

## History is His Story

**June 10, 1768**, the British dispatched marines and the *HMS Romney* to protect a tax collector who was to seize a sloop, *Liberty*, in Boston harbor. *Liberty* was owned by John Hancock, a successful trader and banker. The sailors of *Liberty* were sneaking bottles of Madeira wine ashore without paying taxes. Taxes were not normal in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, usually imposed only in times of national emergency after Parliament recommended them to fight a war. But after the French and Indian War, Britain decided that America needed a military presence with a tax to pay for them. The Bostonians resisted an oppressing army, throwing dirt clods at a tax guy. The Royal-appointed Governor of Massachusetts was baffled and wrote the King about 'The Great Riot'. A patriot leader simply said, "We will support our liberties, depending on the strength of our own arms and of God." Where did these formerly loyal British citizens get this? For just 5 years earlier they had joined forces in the French and Indian war. *Liberty* was the term coined by Martin Luther in his book, *Christian Liberty*. The former meaning of the term was for liberation of a slave. Luther's liberty was that God had delivered from sin and gives the Christian a mission in life. John Locke read Luther a century later and formulated a system that would resonate with man's motivations in *Two Treatises on Government*. Liberty was key--to live freely as your relationship with God leads, stewarding His gifts. Liberty was taken up by Americans as Ben Franklin published Locke's book. Hence Hancock named his boat. The universally disliked taxes were the 1767 Townsend Act.

John Dickinson of Pennsylvania saw the Boston skirmish and wrote a song, "**The Liberty Song**". Days later it was published in the paper. This now-forgotten song was set to the tune of a Royal Navy march and became the American anthem of the Revolutionary War. Listen to the words: "Come join in hand brave Americans all/ And rouse your bold hearts at fair Liberty's call." It spoke of inherited freedom from the forefathers, "Their generous bosoms all dangers despis'd/ So highly, so wisely, their birthrights they priz'd." The idea was that the country had been wrested from the wilderness and Americans were honored to keep stewardship of it. "Then join hand in hand brave Americans all/ By uniting we stand, by dividing we fall/ In so righteous a cause let us hope to succeed./ For Heaven approves of each generous deed." *The Liberty Song* quickly spread. It was a moral call to action, putting the New England politics of the day in a more universal way.

Yet the United States didn't declare independence for 8 more years while atrocities mounted against citizens and more joined the cause. The soldiers that Britain deployed held colonists in contempt. More protests and atrocities arose, the Boston Tea Party and the Boston Massacre. The brigade dispatched to Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775 played *Yankee Doodle* tauntingly, a song making fun of American militia. But the Americans ambushed the brigade all the way back to Boston inflicting murderous losses, making the song forever famous.

**Phyllis Wheatley** was an African slave child bought by a couple in Massachusetts, but kept as a free daughter. She was a brilliant poet who began publishing poems in the *Boston Herald*, extolling George Washington as a hero. She even wrote a private poem and sent it to the commander. Washington was so impressed that he invited her to come meet him at the front. But of course, there was no chance of that. The deeply Christian girl wrote back, "Remember, Christians, Negros black as Cain/ May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train." Washington ever after kept that verse in his Bible and freed his slaves in his waning years. "Remember the ladies," Abigail Adams wrote her husband John as the Constitution was being written. Amazingly, the language the men wrote left room for all to have Liberty even though circumstances and politics of the day still had no women's suffrage nor abolition of slavery. Hence it is no wonder that when another mostly forgotten anthem, *Hail Colombia* was first performed publicly just after the revolution, it celebrated God's grace on the nation, Abigail Adams was there. She wrote her sister, "the whole...Audience broke forth in the Chorus whilst the thunder from their Hands was incessant, and at the close they rose, gave 3 Huzzas, that you might have heard a mile—My heart aches in the consequence of it." Clearly, when people of that era thought about Liberty, politics, the Revolution, and God, they were intertwined.

As a liberated Christian is there a song in your heart? For it is up to us to still believe in the Self-evident Truth: God's Grace, His mission for you in life, and for Liberty.