



Marietta Chapter, Ohio Society

Sons of the American Revolution

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Marietta's Mound Cemetery Memorial Day Ceremony The Florida Surveys & The Intolerable Acts by Scott A. Britton, Marietta Chapter SAR Historian

Good morning and welcome to historic Mound Cemetery, the final resting place of more Revolutionary War officers than any cemetery in the United States. This year I'd like to talk about a couple events in what I'll call the transitional year of 1774.

As a background, let's start by going back a bit farther though to 1772 when General Lyman returned to the American Colonies from England with good news from the British parliament. The colonial provincial officers and soldiers who had served in the British army and navy in the French & Indian War (fought from 1754 to 1763), were looking for compensation for their service. In November 1772, a group who called themselves the "Company of Military Adventurers" met in Hartford, Connecticut to learn the details of General Lyman's negotiations and verbal support by parliament on an agreement. The King was going to grant lands in what they called "West Florida" for these colonial soldiers. Britain had received nearly three million acres of land in West Florida from both France and Spain in the peace treaty at the end of the French & Indian War. West Florida stretched from Pensacola in the Florida panhandle, all the way to the Mississippi River, and included most of the southern half of what is today Alabama and Mississippi. So, on December 10, 1772, Marietta founder Rufus Putnam left his home in Massachusetts and arrived the next day at the home of his cousin and future leader of American forces at Bunker Hill, Gen. Israel Putnam in Brooklyn, Connecticut. As a quick sidenote, General Israel's son, Colonel Israel Putnam, Jr, would move his entire family to Marietta and nearby Belpre in 1789.

The two men would set off for New York, arriving a week later and eventually boarded a Sloop named the *Mississippi*. Along with Capt. Roger Enos, Thaddeus Lyman, Daniel Putnam (the 13-year-old son of Gen. Israel Putnam), and a hired man named William Davis, they would travel down the Atlantic coast. Enduring terrible and violent squalls as well as bouts of seasickness most of the way, they would make

brief stops at modern day Haiti, Montego Bay (Jamaica), Great Commanders Island (I think this might be Grand Cayman Island), up to Pine Island (Cuba), passing Cape de Corrientes and Cape Antonio (on the southwest ends of Cuba), before swinging north and arriving at Pensacola on March 1, 1773. There Rufus Putnam was appointed Deputy Surveyor of West Florida. Three weeks later they left Pensacola and headed to the mouth of the Mississippi, sailing up that great river on March 22, 1773. The group would eventually land at their destination, Natchez, Mississippi on April 26, 1773 and set about exploring and surveying the area. On July 7, 1773, the surveying party would return to Pensacola after completing their work and presented a request to the British Council there for 20,000 acres, divided into 19 townships, to be granted to the colonists who had served their King George III in the late war. Just 5 days later, that Council agreed to support their request to hold this land for that purpose for 2 years, **CONTINGENT, HOWEVER,** on the British crown **CONFIRMING** this plan **IN WRITING**. Thinking their hard work had been completed, these six men returned back to Connecticut to spread the news that West Florida was ready for settlement.

On December 9, 1773, just one week before the Boston Tea Party, thirty prospective settlers set off from Connecticut for Natchez. Unbeknownst to this group who followed the recommendation of these honorable men of the “Company of Military Adventurers,” the political war between their British rulers across the Atlantic and their fellow New Englanders was about to get much worse. In the early spring and summer of 1774, another group from Connecticut and one more from Massachusetts, numbering over 100 in all, following the recommendations of Rufus and Israel Putnam, headed to Pensacola to claim their lands. When they got there, however, they found that the land office had actually closed the previous October, less than three months after the Putnam’s had returned home. Then, to make a bad situation even worse, many of those emigrating families that had traveled there became ill, and several would die before they could return home. And finally, to add insult to injury, the Putnam’s and their crew, who had organized, traveled, and labored for nearly a year, were never paid for any of their work or expenses.

Disturbed by their ever increasingly rebellious fellow British colonists in America, the King and his Parliament instead had begun the process of punishing their wayward brothers and sisters to bring them back into compliance. In March 1774, British Parliament passed the “Boston Port Act” in direct retaliation for the Boston Tea Party. Effective June 1, 1774, this new law hereby closed Boston Harbor to ALL commerce and trade, both import and export, which would be enforced by both the British Army and Royal Navy. It ordered that the port would remain closed until the British East

India Tea Company was fully compensated for the loss of their tea, amounting to nearly \$1.7 million in today's currency.

