

Concord Museum, Concord, Massachusetts

The Shot Heard Round the World

by Jeanne Schinto

Photos courtesy Concord Museum

"It's big and it's small at the same time," militaria expert Joel Bohy said of *The Shot Heard Round the World: April 19, 1775*. The show, on view at the Concord Museum, Concord, Massachusetts, through September 21, is big because it's about some of the biggest ideas America ever had—liberty and independence, for starters. It's small because the objects in the show number just 50. Chosen as material representatives of the first

From Boston's august Massachusetts Historical Society, for example, came Revere's draft deposition, handwritten on April 23-25, 1775, by order of the Provincial Congress. "They wanted the story of that day to be told afterwards," said Wood.

From a small public collection came no less of a gem, the silk hatband worn by Abner Hosmer of Acton, Massachusetts, who was shot in the head and killed on the North Bridge in Concord

remarkable for the greatest Events taking Place in the present Age," William Emerson, a Concord minister, wrote in his diary on April 30, 1775. Quoting his words for a crowd who came to hear a gallery talk on this year's April 19, celebrated since 1969 as Patriots' Day in Massachusetts and Maine, Wood said, "The way they wrote about these things, the way they saved these things, it's just abundantly clear, they knew they had changed the world."

As Wood and Bohy searched for and arranged to borrow these "witness objects," as Bohy calls them, they worked to ensure that their exhibit would correct popular misconceptions about the Provincials. "One thing we wanted to convey was that they were not a flash mob," said Wood. "It just wasn't like that." The Provincials' response to the British offense "was the result of careful planning and breathtaking organization." There were 58 Massachusetts towns "ready to go." Their names are listed in a column on a wall in the exhibit. In November 1774, the townspeople started training for war 12 hours a week (the training itself was an act of treason), and in Concord they began stockpiling supplies for an army of 15,000.

Pork, flour, rice, dried peas, molasses, fish, salt, rum, tents for firearms and tents for men, cannon balls, cartridges, gunpowder, entrenching gear—these were the kinds of things that were stashed all over, said Wood. "And the quantities were enormous," said Bohy, "everything you would need to fit out an army that was meant to be sustained."

Britain's General Thomas

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24 hours of the American Revolution, they are arranged in only two modest-size rooms.

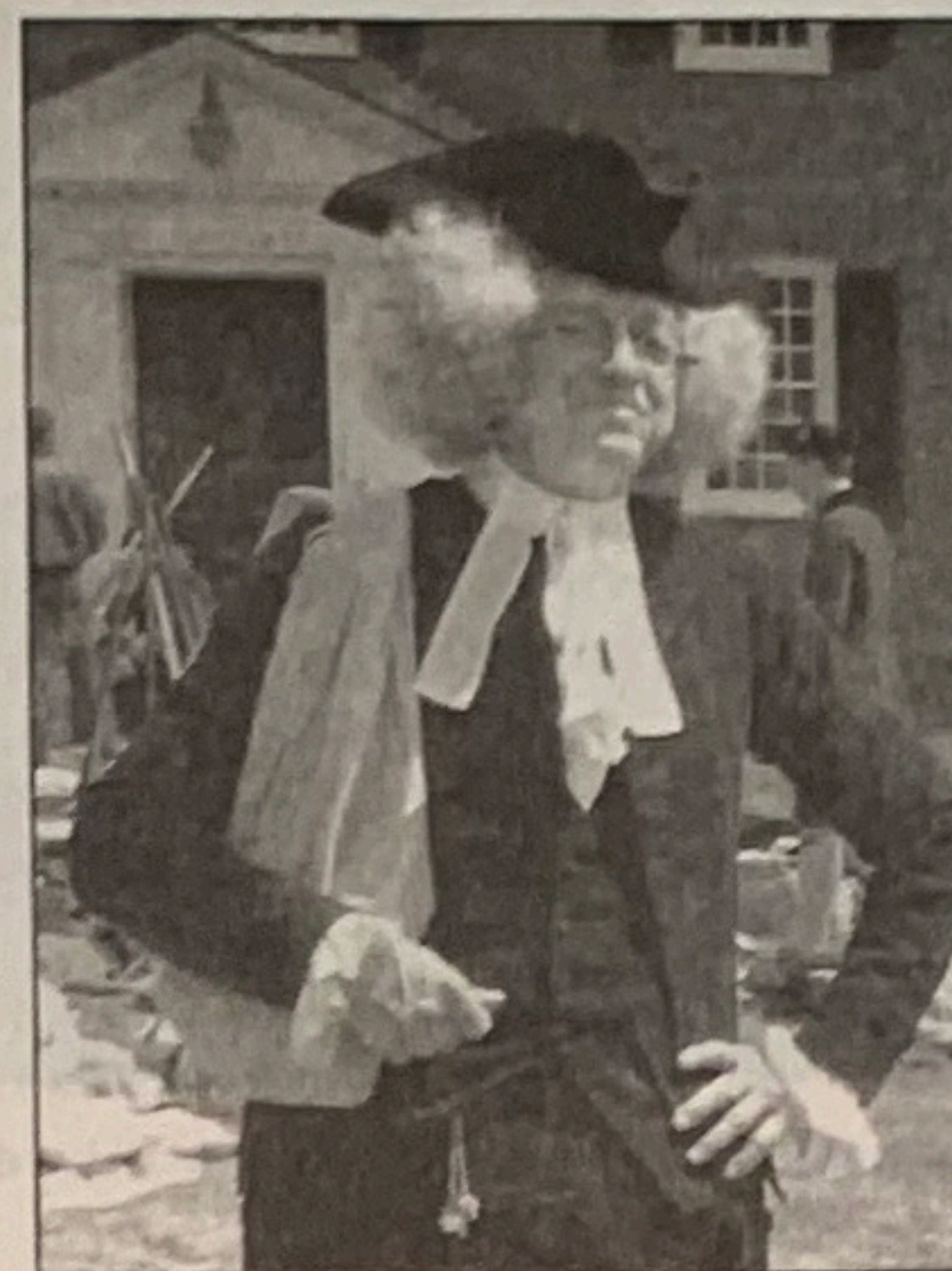
As it turns out, being both big and small is exactly as it should be. Within that space and the exhibit's parameters, Bohy and David F. Wood, the museum's eminent curator, have created a sharply focused, deeply moving display. Although its profound ideas are abstract, the pair made sure that we understand the flesh-and-blood reality of those who fought and died for them.

