

# **JASON RUSSELL HOUSE**



## **TOUR GUIDE MANUAL 2022**

## Acknowledgements

The Tour Guide Manual is the product of many hands and many years of cumulative research by individuals too numerous to mention. It will always be a living document as we continually learn more about the house, its history, and its contents. Furthermore, the collections on view change as we accession new items and modify our displays. Special thanks for help go to Doris Birmingham who originally expanded this Tour Guide Manual in 2012 in addition to editing this version.

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## ***Introduction: How to Use this Manual***

This manual is intended to help tour guides learn about the Jason Russell House, its history, and its contents. It will always be a “work in progress” as new information is uncovered and objects in the house are rearranged from time to time in order to better tell the story of Jason Russell and his family and the history of Arlington.

***The Manual contains considerable detail, which you should not try to memorize or cover in a single tour.*** Rather, it should be used as source material to help you in crafting your own tour and answering visitors’ questions. The Tour Outline on page four is intended to further help you to organize your tour and to highlight the most important points.

***You should skim the Manual frequently during the touring season*** in order to become increasingly familiar with the content and to possibly enliven your tours with fresh information.

***The short passages in the text printed in blue*** are special instructions or precautions for guides. Material printed in red highlight’s objects of particular importance.

At ***the back of the Manual are a bibliography and several appendices*** that supplement the main text. These are to be used as resources for enriching your knowledge and answering visitor questions.

# Jason Russell: a Menotomy Farmer and His Family

## 1. Jason's Farm

Two hundred and fifty years ago, if you were standing in Jason Russell's bustling Menotomy farmyard, you would see wagons drawn by oxen or dray horses loaded with farm produce or lumber rumbling down the rutted dirt road, known as the County Road or Concord Road, today's Massachusetts Avenue. As Menotomy was a crossroads town, much of this traffic came from outlying counties and towns, heading to markets in Boston. In winter, sleds, cutters and sledges traveled along the same road, the snow packed down for easy movement. Across the road was Stephen Cutter's sawmill, one of several mills operating at the time along Mill Brook.

Compared to many of his neighbors Jason Russell was fairly well off, owning more than 100 acres of farmland in Menotomy including pasture, meadow and upland, orchard and woodlot. This acreage was not contiguous, but instead scattered among different locations within the town. However, the plot of land on which the house stands was substantial, extending all the way to what is now the Unitarian-Universalist Church on the corner of Pleasant Street and well up the hill behind the house. Jason also owned a large barn, worth £40 when he died. In the yard in front of the barn, much of the daily work would have been done: the threshing, repair work and wood splitting, lots of wood! A large house like the Russell's would have used about 25-30 cords of wood each year for heating and cooking. Various domestic chores also would have been done in the barnyard nearer to the house, e.g. laundry, soap making, animal slaughter, and some cooking. In addition, Mrs. Russell would have had carefully tended vegetable and herb gardens, the harvest from the latter being used for cooking and medicinal purposes. The herb garden now outside the house was planted by the Arlington Garden Club and contains herbs frequently used for cooking and medicinal purposes in Jason's time.

## 2. Jason's Family

*(Also, see Appendix, "Jason Russell Family Tree and House Occupants")*

Jason's *great grandfather*, **William** (1605-1661) emigrated from England before 1640 with his wife Martha, settling in an area within Cambridge Town known as West Cambridge, or Menotomy, as it was called by local Native Americans. One of his sons, also called **Jason** (1658-1736), who would be "our" *Jason's grandfather*, built a house in the vicinity of the present house around the time he married his wife Mary Hubbard (1684); in 1699 he was granted a significant additional parcel of land known as the Great Pasture. Grandfather Jason's second son **Hubbard** (1687-1726) would become the *father* of "our" **Jason**; when Hubbard died at the age of 40, "our" Jason and his sisters went to live with their grandfather Jason. Nine years later, Grandfather Jason died, and young Jason inherited his grandfather's house and substantial land holdings. Jason's grandfather's 1684 house no longer exists. It was probably taken down and some of its timbers re-used when Jason built the current dwelling.

What follows is a description of the Russell family when the armed conflict of the American Revolution began:

**Jason Russell** (1716/17-1775) and **Elizabeth Winship** (1721-1786) were married in 1740.

Jason, the patriot, was killed by the British (Regulars) April 19, 1775. Their children, most of which were grown up by the time of the Revolution, were:

1. **Jason** born March 7, 1741/2 (**age 33 in 1775**) lived in Mason NH (he married Elizabeth Locke)
2. **Elizabeth** born December 27, 1743 died March 29 1751
3. **John** born August 4, 1746 (**age 29 in 1775**) lived in Mason NH

4. **Hubbard** born March 25, 1749 married Sarah Warren of Weston published March 31 1774 lived in Mason NH
5. **Thomas** born July 22, 1751 (**age 24 in 1775**) stayed in Menotomy, storekeeper
6. **Noah** born July 15, 1753 ~~died October 13 1754~~
7. **Elizabeth** born July 3, 1756 married Jonathan Webber March 12 1778 (**age 19 in 1775**)
8. ~~Mary died 1762, aged 11 months~~
9. **Noah** born March 8, 1763 (**age 12 in 1775**) stayed in Menotomy (inherited the farmstead)

**Thus, only two Russell children, Elizabeth and Noah, were still living in the house with their parents at the time of the Revolution.**

There may have been at least one more person living in the household in 1775, namely, **Kate (b. late 1753 or early 1754). Referred to as “Jason Russell’s Negro Child,”** she was baptized on 17 March, 1754. The Rev. Cooke recorded in his journal that she was a “gift” to Jason. Menotomy assessors noted in 1770 that Jason Russell owned one slave (presumably Kate who would have been around 21 at the time). There is no information regarding her death date.

After the Revolutionary War, three more generations of Jason’s descendants occupied the house (*See Appendix, “Jason Russell’s Family Tree and House Occupants”*). The members of the last generation known to have been born here were his six great-grandchildren, the offspring of his granddaughter Lydia Russell Teel. One or more of these six probably lived in the house as adults at different times and several may have born children here; so far, however, we do not know exactly when the last Russell left the house.

What is sure is that Lydia Russell Teel gave the house and its outbuildings to her son George W. Teel when she divided her property among her children in 1884. She died in 1886. George Teel had already lived in Chicago for some years at the time of this property division. He never occupied and perhaps never even visited, the property he inherited; in 1892, he sold it to Mr. James A Bailey, who owned it until the Society purchased it in 1923. It is possible that by 1892 the last Russell descendant had been gone for several years. Meanwhile, Mr. Bailey further subdivided the lot on which the house stood, using the original house as a rental property and building additional dwellings in front of it on both Jason Street and Massachusetts Ave. By the time the Society purchased the house, it was nearly obscured by the presence of these other structures.

## **The Jason Russell House: Construction and Dating**

*(See Appendix for “Timber Frame Construction and House Plan” drawings)*

### **1. Construction**

Carpentry was a trade in the Russell family; hence Jason most likely oversaw the building of his house. He constructed it of solid oak timbers, perhaps from trees that grew on his own extensive property. The timbers were sawn not by hand but in a sawmill, two of which were only an oxcart ride away: Cooke’s Mill at Mystic Dam and the Winship Mill, owned by the family of Jason’s wife, Elizabeth Winship, for several generations.

The post and beam frame covered with wood sheathing was typical for the period in New England. (*See Appendix, “Typical timber frame construction”*) The exterior with its symmetrical arrangement consisting of a central doorway flanked by two sets of windows above and below and the roof capped by massive center chimney were typical everywhere in New England at this time. Since Jason’s 18<sup>th</sup> C. doorway was obscured in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century by the projecting entryway built by his granddaughter Lydia, we do not know if that original door was framed by any decorative elements such as pilasters or a

simple triangular pediment like those found on many Colonial doorways. The house was probably left unpainted, with the possible exception of the front door.

The floor plan consists of one room upstairs and another down on each side of a small central hallway—only four rooms total. At some point, Jason, like many of his neighbors, may have added a lean-to at the back of his house. This would have been a single story addition used for various purposes, e.g. summer kitchen and extra sleeping or storage space. *(See Appendix for a “Typical 18<sup>th</sup> C. house plan”)* Today’s Assembly Room (now an exhibition space) is a lean-to constructed in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, which may have replaced an earlier one built by Jason as his family grew.

Nomenclature for the interior rooms varies, but in Colonial times, the room we now call the kitchen was called the “hall,” while the more elegant living room was known as the “parlor.” The upstairs rooms were referred to as “chambers”—the hall chamber and the parlor chamber. **In this Manual we will maintain the words “parlor,” and “chamber,” but substitute the word “kitchen” for “hall.”**

Like every old house, the Russell House has seen many changes during its lifetime. Originally there was a door leading to the cellar from the entry hall—a common occurrence. But by 1775 Jason had closed that off and opened a door from the kitchen to the basement—a fateful modification, as it turned out, since it was perhaps this departure from the norm that on April 19 confused the colonial fighters seeking cover from the British attack. Only the eight Beverly men found that door and were able to hide in the basement shielded from enemy bullets.

More changes occurred after the Revolution. In the Federal Period (c. 1790-1820) when Noah invited his newly married daughter, Lydia, and her groom, Thomas Teel, to move in, the projecting enclosed entryway was built and a number of modifications were made to the parlor. The ceiling timbers may have been plastered over at this time. The Russell/Teel family probably had the walls papered with Federal style paper much like what is on the walls today and the paneling around the fireplace painted to match. In Jason’s day, the paneling around the fireplace was almost certainly unpainted and the walls of the room would have been whitewashed, not papered, as wall paper then had to be imported and would have been beyond the means of a typical farm family.

Further changes made in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century left the house much as we see it today. Lydia and Thomas Teel, who had six children, sealed up a south door from the kitchen to the barnyard. Around the 1860’s they also added the lean-to, which we now call the Assembly Room, and the ‘ell’ that today functions as the caretaker’s residence.

The Historical Society purchased the house in 1923, by which time it had become exceedingly derelict. Using the best advice available, the Society restored the house, balancing practical and financial concerns with the most scientific restoration techniques known at the time. It was proudly opened to the public in 1924. Since that time, little has changed except when mandated by either maintenance or cosmetic concerns.

