

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Lexington, Worcester, and the American Revolution:

Debunking the Myth of the "Shot Heard 'Round the World"

RAY RAPHAEL



Editor's Introduction: *HJM is proud to select as our Editor's Choice Award for this issue Ray Raphael's Founding Myths: Stories that Hide Our Patriotic Past (Revised, Tenth Anniversary Edition, 2014) published by The New Press. Ray Raphael is a prolific writer who has authored a series of groundbreaking books on the American Revolution. These include (among many): A People's History of the American Revolution: How Common People Shaped the Fight for Independence (The New Press, 2001), The First American Revolution: Before Lexington and Concord (The New Press, 2002), Founders: The People Who Brought You a Nation (The New Press, 2009), and most recently, The Spirit of '74: How the American Revolution Began (The New Press, 2015). As in any study of the American Revolution, Massachusetts features prominently among the places, protagonists, and events described.*

In Founding Myths: Stories that Hide Our Patriotic Past, Raphael brilliantly deconstructs both popular and professional distortions of our nation's past. He includes chapters on Paul Revere, Sam Adams, Molly Pitcher, Valley Forge, Yorktown, the role of slaves, the origins of the Declaration of Independence, the portrayal of the founding fathers, and British brutality. He explores not only the truth behind these myths, but painstakingly documents the process through which they were created and propagated by different generations of historians.

One might be surprised to discover that before Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1860 poem titled "Paul Revere's Ride," Revere "was not regarded as a central player in the Revolutionary saga (10)." Similarly, Sam Adams was not the "mastermind" behind events in Boston. Indeed, until the mid-nineteenth century "Boston's most celebrated idol" was not Adams but Dr. Joseph Warren, little known among the general public today (27). Likewise, one might be surprised to learn that Valley Forge was not the coldest winter of the Revolutionary War, nor did soldiers suffer "patiently": they complained, pillaged, deserted, and almost mutinied.

More intriguingly, the Declaration of Independence was not the first of its kind and the "founders" did not lead the nation towards independence. Nearly ninety locales (towns and states) had already passed their own "declarations of independence" in the early months of 1776 which included lengthy lists of grievances against the crown. Many conventions and associations had sent explicit instructions to "their representatives in state conventions to instruct their representatives in Congress to vote for independence" (128). Thus, many of the delegates to the Continental Congress had received specific instructions from their constituents to vote in favor of independence. Jefferson and a five-member drafting committee drew upon the ideas and language of these declarations in constructing their own. Raphael concludes that, "Jefferson was one of many scribes, not the sole muse, of the American independence movement" (129).

This last example reveals Raphael's underlying objective, aptly captured in the book's subtitle, Founding Myths: Stories that Hide Our Patriotic Past. For Raphael, many of the "myths" about the American Revolution "hide" or distort its true grandeur and its true heroes – ordinary Americans who, for over a decade, had been engaged in debating new ideas, crafting revolutionary doctrines, creating new forms of organization, taking bold and unprecedented actions, and, finally, taking up arms against the British.

As Raphael explains on his excellent website (which includes many articles and primary source documents at www.rayraphael.com):

Our country's beginnings were chaotic and confusing, just as the present is. Inspirational stories of the birth of the nation tidy up that

mess by featuring heroes and heroines, clear plotlines, and happy endings. Many were invented in the nineteenth century to serve the interests of an expansive nationalism, but we cling to them today because they honor America in steadfast ways. Revolutionary Era historians must look past these simplifications and distortions to discover what really happened in those formative years, when our nation was being defined.

In this Editor's Choice excerpt, we are reprinting Chapter Four, titled "The Shot Heard 'Round the World." The editors felt this was an ideal selection for our readers. Massachusetts and Maine (part of Massachusetts until 1820) are the only states to have an official state holiday commemorating the anniversary of the Battles of Lexington and Concord, the first battles of the American Revolution (Wisconsin celebrates it as a public school holiday only). Many readers will be surprised to learn that Massachusetts citizens outside of Boston had already thrown off British authority over twenty months before these two battles during the "Massachusetts Revolution of 1774" that culminated in events at Worcester. However, this earlier revolution remains uncommemorated and has been "lost in history" (89). Raphael documents the history of this forgotten revolution while exploring the many myths surrounding the "battles that all Americans learn (or mislearn) in their fifth-grade classrooms."

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Every year, over one million Americans commemorate "the shot heard 'round the world" with a patriotic pilgrimage to Minute Man National Historical Park on the outskirts of Concord, Massachusetts. On April 19, the anniversary of the famous event, reenactors dress up as colonial Minutemen and march from nearby towns to Lexington and Concord, where they exchange make-believe musket fire with friends and neighbors dressed as British Redcoats. Throughout the state, and in Maine and Wisconsin as well, "Patriots' Day" is celebrated as an official holiday.

The story is classic David and Goliath, starring rustic colonials who faced the world's strongest army. At dawn in Lexington on April 19, 1775, several hundred British Regulars, in full battle formation, opened fire on local militiamen. When the smoke had cleared, eight of the sleepy-eyed farmers who had been roused in the middle of the night lay dead on the town green.

In the wake of the bloodbath, to mobilize popular support, patriots proclaimed far and wide that the Redcoats had fired first. The Massachusetts Provincial Congress collected depositions from participants and firsthand

witnesses, then published those accounts that conformed to the official story under the title *A Narrative of the Excursion and Ravages of the King's Troops*. British authorities countered with their own official version: the Americans had fired first. Not surprisingly, this story received little circulation in the rebellious colonies.

Because of the biases and agendas of the witnesses, we can never know for sure who fired the first shot at Lexington. But we do know that the patriots won the war of words. “The myth of injured innocence,” as David Hackett Fischer calls it, became an instant American classic.¹ We have all learned that the British started the American Revolution when they opened fire on outnumbered and outclassed patriot militiamen on the Lexington Green. But this makes no sense. Revolutions, by nature, are proactive—they must be initiated by the revolutionaries themselves. The American Revolution had begun long before the battle at Lexington.

In 1836 the poet and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson coined a catchy phrase that has signified the event ever since: “the shot heard ’round the world.” Actually, Emerson’s poem “Concord Hymn” commemorated the fighting at the North Bridge in nearby Concord, and his celebrated “shot” was fired by Americans:

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April’s breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood,
And fired the shot heard ’round the world.

Over time, however, Emerson’s poem was relocated to Lexington, a site more hospitable to the story we wish to hear. At Lexington the farmers were clearly the victims, while at Concord they were not. The David and Goliath tale, highlighted by the image of bullying British troops mowing down Yankee farmers, has prevailed. Popular histories still repeat the story as it was first told by American patriots, making it very clear who fired the first shot: “British professionals... pump[ed] shot into the backs of fleeing Minute Men.”² Current textbooks routinely locate “the shot heard ’round the world” to the standoff at Lexington, not the “rude bridge” at Concord, where Emerson placed it. One grade school text, even as it quotes the “*Concord Hymn*” verbatim in a sidebar, says Emerson called the first shot fired at Lexington “the shot heard ’round the world.”³ A college text, after outlining the events at both Lexington and Concord, tries to have it both ways by misquoting Emerson, switching from the singular to the plural: “The first *shots* – ‘the “*shots* heard ’round the world,’ as Americans later called them –

had been fired. But who had fired them first?" It then discusses the debate over who had fired the first shot at Lexington, showing a clear preference for that location.⁴

But what if the roles were reversed? What if American Revolutionaries were actually Goliath, and the British occupying force, greatly outnumbered and far from home, more like David? In fact, the American Revolution did not begin with "the shot heard 'round the world," wherever it was fired. It started more than half a year earlier, when tens of thousands of angry patriot militiamen ganged up on a few unarmed officials and overthrew British authority throughout all of Massachusetts outside of Boston. This powerful revolutionary saga, which features Americans as Goliath instead of David, has been bypassed by the standard telling of history. By treating American patriots as innocent victims, we have suppressed their revolutionary might.

