

# Revolutionary sword leads to historic journey

**Exeter** | American Independence Museum is interesting place to discover NH roots.

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My mother used to keep a Revolutionary sword in the trunk of her Chevy. Then she put the thing under her bed.

It was from my great-great-grandfather Amasa Newland. There

was no place for it on the wall or by the bookshelves or next to the front door.

"Do you want it?" my mother asked me.

I looked at it, rusted and thin, propped up against the wall.

"No, not really."

I suggested donating it to a museum, and my mother thought that might be a nice idea.

"Tell them that you are a Daughter of the American Revolution. That might help."

I'm not a Daughter of the Revolution, but I said "Fine" anyway.

I decided to take a trip to Exeter and visit the American Independence Museum to see if there

might be interest in the rusted sword.

On my first try with the sword, I stayed at the Inn by the Bandstand – an inn chock full of knickknack elegance in the center of town. Exeter spreads in all directions from the second floor of my room: the white clapboard bandstand in front where local teenagers prop themselves, bookstores,

## ONE-TANK TRIP

### IF YOU GO

The 20th American Independence Festival is an all-day event on Saturday, July 17. Watch as re-enactors of George Washington, Revolutionary-era militia, country folk, artisans and townspeople portray life in 18th-century Exeter. See early drafts of the U.S. Constitution and the original Dunlap Broadside of the Declaration of Independence.

Permanent collections also include early American

furnishings, silver, ceramics, clothing and military equipment.

Much of the event occurs downtown in historic Exeter's Ladd-Gilman House and Folsom Tavern. Make sure to see the encampments down by the Exeter River, and watch out for the cannon blasts.

For more information, visit [www.independencemuseum.org](http://www.independencemuseum.org).



Photo courtesy AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE MUSEUM

The Folsom Tavern in Exeter was built circa 1775 and has undergone renovations, most recent phase completed in spring 2007.

I tool around the property, looking into the windows of the 18th-century Ladd-Gilman House and the Folsom Tavern. I read about the Gilman family.

Three are linked to the American Revolution by way of politics: Nicholas Sr. was a state

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# Exeter | Discover America's historical past

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treasurer, John was a governor and Nicholas Jr. was a signer of the U.S. Constitution.

I think of my rusted sword and wonder if there will be interest in it.

I decide to go to dinner at Las Olas, a Mexican restaurant with fresh salsa, in honor of my failure to release the sword.

"Did they take it?" my mother asks.

"They were closed," I tell her.

"Well, that's a shame. Why didn't you call first?" she asks.

So, I call the curator, Wendy Bergeron, prior to my second attempt at historical significance.

"Would you like a Revolutionary sword?" I ask on the phone.

"Absolutely," Wendy informs me. Which is good news.

"But we'll need to see if it is, in fact, a sword from the Revolutionary period before we'll take it. Do you know its history?"

"My mother said it came from Amasa Newland, of Ware, Mass. Is that a problem because it's not from New Hampshire?"

"No, we take all kinds of historical artifacts as gifts."

This time, I make a reservation at the revamped Exeter Inn, which is a couple blocks away from downtown and next door to Phillips Exeter Academy.

I'm there on a Thursday, so it's Martini Night at the bar. The place is packed. I feel as if I'm in a New York club with its funky, urbane decor and funky, urbane clientele.

A set of steps leading down to a dining room are lit red and the couches and bar stools make you feel comforted, as if you don't want to get up. My room upstairs has bathrobes and slippers, a marble and tile bath, and feather pillows. I could live in this place.

I order a martini and get ready for the next day's momentous adventure.

That night, my mother calls to tell me she gave the sword to her girlfriend to keep in her basement. That she isn't ready to give it away just yet. That she won't be coming to the museum.

The next morning, I go anyway to the American Independence Museum. Without the sword, my hands feel empty, but there's plenty to fill my head with while inside the house and tavern.

I find out that, in 1985, a rare copy of the Declaration of Independence was found in the Ladd-Gilman House. There are also two drafts of the U.S. Constitution and an original Purple Heart, awarded to soldiers by George Washington.

As I continue through the museum, I think of Amasa's sword in my mother's girl-



Photo courtesy AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE MUSEUM

At the American Independence Museum on Water Street in Exeter, visitors can discover stories of America's Revolutionary past. For more information, visit [www.independencemuseum.org](http://www.independencemuseum.org).

friend's basement. Is it next to a box of Christmas decorations? Or lying on the cement floor? Would it be propped next to the washer and dryer?

I think of it displayed here, near the permanent collections of furnishings, ceramics, silver, other swords and military equipment in a glass case. Or over the antique bar in the Folsom Tavern, where all the revolutionaries drank and collected tales.

In fact, Washington even stopped by the tavern on Nov.

4, 1789, to "partake of a collation" during his tour of New England.

Perhaps I'll convince my mother to bring the sword to next year's American Independence Festival. She and I could help celebrate history by hearing public readings of the Declaration of Independence, listening to fife and drums, seeing fireworks and watching cannon firings.

Perhaps she'll even let me visit her girlfriend's basement beforehand.