

Ebenezer Lock(e)

His Story

By Bill Poole

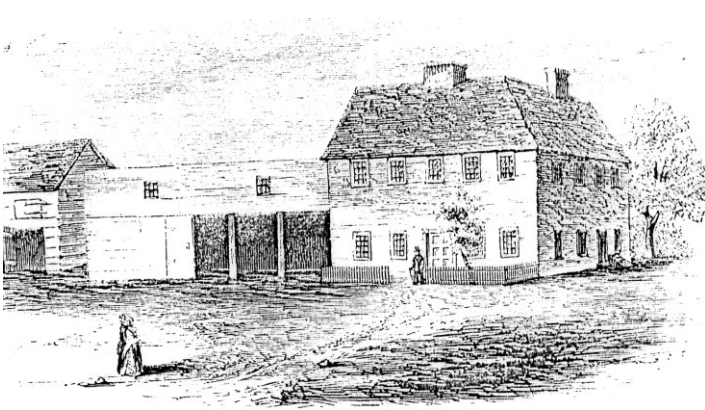


On a narrow, secluded dirt road in the town of East Deering, New Hampshire there is a small graveyard, enclosed by a stone wall, and called Goodale Cemetery, but known popularly as the Old Revolutionary War Cemetery because of the number of veterans of that war buried there. One of the graves therein is that of Ebenezer Locke. The inscription on the tombstone reads simply “Ebenezer Locke, Died September 12, 1816, Age 82 Years.” There is also a long-standing tradition in Deering, as recorded in the history of the town published in 1885, that Ebenezer Locke “discharged the first gun at Lexington, Mass., upon the British troops, April 19, 1775.” And he is credited further with “firing the shot heard round the world.” To honor his action, beginning back in the Nineteenth Century and carrying on well into the Twentieth Century, on each Fourth of July the residents of Deering would march in procession to the Old Revolutionary War graveyard to decorate Ebenezer’s grave. Even though many Revolutionary veterans were buried there, Ebenezer’s gravesite was the only one so honored. In fact when I first found the cemetery a few years ago, Ebenezer’s grave was still the only one decorated with a small American flag. However, more recently in Deering, including last year’s Fourth of July celebration, it has become the practice to carry on a spirited debate concerning whether or not Ebenezer really deserved credit for “firing the shot heard round the world.”

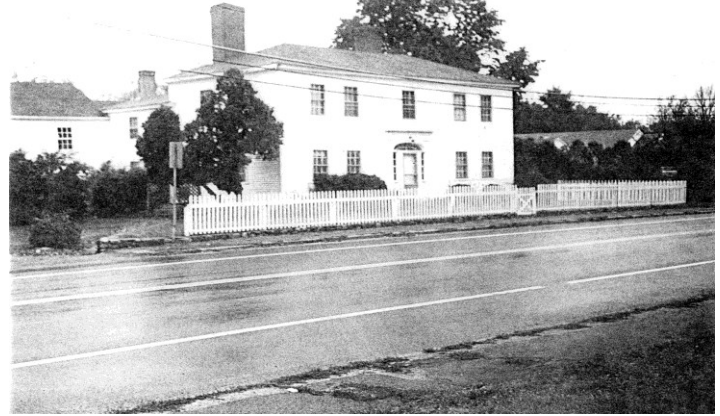


Locke Family Plot, Goodale Cemetery East Deering, NH The American Flag Identifies Ebenezer's Grave

So who was this Ebenezer Locke, who has been the subject of so much debate and interest up there in Deering? Well, Ebenezer was born March 2, 1735 in Woburn, Massachusetts, the son of Ebenezer Locke, Sr. and Elizabeth Poulter Locke, and the great grandson of William Locke, an orphan who immigrated to Massachusetts in 1635 at the age of fourteen, and later became a successful farmer and extensive landholder in west Woburn. You can still see the original William Locke homestead at 183 Lexington Street in Woburn. Although much altered over the years, it is located on the North side of Lexington Street, less than 100 yards east of the intersection of Route 3. It is now referred to as the Fox home, for a later owner.