BELEAGUERED BOSTON

At Lexington, the story goes, poorly trained militiamen, roused from their slumber by Paul Revere, were surprised and mowed down by British Regulars. Surprised? Untrained? Unprepared? Let's take a closer look at events that culminated in "the shot 'heard round the world."

On December 16, 1773, patriots dressed as Indians dumped 342 chests of tea into Boston Harbor. On the night of April 18, 1775, sixteen months and two days later, British troops marched from Boston toward Lexington and Concord. Blood was shed, lots of it, and a war was on. What, exactly, happened during that intervening sixteen months and two days? How did an act of political vandalism lead to outright warfare?

Here is one response, repeated for generations in our textbooks and in almost all accounts of the American Revolution.

To punish Boston for what we now call the Boston Tea Party,⁵ Parliament passed four bills it called the "Coercive Acts" and colonists dubbed the "Intolerable Acts." The "most drastic" of these was the Boston Port Act, which closed the port of Boston.⁶ (The others are generally listed but rarely discussed in any detail.) This measure was supposed to isolate Bostonians from other colonists, but it had the reverse effect: "Americans in all the colonies reacted by trying to help the people of Boston. Food and other supplies poured into Boston from throughout the colonies."⁷

Meanwhile, leaders in twelve colonies gathered in the First Continental Congress to show support for Boston and present a united opposition to Britain's harsh move. Congress petitioned Parliament to change its course,

but Parliament remained firm. Six months later, British Regulars marched on Lexington and Concord.

Most of this account is correct – as far as it goes. Colonists did help Boston and form a Continental Congress, and British soldiers did march. But why did Britain take the offensive? Was it because other colonies came to the aid of Boston or because Congress complained? Do acts of charity or written protests, in the absence of stronger forms of resistance, generally lead to war? The beleaguered Boston story does not explain why British officials used military force against British citizens living in Massachusetts in April of 1775. Something critical is missing here. We need to see how political tensions resulted in actual warfare.

The problem begins with one false statement in the Boston-based narrative, namely, that closing the Boston Harbor was “the final insult to a long list of abuses.”⁸ In fact, it wasn’t so much the Boston Port Act that set one colony aflame and triggered the American Revolution, but the second of the offensive bills, the Massachusetts Government Act. In this measure, Parliament unilaterally gutted the 1691 Charter for Massachusetts, the people’s constitution. No longer could citizens call town meetings except with permission of the royal governor, and once they met, they could not discuss any items the governor had not approved. No longer could the people’s representatives choose the powerful Council, which functioned as the upper house of the legislature, the governor’s cabinet, and the administrative arm of provincial government. No longer could the people have any say in choosing judges, juries, or justices of the peace—local officials with the power to put citizens in jail or take away their property.

The people of Massachusetts, accustomed to home rule in local matters through their town meetings and a representative structure of government for a century-and-one-half, were thoroughly disenfranchised by the Massachusetts Government Act. Try to imagine, today, that our constitution was suddenly declared obsolete – not slowly eroded, but actually yanked away. This would spark considerable protest, and it did so then. Outraged citizens rose as a body to say, “No way!”

THE FIRST AMERICAN REVOLUTION

When the Boston Port Act took effect, other colonists passed the hat for relief, held days of prayer and fasting, embarked on another round of boycotts like those of the 1760s, and called for conferences to talk things over.⁹ These were common forms of political action in British North America. But when the Massachusetts Government Act took effect shortly afterward, the people

of that colony actually shut down the government and prepared for war. This was the stuff of revolution. Citizens of Massachusetts forcibly shed the old regime and began to replace it with their own.¹⁰

In June of 1774, upon hearing news of the Massachusetts Government Act, patriots sprung to action. In Worcester, on July 4, members of the radical American Political Society (APS) pledged to arm themselves with “Two Pounds of Gun Powder each 12 Flints and Led Answerable thereunto.”¹¹ Stephen Salisbury, a local merchant, sold so much gunpowder over the next few weeks that he contemplated building his own powderhouse.¹² They hadn’t yet figured out exactly what actions they would take to resist the Massachusetts Government Act, but they did know they would not submit to it, and they reasoned – correctly, as it turned out – that it would come to blows at some point.

The Massachusetts Government Act was due to take effect on August 1, 1774, and the first court to sit under the new provisions was scheduled to sit in remote Berkshire County, on the western edge of the province, on August 16. That court never convened. When the Crown-appointed officials showed up for work, they found themselves locked out of the Great Barrington courthouse and face-to-face with 1,500 patriots, who told them the court was closed.¹³

The next court on the schedule was to meet in Springfield on August 30, but on that day three thousand to four thousand patriots, marching “with staves and musick,” again shut it down. “Amidst the Crowd in a sandy, sultry place, exposed to the sun,” wrote one firsthand observer, the judges were forced to renounce “in the most express terms any commission which should be given out to them under the new arrangement.”¹⁴

Patriots who closed the courts in Great Barrington and Springfield proceeded unopposed, but General Thomas Gage, the newly appointed military governor of Massachusetts, vowed to take a stand in Worcester, where the court was supposed to meet on September 6. “In Worcester, they keep no Terms, openly threaten Resistance by Arms, have been purchasing Arms, preparing them, casting Ball, and providing Powder, and threaten to attack any Troops who dare to oppose them,” he wrote on August 27. “I shall soon be obliged to march a Body of Troops into that Township, and perhaps into others, as occasion happens, to preserve the peace.”¹⁵ Peace? If Gage did make good on his promise, it would look more like war – and this was more than seven months *before* Lexington and Concord.

But events soon took a dramatic turn. On September 1, taking the offensive in a rapidly escalating arms race, General Gage ordered British troops to seize powder stored in a magazine in nearby Somerville, not far

from Boston. As news spread, the story of British troops on the march took on a life of its own, and soon, across the Massachusetts countryside and proximate points of neighboring colonies, an estimated 20,000 to 100,000 angry men (this is the range of contemporary estimates, perhaps also a bit exaggerated), believing that the British Redcoats had killed six patriots and set fire to Boston, headed toward Boston to confront them.¹⁶ In some towns, nearly every male of fighting age participated in the “Powder Alarm,” as people soon called it. One firsthand observer described the frenzy of the moment:

[A]ll along were armed men rushing forward some on foot some on horseback, at every house women & children making cartridges, running bullets, making wallets, baking biscuit, crying & bemoaning & at the same time animating their husbands & sons to fight for their liberties, tho’ not knowing whether they should ever see them again.¹⁷

Alas, it was a false alarm. “The people seemed really disappointed,” one man told John Adams two months later, “when the news was contradicted.”¹⁸

After the patriots’ showing in the Powder Alarm, Gage reasoned that his troops would be vastly outnumbered. “The flames of sedition,” he conceded to British Secretary of State Lord Dartmouth, had “spread universally throughout the country beyond conception.”¹⁹ Gage had little choice but to let the judges fend for themselves, but judges alone could not uphold the power of the Crown and Parliament against such odds. The battle was won before it raged. The day before the court was slated to meet, the APS “Voted, not to bring our Fire-arms into Town the 6 Day of Sept.” Guns would not be needed; sheer numbers would suffice.²⁰

At dawn on September 6, 1774, militiamen from across the county of Worcester started marching into the town of Worcester. By ten o’clock, as the day grew hotter, 4,622 men from thirty-seven different towns stood at the ready. (We know the numbers because Breck Parkman, one of the participants, counted the men in each militia company.)²¹ Approximately half the adult male population of a county that ranged from the Rhode Island to the New Hampshire borders had mustered in force to topple British rule at the local level.

When two dozen Crown-appointed court officials showed up to work in their black suits and wigs, they found the courthouse doors barricaded. Locked out, they huddled instead in Daniel Heywood’s tavern, halfway

between the courthouse and the town common. There they waited, waiting for the throngs to determine their fates.

