

**“So That They May be Qualified for Public Service if Called There Unto”  
The Westborough Minute and Militia Companies of April 19, 1775**



*Report and Findings  
Submitted by  
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## **I. Introduction**

Westborough resident David Nourse has conducted research into the 46 men who marched from Westborough to Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775, and listed on a plaque displayed on a monument in Westborough's Minuteman Park. Based on his research into muster and payrolls, Nourse contends that an additional 55 men from two other militia companies were omitted. He also notes that several errors in the names and ranks appear on the current monument. Nourse has submitted a detailed report to the town that outlines his research methods and discusses the reasoning behind his conclusions. Based on his findings, Mr. Nourse proposes that an additional plaque be added to the monument to address these oversights and honor the 55 militiamen from Westborough who responded to the Lexington Alarm.

Historian Alexander Cain was contacted by Dr. Anthony T. Vaver, Westborough's Local History Librarian, to conduct a peer review of Mr. Nourse's work.

The proposed scope of work to be conducted by Alexander Cain entailed a peer review of Nourse's proposal, validating his research, and helping resolve any historical discrepancies or disputes that may arise in determining a final list of men for the monument.

As part of the review process, the author of this report was asked to provide an overview of the Massachusetts militia and minute man system on the eve of the American Revolution. He was also asked to review Westboro's build-up to war and the town's role in the Lexington Alarm of April 19, 1775.

Furthermore, the author was asked to evaluate David Nourse's research, his interpretation of the documents he consulted, and his conclusions. Mr. Cain's review was to

identify any research errors contained in Mr. Nourse's report, as well as the resulting findings of the original Bicentennial Commission. Conversely, Mr. Cain would validate any conclusions in the report that were deemed accurate.

The following resources were utilized during this review:

1. Any and all primary sources related to the wartime buildup of the Town of Westborough and Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1774 and 1775. These documents included, but were not limited to, the Journals of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, Massachusetts General Court legislative decrees, the minutes of the Massachusetts Committees of Safety and Supplies, county convention records, and the Town of Westborough meeting and selectmen resolutions.
2. Any primary accounts of the Battles of Lexington and Concord and the role of Westborough played on that fateful day. The documents reviewed included, but were not limited to, period diaries and journals, letters of correspondence, legal affidavits, newspaper advertisements, probate inventory reports, submitted mileage claims, requests for financial compensation and reimbursement, and contemporary illustrations.
3. Any formal requests for compensation or financial assistance submitted to the Massachusetts General Court by Westborough men or their families as a result of their military service at the Battles of Lexington and Concord
4. Any early 19th-century pension application claims submitted by Westborough Revolutionary War veterans who responded to the April 19, 1775 alarm.

The following report summarizes the research conducted on behalf of the Town of Westborough and addresses the requests outlined above.

## **II. An Overview of the Massachusetts Militia System**

By the Fall of 1774, Massachusetts Bay Colony was on the brink of war with England. From the colonists' perspective, many firmly believed that a corrupt British government, having exhausted opportunities for plunder and profit in England and Ireland, was now seeking a dispute with the American colonies as an excuse to enslave and deprive them of their wealth and liberties. In response, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress looked to the colony's militia to serve as its military arm.

The origins of the Massachusetts militia can be traced back to the reign of Edward I when Parliament enacted legislation decreeing that every freeman between the age of fifteen and sixty was to be available to preserve the peace within his county or shire.<sup>1</sup> In the towns where the freemen were located, they were organized into military units known, by their periodic training, as "trained bands." However, when Parliament, under the rule of Charles II, revised membership requirements, established payment protocols, and appointed officers, trained bands became known as militias. By the 17th century, militias had become one of the cornerstones of English society. Thus, when Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay colonies were founded, the establishment of the militia followed naturally. In both territories, every man over sixteen automatically became a member. The governor maintained the sole authority to activate the militia in a time of crisis. Each time a new town sprung up, a militia company was formed. As the town expanded, additional companies often were created. When counties were founded, the various town militias within the borders of each county were organized into regiments. The governor held the sole authority to activate the militia.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward M. Harris, *Andover in the American Revolution*, (Marceline, Missouri: Walsworth Publishing Company, 1976), 37.

In the decades following the establishment of the initial English settlements in Massachusetts, the number of hostile encounters had continually increased between the colonists and the French and Native Americans who opposed further English expansion west and north into New England.<sup>2</sup> To counter the ever-present threat of French and Native American attacks, Massachusetts created rapid response militia units that evolved gradually into what became known as the minutemen. For example, during King Phillips's War (1675-1676), Massachusetts ordered one hundred men from each county regiment "to be ready at an hour's warning and . . . not fail to be at the [appointed] rendezvous."<sup>3</sup> With the outbreak of King George's War in 1745, militia commanders were again required to appoint a fraction of their men "to be [ready] at a minutes warning to march [to the] enemy."<sup>4</sup> When the French and Indian War started, Massachusetts continued to use the rapid-response concept. Militia companies were required to single out particular men "to be completely furnished with arms and ammunition . . . and hold themselves in readiness to march at a minute's warning to such part of the [frontier] or elsewhere as service required."<sup>5</sup>

However, with eliminating the French threat after the French and Indian War, the need for a militia decreased significantly. After 1763, Massachusetts militia companies and regiments rarely mustered to drill and were viewed as having little military value. By the eve of the Boston Tea Party, a militia muster was not considered as a military gathering but rather as a sort of town holiday offering an opportunity for families and friends to get together.