Some objects, such as one of the lanterns that Paul Revere arranged to glow briefly in the belfry of Boston's Christ Church (known as Old North Church)—signaling that the British raid was about to begin—are from the Concord Museum's own collection. Numerous other institutions, again big and small, lent a single great thing or a few.

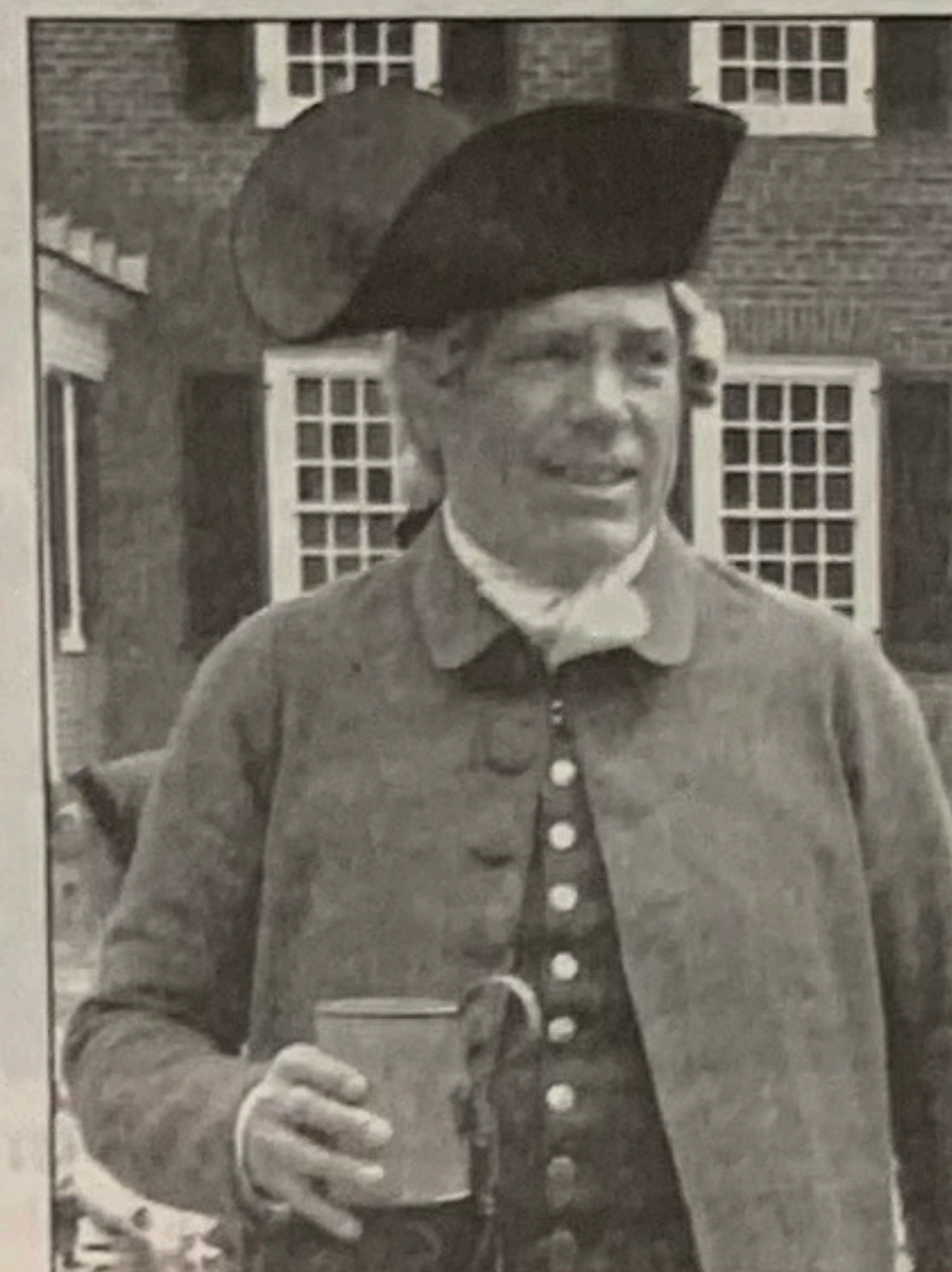
hatband is his powder horn, a gift of "Miss Elizabeth S. Hosmer" to the Concord Museum in 1936. The two are being exhibited publicly for the first time, as far as anyone can tell.

Of the impulse to save these and other items, Wood said, "It's always interesting to me to imagine people that far in the past displaying a thoroughly modern historical consciousness. They knew what they were doing, and they deliberately saved pieces of it at the moment. That's why the Hosmer powder horn survives with its woven strap intact. Those things never survive with their straps," but like the hatband, this one was put away in a drawer and cherished.

They not only saved objects, they wrote about that day in forms other than the depositions made by some 40 participants besides Revere. "This Month



Henry Cooke as the Reverend William Emerson. Schinto photo.



