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THE CHARLESTON TEA PARTY:
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DECEMBER 3, 1773 *

GEORGE C. ROGERS, JR. **

Growth and revolution have been the chief characteristics of South Carolina society during the past decade. We have had to adjust our political institutions so that the voices of the new generation coming off the campuses and out of the streets can be heard. Thus the struggles over reapportionment.

Growth and revolution were also the dominant characteristics of South Carolina society in the decade before the American Revolution. Amidst a turbulent people a search was begun for institutions that would be "an accurate mirror of the people, sensitively reflecting their desires and feelings." Consent was discovered to be "a continuous, everyday process." Discarded was the idea, as John Locke would have had it, that consent was given only once, at some climactic moment when government was overthrown by the people and then frozen in written documents forever. The new view was "that the only reason why a free and independent man was bound by human laws was this — that he bound himself."¹ The search to discover the voice of the people and the channels through which it might be continuously heard reached an important milestone — perhaps even a starting point — on December 3, 1773.

Between 1748 and 1775 a man could get rich more quickly in South Carolina than at any other time in her history. Indigo, which had been granted a Parliamentary bounty in 1748, was a crop worth £250,000 sterling by 1775.² When Parliament removed the English import duty

* This paper was delivered as an address to those attending the Governor's Banquet at The Municipal Auditorium in Charleston on the evening of December 2, 1973. This paper is slightly longer than the address. Footnotes have been added for complete documentation.

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¹ Bailyn drew the final quotation from the writings of James Wilson. Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 173-174. It is Bailyn's theme that certain traditional concepts such as consent took on new and unexpected meanings during the transforming experience of the American Revolution.

² William Bull to Earl of Dartmouth, December 19, 1774, Sainsbury Transcripts of Records in the British Public Record Office deposited in the South Carolina Department of Archives and History (hereinafter BPRO), XXXIV (1774), 224.

on rice in 1767, the price of that staple almost doubled by the summer of 1772.³ These were also the years of the greatest importation of slaves from Africa, an obvious sign that planters were prospering. During the 1760's the backcountry was filling up with men who grew provisions for the slave-run plantations of the lowcountry. When Henry Laurens, a great merchant who became an equally successful planter, withdrew to England in 1771 to educate his sons, he had an income of £2,500 sterling per annum, an income surpassed only by the incomes of the great lords of England.⁴

Outward and visible signs of this Carolina wealth were the completion in 1756 of the first State House which was erected on the north-west corner of Broad and Meeting Streets and the opening of St. Michael's Church in 1761 on the southeast corner.

On September 3, 1768, Peter Timothy, the printer of the *South-Carolina Gazette*, wrote to Benjamin Franklin, who had staked the Timothy family to their start in the printing business in Charleston: "I do not suppose there is a Colony on this Continent in so flourishing and promising a Situation as So. Carolina at present. Private and public Works are every where carrying on with Spirit."⁵ Broad Street was being transformed into the most elegant thoroughfare in the Empire. At the eastern end, the Exchange was already under way; it would be completed by the fall of 1771. It was the formal entrance for those arriving by sea, who upon passing through the open arcade under the Great Hall would emerge upon a perspective as compelling as any designed by Palladio.⁶ A new Watch House being built on the southwest corner of Broad and Meeting was raised a story higher than beyond the first design so that it could contain the treasurer's, the country comptroller's, and the powder-receiver's offices.⁷ On the northeast corner already stood the Beef Market.

³ Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (2 vols.: Gloucester, Mass., 1958), I, 284, 289-290.

⁴ Henry Laurens to John Laurens, February 8, 1774, Laurens Papers, S. C. Hist. Soc.

⁵ *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. William B. Willcox, Vol. XV: January 1, 1768-December 31, 1768 (New Haven, Conn., 1972), 201.

⁶ John Morrill Bryan, "The Exchange Building, Charleston, 1766-1773, An Architectural History and Restoration Proposal" (unpub. manuscript, 1973). Dr. Bryan kindly permitted the author to read this report which was prepared for the S. C. Department of Archives and History (hereinafter S. C. Archives).

⁷ *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. William B. Willcox, Vol. XV: January 1, 1768-December 31, 1768 (New Haven, Conn., 1972), 201.

