



Spilling the Tea in '73



# Tea Origins

All tea imported to Europe and the Americas came from China in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The Chinese have been cultivating and consuming tea since at least the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, though tradition places the first tea consumption during the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE.

Most Chinese tea purchased by Europeans came from the Fujian region of southern China.

# Varieties

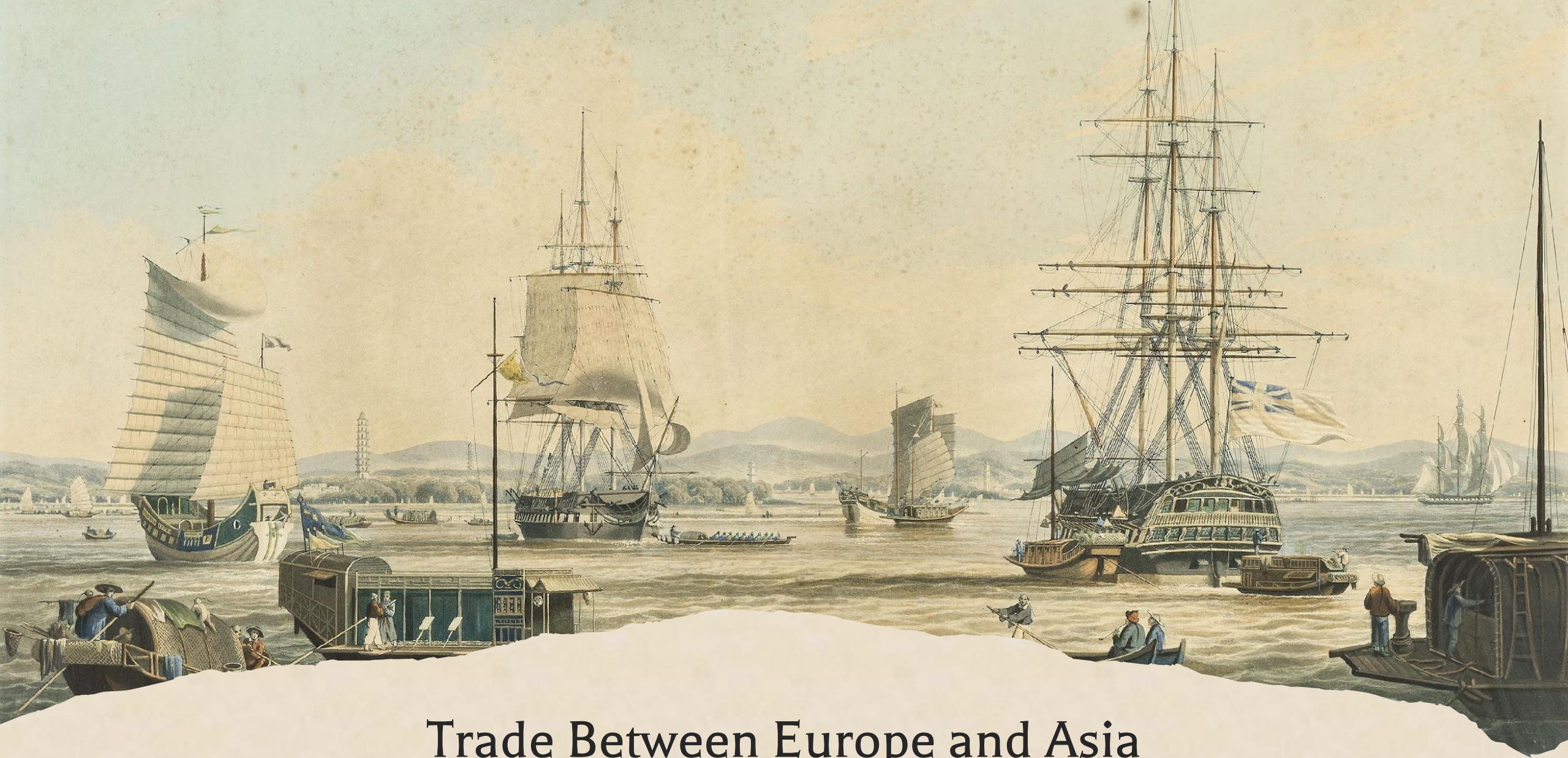
Generally speaking, all true tea comes from the same plant: *camellia sinensis*.

The variety comes from where it was grown, when/how it was picked, and how it was prepared.

The quality of the tea largely depends on how old it is and how whole it is.

Up until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century tea was categorized as black or green.





