

“Sowing the Seeds of Liberty: Lexington and the American Revolution”
Opens April 16, 2007

"Sowing the Seeds of Liberty" is the Museum's new cornerstone exhibition on Lexington and the American Revolution. It will open on Patriot's Day 2007. This new long-term installation is designed to stimulate new ways of thinking about the battle at Lexington on April 19, 1775, a conflict that has long sparked the American imagination.

"History doesn't happen in the abstract—it is made by people," says Hilary Anderson, director of exhibitions and collections at the Museum, summing up the exhibition's premise. " 'Seeds of Liberty' is told through the eyes and voices of the people who shaped our nation's struggle for independence."

Much of the exhibition's focus centers on two main Lexington leaders, John Parker and Jonas Clarke. Parker, among the many roles he played, was the elected captain of the local militia. He was in charge of the men on the town common when the British regiment arrived from Boston. Legend has it that his last order to his men was, "Don't fire unless fired upon, but if they mean to have a war, let it begin here." The other, Jonas Clarke, was minister of the local church. He was a strong and well-respected voice in favor of independence. "Seeds of Liberty," however, makes clear that the revolution involved more than those that stood on the Green. The entire town was involved. The idea of revolution permeated all facets of life. In the small town of Lexington, everyone was connected, either by family, trade, or church—often by all three. The exhibition's organization reveals the story.

Introduction

In Lexington ca. 1774, everyone was a farmer. People may have had other jobs, such as blacksmith, cooper, or wheelwright, but all were tied to the land. Every man was also citizen-soldier. A compelling image in the introduction underscores that theme as a farmer transforms into a soldier and then back again. Images and artifacts relating to farming—especially dairy farming, which was central to the Lexington economy—are on display in this section.

The Loring Kitchen

Visitors are introduced to family life in the 1770s through the Loring family. Visitors meet the Lorings in their kitchen where the family of five women, two men, and a baby worked and gathered. Visitors will learn about the tasks the Loring girls undertook such as making cheese and butter, cooking, cleaning, and producing wool, all of which contributed to the family economy. Visitors will also have a chance to see how the Loring's world connected them to the larger world of trade.

Taxes, Trade, and Tension

The roots of revolution are revealed here, and visitors learn how tension mounted in the region over several years. Historic, as well as not-so-famous, protests are examined, such as the Boston Tea Party and the lesser-known Lexington Tea Bonfire. A video tells of the gathering storm between 1765-1774 as seen through the eyes of Paul Revere. Known

chiefly for his “midnight ride,” this famous patriot was also a Freemason, a silversmith, and a political cartoonist, and he maintained strong ties to Lexington.

John Parker: Wheelwright

In addition to his historic role on Lexington Green, John Parker was a local businessman. Primarily a wheelwright, the talented Captain Parker also crafted furniture, barrels, tools, and presses. Through examples of the kind of tools Parker used, several of which visitors can use themselves, the exhibition brings Parker’s world to life.

Common Cause: The Role of the Meeting House

Lexington residents discussed political matters and also tended to spiritual matters in the meeting house. The Reverend Jonas Clarke occupied a unique position in Lexington as both a spiritual and a political leader. As tensions built over a period of years, townspeople initiated military preparations at the meeting house. They stockpiled military supplies in the building, including storing gun powder under the pulpit. Lights and sound are used to transform the meeting house from a place of town business to a house of worship.

Confrontation on the Common

Here visitors learn how the day of April 19, 1775, unfolded. The visitor begins the journey with the march of the British regulars from Boston, to Paul Revere’s ride, to the skirmish in Lexington, concluding with the British retreat to Boston. Portraits and military equipment are on view. An interactive computer map demonstrates the progress of the battle over time and space.

An Enduring Symbol

The final area examines the Battle of Lexington as an enduring American symbol. The question “Where are they now?” is answered through epilogues about many of the chief players in the day’s drama. Visitors can also share why April 19, 1775, is important to them.