



## The Apprentice

Saturday morning, April 15, is sunny and pleasant. Uncle Alex and Uncle Ben, both up since dawn, are talking in the kitchen. Uncle Ben is holding the weekly issue of the *Boston Gazette*. He begins to read part of an article out loud, and this prompts a response from his brother.

“The Colonies must stand together if we are to emancipate ourselves from that tyrant,” says Alexander. “What news do you hear from the Whigs in New York and Philadelphia?”

“They view Boston as the powder keg of the revolutionary movement,” says Uncle Ben. “Tensions are increasing every day. Talk in Framingham is that something will happen here, and soon.”

“Then let it happen,” exclaims Alexander, his fist pounding the table. “Then King George will see he cannot treat us in this tyrannical manner. His actions and policies are intolerable! We can bear their effects no longer.”

Young Ben, sleeping in the next room, is awakened by his uncles’ words. He had heard Uncle Alex speak passionately before about colonial rights and the economic hardship brought on by Britain’s taxes on the Colonists. He remembered hearing his uncle talk about the Stamp Act, a tax on paper products, dice, and playing cards, that had been created in 1765. Uncle Alex had spoken of a protest that occurred that same year at what became Liberty Tree, a large elm tree that stands on Orange Street, close to the Common. He also described how a British tax on tea resulted in the dumping of 342 chests of it into Boston Harbor on the night of December 16, 1773. Alexander recalled a meeting he attended that same night at Boston’s Old South Meeting House. After this meeting, some of the Colonists marched to Griffin’s Wharf, boarded three British ships, and destroyed the tea.

Perched on the edge of his bed, Ben strains to listen for more details.

“They’ll surely seek out Adams, Hancock, and the other members of our party, when the time comes,” Uncle Alex tells his brother. “The Sons of Liberty shall

stand united against the King's soldiers and their Tory friends."

As Ben enters the kitchen, the conversation changes to a lighter subject. It is the first day of his apprenticeship as a woodworker.

His uncles greet him. "Good morning, Ben. Today, nephew, you take the first step on a long journey that will see you aboard a sailing vessel someday," says Uncle Alexander. "God willing, and with great effort, you can make it happen. Are you ready?"

"Yes, Uncle," says Ben eagerly, "but do I get to eat first?"

"If you hurry. Uncle Ben and I will head to the shop now, so be quick and don't delay. We have a busy morning ahead of us."

"Yes, sir," is young Ben's response.

After eating, Ben dashes out the front door. Less than a minute later he is back, having forgotten his spyglass. Grasping the familiar item, he is off again, running down a passageway to his uncle's shop. Charging through the door, Ben trips over a board and flies head first into his uncle's arms. Uncle Alex, having saved Ben from certain injury, picks up his nephew's favorite hat and sternly asks, "Does walking so disagree with you, Ben? Must you always run everywhere you go?"

"I love to run," says Ben. "When I feel the wind in my face, I imagine I'm sailing across the ocean."

His uncle shakes his head and grins.

"There will be no sailing in my shop, is that clear?"

"Yes, Uncle," replies Ben.

"Safety," adds Alexander, "is the first priority here, so we walk, however, that should not discourage your sailing, or running around Boston outside of the shop."

Ben smiles.

The cabinetmaking shop contains three items in different stages of production. In the far corner is a bookcase Ben's uncle is repairing for Moses Gill. Next to it is a case of drawers he is building for Grant Webster. Both men are regular customers. In the center of the floor stands the only finished item in the shop. It is a desk, constructed of mahogany. At first glance, it looks like a case of five drawers with a slanted top. The top has a fanciful design that resembles some sort of star, or maybe a serpent. Young Ben watches as his uncle slides out two wooden rails from the front of the cabinet, then unlocks the top. As the hinged top is lowered, it comes to rest on the wooden rails. The transformation reveals a wonderful desk, complete with several drawers and secret compartments.

Uncle Ben recognizes the design immediately. It matches their grandfather's desk, brought to the Colonies from England some 70 years ago. Uncle Ben keeps the original desk at his Framingham home. He had sent his brother drawings of it

nearly six months ago with little confidence that Alexander would be able to duplicate it. To his surprise, it looks exactly like the original.

