

The quiet Massachusetts towns that sparked a revolution

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(Credit: Alamy)

Two hundred and fifty years ago, several small farming communities rose up against the British and helped form a new nation. Now, the towns are gearing up to party like it's 1775.

On 19 April 2025, [Lexington](#), [Concord](#) and two other neighbouring towns north-west of Boston will mark the 250th anniversary of the chilly spring day in 1775 when Massachusetts militiamen faced off against British forces in a clash that launched the US on a path to independence.

The fateful die was cast when [Paul Revere](#) arrived on horseback to the small farming community of Lexington to warn leaders that British soldiers were marching from Boston to seize colonial military supplies stored in Concord, a few miles down the road. When the British arrived, they found a small force of local militiamen, known as Minutemen, waiting in the dawn light.

No one knows who fired the first shot, but when the skirmish was over, eight Minutemen lay dead, along with one British soldier. The British forces marched on to Concord where they met a larger force of Minutemen by the [North Bridge](#). After fierce fighting and significant losses on both sides, the British retreated. Marching back to Boston, British troops faced a running battle as the towns of Lincoln, Lexington

and Menotomy (now Arlington) had mustered their militias to mount an organised resistance.

The American War of Independence had begun.

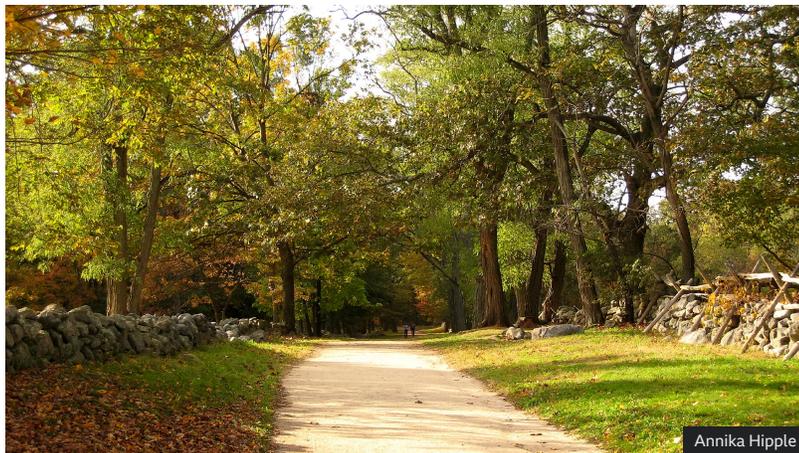


The first shots of the American War of Independence were fired in Lexington, Massachusetts (Credit: Alamy)

Every year, the events of 19 April are celebrated with various historical reenactments and other special events in these small Massachusetts towns. But with additional celebrations planned in honour of the 250th anniversary, organisers are expecting this year's festivities to draw more travellers than ever before to what many call "the birthplace of American liberty".

This year's festivities kick off on 18 April with a commemoration of Paul Revere's famous midnight ride to Lexington, followed by a reenactment of the Battle of Lexington the following morning. On 21 April, an event honouring the opening shot of the Battles of Lexington and Concord will take place at Concord's North Bridge, while a host of special exhibits, lectures and parades will take place throughout April.

Two and a half centuries after shaping American history, Lexington's colonial heritage remains a defining presence, offering year-round visitors a window into the past. The Lexington Battle Green, where the Minutemen met the British forces, remains the centre of the quiet, 34,000-person community. A statue of farmer-turned Minuteman captain John Parker stands at one end, facing the direction from where British troops approached. Elsewhere, a stone marker on the Lexington Battle Green is engraved with the words Parker is said to have uttered to his men: "Don't fire unless fired upon, but if they mean to have a war, let it begin here." A memorial obelisk marks the spot where the Minutemen killed in the battle were reburied after being moved from their original graves in the nearby Old Burying Ground.



Nearby, the [Lexington Visitors Center](#) provides an overview of the events of 19 April along with a detailed diorama of the battle. From April through October, [Liberty Ride](#) trolley tours whisk travellers from the Visitors Center to historical sites in Lexington and Concord along the [Battle Road](#) that connects the two towns.

Next door to the Visitors Center, [Buckman Tavern](#), where the Minuteman gathered before the clash, is one of three historic houses maintained by the Lexington Historical Society. The other two include [Munroe Tavern](#), which was occupied by retreating British soldiers after the battle; and the [Hancock-Clarke House](#), where patriot leaders John Hancock and Samuel Adams were staying when Revere arrived to sound the alarm.

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"Buckman Tavern really gives you a good overview of the battle, but also what life was like in 1775," said Lexington High School student Sabrina Bhattacharjya, who runs the history website [Lexington250.com](#). "My personal favourite is the Hancock-Clarke House. You kind of get to hear the kids' experience of the [American] Revolution. Elizabeth Clarke was a 12-year-old girl who wrote everything down that night in her diary, because she watched the midnight ride and Battle of Lexington out [of] her bedroom window."

Monroe Tavern, in contrast, presents the perspective of the British, who used it as a field hospital during their retreat. "It asks my very favourite question, and that is: who [were] the real patriots that day?" said Craig Sandler, president of the board of the Lexington Historical Society, noting that British soldiers viewed the colonists as rebelling against their rightful king. "The [British] were noble in their own way. You can't tell the story without both sides because it doesn't make sense."



