

## **A Brief History of Patriot Solomon Peirce**

**By: Bruce J. Leader (and further edited by Dave Gipson December 2019)**

Solomon Peirce was born in Lexington in 1742. Although his ancestry can be traced back farther than 1637, I believe that year is a good starting point. The reason being that 1637 is the year, in which a 49-year-old Norwich, England weaver named John Pers, along with his 36-year-old wife Elizabeth and four children, arrived in America. He chose to settle his family on a 12-acre lot in the town of Watertown near its border with Waltham, and commenced farming. By the year 1644 he had expanded that single 12-acre lot farm into a holding of four lots. However, John Pers was not the only Watertown landholder in the Pers family. His oldest son, Anthony along with Anthony's wife Mary had settled in America four years before John's arrival. Anthony also owned a farm in Watertown, however his farm covered 86 acres! Anthony Peirce (once in America the family chose to spell their name "Peirce") had a grandson by the name of John who married Elizabeth Smith and together moved over to town of Waltham to raise a family. John and Elizabeth Peirce's second child, was a son named Jonas who married Abigail Comee of the Lexington Comee family. Once married, Joseph and Abigail settled in Lexington to raise their family.

On June 15, 1742, in Lexington, Jonas and Abigail Peirce welcomed their sixth child, a boy. They chose to name him Solomon who along with his seven siblings, was born and raised in the Town of Lexington. However, when Solomon's older brother, John, married and moved to Westminster, MA, Solomon's parents and many of his siblings chose to follow John to Westminster. By April 19, 1775, Solomon, his wife and his children were the only members of the Peirce family still residing in Lexington.

Let's step back a bit to Solomon Peirce's wedding. On December 15, 1763, at the

age of 21, Solomon married 20-year-old Amity Fessenden. At that time, both the Peirce and Fessenden families resided in Lexington, so naturally the wedding was held in Lexington. After the wedding, the couple chose to reside in Lexington. In 1764, 21-year-old Amity gave birth to their first child, a boy. Unfortunately, as happened far too often in those years, the baby died during the birth. Thankfully, the following years were more joyous as Amity gave birth to eleven healthy children –

Amity Peirce, born August 26, 1765; Jonas Peirce born November 16, 1766; Abiel Peirce born September 22, 1768; Solomon Peirce born September 10, 1770; Samuel Peirce born January 24, 1773; Abijah Peirce born May 19, 1775; Betsey Hall Gray Peirce born February 2, 1777; Lucy Peirce born March 14, 1779; Thaddeus Peirce born May 15, 1781; Leonard Peirce born March 30, 1783; William Peirce born January 16, 1786.

Solomon's wife, Amity was an incredibly resilient and strong woman! For, despite the state of health care in the Colonies at that time, she bore twelve children (eleven of whom survived). Incredibly, she delivered her last child when she was 43 years old!

As for occupation, Solomon Peirce's property deeds listed him as a cordwainer (or shoemaker). In addition, he was listed in the 1772 Lexington Town Records as a surveyor of highways. As were most other Lexington townspeople at that time, he was also a farmer. He was a rather ambitious farmer as well. In 1764 he paid his father, Jonas Peirce seventy pounds for fourteen acres of land. The fourteen acres was a portion of one of his father's holdings then known as "Bryant Place" (that land being the same land bought by Jonas Peirce of Joseph White in 1731). The

current location of Solomon's first holding is found along Lexington's Concord Avenue. In 1765 he bought from a B. Smith, four acres adjoining his first holding. 1783 was a busy year for Solomon Peirce. First, he bought from E. Munroe *et al* seven further acres adjoining. Then he bought, again from his father, forty additional acres adjoining the original fourteen acres. Finally, he bought of Ezekiel Hall thirty acres also adjoining the original fourteen, making a total land holding of ninety-five acres.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of April in 1775, Solomon Peirce was a 32-year-old husband and father of five with a pregnant wife. He was a rank in file member of the Lexington militia Company. He was a neighbor of Captain John Parker, and mustered on the common along with others of the Lexington Company when the first call went out. However, after a long wait with no sign of the Regular Troops, Capt. Parker dismissed the men for breakfast with the order that they assemble again when and if the alarm was sounded. As Solomon Peirce lived a farther distance away, he joined many of the men in the Buckman Tavern. Later, when the alarm was finally sounded, Solomon Peirce, along with the other men in the tavern, hurried out toward the Lexington Common. He was in the process of scaling one of the Buckman Tavern's bounding stonewalls, in order to muster with the other militiamen, when the first shot was fired. In the brief exchange of musket fire, Solomon took a musket ball to the thigh. After the Regulars finally quit the Lexington Common to continue their march to Concord, Solomon rose up and, with great pain, limped the long walk home. Once there, his wife, Amity, dressed the wound by binding it with a bandana handkerchief. Immediately thereafter, Solomon resolutely headed back out to join Captain Parker and the Lexington Company in attacking the retreating Regulars.

