

The Road to Lexington and Concord

MAIN IDEA

The tensions between Britain and the colonies led to armed conflict in Massachusetts.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Americans at times still find themselves called upon to fight for their principles.

TERMS & NAMES

militia

Minuteman

Intolerable Acts

First Continental Congress

Paul Revere

Lexington and Concord

Loyalist

Patriot

ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

On April 19, 1775, some 70 militiamen led by Captin John Parker gathered in Lexington, Massachusetts, a town near Boston. A **militia** is a force of armed civilians pledged to defend their community. About one-third of the Lexington militia were **Minutemen**, trained to “act at a minute’s warning.” They had heard that the British were coming.

Parker’s troops had never faced soldiers. Soon they would meet the British on Lexington Green in the first battle of the Revolutionary War. According to tradition, Parker told his men, “Stand your ground; don’t fire unless fired upon, but if they mean to have war, let it begin here.”

In this section, you will read how colonial protests led to revolution.



This statue of Captain John Parker stands in Lexington, Massachusetts.



Taking Notes

Use your chart to take notes about the beginning of the American Revolution.

Proclamation of 1763



The Intolerable Acts

The Boston Tea Party had aroused fury in Britain. One British official said that the people of Boston “ought to be knocked about their ears.” King George III declared, “We must master them or totally leave them to themselves and treat them as aliens.” Britain chose to “master” the colonies.

In 1774, Parliament passed a series of laws to punish the Massachusetts colony and to serve as a warning to other colonies. The British called these laws the Coercive Acts, but they were so harsh that the colonists called them the **Intolerable Acts**.

One of the acts would close the port of Boston until colonists paid for the destroyed tea. Others banned committees of correspondence, allowed Britain to house troops wherever necessary, and let British officials accused of crimes in the colonies stand trial in Britain. To enforce the acts, Parliament appointed General Thomas Gage governor of Massachusetts.

In 1773, Sam Adams had written, “I wish we could arouse the continent.” The Intolerable Acts answered his wish. Other colonies

immediately offered Massachusetts their support. They sent food and money to Boston. The committees of correspondence also called for a meeting of colonial delegates to discuss what to do next.

The First Continental Congress Meets

In September 1774, delegates from all the colonies except Georgia met in Philadelphia. At this meeting, called the **First Continental Congress**, delegates voted to ban all trade with Britain until the Intolerable Acts were repealed. They also called on each colony to begin training troops. Georgia agreed to be a part of the actions of the Congress even though it had voted not to send delegates.

The First Continental Congress marked a key step in American history. Although most delegates were not ready to call for independence, they were determined to uphold colonial rights. This meeting planted the seeds of a future independent government. John Adams called it “a nursery of American statesmen.” The delegates agreed to meet in seven months, if necessary. By that time, however, fighting with Britain had begun.

ReadingHistory

A. Evaluating

Why do you think the First Continental Congress was important?

Between War and Peace

The colonists hoped that the trade boycott would force a repeal of the Intolerable Acts. After all, past boycotts had led to the repeal of the Stamp Act and the Townshend Acts. This time, however, Parliament stood firm. It even increased restrictions on colonial trade and sent more troops.

By the end of 1774, some colonists were preparing to fight. In Massachusetts, John Hancock headed the Committee of Safety, which had the power to call out the militia. The colonial troops continued to train.

CAUSE AND EFFECT: Growing Conflict Between Britain and America

DATE	BRITISH ACTION	COLONIAL REACTION
1763	Proclamation of 1763 issued	Proclamation leads to anger
1765	Stamp Act passed	Boycott of British goods; Stamp Act Resolves passed
1766	Stamp Act repealed; Declaration Act passed	Boycott ended
1767	Townshend Acts passed	New boycotts; Boston Massacre (March 1770)
1770	Townshend Acts repealed (April)	Tension between colonies and Britain reduced
1773	Tea Act passed	Boston Tea Party
1774	Intolerable Acts passed	First Continental Congress bans trade; militias organized
1775	Troops ordered to Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts	Militia fights British troops; Second Continental Congress; Continental Army established

SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Charts

1. What British action caused the first violence in the growing conflict between Britain and America?
2. How might the Intolerable Acts be seen as a reaction as well as an action?