“Alexander,” he says, “you have become a true craftsman. Your talents surprise even me.” Alexander is pleased with his brother’s words.

The desk is placed on Alexander’s wagon. He retrieves his trusted horse from the barn and hitches him to the wagon. All three climb aboard.

“Where does Mr. Barber live?” asks young Ben.

“Nathaniel lives on Charter Street,” responds his uncle. The wagon travels along Back Street to its intersection with Prince Street. Salem Street is just ahead. As the wagon travels up Salem Street, young Ben notices the confident stride of three British Regulars. He and his friends call them lobster-backs, because of the bright red coats they wear. Their occupation of the town is a constant source of anger for Ben’s uncles, who now ignore the soldiers’ presence.

On the right, just three blocks from the Edwards home, Christ Church appears. The brick building is topped by a three-tier, 191 foot steeple. Ben’s uncle stops the wagon a short distance beyond the church in front of Nathaniel Barber’s home, located near the intersection of Salem and Charter streets. A large man stands outside the front entrance to the modest wooden dwelling. He greets Uncle Alex with a warm handshake. The two men are long-time friends.

“It’s perfect,” bellows Nathaniel, as he inspects the desk.

The three men take the desk off the wagon and carry it through the front door of the Barber home. They then sit down for a drink and begin to talk. Young Ben asks his uncles if he can wait outside so he can look at the steeple of Christ Church. Alexander responds, “Yes, but stay close by, as we will be leaving soon.”

Ben steps outside into the crisp Boston air. The sun shines brightly. Just then, the breeze picks up, and he clutches his hat moments before the wind would have taken it. Ben peers at the steeple of Christ Church through his spyglass. Through the lens, he sees a single flicker of light and then a second in the top window of the steeple. “What could that be?” he wonders out loud.

Ben imagines what the view would be like from that same window. Soon, he has “that look” on his face, the one his Aunt Sarah always notices when he’s about to get himself into “some real trouble.” Sensing he has the time, Ben runs down Salem Street toward the church, hoping that he might somehow get in. To his surprise, he finds the door slightly open, and he slips inside.

Young Ben walks down the aisle of the church, passing the high box pews on either side. As he gets closer to the pulpit, a voice rings out in a rather strong tone.

“Can I help you son?”

Ben turns, staring into the eyes of a large man. It is John Pulling. John is a

member of Christ Church and the Sons of Liberty.

“What’s your name, lad?” he asks.

“Ben Edwards, sir,” responds Ben, rather sheepishly.

“Edwards, ... of any relation to Alexander Edwards?”

“He is my uncle, sir. He is up the street delivering a desk to Mr. Barber.”

“I know your uncle. He is a fine man. My name is John,” he says extending his hand, “John Pulling.” Just then another man appears.

“It’s all right, Robert,” says John. “I know this lad’s uncle. He means no trouble.” Robert Newman, the church sexton, appears concerned by the intrusion. Sensing that time is running short, Ben gathers his nerve and asks John a question.

“The steeple, sir, is it really the tallest in Boston, even taller than the New Brick?”

“That it is, son,” is the reply.

Taking a deep breath, Ben continues.

“Can you see Charlestown from it, sir, and any ships on the Charles River on a clear day ... like today?”

John Pulling grins, admiring the lad’s persistence, then glances at Robert Newman. The sexton shakes his head, but after more convincing, reluctantly agrees to the request.

“Follow me, lad, and you can see for yourself,” is John’s response.

Ben follows his new found friend up a flight of wooden steps that leads to a landing. From here, they go through a door, up more steps and reach a second landing. From this location, the bells are rung for church services. They continue up 154 steps and finally climb a series of ladders that lead past the massive bells to a trap door and the top of the steeple.

Ben had never seen the town from such a vantage point before. Through his spyglass, he can see beyond Hudson’s Point to Charlestown. There is no guarantee he will see a sailing ship. The Boston Port Bill of 1774 had closed Boston Harbor to all but the King’s warships. It would not be reopened until the Colonists paid for the tea they had destroyed in 1773. Soon, Ben grows excited as a large military vessel comes into view. Its magnificent sails are caught in the stiff breeze. It is just what he had hoped to see. John points out Copp’s Hill and several of the shipyards.