Home of William Locke the Immigrant 1850



20th-Century Appearance



Modern Day Appearance—Note the Growth of the Tree over the Years

When Ebenezer Sr. died, his son inherited the family homestead which was located somewhere in the vicinity of North and Lowell streets near the border of Lexington. There, Ebenezer farmed his lands and raised three sons with his wife, Lucy Wood, sister of Sylvanus Wood. When the militia act of 1774 was enacted, Ebenezer became part of the Woburn Training Band serving as a private in Capt. Joshua Walker's Company of Colonel David Greene's 2d Middlesex Regiment of Foot. Ebenezer had many connections to

Lexington. He and his wife were members of the Lexington church. Many of his relatives lived in Lexington, he owned land in the town, and since his farm was much closer to Lexington center than Woburn center, he perhaps carried out a good deal of business in Lexington. So, when the alarm bell rang out in the early hours of the April 19th, it was natural for Ebenezer to arm himself, and hurry to Lexington common in company with his first cousin, Amos Locke.

Amos Locke was one of the individuals who in 1825 gave depositions concerning their activities on the April 19th. According to Amos, he and Ebenezer hurried to the Green, coming across lots over the hill by George Wright's house and by Warren Duren's to the common where they found the militia rallying. Their route would have probably taken them from North Street, over the northern slope of Bucks Hill to Adams Street then to the intersection of Hancock Street and finally down Hancock to the Common. There, they stood around for some time until someone came up the road to report that there weren't any regulars anywhere between Boston and Lexington. With this, Amos and Ebenezer decided to return home to their families, but had not proceeded far, when they "heard a firing." "We immediately returned," Amos recalled, "coming up towards the easterly side of the common, where under the cover of a wall about twenty rods distant from the common, where the British then were, we found Asahel Porter of Woburn shot through the body; upon which Ebenezer Lock took aim, and discharged his gun at the Britons who were about twenty rods from us." Amos and Ebenezer were then forced to retreat from the protection of the wall, probably because the regulars were by then rampaging through the center of town.

Following the engagement on Lexington Common it was thought that Ebenezer probably rejoined his own Woburn Company, as he is listed among the men of Captain Walker's company who responded to the alarm of the 19th of April. He also perhaps then might have taken part in the ambush of the Regulars at the "Bloody Curve" where, under the command of Major Loammi Baldwin the Woburn troops comprised the largest portion of the provincials who took part in that action. Thereafter, it is known that Ebenezer was involved in the siege of Boston, first as a member of the 38th Massachusetts Regiment, and then when the Massachusetts militia was incorporated into the continental forces, serving as a private in the 26th Massachusetts Regiment of the Continental line again under the command of Loammi Baldwin now a colonel. At this time, his son Ebenezer, Jr. also joined the 26th.

After the British evacuation of Boston, the 26th marched to New London, Connecticut where they boarded ships to carry them to New York to help defend that city from an expected British attack. Later, when the siege of New York did take place, the 26th did not play a part in the Battle of Long Island, but as part of Colonel John Glover's brigade they helped twice to save Washington's army from being cut off during the retreat from Manhattan. In one of these engagements, at Pell's Point, Glover's brigade of 750 men single-handedly held off a force of 4,000 British and German troops attempting to flank the American army and cut off their retreat to White Plains. The brigade fought all day, inflicting perhaps between 800 and 1000 enemy casualties. The commander of the British force, Sir Henry Clinton, reported that he had been facing 14,000 Americans at Pell's Point. General Howe then delayed any further advance for another two days giving Washington time to extricate his army and fortify White Plains. Washington in his general orders commended Glover's brigade for their bravery, and urged other units to follow their example.

The 26th Regiment next played an important role in the Battle of White Plains, following which as part of General Charles Lee's division (later commanded by John Sullivan following Lee's capture) they marched from White Plains to General Washington's camp on the Delaware River just above Trenton, New Jersey. The 26th was part of the force that Washington led across the Delaware River on Christmas Eve, 1776 to carry out the surprise attack on Trenton. During that battle Colonel Glover's brigade was credited with cutting off the retreat of the Hessian garrison helping to force their surrender. Like the rest of the Continental regiments, the term of enlistment of the 26th was due to expire the last day of December 1776. Washington was faced with the prospect of seeing his entire army evaporate before his eyes, and he begged

the veterans of the Continental Line to stay with him for a few more weeks. However, most just wanted to go home. Colonel Baldwin left, and Colonel Glover took his entire regiment of Marbleheaders home. Only about half of the members of the continental line, some 1200 men agreed to stay on for ninety more days, but Ebenzer Locke and his son were among them.

