

SIDE WALKS SANDRA SERKESS BY GEORGE! WEST ROXBURY IN PRE-REVOLUTIONARY DAYS 1764-1767

In the minutes of the town records, the years 1764-1766 are taken up mostly with cases of smallpox (fascinating fare for a future article), the repair of Annuli Hall, the giving of Alms to the needy (the requests and reasons are most specific!), and leave to set up a dancing and fencing school by Mr. William Pope- which is granted. But the situation with the Mother Country was slowly, very slowly, worsening. Both the British and the Colonist considered the Colonies British with no sign of war yet on the horizon. Heretofore, taxation had been only for the purposes of commerce regulation and not money for the Crown, so there was no quarrel. In fact, when Paul Revere made his famous ride, he did not call out "The British are coming" because he too was British! He shouted, "The Regulars are coming! The Regulars are coming!"

Here are a few samplings from the Boston Town Records so generously donated by Michael Dolan to the archives.

At a meeting of the Selectmen, February 6, 1764:

"Mr. Paul Revere living near Dr. Clark on Fish Street acquainted the Selectmen that a child of his has the Smallpox out upon it, they could not prevail upon him to consent to its being removed, therefore ordered a flag to be put out and appointed Nicholas Murphy as a guard for said house who had directions given him for his conduct in writing."

The following Advertisement was sent to several printers for a place in the Monday papers.

Boston, February 20, 1764: "The public are hereby informed that on Saturday last a child of Mrs. Glen worth's near the Old North Meeting House and one of Mr. Aitchbone's near the Rev. Mr. Pemberton's Meeting House were taken with the Small Pox, these with the sick at Mr. Dean's and Mr. Reverie's (sic) on Fish Street are the only person in town having the Smallpox except those who are in the Hospital."

On April 4, 1764, the Sugar Act was passed suggested by Prime Minister Greenville. This was one of the first taxes to help the King get out of debt and the Colonists protested. There were legitimate expenses incurred in the French and Indian War by the British to protect the colonies, but the fact that they laws were summarily enacted by the Crown was the source of the problem.

The taxes were abated, but the British Parliament then passed Greenville's Stamp Act on March 22, 1765, which was to be imposed on all colonists on November 1 of that same year; they would have to pay a tax for every piece of paper used, even playing cards! Though the financial costs were not much, the decline of democracy could not be disguised, and decency demanded that the tax be disputed. It was. First only by Patrick Henry's House of Burgesses in Virginia which disallowed and disavowed the taxes,. The House was dissolved by the British Governor there, but the posturing principle had been adopted!

The response of Parliament to their argument was that the "colonists were children planted by our care, nourished by our indulgence, and protected by our arms." While it was true that the money was to be used by the Crown to protect the Colonists with the British Army, His Royal majesty was really just protecting his own land! Benjamin Franklin was in London when the Act was passed and he wrote, "The sun of liberty has set!" Thus the Sons of Liberty were born.

Also in March of '65, the Quartering Act required colonists to house British troops and supply them with food. This was not acceptable, as you can imagine.

James Otis of Massachusetts was particularly aghast at the notion of taxation without representation and on June 8 a petition was circulated to all the Colonies to send delegates to a Congress in New York on October 19, 1765. Only nine of the colonies accepted the invitation.

In West Roxbury, in 1765, Captain Jeremiah Richards built Richards' Tavern located where the post office is now, but below street level. He lived in a mansion across the street where CVS is today, and his daughter Hannah kept a daily diary, the original of which is in the archives! The Tavern stood until 1965 when it fell apart as they tried to move it to Sturbridge Village. Many of the original bills of goods are in the archives as well.

