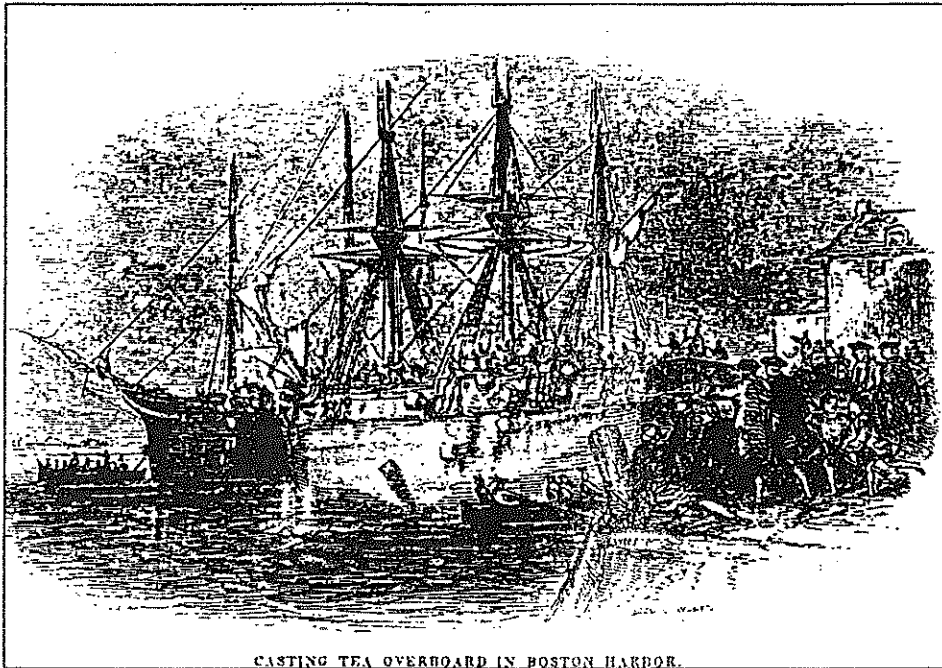


1773

# The Boston Tea Party:

The Night Boston Harbor  
Turned into a Giant Teapot

By Sarah Glasscock



CASTING TEA OVERBOARD IN BOSTON HARBOR.

## Characters (in order of appearance):

WOMEN 1-2

MEN 1-3

SAM ADAMS: a Patriot

JOHN HANCOCK: a Patriot and merchant

BOYS AND MEN 1-5 (nonspeaking roles)

CAPTAIN OF THE DARTMOUTH

BRITISH OFFICER

BRITISH SOLDIERS 4-5 (nonspeaking roles)

HONOR TURNER: a Boston woman

ELIZABETH HARRISON: a Boston woman

GIRLS AND WOMEN 1-5 (nonspeaking roles)

THOMAS BOYLSTON: a Boston merchant



## ACT I

### Scene 1: The night of December 16, 1773. Old South Church in Boston.

NARRATOR: Old South Church is filled with people. It's also filled with tension and excitement. Everyone is talking. Three ships—the *Dartmouth*, *Eleanor*, and *Beaver*—are anchored in Boston Harbor. The ships are filled with 90,000 pounds of tea, but the people of Boston won't take the tea. And the British won't let the ships leave and go to another port. Why? Listen—

WOMAN 1: I don't mind paying a bit of tax on my tea. It's the rest of it that I don't like.

WOMAN 2: I don't mind it at all. Only one company can bring in the tea, and they get to choose who sells it to us. So what? It's still tea, isn't it?

MAN 1: First it's tea—then what? They'll be putting a tax on going to church or talking to your friends on the street.

MAN 2: The British won't let Francis Rotch take the *Dartmouth* out of the harbor and sail her to another port. Francis doesn't want any trouble. He's willing to take his cargo somewhere else.

MAN 3: The British don't want any trouble. They'll let him leave. You'll see.

MAN 1: If they don't, we have a little surprise for them.

MAN 3 (*looking suspiciously at Man 1*): What do you mean?

WOMAN 1: Sshh! (*nudging Man 1*) There's Mr. Rotch now!

WOMAN 2: Look at him! Going right up to Sam Adams. Well, we're in trouble now. Sam Adams would pick a fight with a newborn kitten.

WOMAN 1: Oh, hush!

NARRATOR: The crowd inside the church is silent. Will the British let the three ships, still loaded with tea, sail out of Boston Harbor? They watch as Francis Rotch tells Sam Adams and John Hancock about his meeting with the British. Francis Rotch shakes his head each time Sam Adams asks him a question. Adams' face turns as red as his hair. A low murmur starts in the audience and grows.

