



# INVENTORY FORM C CONTINUATION SHEET

LEXINGTON

16 MERIAM STREET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

H

947

\_\_\_ Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

*If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

## DESIGN ASSESSMENT

*Describe the design features of the object and evaluate in terms of other similar types of objects within the community.*

Roughly square granite tablet with rounded bottom corners measuring 41 1/2 inches x 40 inches, tapering to 31-1/2 inches at the bottom, with raised granite panel mounted on a fieldstone retaining wall along the sidewalk in front of the house at 16 Meriam Street. The inscription consists of plain block lettering without serifs, all upper case although of various sizes.

## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

*Explain the history of the object and how it relates to the development of the community.*

The Town of Lexington appointed a Committee on Historical Monuments and Tablets in November, 1883 to discuss "places which it would be desirable to have permanently marked" to identify and commemorate important events associated with the Battle of Lexington on April 18, 1775. After 18 meetings, the Committee had identified and placed three memorial stones and nine memorial tablets, at a total cost of \$14,999.61 (Town Meeting had appropriated \$1,500 for the project), submitted its final report in March 1885, and was discharged. This monument, while of similar subject matter -- identifying important sites of the Battle of Lexington and subsequent retreat -- was not included in the original project nor referenced in any subsequent Town record. The inscribed date of 1886, the original location on undeveloped private property and the absence of town records with respect to the project suggest that a patriotic citizen may have placed the stone privately to commemorate the purported conversation between Samuel Adams and John Hancock on the morning of April 19, 1775 at the site. The stone remained on or near its original location through the subsequent subdivision of the lot and demolition of the original home, the Goodwin Estate, in 1937, the construction of a subsequent home in 1949 and its demolition in 2001. At that time, the owners of the newly constructed home removed the plaque and embedded it in the stone retaining wall at the front of the property.

The actual text of the quotation is the subject of some dispute. William Gordon, in *The History Of The Rise, Progress and Establishment Of The Independence Of The United States of America, Including An Account Of The Late War, And Of The Thirteen Colonies, From Their Origin To That Period* (London: 1788), reports that "During this interesting period [while the Battle on Lexington Green was taking place], Messrs. S. Adams and Hancock, whose residence was near at hand, quitted and removed to a further distance. While walking alone, Mr. Adams exclaimed, "Oh! what a glorious morning is this!" in the belief that it would eventually liberate the colony from all subjection to Great-Britain. His companion did not penetrate his meaning, and thought the allusion was only to the aspect of the sky." (Gordon, at pp. 478-79).

Similarly, years later in an address delivered on the 19th of April, 1835, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Battle of Lexington, the American politician and orator Edward Everett reported that "when on the morning of the day you now commemorate, the volleys of firearms from this spot announced to [Samuel Adams] and his companion [John Hancock], in the neighboring field, that the great battle of liberty had begun, he threw up his arms and exclaimed, in a burst of patriotic rapture, 'Oh what a glorious morning is this!'"

Somehow, over the years, this was apparently paraphrased to include the words inscribed on the plaque, i.e. "What a Glorious Morning for America!" Indeed, it is this latter wording that appears on the official Lexington flag.

Adding to the confusion, the Lexington Historical Society has in its archives an undated monograph handwritten by the Reverend Carlton A. Staples (1827 - 1904), pastor of First Parish Church in Lexington and a founder and the historian of the Lexington Historical Society. In this work, entitled "Some historic doubts concerning the battle of Lexington," Rev. Staples asks "Where did Hancock & Adams go at the time of the alarm on the morning of April 19th? Were they witnesses of the battle, & did Adams really say, What a glorious morning this is for America up there on Mr. Goodwin's lawn? ...[E]yewitnesses and participants in [the battle] [whose] statements would seem to be trustworthy... agree at least in that Hancock & Adams were at a long distance from the Common when the firing occurred; they seem to make it improbable, if not impossible, that they should have been up on Mr. Goodwin's lawn, though a pleasant, safe & proper place for them, or on the Hayes Estate where it has been proposed to erect a monument on the spot where they stood when those immortal words were uttered. But it appears more probable that they were far beyond the limits of Lexington when that fatal volley was fired on the Common."

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Nevertheless, the plaque, and its inscription, have occupied this site on Merriam Hill since the late 19th century.

## ENTIRE INSCRIPTION *(if applicable):*

ON THIS HILL  
SAMUEL ADAMS  
HEARING THE FIRE OF THE  
BRITISH TROOPS APRIL 19, 1775  
EXCLAIMED TO HANCOCK  
"WHAT A GLORIOUS MORNING FOR AMERICA!"

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES:

Everett, Edward, *An address, delivered at Lexington, on the 19th (20th) April, 1835* (Charlestown, William W. Wheildon: 1835)

Gordon, William, *The History Of The Rise, Progress and Establishment Of The Independence Of The United States of America, Including An Account Of The Late War, And Of The Thirteen Colonies, From Their Origin To That Period* (London: 1788)

Staples, Rev. Carlton A., "Some historic doubts concerning the battle of Lexington" (Lexington: Lexington Historical Commission, undated monograph)

Town of Lexington, *Reports of the Committee on Historical Monuments and Tablets*, 1884 and 1885

