

# Introduction to Committees of Safety

## Mayflower Compact

In the name of God, Amen. We whose names are under-written, the loyal subjects of our dread sovereign Lord, King James, by the grace of God, of Great Britain, France, and Ireland King, Defender of the Faith, etc.

Having undertaken, for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith, and honor of our King and Country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia, do by these presents solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God, and one of another, covenant and combine our selves together into a civil body politic, for our better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute, and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the Colony, unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof we have hereunder subscribed our names at Cape Cod, the eleventh of November [New Style, November 21], in the year of the reign of our sovereign lord, King James, of England, France, and Ireland, the eighteenth, and of Scotland the fifty-fourth. Anno Dom. 1620. [ 41 signatories ]

\*\*\*\*\*

Committees of Safety, or like elements, existed throughout the history of colonial America. Though known by various names (Committees of Protection, Associations, or, as the case in Plymouth Colony, an unnamed civil body politic, and, in Jamestown, simply governing council), they had the characteristic of being a civil government absent a government established by the sovereign.

In the early eighteenth century, Committees of Safety were quite common, especially on the frontiers, where the possibility of Indian attacks were likely. The Committee would appoint watchmen, hog reeves, fence reeves, and, militia officers. These are functions that were taken on by more organized governments, in some towns, though were common through most of the colonies, leading up to the War of Independence.

Committees served, primarily, to fill in gaps that were left by existing colonial and county governments, providing services that were otherwise unavailable.

As tensions grew between the colonists and the Crown government in England, the need for Committees increased, especially in western Massachusetts and South Carolina. After the Massachusetts Government Act (May 20, 1774), which revoked the Massachusetts Charter and replace the locally elected governments with appointments by the King, the farmers in western Massachusetts began forming Committee to assure a continuity of government and to take charge in expelling courts and judges who were not abiding by the original charter, and replacing them with their owns courts, though primarily only for criminal matters.

There were sufficient numbers of Committees in most of the colonies to call for the First Continental Congress, in 1774. These Committees were not subject to Royal governance,

because, quite simply, to call for such a Congress would have been a contradiction of their authority granted by the various charters. Subsequently, the Second and Third Continental Congress were called by the Committees, which by this time, had evolved to the point where sufficient numbers of participating Committees established a Provincial Committee of Safety.

Committees of Safety continued to operate as functions of local government throughout the War of Independence, until each state adopted a Constitution, or otherwise revised their form of government, absent any Royal control. Once the Article of Confederation were instituted (1781), the need for the Committees, except, once again, in the frontiers, diminished, as did the Committees.

Their next occurrence was in 1835, when President Santa Anna abolished the Constitution of 1824, granting himself enormous powers over the government. Colonists in Texas began forming Committees of Correspondence and Safety. A central Committee in San Felipe de Austin coordinated their activities. This de facto government waged the revolution against Mexico, directing and supplying the militia, until independence was won.

## **A Brief History of Committees of Safety in America**

Cambridge April 29, 1775

This may certify that the bearer, Mr. Paul Revere is messenger to the Committee of Safety and that all dispatch and assistance be given him in Instances that the business of the Colony may be facilitated. - Jos. Warren, Chair.

Committees of Safety existed prior to 1692 and were called by various names. The Committee which was created, in that year, in New York is significant in that it was created by the militia. The colonists were dissatisfied with the government of the Crown. headed by Governor Sir Edmund Andros. Recognizing that the military (militia) authority must always be subordinate to the civil authority, and having serious concern over the abusive authority imposed by Andros, the militia of New York created their own civil authority in the form of the Committee of Safety.

Representation on the Committee was based upon two delegates being selected by the citizenry to represent each community. The delegates gathered and exercised their authority by, eventually, imprisoning Governor Andros for a period of one year.

On and off, many communities, colonies and provinces exercised their right of "self government" by establishing Committees as the need arose. The practice became even more common after the French and Indian Wars of 1756-1758. The Crown had imposed a number of new taxes on the colonies. It was felt that since the French and Indian Wars were in defense of the colonies, the burden of the enormous expense should be borne by the colonists. Of course, few colonists agreed.

As the taxes were increased (even though the colonies would never be able to pay the costs and interest), the demand by the colonists for the "rights of Englishmen" were raised. The Parliament had virtually no direct representation from the colonies, although there were some members of the House of Commons who were sympathetic with the colonies.

Each effort by the Crown to raise taxes resulted in the colonies refusing to purchase the goods taxed to raise the revenue. This caused the Crown to impose even more taxes, or replace those that had failed to return the revenue.

Finally, the Coercive Acts<sup>1</sup> of 1774 caused sufficient concern in the colonies to prompt action. Those communities that had formed Committees sent delegates to the colony or province level in order to respond to the call from the Boston Committee for a Continental Congress. In September, 1774, nine colonies responded to the call and met in Philadelphia to join in actions to counter the increasing imposition of arbitrary control by Britain.

Although during the course of colonial history many Committees of Safety were formed and operated under British government, frequently their actions were outside of the authority granted. They frequently co-existed alongside the "authorized" government of the Crown, creating a parallel government which was the direct representation of the people as opposed to the legitimate government of the Crown.

These "parallel" governments formed the nexus that would come together again in June, 1776, comprised of representatives of all thirteen colonies, to form the Second Continental Congress. The outcome of this second congress was the Declaration of Independence.

