



#2 1995

A Chronology Of The Revolutionary War

with emphasis on Bedford County, Pennsylvania's role

Continued

1775

"the shot heard 'round the world"

Of the many incidents of the American Revolutionary War, those which occurred at the two small Massachusetts villages of Lexington and Concord are perhaps the most revered by the descendants of the American Patriots. Even if they may not know to connect the phrase *"the shot heard 'round the world"* with the incident at Lexington, Massachusetts, most people are at least familiar with the phrase. The stand which the Massachusetts militia made against the British infantry at the village green of Lexington resulted in the first musketfire of an eight year war that would evolve from a civil uprising to a world war that would stretch all the way from the American colonies to the sub-continent of India. It would affect most of the major European Nations. France, by providing large sums of money to the Patriot cause would be forced into bankruptcy and pushed along the path of a major revolutionary struggle. The "Fourth English War", as the Dutch called the conflict, would engage the Netherlands in open fighting. The influence that the Netherlands held over trade on the high seas would be irreparably damaged and she would lose her important, and only, port in the western hemisphere ~ St. Eustasius. The economy of Portugal's colonial empire, consisting of Brazil, was very dependent on the British~American commercial system and therefore was strained as a result of the American Revolution. The intellectual influence of the American Patriots also contributed to the Minas Conspiracy of 1789 and the Bahian Plot of 1798 which, despite the fact of being suppressed at the time, revealed growing tensions between that colony and her mother country. The rebellion against the mother country shown by the American Patriots also influenced the people of Ireland and precipitated the formation of "associations" in the American example. It has been estimated that by 1779 there were approximately 40,000 militia raised within Ireland and mob violence erupted in centers such as Dublin. Russia, under Emperess Catherine II, at first adopted a policy of "patient neutrality". As the war progressed and British vessels seized Russian ships, the policy was changed to "armed neutrality" and Russia proceeded to enforce a naval blockade against Great Britain to defend neutral shipping. Through her efforts, the League of Armed Neutrality was formed between Russia, Sweden and Denmark; the Netherlands, Prussia and Portugal would join the League later on. Spain entered the conflict on 16 June, 1779 with a formal declaration of war against Great Britain; she had signed an offensive alliance, the Convention of Aranjuez, with France in April of that year which vowed that the two nations would support each other until Spain could recover possession of Gibraltar. Halfway around the world, in India and the so-called Dutch Spice Islands of the Pacific, a ferocious struggle that would result in the deaths of

many, would develop because of the conflicting Dutch, French and English interests in that region.

As the noted British Historian, Piers Mackesy, wrote in his book, *The War For America 1775-1783*, "The struggle had opened in a grey dawn at Lexington; its last shot was fired eight years later on the other side of the world outside a dusty town in southern India."



Major General Thomas Gage, recently named Royal Governor of the Massachusetts~Bay Colony and now in command of the British army quartered in and around Boston for the purpose of enforcing the New England Restraining Acts, was made aware that the American colonists had stockpiled munitions at the small village of Concord. Concord lay only a short distance northwest of Boston. Gage determined, during early April, 1775, to take a body of troops westward to claim possession of those munitions. The mission was intended to be carried out at night and in secrecy so that the British could avoid a confrontation with the colonial militia. Dr. Joseph Warren, who was sympathetic to the emerging Patriot cause, learned of the mission and devised his own secret plan to warn his fellow patriots.

The Massachusetts~Bay Committee of Correspondence had, by early-1775, organized volunteer patriots into a militia association known as the *Minutemen*. The Minutemen were simply militia which would be ready at a minutes' notice if necessary. It should be noted that, despite the effects of popular legend and folklore, and although the term, Minutemen, has often been used in reference to almost any Revolutionary War period militia, the term actually refers specifically and only to the volunteer troops raised in Massachusetts~Bay in the early months of 1775. The threat of danger posed by the restrictive New England Restraining Act motivated the need for that association. The militia that would later be raised in Massachusetts~Bay during the course of the war were not even considered to be *Minutemen*; they were then designated as either *Militia* or *Continental Line*, as was the case in all of the other colonies.

