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The Spark: How Boston Ignited the American Revolution

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 00:05
So, from the maps, why Boston?

Katy Lasdow 00:08
Boston sparked the Revolution because it was a nexus of a lot of imperial and local questions about what the future of this region of the world would look like.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 00:23
[Intro music fades in] This is Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai.

Cassie Cloutier 00:31
This is Cassie Cloutier, and this is The Object of History, the podcast of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 00:39
Since 1791, the MHS has sought to collect, preserve and communicate the building blocks of history. Each episode examines an object, document or set of items from the society's millions of manuscript pieces and artifacts.

Cassie Cloutier 00:52
We take you on a behind the scenes tour of our stacks to explore the incredible stories held within our collections.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 00:59

We are dedicating the entirety of season five of The Object of History to topics related to the American Revolution. For season five, we are also joined by special co-host Lauren Gray, a reference librarian at the MHS.

Cassie Cloutier 01:12

On this first episode, we ask several historians for their thoughts on why Boston helped light the spark of the American Revolution. Was there something unique about Boston's community or geography that made it prone to our rebellious spirit?

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 01:27

We sit down with Garrett Dash Nelson, president and head curator at the Leventhal Map & Education Center at the Boston Public Library. Kathryn Lasdow, an Assistant Professor of History and Director of Public History at Suffolk University, and J. L. Bell, a leading historian of the Revolutionary era in Massachusetts.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 01:49

Well for the first episode of season five, I thought we would start by introducing our special guest cohost. Hello Lauren.

Lauren Gray 01:55

Hi Kanisorn, hi Cassie. I'm absolutely delighted to participate on season five of the podcast.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 02:01

And we've asked you to be our guest cohost this season because you really are interested in the Revolutionary period.

Lauren Gray 02:09

I love the Revolution. I think it's absolutely an incredible time in history. It's profoundly unique in its outcome and how it was waged across decades of thought and the war itself, of course, eventually culminating in American independence. I grew up loving the American Revolution, loving learning

about it in school, and then working here at the Massachusetts Historical Society has been absolutely a dream to be able to be hands on with the documents and artifacts every day when I come to work really couldn't ask for anything more as a librarian and enthusiast.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 02:46
And that is why you are the perfect guest cohost for this season. Do you want to give our listeners just a taste of what we shall be covering in season five?

Lauren Gray 02:56
Absolutely, we have a stellar season ahead of us, and we will be looking at the geographical disparities of the American Revolution. We'll be traveling from Maine to South Carolina, much as the war did in 1775 to 1783 and we'll also be talking about disease and the personas and personalities that shaped the founding of this country. We'll be talking about the people and places and names that have become part of our founding story, our national mythos, but we'll really be diving into what those mean and how the MHS collections connect us to our national story at this very momentous time in history. Cassie and I sat down with J.L. Bell, a noted historian of the period, to talk about the lead up to the Revolution and why and how Boston became so prominent in those early years of the war.

Cassie Cloutier 03:55
Being in Boston, first question on our minds is why Boston? Why Boston in the Revolution?

J. L. Bell 04:02
Boston was the center of this weird corner of the British Empire that had been founded and developed by Puritans in the 1600s and still held a lot of the Puritan culture. And I think elements of that culture, not the theology, necessarily, but the culture made that area of the British Empire more ripe for revolution, and I'm talking about things like voting in church, in their churches, meeting houses, voting in their town meetings. Talking about widespread literacy. That area was probably the most literate part of the British Empire, and a certain anti-establishment tradition that went back to the 1600s. Most of the British Empire had decided that the protectorate of the mid 1600s was a mistake, and in Boston, there was still a tavern in the center of town with Oliver Cromwell's head on it. That made them, I think, a little more the Bostonians of that time, a little more open to the idea rebelling against the British

establishment. There was also a great deal of economic pressure in Boston compared to the other large ports. At the beginning of the century, Boston was the biggest, richest port in North America. By the middle of the century, its population growth stalled and New York and especially Philadelphia had gotten much bigger. So, Bostonians who, you know, always feel that we're the most important place in the world where we're getting harder to keep up that argument. And then, just before news of the Stamp Act arrived in 1765 there was this big wave of bankruptcies. So, people were feeling economically pressed. And I think the third big element of why Boston is because in Boston, the British government, the royal officials like Governor Francis Bernard and Governor Thomas Hutchinson and the customs commissioners, they pushed back in a way that they didn't do in, for instance, Rhode Island, which also had that Puritan tradition and also had some very rebellious actions against the British government but the war did not start there.