At the crossroads the statue of William Pitt, executed by Joseph Wilton, was placed in 1770, a civic ornament dedicated to the man most responsible for the repeal of the hated Stamp Act.⁸

To complete the prospect from the Exchange, a canal was ordered to be cut in 1768 from the upper end of Broad Street through the marsh to the Ashley River. The spoil thrown up on each side of the canal was to be reserved as a commons for the people of the town. Among the commissioners named to carry out this improvement were Henry and Arthur Middleton, William Henry Drayton, Edward Fenwick, and Rawlins Lowndes, who thus made this the planters' entrance to the city from their Ashley and Stono River plantations.⁹

The first suburbs—Ansonborough, Harleston Village, and White Point—were linked to the town by extensions of the principal thoroughfares. In 1767 a stone bridge was built over the creek at the north end of Bay Street near Craven's Bastion, while Meeting Street was continued northward to George Street.¹⁰ The northern limit of Ansonborough was fixed in 1769 by the laying out of Boundary Street, seventy feet wide, from Scarborough Street to the Broad Path (King Street).¹¹

In 1770 Harleston Village was surveyed on Coming's Point with the north-south streets named after the patriots Gadsden, Lynch, and Rutledge and the east-west streets named for royal officials—Bull, Montagu, Wentworth, and Beaufain.¹²

The private improvements were no less noteworthy than the public. Peter Timothy described Christopher Gadsden's wharf as the most "stupendous work" of all.¹³ On May 23, 1774, Gadsden explained to Samuel Adams, the Boston patriot, that he had undertaken to build "a large Wharf, or rather, quay, the largest in America" in order "to relieve my Mind for the almost insupportable Loss of my eldest Son, a very promising youth of about sixteen years old."¹⁴ On June 5 he added in another letter to Samuel Adams: "I have been above seven Years at hard Labour and the utmost Risk of my Constitution about one of the most extensive Quays in America during which Time no negroe in any of our swamps has been more exposed, at which thirty of the largest

⁸ D. E. Huger Smith, "Wilton's Statue of Pitt," *S. C. Historical Magazine*, XV (1914), 18-38.

⁹ Manuscript Act No. 965, signed April 12, 1768, S. C. Archives.

¹⁰ Manuscript Act No. 954, signed April 18, 1767, S. C. Archives.

¹¹ Manuscript Act No. 985, signed August 23, 1769, S. C. Archives.

¹² Manuscript Act No. 991, signed April 7, 1770, S. C. Archives.

¹³ *South-Carolina Gazette* (hereinafter *S. C. Gazette*), March 7, 1774.

¹⁴ *The Writings of Christopher Gadsden, 1746-1805*, ed. Richard Walsh (Columbia, S. C., 1966) (hereinafter Walsh, *Gadsden*), pp. 92-93.

Ships that can come over our Bar can be Loading at the Same time and all afloat at low water with their whole loads in, and have exceeding good and Convenient Stores already . . . thereon Sufficient to Maintain Sixteen thousand Tierce of Rice.”¹⁵

This building where we meet tonight rests on land which Gadsden developed as the suburb of Middlesex just behind his great wharf which stretched along Cooper River. The streets of this development he named in honor of John Wilkes, the defender of English liberties, and of Pasquale Paoli, the defender of Corsican liberties.¹⁶

Gadsden, whose father Thomas Gadsden was for a long time collector of the royal customs in Charleston, has usually been labeled a merchant, but he expressly stated in 1769 that he was no longer a merchant, but a factor—generally known as a Country Factor.¹⁷ The distinction is important for understanding Gadsden’s role in the Revolution. A merchant was a man with English connections, who drew his capital from London, who wanted therefore to buy the country produce cheap in order to load the vessels consigned to him by his English friends to the best advantage. The Charleston factor was the man who marshaled the produce from the country on his wharf and had the same interest as the planter—to sell at high prices.

Peter Timothy, who observed the urban bustle from his printing office on the Bay near the Exchange, pointed out in 1774 that Gadsden’s wharf was not the only new one. John Gaillard had constructed one on the north side of the new Fish Market which stood at the foot of Queen Street; Samuel Prioleau, Jr. a wharf on the southside. More noteworthy were the wharves being built for the first time into the Ashley River westward of White Point. Here the most extensive construction was that of the factor William Gibbes. Timothy boasted: “All *White-Point*, which for many Years was almost a desolate Spot, is lately almost covered with Houses, many of them very elegant.”¹⁸ Among these houses were those of Miles Brewton, William Gibbes, and Thomas Savage, all of which still stand. This incessant building created a new class, the artisans, who were ready to challenge the dominance of the planters and the merchants.

It is only with a knowledge of these public and private improvements that one can understand, both Governor Montagu’s attempt to

¹⁵ Walsh, *Gadsden*, p. 95.

¹⁶ “Plat of Middlesex,” Walsh, *Gadsden*, facing p. 228.

¹⁷ *S. C. Gazette*, July 27, 1769. Throughout these years Gadsden advertised as a “Factor” in the *S. C. Gazette*.

¹⁸ *S. C. Gazette*, March 7, 1774.

move the capital from Charleston to Beaufort in October 1772, and the deep resentment of that move felt by the propertied men of Charleston. Montagu's action was as great an attack upon Charleston property as Lord North's Boston Port Bill would be upon Boston property.

It was the tax on tea, however, that symbolized the most fundamental threat to the property of these aspiring men. The Stamp Act had been repealed. All of the Townshend duties had been repealed, except that on tea. The tax on tea had been retained as proof that Parliament had the right to tax the colonists; the colonists must therefore never consent to pay it, for to do so would be an admission that the power of taxation rested in Parliament, a body in which they themselves were not represented.

