



#TallShipTuesdays

Historical Context

As the year 1773 drew to a close, Boston patriots faced a dilemma. Although most of the taxes under the Townshend Acts had been repealed in 1770, a small tax remained on tea. For a few years, no one paid much attention, and many colonists avoided the tax altogether by purchasing tea smuggled in from Holland and the Dutch West Indies.

The British government, however, was not happy that the colonists were buying smuggled tea. The East India Company of London, which dominated Britain's tea trade, was slowly sliding into bankruptcy. To save the company, the government passed the Tea Act of 1773. The law required that the colonists buy tea only from the East India Company and only through selected merchants to ensure that the tax was paid. Opposition to the Tea Act mounted.

In December 1773, three tea ships—the *Dartmouth*, *Eleanor*, and *Beaver*—were docked at Griffin's Wharf in Boston. The colonists refused to let the tea be unloaded. The royal governor of Massachusetts, Thomas Hutchinson, refused to let the ships return to London. Things could have stayed that way for a long time, except that the law also said that the cargo had to be unloaded and taxes paid within twenty days. If not, the cargo could be seized by customs officials and the duties paid. The deadline was December 17. Determined to keep the tea from being unloaded, the patriots took action on the night of December 16, 1773, and held a **tea party** like no other.

Vocabulary: **Redcoats** is a name the colonists gave to the British regulars because of the **red uniforms** they wore. Another, more insulting name was "**lobsterbacks**."

Did You Know...?

- During colonial times, government officials, including the occupying British troops, had the right to search people's homes at any time. This practice of "search and seizure" was so distasteful to the colonists that the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution, part of the Bill of Rights, states that no one can enter a person's home without a legal paper called a warrant.
- The "Native Americans" who took part in the Boston Tea Party were young men like Polly's brother. Many were apprentices, bound out to tradesmen to work and learn their trade. They were chosen to dump the tea because they would not be recognized. Only a few patriot leaders, including Paul Revere, went along to make sure the protest didn't turn into a riot.

Resource – the historical context comes from the short story "Polly and the Boston Tea Party," by Elizabeth Vollstadt in the book, *Young Patriots: Inspiring Stories of the American Revolution*, by Marcella Anderson & Elizabeth Vollstadt. The story is read by Capt. Jones in the #TallShipTuesdays video, "Polly and the Boston Tea Party."