

## **Samuel Adams**

**1722-1803**

**American Patriot, Journalist, and Statesman  
Rallied the Colonists to the  
Cause of the American Revolution**

**SAMUEL ADAMS WAS BORN** on September 27, 1722, in Boston, Massachusetts. His parents were Samuel and Mary Adams. Samuel was a brewer and Mary was a homemaker. Samuel was one of 12 children. All but three died as infants. Samuel grew up with a brother and a sister. His most famous relative was his cousin, **John Adams**, his fellow Patriot and the second President of the United States.

**SAMUEL ADAMS GREW UP** in Boston in a close family. His mother was very strict, and a devout Christian. Samuel was raised to be a responsible, dutiful young man.

**SAMUEL ADAMS WENT TO SCHOOL** at Boston Grammar School. He went to Harvard College when he was 14 years old. When he graduated, he took part in a debate on liberty. He won. Adams completed a master's degree at Harvard in 1743.

**FIRST JOBS:** Adams went to work as a businessman. But he wasn't very good at business, and he went broke. Soon, he was working at the family brewery. (There is currently a brewery called "Samuel Adams," but it is not run by any of Adams's descendants.) However, Adams's first love was politics, so his work at the brewery took second place.

Adams took a job as a tax collector in Boston in 1756. He served in the job for eight years, but he didn't keep his mind on his work. He failed to collect almost \$10,000 in taxes owed to the government. By this time, he was too involved in politics.

**NEWSPAPERMAN:** In 1748, Adams started a newspaper, *The Independent Advertiser*. It was his first experience in writing about politics. After his father died in 1748, Adams was supposed to take over the brewery. But he kept his focus on the growing unrest in Boston. His brother and brother-in-law ran the brewery, while he ran the paper. Over the next 30 years, Adams wrote many articles and pamphlets, promoting his political beliefs. Adams's message from the beginning was his firm belief that people had the natural right to self-government.

By this time, the British Parliament had begun to tax the colonists. They did this in part to pay for the expense of the **FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR**. That war took place between 1754 and 1763. Britain defeated France and gained vast territories in North America, but it was also very expensive. They imposed a series of taxes, which infuriated many colonists.

Some colonists, known as Loyalists, wanted to work out their differences and remain part of England. But many others, known as Patriots, wanted to break away from England and form a new country. The growing hostilities between Patriots like Sam Adams and British officials helped spark the Revolution.

**OPPOSING THE SUGAR ACT:** In 1764, the British Parliament revised a previous tax on sugar, molasses, and other goods imported from the French West Indies. The Sugar Act changed the way in which money was collected from the colonists, ensuring that the colonists paid high tariffs.

Adams reacted with outrage. By this time, he was involved in the “Caucus Club,” a group of like-minded Boston Patriots. He challenged the Sugar Act because he felt it limited the colonists’ right to self-government. The British were imposing these taxes without giving the colonists a say. So strong was the protest that the British reversed the Act.

**SONS OF LIBERTY:** Adams was also active in a group of Patriots who called themselves the Sons of Liberty. Members, like Adams and **Paul Revere**, were adamantly opposed to British rule in the colonies. Often in secret, they met to plan the best way to fight the British.

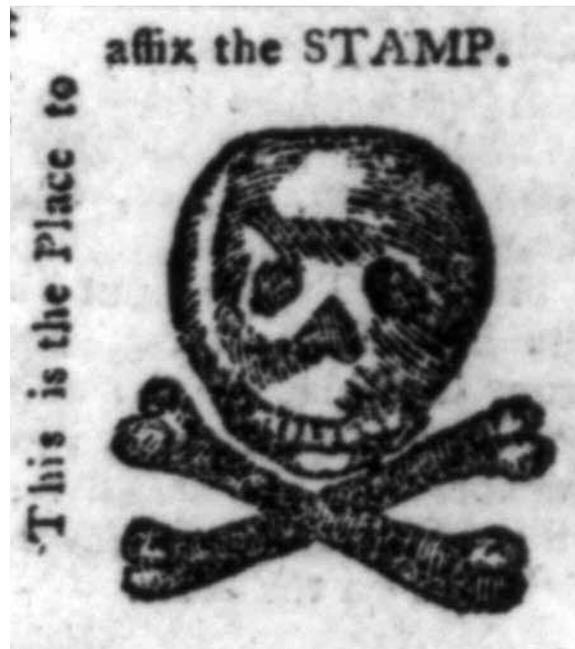
**OPPOSING THE STAMP ACT:** In 1765, Adams rallied the colonists against the Stamp Act. This Act of Parliament, passed in 1765, made it mandatory that most documents, such as contracts, newspapers, and pamphlets, had to be written on special paper bearing a stamp from the British government.