Bill Rose, portraying a member of Brown's Minute Man Company. Schinto photo.

Gage, commander of the Regular Army troops in Boston, initially sent 700 men to Concord to destroy the supplies. His was the "best-equipped best-trained army in the world," Wood reminded his gallery-talk audience. "That's who was being taken on." But the militia and Minutemen had not only trained, they had figured out such things as the chain of command that should prevail after the various towns' commanders were brought together. An April 5, 1775, pamphlet, *Rules and Regulations for the Massachusetts Army*, laid it all out. The copy in the exhibit belongs to the Concord Museum. Massachusetts Army? "What's wrong with this picture?" Wood rhetorically asked. "Massachusetts is not supposed to have an army."

The exhibit makes clear how quickly the Provincials spread the word and sprang into action. Their growing magnitude is brilliantly expressed in a graphic that runs along the gallery's walls. They are represented at first by a thin blue line. Just 1/64" wide, it represents one man, i.e., Paul Revere on his horse, galloping toward Concord. The blue line is surrounded by two wider bands of red, which represent the troops of the British. Then the blue line grows.

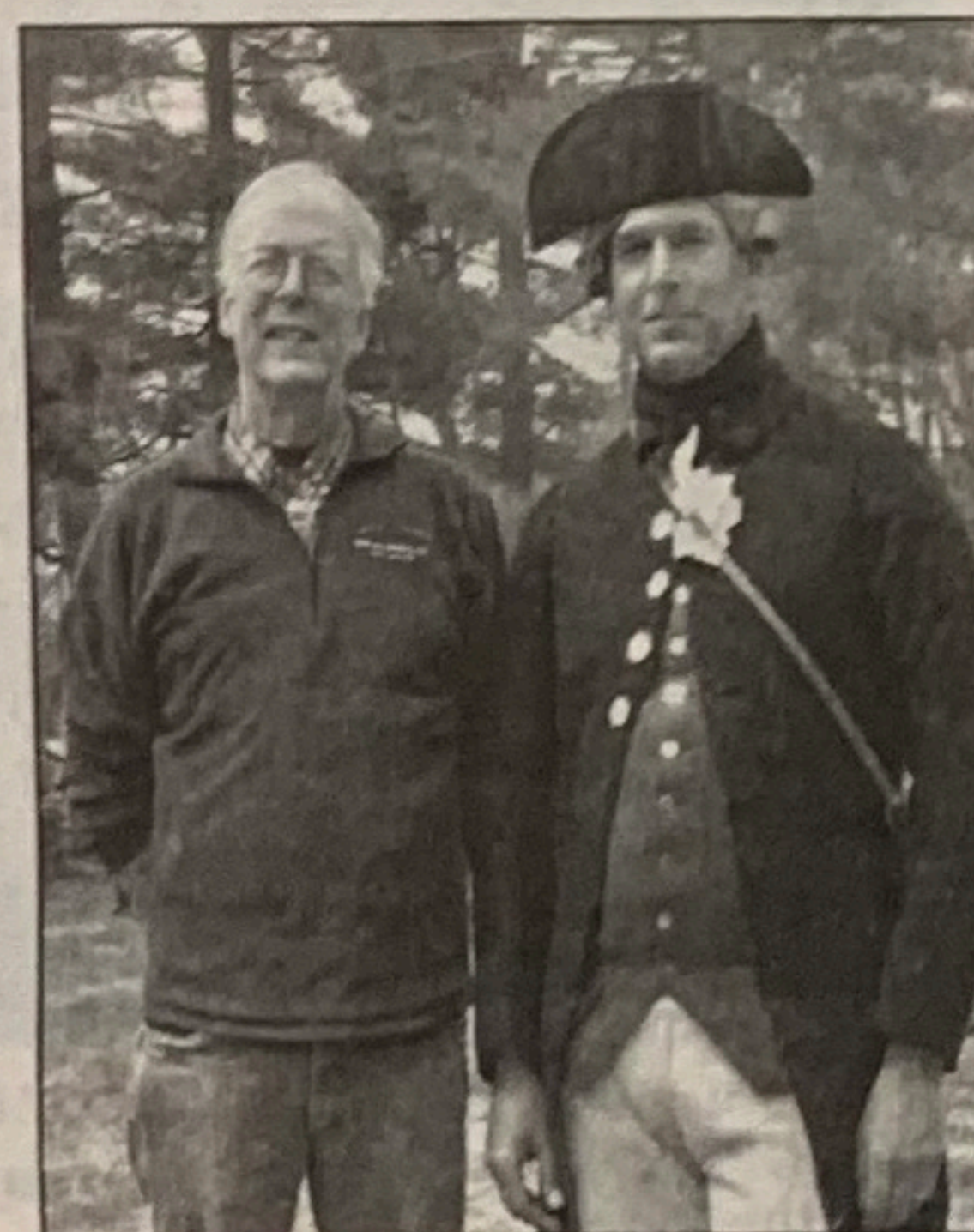
Revere got only as far as Lincoln before being captured. The alarm traveled via a network of other riders, accompanied by the ringing of church bells and the firing of guns. The convergence of militia and Minutemen from the surrounding towns is symbolized by the gradual widening

of the blue line. The red bands also widen, representing the fresh British troops that arrived. Eventually, though, toward the end of the exhibit, the blue line splits into two broad swaths that are more than equal to the red.

The muskets of the Provincials were all different sizes. Members of the militia and Minutemen companies were required to provide their own. Some of them were smaller-caliber fowlers, ones the men would use to shoot birds with. In 1934, an archaeologist, Benjamin Lincoln Smith, found dozens of flints in two distinct lines in the field above the North Bridge. He concluded that the men had marched two by two and been given an order to change their flints just before marching onto the bridge and into the pages of history.

