



**General John Thomas
(1724 – 1776)**

Thomas was born in 1724 in Marshfield where his family farmed. After receiving a medical education in Medford where he studied with Dr. Cotton Tufts, a distinguished physician, he commenced practice in his native town, but soon removed to Kingston, where he was a skillful and very successful physician. He became a prominent man in the affairs of the town and was chosen clerk for the years 1764 – 1766 and was also one of the selectmen from 1763 until 1775.

In March 1746 he was commissioned as a second surgeon in a body of troops raised to be stationed at Annapolis Royal. In 1755 he was appointed surgeon's mate in Shirley's regiment, but soon left the medical staff, and was appointed lieutenant

in the same regiment. He was appointed a colonel in 1759, and reappointed by Governor Pownall in 1760, and commanded his regiment part of both these years in Nova Scotia. This latter year he joined the army at Crown Point, commanded by Sir Jeffry Amherst, the commander-in-chief of the North American forces. At the close of this French War, Col. Thomas continued in his profession at home until 1775, when the war of the Revolution commenced. The Provincial Congress assembled at Cambridge, February 9, 1775 whereas they created the position of lieutenant-general and appointed Thomas to the office.

After the battle of Lexington Ward was commander-in-chief, and had his headquarters at Cambridge, while Thomas commanded on the Roxbury side as lieutenant-general, but soon after the Continental Congress assumed the army at Cambridge as the army of the United Colonies, and appointed the general officers. Among these, after Washington, were four major-generals, eight brigadiers, and an adjutant-general. Ward being the only major-general Massachusetts was entitled to, Thomas should have been the first brigadier of the army, and is so called in his commission, but the dates of the commission gave Pomeroy and Heath precedence. This difficulty produced a great deal of feeling and the fears that Thomas would resign caused Washington and other officers to make a great effort to induce him not to take such a step, at the same time showing in what esteem he was held.

Despite support from Washington and others, Thomas withdrew from his command at Roxbury, feeling that he could not in honor serve in an army and be commanded by those whom he had so recently commanded. This difficulty was in a short time entirely settled,

as the Congress passed a special resolve that General Thomas should have precedence of all the brigadiers in the army, in which decision the army and public fully acquiesces, and he was restored to rank and command.

Until March 1776, General Thomas was in command at Roxbury. It was determined to take possession of Dorchester Heights, which would bring on an action or compel the evacuation of Boston by the British. On the evening of Monday, March 4th, Thomas marched with about twenty-five hundred men. Boston was evacuated on the 17th of March, and as the Congress had been looking for an officer to command the troops led into Canada by Montgomery and Arnold, General Thomas was selected for that purpose. He was promoted to the rank of major general on the 6th of March, and after seeing the British army and fleet leave his native province, he took his departure for Canada.

It had been the one great hope and desire of Congress, and the Revolutionists in general to take and keep possession of Canada, but all their efforts, primarily lead by General Thomas, failed and disaster and misfortune seemed to follow the army in rapid succession. While waiting at Chamblee, on the River Sorel, General Thomas fell sick with the smallpox of the most malignant kind, and died on June 2, 1776, fifty-two years.

The above is from the *History of Plymouth County* by D. Hamilton Hurd, published in 1884 by J.W. Lewis and Co. of Philadelphia.