Cassie Cloutier 06:07
So, it sounds like we're talking about economic, political causes of Boston being the center of the Revolution, but can you tell us a bit about the people of Boston between 1765 and 1777?

J. L. Bell 06:22
The population of Boston in 1765 was 15,520 according to the census. And of that number, and that's that is what we would now consider a small town that was the third largest town or port in British North America at the time. Of that 15,000 plus people, over half were under the age of 16, so that it was really a youth culture that wasn't very different from other parts of the empire, where everywhere there were large families, and although there was more child death, there's also shorter lifespans for adults, so that the entire world was mostly children. But that is that population of youth is something that we do not have today, and it really we have to reimagine our what a society looks like. So that left only about 3,000 adult white men of the sort who the culture thought were political actors should be involved in politics, should be involved in the military, should be involved in major trade. And they came from a mix of the old Puritan families who were still dominant, but also because it was a port, because it was tied into the British Empire, a large fraction of Anglicans, some Quakers, some from a small Scottish sect called Sandemanians, who were providing a more cosmopolitan culture in Boston than elsewhere in New England.

Lauren Gray 07:59
You've talked about the economic interests. How do politics and economics intersect in this period to create this wave of revolution?

J. L. Bell 08:09
I think that there are abstract ideals involved in the Revolution, like no taxation without representation, like self-government, the idea that the Massachusetts legislature should be on par with parliament when it comes to providing laws for Massachusetts, but it's the economic and in some cases, the physical manifestations of those arguments that really drive people to rebel. So for instance, it's all very well for the British parliament to pass the Declaratory Act saying that Parliament passed any taxes in North America, as they did in 1766 but it wasn't until they were actually collecting those taxes through the Townshend Duties and especially the tea duty, that Americans began to feel the policy coming home and that economic pressure took what was abstract political argument and made it real. Same thing with the idea that the British government could deploy soldiers anywhere. Well, that's one thing, but to have them actually in your streets, in the big building next to you, that's a different matter.

Lauren Gray 09:22
Do you think the presence of the British soldiers was galvanizing for the people of Boston where they may have been leaning loyal before, but that changed their mind seeing troops in the city and then later on, being quartered in their homes.

J. L. Bell 09:36
The soldiers were definitely important when they arrived in 1768 and then when they came back in 1774, there was a great deal of pushback, and we can see in things like the memoirs of George Robert Twelves Hewes, who was a poor shoemaker. He did not mention feeling upset about the Stamp Act. He did not mention feeling upset about the Townshend Duties but when soldiers were on the streets asking people who goes there, guarding the gates of town, and just being a presence of suddenly 1000s more men in the town that did definitely galvanize his feelings that there was something wrong, that there was the imperial government was being too imperious.

Lauren Gray 10:20

So, when we look at Boston and the interaction between British troops and the American colonists there, this would be obviously very different than what we see maybe in rural Massachusetts or in other places in New England where you don't have that strong British presence. Can you talk a little bit more about how the geographical differences?