In October 1773 seven ships with tea set sail for America. The ship *London*, Alexander Curling, master, was destined for Charleston with 257 chests of tea on board consigned to the agents of the East India Company in Charleston. The ship *London* arrived off Charleston bar on December 1; she came to anchor in the harbor on December 2.¹⁹

The names of Carolina vessels had long been a faithful index to her fortunes. As she struggled to get rich, her vessels were called *Adventure*, *Delight*, *Endeavour*, *Enterprize*, *Experiment*, *Friendship*, *Good Intent*, *Hope*, *Industry*, *Speedwell*, *Success*. After 1764, however, nine vessels built in Carolina were christened *Liberty*. Others were launched as the *Fair American* and *Heart of Oak*. In 1770 Henry Laurens selected the name of *Magna Charta* for the ship he intended to sail up the Thames.²⁰ The arrival of the *London*, therefore, in Charleston harbor might seem ominous indeed.

How was the landing of the tea and the collection of the duty to be opposed?

On December 2 handbills were circulated "inviting all the inhabitants without exception, particularly the landholders, to assemble in the Great Hall over the Exchange at 3 o'clock on Friday afternoon."²¹

On the 3rd the assembled group called Col. George Gabriel Powell to the chair, a place he occupied at each of the General Meetings held during the ensuing seven months.²²

¹⁹ S. C. *Gazette*, December 6, 1773.

²⁰ R. Nicholas Olsberg, "Ship Registers in the South Carolina Archives, 1734-1780," S. C. *Historical Magazine*, LXXIV (1973), 189-299.

²¹ S. C. *Gazette*, December 6, 1773.

²² S. C. *Gazette*, December 20, 1773, July 11, 1774. Peter Timothy served as secretary for each of the General Meetings. S. C. *Gazette*, July 11, 1774.

Colonel Powell was selected to preside over these meetings of the people not because he was a strenuous votary to liberty, as Henry Laurens later depicted him,²³ nor because he could propagate his ideas "with zeal," as Lieutenant Governor William Bull once wrote,²⁴ but because he was one of the most respected leaders in the backcountry. Of Welsh descent, his fiefdom was the Welsh Tract. He had acquired extensive lands along the Pee Dee River. As a justice of the peace and a colonel in the Craven County militia, he had upheld authority during the Regulation yet retained his popularity for he was the overwhelming choice in 1769 of the people of St. David's parish to represent them in the assembly. Perhaps because he was something of an outsider he could moderate the clashing interests of the planters, merchants, and mechanics. After all, he had been an assistant judge from August 10, 1769, until April 23, 1772, when he was removed to make way for a placeman.²⁵

At this meeting the agents of the East India Company—Roger Smith, Peter Leger, and William Greenwood—were called in and by "threats and flatterys" convinced that they should decline to receive the tea.²⁶

It was then resolved: "We the underwritten, do hereby agree, not to import, either directly or indirectly, any teas that will pay the present duty, laid by an act of the British Parliament for the purpose of raising a revenue in America."²⁷ A committee was appointed to secure signatures to the resolution. Some merchants who were present signed. But

²³ Henry Laurens to John Laurens, September 26, 1775, *S. C. Historical Magazine*, V (1904), 78.

²⁴ William Bull to Earl of Hillsborough, December 5, 1770, BPRO, XXXII (1768-1770), 409.

²⁵ "Diary of William Dillwyn During a Visit to Charles Town in 1772," ed. A. S. Salley, *S. C. Historical Magazine*, XXXVI (1935), 34-35; Index to Grants, S. C. Archives.

²⁶ *S. C. Gazette*, December 6, 1773; William Bull to Earl of Dartmouth, December 24, 1773, BPRO, XXXIII (1771-1773), 350-354. It is interesting to note that when it came time to sell the tea (which was to be stored in the basement of the Exchange) in order to raise money to defray the expenses of repelling the British in 1776 that Roger Smith, Peter Leger, William Greenwood, along with George Abbot Hall, were named the commissioners to sell the tea. By a law signed on September 27, 1776, the commissioners were permitted to receive a commission of five per cent on the sales. *S. C. Statutes*, IV, 352. The sale was announced for October 14, 1776. *South-Carolina and American General Gazette* (hereinafter *General Gazette*), October 2, 1776.

²⁷ *S. C. Gazette*, December 6, 1773.

others according to Bull "were cool, and . . . differed in the reasonableness and utility thereof." ²⁸

The committee, although composed of Capt. Christopher Gadsden, Col. Charles Pinckney, Thomas Ferguson, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, and Daniel Cannon,²⁹ was not to have an easy job as the following letter written by James Laurens to his brother Henry on December 4 indicates: "Our Liberty folks met Yesterday at the Exchange & came to a Resolution to prevent the Tea sent out by the India Company from being Landed here & Capt. Curling will be obliged to carry every chest of it back to London. This day a Select Committee Mr. Gadsden, &ca. are going about to demand a Subscription from the Merchants to Import no more of that Article untill the Duty shall be taken off. How that will Succeed I don't know but I hear many are offended at some severe reflections that Mr. G. Let drop against that Body in the Wrath of declamation yesterday. I have not been among them. I am determined if it be possible, so far as honor & conscience will permit, to keep peace with all Men."³⁰

The five men who made up the committee represented the two principal groups attending the meeting—the planters and the mechanics.