The Smith Museum, built to house and display the Historical Society’s collection of artifacts and archives is a 1980’s structure sited approximately on the site of the old barn.

## **2. Date of the Original Construction**

The dating of the house has often been disputed. A sign next to the Smith Museum, erected in 1930 by the Massachusetts Bay Centenary Commission, states that the house was built in 1680 by Martha Russell, widow of William (the first Russell in America). Early 20<sup>th</sup> C. accounts often repeat this date, but the facts do not support it. First, the land on which the house stands did not come into Russell hands until 1689. Secondly, Lydia (Russell) Teel, the granddaughter of Patriot Jason and possibly the last Russell to live for any extended period in the house, told interlocutors that family tradition had always maintained that the house was constructed in one campaign around 1740.

In 1964, architectural historian Robert Harrington Nylander, in an extensively researched article, decisively rejected the 17<sup>th</sup> Century dating but suggested that the house had been built in two stages, the first in 1740, the second in 1750. Nylander believed that Jason first constructed only the south half of the house—the kitchen and children’s room, in 1740, the year of his marriage to Elizabeth Winship. The house therefore would have been asymmetrical and just half the width of today’s structure. The stairs to the upper room would have been on the north side of the house. Not until about 1750, according to Nylander, did Jason add the north half of the house in order to accommodate his growing family, thereby transforming it into the symmetrical edifice we see today.

Nylander bases his argument on the fact that two-stage construction like this was common in Colonial times as a way of economizing until the owner’s family had grown large enough to need more room. By 1751, Jason and Elizabeth had four children, and there would be five more to come, so it is not surprising that they would expand their dwelling. But other than describing this practical rationale for a two-phase construction, Nylander offers little more to support his hypothesis

Nylander’s theory has now been challenged by research conducted in 2012 by the Dendrochronology Laboratory of Oxford University, England. This study proposes the possibility of a single ‘building campaign, during which the entire house was built as we presently see it save the Federal period porch and the mid-19<sup>th</sup> C. lean-to and ell.

Dendrochronology is the leading and most accurate scientific dating method for wood-constructed buildings, and it is based on a combination of biology and statistics. Based on tree rings and other features of the wood a precise date, nearly to the month, can be determined for the felling of a tree. The framing beams of buildings were generally built with newly felled trees so that the frame would bind together tightly as the wood seasoned; thus a felling date is generally synonymous with a building date. However, older repurposed wood could be used for non-structural members, e.g. ceiling and floor joists. Finally, to confirm the date of a beam these wood samples are compared with samples from structures in the same small geographical area of known date.

The core samples taken from the Russell House present an intriguing picture. Twenty-one timbers were sampled, all but one of which were interior non-supportive members (e.g. joists), not principal structural beams. The one structural sample was a tie beam in the attic above the kitchen and children’s room. Testing of the joists showed them to have been felled at different dates in the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century. On the other hand, the very important tie beam in the attic indicated a date between 1740-45. This structurally essential element has lost some of its defining characteristics that could more accurately pinpoint the house’s date, but it is significant.

What does all this mean? According to the Oxford investigators, it suggests that the entire house was built between 1740 and 1745, using recently felled trees for the frame and wood salvaged from several earlier buildings for the non-supporting members—a striking example of New England frugality. However, the scientists consider this merely a tentative conclusion stating that the testing of more structural members would be necessary to confirm their hypothesis.

## April 19, 1775, at the Jason Russell House

*(For more on the events of this day, see Appendix II, "April 19, 1775, Timeline," Appendix, "A Walk Through Revolutionary Menotomy," and the exhibition, "Menotomy: Road to Revolution.")*

The Jason Russell House played a central role in the 'Battle of Menotomy,' which was a series of bloody encounters that took place in present-day Arlington in the late afternoon of April 19 during the British retreat from Lexington and Concord.

First, some background to this event. During the night of April 18, 1775, British Lt. Colonel Francis Smith (1723-1791) led some 700 unseasoned Regulars (soldiers serving the British Crown) from Boston to Concord, where they had been ordered to secure three rebel canons and a large store of ammunition rumored to be hidden at James Barrett's farm. They passed across the Charles River, through Charlestown, Cambridge and Menotomy along the Concord Road (now Massachusetts Ave) and arrived in Lexington, where, on the village green, they exchanged the first shots of the Revolution, which killed eight Americans and wounded one British soldier. The British troops continued toward the North Bridge in Concord, which they needed to cross to get to Barrett's farm. At the Bridge they encountered nearly a thousand Colonial militiamen, who, having heard about the action at Lexington had come from miles around to defend Concord. Seeing fire rise from the liberty pole in the town center—and thinking that houses had been set on fire—the Colonial troops fired on the Regulars, beginning the engagement that would last until the 1100 relief troops led by General Hugh Percy met the retreating Regulars in Lexington on Munroe Hill, where they had stopped to rest near Munroe Tavern.

Why had these relief troops been summoned? It was due to Smith's perception, as he had passed through Cambridge and Menotomy in the early morning hours, that the surrounding countryside had been dangerously alerted; thus, early in the day, he had requested reinforcements from his Boston commander, General Thomas Gage. These men marched to Lexington, where they met Smith's group of exhausted fighters at Munroe's Tavern on the edge of town.

After about two hours' rest--Smith's men had been walking for 17 hours at this point--the entire British body set out on the treacherous march back to Boston, under Percy's command, carrying their dead and wounded. As soon as they descended into Menotomy they ran into trouble. Accounts by surviving soldiers indicate that as they passed the Foot of the Rocks (near today's Dunkin Donuts on Arlington Heights) Colonials began to attack from the rear and from behind buildings, trees and walls, harrying the British all the way. ***The "bloodiest battle of the first day of the American Revolution" --the Battle of Menotomy--had begun.***



Ruth Berry, "The Battle at the Jason Russell House," 1976

Ruth Berry's painting, *The Battle at the Jason Russell House*, 1976 illustrates what happened at the Jason Russell House during the British retreat. Anticipating trouble, Percy had placed Smith's imposing grenadiers in the front of his column and his inadequately armed field canons near the rear while the main body of troops boxed in the wounded. Moreover, wherever possible, he posted flanking units, composed of fresh, well-armed soldiers, out of sight in the woods on either side of Concord Road. But even this clever strategy did not prevent the frightened, exhausted and poorly disciplined Regulars from burning, pillaging and breaking into taverns to quench their thirst and fortify their courage. Thus they became even less effective fighters and more vulnerable to the fear and rumors running up and down the line. **[Note the Berry painting is no longer on display due to lack of space. A photographic reproduction is provided in the kitchen of the Jason Russell House for guides to use as an illustration.]**

During the day, most of the Menotomy men living near the Concord Road, including Jason Russell, had sent their wives and children to safer farmsteads in the hills behind. Meanwhile some 2000 colonial troops, coming from as far away as Beverly, Danvers, Lynn, Salem, Dedham, and Needham, had gathered in Menotomy. Many deployed themselves around **Jason Russell's house** and outbuildings, training their guns on the approaching column of Redcoats, which arrived at the house between 3 and 4 p.m. This made the Colonials easy targets for the British flanking units posted so effectively by Percy in the hills behind: in short, many were trapped between the two British ranks.

Scattering, some ran into the house. Jason Russell himself was shot and bayoneted on his doorstep as he tried to escape, and eleven other men were killed in the house and yard. When Elizabeth Russell returned at the end of the day, she found the bodies of her husband and the eleven other slaughtered men lying side by side in pools of blood on her kitchen floor. According to some accounts the bloodstains on floorboards remained for many years.

At the end of this first day of the Revolutionary War, the British suffered heavier losses than the Colonials and heavier losses in Menotomy than anywhere else:

The total numbers killed and wounded on April 19, 1775:

- British regulars                      73 killed; 174 wounded
- Colonials                                49 killed; 41 wounded

Numbers killed in Menotomy alone

- British regulars                      40 killed; 80 wounded
- Colonials                                25 killed; 11 wounded

# Visiting the Jason Russell House

## Room by Room Descriptions

### Kitchen (Hall)

**Note: The door between the kitchen and the exhibit must always remain CLOSED.  
The door to the cellar must always be OPEN for airflow.**

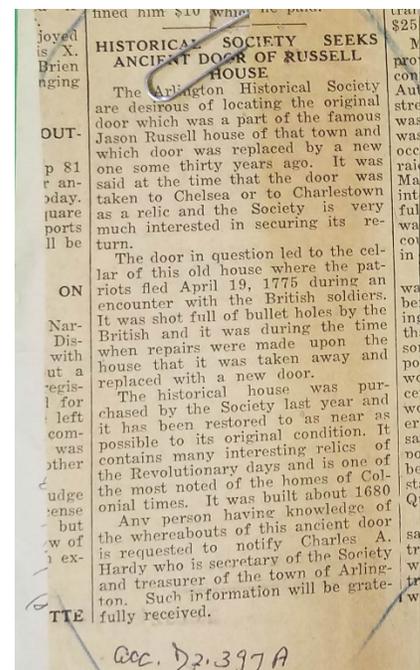
#### 1. A scene of mayhem on April 19, 1775

The kitchen, known as the “hall” in Colonial days, was the site of vicious hand to hand combat during the battle. It is the room from which the men from Beverly fled to the safety of the basement, while others tried to do that and failed; it was through its south window that Timothy Munro and Daniel Townsend of Lynn jumped as they tried to escape from the British; finally, it is the room where Mrs. Russell, at the end of the day, found the cold bodies of her husband and eleven other men laid out on the blood-stained floor. Visitors may want to spend a minute or two here quietly contemplating the horror of that scene, imagining the shouts of the men, the cries of pain, and the noise of firing muskets. In the basement entry area they can view **two of the musket ball holes** on the stair risers left from the exchange of fire between the British and the Beverly men below, and they can mentally reconstruct the past as they view the now intact south kitchen window and the site where the bodies had been hastily arranged. The current floor is a 19<sup>th</sup> century replacement of the reportedly blood stained original.