J. L. Bell 10:39

Boston because it was a center of trade and because it was where the soldiers were stationed, and practically the only place in Massachusetts that soldiers ever went in that pre-Revolutionary period, it was viewing these issues differently, and just as it took the arrival of soldiers to make a shoemaker like George Robert Twelves Hewes into a political actor. So, it took more spurs to get the rural parts of Massachusetts and New England upset. There were a couple of things that made that happen. One was the Stamp Act. And I think it was a strategic error on the part of the British government to enact the Stamp Act in 1765 first, because the Stamp Act affected all of daily life. If you wanted to get married, you needed stamped paper. If you were reading a newspaper, you needed stamped paper. If you were somebody else sued you and New Englanders are pretty litigious, you needed to respond on stamped paper. So that made it really brought home the message in 1765 that these new taxes were affecting everybody. So even though the next round of taxes, the Townshend Duties of 1767 they only affected people who were importing a small, specific quantity of goods, things like painters' colors and paper that really should not have gotten a whole lot of people upset. By that point, the entire population, including the rural population, was a little more sensitive to the idea that these taxes were going to affect them and that there was a no taxation without representation problem here. The one commodity that was most produced most of the revenue from the tax Townshend Duties from 1767 all the way to the start of the war, was tea, and tea was something that was consumed pretty widely, both in Boston and in the rural towns. So even though, if you're in a rural town, you were not paying the tea tax directly when you got up in the morning and you had your tea, or in the afternoon, whenever you were being reminded that this this tax was going to affect you. And then the thing that really pushed rural Massachusetts over the edge was the Massachusetts Government Act of 1774 that arrived in August very quickly the new Governor General Thomas Gage began to put it into action by swearing in new counselors who are not elected. He had already prorogued the legislature, and almost immediately, the rural town started to rise up against that because the most important element of the Massachusetts Government Act for their

purposes was the fact that it required prior permission from the governor to have a town meeting, except once a year when you were electing new selectmen and other officials. So, if you were out in Western Massachusetts and a problem came up with the town pound, and you wanted to have a meeting as normal, you would have to, under the law, send a message all the way across to Boston, get permission, have them come all the way back. And then by that point, of course, the animals would have run all over the place. So, this was part of the self-government, part of the tradition of voting which New Englanders had gotten used to and the Massachusetts Government Act was a direct attack on that. So, as I say, the law arrived in August 1774 Governor Gage started to put it into practice, and by the end of the month, there were crowds swarming around courthouses refusing to allow the normal operation of the Royal Government. There were county conventions, and then come September 2nd, there was a militia uprising in the middle of the colony center coming with 1000s of men coming into Cambridge, demanding the resignations or apologies from all the royal officials they could find. So, at that point, it was quite clear that the Massachusetts outside of Boston was in revolt, and Massachusetts and Boston itself was under British occupation.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 14:56
In anticipation of our visit to the Leventhal Map Center, Lauren and I then took a look at some of the maps related to the Revolution in the MHS collections.

Lauren Gray 15:07
Well, I had some thoughts of cartography as kind of a colonial tool, and cartography is really used to locate, classify and really project control over the environment. And maps are a really powerful visual document. They help us and those in the past to define themselves within a geographical space and whether that place was a town or a colony, by nationality or nation, or by the boundaries of whether a person was free or enslaved, maps are defining the people who lived in that space, and maps were also used to construct settler colonialism, and were an extension of it. And within these maps that we're looking at are power relations and histories of violence and removal and choices are made by the map makers and the surveyors and their patrons over what is or is not included, excluded within these maps. And maps are a means of extending authority over space, and they include ideological symbols, political principles, and they reveal their maker's motivations and intentions. Maps are also shaped by and alternatively, shape public discourse. They shape geographies, and in turn, who has the right to occupy

those geographies. Maps can also drive political and social change, but they're also embedded within and responsive to the cultures that created them. Maps can create knowledge but also erase it. They create boundaries, but maps cannot enforce those boundaries. So, some scholars have referred to maps as, quote 'weapons of imperialism' and that's the situation in 1763 at the end of the Seven Years War, or the French and Indian War, as we say here in North America. As the British are trying to extend their authority over their colonial holdings in North America in the 1750s and 1760s, they're doing this in part by surveying and by map making, and they're trying to extend this authority through these official documents. And it really turns out to be a hollow authority, because the British don't have the manpower to assert these claims of empire on this new territory. They can't support the claims they're making through these maps. So I started with a map of the British and French Dominions in North America created by John Mitchell in 1755 and it's the map that the British and the French used to really define the scope of the Treaty of Paris that was ending the Seven Years War, and while it doesn't reflect the Proclamation of 1763 we really need to focus on how the boundaries of the English empire start to affect the public discourse in a way where colonial Americans are seeing their liberties and their freedoms impinged upon by the boundaries set by this proclamation where they cannot move past or west of the Appalachian Mountains.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 18:08
I think a map is something that contemporaries would have used to assert their dominance over land that they did not actually control, and claim that it was vacant for them, which is in itself, sort of a way to assert its their assertion of settler colonialism.