Charles Pinckney, his first cousin Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, and Thomas Ferguson were planters who had long been members of the Commons House of Assembly. Charles Pinckney, who was colonel of the Charles Town Regiment of Foot,³¹ had sat in every assembly since 1754, first for Christ Church parish, then for St. Michael's, and finally for St. Philip's. Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, the son of the famous Eliza Lucas, had only recently returned from studying abroad when he was elected in 1769 to represent St. John's Colleton in the assembly, which he continued to do until the Revolution.³²

²⁸ William Bull to Earl of Dartmouth, December 24, 1773, BPRO, XXXIII (1771-1773), 350-354.

²⁹ S. C. Gazette, December 6, 1773.

³⁰ James Laurens to Henry Laurens, December 2, with postscript dated December 4, 1773, Laurens Papers, S. C. Hist. Soc.

³¹ On March 18, when Charleston celebrated the anniversary of the repeal of the Stamp Act, Col. Charles Pinckney was in command of the militia when it was reviewed on the new parade ground outside the city gates by Lt. Gov. William Bull. That evening the officers and other notables dined at Mrs. Frances Swallow's tavern on Broad St. and then attended a performance of "The Recruiting Officer" at the Dock Street Theater. S. C. Gazette, March 21, 1774.

³² The list of members of the Commons House of Assembly can be found in *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina House of Representatives, Volume I, Session Lists, 1692-1973*, compiled by Joan Faunt, Robert Rector, and David Bowden with Walter Edgar as editor and Inez Watson as research consultant

Thomas Ferguson was described by Henry Laurens in 1768 as "a knowing wealthy Gentleman Planter."³³ He was master of several plantations in Colleton County and owned the rights to Ferguson's Ferry over the Edisto River where he had established several country stores.³⁴ He sat for a number of parishes after 1762, but during the last four assemblies prior to the Revolution represented St. Paul's Colleton. He married five times. His fourth wife, whom he married in 1774, was the daughter of Christopher Gadsden, who had previously been married to Andrew Rutledge, the brother of John and Edward Rutledge.³⁵

These three men were accustomed to govern through the assembly. Jack Greene, in his book *The Quest for Power*, has described the way in which the local elites in the four southern colonies had gained power through increasing their control over the colonies' finances.³⁶ In South Carolina, however, because of a dispute over the Wilkes Fund, a gift of £1,500 sterling made by the assembly to John Wilkes in 1769, the assembly had ceased to function, for the crown would approve of no legislation until the commons house made amends for this gift.³⁷

This was why they could not act through the assembly and had to join forces with another group which had been working out of doors—the Sons of Liberty. Christopher Gadsden and Daniel Cannon represented this other tradition. Gadsden, although he had been a member of every assembly since 1757, was the darling of the mechanics. His constituency was St. Philip's, which was as close to a democratic one as could be found in colonial South Carolina. It was Gadsden who had been the chief candidate of the Sons of Liberty in October 1768.³⁸ It

(Columbia, S. C., 1974). Of course, Charles Pinckney and Charles Cotesworth Pinckney were lawyers and therefore represented another very important group among the patriot leaders, but there was no time in this talk to develop this side of their interests. For a fine biography of Charles Cotesworth Pinckney see Marvin R. Zahniser, *Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, Founding Father* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1967).

³³ Henry Laurens to James Penman, February 9, 1768, Laurens Papers, S. C. Hist. Soc.

³⁴ "Will of Thomas Ferguson," dated June 4, 1785, proved May 20, 1786, Charleston County Wills, XXII, Book A (1786-1793), 11-19, S. C. Archives. Ferguson's Ferry was also known as Parker's Ferry. S. C. *Statutes*, IX, 211; S. C. *Gazette*, December 22, 1766.

³⁵ S. C. *Historical Magazine*, XXXI (1930), 12.

³⁶ Jack P. Greene, *The Quest for Power, The Lower Houses of Assembly in the Southern Royal Colonies, 1689-1776* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1963).

³⁷ Jack P. Greene, "Bridge to Revolution: The Wilkes Fund Controversy in South Carolina, 1769-1775," *Journal of Southern History*, XXIX (1963), 19-52.