Later, when Washington slipped his army around the British flank to attack Princeton, what remained of the 26th now under the command of Major Isaac Sherman of Connecticut was given the honor of leading the army. The 26th did not take part in the bitterest part of the fighting at Princeton, but they were among those who at the close of the battle chased the Regulars out of town. Following the battle, the army took up winter quarters in Morristown, New Jersey, where in April 1777 Ebenezer was discharged and left the army for good. After the war, he sold his property in Woburn and Lexington and sometime in the late 1780's or early 1790's he moved to Deering, NH along with his three sons, who by the way all served at one time or other in the Continental Army. There he lived with his son Benjamin, surviving to a ripe old age and no doubt spending many a winter's evening sitting around the fire swapping war stores, and telling his grandchildren how he fired the shot at the Regulars on that April morning.

Another Scenario

Several articles have appeared in various sources that describe another version of Ebenezer's actions following the engagement on Lexington Common. The first appeared in an as of yet unidentified newspaper, probably sometime in the 1860's. The item is undated, but some of the text and the advertisements suggest it was published during the Civil War. According to the article, Ebenezer did not join his militia regiment in pursuit of the King's troops, but instead perhaps returned home and in the afternoon may have engaged Earl Percy's relief column. That scenario is the only one that seems logical given the description of Ebenezer's purported, highly colorful, and probably fancifully exaggerated actions. The article appears below.

FIRST SHOT IN THE REVOLUTION.

The first American who discharged his gun on the day of the battle of Lexington, was Ebenezer Lock, who died at Deering, N. H., about fifty years ago. He resided at Lexington in 1775. The British regulars, at the order of Major Pitcairn, having fired at a few Americans on the green in front of the meeting-house, killing some and wounding others, it was a signal of war. "The citizens," writes one, "might be seen coming from all directions in the roads, over the fields and through the woods, each with his rifle in his hand, his powder-horn to his side, and his pockets provided with bullets." Among the number was Ebenezer Lock.

The British had posted a reserve of infantry a mile in the rear, in the direction of Boston. This was in the neighborhood of Mr. Lock, who, instead of hastening to join the party at the green, placed himself in an open cellar at a convenient distance for doing execution. A portion of the reserve was standing on a bridge, and Mr. Lock commenced firing at them. There was no other American in sight. He worked valiantly for some ten minutes, bringing down one of the enemy at nearly every shot. Up to this time not a gun had been fired elsewhere by the Americans. The British, greatly disturbed at losing so many men by the random fire of an unseen foe, were not long in discovering the man in the cellar, and discharged a volley of balls, which lodged in the walls opposite. Mr. Lock, remaining unhurt, continued to load and fire with the precision of a distinguished marksman. He was driven to such close quarters, however, by the British on his right and left, that he was compelled to retreat.

He had just one bullet left, and there was but one way to escape, and that was through an orchard, and not one moment was to be lost; he leveled his gun at the man near by, dropped the weapon, and the man was shot through the heart. The balls whistled about him. Lock reached the brink of a steep hill, and throwing himself down upon the ground, tumbled downwards, rolling as if mortally wounded. In this way he escaped unhurt. At the close of the war he moved to New Hampshire, where he resided until his death, twenty years after. He lived in seclusion and died in peace.

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In 1890, an article similar in content and written by Benjamin L. Bartlett was published in the Granite Monthly, a New Hampshire magazine. Then, on June 5, 1936 another item entitled "New Hampshire Claims Man who Fired That Shot" appeared in the Boston Traveler newspaper. It summarized the Bartlett article and connected the story to the continuing argument between Lexington and Concord over where the first shot of the Revolution had taken place. The controversy had been revived that year when a discussion occurred in the United States Senate concerning where that shot was fired. The exchange was occasioned by a speech of Senator Robert Rice Reynolds of North Carolina in which he mentioned a trip to Concord and an article he had written describing the trip. "I made mention about having been to Concord (Mass) where the first shot fired in the Revolutionary days was heard round the world. I was criticized by some historian for that." In response, Senator Reynolds had sent his secretary to the Library of Congress, who had returned to report that "the whole incident was a legend." "I was sorry to hear that" said Reynolds, "because when I was a little boy I had built my whole world about the poem concerning that shot."