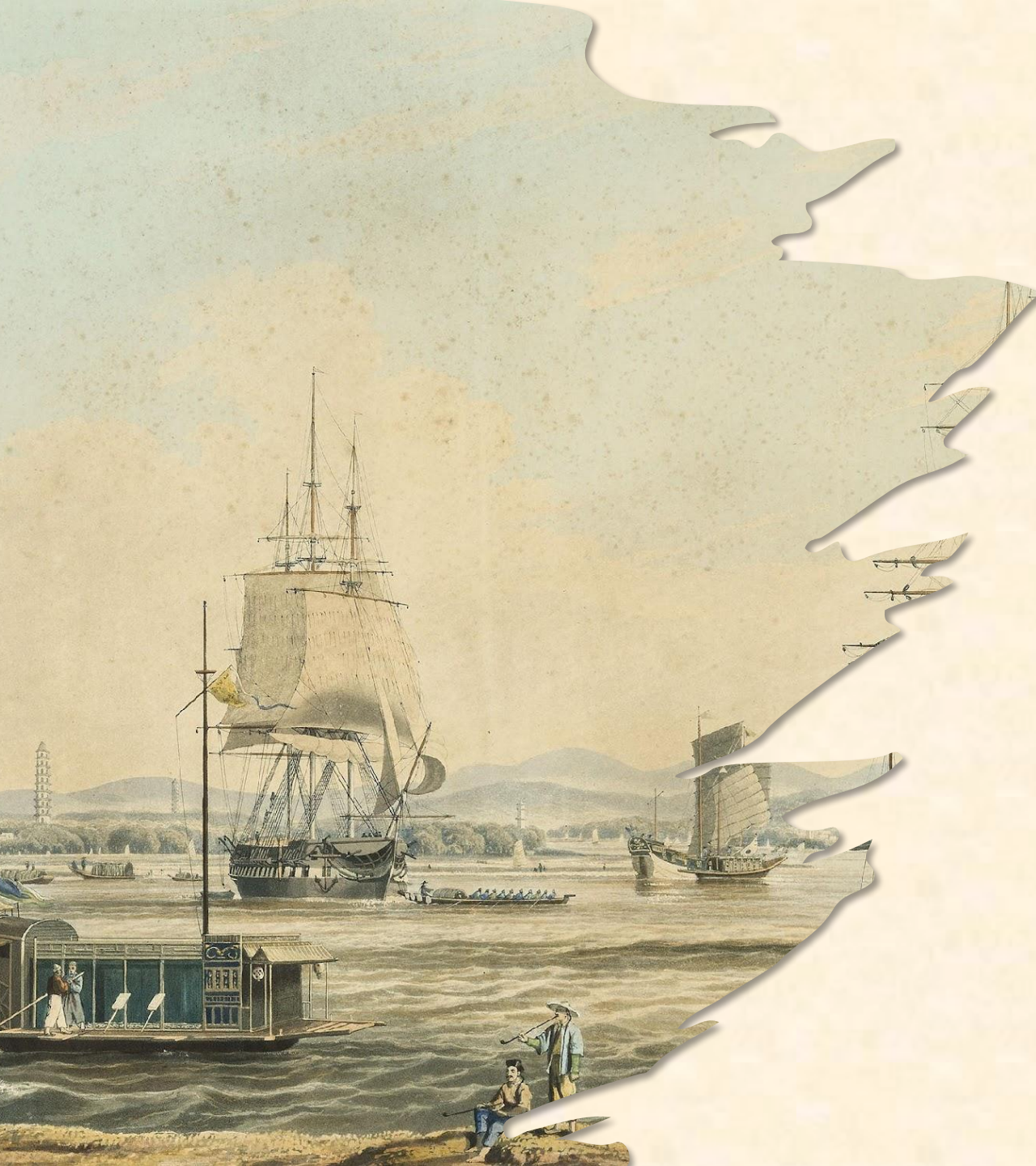
## Trade Between Europe and Asia

# Eurasian Trading

Trade between Asia and Europe had been happening since antiquity.

The Silk Road during the Middle Ages made this trade faster and more regular, though diplomatic contact between the nations of Asia and Europe was not consistent.

The things traded along the Silk Road were mostly decided upon by traders, and what they could acquire from local merchants and transport generally over land in caravans.

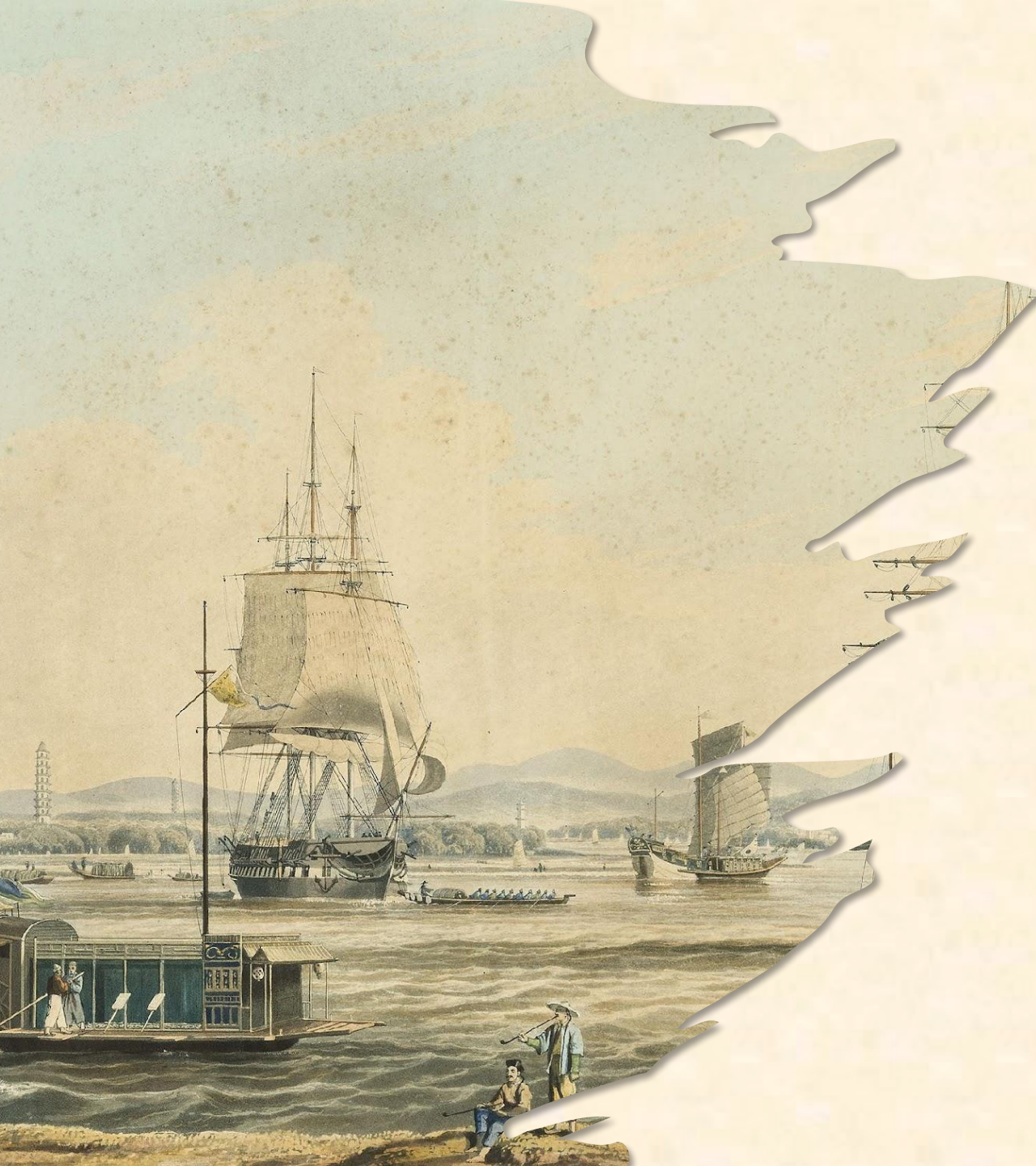


# Ship-Based Trading

Trade along the Silk Road, while very profitable, was long, difficult, and dangerous. Trade over the oceans was shorter, at least time-wise, and seen as less dangerous than land travel.

