



# Revolutionary Times



Containing the Latest News from the Sons of the American Revolution

## Gaspee Affair

In 1764, the British Parliament passed the Sugar Act, a tax on sugar, and the British Admiralty brought six ships 'of Marblehead design' to enforce it.

The Gaspee, a schooner of eight guns, arrived in Narragansett Bay in the spring of 1772 to carry on the work for which the other ships had proven ineffectual.

A letter exchange began between Rhode Island's elected Governor, Joseph Wanton, and the captain of HMS Gaspee, Lt. Dudingston.

Rhode Island was fed up with the Gaspee. Lt Dudingston continued his harassment, infuriating merchants, and he threatened to cripple the economy.

The persistent harassment against Rhode Island merchants led a group of them to retaliate.

The attack is the first major armed act of rebellion against the British crown, and the subsequent investigation prompted the colonies to consider united action against England.

On the morning of June 9, 1772, Hannah, a medium-sized packet boat captained by colonist Benjamin Lindsey, began sailing north from Newport to Providence.

A chase left the Gaspee aground and stranded on Namquit Point. On that moonless night, more than 100 Sons of Liberty silently rowed

out in a line of longboats to the Gaspee.

A shot was fired and Dudingston was wounded. Today, Rhode Islanders celebrate that shot as the 'First Shot of the Revolutionary War.' Then, they set the Gaspee on fire.

An investigation was started on June 12, 1772 by the British.

By August 1772, with the investigation making little progress, King George III issued a proclamation offering a reward to anyone who would supply the names of those responsible for the destruction of the ship and the injury to its commanding officer.

The King created the Gaspee Commission, who conducted its investigation, issuing warrants and taking testimony from Gaspee crew and people believed to have knowledge of the attack.

After ten months, the Commissioners issued their final report to King George III; they explained that due to contradictory evidence and coerced testimony, they were unable to name any of the perpetrators of the crime.

The burning of the Gaspee is celebrated in Rhode Island as an important early strike against the tyranny of the crown.

However, it was the King's threat to try the accused in England, rather than on native soil by a jury

of their peers, that had the most lasting effect.

Soon after, understanding that the colonies' many grievances were best addressed with a "unity of action," a meeting of deputies from every colony was proposed. These deputies became the First Continental Congress.



This broadsheet is dedicated to the 250th Anniversary Celebration of the Declaration of Independence for more information visit the National Society Sons of the American Revolution website at: [www.sar.org](http://www.sar.org)

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