

*Note: the following is the entire text content from the interactive historic scene.*

## TAKING THE OATH: PUNISHMENT AND APPEASEMENT

The bloodshed and death at Springfield horrified the people of Massachusetts and shocked observers abroad. An uneasy peace followed as thousands of men surrendered their weapons and took an oath of loyalty to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that would keep them out of prison and off the gallows.

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**Reuben Wells' Tavern, Greenfield, Massachusetts, March 1, 1787**

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### Overview

#### Grim Occasion

Barely a month had passed since the bloody confrontation at the United States [Arsenal](#) in Springfield. The grim-faced men gathering at [Reuben Wells' tavern](#) in [Greenfield](#) were in no mood to socialize. Like thousands of other [Regulators](#) across the state, the men standing before [Seth Catlin](#) of [Deerfield](#) were there on government orders.

#### Regulators Defeated

In the days following their devastating defeat at the Arsenal, many Regulators had fled to their homes or gone into hiding. People along the way offered food, shelter and sympathy, defying General [Benjamin Lincoln](#)'s stern warnings not to aid the fleeing men. The remnants of Captain [Daniel Shays](#)' forces retreated, only to be defeated at [Petersham](#) on February 4 by General Lincoln's government militia. Shays escaped to Vermont while the Massachusetts government ordered his arrest and imprisonment for treason, along with other Regulator leaders. Organized violence in the Berkshires ended when government militia and Regulators met in a final, deadly clash at the town of [Sheffield](#) on February 27.

#### Partial Pardon

The [Disqualification Act](#) passed on February 16 was part of the government's attempt to deal with the thousands of citizens who had taken up arms against the state. The act pardoned any rank-and-file Regulator who came forward and paid nine [pence](#) to take an oath of loyalty to the state before a town [selectman](#) like Seth Catlin. The pardon was conditional. It did not apply to men identified as leaders. Oath takers had to surrender their weapons. They were prohibited from running a tavern, teaching school, holding office or voting for three years.

#### Spring Elections

The men taking the oath had no way of knowing that the onerous conditions spelled out in the act would melt away with the coming of spring and new state elections. Nor could they know that the newly-elected Governor [John Hancock](#) would unconditionally pardon almost all the Regulators except Daniel Shays and a handful of others.

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## Government

#### Welcome News

In between carrying out his government duties at [Reuben Wells' tavern](#), [Seth Catlin](#) could read with stern satisfaction news of the rebellion in the much-handled copy of the [Hampshire Gazette](#) on the table before him. Still

more reassuring was the stream of former rebels coming before him to take the [oath of allegiance](#) to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

### **Rebellion Crushed**

The government militia had wasted no time in following up on the supremely successful and spirited defense of the United States [Arsenal at Springfield](#). General [Lincoln](#) and [General Shepard](#)'s militias dispersed [Captain Day](#)'s rabble at [West Springfield](#) on January 28. [Petersham residents](#) witnessed a spectacular [rout](#) of Shays' mob on February 3. As Lincoln marched west to [Pittsfield](#) to put down what remained of the rebellion in the Berkshires, the Massachusetts government turned to the task of dealing with the many misguided citizens who had followed the treasonous leaders of the rebellion.

### **Merciful Government**

Like other friends of law and order, Catlin hoped the Legislature's recently-issued [Disqualification Act](#) would help people put the recent disorder and violence behind them. The Act allowed former insurgents to surrender without fear of arrest so long as they paid nine [pence](#) and took the oath of allegiance. The Act kept taverns and schools from becoming hotbeds of political intrigue by barring known insurgents from running taverns or teaching. It also disarmed them and denied them the vote for three years.

### **Stern Measures**

Of course, the state's leaders, while offering clemency to most, also needed to make examples of the rebellion's most notorious leaders. The Legislature arrested known ringleaders and called upon [neighboring states](#) to aid in the arrest and return of Shays and other men who had fled Massachusetts. Catlin administered the oath hoping that these stern government measures would bring peace and stability to his state.

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## **Regulators**

### **No Choice**

Four weeks ago, the men of Captain [Agrippa Wells](#)' company had marched on the [Arsenal at Springfield](#). Now they stood together at [Reuben Wells](#)' [Greenfield tavern](#), taking an [oath of allegiance](#) to the very government that had not hesitated to open fire on them. Like thousands of other [Regulators](#) across Massachusetts, [Caleb Philips](#) and his comrades had little choice but to accept the harsh terms of the government's February 16 [Disqualification Act](#) and take the oath which denied them the right to vote for three years.

### **Defeat**

Following the bloody defeat at the [Arsenal](#), Phillips and many other Regulators had fled rather than take their chances with Captain Shays' forces. The warm food and sympathy people offered along the way could not disguise the fact that the Regulators were on the run and all the news was bad. The government [mercenaries](#) attacked and arrested or put to flight Captain Day's men at [West Springfield](#). General [Lincoln](#)'s army hounded Shays' remaining men to [Petersham](#) in a howling blizzard and defeated them there. Now Lincoln was putting down the Regulation in the Berkshires. Shays and other leaders had gone into hiding in neighboring New York and Vermont, exiled from their homes and families.

### **A Bitter Pill**

To receive the government pardon, Regulators had to surrender their weapons to a local militia officer. Many also faced the humiliation of taking the oath before pro-government selectmen. For men from [Colrain](#), this meant taking the oath before Colonel [Hugh McClellan](#), the Colrain selectman who had fired the Arsenal cannon. For some, paying nine pence for this final insult was too bitter a pill to swallow. Like Phillips, they chose to travel to other towns to throw themselves on the dubious mercies of a government in which they possessed little faith.

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# Rollovers

Text for rollovers in the interactive scene illustrations.