Lauren Gray 18:31
That they're right over the land and over its people but I think it's also interesting that as you see this Proclamation of 1763, it's actually one of the first time some people have argued that you're actually seeing the British recognize indigenous land rights by preventing Americans from moving into these indigenous occupied lands, which is one of the real crux of the argument, as we start moving forward in the 1760s and 1770s Americans are or colonials are pushing back against this restriction on settlement because they, you know, they feel they also have a right to the land, and they're not, they're not allowed to move past this kind of arbitrary boundary that the English are putting into place.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 19:15

Right, so that's really fascinating, because when we generally tell the story of the French and Indian War, at least in some of the narratives the pushback from some of the tribal leaders is that their land claims, their participation, their roles, are not factored in in the Paris Peace Treaty. And so here, if the maps are actually acknowledging that there are tribes there, that seems like a big leap. But I mean, overall, what's the time period? What's the scope of the maps that we're looking at here? So, is the first one the French and Indian War?

Lauren Gray 19:57

Yeah so, we're looking at a map created in 1755 and like I said, it's a map of the British and French Dominions in North America. It has roads, distances, limits, extensive settlements. It's created by a man named John Mitchell, 1755 and we have several digitized insets from the map, showing the map of New England, New York, part of Canada, a map of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. And like I said, the British are really trying to map out the extent of their of their empire, of their colonial holdings within these maps. And they're absolutely beautiful as you can see, we're looking at a digital image now which is accessible wherever you have internet access and an electronic device. They're beautifully drawn with rivers and oceans and these intricate coastlines, and it's really the British are attempting to get a grasp on these territories in a way that they hadn't done in previous decades.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 20:54

Right so let's specify which one we're looking at. What's the name of this map?

Lauren Gray 20:57

Right now, we're looking at a digitized inset called, 'Map showing New England, New York, part of Canada, part of Pennsylvania' engraved by Thomas Kitchin, published by John Mitchell in London in 1755.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 21:10

Okay, so actually, the fighting is broken out in the French and Indian War in North America. But it's still not the Seven Years War, is it? So technically, war hasn't broken out?

Lauren Gray 21:21

Technically. I mean, map making is a long process, so they're engaging in this act of surveying and act of map making, really through the 1750s and the 1760s especially as they defeat the French in the Seven Years War, French and Indian War. It wraps up in 1763. All of a sudden, the British are left to grapple with this huge territory that they really have no plan and no troop support to be able to really hold their empire. They're really doing it by just the authority of being the victors. It's a huge map. I can see there are several sheets, 133 by 193 centimeters on eight sheets. So, this is pretty hefty map.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 22:01

So, the map makers are trying to tell a story in the same way that our friends over at the Leventhal are trying to tell a story.

Lauren Gray 22:09

Well, like I said, it's really a hollow authority, because as they lay out these plans for the frontier of we have another document here, a set of plans in forts in America dated 1765, they have no troops to really to occupy these forts, to enforce their authority on the frontier, to keep the peace between the indigenous peoples and the American colonials that are moving into native lands. So again, it's, I keep saying the word hollow, but they're trying to assert this kind of dominance that they really don't have. They can't back it up.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 22:43

Right, but that's also part of this problem for them, right because prior to this, no regular troops are actually in North America, or their intervention has been very limited, that most of the colonies, the English colonies, have been left alone. They're in charge of their own defense. They're in charge of expansion and all that. So perhaps with the creation the visualization of English land holdings, thanks to these maps, London is trying to assert more control, which ultimately leads to this conflict.

Cassie Cloutier 23:24

We then visited the Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library to tour their latest exhibit on how geography influenced the early Revolution. We spoke to Garrett Dash Nelson and Kathryn Lasdow about their exhibit's argument.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 23:38

Well, how about we start with the Leventhal Map Center itself, tell us a little bit about what it is.

