concern to find that measures have been adapted by the British Ministry, and Acts of Parliament made, which press hard upon our invaluable Rights and Liberties. But we are more particularly alarmed and astonished at the Act, called the Stamp Act, by which a very grievous and, we apprehend, unconstitutio­
nal tax is to be laid upon the Colony.34

Oxenbridge Thacher, the Boston representative in the General Court died and Adams was elected to take his place in 1765. Seemingly this was the first time that people had a champion who demanded some attention on the part of the royal officials.

Adams proved to be a menace to the British government as a member of the Massachusetts General Court. In 1765 when the assembly met, Bernard was dismayed to find: "... that the faction in perpetual opposition to the Government swept everything before it."35

33. Ibid., 14
35. Bernard Papers, Bernard to General Conway, London, 1765
The Stamp Act indeed was the driving power behind the Revolutionary leaders. Without this act the war might easily have been postponed indefinitely. It was not the Act itself that brought on war but the leaders it created used it to incite the people against Great Britain and eventually the war was fought. Adams was the greatest leader and his work among the Sons of Liberty was untiring. His contributions to the press were numerous. His work with the Sons of Liberty and the press will be taken up in the proper chapters.

Both from the general history of the period and from the life of Samuel Adams the most important result of the Stamp Act seems to be the obvious increase in radical influence, and the widely extended rage of radical activity.

The methods used by John Adams to incite opposition to British legislation were quite different from those of his cousin Samuel Adams. His purpose, however, was similar. It cannot be said at this point that Adams wanted a definite break with Great Britain but rather a release from the Stamp tax and from Tax in general. The use John Adams made of the Stamp Act in creating resentment among the colonists was unique. The use to which John Adams put the Act differed from Samuel Adams' only in so far as his utterances were to a great extent sober and dignified. He was cautious about visiting radical groups when it would depreciate his dignity among the people of Massachusetts. Adams was indeed careful of his speech and his personal associates at the beginning of his entrance into public affairs. In his own words Adams says:
I thought a man ought to be very cautious what kinds of fuel he throws into a fire ... I have seen many firebrands thrown into the flame ... so that I think every man ought to take warning.36

John Adams at the time the Stamp Act was passed was approximately thirty years old. He had begun the practise of law on an extremely small scale. He had not attained any great degree of public notice up to this time. John Adams states:

I have groped in dark obscurity, till of late, and had just known and gained a small degree of reputation, when this project was set out on foot for my ruin as well as that of America in general and of Great Britain.37

He was generous in giving a large measure of his time to the church of his belief. According to his diary he witnessed the signing of wills and took care of property transactions. These small tasks constituted to a great extent his early career until the time of the passage of the Stamp Act. At this time his life as a private citizen comes to an end and the career which made him an object of public attention began.

It was the news of the Stamp Act that resulted in John Adams' performing his first public service in the name of Massachusetts. He composed the protest that Ebenezer Thayer, representative of the town of Braintree, was instructed to carry to the council. His apprehension of the Stamp Act and its effects was apparent in his protest. He wrote in part:

36. *Writings of John Adams*, II, 14
37. *Ibid.* II, 155
Sir, in all the calamities which have ever befallen this country, we have never felt so great a concern or such alarming apprehensions, as on this occasion ... and we shall no longer forbear complaining, that many of the late measures of the ministry and some of the late Parliament have a tendency in our apprehension to divest us of our most essential rights and our liberties. We shall confine ourselves chiefly to the Act of Parliament commonly called the Stamp Act, by which a bothersome, and in our opinion, unconstitutional tax is to be laid upon us all. 38

Adams seemed to recognize the magnitude and the possibilities that the passage of the Stamp Act gave to those who deliberately promoted resistance to English legislation. He remarks:

The year 1765 has been the most remarkable year of my life. That enormous engine, fabricated by the British Parliament, for battering down all the rights and liberties of Americans, I mean the Stamp Act, has raised and spread through the whole continent a spirit that will be recorded to our honor. 39

Adams not only thought the act as a weapon in the hands of those who wielded it with great success toward creating opposition but thought it definitely acted as an impetus to a union of the people. He states that the effect of the Stamp Act was so great that:

The people even to the lowest rank have become more attentive to their liberties, more inquisitive about them, and more determined to defend them, than they were ever before known or had occasion to be; innumerable have been the monuments of wit, humor, sense, learning, spirit, patriotism, and heroism erected...in 1765. 40

38. Ibid., III, 465
39. Ibid., II, 154
40. Ibid.
In another instance Adams speaks of the union of the colonies where he states:

So triumph is the spirit of liberty everywhere. Such a union was never before known in America. In the wars that have been with French and the Indians a union could never be effected. 41

There can be no doubt that John Adams was a propagandist. He probably was more dangerous than Samuel Adams because of the great respect which the people of the colony tended him. Later in his career when speaking of his part in the rousing of colonials he says:

I never bestowed much attention on any of those addresses which were all but repetitions of the same things, the same facts and arguments ... I was in great error, no doubt ... but those things were necessary to give popularity to our cause, both at home and abroad. 42

Adams wrote frequently for the press and much help was given by him to the Sons of Liberty. His writings and his contact with the Sons will be discussed in their proper chapters.

The fact that the Stamp Act had the greatest amount of influence in producing leaders is unquestioned. Naturally enough, the leaders became stronger and Great Britain passed new and more stringent laws.

About this time another Revolutionary leader made his appearance under the person of Patrick Henry of Virginia. According to historical account Patrick Henry was given a seat in

41. Ibid., II, 173
42. Ibid., X, 80
the House of Burgesses in order that he might exert himself against the Stamp Act. However, there seems to be no historical proof for this statement as Mr. Johnson seems to have handed in his resignation as a member in order to become coroner before information concerning the Stamp Act was received in America. Patrick Henry was definitely a force not only in Virginia but all along the Atlantic coast. George Morgan seems to feel that Henry's leadership was unmatched for he says concerning him:

By his ever memorable resolutions in opposition to the Stamp Act, and the lofty eloquence with which he sustained them, he struck a timely blow which resounded throughout America and the world and roused a spirit that never slumbered till its great work was accomplished.43

It is a question of uncertainty whether historians would place Henry in the rank of file of the Revolutionary propagandists.

Though Henry's name rang through the Virginia forests, and he became at once a hero of the lower classes, he was not so highly rated by the contemporary rulers of the Colony, the clergy, or the upper classes in general.44

He seemed to stand as a rallying point for revolutionists and dissenters. One of his admiring contemporaries, William Wirt, declares that in religious matters he was a saint but a very devil in politics.45

43. G. Morgan, The true Patrick Henry; Lippincott Company, Philadelphia, 1907, 111
As a leader there seems to be no question but the documents so far uncovered do not seem to bear him out as a propagandist in the true sense of the word. Morgan again speaking of his renown says: "He was twenty-nine when by his Stamp Act stroke he became a continental celebrity."\textsuperscript{46} Henry himself feels that his Virginia Resolves formed the first opposition to the Stamp Act. He remarks:

... all the colonies through fear or want of opportunity to form an opposition, or from influence of some kind or other, had remained silent ... the alarm spread through America with astonishing quickness and the ministerial party were so overwhelmed. The great point of resistance to British taxation was universally established in the colonies. This brought on a war which finally separated the two countries and gave independence to ours. Whether this will prove a blessing or a curse will depend upon the use the people make of the blessing.\textsuperscript{47}

Bancroft also observes, "Virginia rang the alarm bell for the continent."\textsuperscript{48} Frothingham declares that the commander of the British force wrote him that: "The Virginia Resolves gave the signal for a general outcry over the entire continent."\textsuperscript{49} John Adams, although he gave credit to Virginia for excellent work, seems to feel that Massachusetts did as much in promoting the revolutionary spirit and takes pride in remarking to William Wirt Henry his idea of Massachusetts glory. He says:

\textsuperscript{46} Morgan, 112  
\textsuperscript{47} Writings of Patrick Henry, I, 81  
\textsuperscript{48} George Bancroft, History of the United States, Little Brown Co., Boston, IV, 278  
\textsuperscript{49} R. Frothingham, Rise of the Republic of the United States, Little Brown Co., Boston, 1872, 181
Your sketches of the life of Patrick Henry have given me rich entertainment ... I am not about to make any critical remarks upon your work at present but, sir, ... I envy none of the well merited glories of Virginia or any of her sages or heroes. But, sir, I am jealous, very jealous of the honor of Massachusetts. The resistance to the British system for subjugating the colonies began in 1760 and in the month of February James Otis electrified the town of Boston, the province of Massachusetts Bay, and the whole continent, more than Patrick Henry did in the whole course of his life.50

Patrick Henry was a leader and a product of the Stamp Act. He forced the Virginia resolves through the House of Burgesses by a single vote; the result as Davidson states was: "The protest of an entire colony not just a small group."51 It could naturally be assumed no matter how unjustifiable that Virginia was wholeheartedly united in the sentiments set forth in Henry's resolutions. Summing up Henry as a leader at the time of the Stamp Act, Harlow states:

Like so many of his revolutionary brethren he breathed the rarefied atmosphere of emotionalism, and his work generally made up in vividness what it sometimes lacked in sound reason. His 'Stamp Act' resolution ... acquired a notoriety somewhat like that of the thesis of Martin Luther.52

Although John Adams refers to Hancock as one of the three movers of the Revolution, history does not seem to point him out as an important character at the time of the Stamp Act. John Hancock became possessor of a large estate through

50. John Adams, 18
51. Davidson, 49
52. Harlow, 46
the death of his uncle. Adams felt kindly disposed toward Hancock for he possessed exterior grace which Adams thought quite requisite to form a popular public character. Harlow remarks concerning the election of 1765: "Otis, Cushing and Adams were reelected, while Thomas Grey who was somewhat inclined toward moderation, was set aside for that wealthy young satellite of Samuel Adams, John Hancock." Adams felt that the personal qualities of Hancock together with his wealth rendered him a proper object for the effective patriots of the day to bring their view forward to the people. Adams further states: "Upon these principles and with these views was he introduced into public life by the leaders of the opposition to Britain on that day."54

Higginson seems to feel that John Hancock was not too staunch a supporter to the opposition for he says:

His character and his passions were so well known to Bernard and Hutchinson that they could always attempt his seduction with a prospect of success .... Hancock would several times have joined Bernard and Hutchinson but for the vigilant eye of the two Adamses and Otis .... So great was his vanity and so excessive his caprice, that his leaders were often at a loss how to restrain and keep him steady.55

The Stamp Act can be recognized as an introductory stage into public community life of John Hancock. Hancock seemed to be of much more renown at the time of the Townshend Acts in 1767.

Dickinson, a Quaker, was a conservative of Pennsylvan-

53. Ibid., 73
54. Works of Samuel Adams, II, 7
When the impending Stamp Act was announced there was not too much notice given to it by the assembly of Pennsylvania then in session. The only notice given to the news of the act at that time was an order sent to the Committee of Correspondence. Lincoln states the following concerning the message sent to the Committee:

To proceed with the utmost caution in their application for a change of government tactics and in no wise to present the petitions for such a change if they apprehended there was danger of losing any part of the privileges which the colony had a right to enjoy under the present charter. 56

Dickinson held a place of prestige in the colony of Pennsylvania. It must not be thought by the reader that because the Stamp Act did not receive as much attention from the assembly as the question of proprietary government that the colony at large was not cognizant of the Act. The movements in the other states of which the assembly was kept well informed were known to the general public. Through various systems of communications and the press the Pennsylvania Colonist was kept informed of the grievances of the Stamp Act.

The idea of violent resistance to the Act was not countenanced by the assembly. Lincoln remarks:

... resistance to the Stamp Act and the spectacle of mass meetings giving instructions to a legal assembly were by no means popular with the Conservative party in Philadelphia, and among others Dickinson protested against such measures. 57

56. Lincoln, 132
57. Ibid., 133
Although Dickinson is noted for his *Farmer's Letters*, nevertheless, he spoke out as a leader against those who charged the colonists with rebellion because they protested against the Stamp Act. Dickinson himself states:

Had the charge of rebellion been made by a private person against the colonies on this Continent, for their opposition to the Stamp Act, I should not have thought it worth answering, but when it was made by men vested with a public character ... representing two branches of a legislature in a considerable government and the charge was not only approved but it is said, by those two branches, was actually published to the world in newspapers, it seems to me to deserve notice.

Dickinson wrote in defence of the colonists and their principles. Davidson remarks the following concerning Dickinson:

... he is perhaps the very antithesis of the popular conception of a propagandist. Yet a series of letters he wrote in 1767, called "Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies", determined the legal argument against the Townshend Acts ... Earlier, Dickinson had written against the Stamp Act, and in 1768 he composed the American Song.

His work as a writer was so effective that he was called Penman of the Revolution. Ford has this to say concerning Dickinson:

"He is as preeminent as Washington in war, Franklin in diplomacy, and Morris in finance." Tyler gives the impression that Dickinson had become involved in the political life of Pennsylvania a few years prior to the enactment of the Stamp

59. Davidson, 15
Act but he also notes that: "The year 1765, which is marked by the first contribution of John Dickinson to the literature of the American Revolution, presents him to us as an accomplished young barrister ...."61

The work of John Dickinson as a pamphleteer will be discussed in Chapter Three where it will be in proper order. The influence of the Stamp Act in making Dickinson a character prominent in history cannot be denied, but from his writings it may be assumed he was not one of the radicals so-called of his day.

61. Tyler, 21
CHAPTER TWO

FORMATION OF SOCIETIES AND COMMITTEES

It is an established fact that conventional, social and political revolutions are brought about by the overthrowing of the regular and used agencies of government. In the American Revolution open rebellion against the laws of the British government was carried on through the regularly established legal system of town and county governments, courts and legislative assemblies.

Whig propaganda controlled the revolutionary agencies of government in every colony. These agencies were used for the disseminating of propaganda by inducing the agencies to adopt resolutions incorporating their ideas. Resolutions, addresses or petitions when adopted by the legal agencies of the government were of great importance for they gave the effect of unity.

In this chapter we will discuss the use made of the Sons of Liberty, the Circular Letter, and the Committee of Correspondence as valuable aids in promoting hatred of English domination over America.

Colonial leaders had extensively propagated their theories of autonomy and at the same time, by strengthening their party organization and by broadening its field of action they
were making the institutions of imperial control less and less necessary. Whether the colonies were legally dependent or not made little difference; practically they were competent to manage their own affairs and the radical leaders of the Colonists were determined that they should do so.

So that the reader will not confuse the revolutionary "Sons of Liberty" with the organization that bore a resemblance to that name a few years before, we will account for the Sons of Neptune preceding the Revolutionary Sons.

The organization seems to have come into prominence at the time of John Zenger's trial in 1734. John Zenger, a German, was imprisoned for attacking British corruption and arbitrary administration. Zenger was charged with seditious libel. The "Sons of Liberty" became so active and so violent that Zenter was acquitted by the jury to the great mortification of the governor's Council. The organization had much to do with the freeing of the American Press, the speaker of men's thoughts. At the time of the Stamp Act we see the "Sons of Liberty" playing a particular part in freeing the colonies from English Parliamentary dictates.

Not all of the clubs that called themselves "Sons of Liberty" were founded spontaneously to resist the Stamp Act. Many of the resisting Sons had been in existence for years and had been created with the purpose of resisting the trade regulations imposed on the colonies by Great Britain. The purposes of the Sons of Liberty were varied. Miller in speaking of the early organization says:
"Their purpose was rather to combat colonial aristocracy and give the underprivileged class a share of political power."

In speaking of the earlier organizations created to intimidate any officials, royal or colonial, Langley has this to say:

The Massachusetts mob was not a creation of Parliamentary taxation. Mobs had existed on both sides of the Atlantic many years before George III came to the throne of England. The organization behind the "Sons of Liberty" gave it political color and led to its members being called patriots. It was easily led by Adams and Otis. Up until 1765 the Massachusetts mob was not political. Even after this date, its political organization was gradual but it began with the Stamp Act.

The Sons of Liberty was one of the finest organizations for disseminating propaganda among the working classes. It was made up chiefly of working men and through this organization the political radicals sought to reach indirectly those suffering from the enforcement of the trade laws. The Sons reached those who could not be reached by literature because of their lack of reading comprehension. For the mentally able, the Sons of Liberty had its committee of correspondence to divulge the tyranny of England.

In 1763 the colonists were told that in a year some kind of tax would be levied. The tax that Grenville suggested was a stamp tax but if the colonists would suggest some other

1. Miller, 51
type within a year the Crown would be willing to consider the proposition. The year slipped by quickly and the Stamp Act was passed on March 22, 1765.

This act required stamps on all legal and commercial documents, bonds, insurance policies, and newspapers. The proceeds were to be expended exclusively on the colonies. Offenders against the Act were to be tried by Admiralty courts in America or in England.

When the Stamp Act was passed America was "Awakened, alarmed, restless and disaffected." 3 "When the colonists saw the common danger they at the same time saw their mutual dependence." 4 There was scarcely a family which had not heard of the Stamp Act and which did not regard it with dread although "many had little idea what it actually was." 5

At the time that the Stamp Act was being considered in the House of Lords and the House of Commons, Jared Ingersoll sat in the gallery in the House of Commons and listened to the debate. In reply to the assertion by Charles Townshend that the colonies had been cared for and nourished into strength by the indulgence of the British government, Colonel Isaac Barre scornfully denied it, saying that care was exercised in sending unfit governors to rule over them. " ... men whose behav-

3. Bancroft, V, 241
5. Hutchinson's Correspondence. Massachusetts Archives II. Edes and Gill Company. London, 1773, 84
ior on many occasions caused the blood of those Sons of Liberty to recoil within them."6 Pitt was absent at the time that Barre vigorously defended the colonists and their liberty.