The Coercive Acts were a number of enactments passed by the British Parliament which closed Boston's Harbor, placed Massachusetts under close British rule and extended Canada's boundaries South into lands which the American colonists believed to be their western extension.

## **The Committee of Safety Concept**

"Resolved unanimously, As our opposition to the settled plan of the British administration to enslave America will be strengthened by a union of all ranks of men in this province, we do most earnestly recommend that all former differences about religion or politics, and all private animosities and quarrels of every kind, from henceforth cease and be forever buried in oblivion; and we entreat, we conjure every man by his duty to God, his country, and his posterity, cordially to unite in defense of our common rights and liberties."

- Resolution of the Maryland Deputies, December 12, 1774

The concept of committees of safety was the forerunner of that principle of government implemented by the states and the federal government. Each committee would delegate its representatives to go to the next higher level, and carry with it the will of the people. Within each group there were chairmen selected to act as conciliator to the delegation. His purpose was not to rule, dictate or control the meetings, with the exception of providing order and purpose. Most often, he may have been denied the right to vote to compensate for what additional power he might have as chairman. In Boston, for example, a rather meek and mild Doctor John Warren was chairman of the Boston Committee of Safety. He provided order at the meetings, and otherwise carried out his duties as the administrator of the will of the people.

Since those times, we have subordinated our individual thought process to one which might be best described as "corporate mentality", where the chairman is usually chief executive officer

(CEO) and wields an unnatural (but, then, what is a corporation?) authority. His word is assumed "law", and until he is replaced, he is the power.

"The fabric of American empire ought to rest on the solid basis of THE CONSENT OF THE PEOPLE. The stream of national power ought to flow immediately from that pure, original fountain of all legitimate authority."

- Alexander Hamilton, Federalist Papers #22

What has to be understood if the concept of Committee of Safety becomes a tool in our efforts to return to constitutional government, is that the authority of the people be recognized above all else. All "enactments" should come from that source, and finally be approved by that source. Any executive committee actions should be for their ministerial nature, only. The corporate pyramid must be turned over and recognized in its proper light, that the people are at the top, just under God. Next comes the committee of safety, and its various sub-committees, which function as the source defined by interest, to generate "enactments". Finally come the delegates, chairmen, and executive committee whose only purpose is to facilitate the orderly determination of the will of the people, and provide the means to implement that will.

The Committee of Safety concept, in order to operate in a manner which is suggested by history, must operate as committees and the Committee of the Whole. It must never operate as a "star chamber" or an executive authority under the current concept. It must never operate as a corporation, for a corporate interest might not be the same as the employees or the owners, except if its goal is strictly profit. This is not the goal of the Committee of Safety. The goal that is sought to be achieved is that the will of the people be carried out by those who have sought to assist in that administration, not by those who seek to control that will.

## **Are Committees of Safety A Historical Answer to Today's Problems?**

The Right to speech and assembly also includes the right to associate, freely, with those of like mind. Guilt by association, although sometimes evident in today's judicial system, is an inherent right without the authority of any government, but guaranteed to be protected by the government, by order of the Constitution; in the First Amendment, which prohibits federal enactments that would limit that Right; and, Article I, Section 8, clause 17, which is outside the jurisdiction of federal authority; Article I, Section 10, clause 1, which prohibits any state from passing any "Law impairing the Obligation of Contracts", which is the nature of any association; Articles IX, Bill of Rights, "The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people;" and, Article X, "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

Although nearly every community, circa 1760-1780, had an association, the wording of the Albany Association is still available to us. The Albany Committee was established prior to the First Continental Congress. This General Association was executed in 1775. It was signed by all members of the association at the time. It might provide us an understanding of the necessity for establishing an association of like minded people for the purpose of furthering the discussion of solutions to the problem. The original Albany version:

## **GENERAL ASSOCIATION**

A General Association agreed to and subscribed by the Members of the several Committees of the City and County of Albany.

PERSUADED that the salvation of the Rights and Liberties of America depends under God on the firm Union of it's Inhabitants, in a Vigorous prosecution of the Measures necessary for it's Safety; and convinced of the necessity of preventing the Anarchy and Confusion, which attend a Dissolution of the Powers of Government

WE the Freemen, Freeholders and Inhabitants of the City and County of Albany being greatly Alarmed at the avowed Design of the Ministry, to raise a Revenue in America; and shocked by the Bloody Scene now acting in the Massachusetts Bay Do in the most Solemn Manner resolve never to become Slaves; and do associate under all the Ties of Religion, Honour, and Love to our Country, to adopt and endeavour to carry into Execution whatever Measures may be recommended by the Continental Congress, or resolved upon by our Provincial Convention for the purpose of preserving our Constitution, and opposing the Execution of the several Arbitrary and oppressive Acts of the British Parliament until a Reconciliation between Great Britain and America on Constitutional Principles (which we most ardently desire) can be obtained; And that we will in all things follow the Advice of our General Committee respecting the purpose aforesaid, the preservation of Peace and good Order and the safety if Individuals and private Property.

## **What role could Committees of Safety play in today's world?**

Events such as Katrina, as well as the possibility of man caused disasters, are potential threats to the security, safety, and well-being of our families.

If a Committee existed in your community, and you were a member, then your family is also a member. Suppose there was some sort of event that affected food supply, utilities, water, or otherwise threatened your safety. You have in place, through the Committee, a cooperative with which to share needed resources. Though short lived in Plymouth Colony and Jamestown, this "cooperative" served quite well for survival in a hostile land, for the first few years.

