

A REPORT TO THE TOWN OF WESTBOROUGH ON ITS TWO FORGOTTEN MILITIA COMPANIES

We celebrate April 19th, “Patriots’ Day”, in remembrance of the estimated 20,000 Massachusetts militia men who responded on that date in 1775 to the British military’s attempt to seize powder and munitions at Lexington and Concord at the start of our Revolutionary War. Three companies of Westborough militia marched in response to that event but only one of those companies, a minute company captained by Edmund Brigham and consisting of 46 men, has been honored by the Town with a memorial in Minuteman Park alongside Sandra Pond. The other two companies, captained by Seth Morse and George Baker respectively and having a total of 55 men, have been overlooked and effectively forgotten. Here are their names and ranks:

Seth Morse, Captain

Hananiah Parker, 1st Lieutenant
James Bowman, 2nd Lieutenant
Stephen Cock, Sergeant
Beriah Ware, Sergeant
Reuben Maynard, Corporal
Benjamin Tainter, Fifer
Paul Biglow, Drummer
Richard Barns, Private
Thomas Twitchel, Private
James Miller, Private
Daniel Nurse, Private
Ebenezer Miller, Private
Timothy Warren, Private
Benajah Brigham, Private
Rufus Forbush, Private
John Warren, Private
Joseph Belknap, Private
Solomon Barthrick, Private
Winslow Brigham, Private
Job Pratt, Private
Timothy Warren, Private
Abraham Beaman, Private
Isaac Furbush, Private
Caleb Seger, Private
Asa Ware, Private
Stephen Maynard, Private
Stephen Fay, Private
Thomas Fay, Private
Timothy Fay, Private
Reuben Gashet, Private
Nahum Smith, Private
Joshua Twitchel, Private
John Beton, Private

George Baker, Captain

George Andrews, 1st Lieutenant
Eli Whitney, Sergeant
Ebenezer Chamberlin, Sergeant
Daniel Warren, Private
Jonathan Grout, Private
Simeon Bellows, Private
Benjamin Fay, Jr, Private.
Daniel Chamberlin, Private
Eleazer Prat, Jr., Private
Benjamin Warren, Private
Thomas Andrews, Private
Jonathan Cooke, Private
Aaron Warren, Private
Phineas Haskell, Private
John Beeton, Private
Joseph Keens, Private
Edmund Rice, Private
Jacob Broaders, Private
Samuel Andrews, Private
Joseph Lamb, Private

The historical record of all the militiamen who responded to the April 19th “alarm” is clear. It consists of copies of muster or pay rolls, now in the Massachusetts Archives, that were submitted by the company commanders in late 1775 and early 1776 in response to the direction of the Massachusetts government, then known as the Provincial Congress, so that the men could be paid for their services. Copies of the Westborough muster or pay rolls, provided by the Secretary of State of Massachusetts, are attached as Exhibits A, B and C to this Report.

The Requirements for the Muster or Pay Rolls:

For the requirements for the rolls see generally *Massachusetts Militia Companies and Officers in the Lexington Alarm* by Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe and Donna D. Smerlas (published by the Society of Colonial Wars in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1976) (hereinafter cited as *Massachusetts Militia*). A summary of these requirements and the procedures followed by the company commanders in obtaining funds to pay their men is set out in Exhibit D to this Report.

The Westborough Rolls:

The muster roll of Captain Edmund Brigham’s company of minutemen (Exhibit A), confirms the service of 46 men, 20 of whom enlisted in the service of the “United Colonies”, with pay and allowances in the total amount of £47.11.5. It was approved on February 5, 1776.

The pay roll of Captain Seth Morse’s company of militia, (Exhibit B) confirms the service of 34 men, with pay and allowances in the total amount of £ 40.11.1/2. It was approved on February 2, 1776.

The muster roll of Captain George Baker’s company of militia, (Exhibit C) confirms the service of 21 men, 4 of whom enlisted into the “Continental Service”, with pay and allowances in the total amount of £ 20.5.5 3/4. It was approved in April 1776.

All of these documents are in the same general form. They list the names and ranks of the militiamen in a column on the left and then show, for each man, the number of miles travelled, the value of those miles at the rate of 1 penny/mile, the time of service in days or parts of days, the amount of pay for that service and finally the whole amount due to the militiaman. Grand totals for travel, pay and the “whole amount” are shown at the bottom.

Each of the militiamen travelled 60 miles, that being 30 miles from Westborough to Cambridge, where the militia gathered outside of British-occupied Boston, and 30 miles back home. At the rate of a penny or pence/mile and on the basis of 12 pence equaling 1 shilling, this amounted to a total of 5 shillings for each militiaman. Travel miles were not shown for the men who enlisted in the army as travel was dealt with in the rolls of the companies into which the men were enlisted. (See the quotation from the Provincial Resolves in Exhibit D).

