

Women of Lexington and Concord

Beth Ford, Benjamin Hanchett, and Nancy Ponzetti

Framing Question

What roles did women play during the events of April 18–19, 1775? How were their lives affected, and what effect did they have on events with worldwide repercussions?

Objectives

As a result of this lesson, students will understand:

- a. Where Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts, are located
- b. The lifestyles of the women of these agricultural, mixed-husbandry towns prior to the events being investigated
- c. The parts women played in the events of April 18–19, 1775
- d. How those actions changed their roles in the revolutionary period
- e. Whether or not their roles remained transformed after the American Revolution, or whether their lifestyles reverted to pre-revolutionary standards

Documents

On the morning of April 19, 1775, the first shots of the American Revolution rang out on Lexington green and Concord's North Bridge. These primary sources tell the stories of four women, ranging in age from eleven to seventy-one, who were directly affected by the events of that day. Martha Moulton, a Concord widow, dealt directly with Major Pitcairn and 600 to 700 armed British troops on the afternoon of April 19. Hannah Davis Leighton, Alice Stearns Abbott, and Hannah Adams lived in neighboring towns, Acton or Cambridge, and described the preparations for the Concord Fight or the aftermath of the British withdrawal back to Boston down Battle Road. Two of the accounts, Martha Moulton's and Hannah Adams', were recorded respectively one month to ten months after April 19, while the other two accounts were depositions taken in 1835, sixty years after the battle on the "rude bridge".

- a. Alice Stearns Abbott <http://www.nps.gov/mima/forteachers/primary-sources.htm>
- b. Hannah Davis Leighton [http://www.nps.gov/mima/for teachers/primary-sourcess.htm](http://www.nps.gov/mima/for%20teachers/primary-sourcess.htm)
- c. Martha Moulton <http://www.nps.gov/mima/forteachers/primary-sources.htm>
- d. Hannah Adams, contained in *A Narrative of the Excursion and Ravages of the King's Troops Under the Command of General Gage, on the nineteenth of April, 1775: Together*

with the Depositions... Worcester: Printed by Isaiah Thomas, by order of the Provincial Congress, 1775. <http://www.masshist.org/database/627> (See page 20.)

Questions:

- a. What tasks did Alice Stearns Abbott and her sisters perform on the morning of the Concord Fight?
- b. Why was Martha Moulton proclaimed a heroine by the General Court of Massachusetts in 1776?
- c. Are there any similarities between the accounts of Hannah Adams and Martha Moulton?
- d. How did the British troops treat Hannah Adams and Martha Moulton during their time in Concord and during their withdrawal?
- e. What other choices, if any, could these women have made in response to the events of April 19, 1775?

Artifacts

During the Revolutionary Period, women's work centered on the home, caring for the children, preparing and processing the food, making garments, making candles and soap, taking care of domestic animals and managing the farms when the men were away at war. In order to make garments, the women would use a spinning wheel, then weave the cloth, sew the clothes and mend them. The days were long and the work was hard. These artifacts would have been found in a colonial woman's house.

- a. Kitchen Utensils from Hartwell Tavern (Photo: Beth Ford):
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/51154990@N03/4910230959/>
- b. Hartwell Household Spinning Wheel (Photo: Beth Ford):
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/51154990@N03/4910230931/>

Questions:

- a. What types of foods did these women use for cooking?
- b. How did women prepare the food in colonial days? Research and explain how the kitchen utensils shown were used.
- c. Research colonial recipes and plan a Sunday afternoon meal for a colonial family.
- d. Research and explain how the spinning wheel was used.

- e. Write a letter to a husband who is away fighting the war explaining what the day was like for his colonial wife.

Landscape

The Hartwell tavern stands at the “crossroads” between Lexington and Concord. Most travelers would have passed by the Hartwell tavern on their way to Concord. On the morning of April 19, 1775, the Hartwell residence played a pivotal role in sounding the alarm to the residents of Concord. As Dr. Samuel Prescott (a Concord resident) was returning from Lexington after meeting his sweetheart (Miss Mulliken) he came across Paul Revere and William Dawes, Jr., on their way to warn the Concord inhabitants. The British regulars came across them and Prescott escaped. He emerged at the Hartwell residence and awakened the family to spread the word to Captain William Smith of the Lincoln Minute Men. Mary Hartwell, in the absence of her husband, courageously spread the word that the regulars were on their way to Concord. At the site of this house, Mary Hartwell acted in bravery to protect and alert the inhabitants of the area.

- a. The Hartwell Tavern
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/51154990@N03/4850230017/>
- b. Map of Lexington and Concord
<http://www.nps.gov/PWR/customcf/apps/maps/showmap.cfm?alphacode=mima&parkname=Minute%20Man%20National%20Historical%20Park>

Questions:

- a. Based on the landscape and the house, what types of activities do you think the Hartwells did to make a living?
- b. What roles do you think women occupied based upon the landscape?
- c. Why did Mary Hartwell sound the alarm after Dr. Samuel Prescott arrived at their house?
- d. Based upon the map, how far was the Hartwell Tavern from the heart of Concord?
- e. Based upon Mary Hartwell’s actions, what does this say about her commitment to her family?

Assessment/Activity

- a. Students will write a diary or journal entry as a woman living through the events of April 18-19, 1775.

- b.** Students will write a letter as a soldier from Concord or Lexington requesting news from home. Other students may answer these letters.
- c.** Students will be assigned a woman from Lexington or Concord to research and will present her life to the class (examples: first-person monologue, poster project, etc...).