

Jason Russell House 2022 Highlights Tour Outline

Guide leads visitors into the Smith Museum for a brief orientation and introduction.

ORIENTATION 2 minutes

Smith Museum

Guide gives a brief overview of the tour components:

1. **Introduction: Historic Significance of the Jason Russell House**
2. **Exhibit: Menotomy: Road to Revolution** Menotomy (Arlington) and citizens on April 19, 1775
3. **Guided tour** of the Jason Russell House 20 - 25 minutes

Guide tells visitors they have the option at the end of the tour to return to the April 19th exhibit, view the Smith Museum exhibit, and the browse book cart.

1. INTRODUCTION: Historic Significance of the Jason Russell House 3 - 4 minutes

- The Jason Russell House is a fine example of an **18th century colonial farmhouse**. Its rooms illustrate the **changing periods** allowing us to take a walk through time.
- Situated on the British retreat route, it was the **site of the worst fighting on April 19, 1775**.
 - After their unsuccessful attempt to seize ammunition in Concord, British troops fought their way back to Lexington where they were met with 1100 reinforcements led by Lord Percy.
 - The **fighting intensified in Menotomy** where British forces found themselves outnumbered by 2000 colonial militia gathered in this crossroads village.
 - Percy ordered his troops to **flank the main column** and to **clear every dwelling of snipers** which resulted in numerous skirmishes along Concord Road in Menotomy.
 - **British troops suffered heavier losses than the colonists** with 40 British regulars and 25 colonial militia killed in Menotomy.
 - **Twelve militia** and at least **two British soldiers** were **killed at the Jason Russell House**.
- There are **eleven bullet holes** located throughout the house providing evidence of the violence that took place here.
 - A **ballistics study begun in 2020** discovered more bullet holes than originally known.
 - **Laser and forensic technology** was used to **track the trajectory of the bullets** and pinpoint exactly where the shooter was positioned. The study confirmed that **almost all shots were fired into the house through the windows from the direction of Concord Road**.

Guide leads visitors to the Exhibit Room. Guide tells visitors they can spend 8 - 10 minutes in the exhibit and reminds them that they may return to the exhibit after the house tour if they wish.

NOTE: The door to the Kitchen should remain **CLOSED** at all times.

2. EXHIBIT: Menotomy: Road to Revolution 8 - 10 minutes

Exhibit Room

Guide should remain available to visitors during the exhibit to answer questions and judge visitor pace before starting the house tour.

After 8 - 10 minutes the guide asks visitors if they have any questions about the exhibit before opening the kitchen door to start the house tour.

Guide reminds visitors not to touch any of the original artifacts, furniture or woodwork in the house. Guide should wear white gloves for the tour.

3. HOUSE TOUR: Room Highlights 20 - 25 minutes

Jason Russell House

- **Kitchen 3 bullet holes**

Cellar door should remain **OPEN** at all times for air flow for the vent.

Guides may refer to the reproduction of the 1975 Ruth Berry painting *The Battle at the Jason Russell House* to illustrate what happened on April 19th.

- **April 19, 1775 action at the Jason Russell House**

- After entering Menotomy around 5:00 p.m., the **southern flank of British troops surprised the militia** who were gathered along Concord Road aiming their muskets toward the main British column.
- As the **militia scattered**, some ran toward the house for shelter. **Jason**, who was lame, **was shot and bayoneted** to death.
- **Troops outside** near Concord Road were **shooting into the windows** of the house.
- **Two militiamen from Lynn** who ran into the house jumped out the south-facing kitchen window in an attempt to escape. One was killed and one survived.
- **Eight militia from Beverly ran into the basement** aiming their muskets up the stairs. The Beverly eight survived.

Guide points out 3 bullet holes in the cellar entrance. (2 straight ahead, 1 to the left on the inside of the door casing.)

The ballistics study revealed that these bullet holes were made by shots fired at close range by a shooter or shooters inside the kitchen. The corresponding exit holes are located in the stair risers visible from the staircase. The original cellar door was kept on the property for many years but was later lost. Attempts have been made to locate the original door.

- **British soldiers pursued the militia throughout the house** resulting in the deaths of **twelve militiamen** and **at least two British soldiers**.
- At day's end, Menotomy **residents returned to a scene of devastation**, their homes burned or riddled with bullets, windows broken and livestock dead.
- **Elizabeth Russell** arrived home to find her husband **Jason and 11 other militia laid out on the kitchen floor**.
- The twelve colonial **militiamen are buried in the Old Burying Ground** at the First Parish Church in today's Arlington Center. An **obelisk monument** marks their graves.
- **Two British soldiers** are also buried there **in unmarked graves**.

- **About the Kitchen**

- The kitchen, known as the "hall" in the 18th century, would have been the **center of family life** and activities. Usually **south-facing**, it was the **warmest room in the house** in winter and may have also been used for sleeping.
- The **ceiling support beams** are original. The **spotted design** on the ceiling is a unique ceiling treatment which is rarely found in surviving 18th century homes.
- The house is an example of **colonial-era New England post and beam construction**.
 - The house was **built between 1740 and 1745** with new lumber for structural beams and repurposed lumber for walls and floors, possibly collected from the farmhouse of Jason's grandfather. **The floor was replaced in 1867**.

