

Nathaniel Wyman
A Brief Biography
By Bill Poole

Nathaniel Wyman was a member of Captain John Parker's Lexington Militia Company and was killed in the afternoon on April 19, 1775 when the men of Lexington ambushed the Regulars returning from Concord at the site now popularly known as Parker's Revenge. There is some controversy concerning Nathaniel — did he belong to the Lexington Company, was he even from Lexington, where was he killed and what was his ancestry and parentage? Was he from Billerica as some sources claimed?

Charles Hudson in the 1868 edition of his *History of the Town of Lexington* identified him as the second and youngest son of Increase and Deborah Pierce Wyman aged 24 at his death.¹ An examination of genealogical and vital statistics of the several towns in which the Wyman family settled and lived suggests that he was indeed the son of Increase Wyman, but of his second wife, Ruth (maiden name unknown), and not the child of Deborah. As such, Nathaniel would have been born in Woburn on March 5, 1741 and thus was 34 years of age on April 19, 1775.²

Was Nathaniel a Lexington resident? An examination of the Assessment and Tax Lists of Lexington has Nathaniel Wyman listed for the years 1773 and 1774, but disappearing from the lists for 1775, thus suggesting that he was indeed an inhabitant of Lexington prior to April 19, 1775 and then was struck from the rolls following his death. Nathaniel ranked well down the scale in wealth according to the 1774 tax assessment, in the 8th decile and 139th of the 165 individuals taxed.³ The vital records of Billerica do not have an entry for Nathaniel in either births, marriages or deaths, nor is he listed in the ranks of the Billerica militia according to Frank Warren Coburn in his *Muster Rolls of the Participating Companies*. Coburn does place him with the Lexington Militia in that volume.⁴

Why the controversy, then, as to whether he was a member of Captain Parker's Company and a resident of Lexington? The origin seems to lie with historian Lemuel Shattuck in his *History of Concord*, published in 1835 in which he wrote: "The Sudbury company attacked them near Hardy's hill on the south; and below the Brooks tavern, on the old road north of the schoolhouse, a severe battle was fought. Some were killed in the woods, and others in or near Mr. Hartwell's barn, close by. It was here that Captain Jonathan Wilson of Bedford, Nathaniel Wyman of Billerica, and Daniel Thompson of Woburn were killed."⁵

Interestingly, it was Charles Hudson who next picked up this version in one section of the 1868 edition of his *History of the Town of Lexington*. "The loss of the Americans was comparatively light; though Captain Jonathan Wilson, of Bedford, Nathaniel Wyman, of Billerica, and Daniel Thompson, of Woburn, fell in this part of the field."⁶ However, in every other instance in the 1868 edition Hudson listed Nathaniel as being from Lexington.⁷ Yet, the editors of the 1913 republication of Hudson favored Shattuck's claim that he was from Billerica, and editorially corrected Hudson's statements that Nathaniel was from Lexington.⁸

Henry Allen Hazen in his *History of Billerica*, published in 1883 continued the error, although admitting that Nathaniel was also credited to Lexington.⁹ Abram English Brown in his 1896

Beneath Old Roof Trees repeated the mistake as did Richard Frothingham *History of the Siege of Boston, and of the Battles of Lexington, Concord and Bunker Hill*, published in 1903 and Ellen Chase in her 1910 *The Beginnings of the American Revolution Based On Contemporary Letters Diaries and Other Documents*.¹⁰ Frank Warren Coburn then parroted the story in his *The Battle of April 19, 1775*, although listing him as from Lexington in his *Muster Rolls* volume.¹¹ In his 1930 book *Heroes of the Battle Road*, Frank Wilson Cheney Hersey continued the myth of Nathaniel being from Billerica.¹² David Hackett Fischer in his 1994 *Paul Revere's Ride* does not mention Nathaniel's participation in the afternoon engagement, but lists him from Lexington.¹³

Lexington has long claimed Nathaniel as a native. As stated earlier, with the exception of the single instance of quoting Shattuck's statement, Charles Hudson everywhere listed Nathaniel as from Lexington despite the editors of the 1913 edition attempt to correct him. But, perhaps the most telling piece of evidence that Nathaniel was from Lexington is the broadside that appeared in E. Russell's *Salem Gazette* just two days after the battle on April 21, 1775, titled "Bloody Butchery of the British Troops or the Runaway Fight of the Regulars." Among the names of the ten men from Lexington killed on April 19, 1775 appears that of "Mr. Nathaniel Wyman."¹⁴ So, this contemporary account certainly considered him as being from Lexington.

