
A HISTORY OF US

Grenadiers, dragoons, regulars, redcoats—they're all British soldiers.

Redcoats march through Concord looking for weapons and ammunition while their officers spy out the land. Too late.

Would they go by the long land route over the Boston neck? Or would they take the shorter route—by boat across the water to Charlestown and then on foot from there?

Billy Dawes didn't wait to find out. He pretended to be a drunk farmer and staggered past the British sentry who stood guard at the neck. As soon as he was out of sight of the guard, Dawes jumped on a horse and went at a gallop. He knew the redcoats would start out soon, and he shouted that message at each Patriot house he passed.

That same dark night Paul Revere sent someone to spy on the British. "Find out which way the redcoats will march," the spy was told. "Then climb into the high bell tower of the North Church and send a signal. Light one lantern if they go by land. Hang two lanterns if they go by sea."

Revere got in a boat and quietly rowed out into the Charles River. A horse was ready for him on the Charlestown shore. He waited—silently. (Revere was a known Patriot and would have been arrested if the British had found him outdoors at night.)



"A View of the Town of Concord" by Amos Doolittle.
The Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Connecticut.

*And lo! as he looks, on the belfry's height
A glimmer, and then a gleam of light!
He springs to the saddle, the bridle he turns,
But lingers and gazes, till full on his sight
A second lamp in the belfry burns!*

Now he knew! The redcoats would take the water route across the Charles River, just as Paul Revere was doing. What happened next? Well, both Billy Dawes and Paul Revere rode hard, through the night, warning everyone in the countryside that the British were coming. They met at Lexington in time to tell Sam Adams and John Hancock to escape. But before they could go on to Concord, they were stopped by a British patrol. The redcoats took their horses. Luckily, by this time, a third man, Dr. Samuel Prescott, was riding with Dawes and Revere. (Prescott had been visiting the girl he intended to marry, who lived in Lexington.) The doctor managed to escape from the British, ride home to Concord, and warn everyone there.

The American farmers were ready, and they grabbed their guns. They were called “minutemen” because they could fight on a minute’s notice. (Some had been trained fighting in the French and Indian War.) Captain John Parker was the leader of the minutemen, and what he said on that day is now carved in stone near the spot where he must have stood. “Stand your ground. Don’t fire unless fired upon. But if they mean to have a war let it begin here!”

And it did begin right there, at Lexington. Each side said the other fired the first shot. No one knows who really did, but a poet named Ralph Waldo Emerson called it “the shot heard round the world.” (Can you see why?)

When the smoke cleared, eight American farmers lay dead. It was April 19, 1775. The American Revolution had begun.

But it was gunpowder that the redcoats had set out to get, so they marched on—to Concord—but they couldn’t find the powder. That made them so angry they started a fire. “Will you let them burn the town down?” shouted one colonist. “No, I haven’t a man who is afraid

The stanza with Ralph Waldo Emerson’s famous line goes like this:

**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.**

Senior Citizen’s Arrest

One of the best stories of the Revolutionary War involves an old woman. She was called Mother Batherick, and she lived near Concord. On the day of the famous battle, all the young men of her town became minutemen and rushed off to fight, leaving behind a group of old men. They were supposed to guard the town. The old soldiers chose as their leader a veteran of the French and Indian War, a black man whose name was David Lamson. Lamson and his men were all behind a stone wall when some

British supply wagons came by. Lamson told the redcoats to halt. They didn’t, and the old warriors fired. Two British soldiers and four horses went down. The other redcoats ran.

Mother Batherick was digging weeds at a nearby pond. Six breathless British soldiers rushed up and surrendered to her. She turned them over to Lamson and his old troopers. After that, Americans liked to ask this question: “If one old lady can capture six grenadiers, how many soldiers will King George need to conquer America?”

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"Paul Revere" by John Singleton Copley
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Paul Revere in his regular job as a silversmith, showing off one of his teapots. This portrait was painted by John Singleton Copley, a leading colonial artist.

to go," said the minutemen's Captain Isaac Davis. The British stood at the North Bridge in Concord. They fired at the colonists. The minutemen fired back. Now the British were scared, and they tried to retreat. The Americans followed and whipped the redcoats. More than two Englishmen fell for every American casualty.

Do you know the song "Yankee Doodle"? Well, the British made it up to insult the Americans. They said a Yankee Doodle was a backwoods hick who didn't know how to fight. When the British marched to Concord and Lexington, they wore their fancy red uniforms, and their drummers and pipers played "Yankee Doodle."

After the battle, it was the Americans who sang that song. They said, "We'll be Yankee Doodles and proud of it!"

But that isn't the whole story. There is always more to war than winning or losing. These are words written in 1775:

Isaac Davis...was my husband. He was then thirty years of age. We had four children; the youngest about fifteen months old....The alarm was given early in the morning, and my husband lost no time in making ready to go to Concord with his company...[he] said but little that morning. He seemed serious and thoughtful; but never seemed to hesitate....He only said, "Take good care of the children." In the afternoon he was brought home a corpse.

Yankee Doodle

Yankee Doodle went to town,
A-ridin' on a pony.
Stuck a feather in his cap
And called it Macaroni.

Chorus:

*Yankee Doodle, keep it up,
Yankee Doodle Dandy,
Mind the music and the step
And with the girls be handy.*

Father and I went down to camp,
Along with Captain Gooding,
And there we saw the men and boys
As thick as hasty pudding.

