

The Boston Riot of 26 August 1765

This account of the destruction of the home of Thomas Hutchinson, Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts, is from a letter written by Hutchinson to Richard Jackson on 30 August. The punctuation, syntax and spellings are as Hutchinson wrote. The riot came as a result of the passing of the [Stamp Act](#) by the British government on 22 March 1765.

Boston, 30 August 1765

My dear Sir

I came from my house at Milton with my family the 26th in the morning. After Dinner it was whispered in town there would be a mob at night and that Paxton Hallowell, and the custom-house and admiralty officers houses would be attacked but my friends assured me the rabble were satisfied with the insult I had received and that I was become rather Popular. In the evening whilst I was at supper and my children round me somebody ran in and said the mob were coming. I directed my children to fly to a secure place and shut up my house as I had done before intending not to quit it but my eldest daughter repented her leaving me and hastened back and protested she would not quit the house unless I did. I could not stand against this and withdrew with her to a neighbouring house where I had been but a few minutes before the hellish crew fell upon my house with the rage of devils and in a moment with axes split down the doors and entered by some being in the great entry heard them cry damn him he is upstairs we'll have him. Some ran immediately as high as the top of the house others filled the rooms below and cellars and others remained without the house to be employed there.

Messages soon came one after another to the house where I was to inform me the mob were coming in Pursuit of me and I was obliged to retire thro yards and gardens to a house more remote where I remained until 4 o'clock by which time one of the best finished houses in the Province had nothing remaining but the bare walls and floors. Not contented with tearing off all the wainscot and hangings and splitting the doors to pieces they beat down the Partition walls and altho that alone cost them near two hours they cut down the cupola or lantern and they began to take the slate and boards from the roof and were prevented only by the approaching daylight from a total demolition of the building. The garden fence was laid flat and all my trees &c broke down to the ground. Such ruins were never seen in America. Besides my Plate and family Pictures household furniture of every kind my own my children and servants apparel they carried off about £900 sterling in money and emptied the house of everything whatsoever except a part of the kitchen furniture not leaving a single book or paper in it and have scattered or destroyed all the manuscripts and other papers I had been collecting for 30 years together besides a great number of Publick papers in my custody. The evening being warm I had undressed me and slept on a thin camlet surtout over my wastcoat, the next morning the weather being changed I had not cloaths enough in my possession to defend me from the cold and was obliged to borrow from my host. Many articles of cloathing and good part of my Plate have since been picked up in different quarters of the town but the Furniture in general was cut to pieces before it was thrown out of the house and most of the beds cut open and the feathers thrown out of the windows. The

next evening I intended with my children to Milton but meeting two or three small Parties of the Ruffians who I suppose had concealed themselves in the country and my coachman hearing one of them say there he is, my daughters were terrified and said they should never be safe and I was forced to shelter them that night at the castle.

The encouragers of the first mob never intended matters should go this length and the people in general express the utmost detestation of this unparalleled outrage and I wish they could be convinced what infinite hazard there is of the most terrible consequences from such daemons when they are let loose in a government where there is not constant authority at hand sufficient to suppress them.

I am told the government here will make me a compensation for my own and my family's loss which I think cannot be much less than £3000 sterling. I am not sure that they will. If they should not it will be too heavy for me and I must humbly apply to his Majesty in whose service I am a sufferer but this and a much greater sum would be an insufficient compensation for the constant distress and anxiety of mind I have felt for some time past and must feel for months to come. You cannot conceive the wretched state we are in. Such is the resentment of the people against the [stamp duty](#) that there can be no dependence upon the general court to take any steps to enforce or rather advise the payment of it. On the other hand, such will be the effects of not submitting to it that all trade must cease all courts fall and all authority be at an end. Must not the ministry be extremely embarrassed. On the one hand it will be said if concessions be made the Parliament endanger the loss of their authority over the colonies on the other hand if external force should be used there seems to be danger of a total lasting alienation of affection. Is there no alternative? May the infinitely wise God direct you. I am with the greatest esteem

Sir Your most faithful humble servant