

CHAPTER III

IN THE REVOLUTION

Patriots and Tories. The Battle of Fall River. Resolutions on Boston Tea Party and Declaration of Independence. Schools and Churches

The town of Freetown, of which Fall River was then a part, had an excellent record in the Revolution. Though at first under Tory influence, the patriots here rallied promptly and by word and deed took their stand in favor of liberty and independence. The southern and eastern sections were strongly patriotic, but in conservative Assonet there were many Tories. "The latter appear to have been successful at a town meeting in January, 1744, at which the destruction of tea in Boston harbor was condemned in strong resolutions.

The tea had been thrown overboard on December 16, and on January 8, pursuant to a request of a number of inhabitants for a meeting to consider the affair, such a meeting was called to be held at the middle school house January 17. Captain George Chase was moderator, and "after sum Debates and Duely Considering ye bad Consequences which probably may arise from ye proceeding," it was decided that the town should act on the matter, and a committee was appointed to prepare resolutions, which were adopted on January 26. These criticised the town of Boston for allowing the incident, declared that Freetown abhorred, detested and forever bore testimony against such acts, and instructed the representative in the General Court to use his utmost endeavor to prevent in the future all such "Kiotous and Mobish proceedings." Fear was expressed that the affair "will bring upon us the Vengeance of an Affronted Majesty, and also plunge us in Debt and Misery when ye Injured owners of sd Tea shall make there Demand for ye Vallue of ye Same," and it was ordered that the vote be "farely Recorded in ye Town Book" and a copy sent to the press "that ye World may know our minds Respecting our libertys and Good Government, and ye Resolutions we

have to obey ye good Laws of our land, which under God for so long this Province have been happy in ye Injoyment of." The committee which drew up these resolutions consisted of Thomas Gilbert, Abiel Terry, James Winslow, Jail Hathaway, and Jesse Bullock.

The sentiment changed quickly, however, for at a town meeting on September 19 of the same year, agreeable to the request of the Taunton committee to choose representatives to confer with those of other towns in the county as to "measures proper to us in our deplorable circumstances," Thomas Durfee, Captain Ambrose Barnaby, Dr. John Turner, Nathaniel Morton and Joshua Hathaway were selected "to consult the neighboring committees in said county and elsewhere as they shall think most for the good of the county respecting the dispensation of government at this critical day."

The committee, with others, met at the Court House at Taunton September 28, 1774, with Zephaniel Leonard, Esq., chairman. Patriotic speeches were made and resolutions unanimously adopted that they were "determined at the risk of their fortunes and their lives to defend their natural and compacted rights" and "oppose to their utmost all illegal and unconstitutional measures which have been or hereafter may be adopted by the British Parliament or the British Ministry."

Thirty-one men under Captain Levi Rounselle responded to the first call, April 19, 1775, usually known as the Lexington alarm. They were Lieutenants Samuel Taber and Natt Morton, Sergeants John White and Consider Crapo, Corporals Joshua Lawrence and Seth Hillman and Privates Philip Taber, Uriel Pierce, Benj. Lawrence, Abiel Cole, Consider White, Jesse Keen, Jacob Benson, John Clark, John Braley, Per-

cival Ashley, Ichabod Johnson, Michael Ashley, Seth Morton, Jeff Sachems, Israel Haskell, Louis DeMoranville, Abram Ashley, Charles DeMoranville, Aaron Seekel, Abner Haskins, Benjamin Runnells, Thomas Rounsvill, Peter Crapo and Joseph Hacket.

The town also furnished a number for service in the field, especially against the British on Rhode Island. At a town meeting May 10, 1775, it was voted to care for the families of poor soldiers, and at a meeting the following March a committee of correspondence, inspection and safety was selected and boats ordered built for the town's use "to cross the river in if our enemies should attack our friends on the opposite shore." The articles of confederation were approved February 10, 1777.