“That’s a fine spyglass you have there,” comments John.

“It belonged to my grandfather,” says Ben. “He was a sea captain who traveled across the ocean. That’s what I want to do ... someday.”

“And do it you shall,” says John. “Never stop believing in your dreams, lad, for it is that belief, combined with hard work, that guarantees everything you imagine will someday come true. Your Uncle Alexander and I share the same dreams. We



dream of liberty for the Colonies, freedom from England, and the right to govern ourselves. However, even our dreams will remain ‘just dreams’ unless we are committed enough to act. You too lad must commit yourself. Take some action each day that will bring you closer to the course you have chosen. Remember these words, lad, and never forget this view I have given you today.”

“Thank you, Mr. Pulling,” replies Ben. “I’ll never forget this day! Before we leave I must tell you that I saw two flickers of light in this window before I entered the church.”

“Flickers of light?” responds John. “Likely a reflection in the window pane.”

“Perhaps,” agrees Ben, “but the window was open, sir. Maybe it’s a reflection of things to come.”

“Quite an imagination you have there, lad, and where might that come from?” asks John.

“I see things through my spyglass, but only my cousin Betsey believes me. Do you believe me, Mr. Pulling?”



## Uncle Alexander

“Don’t mind what others say, Ben, believe in yourself. That’s all that matters.”

As Ben considers the response, John turns around and opens the trap door that leads to the ladder below.

“Be careful now, Ben,” says John. “Both my friend Robert and your Uncle Alexander will want you back in one piece.” Ben slowly and carefully follows his guide down the ladders, past the bells and finally down the narrow steps that lead to the floor of the church.

Lost in the moment, young Ben barely hears his uncles call as they search for him.

John leads Ben outside through the front door, and they spot his two uncles approaching.

“Well, good day to you, John, I see you’ve met my nephew,” exclaims Alexander. “I was beginning to think he’d run off to the wharf. I hope he caused you no trouble.”

“No trouble at all,” says John. “He’s a fine lad with a sharp mind and a love for

the sea, I'd say. I gave him a view of our town that few children have seen, a view from the top of the highest steeple in all of Boston."

Young Ben had such a grin on his face that Uncle Alex didn't have the heart to scold him.

"John, this is my brother, Ben. He is visiting us from Framingham. He is active in the militia and in the service to our cause for liberty. Ben, this is my friend John Pulling."

Uncle Ben and John shake hands.

"Alexander, your nephew tells me you were delivering a desk to Nathaniel Barber. Would that be the desk you felt would be such a challenge?"

"That it would be, John. It was indeed a challenge, but I am rather pleased with the outcome. You may call on Nathaniel and view it yourself. I would value your opinion, John. Can I interest you in a case of drawers or a chamber table this spring?"

"Sadly, times are difficult thanks to the Intolerable Acts of King George. For now, we will have to make due with the furniture we have."

"Thank you for looking after my nephew, John. We will speak again soon."

Young Ben adds, "Thank you, Mr. Pulling, for everything you've shown me."

John pats Ben on the head and says, "You're most welcome, lad. Now it's back to the day's business." At that, John Pulling steps back into the church and seeks out his friend Robert Newman.

Uncle Alex finally addresses young Ben.

"Now I see why you try your aunt's patience at times, Ben. Although she tries, she cannot understand you, ... but I can. You remind me of myself when I was your age, full of energy, ideas and always into mischief. Ah, to be 10 years old again."

"Uncle, Uncle," Ben exclaims, "I could see clear across to Charlestown. I saw a sailing ship on the Charles and many of the shipyards, too. It felt like I was on top of the world!"

The experience has somehow changed Ben. He pledges that his desire to learn the woodworking trade from his uncle is sincere.

"Starting Monday I will be at the cabinetmaking shop bright and early to help you. I can clean up, and I promise I will walk and not sail when I sweep the floors. Please teach me, Uncle Alex. I will make you proud."

The two uncles exchange winks, and all three climb aboard the wagon and begin the short trip to their next stop.