Across from the courthouse, at the home of blacksmith Timothy Bigelow, the Worcester County Committees of Correspondence tried to coordinate the day's activities, but members soon adjourned "to attend the body of the people" outside.²² Each of the thirty-seven militia companies, which had recently elected a new military captain, now selected a political representative as well, to serve for one day only—the ultimate in term limits. These men appointed a smaller committee, which visited the court officials to work out the details of their resignations. But the plan they settled on had to make its way back to the thirty-seven representatives, and through them to the "body of the people," who rejected the first draft. The process then began anew. The apparatus was democratic but cumbersome, heavily weighted at the bottom. Things moved slowly. People became impatient.

Finally, by mid-afternoon, the stage was set. The militiamen arranged themselves along Main Street, half on the Mill Brook side and the other half under the embankment to the west. The lines stretched for a quarter mile between the courthouse and Heywood's tavern, each company in formation, Uxbridge in front of the courthouse, Westborough next, and so on, down to Upton and Templeton, stationed outside Heywood's tavern. When all were in place, each of the two dozen court officials emerged from the tavern with his hat in his hand, reversing the traditional order of deference, and recited his disavowal of British authority to the first company of militiamen, then

Understand that there was any disorder. The list stands thus,

<i>Worcester 260</i>	<i>Princeton 60</i>	<i>Palmer 38</i>
<i>Uxbridge 156</i>	<i>Harvard 103</i>	<i>Sutton 500</i>
<i>Westborough 200</i>	<i>Hubbardston 55</i>	<i>Westminster 120</i>
<i>Rutland 150</i>	<i>Lunenburg 40</i>	<i>Oxford Troop 40</i>
<i>Athol 51</i>	<i>Western 100</i>	<i>N. Shrewsbury 100</i>
<i>Royalston 39</i>	<i>Winchenden 45</i>	<i>S. Shrewsbury 135</i>
<i>New Braintry 140</i>	<i>Southboro 35</i>	<i>Northboro 85</i>
<i>Brookfield 216</i>	<i>Chauvitt 200</i>	<i>Oxford 80</i>
<i>Dunlaps 130</i>	<i>Leicester 180</i>	<i>Oakham 50</i>
<i>Grafton 210</i>	<i>Spencer 164</i>	<i>Peterham 70</i>
<i>Holden 100</i>	<i>Sturbridge 150</i>	<i>Upton 100</i>
<i>Hardwick 220</i>	<i>Bolton 100</i>	<i>Templeton 120</i>
		<i>4722</i>

This, except Worcester & Spencer is by order in which 4 companies stood from Court House & Southward. viz. Uxbridge 1st, Westboro 2nd & a few company had arms

List of Participating Towns

This image shows part of a page listing the militia units and the number of men from 37 towns. The numbers ranged from 51 men (Athol) to 500 (Sutton), totaling 4,720.

walked to the next to repeat his recantation there, and in this manner made his way slowly through the gauntlet, all the way to the courthouse. Over thirty times apiece, so all the militiamen could hear, the judges, justices of the peace, court attorneys, and others whose power had been sanctioned by the Crown pledged “that all judicial proceeding be stayed . . . on account of the unconstitutional act of Parliament . . . which, if effected, will reduce the inhabitants to mere arbitrary power.”²³ With this humiliating act of submission, all British authority disappeared from Worcester County, never to return.

As in Great Barrington, Springfield, and Worcester, patriots shut down the governmental apparatus in Salem, Concord, Barnstable, Taunton, and Plymouth—in every county seat outside Boston, where garrisoned British soldiers could protect the judges. From the time the Massachusetts Government Act was supposed to take effect, the county courts, which also functioned as the administrative arms of the local governments, were powerless. According to merchant John Andrews, rebels in Plymouth were so excited by their victory that they:

attempted to remove a Rock (the one on which their fore-fathers first landed, when they came to this country) which lay buried in a wharfe five feet deep, up into the center of the town, near the court house. The way being up hill, they found it impracticable, as after they had dug it up, they found it to weigh ten tons at least.²⁴

Meanwhile, all thirty-six Crown-appointed Council members were told by their angry neighbors to resign. Those who refused were driven from their homes and forced to flee to Boston, where they sought protection from the British army.

In direct violation of the new law, the people continued to gather in their town meetings. When Governor Gage arrested seven men in the capital of Salem for calling a town meeting, three thousand farmers immediately marched on the jail to set the prisoners free. Rather than initiate a bloodbath, Gage ordered two companies of British soldiers to retreat. Throughout Massachusetts, town meetings continued to convene. According to one contemporary account:

Notwithstanding all the parade the governor made at Salem on account of their meeting, they had another one directly under his nose at Danvers, and continued it two or three howers longer

than was necessary, to see if he would interrupt 'em. He was acquainted with it, but reply'd—"Damn 'em! I won't do any thing about it unless his Majesty sends me more troops."²⁵

More than half a year before the "shot heard 'round the world" at Lexington, Massachusetts patriots had seized all military authority outside Boston. On September 21, the Worcester County Convention took it upon itself to reorganize the county militia into seven new regiments and urged each town "to enlist one third of the men... between sixteen and sixty years of age, to be ready to act at a minute's warning."²⁶ These were the famous "Minutemen," formed half a year before they would respond to the call at Lexington. Other counties did the same. The story of the Minutemen does not begin at Lexington, where we normally put it; it is part and parcel of the Revolution of 1774.

By early October patriots had seized all political authority from British officials and vested it in their town meetings, county conventions, and a Provincial Congress. Throughout the preceding decade, patriots had written petitions, staged boycotts, and burnt effigies—but this was something new. In the late summer and early fall of 1774, patriots did not simply *protest* government, they *overthrew* it. In his diary, one disgruntled Tory from Southampton summed it all up: "Government has now devolved upon the people, and they seem to be for using it."²⁷

Many patriots at that point were ready to formalize the end of British rule and form an entirely new government, based not on royal authority but on the will of the people. On October 4, 1774—a full twenty-one months before the Continental Congress approved the document prepared by Thomas Jefferson—citizens of Worcester, Massachusetts, declared that they were ready for independence. Four weeks earlier, on September 6, they had toppled British authority. Now they were ready to replace the old government with a new one. In a set of instructions for its representative to the forthcoming Provincial Congress, which was about to meet in defiance of Governor Gage's orders, the town meeting told Timothy Bigelow:

You are to consider the people of this province absolved, on their part, from the obligation therein contained [the 1691 Massachusetts charter], and to all intents and purposes reduced to a state of nature; and you are to exert yourself in devising ways and means to raise from the dissolution of the old constitution, as from the ashes of the Phenix [sic], a new form, wherein all officers shall be de-pendent on the suffrages of the people for

their existence as such, whatever unfavorable constructions our enemies may put upon such procedure. The exigency of our public affairs leaves us no other alternative from a state of anarchy or slavery.²⁸

Patriots in Worcester had a word for their dramatic move: “independency.” For the British and the Tories, any mention of “independency” was considered treasonous—and even patriot leaders shied away. Samuel Adams wrote from the Continental Congress to his comrades back home, cautioning them not to “set up another form of government.”²⁹ John Adams, also a member of Congress, wrote that “Absolute Independency . . . Startle[s] People here.” Most congressional delegates, he warned, were horrified by “The Proposal of Setting up a new Form of Government of our own.”³⁰ Perhaps Samuel and John Adams were right, for if Massachusetts moved too quickly, other colonies might balk and not come to their aid. But right or wrong, this was a revolution by and for the people of Massachusetts; even the most radical members of Congress could not keep pace.

