***PRESS RELEASE***

Blue Ridge Chapter

National Society Sons of the American Revolution

***250th Anniversary of Boston Massacre Recalled on March 5th***

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On the **cold**, **snowy night** of March 5, 1770, an unruly mob of American colonists approach the Customs House on King Street in Boston and begin taunting the lone British soldier stationed on sentry duty. Before the night is over, this *“incident on King Street”,* as the British would call it, embroils the world’s most powerful nation in a global conflict that will not end for another 13 years and will cost the British Crown its most prestigious colony.

Tensions in Colonial America had been running high ever since the British Parliament had imposed the hated Townshend Acts on its North American colonies in 1767-1768. The Crown and members of Parliament saw the enactment of this legislation as its rightful and necessary prerogative. The acts were a way to assert Parliament’s authority over the affairs in this far away land and to generate much needed revenue to pay for debt created by the French & Indian War that had recently concluded in 1763.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Charles Townshend expected the revenue collected from the Townshend Act to pay for judges and governors in the colonies (thus ensuring their loyalty to the Crown), to create more effective compliance to trade regulations, to punish the Province of New York for failure to comply with the Quartering Acts, and to bolster Parliament’s right to tax its colonies. Passage of this law was seen by colonists from New Hampshire through Georgia as “taxation without representation” since their input was totally ignored nor was it welcomed.

The inflated levies that accompanied the Townshend Act were impossible for the American colonists to afford or avoid since the duties were on essentials such as glass, lead, paint, paper, and tea; all items that had to be imported from the Mother Country. Hence the outcry from merchants and citizens alike.

 On 5 March 1770, the port city of Boston was home to approximately16, 000 residents. In October 1768, the British army had sent 2,000 soldiers to Boston that, according to the Quartering Act, were to be housed with the citizenry. The ratio amounted to one soldier for every 12 residents. This became a toxic relationship that was intensified with each passing month of occupation.

Frequent confrontations between brawlers and street toughs aimed at the British soldiers put nerves on edge. The Colonies’ governor, Thomas Hutchinson, had sentries posted at the Customs House per the request of the American Customs Board as this building was a favorite target of protests by the roaming gangs who were determined to make their voices heard. Plied with rum and stoked by anger, the mob estimated at 300-400 men and boys worked its way to King Street on the night of March 5, 1770. The stage was set for world history to take an unexpected turn.

The ill-fated encounter that evening started out with insults and accusations being hurled at Private Hugh White, the lone Customs House sentry on duty. Responding to his anxious calls for help, the Officer of the Day, Captain Thomas Preston of the 14th Regiment arrived at White’s side with seven additional soldiers in an attempt to instill order. As tempers flared and taunts escalated, the Patriot mob began throwing snow balls, stones, and sticks at the assembled troops. Accounts vary but the general consensus was that one of the British soldiers slipped on the icy cobblestone street and accidently discharged his musket. Upon hearing that errant shot, the other soldiers believed that a command to open fire had been given and they, too, fired into the throng.

The first man to fall, fatally shot in his chest by Private Hugh Montgomery, was an American seaman of African-American and Native-American descent named Crispus Attucks. Rope maker Samuel Gray, a 17-year old mate from the brigantine *HMS* *Hawk*, also fell dead from gunshot wounds. The following morning, another 17-year old named Samuel Maverick died from injuries he sustained the night before. Two weeks later, Irish immigrant and leather worker Patrick Carr succumbed to his wounds and passed away. According to the Boston Massacre Historical Society, a sixth fatality was Christopher Monk. Five additional civilians were wounded but recovered from their wounds.

The fuse to a revolution had been lit and it would not be extinguished.

Citizens of Boston urged Governor Hutchinson to bring murder charges against the nine British officers and privates. Two months later, the highly charged trial began in Boston. A young lawyer named John Adams would be the defense attorney for the accused British Regulars. Ironically, five short years later Adams would be a prominent rebel and member of the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia. Later still, he would become the 2nd President of the United States of America.

Adams was successful in saving the British troops from murder convictions. Seven of the defendants were acquitted while the two others were convicted of manslaughter charges. Their punishment, as it was their first offense, was the branding of an “X” on their thumbs. The jury contained no Bostonians. This trial also heard the legal term, *“Beyond Reasonable Doubt”,* used for the first time.

Though an American-born subject, John Adams believed that every man deserved a fair trial, even if that person was not a residing colonial citizen. Adams defended his decision to serve as the defendants’ attorney and the successful acquittal by saying, “Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.”

This historic event was the culmination of civilian and military tensions. The outcome triggered more aggressive encounters by Patriots and British authority. Patriot incendiaries by the likes of Samuel Adams, James Otis, and Paul Revere would seize on this event to fan the flames of an independence movement. It would no longer be called the “Incident on King Street”, or the “Boston Riot”. Instead it would be called the “Boston Massacre” by Patriot leaders. By December of 1774, Patriots would storm Fort William and Mary in Massachusetts and confiscate the armory’s shot and powder supply. April 19, 1775, the “Shot Heard ‘Round the World” would be fired in Lexington and Concord. The world would never be the same. It all started 250 years ago—on the **cold**, **snowy night** of March 5th.