Europe possessed trees large, strong, straight, and light enough to build vessels robust enough for ocean travel.

European nations quickly started creating colonies and ports in the Americas and Asia in order to facilitate shipping, most crucially places to resupply provisions and make any necessary repairs.





# Chinese Ports

Though open for trade, China was not an open country. All diplomacy between China and other nations happened through many layers of bureaucracy.

Only Canton was open to foreign nations, and access was heavily regulated and controlled by the Chinese.

The Chinese people were not allowed to go abroad, and foreigners were only allowed in Canton.



# Canton

The Port of Canton was made up of series of “factories” managed by Chinese agents. Each nation that wished to trade with China had its own factory complex, and they were not allowed to freely go anywhere except the factories.

Factories were equal parts warehouse, hotel, and consulate. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries factories were only open part of the year, during the trading season. By the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century many were open and had staff year-round.



# European Goods in China

Spices, textiles, and pottery remained the primary exports from Asia to Europe.

In return, the Chinese mostly wanted silver. Other items such as furs, timber, tar, lead, and herbs like ginseng were also often traded, but silver was the only thing the Chinese reliably traded for.

European mechanical devices like clocks were used as bribes for local Chinese officials, but they were not popular as trade items.

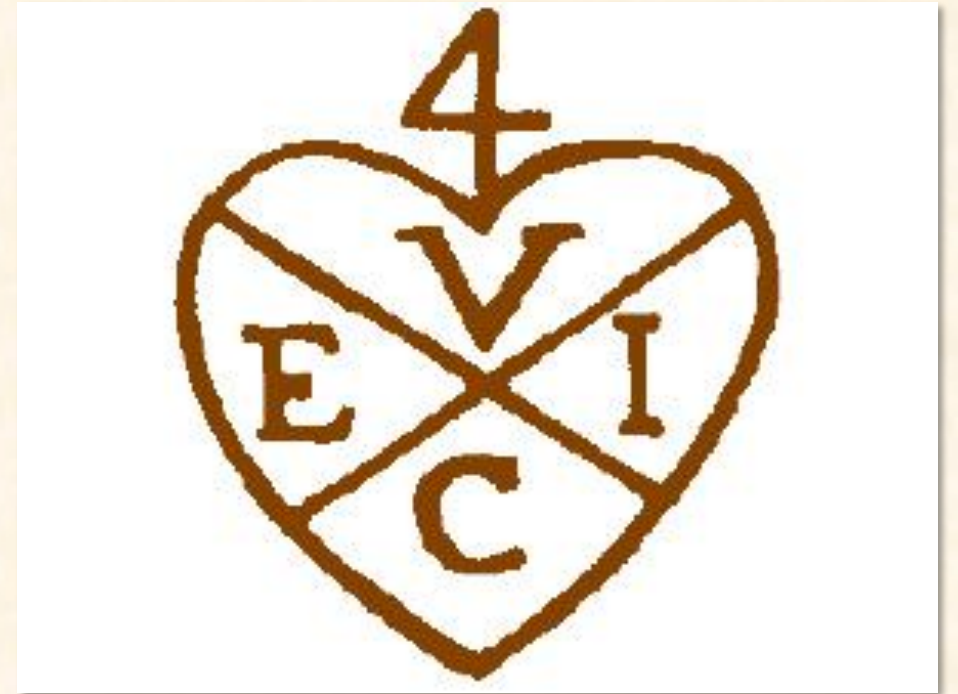
British East  
India  
Company



# British East India Company

It was chartered as a joint stock company in 1600. Many of the stockholders were high ranking members of British society, and there was very little government oversight.

In 1709 it was given exclusive rights to the China trade within Great Britain, which essentially gave it a trade monopoly.

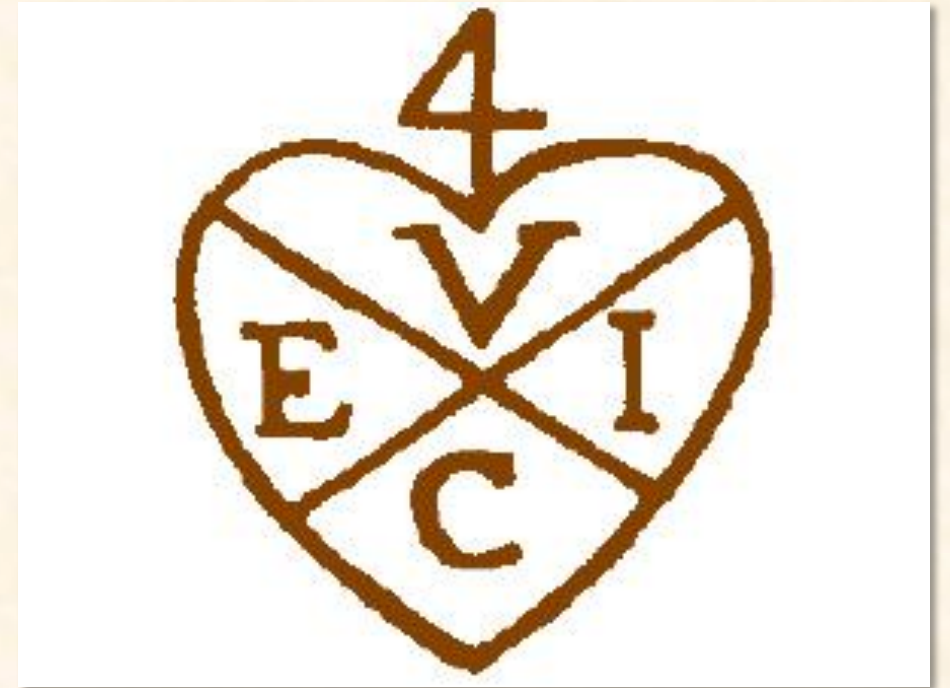


# British East India Company

The East India Company did not have its own stores. Instead, it sold the goods it acquired at public auction to merchants in Britain. There were, of course, merchants and dealers who were given preferential treatment by the EIC.