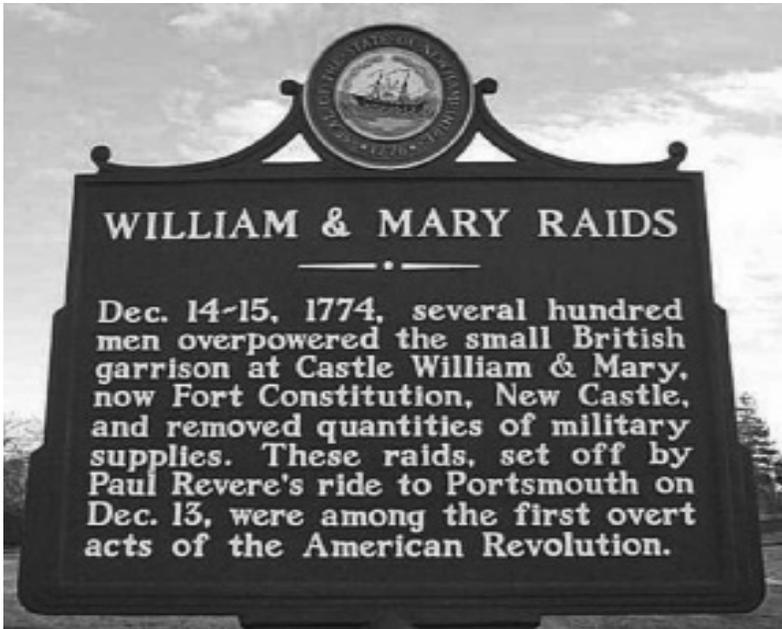
PREPARATIONS FOR DEFENSE

The most pressing duties of the new Provincial Congress were to collect taxes and prepare for war. On October 26 delegates listed exactly what they would need to defend against a British invasion:³¹

16 field pieces, 3 pounders with carriages, irons & c., wheels for ditto, irons, sponges, ladles & c., @ £30	£480.00
4 ditto, 6 pounders, with ditto, @ £38	£152.00
5 tons lead balls, @ £33	£165.00
1,000 barrels of powder, @ £8	£8,000.00
And 75,000 flints	£10,000.00
Contingent charges	£1,000.00
In the whole	£20,837.00

All the political and military maneuvers of the next several months would focus on how to procure these armaments and how to keep arms and powder the patriots already possessed out of the hands of the British.

On December 14, 1774, four months before Lexington, patriots in nearby New Hampshire made the first offensive move of the war: four hundred local



Raphael refers to this event as the real “first shot” of the American Revolution. Note also the role of Paul Revere. Revere, along with others, carried messages during many critical junctures. Raphael concludes elsewhere: “Let’s realize he was not a one-trick, one-trip pony. Many times, and on many horses, did he ride. His mission: to connect people and groups. To succeed, a revolution requires careful coordination among various organizations. . . . That can only happen if people communicate with each other, and in those days, missives were carried either by ship or by horse. Revere made use of the latter, more versatile and less vulnerable.” (See the online *Journal of the American Revolution*, April 18, 2014)

militiamen stormed Fort William and Mary in Portsmouth, took down the king’s colors, and carried away approximately one hundred barrels of the king’s gunpowder (some of which was later put to use during the Battle of Bunker Hill). The following day, one thousand patriots marched again on the fort, this time removing all the muskets and sixteen cannon. This armed attack on a British fortress was not merely a prelude to war, it was an act

of war: cannons and muskets were fired. Emerson's "shot heard 'round the world" was not the first shot of the American Revolution.³²

Although the offensive against Fort William and Mary was the first frontal military assault, it was not the first time patriots removed British arms and ammunition. Using stealth, cunning, and insider information, patriots had already taken cannon and munitions from British magazines in Boston, Providence, Newport, and New London.³³

On February 24, 1775, almost two months before Lexington, British intelligence reported that fifteen thousand "Minute Men" were "all properly armed." The report noted: "There are in the Country thirty-eight Field pieces and Nineteen Companies of Artillery most of which are in Worcester, a few at Concord, and a few at Watertown," as well as ninety to one hundred barrels of powder at Concord. Further, the Provincial Congress's Committee of Supply was trying to procure more arms yet, "to be deposited at Concord and Worcester." If British soldiers tried to seize any of this cache, they were likely to trigger a massive mobilization of angry patriots.³⁴

The spies also reported, though, that there were "eight Field pieces in an old Store or Barn, near the landing place at Salem," which were to be removed shortly. "The seizure of them would greatly disconcert their schemes," it concluded – and General Gage acted accordingly. On Sunday, February 26, he ordered 240 soldiers to find and remove eight field pieces and a supply of powder that patriots were hiding at Salem. Local citizens, gathered together in church, learned of the invasion in time to remove the arms and ammunition to a safer location. To stop the British advance, they simply raised a drawbridge that lay on the route of the marching troops.³⁵ When the British invaded Lexington seven weeks later, they would avoid the mistakes they had made in Salem: they marched by night, not on the Sabbath, and they chose a route that did not have a drawbridge.

On April 2, over two weeks before the march of Lexington, the February 11 issue of the *London Times* arrived in Boston and set off a firestorm. Vowing to starve the errant colonists into submission, Lord North was closing the Newfoundland fisheries to Americans, cutting off all trade with anyone but the British, and mobilizing two thousand additional seamen and "a proper number of frigates" to enforce this embargo. Further, the King had dispatched four additional regiments from Ireland to Boston. Everybody in town knew immediately what this meant. Governor Thomas Gage, who was also Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in North America, had been ridiculed through the winter by his own soldiers — "Old Woman," they called him — for sitting by and letting the patriots take charge of Massachusetts without fighting back. His excuse, he said, was that he did

not have sufficient troops to take the offensive. Now, with reinforcements imminent, he would certainly make a move.³⁶

But where would he strike? Could he possibly attack Worcester, the very heart of resistance? There, according to a spy report written in French, patriots had accumulated fifteen tons of powder (hidden in places unknown), thirteen small cannon (proudly displayed but poorly mounted in front of the meeting house on Main Street), and various munitions (in the hands of a merchant named Salisbury and “un grand chef” named Bigelow). But the road there was rough, the journey arduous, and the patriots numerous, vigilant, and excessively hostile. Gage’s soldiers would likely be ambushed and possibly annihilated.³⁷

Concord offered better prospects, for it was much more accessible. Unlike the 40-mile trek to Worcester, this 20-mile jaunt could be accomplished in a single night, which allowed the possibility of a surprise attack. It wouldn’t be much of a surprise, however, because patriots easily surmised that Concord would be the likely target. On April 7, working with Doctor Joseph Warren and the Boston Committee of Correspondence, Paul Revere traveled from Boston to Concord with an urgent message: British Regulars would soon march to seize the patriots’ cannons and other military stores, possibly the very next day. Even that message was not really necessary, however, because patriots in Concord, where the Provincial Congress was sitting, had figured it out themselves. Two days earlier, James Warren had informed his wife, Mercy Otis Warren: “This town [Concord] is full of cannon, ammunication, stores, etc., and the [British] Army long for them and they want nothing but strength to induce an attempt on them. The people are ready and determine to defend this country inch by inch.”³⁸

Ready they were, thirteen days before the Redcoats showed up. Patriots by then had been preparing for half a year for this counter-offensive by the British Army, yet they continued to refine their intelligence network. On the morning of April 16, Paul Revere made a second ride westward, to Lexington this time, to confer with Samuel Adams and John Hancock, who had sought refuge there, about how to respond to Gage’s imminent move. On his way back, Revere met also with patriots in Cambridge and Charleston to fine-tune their warning systems, including the now-famous signal lantern ploy. When the big moment arrived, the Minutemen who had been training for months needed to get the word.

By dawn of April 19, 1775, when Regulars finally showed up at the Lexington Green, and later that morning, when they continued their march to Concord, patriot militias were as prepared as they could ever expect to be.

They were willing partners in this war-in-the-making. They knew the likely consequences, and they were ready to face those consequences.

LOST IN HISTORY

The Massachusetts Revolution of 1774 was the most successful and enduring popular uprising in the nation's history, the only one to permanently remove existing authority, yet this momentous event is never highlighted and rarely even mentioned in our textbooks. A logical question to ask of any revolution would be: "Where, when, and how did political and military authority first transfer from one group to another?" Strangely, though, we don't ask this of our own Revolution, the very founding of our nation. If we *did* posit that fundamental question, the answer would be obvious and the Massachusetts Revolution of 1774 would become a standard and indispensable part of our national narrative, featured on every timeline and included on many a test.

Our most triumphant rebellion did not always suffer such neglect.