Multiple musket ball holes, by the way, have recently been rediscovered in almost every room, including in the attic, some shot at close range, others from the yard outside. One example is **near the two previously known bullet holes** on the stair risers. Step into the landing to the stairs, looking back toward the kitchen to see a bullet hole just right of the door jamb. The hole was covered on the other side by the casing for the replaced door. The original door was reportedly riddled with bullet holes and had been taken to “Chelsea or Charlestown” in the 1890s for a now unknown purpose. When the Society purchased the house, the Chelsea Gazette ran an article that the Society was seeking the whereabouts of the door that had been removed some 30 years earlier.

On the wall above the blanket chest hangs a powder horn and a musket of the kind that Colonial troops might have carried as they fought for their lives in this room. The **musket** is a French-made Charleville .69 caliber smoothbore flintlock musket, probably made between 1768 and 1773. It could shoot 2-3 times per minute and was accurate to about 50 yards. Both the bayonet and the heavy walnut stock were useful in hand-to-hand combat. This particular musket was altered at some point in its life, with the barrel bands replaced by permanent pins. The hand-cast musket balls in the pewter porringer on the chest are typical of the projectiles fired from this type of weapon.

It is interesting to recall some common expressions inspired by flintlock muskets, including: “lock, stock, and barrel;” a “flash in the pan” (a backfiring gun); and “skinflint.”



## 2. Center of Family Life

The kitchen, called the *hall* in early Colonial times, is on the south side of the house, a common location for this room as it was the main living space and the center of much hard work. With its large fireplace, which was always active, it was the warmest place in the house. Originally the room had a south door to the farmyard, but this was closed off by a later generation of Russells. [\[See Appendix for the typical Colonial house floor plan\]](#)

Several features of the room are not original but rather reconstructions based on guesswork; yet the room maintains an authentic aura of antiquity and accurately presents several **18<sup>th</sup> C construction techniques**. Visible, and original, is the heavy oak chamfered summer beam spanning the ceiling from the outer wall to the fireplace and the strong wall and chimney girts, which structurally tie the house together. Between these massive timbers are the smaller ceiling joists that support the floor above. Several of these were recycled from a 17th century house, possibly that of Jason's grandfather, which may have been demolished to provide materials for this one. The wall paneling is not part of Jason's original house either but was salvaged from another 18th Century Arlington house that was being demolished in 1924 when this house was being restored. [\[See Appendix for an illustration of Colonial Timber Frame Construction\]](#)

The **unique ceiling treatment**, a dark spotted pattern applied to a whitewashed ground, is a rare feature, one surviving in few 18th century houses. The black spots were usually made using lampblack applied with a sea-weed sponge, a rolled up rag, or even the end of a corncob. Our ceiling was fortunately preserved owing to the fact that either the Russell family, or a subsequent owner, did not paint over it but covered it with a plaster sheathing that protected it until the Society began its 1923 restoration. The severely scorched beams near the fireplace hint at what was perhaps a near catastrophe at some point in the house's history.



Kitchen ceiling showing the massive summer beam in the foreground; the joists supporting the ceiling and the spot painting decorating both joists and ceiling.

The kitchen was the all-purpose living space in every Colonial house. It may have been the only room that was consistently heated in the winter. It was here, of course, that most food preparation and many other domestic activities took place; where children would have studied their letters and numbers; where the family would have informally entertained neighbors; and where some people might have slept, e.g. a slave, servant, or even some of the older children.

The items in the kitchen reflect the hard labor required of the Colonial housewife: cooking, baking, preserving food, carrying water, and filling the larder with staples such as butter and cheese. Others

relate to the making of textiles. Some of the **fireplace tools** may date from Jason Russell's era, but many came to the house through the generosity of the heirs of Elijah Cutter (1788-1885) a local blacksmith. According to Jason's probate inventory he owned an **iron three-footed skillet** (called a "spyder") like the one on the floor, at left, and family tradition says that this one belonged to the family. Also displayed:

- Wrought iron fork
- Wrought iron toaster
- Wrought iron rectangular broiler
- Circular trivets
- Square wrought iron broiler
- Tin Dutch oven –wrought iron spit and one skewer
- Wrought iron and pierced brass skimmer.
- Crockery for slow cooking items like soups and beans

The English gateleg table, dating from around 1700, was acquired by the Society at auction and therefore was not a Russell possession. However, we know from Jason's probate inventory that he owned a "round table," and it may have looked something like this one. The drop-leaf construction would have allowed it to be folded away when extra space was needed in the kitchen. It is here partially set with pewter ware, (Jason's probate inventory mentions "puter dishes and plates.") Other items in the kitchen used in food preparation are the **butter churn, carrying yoke for water buckets, a bread rising bowl, and a rolling pin.**

Notice the large "**walking**" **spinning wheel** for spinning raw wool into yarn. We know that Jason raised sheep, so it is possible that Elizabeth Russell and her daughters helped to spin the wool into yarn. The raw wool first had to be carded to remove dirt and organic matter (see the nearby hand carding tool) and then spun on a wheel like this, where the spinner walked back and forth to guide the yarn. Spinning became a more pressing obligation in the years prior to the Revolution during Colonial boycotts of imported British textiles. Another connection for visitors who inquire – the walking wheel comes from the family of Benjamin Locke (who is featured in the exhibit).

While spinning often was done at home, weaving was generally farmed out to a local weaver who served multiple households in town. Thus, Elizabeth Russell would have had to measure her yarn into uniform skeins for the weaver. In order to do this she might have used a **niddy-noddy** like the one resting on the large chair near the fireplace. Holding the shaft in her hand and twirling the tool like a baton, she counted each turn to arrive at a uniform length for each skein.

## **Front Entry Hall ("Porch")**

Early settlers would have called this area a *porch*. It was enlarged by Jason's son Noah around 1814. But in what was then a very cramped space, there are reminders of the violence that occurred here on April 19. First, observe the **deep groove in the stair newel post where a musket ball**, fired through the side window, penetrated the wall to the parlor, through currently plastered wall on the stairs, and glancing on the newel post to make the groove.

Even more remarkable is the gutted **English tall clock** (c. 1720), whose story is told in the April 19 exhibit. The clock belonged to Jason's nearby neighbor, the Deacon Joseph Adams, who must have treasured this timepiece with its intricate japanned decoration. The now gutted wreck speaks volumes about the rapaciousness of the British as they raided Menotomy houses. A clock such as this was probably the most costly item in the Adams household; and the British destroyed it to salvage the valuable brass works for personal profit or military use. It is interesting to know that Jason Russell's probate inventory lists a "broken clock." It would likely have been a tall clock like

this one, but of simpler design and perhaps displayed in Jason's parlor. (Wall clocks did not come into fashion until after the War.)

The front entry addition, c. 1814-15. In Jason's time this space would have been about half as deep as it is now, and the front door would have been directly on the facade of the house. The original basement entry would have been located here, under the stairs, as was common in 18th century farm houses, but at some time before the Revolution, Jason had altered it so that the basement was accessed from the fireplace wall of the kitchen. Quickly finding that door when entering the house on April 19 saved the Beverly men.

## **Upstairs Hall**

Note on the way up the stairs that there is a **second bullet hole** on the upper newel post of the stairway. It has been plastered over and looks like a nail hole but when looking at the exit area you can see the characteristic splintering that implies that it may be another musket ball hole. This hole is the most recent one found in the study and is still under investigation.

On the second floor level, a door conceals the **attic** or garret. The attic would have been used for storage, for the drying of foodstuffs, such as corn and beans, and sometimes even for sleeping quarters for children or servants. During the dendrochronology study of 2012 some attic floorboards were lifted and beneath one was concealed a cache of corncobs of unknown date.

Ballistic experts who examined the attic in 2020 found **two additional musket ball holes** in the attic near a small window, which appear to have been fired from the road outside (now Mass Ave) during the retreat. It shows how the column of troops arching toward Boston may have been responding, rather wildly, to heavy fire coming from colonial fighters in the vicinity of the house and firing directly at windows – either as a response to being fired at or to ensure clear passage. To the right of the attic stairs there is a **"secret cupboard"** with a sliding door, which may have been used to hide important documents and valuables. A musket ball shot through the fireplace wall of the parlor chamber must have dropped into this space, but it has not been found. *[Guides, please avoid opening the sliding door—you can see the staining and wear of too much touching over the years.]*

The upstairs hall and the Children's Room are good places to appreciate the hand-hewn nature of the wood structure. The **paneling**, unlike that in the kitchen, is mostly original. Jason Russell built his house of lumber, mostly oak, cut on his own property, and it may have been shaped at his wife's family (Winship) mill. Certain prized trees belonged to the King between 1680 and the Revolution; for instance, species of tall pines over 24 inches in diameter were needed as masts for the British Navy. These trees were marked with the Kings' broad arrow, and anyone cutting them could be prosecuted. Other trees were protected by local custom; such as those shading roads or marking property boundaries. The Town officials kept close watch on such resources, so Jason surely used his trees wisely.

## **Childrens' Room (Kitchen Chamber)**

Directly over the kitchen, this room is similar in appearance to that room with its exposed beam ceiling and its wall paneling (here, in contrast to that in the kitchen, mostly original). Although various members of the household may have slept here at different times, judging from the **scratch marks** above the fireplace, the room must have once functioned as the principal childrens' sleeping quarters.

Note to visitors that there are **two rediscovered holes** in this particular room, both of which come from the same ball. On the upper wall leading into the hall right near the ceiling where visitors can observe both the entrance and the exit on the adjacent hall above the upper stair landing. It features the characteristic splintering that shows that the musket was fired from the other direction. Interestingly, when ballistics rods were placed in this musket ball hole, it pointed to the second rediscovered hole

which is on the paneling just under to the left of the south (side) window. You can see that this hole also has the splintering characteristic of an exit and has been roughly covered over with plaster. This led researchers to assess that both holes were from the same projectile, from a shooter aiming at that upper window. The musket ball burst through the exterior clapboard, interior sheathing, and through the interior wall, and then glanced against the ceiling of the upstairs hall where it lost its terminal velocity and dropped to the ground.



