

Uxbridge and the Revolution of 1774

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The people of Uxbridge were well-situated to follow the developments that created unrest within the Province of Massachusetts and led to a growing rebelliousness. The Middle Post Road, the shortest route from Boston to Hartford, and on to New York, passed through the Town. So too did the Worcester-to-Providence Road which intersected the Post road in Uxbridge. Those important thoroughfares brought travelers, newspapers, and mail to and through Uxbridge. Serving this activity were three taverns operated by Joseph Read, Samuel Read, and Ezekiel Wood. Taverns played an important role of serving as gathering places between Sabbaths where residents might exchange news about the goings-on in different parts of the Town as well as hear the latest information from travelers about other parts of the Province, other provinces, and from abroad. The taverns also served as collection points for incoming and outgoing mail and parcels.

Adding to the flow of news, tavern-keeper Ezekiel Wood served as the Town's representative to the General Court in Boston and Nicholas Baylies served as Grand Jurymen on the Court of General Sessions of the Peace in Worcester. Both men travelled frequently to their respective Court assignments where they were exposed to the political issues and discussions of the time. Additionally, Baylies and other Uxbridge traders frequently went to both Worcester and Boston on business.

Uxbridge, like the other towns in the Province, was readily able to verify the illegitimacy of the several Acts of Parliament that imposed restrictions and taxes on the North American provinces that did not apply elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The 1759 edition of "The Acts and Laws of His Majesties' Province of the Massachusetts Bay" included a reprint of the Charter granted in 1691 by King William and Queen Mary to the Inhabitants of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay. The availability of the volume, with its reprint of the Charter, proved to be important in the years leading up to the Revolution. The several Acts of Parliament which increased the level of discontent were objectionable specifically because they were seen to be in violation of the Charter which established the relationship between England and Massachusetts. Efforts at reconciliation were specifically couched in terms of English adherence to the Charter and equitable treatment of North Americans as English subjects of the Crown. Those arguments were broadly known and the people of Uxbridge, like those elsewhere, fully understood their significance. The Town's copy continued in use through the Revolution as evidenced by notations on the end papers of various Town officials taking their oaths of office.

Disaffection over arbitrary actions by officials in London was a long-simmering matter. The growth of prosperity was circumscribed by a lack of currency or mediums of exchange. As a result, many Uxbridge landowners subscribed to a Land Bank in 1740 as a way of leveraging property to acquire currency. The purpose was to issue private scrip, secured by liens on property and future crops, to be used to pay for goods, services, taxes, and assessments. The impetus started in Boston and other large coastal towns and idea quickly caught on across Massachusetts. In the end, a higher percentage of Uxbridge land owners participated in the program than any

other town in Worcester County and Uxbridge ranked among the top colony-wide. A subsequent order from London to close the Land Bank and compel redemption of the scrip in official currency cost those property owners dearly.

Defiance of the London order quickly arose as Uxbridge and other towns sent Land Bank subscribers as their representatives in the General Court. Governor Jonathan Belcher twice prorogued the Legislature and ordered fresh elections with instructions that Land Bank subscribers be disqualified from serving. Unrest steadily grew and Belcher was recalled to London and replaced as Governor by William Shirley.

The efforts to collect the outstanding balances of scrip used by Uxbridge land owners continued for the next 20+ years with interest and penalties accruing on unpaid balances. This delivered a significant financial setback to the Uxbridge land owners who subscribed to the Land Bank and the lingering effect of London's action against the Land Bank contributed to the radicalization of the people in rural communities and contributed to their willingness to object to the Stamp Act and other legislation of the 1760s. In the end, the loss of family wealth made the Land Bank subscribers and their sons and grandsons more susceptible to the revolutionary cause and prompted them to lead their towns into open rebellion.

Uxbridge defied King George and Military Governor General Thomas Gage by ignoring the provisions of the Massachusetts Government Act when it convened a Town Meeting on 6 July 1774. That Act prohibited the calling of Town Meetings for any purpose other than electing Town officials or raising and spending money. The July meeting established formally a Committee of Correspondence to coordinate its activities with those of other towns and with the Convention of Committees of Correspondence in Worcester. Samuel Read, Joshua Wood, Moses Taft, Seth Read, Joseph Chapin, Moses Keith, Dexter Wood, Simeon Wheelock, and Nehemiah Hall were appointed to the Committee and were instructed to remain empanelled until explicitly dismissed. This meeting authorized the purchase of a cannon, 5 ½ barrels of gun powder, and as much lead for shot as might be necessary. A committee comprised of Noah Taft, Joseph Taft, Jr., Abner Rawson, Dexter Wood, Samuel Read, Jr., Nathaniel Fish, and Peter Taft, Jr. was appointed to ensure that any Uxbridge militiaman called for duty was adequately provisioned. The Meeting also approved payment of 0-38-3 as the Town's portion of the cost of sending John Adams and others to Philadelphia to represent Massachusetts in the Continental Congress.