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<sup>2</sup> In response to this threat, Massachusetts Bay Colony decentralized its tactical control of the militia and on September 7, 1643, allowed "in cases of danger and assault, to raise the whole force of the country . . . and to draw them together to [a place] necessary [for the] defense of the country." John R. Galvin, *The Minute Men The First Fight: Myths and Realities of the American Revolution*, (Washington D.C.: Brassey's Inc., 1989), 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

Thus, in 1774 when the members of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress realized it had to prepare for war, it resolved to “consider what is necessary to be done for the defence and safety of the province.”<sup>6</sup> As a preliminary maneuver, members of the de facto legislative body voted to wrest control of the militia away from loyalist officers who commanded it. To achieve this, the Provincial Congress first ordered the militias to “meet forthwith and elect officers to command their respective companies; and that the officers so chosen assemble as soon as may be . . . and proceed to elect field officers.”<sup>7</sup>

Congress also recognized the need to revitalize and strengthen the colony’s militia system as quickly as possible. On October 26, 1774, the delegates set into motion the formation of minute companies within Massachusetts. As part of its resolution, it declared

[The] field officers, so elected, forthwith [shall] endeavor to enlist one quarter, at the least, of the number of the respective companies, and form them into companies of fifty privates . . . who shall equip and hold themselves in readiness, on the shortest notice from the said Committee of Safety, to march to the place of rendezvous . . . said companies into battalions, to consist of nine companies each.<sup>8</sup>

The delegates strongly emphasized emphasis on proper military skill and logistical supply. On the same day as the creation of minute companies, the Provincial Congress resolved,

That, as the security of the lives, liberties, and properties of the inhabitants of this province, depends under Providence, on their knowledge and skill in the art of military, and in their being properly and effectually armed and equipped, it is therefore recommended, that they immediately provide themselves therewith; that they use their utmost diligence to perfect themselves in military skill; and that, if any of the inhabitants are not provided with arms and ammunition according to law, and that if any town or district within the province is not provided with the full town stock of arms and ammunition . . . that the selectmen of such town or district take effectual care, without delay, to provide the same.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Massachusetts Provincial Congress, Saturday, October 22, 1774; Massachusetts Provincial Congress, *The Journals of Each Provincial Congress of Massachusetts in 1774 and 1775*, (New York Public Library, 1838).

<sup>7</sup> Massachusetts Provincial Congress, Wednesday, October 26, 1774; Massachusetts Provincial Congress, *The Journals of Each Provincial Congress of Massachusetts in 1774 and 1775*, (New York Public Library, 1838).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Finally, the Congress voted to create a Committee of Safety, charged with the responsibility to “carefully and diligently . . . inspect and observe all and every such person or persons as shall at any time attempt or enterprise the destruction, invasion, detriment or annoyance of this Province . . . [The Committee] shall have the power . . . to alarm, muster, and cause to be assembled with the utmost expedition, and completely armed, accoutered . . . march to the place of rendezvous, such and so many of the militia of this Province, as they shall judge necessary for the ends aforesaid.”<sup>10</sup>

On October 29, 1775, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress addressed what appropriate military exercise the various militia and minute companies should adopt. The Norfolk Exercise, or “A Plan of Discipline, Composed for the Use of the Militia of the County of Norfolk,” was developed in England in 1757 and adopted by many New England militia companies in the mid-1760s. It was declared the official drill of the colony in the early 1770s. Instead, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress ordered that “it be recommended to the inhabitants of this Province that in order to their perfecting themselves in the Military Art, they proceed in the method ordered by his Majesty in the year 1764, it being, in the opinion of this Congress, best calculated for appearance and defence.”<sup>11</sup> Known as the 1764 Crown Manual of Arms, this was the drill used by the British troops stationed in Boston in 1775.

Acting upon these instructions, the recently elected militia officers loyal to the Provincial Congress traveled throughout their respective counties recruiting minutemen. Most towns had little or no problem finding men willing to fill the ranks of minuteman companies. However, to ensure enlistments, many towns established a salary and reimbursement of expenses, including

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Massachusetts Provincial Congress, Saturday, October 29, 1774; Massachusetts Provincial Congress, *The Journals of Each Provincial Congress of Massachusetts in 1774 and 1775*, (New York Public Library, 1838).

mileage, for those who joined the ranks of minuteman companies. Those who served in militia companies were also offered compensation for costs incurred when mobilized.