At a town meeting July 15, 1776, with Stephen Borden moderator, resolutions drawn up by Major Joshua Hathaway, Col. James Winslow and John Hathaway as a committee, declaring strongly in favor of the recently signed Declaration of Independence, were adopted. These were as follows:—

"Whereas, George, the Third, King of Great Britain, in Violation of ye Principles of British Constitution and of the Laws of Justice and Humanity, Hath, by an accumulation of oppressions unpariled in history, excluded ye Inhabitants of this as well as ye other neighboring Collones from his Protection; and whereas, he hath paid no regard to any of our Remonstrances and Dutiefull petitions for redress of our Complicated Grevinces, but hath purchased foreign Troops to assist in Enslaving us and Enciteed ye Savages of this Countery to Carry on a war aagainst us, as also ye Negroes, to imbru their hands in ye Blood of their masters in a manner unpractised by Civilised Nations, and moreover hath Lately insulted our Calematyes by Declaring that he will have no mercy on us till he hath Subdued us; and, whereas, the obligations of alegence being reciprocal between ye King and his subjects, are now dissolved on ye side of ye Collonies by ye Dispotism and Declaration of ye King, insomuch that Loyalty to him is Treason against the good people of this Countery; and, whereas, not only ye parliment, but there is Great reason to believe Too many of ye people of Great Britain have concured in ye aforesd arbitrary and unjust proceedings Against us; and, whereas, the Publick Virtue of this Collony,

so essential to its Liberty and happiness must be indangered by a futer political union with, or Dependence on, a Crown and nation so lost to patriotism and magnanimity; We, the Inhabitants of Freetown, in publick Town meeting assemblé, for giving instructions to our representative by Direction from ye general Court, Do in publick Town meeting Vote and declare, and Direct our representative to Declare in ye general Court that we are ready with our Lives and fortunes To Support the General Congress in Declaring the united American Colonies free and independent of Greate Britain, and also Direct our said representative to move in the General Court for ye Delegates for this Colony to be Directed to move for, and give votes for, said Independence, provided, that the internal police of this Government Be allwise left to the people of the said Colony, and we declare to all ye world that we do not make this Declaration out of pride or Envy, but By the Dictates of the Laws of Nature, and appeal to ye Supreme Governor of the world for our Sincerity in the Declaration."

The graves of a number of Revolutionary soldiers buried here have been marked by the Sons of the American Revolution and are as follows: In the North Steep Brook burying ground, Captain James Simmonds and Benjamin Weaver; in the North burying ground, Colonel Joseph Durfee, Thomas Durfee and Robert Irving; in the Oak Grove Cemetery, Ephraim Boomer, Elisha Caswell and Benjamin Peck.

One of these, Colonel Joseph Durfee, took an active part in the war and was prominent in the fight with the British here, May 25, 1778, of which he has left a graphic account. The British were then holding the southern end of the island of Rhode Island and with the aid of their fleet continually harassed the towns on the bay, including Freetown. In the fall of 1777, on his return from service in the field, Colonel Durfee saw the need of a guard for the protection of the citizens, and secured the consent of the authorities to form one. What followed is best told in his own words:

"I soon raised a guard, procured the store now standing at the end of the Iron Works Company's wharf, in this place for a guard-house, where we met every day, called the roll, and stationed sentinels for the night to watch the movements of the enemy and give the alarm when approached. The or-

ders of the sentinel were peremptory—that if a boat was seen approaching in the night to hail them three times, and if no answer was received to fire upon them. It was not long before one of the guard, Samuel Reed, discovered boats silently and cautiously approaching the shore from the bay. The challenge was given but no answer received. He fired upon the boats. This created an alarm, and the whole neighborhood was soon in arms. I stationed the guard behind a stone wall, and kept up a constant fire upon the enemy until they brought their cannon to bear upon us, and commenced firing grape shot amongst us—when, as we were unable to return the compliment, it was deemed advisable to retreat. Two of the guard were sent to remove all the planks which laid over the stream for foot people to cross upon, and to cut off, as far as possible, every facility for crossing the stream, except the upper bridge. We then retreated slowly until we reached the main road, near where the bridge now crosses the stream. I then gave orders to form and give them battle. This was done, and never were soldiers more brave. So roughly were the enemy handled by our little band of Spartans that they soon beat a retreat, leaving behind them one dead and another bleeding to death, besides the wounded whom they carried away.