Additionally, to a sermon he wrote in 1776, the Reverend Jonas Clarke of Lexington appended a list of the April 19, 1775 casualties from the various towns and listed Nathaniel as being from Lexington. The Reverend Avery Williams, in his *Discourse Delivered at Lexington March 31, 1813*, cited Reverend Clarke's sermon and also included the names of the Lexington casualties including Nathaniel. Finally, Elias Phinney appended the list of casualties of April 19th to his 1825 *History of the Battle at Lexington*, and this is the list that also appears in the 1913 edition of Hudson citing Nathaniel Wyman as a citizen of Lexington.¹⁵

In Cary Memorial Hall in Lexington there is a marble plaque placed there shortly after the Civil War and Nathaniel Wyman's name appears with those of the nine other Lexington men who died on April 19, 1775 with the inscription

"THEY POURED OUT THEIR GENEROUS BLOOD LIKE WATER BEFORE THEY KNEW WHETHER IT WOULD FERTILIZE THE LAND OF FREEDOM OR OF BONDAGE."

The heritage of Nathaniel, the subject of this biography, extends back to the villages of Barkway and Westmill, Hertfordshire, England. [For the genealogy and history of the Wyman Family, see [A Brief Biography of James Wyman](#) presented on this site.] Nathaniel's great grandfather, Francis Wyman, arrived in America at Charlestown, MA in 1636 at the age of seventeen along with his fourteen year old brother, John. They came probably with their uncles, Samuel and Thomas Richardson, who were among the founders of Woburn, MA. Francis married Abigail Reed October 2, 1650. Their fourth child and third son, named Nathaniel, was born in Woburn in 1665 and died there in 1717.¹⁶ He was the grandfather of Nathaniel the subject of this biography and was frequently referred to as Sergeant Nathaniel. He married Mary Winn June 28, 1692.¹⁷ They had twelve children, the tenth of whom, and the second son, was named Increase who was born in Woburn March 1, 1707 and died there sometime after 1749. He first married Deborah Pierce on March 11, 1729, and after she died on September 5, 1739 he took as his second wife

Ruth [family name unknown].¹⁸ Increase and Ruth's son, Nathaniel, was born on March 5, 1741 in Woburn, and would have been thirty-four when he died on April 19, 1775.¹⁹ Records exist showing the marriage of a Nathaniel Wyman in Woburn on July 2, 1772 to Catherine Tufts of Medford, who subsequently married Ebenezer Richardson on December 12, 1776. Presumably, these relate to Nathaniel, and his wife, Catherine, who remarried after his death.²⁰ Sadly, we do not know the location of Nathaniel's gravesite.

Footnotes

¹Charles Hudson, *History of the Town of Lexington, Middlesex County, Massachusetts from Its First Settlement to 1868 with Genealogical Register of Lexington Families*, Wiggin and Lunt Publisher, Boston, 1868, p. 277.

² Woburn, Massachusetts, *Records of Births, Deaths and Marriages from 1640 to 1873*, Andrews, Cutler & Co., 1890; New England Historical Genealogical Society (NEHGS), Part One Births, p. 290; *Vital Records of Billerica, Massachusetts to the Year 1850*, Boston, Mass. 1908; Lexington, Mass., *Vital Records of Lexington, Massachusetts through 1898, Births, Marriages and Deaths*, Wright and Potter Printing Company, Boston, Mass, 1898; Henry S, Nourse, Ed., *Birth, Marriage and Death Register, Church Records and Epitaphs of Lancaster, Massachusetts, 1643 – 1850*, Lancaster, Mass., 1890.

³*Assessments and Tax lists, Town of Lexington 1773-75*, On CD at Assessors Office, Lexington, MA.

