

**Jonathan Harrington Jr.
A Brief Biography
By Bill Poole**

Jonathan Harrington Jr., like all the other Harringtons in Lexington, was a descendant of Robert Harrington — the first of the Harringtons to come to Massachusetts. Robert settled in Watertown in 1642 where he married Susanna George on October 1, 1649. Susanna predeceased Moses on July 6, 1694, and he died May 17, 1707.¹ Their gravestones can be seen in the Old Burying Ground in Watertown.² Robert and Susanna had thirteen children, the second of whom was John, born August 24, 1631.³ He married Hannah Winter at Watertown on November 17, 1681. She died July 17, 1741 and he followed on August 24, 1741.⁴ They lived in that part of Watertown that became Waltham and are buried in Grove Hill Cemetery in Waltham.⁵ They had twelve children, the second of whom was John, born October, 1684, died November 29, 1749-50.⁶ He married Elizabeth Cutter of Cambridge Farms (Later Lexington) on April 12, 1705. Elizabeth was born March 5, 1680-81 and died February 8, 1749-50.⁷ Their burial site is unknown. John and Elizabeth had nine children the fourth of whom was Henry born January 8, 1711-12, died December 25, 1791.⁸ Henry married Sarah Laughton in Lexington on June 4, 1735. He and Sarah had eleven children, the fourth of whom was Jonathan, known as Jr.⁹

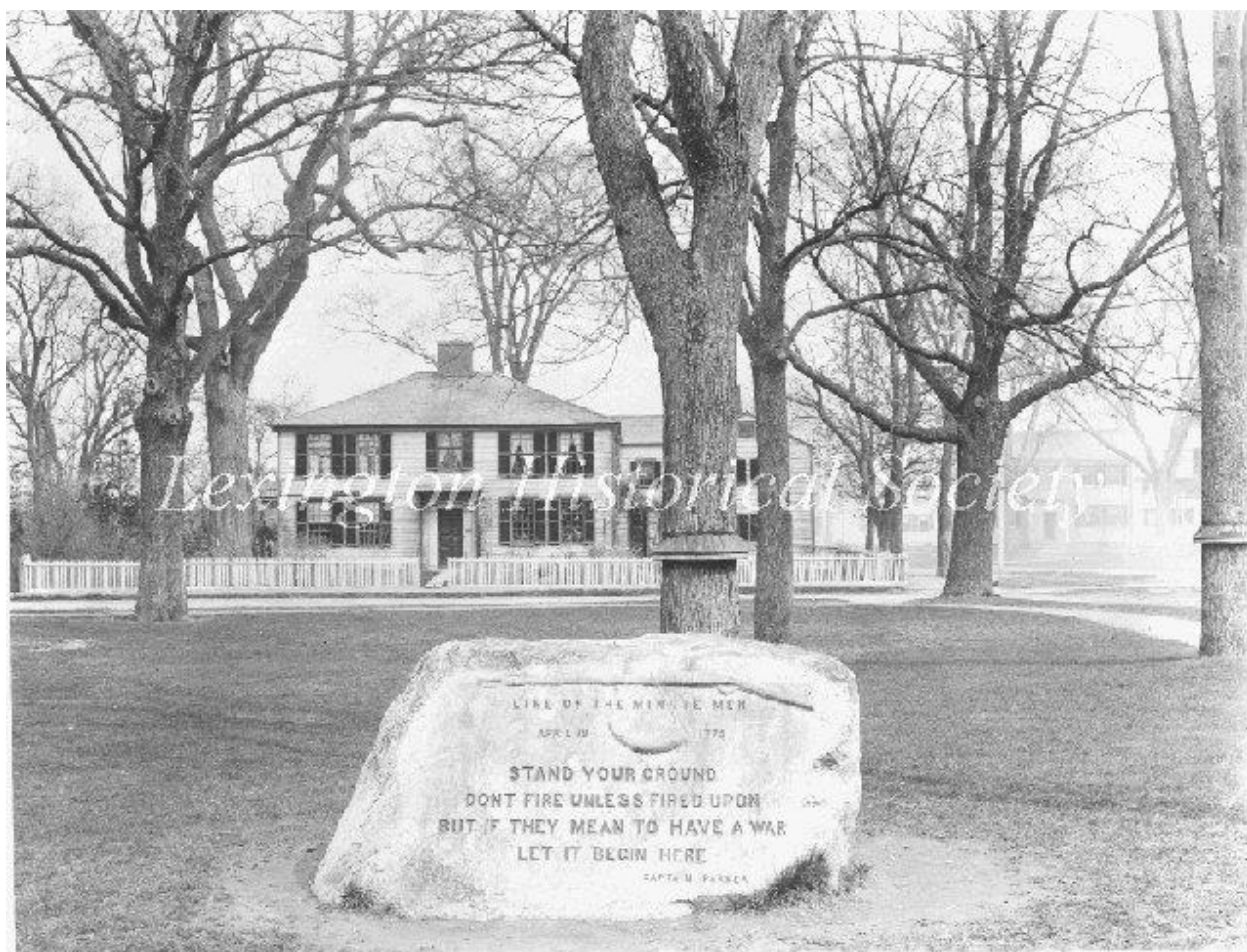
Jonathan was born March 5, 1744-45 in Bedford, MA. Three of Jonathan's brothers were also born in Bedford, while Henry and Sara's other eight children were all born in Lexington.¹⁰ He was known as Jr. to distinguish him from his older second cousin, Jonathan. Cousin Jonathan's son by the same name was thus known as Jonathan 3rd. The 1774 tax evaluation for Lexington listed Jonathan Jr. with a taxable rate of 10 pence which placed him about in the middle valuation of taxpayers of the town. He ranked 95th of the 194 taxpayers, in the 5th of 10 deciles according to wealth, and slightly below half of the property owners. I have not found out what his occupation was other than farmer.