“The wounded soldier left by the enemy, before he expired, informed me that the number of the enemy who attacked us was about 150, commanded by Major Ayres. When the enemy landed they set fire to the house of Thomas Borden, then nearly new. They next set fire to a grist mill and a saw mill belonging to Mr. Borden, standing at the mouth of Fall River. These buildings I saw when set on fire. When the British troops retreated, as they were compelled to do, from the shots of our little band of volunteers, they set fire to the house and other buildings of Richard Borden, then an aged man, and took him prisoner. We pursued them so closely in their retreat that we were enabled to save the building which they had last fired. The British were frequently fired upon and not a little annoyed by the musketry of our soldiers, as they passed down the bay in their boats on their retreat. Mr. Richard Borden, whom they took prisoner, was in one of their boats. Finding themselves closely pursued by a few American soldiers, who from the shore poured in their

shot and balls upon them as fast as they could load and fire, and finding themselves in danger from the musketry of these few brave Whigs, who pursued them, they ordered Mr. Borden, their prisoner, to stand up in the boat, hoping that his comrades on the shore would recognize him and desist from firing upon them. But this he refused to do; and threw himself flat into the bottom of the boat. While laying there, a shot from the Americans on shore killed one of the British soldiers standing by his side in the boat. Mr. Borden was obstinately silent to all the questions which were asked him; so that not being able to make any profitable use of him, they dismissed him in a few days on parole. The engagement took place on a Sabbath morning on the 25th of May, 1778. The two British soldiers killed in this engagement were buried at twelve o'clock on the same day of the battle, near where the south end of the Massasoit factory now stands.”

The site of this battle was marked by a bronze tablet erected by the Quequechan Chapter, D. A. R., May 25, 1899, on the southwest corner of the City Hall.

The Tories here were chiefly of the older, more wealthy and conservative inhabitants, who had become so accustomed to the established order that they hesitated to risk security under the new and who found the shifting of allegiance from King to colony too difficult. Some who in earlier years had been Tories, like Captain Ambrose Barnaby, and Captain Levi Rounseville, were later brought to the patriot cause and were active in its support. Captain Rounseville, indeed, was in command of the Minute Men who responded to the Lexington alarm, and Captain Barnaby also did much in the cause of liberty.

The most prominent of all the loyalists was Colonel Thomas Gilbert, of Assonet, a veteran of the French and Indian war, and the head of the second regiment of militia, to which the Freetown companies belonged. He was the town's representative in the General Court and chairman of the committee which drew up the resolutions expressing abhorrence at the Boston tea party. Early in 1775, by direction of General Gage, at Boston, he stored considerable quantities of war material and organized 300 men of this county for quelling any uprising in this section. Two thousand Whigs from other towns marched on the force, but Col-

onel Gilbert, learning of their approach, took what he could of the munitions and, with some of his followers fled to an English war vessel at Newport. The arms and ammunition left behind were seized and 29 men, who had enlisted under Gilbert, were captured, but released on promises of better behavior. This was on April 9, ten days before the battle of Lexington. Colonel Gilbert's property was confiscated.

Another active Tory was Samuel Valentine, though not the only one, as appears from a list of 26 men, voted for trial May 31, 1777.

But very little knowledge of the schools of the Colonial period has come down to us. The children were not without instruction in the elementary subjects of reading, writing and arithmetic, however, for it was firmly fixed in the minds of the fathers that the educating of their offspring was a solemn religious duty. This was emphasized by the early enactment of a law compelling every town of fifty families to maintain a public school and every town of 100 families one to fit pupils for Harvard College. In this community, too, the teaching of the Friends' Discipline that members of the meeting should give special care to the instruction of the young was of great weight, for a large number of the settlers belonged to that faith and early established their own school system, by which the Quaker children were taught, usually by women, at homes of members of the society.

The first mention of schools in the town records appears in 1702, when Robert Duffee was chosen agent to secure a man to dispense the gospel and teach the children reading and writing. This double service as minister and pedagogue was common in the colonies and continued to be so for many years. William Way was the first schoolmaster, elected in 1704, it appears, and remained till three years later, when he was dismissed by vote of the town.

