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Register of Deeds

Worcester Registry of Deeds

Quarterly Newsletter

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The Worcester Revolt

Not a shot was fired.

Bloodshed had been avoided.

British Authority had been demonstrably overthrown for the first time in the American colonies.

Where: In Worcester, MA

When: September 6, 1774

The Worcester Revolution of 1774, also known as the Worcester Revolt, was a significant event in the lead-up to the American Revolution. The Massachusetts Government Act, part of the Intolerable Acts* passed by the British Parliament in response to the Boston Tea Party, aimed to curtail self-governance in Massachusetts by restructuring the government and placing more power in the hands of the royally-appointed officials.

This is a grossly under-appreciated story and for some reason not commonly known. It took place on the morning of Sept. 6, 1774, more than seven months before the first shots were fired at Concord and Lexington. That day, 4,622 militiamen from 37 Worces-

ter County towns in Massachusetts marched to Main Street in Worcester, determined to shut down the courthouse before the new Crown-controlled courts could open to sit for a new session.



Gen. Thomas Gage

Thomas Gage, commanding general of British forces headquartered in Boston, was just as determined to keep the Worcester courts open. General Gage had promised in an Aug. 27 letter to his superior in London, Lord Dartmouth, "I apprehend that I shall soon be obliged to march a Body of Troops into that Township, and perhaps into others, as occasion warrants, to preserve the peace."

By Sept. 2, Gen. Gage had actually started to rethink the vow to march on Worcester. He confided to Lord Dartmouth in a letter that day, acknowledging that he had intended to send a body of troops to Worcester to protect the courts, but had been informed "from undoubted authorities that the flames of sedition had

spread universally throughout the country beyond conception ... and that no courts could proceed on business." Early, on the morning of Sept. 6, an advance party of militiamen seized the Worcester courthouse, barricaded themselves inside, and awaited the arrival of twenty-five (25) Crown appointees. The well-organized, well-trained, and highly disciplined militia force of almost 5,000 men entered the Main Street area overlooking the court building, assembling themselves into 37 town military companies. The militia lined both sides of Main Street, forming a gauntlet for the king's men to pass through. When the court officials arrived at the courthouse, they were denied entry and escorted to the nearby Daniel Heywood Tavern. (For current reference the restaurant: Dead Horse Hill, located at 285 Main Street)

All 25 court officers, faced with 4,622 hostile militiamen, knew well the stories of patriots tarring and feathering Tories who they deemed traitors to their cause, ransacking of their homes, and even the occasional use of death threats.

September 1774.

5. Another Town meeting upon a public Difficulty - they agree to go to Worcester tomorrow as it is expected all other Towns of this County will to prevent a session of Court under a new unconstitutional Establishment - and talk of superseding the necessity of Courts by resolving upon having a few Judges as may be, & by choosing men from among us. Squire Whipple & several others sign the Agreement. - Mr. Webb dined with us.
6. A great Company march wth Staves & Pikes und^r Capt. Maynard to Worcester. Mr. Connelley Waters from Dartmouth Col. dined with us. Read Confederations on the present measures with the Colonies.
7. Breck gives me acc^t of yesterday there assembled at Worcester 4722 persons w^o were in arrangement und^r their particular Heads, leading each Town but without Arms: Those Heads treated with the Judges & other Officers of the Court. The Court House was filled with Cont^{ts} of correspondence from each Town, & of Door fastened & guarded. The Court walked from Hayward Tavern to the Court House wth their Hats off, and then back; a paper being read, signifying that if w^o Endear^d &c. but this not satisfying, and was drawn & read promising if it would not sit or interpose or any other Court und^r a new Reg^l. by a late act of parliament. - I dont understand that there was any disorder. The Lists stands thus,

Between the Ranks,

This, except Worcester & Spencer, is the order in which the Companies stood from the Court House & Southward. viz. Westboro first, Westboro second &c. a few Companies had Arms

Worcester	200	Princeton	60	Palmer	38
Uxbridge	156	Harvard	103	Sutton	500
Westborough	200	Hubbardston	55	Westminster	120
Rutland	130	Lunenburg	40	Oxford Troop	40
Athol	51	Westerly	100	N. Shrewsbury	100
Royalston	39	Winchenden	45	S. Shrewsbury	135
New Braintree	140	Southboro	35	Northboro	85
Brookfield	216	Chauvitt	200	Oxford	80
Douglas	130	Lewisfield	180	Oakham	50
Grafton	210	Spencer	164	Peterham	70
Holden	100	Sturbridge	150	Paxton	80
Hardwick	220	Bolton	100	Upton	100
				Templeton	120
					4722