Pay and reimbursement rates varied from town to town. Amesbury ordered, “each man shall have one shilling for exercising four hours in a fortnight and that the commanding officer of said Minnit men shall exhibit an account of them that shall exercise to the Selectmen for to receive their pay for exercising.”<sup>12</sup> Two weeks later, the town amended its resolution to include “that each minit man shall have two dollars bounty paid them at their first marching of provided they are called for by the Congress or a General officer they may appoint.”<sup>13</sup> Haverhill established that its minute men “be allowed for each half day, eight pence till ye middle of March next, and one shilling for each half day afterwards, until they are called out to actual service from home, or disbanded. That when they are called to leave home on actual service, they shall Receive ye same wages & subsistence as Soldiers received the last war. That if they are called upon & do actually march from home in defence of the Province, they shall be intitled to receive three dollars each as a Bounty, either from the Town or Province. Further that the three chief officers recieve for each half Day two Shillings Each till ye middle of March next, & after that time three shillings each half Day till called upon to march from home, or are disbanded.”<sup>14</sup> Andover resolved that its minutemen would receive “eight pence for each half day they shall be exercised in the art of military . . . and from 30th day of March to the 30th Day of September . . . one shilling for each half day they shall be exercised . . . and in the case, each soldier shall be called to active service, thirty-six shillings per month.”<sup>15</sup> The residents of Bradford voted “To

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Resolution of the Town of Amesbury*, April 7, 1775, Amesbury City Hall, Amesbury, Massachusetts. Accessed by the author January 12, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> *Resolution of the Town of Haverhill*, January 30, 1775. “Digital Archives of the Newburyport Public Library,” Digital Archives of the Newburyport Public Library, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://newburyport.advantage-preservation.com/>.

<sup>15</sup> *Report of the Committee Appointed by the Town of Andover*, November 14, 1774. “Digital Archives of the



give each man a dollar for billeting, when they are called to march, and seven dollars per month while in actual service.”<sup>16</sup> Methuen simply established a pay scale of eight pence per day dedicated to drilling.<sup>17</sup>

Following the October 1774 orders of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, provincial towns scrambled to put themselves onto a wartime footing. As part of the effort, many militia and minute companies passed resolutions or entered into covenants clearly outlining the expectations of military service. A strong emphasis was also placed on military drilling and training. Following the recommendations of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, Andover ordered “[Soldiers] on the said first said day of December meet together and chuse such person only for leading or instructing as shall appear to them to be most skillful in Military Discipline and that they be well equipped with good guns, and other necessary warlike armour in order for their performing of all military maneuvers.” The Reverend Jonas Clarke noted Lexington's militia was continuously drilling and “showing arms.” Amesbury resolved that its minutemen would engage in “exercising four hours in an fortnight.” The residents of Boxford voted on March 14, 1775 “that the minute-men shall train one half day in a week, for four weeks after this week is ended.”

Many historians from the 19th and 20th Centuries either promoted or expanded upon the erroneous claim that New England militia and minutemen who served at the Battles of Lexington and Concord were poorly equipped yeomen who operated on the individual level rather than as

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Newburyport Public Library,” Digital Archives of the Newburyport Public Library, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://newburyport.advantage-preservation.com/>.

<sup>16</sup> *Resolution of the Town of Bradford*, January 20, 1775. “Digital Archives of the Newburyport Public Library,” Digital Archives of the Newburyport Public Library, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://newburyport.advantage-preservation.com/>.

<sup>17</sup> *Resolution of the Town of Methuen*, January 1775. “Digital Archives of the Newburyport Public Library,” Digital Archives of the Newburyport Public Library, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://newburyport.advantage-preservation.com/>.

part of a larger military body. However, thanks to research initially conducted by Retired General United States Army John Galvin and expanded upon above, the myth of the independent, untrained, “embattled” farmer is just that, a myth.

Westborough’s minute and militia companies were no exception.

### III. Arms and Equipment of Massachusetts Militia and Minute Companies

Despite popular modern misconceptions, Massachusetts minutemen and militiamen, including Westborough, were not poorly armed and equipped. Instead, it appears most towns took appropriate steps to ensure their soldiers were well supplied for war.

Shortly after the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, the colonial government drafted and issued a series of laws outlining the requirements and expectations of each militiaman. Statutes defined a military emergency and outlined what a civilian soldier was expected to carry for arms and equipment on a campaign. Musters were frequent and mandatory, and criminal penalties in fines and corporal punishment were doled out for being absent or not adequately equipped. As the years passed, the Massachusetts government continued to update its militia laws.<sup>18</sup>

When the Massachusetts Provincial Congress passed its resolutions in the Fall of 1774, these resolves did not alter the old militia acts. Instead, the recommendations encouraged a defensive military system that worked within the colony's existing militia framework. However, as tensions between the army in Boston and colonists continued to escalate, Massachusetts towns instinctively assumed the role of the Massachusetts government. They began to issue their detailed resolutions that often expanded upon or added to what a militiaman or minuteman should carry. Many towns also passed resolutions that agreed to provide specific equipment

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<sup>18</sup> Historically, during the French wars of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries Massachusetts Bay Colony encouraged its provincial soldiers to provide their own arms, rather than rely upon the government. For example, Governor Pownall declared in the *Boston Gazette* that "as most people in North America have arms of their own, which from their being accustomed to and being so much lighter than the Tower Arms, must be more agreeable and proper for them, General Amherst, as an encouragement for their coming provided with good muskets, engages to pay every one they shall so bring that may be spoiled or lost in actual service at the rate of twenty-five shillings sterling." *Boston Gazette*, March 26, 1759; Jonathan Barnard of Waltham, Massachusetts petitioned the Massachusetts colony to be reimbursed for the loss of a firearm by his son who was killed "in a battle near Lake George". *Journals of the House of Representatives of Massachusetts*, Volume XXXIV, part 2, page 253.

items to militia and minutemen at a cost to the town.

