An Account of the Boston Tea Party of 1773 by George R.T. Hewes

On the night of December 16, 1773, George R.T. Hewes joined a group of men dressed in Indian style garments and raided cargo ships full of the East India Company’s shipment of tea. Recalling his experience, Hewes sat down fifty years later with James Hawkes to put his experience on paper, titled as “An Account of the Boston Tea Party of 1773”. Although an eyewitness account, there is some uncertainty with his recollection of his experience in the raid. The time in between participation and remembering the event is large which can lead to false memories, especially in his older age. The year that his account was published in 1835, it was five years later that George Hewes died and left behind his works and family (Young 563). With the gap of recollection dealing with memory, the possible bias and one-sided view, and the purpose of the piece, Hewes’ account is not considered reliable in the historical content.  
 The Boston Tea Party was caused by a few events that took place before that encouraged the participation of the patriots. To make up for the debt created by the British for the battles between them and the Spanish, the British created a series of taxes to make up for the lack of funds. It began with the Townshend Acts that put barriers on trade with the colonies and other countries and eventually led to the Stamp Act, Sugar Act, and Tea Act. The colonist did not approve of the amount of restriction, or the amount taxed and led to some disgruntled colonists. Tea however, was a staple in the British diet that carried over to the colonists as well. With the tariffs on tea, it limited the amount the colonies could get their hands on. This led to smuggling goods from other countries like the Dutch. Tea was light and could be hidden, which made it easy to be smuggled (Carp 339). Oddly enough, Boston was a high consumer of British tea compared to the other big cities like New York and Pittsburgh (Carp 335). From these protests towards the monopolies took place. One of these protests was the Boston Massacre. Five men was killed in a protest between colonists and British troops in the Townshend Acts. Although unknown who started the violence, it created an outcry from the information circling from the trials for the charges. The trial process was not a just one due to the lack of evidence, yet two men were charged and many were acquitted (York 57). If the new acts did not upset the colonists, the “massacre” that took place in Boston created that feeling.   
 In the excerpt of Hewes’s account, it does not talk about the big events leading up to the event. Just the growing tensions between the group he was a part of and of a meeting taking place before the event on the same day. This meeting was on the topic of the incoming cargo and what they could do to prevent it from being dropped off. Led by the governor of Boston, Hutchinson, he was in charge of determining the next step of the group. Hutchinson then fled and left the group to themselves. From this, a persona of what a man should do arose and created the atmosphere that led to the event taking place a few hours later. From this section of the piece, it can be inferred that this meeting was a last minute thing with no organization. Most of the people in the room were all for preventing the shipment from reaching their docks which can lead to the conclusion of them all being patriots. Due to the lack of organization, it can be easy to misinterpret what is happening and what is true if there is a lot of commotion. Time can be altered and for events like this, time was not something recorded. Knowing the targeted group of those at the meeting, it is understandable why a good portion of the people were of the patriot group, however, there was a lot of colonists that wanted to remain neutral and stay out of the drama. The recollection made it seem almost unanimous when the meeting ended that something like the Boston Tea Party was going to happen, when it may not have been the case. This could be a by-product of the amount of time passing between the event occurring and Hewes’ account of the event.  
 Hewes was born into a working class family and took on the profession of a shoemaker. This shows that he did not start out with riches and could influence his standing on certain views. For all his life he had to work to survive and remained a poor man for most of his life. It was not until the revolution that he made a small name for himself by participating in the events that made him a hero, so to speak. In the 1830s, people were fascinated in what took place decades before, believing the Boston Tea Party to be a staple in the revolution, but one of the last remaining members was in old age (Young 563). For someone who grew up with nothing and lived a life of struggle, it makes sense for him to bring awareness to his life. It was not until he put himself into the position that people wanted to know what happened during that time. It is quite possible that he waited to tell his story until people were interested. He wanted to make his presence known when the time was right. After the Tea Party event, there was more important things to focus on like the future Revolutionary War and the creation of the first form of government. A country of crisis could not focus on the history, until they were done creating it. Although it can be interpreted differently, it makes a person wonder what the intent of the piece was. Was it to present historical evidence, or was it for personal gain? To rise from a poor man to a hero can definitely scue the purpose if the mind is not in the right place.  
 For a man to be reaching 100 years of age, it can be difficult to remember exactly what took place so many years ago. The man himself believed to be older than he was when being interviewed by Hawkes. No matter how many times he told Hewes his real age, Hewes was in firm disbelief (Young 563). If Hewes could not remember his age, it only raises questions in regard to his memories and experience he presents. In Alfred F. Young’s piece on George R.T. Hewes, it raises a statement that makes one wonder if it influenced his account. Back in the 1818-1832 period, in order for soldiers to receive their pension for their service, they had to submit a full account of their time in the service. Hewes was one of many who went through this process to be granted a pension (Young 564). Was his record of his time read back to him? How was influenced by the thought of a pension? There may not be answers to these questions, but they raise a good point to consider.   
 There are a few viewpoints that are left out of this account that could be important to have been addressed. As stated before, Hewes was a patriot. He strongly believed that it was time to be represented and be treated fairly by his standards. The views left out are those against the idea of preventing the shipment from being imported. Boston thrived on tea just like every other city. Smuggling of goods was taking place too. It was not like Great Britain could stop every smuggling ring entering the colonies, especially with countries like the Netherlands benefitting from the smuggling. The view of those being neutral was lacking too. When things just started leading to the Revolution, people were unhappy, but they were not going to go up against the mother country. Thirteen colonies with no army or navy could not win against the most powerful player over the Atlantic ocean. Many colonists believed that there needed to be reform, but not at the cost of separating themselves from their benefactor.  
 History is a never ending cycle. Based on what has occurred up to present day, it has shown that sometimes history repeats itself. This may not be the best source to use, but it does show some insight on what could have possibly happened that led to or occurred during the event. It makes it more relatable and exciting when there is a story to match with an event that happened. If it is just read in a book, there is no thought process that takes it beyond the level of it being a part of our history. Stories and accounts from real people make history come alive. It may not be the best due to the one-side view, the purpose of the piece, and the misconception of memory, but it was a great buffer to kickstart the audience to form their research.

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