Dominating the room is the **bed and bedstead**. In colonial terminology, “**beds**” are what today are called mattresses: the ticking that holds the stuffing—or, for the fortunate, the padding—upon which people slept. Stuffing materials included feathers (saved over many years from the family’s geese, ducks, and chickens); wool; cornhusks, or straw (changed with some regularity by good housekeepers). The “**bedstead**” is the wooden bed frame with a rope gridwork stretched across it to form a support for the softer bedding materials. With use, the rope would stretch, causing the bed to sag, and it would have to be tightened with a wooden tool like the one on display nearby. It often would have been crowded. Jason and

Elizabeth had nine children, six of which survived to adulthood, so for many years they would have had an infant, who during at least his first year would have slept in the parents’ room either in a cradle or in bed with his parents. Many people, would have owned a **trundle bed** like the one shown here. Pulled out at night and meant for younger children; it was easily stashed beneath the bed during the day to make room for other activities in the room.

This bedstead (dated around 1790-1820) is somewhat unusual in that the entire structure folds up against the wall--an early version of a **Murphy bed**--providing yet another way of making space for daytime activities. The built-in hinges are on the side rails about three-quarters the way toward the head of the bed. *(Above, a photo of a Murphy-type bed from another Colonial house.)* **[Guides, please do not lift the delicate featherbed or the woven coverlet to show the features of the bedstead. The museum staff will try to keep a portion of these materials lifted so you can show the wooden hinges and rope supports]**

The blue wool in the overshot double weave coverlet was dyed with indigo, a slave-grown product, and like sugar, a common everyday item in early America. This dye, incidentally, came in a hard cake that had to be dissolved in urine to make it useable. Woven coverlets like this one were made of two wide woven strips sewn together to make the piece wide enough to cover the bed.



Creature comforts were few in Jason’s house, especially in winter. Fires were rarely lit in the bedchambers unless a family member was sick, or there was an important guest sleeping there. A tiny fireplace like the one here did little to warm the room anyway, so **bed warmers** of different types were helpful. One type of bed warmer, displayed on the hearth, is a rectangle of soapstone (c. 1800), which could be heated up near a fire and then placed between the layers of bedding near the foot of the bed to take off the chill (much like a hot water bottle might be used today).

This room also contains an essential item of Colonial “plumbing”: a **chamber pot**, which most people would have favored over a trip to the privy on a dark winter’s night. It may have been a child’s responsibility to empty and rinse this vessel in the mornings.

## **Parlor Chamber (Best Bedroom)**

This room is considerably more elegant than the Children's Room as would be appropriate for the owners of the house. We should keep in mind, however, that at different times it might have had different uses. When there were many children still living at home, the room could actually have been the sleeping quarters of some of the older children while their parents would have adopted the downstairs parlor as their bedroom. It was also the fashion in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to display your "best bed" in your best room (the parlor) despite the crowded conditions of the home. This custom was going out of fashion during Jason's time and we have no evidence of where he and Elizabeth's bed would have been. When the room was strictly utilized by the married couple, the wife may have used it during milder weather as a workspace to sew or spin, or as a cozy setting for a cup of tea with her friends.

In contrast to the kitchen and children's room, the walls and ceiling of the parlor chamber are plastered (it is unclear as to when that was done), and the fireplace wall is covered with painted wood paneling typical of that in many mid- and late 18<sup>th</sup> century houses. The hole in the paneling high and to the left of the fireplace is a **musket ball hole**, ballistics rods show that it was shot from outside the house near the current location of Mass Ave. From there the ball would have entered the secret compartment in the hall, where it bounced off the attic stair riser, and fell within the wall cavity (secret compartment).

Other items of interest in the room are the brass **warming pan** at the right of the fireplace, which was filled with coals and rubbed between the sheets on frigid nights prior to bedtime, and the **chair-on-rockers** (c.1820) an example of Yankee ingenuity and thrift. Possibly the original owner needed a rocker for an aging family member, and instead of purchasing a new one, decided to craft the rockers and attach them to an old, disused chair whose legs may have been worn down.

The bed, like the one in the children's room has a rope support and similar coverings, but it is not a Murphy-style bed. The painted chest at its foot is a **tea chest**, camphor-lined to repel vermin on the trans-Atlantic journey.

This room became Elizabeth Russell's home, literally and legally, after the death of her husband. At the settling of Jason's estate, Elizabeth and her youngest son Noah each received half of the house and land—17 acres for Elizabeth. She also got as part of her widow's thirds: "*half the Dwelling House the Northarly end with half the selar and Libberty to ues the oven when wanted and Half the well and to use the Previledge Land Before the House to the gate*" Such were the official efforts to prevent family feuds in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century!

Many colonial women entertained their friends with tea in their parlor chambers, and Elizabeth Russell may have done that as well, especially after she was widowed and sharing the house with her son Noah and his wife, Eunice. Near the fireplace is an Irish made Chippendale style tea table set with some small porcelain cups and a pewter teapot. The teapot was once thought to have been owned by Samuel Whittemore, (1696-1793) but according to experts consulted, the teapot could not have belonged to the brave fighter. Stylistically, it dates to the early 1800's well after old Samuel died; instead, it probably belonged to one of the many other men named Samuel in the Whittemore family.

Among the objects of particular interest in this room are the **painted wash stand** and the **Locke family chest of drawers**. The wash stand, probably from the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is rather roughly constructed and painted in bright yellow and green hues. Due to the availability of stencils, this type of painting enjoyed popularity among school girls; therefore, it could be imagined as a "father/daughter project" with Dad doing the construction and the daughter, the painting.

The mahogany and rosewood chest of drawers, made in 1788 as a wedding gift for William Locke, the son of Revolutionary War Captain Benjamin Locke, provides a singular contrast to the wash stand. Both products of the Federal Period in American furniture, the washstand is an example of folk art while the

chest represents the ultimate of high style elegance. Captain Benjamin Locke (1738-1791) led Menotomy's Minutemen into battle on April 19, 1775, and fought at the Battle of Bunker Hill; moreover he was a leader in the town's First Baptist Church, founded in 1790. Members of the Locke family married members of the Russell family and brought some of them into that church. The Bible on the chest belonged to Mrs. Hannah Lock. In it she recorded family births, marriages, and deaths from her marriage in 1806 until the last recorded death, that of Henrietta Locke in 1881.

Hanging to the right of the bed is a copy of an essay that Rebecca Russell of Charlestown wrote as a school exercise. Note the exquisite penmanship and the lovely decorative border. In 1804, Rebecca married Amos Whittemore, Jr. of Menotomy. Below is a transcription of the text. The content reflects ideas in the early American Republic about childhood innocence, the virtues of young womanhood, and the transience of life.

**1797 Address:** Give ear, O ye daughters of Beauty, attend to the voice of your sister, for experience has taught her wisdom and length of days, virtue, and understanding. My father was the Brother of Tenderness, my mother was the Sister of Love. As the rosebud opening to the morn, as the dew on the lily so was the loveliness of my youth. I awoke at the rising of the dawn; my salutation was that of joy and gladness; Pleasure beckoned me forth, and, I sported in the sun-shine of Plenty. The hours were swift and ran smiling away but the lightness of my heart out-lived the going down of the sun. The day departed with the mildest breeze, and the night but invited me to bed or repose. My pillow was the softest down, my slumber attended with golden dreams. Thus one day passed away, and the morning passed of the next found me happy! Happy are the hours of artless innocence! Happy the days of virgins simplicity, where the bosom is stranger to deceit, and the heart in conscious of the painful sigh. Oh that I could overtake the wings of Time! O that I could recall the pleasures of my youth!



## The Parlor

### 1. History

This could have been the room in which Elizabeth and Jason slept when their house was crammed with children, but, also, as was common in 18<sup>th</sup>-century America, the parlor was typically the room for

important family rituals--weddings, funerals, and christenings--as well as various forms of social interaction, e.g., entertaining important visitors, having tea, funerals, and playing cards with friends.

Although the most recent research suggests a date of 1740-1750 for the construction of the entire house, the parlor, like the chamber above, is very different in style from the rooms on the south side of the house. These were the more public rooms, and it seems natural that the Russells would have wanted them to reflect the fashion of the day. In the parlor, as in the chamber upstairs, the fireplace wall is faced with decorative paneling typical of the more formal rooms in colonial houses from 1740 on; moreover, the walls are plastered instead of being covered with dark wood paneling as they are in the kitchen and children's room.

The ceiling, too, is plastered, thereby hiding all the beams except for the summer beam. However, the actual appearance of the original 1740 ceiling is impossible to determine. In 1985, a preservationist from SPNEA (now called Historic New England) discovered that Jason's original ceiling had been modified, perhaps more than once, and that the "summer beam" now visible is actually a false one (literally a wooden box) hiding the mangled original above.

The wide floorboards, on the other hand, are original; likewise, the **musket ball hole** penetrating the paneling to the left of the fireplace. This is the one that cut a path through the wall and into the newel post of the stairway beyond, as we saw earlier. Also of early vintage are the **fireplace tools**. The crane and the andirons descended through a branch of the Russell family and may have been owned by "our Jason," although that claim has been impossible to verify.

The room today is decorated in the Federal style, which was at its peak in America between 1800 and 1814. It was in 1814 that Noah Russell's daughter Lydia (Jason's granddaughter) married Thomas Hall Teel, and the young couple moved into the house with Lydia's father Noah and mother Eunice (Bemis) Russell. Doing a paint analysis in 1985, the experts from SPNEA determined that in Jason's day the woodwork probably had remained unpainted. Further, the bottommost layer of paint on the woodwork was this light Prussian blue, popular in the Federal period. In light of this information, the Society in 1985 had the fireplace paneling and all the trim in the room painted that same light Prussian blue and chose a reproduction Federal style wallpaper to match. [\[Guides, the wallpaper is not a copy of bottom layer of wallpaper found after stripping the more later upper layers, as we have sometimes told our visitors\]](#)

## **2. Parlor Furnishings**

[\[For more detail about the furniture in this room and throughout the house, see Appendix\]](#)

The sophisticated, but eclectic mix of furniture in the parlor came to the Society as gifts from several Arlington families, and we are proud to show these pieces as part of the history of our town, although they have little direct connection with the Russells. Their dates range in date from around the time of the Revolution to the late 19th Century, when the last Russells left.



The mahogany **Chippendale chest of drawers** is one of the most sophisticated pieces of furniture in the house. Like the Adams family clock in the entry hall, it is an object that would have been proudly displayed in a prominent location, as it is here, even though it may have stored ordinary items used elsewhere in the house. This is a classic example of the Chippendale style, the most fashionable furniture style in America from about 1755 to 1790, and its original owner would have been wealthier and more sophisticated than anyone in the Russell family. This piece, like the card table and sideboard discussed below, came to the Society as a gift from the prominent Whittemore family, to whom it had been originally given by a wealthy Boston friend, Clarissa Chadwick.