³⁸ S. C. *Gazette*, October 3, 1768.

was Gadsden who had read the Association at the Liberty Tree on July 22, 1769, which put into operation the non-importation agreement.³⁹

Daniel Cannon had never sat in the assembly. He was a carpenter by trade, but we would have to call him a building contractor, for he amassed a great deal of property including by 1770 all that extent of land known as Cannonsboro. In 1769 his name led the list of the mechanics appointed to enforce the non-importation agreement.⁴⁰ His great popularity in the community is attested by the fact that in the spring of 1774 he was elected a vestryman of St. Philip's church, a firemaster (a post generally filled by the most responsible merchants), president of the St. George's Society, and senior warden of the South Carolina Society.⁴¹

Pauline Maier in a very perceptive article entitled "The Charleston Mob and the Evolution of Popular Politics in Revolutionary South Carolina" has found the seeds of self-government in these revolutionary mobs. There was a progression, she says, from the mobs at the time of the Stamp Act crisis to the more self-disciplined meetings of the Sons of Liberty at the Liberty Tree. By the time of the crisis over tea these had become the General Meetings of the Inhabitants—a kind of New England Town meeting.⁴²

Thus on December 3, 1773, we have a merger of Greene's traditions which had been charted through the duly constituted bodies with Maier's traditions which had been gathering out of doors. Therein lies the supreme importance of the day we celebrate.

Missing were the Charleston merchants. The mercantile community was the most conservative group in the city and in the light of the events they decided to organize. At "a General Meeting of the Gentlemen in Trade" held on December 9 at Mrs. Swallow's Tavern on Broad Street they organized the Charles Town Chamber of Commerce, in order to "adjust Disputes relative to Trade and Navigation."⁴³ The first president was John Savage, a Jew from Bermuda who had amassed one of the largest Charleston fortunes while trading jointly with Gabriel Manigault. Miles Brewton, the most successful importer of slaves, was

³⁹ *S. C. Gazette*, July 27, 1769.

⁴⁰ *S. C. Gazette*, July 27, 1769.

⁴¹ *S. C. Gazette*, April 25, 1774; *South-Carolina Gazette and Country Journal* (hereinafter *Country Journal*), April 5, 1774.

⁴² Pauline Maier, "The Charleston Mob and the Evolution of Popular Politics in Revolutionary South Carolina, 1765-1784," *Perspectives in American History*, IV (1970), 173-196.

⁴³ *Rules of the Charlestown Chamber of Commerce* (Charleston, S. C., 1774), p. 4; *S. C. Gazette*, December 13, 1773.

vice president. David Deas, a Lowland Scotsman, treasurer, and John Hopton, a former clerk of Henry Laurens, secretary.⁴⁴

Since the "great Stumbling Block" was that some merchants had not desisted from importing teas privately and might still want to sell what they had on hand, a general meeting was called for the 17th of December. At that General Meeting held from 10 to 3 "under the Exchange" it was resolved that the tea on Captain Curling's vessel should not be landed.⁴⁵

From a letter that Lt. Gov. William Bull wrote on December 24 to the Earl of Dartmouth, the King's Secretary of State for American Affairs, we know what ensued. "Tho' the Merchants of the Town had generally disagreed to this Measure of prohibiting the Landing the Tea, yet some warm bold Spirits took the dangerous method of sending anonymous Letters to Captain Curling and some of his Friends & the Gentleman who owned the wharf where the ship lay," threatening dire consequences unless the vessel was moved into mid-stream.⁴⁶

Bull had thereupon called together the royal council on December 21 to ask their advice. Captain Curling, who appeared before the council, said that he feared no personal violence. Collector of the Customs Robert Haliday, who also appeared, stated that he would have to seize the tea if the duties were not paid within 21 days after the arrival of the vessel. That was the law. Since some disturbance was likely, the council agreed with Bull that the sheriff and his officers should provide protection for the collector.⁴⁷ On the 22nd the collector seized, landed, and stored the tea in the cellar of the Exchange without, as Bull wrote, "one Person appearing to oppose him."⁴⁸ Peter Timothy's comment was that "there never was an Instance here, of so great a Number of Pack-

⁴⁴ *General Gazette*, December 24, 1773. For information on Savage, Brewton, Deas, and Hopton see *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, ed. Philip M. Hamer and George C. Rogers, Jr., Volumes I, II, III, and IV (Columbia, S. C., 1968-1974), passim.

⁴⁵ *S. C. Gazette*, December 20, 1773.

⁴⁶ William Bull to Earl of Dartmouth, December 24, 1773, BPRO, XXXIII (1771-1773), 350-354.

⁴⁷ This meeting is dated December 31 in the council journal, but this is certainly an error for December 21. Council Journal, XXXVIII (October 20, 1773-December 9, 1774), 8-9, S. C. Archives. Robert Haliday (or Halliday) arrived on October 21, 1773, from England in the ship *Magna Charta*. *Country Journal*, October 26, 1773. After Haliday had been sworn in as the new collector of the customs on December 6, Timothy wrote that he hoped that he would be another Beaufain. *S. C. Gazette*, December 13, 1773.

