

SAMUEL ADAMS:

"The Father of American Independence"

Sam Adams

MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE, a Massachusetts man ignited America's rebellion against England. In fact, during the decade before the war began, Samuel Adams was basically a one-man revolution.



He was born in Boston in 1722. Despite graduating from Harvard, Samuel failed at nearly everything he tried for many years. He went to work at a Boston countinghouse—a business similar to a bank. Samuel lost that job because he spent his time talking politics. His father gave him a large sum of money to start any business he wanted. Samuel passed along half the money to a needy friend, and he somehow lost the other half. The bottom line was that all the money was soon gone. His father then put Samuel to work in the family brewery. Samuel neglected the business until it was eventually destroyed.

Bostonians elected Samuel to the job of tax collector. People who wanted to avoid paying their taxes could not have picked a better man! As he listened to his neighbors' tales of woe about their financial problems, he felt sorry for them, and ended up collecting little of the money.

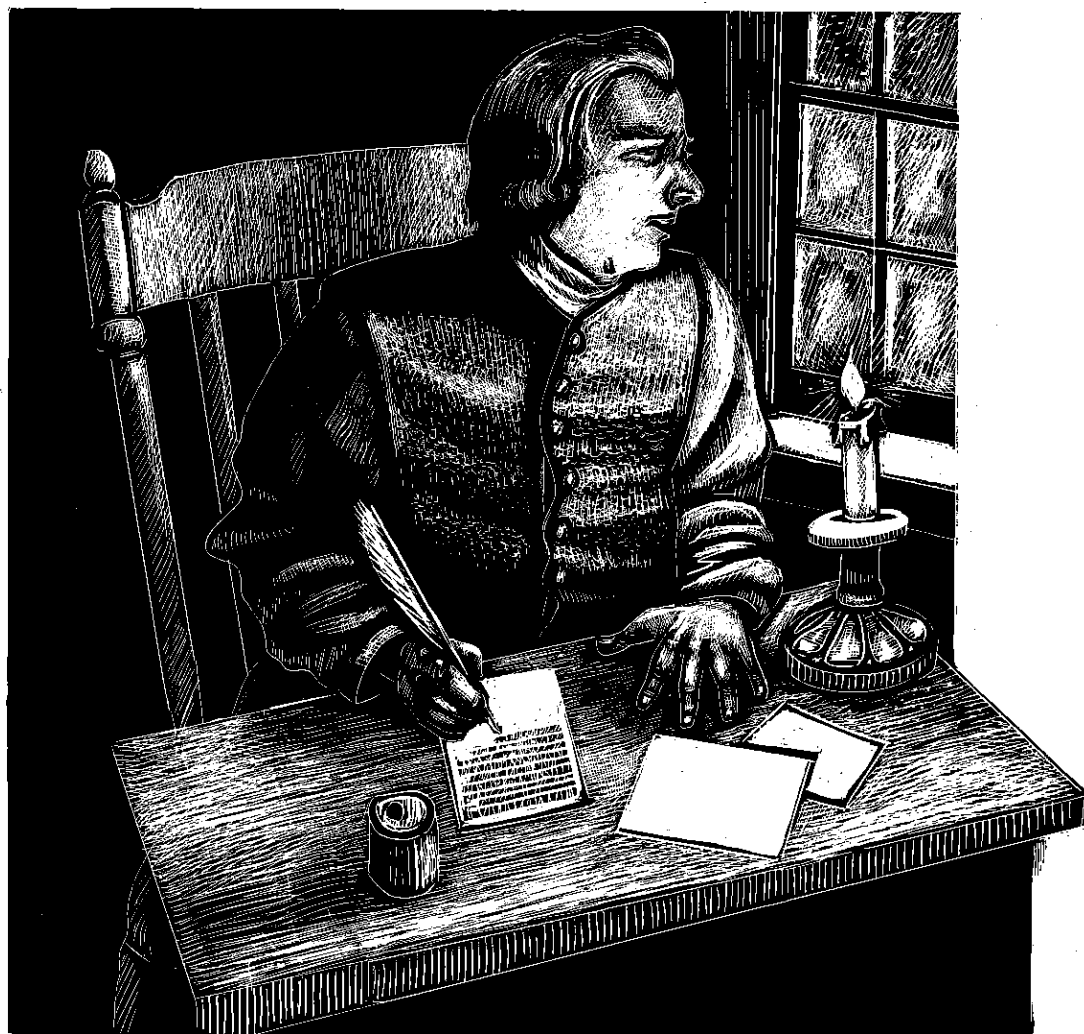
Samuel had six children with his first wife, Elizabeth Checkley. After she died, he married Betsy Wells, with whom he didn't have any children. It was said that Samuel Adams was so poor that his family would have starved had not the rich merchant John Hancock helped support them.

There was one thing that no one could do as well as Samuel Adams. By the 1760s, he was the most outspoken critic of England. He and Patrick Henry of Virginia both argued in favor of independence by about 1765 and are considered the first Americans to do so. But while Patrick made speeches, Samuel wrote thousands of letters about British injustice, which he sent to newspapers and colonial leaders around the country. He signed the newspaper letters with dozens

of false names. This gave readers the impression that all of Boston was up in arms—when really just Samuel Adams was doing much of the complaining!

Samuel also recruited young men and turned them into revolutionaries. Paul Revere, Samuel's cousin John Adams, and John Hancock all considered Samuel their "political father," as Revere expressed it. All three became more famous than their political father. That was fine with Samuel Adams, who liked to remain in the shadows and let others receive the credit.

Samuel Adams took part in some of the main events that sparked the Revolution. He organized Boston's Sons of Liberty, a group of rebels who protested British injustice by destroying British property and picking fights with British officials. Dozens of towns throughout the thirteen colonies formed Sons of Liberty organizations modeled after the famous group in Boston. After England



passed a tax on tea, Samuel planned the Boston Tea Party and gave the signal for the tea to be destroyed. He also began the Committees of Correspondence, the letter-writing networks through which colonial leaders kept in touch.

The British called Samuel Adams "the Grand Incendiary," meaning someone who stirs up trouble, and "the most dangerous man in Massachusetts." The Revolution began when the British marched to Lexington, Massachusetts, in an attempt to arrest Samuel Adams and John Hancock. Fortunately, Paul Revere warned Adams and Hancock of the enemy's approach, allowing them to slip away. Soon after the war began, the British offered to pardon all Americans who would "lay down their arms and return to the duties of peaceable subjects" except for two persons: Samuel Adams and John Hancock. Had Britain won the war, the pair probably would have been among the first Americans executed.

But America triumphed, and a grateful nation called Samuel Adams "the Father of American Independence" and "the Father of the Revolution." Thomas Jefferson called him "truly the Man of the Revolution."

Later in life, Adams served as governor of the new state of Massachusetts from 1793 to 1797. Following his death, his deeds were largely forgotten, and he faded back into the shadows. He wouldn't have minded, for he often said that he worked not for personal glory but so that "millions yet unborn" could enjoy independence.