

**Volume 13**

**Number 039**

**Jamestown Journey: Whiskey**  
**Rebellion I**

**Lead: The new United States need to pay off its war debt and so congress levied an excise tax on whiskey. It got a rebellion.**

**Intro.: Dan Roberts and *A Moment in Time* with *Jamestown - Journey of Democracy*, tracing the global advance of democratic ideals since the founding of Jamestown, Virginia in 1607.**

**Content: Alexander Hamilton had a problem. As George Washington's Secretary of the Treasury he was responsible for paying off the**

**enormous debt run up by the colonies in their eight year long bid for independence. \$54 million doesn't sound by today's standards, but in those days it was an onerous burden for the young republic.**

**Hamilton's solution, one that has been repeated throughout the nation's history, was a sin tax on whiskey, part of broad effort to levy excise taxes on goods manufactured and used within the country. It was a particularly severe tax on frontier farmers in western Pennsylvania. Unable to ship their grain east or store it long enough to use it, they distilled it. Fine grain whiskey became a medium of exchange, almost money. A petition from the**

**Monongahela Valley thundered, “Why we should be made subject to a duty for drinking our grain more than eating it seems a matter of astonishment.”**

**Federal attempts at collection of the excise tax produced violence. By the summer of 1794, a citizen army rumored to number 5000 had been raised to resist Federal agents. Mobs had burned tax records and the homes in which they were stored.**

**Next time: the “Washington of the west.”**

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**Series on the Foundations and Future of Democracy, see [jamestownjourney.org](http://jamestownjourney.org), at the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

**Resources**

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**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 : Oxford University Press, 1986.**

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