Once purchased at auction at Britain, goods could then be reexported to British colonies or other nations in Europe, for additional import/export fees, of course.

It was also not uncommon for supercargos on EIC ships to be allowed a chest of two of tea "for their personal use", which they often then sold illegally without them having to pay duties or taxes on it.



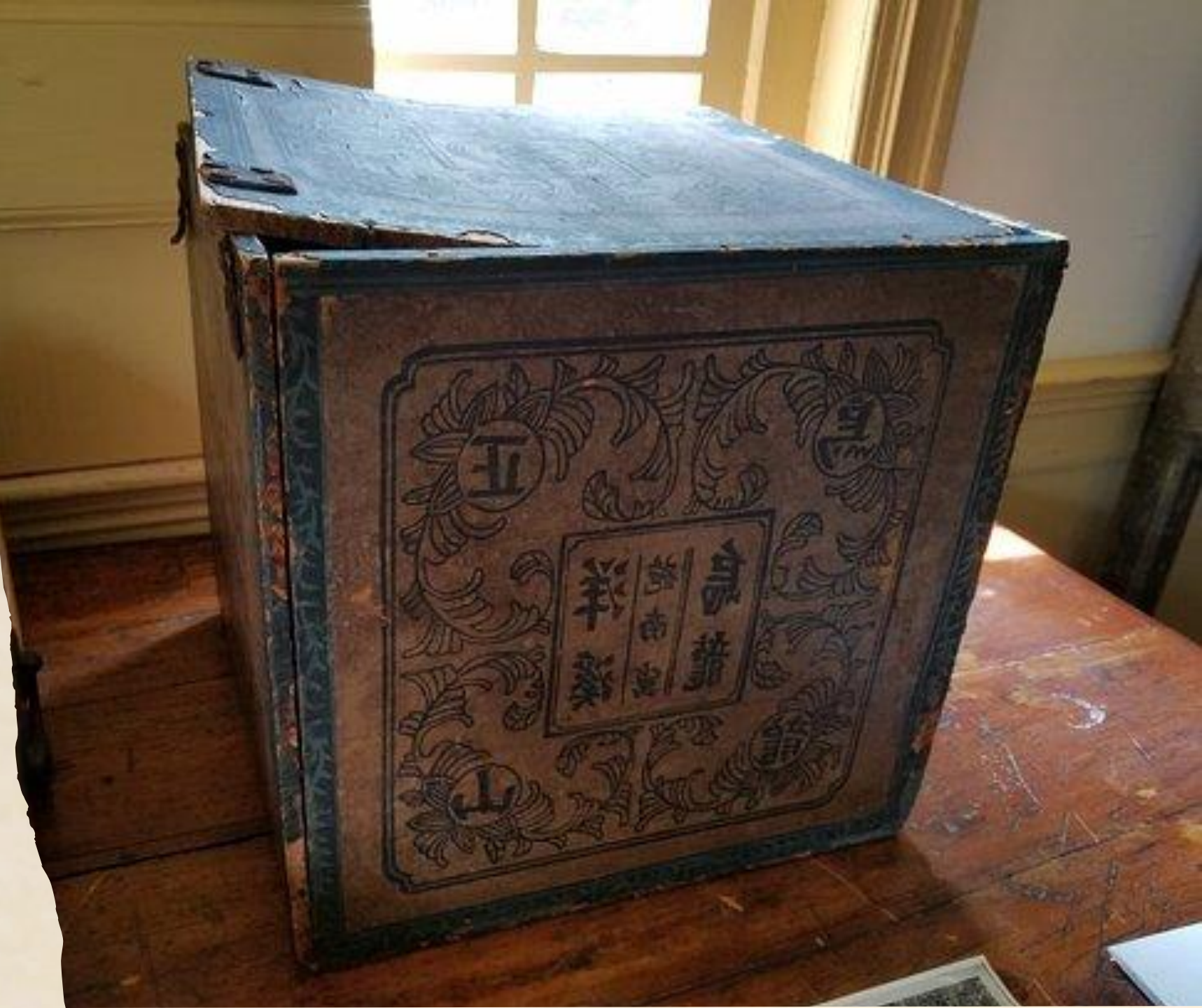
# Shipping



## Tea Chests

Tea was generally shipped out of China in large chests.

Once stacked in the ship, the gaps around the chests were packed with rice stalks to soak up moisture and to help preserve the flavor of the tea.



# The Trouble with Tea



# Creating a Market

Though tea was easy to transport and trade for, the English were not at all familiar with it until the mid 1600s, when Catherine of Braganza of Portugal married King Charles II and brought her love of tea to England. The court soon appropriated her tea habit, and in addition to the tea itself, merchants began importing tea pots and its ephemera.

Tea became fashionable in the British Isles, and within a few decades it became a daily habit for many.







## Creating a Market

The import of tea outpaced consumption in the Americas, however, and merchant warehouses were soon completely overstocked with tea. Still the EIC continued to import tea to Britain and then on to her colonies.

Many merchants began paying their workers with some amounts of tea. The barter economy was quite common in the colonies, so it was not an unusual move. Merchants would also trade tea for locally made goods and crops that they could then export to England to get the currency needed to import more goods.

By the 1760s, tea was a daily beverage for the majority of people living in British North America.

# Path to the Americas

Though the East India Company was the only legal British importer of tea and the largest purchaser, the Dutch, French, and other European nations also traded in it.

Tea smuggling through the Caribbean was quite common, and was much cheaper for those in British North America than EIC tea, which was subject to import and export duties and fees.

In order to keep tea profitable, EIC merchants often attempted to create false tea shortages, and sent the lesser quality teas to the Americas.

# European Wars

From the 1740s through the 1760s most of the major European powers were at war with each other. Those wars also involved the European colonies in Asia and the Americas.

In North America, England and its Indigenous American allies fought against France and its Indigenous American allies in the northern part of the continent, and Spain, England, and France fought over the southern part and the Caribbean.

# War in India

In India, the local Indian Kingdoms and mighty Mughal Empire were at war with both France and the British East India Company over control over the Indian Subcontinent.

Both France and England had large trading ports in India that were crucial to trade with China. The Dutch, Portuguese, and Spanish had all moved their ports to the islands in what are now Indonesia and the Philippines.

