

Menotomy Minutes



NEWSLETTER OF THE ARLINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WINTER 2020



“Fiercest Fighting was in Arlington”

by Howard B. Winkler, Past President

My wife Lenore and I have visited the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem many times and had noted that the Salem Maritime Historic Site of the National Park Service is adjacent to it. Housed in the former Salem Armory, it is a good example of adaptive reuse of an obsolete structure. On our most recent visit we walked over and looked at the engraved stones along the side of the building, finding one inscribed:

Essex County militiamen respond to the Lexington Alarm of April 19, 1775 and take part in the fiercest fighting of the day in Arlington. Essex militiamen later fight at Bunker Hill and help form units of the Continental Army.

I made a connection between this and the words on the obelisk monument in Arlington’s Old Burying Ground. It has two limestone inset tablets, the first of which reads:

Erected by the Inhabitants of West Cambridge, A.D. 1848, over the common grave of Jason Russell, Jason Winship, Jabez Wyman and nine others, who were slain in this town by the British Troops on their retreat from the Battles of Lexington and Concord, April 19th, 1775. Being among the first to lay down their lives in the struggle for American Independence.

The second tablet is inscribed:

(Continued on page 2)



Artist Ruth Berry’s interpretation of Jason Russell defending his house and his slaying at his house, and the retreat of the Regulars.

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Nine Americans killed at Menotomy April 1775 and buried here.

Lieut John Bacon, Amos Mills, Jonathan Parker, Nathan Chamberlain; Needham

Elias Haven, Dedham;

William Flint, Thomas Hadley, Abednego Ramsdell; Lynn
Benjamin Peirce; Salem

Two of the towns, Lynn and Salem, are in Essex County, so that made clear the phrasing on the Salem marker relating to Arlington in 1775. I wondered if there was even more of a connection, and why the words “fiercest fighting” was used on it.

In 1775, Gen. Thomas Gage was the military governor of the rebellious Province of Massachusetts Bay. Through his network of informers, Gage learned that military supplies were being stored in Concord. These supplies had to be destroyed, so on the night of April 18, he ordered Lt. Col. Francis Leslie to lead a force of 700 Regulars to Concord, not to start a war, but to seize and destroy military supplies held by the colonial militia.

Early the following morning, militia Capt. John Parker and about 80 men from his company stood with their muskets on Lexington Common (Battle Green) to confront the Regulars led by Leslie. Parker had military experience, as he had fought in the French and Indian War. When he saw the size of the British force approaching, with two companies in the vanguard, he knew it would be folly to resist, so he ordered his men to disperse. As they were doing so, a shot rang out on the Buckman Tavern side of the common. The Regulars, with no order given, fired and killed eight members of Parker’s company. This was not supposed to happen—it is my conjecture that the first shot was fired by an inebriated American who emerged from the tavern.

Later in the morning, after a few companies of Regulars arrived at North Bridge in Concord, the colonial militia at the bridge believed the other

companies of Regulars were setting fire to the town and thus fired on them. This also was not supposed to happen. The Regulars were doing no such thing; they were burning seized military supplies in the street, not endangering anyone or anything. The war for American independence started by accident—a solemn lesson for our time.

When Leslie’s retreating force reached Meriam’s Corner, east of Concord center, colonial militia from nearby towns attacked them and a running battle began. There was clash of militia and Regulars at the “Bloody Angle” in Lincoln, and again at what is known as “Parker’s Revenge” in Lexington. During all their retreat the Regulars were under fire. Informers advised Gage that the countryside was alive with many militias on the move, so he ordered Gen. Hugh Percy to march with 1,000 men and two cannons to reinforce Leslie. By midafternoon Percy’s advancing force met Leslie’s retreating force, marked by the stone cannon monument on the north side of Massachusetts Avenue in Lexington. Soon 1,700 soldiers were marching towards Boston.

By about 4:30 in the afternoon of April 19, the British



A tinted copy of “A map of a hundred miles round Boston,” was published in The Gentleman’s Magazine (London, August 1775). It gives an appreciation of the distances traveled on foot by the militiamen to Menotomy, which was located approximately where the last “S” in “Massachusetts” appears. Note that Norfolk County was not established until 1793. (Alamy Stock Photo.)

soldiers entered Menotomy, the local name of the northwest precinct of Cambridge. Lt. Col. Francis Leslie's men had been up since 8:30 a.m. the day before and had marched about 33 miles. The column was huge—500 yards long, the distance from the Jason Russell House to the Old Burying Ground. The Regulars were exhausted, scared, and vengeful. Unit cohesion started to break down in Lexington, escalating to killing, looting, and non-military property destruction.