(Chorus)

And there we saw a thousand men,
As rich as Squire David;

And what they wasted every day,
I wish it could be savèd.

(Chorus)

And there was Captain
Washington
Upon a slapping stallion,
A-giving orders to his men;
I guess there was a million.

(Chorus)

And there I saw a little keg,
Its head was made of leather;
They knocked upon it with two
sticks

To call the men together.

(Chorus)

And there I saw a swamping gun,
As big as a log of maple,

Upon a mighty little cart,
A load for father's cattle.

(Chorus)

And every time they fired it off
It took a horn of powder,
It made a noise like father's gun,
Only a nation louder.

(Chorus)

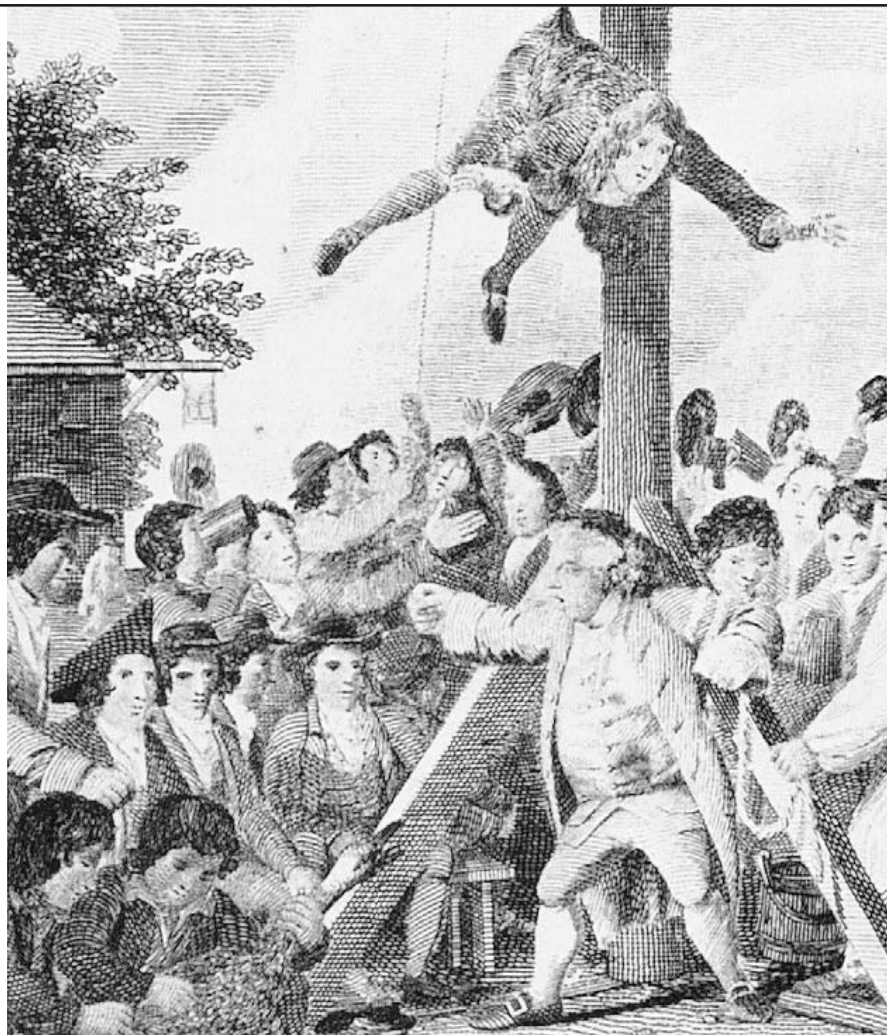
I can't tell you half I saw,
They kept up such a smother,
So I took my hat off, made a bow
And scampered home to mother.

(to tune of chorus)

Yankee Doodle is the tune
Americans delight in.

'Twill do to whistle, sing or play
And just the thing for fightin'.

Library of Congress



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow finished the story:

*You know the rest. In the books you have read
How the British Regulars fired and fled,—
How the farmers gave them ball for ball,
From behind each fence and farmyard wall,
Chasing the redcoats down the lane,
Then crossing the fields to emerge again
Under the trees at the turn of the road,
And only pausing to fire and load.*

*So through the night rode Paul Revere;
And so through the night went his cry of alarm
To every Middlesex village and farm,—
A cry of defiance and not of fear,
A voice in the darkness, a knock at the door,
And a word that shall echo forevermore!
For, borne on the night-wind of the Past,
Through all our history, to the last,
In the hour of darkness and peril and need,
The people will waken and listen to hear
The hurrying hoof-beats of that steed,
And the midnight message of Paul Revere.*

After Lexington and Concord, a known British sympathizer—a Loyalist—could be strung up and ridiculed, like this man, or sometimes find a worse fate.

The people of New England did not wish for war. This was not a warrior culture... and showed none of the martial spirit that has appeared in so many other times and places. There were no cheers or celebrations when the militia departed....The people of New England knew better than that. In 140 years they had gone to war at least once in every generation, and some of those conflicts had been cruel and bloody. Many of the men who mustered that morning were themselves veterans of savage fights against the French and Indians. They and their families knew what war could do.

—DAVID HACKETT FISCHER,
PAUL REVERE'S RIDE