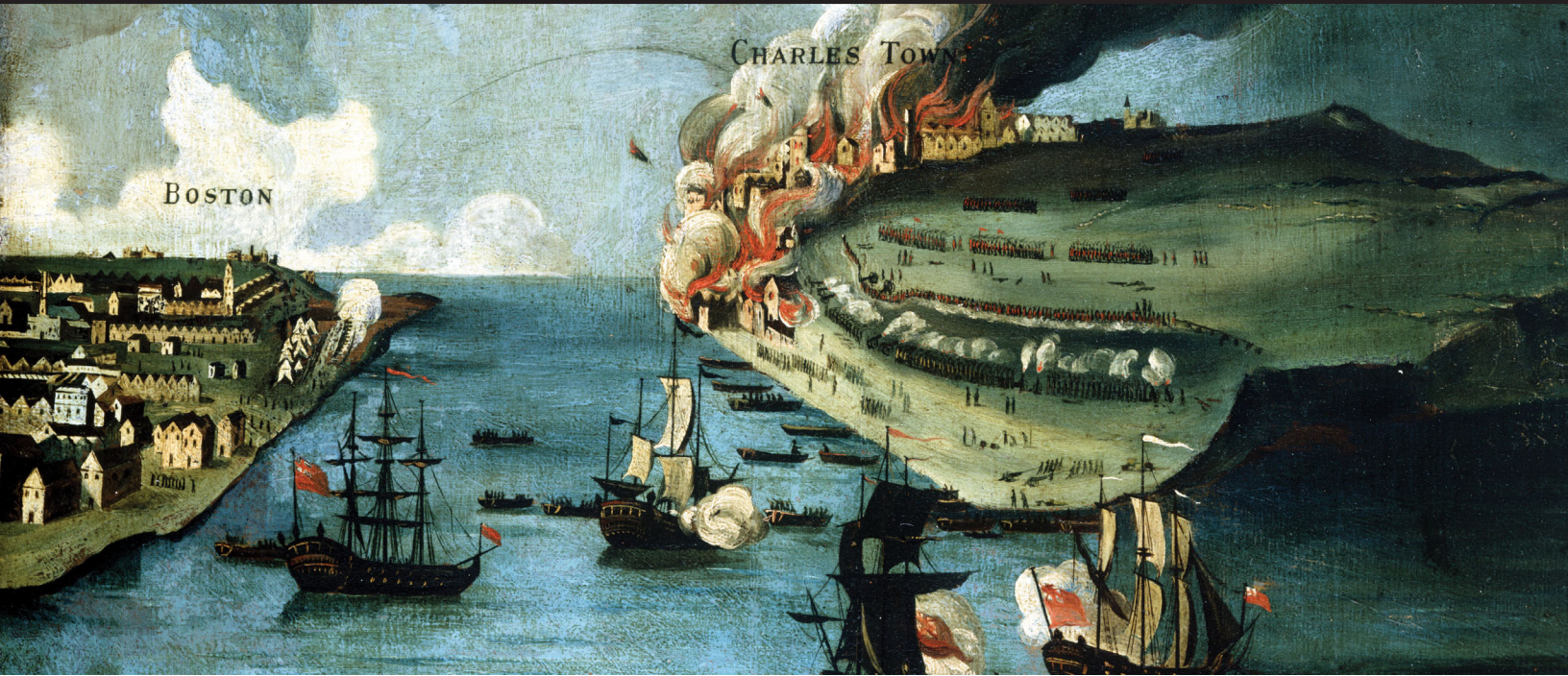


Bunker Hill Monument

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Boston National Historical Park
Boston, MA



On the morning of June 17, 1775, no one could have imagined the outcome of events later that day in Charlestown, MA. That afternoon, New England provincials, subjects of the king, stood up to the mighty British army for the first time in pitched battle. They repulsed two assaults before retreating during a third attack. What would cause countrymen to fight one another, risking their lives and all they held dear?

Growing Dissent

For nearly twelve years, a growing discontent had been brewing among many colonists. Following the French and Indian War (Seven Years' War), new taxes on sugar and other goods had been imposed



Dr. Joseph Warren

on the colonists in order to help pay down the British government's huge debt from the war. While some people had little objection to these minor taxes, others declared them unfair, principally because they had no input. "Taxation without representation is tyranny," became the rallying cry of the

Patriots, as they called themselves. Many colonists felt that their rights as Englishmen had been abused. In Boston, these taxes gave rise to protests, boycotts, and destruction of personal property. The resentment over the despised tea tax would lead colonists to dump over 342 chests of tea, valued at over \$1 million in today's currency, into Boston Harbor on December 16, 1773.

Parliament reacted swiftly to the Boston Tea Party. A series of punitive measures were passed. Soldiers and sailors were sent to Boston to enforce a blockade of the harbor. Martial law was established, when British general Thomas Gage replaced the civilian royal governor Thomas Hutchinson. Most important of all, town meetings were outlawed, except to elect representatives and petty officials. The colonists retaliated by creating a parallel government, the Provincial Congress, that met in Watertown, outside Boston. Realizing the potential for British troops to assert their authority beyond Boston, militia groups, called minutemen, began training with a set purpose in mind. The stage was set for armed conflict.

