

Samuel Cooper's Eyewitness Account of the Boston Tea Party, 1773

The duty on tea gave great umbrage to the colonists generally and in Boston an association was formed in 1770 to drink no tea until the duty was repealed. This course was persisted in 1773 the arrival of 3 ships from England laden with tea caused great disgust.

No little excitement prevailed among the inhabitants of Boston, on account of the arrival of the ships laden with tea from England. Every effort was made to send these ships back but without success and it was soon evident that the tea would be landed unless some active measures were adopted by the citizens to prevent it. A town meeting was called on the afternoon of December 16, 1773 to devise measures for getting rid of this annoyance. At this meeting, which was held in the Old South Meeting House corner of Main and Milk Street, Jno. Hancock presided.

A little before sundown an alarm was created among the assembled citizens by the cry of fire, which was suppose to be given by some of the British officers who had attended the meeting in citizen dress and had given the alarm for the purpose of breaking up the assembly. They had nearly effected this object when the town clerk, Wm. Cooper rose and in a loud voice told the citizens that there was no fire to be apprehended but the fire of the British and begged them to keep their plaices.

Immediately after a detach't of about 20 men disguised as Indians was seen to approach in single file by the west door of the Church. They marched with silent steps down the isle and so passed by the south door brandishing their tomahaws in that direction. The appearance of these men created some sensation. No one appeared to expect their arrival and the object of their visit seemed wholly inexplicable. On leaving the church, they proceeded in the same order in which they entered it, down Milk Street through that part of town which led to Gray's and Tiletson's wharves where the tea ships lay.

Arrived at the wharves they divided into three troops each with a leader gained possession of the ships quietly and proceeded to lighten them of their cargo by hoisting out the boxes and emptying their contents into the dock. No noise was heard except the occasional clink of the hatchet in opening the boxes and the whole business was performed with so much expedition that before 10 o'clock that night the entire cargo of the three vessels were deposited in the docks.

Many a wishful eye was directed to the piles of tea which lay in the docks and one poor fellow (5) who could not resist the temptation had filled the lining of his cloak with about a bushel of the plants. He was soon observed by the crowd and the process of lightening him of his burden was short. He was dragged a little distance on the wharf to a barrel and was soon furnished with a coat of tar and shavings.

Document Source: The Boston Tea Party Historical Society