Those flints, a gift of the archaeologist to the Concord Museum, are included in the exhibit and are yet more items that "sharpen and augment the narrative of the day," Wood observed. "You change your flint because you want your gun to go off reliably. The men were about to pull their triggers."

As in all wars, the daily life of the citizenry was very much affected; their sacrifices are represented in the exhibit by things other than weaponry. For example, there are five silver beakers, Boston-made in 1715-59, lent



David F. Wood (left) and Joel Bohy are shown on the grounds of the Concord Museum on Patriots' Day. Bohy took part in a weekend encampment that re-created David Brown's Minute Man Company of Concord, Massachusetts. Brown and his men were at the North Bridge on April 19, 1775. Schinto photo.



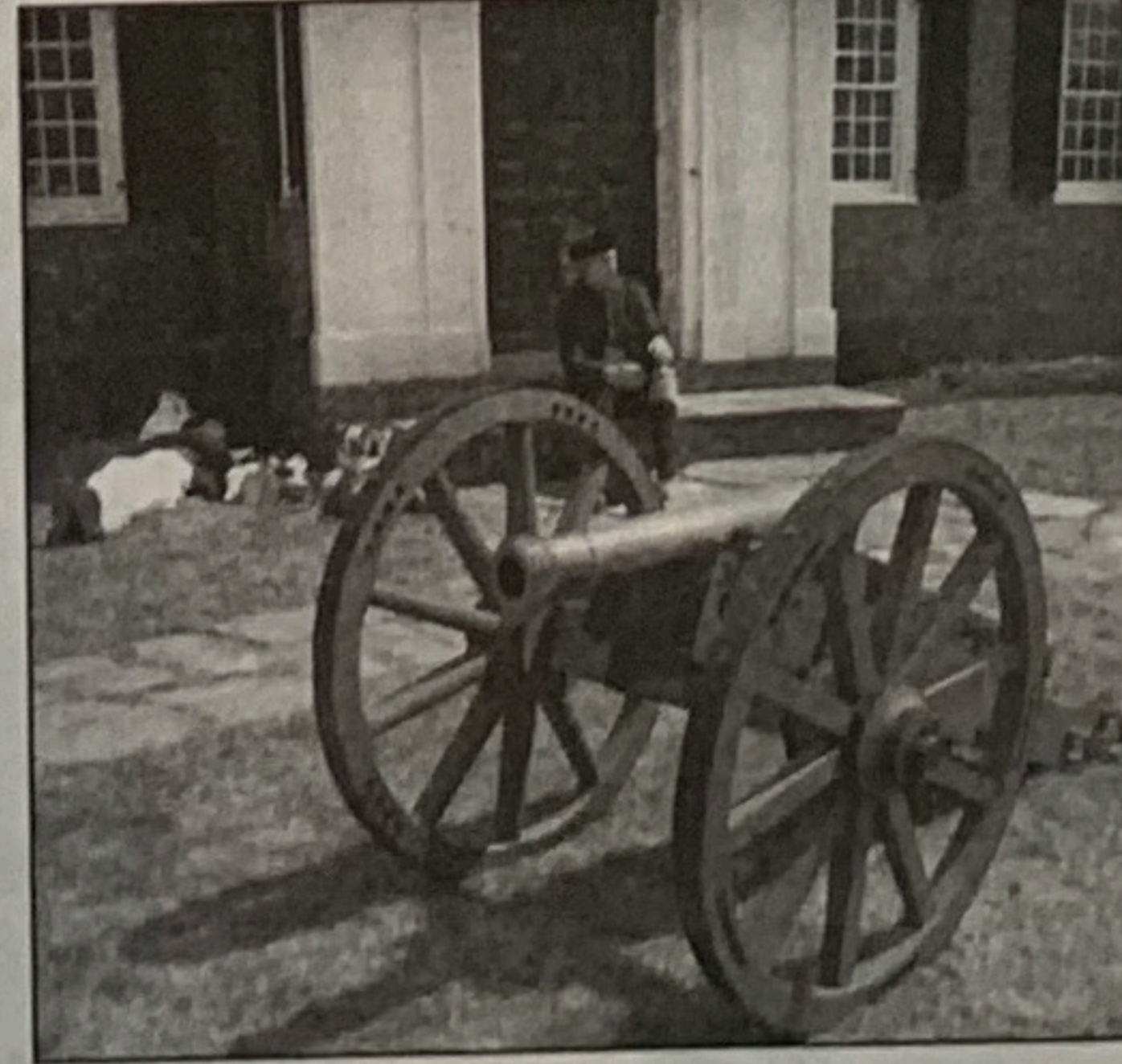
Joel Bohy's powder horn, inscribed, "Joel Bohy His Horn 1749." The horn was carved of cow by contemporary horn maker Mike Burke. It was copied from an original with the same date. Schinto photo.



More living historians, which is the term they prefer to reenactors. Schinto photo.



Exactly the kinds of things that were stockpiled in Concord in 1775 were brought to the grounds of the Concord Museum for the reenactment. "There are a lot of eighteenth-century houses that survive in the center of town," said David Wood. "You go by them and wonder, 'Did they have supplies in there?' The answer is 'Yes.'" Schinto photo.



The living historians' day began with a dawn salute. One is napping in the background. In the foreground is a cannon made in the 1970s. It is co-owned by Joel Bohy and James Kochan of James Kochan Fine Art & Antiques, Frederick, Maryland. Schinto photo.



Making midday dinner, 18th-century style—a stew of parsnips and cubes of sautéed meat. Schinto photo.

by the Lexington Historical Society. They are from the communion service of the Lexington Church. Stored at the home of Deacon Joseph Loring, they survive because they had been hidden outside before the British looted and burned the Loring home.