The royal military authorities were under orders to crush this "most unnatural rebellion." This action came to a head at Lexington, Concord and then Menotomy (now Arlington) in April of 1775, when local militias confronted British troops that had marched out from Boston. The armed conflict that became the American Revolution had begun.

Following these skirmishes, the rebel Committee of Safety asked the men of Massachusetts to "immediately raise an army...and send them to headquarters at Cambridge..." In a few short weeks, men from not only Massachusetts, but also Connecticut and New Hampshire, arrived to lay siege to Boston. Farmers, tradespeople and merchants, from every level of society, came by the hundreds. Men as diverse as prominent physician and political organizer Joseph Warren and former slave Salem Poor came to fight side by side. Before long, some ten to fifteen thousand colonists had surrounded Boston, and General Gage found his army encircled.



Map of Charlestown by Lt. Sir Thomas Hyde Page showing the troop movements and fortifications.

Decisive Day



General William Howe

Before it was known that they would be desperately needed, King George III sent three of the best available generals to Boston to assist Gage. When William Howe, John Burgoyne and Henry Clinton arrived on May 25, 1775, they found this prolonged situation incredible and intolerable.

Maps were reviewed and it became apparent that the hills of Charlestown and Dorchester Neck would have to be seized and fortified to break this siege and regain control over the rebellious New England colonies. A plan was quickly drawn up to do so. The Committee of Safety discovered this plan, and gave orders to foil the British army by seizing and fortifying the heights of Charlestown. Late in the evening of June 16, 1775, William Prescott passed over Bunker Hill and led 1,200 men to Breed's Hill and, under the direction of Richard Gridley, built an earthen fort there.

By morning, this hastily built dirt redoubt was visible from downtown Boston, where surprised

British sentries observed what they thought to be impossible—a fort had been built overnight! After making preparations for the attack, the powerful King's army landed on the shores of Charlestown in the early afternoon of June 17. As the regulars formed for battle, snipers in the town began to fire at them. To avoid further harassment, the army set the town on fire. With this spectacular blaze as a backdrop, the battle began. The first two attacks were disastrous for the British army, which expected little or no resistance from mostly inexperienced militia men. These men, along with Marine reinforcements, made a surge up the hill in a third and final assault. With fixed bayonets they scaled and entered the fort. The colonists fought back as long as they could, but had exhausted their ammunition, and could not counter this powerful bayonet charge. By 5:30 pm, the colonists had been pushed off the hill, and the British army had won.

Loyalist Ann Hulton had observed the carnage from a rooftop in Boston. Just days after the battle she wrote to a friend in England, "In the evening the streets were filled with the wounded and the dying; the sight of which, with the lamentations of the women and children over their husbands and fathers, pierced one to the soul."

The Turning Point

"A hill too dearly bought," lamented General Clinton. Although the British army won this battle, more than 1,000 of its 2,200 men were either killed or wounded. General Gage wrote, "The loss we have sustained is greater than we can bear." The colonists realized that they had fought one of the finest armies in the world and turned them back twice. Abigail Adams, who could see the battle

smoke from her home in Braintree, would write to her husband, John, "The day, perhaps the decisive day has come, on which the fate of America depends." This pivotal event would mean little chance for reconciliation with Great Britain, and the beginning of a war that would last another eight years.

"A Monitor to the Present"

In the years following the battle, the hill became sacred ground, though for years it had no official recognition. Individuals interested in our nation's founding made the pilgrimage to the site of the first major battle of the American Revolution. In 1794, the first monument to be erected at this site honored Joseph Warren, a key Boston leader in the American Revolution, and a victim of the battle. By the early 1800s, it was felt that a monument should be built to honor all the men who fought here. The Bunker Hill Monument Association solicited funds from the public to be raised for this purpose, and in 1825 the cornerstone was laid for the Bunker Hill

Monument. By 1840, the granite obelisk was little more than half complete, prompting action from Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*. She, along with other prominent Boston women, planned a fair and bake sale to be held in the fall of that same year. The fair, which lasted for eight days, raised over \$30,000, a significant sum at the time. With the help of two philanthropists, Amos Lawrence, and Judah Touro, who each contributed \$10,000, the monument was completed just three years later. The monument was dedicated on the anniversary of the battle in 1843, with over 100,000 people in attendance, including President of the United States John Tyler, and veterans of the battle. Statesman and orator Daniel Webster spoke that day, asserting that the "monument stands a memorial of the past, a monitor to the present, and to all succeeding generations."



Bunker Hill Monument today

Through the years, the monument has been embraced as a symbol of the times. Countless scores of people have come to the monument to learn of the events that took place here, and to ponder the meanings behind the monument. Its enduring legacy remains, reminding us of those who struggled to control their own destiny, and were willing to sacrifice and fight for their individual and collective rights.

Image Credits: The attack on Bunker Hill with the burning of Charlestown, June 17, 1775; National Gallery of Art. General William Howe, John Singleton Copley, 1738-1815, c.1768, oil on canvas mounted on masonite, 50 x 39 3/4 in. (127 x 101 cm), Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection; Joseph Warren, Attributed to John Singleton Copley, Adams National Historical Park; A plan of the action at Bunkers-Hill, on the 17th of June, 1775 by Lieut. Sir Thomas Hyde, 1746-1821, 1775; Bunker Hill Monument, NPS Photo