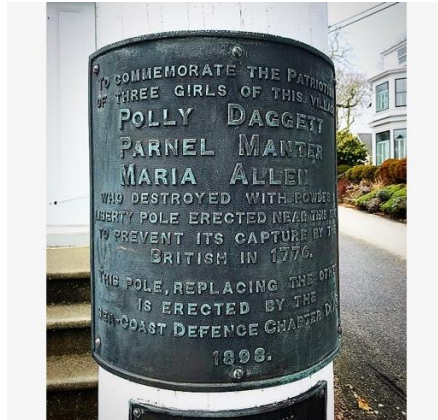




MVMUSEUM EDUCATION

The Liberty Pole



The Liberty Pole is the story of 3 girls who blew up a liberty pole in Holmes Hole (now Vineyard Haven) in 1776. They wanted to prevent it from being used by a British Captain to replace the broken mizzen mast on his war ship.

Lesson

1. Visit the commemorative plaque in Vineyard Haven, 1 block up from Waterside Market.
 - Tape a piece of paper over the plaque and rub it with a crayon. Can you read the 3 girls' names?
2. Read *The Liberty Pole Incident of 1776* (below) or have someone read it to you.
 - Who is telling the story?
 - What are some of the key objects used by the girls?

3. [Watch Liberty Pole Silent Film](#) made by The Martha's Vineyard Film Festival summer filmmaking camp.

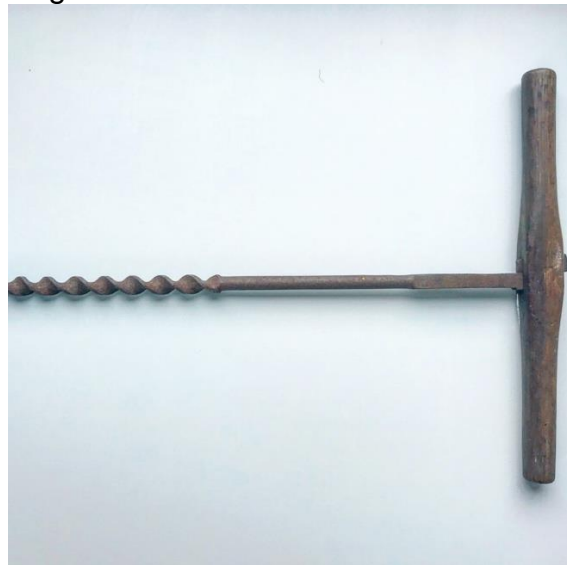
- Does the movie seem different than the story?
- How would you describe the differences?
- Why do you think the filmmakers chose to do a silent, black & white film?

4. Your turn! Illustrate one aspect of the story – anything at all. Include as many details as you can. Use pictures of the museum objects below, for reference.

Powder Horn



Auger



Petticoat



Warming Pan



THE LIBERTY POLE INCIDENT OF 1776

Adapted from Kate Hancock

My name is Polly Daggett Hillman. I grew up in Holmes Hole near the harbor. I think you call it Vineyard Haven, now. The harbor was a bustling place in 1776 when I was a child. Chandlers and coopers, blacksmiths and sail makers all had establishments along the harbor and they supplied the needs of the ships sailing to Martha's Vineyard.

The Vineyard was a beautiful, peaceful place – until the war that is – *The American Revolution*. In many ways we were protected from the war and everything going on in Boston. But, even we had our run-ins with the British. This is the story of *Liberty Pole Incident of 1776*.

I was just a young girl. One night at dinner, my father explained to my mother that a British Man of War – a huge military sailing ship - named the *Unicorn*, had moored in the harbor. This was not unusual. British War ships often sought refuge or safe shelter in our harbor. The Unicorn had lost its mizzen mast in a storm, which only left them with 2 masts. They needed 3 to move swiftly through the water. The Captain of the Unicorn had spied our Liberty Pole on Manter's Hill from the ship and thought it would be the perfect replacement.

A Liberty Pole is a tall wooden pole, very much like a flagpole, but much bigger. It is planted in the ground and it is sort of a community statement of independence. This was long before we had the red, white and blue flag you have today. During the American Revolution colonists put up liberty poles all up and down the eastern seaboard to show England that they wanted to be independent and free from being ruled by King George.