It also allowed the sharing of crops in the frontier towns and agricultural communities, in later colonial times, when Indian raids, or weather, destroyed crops, which would leave those affected short of food, had their neighbors (fellow Committee members) not shared with them what food was available.

In the aftermath of Katrina, if a Committee existed in a consolidated area (a community), and sent a representative to the local law enforcement with the message, "we will provide our own protection in our area", describing the limits of the area protected by the Committee, it would make sense the law enforcement would be relieved that their job was made easier based upon the Committee relieving them of a substantial area that might otherwise require their patrolling.

The Committee would be a resource for such eventualities, and would be an ideal place from which to gain recognition by launching programs to help those in need. Roof repairs, painting, yard maintenance, etc., for those unable to care for their own property. This would encourage

friendship, appeal to potential members, improve the quality of the neighborhood, and set the Committee out as supportive of the neighborly attitude that prevailed in this country, many decades ago. This would result in reduced crime, safer streets and communities, and, a reaffirmation of our rights, freedoms, and liberty.

Committees of Safety are quite able to fill in where government fails to provide, at least for those who see the need, join, and, participate in, Committees of Safety.

## **A Thought on Leadership**

One of the most important tools utilized by those who have sought to take our freedoms and our country from us is the control of public education. By these means they have been able to remove aspects of our history which would have enabled us to both perceive and deal with the problems of today long before now.

We have a group of leaders in the Patriot Community, many whom have proclaimed their position by methods of public relations which are founded on promulgation of sensationalism. Perhaps their positions are merited, yet if we look at history, we will find that these are not the means by which leaders were selected two hundred years ago.

Jefferson, Adams, Washington, Henry and the rest of those who gave us the nation we seek to restore today were well established in their respective communities, and recognized by their efforts to be men of sincerity. Their efforts extended, in most cases, over many years of guidance to their neighbors. The respect that was earned by these efforts, and their willingness to represent the will of the people, propelled them into the delegations which formulated the course that the colonies would pursue.

Would it be possible for the government to anticipate the desire of the Patriot Community to return to Constitutional government, and send agents into the community to infiltrate, say what patriots want to hear and acquire a position of leadership?

By what we know, the One World Government people have achieved this very goal in our Congress, Courts and even in the Presidency.

## **Are we foolish enough to allow the same to happen to us?**

The War of 1812 was first declared by the British. The President sent to the Congress a Declaration of War which gave six reasons for which he requested the Congress to agree that a state of war existed. The Declaration was approved by the House on June 4, 1812 and the Senate on June 18. Of the six causes for war, probably the most significant is the fifth, which reads:

"Fifthly. Employing secret agents within the United States, with a view to subvert our government, and dismember our union."

The selection of members of the community who have proven themselves to those they know and live with as local leaders will minimize the possibility of infiltration by those who might otherwise have objectives different than our own. Under the scrutiny of their neighbors, their true self will be much more apparent. Their positions will not have been achieved by expertise in promotion, rather by the efforts they have expended in the cause.

It should be understood that when seeking our "leaders", we should look to those who ask questions, listen to the answers, and seek to understand others rather than to attempt to impose their will on others. The outspoken advocates are suited for private associations which are gathered for specific purposes, but are absolutely unsuitable for the form of government our Founders granted to their posterity.

## **Some Thoughts about Our Representative Form of Government**

After the War of Independence, each state was allowed to maintain, under its Constitution, the method for selection or election of representatives which best suited their respective forms of government. The Constitution was modeled after the most common forms in existence in 1787. Thus, from that great document, we have some insight into what method was utilized most often.

If we look at the Constitution closely, there are provisions whose meanings have been lost. Article IV, Section 4, for example, provides that "The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government,..." There was a limitation of thirty thousand people for each representative (Article I, Section 2, clause 3), and two senators were to represent each State (Article I, Section 3, clause 1), and each State's interest. These three concepts have since been obscured by our controlled educational system. When one reads the words of the Founding Fathers, the significance of these matters becomes clear.

The Union was of the states. Each State was a country which had chosen to subordinate only certain aspects of its authority to federal powers. To protect the authority of the state in respect to the Union, the senators were selected by the respective state legislatures to protect the interest of the state (states rights). Although we have been led to believe that a state is merely a geographic entity in the country called the United States, we can see that, within the last decade, the Congress perceived the relationship in another way. In the Laws of the 100th Congress - 2nd Session, Public Law (P.L.) 100-702, 297 (b), it makes quite clear that as recently as 1988 each of the states was recognized by the federal government to be a "country". These countries, however, have been denied their proper representation by the ratification (if valid) of the Seventeenth Amendment in 1913 (the same year we "acquired" the Federal Reserve Act and the "income tax" {Sixteenth} Amendment).

The representation of no than more thirty thousand people by a member of the House of Representatives has been modified by legislative acts, not by way of a Constitutional amendment (as required by the Constitution). At the present time there are over 400,000 people represented by each Representative. This is a result of the imposition of a limitation of 435 representatives, which violates the concept of the Founders. Instead, we have a system in which votes are bought (by entitlement programs and through massive advertising campaigns) without regard to the delegation of the interests of the constituents, as would be true if the thirty thousand limit were recognized.

If we look at these two issues with an insight into some of the concepts understood at the time of the War of Independence, we can find that there was good cause for these restrictions on government. The concept of government, as envisioned then, and which satisfies the primary criteria of "Republican Form", is based upon delegation. Each community would delegate

representatives to the next higher sitting authority. This process is applied in each state, and those delegates became the state legislatures, which, in turn, delegate two senators to represent the interests of the state in the United States Senate.