Garrett Dash Nelson 23:46

The Leventhal Map and Education Center is an independent nonprofit that's located inside of the Boston Public Library. We care for the library's cartographic collections consists of more than a quarter million maps, atlases, geographic data sets, travelogs, other types of library collections that look at the world around us. But most importantly, here at the Leventhal Center, we encourage students, researchers, folks from all walks of life to see the world through a geographic perspective. We put on exhibitions, run educational programs, create digital materials that foster geographic and place-based approach to history.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 24:29

And I understand that you are making an argument with this exhibit that you have up here about why it started in Boston.

Garrett Dash Nelson 24:38

The goal with our exhibition 'Terrains of Independence' is to crack open the question of, why did so many of the key events that set the American Revolution in motion happen here in Boston in Massachusetts? Why didn't they happen somewhere else in the far-flung British Empire? What was it particularly about Boston, its people, its economy, its geography that made it such a tinderbox for this historical moment.

Katy Lasdow 25:08

And one of the wonderful things about the Map Center's collection is that we can do that storytelling using cartographic collections. And so that that question of why Boston, why Massachusetts, why here and not someplace else, we attempt to answer that through a series of geographic scales ranging from the sweeping scale of empire down to the tiniest scale of an individual landmark. And at each juncture, we have a series of maps or objects or artifacts that help us get at the answer to that why question.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 25:38

Well, shall we start? What have you got? Show us. Make the argument.

Garrett Dash Nelson 25:44

So, one of the key kind of ways of approaching this question in 'Terrains of Independence' is to actually back away from a couple of pat [Patriot] stories, right? One of those pat stories is just Bostonians were so patriotic, they were so charged up about these abstract ideas about liberty and independence that they were just naturally drawn to revolution. We try to kind of sort of think more structurally about what was going on in Boston, Massachusetts that created those conditions. And another thing that we want to do is to take the Americanness out of the story of American independence. When we say the word American Revolution, the map you probably automatically think of is the map of the United States. It's the moment where the United States is created. But of course, the map of the United States that we know today did not exist in the 1770s. It was not on people's minds as the thing they were creating in the future. So, the maps on display are both not maps of the United States, and they're also not maps that are just meant to tell a kind of convenient story about Boston's patriotic spirit, three cornered hats and the Boston Tea Party that naturally drove them to throw off British rule.

Katy Lasdow 27:11

And I think another aspect of the kind of map as storytelling device is that it helps situate Boston in all its many capacities during this period, as a kind of agent of empire, as an important site of military activity for the British Empire, as a place where patriotic fervor starts to foment and come together into a kind of ideology that shapes how people behave in the 1770s and throughout the duration of the war. But also, Boston as a place where, once we do find ourselves on the other side of revolution, and the question of, what will the United States be? What will it look like? Who will be a part of this nation? How Boston is no longer kind of an outpost of the British Empire, but rather on the kind of eastern edge of this new undetermined nation. This question of why Boston? Why this place? Why these people? It comes up again and again and again through the different lenses that we're using at different geographical scales.

Garrett Dash Nelson 28:05

Those scales are really how we take visitors through the exhibition. As Katie mentioned, we use the idea of scale, which is a core idea in the study of geography, as not only a kind of division of our gallery. We're not just trying to march you through a series of scales, but to encourage visitors to think about how historical forces that are taking place at different geographic scales actually lead us into different types of questions about the past. So, one of the first objects that visitors will see is this 1763 Map of North America, which is very much a political document about the imperial division of the Americas in the decade right before the American Revolution. This map connects Boston to a broader hemispheric empire. It's actually the only map in the exhibition where you can actually see Britain. So, we see a little corner of Britain poking out from the upper right side of this map. This is, of course, a British story that Boston is a part of the political territory of Britain in the 1760s and Bostonians would have thought of themselves in that way.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 29:19

It says, 'Western Ocean.'

Garrett Dash Nelson 29:20

Exactly, The Atlantic Ocean is west of Europe. Europe is the center of people's conceptual geography at this time, at least certainly the center of white Bostonians' imagined geography. But we also see Boston connected to a series of American, North American and Central American ports that are a gesture at the way that Boston was connected to a broader trade in people, goods, finished products, agricultural products across the Atlantic.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 29:54

Have colonial maps influenced modern mapping?