On 9 August 1774 the first Convention of Committees of Correspondence from the towns of Worcester County assembled in Worcester. The delegates passed a series of resolutions declaring allegiance to King George and asked that they be granted the same rights as Englishmen in other provinces, to be self governing, and free from arbitrary exercise of authority. However, the Convention also resolved to call upon all the towns to adopt prudent measures to prevent the execution of British authority in the court system. The following day the Convention called upon towns that had not yet established a committee of correspondence to do so and to send delegates to the convention. No Uxbridge participation was noted on the list of delegates despite the appointment of a 9 member Committee the previous month.

The Convention of Committees of Correspondence for Worcester County, being prompted by the American Political Society, again met in Worcester on 30 and 31 August and directed all militia officers to resign the commissions they had received in the King's name and for all field grade

officers to publish their resignations in the Boston papers as a notice to General Gage. The Convention called for all militia companies in the towns to elect new officers and for those officers to meet by 10 October to select regimental officers. The Committee reviewed the military organizational structure in the County on 20 and 21 September and directed that a seventh regiment be raised. Ezekiel Wood of Uxbridge was instructed to oversee that effort and the selection of field officers for the new regiment. Initially, the 7th Worcester County Regiment of Foot was defined as encompassing the militia companies of Uxbridge, Northbridge, Mendon, Upton, and Douglas. It was subsequently designated the 3rd Regiment of Foot.

News of the military preparations in Worcester County was spread widely. The “Massachusetts Spy” in Boston, the “Essex Gazette” in Salem and the “Boston Post-Boy” and “Boston Gazette”, both published in Boston, carried the Resolves of the county convention which detailed the reorganization of Worcester County militia forces. The four papers were distributed in numerous towns. Isaiah Thomas, publisher of the “Massachusetts Spy” added the subtitle “Oracle of Liberty” to the banner on his paper. Thomas left Boston with his printing presses and moved to Worcester to avoid a crackdown by General Gage. Benjamin Green of Uxbridge was named agent for subscriptions and advertisements in southern Worcester County.

On 6 and 7 September 1774, the Convention closed the court in Worcester, ordered all British-appointed judges and court officers to step down, appointed new judges and civil officials for the county, directed all militia officers to resign their British commissions and instructed the militia units to elect new officers, and ordered all British regular military units to leave the County. Militia units from 39 towns arrayed themselves on both sides of Main Street southward from the Court House with 156 men from Uxbridge stationed just south of the Court House. The judges and court officers were compelled to walk that gauntlet loudly reciting their resignations.

The Uxbridge muster rolls from 1774 cannot be found. However, most, if not all, of the men who mustered in April 1775 were likely in Worcester in September 1774. They were:

Captain Joseph Chapin

1st Lieutenant Simeon Wheelock

2nd Lieutenant Stephen Taft

Sergeant Aaron Taft

Sergeant Peter Taft

Sergeant Solomon Wood

Corporal Samuel Cumings

Corporal David Draper

Corporal Caleb Farnum

Privates Robert Brown, Joseph Carpenter, Ebenezer Chace/Chase, Samuel Chapin, Benjamin Cogswell, Peter Darling, Nathan Druce, Cleophas Green, Baxter Hall, James Hall, John Hall, Elias Heyward, Jacob Hooker, John Hull; Ichabod Keith, William Lowing, Jesse Morse, Adna Pennimon, Timothy Rawson, David Read, Thaddeus Read, Jesse Rutter, Abner Sibley, Stephen Southworth, Ephraim Spring, Jacob Taft, Luther Wheelock, Adam White, Nathan White, Peter White, and David Wood

Captain Samuel Read

1st Lieutenant Edward Seagrave

2nd Lieutenant Noah Taft

Sergeant Abner Taft

Sergeant Bazaleel Taft

Sergeant Dexter Wood

Corporal Jonah Wood

Privates James Albee, Abel Aldrich, Samuel Amidown (Amedown), Edward Battles, Joseph Bishop, Joseph Blake, David Chilson, Joseph Cleavland, Joseph Dammon, John Daniels, James Emerson, James Hale, John Holbrook, Micah Holbrook, Sylvanus Holbrook, Noah Keith, Ephraim Kempton, Benjamin Lee, Gideon Leisure, Benjamin Murdock, John Murdock, Samuel Murdock, William Persons, Abner Rawson, Thomas Rawson, Nathaniel Rist, Peter Thayer, Reuben Thayer, and Nathan Tucker.

