

## MEET BILLY THE PATRIOT MOUSE

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Sheli Petersen, Associate Professor of Art, was chosen to illustrate the Billy the Patriot Mouse series for the National Heritage Museum's cornerstone exhibition, "Sowing the Seeds of Liberty: Lexington and the American Revolution." The long-term exhibition opened on April 16, 2007—Patriot's Day.



The museum put out a call for submissions, asking for drawings of a sample mouse and describing various things he needed to do. After museum staff had chosen three finalists, a group of young children and a group of fifth-graders were asked which mouse they liked best. Petersen's drawings won with the children.

Billy is placed throughout the display at the eye-level of a child, where he helps grade school students learn about the American Revolution. "They asked me to show him taking part in different activities in different scenes," Petersen says. The nine illustrations depict Billy taking part in the life of Colonial Lexington. They show him singing with the church choir, listening to gossip in the wheelwright shop, and throwing tea into a bonfire on the Lexington green to protest taxation without representation.

"I'm fascinated with history—I loved that part of the project. I got to learn a lot," Petersen says. For example, she researched period costumes to decide what Billy should wear. Originally, she drew him with a blue and white jacket and tri-corn hat and a red scarf. The museum staff asked her to make the scarf a lighter color, because dye was expensive and the color would have been unusual for the time. "Even though Billy is a fantasy, to make the fantasy believable, you have to base it in fact. It was fun to work with the museum to do that," Petersen says.

Hilary Anderson Stelling, Director of Collections and Exhibitions at the National Heritage Museum, says that the museum staff enjoyed working with Petersen to bring Billy to life as well. Visitors' comment cards often cite Billy as their favorite part of the exhibition. One of the questions on the comment card asks, "If you could travel back in time and meet anyone from the exhibition, who would it be and why?" Younger guests say they'd like to meet Billy "because he's cool and he knows a lot."

"Children enjoy Billy and respond to him," Stelling says.

Billy also appears on the National Heritage Museum's website, [www.monh.org](http://www.monh.org). Admission to the museum is free. "They did a beautiful job putting together the exhibition—I'm proud to be a part of it," Petersen says. She also exhibited her children's book and fine art work at Canal Street Collectibles and Framing in downtown Nashua throughout the month of June. ■

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