Ingersoll, though later a stamp distributor and loyalist, was greatly moved by the oration. He sent the eloquent speech of Barre back to the colonists. The added aid from parliamentary leaders seemed to act as an impetus to the ever increasing Sons of Liberty. After the speech of Barre, societies sprang up simultaneously in scattered communities of the colonies. In speaking of the rapid expansion of the Sons, Van Tyne remarks: "... the colonies of New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and South Carolina joined with Massachusetts in remonstrating against the proposed Stamp Act."7

The Ancient and Honorable Mechanical Company of 1763 became Sons of Liberty in 1765. As McCreary remarks: "The company was made up almost entirely of small tradesmen and artisans."8

Concerning the type of members found in the Sons of Liberty, John Adams remarks:

It is a counting-room in Chase and Speckman's distillery; ... John Avery, distiller or merchant of liberal education, John Smith, the brazier, Thomas Crafts, the painter, Edes, the printer, Stephen Cleverly, the brazier, Chase, the distiller, Joseph Field, master of a vessel, Henry Bass, George Trott Jeweler, were present.9

7. Van Tyne, I, 143
8. G. W. McCreary, The American Revolutionary Period, 1901
9. Writings of John Adams, V, 178
Because of the violations of peace, "Persons of considerable influence, although they generally favored the acts of the Sons of Liberty, kept aloof from open friendship with them for political reasons."\textsuperscript{10} In speaking of the New York Sons of Liberty, Becker remarks, "The Sons of Liberty were much concerned that the gentlemen of fortune don't publicly join them."\textsuperscript{11}

Intimidation was the most forceful weapon of the Sons. The stamp distributors were the first victims. It is interesting to note that Jared Ingersoll, the gentleman responsible for the account of the famous Barre speech reaching the colonies, was stamp distributor of Connecticut. Concerning the person of Ingersoll, Chase observes: "The Sons of Liberty harassed him, threatened him, and burned his effigy in sundry places."\textsuperscript{12} We can follow the actions of the Sons of Liberty from a description given by Ingersoll to Richard Jackson.

Ingersoll remarks:

When I first came home everything appeared tolerably quiet, but the Virginia Resolves taking air threw Boston into a flame where after having offered the highest indignities to Mr. Oliver, the mob fell upon Lieu Governor Hutchinson's house and destroyed it with more than a savage fury.\textsuperscript{13}

The damage wrought by the Sons of Liberty is unequaled in colonial history. In speaking of the destruction caused by

\textsuperscript{10.} Harper's III, 45
\textsuperscript{11.} Becker, 45
\textsuperscript{12.} E. Chase, Beginning of the American Revolution, Baker Taylor Co., New York, New York. 1910, 120
\textsuperscript{13.} Papers of the New Haven Colony Historical Society, New Haven, Connecticut, Taylor Press, 1918, IX, 357
the Sons of Liberty, Gordon writes:

To manifest their abhorance and detestation of those persons, who they supposed were endeavoring to subvert the British Constitution to enslave the Colonies, and to alienate the affections of his majesty's most faithful subjects in America, provide and hang out early in the morning of August fourteenth, upon the limb of a large old elm ... two effigies, one of which by the labels appears to be designed for the Stamp officer; the other a pack boot with a head and horns peeping out of the top ... in the evening the pageantry is cut down and carried in funeral procession, the populace shouting, liberty and property forever, no stamps ... after this return to attack his premises and many of them with clubs, staves go to work on the garden, fences, barns ... eleven days after the disorders grow more enormous of persons, disguised and armed with clubs and sticks collect in King Street ... they hurry away to Mr. Hutchinson's house with the rage of madmen. He sends off his children; bars his doors and windows, and means to remain, but is soon under the necessity of withdrawing, first to one house, then to another, where he continued till four in the morning; by which time one of the best houses in the colony had nothing remaining.14

The destruction of Hutchinson's home is noted by Van Tyne when he states, "The greatest loss to posterity was the destruction of books and records of the colony collected by Hutchinson during thirty years."15 Governor Bernard in speaking of the activities of the Massachusetts Sons of Liberty remarks: "The province was on the brink of a precipice."16 The riotous conduct of the agitators seemed impossible to quell. Governor Bernard observed the lack of authority for

14. Gordon, I, 175--177
15. Van Tyne, I, 167
16. Ibid., 167
he states:

That the real authority of the government is at an end; some of the principal ring leaders in the late riots walk the streets with impunity; no officer dare attack them; no attorney-general prosecute them; and no judge sit upon them."17

The general attitude of the Sons of Liberty was consistent throughout the colonies. In South Carolina Henry Laurens, a prominent citizen, was awakened with: "Liberty! liberty! open your doors and let us search your house and cellar."18 Laurens was asked to take a bible oath that he had no stamps and did not know where they were. He refused to do this and they demanded that he say, "May God disinherit me from the kingdom of heaven if I knew where the stamped papers were."19 He likewise refused to repeat this latter statement. In North Carolina the Sons of Liberty burned the effigy of an honorable gentleman and in many cases, "... forced them who preferred to remain quietly at home to come to the court-house and drink toasts to liberty."20

The destruction and riotous conduct of the New York Sons of Liberty was perhaps unequalled anywhere in the colonies. Even though the Massachusetts Sons seemed to have more political backing than the organization in New York the New York Sons made themselves conspicuous by their influence in

18. Ibid.
19. Force, 14
20. Ibid.
promoting the Merchants Agreement to boycott English goods.

Becker speaking in particular of the New York Sons of Liberty makes the assertion:

... on January 7, 1765 the very day the brig Polly sailed into the harbor with the detested stamps on board they threw off the mock of secrecy that had hither-to somewhat veiled their actions and publicly declared their organization and their principles.\(^{21}\)

The Sons of Liberty agreed upon a set of resolutions and according to Becker they were stated thus:

Resolved: that we will go to the last extremity and venture our lives and fortunes to prevent the said Stamp Act from ever taking place in this city and province.
Resolved: That any person who shall deliver out or receive any instrument of writing upon stamped paper ... agreeable to said act, shall incur the highest resentment of this society and be branded with our lasting infamy.
Resolved: That the persons who carry on business as formerly on unstamped paper ... shall be protected to the utmost power of this society.\(^ {22}\)

One of the most important results of the founding of the Sons of Liberty was their success in bringing about a boycott of English merchandise. Langley writes: "The Sons of Liberty organized non-consumption and non-importation agreements, and cultivated the most efficient of all agents, intimidation of the mob."\(^ {23}\) The Sons of Liberty felt if the colonies refused to purchase British products and produce, the

\(^{21}\) Becker, 43
\(^{22}\) Ibid.
\(^{23}\) Langley, 98
English merchants would in turn petition Parliament for the repeal of the hated Stamp Act. The Sons of Liberty stood to abide by their boycott decision. Schlesinger makes the following observation concerning British goods coming into the colonies:

The first attempt to introduce forbidden British merchandise occurred at Philadelphia ... at the demand of the Sons of Liberty the goods were delivered into their care, to be returned to Bristol at the first opportunity.24

Dulany, in speaking of the boycott, remarks:

A garment of Lensy-woolsey, when made the distinction of real patriotism, is more honorable than all the pageantry and the robes and the plumes and the diadem of an emperor ....25

Very soon it became the fashion to wear home spun. Schlesinger points out that:

The colony of New York was first to take formal action for the boycotting of British goods. Four days before the Stamp Act was to go into operation ... two hundred merchants affixed their signatures to the agreement ... the merchants of Philadelphia got under way a week after New York ... more than four hundred merchants and traders signed the agreement ... in December two hundred and fifty merchants of Boston quickly signed.26

The boycott made itself felt in British circles. Nettels points out the decrease in colonial orders when he states:

25. D. Dulany, Consideration on the Propriety of Imposing Taxes in the British Colonies, J. Holt Co., New York, 1765, 64--65
26. Schlesinger, 78--80
"... by the summer of 1765 colonial orders for British goods were cut by £600,000".\textsuperscript{27} Although it can be stated that a certain number of colonial merchants were in favor of a British boycott, it can also be as safely stated that many merchants were most probably intimidated into entering the merchants agreement. Smith in speaking of the South Carolina colonists says:

Not all the colonies were in favor of boycotting English merchants. Governor Bull of South Carolina testified that the people were generally disposed to obey the Stamp Act, but by the artifices of some busy spirits the minds of men here were so universally poisoned with the principles which were imbied from Boston and Rhode Island that after their example the people of this town resolved to seize and destroy the Stamp Papers.\textsuperscript{28}

Sons of Liberty circulated patriotic decrees. They stimulated a consciousness of colonial grievances by propaganda. They conducted funerals of patriots killed in street brawls. They promoted picnics, dinners, sang songs, denounced British tyranny and hanged unpopular officials in effigy. Finally spreading widely from Massachusetts to Georgia, the radical Sons in their quarrel with Great Britain did much to promote revolutionary ideas in the minds of the colonists. The activities of the Sons of Liberty were probably the strongest force in bringing about the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766. Bassett sums up the Sons of Liberty by saying:

\textsuperscript{27} C. F. Nettels, \textit{The Roots of American Civilization}. F. S. Crofts Co., New York, 1939, 61
\textsuperscript{28} W. R. Smith, \textit{South Carolina as a Royal Province 1719--1776}. Macmillan Co., New York, 1903, 351
The popular indignation was general; associa-
tion of the Sons of Liberty were formed in
every colony. They found leaders as fervent
as Henry, Otis, and Adams. They intimidated
the stamp agents and forced them to resign,
in many places employing violence; they pill-
aged and wrecked. But the Sons of Liberty
were only part of the Whip; for there were
many conservatives in America who opposed
taxation by Parliament but who did not partici-
\-pate in the demonstrations of the radicals.
At this time no one openly advocated indepen-
dence.29

The greatest period of usefulness in the existence of
the organization of the Sons of Liberty was during the Stamp
Act controversy. It was through their rebellious acts that
the Stamp Act was finally repealed, March 17, 1766. The Declaratory Act stated that the Parliament had the right to tax.
However, at the time this did not cause too much consternation.
Concerning the value of the Sons of Liberty, Becker has this
to say:

It is sometimes said that the society of the Sons of Liberty was formed for the purpose of resisting the Stamp Act, it is sometimes asser-
ted, that it was a continuation of the Whig club of 1752. The latter statement is wholly unfounded; the former is misleading. It is a
curious fact that the Society whose raison d'etre is said to have been the nullification of the stamp act was not formally organized until the stamps had been safely lodged in the town house. The fact is simply, that no organization like the Sons of Liberty was necessary to nullify the stamp act, because practically every class in the province was openly determined that it should not take effect ... The General result of the stamp act episode was thus to create a broad, ill defined destination between the conservative and the radical elements of the population....30

30. Becker, 49--51
They were heard again in other crises but never so loudly or successfully. Speaking of the Stamp Act, Fisher remarks: "It would be difficult to find in all history another instance of such complete and thorough disobedience to a law...."31

The meeting of the Stamp Act Congress was one of the most important acts resulting from the Stamp Act. Van Tyne states:

The most significant thing about the congress is that the initiative came for the first time in colonial history, not from crown officers, but from concerted action of provincial assemblies.32

The Stamp Act Congress seemed to act as an impetus to the rowdy Sons. At this time they were almost uncontrollable. Frothingham seems to feel the strength of the Sons of Liberty in the Stamp Act Congress for he says, "... in no place were the Sons of Liberty more determined than in the Congress."33 Perhaps Frothingham was viewing the representatives from the various colonies when he spoke of the strength of the Sons of Liberty in the Congress. Out of the twenty-eight delegates sent from nine colonies many were secretly in sympathy with the movement of the Sons of Liberty. Virginia, New Hampshire, Georgia, and North Carolina did not send delegates, but according to Niles, "... their assemblies wrote that they would agree to whatever was done by the Congress."34

31. Fisher, I, 105
32. Van Tyne, 182
33. Frothingham, 184
34. H. Niles, Principles and Acts of the Revolution in America, Barnes Company, New York, 1876, 156
According to the Journal of Boston, June, 1765, Niles notes the following as to the purpose of the Stamp Act Congress:

Sir, the house of representatives of this province, in the present session of general court, have unanimously agreed to propose a meeting, as soon as may be, of committees from the house of representatives or burgesses, of the several British colonies on this continent, to consult together on the present circumstances of the colonies, and the difficulties to which they are and must be reduced by the operation of the acts of parliament, for levying duties and taxes on the colonies and to consider a general and united, dutiful, loyal and humble representation of their condition to his majesty and to the parliament, and to implore relief. 35

The delegates had definite instructions as to what policy they were to hold. James Otis, Oliver Partridge and Timothy Ruggles, representatives of Massachusetts Bay were instructed to:

... agree upon such representation, as may tend to preserve our rights and privileges
... If it should be said that we are in any manner represented in parliament, you must by no means concede to it ... Further, the house thinks that such a representation of the colonies as British subjects are to enjoy, would be attended with the greatest difficulty, if it is not absolutely impracticable, and ... you are not to urge or consent to any proposal for any representation, if such be made in Congress. 36

It would appear from the instructions quoted above that at the time of the Stamp Act Congress, "No taxation without representation" was an idea completely forgotten. The principle of government by the consent of the governed was never lost from

35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
the sight of the colonies even though the colonies had given up the desire of representation in Parliament at the time of the Stamp Act Congress. The Colony of Rhode Island was reticent in its instructions when compared with Massachusetts. The strongest statement of Rhode Island in its instructions to its representatives was as follows: "And you are also hereby empowered to conclude and agree with other commissioners, upon such measures as you shall think necessary and proper for obtaining redress of the grievances of the colonies ..."37 We note from the Connecticut instructions that this colony was rather sceptical of the outcome. According to Niles the Connecticut delegates were prudently told, "In your proceedings you are to take care that you form no such junction with the other commissioners as will subject you to the major vote of the commissioners present."38 Pennsylvania delegates went to the Congress at New York with definite instructions to avoid revolutionary conduct. The instructions read in part:

... and you are strictly required to take care that such addresses in which you join are drawn up in the most decent and respectful terms; so also avoid every expression that can give the least offence to his majesty or to either house of parliament.39

It is interesting to note that although four colonies did not send delegates, letters were sent from these colonies

37. Ibid. 157
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid. 159
to the congress giving reasons for the very conspicuous fact of their absence. Georgia in her letter would seem to give support to the movement. It follows thus:

Sir, your letter dated June last, acquainted me that the house of representatives of your province has unanimously agreed to propose a meeting at the city of New York... to consult together on the present circumstances of the colonies, and the difficulties to which they are and must be reduced by the operation of the acts of parliament, for laying duties and taxes on the colonies and to consider of an humble representation of their condition to his majesty... came to hand at an unlucky season, it being the recess of the general assembly of this province. Nevertheless, I dispatched expresses to the several representatives of this province, acquainting them with the purport thereof... they met Monday last, to the number of sixteen, being a large majority of the representatives of this province; the whole consisting of twenty-five persons; but his excellency, our governor, being applied to, did not think it expedient to call them together on the occasion: which is the reason of not sending a committee as proposed by your house, for you may be assured, no representatives on this sentiment can more sincerely concur in the measures proposed, than do the representatives of the province now met together; neither can any people, as individuals, more warmly espouse the common cause of the colonies than do the people of this province.40

The colony of New Hampshire also resolved:

That, notwithstanding we are sensible that such a representation ought to be made... yet the present situation of our governmental affairs will not permit us to appoint a committee to attend such meetings: but shall

40. Ibid. 168
be ready to join in any address to his majesty and the parliament we may be honored with the knowledge of, probable to answer the proposed end.\textsuperscript{41}

Although a letter from Virginia excusing her absence is not found in the Journal of the Stamp Act Congress, it can be safely assumed that the body of men in New York knew Virginia would join in the petition of redress. The colony of North Carolina sent no word excusing her absence.

The absence of four of the colonies from the Stamp Act Congress naturally weakened the prime purpose for which the Congress had been called, namely unification and exchange of political views. The Whig party was by no means firmly established in 1765. The leaders of the several colonies in many instances had never had the opportunity of meeting each other. It was hoped that the Stamp Act Congress would effect such an assembly. The interests of the various sections differed widely. The internal affairs of the southern colonies, for instance, were dominated by an eastern planters' aristocracy, largely Anglican. The dominant interests in the northern colonies on the contrary were commercial. Because of these differences, it was extremely important that all colonies be represented at the Congress. Hence, the non-attendance of Georgia, New Hampshire, Virginia and North Carolina greatly reduced the results of the Congress.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
Regarding the circular letter and its connection with Congress of 1765, we note in Niles' works the following statement:

In consequence of the foregoing circular letter, the following gentlemen met at New York, in the province of New York, on Monday, the 7th of October, 1765 ... who produced their appointments as follows ... 42

It is a fact that the circular letter was sent out June 8, 1765 by the Massachusetts House of Representatives urging the other colonies to send committees to New York in October. Regarding the action of Massachusetts in composing the circular letter of 1765, Frothingham remarks: "While the discussion was going on in the press, the Massachusetts committee of Correspondence sent a circular to the other assemblies, proposing harmonious action."43 Frothingham states: "I have not met with any other references to a correspondence between the assemblies by their committees, during the year 1764, other than those noted."44 The term circular letter as used in reference to calling the Stamp Act Congress into being should not be confused with the circular letter that caused so much consternation among the royal representatives at a later period. Once more Massachusetts came forward with a suggestion. It was in the form of a circular letter. The chief purpose of the new Massachusetts circular letter of 1768 was to gain unity of

42. Ibid., 156
43. Frothingham, 171
44. Ibid., 173
Van Tyne remarks:

It was about the time of the Stamp Act that Adams first became an outstanding figure; though too passionate and too eager for advance, content only with perfection, he was no statesman, but a master agitator ... It was Samuel Adams, who, after one failure, had induced the Massachusetts House of Representatives two years before the "massacre", to send a circular letter to the other colonial assemblies, urging the need of harmony in asserting their natural and constitutional rights ... It became the classic example of the way to secure unity of action and interchange of sentiment. 45