With help from the British government, the East India Company largely defeated France, and forced the Mughal Emperor in India to cede control of his empire (and its revenue) over to the EIC.



# Indian Exploitation

The East India Company had its own private army and navy to help protect itself from smugglers and pirates. The EIC knew that in order to keep control over India it would need to increase the size of its armed forces, as it had needed help from the British Government in order to gain control in the first place. Increase it the EIC did, and by the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the EIC forces were almost double the size of those controlled by Great Britain, some 260,000 men.

To pay for the war and its increasing military, the EIC raised taxes in the area it now controlled. The local people who could not or would not pay were tortured until they gave up what they had or until they died. Famine beset India in 1769, and tens of thousands more people died.

Within only a few years of governing in India, Robert Clive, who had been appointed as Governor in Bengal, and the EIC had begun looting the subcontinent and sending its riches back to England. Soon Clive was the richest private citizen in Europe. Eventually his crimes would catch up to him, and he took his own life in 1774.

# Paying for War

War is expensive, and the British Government was largely in debt. It turned to its colonies to recoup the costs of war.

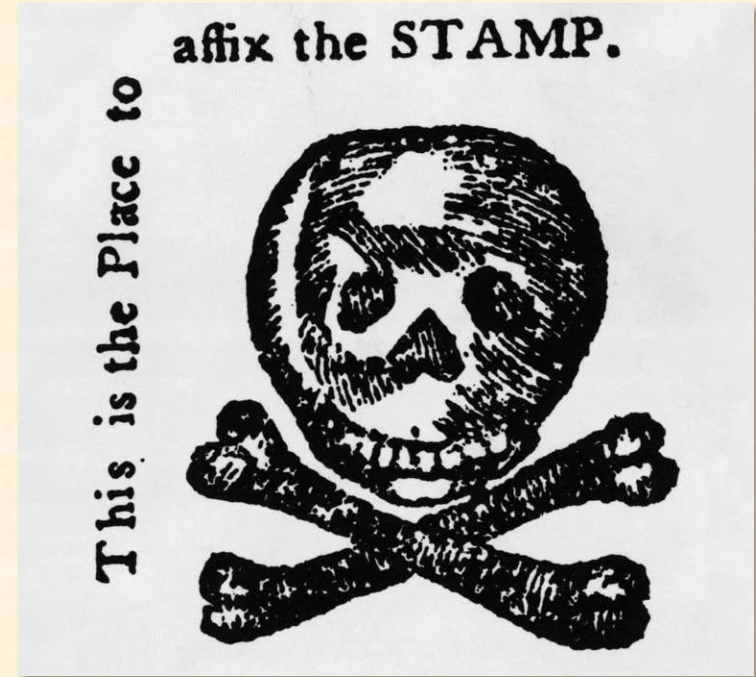
Local shipping economies in the colonies and England, though disrupted, had largely benefitted from the wars by moving goods around. The British Government hoped that by raising taxes and duties on goods reexported from England to its colonies that it could start recouping its costs.

# Stamp Act

Passed in 1765 and created a tax on all paper products, requiring them to be stamped to certify that the tax had been paid.

It was widely unpopular and was withdrawn within a year.

Benjamin Franklin famously called the men tasked with enforcing the act "Stamp Pimps."



# Public Response

Local leaders called for people to give up tea and other luxury items, knowing that they probably would not be successful. The reasons cited were as varied as the citizens. Some of the more colourful ones include:

“Tea makes men effeminate.”

“Tea makes women lazy and gossipful.”

“Luxury and the pursuit of money lead one away from God.”

“Reliance on foreign goods over our own products makes us weak and opens us up for exploitation.”

They also called for colonists to make use of the fruits of their own industry in the form of “homespun goods.”



# Townshend Acts

Passed in 1767 and 1768 and named after Charles Townsend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, this set of duties were meant to raise money for the coffers of the Crown and to punish the American Colonies for their actions against earlier legislation.

Before this time, British colonies were not taxed directly, with revenue instead being generated through import and export duties. Exports coming from Britain were now subject to being taxed in the colonies, including lead, textiles, paper, glass, paint, and tea.

The revenue generated would be used to pay the salaries of Crown appointed judges, magistrates, governors, and other Crown officials.

The acts were also an attempt enforce British control over her colonies.

The acts were extremely unpopular, and eventually all except the tax on tea would be repealed.

# Tea Act



There you see the Little Hot Spit Fire Tea pot that has done all  
 The mischief - There you see the Old British Lion basking before the  
 American Bon Fire while the French Lock is blowing up a storm  
 About his ears to Destroy him and his young Welpes - There you see  
 See Mrs America grasping at the Cap of Liberty - There you see  
 The British Forces be yoked and be crump'd flying before the  
 Congress Men - There you see the thirteen Stripes and Rattle =  
 Make the exalted - There you see the Stamp Paper help to  
 Make the Pot Boil - There you see. S. S.

*The TEA-TAX-TEMPEST. or OLD TIME with his MAGICK-LANTHERN.*  
 Pub. March 12, 1783. by W. Humphreys, N. 27 Strand.

# Tea Act

In the early 1770s it became apparent to the Crown that the East India Company was in danger of becoming insolvent. The EIC had been losing money for quite some time yet continued to pay its stockholders at 12.5%. The British Government stepped in and enacted reforms to prevent bankruptcy.

To pay for these reforms, it enacted the Tea Act in 1773.

The Tea Act created a monopoly for EIC tea in Britain and her colonies. This upset many merchants and smugglers who were used to acquiring tea from Dutch colonies in the Caribbean without paying taxes on it.