The representatives were delegated by thirty thousand (small enough to allow personal knowledge of the delegate prior to selection, and not subject to "media" control). Perhaps another level in this process would allow representation at thirty thousand, and subsequent delegation at a state level which would accommodate the 435-member limitation.

Finally comes the Electoral College. This concept has been in place since the Constitution (Article II, Section 1, clause 1) was ratified, and was also based upon delegation. Each state selected delegates equal in number to the number of senators and representatives from that state. These "electors" were the delegates of the states who carried the wishes of their constituents to the process of selecting the President, who, as the executive, was not the leader, or the lawmaker, rather the administrator who would carry out the will of the people as directed by the Congress through their enactments. Now this "electoral college" is controlled by the primary parties (Democrats and Republicans), and has been removed as a part of our Republican Form of Government.

We have, since the time of the Founders, seen a gradual but persistent effort to replace the role of President with that of a monarch, with some limitations on power, which is surprisingly similar to what was then true in England. The arbitrary authority of President was not conceived to exist by the Founders, except in times of national emergency, and this only because of the expediency of timely decision making ability to deal with an emergency.

The leaders of those times were men who had earned their positions, and were appointed by the people. When they achieved that position of leadership, they subordinated themselves to the will of the people. The inherent authority of the people permeated the entire structure of government in those early days. The people spoke, and their delegates, or representatives listened.



# THE COMMITTEES OF SAFETY

PRIMARY SOURCE: NCpedia. State Library of NC. 2018.

<https://www.ncpedia.org/anchor/primary-source-committees#citation>

*During the American Revolution, the revolutionary provincial congresses or assemblies needed a system of organization and networking to enforce their resolutions, organize activities, and to communicate with citizens. When the First Continental Congress met in September of 1774, the representatives agreed on establishing a system of local institutions or committees to carry this out. Each provincial congress or assembly established its own local committees, and organization might take place at the county or district level. Congresses often created committees of correspondence, committees of inspection, and committees of safety. And some colonies, including North Carolina, had already been forming these as early as 1773.*

*Committees of Correspondence dealt with communication activities to keep people aware of what was going on. Committees of Inspection, also called Committees of Observation, enforced violations of boycott resolutions. And Committees of Safety were organized as the executive authority, eventually replacing the authority of the local colonial government. They also became involved in organizing local militia.*

*Even after the colonies declared their independence and war began, the authority of the local committees was somewhat ambiguous. However, the committees were an important step in the process of the colonies becoming independent states as they replaced royal governments with their own. North Carolina's Committees of Safety were established in late 1774 and early 1775 by its revolutionary Provincial Congress to help implement the trade boycotts endorsed by the Continental Congress and to help organize militia activity. At times the Committees in various communities also published their actions and resolutions in a local newspaper.*

*In April of 1775, Governor Josiah Martin, the royal colonial governor, dissolved North Carolina's colonial assembly because it had endorsed the Committees of Safety and because many members had already convened the revolutionary Provincial Congress in August 1774 and sent their representatives to the Continental Congress in September of 1774. Within months of this action, Martin had lost any authority he had left and abandoned the governor's office.*

*Read the following excerpts from the minutes of the Committees of Safety set up in North Carolina towns and counties in 1775. These excerpts relate to the Committees' goal of enforcing the trade boycott against Britain.*

---

## **Chowan County, January 28, 1775**

It being made appear to the satisfaction of the committee for this county that we have violated the eighth Article of the Association entered into by the Continental Congress by being concerned in a horse race -- We do therefore most heartily and sincerely declare and profess that we are sorry for our misconduct, and in order that proper atonement be made for such our enormity do promise that in future we shall strictly observe every

article of the Association and hope by such behaviour to be reinstated in the esteem and favour of our countrymen and acquaintance which we have justly forfeited by our misbehavior.

**WILLIAM ROBERTS,**

**John Ellis, Demsey Bond.**

---

**Wilmington, January 28, 1775**

Resolved, that Balls and Dancing at Public Houses, are contrary to the Resolves of the General Congress. It is the opinion of this Committee that every tavern Keeper in this town, have notice given them not to suffer any Balls or Public Dancing at their Houses as they wish to avoid the censure of the people.

Mr. W. Campbell, and Mr. John McDonnell reported sundry dry goods imported by them in the Brigantine Carolina, Packet, Malcom McNeil, Commander and delivered up their invoices to the committee, to have the said goods disposed of agreeable to the resolves of the General Congress.

Ordered, That the said Goods be advertised to be sold at public vendue, at 11 o'clock, on Monday, the 30th inst.

---

**Wilmington, February 13, 1775**

Information was made against Jona. Dunbilrie for taking four shillings per bushel, for salt, contrary to the resolves of this committee, he being sent for waited on the committee, confessed it was a mistake, and promised to return the money so exacted, which the committee were satisfied with.

---

**Wilmington, March 1, 1775**

The committee being informed of a Public Ball, to be given by sundry persons under the denomination of the gentlemen of Wilmington, at the house of Mrs. Austin, this evening, and as all public Balls and dances, are contrary to the resolves of the General Continental Congress, and a particular resolve of this committee: Ordered, That the following letter be sent to Mrs. Austin, to forewarn her from suffering such Public Ball and dancing at her house.