The next date on which the matter of schools appears is May 5, 1718, when Jacob Hathaway was chosen "to seek for a schoolmaster." In October of that year Thomas Roberts was hired to teach for £36 a year, the first third of the period at the north end of the town, the next third at the meeting house and the last third at or near John Howland's, which was within the limits of the present city. Roberts probably did not stay more than three years, for in 1721 it

was voted to seek a new man, and in the following year William Caswell was voted £30, to teach for a year, with the understanding that he was to be at all cost for boarding himself. William Gaige was another early teacher. There were years, however, when public educational facilities were few, for the town was repeatedly indicted for not having a schoolmaster as the law directed.

The first record of schoolhouses appears in 1722 in a vote to erect two buildings "at the middle of each half of the town from the meeting-house or centre," and in 1727 it was ordered that a school to be erected should be 18 by 14 feet. Seventy pounds were appropriated for meeting the expense of the three structures. The dimensions and cost given show that the buildings of this time were far different from the modern structures, and even as late as 1791, when the town was divided into seven school districts and a vote passed for the erection of new houses, they had not greatly increased. The largest of these, for district No. 3, between Steep Brook and Assonet, where there were 58 families, was but 25½ by 20 feet. The school in district No. 1, near the centre of Fall River, was 24x20, and was to accommodate the pupils from 47 families. District No. 2, to the north of this, had a building of the same dimensions and 52 families.

These schoolhouses were, of course, but one story high, and were built with an eye single to utility. The walls were covered with pine boards and plastered and a small entry partitioned off at the front. Opposite the teacher's desk was a large fireplace in which four-foot wood was burned, and running around the side of the room in several rows were rough benches for the pupils with desks for the older scholars of two-foot planks. There were no receptacles for books and slates, unless here and there an individual drawer. The teacher's desk was equally plain—a frame of planed pine boards standing four and a half feet high. The windows were small and without shades, and there were no maps or pictures.

Reading, writing and arithmetic were the principal studies. For the first the Bible was a favorite, and later the New England Primer. For penmanship, in which the pupils took much pride if they did well, for graceful chirography was considered a notable accomplishment, there were copies set by the teacher, whose duty it also was to

mend the goose-quills used for pens. The arithmetic was mostly done by rules, easily learned and applied, and while the examples set often involved laborious calculations, they did not tax the mental powers or develop the reasoning abilities as do the problems given to the school children of to-day. Spelling was also taught, but history, geography, nature study and other subjects brought into the schools of this century received but scant notice.

The early town records are still preserved in the old town of Freetown, and copies of them are kept in the City Clerk's office here. The records are not in chronological order at the first, and the minutes appear to have been written wherever a convenient place offered. The first entry is the birth of Abigail Makepeace, and is followed by the record of the election and swearing in of various officers, including Thomas Freelove as tuning man. There are also numerous records of the ear-marks of domestic animals belonging to citizens of the town, of which "Joseph Dunham his earmark on his creatures is a fork on the left ear and a half-penny on each side of the same" is a typical example. Regulations for horses, swine and sheep that were allowed to go at large, fines for non-attendance at town meeting, provisions for scout duty and the licensing of Indians who came here to hunt, and the appropriation of 15 shillings to build a town stocks, after the town had been indicted for not having one, throw considerable light on the life of the period.

A frequent subject for consideration at town meetings was the matter of a town minister, in accordance with the law of the colony. The local residents appear to have had little sympathy for this, and were repeatedly indicted for failure to provide such an officer. The early schoolmasters were sometimes also expected to act as ministers, but objections were raised that they were not duly approved by the ministers of the neighboring towns, as the law required. In 1707 the town voted to appeal to the Bishop of London to supply a clergyman, possibly hoping thereby to escape the expense of the minister's salary, as well as annoy the Puritan State Magistrates, and this vote was frequently cited as an objection when attempts were later made to elect a Congregational clergyman. Joseph Avery, Jonathan Dodson, Thomas Craighead, James McSparron and Silas Brett were among the official ministers of the town at this period.

A meeting-house 26x36 feet and 18 feet between joints was completed in 1714, on land given for the purpose by Samuel Lynde. It stood on the main road, near the present line between Freetown and Fall River. Twenty pounds toward the cost were given by the General Court.

The Friends were long the largest and most powerful denomination in the town. Their meeting-house was erected not far from the present Crystal Spring Bleachery, about 1725.

