

“To See That the Plans of the Provincial Congresses Are Faithfully
Carried into Executione”

A Review of the Arms and Equipment Carried by Captain John
Parker’s Company at the Battle of Lexington.





Battle of Lexington - 1775



What did Captain Parker's Company Carry at the Battle of Lexington?

- A common misconception about the Battle of Lexington is that Captain John Parker's Company was sparsely armed and equipped.
- A review of period documentation, including primary accounts of the Battle of Lexington, town records and probate inventories shows that the Lexington Company actually assembled on the common fully equipped for a military campaign.
- In other words, the militia fielded with packs, blankets, cartridge boxes, powder horns and edged weapons.

What Documentation/Material was Relied Upon for this Presentation?

- Lexington town meeting records from 1774 - 1776.
- Probate estate inventories for those Lexington men who died between January 1, 1774 and December 31, 1775.
- Surviving artifacts
- Claim submitted by Lexington residents to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress for property lost, damaged or destroyed on April 19, 1775.
- Primary accounts of the Battle of Lexington
 - Depositions
 - Official government records
 - Military reports
 - Sermons and public statements

What the Analysis of Primary Documentation Revealed

1. Lexington was on a wartime footing as early as September, 1774.
2. In December, 1774, Lexington resolved to *strictly follow* the military recommendations of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress.
3. That same month a committee composed of Lexington men, including John Parker, was created and oversaw the execution of the orders of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress to properly equip the militia.
4. Local Lexington men were making and supplying arms and equipment to Captain Parker's Company.
5. Accounts of the Battle of Lexington establish that the company was fully armed and equipped at the engagement.

Lexington was Preparing for War

- A full month before the Massachusetts Provincial Congress first ordered the residents of the colony to reorganize its militia system and create minute companies, Lexington was already in full wartime preparation.
- According to the Reverend Clarke, the Lexington militia were “training” and “showing arms” as early as September 15, 1774.
- On September 26, 1774, Lexington voted to provide a pair of drums for the use of the military company in town.
- Finally, on November 3, 1774, the town gathered to plan “military discipline and to put themselves in a position of defense against their Enemies.”

The Massachusetts Provincial Congress

- On December 10, 1774, the Provincial Congress declared “The improvement of the militia in general in the art military has been therefore thought necessary, and strongly recommended by this Congress. We now think that particular care should be taken by the towns and districts in this colony, **that each of the minute men, not already provided therewith, should be immediately equipped with an effective firearm, bayonet, pouch, knapsack, thirty rounds of cartridges and balls . . .** [that], as the security of the lives, liberties and properties of the inhabitants of this province, depends under Providence, on their knowledge and skill in the art of military, and in their being properly and effectually armed and equipped, it is therefore recommended, that they immediately provide themselves therewith; that they use their utmost diligence to perfect themselves in military skill”
- Most towns passed additional resolutions that expanded upon this order to include canteens, powder horns and blankets.

Lexington Resolves to Carry Out Congress' Orders

- When the Massachusetts Provincial Congress issued a resolution regarding the arms and equipment to be carried by its minute and militia companies, Lexington quickly responded.
- Two days after the Provincial Congress order, the Lexington selectmen ordered the militia to appear at the meeting house for an inspection. During the review, deficiencies in arms and equipment were apparently observed. As a result, the selectmen quickly scheduled a town meeting.
- On December 27, 1774, the residents reviewed their options and voted to form a committee that would oversee measures to ensure the militia was prepared for war. “Votede . . . That seven persons be appointed as a committee of inspections to see that the plans of the . . . Provincial Congresses are faithfully carried into executione.”

- One of the individuals assigned to the committee was Captain John Parker, commander of the Lexington militia.
- Over the next several months it appears that this committee, under the leadership of Parker, took steps to ensure the company was properly armed and equipped.
- As a result, several men in Lexington personally contributed to Lexington's effort to properly arm and equip the town's militia for war.

Who Helped Arm and Equip the Lexington Militia?