There is also a wooden door, lent by the Medford Historical Society. It is the entryway to what was once the home of James and Rebecca Barrett of Concord. Many women evacuated the area when the British raid was imminent, but Rebecca stayed to witness 100 soldiers marching to her doorstep to search her home for supplies.

A piece of an oak beam from the North Bridge is part of the exhibit. It

was excavated from the river below the bridge in 1956 and now belongs to the Concord Museum. The North Bridge was the place where, in Ralph Waldo Emerson's phrase, "the shot heard round the world" was fired. Some companies of Regulars had been sent out to secure the bridge after they searched the Barretts' house. About 450 Provincial troops from Concord, Lincoln, Acton, and Bedford had retreated from Concord center across the bridge to observe the Regulars. They could see from there that the burning of supplies and homes had already begun. Smoke was rising.

The Regulars fired three warning shots into the river. Then they fired on

the Provincials. Captain Isaac Davis of Acton and Abner Hosmer were both killed instantly. Concord's Major John Buttrick—whose English-made sword, now owned by the Massachusetts Archives, is on display—ordered the Provincials to return the fire. Three of the Regulars were killed and several more were wounded.

"That's for the first time that day—and the first time in history—that Provincial troops were specifically ordered to fire on Regular troops," said Wood. The American Revolutionary War had begun.

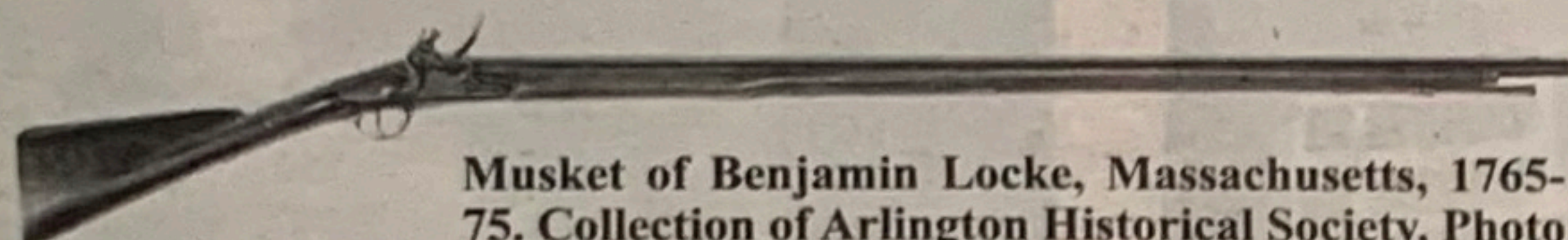
For more information, phone the museum at (978) 369-9763 or see the Web site (www.concordmuseum.org).



The movement and dial from a tall clock that belonged to John Buckman, who owned Buckman's Tavern on Lexington Common. Its original case lost, the clock was made for him in Lexington in 1769. The town's militia and Minutemen kept vigil in the tavern as the clock ticked away the hours until the sound of William Diamond's drum summoned them to assemble on the common for a confrontation with the British. Concord Museum. Gift of Jennifer Lingelbach. Schinto photo.



This is the drum that 16-year-old William Diamond was ordered by Captain John Parker to beat, summoning about 70 members of Lexington's militia and Minutemen to gather on the common as about 700 British Regular Army troops were sighted a half-mile away. When British Major John Pitcairn and a portion of those Regulars converged in the common, Captain Parker ordered his men to disperse—they were clearly outnumbered—but the Regulars opened fire, killing eight and wounding ten more. They then continued on to Concord. Lexington Historical Society. Photo by David Bohl.



Musket of Benjamin Locke, Massachusetts, 1765-75. Collection of Arlington Historical Society. Photo by David Bohl.