For example, on December 26, 1774, Roxbury ordered “Militia minutemen [to] hold themselves in readiness at a minutes warning, compleat in arms and ammunition; that is to say a good and sufficient firelock, bayonet, thirty rounds of powder and ball, pouch and knapsack.”<sup>19</sup> The following month, Braintree required each soldier furnish himself with “a good fire lock, bayonett, cartouch box, one pound of powder, twenty-four balls to fitt their guns, twelve flints and a knapsack.”<sup>20</sup> In Bridgewater, it was expected “each soldier to provide himself with a good fire arm, a steel or iron ram rod and a spring for same, a worm, a priming wire and brush, a bayonet fitted to his gun, a scabbard and belt thereof, a cutting sword or tomahawk or hatchet, a . . . cartridge box holding fifteen rounds . . . at least, a hundred buckshot, six flints, one pound of powder, forty leaden balls fitted to the gun, a knapsack and blanket, [and] a canteen or wooden bottle to hold one quart [of water].”<sup>21</sup> On October 24, 1774, the Town of Newburyport resolved “to protect and preserve the rights and privileges granted and guaranteed by the charter of the Province . . . Voted that all the Inhabitants of this Town be desired to furnish themselves with arms and ammunition according to Law, and that they have, also, Bayonets fixed to their Guns as soon as may be.”<sup>22</sup> Finally, on November 21, 1774, the Town of Danvers resolved its minute companies would be equipped with “an effective fire-arm, bayonet, pouch, knapsack, thirty

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<sup>19</sup> *Town of Roxbury Resolves*, December 26, 1774. “Digital Archives of the Newburyport Public Library,” Digital Archives of the Newburyport Public Library, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://newburyport.advantage-preservation.com/>.

<sup>20</sup> *Town of Braintree Resolves*, January 23, 1775. “Digital Archives of the Newburyport Public Library,” Digital Archives of the Newburyport Public Library, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://newburyport.advantage-preservation.com/>.

<sup>21</sup> Journal of Arthur Harris of the Bridgewater Coy of Militia; George C. Neumann, *Collector's Illustrated Encyclopedia of the American Revolution*, (Texarkana, Texas: Schurlock Publishing Company, 1975), 8.

<sup>22</sup> Newburyport Town Records, Volume I, page 211, “Digital Archives of the Newburyport Public Library,” Digital Archives of the Newburyport Public Library, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://newburyport.advantage-preservation.com/>.

rounds of cartridges and balls.”<sup>23</sup>

Militia and minutemen obtained their firearms from a variety of sources. Thus, it was not uncommon to observe within the same militia company, 20 gauge fowlers, 12 gauge fowlers, 1742 King’s Pattern musket (often and erroneously referred to as the 1<sup>st</sup> Model Brown Bess),<sup>24</sup> Dutch muskets,<sup>25</sup> Spanish muskets, American muskets with parts obtained from several sources and French muskets all within the same militia company. The makeup of muskets within the ranks of the Westborough minute and militia companies was no different. A review of a 1775 document currently in the custody of the Westborough Public Library suggests that many of the town soldiers who responded to the Lexington Alarm of April 19th carried fowling guns of possible French origin.<sup>26</sup>

Recent research has revealed the widespread assumption that militia and minutemen of Massachusetts carried their ammunition and gear in various, individualistic ways to be incorrect.<sup>27</sup> Instead, it appears most towns, undertook various steps to ensure its minute

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<sup>23</sup> *Resolution of the Town of Danvers*, November 21, 1774. “Digital Archives of the Newburyport Public Library,” Digital Archives of the Newburyport Public Library, , accessed December 22, 2017, <http://newburyport.advantage-preservation.com/>.

<sup>24</sup> The 1742 King’s Pattern was the successor to the 1730 pattern and represented the majority of muskets shipped from England to Massachusetts during the French and Indian War. The 1742 musket’s overall length was 61 11/16 inches, its barrel length was 45 1/2 inches and its caliber was .77. This firelock featured a double bridled firelock, a wood ramrod, a brass nose band to slow wear on the fore end of the stock and a redesigned oval trigger lock. All furniture was brass.

<sup>25</sup> Dutch muskets were generally 61 3/8 inches in length; its barrel was 45 7/8 inches and had a caliber of .78. Its furniture was composed of iron or brass, the ramrods were made of wood and the lock plate was rounded (as opposed to flat). It is the author’s estimate that at least 4585 British and Dutch muskets remained in the hands of the Massachusetts provincials by 1759.

