

80 Nourse Street
Westborough, MA 01581
September 22, 2021

Trustees of Soldiers' Memorials

Re: New Memorial in Minuteman Park

Dear Trustees:

The purpose of this letter is to confirm the authenticity and correctness of the names on the new memorial which I have proposed be erected in Minuteman Park and to set out my recommendations for completion of this project.

The muster rolls:

The original muster rolls for the three companies of Westborough militia that responded to the alarm of April 19, 1775, are held by the Massachusetts Archives under the following references:

Edmund Brigham's company:	Vol. XI, No. 235
Seth Morse's company:	Vol. XII, No. 193
George Baker's company:	Vol. XI, No. 211

Copies of my email correspondence with John Hannigan of the Massachusetts Archives in May of 2019 relating to the obtaining of digital copies of these muster rolls were submitted to Shelby Marshall on August 24, 2021, with the request that they be made available for verification of my proposal.

Given that these muster rolls were prepared pursuant to the requirements of the 1775 statute passed by the Provincial Congress for the purpose of getting the men paid and were preserved in the Archives, I do not believe that there is any basis to question their authenticity.

The organization of the three companies:

The organization of the three companies, including the naming of the company commanders and the listing of the numbers of men in each category of rank, is detailed by Hambrick-Stowe and Smerlas in their 1976 publication *Massachusetts Militia Companies and Officers in the Lexington Alarm*, based upon their review of the records in the Archives. These three companies were the only ones identified with Westborough.

Given the likelihood that militia men who had responded to the April 19th alarm would seek compensation under the statute which had been passed for that purpose, I do not believe that there is any reasonable basis to suggest that other men, not included on the Brigham, Morse and Baker muster rolls, may have participated in the response. None are identified by any record.

The names of the men:

The muster rolls are handwritten documents, with the names of the men set out in script. While the handwriting on the muster rolls is generally clear, reasonable persons may differ in reading 18th century handwriting. However, all of the men whose names appear on the three muster rolls obtained from the Archives are found in the 18 volume publication by the Massachusetts Secretary of State entitled *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors in the Revolutionary War*. Given that the persons who compiled this record, starting in 1891, probably were more familiar with 18th century script than we are today, and that they were tasked with creating an official record, I believe it is reasonable to conclude that their version of the men's names, as set out in this publication, is true and accurate.

It is possible to see differences in spelling between some of the first names given in the Secretary of State's publication and those on the muster rolls and the March 18, 1776, receipt for training services, a document in the Town archives which shows actual signatures. (See: <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/collections/commonwealth:z316sd465>). For example, while the **Phinehas** Brigham is the name appearing on the Captain Brigham's muster roll and on the receipt, *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors* shows the name as **Phineas** Brigham, which is probably the more modern version of the name.

Given that our task is to create a Town memorial, an official structure, I recommend that we accept and use the spellings of names used in *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*. To that end, I have revised my Plan of Monument by making the following changes:

Captain Brigham's company:

Phineas Brigham in place of Phinehas Brigham

Captain Morse's company:

Nahum Smith in place of Naham Smith

A corrected copy of the Plan is enclosed. I believe all of the names are now consistent with those in *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*.

Completion of the memorial project:

My discovery of the identities of the 55 men in Captain Morse's and Captain Baker's companies of militia who responded to the alarm of April 19, 1775, together with Captain Brigham's company of minutemen and my discovery of the errors in the existing memorial were the twin reasons for my proposal for a new memorial in Minuteman Park, designed to honor all of the 101 men of Westborough who participated in this extraordinary event. I believe it is important that the existing memorial is corrected with respect to the names and ranks of the minutemen. I also believe it is important to honor the men of the two forgotten militia

companies who similarly participated. The most practical way to accomplish both goals is to erect a new memorial which lists all of them, using the names and ranks on the muster rolls by which they were paid, as set out in *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, the official record compiled pursuant to the direction of the General Court in 1891.

As a historical event, the response to the April 19, 1775, alarm resulting from the British military's advance on Lexington and Concord has few counterparts. Some twenty thousand Massachusetts militiamen mobilized to meet the British advance, some coming all the way from the western parts of the colony. While only a portion of them engaged in the fighting on that day against men from an army considered the best in the world, the effect of their massive response was to confine the British to the limits of Boston, from which they emerged once, to be badly bloodied at Bunker Hill, and from which they eventually sailed away on March 17, 1776.

As we now know, Westborough made a significant contribution to this event, sending 101 men marching to join the militia army that gathered at Cambridge and other places around Boston. One measure of this response can be seen in a document in the Town's Archives entitled "A List of Male Persons Belong to Westboro January 1 AD 1777 who are 16 years old". See: <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:z316sd686>. This document was compiled pursuant to the direction of the Provincial Congress to identify possible soldiers. It lists 215 men of 16 or over, starting with the Rev. Ebenezer Parkman, and including some quite old men, such as William Nurse who, being born in 1696, was about 81. Thus, assuming the Town's population was roughly the same in 1775 as at the start of 1777, Westborough's response to the alarm involved about half of its entire population of men and boys.

A response of that sort is something to celebrate, which is what the Bicentennial Commission did by creating Minuteman Park. That it was the Commission's intent to honor those responding to the alarm of April 19, 1775, rather than Revolutionary War veterans generally, is seen both by their name for the park and by their choice of names for the memorial there. Those names came from the Rev. DeForest's *History of Westborough*, set out immediately following this statement:

"At length, on the 19th of April, 1775, the swift courier brings to town the call to arms. Lexington and Concord are attacked by British troops; the war has begun. There is no hesitation; the minute-men are ready." (at page 162)

The members of the Bicentennial Commission clearly knew the names of other men who had participated in the Revolutionary War because the *History of Westborough* lists a number of them. Seth Morse is named at page 164; James Bowman and Levi Warren are named at page 169. Also, they presumably would have been aware of the names of Samuel Andrews, James Fay, Joseph Morse, Edmund Rice and Abel Woods, the five men who gave their lives in that War, as their names are set out on a plaque in the Town Hall, placed there at the dedication of the building in 1929. However, none of these men were included on the memorial in Minuteman Park.

I believe we should respect the intent of the Bicentennial Commission to dedicate Minuteman Park to the men who responded to the April 19th alarm and not convert it, as Mr. Passler appears to suggest, into a Revolutionary War memorial. While I agree that a Revolutionary War honor roll would be nice, I believe that it will be difficult, and time consuming, to construct a comprehensive list of all those who participated. Also, judging from my experience with the militia names, I believe that it will be difficult, and time consuming, to sort out the differences in spelling of names of those men.

In short, I believe that a memorial to the 101 men who responded to the April 19th alarm can now be erected with confidence that we have “got it right”, correcting the existing record and honoring the two forgotten militia companies. The \$5,875.92 quotation from Expose Signs & Graphics, Inc. for production of a bronze plaque with their names and ranks appears reasonable. I believe that private funding can be found to cover the costs.

I recommend the Trustees approve this project so that we can proceed to complete it.

Sincerely

David A. Nourse

Encl: Plan of Monument - corrected