- **Front Entry Hall 2 bullet holes: grazing on the front stair post, bullet mark on upper post.**

- The front hall did not exist in 1775. It was **added around 1815** by Jason's granddaughter.
- The **English tall clock** originally belonged to Jason's neighbor **Deacon Joseph Adams** and is featured in the exhibit. The interior works and the face were stolen by the British, part of the **pillaging by troops** that occurred along the retreat route in Menotomy as discipline deteriorated.
- The **stairs and posts are original.**

Guide points out the grazing of the front stair post which occurred as a result of a bullet shot into the parlor from outside near Concord Road; 2 bullet exit holes in the stair risers from the shots fired in the kitchen; angled bullet mark through the upper stair post visible as you go up the stairs.

- **Children's Room 2 bullet holes**

- This room shares the rustic look of the kitchen with its **original floor boards and wood paneling.**
 - The bed is a **foldaway rope-support bed** that provided multi-purpose room use. The **rope tightener** was needed to adjust and restore the bed's support.

Guide points out 1 bullet hole near the ceiling to the left of the door (The bullet exit mark is on the other side of the wall in the hall.) 1 bullet hole below the window opposite the door.

- **Jason's Farm and Family**

- In 1775 Menotomy was bucolic farmland. Jason was considered a **prosperous farmer with 100 acres of land** in separate parcels which he **inherited from his grandfather.**
 - In addition to owning livestock, Jason had a barn, an apple orchard and a vegetable and herb garden for cooking and medicinal uses.
- Jason had **6 children** who survived into adulthood.
 - Jason's three oldest sons moved to Mason, NH to farm their own land.
 - Another son, Thomas opened Russell General Store in Menotomy's village center.
- **In 1775 his daughter Elizabeth** (age 19) and his **son Noah** (age 12) were living in the house with **Jason** (age 58) and his **wife Elizabeth** (age 51).
 - An **enslaved African** by the name of **Kate** (age 21) was also living in the house in 1775. She was baptized in 1754 and was entered into the minister's journal as a "gift" to Jason. 1770 Menotomy assessors noted that Jason "owned 1 slave," presumably Kate.
 - Kate likely worked inside the house and slept in the kitchen or attic. Little else is known about her.

- **Upstairs Hall and Attic Bullet exit mark in hall; 2 bullet holes in the attic (not visible to visitors)**

Guide points out the bullet exit mark in the hall belonging to the bullet hole in Children's Room.

Guides may talk about the attic and the secret compartment but DO NOT OPEN DOORS to the attic or the compartment!

- The **attic** would have been used for **storage** and for **drying foodstuffs** like corn and beans during the long winter months.
- When the house was fully occupied with many Russell and Teel children, the attic was used for **sleeping quarters.**
- The **2020 Ballistics Study** discovered **2 bullet holes in the attic wall** under the window facing Mass Ave

- **Best Bedroom 1 bullet hole**

Guide points out **1 bullet hole in the paneling to the left of the fireplace.**

- The **paneled fireplace wall** and **plastered** walls and ceilings were a more refined style in mid-18 century New England for “best rooms.”
 - All rooms in colonial homes needed to be **multipurpose** for growing families and changing family needs over time.
 - This more **formal room** would have served as a bedroom for Jason and Elizabeth and also a room for entertaining family and close friends.
- The **Locke family chest of drawers** from 1788 was a wedding gift to William Locke, the son of **Benjamin Locke** who led the **Menotomy Minutemen in 1775**. **Benjamin’s musket**, tea cup and spectacles are on display in the exhibit.
 - Members of the Locke family married members of the Russell family.
- When Jason died in 1775, his son **Noah inherited one half** of the house and his wife **Elizabeth inherited the other half**. They shared the house until **Elizabeth’s death in 1786**.
 - Noah remained here with his wife and children. After his death, their **daughter Lydia Russell Teel inherited the house** where she raised her family and lived until a few years before her death in 1886.
 - **Jason’s great granddaughter Abbie Teel Dupee lived in the house until 1892.**

- **Parlor 1 bullet hole**

Guide points out **1 bullet hole in the paneling which passed through the wall and grazed the stair post in the front hall.**

- This room looks much like it did at the height of the **Federal period** in 1814.
 - The **Prussian blue paint**, popular in the Federal period, was revealed as **the bottom layer** in a paint analysis in the 1980s. The wallpaper is a reproduction of the Federal period.
 - **In Jason’s time the walls would have been whitewashed** and not papered since wallpaper at that time was very expensive. The **floor boards are original**.
- As **the most formal room** in the house, the parlor was the setting for **important family rituals** like weddings, christenings, hosting important guests and social gatherings. It may have been used as **a bedroom** when the house was crowded with young children.
 - The Hepplewhite **folding card table** would have been a key piece of furniture since card playing and gaming were at the heart of **socializing in the early 19th century**.
- **The house was sold in 1892** to a buyer outside the family and became a rental property.
 - During a period of **rapid development in Arlington** in the **1890s and early 1900s**, three more houses were added to the lot, blocking the Jason Russell House from view.
 - In **1923** the **Arlington Historical Society purchased** and restored the house. It **opened to the public in 1924**.
 - Jason’s great granddaughter **Abbie lived to the age of 101** and was able to **identify the bullet holes** to the Arlington Historical Society when it acquired the house in 1923.

Guide reminds visitors that they may return to the April 19th exhibit, visit the Smith museum exhibit and browse the book cart.

When exiting the Parlor, guides may choose to point out the trajectory of the Parlor bullet hole and the grazing mark on the stair post.