<sup>26</sup> This conclusion is based upon conferring with historian and 18th Century weapons expert Joel Bohy. After reviewing Westboro documentation regarding gun powder quantity and caliber ammunition drawn by Westboro’s minute company, Mr. Bohy was able to determine that the minute men were likely carrying French fowling or hunting pieces.

<sup>27</sup> The only limited exception appears to have been powder horns. A militiaman would have obtained a horn from a slaughtered cow, boil out the inner material, fill it with gunpowder and insert wooden stoppers on both ends to prevent the powder from falling out. They might personalize it by engraving it with maps, slogans or pictures. A leather or linen strap was then attached to the horn, and slung over the left shoulder. A shot pouch occasionally accompanied the powder horn. These leather bags usually held bullets, buckshot, flints and other necessary supplies. Like the horn, the hunting bag was suspended over the left shoulder.

companies were somewhat uniformly armed with belting, bayonets, and cartridge boxes. In Bradford, the town resolved, "Voted, That the Selectmen provide bayonets and cartouch boxes for the Minute-Men on the town cost, to be returned to the town after they are dismissed from the service."<sup>28</sup> Residents of Brimfield resolved that it "provide for 50 minute men a Cartridge Box, Knapsack, and thirty rounds of cartridge and ball a sett for each private in said Company to be provided imemdiately."<sup>29</sup> Finally, in March of 1775, the Town of Ashburnham voted that Captain Jonathan Gates procure thirty-six cartridge boxes for the use of the town's minute-men at the expense of the town.<sup>30</sup>

Many Massachusetts towns developed a cottage industry and paid its saddlers to make cartridge boxes and belting for its minute and militia companies.<sup>31</sup> Scituate's Israel Litchfield recorded in his journal the making of cartridge boxes. "[January] 14 [1775] I made me a Cartridge-box, I Covered it with a Coltskin it will Carry 19 Rounds."<sup>32</sup> In Lexington, Jonathan Harrington, father of the company fifer, and Phillip Russel were hired to make cartridge boxes and bayonet belts made out of moose skin.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Resolution of the Town of Bradford*, January 20, 1775, "An Historical Sketch of Bradford, Mass., in the American Revolution", accessed December 26, 2017, <http://magenweb.org/Essex/Bradford/bradford1776.htm>.

<sup>29</sup> *Resolution of the Town of Brimfield*, January 18, 1775, "Historical Celebration of the Town of Brimfield, Hampden County, Mass"., accessed December 26, 2017, <https://archive.org/stream/cu31924028819435>.

<sup>30</sup> *Resolution of the Town of Ashburnham*, March \_\_, 1775, "History of Ashburnham, Massachusetts, from the grant of Dorchester Canada to the present time, 1734-1886; with a genealogical register of Ashburnham families: Stearns, Ezra Scollay, 1838-1915 : Free Download & Streaming," Internet Archive, January 01, 1887, accessed December 26, 2017, <https://archive.org/details/historyofashburn00stea>.

<sup>31</sup> For an example, see Concord Massachusetts, Town Records.

<sup>32</sup> Israel Litchfield Journal, January 14, 1775; Israel Litchfield, "Diary of Israel Litchfield," ed. R.B. Johnson, *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, 1975.

<sup>33</sup> "Accounts of Damages", April 25, 1775, Massachusetts Provincial Congress, *The Journals of Each Provincial Congress of Massachusetts in 1774 and 1775*, (New York Public Library, 1838); *Meeting of the Town of Lexington Selectmen*, July 3, 1776, Lexington Town Hall, Lexington, Massachusetts. A transcribed copy of the document is in the author's possession.

Bayonets were scarce in Colonial Massachusetts. The bayonet was an offensive tool with the dual purpose of serving as a weapon during close-quarter combat and, at the same time, instilling “shock and awe” in the enemy.

As a result of this shortage, Massachusetts militia and minutemen companies scrambled to adopt bayonets on the eve of the American Revolution. On October 25, 1774, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress ordered 5,000 bayonets produced.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, an April 1775 inspectional return to the Provincial Congress indicated that the effort was unsuccessful and only 10,108 bayonets existed for 21,549 muskets.<sup>35</sup> Of course, when bayonets could not be acquired, towns countered the deficiency by using other edged weapons, such as cutlasses, hangars or hatchets. As described below, Westboro was no exception.

Militia and minutemen varied little in other equipment as well. Although some carried canteens dating back to the French and Indian War, most carried “cheesebox” canteens that their town coopers supplied. Styles in knapsacks appeared to be consistent as well. Many militiamen used a single pouch, double strap knapsack constructed of heavy linen or hemp canvas.<sup>36</sup> Blankets were tied directly to the packs or carried on heavy linen or leather tumpline or strap, a style popular both before and after Lexington and Concord.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, when Massachusetts militia and minute companies took to the field on April 19, 1775, including those from Westborough, they were fully armed and equipped for war.