Gen. Gage and his troops were nowhere to be found in Worcester that day. The militiamen forced the court officials, who were appointed by King George III, to resign their positions, effectively ending British rule in the area. Then to add insult to injury, the disgraced court officials were then marched publicly, hat in hand through the gauntlet, in a procession toward the courthouse, recanting out loud their oaths of office and repeating their renunciations so that all assembled militiamen could hear.

The spectacle of the Worcester rebellion against British Authority and public humiliation of its officials sent a shockwave across the Massachusetts colony, all the way to Philadelphia, where the First Continental Congress was in session. Worcester's militiamen had irreversibly set the stage for an inevitable later, larger confrontation with the British military. In the meantime, these Colonial forces had exceeded even the most optimistic expectations of the patriot resistance movement.

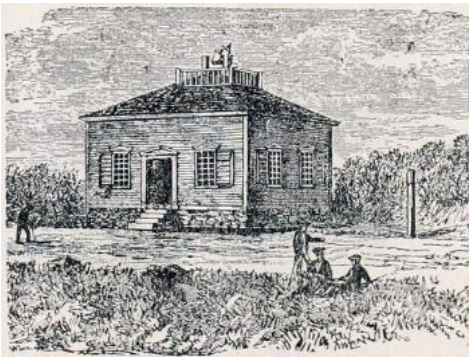
While often overshadowed by the battles of Lexington and Concord, the Worcester Revolt is recognized by some historians as a pivotal moment, demonstrating the colonists' resolve for self-governance and their willingness to defy British authority.



Daniel Heywood Tavern

Ebenezer Parkman's Diary

On September 6, in Worcester, a militiaman from Westborough, Breck Parkman, went through the ranks to gather numbers from each of the participating 37 militia companies. He showed these to his father, Ebenezer Parkman, who entered them into his diary, which is housed at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester. From the note in the margin, we even learn the order in which these companies lined up on Main Street to witness the recanting of court officials.



Worcester Court House

*Intolerable Acts

The **Boston Port Act** was the first of the laws passed in 1774 in response to the Boston Tea Party. It closed the port of Boston until the colonists paid for the destroyed tea and the king was satisfied that order had been restored. Colonists objected that the Port Act punished all of Boston rather than just the individuals who had destroyed the tea, and that they were being punished without having been given an opportunity to testify in their own defense.

The **Massachusetts Government Act** provoked even more outrage than the Port Act because it unilaterally took away Massachusetts' charter and brought it under control of the British government. Under the terms of the Government Act, almost all positions in the colonial government were to be appointed by the governor, Parliament, or the king. The act also severely limited town meetings in Massachusetts to one per year, unless the governor called for one. Colonists outside Massachusetts feared that their governments could now also be changed by the legislative fiat of Parliament.

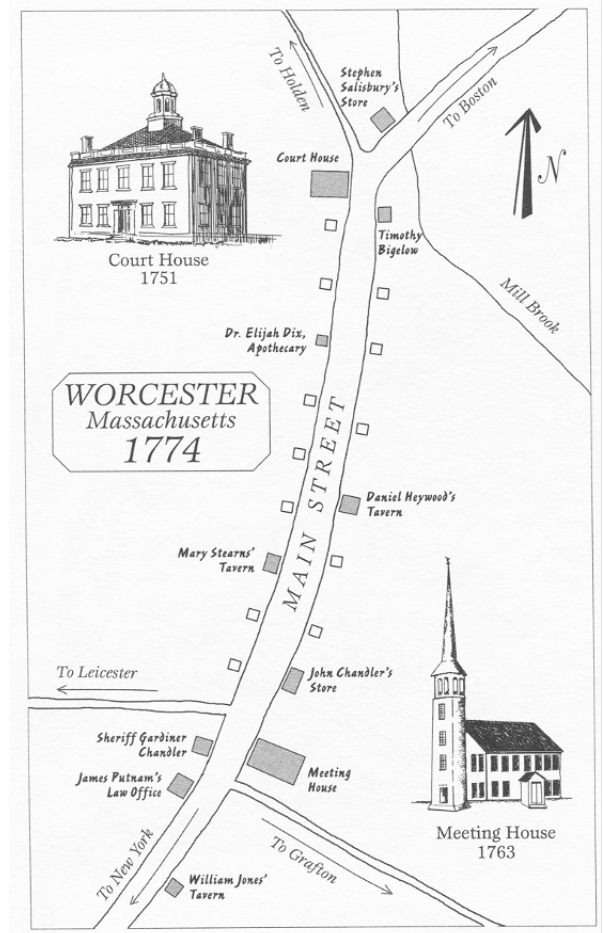
The **Administration of Justice Act** allowed the royal governor to order trials of accused royal officials to take place in Great Britain or elsewhere