On top of the chest of drawers is a creamware ceramic **Liverpool Jug** c. 1790-1800. The transferware image to this British manufactured vessel shows a clipper ship on one side and lady liberty on the other, with a cartouch bearing the initials "J.C." and "Success to America" near the spout. This is an example of a popular British export item that was popular in the new United States during the early national period. To the side is a fire heated **branding iron** with the name "T.H. Teel." Thomas Hall Teel was both a farmer and a leatherworker and it is likely that this tool was used to stamp leather or finished horse tack to mark his craftsmanship.

The **desk** on the opposite side of the room is another example of Chippendale craftsmanship, although it is somewhat different in style to the chest. The use of cherry and certain construction techniques suggest that he was a central Massachusetts cabinetmaker. It is worth noting that Jason owned a desk, probably more modest than this one, which his probate inventory describes as "broken," presumably another victim of British pillaging.

Arranged around the room is a variety of 'country' Chippendale chairs, some with ladder-backs, others with openwork splat backs. The adjective 'country' is appended to the stylistic label because while they retain some features of Chippendale, their simple, sometimes even crude construction distinguishes them from their far more refined urban cousins. It's worth mentioning that Jason's probate inventory lists numerous chairs, and it is quite possible that he would have owned some much like these. Near the fireplace are two examples of Windsor chairs, the most popular chair for everyday use in America after the Revolution. The rocker belonged to Benjamin Locke, the Revolutionary fighter discussed in the parlor chamber upstairs, and the side chair belonged to a member of the Cutter family, prominent mill owners in Arlington during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Adjacent to the fireplace is a closet where part of the Society's collection of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century **pottery and porcelain** is displayed. The presence of these ceramics shows how West Cambridge citizens were partaking of the wider Atlantic trade, and purchasing expensive luxury items from across the globe.

Hanging over the fireplace is reproduction of what might be the first image of Arlington Center – an **oil painting** c. 1817 by Charles Codman as a commission from "Squire" William Whittemore. The original

painting is in the collection and is too fragile for display. It shows various sites around today's Mystic Street and Massachusetts Avenue - store of Moses Proctor on the far left, First Parish Church center left, the Whittemore (later Whittemore-Robbins House) center right, and the house of James Russell to the right. The painting illustrates the rapid change in the center during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century – as the Town was becoming less agrarian and more industrial. The fine home of William Whittemore is one example – the finances for such a prestigious home was paid for by a factory operating at the rear by William and his brothers Amos and Samuel. The church was the second building on that location, after the congregation outgrew the seating capacity of the previous building. It was formally dedicated in 1805.

The Hepplewhite **card table** between the windows has a 'fold-over' top in burl wood and elegant inlays of other precious woods. The inlays, delicate proportions, curved top, and tapered legs of this piece mark it as a high style Federal period piece (1790-1820). The exposed top has been recently restored by Arlington-based preservationist Melissa Carr, who observed that many of its features recall the work of John or Thomas Seymour, a father-son team of highly regarded, and prolific, Boston cabinet makers in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century.



A card table was an item that no 19<sup>th</sup> C. family, if it had any means or pretensions, could do without: playing cards and gaming were at the heart of socializing (along with the consumption of large quantities of drink). The pressed glass vessels here are from ca. 1830 would have been used for drinking port or Madeira, common wines of the period. The playing cards are reproductions of a pack from the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The Society's most recent furniture acquisition is the massive Sheraton style, Federal period **sideboard** on the north wall of the room, a gift from a descendant of inventor and entrepreneur Amos Whittemore. (Illustrated below.) Such an item would have stood proudly in an owner's dining room as it surely did in Whittemore's mansion on Massachusetts Ave. Inspired by English models, sideboards came into fashion in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the homes of wealthy Americans became more palatial and dining practices more elaborate. The provenance of this work is well established due to the rare survival of the signed receipt of Amos's payment of \$60 (about \$1000 today) to the cabinetmaker Abel Whitney of Cambridge. The sideboard has been recently brought back to its original glory by Melissa Carr of Masterworks Preservation in Arlington.



On the sideboard is an 18th century English knife box, one of the few objects in the house with a solid Russell family provenance. It was a wedding gift to Thomas and Lydia Teel in 1814 and given to the Society by their daughter Abby Dupee, who advised the Society during the restoration of the house in 1924. **[Guides: the lid of the box is very loose. Please do not try to open it.]**

As we stand in this room, we might consider the history of the house at the end of the Russells' residence here with the aid of this old photograph of 1870-80. Here are depicted two women and two young girls posing in front of the house in what was known as "Jason's orchard:" the seated woman in black is probably Jason's granddaughter Lydia; the standing figure, her daughter Abbie, and the two girls in white, Abbie's daughters, Emma and Effie. We can see the front entry porch on the left, which Thomas and Lydia probably added early in their marriage, and the extended "ell" on the right, built by Lydia after her husband's death in 1855. The photograph does not yet show Jason Street, which Lydia had laid down when in 1883-84 she subdivided what remained of her grandfather's farm and distributed the lots among her children. She gave her eldest son George W. Teel, who was living near Chicago, the house, outbuildings and land upon which they stood. George was not her eldest son, who normally would receive the best part of an inheritance, but it was a source of some distress when George moved so far from home. Perhaps Lydia hoped, futilely, as it turned out, to lure him back home with what must have been a very attractive property. **[Guides: the name information is pasted onto the back of the print]**

Lydia moved in with her daughter Abbie in about 1884 and died in 1886. The last members of the Russell family to live in the old house left sometime between 1884 and 1892 when George sold it to a local man, James A. Bailey. Mr. Bailey sold off plots surrounding the house on both the Massachusetts Ave and the Jason St. frontages. These houses obscured the view of this historic house and were not finally completely removed until 1961. In Mr. Bailey's hands, however, the house remained reasonably intact until the Arlington Historical Society heroically marshaled the resources to purchase it in 1923 and to preserve it as an historical and architectural landmark and a reminder of Arlington's role in the first day of the American Revolution. When the Society purchased the house it was Abbie Teel Dupee (standing woman in white) who lived just across the street at the time, who helped to assist the Society in recollecting that Revolutionary history. Abbie was born in the house, was an active Society member, and had a good memory of the location of all the many musket ball holes that had been patched over the years. Abbie's home at the time is the green office building just across the street on the other corner of Jason Street and Mass Ave.



Jason Russell House c. 1880

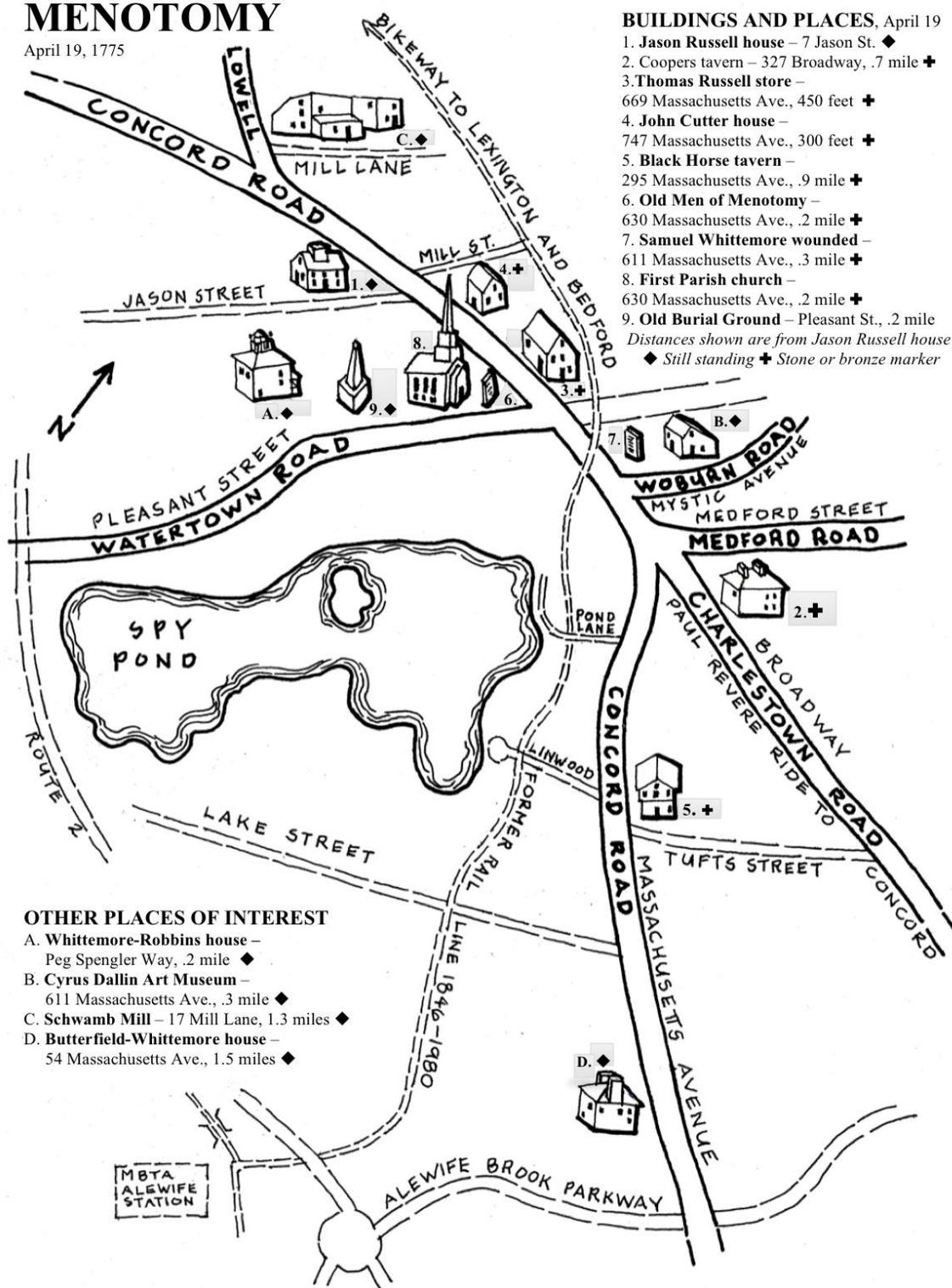
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## **APPENDICES**