Our Liberty Pole was on Manter's Hill, at the top of Main Street in Vineyard Haven. My father told us that the British captain was coming to take it. If we didn't comply with his demand, he would attack the town. My father and the selectmen felt they had no choice but to agree. I had other ideas.

As soon as dinner was finished and I had helped my mother to make the kitchen tidy, I ran to my friend Parnel Manter's house and told her what I had heard. We decided that it was not right for the British to have our Liberty Pole and we decided to do something about it. A short time later we went and got our friend Maria Allen. We thought and thought about how we might stop the British captain's plan. "Let's blow it up!!!", someone said.

"Blow up the ship?" asked Maria.

“No, silly goose,” I said, “blow up the Liberty Pole. They can’t make a mast of it, if it is nothing but charred splinters!”

“I see,” said Maria, “but how on earth are we to accomplish such a thing?”

I said, “Let’s think. We should make a plan. I think we’ll need gunpowder first.”

“I can borrow my father’s **powder horn**,” said Parnel, “but how will we get it into the pole?”

“I can bring my father’s ship’s **auger**,” suggested Maria. An auger is a kind of drill.

With the plan agreed upon, we secretly gathered the **auger** and the **powder horn** and off we went to the Liberty Pole, taking extra special care to hide our tools in our **petticoats**. It was quite dark when we arrived at the pole. We took turns with the **auger**, drilling a hole on either side of the pole. It was much harder than we thought! Using the smaller end of the **powder horn**, we carefully poured gunpowder into the holes.

We knew we couldn’t light the gunpowder directly. It could blow up in our faces!!! AND we’d be caught. I had an inspiration; I quickly tore off pieces of my **petticoat** and stuffed them into the holes on top of the gun powder, like wadding in a musket.

It was then that we realized we had no fire to light the wadding. I had an idea. I ran home and got a **warming pan** filled with hot coals. In those days, we used **warming pans** to warm our beds when it was cold. It was bulky and hard to carry, with a really long wooden handle. The brass pan part had a lid with steam holes. It was really heavy and really HOT!!! On the way back to my friends, I grabbed a bean pole from my neighbor’s garden and tied another piece of my **petticoat** onto the end. This would allow us to light the wadding without getting too close to the pole, sort of like a really big match.

Now we really terrified. Who would actually light it? Since we thought up the plan together, we decided to light it together. Cautiously we poked the end of the beanpole into the hot coals until the strip of **petticoat** was burning. We shoved it into the base of the pole where the holes had been drilled and ran as fast as we could for cover behind an old barn. We put our fingers in our ears..... Nothing! The wadding hadn’t caught fire. We retrieved the beanpole and relit it from the **warming pan** and tried again. Nothing. We were really nervous now. What would we do if it didn’t work? We tried yet again. Finally, the wadding caught and began to smoke and then a little flame appeared.

We ran fast to our hiding place and covered our ears. We waited 1 second, 2 seconds, 3 KABOOM – a tremendous blast shook the ground. We heard the wood continue to crackle and pop as the heat split whatever was left of the pole

into splinters. We peeked from our hiding spot. The Liberty Pole was no more. We cleaned ourselves up and got ready to sneak back into our houses and pretend to be asleep.

BUT FIRST, we hugged and congratulated each other. We took a deep breath and we vowed that we would never say a word about what we had done to anyone ever.

The next morning when the Captain of the Unicorn arrived with his men to take possession of our Liberty Pole, he found nothing but the blackened, burnt, ruined wood scraps. He was furious and went immediately to the selectmen. The selectmen - in all honesty – could say that they knew nothing about what happened. No one did! The Captain had no choice but to limply sail the Unicorn away with only 2 masts.

We never did tell anyone. Until much later when we were old ladies and the war was long over. We wanted to tell our story to our grandchildren so they would tell their children and their children and so on. We wanted all Islanders to be amazed and proud of the 3 girls who blew up the Liberty Pole on Martha's Vineyard in 1776.