The colonists were forced to purchase the stamped paper for most of their documents, because documents on plain paper had no legal standing. The American colonists were suspicious of the tax because many thought that the money paid remained in the pockets of the “Stamp Men.” Those were the agents who sold the paper to them.

Adams wrote pamphlets denouncing the British. He and other Patriots rallied the people. The colonists protested so much that in 1766, the Stamp Act was repealed.

**ELECTED TO THE ASSEMBLY:** Adams was elected to the Massachusetts General Assembly in 1765. By that time, he was already a seasoned and effective political leader. He served as the clerk of the Assembly until 1774.

Adams wrote and spoke to the colonists about the British presence in the colonies. He railed against British rule, which he said



*Political cartoon indicating how much the colonists, especially Sam Adams, hated the Stamp Tax.*

was unjust. He stated that the colonists and their government were independent of British control. These rights, he claimed, were the natural rights of all men.

**BOSTON MASSACRE:** On the evening of March 5, 1770, a rumor began to fly around Boston. A British soldier had supposedly struck a young barber's apprentice. Armed only with snowballs and sticks, a group of citizens confronted the soldiers. With **Crispus Attucks** at the head of the crowd, they marched to the Boston Customs House.

The soldiers fired into the crowd. When the smoke cleared, Attucks and three others lay dead. Eventually five men—Attucks, Samuel Gray, James Caldwell, Samuel Maverick, and Patrick Carr—died of their wounds.

The people of Boston were furious. They claimed that Attucks and the other men were martyrs in the cause of independence. Adams called their



*The Boston Massacre.*

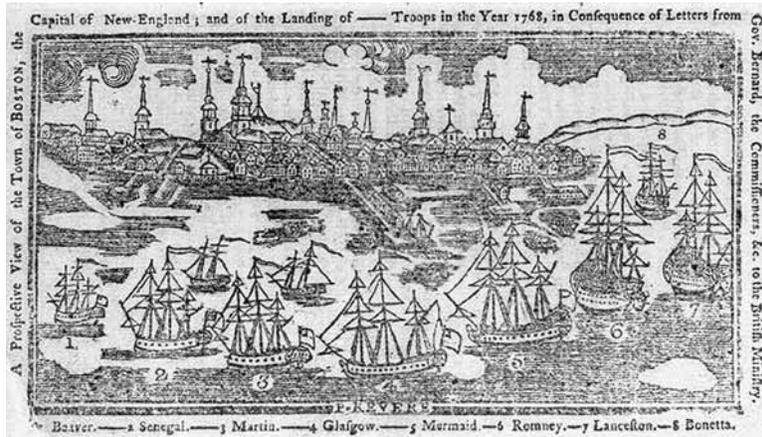
murder “The Boston Massacre.” It became another rallying cry of the Patriots.

**THE COMMITTEE OF CORRESPONDENCE:** In 1772, Adams helped to form the Committees of Correspondence. These important groups shared information about resistance to the British among the colonies. The British authorities were furious. Loyalist Thomas Hutchinson wrote of its effect on Massachusetts. “All of a sudden from a state of peace, order, and general contentment, the province was brought into a state of contention.”

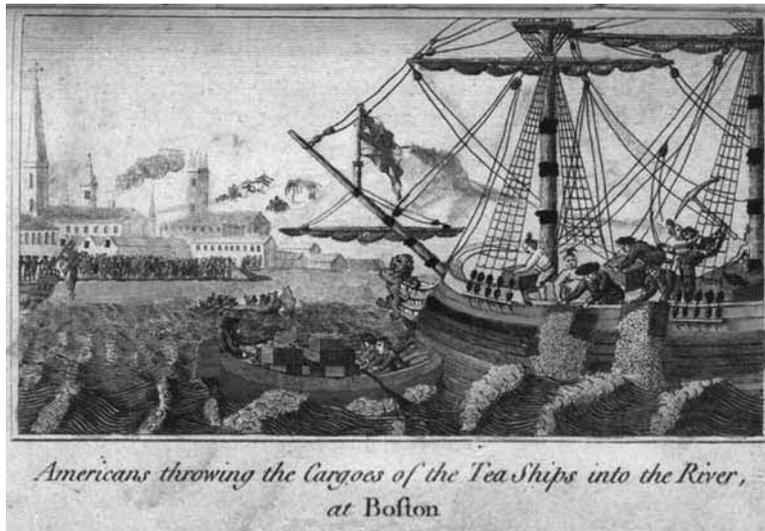
**TEA ACT:** Probably the most famous law passed by Parliament was the Tea Act. The Act was passed in 1773. The East India Company was a large importer/exporter of tea. They were in financial trouble and the British government wanted to help them. In the colonies, East India could sell the tea at a much reduced price to the Americans. This undercut the prices sold by colonial merchants. When the ships loaded with East India tea reached Boston Harbor, the colonists refused to unload them.