The letter formulated a new theory of colonial rights. Parliament was accorded the rights to regulate colonial trade and was recognized as the supreme legislative power over the whole empire, however, "only in so far as was consistent with the rights of Englishmen." 46 Later in commenting on the circular letter, Hutchinson remarks: "In the same breath they give and take away all power of parliament over the colonies." 47 Davidson remarks:

Samuel Adams ... worked out a plan for unifying the assemblies. At his suggestion the Massachusetts assembly in January, 1768, directed a series of letters to prominent officials in England; Shelburne, Rockingham, Chatham, Camden and the King. On February 11th the assemblies sent copies of these letters to other assemblies with a letter urging that each draw up similar protests. 48

The letter was circulated with the permission of the council;

45. Van Tyne, 296--297
46. Hutchinson's Correspondence, 305
47. Ibid.
48. Davidson, 50
but when Hillsborough discovered the strength of the letter, he ordered the Massachusetts Assembly to rescind the letter. By a vote of nine-two to seventeen the assembly refused to rescind the offending resolution. Niles makes reference to this by stating:

Paul Revere made a silver punch-bowl to the memory of the Glorious Ninety-two Members and the mystic number became a popular catch word recalling the courage of those who refused to rescind ... Colonel Barre at a festive board, drank toasts to the ninety-two patriots of Massachusetts Bay.49

His philosophy was excellent. He approached the people from the angle of fear of the future. His idea was good and won many followers. The people were told that the taxes they were paying now were extremely small in comparison with those they would be forced to pay once the British army was firmly established in Boston.

Regarding the question as to who originated the Revolutionary committee of correspondence, we quote Mr. Dawson:

I cannot forget that six years before Massachusetts appointed her faint-hearted committee, whose fear of Great Britain prevented the preparation of even a single letter, and nearly nine years before that celebrated meeting at the Raleigh Tavern, Richmond, when Virginia gave birth to her first born, the assembly of New York originated the movement and appointed a committee of correspondence with Robert R. Livingstone at its head.50

The committees of correspondence, although given much publicity

49. Niles, 116
just prior to the outbreak of the war, were used at the time of the Stamp Act. Becker, in speaking of the work of the committees at the time of the Stamp Act, observes:

Nothing disheartened the radicals: both fanatic and demagogue were incited to renewed activity by indifference or active opposition ... If they were weak in numbers, they might find strength in a further unity of purpose and of organization ... failing to receive general approval at home, the society sought for support in other colonies. February 4, it was unanimously resolved, in pursuance of this policy, to appoint a committee to correspond with those outside of New York who were in sympathy with the purposes of the association, and at the next meeting, the original resolutions ... were republished with an additional clause giving expression to the new project.51

Very little effort was needed, however, to arouse the colonial assemblies against the Stamp Act which they considered a flagrant violation of their rights.

At the passage of the Townshend Acts much more effort was needed to unify the assemblies. Massachusetts again took the lead. Frothingham mentions the far reaching effects of the committee of correspondence where he states:

... Massachusetts committee of correspondence sent a circular ... proposing harmonious action. The Rhode Island assembly chose a similar committee ... this committee addressed an excellent letter to the Pennsylvania assembly ... The North Carolina chose a committee to express their concurrence with the views of the Massachusetts circular ... The New York assembly directed their committee to correspond with the several committees or assemblies on the continent.52

51. Becker, 45--46
52. Frothingham, 171
It can be said in all sincerity that Massachusetts probably promoted the idea of the committees. Immediately following the repeal of the Stamp Act we find Dr. Mayhew suggesting the idea of correspondence committees to James Otis as a measure of great efficiency in producing union of action between the colonies. He says:

A thing of vital importance is cultivating a good understanding and hearty friendship between these colonies appears to me so necessary, a part of prudence and good policy ... no favorable opportunity for that purpose should be omitted. I think such a one now presents itself. Would it not be proper and decorous for our assembly to send circulars to all the rest, on the late repeal of the Stamp Act ... You have heard of the communion of churches ... I was thinking of the great use and importance of the communion of colonies.53

Governor Hutchinson said that the list drawn up by the Massachusetts committee contained "a hundred rights of which they had never heard before and a hundred grievances which they never before had felt."54

These committees were divided into three groups. Local committees and Samuel Adams were the instigators of this type in Massachusetts. On March 2, 1773, Virginia organized the second type, the colonial committees which were in reality standing committees of the legislature. The third type was the most important--the county committee. This type was chosen by the local units and acted as agents of the central colonial

54. Hutchinson's Correspondence, 113
committee. The importance of these committees as channels for the creation and direction of public opinion during the preliminaries of the revolution can hardly be over emphasized.

By May 6th, in the Township of Schenectady, the committee of correspondence was formed. According to the minutes we read, "At the meeting of the freeholders and inhabitants of the Township of Schenectady, the sixth day of May, 1775, the following members were chosen to be a committee ...."55 About ten men or less could be selected. It was their privilege to refuse to serve on the committee if they wished to do so. From Virginia we receive the following report:

Resolved, that a standing committee of correspondence and inquiry be appointed, to consist of any eight members whose business it shall be to obtain early and authentic intelligence of all such acts and resolutions of the British Parliament or proceedings of administrations as may relate to or effect the British colonies in America and to keep up and maintain a correspondence and communication with our sister colonies respecting these important considerations; and the result of such— their proceedings from time to time lay before the House.56

The writings of the Committees of Correspondence that were dominated by and satiated with the radicalism of Samuel Adams and Patrick Henry brushed aside all arguments of positive law and placed their claim squarely on natural law exclusive of all charters from the Crown. Surely it must have been

55. A. C. Flick, Minutes of the Albany Committee of Correspondence, 1775, New York, II, I
56. W. V. Wells, Life and Public Service of Samuel Adams. Little, Brown and Company, Massachusetts, 1883, 71
very disquieting to the British to have Samuel Adams writing to the committees that "By the law of nature all men have a right to remain in a state of nature as long as they please and in the case of intolerable oppression, civil or religious, to leave the society they belong to and enter into another."  

Many times between the passage of the Stamp Act and 1772, groups doing the same work as the committees arose, but this time the idea was to grow and expand and bear fruit.

Because most of the secret proceedings of the meetings of the committees were destroyed because of safety measures, it is rather difficult to give the reader a detailed account of the minute workings and diplomatic correspondence carried on by the committees. Suffice it to say that the committees played their parts well and acted as the strongest bond of union between the colonies until the Second Continental Congress.

57. Writings of Samuel Adams, 351
CHAPTER THREE

The Stamp Act and the Press

In order to have a clear understanding of the influence the Stamp Act had on the press, it is necessary to study the status of the press prior to the passage of the legislation.

The colonist departed from England partly because of the intolerance he had experienced. He in turn brought intolerance to the New World. It is interesting to note that in the colonial period men living within fifty miles of each other argued over a range of six thousand miles because of the lack of a press. Thomas mentions the controversy carried on by two colonists, John Cotton and Roger Williams. He says:

Roger Williams wrote The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience; this book was sent to England for printing and binding. In about six months the book arrived back in the colonies. A copy was sent to John Cotton. John Cotton was so exasperated that he wrote an answer entitled, The Bloody Tenent of Persecution Washed and Made White in the Blood of the Lamb. His work also was sent to England for finishing. A copy of Cotton's work was sent to Williams. This irked him so that he immediately replied with The Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody by Mr. Cotton's Endeavor to Wash It in the Blood of the Lamb.

The colony of Massachusetts was the experimental field

1. T. G. Wright, Literary Culture in Early New England, Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 1920, 83
for many endeavors. Printing was only one of them. The colonies learned many valuable lessons concerning the establishment of the printing press from Massachusetts. Between the years of 1639 and 1690 the early American colonists were too much engrossed in tilling the soil, subduing the wilderness and generally establishing themselves in the New World to give much of their interest, attention or money to the perfecting of the art of printing. Wertenbaker upholds the initiative of the early colonist when he says:

This does not mean that the New England traders or the Virginia planters were inferior to men they left behind in natural capacity; it means rather that their interest and energy turned to the practical problem of clearing the forests, building homes, planting crops, constructing ships, trading and fishing.²

The press might be said to have passed through various periods of supervision. One might call the early period—1638 to 1662—a period during which there was plain supervision. This type of supervision had no law behind it. It was guided to a great extent by the theocracy of New England and unofficially by the clergy. Wertenbaker says: "Nor were the clergy content with guiding the course of intellectual activity through example and leadership for they exercised a strict censorship over the ideas and reading of the people."³ There seems to be a singular absence of information concerning the

³. Ibid., 238
press during the period 1639--1641. The maintenance of the press was doubtless an enterprise of public concern. The public was evidently represented by the Magistrates and Elders. Because of Henry Dunster's ownership of the only printing press and because of his respectable and responsible position in the colonies he no doubt acted as a guarantee of prudent management. The general court itself may have exercised a certain amount of supervision over the press since its approval was sought for the printing of sermons. This approval was not demanded by law. It was rather understood that the ministers should seek the guidance and advice of the Elders before publishing any work for the people to read. The very fact that there was an absence of a board of licensers is proof that nothing very definite was done with regard to censorship. Despite the lack of licensers the local authorities kept a vigilant eye on the press.