Most colonial leaders believed that any fight with Britain would be short. They thought that a show of force would make Britain change its policies. Few expected a war. One who did was Patrick Henry.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

Gentlemen may cry peace, peace—but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why should we idle here? . . . I know not what course others may take. But as for me, give me liberty or give me death.

Patrick Henry, quoted in *Patriots* by A. J. Langguth

Henry delivered what became his most famous speech in the Virginia House of Burgesses in March 1775.

The Midnight Ride

Meanwhile, spies were busy on both sides. Sam Adams had built a spy network to keep watch over British activities. The British had their spies too. They were Americans who were loyal to Britain. From them, General Gage learned that the Massachusetts militia was storing arms and ammunition in Concord, about 20 miles northwest of Boston. He also heard that Sam Adams and John Hancock were in Lexington. On the night of April 18, 1775, Gage ordered his troops to arrest Adams and Hancock in Lexington and to destroy the supplies in Concord.

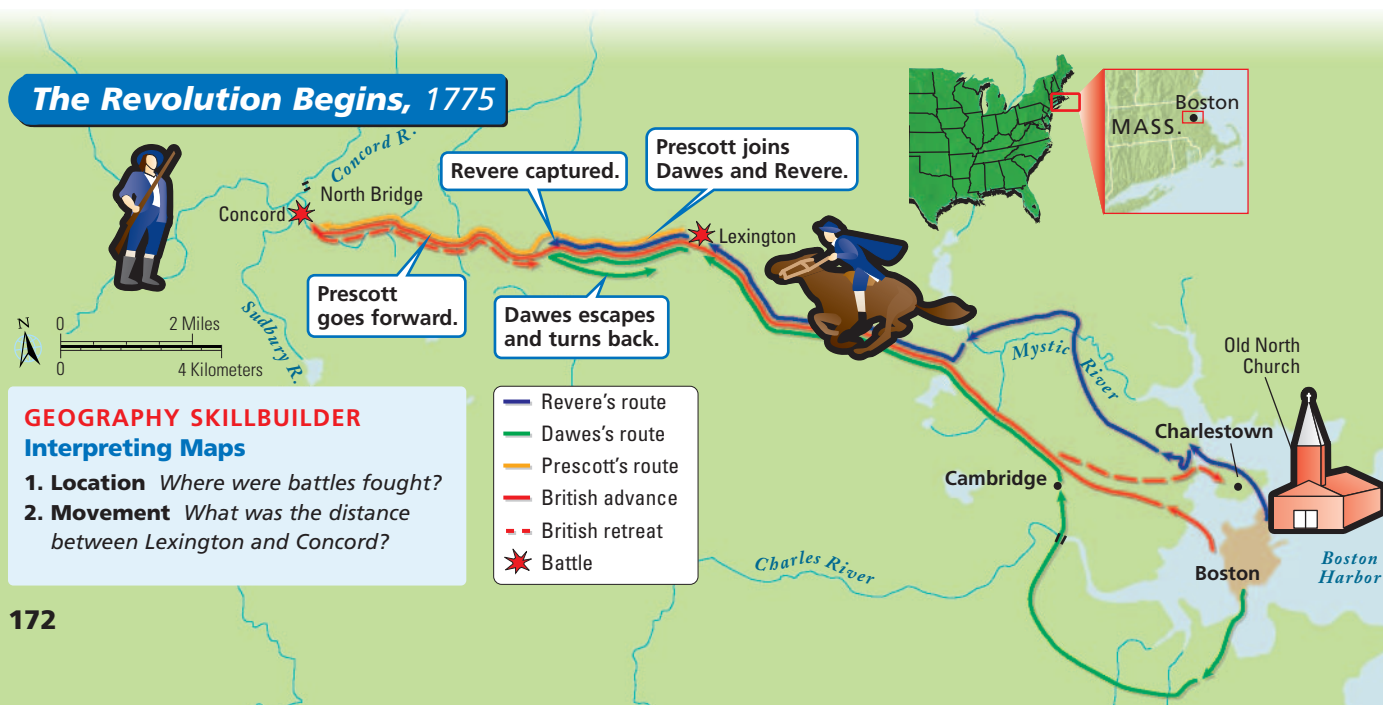
The Sons of Liberty had prepared for this moment. **Paul Revere**, a Boston silversmith, and a second messenger, William Dawes, were charged with spreading the news about British troop movements. Revere had arranged a system of signals to alert colonists in Charlestown, on the shore opposite Boston. If one lantern burned in the Old North Church steeple, the British troops were coming by land; if two, they were coming by water. Revere would go across the water from Boston to Charlestown and ride to Lexington and Concord from there. Dawes would take the land route.