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<sup>34</sup> *Resolves of Massachusetts Provincial Congress, October 25, 1774, Massachusetts Provincial Congress, The Journals of Each Provincial Congress of Massachusetts in 1774 and 1775*, (New York Public Library, 1838).

<sup>35</sup> Galvin, *The Minute Men*, 65.

<sup>36</sup> Sundry Petitions to the General Court, 1775 - 1778, *Massachusetts Archives*, vols 180 -183; Henry M. Cooke IV, *Knapsacks, Snapsacks, Tumplines: Systems for Carrying Food and Clothing Used by Citizens and Soldiers in 1775*, (Randolph, Massachusetts: unpublished and undated), 1-3.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

#### **IV. Prelude to War in Westborough**

Included within this military world of the Massachusetts militia was the Town of Westborough, or more appropriately, “Westboro”. Incorporated in 1717, Westboro quickly established a militia company as required by colonial law. By 1774, the number of militia companies had increased to two companies with 101 men total. There was also a reserve force, more commonly known as an “alarm list,” made up of male residents over the age of sixty. Captains Seth Morse and George Baker commanded the two militia companies. The alarm list was controlled by a “Lieutenant Baker,” possibly Ezra Baker.

As the Massachusetts Provincial Congress debated how to best prepare for war with England, Westboro was already taking steps to ensure its militia companies were sufficiently trained for combat. According to the diary of the Reverend Ebenezer Parkman of Westborough, as early as October 24, 1774, both of the town’s militia companies had assembled and were actively drilling.<sup>38</sup> Even the town’s alarm list was practicing war-like maneuvers. As the Reverend Parkman notes, “1774 October 31 (Monday) ... P.M. Training of Alarm men at Lt. Bakers, their present Captain.”<sup>39</sup>

At the same time, it appears that several men from Westboro pooled their finances together to acquire a cannon for the town’s militia companies. This move would be consistent with the actions of other Middlesex, Essex, and Worcester County communities at this time. In his critically acclaimed book, *“The Road to Concord: How Four Stolen Cannon Ignited the Revolutionary War*, Mr. J. L. Bell discussed how Massachusetts residents scrambled in late 1774 to obtain artillery pieces. Some of the guns, mostly iron cannons, were taken from coastal

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<sup>38</sup> “1774 October 24 (Monday). Training of both Companies, and of the Boys.” “Diary, 1771-1780 – PDF,” The Diary of Rev. Ebenezer Parkman, accessed March 7, 2022, <https://diary.ebenezerparkman.org/diary-1771-1780-pdf/>.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*



communities north and south of Boston and sent to Watertown to be sold to interior communities. At the time, Westboro would have been competing with other towns seeking artillery pieces, including Haverhill, Bradford, Rowley, Lexington, Concord, Waltham, Roxbury, and Lincoln.

According to a November 7, 1774, Westboro town meeting warrant, the selectmen called for a public discussion, of among other things, “To see if the Town will grant money to satisfy those men which advanced their own money to purchase a cannon ... To see if the Town will grant any money to bye Powder and for other necessary which the Town shall think needful.”<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, the male residents voted and approved “to pay those men the money which they advanced for the Town to purchase a cannon ... Voted and granted to Provide Powder and Ball and a Carriage for the cannon.”<sup>41</sup>

It appears that at some point before the end of November 1774, Westboro had formally organized a minute company. Assuming Westboro followed the practices of other Essex, Worcester, and Middlesex County militia regiments and companies at the time, both Captain Baker and Morse’s militia companies would have mustered near the town meeting house and requested volunteers to enlist in a newly organized minute company.

According to research conducted by historian Robert Gross in his work *The Minute Men and Their World*, the average age of those men who enlisted in Massachusetts minute companies were between 18 and 24, while its officers were typically in their thirties.<sup>42</sup> As a result, when the Westboro militia companies assembled to recruit men for its minute company, it would have

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<sup>40</sup> *Town of Westboro Meeting Warrant*, November 7, 1774. “Town Records: Westborough (Mass.): Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming,” Internet Archive (Westborough (Mass.), accessed March 7, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/townrecords01west>.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Robert A. Gross and Alan Taylor, in *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), p.219.

focused on the younger males of the town.

Once the Westboro minute company had drawn sufficient recruits, it held an impromptu meeting to elect its officers. Edmund Brigham was elected Captain, Thomas Bond 1st Lieutenant, and Moses Wheelock 2nd Lieutenant. Non commissioned officers included Sergeants Nathaniel Townsend, James Godfrey, John Harrington and John Ball, Corporals Joshua Chamberlain, Edward Entwistle, John Fay, and Caleb Harrington. Nathaniel Chamberlain served as the company fifer, while Richard Temple and James Gould served as drummers.