Madam: The committee appointed to see the resolves of the Continental Congress put in execution, in this town, acquaint you, that the Ball intended to be given at your house, this evening, is contrary to the said resolves; we therefore warn you to decline it, and acquaint the parties concerned, that your house cannot be at their service, consistent with the good of your country.

Signed, By order of the Committee,

**THOS. CRAIKE.**

---

### Chowan County, March 4, 1775

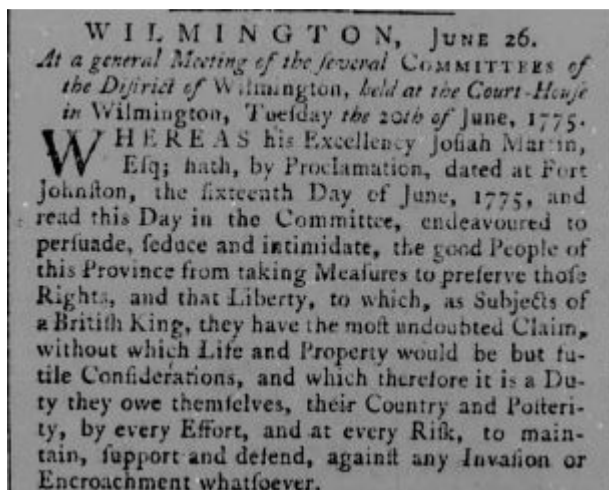
Forty Pounds Sterling be paid by the Chairman of the Committee to any person who shall, in eighteen months from the date hereof, first make in this Province, or cause to be therein made, under his direction, five hundred pair of Wool Cards... and five hundred pair of good Cotton Cards... which the Committee hereby oblige themselves to purchase and pay, ready money, for... The quality and price that such Cards usually cost in Great Britain to be submitted to the Committee.

The Committee also offer a premium of Forty Pounds Sterling, to be paid by the Chairman of the Committee, to the person who shall first make for sale, in this Province, two thousand pounds of good Steel, fit for edged tools....

The Committee likewise offer a Premium of Ten Pounds, Proclamation Money, to be paid by their Chairman, to any person who shall, within twelve months from this date, first produce one hundred yards of well fulled Woolen Cloth to the Committee, spun and wove in this County, and fulled in any County within the District of the Superiour Court of Edenton; and a Premium of Ten Pounds, like money, to be paid by the Chairman, to the person who shall, within twelve months from this date, first produce to the Committee one hundred yards of well bleached Linen...

---

### Wilmington, March 6, 1775



The following association was agreed on by the Committee, and oblige annexed to the resolves of the General Congress, to be handed to every person in this county and recommended to the committees of the oblige adjacent counties, that those who oblige acceded to the said resolves, may subscribe their names thereto.

We the subscribers, in testimony of our sincere approbation of the proceedings of the late Continental Congress, to this annexed, have hereunto set our hands, and we do most solemnly engage by the most

sacred ties of honor, virtue and love of our country, that we will ourselves strictly observe every part of the association recommended by the Continental Congress as the most probable means to bring about a reconciliation between Great Britain and her colonies and we will use every method in our power to endeavor to influence others to the observation of it by persuasion, and such other methods as shall be consistent with the peace and good order, and the laws of this Province, and we do hereby intend to express our utter detestation of all such as shall endeavor to defeat the purposes of the said Congress, and will concur to hold forth such characters to public contempt.

---

**Pitt County, March 10, 1775**

This Committee being informed that Amos Atkinson, Solomon Shepperd and Jno Tison had in many instances obstructed the contribution for the Relief of the Poor of Boston &c.,

Ordered that the Chairman address said gentlemen so as they may appear at the next meeting of the Committee and Justified themselves in that particular.

**Citation**

Primary Sources

## **NEW ENGLAND MASSACHUSETTS COMMITTEE OF SAFETY**

When the American colonists laid by the petition for the musket, prepared to put their strength to the test in defense of their rights, the machinery of the English colonial governments was hampered, and at length rendered helpless by the withdrawal of popular support. That government rested on the supremacy of England over her dependencies, enforced by governors and other royal officials, but workable only with the co-operation of the colonists in their assemblies. When discontent rose to rebellion, the government, comprising two irreconcilable elements in the governors and assemblies, came of necessity to a standstill. The executive attempted to silence the insurrection by dissolving the assemblies, but the people found other channels of expression. Representatives to provincial conventions were elected and gradually assumed entire control.

These conventions served the purpose of deliberative and legislative bodies as well as the former assemblies, but it was difficult for them to perform executive duties on account of their size. Moreover, it was impossible to keep such large bodies continually in session, and in the frequent recesses and the intervals between a dissolution and the meeting of a new congress there was need of some system by which the government could be carried on without interruption. It was to meet these wants that the conventions appointed Committees of Safety during the earlier years of the Revolution. They served as the chief executive of the province in the transition period from colonial to state government.

Opposition culminated early in Massachusetts and that province was the first to choose a Committee of Safety. The spirit of resistance ran high in Boston in the fall of 1774. The white tents of the British on the Common, the cannon that Gage had planted to command the town, the fleet riding in the harbor, brought no thought of submission to the people; rather they were used as effective illustrations by their leaders to point the wrongs of the colonists and the tyranny of England. A martial spirit had sprung up; the people brought together arms and ammunition and drilled in small companies. The situation was discussed in club, convention and committee, and acceptance of armed resistance if necessary was the common outcome of their deliberations.