SAM ADAMS (*standing up*): People of Boston! Friends! The British will not let Mr. Rotch take the *Dartmouth*—his own ship—out of Boston Harbor. They insist that we must take the tea. I'm sorry—they insist that we must buy the tea from their agents, and their agents only. They insist we must pay a tax on this tea. They insist that we are not free to

decide these things. (*pausing and then shaking his head*) Ladies and gentlemen—this meeting can do nothing more to save the country.

MAN 1 (*springing up*): They want us to take the tea? Then let's take it! We'll turn Boston Harbor into a teapot!

WOMAN 1: Aye, we'll hold a tea party the British won't ever forget!

MAN 2: To the Dartmouth! We'll free your ship, Mr. Rotch!

JOHN HANCOCK: Let every man do what is right in his own eyes!

NARRATOR: Shouting and talking excitedly, the people pour out of the church and head for Griffin's Wharf where the three ships are anchored.

**Scene 2: Later that night at Griffin's Wharf in Boston Harbor where the Dartmouth, Eleanor, and Beaver are anchored.**

NARRATOR: Three groups of men and boys carrying torches board the ships. Some have stopped long enough to darken their faces with ash and paint so they look like Indians. No one says a word. The people on the wharf are quiet, too, as they watch. They know that there's no turning back.

JOHN HANCOCK (*approaching the captain of the Dartmouth*): We won't harm you or your ship, sir. All we ask is that you stand aside.

CAPTAIN: I don't have a choice, do I?

JOHN HANCOCK: No. And neither do we. The British have decided for us.


NARRATOR: The Boston men go to work quickly. They bring up the chests of tea and dump their contents into the harbor. When all the chests are empty, the men sweep the decks of the ships. The people of Boston want to send a message to the British: They demand freedom and liberty, and will fight for it. But they believe in law and order, too.

## **ACT 2**

**Scene 1: May 10, 1774. Griffin's Wharf.**

NARRATOR: The tea party in Boston angers King George III and the British. A new set of acts, or rules, is forced upon the people of Boston. At Griffin's Wharf, a crowd gathers to read the list of rules.

MAN 1: They can't do this!



WOMAN 1: We knew there'd be a price to pay for dumping the tea.

MAN 1: But this! This is intolerable! Closing the port of Boston until we pay for the tea! Moving the capital from here to Salem! Forbidden town meetings! Making us feed British soldiers and put them up in our homes!

WOMAN 1: They mean to starve us. They mean to close down our shops. If they close the harbor, no boats can come in or go out.

MAN 2: You've left out the worst one. They've taken away the colonial assembly from us. From now on, the governor chooses the members of the assembly. And who chooses the royal governor? Not us! We've lost our right to vote on the members. We've lost our voice.

WOMAN 2: A fine fix you've got us into. Dressing up like Indians and ruining perfectly good tea. Why pick a fight with England? We'll lose, and then what?

WOMAN 1: Can't you read, woman? They're taking away our rights. They're treating us like children. They want us to be good and keep quiet.

MAN 1: Aye, as long as we send them boats loaded with timber and fish and fur! They need us, our resources, more than we need them.

MAN 3 (*pointing to Woman 2*): No, she's right. We've got friends in England. The colonies will get representatives in Parliament and go slowly. That'll be an end to that. No more taxation without representation. The colonies will have a voice in England. We'll have a say in how we're governed—

WOMAN 1: It's too late for that. He's right (*nodding to Man 1 and then tapping the list of rules*); these are intolerable. They're intolerable Acts.

WOMAN 2: Don't say I didn't warn you. When you're on your knees, begging the British to forgive you, and they're not interested. Just don't say I didn't warn you.

MAN 1: If you love the British so much, why don't you— (*stops talking when Woman 1 elbows him*)

(*A group of British soldiers marches toward the crowd.*)

BRITISH OFFICER: Move on! Come on, move on, move on! You've had time enough to read. If it was up to me, I'd have you fish every single tea leaf out of the harbor. Move on, I said! Come on!

MAN 2 (*muttering*): If it was up to me, I'd stuff every single leaf of tea down your throat—all ninety thousand pounds of it.

BRITISH OFFICER: What's that!

WOMAN 2: Nothing! He was just telling me to keep quiet and mind my own business.