After harassing the retreating Regulars, Solomon Peirce returned home to convalesce.

A few days after the battle of Lexington and Concord, the Provincial Congress authorized depositions to be taken as soon as possible, to document what occurred. Below is the deposition of Solomon Peirce and 13 others, taken six days later on April 25, 1775.

We, Nathaniel Parkhurst, Jonas Parker, John Munroe, Jur  
ship, **Solomon Peirce**, John Muzzy, Abner Meads, John Bridge  
nezer Bowman, William Munroe, 3d, Micah Hagar, Samue  
Samuel Hastings, and James Brown, of Lexington, in the coun  
sex, and colony of the Massachusetts Bay, in New England, an  
ful age, do testify and say, that on the morning of the nineteen  
instant, about one or two o'clock, being informed, that a num  
officers had been riding up and down the road the evening a  
ceding, and that some of the inhabitants as they were passing,  
sulted by the officers and stopped by them, and being also infor  
regular troops, were on their march from Boston, in order, as  
to take the colony stores then deposited at Concord, we met o  
of our company in this town. After the company had collected  
dered by Capt. John Parker, who commanded us, to disperse  
sent, and be ready to attend the beat of the drum, and accordi  
pany went into houses near the place of parade. We furthe  
say, that about five o'clock in the morning, we attended the  
drum, and were formed on the parade. We were faced toward  
then marching up to us, and some of our company were comi  
rade, with their backs towards the troops, and others on the pa  
disperse, when the regulars fired on the company before a gun  
any of our company on them; they killed eight of our compan  
ed several, and continued their fire until we had all made our e

NATHANIEL PARKHURST,	JOHN BRIDGE,
JONAS PARKER,	EBENEZER BO

Almost two months later, Solomon Peirce had healed well enough to report to Cambridge to participate in the battle of Bunker Hill on June 17 & June 18, 1775. From March 4 – 8, 1776, he was stationed at Dorchester Heights as a member of John Bridge's Lexington Company. From August 16 to November 30, 1777 he served as a sergeant under Captain George Minott, in a Concord company under the umbrella of Col. Samuel Ballard's regiment. In this capacity he fought against General Burgoyne's Army in the eleventh battle of Bennington. On June 7, 1780 he was commissioned first lieutenant of Captain William Munroe's company under the command of Colonel Francis Faulkner. Shortly after the close of the war in July 25, 1784, he was made captain of this same company. At the time that he was made captain, the company was a part of the State Militia under the command of Colonel Samuel Lamson of Weston. Finally, on April 23, 1785, just shy of his forty-third birthday, Solomon Peirce resigned his commission and retired from the service.

For much of his life, Solomon Peirce was quite successful. He had acquired a more than comfortable ninety-five acres to farm, and was a shoemaker as well. Along with his wife, Amity, he raised 11 children in Lexington in what has been described by others as a "mansion house" on his property. "In 1783 as recorded in the tax account he had a personal estate of 62 £, and real estate of 344 £, a not inconsiderable sum in those days."<sup>†</sup> However, in 1784, overburdened by a combination of loans for the seventy-seven acres that he purchased the prior year and the massive inflation and devaluation of the paper currency of the time, he was forced to sell his entire ninety-five acre farm with mansion house and barn to Joseph Underwood. Despite losing his entire holding, Solomon Peirce remained in

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<sup>†</sup> Memorial address At The Dedication of Monument To The Memory OF Capt. Solomon Peirce A Soldier Of The Revolution by Arthur W. Peirce. . [*The Tufts College Press*] 1904.