Name	Personal shilling	Personal pence	Real shilling	Real pence	Total shilling	Total pence	Decile	Age	Father
Harrington, Jon'thn"Jr"	0	9	2	1	2	10	5	30	Henry sr-1711-1791

He married Ruth Fisk on February 13, 1776 who was the Daughter of Robert and Abigail Grover Fiske. Ruth was born on April 10, 1646, and was twenty-nine on April 19, 1775 while Jonathan Jr. was thirty one or thirty two. They had two children. Jonathan was born October 25, 1766 and probably it was his death that was listed in the vital records as "Widow's s., October 14, 1776." Their second child Peter was baptized July 26, 1772 and it was probably he who's death was listed in the vital records as "Jonathan Jr.'s ch., Sept. 9, 1774."¹¹

As can be seen from the spreadsheet on page five, Jonathan Jr. along with three of his brothers, Thomas, Moses and John were among those who rallied to the sound of William Diamond sounding the assembly in the early morning of April 19, 1775. The company first formed just to the rear of the Meeting House, but at Captain John Parker's command moved to a position to the rear of the Common.

When the British Regulars arrived and moved swiftly to confront Captain Parker's command, some of the militiamen were just joining the ranks while others were still arriving on the Common. Captain Parker, seeing that a dangerous confrontation was likely, gave the order to disperse. Some obeyed the command, others perhaps did not hear it due to the din and clamor of shouted commands and clamor of the unruly Regulars, and others might have resolved to stay in place. We do not know which group Jonathan might have been among when the firing began. After a first scattered volley by the British, a second crushing fusillade struck the wavering lines of the militia. Jonathan was struck down along with others within sight of his home.



The line of the militia marked by the granite boulder showing Jonathan Jr. and Ruth's home in the immediate background showing how close to his home Jonathan met his death. [Photo courtesy of the Lexington Historical Society.]

When the shooting ended, and the British troops fired their victory salute and then headed off toward Concord, the stunned surviving militiamen returned to the Common. There they found fathers, sons, brothers, cousins and neighbors, dead, dying, wounded or maimed.

Thomas, Moses III and John Harrington gazed upon the dead face of their beloved brother, unable to believe that he had been taken from them so violently. Ruth and her young son, Jonathan must have been overcome with grief, and Ruth would suffer another tragedy when young Jonathan would die the following year just before his tenth birthday. The dead were placed in rough-hewn wooden caskets and respectfully placed within the meeting house before being hastily buried at the rear of the Old Burial Ground. There, the common grave was hidden with branches for fear the returning British would desecrate their resting place.¹²

John Munroe in a deposition given on December 28, 1824 recorded that "Isaac Muzzy, Jonathan Harrington, and my father, Robert Munroe, were found dead near the place where our line was formed."¹³ Levi Harrington, son of Daniel, and an eyewitness to the events, in March 1846, dictated an account of the events of April 19th to his son Bowen. providing a fuller description of Jonathan's death.

"Jonathan Harrington, after leaving the Common went to his house, a few rods north, took his wife and child by the hand and was leaving the house by the back way, when he

was discovered by the British, who fired and killed him. (Perhaps he was running towards his house when he was killed) His wife saw him fall. He was found near his barn, where the Bedford road now is.”¹⁴

However, it appears that earlier, during the 60th anniversary commemoration held on April 19-20, 1835, the noted orator, Edward Everett, embellished the story of Jonathan Jr.’s death, and a version of this has been elaborated on and survives to this day.