Dr. Warren, on April 16, 1775, solicited the help of a Boston silversmith, Paul Revere, to ride to the nearby village of Lexington. Dr. Warren was aware that two delegates of the Continental Congress, John Hancock and Samuel Adams, were staying there and he wished to warn them of the British plans. They would be better suited to decide what course of action the local patriots should take. Revere made the trip and conferred with Hancock and Adams. They made plans for Revere to arouse the Minutemen when the British marched from Boston. The militia would attempt to halt the British advance near Lexington; they hoped that a show of force would be sufficient to dissuade the British from their mission. Paul Revere returned to Boston that same night. On the way he stopped to request the assistance of other associates residing in the village of Charlestown. A signal would be needed to inform the patriot sympathizers residing on the mainland west of the Boston peninsula of the route the British would take from Boston. In Revere's own words, they

"were apprehensive it would be difficult {for a messenger} to cross the Charles River or get over Boston Neck."

The steeple of North Church in Charlestown would provide the perfect point from which a lantern could be exposed as a signal. It was decided that if the British began to move southward and over Boston Neck, the only land route out of the city, which led through Roxbury and Brookline, a single lantern would be lit. If the British took the shorter route across Back Bay two lanterns would be lit and exposed. The patriot sympathizers outside of the patrolled bounds of Boston would be able to alert their fellow Massachusetts~Bay colonists of the British movements even if Revere failed in his mission. (It is interesting to note that legend and myth have served to reverse the true facts of the story. Because of the poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's famous poem, *The Midnight Ride Of Paul Revere*, most people assume that the lanterns were placed to notify Paul Revere to begin his ride.)

The British troops were assembled on Boston Common in the southern part of the city around ten o'clock on the evening of 18 April, 1775. They boarded boats and crossed Back Bay to Lechmere Point east of Cambridge. They waded ashore and spent an inordinate amount of time while supplies were distributed. In the cool spring night air, with their clothes wet from wading through the water, the British troops were no doubt anxious to get moving.

From the North Church shown two lanterns. Perhaps they were seen by some of the infantry and grenadier troops milling about on the shore, but the reason for their being there was known only to Revere's patriot associates. In a letter written to Dr. Jeremy Belknap in 1798, Paul Revere noted the activities of that night, particularly of his famous "ride":

"On Tuesday evening, the 18th, it was observed that a number of soldiers were marching towards the bottom of the Common. About ten o'clock, Dr. Warren sent in great haste for me and begged that I would immediately set off for Lexington, where Messrs. Hancock and Adams were, and acquaint them of the movement, and that it was thought they were the objects. When I got to Dr. Warren's house, I found he had sent an express by land to Lexington - a Mr. William Dawes."

"I left Dr. Warren, called upon a friend and desired him to make the signals. I then went home, took my boots and surtout, went to the north part of the town, where I kept a boat. Two friends rowed me across Charles River, a little to the eastward where the Somerset man-of-war lay. It was then young flood, the ship was winding, and the moon was rising. They landed me on the Charlestown side. When I got into town, I met Colonel Conant and several others. They said they had seen our signals. I told them what was acting and went to get me a horse..."

"I set off upon a very good horse. It was then about eleven o'clock and very pleasant. After I had passed Charlestown Neck... I saw two men on horseback under a tree. When I got near them, I discovered they were British officers. One tried to get ahead of me, and the other to take me. I turned my horse very quick and galloped toward Charlestown Neck, and then pushed for the Medford road. The one who chased me, endeavoring to cut me off, got into a clay pond... I got clear of him, and went through Medford, over the bridge, and up to Menotomy. In Medford, I awakened the captain of the minute men; and after that I alarmed almost every house, till I got to Lexington. I found Messrs. Hancock and Adams at the Rev. Mr. Clark's; I told them of my errand and enquired for Mr. Daws; they said he had not been there...After I had been there about half an hour, Mr. Daws came; we refreshed ourselves, and set off for Concord."

