



*The Marblehead Museum
Commemorates the
250th Anniversary
of the Death of
Colonel Jeremiah Lee
on May 10, 1775*

**Saturday at 12 noon
May 10, 2025 (20 min.)**

**In the churchyard
behind the Unitarian
Universalist Church
28 Mugford Street**

The **Marblehead Museum** and **Judy Anderson**, former Lee Mansion curator and now proprietor of Marblehead Architecture Heritage & Tours, in cooperation with the **Unitarian Universalist Church** of Marblehead on Mugford St., will host a short gathering to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the death of eminent merchant and Patriot, Colonel Jeremiah Lee (April 16, 1721 – May 10, 1775).

Presenters will review Col. Lee's contributions to the Patriot cause and tell the story of his untimely passing less than a month after the onset of the American Revolution, as well as the mystery surrounding the location of his final resting place. The commemoration will last approximately 20 minutes and will be held rain or shine. No RSVP.

About Colonel Jeremiah Lee



Born in Manchester, Massachusetts on April 16, 1721, Jeremiah came to Marblehead in the early 1740s. He soon became the leading merchant in town, trading all along the coast of British North America as well as the West Indies, England, and southeastern Europe.

Colonel Lee was also an ardent patriot.

He was active in town government and served as Colonel of Marblehead's town militia for 25 years.



Lee was active as a local town leader, and then in revolutionary politics, serving as the chair of the 1774 Essex County Convention, dealing directly with the military governor. He also travelled to southern colonies to discuss rebellion.

In October 1774, he participated in the Massachusetts colony's Provincial Congress and was appointed to the smaller crucial Committee of Supplies.

Using his trading agents in Spain and contacts in New York and New England, Colonel Lee also procured weapons and ammunition which were then sent secretly to various locations in towns outside of Boston, including Concord.

Col. Lee's involvement in preparations for armed conflict between England and the colonies in April 1775 turned deadly after a secret meeting with chairs John Hancock and Samuel Adams, plus fellow Marbleheaders Elbridge Gerry and Azor Orne. The three Marblehead men had settled in for the night at the tavern where the meeting had been held, not far from Lexington.

As the British Regulars marched past their tavern lodging toward Concord, the three men fled outdoors and hid to evade potential search parties. Lee contracted a fever and died three weeks later at age 54, on **May 10, 1775.**

Sunday, May 18

Sunday, June 1

“The Loyalist / Patriot Divide in Marblehead in 1775”

“Marblehead Loyalists & their Homes”

Marblehead and the Revolution

On the eve of the American Revolution, Marblehead was a thriving and prosperous international Atlantic seaport with nearly **5,000 residents** — perhaps the sixth most populous metropolis in British North America in the mid-1700s, with about 950 families living in about 525 houses — nearly 300 of which still survive. In 1790, it was still the tenth most populous town in the new United States.

Only about a dozen heads of those nearly a thousand families can be clearly identified as Loyalists (“Tories”). The rest of the community ~ around 90 % ~ were **“rebels” (“Patriots”).**

Tensions came to a head in May 1775, after the battle shots of April 19, 1775, and most Loyalists were run out of town. Half would return, but others never did.

The huge proportion of rebels is largely because devastating economic sanctions by Parliament that took effect in March 1775 (called “Coercive Acts” and “Intolerable Acts”) spelled ruin for Marblehead.

As a result, nearly 600 men and boys, most of whom were already or soon to be without employment, signed up to fight — first as resistance, then for independence.

Starting in January 1775, when the Loyalist *New-York Gazetteer* jeeringly reported that “the madmen of Marblehead are preparing for an early campaign against His Majesty’s troops” [*“without waiting for the Congress’ measures in England”*], most ‘Headers served first in the town militia under **Colonel Jeremiah Lee**, until his death on May 10, 1775. Then nearly 600 formed a full regiment commanded by Col. Lee’s successor, **Lt. Col. John Glover**, who was promoted to full Colonel after Colonel Lee’s death.

They were not just fishermen and seamen, but also tradesmen (block-makers, coopers, sail-makers, riggers, and heavy laborers) and craftsmen (including the town silversmith, a captain of a company, with his teenage son and apprentice as the company’s drummer boy) — as well as sea captains’ and merchants’ sons (including Col. Jeremiah Lee’s and Col. John Glover’s eldest, whose lives were shortened and lost due to their service). Later, some of the Black Africans owned by some of the town’s wealthier families would be sent (including Diamond Lee, a private a few years into the war).

By the end of the eight-year war in 1783, it’s estimated that perhaps **1,400 or more men and boys** would serve the cause — though most turned to service on privateer vessels after 1776. Many of them would be wounded, imprisoned, lost, or died, while their families suffered at home.

The 8-year war devastated Marblehead’s economy, causing great suffering and loss in town.

But all of their sacrifice helped to earn independence for the new nation. And their town’s hardship through the next two generations indirectly preserved much of the 18th-century streetscape.

After the war, the few former Loyalists and the many Patriots worked diligently to rebuild their trades and businesses, and the town’s fishing industry and commerce, well into the 1850s.

More broadly speaking, it was Marblehead’s prosperity in the 1700s, up to 1775 and the war, then again in the mid-1800s (until the second of two major fires (in 1877 and 1888) in the 19th-century shoemaking area) which created the singular historic downtown architecture that Marblehead’s many residents and visitors find so captivating today.