

1775

*30 April 2008*

**LIBERTY TREE**

**by Thomas Paine**

*Ted Kennedy*

**Liberty Tree**

**IN a chariot of light from the regions of day,**

**The Goddess of Liberty came;**

**Ten thousand celestials directed the way,**

**And hither conducted the dame.**

**A fair budding branch from the gardens above,**

**Where millions with millions agree,**

**She brought in her hand as a pledge of her love,**

**And the plant she named Liberty Tree.**

**The celestial exotic struck deep in the ground,**

**Like a native it flourished and bore;**

**The fame of its fruit drew the nations around,**

**To seek out this peaceable shore.**

**Unmindful of names or distinctions they came,**

**For freemen like brothers agree;**

*Mike Bongioanni  
John O'Brien  
Casper King  
Chris McDermott  
John King*

*John King  
Bernie Frank  
Ed Markey  
Nancy Pelosi*

**With one spirit endued, they one friendship  
pursued,**

**And their temple was Liberty Tree.**

**Beneath this fair tree, like the patriarchs of old,**

**Their bread in contentment they ate**

**Unvexed with the troubles of silver and gold,**

**The cares of the grand and the great.**

**With timber and tar they Old England supplied,**

**And supported her power on the sea;**

**Her battles they fought, without getting a  
goat,**

**For the honor of Liberty Tree.**

**But hear, O ye swains, 'tis a tale most profane,**

**How all the tyrannical powers,**

**Kings, Commons and Lords, are uniting amain,**

**To cut down this guardian of ours;**

**From the east to the west blow the trumpet to  
arms,**

**Through the land let the sound of it flee,**

**Let the far and the near, all unite with a cheer,**

**In defence of our Liberty Tree.**

## The "Orginial" Liberty Tree

The **Liberty Tree** was a famous elm tree that stood near the commons of Boston, Massachusetts Colony, in the days before the American Revolution. The tree was a rallying point for the growing resistance to the rule of England over the American colonies. In the years that followed, almost every American town had its own Liberty Tree—a living symbol of popular support for individual liberty and resistance to tyranny.

In 1765 the British government imposed a Stamp Act on the American colonies. It required all legal documents, permits, commercial contracts, newspapers, pamphlets, and playing cards in the American colonies to carry a tax stamp. Because the Act applied to papers, newspapers, advertisements, and other publications and legal documents, it was viewed by the colonists as a means of censorship, or a "knowledge tax," on the rights of the colonists to write and read freely.

The summer of 1765 in Boston was marked by militant citizens demonstrating against the Stamp Act. On August 14, 1765, a group of men calling themselves the Sons of Liberty gathered in Boston under a large elm tree at the corner of Essex Street and Orange Street near Hanover Square to protest the hated Stamp Act. The Sons of Liberty concluded their protest by hanging two tax collectors in effigy from the tree. From that day forward, the tree became known as the "Liberty Tree." The tree was often decorated with banners and lanterns. Assemblies were regularly held to express views and vent emotions. A flagstaff or pole was raised within the Tree's branches and when an ensign (usually yellow) was raised, the Sons of Liberty were to meet.

When the news of the Liberty Tree spread throughout the colonies, local patriots in each of the 13 colonies formed a Sons of Liberty group and identified a large tree to be used as a meeting place. In those times, holding an unauthorized assembly was dangerous business that carried threats of imprisonment or death. The casual appearance of a group chatting beneath a tree was much safer.

Other towns designated their own Liberty Trees as well. The Liberty Tree in Acton, Massachusetts, was an elm tree that lasted until about 1925.

In the years leading up to the war, the British made the Liberty Tree an object of ridicule. British soldiers tarred and feathered a man named Ditson, and forced him to march in front of the tree. During the siege of Boston, about the last day of August 1775, a party of Loyalists led by Job Williams defiantly cut the tree down in an act of spite, knowing what it represented to the colonists, and used the tree for firewood. This act only further enraged the colonists. As resistance to the British grew, flags bearing a representation of the Liberty Tree were flown to symbolize the unwavering spirit of liberty. These flags were later a common sight during the battles of the American Revolution.

For many years the remnant of the tree was used as a reference point by local citizens, similar to the Boston Stone, and became known as the "Liberty Stump."

Later the citizens in many of the colonies erected a Liberty pole in commemoration of the Liberty Tree.

In October 1966, the Boston Herald began running stories pointing out that the only commemoration of the Liberty Tree site was a grimy plaque on a building three stories above what is now the intersection of Washington and Boylston Streets. Reporter Ronald Kessler persuaded then Massachusetts Gov. John A. Volpe to visit the site. Volpe promised to preserve the site, and eventually the Boston Redevelopment Authority created a handsome bronze replica of the liberty tree and installed it in a small plaza on Boylston Street at Washington Street. The plaque bears the inscription "Sons of Liberty, 1766; Independence of the Country, 1776."

### **The American Liberty Elm**

The American Liberty Elm is the official Massachusetts State Tree. Since 1983, volunteers around the country have been nurturing a new American elm - the Liberty elm. They've planted over 250,000 of these trees in more than 650 communities.

The Liberty elm is not a hybrid. ERI's American Liberty elm is actually a group of six genetically different cultivars. All six look like classic, old fashioned American elms.

### **Massachusetts American Elm Tree**

On October 21, 1993 Senator Kennedy planted an American "Liberty" Elm Tree, the Massachusetts State Tree, on the Capitol grounds.