What were they to do? Disgusted by the high tea taxes, the Bostonians had dumped 46 tons of their favorite beverages into the harbor. Now, the King was taking even more of their money **AND** they were not allowed to even work or trade their goods at all! This new law, and the three others that followed would be termed the "Coercive Acts" by the Crown...but in the American colonies they would be forever labeled as the "Intolerable Acts." Essentially, one man's coercion is another man's tyranny! And although this first law was aimed solely at Boston, it did not take much imagination for people living and working in the other colonies to think that if they could do it to Bostonians...what would prevent you, your town, or your entire state from being the next in line to be bankrupted and destroyed!

Next came the Massachusetts Government Act and the Act for the Impartial Administration of Justice that were both passed on May 20, 1774. As British Parliament stated that the Massachusetts' legislative delegates were being ruled by a "mob," the Government Act abolished the entire representative government for that state and replaced it with an all-powerful governor. That governor would be appointed by the British authorities, of course, and would serve at the whim of the King. He could also be easily replaced if he didn't toe the line. The governor's powers allowed him to even unilaterally appoint judges and sheriffs. The sheriffs in turn could appoint jurors in all trials, literally stacking the deck against a defendant and rigging the outcome of any case. Voting by the citizens on all new state representatives was also replaced. Now each delegate would have to be royally appointed by King George III himself. And finally, town meetings could only be called once per year, and only after receiving approval from the governor. Meanwhile, the farcically named *Act for the Impartial Administration of Justice* was anything but impartial and did not resemble anything that was just. George Washington would rename it the "Murder Act" while other Americans nicknamed it the "Monkey Act." This new law allowed the Governor to move all trials to other less friendly jurisdictions and even eliminated the right to a trial by one's own peers.

And finally came the passage of the Quartering Act on June 2, 1774. Affecting all of the 13 colonies, British troops were to be properly fed, provided with drinks, and housed in uninhabited houses, outbuildings, barns, or other structures. All expenses for doing so would be covered by the individual colonists. It's not random what issues our

Founding Fathers chose to put into our Bill of Rights...many were just outlawing these Intolerable Acts!

The four new laws targeted these colonial rebels by wrecking their economy, driving up the unemployment rate dramatically, severely deprived or even starved the people of Boston, and forced the housing of troops under the control of their oppressors all throughout the colonies. Representative government was no more. The might of the British Empire power was being wielded more and more. The tighter they squeezed, the more frequent and overt pushback they received. And as the targets and punishment of their citizens began to grow and spread beyond just the rabblers and malcontents in Boston, the more united the states became in a common cause of revolution and a yearning for independence.

As a result of this severe and growing oppression, on September 5, 1774, to coordinate a formal colonial response to these “Intolerable Acts”, a group of patriot leaders assembled in Philadelphia for the first time to form the First Continental Congress. One of the first to actually call for the formation of a Continental Congress, over two years earlier in a letter to the patriot leader from Massachusetts, Samuel Adams, was a member of the Connecticut Committee of Correspondence, General Samuel Holden Parsons. Parsons was later a Marietta founder and was its highest-ranking Revolutionary War army officer who would settle here. Many of those first congressional delegates are names you would recognize – George Washington, John and Samuel Adams, and Patrick Henry. There were also lesser-known delegates who had local connections, like Stephen Hopkins of Rhode Island, uncle of Sarah (Hopkins) Whipple and wife of Marietta’s Commodore Abraham Whipple (buried here), Thomas Cushing of Massachusetts, who was the great uncle of Belpre founder Major Nathaniel Cushing, and Eliphalet Dyer of Connecticut, who has the distinction of receiving the first deeded properties recorded in all of Washington County from General Parsons (Volume 1, Pages 1 & 2). With more genealogy research I would guess there may be even more local connections to a few others. We also had men like General James Mitchell Varnum, who called Marietta his home, who would join the Second Continental Congress in 1780 to continue to carry on the work of the previous Congress.

I believe that same American patriotic spirit that our ancestors showed in 1774 is still with us today. So, as we approach the 250th Anniversary of Lexington and Concord next April and the many other anniversaries that follow to mark the various milestones in America’s struggle for Independence, let us heed the words written on

the monument in Oak Grove Cemetery, just a few blocks from here, that overlooks the graves of Continental Congressman Gen. James Mitchell Varnum and several other early Marietta pioneers, "Names pass away, but deeds live on." Let us never forget the legacy they have left to us. May God Bless our country and the patriots that have gone before us and those who continue to fight for our freedoms every day. Thank you!