It took longer for the alarm to reach the militias in distant towns, and for them to reach the retreating British column. They knew how fast they could move and how fast the Regulars could move. The convergence place was Menotomy. In *The Lexington-Concord Battle Road, Interim Report of the Boston National Historic Sites Commission to the Congress of the United States (1958)*, it was written of the Jason Russell House "There followed the most famous fight at close quarters during the eventful day and the bloodiest encounter associated with any house in the Revolution." Many Americans were killed in and around his house, including Russell.

It is estimated that about 1,850 militia men from 38 companies from 12 towns engaged the retreating British column in Menotomy. Militia from four Essex County towns: Beverly, Danvers (including present-day Peabody), Lynn (including present-day Lynnfield, Swampscott, and Saugus), and Salem were at Menotomy. Beverly was the most distant, 20 miles away, and militia men had to carry their own rifles, powder, shot, and provisions. They sent about 700 men from 17 companies, and 13 were killed — from Beverly (Reuben Kennison); from Danvers (Henry Jacobs, Jr. and Perley Putnam; from present-day Peabody: Samuel Cook, Jr.; Benjamin Daland, Jr.; Ebenezer Goldthwaite, George Southwick, Jr.; and Jotham Webb); from Lynn (William Flint and Thomas Hadley; of present-day Swampscott, Abednego Ramsdell; of present-day Lynnfield, Daniel Townsend); and from Salem (Benjamin Peirce). The estimate of Americans killed on April 19 is 49 with 25 fatalities in Menotomy; the number of British is 65 with 40 fatalities in Menotomy. The Essex County dead, not buried in Menotomy, were carried back to their hometowns.

It was about 6:00 p.m. when the British column moved out, leaving a wake of death, suffering, and destruction. It took just 90 minutes to start and conclude the fiercest fighting episode of the day. And it happened in Menotomy. ❖



A 19-foot high obelisk of New Hampshire granite rises above the graves of Jason Russell and eleven other Americans killed at Menotomy on April 19, 1775.



The inscription on this stone cannon standing on the site of the former hill on the grounds of the Muzzey School Condominiums in Lexington reads: "Near this spot [General] Earl Percy, with reinforcements, planted a field piece to cover the retreat of British troops on April 19, 1775." Another field artillery gun was placed by Percy on the high ground near the Munroe Tavern.

New Exhibition and Research at the Jason Russell House



One of the door panels from the William Adams house, saved when the house was razed to make way for the railroad. The ball hole is .58-.60 which makes it either a strike from a Provincial fowler or a British fusil/ carbine. This item will be on view in the new exhibition along with a musket ball that was found at the house. *below*: Detail of hole in the front and back of the door panel.



A new hole found near kitchen stairs. This hole was hidden when new molding was attached to the stairs leading into the cellar. It can be viewed only by looking along the wall on the reverse side with a flashlight.

by Sara Lundberg

Dreadful were the vestiges of war on the road. The houses on the road of the march of the British, were all perforated with balls, & the windows broken. Horses, cattle & swine lay dead around. Such were the dreadful trophies of war, for about 20 miles! –Diary of Reverend David McClure, April 20, 1775.

New and exciting work is being done at the Jason Russell House and the small addition leading into the house, colloquially termed an “Assembly Room” by the Society in 1924. We have received two grants from MassHumanities for the planning and implementation of an exhibition on the events of April 19, 1775 in the 315 square foot space which formerly housed the large-scale Ruth Berry painting of the Jason Russell House. The goal of the exhibition is to improve the visitor experience at the Jason Russell House, set the scene and background to the day, and tell more stories of the fighting between Colonists and retreating British troops on the first day of the American Revolution. Parts of these stories have been told, interwoven with the historic house tour, but the exhibit will allow us to share many more objects from the collection and new stories to be told. Scholarly research encompassed primary and secondary documentation related to the British retreat, including some new information from formerly unavailable sources. It’s hard to imagine 245 years after the fact, but there is more history out there to be found! The exhibition is set



Commonly seen bullet holes shown to all visitors at the JRH fired by British soldiers from kitchen into basement.