Alarmed at the firmness displayed by the people and their preparations for defense, Gage felt it unsafe to allow the General Court to meet and issued a proclamation discharging the members from attendance. But the colonists refused to be denied expression at this critical moment. Ninety of the delegates assembled at the time appointed for the Assembly, October 5, 1774, and finding the Governor unwilling to recognize them, formed themselves into a Provincial Congress. A committee was chosen October 20, to consider what was necessary for the safety and defense of the Province and their report was given and accepted on the twenty-sixth.

The Committee reviewed the grievances of the colonies, and while it denied somewhat too strenuously that the people had the most distant idea of attacking or molesting the King's

troops in any way, it was held that the necessity of providing against possible contingencies dictated the following measures: first, the appointment of a Committee of Safety to continue in office until further order, whose duty it was to be to keep careful watch of any person attempting "the destruction, invasion, detriment, or annoyance of the province." The Committee, or any five of its number (providing not more than one was a citizen of Boston) were authorized, whenever they judged the safety of the people required, to call out the militia to such places as they thought fit, to see that the men were well armed, equipped and provisioned and to keep them in service as long as necessary. All officers and soldiers were earnestly requested to give obedience to the commands of the Committee; second, the appointment of a Committee of Supplies to make provisions for the reception and support of the troops if called out, and to purchase without delay, for the Colony, cannon, small arms and ammunition; third, the appointment of general officers to command the forces. The militia were recommended to choose company officers and to enlist minute-men ready to march at the first call of the Committee of Safety. The inhabitants were urged to perfect themselves in military discipline and to provide arms and powder.

These proposals spoke plainly of war. The Congress foresaw its probability and was determined to meet it well prepared. It was left with the Committee of Safety to take the decisive step of calling the troops into the field and of turning the struggle from passive resistance to civil war. Like a sentinel it was to watch the approach of the enemy and give the signal for attack.

The Committee was chosen on October 27, 1774, and was composed of nine members, three from Boston and six from the country districts. It existed until February 9, 1775, when a new Committee of Safety was chosen of eleven members, most of them, however, identical with those of the first appointment. As time passed and the situation became more critical the Provincial Congress realized the danger of leaving entirely to the Committee of Safety the decision of the grounds and time for resistance. In this second appointment therefore the Committee was authorized to call out the militia only if an attempt were made to execute by force the two laws, "for the Better Government of Massachusetts," and "for the Impartial Administration of Justice." Even as thus limited the discretionary power of the Committee was large. What constituted a forcible attempt to carry out the laws might be open to dispute, and the Committee might give the signal on too slight occasion. The support of the other colonies was not assured, while weighed with England in numbers, resources and military skill, Massachusetts hung but lightly in the balance. The thought that the Committee, in its confidence and enthusiasm, might force the conflict prematurely, made the more thoughtful afraid of its power. Joseph Hawley, a member of the Provincial Congress, wrote from Northampton on February 22, 1775, "I have been most seriously contemplating the commission and most important trust of our Committee of Safety, and especially that branch of it which relates to their mustering the minute-men, and others of the militia . . . the soldiers when thus mustered . . . will suppose it their duty to fight . . . they will suppose the continent to have devolved the resolution of that question upon this province, and that this province has devolved it on the Committee of Safety and that the Committee by calling them, have decided it. . . .

Thus hostilities will be commenced . . . I beg of you therefore, as you love your country, to use your utmost Influence with our Committee of Safety that the people be not mustered, and hostilities be not commenced, until we have the express categorical decision of the continent, that the time is absolutely come that hostilities ought to commence." Events, however, demanded positive action of Massachusetts too soon to obtain such united assent.

The Committee of Safety came together for the first time November 7, 1774. There seems to have been no doubt in the minds of the members from the first that the outcome of events was to be war. The first day the Committee of Supplies was recommended to buy large amounts of pork, flour, rice and other provisions, and store them at Worcester and Concord. In the following week, spades, shovels, mess-bowls, fuses, cannon and ball were collected and deposited at the two places. On February 23, 1775, the Committee ordered the officers to assemble one-fourth of the militia, not for a general muster, but in order that the troops might meet for drill throughout the Province.

Afraid that Gage would attempt to capture the war stores that had been collected, the Committee appointed watches on March fourteenth and fifteenth, to guard them. Teams were kept in readiness to remove them and couriers provided to alarm the towns on the first news of a hostile movement of the British.

On the eighteenth of April the Committee of Safety was in session at a tavern in Menotomy (now Arlington). After the sitting, two of the members, Mr. Devens and Mr. Watson, left the others to go to Charlestown, but meeting an unusual number of British officers on the road, turned back to alarm their comrades. Later in the evening Devens received certain information that the enemy were in motion, and went at once to warn Gerry, Hancock, and Adams. He then started Paul Revere on his ride to Lexington and Concord. Through his efforts and those of the other couriers employed by the Committee, Gage's secret was the property of the country side before morning.

The battle of Lexington marks the opening of the war and the Committee of Safety bent its energies to raise forces and concentrate them around Boston as rapidly as possible. The Provincial Congress was not in session and responsibility in the crisis rested with the Committee. On the day after the battle a circular letter was sent to the different Massachusetts towns, telling the news, and setting forth in the strongest terms the need of an army, and begging them to encourage the enlistment of soldiers and to send them forward to Cambridge. They determined to raise eight thousand capable men from the Massachusetts forces, to organize them into regiments and place them under proper discipline. In this way, it was hoped, the nucleus of an efficient army would be formed. Troops were asked from Connecticut and Rhode Island, and the New Hampshire men in the Province were enlisted in the Massachusetts regiments.