Garrett Dash Nelson 29:58

One thing that visitors are always commenting on is, 'I'm really surprised how accurate these maps are. You know, how did they know in the 1760s where these places were, what was the coastline of Massachusetts shaped like?' I will often say that some of the map making projects, especially that were conducted by the British Empire the British Navy, were the equivalent of the Manhattan Project at the

time. They threw resources, technology, experts at the problem of creating accurate maps. Certainly, if you were the British Navy and you were trying to control this far-flung oceanic empire, you need really good maps to do that work. So certainly, for military purposes, they spared no expense at investing in cartographic works. And there's a long history of connection between map making and power and the military. Many of the techniques that are being perfected in the 18th century continue to be used even today. So, the history of geographic measurement, surveying, trigonometry, those are actually embedded still in, you know, computer map making and GPS in 2025 but maybe a more interesting way of putting that question is, how do the maps themselves shape our ideas of who we are. And I think that's actually a perfect bridge into the last section of the exhibition 'Nation' where we start to look at the emergence of the United States on some of the first post-Revolutionary War maps. The exhibition actually jumps over most of the most famous moments in the American Revolution. So, you don't find anything about Yorktown here, Washington Crossing the Delaware. This is a story about how Boston sets the war in motion, and then how it reconsiders its geographic identity after independence, now that it's located in a very different geographic context.

Katy Lasdow 32:02
And so, you know, this tiny urban hamlet that was on the western edge of the British Empire is now an independent, you know, state and city on the eastern edge of a sweeping continent. And many of the maps that you see around you here gesture to that idea, Boston's changing sense of itself as relative to the state of Massachusetts. Massachusetts is placed in the region of New England and also the United States of America. And one of the maps here on the wall, 'The Map of Massachusetts Proper,' every time Garrett and I come through this exhibition, we're always discovering new stories and new details that we might have missed the first time through. These maps are continuously revealing new stories to us. And I'll have because Garrett's standing closer to it, he can sort of point out. What do you notice there, Garrett?

Garrett Dash Nelson 32:49
So, on the outside of this map is very common. We see latitude and longitude measured. And we actually noticed as we were putting this map up, that this this map, which was created by a guy named Osgood Carleton, he's sort of the first official map maker of the independent Commonwealth of Massachusetts, one of the only people with the skills to produce good maps at the end of the 18th

century. The Commonwealth commissions Carleton to make this map. It's kind of a birth certificate map, in a way, now that it's an independent state, part of the United States. This measurement of longitude here is executed in two ways. It's a subtle detail, but in a way, it kind of like concludes the story of this exhibition. So, on the bottom, it's measuring longitude west from London. So, it's using Greenwich as the prime meridian. The prime meridian is an arbitrary definition. You can put the Prime Meridian anywhere. The French put it in Paris. It's been located many different places by different cartographic tradition. So here Carleton's still retaining the British fashion, or British norm of measuring longitude West of London, but then he's also added a second longitude measurement above this, which is longitude east from Washington. So, we're looking at how far east Massachusetts is from Washington. If you had gone back 30 years from this map, and you had asked Bostonians how far they are east from the Potomac River, right, Washington's famous city at that time, like, I don't think of myself in that context at all. They definitely would have thought of London as the sort of orienting geography. Now, all of a sudden, we're creeping towards, okay, there's a new national capital in Washington. We are, you know, between five to seven degrees east of Washington, and that's kind of subtle cartographic gesture at the change which has happened over the course of the maps in this exhibition.

Cassie Cloutier 34:55
Let us return to our conversation on maps within the MHS collections that were created during the Revolutionary era.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 35:04
My goodness, look at that. Whoa, okay, never seen this. This is 'The Seat of War in New England

Lauren Gray 35:16
by an American volunteer with the marches of the several corps sent by the colonies towards Boston with the attack on Bunker Hill, 1775.' What I think is adorable about this map is, if you look closely, you'll actually see troops sketched in there moving along the roads.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 35:34
I see wagon trains. Well so this is similar to one of the ones that is at the Leventhal library.