By November 28, 1774, Brigham's minute company was already exercising and drilling in conjunction with the town's militia companies and alarm list. According to the Reverend Parkman, "P.M. Training of the Company of Minute Men, and Capt. Morse's Company."<sup>43</sup> On December 16, 1774, the minute company held a drill at 1st Lieutenant Bond's house followed by a social gathering and dinner.<sup>44</sup>

By the end of December 1774, Westboro was faced with a dilemma that other Massachusetts towns also had to address: how to best pay their minute men to ensure they continued with their enlistments. On December 30, 1774, the town held a meeting to "see if the Town will grant any money to encourage the Minut men so called to Train and Exercise themselves so that they may be qualified for Public Service if called there unto".<sup>45</sup> After some debate, the residents of the town voted not to compensate its militia company. The issue of compensation resurfaced at a February 7, 1775 town meeting. Again, the proposition of paying minute men was voted down. The town also ordered that all of its military companies "train once a forenit four hours in a day without pay."

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<sup>43</sup> Diary of Rev. Ebenezer Parkman.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

However, at the same meeting, the town formed a committee to determine what arms and equipment Westboro's minute and militia companies should carry if they were mobilized for war. The committee left the meeting to discuss their assignment and returned with a draft document. At the end of the session, the town accepted the committee's recommendation and voted "relative to the Regulation of the Militia in this Town be accepted by the town and reference is herein had to said draft."<sup>46</sup>

By early March 1775, the same committee secured gunpowder and ammunition for its minute and militiamen. It also obtained the approval of the town to purchase "twelve fier arms and bayonets and other articles ... [and] two good drums for the minut company on the Town cost ... and to provide and do everything that is necessary and convenient to make the said cannon fit for use and our defence."<sup>47</sup>

The town's use of the phrase "fier arms and bayonets and other articles" suggests Westboro was actively attempting to comply with the Massachusetts Provincial Congress' recommendation that minute and militia men be armed and equipped with muskets, bayonets, belting, cartridge boxes, ammunition, knapsacks, and blankets. Although there is no direct evidence establishing that the town hired local artisans to make these desired military items, there is a fair inference that the town was trying to acquire supplies from the community at large or through outside sources from neighboring towns.

As noted above, at some point over the winter, Westboro secured an inoperable iron

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<sup>46</sup> *Declarations and Resolves of the Town of Westboro*, February 7, 1775. "Town Records: Westborough (Mass.): Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming," Internet Archive (Westborough (Mass.), accessed January 27, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/townrecords01west>.

<sup>47</sup> *Declarations and Resolves of the Town of Westboro*, March 6, 1775. "Town Records: Westborough (Mass.): Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming," Internet Archive (Westborough (Mass.), accessed January 27, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/townrecords01west>.

cannon at some point over the winter. The gun was repaired and mounted on a wooden carriage. Afterward, seven men from the town's alarm list were attached to Brigham's Minute Company and ordered to train on the artillery piece.<sup>48</sup>

According to the Reverend Parkman, with the Spring thaw, the four military companies of the town increased their drilling activities. Captain Brigham's Company began to host joint military drills with minute companies from neighboring communities, while the militia companies frequently met to conduct complex field maneuvers.<sup>49</sup>

In short, by March 1774, Westboro was on a full wartime footing.

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Diary of Rev. Ebenezer Parkman.

## V. April 19, 1775, and Westborough

Word of the British expedition to Concord and the subsequent fight at Lexington reached Westboro sometime between 5 AM and 9 AM on April 19, 1775. According to the Reverend Parkman, “the world was full of Alarms -- the Regulars (twas Said) had marched last night, and were gone to Concord -- had killed six men at Lexington -- posts were flying to rally the Minute Men every where.” Parkman also notes that the town’s minute company was the first to assemble and depart. Captain Seth Morse’s militia company was the second. “Our Minute Men under Capt. Edmund Brigham had marched. Capt. Seth Morse with his Men marched. Asa Ware was with them. May the Lord of Hosts go with them and grant them Salvation!”<sup>50</sup>

According to town records, Captain Brigham’s minute company drew gunpowder, ammunition, and hatchets from the town common stockpile before departing. The taking of hatchets suggests Westboro’s minute company lacked bayonets. It is unclear if the two militia companies also drew supplies from the stock. The town’s cannon was not utilized on April 19, 1775.

Although Parkman is silent on the activities of Captain George Baker’s Company, there is a fair inference from the minister’s journal that Westboro’s second militia company also mobilized as well. On the evening of April 19, 1775, Parkman noted that only “a watch of 5 men, through the night at the Meeting House. We were anxious and distressed for the events at Concord.”<sup>51</sup> This night watch was likely drawn from the town’s alarm list - those older men who remained behind to protect the town and its residents. Furthermore, in the days after the Battles of Lexington and Concord, Parkman describes how various militia companies passed through the

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

town and his interaction with them. He is silent on Captain Baker's Company, suggesting that the militia unit had already marched off to war.

However, in addition to Parkman's account, there is direct evidence that Captain Baker's militia company responded to the Lexington Alarm. In the months after the Battles of Lexington and Concord, most militia and minute companies that mobilized that day, regardless if they saw combat or not, submitted claims seeking compensation for travel and mileage expenses incurred as they pursued the British back to Boston. Westboro was no exception. As correctly pointed out by David A. Nourse, all three Westboro companies submitted mileage claims for compensation. A review of the existing mileage documents not only reveals that Westboro's claims were properly submitted and carefully scrutinized by the appropriate governmental authorities, but were also approved.