At a meeting of the Selectmen, September 8, 1765

Present: Joshua Henshaw, Joseph Jackson, Benjamin Austin, Samuel Sewall, John Ruddock, John Hancock. " John Winslow Ordered that the town Clerk issue forth a warrant directed to the Constables of Boston: In His Majesty's Name

requiring them forthwith to warn all the freeholders and other inhabitants of the town of Boston duly qualified, ratable at Twenty pounds Estate to a single Rate (besides the Poll) to Convene at Faneuil Hall on Thursday the twelfth day of September Instant at 3.O'clock in the afternoon then and there agreeable to the request of a number of inhabitants to confer upon such measure, as shall appear to them necessary to be taken in consequence of the Stamp Act, and other matters of grievance, and to determine other instructions shall be given their representatives in General Assembly for their conduct at this very alarming Crisis. Voted that Messrs. Edes and Gill have the printing of the notifications for the ensuing Town meeting."

On Saturday, October 19, 1765, the First Congress of the American Colonies agreed upon a Declaration of Rights with which they petitioned the king and Parliament. It stated basically that though they too loved the crown, the king had no right to impose taxes without consent. in Massachusetts, rioters looted Andrew Oliver's dwelling- he was the newly appointed stamp commissioner!- and he resigned the next day. Other colonies had similar sentiments and by November1 there was not a single stamp commissioner left in the colonies to collect the tax.

Benjamin Franklin was sent to testify before Parliament as to the negative sentiments towards the Stamp Act. He testified in February of 1766 and the Acts were repealed in March. But news—even good news-- in those days traveled slowly.

At a meeting of the Selectmen April 9, 1766—present Jackson, Ruddock, Hancock, Phillips. Newell, Rowe. " Mr. Hancock desired of the Selectmen the use of Faneuil Hall on Fryday (sic) next for the Cadet Company to exercise in which was granted accordingly."

At a meeting of the Selectmen April 14, 1766, present Jackson, Ruddock, Hancock Phillips, Newall, Rowe. A letter from the Sons of Liberty relative to the repast of the Stamp Act was read.

At a meeting of the Selectmen May 16, 1766 PM, Present Mress. Jackson, Sewall, Ruddock, Hancock, Phillips, Newel, Rowe: "Capt. Coffin arriving from London with the agreeable news that the Act repealing the Stamp Act had passed and finding that the said Intelligence was well founded as it appeared by the publick (sic) papers that His Majesty had signed the said Act the eighteenth of March last.

"Voted that Monday the next, the 19th instant, be the day of general rejoicing and that the inhabitants be notified thereof in compliance with the Vote of the town passed a the town meeting April 21, last. Accordingly the votes of the town relating thereto were ordered to be published by the Messrs. Drapers with a Notification annexed thereto in the following words.

"The Selectmen, having received certain Intelligence that the Act, repealing the Stamp Act, has past all the requisite formalities, congratulate the inhabitants of the town on the joyful news; and appoint, Monday next the 19th Instant for the Day of General rejoicing, in compliance with the Foregoing votes, recommending to all persons a due and punctual observance of the Salutory regulations enjoined therein.

"Mr. Williston was ordered to notify all the Sextons in town to ringing their several bells at Five a Clock in the Morning to continue til 6aclock in the Evening."

On the same day it repealed the Stamp Act, the English Parliament passed the Declaratory Act stating that the British government has total power to legislate any laws governing the American colonies in all cases whatsoever.

New Year's Eve, 1766, "Mr. Proctor, keeper of the Alms House was directed to receive into the Alms House on the Province Account one Christopher Morton a distracted and poor person who is a stranger and not an inhabitant of any town in this province." Happy New Year!

But it really wasn't all that happy. The Townshend Acts were soon to be passed and they were very similar to the Stamp Act, but even more incendiary.

In 1740, a school house, the Spring Street School, became so dilapidated that it was soon voted to have the school located in a private home of Nathaniel Whiting. But in 1767 Captain Jeremiah Richards of Richards' Tavern donated enough land for a schoolhouse to be built in West Roxbury. Everyone else in town donated books, supplies, or money

enough to make the school quite a success. It was located behind where the West Roxbury Library still stands—until 1967!! At that time, of course, King George was on the wall and allegiance was pledged daily to the crown! Hail to the king!!

The original deed, handwritten by Captain Jeremiah Richards, is in the archives today!

Sandi Serkess can be reached at sserkess@juno.com.