Harrington's was a cruel fate. He fell in front of his own house, on the north of the common. His wife, at the window, saw him fall, and then start up, blood gushing from his breast. He held out his hands to her, as if for assistance, and fell again. Rising once more on his hands and knees, he crawled across the road towards his dwelling. She ran to meet him at the door, but it was to see him expire at her feet.¹⁵

Whether this was the first time the story was told in this fashion, it caught on. Frank Warren Coburn in 1912 wrote:

“Jonathan Harrington Jr. was mortally wounded, but staggered towards his home, on the northerly end of the Common. He fell before reaching there, struggled to his feet again, and staggered almost to his own door, where he expired, just as his wife rushed to meet him.”¹⁶

In 1921, Coburn wrote with a sense of immediacy and greater pathos:

“He is mortally wounded on the northerly end of the Common. Across the road is his home. He struggles to reach it, falls, but with renewed effort rises and staggers to his own door-stone. His wife meets him there, and he dies in her arms.”¹⁷

David Hackett Fisher, in his *Paul Revere’s Ride*, related the story in the most dramatic and poignant style.

Jonathan Harrington was mortally wounded only a few yards from his home on the western side of the Common. His wife and son watched in horror as he fell in front of the house, and struggled to get up again, his life’s blood coursing from a gaping chest wound. Jonathan Harrington rose to his feet and stretched out his hands to his family. Then he fell to the ground and crawled painfully toward his home, inch by inch, across the rough ground of the common. He died on his own doorstep.¹⁸

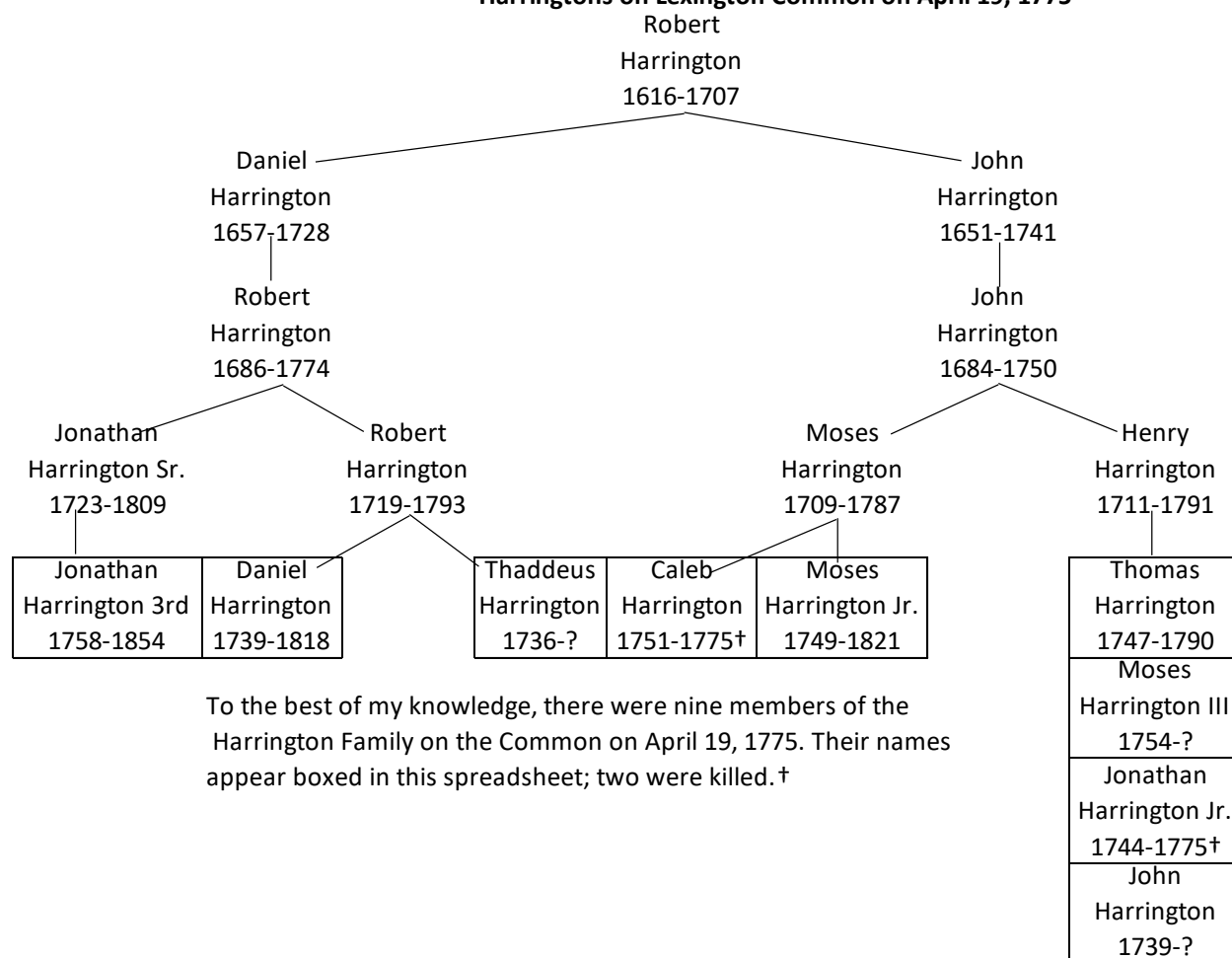
In 1799, a monument was erected on Lexington Common to honor those who had died on April 19, 1775. The inscription of the plaque was written by Reverend Jonas Clarke who served as the minister to Lexington from 1755 until his death in 1805. In 1835, the remains of the fallen of April 19, 1775 were disinterred and reburied in a vault at the back of the monument. Although not the first Revolutionary War monument, that erected to General Richard Montgomery in St. Paul’s Chapel in lower Manhattan lays claim to that, it is the first to honor the ordinary civilian-soldiers who died in the cause of our freedom.