### **BOSTON TEA PARTY:**

Although the Tea Act did not impose additional duties or taxes on the colonists, they were suspicious of Parliament’s motives. The colonists felt that the British would not stop increasing taxes. It was time to



*This drawing shows several British ships carrying troops to calm the Colonists of Boston in 1768.*



*A painting showing the Boston Tea Party*

resist as best they could. Led by Adams and Paul Revere, the colonists made a plan. On December 16, 1773, “The Boston Tea Party” took place. A group of patriots, many of them from the Sons of Liberty, dressed as Mohawk Indians and dumped 342 chests of tea into the harbor.

The British were infuriated. They closed the port of Boston to all trade in March 1774. They imposed martial law and martial courts. Adams called for a congress to discuss the colonists’ response.

**FIRST CONTINENTAL CONGRESS:** The First Continental Congress met in Philadelphia in 1774. Adams was elected to represent Massachusetts. He became a leader within the Congress, speaking for a strong response to English rule. The members of the Congress decided to boycott British goods and fight taxes.

**PAUL REVERE AND HIS MIDNIGHT RIDE:** After Adams returned to Boston, he was once again at the center of the conflict. But he was

also in danger. The British authorities wanted Adams and fellow Patriot **John Hancock** arrested for plotting against them. On April 18, 1775, Paul Revere warned Adams and Hancock to the danger during his famous ride. The next day, the battles of Lexington and Concord took place. Soon, Adams was back in Philadelphia, as the call for Revolution spread.

**SECOND CONTINENTAL CONGRESS:** In May 1775, the colonists called a Second Continental Congress. Adams once again represented Massachusetts. The Congress issued its call to action: the Declaration of Independence.

**THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE:** The Declaration outlined the reasons behind the Revolutionary War. It was written mainly by **Thomas Jefferson**, with help from **John Adams** and **Benjamin Franklin**. In simple, powerful language, it describes what the colonists thought about their rights as individuals and as citizens. It states that all men are born equal and free. They have the right to revolt against those who will not give them freedom. On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress accepted the Declaration of Independence. Adams was among the signers.

**THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR:** Throughout the Revolutionary War, Adams continued to write and to rally the Patriots. He also continued to serve in the Continental Congress until 1781. After the defeat of the British, the United States came into being.

**THE U.S. CONSTITUTION:** Adams served as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, helping to define the new nation. He urged his colleagues to resist the goal of some delegates to build a strong central government. He believed in very limited powers for

any government. This was in keeping with his belief in self-government for all. He voted for approval of the Constitution, but insisted on the addition of the **BILL OF RIGHTS**. These guaranteed those individual freedoms—of speech, of the press, of the right to assembly—so dear to his heart.

**LATER LIFE:** The old Patriot stayed in politics until late in life. He helped draft the state constitution for Massachusetts. He ran for, but did not win, a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. He was elected lieutenant governor of Massachusetts in 1789. He served in that post until 1794. That year, after the death of his old friend John Hancock, he became governor of the state. He held that job until 1797. Adams died in Boston on October 2, 1803.

**MARRIAGE AND FAMILY:** Adams was married twice. His first wife was named Mary Checkley. They married in 1749 and had five children. Only two lived to be adults. Mary died in 1757. Adams married again in 1764. His second wife was named Elizabeth Wells. They had no children of their own, but Elizabeth helped to raise Adams's two children from his first marriage.

**HIS LEGACY:** Adams was one of the most important early Patriots in the fight for independence. His dedication to self-government helped insure that that concept was central to the goals of the Revolution and the Constitution.

**WORLD WIDE WEB SITES:**

[http://www.ushistory.org/Declaration/signers/adams\\_s.htm](http://www.ushistory.org/Declaration/signers/adams_s.htm)

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/kids/dreamteam/samueladams.html>