- **Jonathan Harrington Sr.** - father of company fifer Jonathan Harrington, was charged with making cartridge boxes and belting for the militia.
- **Phillip Russell**- was also making cartridge boxes and bayonets for members of the militia.
- **Jonas Parker** - was cutting back gunstocks so fowlers could accept socket bayonets.
- **Nathan Simonds** - was providing blankets to those Lexington militiamen who could not afford them.
- **Jeremiah Harrington** - was making tow cloth knapsacks for members of the militia.
- **John Parker** - Was possibly making powder horns for the Lexington Company.

Bullets and Powder

- **Joshua Reed and an “Ensign Harrington”** were even scrambling to acquire gunpowder and lead for bullets for the militia.
- “Granted an ordere to pay Ensign Harrington £2.12.10 in full . . . for 104 lbs. of bullets & . . . for going to Walthame for powdere & to Bostone for leads.”
- “Grantede an ordere to pay Mr. Joshua Reed . . . in full for his bringing up leade from Boston and running the bullets.”

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In Provincial Congress,

Cambridge, February 14, 1775.

WHEREAS it appears necessary for the Defence of the Lives, Liberties, and Properties, of the Inhabitants of this Province, that this Congress on the first Day of their next Session, should be made fully acquainted with the Number and Military Equipments of the Militia, and Minute Men in this Province; and also the Town Stock of Ammunition in each Town and District.

It is therefore *RESOLVED*, That it be and it is hereby recommended, to the commanding Officers of each Regiment of Minute Men, that now is or shall be formed in this Province, that they review the several Companies in their respective Regiments, or cause them to be reviewed, and take an exact State of their Numbers, and Equipment, —and where there is any Company that is not incorporated into a Regiment, the commanding Officer thereof shall review the several Companies, or cause them to be reviewed, and take a like State of their Numbers and Equipment —And it is also recommended to the Colonels or commanding Officers of each Regiment of Militia in this Province, that they review the several Companies in their respective Regiments, or cause them to be reviewed, and take a State of their Numbers and Accoutrements; which said State of the Minute Men and Militia, shall be by said Officers returned in Writing to this Congress, on the first Day of their Session after the Adjournment.—

And it is further *RESOLVED*, That it be recommended to the Select-Men of each Town and District in the Province, that on the same Day they make return in Writing of the State of the Town and District Stock of Ammunition, and War-like Stores to this Congress.

Signed by Order of the Provincial Congress,

JOHN HANCOCK, President.

A true Extract from the Minutes,

BENJAMIN LINCOLN, Secretary.

Inspections

- In February, 1775, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress notified all the towns in the colony that they were expected to be in full compliance with its December 10, 1774 order.
- Officers of militia and minute companies were instructed to conduct inspections and submit returns to the Provincial Congress as proof of compliance.
- Unfortunately, an inspectional return from Lexington does not exist.
- *However, a review of surviving artifacts, probate returns and period accounts suggests that John Parker and his committee were successful in their mission.*

Was Captain Parker and the Committee Successful?

Items Required by the
Massachusetts Provincial
Congress in the Event of War
with England

Firearm
Bayonet
Cartridge Box
Knapsack
Ammunition
Blanket
Canteen

Items Acquired by Lexington in
Preparation for War

Firearm
Bayonet
Cartridge Box
Powder Horn
Knapsack
Ammunition
Blanket
Canteen
Two Iron Field Pieces

Yeah...but did they *really* carry all that stuff on April 19, 1775?



There are *Five* Pieces of Evidence That Support the Theory Captain John Parker's Company Assembled Fully Equipped for a Military Campaign

- **The legal term “Alarmed”.**

- “Alarmed” was a 17th and 18th century legal term describing a militia's response to an emergency situation.
- Under Massachusetts militia laws between 1690 and 1773, when a company was alarmed, they were also required to rally armed and equipped for a military campaign.
- Massachusetts militia laws went into great detail describing what arms and equipment a militia man was required to carry during an alarm: a firelock, edged weapon, ammunition, powder horn, pack, blanket and canteen.