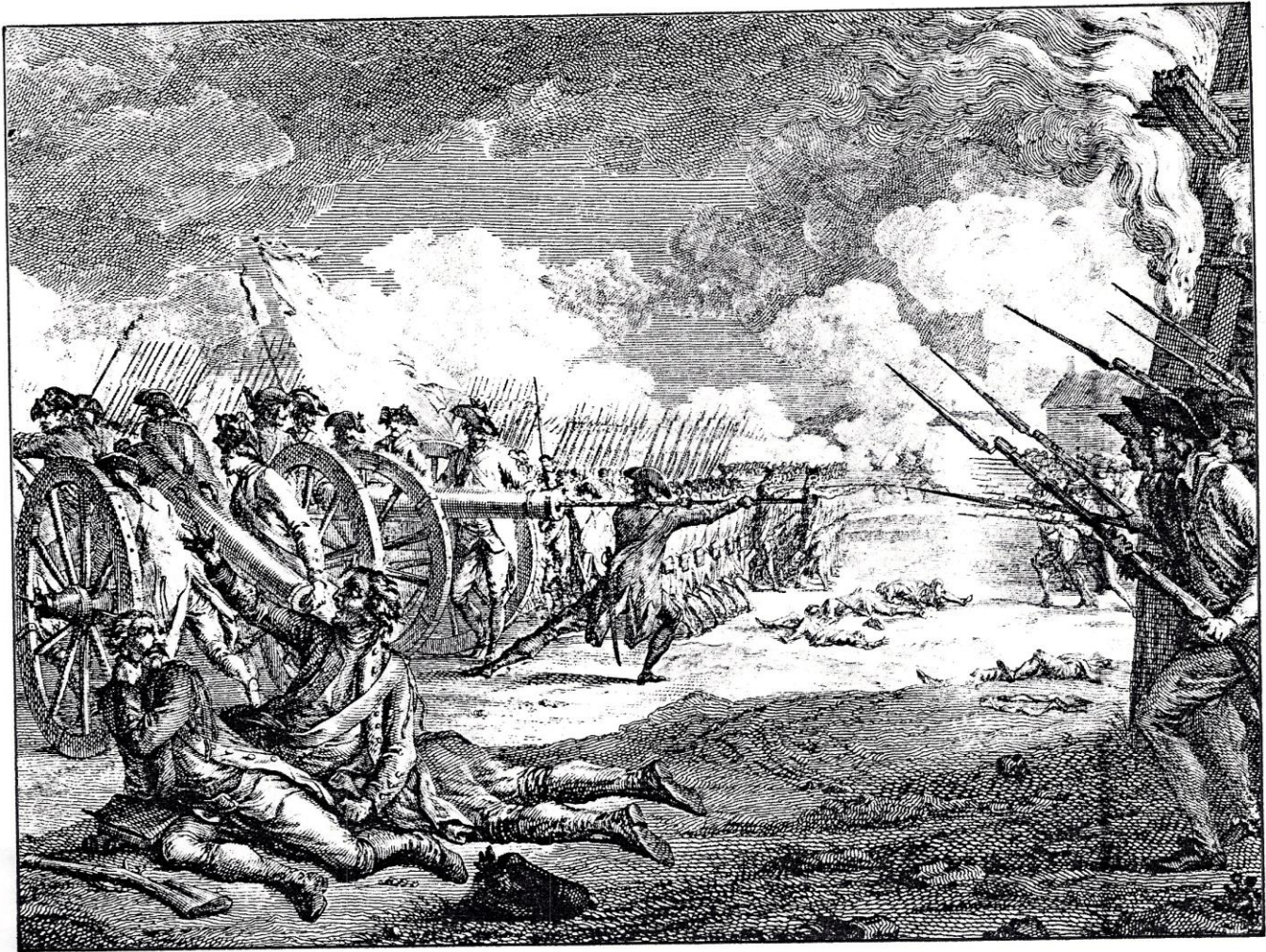
William Dawes had taken the land route across Boston Neck and then northward through Cambridge to Lexington, which explained his lateness. Revere and Dawes had not reached Concord before meeting up with Dr. Samuel Prescott, whom Revere recalled was "a high Son of Liberty". Prescott was returning from an evening visit with his sweetheart and upon being told of their mission, offered to join them in spreading the alarm. When the three had arrived at a point about halfway between Lexington and Concord they were brought to a sudden halt by a party of British officers. Dawes and Prescott escaped the trap, but Revere was taken captive and, with a pistol to his head, transported back to Lexington. Revere's letter to Dr. Jeremy Belknap continued by stating:

"We rode till we got near Lexington meeting-house, when the militia fired a volley of guns, which appeared to alarm them (the British officers holding him) very much. The major inquired of me how far it was to Cambridge, and if there were any other road. After some consultation, the major rode up to the sergeant and asked if his horse was tired. He answered him he was - he was a sergeant of grenadiers and had a small horse. "Then," said he, "take that man's horse." I dismounted, and the sergeant mounted my horse, when they all rode towards Lexington meeting-house.

I went across the burying-ground and some pastures and came to the Rev. Mr. Clark's house, where I found Messrs. Hancock and Adams. I told them of my treatment, and they concluded to go from that house towards Woburn."

The Lexington town bell was tolled shortly after midnight, following Revere's arrival in that place. About seventy minutemen {some estimates placed the number at one hundred and forty} left the comfort of their beds and made their way to the triangular shaped town common. After some time, without the appearance of any British soldiers and the possibility that they had turned back to Boston, the militiamen were told they could go back to their homes. They were cautioned, though, to be on the alert; they might be called out again that night. Many of them went instead to the nearby Buckman Tavern to wait.

Just before dawn of the 19th of April, 1775, at some time between four o'clock and four-thirty, drums beat the call once more. Between fifty and seventy men again hurried to Lexington Common and formed a line. Major John Pitcairn also heard that call to arms. Pitcairn, second in command



Journée De Lexington, by F. Godefroy. An exaggerated view of the battle by a French artist, 1784.

to Lieutenant Colonel Francis Smith, had been chosen to lead the British column by General Gage. At the sound of the drum roll Pitcairn was just reaching the outskirts of the town on its south side. He halted his column momentarily for them to load their muskets. He then doubled the ranks and ordered them forward at double time pace. As the British troops came round both sides of the church toward the common, they saw before them the two ragged lines of the militia. They were not actually blocking the road to Concord, but their presence posed a threat nonetheless.

Major Pitcairn rode ahead of his troops and called out to the Massachusetts-Bay militiamen to lay down their firearms and vacate the ground. Ebenezer Munroe, one of the militiamen who stood in the line on Lexington Common, noted that:

"The British troops came up directly in our front. The commanding officer advanced within a few rods of us and exclaimed, 'Disperse, you damned rebels! You dogs, run! ~ Rush on, my boys!' and fired his pistol."

Colonel Francis Smith, the mission's top commander, submitted a different story about the opening fight of the war. His version stated that:

"Our troops advanced toward them, without any intention of injuring them, further than to inquire the reason of their being thus assembled, and if not satis~

factory, to have secured their arms; but they in confusion went off, principally to the left ~ only one of them fired before he went off, and three or four more jumped over a wall and fired from behind it among the soldiers; on which the troops returned it..."

The various eyewitness reports disagree on the actual circumstances by which the first shot was fired and to whom that "shot heard 'round the world" could be attributed. Both, Major Pitcairn and Captain John Parker, who commanded the militia, had ordered their respective troops not to fire unless to return fire directed at them. Captain Parker reportedly told his men:

"Don't fire unless fired upon! But if they want war, let it begin here."

Depositions given by various of the patriots who stood on the common that morning stated that a member of the militia near the edge of the green had attempted to fire his musket at one of Pitcairn's subalterns, but the powder flashed in the pan. It is believed that the first shot was fired from the vicinity of the Buckman Tavern, or from behind the wall that ran beside that property. The patriots' statements noted that as soon as that shot split the tension hanging in the air the British troops were given the order to open fire. American witnesses standing near the center of the militia line attested that they heard the British commander, Pitcairn, shout to his troops "fire, fire damn you fire". The British reports would claim that no such order was given by the major; rather, the British troops responded spontaneously to that initial shot and began firing without orders.