A few examples of the supervision of the press will clear up any question in the mind of the reader.

Charles Deane states: "The man who shows a novel disposition was asked to leave the colony." The spirit of the early magistrates is illustrated by the reception of a work by the lawyer, Thomas Lechford, entitled Of Prophisie. He entrusted the manuscript to Thomas Dudley with the request that he advise him as a private friend whether it ought to be pub-

4. Ibid.
lished. Dudley was so aroused by what he read that he wrote to Winthrop: "I find the scope thereof to be erroneous if not heretical. I have sent you the book herewith that instead of putting it to the press as he desireth it may be put into the fire as I desire." A pamphlet entitled, The Meritorious Price of Our Redemption by William Pynchon, met a sad fate. The general court finding the work to be of an erroneous nature ordered it to be burned in the common market place in Boston.

Henry Dunster was a victim to this consistent theory of intolerance. He became president of Harvard in 1640. Dunster, it seems, became an Anabaptist. The Anabaptists were placed under the ban in 1644. Great, therefore, was the consternation of the ministers when Mr. Dunster became entangled. The doctrine itself held that baptism should not be administered to infants. Mr. Dunster was removed from his position as president of Harvard because he would not retract his error. He published pamphlets on the subject of Anabaptism.

Because of some religious treatises having been published in 1662 the general court, governed and influenced by some of the leading clergy, judged that the ideas of some of the Elders were too liberal and tended to open the door of heresy, and, therefore, licensers were appointed. Major Daniel Gookin and Reverend Jonathan Mitchell were the first appointed licensers of the press. This was in 1662. Anyone who published

5. Ibid.
anything without being licensed was subject to the loss of his press. As can be seen from the above names one of the licensers was a minister. Even after licensers were appointed, the clergy still had a great amount of influence.

In 1665 the royal governors were instructed to license printed matter and at that time censorship passed from the hands of the clergy or people controlled by the clergy into the hands of the governors. In 1686 Edmund Andros arrived in Boston to assume his office as the royal governor. His attitude of censorship can readily be seen by the following. A few weeks after the installation ceremony Governor Andros took steps to put into effect this important article of his instructions. It read thus:

Thursday the 28th of January, 1686, the council being met, his Excellency acquainted them that it was his Majesty's express command that the printing presses in the towns of Boston and Cambridge in New England would be effectually taken care of. Upon which an order was passed in council that no pamphlets or books should be printed in New England until they were licensed according to law and that no printer print until he has given five hundred pounds security to his Majesty to observe the order.6

The loss of the right of censorship which came with the Andros regime was bitterly resented by the clergy. During Andros's administration some of the prominent men of the colony, dissatisfied with the curtailment of their privileges, determined to appeal to England for relief. A complaint was registered

by the Massachusetts colony. Wright notes: "... Increase Mather, the influential pastor of the Old North Church, was selected to bear to the king, James II, the complaints of the colony and to obtain, if possible, a restoration of the charter."  

Suppression of the Press and of free discussion was by no means confined to New England colonies. In 1671 Sir William Berkley boasted that there was no printing press in Virginia. Berkley said: "I thank God we have no free schools nor printing; and I hope we shall not have these for a hundred years. Learning has brought disobedience and heresy and sects into the world; and printing has divulged them and libels against the government; God, keep us from both."  

The Quaker or the Puritan who came to that colony with the purpose of making converts found himself outside of the pale of the law. But in none of the middle or the southern provinces was there anything comparable to the rigid control over men's thoughts and opinions exercised by the New England theocracy.  

James Franklin was imprisoned for a month because in the issue of the New England Courant June 4, 1722 he made the statement that the government had not been so aggressive as it should have been in suppressing pirates on the New England coast. In 1723 he was again taken to task for releasing a

7. Wright, 154
publication on hypocrites. He was forbidden by the council to publish any more material. Franklin was denounced by Reverend Increase Mather.

Presses in Pennsylvania and Boston were under strict censorship. A certain John Bradford was imprisoned for having printed matter that was displeasing to the Quaker party. This was the cause of his removal to New York and the establishment of the press there.

The very first newspaper called *Public Occurrences* that was issued in the colonies was suppressed because as Duniway remarks: "The Governor and council declared their high resentment and disallowance of the said pamphlet." The paper gave much distaste because it was not issued with the consent of the licensers. In 1690 the first attempt to publish a newspaper in America was tried in Boston but was unsuccessful.

In a little over a hundred years we have seen a new institution born and develop into actual power. It apparently prospered in adversity. From 1740 on, the story of the press is not one of struggles in trying to get started but rather of the struggles of the ideas for which it stands. Politically and economically the colonies were preparing for a change. They were no longer the separate settlements in which the first printer was an historic event. In the words of the historian,

9. Duniway, 69
Payne, "The colonist had accomplished a complete 'volte face'."\textsuperscript{10}

In all periods newspapers have been a powerful agency, not merely by appeals but by virtue of its prime office of collecting and circulating of intelligence; by disseminating the facts that enable the public opinion of one political center to act on others. In describing the press, Frothingham states:

It is a dial which measures and marks the play of the inner forces of society, as the meter marks the passage of the sources of life. The pages of an unfettered press are a mirror which reflects the past of a collective life, when it was stirred by fear; when it glowed with hope, when it was inspired into heroic action by the presence and the power of great ideas.\textsuperscript{11}

Schlesinger, in speaking of the valuable work of the newspapers in helping to rescind the Stamp Act, remarks:

Since the first widespread employment of newspaper propaganda in America coincided with the adoption of the Stamp Act, a consideration of the circumstances and results may serve as a knot-hole through which to observe the first stages of journalistic warfare which eventually led to revolution and independence.\textsuperscript{12}

Printers were directly affected by the Stamp Act. Benjamin Franklin, one of the foremost printers in the colonies wrote:

\textsuperscript{10} G. H. Payne, History of Journalism in the United States, D. Appleton Company, New York, 1920, 60
\textsuperscript{11} Frothingham, 130
The Stamp Act will affect the printers more than anybody, as a Sterling Half penny Stamp on every Half Sheet of a Newspaper, and Two Shillings Sterling on every Advertisement will go near to knock up one Half of both. There is also Fourpence Sterling on every almanac.\textsuperscript{13}

David Ramsay, the South Carolina historian, in speaking of the printers being afflicted by the Stamp Act wrote:

It is fortunate for the liberties of America, that Newspapers were the subject of a heavy stamp duty. Printers, when influenced by government, have generally arranged themselves on the side of liberty; nor are they less remarkable for the attention to the profits of their profession. A stamp duty, which openly invaded the first and threatened a great diminution of the last, provoked their united zealous opposition.\textsuperscript{14}

The printers were in danger of prosecution for openly printing papers without stamps; however, in the colonies where the Sons of Liberty were strong, the printers were bold in their publications and assertions. Schlesinger writes:

The leaders at Portsmouth, distrustful of the anticipated course of the New Hampshire Gazette, brought about the establishment of the Portsmouth Mercury, the first number of which promised that neither opposition, arbitrary power, or public injuries would be screened from the knowledge of the people ...\textsuperscript{15}

Benjamin Mecom, a printer, went to New Haven to revive the Connecticut Gazette, the discontinuance of which more than a year before had left the people without a local journal.

\textsuperscript{13} The Life and Writings of Benjamin Franklin, (ed. A.H. Smyth), Macmillan Company, New York, 1905, VI, 363
\textsuperscript{14} D. Ramsay, History of the American Revolution, John Stockdale Co., London, 1763, I, 61
\textsuperscript{15} Schlesinger, New England Quarterly, 71
When the first issue reappeared, the political creed of that time was flashed across the headlines. According to Thomas it ran thus, "Those who would give up Essential Liberty to purchase a little Temporary Safety deserve neither Liberty nor Safety." The southern newspapers met the crisis through suspension, the editors being apprehensive of securing popular support from the colonists.

John Adams, in speaking of the courage portrayed by the printers says:

... for the jaws of power are always opened to devour, and her arm is always stretched out, if possible, to destroy the freedom of thinking, speaking, and writing ... And if the public interest, liberty and happiness have been in danger from ambition or avarice of any great man ... you have done your country service by publishing and pointing out that avarice and ambition.

The newspapers continued in spite of all. Thomas speaks of the art of deception practised by the editors in publishing their papers. He remarks:

In the troublesome times, occasioned by the Stamp Act in 1765, some of the more opulent and cautious printers, when the act was to take place, put their paper in mourning, and, for a few weeks, omitted to publish them: others were not so timid, but doubtful of consequence of publishing newspapers without stamps, omitted the titles, or altered them, as an evasion; for instance the Pennsylvania Gazette, and some other papers, were headed Remarkable Occurrences, other printers, particularly those in Boston, continued their papers without any alteration in title or imprint.