Public  
Response



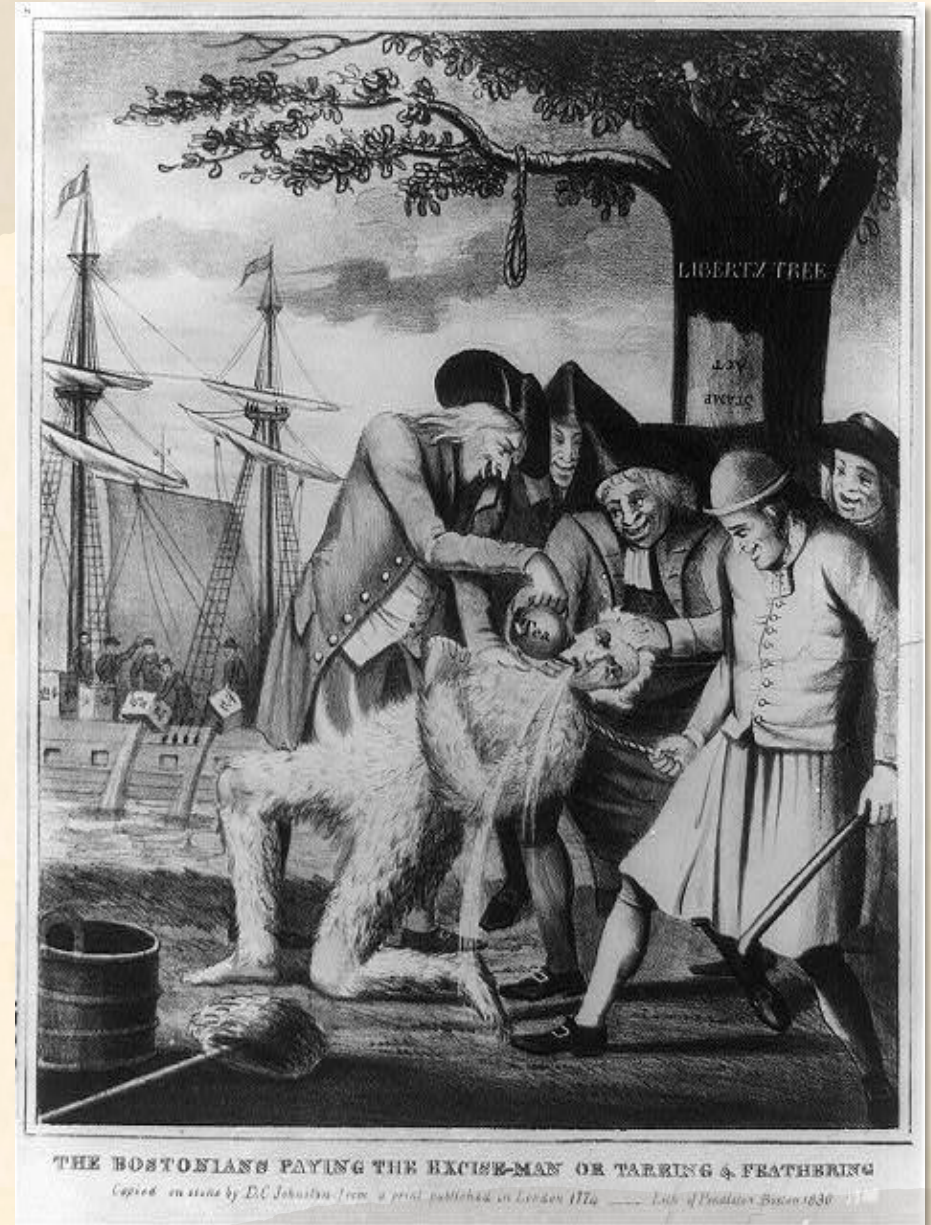
# Public Response

Many in the colonies saw the taxes for what they were: a way to help pay for Britain's wars.

Most colonists did not object to being taxed, but they felt that the extra tax only on tea sent to the colonies and not the British Isles was an unfair burden on them.

Many also realized that lowering tax rate on EIC teas was an attempt to reenforce their monopoly over the tea trade in the Atlantic. This might make tea cheaper in the short term, but would allow the EIC to raise its prices at any time with no competition. They were, in essence, financing a private company in the hopes that its revenue would then travel into government coffers.

Leaders in the colonies were also well aware of what had happened in India only a few years earlier, and were terrified of the same happening in the Americas.





## Alternatives in the Colonies

Tea was not easy to give up, and even with non-importation agreements and controversies over consuming it, most people continued to buy and drink tea.

There were some local alternatives available: Labrador tea, herbal teas, roasted chicory root, and chocolate.

# More Tea

Knowing that the Tea Act was unpopular, and anticipating that it would be repealed, merchants in Philadelphia and New York agreed to allow their EIC partners to send more tea in late 1773. Tea was also ordered to be sent to Boston and Charleston.

When it became obvious that the act was not going to be repealed, the EIC merchants in Philadelphia and New York offered to just store the tea and not sell it. Under pressure, they agreed to send the shipments back to London when they arrived.

The Philadelphia-bound ship, *Polly*, docked in mid-December, and returned to England after being presented with notarized letters stating that the tea could not be unloaded or sold.

*Nancy*, the ship bound for New York, was damaged and ran aground on Sandy Hook during a storm. The Captain agreed to return to England after resupplying and repairing his ship.





Tea Parties



# Timeline

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Boston, MA - December 16, 1773

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Lexington, MA - December 24, 1773

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Charlestown, MA - December 31, 1773

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Princeton, NJ - January 1774

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New York City - April 25, 1774

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Chestertown, MD - May 18, 1774

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Annapolis, MD - October 20, 1774

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Edenton, NC - October 25, 1774

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Yorktown, VA - November 7, 1774

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Charleston, SC - November 21, 1774

