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Jamestown Journey – Whiskey
Rebellion II

Lead: In 1791 to pay off war debts, the Federal government passed a excise tax on whiskey. It almost restarted the Revolution.

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: The tax was imposed to pay off a huge national debt incurred when the colonies fought for independence. President Washington

and Congress, at the urging of Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton hoped to raise revenue with a tax on whiskey. The problem was that many frontier farmers, too far away to ship grain east and unable to store grain before it rotted, converted it to liquor. For them it was almost like cash.

Things began to get out of hand in 1794 in western Pennsylvania. Riots, protests and an citizen army rumored to be in the thousands, whipped up by radicals like David Bradford, the self-identified “Washington of the West,” began to talk of secession from Pennsylvania or even the United States.

President Washington, whose popularity in that part of the world was in serious decline, declared them traitors and sent an Army under General “Light-Horse” Harry Lee to put them down. He encountered little opposition as Bradford and his colleagues had escaped down the Ohio to Spanish territory. Unfortunately, the Army got out control for a brief time and instituted a reign of terror, but the U.S. government had proven that it had the power to tax.

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University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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