



4

The War Begins

Scott Stephenson: You're standing in a small round Gallery with a wooden floor surrounded by the sounds of gunfire. If you take a peek out the glass doors into the atrium, you'll see that we're about a quarter of the way through the Museum's core exhibition. So after 10 years of increasing divisions between British policymakers and officials and colonial Americans, fighting finally breaks out in Massachusetts on the morning of April 19th, 1775. That night, British troops had left Boston intent on marching through the countryside to seize military supplies in Concord, Massachusetts. If you turn your attention now to the animated graphic on the wall, you're seeing a print that was done in 1775, depicting the fighting at the Old North Bridge in Concord. And in the cases to the left and right and below, you can explore original objects that were witnesses of that fighting on April 19th.

Now, if you were standing on this spot in 1775 and viewing the fighting at the Old North Bridge, you would have been standing at the house of William Emerson, a minister who served with the Continental Army and who died at Fort Ticonderoga in upstate New York the following year, his grandson Ralph Waldo Emerson – we remember him as a famous transcendentalist, essayist and writer – wrote a poem in 1837 that was inspired by this scene and the experience of his grandfather, and you may recognize its first stanza: "By the rude bridge that arched the flood, / Their flag to April's breeze unfurled, / Here once the embattled farmers stood / And fired the shot heard round the world."