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The Whiskey Rebellion - Part III

Lead: Aroused by the imposition of an excise tax on whiskey, farmers on the frontier of Western Pennsylvania took on the fledgling national government of George Washington.

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

Content: In 1791, to pay off debts run up by the colonies in their fight for independence, the U.S. government, at the urging of Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton, passed a tax on whiskey. This tax struck at the livelihood of frontier farmers who

could not get their grain east to market and so made it into whiskey, which they used for medicine and traded for all sorts of goods. It was their money.

Hamilton's tax set western teeth on edge and by the summer of 1794 the farmers were in open rebellion. After burning the Bower Hill estate of the local tax collector, John Neville, the radical and thoroughly aroused farmers of the area met in the churchyard of the Mingo Presbyterian Church south of Finleyville in Allegheny County. A local lawyer David Bradford, who had visions of being the "Washington of the West," whipped up the crowd urging them onto a new fight for freedom. He wanted total resistance and held out

the possibility of creating a separate state or in an extreme case, secession from the Union.

Fortunately there were moderating voices present. Hugh Brackenridge, a lawyer and occasional writer for the *Pittsburgh Gazette*, rose to speak. He warned the farmers that on the basis of the Bower Hill incident, the President could send in the Army and have them all arrested. This was treason. Brackenridge's words had a calming effect on many present but not Bradford. As the meeting broke up he left determined to fight for western liberation from the federal oppressor.

In the next few weeks Bradford assumed the rank of Major General

and began recruiting an army at a base about eight miles east of Pittsburgh. The townspeople were becoming concerned that they might be the easy target of a force that was rumored to number about 5,000. In order to save the town Brackenridge urged Bradford to march through Pittsburgh in a peaceful show of force. The self-appointed general agreed and the townspeople welcomed them as conquering heroes, probably as much fearing the chance of looting and disorder than any enthusiastic support for the Cause. Next time: the President acts.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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