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**The Whiskey Rebellion - Part I**

**Lead:** In 1795 the government of the fledgling United States of America found itself at war with farmers on the western frontier of Pennsylvania over whiskey.

**Intro.:** *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

**Content:** George Washington may have been the "father of his country" but in the middle of the 1790s he was none too popular in the hill counties south of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The reason: a federal excise tax on whiskey. The author of the tax and

**what might have been an early dissolution of the Union was Washington's Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton.**

**Hamilton had a big problem. As the nation's chief accountant, he had the responsibility to pay off the huge lingering debt the colonies ran up winning their independence from England. For the young country \$54,000,000 was a crushing load to bear but it had to be paid off or the nation would have trouble obtaining loans in the future. Hamilton convinced George Washington to support a tax on distilled whiskey.**

**This was an excise tax, a levy on goods manufactured and used within**

**the country. This form of taxation was opposed by many who felt it hurt the national economy. Raise money on goods imported from outside, they argued, raise money on land but don't kick domestic industries in the teeth with an excise tax.**

**A tax on whiskey might have been an irritant to the townspeople of the East but it was disastrous for farmers in western Pennsylvania. It was too expensive to ship their grain to markets around Philadelphia and it would soon rot in storage bins before it could be used by the farmers themselves, so they devised a means of preserving their grain and turning a profit, they distilled grain whiskey. It lasted indefinitely and over the years**

became, for these farmers, a medium of exchange, a form of money. It could be traded for most of their needs and was used as a medicine for everything from fever to snake-bite. A petition from the Monongahela Valley expressed their anger, "Why we should be made subject to a duty for drinking our grain more than eating it seems a matter of astonishment." Next time: whiskey protests.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

### Resources

Baldwin, Leland Dewitt. *Whiskey Rebels: The Story of a Frontier Uprising*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1968.

**Parker, Iola B., "Whiskey Creek Keeps Running, but Only With Water," *Smithsonian* 5 (3, June 1974), 82-89.**

**Slaughter, Thomas Paul. *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986.**

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