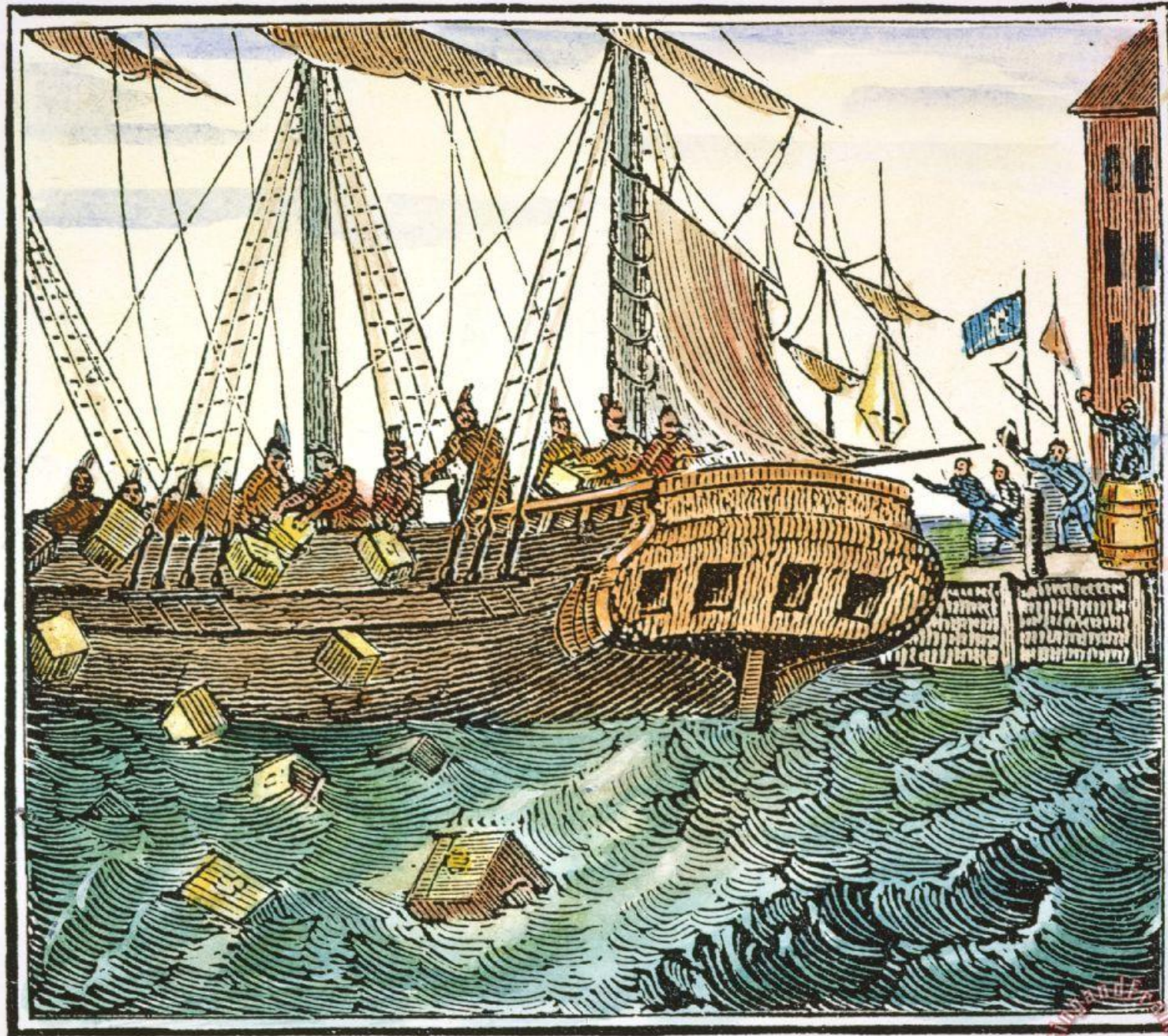
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Greenwich, NJ - December 22, 1774

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Wilmington, NC - March/ April 1775