## Joseph Stebbins

Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Stebbins of Deerfield has confiscated many guns from former Regulators, including Caleb Phillips. Now, he watches as Phillips and other local men take the oath of allegiance [Click for more information.](#)

## Edward Allen

Edward Allen of Greenfield takes the oath.

## Caleb Phillips

Caleb Phillips of Ashfield has traveled to Greenfield to take the oath of allegiance alongside men who marched with him at the Arsenal three weeks earlier. [Click for more information.](#)

## Seth Catlin

Like other Massachusetts town officials, Seth Catlin will be required to declare the same oath of allegiance he now administers to the Regulators. [Click for more information.](#)

## Sympathetic Bystander

Reuben Wells' sympathies lie with the men taking the oath. [Click for more information.](#)

## Moses Bascon

Moses Bascom, Jr., of Greenfield takes the oath of allegiance.

## Surrendered Firearms

Not all regulators who own guns are willing to give them up, despite the government's order [Click for more information.](#)

## Refreshments

Seth Catlin refreshes himself with a glass of West Indies rum from Reuben Wells' bar. [Click for more information.](#)

## Latest News

Seth Catlin and other tavern visitors can read a defiant letter from Regulator leader Eli Parsons in this latest issue of the Hampshire Gazette. [Click for more information.](#)

## Record Keeping

Seth Catlin carefully records the names of each man who comes before him to take the oath. [Click for more information.](#)

## Conditional Pardon

Governor James Bowdoin's Proclamation offers a conditional pardon to Regulators who surrender their weapons and take an oath of allegiance to the government by March 21, 1787. [Click for more information.](#)

## Marked Men

A Proclamation offers a reward for the capture of the four men the government believes are the principal "Abettors and supporters of this unnatural, unprovoked and wicked Rebellion against the dignity, authority and Government" of Massachusetts. [Click for more information.](#)

## Tavern Offerings

Taverns often list the beverages and other services they offer.

## Glassware

Reuben Wells stores rum and other spirits in a cellar below the bar. He decants smaller amounts into glass bottles.

[Click for more information.](#)

## Rum Glasses

Drinks made with rum are among the most popular beverages at Wells' tavern. They are usually served in glass tumblers. [Click for more information.](#)

## The Bar

The tavern bar can be locked, offering additional security for rum, wine, glassware and other valuable items.

## A Warm Drink

Joseph Stebbins warms himself with a tankard of flip, a warm drink made with beer and milk. [Click for more information.](#)

## Hat

Both comfort and fashion dictate that men, women and children wear hats. [Click for more information.](#)

## Winter Travel

Male travelers wear wool greatcoats, or cloaks, to protect themselves from the bitter February cold. [Click for more information.](#)

## "So Help Us God"

Each man taking the oath declares that he "will bear true Faith and Allegiance, to the said Commonwealth, and...will defend the same against traiterous Conspiracies and all hostile Attempts whatsoever." [Click for more information.](#)

## Windsor Chair











Catlin rises from his chair to administer the oath of allegiance. [Click for more information.](#)








## Functional Furniture

Tavern furniture like this table tends to be sparse, functional and inexpensive to replace. [Click for more information.](#)

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## Related to this scene

-  [Benjamin Lincoln Order for Provisions](#)
-  [Bottle](#)
-  [Brown Bess](#)
-  [Circulating Letter from Eli Parsons](#)
-  [Commendation of General Shepard](#)
-  [Firearm Log](#)
-  [Firearm Receipt](#)
-  [Glass](#)
-  [Letter from Huntington to Bowdoin](#)
-  [List of Grievances Poem](#)

-  [Massachusetts Disqualification Act](#)
  -  [Pewter Mug](#)
  -  [Proclamation for the Apprehension of Daniel Shays](#)
  -  [Resolve of the General Court that There is a Rebellion](#)
  -  [Tavern Sign](#)
  -  [Tavern Table](#)
  -  [Windsor Chair](#)
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## Observers

**Major General Benjamin Lincoln** Pittsfield, MA, February 17, 1787

*"The opposition to Government is giving way in every part; the people are hourly surrendering themselves, giving up their arms, and taking the Oaths, &c.—"*

[Click for more information.](#)

**Captain Eli Parsons** Vermont, March 1, 1787

*"Will you now tamely suffer your arms to be taken from you, your estates to be confiscated, and even to swear to support a Constitution and form of government, and likewise a code of laws, which common sense and your conscience declare to be iniquitous and cruel..."*

**James Madison** Virginia, February 21, 1787

*"Our latest information from Mass/ts gives hopes that...the Rebellion is nearly extinct. If the measures however on foot for disarming and disfranchising those concerned in it should be carried into effect, a new crisis may be brought on..."*

[Click for more information.](#)

**George Washington** Virginia, February 25, 1787

*"On prospect of the happy termination of this insurrection I sincerely congratulate you; hoping that good may result from the cloud of evils which threatned, not only the hemisphere of Massachusetts but by spreading its baneful influence, the tranquillity of the Union. Surely Shays must be either a weak man, the dupe of some characters who are yet behind the curtain, or has been deceived by his followers."*

[Click for more information.](#)

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## Themes

### Getting By and Getting Ahead

In the wake of the violence, the General Court began enacting legislation that would pay for the expenses of the militia called up to put down the insurgency.

[Click for more information.](#)

### We the People

The crisis facing the Massachusetts state government did not end with the defeat of Shays' force at Petersham on February 3, 1787.

[Click for more information.](#)

**The Wider World**

Throughout the remainder of the winter of 1787, leaders in other states eagerly sought out and shared information on the rapidly developing situation in Massachusetts.

[Click for more information.](#)

**Everyday Life**

Relations remained strained as Regulators and pro-government militia men returned to their communities.

[Click for more information.](#)

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