Time of service, measured from the time the men left home until the time they left Cambridge, plus one and ½ days for travel home, varied between the three companies. In Captain Brigham’s company (see Exhibit A) the period ranged from 10 ½ days to 22 ½ days. In

Captain Morse's company (see Exhibit B) the period varied from 3 ½ to 14 days. In Captain Baker's company (see Exhibit C) it varied from 2 ½ half to 13 ½ days. In the case of the men who enlisted in the service of the united colonies, their time until the time of their enlistment was counted as 5 days for the enlistees in both Captain Brigham's and Captain Baker's companies.

The pay scale for the militiamen's service was specified in the November 9, 1775 Resolves as being at the same rates set in April 1774, when new requirements had been set for the Massachusetts militia. The effective rates, measured "per lunar month" were as follows:

Captain:	£ 6.0.0
Lieutenant, 1 st :	4.0.0
Lieutenant, 2 nd :	3.1.0
Ensign:	3.1.0
Sergeant:	2.8.0
Corporal:	2.4.0
Fife and Drum:	2.4.0
Private:	2.0.0

Massachusetts Militia at xx-xxi

On this basis Captain Brigham earned £4.16.5 for his 22 ½ days service and, with the 5 shillings for travel, was entitled to the whole amount of £5.1.5. (see Exhibit A). Similarly, for example, Daniel Nurse, a private in Captain Morse's company, earned £1.00 for his 14 days service (or half a lunar month) and, with the 5 shillings for travel, was entitled to the whole amount of £1.5.0. (see Exhibit B).

The official acknowledgements respecting the rolls were made on the sides and backs of the documents. Thus, each of these Exhibits of the company rolls has two pages, one being a copy of the roll on the front and the second being the acknowledgement on the back

Verification of the names:

All of the names on the rolls were handwritten and, while most of the names are legible on these copies from the Archives, some are not. Fortunately, we have the advantage of an indexed compilation of the muster and pay rolls which was made of the records in the Archives, pursuant to a direction by the General Court in 1891. Starting in September 1891 a card record index was made of all names found on the muster rolls, pay rolls and other documents which formed the Revolutionary War archives. Some 620,000 cards were prepared. These became the basis for the publication by the Secretary of State during the period of 1896-1908 of an 18 volume alphabetical compilation of the names of the persons who served entitled *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailor in the Revolutionary War* (Wright & Potter Printing Co., State Printers, Boston) (hereinafter *Soldiers and Sailors*) (see Vol. I, Preface, for a summary of the procedures used in making the compilation).

This publication used to be held by public libraries in Massachusetts, including Westborough's, but Westborough has "weeded" it from its collection. Fortunately, the

Worcester Public Library has kept a full set of the volumes. Also, in recent years this work has been digitized and is now accessible on line.

Hambrick-Stowe and Smerlas, in their 1976 publication *Massachusetts Militia*, reviewed *Soldiers and Sailors*, identified the Westborough officers by name and rank and recorded the number of men in each of the three companies responding to the April 19th alarm as follows:

Edmund Brigham's minutemen company:

Captains: 1
Lieutenants: 2
Sergeants: 4
Corporals: 4
Drum/fife: 3
Privates: 32

Total: 46 men

Seth Morse's militia company:

Captains: 1
Lieutenants: 2
Sergeants: 2
Corporals: 1
Drum/fife: 2
Privates: 26

Total: 34 men

George Baker's militia company:

Captains: 1
Lieutenants: 1
Sergeants: 2
Privates: 17

Total: 21 men

Grand total: 101 men

I have matched the names shown on the three muster/pay rolls (Exhibits A, B and C) against the names published in alphabetical order in *Soldiers and Sailors* and have confirmed all of the names on the rolls with their ranks, assigned companies and service in response to the April 19th alarm. There are some minor differences in the spelling of a few names. I have prepared a company-by-company tabulation of all the names shown on the rolls, using the captions of the rolls as drawn up by the Captains but omitting the data for the individuals' travel,

service time and amounts due. On this tabulation I have placed the volume and page references from the *Soldiers and Sailors* publication for each name. A copy of this tabulation is attached as Exhibit E. The numbers of officers and men for each company match those found by *Massachusetts Militia*. I believe that Exhibit E is a complete and accurate record of all the militiamen who marched from Westborough on April 19, 1775.