Following the first barrage of British musketry, Pitcairn's troops continued to discharge their muskets at the colonial militiamen. The militiamen, meanwhile, dispersed and fled for cover. Eight of them lay dead on the field and ten were wounded, including Captain Parker who had been shot in the leg. The British troops charged after the retreating militiamen, all the while shouting so loudly that orders, if they had been given, could not be heard.

According to one member of Parker's militia none of the Americans had discharged their muskets as they faced the oncoming British troops. The British did suffer one casualty, a slight wound, the particulars of which were corroborated by a deposition made by Corporal John Munroe. Munroe stated that:

"After the first fire of the regulars, I thought, and so stated to Ebenezer Munroe ...who stood next to me on the left, that they had fired nothing but powder; but on the second firing, Munroe stated they had fired something more than powder, for he had received a wound in his arm; and now, said he, to use his own words, 'I'll give them the guts of my gun.' We then both took aim at the main body of British troops ~ the smoke preventing our seeing anything but the heads of some of their horses ~ and discharged our pieces."

Colonel Smith appeared on the scene soon after the engagement. He was evidently appalled at the sight of the dead colonials and the disorder of his own troops. He directed a drummer to beat out a tattoo for his men to lay down their arms and then he assisted Major Pitcairn in restoring order among their troops. After the British troops were reformed into columns Colonel Smith allowed them to fire a traditional victory volley and then give three cheers. Then, to the tune of fife and drum, they marched off toward Concord. The time was nearly eight o'clock in the morning.



As Captain John Parker had predicted, a war was indeed started there are on the town common of Lexington, Massachusetts, a war that would cost many lives on this continent, upon the oceans and on foreign lands halfway around the world.

This chronological history of the Revolutionary War will be continued in a future newsletter.

2nd QUARTERLY MEETING

The 2nd Quarterly Meeting of the Blair County Chapter, SAR will be held on Saturday April 15, 1995 at 12:00noon. The meeting will be conducted at the Waffle King Restaurant in Altoona. We hope that you will be interested and attend.

Compatriot E. Merle Glunt will be the guest speaker for the meeting program. (See item bellow)

DAR LUNCHEON INVITATION

The Standing Stone Chapter, DAR has invited the members of the Blair County Chapter, SAR (and their guests) to a luncheon. It will be held on Saturday April 22, 1995 at 12:00noon at the Days Inn at Huntingdon. Prior reservations are not required.

BLAIR COUNTY CHAPTER, SAR MEETING PROGRAM

In order to infuse a little more variety into the Quarterly Meetings of the Blair County Chapter an idea was suggested at the last meeting that a short discussion or other type of program be presented following the business portion of the meeting. The following points were suggested.

1. The program should be short. Fifteen to twenty minutes would be sufficient. Any longer and interest might drop.
2. The speaker can be anyone, SAR Compatriot members or non-members.
3. The subject matter can be anything that relates, in some way, to the American Revolutionary War or that time period. The subject would not need to be academic though. For example, a discussion about powder horns would pertain to equipment used by the Revolutionary War Patriots. Also for example, a reading of General George Washington's Last Will and Testament would not necessarily be academic, but it might be interesting. Also for example, a story about a Compatriot member's Revolutionary War ancestor would be appropriate.
4. The subject matter could be presented in any way imaginable. The speaker might want to simply read an article or portion of a book to the group. Slides or videotape could be used to present the subject. A display of artifacts could be laid out on a side table or simply passed around from person to person. The only requirement would be that the speaker would notify the chapter secretary at least a week prior to the scheduled meeting date if any special equipment would need to be brought to the meeting.

The chapter will need someone to coordinate or schedule the speakers for each upcoming meeting. The person who performs that duty would not necessarily need to be a regular attendee of the meetings; the coordination effort could be handled and then the information on who will be the speaker (and what the subject will be) at the next meeting could be forwarded to me (Larry Smith) for inclusion in the newsletter that precedes the meeting. Please consider volunteering to serve as the "program coordinator"; your help will be appreciated.