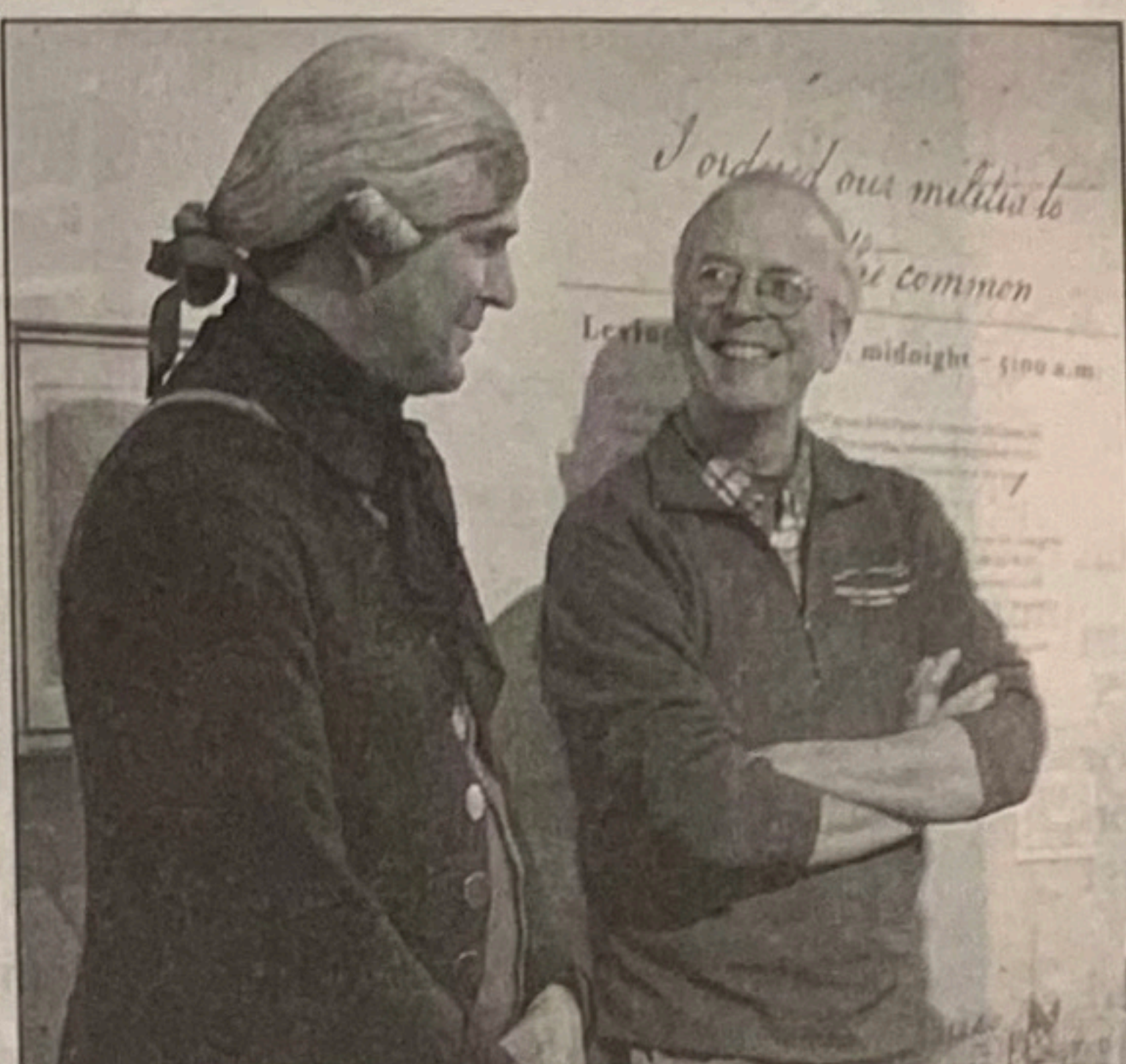


Frame of a looking glass, made in England, 1750-70, from the home of David Brown, Concord Minute Company captain. The glass was broken, perhaps by a British soldier, "an expensive piece of vandalism," the exhibit's signage points out. Photo by David Bohl.



The door of the James and Rebecca Barrett house, built circa 1760 in Concord. Medford Historical Society. Schinto photo.

A good look at the powdered wig of Joel Bohy, who with David Wood gave a gallery talk about the exhibit on Patriots' Day. Schinto photo.



Hilt of the sword of a private in the British 10th Regiment, made in England 1765-70. Concord Museum. Gift of George Tolman. Photo by David Bohl.



The silk hatband of Abner Hosmer, made in England circa 1770. Collection of Acton Memorial Library. Shown with Hosmer's powder horn. Concord Museum. Schinto photo.



A 6 1/2" x 5" watercolor portrait by Paul Revere, Boston, 1775. It sold for \$39,975 at Skinner Inc., the exhibit's lead sponsor, on March 2, 2014. The buyer was Christopher Bryant, who lent it to the exhibit. The likeness is inscribed "Major John Pitcairn," commander of the British Marines. However, Bryant, a dealer and researcher of historical paintings and objects who looked into the matter after he made his purchase, has asserted that the face is that of General Thomas Gage. He has concluded that Revere "repurposed" a drawing of Gage, turning it into one of Pitcairn. For more of the story, see David Hewett's article in *M.A.D.*, May 2014, p. 36-E. Schinto photo.