Sacred to the Liberty and the Rights of Mankind!!!
 The Freedom and Independence of America,
 Sealed and defended with the Blood of her Sons.

This Monument is erected
 By the inhabitants of Lexington,
 Under the patronage and at the expense of
 The Commonwealth of Massachusetts,
 To the memory of their Fellow Citizens,
 Ensign *Robert Munroe*, and Messrs. *Jonas Parker*,
Samuel Hadley, *Jonathan Harrington, junr.*,
Isaac Muzzy, *Caleb Harrington* and *John Brown*,
 Of Lexington, and *Asahel Porter*, of Woburn,
 Who fell on this Field, the First Victims to the
 Sword of British Tyranny and Oppression,
 On the morning of the ever memorable
 Nineteenth of April, An. Dom. 1775.
 The Die was cast!!!
 The Blood of these Martyrs
 In the cause of God and their Country
 Was the Cement of the Union of these States, then
 Colonies, and gave the spring to the Spirit, Firmness
 And Resolution of their Fellow Citizens.
 They rose as one Man to revenge their Brethren's
 Blood, and at the Point of the Sword, to assert and
 Defend their native Rights.
 They nobly dar'd to be free!!
 The contest was long, bloody and affecting.
 Righteous Heaven approved the solemn appeal,
 Victory crowned their arms: and
 The Peace, Liberty, and Independence of the United
 States of America was their Glorious Reward.

Harringtons on Lexington Common on April 19, 1775



Footnotes

¹Charles Hudson, *History of the Town of Lexington, Middlesex County, Massachusetts from Its First Settlement to 1868, Revised and Continued to 1912*, Two Volumes, Lexington Historical Society, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York, 1913, Volume II, *Genealogy*, pp. 275-6;

²Henry Bond, *Genealogies of the Families and Descendants of the Early Settlers of Watertown, Massachusetts, Including Waltham and Weston: To Which is Appended the Early History of the Town, With Illustrations, Maps and Notes*, New England Historic-Genealogical Society, Boston, 1860, pp. 272-3.

³Photos of their gravestones can be seen at:

<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=20992084>

⁴Bond, p. 273

⁵Ibid., pp. 273-4.

⁶A photo of their gravestone can be found at <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/34308448/john-harrington>

⁷Bond, p. 273; Hudson, *Genealogies*, pp. 272-73.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Hudson, *Genealogies*, p. 275-6.

¹⁰Vital Records of Bedford, MA to the End of the Year 1849, Births, at <https://ma-vitalrecords.org/MA/Middlesex/Bedford/aBirthsH.shtml>; Vital Records of Lexington, MA, to the end of 1849, at https://ma-vitalrecords.org/MA/Middlesex/Lexington/Images/Lexington_B032.shtml, p. 32.

¹¹Vital Records of Lexington, MA, Lexington Deaths, page 179 at https://ma-vitalrecords.org/MA/Middlesex/Lexington/Images/Lexington_D179.shtml

¹²Letter of Elizabeth Clarke, daughter of Reverend Jonas Clarke, written to her niece, Lucy Ware Allen on April 20, 1835, describing the events of April 19, 1775 and the burial of the victims, collection of the Lexington Historical Society.

¹³Kehoe, Vincent J.R., *We Were There, April 19th 1775, Self-published, Chelmsford, MA, 1973*, pp. 242-43

¹⁴"An account of the battle of Lexington—April 19th, 1775 By Levi Harrington, an eye-witness, March, 1846, Collection of the Lexington Historical society.

¹⁵*Orations and Speeches on Various Occasions by Edward Everett*, Boston, American Stationers' Company, 1836, p. 516.

¹⁶Coburn, Frank Warren,

¹⁷Coburn, Frank Warren, *The Battle on Lexington Common, April 19, 1775*, Lexington, Mass., Published by the Author, 1921, p. 26.

¹⁸Fisher, David Hackett, *Paul Revere's Ride*, Oxford University Press, Paperback Edition, 1995, p. 197.