The mileage claims alone are sufficient proof that both Captain Brigham's Company and Captain Baker's Company responded to the Lexington Alarm. More importantly, the documents also establish those Westboro men that responded to the crisis, took up arms, and marched off to war.

Parkman's journal notes how the military companies from Westboro remained outside of Boston in support of the American siege in the days after April 19th. The minister described how Westboro residents initiated a unified relief effort to deliver food and clothing supplies to the men of their town. The fact that such a massive undertaking occurred suggests that a large body of men from Westboro and not just its minute company was active in the early days of the Siege of Boston and needed to be logistically supported.

Given the above, the claim that Westboro's militia companies mobilized along with its minute company is factually accurate.

## VI. The Monument: Findings

Based on the above findings, the next step in this peer review was to examine those Westboro men who answered the Lexington Alarm on April 19, 1775.

The review attempted to identify any research errors in Mr. Nourse's report, in the resulting conclusions of the original Bicentennial Commission, or the lists of soldier names. In support of this evaluation, the following primary sources were consulted: Westborough town records from 1774 through 1776, the *Journal of the Reverend Ebenezer Parkman*, the *Minutes of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress*, the *Minutes and Records of the Massachusetts Committee of Safety*, acts and resolves of the Massachusetts Legislature for 1776, service records contained in *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the American Revolution*, various expense reports and mileage records currently housed at the Massachusetts State Archives, and 19th century finally pension applications submitted by surviving Westborough veterans of the American Revolution or their spouses.

As a preliminary matter, Mr. David Nourse should receive praise and thanks for his well-researched and carefully thought out proposal. This author concludes that Mr. Nourse's research, including his interpretation of the primary source documents he consulted, and his resulting conclusions are accurate and complete. The information contained in his report is both detailed and supported by important primary and secondary sources.

It is also important to note that in his research, Mr. Nourse did not rely too heavily on various late 19th Century works that purport to document Westboro's 18th-century history. Unfortunately, in the aftermath of the American Civil War and the nation's Centennial celebration, many historians released works that glossed over adverse town history or



misinterpreted resolutions, laws, or decisions to develop a sense of town pride. Westboro was no different. In reviewing the various books released in the 1890s, the town's role in the events of April 19, 1775, was either ignored or erroneously minimized by local historians.

Admittedly, a review of the findings of the Bicentennial Commission reveals that it did overlook the two militia companies that mobilized in response to the Battles of Lexington and Concord. However, this error is understandable as many communities and historical societies during the Bicentennial era tended to focus on the "glamor" of Massachusetts minuteman companies and unintentionally overlooked community militia and alarm list military bodies. Furthermore, in preparation for the Bicentennial, these same organizations had limited access to primary documentation and thus, had no choice but to rely upon the same 19th-century town histories described above. In addition to containing various errors, many of these town histories either ignored the role of militia and alarm list companies or failed to explain the relationship between minute man and militia companies sufficiently.

Regardless, the names the Bicentennial committee did identify for its monument are accurate and complete.

The only military body the author did not examine was the town's alarm list company. Although this unit of older men did muster on April 19, 1775, it did not leave the town. Instead, it served as a reserve guard that protected the remaining civilian population and essential political and religious structures. The Town of Westborough will have to determine if it wishes to include the names of these men on its revised monument. If it does, additional research will be needed to identify those men who served with the town's alarm list in the aftermath of Lexington

and Concord. This author recommends that the town not include the alarm list men as they did not respond to the Lexington Alarm nor support the Siege of Boston.

With that said, Westborough should always be mindful of potential corrections or updates. In the author's experience, lost or re-discovered documents that shed new light on the events of Lexington and Concord occasionally surface. It is recommended that the town conduct occasional historical reviews to ensure no new documentation surfaces that identify other Westborough April 19th participants.

Finally, if altered or modified, the author would defer to the Town of Westborough concerning the monument's design and language. With that said, if the town wishes to include a quotation on the plaque that is "historically correct," the author would recommend a review of the Westborough town records between November 1774 and March 1775 for an appropriate quote.

However, if pressed for a recommendation, the author would humbly suggest a segment of the December 30, 1774, Westborough resolution as it reflects the town's unified commitment to protecting their collective liberties and safety: "to Train and Exercise themselves so that they may be qualified for Public Service if called there unto."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Cite

## Conclusion

It is the author's opinion of this report that Mr. Nourse's research and respective findings are accurate and complete. The primary and secondary resources he relied upon to reach his conclusion are appropriate. Finally, although the Bicentennial committee unintentionally omitted the men who served in the two militia companies that mobilized on April 19, 1775, it did correctly identify those minutemen who did march off to war.

Given the above, Mr. Nourse's findings can be relied upon when revising the town's Revolutionary War monument.

Respectfully submitted,

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