Senator Tom Connally of Texas then interrupted to say, "As I now recall, without reference to the Library of Congress for my recollection, the first shot was fired on the village green at Lexington." The Senator then recited the first stanza of Emerson's poem, whereupon Senator Alben W. Barkley of Kentucky entered the

conversation, concluding. "I think that someone ought to decide just where this shot was fired." New York Representative Sol Bloom hearing about the Senate discussion then took upon himself the task of "getting the real lowdown." "Of course," he said, "the stories about Paul Revere and Betsy Ross are phoneys [sic], but someone did have to fire the first shot, and at some place up in New England." The story was widely reported in newspapers throughout the country, and the fact that the article bore the AP heading "April 1" perhaps had something to do with the amusement with which it was received and reported.

The Milwaukee Sentinel, April 8, 1936, presented the view from Concord.

Concord, Mass., April 7 — (AP) — "Concord Assumes 'Everybody Knew.' Concord residents raised eyebrows in polite surprise today when they learned Rep. Sol Bloom had set out to find the place where 'the shot heard round the world' was fired. 'We assumed everyone knew it was Concord,' they commented. Arthur W. Parke, local authority on Concord history, when informed members of congress had engaged in dispute about the revolutionary war scene commemorated in Ralph Waldo Emerson's 'Concord Hymn,' said: 'These fellows ought to inform themselves on simple matters of history.' 'Emerson wrote the poem in 1836,' Parke said, 'on the occasion of the dedication of the statue of the Minute Men in Concord.' 'It was in accordance with historical fact,' Parke added, 'and written when many veterans of the battle of Lexington and Concord were still alive.'"

The Lewiston (Maine) Daily Sun April 20, 1936, did not appear to wish to take sides, but could not resist taking a "shot" at Representative Bloom. "Boston, April 19 — (AP) — Mass Honors Heroes of 161 Years Ago Today. Massachusetts will pay new tribute to old heroes tomorrow on the ground where they fought for freedom 161 years ago. On the battlefields of Concord and Lexington, generally recognized as the spot where the Revolutionary War began, high State officials once again will praise the patriots whose deeds history had recorded. At the old North Bridge in Concord, a feature will be the singing of the 'Concord Hymn' written by Ralph Waldo Emerson. It is this hymn which contains the famous line 'the shot heard round the world.' But absent from the services in Concord will be Congressman Sol Bloom, who described that shot as a 'phony.' To an invitation to come to Concord 'and see for himself,' Bloom replied that he must refuse because of pressing Congressional duties.

The Troy (New York) Times Record (Date Unknown), attempted to put the argument in perspective.

"Representative Sol Bloom is trying to establish the place where the first shot of the Revolution was fired and who fired it. He says he does not know whether the event took place in Lexington or Concord. Congressman Bloom need not feel badly about his ignorance. If he will consult original authorities he will discover that the man who started the war by first discharging his musket against the enemy is unknown. The best opinion holds that it was an American who accidentally, in the excitement, fired a shot and slightly wounded a British officer. But there are those who question the evidence. Some think the first shot came from a Colonial, some from a Britisher, some think it was fired in Concord, some in Lexington. Mr. Bloom is not so ignorant as he says he is. He is merely equally ignorant with the historians themselves."

As important as the question may have been to Lexington and Concord, many simply thought the discussion had degenerated to the point of absurdity, as expressed in The Palm Beach Post, May 16, 1936, quoting the Fort Lauderdale News: "Sol Bloom has debunked the Revere ride and the Shot Heard Round the World, and the Boston tea party may turn out to have been just a bridge gathering."

That Ebenezer was one of the very few who fired at the Regulars in Lexington is enough to assure his place in history, but whenever the questions arises, "Who fired the first shot" or "Where was the first shot fired," his name will probably be mentioned thus insuring his action always will be remembered.