⁴⁸ William Bull to Earl of Dartmouth, December 24, 1773, BPRO, XXXIII (1771-1773), 350-354.

ages, being taken out of any Vessel, and thus disposed of, in so short a Time.”⁴⁹

The Earl of Dartmouth replied to Bull on the 5th of February 1774, to give the King's reaction to the Charleston tea party. “What passed at Charles Town in consequence of the arrival of Capt. Curling, Altho' not equal in criminality to the Proceedings in other Colonies, can yet be considered in no other light than that of a most unwarrantable Insult to the authority of this Kingdom. The steps you took . . . are very much approved by the King . . . it is the King's firm resolution upon the unanimous advice of his confidential servants, to pursue such measures as shall be effectual for securing the Dependence of the Colonies upon this Kingdom.”⁵⁰

Undoubtedly Charleston had responded in a less criminal manner than Boston where the tea had been destroyed by dumping it into the harbor and New York and Philadelphia where the tea ships were simply turned back.⁵¹

⁴⁹ *S. C. Gazette*, December 27, 1773.

⁵⁰ Earl of Dartmouth to William Bull, February 5, 1774, BPRO, XXXIV (1774), 5-6.

⁵¹ Henry Laurens gave his version of the Massachusetts and Pennsylvania tea parties in a letter written to John Laurens, January 21, 1774: “You will receive inclosed, part of a News Paper which contains an Account of the first proceeding of the people in Boston relative to the Tea Shiped for that port by the East India Company. During the time of the Meetings & Resolutions set forth in this paper, it seems a stratagem was devised, which was intended for defeating the purposes of the people to return the Tea to G. Britain by Act of Parliament, the Duty ought to be paid within 21 Days, I should say the Article being liable to pay such Duty ought to have been Entered at the Custom House within 21 Days from the day of arrival. 19 Days were elapsed in altercation & Admiral Montague was on the proper day as a Custom House Officer (By an Act of the . . . George 3d, All Commanders of His Majesty's Ships are Constituted Custom House Officers) as well as Admiral to have made a Sham Seizure of the whole quantity of Tea & lodg'd it on board one of the King's Ships. The Wily Cromwellians who have Spies everywhere, discovering the plot, delved a foot Deeper & blew up the King's Officers. They made short work, about 30 fellows properly equiped Entered the three Ships in which the Tea was Laden 114 Chests in each, & in a few Hours cast every ounce into the Sea, & Balanced that Account of Sale in one line. What resentment will be shewn on this side for this Act of Violence is yet unknown.

The peaceable Crafty Quakers who subdued the Savage Inhabitants of Pennsylvania without Musket, Sword, or Scalping Knife, pursued a quite different measure from that of the New England Men. The River Pilots were properly addressed & admonished not to take charge of any Ship having such Tea on board, & accordingly, when the Ships arrived in the Bay of Delaware, every pilot refused his assistance. The Bay is a more dangerous Navigation than the open Sea. The Captains of such Ships were therefore necessitated to put to Sea again, but for

When the news of these northern tea parties reached Charleston in January, the local firebrands were chagrined that they had been somewhat backward in the united cause. Peter Timothy's *S. C. Gazette*, which Bull described as "the conduit Pipe of Political matters on one side,"⁵² was unable to publish its first two issues of 1774 due to the lack of paper. When it did resume publication on January 17, Timothy noted that the consignments of East India Company tea had not been landed any where in America but "here." To Timothy that seemed to be to Charleston's shame.⁵³

This point was driven home by a letter from the New York Sons of Liberty, printed in Crouch's *Country Journal* on February 1, in which letter the New Yorkers stated that they were disappointed to learn that the collector had seized and landed the tea in Charleston. "This we are informed, is owing to an unhappy Difference between the Planters and the Trade. It was an Evil Hour for America." South Carolina's receiving the tea would "Delay the Repeal of the Revenue Act." This "Manifests a disunion among the Colonies. . . ."⁵⁴

Goaded by the opposition of the Chamber of Commerce and the criticisms from their friends in the North, the Sons of Liberty redoubled their efforts. A call went out for a General Meeting of "Every Inhabitant of the Town or Country" to be held on March 3 at 9 a. m. at the Liberty Tree.⁵⁵ Because of continuing bad weather, this meeting had to be postponed several times until the decision was finally made to meet on March 16 at Pike's Long Room.⁵⁶ A clash was expected at that time between the merchants and the mechanics.

Timothy wrote in his *Gazette* on February 28: "The late Institution of a Chamber of Commerce in this town, it is said, has given Rise to an Idea of forming a Chamber (or House) of Counterpoise."⁵⁷ A handbill was soon circulating, calling for a meeting of the mechanics on March 15, the day before the General Meeting: "The Mechanicks in Charles-Town, are requested to meet, In the Lodge-Room in Lodge-Alley, at Seven o'Clock this evening, Upon Matters of Importance: For, upon

what port, no body knew. They will find no hospitable Anchorage in any upon the Continent. Charles Town, New York, & Rhode Island were it is said all ready to Act their parts, but the Tea Ships were not arrived at those places."