# MENOTOMY

April 19, 1775



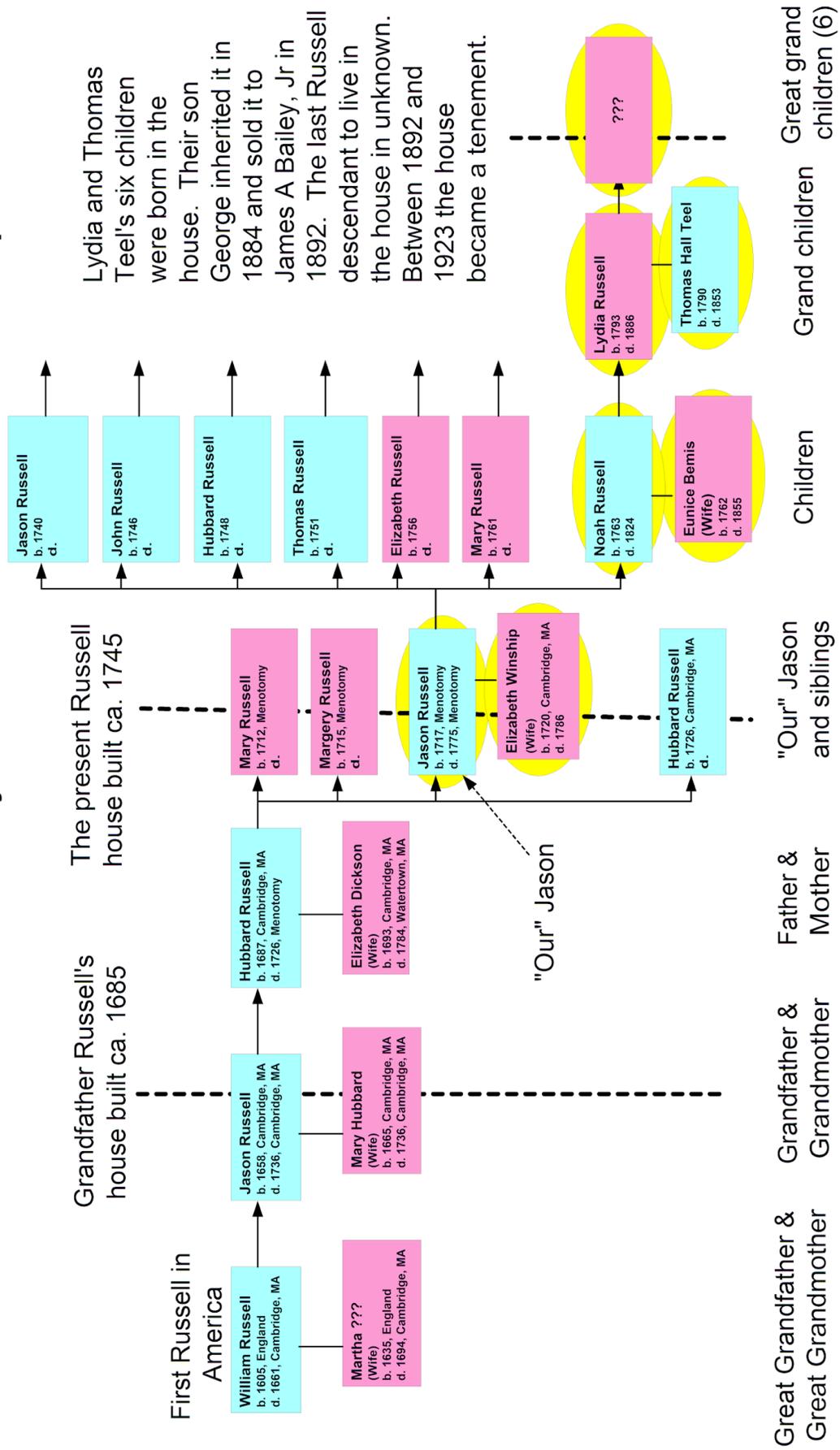
## BUILDINGS AND PLACES, April 19

1. Jason Russell house – 7 Jason St. ◆
  2. Coopers tavern – 327 Broadway, .7 mile +
  3. Thomas Russell store – 669 Massachusetts Ave., 450 feet +
  4. John Cutter house – 747 Massachusetts Ave., 300 feet +
  5. Black Horse tavern – 295 Massachusetts Ave., .9 mile +
  6. Old Men of Menotomy – 630 Massachusetts Ave., .2 mile +
  7. Samuel Whittemore wounded – 611 Massachusetts Ave., .3 mile +
  8. First Parish church – 630 Massachusetts Ave., .2 mile +
  9. Old Burial Ground – Pleasant St., .2 mile
- Distances shown are from Jason Russell house*  
 ◆ Still standing + Stone or bronze marker

## OTHER PLACES OF INTEREST

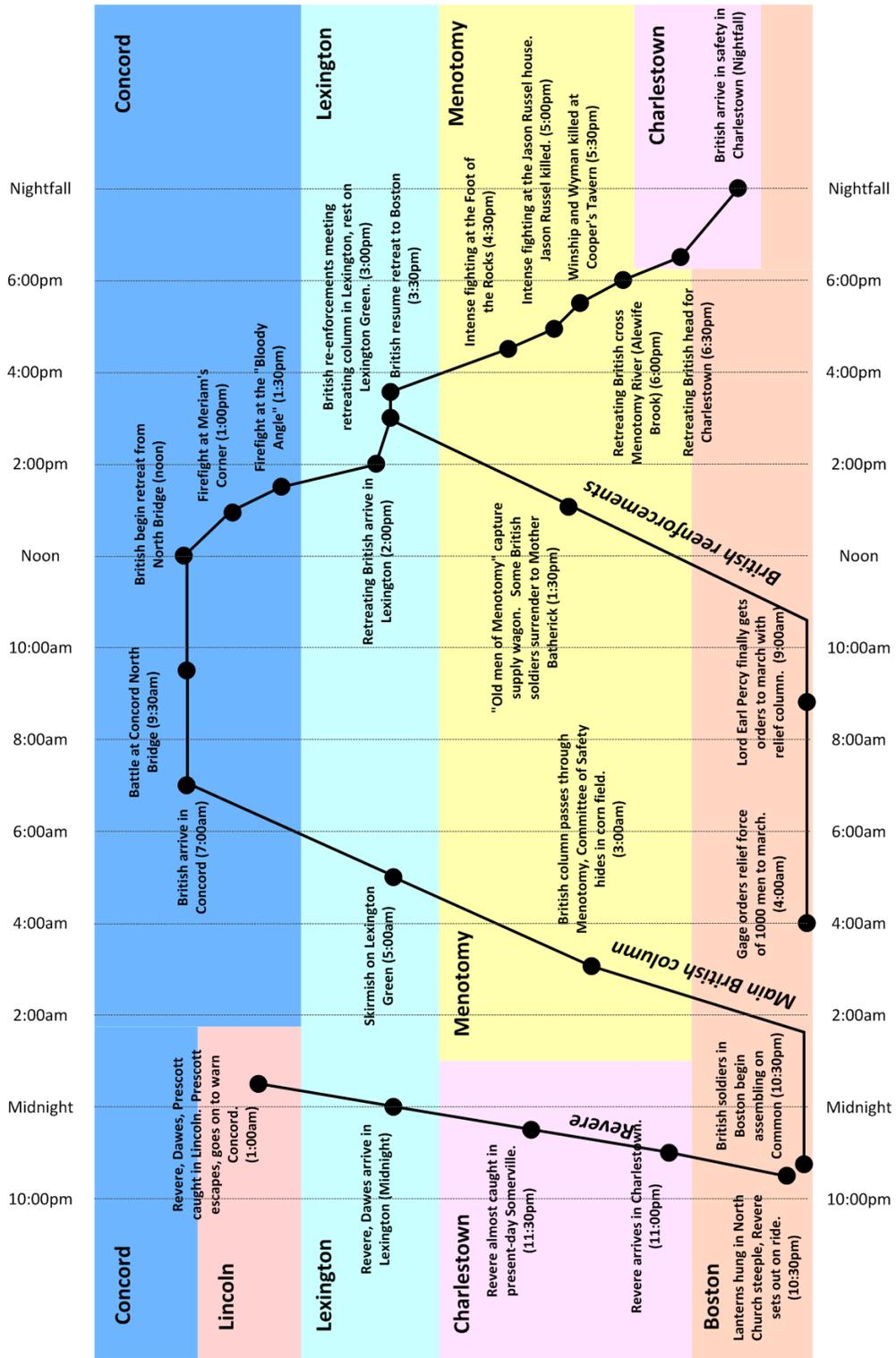
- A. Whittemore-Robbins house – Peg Spengler Way, .2 mile ◆
- B. Cyrus Dallin Art Museum – 611 Massachusetts Ave., .3 mile ◆
- C. Schwamb Mill – 17 Mill Lane, 1.3 miles ◆
- D. Butterfield-Whittemore house – 54 Massachusetts Ave., 1.5 miles ◆

