



Talking History
... with Chris Haugh

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BY SCOTT GROVE

WHEN GREAT BRITAIN IMPOSED THE STAMP ACT ON THE AMERICAN COLONIES IN 1765 TO HELP PAY FOR THE EXPENSIVE NINE-YEAR FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR AND TO KEEP ITS MILITARY STATIONED IN THE NEW WORLD, Frederick County's twelve justices responded with a decision that would ignite the fuse of the American Revolution. Chris Haugh, Special Projects Manager at the Tourism Council of Frederick County, explains why.

Scott: Just how committed were Frederick's residents to the French and Indian War?

Chris: Frederick Town settlers were never fully committed to the war. The town was primarily populated by German immigrants who had escaped upheaval in their homeland as well as the Scot-Irish settlers whose ancestors had done the same a century prior. The common settlers of Maryland were more concerned with Indian attacks than the French occupation of western lands. It was the Proprietors of Maryland (British land owners of the colony) and Provincial government officials who were concerned about foreign encroachment on their land holdings. But the residents surely demonstrated apathy toward the British Army and Crown.

Scott: What exactly was the Stamp Act of 1765?

Chris: The Stamp Act, passed by British Parliament, required that a special parchment paper embossed with a revenue stamp be purchased and used exclusively when drawing up legal documents. A document without this seal would be considered null and void. The Stamp Act also applied to newspapers and magazines. This act was only imposed in the American colonies—not in England.

Scott: What prompted the British to create such a tax?

Chris: Great Britain wanted to keep its "war machine" going in the New World and it felt the colonists should fund it. But because there was no real military threat, the colonists considered the military occupation to be unnecessary and their commanding officers to be living a life of extravagance. Making the issue more contentious was the fact that the colonists were not represented in Parliament. On Aug. 29, 1765, Frederick Town residents protested and burned in effigy the tax collector in response to the act.

Scott: Later, the twelve Frederick County justices repudiated the Stamp Tax Act on Nov. 23, 1765. What justification did they have for doing so?

Chris: There were two rationales. First, there had been no legal publication of the act, as required when new laws were passed. Secondly, no stamped parchment had been delivered to the court for use, so it was impossible to conduct any type of business brought forward by the public.

Scott: So, this decision by the justices was the first official act in defiance of the act?

Chris: Yes. While there had been public protests in many of the colonies, this was the first governing body in America to defy an Act of Parliament. It was radical.

Scott: Wasn't there a public celebration that followed?

Chris: Yes, a week later local residents staged a mock funeral for the Stamp Act that included a parade and its burial on the town green in front of what is now City Hall. Frederick Town's early residents obviously had a lot of moxie.


Scott: Did word of the protest spread among the other colonies?

Chris: An account of the protest first appeared in Jonas Green's *Maryland Gazette* newspaper on Dec. 16, 1765. The story was reprinted in subsequent weeks by the major newspapers in cities such as Philadelphia and Boston. It really put Frederick Town on the map.

Scott: What was the outcome of the Stamp Act? Was it ever imposed?

Chris: The Stamp Act was repealed just five months later in March 1766, further illustrating the weakness of the Crown and Parliament to flex their muscles on the American colonists.

Scott: In your estimation, just how important was the justices' repudiation of the Stamp Act in the road to the American Revolution?

Chris: It played a major role. The Frederick County Court was the first in the land to refuse to enforce an Act of Parliament. The repudiation helped galvanize the colonies' Sons of Liberty groups (underground patriot organizations), unite Committees of Correspondence and lead to delegate assemblies such as the Continental Congress, America's first unified governing body. 

Chris Haugh is experienced with both researching and promoting Frederick County rich heritage. He has been with the Tourism Council since January, 2007, preceded by 17 years managing Frederick's former Channel 10 cable television operation. As a contributing director/producer, Chris has designed and produced many local television programs, including a number of award-winning video documentaries based on Frederick County's historic past.

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