The British *Annual Register*, written immediately in the wake of the 1774 revolution, gave considerable attention to the forced resignations, court closures, and preparations for war throughout the countryside of Massachusetts.³⁹ Early American historians—William Gordon in 1788, David Ramsay in 1789, and Mercy Otis Warren in 1805—covered the response to the Boston Port Act, but they highlighted the Massachusetts Government Act as the major catalyst leading to the American Revolution. According to Ramsay, the Massachusetts Government Act:

excited a greater alarm than the port act. The one effected only the metropolis, the other the whole province. . . . Had the parliament stopped short with the Boston port act, the motives to union and to make a common cause with that metropolis, would have been feeble, perhaps ineffectual to have roused the other provinces; but the arbitrary mutilation of the important privileges...by the will of parliament, convinced the most moderate that the cause of Massachusetts was the cause of all the provinces.⁴⁰

Gordon described the popular uprising in considerable and vivid detail. In response to the "obnoxious alteration" dictated by the Massachusetts Government Act, "the people at large" prepared "to defend their rights with the point of a sword," and even the moderates "became resolute and resentful."⁴¹

Warren went even further, calling the 1774 rebellion “one of the most extraordinary eras in the history of man: the exertions of spirit awakened by the severe hand of power had led to that most alarming experiment of leveling of all ranks, and destroying all subordination.”⁴²

This was too much of a revolution for conservative historians and schoolbook writers of the next generation, who argued that the “American Revolution” was not really revolutionary and that patriots were not to be construed as “rebels.” Paul Allen, writing in 1819, devoted seventeen pages to the aid sent to Boston, while he assigned less than a paragraph to the resistance triggered by the Massachusetts Government Act.⁴³ Salma Hale’s 1822 school text emphasized the themes of sympathy and solidarity, with nary a word about the over-throw of British authority.⁴⁴ The following year Charles Goodrich, in his popular *History of the United States of America*, wrote about Virginia’s “expression of sympathy” with Boston, while ignoring altogether the people’s rebellion in Massachusetts.⁴⁵

The Good Samaritan approach certainly played better to children. Stories featuring neighbor-helping-neighbor conformed to educational goals, while those showing bullying crowds did not. Richard Snowden’s school history, written in biblical style, made the events of 1774 sound like the story of the three wise men at the nativity: “Now it came to pass, when the people of the provinces had heard that their brethren in town were in a great strait, they sent to speak comfortable words unto them, and gave them worldly gifts.”⁴⁶

By midcentury, the patriotic historian George Bancroft was comfortable enough with the idea of a people’s revolution to pay some respect to the uprising of 1774. Although Bancroft spoke of “sympathy” for Boston, he also devoted the better part of three chapters to the dramatic resistance to the Massachusetts Government Act. He did not, however, embrace its democratic character: it was under the direction of Boston’s Joseph Warren, he claimed, who was told what to do by an absent Samuel Adams.⁴⁷ With this imaginary chain of command, Bancroft placed the first overthrow of the British firmly in the hands of America’s favorite revolutionary. (See Chapter 2.)

In 1865 William Wells followed Bancroft in placing Adams at the forefront of affairs in Boston, even though he was in Philadelphia at the time. But with no credible evidence linking Adams to the revolution in the countryside, Wells simply ignored those events.²⁹ For Wells and most subsequent writers, Samuel Adams had to be the prime mover of all crowd actions—and if Adams was not present, the tale was not told. Most historians since that time have unwittingly followed the lead of British officials like Secretary of State for the Colonies Lord Dartmouth, who simply could not believe that authority

had been overturned by “a tumultuous Rabble, without any Appearance of general Concert, or without any Head to advise, or Leader to Conduct.”⁴⁸

One might think that progressive historians of the early twentieth century—people like John Franklin Jameson, Charles Beard, and Carl Becker—would have taken notice of this popular uprising, but since it did not appear at first glance to be a class struggle, it eluded their attention. While radical historians failed to pick up on this forgotten revolution, moderates saw no need to rock the boat. In their monumental, 1,300-page compilation of primary sources published in 1958, Henry Steele Commager and Richard B. Morris failed to document this vital episode. Instead, they included a complete section titled “All America Rallies to the Aid of Beleaguered Boston,” another on the debates within the First Continental Congress, and over thirty pages on Lexington and Concord.⁴⁹

WHY THE STORY IS RARELY TOLD

There are several overlapping reasons why we have dropped the story of America’s first and most successful revolution, each deeply rooted in our national self-image and the nature of storytelling. Nationalistic and narrative demands have conspired against this saga. Ironically, on several counts, the very strengths of the Revolution of 1774 have insured its anonymity.

This revolution was democratic by design; the people not only preached popular sovereignty but practiced it. Although the toppling of authority enjoyed unprecedented, widespread support, there were no charismatic, self-promoting leaders to anchor the story and serve as its “heroes.” There could never be too much democracy, these people believed. These rebels ran their revolution like a mobilized town meeting, each participant as important as any other; all decisions, even during their mass street actions, had to be approved by “the body of the people.”⁵⁰ This made for a stronger revolution, but it simultaneously helps explain why we know so little about a popular movement that would not even tolerate individual leadership.

This revolution involved no bloodshed, for resistance was unthinkable. The *force* of the people was so overwhelming that *violence* became unnecessary. The handful of Crown-appointed officials in Worcester, when confronted by 4,622 angry militiamen, had no choice but to submit. Had opposition been stronger, there might have been violence; that would have made for a bloodier tale but a weaker revolution – indeed, more like a civil war, with the population divided. If it bleeds it leads, they say, but because of its overwhelming popularity, this revolution didn’t bleed.

The Massachusetts Revolution of 1774 was ubiquitous, erupting everywhere at once. General Gage had no idea where or when he might oppose it. But a widespread uprising, not marked by a single iconic event, is difficult to chronicle; there is no clear storyline, starting with A and climaxing at Z. This revolution occurred throughout the countryside, while the media of the times were confined to Boston. Again, the broad participation led to a stronger revolution but a less compelling tale.

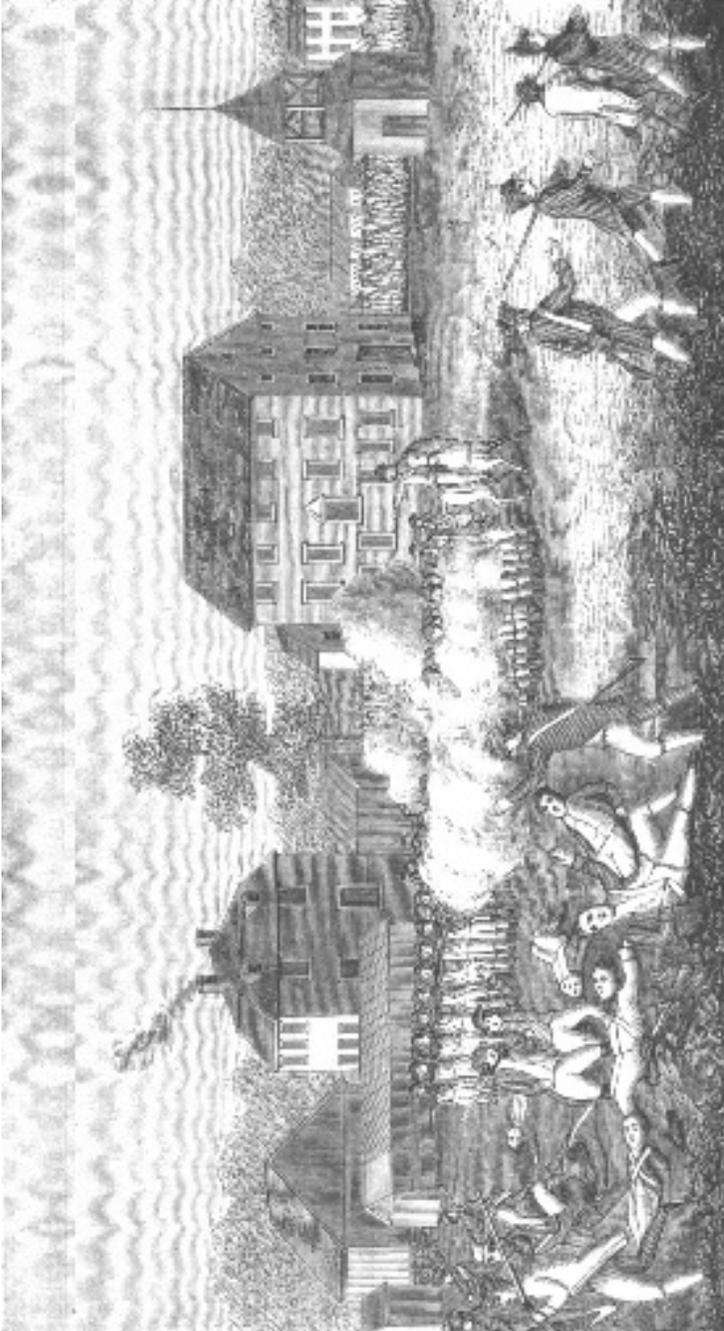
The Massachusetts Revolution of 1774, like all true revolutions, was a bullying affair. Who is David, and who is Goliath, when crowds numbering in the thousands force a few unarmed officials to cower and submit? Contrast this exertion of brute strength to “helping beleaguered Boston,” a far gentler tale. Particularly now, when our powerful nation is undeniably Goliath, we prefer to balance our national self-image by treating the original patriots as David, overcoming great odds.

