

*The Shot Heard Round The World.
April 19, 1775*

Divinely Inspired Heroes at Lexington and Concord

The Americanism article for March focused on the role of patriotic women before and during the Revolutionary War. In this month's article it's the men's turn. It centers around a fateful day in April, 1775, when the men of Lexington and Concord proved themselves American patriots.

Patriots' Day is celebrated in Massachusetts as an official holiday on the 3rd Monday in April, commemorating the April 19, 1775, battles in the towns of Lexington and Concord, considered the 1st battles in the war that would eventually lead to American independence. The battles, the heroic men who stood against the British forces in those two colonial towns, and "the shot heard round the world" were immortalized in Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Concord Hymn".

Thanks to the daring late night ride of Paul Revere and William Dawes on April 18, 1775, minutemen and colonial militia were warned that several hundred British troops were on the march, planning to seize and destroy the munitions that the colonials had stored in Concord. Also alerted were outspoken and influential Sons of Liberty John Hancock and Samuel Adams, whom the British hoped to find and capture at Lexington before proceeding to Concord. That night, Hancock and Adams were staying at the home of Rev. Jonas Clark, the patriot-pastor of the church in Lexington, and his family. Born in 1730, and educated at Harvard, Jonas Clark was known as a powerful preacher, a man of strong faith and Christian principles, high moral character and courage. He was recognized as not only Lexington's moral and religious leader, but also a leader on issues concerning liberty and government. His home was often a meeting place for the Sons of Liberty and other patriots. Clark used his sermons and tracts to instruct those in his congregation on their duty to resist tyranny, and on the just cause of defending their God-given right to liberty. "No population within...the Colonies were better prepared for the events of the 19th of April, than the people of Lexington...No single individual probably did so much to educate the people up to that point of intelligence, firmness, and courage, as their honored and beloved pastor", wrote Rev. William Ware in his 1850 *Annals of the American Pulpit*.

Though Hancock and Adams escaped in time to avoid capture, the 77 brave members of Lexington's militia, led by Capt. John Parker, who was a deacon in Jonas Clark's church, were badly outnumbered by the nearly 800 British troops they faced on the morning of April 19th. Eight men in Capt. Parker's militia were killed, including a cousin of his. The British, considering the fight a victory, marched confidently off to Concord.

Concord had its own patriot-preacher, Rev. William Emerson, grandfather of Ralph Waldo Emerson. He was only 22 in 1765, when he became the minister of the church in Concord, and he also served as chaplain for the local militia. Vehemently opposed to the oppressive and unjust treatment of the colonies by the British, his views and his support for active resistance were evident in his sermons. In his spare time he added to the ammunition supply by rolling cartridges and molding bullets. When a warning shot was fired to alert the town to the approaching British troops, and calling the Concord men to arms on April 19th, Rev. Emerson was one of the first to respond, wearing his black ministerial robe and cradling his musket in his arm. He has been credited with encouraging an anxious 18-year-old in the militia, Harry Gould, telling him, "Stand your ground, Harry, your cause is just and God will bless you." Just a few weeks before, the scriptural text for his sermon had been "And behold, God Himself is with us for our captain".

At Concord, by the north bridge, the British advance was halted when militias from several other towns in the area, estimated to be between 250 and 300 men, joined the fight. As the British troops retreated back toward Boston, the tables were turned, and they became the targets for the colonial patriots lying in wait along the route.

The concluding thoughts about the events and the American patriots of April 19, 1775, at Lexington and Concord, are from a sermon that Jonas Clark delivered on the one-year anniversary of that historic day: "*May this day be remembered, to the glory of God, and our own instruction and improvement, so long as we live.*"

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