ReadingHistory

B. Recognizing Effects What effect might spying have had on the people of Boston?

Background

The signals were a backup system in case Revere was captured.



When the British moved, so did Revere and Dawes. They galloped over the countryside on their “midnight ride,” spreading the news. In Lexington, they were joined by Dr. Samuel Prescott. When Revere and Dawes were stopped by a British patrol, Prescott broke away and carried the message to Concord.

Lexington and Concord

At dawn on April 19, some 700 British troops reached Lexington. They found Captain John Parker and about 70 militiamen waiting. The British commander ordered the Americans to drop their muskets. They refused. No one knows who fired first, but within a few minutes eight militiamen lay dead. The British then marched to Concord, where they destroyed military supplies. A battle broke out at a bridge north of town, forcing the British to retreat.

Nearly 4,000 Minutemen and militiamen arrived in the area. They lined the road from Concord to Lexington and peppered the retreating redcoats with musket fire. “It seemed as if men came down from the clouds,” one soldier said. Only the arrival of 1,000 more troops saved the British from destruction as they scrambled back to Boston.

Lexington and Concord were the first battles of the Revolutionary War. As Ralph Waldo Emerson later wrote, colonial troops had fired the “shot heard ‘round the world.” Americans would now have to choose sides and back up their political opinions by force of arms. Those who supported the British were called **Loyalists**. Those who sided with the rebels were **Patriots**. The conflict between the two sides divided communities, families, and friends. The war was on!

Background

British losses totaled 273 soldiers compared to 95 militiamen.

ReadingHistory

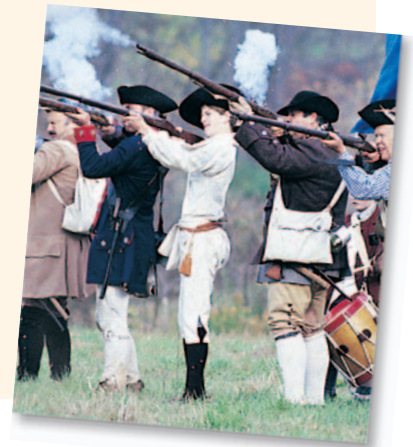
C. Drawing Conclusions

Why did Emerson call it the “shot heard ‘round the world”?

Now and then

PATRIOTS’ DAY

The “shot heard ‘round the world” is celebrated every year in Massachusetts and Maine. Patriots’ Day, as it is called, is the third Monday of April. In Concord and nearby towns, modern-day Minutemen like those below reenact the battle that began the Revolution on April 19, 1775. The Boston Marathon is also run on Patriots’ Day.



Section 3 Assessment

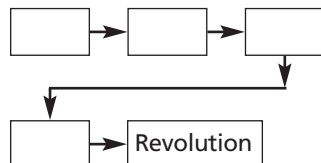
1. Terms & Names

Explain the significance of:

- militia
- Minuteman
- Intolerable Acts
- First Continental Congress
- Paul Revere
- Lexington and Concord
- Loyalist
- Patriot

2. Using Graphics

Use a diagram like the one below to show events that led to the Revolutionary War.



3. Main Ideas

- Why did Britain pass the Intolerable Acts?
- Who took part in the First Continental Congress?
- What was the purpose of the “midnight ride”?

4. Critical Thinking

Supporting Opinions

Do you think the fighting between Britain and the colonies could have been avoided? Why or why not?

THINK ABOUT

- Britain’s attitude toward the colonies
- colonial feelings about Britain

ACTIVITY OPTIONS

GEOGRAPHY

MATH

Research the Battles of Lexington and Concord. Draw a **map** of key events or create a **chart** showing statistics from the battles.