At some point during the August and September 1774 alarm and musters Joseph Read stepped down as the Uxbridge representative in the Provincial Congress to take up military duties on regimental staff in Worcester. Events in the counties and general outrage over the Massachusetts Government Act, dubbed the Intolerable Act or Coercive Act, particularly in the General Court, prompted General Gage to order the General Court to disband. When the General Court reconvened in Salem on 7 October 1774 as the Provincial Congress, Captain Samuel Read was representing Uxbridge as one of 56 men from Worcester County – an increase from the 42 representatives in the previous session.

The Congress established a Committee of Safety to function as its Executive and formalized the earlier institution of Committees of Correspondence. The Massachusetts Congress endorsed the creation of county-level conventions of committees of correspondence to serve as a lower echelon body to communicate with the towns and coordinate their activities, and also to relay instructions to the county regimental system.

The Congress moved quickly to increase Massachusetts' military readiness in anticipation of further confrontations with General Gage's forces. The Congress established a Committee of Supplies to coordinate logistical preparations and selected commissary officers. A Receiver General was appointed and all selectmen, constables, and other officials in Massachusetts were directed to remit all taxes, fees, and assessments to that office instead of British authorities.

The Congress' Committee of Safety issued updated directives on military preparations and informed the selectmen that they would be held responsible for the state of their town's militia. A Committee of Supplies was chosen and Commissary officers appointed to handle logistical matters. The post of Receiver General was established and selectmen, constables, and other town officials were directed to remit all provincial taxes and fees to that office rather than to British authorities.

Uxbridge acted to determine its ability to comply with the requirements of the Provincial Congress and the Worcester Convention when it called Town Meeting into session on 21 October 1774. The Town appointed Nicholas Baylies, Bezaleel Taft, and Paul Wheelock to a Committee tasked with reviewing Town accounts and establishing a budget for the coming year.

The Meeting also directed the Treasurer to call in all money owed to the Town except for the ministry rates.

Uxbridge Town Meeting assembled on 19 November 1774 and repeated the votes of the previous July to acquire a cannon and other military supplies. A Committee comprised of John Hawkins, Seth Read, and Edward Seagrave was appointed for that purpose and instructed to also purchase 5 ½ barrels of powder and an adequate supply of cannon balls. They were also to increase the stock of lead for musket balls to one thousand pounds. Additionally, Noah Taft, Joseph Taft, Abner Rawson, Dexter Wood, Samuel Read Jr., Nathaniel Fish, and Peter Taft Jr. were appointed to a committee charged with recruiting men for the Town's militia units.

Edward Seagrave took on the procurement task assigned to the Committee. He went to Boston to acquire gun powder and lead and arranged to have it shipped back to Uxbridge. While Boston was still an open town in late 1774 the nature of Seagrave's mission would have caused him problems had British authorities become aware of it. He also went to Worcester, Providence, and Medway seeking a cannon. While in Providence he was able to obtain additional gun powder. His travel expenses for these trips were not reimbursed by the Town until 20 February 1776.

Uxbridge assembled again in January 1775 with Samuel Read as Moderator and voted to support the Resolves of the Continental Congress, the Articles of Association, and the decision to boycott British goods that were passed by the Continental Congress. The Town appointed a Committee of Inspection comprised of Lieutenant David Draper, James Wood, Jacob Taft, Noah Taft, Ensign Edmond Rawson, Nathan Taft, Sylvanus Holbrook, Thomas Read, and Samuel Read Jr. to ensure strict adherence to the goals and resolutions of the Continental Congress. This meeting also complied with the directions handed down by the Provincial Congress the previous Fall when it directed the Assessors to forward to Henry Gardner of Stowe, who was Treasurer/Collector of the renegade Provincial Congress, all tax money still owed to the Province. The Town also voted to indemnify the Assessors for following those orders. Uxbridge also elected Benjamin Green as representative in the Provincial Congress to replace Samuel Read.