- In the aftermath of the Battle of Lexington, thirty three Lexington militiamen signed a deposition asserting they were “alarmed” and appeared at the company parade.
- Thus, when the Lexington men stated they had assembled on the Lexington Green due to an “alarm”, they were asserting that they were lawfully responding to an emergency and carrying all lawfully required equipment.

- **The Account of the Battle of Lexington by the Reverend Jonas Clarke**

- According to the Reverend Clarke, there was a debate over whether the company should dismiss and reform at another location. Clarke also discussed how Parker's Company was prepared to respond to any military emergency, regardless of the location.
- “Upon this intelligence, as also upon information of the conduct of the officers as above-mentioned, **the militia of ths town were alarmed, and ordered to meet on the usual place of parade; not with any design of commencing hostilities upon the king's troops but to consult what might be done for our own and the people's safety; And also to be ready for whatever service providence might call us out to,** upon this alarming occasion in case overt acts of violence or open hostilities be committed by this mercenary hand of armed and blood thirsty oppressors.”

- Clarke's statement "[and] *also to be ready for whatever service providence might call us out to*" meant Captain Parker's Company was assembled on the common, fully equipped for a military campaign and prepared to march to any location to repel the enemy.

- **The official correspondence from Lt. Colonel Francis Smith.**
 - In his report to General Thomas Gage regarding the events of April 19th, **Smith specifically states the Lexington militia was drawn up in military order, armed and equipped for a campaign!!**
 - “I think it proper to observe, that when I had got some miles on the march from Boston, I detached six light infantry companies to march with all expedition to seize the two bridges on different roads beyond Concord. On these companies' arrival at Lexington, I understand, from the report of Major Pitcairn, who was with them, and from many officers, that **they found on a green close to the road a body of the country people drawn up in military order, with arms and accoutrement, and, as appeared after, loaded.**”

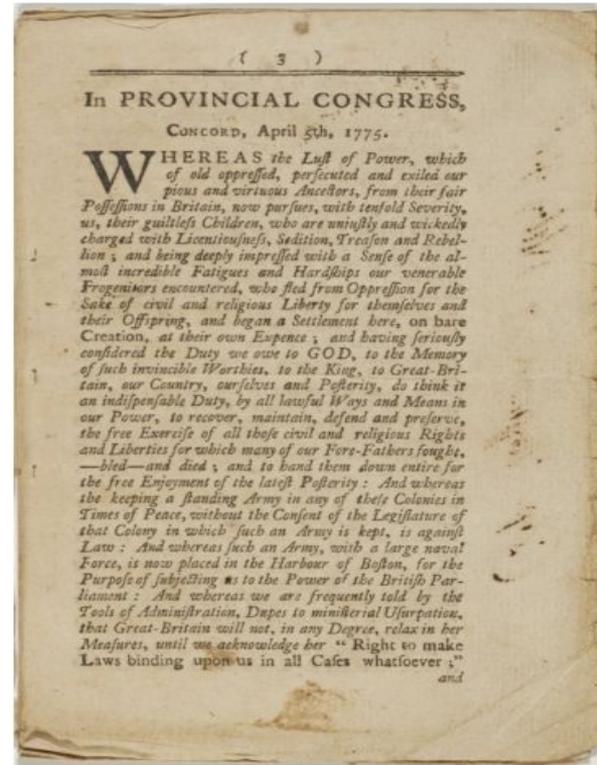
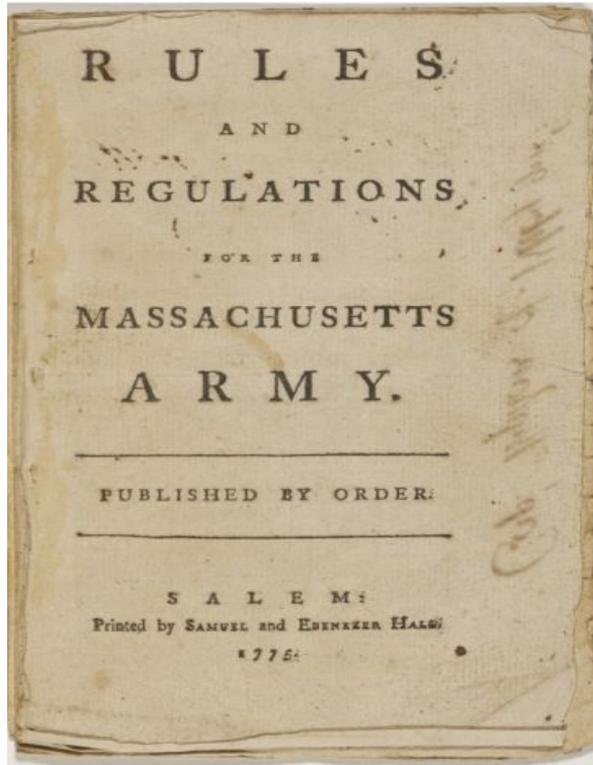
- **According to 18th Century military treatises, the term “accouterment” collectively included the following items:**
 - Cartridge boxes
 - Edged weapons
 - Belting
 - Knapsacks
 - Canteens
 - Ammunition