Lexington for four more years. In 1788, due to their increasing economic hardship, he and his wife relocated to Menotomy (later named Arlington) – then a village within the larger town of Cambridge, Massachusetts, to live with the family of their oldest son, Jonas Peirce. On June 15, 1788, Solomon and his wife enrolled in the second precinct church in Menotomy. At this time, their son, Jonas and his family lived in what is now known as the historic “Amos Russell House” located in modern-day Arlington Heights. However, in 1803, Jonas “... bought a large farm March 12. 1803 composing the whole of what is now Arlington Heights known afterward for many years as Peirce's Hill. The property was then called Spring Hill Farm, and had been owned by the well-known Appleton family of Boston and used by them as a country place. Jonas bought it of Thomas Perkins, who had married a daughter of Nathaniel Appleton. The purchase Included about two hundred and fifty acres of land, a mansion house, a smaller house and barn, a piece of land called Bear Hill Pasture, and a piece of salt marsh on the Charles river, Cambridge. His parents occupied the smaller house, while he lived in the mansion house. “<sup>‡</sup>

Solomon and Amity Peirce were married for 48 years, when, in 1811 Amity Peirce died. Following her death, Solomon moved into Jonas Peirce’s mansion house and lived there for 10 more years. He died there on October 16, 1821 at the age of 79. Upon their respective deaths, both Amity and Jonas were buried in The Old Cemetery. This cemetery is located on the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Pleasant Street just behind the First Parish Unitarian Church in the modern-day town of Arlington, Massachusetts. Due to their economic situation at the times of

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<sup>‡</sup> *Historic homes and places and genealogical and personal memoirs ...*, Volume 3 edited by William Richard Cutter [New York, Lewis Historical Publishing co.] 1908 Pages 892 –893

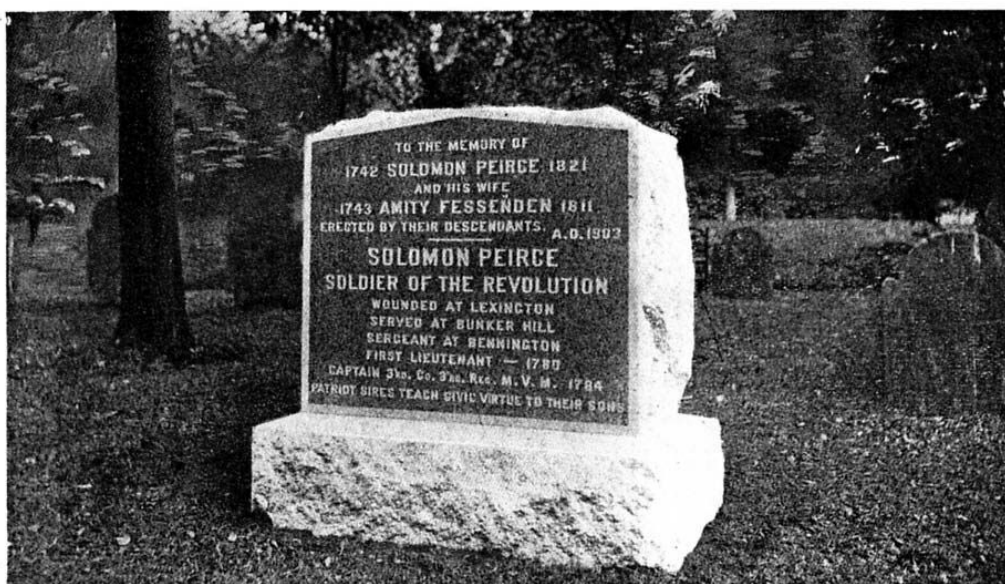
their deaths, neither Solomon nor Amity were given any kind of markers on their graves. However, in the early 1900's, a group of their descendants who were engaged in genealogical research realized that there were no memorials at the site of their ancestor's burials. So, they decided to solicit money from as many descendants as they were able to locate (which was quite a few!), and on September 2, 1903 they dedicated a great stone monument to the memory of both Solomon and Amity Peirce.





House occupied by Solomon Peirce from 1788 to 1803 or later

I have been unable to find the exact location on which this house stood, but it is certain that the house was located somewhere in what is now known as Arlington Heights, Massachusetts.



MONUMENT ERECTED TO THE MEMORY OF SOLOMON PEIRCE AND HIS WIFE, AMITY FESSENDEN, BY THEIR DESCENDANTS IN 1903





A 2006 photograph of the Solomon and Amity Peirce Monument (shown above in 1903) This headstone is located in The Old Cemetery on the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Pleasant Street, Arlington, Massachusetts.

### **REFERENCE MATERIAL:**

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