Like conservatives of the early nineteenth century, we remain fearful of our own revolution. All narratives of early United States history include accounts of an uprising labeled by its opponents Shays’ Rebellion, which was modeled after the Revolution of 1774.⁵¹ In 1786, exactly twelve years after Massachusetts farmers had closed the courts and dismantled the established government, many of the very same people tried to repeat their earlier triumph. In Great Barrington, Springfield, Worcester—all the same places—disgruntled citizens of rural Massachusetts, calling themselves “Regulators,” once again gathered in crowds to topple existing authority. There were two important differences between the uprisings of 1774 and 1786: the latter was

Evolution of Iconography

The following two images, set in the exact same scene, offer differing perspectives on the event. The 1775 engraving by Amos Doolittle fully illustrates David Hackett Fischer’s “myth of injured innocence.” The Americans are portrayed only as passive victims, either shot or fleeing, moving away from the scene. The figures are drawn in a quaint, folk art style. In contrast, the 1903 print shows the militiamen as far more robust figures who are organized and actively engaged in fighting back.

Amos Doolittle (1754–1832) was an American engraver and silversmith, known as “The Revere of Connecticut.” He first became famous for his four engravings depicting the battles of Lexington and Concord. He arrived in Cambridge ten days after the battles, inspected the sites, made sketches of the scenes, and interviewed participants.



"The Battle of Lexington" (1775) by Amos Doolittle



"The Battle of Lexington" (1903)

Published by John H. Daniels & Son (Boston). Source: Library of Congress <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/204669976/>

much smaller, involving crowds that numbered in the hundreds rather than the thousands, and it failed. In our histories, we have chosen to feature the smaller, failed rebellion in preference to the larger, successful one. Although we like to commemorate the break from Britain, we hesitate to celebrate the raw and rampant power of the people who made this happen.

Finally, we don't tell this story because we prefer other stories that appear to contradict it. If Paul Revere woke the sleepy-eyed farmers, how could those farmers *already* have staged a revolution and prepared for war? If Sam Adams was commander-in-chief of revolutionary unrest, how could anonymous rebels throughout the countryside, on their own, have cast off British rule without him? If the "most drastic" move by Parliament in 1774 was to close the port of Boston, and if this was the "final insult" to the colonists, how could a *different* act of oppression, the Massachusetts Government Act, have been the truly intolerable act, the one that disenfranchised an entire colony and led its citizens to topple British rule? If the "shot heard 'round the world" was the true start of the American Revolution, how can there have been a successful revolution *before* that shot was fired?

EMBATTLED FARMERS: "A GREAT SPONGY MASS"

Depicting the start of the American Revolution as a single iconic moment, "the shot heard 'round the world," confuses the revolution itself with the *defense* of that revolution. Worse yet, when Emerson's "shot" migrates from Concord, where it is fired by a patriot, to Lexington, where it is allegedly fired by a British soldier, it becomes a passive event: patriots become victims, not true revolutionaries.

Politically, patriots needed to portray themselves that way. According to a spy report sent to General Gage on April 9, ten days before Lexington, Massachusetts rebels were divided into two camps:

The people without doors are clamorous for an immediate commencement of hostilities but the moderate thinking people within [the Provincial Congress] wish to ward off that period till hostilities shall commence on the part of the Government which would prevent their being censured for their rashness by the other Colonies & that made a pretence for deserting them.⁵²

The shots fired on April 19 placed radical and moderate patriots once again on the same page.

Because blood had finally flowed, not just in dribbles but in torrents, the events of April 19, 1775, assumed great symbolic as well as political significance. The memory of that special moment in our nation's history is indelibly inscribed and frequently celebrated in American lore. The "embattled farmers," the story goes, responded to Paul Revere's alarm, grabbed their hunting guns, rushed to the scene of the action, then ran through the hills, hiding behind trees and stone walls while firing away at the arrogant Redcoats, who marched foolishly on the road below.

This simple memory does not do justice to what these men did, for it pays no heed to the collective effort that went into preparing for this momentous day, nor to the organized manner in which the patriots engaged their adversary. Those farmers did not just run off willy-nilly when roused from their sleep by an intricate and very effective communications network; they mustered into their units, then marched together to the scene of the action. Once there, they continued to fight in as methodical a manner as the situation permitted. Historian David Hackett Fischer, the meticulous chronicler of the day's battles, concludes that from the confrontation on North Bridge mid-morning to the time British reinforcements arrived just east of Lexington around 2:30 p.m., patriot militiamen "stood against the British force in large formations at least eight times. Six of these confrontations led to fighting, four at close quarters. Twice the British infantry was broken. ... Altogether, it was an extraordinary display of courage, resolve, and discipline by citizen-soldiers against regular troops." Even during the final stages of the fighting, which appeared more random, militiamen traveled from one skirmish to the next in a reasonably coordinated pattern, communicating with each other and with their officers to insure their tactical engagements would achieve maximal results.⁵³

Although they functioned in organized units, the method of their organization, by military standards, was not at all conventional. Officers were elected, not appointed, and they engaged in open dialogue with common soldiers. On-the-spot strategic decisions — whether to proceed to the left or the right, to fight or withdraw — were made not from the top down, but by deliberations and debates of the body of men in arms.⁵⁴ Vocal disagreements with commanding officers, far from being punishable offenses, were the norm. By contrast, the British privates who were ordered to march through the night were never even told their purpose or destination.

This was a new kind of army, not very seasoned in fighting but well versed in the arts of collective decision making. The "embattled farmers" thought and acted as empowered citizens working in concert, not as isolated individuals taking pot-shots at Redcoats. The group processes of Massachusetts militiamen

had been well rehearsed during the preceding decade of political protest, and beyond that, for more than a century, through their town meetings and community management of churches. Indeed, self governance for these men had a deep religious foundation: the “covenant,” an agreement amongst men to worship God together while acting collectively in their own behalf. The Minutemen who fought so effectively on April 19 had actually signed such a covenant, agreeing to forsake the security of their homes to secure the common good: “We whose names are hereunto subscribed, do voluntarily inlist our selves, as Minute Men, to be ready for military operation, upon the shortest notice,” they had promised each other.⁵⁵

This was not a “real” army in the European mold, but an army it was, and militarily effective. Although George Washington and others would complain repeatedly about the untrained militia, they were better trained than we have been led to believe. Back in December of 1774, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress had acknowledged the unique character of its army-in-the-making by changing its drill book from a standard British text to one drawn up by Timothy Pickering, a lawyer from Salem. Patriot soldiers should be “clearly informed of the reason of every action and movement,” Pickering’s manual stipulated. This differed markedly from the European model, Pickering claimed: “Tis the boast of some that their men are mere machines ... but God forbid that my countrymen should ever be thus regarded.” Guided by this philosophy, militiamen over the next four months went through their drills, suspecting they would soon be called into action.⁵⁶