*(The crowd moves off together.)*

**Scene 2: Later in 1774. The warehouses along Griffin's Wharf.**

NARRATOR: The British close Boston Harbor. Large amounts of coffee and sugar sit in some Boston warehouses. These goods arrived before the harbor was shut down. The owners of these warehouses are now charging high prices for the products. They think the people of Boston will have no choice but to pay the prices. The women of Boston disagree. One morning, they take matters into their own hands. A group of at least a hundred women march down to Thomas Boylston's warehouse. They're wheeling a large cart and smaller hand trucks.

JOHN HANCOCK *(hearing the noise and coming out of his office nearby)*: Ladies! What's happening? Where are you going?

HONOR TURNER *(answering without stopping)*: To Boylston's, for some coffee.

JOHN HANCOCK *(falling in step with Honor)*: But he's charging an arm and leg—

HONOR TURNER: Oh, I think he'll come down on his price for us.

*(The women stop in front of Boylston's warehouse.)*

ELIZABETH HARRISON: Mr. Boylston! Mr. Thomas Boylston!

HONOR TURNER: We've come for your coffee!

THOMAS BOYLSTON *(coming out of the warehouse and then locking the door behind him)*: Ladies! Good morning, good morning! One at a time, one at a time! Plenty of coffee! Price has gone up a bit, you know. Six shillings a pound.

ELIZABETH HARRISON: Your keys, please, Mr. Boylston. We've come for your coffee.

THOMAS BOYLSTON *(thinking he's joking and laughing)*: Now, now, ladies. I'm a merchant. I must make my living. How will I feed my family if I give away my coffee?

HONOR TURNER: Six shilling for a pound of coffee! Shame on you! You're taking the food out of our children's mouths.

THOMAS BOYLSTON *(starting to realize the women are serious)*: I didn't throw any tea

overboard, ladies. If your children are hungry, it's your husbands' fault, not mine.  
(He turns to re-enter his warehouse, but the women block his way.)

ELIZABETH HARRISON: You're a greedy man, Mr. Boylston. It's money you love, not freedom or liberty or your family.

THOMAS BOYLSTON (coldly): You are free not to buy my coffee.

HONOR TURNER: We have not come here to buy your coffee, sir. We have come here to take it. Now, hand over the keys to the warehouse and we'll be quick about it.

THOMAS BOYLSTON: I will not!

(Elizabeth Harrison grabs Boylston by the neck and tosses him into the cart. Boylston looks around in a panic.)

THOMAS BOYLSTON (seeing John Hancock in the crowd): Hancock! John Hancock! Help me!

JOHN HANCOCK: Oh, I would give up the key if I were you, sir.

(A group of women surround Boylston in the crowd)

HONOR TURNER: We would like you to hand over the keys, Mr. Boylston. But if you will not, then we will take them from you.

THOMAS BOYLSTON: All right! All right! (tossing the keys to the ground) There! Go ahead and steal my coffee! You're no better than King George!


NARRATOR: Honor unlocks the warehouse. The women dump Boylston out of the cart. Then they wheel the empty cart into the warehouse. Inside the warehouse, they work as quietly as the men on board the three ships did. After a few minutes, they emerge with the cart loaded with coffee. Elizabeth Harrison stops beside Boylston who's still sitting on the ground.

ELIZABETH HARRISON: You're the one pretending to be king, Mr. Boylston. Charging such high prices. Expecting us to make you a rich man.

THOMAS BOYLSTON (shouting): I hope my coffee keeps you awake all night long! You'll have plenty to think about and be sorry for (muttering to himself) A man can't even try to make a good living for himself and his family (appealing to Hancock) You're a rich man. You know what I'm talking about. I haven't done anything wrong.

JOHN HANCOCK (approaching and holding out his hand to help Boylston stand up): The women of Boston seem to think you have done something wrong. I wouldn't go against them.





HONOR TURNER (*holding out the keys*): Your keys, Mr. Boylston. It was a pleasure doing business with you.

*(Boylston ignores Hancock's outstretched hand. As the women leave, he's left behind, sitting on the ground.)*

NARRATOR: The name for the harsh British rules stuck. But the Intolerable Acts backfired on the British. The acts united the American colonies. Food and supplies flowed into Boston. Virginia called for a Continental Congress. Representatives from every colony met in Philadelphia in the fall of 1774 to talk about what was happening in Boston. Committees of correspondence sprang up. The committees of each colony reported about British actions in its area and how its colonists were responding. Alarmed, the British sent more troops to Boston. A year later, the first shots in the American Revolution were fired.