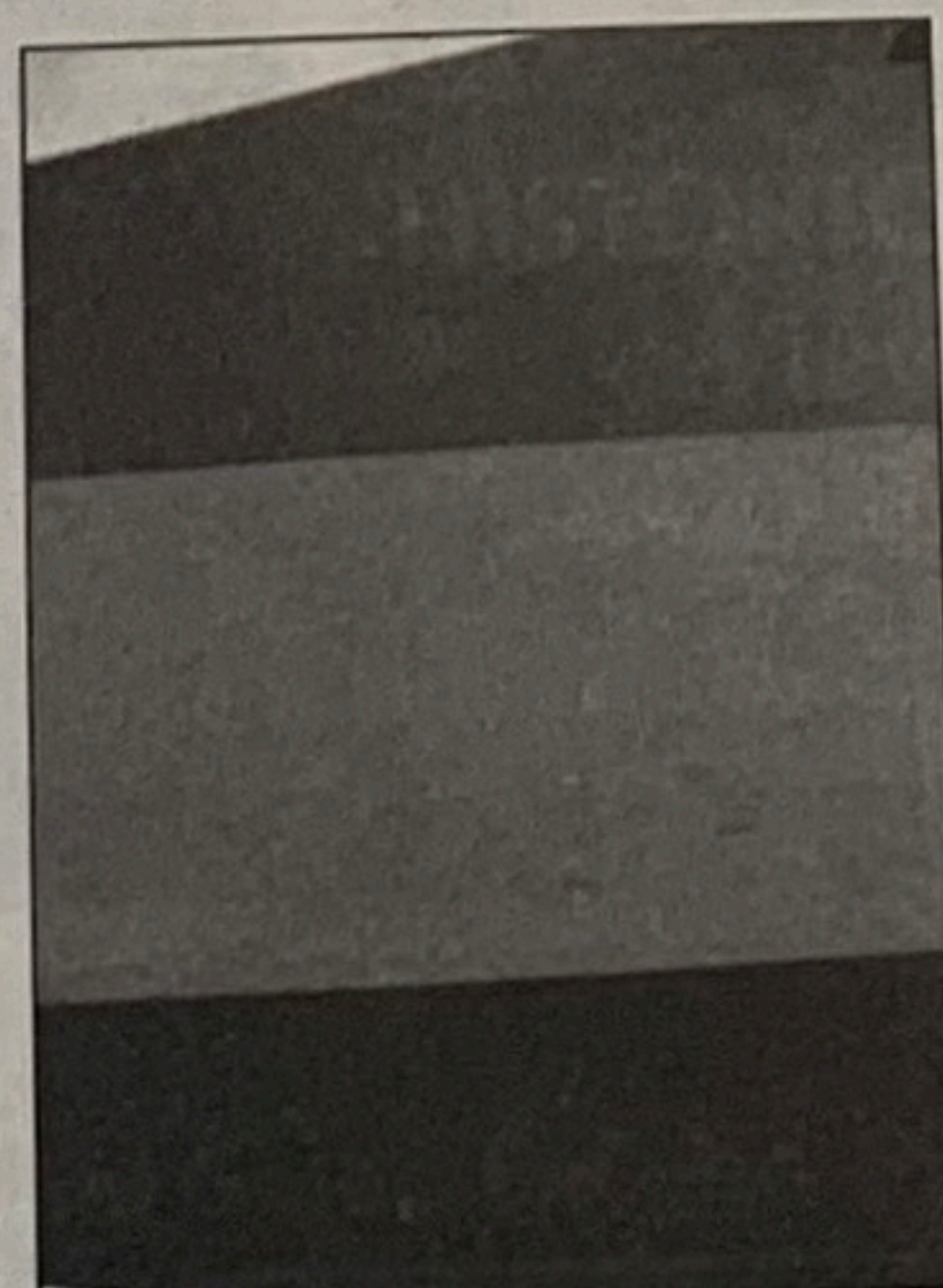
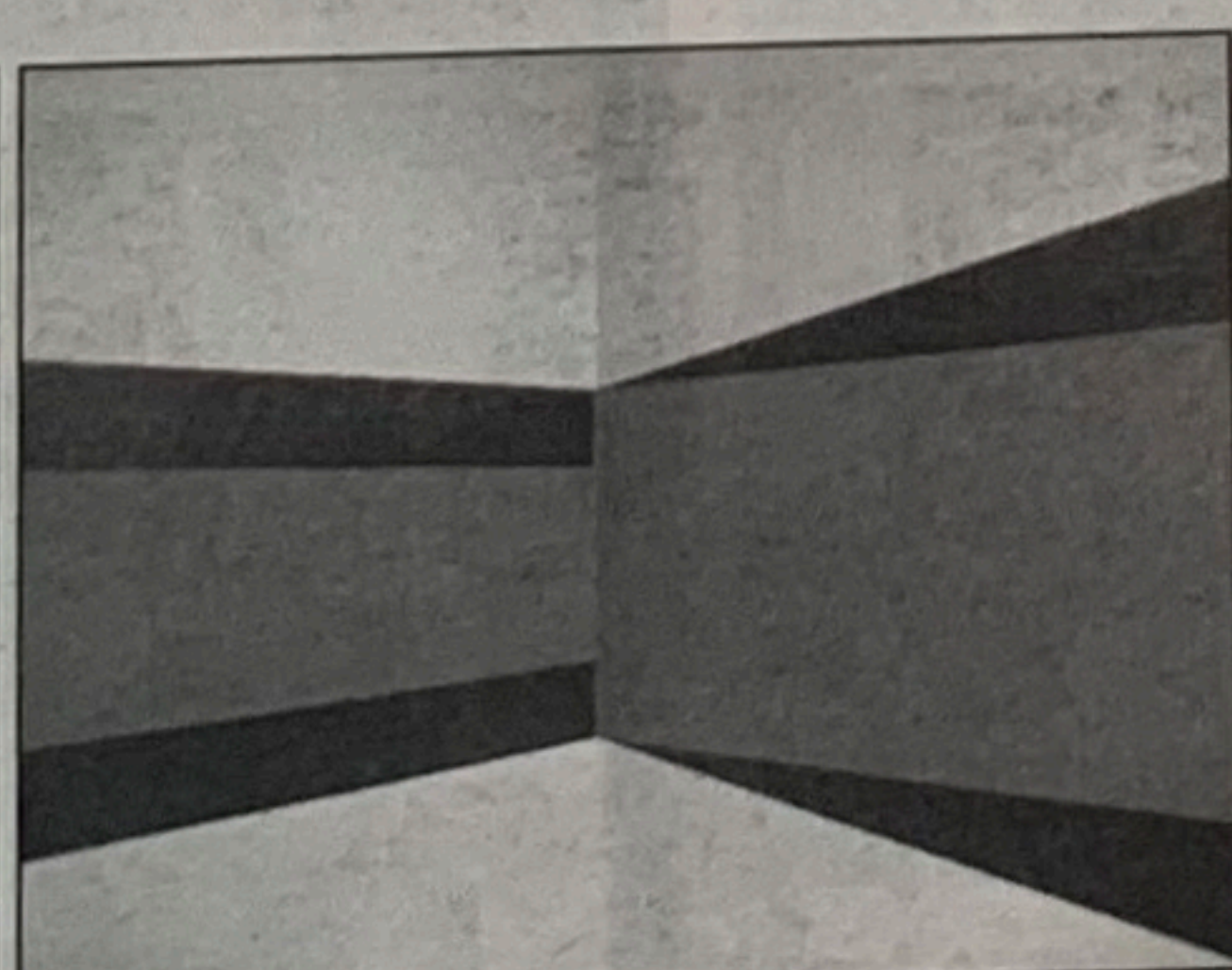
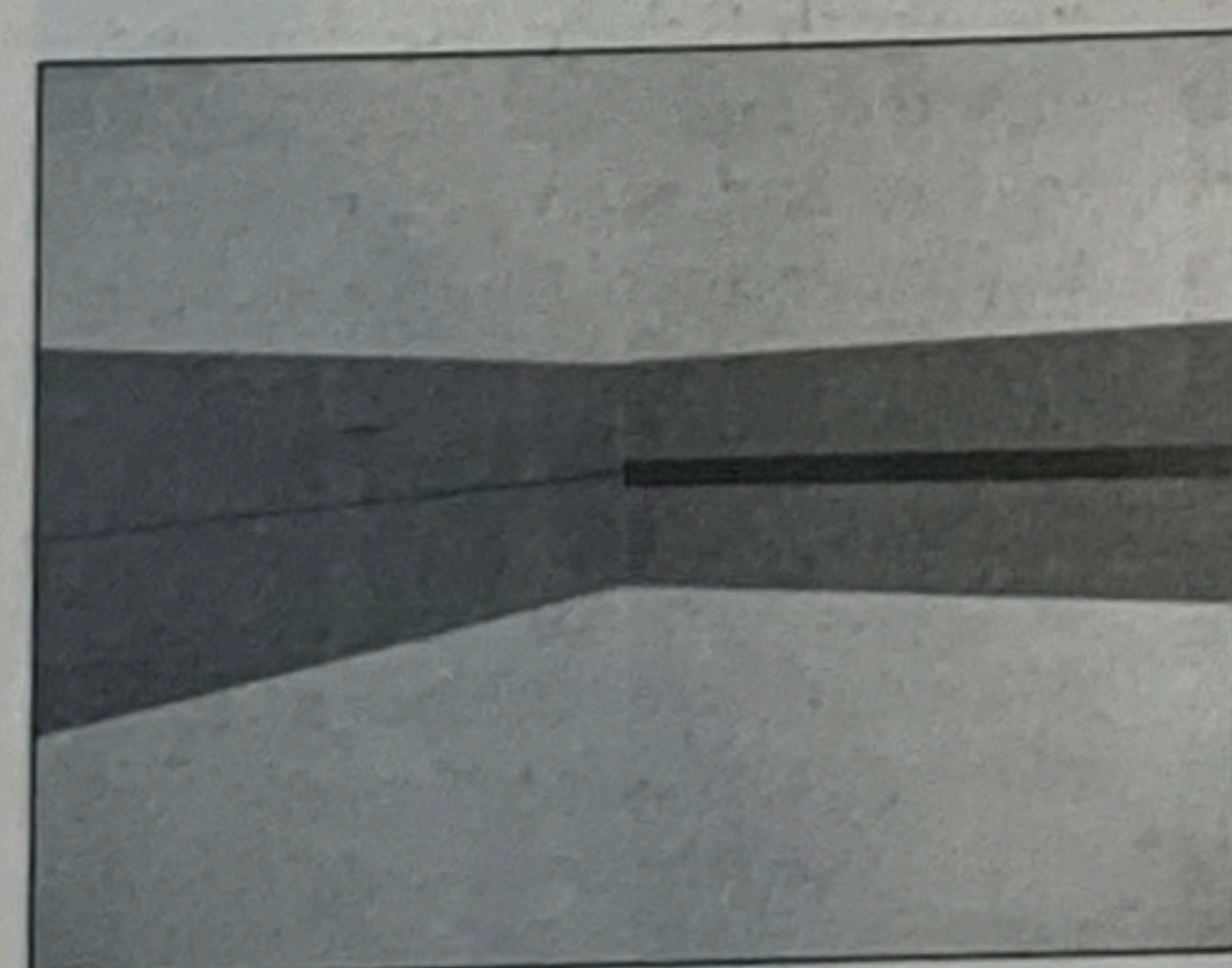
Gun flints of all sizes, made in England and France circa 1775, recovered during an archaeological dig near the North Bridge in 1934. A flint creates the spark that ignites the powder that fires the ball from a flintlock musket. New flints would be needed to assure expedient firing. "The men who dropped those flints were individuals," said David Wood. "We know the names of two hundred or more of them. It's fun to think on which one dropped which flint." Concord Museum. Gift of Benjamin Lincoln Smith. Schinto photo.



