

Remember that the colonies had a form of self-governance, but it was a limited one. While the municipal and colonial assemblies may have been elected to represent the people's interest. They represented those interests to the governor who worked for the King. So, in the end they were always at the mercy of petitioning the King and parliament for the privilege of having their rights respected. In the regulators war the Sheriffs, the Militia and assemblies who were to represent the people, sided with the crown against the people's liberty. I am sure you can think of instances of that going in America where Sheriffs, Police Chiefs, local assemblies and states officials siding against the people's liberty. This is why it is so important to have local and state representatives like sheriffs, who are constitutionally minded, who will stand on their oath to defend liberty and to have a legitimate militia that operates on behalf of the people rather than a standing army that works on the behalf of the govt.

For this lesson let's remember that in the lead up to 1776 Sam Adams, John Adams and James Otis Jr continually expressed their loyalty to the crown. they initially had no desire to separate from GB and even less interest in an armed conflict, Their goal was to see their rights restored and respected; But eventually that sentiment changed. Several events contributed to this change. We looked at the regulators war beginning in 1765 in NC. Another episode in NY added to the growing discontent. It was the Liberty pole skirmishes and the Battle of Golden Hill.

Skirmishes Around Liberty Pole

Pole #1

We start in NY On March 18 the universally despised Stamp Act was repealed and in celebration a liberty pole was erected at what is now City Hall Park in NYC then referred to as the commons or the fields (the same field A. Hamilton would deliver a rousing speech in 1774, The same field Washington celebrated in with a reading of the Declaration and Psalm 80, and the same field at the end of which Nathan Hale was hanged and uttered his last words I regret that I only have one life to give for my country).

On June 4th a celebration was held around the liberty pole. Ship's mast was planted in the ground with 12 barrels of tar strapped to it and 24 chords of wood at the base. After a 25 gun salute the pole was Set ablaze to thunderous cheers.

The other liberty pole was left standing with the inscription George, Pitt & Liberty signifying the repeal of the stamp act.

The loyal British Soldiers marching by the pole daily did not share the joy of what the soldiers saw as “the disobedient and disloyal American colonists. And on August 10 the soldiers concluded that the best way that they could get some enjoyment out of the liberty pole was to chop it down, and that is exactly what they did.

3,000 NEW YORKERS gathered on the commons with Isaac Sears, NY leader of the Sons of Liberty giving a speech and demanding answers as to why the liberty pole had been cut down. Insults were hurled at the troops. And once the insults turned into hurled bricks and stones, the troops charged with fixed bayonets. The colonist swung their Clubs, the soldiers drew their swords, then the colonists drew their pistols. And a stalemate promptly ensued. The commander dismissed the soldiers and the commons was cleared.

The next day Handbills were posted by the Sons of Liberty saying they would have their revenge, and they would stop the soldiers’ daily parades. As a result several of the Sons of Liberty were hauled to court for making threats against soldiers and officers.

POLE # 2

Another even taller liberty pole was installed on the commons but the troops set up a guard and prevented entrance to the crowds. There was pushing and shoving but fortunately no bloodshed.

Afterwards Petitions began to be circulated demanding the removal of troops from the city.

And in the midst of a sweltering heatwave the Sons of liberty advised vendors that no goods were to be sold to soldiers or officers. A petition was sent to General Gage, “any Soldiers not on duty not be allowed to carry arms.” Major James of the 28th reg was served with writs for damages to the liberty pole.

At this point an Artillery detachment was deployed at the barracks with cannons and at the fort 28th artillery deployed 80 men on march 6.

The Writs against Major James were dismissed and rocks and bricks were promptly delivered to the major’s sitting room by way of his windows.

Then on Sept 23, the 2nd liberty pole was cut down.

POLE #3

A third pole was put up which stayed up until 1767 when the colonists gathered to celebrate the anniversary of the Stamp Acts repeal.

On March 18, the New York Journal reported that “a few very mischievous spirits among the soldiery” left the barracks late at night and cut down the liberty pole.

Pole #4

The following night A fourth event larger pole was erected, this time secured with iron bands around the lower third of pole. The same night the soldiers tried to cut it down and failed and then tried to dig it up and gave up.

