

Who Were Our Forefathers?

Who were the men we have so fondly labeled our "founding fathers," and what were the tools they used to prepare public opinion in the colonies for a war against England to gain independence.

The men included Samuel and John Adams, Patrick Henry, John Hancock, Paul Revere, Thomas Paine, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison.

The tools used were the church, the press, demonstrations, public meeting places, ad hoc committees, and tradesmen.

THE CHURCHES in the 13 colonies played an important role in encouraging dissent against the crown, and in participating in events leading toward independence.

The lanterns used as signals for Paul Revere and his fellow riders were hung in Christ's Episcopal Church which still stands in Boston.

Christ's Church was used because it had the tallest steeple in Boston, and because Revere as a boy had a part-time job as a bell-ringer for that church and was familiar with how far one could see from its steeple.

The church was also chosen because the lantern hanger, Robert Newman, had access to the church keys because he was

working part-time as a sexton at the time.

Early contributions to "the cause" were sermons from the pulpits, especially from the Mather brothers, and debates on church porches after congregations were finally dismissed.

New England Puritans referred to their churches as "meeting houses," but they could more accurately be described as hotbeds of sedition.

These were the days of three-hour sermons and one-hour prayers. Churches were centers of intellectual life and Samuel and Ingham Mather, who both pastored at Old North in Boston, often banded King George about for his treatment of God's people in the colonies.

The Sunday following the famed "Boston Massacre," a blistering sermon was presented by the Rev. John Lathrup. Using Genesis 3:10 as a text, he exhorted that the "British Lobsters" (troops) be put to death for their sins.

Churches were used as meeting places because most of the public halls, such as Faneuil Hall in Boston, were unable to accommodate large crowds.

CHURCH BELLS were used to summon townsfolk toward the church building, and not just on the Sabbath either. Peal of bells in

the evening was a signal for fire and would bring men rushing toward the church with buckets.

Bells were also used to draw residents to an outdoor rally and, often, the church bells would ring when an unpopular act of the British Parliament had been repealed.

Church bells also tolled over the withdrawal of an unpopular governor or crown official, and the tolls opened and closed the markets. When Bostonians were on the streets angered over political issues of the day, the ringing of bells from almost every church steeple would heighten the adrenalin.

Boston rebels fermenting unrest often relied on church bells to obtain an "instant mob."

SEDITION was also plotted in the newsrooms and print shops of New England newspapers, particularly in the offices of the Boston Gazette.

According to tradition, the Gazette's columns were not only used to spread revolutionary doctrine but its offices appropriated as a dressing room for the "Indians" who unloaded the tea.

Enactment of the Stamp Act of 1765 marked the end of the period of journalistic beginning in the colonies and the dawn of an era dominated by political discussion.

The Stamp Act provided that all newspapers had to be printed

on a stamped paper. The stamped paper carried a tax of one-half penny for each copy for a two-page edition and a tax of two shillings for each advertisement.

The act did not radicalize Gazette Publishers Benjamin Edes and John Gill, however. They were already dedicated patriots and ignored the act by refusing to pay the tax. Edes was a politician and member of the Sons of Liberty group which John Adams labeled the "Loyal Nine."

The Gazette "news" columns were filled with political articles written by a group of Boston radicals, and helped prepare the minds of readers for the idea of independence.

Reporters drawn from the Caucus Club included such men as Sam and John Adams, Joseph Warren, Josiah Quincy, Thomas Cushing, Samuel Cooper, James Otis, and John Hancock.

Sam Adams used pen names, at least a dozen. Historian Frank Luther Mott states: "Through his writings in the Gazette and his talent for political organization and propaganda, Sam Adams doubtless did more than any other individual to bring independence forward as a practical measure."

John Adams, later in life, wrote of the revolutionary press when he stated: "The printers

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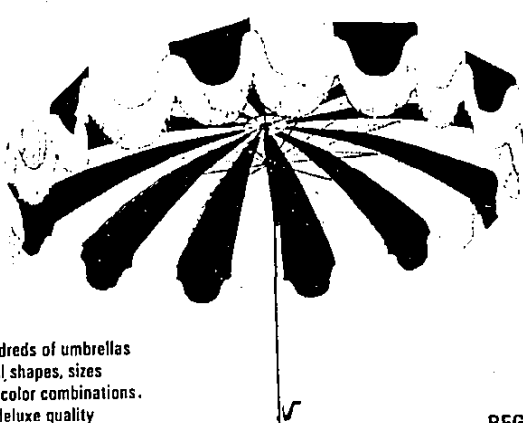
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