⁵² William Bull to Earl of Dartmouth, March 10, 1774, BPRO, XXXIV (1774), 18.

⁵³ *S. C. Gazette*, January 17, 1774.

⁵⁴ *Country Journal*, February 1, 1774.

⁵⁵ *S. C. Gazette*, February 14, 1774.

⁵⁶ *S. C. Gazette*, March 7, 14, 1774.

⁵⁷ *S. C. Gazette*, February 28, 1774.

their present Conduct depends, whether they shall in future be taxed by any other than Representatives of their own Choice—and whether this hitherto respectable Province shall preserve its Reputation, or sink into Disgrace and Contempt.”⁵⁸

At the General Meeting on the 16th there was established a “standing General Committee”—to act as an interim executive, to sound the alarm at the next crisis.⁵⁹

The next contest was a by-election to be held on April 5 and 6 to select a replacement for Henry Laurens, who had declined his seat in the assembly for St. Michael's parish as he had not yet returned from England. At this election Thomas Lynch, Jr., was pitted against David Deas. Lynch was the son of Thomas Lynch of Stamp Act fame. Deas was a merchant and a member of the Chamber of Commerce. Deas was also a Scotsman. A writer to the *Gazette* on April 4 warned: “You are soon, my Countrymen, to have a *Scot* Governor: If you have a *Scot* Assembly, with the present hopeful Council, the Lord have Mercy upon you!”⁶⁰ But David Deas won by six votes.⁶¹

That which turned the tide in the radical direction was the news of the passage by Parliament of the Boston Port Bill. Timothy issued an Extra with large black borders and printed the entire bill. The General Committee met on June 13 and sent out a call for “the Inhabitants of this Colony” to meet on Wednesday, July 6, at the Exchange so that they can prove that they are in *union* with the other colonies.⁶²

The General Meeting that was held on July 6, 7, 8, 1774, at the Exchange was the most important of all. It was the first time that the backcountrymen participated directly in Charleston politics. The letters of Christopher Gadsden to Samuel Adams intimate that the backcountry may have been called in to redress the balance against the Chamber of Commerce.

Gadsden wrote Samuel Adams on May 23: “You must not always judge of the Sentiments of the People of Carolina by their Public Meetings in Town where (I dont know how it is with you, but so it is with us) all the Ministerial men in the Province almost to a man are collect'd

⁵⁸ This handbill can be found in the microfilm edition of the *S. C. Gazette*. It is filmed between the issues of March 14 and 21, 1774.

⁵⁹ At the General Meetings on January 7 and 20 a General Committee had been established. *S. C. Gazette*, January 24, 1774. The *S. C. Gazette*, March 21, 1774, stated that at the General Meeting on March 16 the committee that had been nominated on January 20 was to become a “standing General Committee.”

⁶⁰ *S. C. Gazette*, April 4, 1774.

⁶¹ *S. C. Gazette*, April 11, 1774.

⁶² *S. C. Gazette*, June 20, 1774.

and are artful and strenuous in their Opposition. The Country Gentlemen are hearty and spirited but supine and I am sorry to say that few of them will give themselves the Trouble purposely to come down to attend the publick Meetings; however I am in hopes that this affair relating to your government will effectually rouse them.”⁶³

It did.

At this July meeting there was a contest between two slates of candidates for delegates to the First Continental Congress. Henry Middleton and John Rutledge were on both tickets. But Gadsden, Thomas Lynch, and Edward Rutledge defeated the nominees of the Chamber of Commerce—Charles Pinckney, Rawlins Lowndes, and Miles Brewton. To appease the merchants, there was a compromise on instructions.

This three-day meeting early in July was far more significant than the one we celebrate today. If one pauses to think in terms of political philosophy—here were the people of South Carolina in a state of nature.

Timothy, sensing criticism, parried it by asserting for Lord North's benefit that this was not “the Meeting of a Rabble, and the Election of a Mob,” by printing a list of those who were then members of the Commons House of Assembly and showing that all who had attended had approved.⁶⁴

To seal the new-found unity, a Committee of 99 was established to handle executive matters between future meetings of all the inhabitants. Col. Charles Pinckney, a defeated candidate for delegate to Congress, was made chairman. Chosen as members were 15 merchants, 15 mechanics, and 69 planters.⁶⁵

⁶³ Walsh, *Gadsden*, p. 93.

⁶⁴ *S. C. Gazette*, July 11, 1774.