On march 21st they came back and tried to blow it up with gun powder and that didn't work. Sunday night soldiers were seen by the tavern watch coming to the common when confronted they ran off. Tuesday soldiers arrived with a ladder to get past the iron bands but were headed off by an An officer who ordered them to return to the barracks. Once command was notified an order was issued by Gage to leave it alone. And calmness ensued for almost 3 years.

The Quartering Act had been passed which the New York government mostly left unenforced. Parliament reacted to this by dissolving the assembly and replacing it with one that would be more agreeable.

In November 1769 The New York assembly finally allocated money for the troops. On December 16th, an anonymous writer issued a broadside called "To the Betrayed Inhabitants of the City and Colony of New York" in response declaring that the Delancey faction of the assembly has betrayed the colonists by paying troops "not sent to protect us but to enslave us." Signed A Son of Liberty. The Delancey led legislature offered a reward of 100 pounds for the name of the anonymous journalist.

Protest continued from then into the New year. And on Jan 13th soldiers showed up to blow up the liberty pole. Spotted by tavern patrons who sounded the alarm, but the soldiers invaded the tavern and assaulted the patrons and the waiter. The sons called for an assembly in the commons on the 17th.

But on the night of the 16th the soldiers had succeeded in igniting the powder and blew up this liberty pole And left the remains of the pole on the door of a tavern owner named Mr. Montanye. When the citizens discovered this on the 17th they surrounded the home nearby where troops were staying and threatened to tear down the house. A standoff between the citizens and armed soldiers was diffused by officers just in time to stop a potential bloodbath.

The soldiers posted their own handbills which attacked the Sons of Liberty as "the real enemies to society" who "thought their freedom depended on a piece of wood".

Battle of Golden Hill

As one soldier nailed a handbill to a board, Issacs Sears grabbed soldier demanding to know the meaning of his libelous claims against the citizenry.

2nd soldier went to intervene and was grabbed by another Son. Seeing this a 3rd soldier pulled his sword and started toward the scuffle but Isaac Sears hit him square between the eyes with a

snuffbox. The soldier fled for reinforcements. And Sears and his companion dragged their prisoners off to the mayor's house.

A band 20 Soldiers surrounded the mayors house and threatened to storm the house. Where a crowd had gathered and Sears was explaining the issue to the mayor. The soldiers forced there way to the house, pounding on the door demanding the release of their comrades. A magistrate ordered the soldiers to disperse and the two prisoners apparently fearing the consequences of exiting the mayors house chose to stay and the band of soldiers dispersed and began marching back toward the barracks

The fired up crowd followed the soldiers and all along the route taunted them and hurled insults. The abuse continued all the way to the summit of Golden Hill, where a second contingent of soldiers joined their comrades. The soldiers gaining confidence from the appearance of the 2nd contingent turned on the crowd and the squad's leader called out "draw your bayonets and cut your way through them" drawing swords and brandishing bayonets the soldiers mocked "where are your sons of liberty now?"

The crowd armed with sticks and clubs turned to flee through narrow alleyways. Enraged soldiers ran after the crowd with bayonets and swords ready for payback. As one resident, a Quaker stepped out of his doorway, a soldier swung his sword and slashed the resident's cheek.

1,000 or more residents screaming "murder" were sprinting, tumbling, ducking and dosging enraged soldiers through the streets as astonished residents watched the spectacle. Several innocent bystanders were stabbed and gored. One man received some unwanted dental work from the butt of a musket.

Lee Standiford in Desparate Sons describes that magistrate who dismissed the soldiers hemmed in a corner by 2 soldiers with swords drawn with fiery malice in their eyes and the magistrate with only a stick. A neighbor tossed the magistrate a halberd and the soldiers decided facing a desperate law officer with a six foot steel tipped pike with an massive axe-head affixed near its head for good measure was not a fight they could win.

Despite the numerous injuries there were no deaths.

5th nearly 80 ft liberty pole erected but this time not on the commons but on Isaac Sears' private property. The pole this time bore the simple inscription Liberty and Property.

Skirmishes continued for several more days but eventually calm prevailed once more. But the news spread throughout the colonies describing the soldiers' "mad pursuit of poor colonists." And although no deaths occurred, it was later described as the first blood spilled in the revolution. This was just another piece of the narrative that added to the rising disdain that patriots had for the occupying military force in the colonies and pushed the populace closer and closer to revolution.