

**The Whiskey Rebellion - Part II**

**Lead:** To pay off the war debt run up by the colonies during the Revolution, the government of the United States in the 1790s passed an excise tax on whiskey. Farmers on the western frontier of Pennsylvania rose in rebellion.

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

**Content:** Unable to ship their grain to eastern markets, farmers in the hill counties south of Pittsburgh distilled the grain into fine whiskey. They used it for medicine and to trade for all

sorts of goods almost like cash. It was their medium of exchange. When the government began to tax whiskey the first protests were peaceful. Six months after the passage of the Excise Act of 1791, delegates met in Pittsburgh to draft a protest. The delegates were very concerned to keep the peace and nothing significant was accomplished at this meeting.

The first federal tax collectors that appeared in Washington County were tarred and feathered by some of the more radical farmers, a few of whom dressed up as Indians. John Neville, a respected community leader, took the office of Excise Inspector for the district in hopes he could cool down the situation, but soon after setting up

**shop in Washington County, the house he was using was raided, tax records destroyed, and a picture of George Washington shot full of holes.**

**In the summer of 1792 another protest meeting was held. The resulting petition was sent to President Washington. His reaction was a stern warning that he would enforce the Laws no matter what. Back in the hill country events had begun to take an ugly turn. News of the French Revolution had seeped over the mountains and many had begun to sympathize with the Parisian mob.**

**In July, 1794 Neville and David Lenox, the federal marshal, tried to serve a summons on a delinquent**

**distiller in Allegheny County. They were met with stonewalling from the man and had to flee an angry mob that had gathered when word spread of their mission. Neville returned to his estate at Bower Hill but soon found himself surrounded by hundreds of angry farmers. He held out during a running gunfight for several days, but his summons of the militia only served to incense the farmers who sent for reinforcements and burned the beautiful estate on Bower Hill to the ground. Next time: The "Washington of the West."**

**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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