# Jason Russell's Family Tree and House Occupants

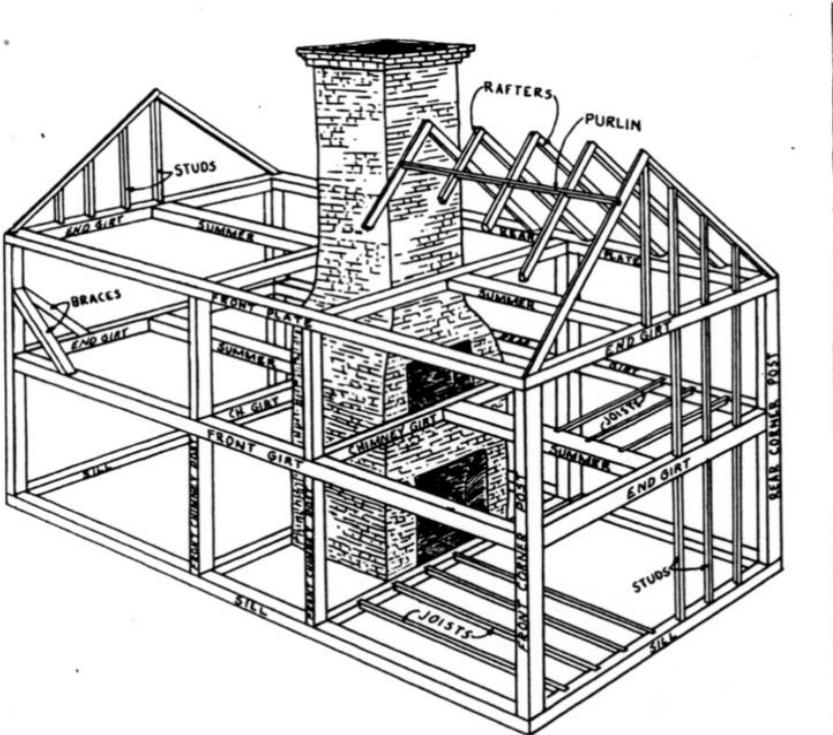


Yellow circle indicates resident of house

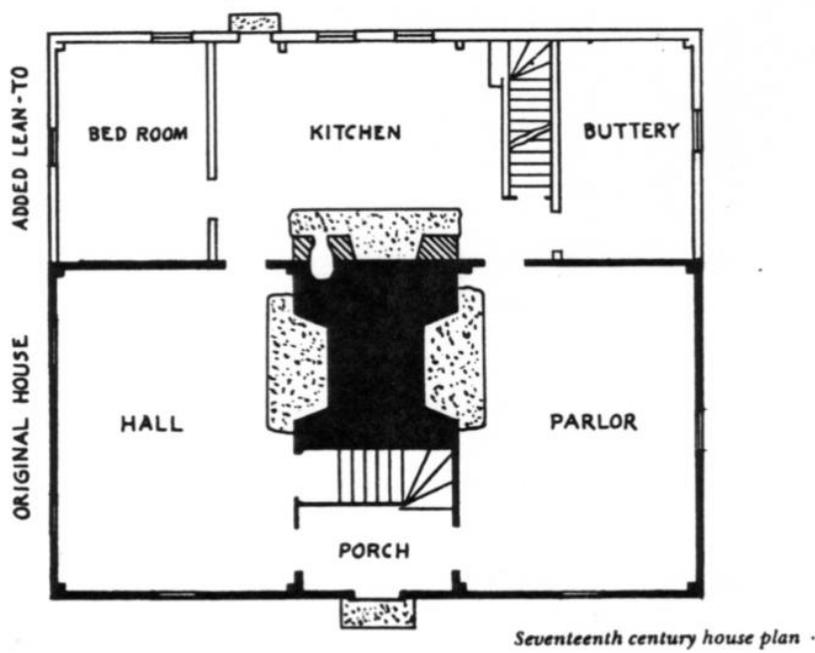
# Timeline for April 19th, 1775



*Timber Frame Construction and Floor Plan with Lean-to*



*Typical framing details, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.*



## *A Walk Through Revolutionary Menotomy*

On our house tours, we discuss the role of the JRH in the events of April 19, 1775. To amplify our account of that memorable day, we may also tell stories or get questions that relate to other places in old Menotomy, such as Cooper's Tavern, Russell's Store, the Meetinghouse, etc. This brief guide may help you to better pinpoint these locations and bring their stories alive for visitors.

The story of April 19 in Menotomy actually began on April 18, at the **Black Horse Tavern**, which stood close to the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Foster Street (now a BP station). The Boston Committee on Safety met there that evening to plan its protests to recent British actions. Three committee members decided to stay at the Tavern overnight and were awakened at around 3:00 a.m. as the British Regulars marched through town. Urged to flee by the tavern keeper, the three men escaped through the back door and hid safely in the corn stubble of a field behind.

Paul Revere, who, galloping into Menotomy between 11 p.m. and midnight warned the population of the impending arrival of the British Regulars, actually had sounded a general alarm a few hours earlier. He entered town via what is now **Medford Street**, turning onto Massachusetts Avenue (then called Concord Road), which he would follow on to Lexington.

At the corner of Medford St. and Mass. Ave. (now the location of Starbucks), stood **Cooper's Tavern**, which was the site of three particularly dramatic events on April 19. First, it was the meeting place where "**the Menotomy Old Men**," including David Lamson, a man of color, planned their capture of a British supply wagon that had become separated from Lord Percy's relief troops on their way to Lexington in the early afternoon of April 19. Second, it was the site of the brutal murders of **Jabez Wyman and Jason Winship**, who were at the tavern, unarmed, and celebrating

the birth of Winship's son, when they were slaughtered by British soldiers. Third, it was at this tavern that the grievously wounded 80 year-old **Samuel Whittemore**, was carried after being shot, bayoneted and left for dead by the British. Mr. Whittemore, miraculously, survived his wounds and lived to the ripe old age of 98.

A monument to the "**Menotomy Old Men**" stands in front of the Unitarian Universalist Church (site of the original **Meetinghouse**); and another, to **Samuel Whittemore**, is situated in front of the Jefferson-Cutter House on the corner of Mass. Ave. and Mystic Street, the general area where Mr. Whittemore encountered the British.

For nearly the first 100 years of its existence, the village of Menotomy, as part of the precinct of West Cambridge, did not have its own meetinghouse or burying ground; thus villagers had to travel to Cambridge to worship and bury their dead. Land for the **Burial Ground** was designated as early as 1724, and the oldest surviving stone is dated 1736. However, the most prominent monument is the obelisk honoring the men killed in Menotomy on the first day of the Revolution. At its foot is the mass grave containing the remains of Jason Russell and the others killed at the JRH. Near the obelisk, stands the famous "barbarously murdered" headstone for Jason, which is flanked by that of his wife Elizabeth.

The **Meetinghouse** was built on a parcel of land lying between the pasture of **Jason Russell** [the grandfather of our Jason] and Ebenezer Swan's field. This Meetinghouse long ago vanished and was followed by four successors. The third of these, dating from 1856, burned in 1975 and was replaced by UU Church existing today. The first schoolhouse was on or near this site, too, for in 1693 the Town of Cambridge voted to "give the Menotomy people a quarter acre of land upon our common, near the house of **Jason Russell** [again, the grandfather], near the highway, for the accommodation of a schoolhouse."

A major business and local gathering spot during the Revolutionary period was the **Russell Store**, originally near the corner of present-day Water Street and Mass. Ave. Owned by **Jason Russell's son Thomas** (b.1751) and remaining in the family for four generations, it was demolished in 1907. This was the scene of a British raid during the retreat when "hogsheads of molasses were left with taps drawn to run all over the floor."

Visitors sometimes ask about the location of the **Deacon Adams House**, where poor Hannah Adams lay with her newborn baby, Ann, while the British ransacked the house. We know that the Adams property was located immediately west of the Russells.' Demolished, (or now hidden under later construction) it is possible that the Adams homestead was near the Bartlett Street area and perhaps a little up the hill from Mass. Ave.

The **Battle at the Foot of the Rocks** in the Arlington Heights launched a series of bloody engagements which historian Thomas Fleming has called a "little known murderous daylong street fight" that extended along Mass. Ave. through Menotomy and Cambridge and ended only at nightfall when the weary British soldiers finally arrived in Charlestown. A **bronze plate on a large boulder** near the corner of Mass. Ave. and Lowell Street commemorates this battle.

## ***A Primer of Early American Furniture Styles***

This is a very brief description of American furniture styles from roughly 1680-1830 represented at the JRH referencing specific pieces in the collection. Nearly all early American furniture derives from English prototypes, but many regional variations exist. Furthermore, the dates given for each style are very general since some styles were in vogue at different times in different places. Furthermore, rural communities like Menotomy/Arlington, where local, often untrained, artisans made much of the furniture, rarely kept up to date with the newest fashions.

Note that few pieces in the house are “pure” examples of any period style. Many are transitional or hybrid in nature; that is, the object combines elements from two or more periods. Furniture of this sort is often found in rural areas where furniture makers or their patrons were less sophisticated or, in fact, preferred an eclectic design.

Many good websites are devoted to furniture styles, and a very useful and well-illustrated book is Jonathan L. Fairbanks and Elizabeth B. Bates, *American Furniture 1620 to the Present*, New York, 1981.

### William and Mary (1690-1725)

*Note:* Since Jason inherited much of his furniture from his grandfather, we can guess that it would have had characteristics of this style.

*Examples:* Adams family chest in the April 19 exhibition; the drop leaf table in the Kitchen (Fig. 1 below), Adams family clock in the Entry Hall, the high backed caned chair in the Parlor Chamber. (Fig. 2 next page). Several of our chairs are also hybrids of William and Mary and either Queen Anne or Chippendale.

*Features:* Preferred materials were oak or walnut, often painted; sometimes japanned like our Adams clock. Case Pieces: as in the Adams family chest, heavy proportions; painted; large bulbous feet. Chairs: vertical proportions, multiple turnings on legs and stretchers; ball or Spanish (brush) feet ; sometimes an ornate front stretcher and top rail. Tables have lots of turnings; large ones often have drop leaves and gatelegs to support the leaves when they are up.



Figure 1. Wm and Mary Table, English, c. 1700



Fig. 2, left. William and Mary chair, English or American, c. 1710. Fig. 3, right. a hybrid Queen Anne/William and Mary chair, American, c. 1750

### Queen Anne 1720-1755

*Examples:* There are no good examples of pure Queen Anne in the JRH, but several of our chairs combine some Queen Anne features with William and Mary. This happens because provincial furniture makers tried to please their customers by “updating” popular older styles with a “touch of the new.” Figure 4, in the collection of the MFA is a fully realized Queen Anne piece. Illustrations 5 and 6 illustrate what happens when chair makers mix Queen Anne features with William and Mary.

*Features of fully developed Queen Anne:* Woods are walnut, cherry or mahogany; highly developed japanning on some case pieces. Chairs have cabriole legs ending in a small, pad or slipper foot (cabriole means formed in a graceful s-curve, somewhat resembling a human leg with bent knee); their backs are tall and curvilinear with vase-shaped splats. Case pieces are light in feeling, usually with cabriole legs and frequently, a prominent pediment. “*Country*” chairs, like several in the JRH, are made of maple or pine. They have graceful, curvilinear backs, but woven seats, brush or Spanish feet, and bulbous leg turnings.