Cross section of external wall with spruce siding on the outside and paneling on the inside. This will be shot at with replica muskets to visualize the results and also be used as a hands-on component in the new exhibition.



Joel Bohy and Chris Fox examining the battle damage at the Jason Russell House. Each hole was measured with calipers to determine the caliber, which can often determine whether the projectile was discharged by a British soldier or provincial.

to open Patriots' Day weekend, and all events will be announced in our Spring 2020 newsletter.

In tandem with the exhibition planning, we contacted a team of experts to research and study in the battle damage in the Jason Russell House and to some objects in the collection. The first visit took place in November 2019 when Skinner Arms & Militaria specialists Joel Bohy and Chris Fox paid us a visit. They discovered that there are a lot more bullet strikes than we knew existed. It appears many of the holes in the interior wood paneling were fired through the windows from the street below, either as a preventative measure or to target a person shooting out of them. Bohy and Fox determined that more formalized study was necessary, and contacted a larger cadre of experts to attend a Boston for a conference in mid-January. They will use ballistic rods and tools to collect more precise data about each strike or hole.

Another part of the study will include an "experimental archaeology" undertaking to examine how damage is incurred in real time. Bohy had a carpenter make mock ups of walls with external cladding and interior molding. The sheathing and an exterior shutter are original 18th century and were removed during remodeling of a historic home in Concord. The plan is to shoot modern replica muskets at each and compare the results to actual damage at the Jason Russell House and battle-damaged items in the collection. Stay tuned for more exciting content and scholarship. ❖

President's Corner

Hello members,

If you have driven or walked by the Jason Russell House in the last month or two, you may have noticed that some of our trees are now wearing garments. This is an outdoor sculpture exhibit of works created by Boston artist Leslie Wilcox. Ms. Wilcox has exhibited works at several corporations, museums, and cultural institutions around Boston. Installation of her work on our lawn is a collaboration between our Historical Society and the Arlington Commission for Arts and Culture. She calls this installation "Arboreal Attire".

You might wonder about the material used for the dresses

and top coat. It is stainless steel mesh, and is able to withstand the rigors of our winter weather while maintaining a gauzy, translucent appearance.

The exhibition will remain in place on our lawn for about one year. (We plan to remove it temporarily for the Patriot's Day re-enactment.) That provides lots of time for you to visit the exhibition and hear about the newly discovered bullet holes at the Jason Russell House, both discussed in this issue.

My best regards,
Stuart Brorson, Society President



Donate to the Annual Fund

Our Annual Appeal is underway. With your help, we are able to continue our mission to educate the public about the history of Arlington. If you like and appreciate the work we do, please consider making a tax-deductible donation to the Society today. Donors will be recognized in the next issue of "Menotomy Minutes."

- Jason Russell Circle (\$1,000+)
- Goldsmiths (\$500-\$999)
- Silversmiths (\$200-\$499)
- Pewtersmiths (\$100-\$199)
- Friends (\$50-\$99)
- Other (any amount accepted)

Gifts at the Friend level or higher will be listed by category in our publications, and in the lobby of the museum. You can donate by mail, securely online at arlingtonhistorical.org/contribute/ or by phone at 781-648-4300 (please call Tuesday through Friday 10 to 6).

Mid-Century Style *by Richard A. Duffy*



CARE-FREE HOME BEAUTY ON A BUDGET

At last we can bring you stunning and practical furniture for your living room, den, study or porch at this unheard of low price. This 6-piece room always looks fresh and clean. It includes a highly-styled black and brass two-piece sectional sofa, matching club chair, and plastic-topped cocktail, step-end, and corner tables.

These attractive Viko pieces are ruggedly built by Baumritter, with comfortable arch-type springs and colorful textured tweed plastics that shrug off dirt from children's shoes with the whisk of a damp cloth. The attractive vinyl-top tables, too, resist stains and dents—look and feel like wood.

Best of all—Viko is open stock furniture for your living or dining areas—get your basic needs now—fill in later. Come in today to see this outstanding value.