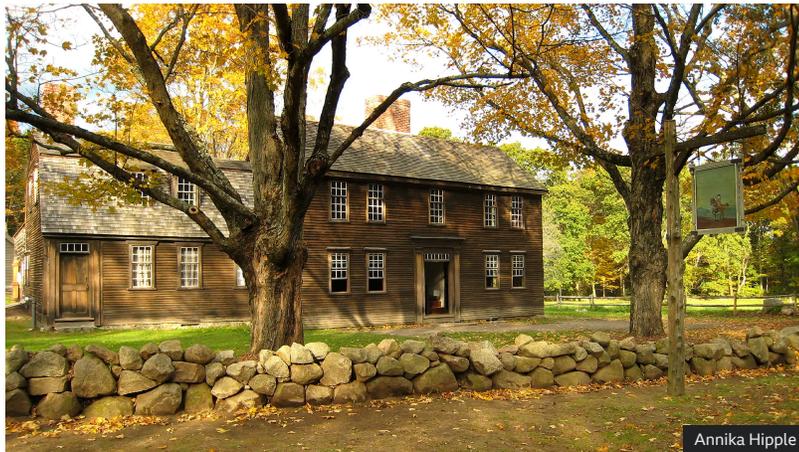
The towns' historical sites also present the British perspective of the war (Credit: Annika Hipple)

Just before the anniversary in April, the Lexington Historical Society will open a new museum in the [Lexington Depot](#), a long-empty former train station built in 1846 in downtown Lexington. The museum will tell the story of the town through Revolutionary-era artefacts and other items that have been off-view for decades.

In addition to a larger-than-usual parade, filmmaker Ken Burns is scheduled to visit both Lexington and Concord on 17 April to present his new documentary series [The American Revolution](#). Lexington's anniversary celebrations will also include a visit from approximately 250 members of the US Army's Old Guard and a dramatic landing on Lexington Green by the Golden Knights, the US Army Parachute Team.

From Lexington, the British marched on to Concord through the town of Lincoln, along today's Battle Road. Much of the route they took is now part of [Minute Man National Historical Park](#), as is the battle site at the North Bridge near downtown Concord. Visitor centres in Lincoln and near the North Bridge in Concord are good starting points to learn more, with educational films to set the stage. The park also incorporates several historic houses from the Revolutionary period and conducts anniversary reenactments of the Battle of Concord and other dramatic events of 19 April, including the capture of Paul Revere.

This year, the park is holding special events throughout April to mark the 250th anniversary, the highlight of which will be a [Battle Road Tactical Demonstration](#) on 19 April, where costumed interpreters will recreate battle tactics and the fighting that took place as the British retreated towards Boston.



Hartwell Tavern in Minute Man National Historical Park is where many living history programmes take place (Credit: Annika Hipple)

"It will be the largest living history event of all the 250th events in this area. We have over 750-800 living historians that will be joining us for a whole day of events," said Minute Man park ranger Jim Hollister. "On the night of the 12th, we're doing an evening programme at Hartwell Tavern portraying the ride of Samuel Prescott, who escaped capture after Paul Revere was captured by a British patrol, and he brings the alarm to the town of Lincoln."

[Concord's Visitor Center](#) also offers guided tours focusing on the Revolution, including one called [A Fight for Freedom: Patriots of Color](#). Stops include the historic [Wright Tavern](#) where Concord Minutemen gathered early on 19 April and British troops later established their headquarters. The town is also developing an app-based augmented reality tour that will be available this spring.

"The idea is that you get superimposed on an object," said Concord Tourism Manager Beth Williams. "Walk into the Wright Tavern and a 3D figure could come up like a hologram and say, 'Oh, when I was 12, I worked as a barmaid in the Wright Tavern.' It gives another layer to the history, certainly to a younger demographic that is more used to getting content in that way."

Nearby, the [Concord Museum](#) has an extensive collection of artefacts related to the Revolution. "We're able to narrate the events of the day essentially minute by minute, with objects that were actually there and that participated. The interpretive material is drawn from the words of participants to the degree that we're able," explained curator David Woods.



Concord's North Bridge is where some of the first shots were fired in the American War of Independence (Credit: Alamy)

Beyond visiting the museum and the historic site at the North Bridge, Woods recommends an exercise in observation and imagination. "Standing in the centre of town," he said, "look around for 18th-Century structures. Any one that you can see, it's reasonable to suspect that there were supplies stored there. You can go up on to the Old Hill Burying Ground, stand right where [British officers] Colonel Smith and Major Pitcairn stood looking at the North Bridge sizing the thing up. There was a mountain of supplies in Concord and they didn't find it."

Asked why the events of Lexington and Concord continue to resonate with visitors, Hollister said, "It's a very accessible story. The main actors weren't great generals and warriors – they were ordinary people just like us: men and women who were confronted with a crisis and had to decide what's worth fighting for. That's something I think every generation has to confront as they move through history in their own time."

"It's this feeling that this was the start. This was the first shot," added Bhattacharjya. "We are a nation of immigrants. That first shot on the battlefield is what brought so many people here, and that's how we've grown as a country. All the inventions and all the greatness of America, it all started because you had a first shot."

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