Figure 4. A fully developed Queen Anne chair, 1740-50, in the MFA

### Chippendale (1755-1790)

*Examples:* The serpentine front mahogany chest in the Parlor is an excellent example of high style Chippendale. Three country-style, rush seated, Chippendale chairs are also on display in the room: one with a ribband back and the two ladder-backs near the windows.

*Features:* Many characteristics are continued from Queen Anne: expensive, frequently imported woods and a love for curvilinear line, seen for example in the continued use of cabriole legs, which now terminate in ball and claw feet. Chairs again have splat backs, but now they are usually pierced giving the splat the appearance of intertwining ribbons. Two features, however, distinguish Chippendale chairs from the Queen Anne: their heavier, lower proportions, and the yoke-shaped top rail, the corners of which might be reminiscent of “ears.” Case pieces appear in a variety of forms. Their fronts can be serpentine like that of our chest, but they can also be composed of projecting and receding blocks. Prominent, highly decorative brasses adorn nearly all Chippendale case pieces; as is also the case with smaller items like our Chippendale knife box displayed on the large sideboard in the parlor.



Figures 5 and 6. High style Chippendale chairs; on the left an example with a ribbanded splat; on the right, a ladderback version with straight legs. See figures 7 and 8 below for Chippendale chairs in the Jason Russell House, naively imitating these chairs.



Figure 7



Figure 8

The Society is fortunate to have in its collection two large case pieces, which together illustrate interesting variants of the Chippendale style. The first (figure 9) is a serpentine front mahogany

chest from about 1780 with ball and claw feet. With its fluid lines and highly decorative brass drawer pulls, it perfectly exemplifies the style; the other (figure 10) is a dropleaf cherry wood desk from about 1800, with ogee bracket feet reminiscent of Chippendale. However, its hardware (if original) and simple lines acknowledge the growing popularity of the Federal style in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century.



Figure 9



Figure 10

Federal Period Styles 1790-1830. (Sheraton and Hepplewhite)

*Examples:* The Hepplewhite style Locke family chest in the parlor chamber and the fold-top card table in the parlor. We have no Federal chairs in our collection, but some elegant examples at the Museum of Fine Arts are illustrated below.

*Features:* Constructed in mahogany, satinwood, and bird's eye maple veneers, often with complex inlays of contrasting woods. English furniture makers were inspired by the recently excavated paintings and furniture at Pompeii, which led to attenuated proportions, emphatically linear qualities and a sense of lightness and fragility. Hepplewhite legs are square-shaped and tapered; Sheraton legs are subtly turned and are often reeded like the fluting of a classical column. For a good example of reeded Sheraton legs, look at the large sideboard in the parlor. Decorative motifs can be fans, feathers, eagles, urns, ellipses and ovals. Chair backs can be square, oval, heart, or shield-shaped while case pieces may have semi-circular or bow fronts. An example of a bow front is the Locke family chest (see Figure 11)



Figure 11 (far left) Locke family chest c.1800; (right) Hepplewhite card table with rich inlays. (The wallpaper here is a reproduction of a Federal period design.) This photograph shows the card table folded up as it would have been when it was not in use thereby consuming less space.



Figure 12 Card table open and ready for play.

□

Figures 14 and 15 (below). Two examples of Federal Period Chairs in the MFA. On the left a painted Hepplewhite style piece with squared, tapered legs and spade feet. The oval back is not unusual, but the fanciful wheat sheaf motif is. On the right a Sheraton style chair with a gently curved back inspired by Ancient Greek furniture. Its tapered and reeded legs remind us of slender Greek columns. Similar legs appear on our sideboard.



Figure 14    Figure 15



## ***Ballistics Study of the Jason Russell House***

New and exciting work is being done at the Jason Russell House thanks to a dedicated group of scholars and professionals.

Joel Bohy, Director of Arms & Militaria at Bruneau & Co. Auctions contacted Society Director Sara Lundberg in the fall of 2019 with an exciting project – a ballistics study of the Jason Russell House. He has done similar projects at other sites, and in doing so has accumulated an incredible group of historians and archaeologists who have been studying battle damaged sites all over the U.S. We were very excited about the opportunity to find out what more we could learn.

Bohy, along with his friend and colleague Christopher Fox, Director of Historic Arms & Militaria at Skinner Auctions, paid the Jason Russell House a visit in November of 2019. Most surprisingly, they discovered a lot more bullet strikes than we knew existed. The first new musket ball hole was found within the first ten minutes of their visit, when he carefully peered around with a flashlight standing in the stairway that leads down to the cellar. Most visitors are familiar with the holes that you can see on the stair risers as you look down into the cellar. Standing just inside the landing area, with a flashlight pointed back at the kitchen, Fox found another hole along the door jamb, which had been covered over by replacement casing in the intervening years. Record indicate that the original door was absolutely riddled with holes, but was replaced and given away in the 1880s when the Russell family was selling the house. The Society made an effort to find out where it went based on scant details when they purchased the house in 1923, but came up short. Bohy and Fox are using their network of resources to look for it, and are hopeful that it's in a public or private collection somewhere.



Bohy and Fox continued their investigation, and found yet another new hole in the exterior wall of the kitchen chamber (room above the kitchen), and to near the window in the attic facing Massachusetts Avenue, and in the reverse side of the stairs leading into the attic. It appears they were fired through the windows from the street below, either as a preventative measure or to target a person shooting out of them. They determined that

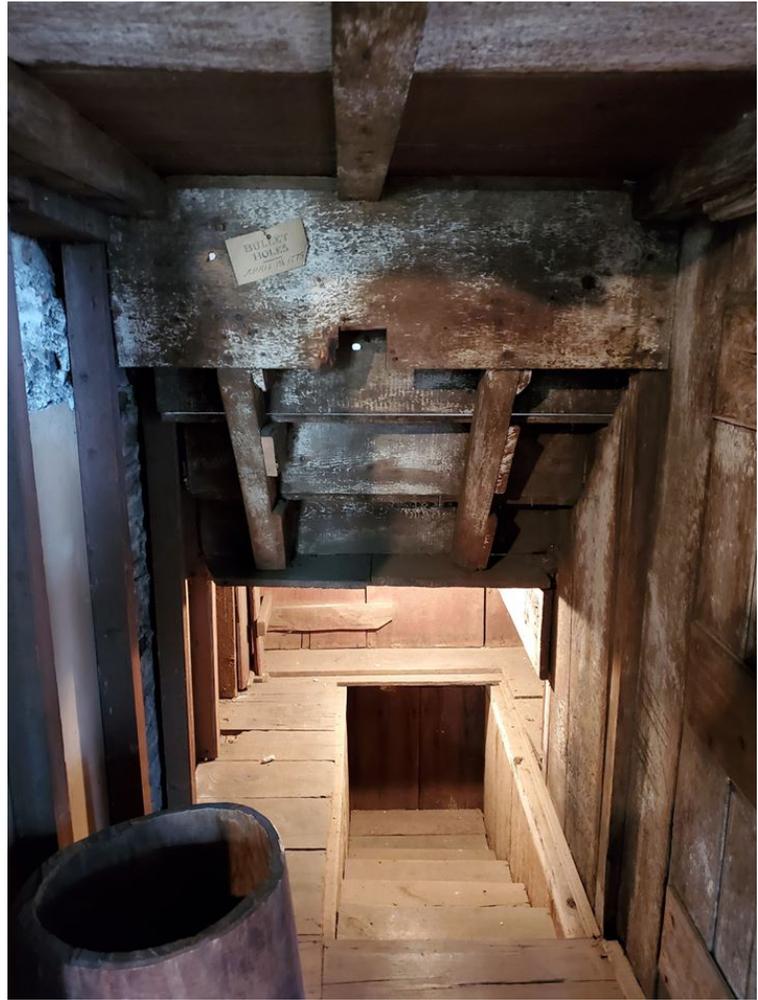
more formalized study was necessary and arranged a site visit with a cadre of experts who were to attend the Society for Historic Archaeology conference in Boston in mid-January.

The group convened at the site on January 13 to collect precise data using modern technology. The team included representatives from the National Park Service Regional Archaeology Program, Bohy, Fox, and Dr. Douglas D. Scott. Scott is one of the foremost battlefield archaeologists, especially known for using the tools of forensics to aid in his research.



The team examined every hole and strike and measured with calipers to determine the caliber, which can often determine whether the projectile was discharged by a British soldier or provincial. They used metal detectors and a video scope to investigate within the walls. Scott swabbed each hole to detect for lead residue, and the team used ballistics rods and laser lights to determine the trajectory of each musket ball. The data is still being studied by Bohy and Scott, but a few things became clear immediately that may be of interest to those familiar with the Jason Russell House:

- The two well-known bullet holes (right) that can be seen on stair risers when looking down into the cellar were fired from within the kitchen, and one may have gone through the closed door first.
- The newly discovered hole on the cellar door jamb lines up with one of the stair riser holes, and came from the same ball.
- The ball that struck the woodwork in the parlor is also the same one that caused the damage to the newel post of the stairs. The trajectory for this strike points to the exterior Massachusetts Avenue facing wall just below the window. It is likely that it burst through the clapboard there first, and there was another hole that was later covered.
- The new hole in the parlor chamber was also the same ball that struck through the interior wall.
- A hole high up on the wall between the kitchen chamber and the upper hall seemed to have an unusual angle. A laser light analysis of the trajectory led the team to discover yet another bit of damage hiding in plain sight – where the musket ball had skidded against the ceiling in the upper hall.



- The known hole in the parlor chamber (room above the parlor) is also the same that struck the reverse side of the stairs leading into the attic. This strike could only be examined from within the “secret compartment” our guides often show to visitors. It is likely that the musket ball rattled down within that compartment. There was some hope that it might still be there but were unable to find it.
- Another plastered hole was found on the second newel post near the top of the stairs.
- Two holes in the attic were both located near the gable end window, indicating that troops firing from the road (today’s Mass Ave) were firing at windows.



All of the research is still being analyzed by the team, with plans to present the research with a scholarly paper and presentation at a conference.