Consideration of the Westborough Bicentennial Commission's July 4, 1975 action in dedicating Minuteman Park with reference only to Captain Brigham's company of minutemen

I have consulted with Kristina Allen and Brian Sullivan, both members of the Westborough Bicentennial Commission, about how the Commission decided who should be honored at the newly created Minuteman Park. They advised me that the Commission was guided by *The History of Westborough*, written by Heman P. DeForest and Edward Bates and published in 1891 (hereinafter *History*). *History* mentions only Captain Brigham's company as responding to the April 19th alarm and sets out, at page 163, the contents of a roll of that company as of November 27, 1775. A copy of that page 163 from *History* is attached as Exhibit F. A comparison of the names on the roll printed in *History* with the names on the Bicentennial Commission's plaque in Minuteman Park shows that the roll from *History* was the source for the names on the plaque. Curiously, while Captain Brigham's name is given as "Edmund Brigham" on the roll quoted in *History*, it is given as "Edward Brigham" on the plaque. *Soldiers and Sailors* and *Massachusetts Militia* both show the name as "Edmund Brigham".

As discussed above, the copy of Captain Brigham's muster roll, prepared for the purpose of getting his men paid, was authenticated in February 6, 1776. (see Exhibit A). Mr. DeForest, the author of the first part of *History*, clearly had access to this muster roll and compared it to the November 27, 1775, roll quoted in *History*, stating at the bottom of page 163:

"The muster-roll in the State Records gives the same list, with one exception, - it substitutes the name of William Woods for that of James Miller, Jr."

He noted that it also gave the names of the men who enlisted in the service of the United Colonies. (see Exhibit F).

However, it does not appear that Mr. DeForest had access to any other muster or pay rolls for the April 19th alarm. He mentions Captain Seth Morse only in the context of leading 17 Westborough men in December 1775 (*History* at 164) and he does not mention Captain Baker at all. He makes no mention of the General Court's Resolve in 1891 to prepare and publish an indexed compilation of the soldiers and sailors who served in the Revolutionary War and, as that work did not start until September 1891, it could well have been unknown to him when his *History* was published that same year.

While the alphabetical compilation of *Soldiers and Sailors*, published between 1896-1908, had been in existence for at least 67 years by the time the Bicentennial Commission made its decision, it was not until the next year, in 1976, that the publication of *Massachusetts Militia* provided some assistance for working through its 18 volumes. While the Reverend Ebenezer

Parkman's diary for April 19, 1775 referred to both Captain Brigham's and Captain Morse's companies as having marched in response to the alarm, that information apparently was not known to the Commission. Accordingly, it appears that the Bicentennial Commission limited its selection of names to those shown on the November 27, 1775 roll quoted by *History* because that was the only information the Commission members had at the time. However, it is unclear why, in designing its plaque, it incorrectly referred to Captain Brigham as "Edward Brigham" and why it avoided listing William Woods on the plaque as *History* confirmed that he had indeed marched as a member of Captain Brigham's company. (see Exhibit F).

Consideration of the existing Westborough records concerning the April 19th Alarm

The original muster and pay rolls for the three companies that responded to the April 19th alarm, which were the basis for the copies in the Massachusetts Archives (see Exhibits A, B and C), probably were kept by the Captains to record the payments to their men. Although some Westborough records relating to the Revolutionary War have been found in recent years and digitized, see <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/collections/commonwealth:z316sd465>, the original rolls for the April 19th alarm are not found among them. However, the original November 27, 1775, muster roll for Captain Brigham's company quoted in *History*, which is the basis for the plaque in Minuteman Park, has been found, digitized and can be reviewed on line at <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:z316sd76w>.

As can be clearly seen, this November 27, 1775, roll has nothing to do with the April 19th alarm. Rather, it is a request by Captain Brigham, addressed to the Selectmen of the Town, seeking funds for payment for service "on the training field" at the request of the Town in a vote "last winter". Each of the men named on the roll was credited with 7 training days except for Caleb Harrington and Amasa Maynard, who were credited with 5 training days. The roll does not indicate when the training had taken place but presumably that was before the alarm.

A companion document, probably the reverse side of the roll, is dated March 18, 1776, and contains the signatures of the men acknowledging payment for the training service. This is an interesting (and potentially quite useful) document as it shows how the men spelled their names. There are a number of discrepancies between the names printed in *History* and those shown on the handwritten rolls. For example, *History* and the plaque in Minuteman Park show the name of "John McCulloch". However, the handwritten November 27, 1775 roll shows the name as "John McCullar" and the signature on the receipt is also, clearly, "John McCullar". This is also the spelling of the name on the payment document, Exhibit A. Thus the digitized Town records may well be useful in correcting this and other apparent errors in the spelling of the names shown on the Minuteman Park plaque.