Boston

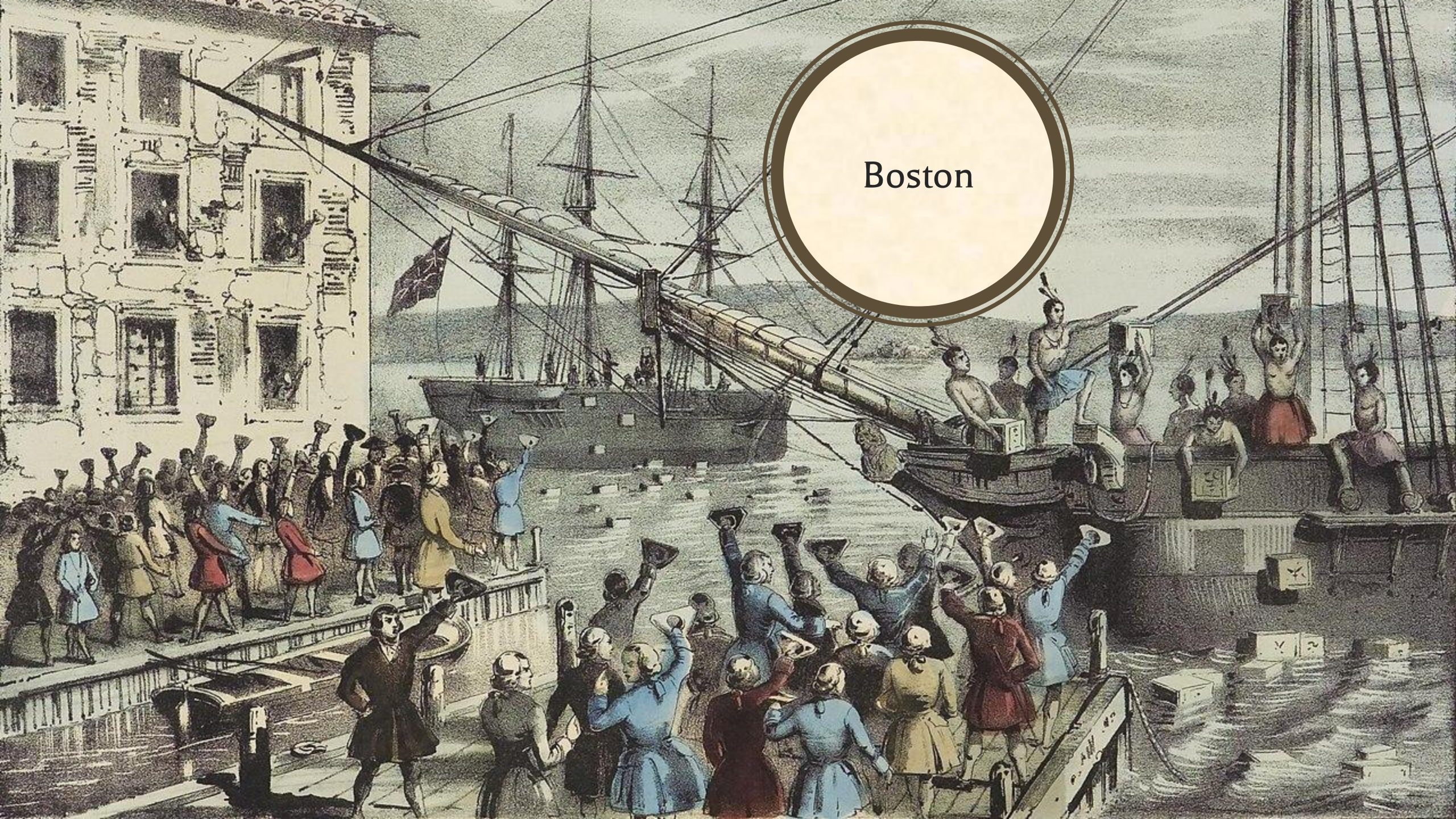


*Destruction of Tea in Boston harbor.*

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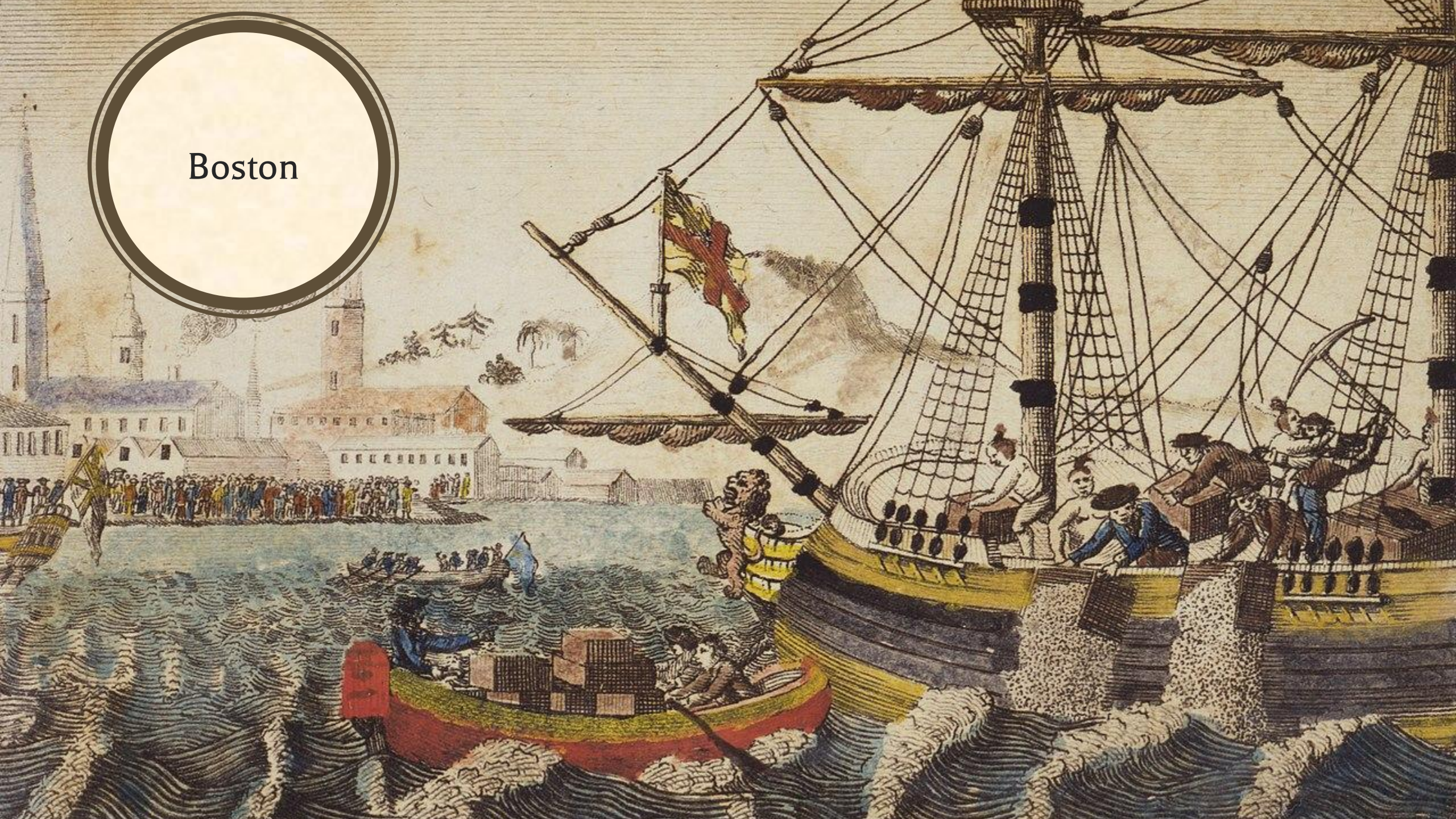


Boston

A detailed historical illustration depicting a large crowd gathered on a dock to welcome a ship. The ship is a multi-masted vessel with a complex rigging system. A large crowd of people, including men, women, and children, is gathered on the dock and the ship's deck. Many are holding up hats or small objects in a gesture of celebration or protest. The scene is set in a harbor with a large building visible on the left. A circular text overlay in the upper right corner contains the word "Boston".

Boston

Boston



# Edenton, NC



Plate V.  
A SOCIETY of PATRIOTIC LADIES,  
AT  
EDENTON in NORTH CAROLINA.  
*London, Printed for R. Sayer & J. Bennet, 1775 in Pall Mall, the 23. Moons 1775.*



## Annapolis, MD

Marylanders chose a different path than their counterparts. Instead of dumping or burning the tea that arrived, they burned the entire ship.

In mid-October 1774 a ship called *Peggy Stewart* attempted to dock in Annapolis and unload its cargo of tea and other British goods. The locals forced the captain and crew off the ship and set fire to her in the harbor.

# Tea Tasting

Now that I've spilled the tea, who would like to try some?

Here for your tasting pleasure are five teas present during the Boston (and other) Tea Parties, all from Oliver Pluff & Co.:

- ❖ Bohea
- ❖ Congou
- ❖ Lapsang Souchong
- ❖ Hyson
- ❖ Singlo





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## Podcasts:

- Ben Franklin's World
  - Episode 112: Mary Beth Norton, The Tea Crisis of 1773
  - Episode 160: The Politics of Tea
  - Episode 337: Dael Norwood Early America's Trade with China

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- Oliver Pluff & Co.: Tea and Coffee Trade in the American Colonies
- Omohundro Institute: The Greenwich Tea Burning: The Political and Religious Roots of Local Revolutionary Resistance
- UNESCO: Cultural Selection: The Diffusion of Tea and Tea Culture Along the Silk Roads