16. Thomas, II, 86
17. Writings of John Adams, III, 451
18. Thomas, II, 10
The effect of the newspapers upon public opinion was indeed gratifying to the promoters of the revolution. Schlesinger, in speaking of the success of the newspaper propaganda, remarks: "The thirty odd newspapers of America carried on a tremendously effective propaganda against the Stamp Act, and in no later crisis exhibited such unanimity of protest."19 Adams seems to substantiate the idea of a successful press campaign for he notes:

Our presses have groaned, our pulpits have thundered, our legislatures have resolved, our towns have voted; the crown officers have everywhere trembled, and all see their little tools and creatures have been afraid to speak and ashamed to be seen.20

Regarding the fear referred to by Adams in the above quotation, Schlesinger mentions the power of radical groups on printers where he says, "The Wilmington printer, Andrew Stewart, was obliged at the hazard of his life ... or his printing office destroyed, to resuscitate the North Carolina Gazette on November 20, 1765."21

Of all the newspapers printed at the time of the Stamp Act the Boston Gazette was the most influential. Payne, in speaking of the Boston Gazette, says: "If Massachusetts was the leader in the events before the Revolution, and she unquestionably was, Samuel Adams was the leader in Massachusetts, and the organ through which he swayed the people was the Boston Gazette."22

19. Schlesinger, 70
20. Writings of John Adams, II, 154
22. Ibid., 64
The Boston Gazette was printed by Edes and Gill and unquestionably it was the recognized organ for the presentation of grievances on all occasions. Duniway, in speaking of its contributors, lists the following: "Samuel Adams, James Otis, John Adams, Joseph Warren, John Hancock, Josiah Quincy Jr., ... were some of its contributors and ardent supporters." Thomas also compliments the Boston Gazette:

During the long controversy, between Great Britain and her American colonies, no paper on the continent took a more active part in defence of the country, or more ably supported its right than the Boston Gazette; its patrons were alert and ever at their posts, and they had a primary agency in events which led to our national independence.

Schlesinger, in comparing the work of the papers, has this to say:

The New England press took a notable part in the campaign against the Stamp Act and ... its efforts were paralleled by the newspapers in other parts of British America, notably New York and Philadelphia.

Samuel Adams wrote in greater abundance for the Boston Gazette than any other propagandist. In Speaking of Samuel Adams and the Boston Gazette, Davidson remarks:

This was peculiary Sam Adams' paper, and as a result of his influence and association with it, it was the only one on the continent which kept up the fight against England in the interludes between periods of agitation.

23. Duniway, 123
24. Thomas, II, 240
25. Schlesinger, New England Quarterly, 64
26. Davidson, 228
Miller also speaks of the magnificent literary work of Adams. He writes:

Most disquieting of all to the Tories was the fact that there was no sign of weakening in Sam Adams: he kept on dealing out malicious strokes in the newspapers, and passersby who saw a light burning late at night in his room knew he was writing against the Tories.27

Cushing, the editor of The Writings of Samuel Adams, includes essays signed by twenty different pen names. Among some of the pen names we find: "Candidus", "Shippen", "A Layman", "A Bostonian", "T. Z.", "Alfred", "Populus", "An Imperialist", and "Vindex".28 Davidson sums up the numerous activities of Adams in excellent fashion. He writes:

... the number of his essays and controversial articles must have run into the hundreds. During the height of the pre-revolutionary struggle he practically filled the pages of the Boston Gazette, writing essays, clipping items from other papers, extracting pertinent bits from his private correspondence, editing news items, all with the one idea of arousing anti-British feeling.29

It has been said that he had the instinct of a great journalist willing to screen his individuality behind his journal. We have heard little of Samuel Adams, journalist, because it was not in journalism itself, anymore than it was in literature or in oratory, that he was interested. Journalism, however, was only used as a means to an end by Samuel Adams. Payne

27. Miller, 238
28. Cushing, I, VIII--IX
29. Davidson, 5
John Adams, sometimes called the Statesman of the Revolution, wrote a series of four essays which were first published in August, 1765. These essays appeared without any descriptive title or author’s name in the Boston Gazette. Tyler evaluates them as follows:

By their wide range of allusion, their novelty, audacity, eloquence, by the jocular savagery of their sarcasms on things sacred, they quickly and easily produced a stir, and won for themselves considerable notoriety.31

Later through the instigation of Thomas Hollis they were welded together into a single document and published under the somewhat misleading title, A Dissertation on the Cannon and the Feudal Law. Adams was definitely an asset to the Whig party. His extraordinary vigor in argument gave the Bostonians a certain degree of confidence in him. His associations with the radicals is mentioned by him in a familiar story he tells of spending a Sunday afternoon in the company of the Boston Gazette editors and several local leaders; he says: "... a curious employment, cooking of paragraphs, articles, occurrences, Sc., working the political machine."32

In Boston, Philadelphia, and New York, the American

30. Payne, 102
31. Tyler, 99
32. Writings of John Adams, II, 219
newspapers had their beginnings, combative beginnings with clashes against the authority that sought to stifle it. The press movement progressed, however, and in the year 1775 Thomas states that:

... more copies of a newspaper were issued weekly from the village press at Worcester, Massachusetts that were printed in all Maryland in 1754; and one paper now published, contains as much matter as did all four published in Boston in the year last mentioned. 33

The influence of the Stamp Act unquestionably acted as the greatest impetus on the development of the press.

**PAMPHLETS**

Oral agitation is always supplemented by written propaganda. The influence of a sermon or public address is more then doubled when discussed in a newspaper or pamphlet. The written word undoubtedly carries an authority of its own for the great majority of people are prone to believe what they read.

The publishers of newspapers and pamphlets realized there were limitations on written propaganda. Davidson remarks: "About one-half of the men and one-fourth of the women could read". 34 In commenting upon the general reading comprehension of the colonist at the time of the Stamp Act, Davidson

33. Thomas, II, 187
34. Davidson, 201
Although the Sons of Liberty publicly thanked Richard Bland for his pamphlet *An Inquiry into the Rights of the British Colonies*, it is doubted that they understood a word of it, for a more involved and inconsistent essay is hard to find.35

The best thought of the revolutionary period was expressed in pamphlets. As Davidson puts it, "The careful reader preferred its greater dignity and the thoughtful reader preferred its greater length."36

In speaking of the pamphlets and news articles published in the years immediately preceding the Revolution, Tyler says:

The literature which we are thus to inspect is not a literature of tranquillity, but chiefly a literature of strife ... and, of course, it must take those forms in which intellectual and impassioned debate can be most effectually carried on. The literature ... has almost everywhere the combative note; its habitual method is argumentative, persuasive, appealing, rasping retaliatory; the very brain of man seems to be in armor; his wit is in the gladiator's attitude of offence and defense.37

James Otis saw very clearly the significance of the acts of the British parliament. In July, 1764 in the midst of the general anxiety caused by the confused ideas of the proposed Stamp Act, James Otis wrote his pamphlet entitled, *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved*. This pamphlet is perhaps his greatest and most elaborate work. In

35. Ibid., 210
36. Ibid., 201
37. Tyler, I, 6
evaluating this pamphlet Tyler says:

Of all his political writings, this is the most sedate. It has even a tone of solemnity. It is as if he then realized that the logical movement of the controversy in which he had become involved, was rapidly sweeping him onward to a position of appalling responsibility from which soon there would be no path of retreat ... Thus James Otis pauses in his career: reviews the principles ... whether or not it should be safe were it least right ... hence, this pamphlet has unwonted sobriety ... few bursts of passion ... a tone almost judicial.38

It cannot be said at this point of the controversy with Great Britain that Otis was in favor of a revolution or independence for in his pamphlet he says:

We all think ourselves happy under Great Britain. We love, esteem and reverence our mother-country and adore our king. And could the choice of independence be offered the colonies, or subjection to Great Britain upon any terms above absolute slavery, I am convinced they would accept the latter ministry, and all future generations may rely on it that British America will never prove undutiful, till driven to it, as the last fatal resort against ministerial oppression, which will make the wisest mad, and the weakest strong.39

Although the actual purpose of Otis's pamphlet was to present the grievances of the colonists to the crown there was no mention of the Stamp Act in it. Otis, it seems, made an attempt to avert a revolution by appealing to the righteousness of Great Britain in his pamphlet, but Tyler feels it had the opposite effect. He states:

38. Ibid., 47
... its actual effect was to furnish the starting point for the entire movement of revolutionary reasoning, by which some two millions of people were to justify themselves in the years as they advanced along their rugged and stormy path toward independence. 40

By the middle of September, 1764 The Sentiments of a British American by Oxenbridge Thacher came from the press in Boston. It was an argument against the new measures of the imperial government. It is interesting to note that despite the printed story that the minds of the colonists were inflamed over the promised Stamp Act the pamphlets printed at that particular time would not give the ordinary reader the impression that the state of the colonist was precariously near rebellion. Thacher concludes his argument much in the same strain as Otis. He says:

... that the happy island of Great Britain may grow in wealth, in power and glory, to get greater degrees; that the conquests it makes over foreign enemies may serve the more to protect the internal liberties of its subjects; that her colonies ... may grow in filial affection and dutiful submission to her, their mother; and that she in return, may never forget her parental affections; that the whole English empire, united by the strongest bonds of love and interest, formidable, may retain its own virtue and happily possess immortality. 41

Tyler seems to feel that the pamphlets by Otis and Thacher are a fair view of political thinking of that day. He says:

40. Tyler, I, 51
41. Thacher, 16
These two pamphlets, the one by Otis, the other by Thacher may fairly be said to give us the attitude of Patriotic American Lawyers and politicians in year of 1764. 42

In neither of the pamphlets was the Stamp Act mentioned. They were published about six months before the act was passed; however, these writers were cognizant of the oncoming storm for they were notified a year in advance that the act would be passed. It is difficult to ascertain whether Otis and Thacher avoided mentioning the Stamp Act in their pamphlets out of fear of the crown or the diplomatic appeal to the supposed affection of England for her colonies.