⁶⁵ *Country Journal*, July 12, 1774. There were two other tea parties, one in July and one in November. The ship *Magna Charta*, Capt. Richard Maitland, arrived late in June with two and one-half chests of tea consigned to two merchants in Charleston. *S. C. Gazette*, June 27, 1774. According to Bull, Captain Maitland promised the General Committee to carry the tea back to England. But when he apparently was ready to renege on this promise, he was threatened and had to take refuge on HMS *Glasgow* which was anchored in the harbor. The tea was then landed and stored in the Exchange. These events took place on July 19. Another parcel of tea which also arrived at this time was lodged in the “King's Stores.” *S. C. Gazette*, July 4, 1774; William Bull to Earl of Dartmouth, July 31, 1774, BPRO, XXXIV (1774), 177-183. The ship *Britannia*, Samuel Ball, Jr., arrived from London in Charleston harbor on November 1 with seven chests of tea. Three had been shipped by Ross & Mill and four by James Graham & Co. of London. One had been consigned to Robert Lindsay, three to Zephaniah Kingsley, and three to Robert Mackenzie. After the Committee of Observation reported these facts to the General Committee, the General Committee forced Messrs. Lindsay, Kingsley,

This Committee in order to place the Revolutionary movement on a broader base called for elections throughout the province for representatives to attend a General Meeting to be held in Charleston in January 1775. When this General Meeting convened on January 11, 1775, a true representation was present from the backcountry. The General Meeting immediately transformed itself into the First Provincial Congress. Symbolic of the change was the fact that the General Meeting adjourned from the Long Room in Pike's Tavern to the Assembly's Room in the State House. As the General Meeting became the Provincial Congress, the General Committee gave way to a Council of Safety.⁶⁶

Thus when the lowcountry had to face the might of Britain on June 28, 1776, the province was united behind the new state government which had been established under South Carolina's first state constitution drawn up by the Second Provincial Congress and signed on March 26, 1776.

As Henry Laurens listened to the reading of the Declaration of Independence in Charleston on August 5, 1776, he realized that the logic of revolution must include the slaves. Although he had been a very reluctant rebel, he was now willing to stake his entire fortune on the outcome. But he could only make the commitment to Revolution on the highest level. He was ready to free his slaves. Indeed, he even said that he would give up his own children to save his country. On August 14 he wrote to his son John: "I am now by the Will of God brought into a new World & God only knows what sort of a World it will be."⁶⁷

It was Chief Justice John Marshall who carried the idea of one people a step further—from the state to the national sphere—in his thunderous decisions of *McCulloch v. Maryland* in 1819 and *Cohens v. Virginia* in 1821.

Ironically it was George McDuffie in July 1821—at that time like Calhoun still a nationalist—who caught the spirit of Marshall's deci-

and Mackenzie on November 3 to go on board the vessel and empty the contents of the chests into the harbor—"an oblation to Neptune." *S. C. Gazette*, November 21, 1774.

⁶⁶ Henry Laurens wrote to his son John on January 18 that those who had been elected to the General Meeting had made this move into the assembly's room in the State House where they sat "with all the Solemnity & formality of a Constitutional parliament." Laurens Papers, S. C. Hist. Soc. For the work of the provincial congresses see *Extracts from the Journals of the Provincial Congresses of South Carolina, 1775-1776*, ed. William Edwin Hemphill and Wylma Anne Wates (Columbia, S. C., 1960).

⁶⁷ Henry Laurens to John Laurens, Aug. 14, 1776, Laurens Papers, S. C. Hist. Soc.

sions in letters to a Charleston newspaper which he signed "One of the People."

What is the security of our government? "It is the responsibility of the general government, not to the state authorities, but to themselves, THE PEOPLE. This, and this alone, is the great conservative principle, which lies at the foundation of all our political institutions, and sustains the great and glorious fabric of our liberty. This great truth ought to be kept in constant and lively remembrance by every American. It is the very life and soul of republican freedom; and no statesman is worthy to minister at her sacred altar, who does not distinctly perceive, and deeply feel it. The state governments, too, are the absolute creatures of the people. . . ." ⁶⁸

In 1861 Abraham Lincoln appealed to the "mystic chords of memory" stretching from the Revolution, to "swell the chorus of the Union." ⁶⁹

In 1909 Woodrow Wilson in delivering an address on Robert E. Lee, spoke of his own and of Lee's love of a particular plot of ground. "You can love a country if you begin by loving a community, but you cannot love a country if you do not have the true rootages of intimate affection which are the real sources of all that is strongest in human life." ⁷⁰ Upon a sense of place one could build a better world.

Our bicentennial celebrations should nurture what began at the Exchange on December 3, 1773—a sense of place, the mystic chords of union, the achievement of *one people*.

⁶⁸ *Defence of a Liberal Construction of the Powers of Congress, as Regards Internal Improvements, etc.* (Philadelphia, Penn., 1832), p. 8.

⁶⁹ Abraham Lincoln's First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1861.

⁷⁰ Woodrow Wilson, "Robert E. Lee: An Interpretation," a speech delivered at the University of North Carolina on January 19, 1909, *Selected Literary and Political Papers and Addresses of Woodrow Wilson* (3 vols.: New York, 1925), I, 200.