⁴Frank Warren Coburn, Compiler, *Muster Rolls of the Participating Companies of American Militia and Minute Men in The Battle of April 19, 1775*, Published in 1912 and Reprinted by Eastern National Park and Monument Association, 1995, p.7.

⁵Lemuel Shattuck, *A History of Concord*, Concord and Boston, Russell. Odiorne, and Company, 1835, p. 115.

⁶Hudson, *History of Lexington* (1868 edition), p. 195; and Lexington Historical Society, *History of the Town of Lexington, Middlesex County, Massachusetts from Its First Settlement to 1868 with a Genealogical Register of Lexington Families by Charles H. Hudson, Revised and Continued to 1912 by the Lexington Historical Society*, Two Volumes, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York, 1913, Volume I – *History*, p. 167. [It is interesting to note that in his genealogical section of the 1868 edition, Hudson wrote that Nathaniel had been “killed in Lex. near the Common, on the morning of the 19th of April, 1775, aged 24 years,” despite stating in the historical section of the book that he had been killed in the afternoon.]

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 185, 186, 263, 422, 423, 444 and 534.

⁸*Ibid.*, footnote³, p. 185 and footnote⁴, p. 186.

⁹Henry Allen Hazen, *History of Billerica, Massachusetts, with a Genealogical Register*, Boston, A. Williams and Co., 1883, pp. 235-6.

¹⁰ Abram English Brown, *Beneath Old Roof Trees*, Boston, Lee and Shepard, 1896, p. 225; Richard Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston, and of the Battles of Lexington, Concord and Bunker Hill, also an account of the Bunker hill Monument with Illustrative Documents*, Sixth Edition, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1903 pp. 73-4; Ellen Chase, *The Beginnings of the American Revolution Based On Contemporary Letters Diaries and Other Documents*, Volume III, New York, The Baker and Taylor Company, 1910, p.58.

¹¹ Frank Warren Coburn, *The Battle of April 19, 1775, in Lexington, Concord, Lincoln, Arlington, Cambridge, Somerville and Charlestown, Massachusetts*, Lexington, Mass., Published by the Author, 1912, p. 101; Coburn, *Muster Rolls*, p.7.

¹² Frank Wilson Cheney Hersey, *Heroes of the Battle Road, A Narrative of Events in Lincoln on the 18th and 19th of April, 1775, wherein are set forth the Capture of Paul Revere, Escape of Samuel Prescott, Heroism of Mary Hartwell and other stirring incidents*. Boston, Perry Walton, 1930.

¹³ David Hackett Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 320.

¹⁴ The broadside can be viewed as posted on Line by the Massachusetts Historical Society at: http://www.masshist.org/revolution/doc-viewer.php?item_id=467

¹⁵ Jonas Clarke, A.M., *The Fate of Bloodthirsty Oppressors and GOD'S tender Care of his distressed People, A Sermon Preached at Lexington, April 19, 1776, To commemorate the MURDER, BLOODSHED and Commencement of Hostilities, between Great-Britain and America, in that Town, by a Brigade of Troops of George III, under Command of Lieutenant-Colonel SMITH, on the Nineteenth of April, 1775, to which is added A Brief Narrative of the principal Transactions of that Day*, Massachusetts State: Boston, Printed by Powars and Willis, MDCC,LXVI; Avery Williams, *Discourse delivered at Lexington March 31, 1813 The Day which Completed a Century from the Incorporation of the Town*, Boston, Printed by Samuel T. Armstrong, 1813, p. 19; Elias Phinney, *History of the battle at Lexington on the Morning of the 19th of April, 1775*, Printed by Phelps and Farnham, 1825, p. 27; Hudson, *History of Lexington* (1913 edition), Volume 1, p. 534.

¹⁶ Woburn, *Records of Births, Death and Marriages*, volume 3 p. 313, volume 1 p. 285 and volume 2, p. 213.

¹⁷ Ibid., volume 1 p. 314

¹⁸ Ibid., volume 1 p. 287, volume 2, p. 214, volume 3 p. 315 and volume

¹⁹ Ibid., volume 1 p. 290.

²⁰ Ibid., volume 3 p. 318; New England Historical and Genealogical Society, *Vital Records of Medford, Massachusetts to the Year 1850*, Boston, MA, 1907, p. 308.