In December 1764 The Rights of the Colonies Examined by Stephen Hopkins came off the press in Providence, Rhode Island. Hopkins is the first pamphleteer to mention the Stamp Act. He speaks of it thus:

As to the proposed Stamp Act, the mere announcement of it hath much more, and for much more reason, alarmed the British subjects in America than anything that has ever been done before. 43

This pamphlet made a very strong impression throughout the colonies for as Tyler says:

...its tone was so temperate and so conciliatory that both in England and America it made its way and carried convictions to many minds that would have been repelled by the brusqueness and asperity of Otis. 44

42. Tyler, I, 56
43. S. Hopkins, The Rights of the Colonies Examined, William Goddard Co., Providence, Rhode Island, 1764, 15
44. Tyler, I, 69
Hopkins' pamphlet was attacked by Martin Howard, an accomplished lawyer. Howard wrote a reply to Hopkins entitled, A Letter from a Gentleman in Halifax to His Friend in Rhode Island. Howard speaks of Hopkins as his friend because as Tyler remarks: "... he had been associated with Stephen Hopkins as a delegate from Rhode Island in the Albany congress."45

Hopkins' pamphlet was attacked by Martin Howard on two scores. Howard felt that the inference made Hopkins that the American colonists had a right to all the political rights of Englishmen at home was false. The second fallacy in Hopkins' work was the idea put forth that the colonists could not be taxed by parliament unless they had sufficient representatives in parliament. Howard's pamphlet was answered by James Otis in his Defence of the Halifax Libel on the British American Colonies. Otis ends his attack on Martin by saying:

These are some of the gentry who, all of a sudden, have become the most loyal subjects in America, and have had the impudence to attempt to persuade all England that the rest of the colonists are as great rebels as ever appeared in arms for the pretender.46

In October, 1765, another pamphlet appeared bearing the title Considerations on the Propriety of Imposing Taxes in the British Colonies for the Purpose of Raising a Revenue by an Act of Parliament. Because of the danger to the author it first appeared without the author's name; and, still, further to obscure its origin, it bore on the title page, for

45. Ibid., 79
46. Otis, 5
In October, 1765, another pamphlet appeared bearing the title **Considerations on the Propriety of Imposing Taxes in the British Colonies for the Purpose of Raising a Revenue by an Act of Parliament**. Because of the danger to the author it first appeared without the author’s name; and, still, further to obscure its origin, it bore on the title page, for the place of publication, merely the words, North America. The place of publication was designated as Virginia. Tyler after investigation says that: "... Maryland was the colony to which its author belonged and in which undoubtedly his pamphlet was written."47 Daniel Dulany is given credit as being author of the pamphlet. Van Tyne, in summing up the influence of the Stamp Act on the writers of the period, says:

Pamphleteers, too, were never so united. Dulany, of Maryland, whose famous pamphlet against the Stamp Act the immortal Pitt had held in his hand and eulogized before the House of Commons, was opposed to no other tax and in time became a Loyalist.48

John Dickinson, one of the most influential penmen of the Revolution, began his political writings at the time of the Stamp Act. He wrote a pamphlet in 1765 entitled **The Late Regulations Respecting the British Colonies on the Continent of America Considered**. This pamphlet was a masterly piece of political argumentation. Stille in evaluating this pamphlet remarks:

47. Tyler, I, 101
48. Van Tyne, I, 160
This pamphlet shows him to have acquired at that time as full a knowledge of the political economy of that day, as it affected the relations between the colonies and the mother country... With great skill he set himself to prove to his English readers, for whom his pamphlet was specially intended that the metropolis would suffer far more from the proposed act than the colony.49

Dickinson's writings against the Stamp Act cannot be compared to those of the Adams' family either in temper or volume. This can partly be attributed to the fact that the Stamp Act did not meet the violent opposition in Pennsylvania as it did in other sections. Lincoln says: "The tax fell on persons engaged in commercial transactions and it had more intense opponents than the propertied classes of Pennsylvania."50 Later in 1774 when it was necessary that Pennsylvania should present a united front in support of American resistance, Lincoln says: "Dickinson did not hesitate to assume the direction of a movement within the state ...."51

Letters to a Farmer seem to constitute the best of Dickinson's writings. Dickinson contributed great help to the reactionaries in his Farmer's Letters addressed to the American people. The union experienced by the colonists at the time of the act was cemented when the Townshend acts were passed. It was the incident of the Townshend acts that brought Dickinson and his Farmer's Letters to the fore. The letters were imbued

50. Lincoln, 135
51. Ibid., 133
with the thought of union. In referring to the Farmer's Letters, Frothingham has this to say:

These letters by John Dickinson appeared first in the "Pennsylvania Chronicle" and "Universal Advertiser", printed in Philadelphia. Number one was printed December 2, 1767; number twelve, February 15, 1768. They were copied into other journals, and widely circulated in every colony. They were printed also in pamphlet form in America and in London. Letters of thanks were sent to their author. Thus the town of Lebanon, Connecticut, April 11, 1768, congratulated him as one born for the most noble and exalted purpose, and as having a monument that would be a grateful remembrance of a "Farmer" to the latest posterity. 52

By the middle of 1774, Parliament had exercised power not covered by the pamphleteers of the first period. Thacher, Hopkins, Dulaney, Otis, Dickinson, and Brand's arguments did not cover the changes taking place now. The Boston Port Bill, the revoking of Massachusetts charter and the altering of the methods of trial represented new tactics on the part of England. The first group of writers protested against the injustice of the crown, but the pamphleteers of the second period promulgated a new theory. In this second group we find Jefferson, Hamilton, Drayton, and Paine among the chief contributors. In the entire revolutionary period there were six hundred political pamphlets written.

The propaganda campaign carried on in the newspapers and

52. Frothingham, 208
pamphlets had a certain degree of success. Despite the fact that only one-fourth of the colonists actively took part in the revolutionary war, the majority lent assistance to the beginning of the movement by verbal sympathy.
CONCLUSION

It can be safely concluded after a thorough investigation that the influence of the Stamp Act on the Revolutionary War was tremendous; not because of the Act itself, but because of the excellent use made of it by the colonial propagandists. Miller, in commenting on the influence of the Stamp Act agitators, remarks: "The Stamp Act had awakened a militant spirit among men who, although in a minority, were the kind of minority that makes revolutions."¹

The English were very little affected by the passing of the Stamp Act Legislation. The English press paid no heed to the Act and it was at the insistence of the English merchants that the English people were made aware of the far reaching influence of the Stamp Act. Stille, in speaking of the Act, says:

This act, which is not recognized by English historians as having been the most important and far reaching in its results of any that was ever passed by Parliament excited far less interest in England than the controversy between John Wilkes and the court.²

It is a very evident fact that the Revolutionary War was the outgrowth of revolutionary measures. It is probable that an attempt to force the Act would have proved fatal to

1. Miller, 81
2. Stille, 70
Great Britain. England was exhausted after the Seven Years' War and the unity of the colonies in 1766 was much stronger than in 1776. Had the Act not been repealed, the American Revolutionary War perhaps would have begun in 1766 as a result of the influence of that legislation.
CRITICAL ESSAY ON AUTHORITIES

SOURCE MATERIAL


SOURCE PAMPHLETS

-- O. Thacher, Sentiments of a British American, Edes and Gill Co., Boston, 1764. This pamphlet is a calm, well-reasoned, manly lawyer-like argument against the new measures of imperial government. -- J. Otis, Considerations on Behalf of the Colonists in a Letter to a Noble Lord, J. Almon Co., Boston, 1765. This pamphlet was indicative of the slashing controversy carried on at that time. It is quite without dignity of expression. It is a mixture of keenness and bitterness. -- D. Dulany, Considerations on the Propriety of Imposing Taxes in the British Colonies, J. Holt Co., New York, 1765. The logical expertness of Dulany is apparent in this pamphlet. Very well handled. -- John Dickinson, Letters from a Farmer, New York, 1906. Excellent for propaganda purposes. -- E. Burke, Speech on American Tax, H. S. Woodfall Co., London, 1774.

SECONDARY SOURCES


The thesis submitted by Sister M. Jean Cecile Hunt, O.P. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of History.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

June 21, 1941
Date

Signature of Adviser