- **The Petition of Lt. John Tidd**

- John Tidd submitted a petition to the Massachusetts Legislature in early 1776 claiming that after he was wounded at the Battle of Lexington, British soldiers robbed him of his arms and equipment.
- “Petition of John Tidd of Lexington setting forth that on the 19th of April he received a wound in the head (by a Cutlass) from the enemy, which brought him (senseless) to the ground at wch time they took from him his gun, cartridge box, powder horn &c.”

- **“The Petition of Benjamin Wellington and others of Lexington”**
 - Three Lexington militiamen and one widow submitted a joint petition to the Massachusetts legislature in 1776. In the petition they too asserted that British troops stole their arms and equipment immediately after the Battle of Lexington.
 - “Petition of Benja Wellington, & others of Lexington, setting forth that they sustained the aforementioned losses by the Kings troops on the 19th of April 1775 viz: Benja Wellington, a gun, bayonet, &c. ... Jno Muzzy, a gun, powder horn, &c. Taken from his son ... Lucy Parker, a musquet, &c. Taken from her husband ... Marrit Munro, a gun & hat taken from him.”

What if John Parker had Permitted his Militia Company to Field Unprepared for a Military Campaign?



- On April 5, 1775, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress adopted *Rules and Regulations for the Massachusetts Army*.
- These regulations addressed a variety of military matters, including conduct for officers, proper behavior for soldiers and punishment for neglect of duty.
- These regulations applied to John Parker and his militia company.
- As the commanding officer, Parker was responsible for ensuring his officers and men were properly armed and equipped.
- If he had been negligent and permitted his men to field improperly prepared for a military campaign, he would have been charged with violating the *Rules and Regulations for the Massachusetts Army* and faced a court martial hearing. If convicted, he would have been cashiered and stripped of his rank.

- American officers after Lexington and Concord *were routinely charged* for neglect of duty.
- Colonel Gerrish was charged and convicted of neglect and improper behavior.
- Colonel Scamman was charged with neglect and improper conduct at the Battle of Bunker Hill.
- A Captain Ingersoll was charged with defamation, neglect and nepotism.
- A Lieutenant Walker was tried by a general court martial for neglect of duty.
- Captain Samuel Grideley was charged with “backwardness in the execution of his duty” and negligence.
- Finally one Captain Town was accused of “behaving in an unofficer like manner”.

In Conclusion

- Captain Parker and the residents of Lexington undertook measures to properly arm and equip its militia company.
- Captain Parker's Company complied with traditional militia laws and were properly armed and equipped for a military campaign when it assembled on the Lexington Common the morning of April 19, 1775
- Thus, a militia man at the Battle of Lexington carried a firelock, edged weapon, canteen, knapsack, blanket, cartridge box and powder horn.

QUESTIONS???