within the Empire if he decided that the defendant could not get a fair trial in Massachusetts. Although the act stipulated for witnesses to be reimbursed after having traveled at their own expense across the Atlantic, it was not stipulated that this would include reimbursement for lost earnings during the period for which they would be unable to work, leaving few with the ability to testify. George Washington called this the "Murder Act" because he believed that it allowed officials to harass colonists and then escape justice. Many colonists believed the act was unnecessary because British soldiers had been given a fair trial following the Boston Massacre in 1770.

The **Quartering Act**, which applied to all British colonies in North America, sought to create a more effective method of housing British troops. In a previous act, the colonies had been required to provide housing for soldiers, but colonial legislatures had been uncooperative in doing so. The new Quartering Act allowed a governor to house soldiers in other buildings if suitable quarters were not provided. While many sources claim that the Quartering Act allowed troops to be billeted in occupied private homes, historian David Ammerman's 1974 study claimed that this is a myth, and that the act only permitted troops to be quartered in unoccupied buildings.

Although unrelated to the aforementioned Acts, the **Quebec Act**, passed in the same parliamentary session,

was considered by the colonists to be one of the Intolerable Acts. The Act expanded the territory of the Province of Quebec into the Great Lakes region and much of what is now the Midwestern United States, which appeared to void the land claims of the Ohio Company on the region. The guarantee of free practice of Catholicism, the majority religion in Canada, was seen by colonists as an "establishment" of the faith in the colonies which were overwhelmingly Protestant. Furthermore, colonists resented the lenient provisions granted to their erstwhile enemies whom they had fought hard against during the French and Indian War.



American Revolution



- FOREIGN MERCENARIES
- BENJAMIN FRANKLIN
- THOMAS JEFFERSON
- BENEDICT ARNOLD
- ABIGAIL SMITH
- MOLLY PITCHER
- PATRICK HENRY
- VALLEY FORGE
- BUNKER HILL
- MARY DRAPER
- PAUL REVERE
- BETSY ROSS
- FORMIDABLE
- JOHN ADAMS
- DESPOTISM
- JOHN HOWE
- LEXINGTON
- RECTITUDE
- SUGAR ACT
- ABSOLVED
- PRUDENCE
- QUARTING
- YORKTOWN
- CONCORD
- ENDOWED
- PERFIDY
- TEA ACT
- TRENTON
- TYRANNY
- IMPEL

C R B M A R Y D R A P E R P A V D O F J S G A E
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 W M L E A M M A E C H P L M S D V Y S Y I W D P
 G Q I R A L U X R T A I M R Q V O C U N L E E C
 L C K E C Q M J D D X F C C O N C O R D N D N B
 J K M B T K W N U G M A Y B V H L K O I H O C F
 X G K F A X O T M L K F F O R M I D A B L E E D

Offsite Events check our website for more events

September 11, 2025 at 10:30
Paxton Senior Center

19 West St. Paxton, MA

Katie Toomey, Register will join the Paxton Police at a fraud seminar. Learn how to protect yourself and your property.

September 24, 2025 9am-1pm
Barre/Hardwick Senior Center

557 S. Barre Rd., Barre, MA

Join us for the Health Fair.

September 25, 2025 10:30am
Auburn Senior Center

4 Goddard Dr., Auburn, MA

Join Register Katie Toomey of the Worcester District Registry of Deeds

For our most up to date list of events visit our website. massrods.com/worcester/events