

CHAPTER 2

SHAY'S REBELLION: A LOUD AND SOLEMN LESSON

**Hampshire County Convention
Hatfield, Massachusetts
Nineteen months later: August 24, 1786**

“Then, it’s agreed!”

“Of course, it’s agreed!” came the impatient retort. “We have been here for three days and we know what we want!”

This was an unruly group, with representatives from fifty towns located in western Massachusetts’s Hampshire County. They had aired their grievances and now had to present a united front against the state government in Boston. But deciding on exactly what that unified front would be was proving difficult.

Many of the men at the meeting were battle-hardened veterans of the Continental Army. One of them, Colonel Benjamin Bonney, was also acting as the meeting’s chair. “So it’s settled, then,” Bonney said. “We will send the petition to the General Court and to Governor Bowdoin.”

“Governor Bowdoin!” The name was shouted by a man in the back of the room; the words spat out as if it were Lucifer’s name itself. “That’s a waste of good Massachusetts paper! Our esteemed new governor, as we all know, is one of the biggest bondholders in the entire commonwealth. It is for him and his kind that we are bled white with taxes—so he and his Boston friends can be paid as much and as soon as possible. Yes, by all means, send our petition to King James Bowdoin—it will be fun to watch him use the paper to tally how much our taxes will increase next.”

“Tell ’em! Tell ’em!” came a rum-soaked exclamation from a young man in a threadbare coat and torn knee breeches. “Tell ’em we can’t afford to pay neither debts nor taxes. We want—*we need*—paper money printed and accepted for all transactions! We want no more of our

money shipped to the Continental Congress! Tell 'em loud and clear: 'To blazes with the Senate and the courts and lawyers!'"

"Yes, we will tell them all of that," Colonel Bonney reassured him. "That's what we have agreed to by the vote of all free men present."

"And, one more thing!" came a Scotch-Irish burr-tinged demand from a man seated to Bonney's right. "We want our demands dispatched to the conventions meeting at Worcester and Lenox as well. They'll be very glad to hear that we Hampshire County men stand strong for our liberties."

"Agreed, Captain Shays," answered Colonel Bonney. "Couriers will leave in the morrow."

And with that, Daniel Shays, a resident of nearby Pelham, tapped the residue from his simple clay pipe and took comfort in the thought that the common people—he among them—were finally standing up to the wealthy merchants and lawyers of Boston town.

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