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POST CARD

Address

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This circa 1956 advertising card has no postmark date. It would have been mailed between May 1, 1955 (when the telephone exchange MIssion 3- replaced ARlington 5-) and December 31, 1957 (on January 1, 1958 postcard postage increased from two to three cents). Viko was the contemporary line of Baumritter, which later changed its corporate name to that of its popular "Early American" line, Ethan Allen. Besides the turquoise and white upholstery colors depicted, the other colors available in this "Hospitality House" design were black, chartreuse, and persimmon.

Upcoming Lectures

Except where noted, our regular Tuesday 7:30 p.m. programs will be at the Masonic Temple, 19 Academy Street (disabled access is at rear).

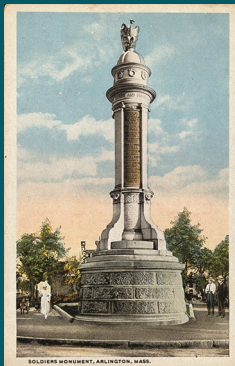


Sunday, January 26 at 2:00 p.m.

Program held in Smith Museum

GOING WITH THE GRAIN

Melissa Carr
of Masterwork Conservation



Tuesday, February 25

“WHAT THEY FOUGHT FOR”

Michael Ruderman



Tuesday, March 31

GEORGE Y. WELLINGTON REMEMBERS

“George Y. Wellington”

Winter Wednesdays—February 2020

Wednesdays 10 am at the Smith Museum of the Arlington Historical Society*

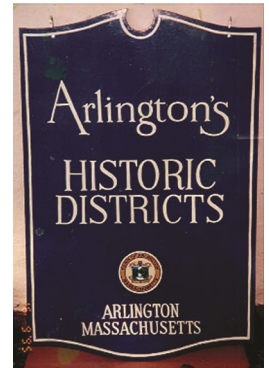
Welcome to our ninth year of Arlington Historical Society members gathering to hear interesting talks and enjoy refreshments on mid-winter mornings!

* *Note: Please check our website the morning of the scheduled talk for postponements or cancellations in event of inclement weather. www.arlingtonhistorical.org*

February 5th

David Baldwin – Arlington's Historic Preservation Movement: Creating Historic Districts

David Baldwin will discuss the past, present and future of the historic preservation movement in Arlington with an emphasis on historic districts. *David Baldwin is a past President of the Arlington Historical Society. He is currently a Commissioner of the Arlington Historic Districts Commission.*



February 12th

Adam Kurowski – Modernizing Municipal Maps

Maps help visualize places at a specific point in time. Arlington's historic map collection shows hand-drawn farms, mills and mill ponds, ice houses, and minimal development. Today, Arlington's mapping is on the Town's website, used on tablets and phones, and includes geographic and statistical analysis, underground pipes, street trees, a property database, and so much more. Learn about the evolution of Arlington's Geographic Information System (GIS), how maps and data help tell stories, and the importance of modern mapping in local government operations. *Adam Kurowski, is the Director of GIS / Systems Analyst, Town of Arlington.*



February 19th

Ken Pruitt – The Past, Present, and Future of Energy Use in Arlington

Arlingtonians have taken advantage of a wide variety of energy sources from early settlement to the present, from firewood, whale oil and water wheels to coal, oil, nuclear power, natural gas and now increasingly renewable energy such as wind and solar power. What sources of energy will we use in the future? Ken Pruitt will talk about the past, present, and future of energy use in Arlington. *Ken Pruitt is the Energy Manager of the Town of Arlington.*



February 26th

Howard Winkler – The Liberty Cap: a Symbol of Freedom

The Liberty Cap was an American emblem of freedom at the time of our Revolution. It is of ancient origin, and was worn by formerly enslaved persons to show that they were free. In the early part of the 19th century due to the growing tensions between the North and the South over the issue of slavery this emblem of freedom was allowed to fade from our national consciousness. *Howard Winkler is a past President of the Arlington Historical Society.*





This pre-1907 postcard features an abandoned mill stone. It is monochrome printed in a Prussian blue color, in imitation of the cyanotype process for photographs that was popular in the era.

Contact Us

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"Fire," the dog of the Robbins Sisters, in a Litchfield studio portrait in Arlington c. 1885. (Robbins Library)



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