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## **THE PRICE OF LIBERTY – EAST HADDAM'S PATRIOTS AND THE BIRTH OF AMERICA**

*By Emmett J. Lyman, III*

As Americans prepare to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, it is worth asking a simple but profound question: How did it all begin?

The answer lies in a long chain of events that transformed thirteen separate British colonies into a united nation and ordinary citizens into patriots willing to risk everything for freedom. Long before the Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4, 1776, the people of the colonies endured decades of uncertainty and danger. During the mid-1700s, England and France fought bitterly for control of vast territories stretching from Canada through New England and beyond. Colonial families lived under the constant threat of attack, with frontier settlements often suffering raids and destruction.

The conflict finally reached a turning point in 1759 when British General James Wolfe and French General Louis-Joseph de Montcalm faced one another at Quebec. Although both commanders died from wounds received in battle, Britain's victory forced France from eastern North America.

But victory came at a tremendous cost.

Seeking to recover the expenses of war, the British Parliament imposed a series of taxes and fees on the American colonies. Colonists did not object to contributing to the empire's expenses. What angered them was their complete lack of representation in Parliament. From that frustration emerged a phrase that would echo through history: "No taxation without representation." Tensions escalated rapidly. Colonists protested new taxes, boycotted British goods, and challenged royal authority. The Boston Massacre claimed the lives of five colonists. The Boston

Tea Party became a symbol of resistance. In response, Britain imposed the Intolerable Acts and stationed troops in Boston.

When the First Continental Congress met in September 1774, delegates hoped reconciliation was still possible. Their petitions to the King were rejected. Then came Lexington and Concord.

Then on April 19, 1775, the British troops marched to seize colonial weapons. The resulting clashes ignited a war that neither side could easily stop. A call known as the Lexington Alarm spread across New England.

East Haddam answered.

Seventy-five members of the East Haddam militia, led by Colonel Joseph Spencer, marched in support of Boston. They joined thousands of armed colonists who surrounded the city and began what would become the American Revolution.

The thirteen colonies soon realized they could not stand alone. The Second Continental Congress met in May 1775 and appointed George Washington commander of the Continental Army. Under his leadership, colonial forces forced the British evacuation of Boston in March 1776. There was no turning back.

In June 1776, a committee that included Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams began drafting a document that would forever change history. On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence.

The United States of America was born.

Yet independence existed only on paper unless it could be defended.

Among those who answered that challenge was East Haddam's own Nathan Hale, the young schoolteacher whose devotion to liberty became legendary. Captured while gathering intelligence for Washington in September 1776, Hale faced execution with remarkable courage. His reported final words "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country" continue to inspire Americans nearly 250 years later.

The war would continue for seven difficult years. Washington's daring victories at Trenton and Princeton revived American hopes. The victory at Saratoga persuaded France to become America's ally. Soldiers endured hunger, cold, and disease at Valley Forge. Battles raged from New England to the Carolinas before the British army was finally trapped at Yorktown in 1781. Two years later, the Treaty of Paris officially ended the war.

America had survived.

The cost, however, was staggering.

Historians estimate that Revolutionary War soldiers faced roughly a one-in-four chance of dying from combat, disease, exposure, or hardship. For East Haddam, the sacrifice was deeply personal. More than 300 local citizens are believed to have served in support of the Revolution. Seventy-five answered the Lexington Alarm. At least 29 East Haddam men are known to have died supporting the cause of liberty.

Their names, along with those of later generations who made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of the nation, are remembered on the memorial plaque at Moodus Green.



*(Photo Caption) Some of the East Haddam Revolutionary Soldiers' names are included on the plaque located on the Moodus Green. (Photo credit: Susan R. Waide)*

Those patriots were not professional soldiers. They were farmers, craftsmen, laborers, teachers, husbands, fathers, sons, and neighbors. They left behind homes and families because they believed that freedom was worth defending.

Today, nearly 250 years later, we enjoy the blessings secured by their courage. The freedoms we often take for granted were purchased through sacrifice, perseverance, and an unwavering commitment to the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence.

As East Haddam commemorates America's Semiquincentennial, residents have an opportunity not only to remember history but also to help preserve it.

Volunteers are needed for the East Haddam 250 celebration on July 11. Community members who wish to honor the legacy of the men and women who built our nation can contribute by helping with activities, greeting visitors, assisting with exhibits, supporting historical programs, and ensuring a successful event for all.

The patriots of 1776 answered the call when their community and country needed them. Today, preserving their story is our responsibility.

To volunteer for the July 11 East Haddam 250 celebration, contact the First Selectman's Office at (860) 873-5021 or email [admin@easthaddam.org](mailto:admin@easthaddam.org). Additional information is available on the Town website at [www.easthaddam.org](http://www.easthaddam.org).



*Photo caption: Emmett J. Lyman III, an avid student of American History, has dedicated 30 years of service to the Town of East Haddam on its Planning and Zoning Commission (18 years), the Board of Selectmen (8 years), and as the Town's First Selectman from December 2016 to November 2019. (Photo credit: Susan R. Waide)*

Emmett J. Lyman III was elected First Selectman of East Haddam in December 2016. Prior to stepping into the top executive role, he built a long history of public service in the town's local government. He served as a regular town Selectman for nearly a decade, winning consecutive biennial elections in 2007, 2009, 2011, and 2013. Before his time on the Board of Selectmen, he spent 18 years serving on East Haddam's Planning & Zoning Commission.

Although Emmett J. Lyman III went on to lead East Haddam, he grew up further up the river valley in Suffield, Connecticut. His memories of the Connecticut River being an “absolute sewer” during the 1950s and 1960s stem from his childhood days trying to boat and play along the riverway in the Suffield area, before modern environmental regulations transformed it. The river has since become pristine all the way up through Suffield.

His parents, Luella and Emmett J. Lyman Jr., raised their family in Suffield on land acquired by the family in 1670. They owned and operated Elm Tex Inc., a Springfield-based business that engraved commercial silk screens for the textile and wallpaper industries. Emmett J. Lyman III later served as the owner and manager of Elm Tex for 18 years before fully dedicating himself to public service in East Haddam.

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