Consideration of the minuteman status of Captain Brigham's company and its response to the April 19th Alarm

As is discussed by Hambrick-Stowe and Smerlas in *Massachusetts Militia* at xxix -xxx there were three basic types of militia in Massachusetts in April 1775, namely minuteman companies, regular militia companies and alarm list companies. The minute companies were established by the First Provincial Congress on October 26, 1774, and were elite units,

containing the best men. The militia companies were made up of all other able-bodied men, with every man in town except older men and some exempt men required to participate. The alarm list was the lowest level of the militia consisting of boys and old men and the exempted ministers and magistrates.

“Popular thought claims April 19 as the day the minutemen marched. But such was the nature of the emergency and so high was the enthusiasm when the alarm went out, especially in the towns nearest Concord and Cambridge, that every type of company gathered, armed, and marched.” *Massachusetts Militia* at xxx

Of the 440 companies identified in *Soldiers and Sailors* as having marched on the April 19th alarm, Hambrick-Stowe and Smerlas found that there were 162 minute companies (36.7%), 111 regular militia companies (25.1%) and 11 alarm list companies (2.5%), with 156 companies whose type was not given (35.4%). *Id.* at xxxi. They noted that there were two reasons why the participation of the minute companies was so high, namely that several towns (Framingham, for one) had more than one minute company and that only minute companies marched from the western Massachusetts towns. (*Id.*)

While *Massachusetts Militia* concluded that about 20,000 militiamen wound up outside of Boston as a result of the April 19th alarm, only about 3,500 of them were involved in the fighting that day. *Id.* at x. This was obviously because of the distances that militia units had to travel and the necessity of proceeding on foot. I posed the question to the Minute Man National Park in Concord as to whether there was any record of Westborough’s militia companies having covered the distance between Westborough and Lexington/Concord in time to be involved in the shooting that drove the British back to Boston. Roger Fuller, a park ranger, advised me that he had consulted Frank Warren Coburn’s *Muster Rolls of the Participating Companies of American Militia and Minute-men in the Battle of April 19, 1775*, published in 1912, and found no reference to Westborough. I have reviewed this publication, which is available on line, and confirm this point. All of the participating companies came from towns located much closer to the Concord/Cambridge area than Westborough.

So, while Captain Brigham’s minuteman company was certainly an elite unit, its role in the response to the April 19th alarm was no different than that of Captain Morse’s and Captain Baker’s militia companies. Its members marched just like the others, they were all too late for the shooting and they all wound up as part of the force besieging Boston after the British had retreated. As shown by the muster and pay rolls, they all received the same rates of pay and allowances. Further, the records in *Soldier and Sailors* show that members of all three companies were involved in other actions during the War. Accordingly, I do not believe there is any justification for honoring only the minuteman company and ignoring the militia companies that also served.

Conclusion:

Minuteman Park on Sandra Pond is a lovely place. It is the perfect spot for a memorial. Honoring Captain Brigham’s company of minutemen there is certainly appropriate as the company responded to the April 19th alarm, an event of monumental importance in American

history, and many of its members served in other actions throughout the Revolutionary War. However, two other companies of militia, whose members also responded to that alarm and also served in other actions throughout the War, have been forgotten. Effectively, the members of these other companies have been left behind.

I believe that there is a simple solution to this oversight, namely erecting a second plaque in Minuteman Park which lists the names of all 101 men from Westborough in the three companies that responded to the April 19th alarm, as shown on the muster and pay rolls used to get them paid. That list effectively would correct the present record by showing Captain Edmund Brigham's name (incorrectly set out as "Edward Brigham" on the present monument in the Park) and would also include the name of William Woods (who, as was pointed out in *History*, marched with Captain Brigham's company while James Miller, Jr., whose name is on the present monument, did not). That list would also show the names of those men who enlisted in the continental army during the alarm and correct the spelling of some of the names. But principally the purpose for a second plaque would be to honor the 55 other residents of the Town who served but have been forgotten.

The construction of such a plaque would require funding but I am confident that any necessary funding could be obtained by contributions from Town residents without the need for Town funding. Permission from the Town to erect this plaque would be required.

I respectfully submit that all 101 men from the Town who responded to the alarm should be honored in this manner.

Sincerely

David A. Nourse

April 2, 2021

- Exhibit A: Muster roll of Captain Brigham's minute company
- Exhibit B: Pay roll of Captain Morse's militia company
- Exhibit C: Muster roll of Captain Baker's company
- Exhibit D: The requirements for the muster or pay rolls
- Exhibit E: Tabulation of officers and men of the Westborough companies
- Exhibit F: *History of Westborough*, DeForest and Bates, page 163