These Massachusetts militiamen, and others who followed in their steps over the next few years, trained in their own way, but train they did, and in times of crisis, they showed up. In the words of military historian John Shy, “A reservoir, sand in the gears, the militia also looked like a great spongy mass that could be pushed aside or maimed temporarily but that had no vital center and could not be destroyed.”⁵⁷ As British soldiers retreated from Concord back to Boston, they were besieged by just such a “spongy mass.” Early that morning, while marching toward Lexington and Concord, Redcoats had amused themselves by singing *Yankee Doodle*, a pejorative little ditty that depicted their opponents as ignorant, provincial farmers. They failed to grasp that to defend the revolution they staged many months before, these farmers had already turned themselves into soldiers. Every time we treat American patriots as no more than unsuspecting victims who needed to be aroused from their slumber, we repeat the mistake the Redcoats made. Although Emerson’s embattled farmers had not opened until the confrontation by Concord’s North Bridge on April 19, the shots, cartridges, and muskets they used had long stood at the ready, as had the men who fired them. Those

months of preparation were part and parcel of the American Revolution, which was well in process by the time the world heard the first shot.

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BOOKS BY RAY RAPHAEL

The Spirit of '74: How the American Revolution Began (The New Press, 2015)
Founding Myths: Stories That Hide Our Patriotic Past (Tenth Anniversary Edition, Revised and Expanded, The New Press, 2014)

Constitutional Myths: What We Get Wrong and How to Get It Right (The New Press, 2013)

Mr. President: How and Why the Founders Created a Chief Executive (Alfred A. Knopf, 2012)

Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation, Co-edited with Alfred F. Young and Gary B. Nash (Alfred A. Knopf, 2011)

The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Founding Fathers and the Birth of Our Nation (Alpha Books: Penguin, 2011)

Founders: The People Who Brought You a Nation (The New Press, 2009)
The First American Revolution: Before Lexington and Concord (The New Press, 2002)

A People's History of the American Revolution: How Common People Shaped the Fight for Independence (The New Press, 2001. Paperback: HarperCollins, 2002)

HJM

Notes

1. David Hackett Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 327.

2. A. J. Langguth, *Patriots: The Men Who Started the American Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 240.
3. Joy Hakim, *A History of US* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3: 73.
4. Alan Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation: A Concise History of the American People, Volume 1*, Seventh Edition (McGraw-Hill, 2014), 102.
5. Americans didn't call this controversial act of vandalism a "Tea Party" at the time. Alfred F. Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 108-113. Public reception, even among those who opposed British policies, was divided. Washington, although he believed "the cause of America ... ever will be the cause of America," chided Bostonians for "their conduct in destroying the tea." Washington to George William Fairfax, June 10, 1774, *The Papers of George Washington*, W. W. Abbot and Dorothy Twohig, eds. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983), Colonial Series 10: 94-101. Franklin and many others believed the East India Company should be compensated for the ruined merchandise.
6. David M. Kennedy and Lizabeth Cohen, *The American Pageant*, Volume 1, Fifteenth Edition (Cengage Learning, 2014), 118.
7. James West Davidson and Michael B. Scott, *America: History of Our Nation* (Prentice Hall, 2014), 152.
8. William Deverell and Deborah Gray White, *Holt McDougal United State History: Beginnings to 1877* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), 112.
9. Much is made in many narratives about the "Day of Prayer and Fasting" held in Virginia, the most populous colony, on June 1, 1774. Supposedly, this revealed how devoted the Virginians were to the people of Massachusetts, since it caused the British to disband the Virginia House of Burgesses. In fact, many Virginians were acting in self-interest, not charity, when they decided on this course. The previous year, growers of tobacco (the basis of Virginia's economy) had announced that by 1775 they would withhold their crops from the market. They hoped that British merchants would then buy tobacco at higher prices, anticipating the shortage to come. Since many tobacco planters were in debt, however, they feared that creditors would take them to court in retaliation, and if their scheme failed, the courts could seize their property. Supporting Boston with a "Day of Prayer and Fasting" and a pledge to boycott British trade solved all their problems. Not only did these actions give their market manipulation a patriotic cover, but they also caused the British government to dissolve the legislature—and since the legislature had not yet authorized the court fees, that meant the courts would have to close as well. The planters' plan worked: tobacco prices soared in anticipation of future shortages while growers sold out their crops before nonexportation was scheduled to take

effect. Meanwhile, no British merchants could take any Virginians to court for unpaid bills.

Boston had asked other colonies to withdraw trade from both Britain and the West Indies. For the reasons just mentioned, Virginia planters were more than willing to comply with respect to Britain, but they refused to end their lucrative trade with the Indies. Similarly, South Carolina went along with much of the boycott but insisted on an exemption for rice, its main moneymaker. These actions, traditionally touted as sympathetic gestures of support, had decidedly self-serving overtones. Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999], 115–129.

10. A “revolution,” according to the *Random House Webster’s College Dictionary*, is “a complete and forcible overthrow and replacement of an established government or political system by the people governed.” By this definition, the people of Massachusetts staged a textbook example of a revolution.

11. American Political Society, Records, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester.

12. Stephen Salisbury to Samuel Salisbury, July 22, 1774, Salisbury Family Papers, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester; Ray Raphael, *The First American Revolution: Before Lexington and Concord* (New York: The New Press, 2002), 108.

13. The story of the 1774 overthrow of British authority throughout Massachusetts, outlined in this and subsequent paragraphs, is told and referenced in Raphael, *First American Revolution*, 59–168.

14. Joseph Clarke to unknown recipient, August 30, 1774, in James R. Trumbull, *History of Northampton, Massachusetts, from its Settlement in 1654* (Northampton: Gazette Printing Co., 1902), 346–348; reprinted in Raphael, *First American Revolution*, 98–101.

15. Gage to Secretary of State Lord Dartmouth, August 27, 1774, *Correspondence of General Thomas Gage*, Clarence E. Carter, ed., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931), 1: 366.

16. Raphael, *First American Revolution*, 130–138. Meanwhile, in Cambridge, some 4,000 patriots forced the lieutenant-governor of Massachusetts, the second highest official in the province, to resign his seat on the Council.

17. Ezra Stiles, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, Franklin B. Dexter, ed., (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1901), 479–481.

18. John Adams, *Diary and Autobiography*, L. H. Butterfield, ed., (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1961), 2:160.

19. Gage to Dartmouth, September 2, 1774, Gage, *Correspondence*, 1:370.

20. American Political Society, Records.

21. Ebenezer Parkman, Diary, American Antiquarian Society.

22. Proceedings of the Worcester County Convention, September 6-7, William Lincoln, ed., *The Journals of Each Provincial Congress of Massachusetts in 1774 and 1775, and of the Committee of Safety, with an Appendix, containing the Proceedings of the County Conventions* (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1838), 635. From this source, with the Parkman diary, we can reconstruct the events of the day.
23. Lincoln, *Journals and Proceedings*, 637.
24. John Andrews to William Barrell, October 6, 1774, in Massachusetts Historical Society, "Letters of John Andrews of Boston, 1772-1776," *Proceedings* 8 (1864-1865), 373-374.
25. Andrews to Barrell, August 29, 1774, in Andrews, "Letters," 348.
26. Proceedings, Worcester County Convention, September 20-21, 1774, Lincoln, *Journals and Proceedings*, 643.
27. Jonathan Judd, Jr., Diary, v. 2 (1773-1782), Forbes Library, Northampton, entry for September 7, 1774.
28. Worcester Town Records, Worcester City Hall, reprinted in Franklin P. Rice, ed., *Worcester Town Records from 1753 to 1783* (Worcester: Worcester Society of Antiquity 1882), 244. These instructions can be viewed in Ray Raphael, "Instructions: The People's Voice in Revolutionary America," *Common-Place* 9:1 (October 2008), URL: <http://www.common-place.org/vol-09/no-01/raphael/> or on the documents page of rayraphael.com. URL: <http://www.rayraphael.com/documents.htm>
29. Samuel Adams to Joseph Warren, September 25, 1774, Harry Alonzo Cushing, ed., *Writings of Samuel Adams* (New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1907), 3: 159.
30. John Adams to Joseph Palmer, September 26, 1774, and John Adams to William Tudor, October 7, 1774, in Robert J. Taylor, ed., *Papers of John Adams* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 2: 173 and 2: 187.
31. Journal of First Provincial Congress, Lincoln, *Journals and Proceedings*, 30.
32. A good account of the storming of Fort William and Mary appears in Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*, 52-58. Documentary sources are reprinted in Charles L. Parsons, "The Capture of Fort William and Mary, December 14 and 15, 1774," *New Hampshire Historical Society Proceedings* 4 (1890-1905), 18-47.
33. *Providence Gazette*, December 23, 1774; Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*, 57; J. L. Bell, "Behold, the Guns Were Gone!": *Four Brass Cannon and the Start of the American Revolution* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2001).
34. L. Kinvin Wroth, ed., *Province in Rebellion: A Documentary History of the Founding of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1774-1775* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), document 671, 1969. Benjamin Church, an informant who was a member of the Provincial Congress's key Committee of Safety, was the likely source of this intelligence. Three days earlier, an intelligence report stated that

