

Lexington Firsts

by S. Levi Doran

More Than Just the "Shot" ...To most people, the name "Lexington" means one of two things: either the first shot of the American Revolution (to New Englanders) or great bluegrass music (to Kentuckians). Looking more closely at Lexington, Massachusetts, there many important events which occurred here and have long gone unrecognized. It's high time we gave ourselves some credit for our Yankee ingenuity! Following are some "Lexington Firsts," so-called, or inventions and "first-of-its-kind" events which took place in our town.

This list is modified from the notes of Anita P. Worthen, written while she was Curator of the Historical Society in the 1960s. Photos courtesy of the Lexington Historical Society.



9. Mass. Ave. in East Lexington was the first hard surface road to be built by the Commonwealth.

1. The first bloodshed of the Revolutionary War occurred at Lexington, April 19, 1775. Bad news for Concord: there's no disputing this fact, for George Washington wrote it in his diary.



5. Here was located the first community Christmas tree in the country.



6. The first example in the world of a telephone switch board to be run on a single battery was in the old

Hunt Block (site of Bertucci's) at Lexington's first Telephone Exchange. This groundbreaking invention was powered by Witcher's Grain Mill on "Grain Mill Alley," back of Hammond Real Estate and Bank of America.

2. The first use of artillery in the Revolutionary War was by the British troops during their retreat back to Boston, on the same day. They fired their cannon from the Munroe District towards the Common. One cannonball went straight through the Meetinghouse, in an ultimate act of British sacrilege, for they had violently damaged the "House of God."



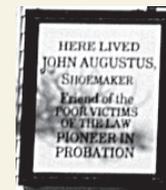
10. In 1894, Charles G. Kauffman (a Grand Army of the Republic member) organized and drilled color guards in Lexington's schools. These were the first such guards in the U.S. Their duty was to raise and lower the flags over the schoolhouses.



3. Capt. John Barry, commanding the brig *Lexington* (named for the town and battle) in 1776, took the British *Edward*, in the first ocean victory under the American flag. When the statue to Barry was dedicated at Wexford, Ireland, admirals and the U.S. ambassador acclaimed him as a father of the U.S. Navy.



7. John Augustus, who lived in the Jonathan Harrington House on the Common, and rests in the Old Burying Ground, formed the first probation system.

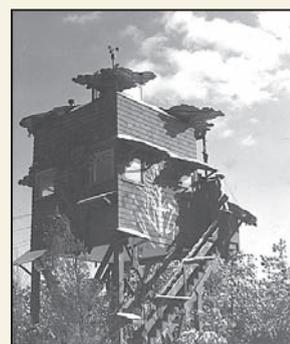


11. March 5, 1827, Lexington established the first juvenile library in the state of Massachusetts.



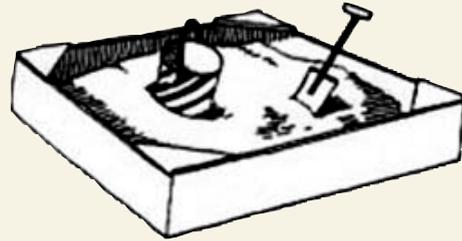
4. In the present Masonic Temple building was the first Normal School (college for teachers) in America.

8. Lexington was ahead of its time in civilian defense during the World War II years. For ours was the first civilian defense outfit in America. In addition, on Robinson Hill was the first airplane warning post, or "watch tower," in 1941. It was manned 24 hours per day, every day of the year.



12. Lexington made the first use of the “Australian Ballot” in America, in 1889. The Australian Ballot is a written rather than spoken vote.

13. Ellen M. Tower, of the Munroe District, was responsible for the first “sand gardens” or playground sand boxes in this region of the U.S., if not the entire country. The idea came from Berlin.

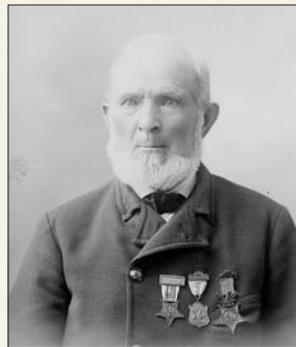


14. In 1821, Lexington became the first to adopt a central school committee. The original committee members were Amos Muzzey, Jr., Ambrose Morrell, Isaac Reed, Joseph Underwood, Jr., John Hastings and Charles Reed.



15. Eli Robbins, who lived on Mass. Ave. at today’s Follen Road, was the first in the world known to have made rubber coats. This venture operated under the name of the Lexington India Rubber Company from May to September of 1835. He was also a great producer of hats, and his factory (painted yellow) stood near Ellen

16. Clara Bowser, of 151 East Street and 171 Grant Street, was the first female professional wrestler in America. Her husband, Paul Bowser, is a member of the Wrestling Observer Newsletter Hall of Fame for his efforts as a promoter of female wrestling.



17. Thomas Cosgrove of Lexington was the first Union soldier to enter Richmond (Virginia) in the Civil War. He was later awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for a daring capture of some “rebels.” Some historians believe Cosgrove was actually some type of spy or scout. He is honored with a special volley every Memorial Day.

NOTE TO READERS

Your correspondent is attempting to expand this list, perhaps to include more modern-day “firsts.” If you have any you would like to share for future publication, please write to S. L. Doran, 168 East Street, or lexhistory@gmail.com.