Lauren Gray 35:41

There are several copies of this map in existence. Yes.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 35:45

I see the troops. That's right, there's troops coming south from Andover, coming east from Worcester.

Lauren Gray 35:54

And what I think a lot of people don't realize is how well these communication networks in New England worked, especially after the initial shots were fired at the Battles of Lexington and Concord. These express riders spread out across New England, you know, as from Connecticut to the northern Maine frontier. And men start streaming in within the first 24 hours, but that stream kind of turns into a river that coalesces into that 20,000 or some odd men surrounding Boston in the immediate the days immediately following the Battles of Lexington and Concord. And really it was the generals in charge and general [Artemas] Ward and general [Joseph] Warren later, attempting to keep these men kind of focused and supplied and ready to fight the British. They're really pushing for the revolution to happen so that people don't start trickling away back to their farms and back to their homes after the immediate actions of the 19th of April.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 36:53

Well, there's a lot of writing on this map here, and several mentions of Canada, Canada to Rowley, Canada to Dorchester. Are these maps as to where those roads go?

Lauren Gray 37:07

Canada had a very significant relationship with New England at the time in terms of trade, in terms of family connections. We know Benedict Arnold, for instance, traded extensively with merchants in Quebec City. So yes, that we would see roads leading back and forth from the Canadian provinces, especially now that they were under British control following the French and Indian War. It's not surprising at all.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 37:31
Boston is just so tiny on this map that it is just part of this much larger landscape, which I suppose this map has the benefit of showing, but also probably the purpose of showing the united nature of New England. You've got New Hampshire, you've got Rhode Island, you've got part of Connecticut here. But this is, perhaps, this is an attempt also at unity making?

Lauren Gray 38:00
I think so. I think in many instances, socially, politically, New England really spoke with one voice. And I think that's why the British were so keen in the early years of the war of securing access to the Hudson River to really sever New England from the rest of the colonies in the hopes of putting down this rebellion. And I will say a note on Benedict Arnold's route up to Canada, you would be better off taking a ship instead of following roads, as we're going to find later on in our podcast season. But again, if you're a commander on the ground, continental or British, this map isn't going to get you very far if you need to actually move troops over this landscape. So, but I do like those, those hand sketch details of the men moving along the roads. It's a very human touch on what can be a very cold medium.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 38:46
And when is this made?

Lauren Gray 38:48
It says 1775.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 38:49
Seventy-five? Well, we've got troops here. We've got the writing 'March of the troops' from, I think, Connecticut, company of artillery, and then up closer to Worcester, you've got 'March of General Washington,' rifleman, Virginian horse. It's not down, suppose, I suppose, to the unit detail, but it shows the types of troops that are coming. This is really remarkable. And one of the arguments that our friends over at the Leventhal, one of the arguments they're trying to make is that Boston is geographically primed to be the spark of the American Revolution, and you get a sense of that here because its harbor is protected, perhaps from some of the more powerful storms that come through that it is in a location that would make it a really important piece of real estate to control?

Lauren Gray 39:48

Important to control, but also you, I think, as Gage found, can get sucked into trying to hold a city and through it, this region and what he finds it's very difficult, once he's entrenched, to actually leave and be able to be an effective commander and go follow through with his orders, which were to put down the rebellion. In fact, he basically ends up starting it in some ways.

Cassie Cloutier 40:14

[Outro music fades in] To look at the items discussed in today's episode, visit our show website at www.masshist.org/podcast. The Object of History was produced by the research department at the Massachusetts Historical Society. We would like to thank J.L. Bell, historian of the Revolutionary era in Massachusetts, Garrett Dash Nelson, President & Head Curator at the Leventhal Map & Education Center at the Boston Public Library, Kathryn Lasdow, Assistant Professor of History and Director of Public History at Suffolk University, and Sam Hurwitz, Podcast Producer at the MHS. Music in this episode is by Ketsa Music and Podington Bear. See our show notes for details. Thank you for listening, and please rate, review, and subscribe to both the MHS produced shows wherever you listen to podcasts.