“Twelve pieces of Brass Cannon mounted, are at Salem and lodged near the North River, on the back of the town.” (Ibid., document 670, 1968).

35. Henry S. Commager, and Richard B. Morris, eds., *The Spirit of ‘Seventy-Six: The Story of the American Revolution as Told by the Participants* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), 1: 63-65.

36. Andrews, “Letters,” 401.

37. Allen French, *General Gage’s Informers* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968).

15; “General Gage’s Instructions, of 22d February, 1775, to Captain Brown and Ensign D’Berniere,” and “Narrative, &c.,” *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections* 4 (1916): 204-218.

38. James Warren to Mercy Otis Warren, April 6, 1775, *Warren-Adams Letters* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1917), 1:44-45.

39. *The Annual Register for the Year 1775* (London: J. Dodsley, 1776), 2–3, 16–17.

40. David Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: R. Aitken and Son, 1789; reprinted by Liberty Classics in 1990), 1: 106–107.

41. William Gordon, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Establishment of the Independence of the United States of America*, reprint edition (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1969; first published in 1788), 1: 382, 380, 377.

42. Mercy Otis Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution, interspersed with Biographical, Political and Moral Observations* (Boston: E. Larkin, 1805; reprinted by Liberty Classics in 1988), 1: 145–146. In 1776 Samuel Adams himself took note of the dramatic turn of events “since the stopping of the Courts in Berkshire.” In context, he seemed to be marking the beginning of the Revolution by this event. (Samuel Adams to Joseph Hawley, April 15, 1776, in Cushing, *Writings of Samuel Adams*, 3: 281.)

43. Paul Allen, *A History of the American Revolution: Comprising All the Principal Events Both in the Field and in the Cabinet* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1819) 1: 180–198.

44. Salma Hale, *History of the United States, from their First Settlement as Colonies, to the Close of the War with Great Britain in 1815* (New York: Collins and Hannay, 1830; first published in 1822), 142–144.

45. Charles A. Goodrich, *A History of the United States of America* (Hartford: Barber and Robinson, 1823), 154.

46. Richard Snowden, *The American Revolution Written in the Style of Ancient History* (Philadelphia: Jones, Hoff and Derrick, 1793), 1: 14.

47. George Bancroft, *History of the United States of America* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1879; first published in 1854), 4: 379, 389, 390.

48. William V. Wells, *The Life and Public Services of Samuel Adams* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1969; first published in 1865).

49. Henry Steele Commager and Richard B. Morris, *The Spirit of Seventy-Six*,

The Story of the Revolution as Told by its Participants (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1958), 31–38, 45–56, 66–97.

50. Here is one telling example. On a September evening in 1774 Abigail Adams, at home in Braintree, Massachusetts, from her window, observed some two hundred men who had gathered to seize gunpowder from the local powder house and force the sheriff to burn two warrants he was attempting to deliver. Some might call these men a “mob,” but Adams observed otherwise. Successful in their missions, the men wanted to celebrate with a loud “huzzah.” Normally they would, but there were extenuating circumstances this time. Should they, or should they not, disturb the Sabbath? “They call’d a vote,” Abigail reported to John, who was in Philadelphia at the time attending the First Continental Congress, and “it being Sunday evening it passed in the negative.” (Abigail Adams to John Adams, September 14, 1774, in *Adams Family Correspondence*, ed. L. H. Butterfield [Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963], 1:152.)

51. For the mislabeling of “Shay’s Rebellion,” see below, “Conclusion: Why We Tell Tall Tales.”

52. French, *General Gage’s Informers*, 20-21.

53. Fischer, *Paul Revere’s Ride*, 249.

54. Some examples: As they mustered in the early morning hours at Wright’s Tavern, Concord’s farmers-turned-soldiers debated with each other the prospect of defending their town. When the Regulars finally reached Concord, no militiamen stood in the way; some had wanted to make a stand there, but they were outvoted. The younger, more impetuous Minutemen then sallied forth to the east, thinking they might face off against the Regulars from that stance, but upon viewing the enemy’s vast numbers, they wisely retreated. Again on Meetinghouse Hill, with a commanding view of Main Street, the Concord militiamen debated whether to stand and fight or stage a strategic retreat, and again they settled on the wiser course, waiting for their numbers to grow. At the North Bridge they also consulted each other and debated the wisest course. These were collective strategic decisions, not knee-jerk individual responses. Fischer, *Paul Revere’s Ride*, 204-205, 208-209.

55. Herbert T. Wade and Robert A. Lively, eds., *This Glorious Cause: The Adventures of Two Company Officers in George Washington’s Army* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 9.

56. Timothy Pickering, *An Easy Plan of Discipline for a Militia* (Boston: S. Hall, 1776), 9-10, quoted in Justin Florence, “Minutemen for Months: The Making of an American Revolutionary Army before George Washington, April 2—July 2, 1775,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 113:1 (2003), 76-77.

57. John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 238.

Americans !---Liberty or Death !---Join or Die !



Or, American ORACLE of Liberty.

VOL.

WORCESTER, WEDNESDAY, MAY 5, 1775.

(NUMB. 219.)

While most colonial newspapers had circulations of between five hundred and one thousand, the *Massachusetts Spy* had a circulation of 3,500 from subscribers throughout the thirteen colonies, making it the most popular American newspaper at the time. It was designed specifically for the middle class of craftsmen and founded in 1770 by Isaiah Thomas and his former master Zechariah Fowle. Although Thomas initially tried to make the *Spy* an impartial voice, he soon found it impossible to do so in Boston, the epicenter of the growing imperial crisis. Thomas's strident Whig position is evident in his masthead: Americans! — Liberty or Death! — Join or Die!

Thomas's views frequently got him in trouble with the Royal authorities. On April 16, 1775, he smuggled the press out of Boston and removed it to the inland Whig stronghold of Worcester. When paper finally arrived in early May, he was able to publish this edition, the first thing ever printed in Worcester. As was customary with Colonial newspapers, the breaking news appeared in the inside of the publication and thus on page three is Thomas's account of the battles of Lexington and Concord. The *Spy* was one of 27 Colonial newspapers that carried news of the battles at Lexington and Concord. But Thomas's version is one of the few that is clearly an eyewitness account. It began with the following paragraph:

Americans! forever bear in mind the BATTLE of LEXINGTON! where British Troops, unmolested and unprovoked wantonly, and in a most inhuman manner fired upon and killed a number of our countrymen, then robbed them of their provisions, ransacked, plundered and burnt their houses! nor could the tears of defenseless women, some of whom were in the pains of childbirth, the cries of helpless, babes, nor the prayers of old age, confined to beds of sickness, appease their thirst for blood! - or divert them from the DESIGN of MURDER and ROBBERY!