The Provincial Congress met on the twenty-second of April and took general control of affairs, sending for the Committee of Safety to report on the situation and to present whatever plans it had in readiness. Throughout the session the Committee made frequent suggestions to the legislature and its advice was usually adopted. Occasionally the

Congress referred matters to the Committee for consideration, asking it, for example, to form a plan for the establishment of the army, to decide on the expediency of removing war stores from the coast, or to report on the advisability of a further issue of paper money. As the Congress sat usually at Watertown and the Committee at Cambridge, where the troops were collecting, much trouble and loss of time was involved in carrying messages between the two places, and the Committee was often too busy to attend to the questions of the Congress until the second or even the third request. That, in spite of difficulties, the Congress took pains to consult it is evidence of the reliance placed on its judgment and its position of leadership.

In the weeks following the battle of Lexington an army was gathered. The Committee issued enlistment orders, assigned to the towns the quota of men they were to raise, and ordered them to be ready to move at a moment's notice, or to march at once to Cambridge. The Committee saw that cannon and entrenching tools were collected and repaired. All was made ready for the siege of Boston. The Selectmen and Committee of Correspondence of Chelsea were directed to prevent any food from reaching the city and the Committee of Safety granted or denied permission to enter it. The Committee did not give attention to Massachusetts alone. Benedict Arnold laid before it a plan for taking Ticonderoga, and it furnished him with powder, ball, flints, and horses. The expedition was sent under its authority and Arnold was directed to draw on it for expenses.

On May 19, 1775, the Committee received fresh powers, as it was felt the change in times rendered its former authority inadequate. Its new commission authorized it to call out the militia whenever, and for as long as it saw fit, and to station them where it thought best. All officers were required to give the Committee obedience. Any command of the Committee of Safety was, however, subject to the control of the Provincial Congress. The Committee was to recommend for commissions to the Congress those officers whose regiments were fully or nearly completed, but in the recess of Congress the Committee might give the commissions itself. The Committee of Safety was thus made Commander-in-Chief of the provincial troops, subject, however, to the control of the legislature. In consequence of this limitation, the natural fruit of long colonial distrust of executive authority, the Committee was careful to consult with the Congress before taking steps of importance, and thus its freedom of initiative was unfortunately checked to a considerable degree.

The Committee showed itself ready to consult with the officers, whose knowledge might be more direct than its own, and to accept their advice. For instance, the Council of War having decided that two thousand men were necessary to reinforce the army at Roxbury, the Committee of Safety at once issued orders to the militia officers of the neighboring towns to march to that place. Again, representatives of the Committee deliberated with the Council of War and some of the general officers on the question of securing Bunker Hill and Dorchester Neck. But though willing to consult with the army the Committee was as punctilious as a Long Parliament in upholding the ultimate superiority of the civil over the military power. For example, the Provincial Congress directed the Committee of Safety to deliver the small arms to those officers who should present orders for them from



General Ward. Thereupon General Ward issued an order to the Committee to deliver the arms to those officers that made application for them. The Committee at once objected. Ward might order his officers to come for the arms; he had no right to order the Committee to deliver them. That power rested only with the Provincial Congress. It was a matter of vast importance, the Committee held, that no orders should be issued by the military to the civil power. Nevertheless at this moment public peril was felt to outweigh constitutional principle, and the Committee, in good Anglo-Saxon manner, having by protest prevented the establishment of a dangerous precedent, consented to give out the arms.

After the first months the Committee of Safety and the Committee of Supplies acted as separate and independent bodies; an uneconomical arrangement, since the Committee of Safety as commander of the troops was in the best position to know what quantities of food, clothing and other supplies were needed, and where they could be used to the best advantage. Instead the Committee of Supplies acted on its own initiative and the Committee of Safety could do no more than occasionally recommend measures to its notice. In the other colonies the Committee of Supplies was generally subject to the Committee of Safety or the latter was given its duties as part of its own commission.

The trial of suspected Tories lay properly outside the powers of the Committee, and it disliked to deal with them for this reason, referring the cases if possible to the Provincial Congress and recommending the appointment of a special court of inquiry. The Committee was exceedingly careful not to go beyond its commission for any reason and constantly refused to touch matters not expressly delegated to it, except in case of necessity, while constantly recommending measures to the Congress that seemed advisable. The commission of the Committee gave it no general discretionary power to act for the public good. In one respect, however, it was more free than the Committees in some of the other colonies. Unless directed to do so in acting on some special resolution of the Congress it was not obliged to submit its proceedings to that body. July 13, 1775, the last Committee of Safety of Massachusetts was appointed. The Colony had decided to go back as nearly as possible to its charter government, to call an assembly and to elect from this body a number of councillors. The Provincial Congress provided for the election of the new legislature, chose a new Committee of Safety to act in the interval before the assembly met and disbanded. The Committee's former commission was abrogated and the new Committee given full power, until the thirteenth of July or until the Assembly took away its authority to assemble or discharge the militia on application of the Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army or at its own discretion. The power of directing the forces was no longer given to it, but to the continental commander. The Committee was to procure and employ all such armorers and artificers as were needed by the troops, and to execute all duties given the former Committee by particular resolves of the Congress. It was to provide for the poor of Boston and Charlestown and if possible to prevent infection from small-pox being communicated by persons from the former town. The trial and disposal of prisoners of war and Tories was at this time definitely assigned to the Committee. It was also directed to care for any interests not otherwise provided for,

thus being given a freer hand than formerly to provide for the general welfare. If necessary, it might reassemble the Provincial Congress before the Assembly met.