Some details of the diorama on permanent display at the Concord Museum show the fight at the North Bridge. It was made by Samuel Guernsey and Theodore Pitman of Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1930. Gift of Raymond Emerson. Schinto photos.



James Hayward's powder horn, pierced by the bullet that killed him. Acton Memorial Library. Photo by David Bohl.



The curators devised a graphic to represent the troop strengths of each side, blue for the Provincials, red for the British. From the single rider, Paul Revere, who is represented by the thin blue line, the Provincials grew to be an army of thousands. David Wood said, "A newspaper reporter wrote that it was 'as if they fell from the skies.'" When the men from Concord, Acton, and Lincoln joined forces with those from Bedford, Billerica, and Reading, they began firing on the Regulars. From that point until the end of the day, the Provincials kept up an encircling fire, with companies from Sudbury, Woburn, and Lexington later joining the battle. Surrounded by Provincials and running out of ammunition, the Regulars, after marching under fire with hardly a pause for 15 hours, were nearly desperate. They backtracked to Lexington, where they were relieved by fresh troops, but that did not spare them hours more of marching under fire on their return to Boston. Schinto photo.



Royal artillery cartridge pouch, made in England circa 1775. Joel Bohy procured the pouch for the exhibit from the Arlington Historical Society. Its buckles, long ago separated from it, came from the Arlington's First Parish Unitarian Universalist. Photo by David Bohl.



As Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote, "One if by land and two if by sea...." This lantern was one of two used to signal that the British troops were coming by water, across the Charles River. Concord Museum. Gift of Cummings E. Davis. Schinto photo.