## PAUL REVERE WAS NOT THE ONLY RIDER

Paul Revere gets credit for being the rider who warned colonists of the approach of British soldiers. But Revere was not the only rider. There were others, perhaps 40 riders. Among them was Isaac Bissell of Suffield.

The riders carried a message from Joseph Palmer of the Massachusetts Committee of Safety. Committees of Safety consisted of leading men in each colony who opposed and undermined the British bypassing laws and regulations prior to the Declaration of Independence in July 1776.

*Here is Joseph Palmer's message:*

Wednesday morning near 10 of the clock — Watertown.

To all the friends of American liberty be it known that this morning before break of day, a brigade, consisting of about 1,000 to 1,200 men landed at Phip's Farm at Cambridge and marched to Lexington, where they found a company of our colony militia in arms, upon whom they fired without any provocation and killed six men and wounded four others. By an express from Boston, we find another brigade are now upon their march from Boston supposed to be about 1,000. The Bearer, Isaac Bissell, is charged to alarm the country quite to Connecticut and all persons are desired to furnish him with fresh horses as they may be needed. I have spoken with several persons who have seen the dead and wounded. Pray let the delegates from this colony to Connecticut see this. —J. Palmer, one of the Committee of Safety.

Unfortunately, Isaac's name was mutated when the message was copied at each stop; he became Isaac Russell, Trail Bissell, Train Bissel and Tryal Bissel. But through the centuries, the name which is generally credited for Isaac's ride is Israel Bissell. A 2024 article by J.L. Bell (<https://allthingsliberty.com/2024/06/the-story-of-isaac-bissell-and-the-legend-of-israel-bissell>) corrects the confusion.

Israel Bissell (1742-1823) was living in East Windsor. He served for a month as a Continental soldier, married Lucy Hancock (1757-abt.1843), and died in Hinsdale, Mass., with no mention of Revolutionary service on his gravestone.

Isaac Bissell (1749-1822) was born in Windsor, but was living in Suffield. He carried the mail between Boston and Hartford. He married Amelia Leavitt (1757-1809) on July 4th, 1776. They had fourteen children, several who died young. They moved to Hancock, New Hampshire but Isaac returned to Suffield after his wife died. He was buried here, although later reburied in Hancock. On April 20, 1775, Isaac rode from Watertown, traveling on the Upper Boston Post Road which from Springfield dropped straight south through Suffield, to Hartford, his final destination.

It was from Isaac's ride that armed companies of men from Springfield, West Springfield, and Suffield immediately marched to aid Boston on the same day that Bissell rode through

the towns. Captain Elihu Kent, Sr. (1713-1814) marched from Suffield with 59 men. The next day, 52 additional Suffield men marched to Boston, led by Captain Daniel Austin (1720-1804). Isaac also marched to Boston either that day or the next. He served in the Connecticut Militia throughout the Revolutionary War, delivering the New Haven Alarm in July 1779.

An interesting aside is that Palmer's message was sent from Hartford to Silas Deane, a member of the Wethersfield Committee of Safety and a delegate to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. Deane didn't believe the veracity of the message. He did not know Palmer and was suspicious of the message because it arrived so fast. As a consequence, some town militias did not respond as quickly.

Isaac was due two pounds, one shilling for his ride but was not paid until April 23, 1776, a year later. First, he appealed to the Mass. provisional government which dissolved before his request was approved. His appeal to Joseph Palmer finally yielded results. These late payment documents identify Isaac Bissell as the real post rider.

Unfortunately, Suffield history does not commemorate Isaac. In Robert Alcorn's book, *The Biography of a Town*, Isaac is portrayed as a poor blacksmith who was constantly in debtor's prison, continuously bailed out by his patient brother-in-law Squire Thaddeus Leavitt, a wealthy merchant. Isaac deserves more credit than that.

## PAUL REVERE AND BOSTON'S COMMITTEE OF SAFETY

1775 The Colony of Massachusetts Bay to Paul Revere D

To riding for the Committee of Safety from April 21 1775 To May 7 <sup>th</sup> Day at 5 <sup>pp</sup>	4 " 5 " 0
To My expenses for self & horse during that time	2 " 16 " 0
May 6 <sup>th</sup> To keeping two Colony Horses 10 Day at 1 <sup>pp</sup> horse	1 " 00 " 0
Aug 2 <sup>nd</sup> To Printing 1000 impressions at 6 <sup>pp</sup> Hour	3 " 00 " 0
Errors Excepted	11 " 1 " 0

Paul Revere  
 charge of ~~Impression~~ change of Impression for 6 pp per hour  
 reduced his Labour to 4<sup>pp</sup> per Day

Paul Revere's Midnight Ride was far from the only messenger work that he did to support the Patriot cause. We know about many of these rides from surviving invoices, where Paul Revere included information about who he was working for and what sort of work he was doing, as well as how much he got paid for it. We're not sure if he got paid for his work as an express rider on April 18-19th, but this invoice in the Massachusetts Archives Collection shows that he was paid for messenger work that he did a few days later:

"1775 The Colony of Massachusetts Bay to Paul Revere D

To riding for the Committee of Safety from April 21 1775 to May 7th,

To My expenses for self & horse during that time

Paul Revere"