

The Bedford Flag Unfurled



Sharon Lawrence McDonald

*Published in Cooperation with
the Bedford Free Public Library*

The Bedford Flag Unfurled
by Sharon Lawrence McDonald
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The colonial banner known as the Bedford Flag is displayed in the Bedford Free Public Library in Bedford, Massachusetts. It is prized as one of the very oldest flags in the United States, yet its rich crimson silk and painted design remain bright. Its history began during the early 1700s, when the flag was commissioned as the standard of a mounted unit of militia raised in an area of the Massachusetts Bay Province about twenty miles northwest of Boston. Two succeeding generations of the Nathaniel Page family were flagbearers at the time of the French and Indian wars. A descendant is believed to have carried it during the battle on April 19, 1775 in the opening hours of the American Revolution. The story of the Bedford Flag is not one of battle, however, but of a family and a town, and their roles in the birth of our country.

ALL THESE STORIES HIDDEN FROM VIEW
FOR SO MANY YEARS, NOW RECEIVE THE SPOTLIGHT,
AND THEY GLOW WITH EXCITING WORD COLOR.
I RECOMMEND READING THIS BOOK AS A CHARMING
STORY AND TO SHARE MANY LITTLE KNOWN FACETS OF
BEDFORD'S GREAT TREASURE, THE BEDFORD FLAG.

WILLISTON FARRINGTON

Introduction



As a librarian at the Bedford Free Public Library, it has been part of my job since 1973 to show the Bedford Flag to interested visitors.

“This is the Bedford Flag!” I always say. “It is one of the oldest flags in the United States, and is believed to have been present at the Concord Bridge on April 19, 1775. Yet it was already an antique on that day, for it had been carried by previous generations as a flag of a Massachusetts militia troop...”

Through the years, I have become quite fond of that old flag and love to tell its story to any who make the pilgrimage to see it. And yet, through years of showing the flag, an enormous urge has grown within me to separate the facts from the myths, and to document them, and my research of the flag’s history has grown from a hobby to a passion. What do we really know about the flag? Where did each story about it come from? What are their original sources? How much can be proven?

I write this book to answer these persistent questions.

Unfortunately, the flag is close with its secrets, and I have been years in research. There is always more to know. This is already the second edition of this book; the first was out of date by the time it was copyrighted and was never published. That I have the temerity to publish it now, I owe to my dear friend, local historian Bill Farrington, who asked me, “When are you going to finish your book? I’d be glad to help you, but you’d better hurry up. I am 96 years old, you know!”

And so I begin.

2000

Table of Contents



1.	A Close Look at the Bedford Flag	1
2.	Dating the Flag	8
3.	Bedford Receives a Relic	14
4.	The Page Family Comes to Billerica	17
5.	Nathaniel Page, 1679–1755: the First Cornet	25
6.	Nathaniel Page, and the Founding of Bedford	29
7.	The English Militia and Its Flags	33
8.	The Later Generations of Pages, 1735–1774	40
9.	Nathaniel Page, 1742–1819: Minuteman	49
10.	Nathaniel's Story of April 19, 1775	52
11.	The Flag in the American Revolution	57
12.	The Flag in the Nineteenth Century	59
13.	The Massachusetts Historical Society Considers the Bedford Flag	66
14.	The Bedford Flag and the Three County Troop	70
15.	Rockingham Attacks the Flag	77
16.	Jenks and Brown Change Their Minds	83
17.	Protecting the Flag	86
18.	A Twentieth Century Passion for the Flag	90
19.	A New Home for the Flag	99
20.	The Bedford Minutemen Salute the Flag	102
21.	The Bedford Flag Unfurled	107

Chapter 1

A Close Look at the Bedford Flag



The fabric of the Bedford Flag is red—a brilliant red; more than a burgundy, close to a crimson. Red is the color of the warrior, of anger, of blood. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century naval tradition, a red flag sent the message “We will give no quarter.” This flag was meant to be noticed.

To an eye accustomed to large rectangular modern flags, the shape of the Bedford Flag is surprising. It is quite small and square. As it is displayed now, it measures about 27" x 29" (69 cm x 73 cm) without the fringe, which has been lost. When it was in use in the field, one edge would be folded over on itself and stitched down to form a sleeve for its staff. This small square size identifies it as a cavalry standard, meant to be carried by an officer on horseback. English foot companies carried large rectangular colours that extended as much as six feet out from the staff, a length which would certainly have annoyed a horse. The Bedford Flag is also identified as a cavalry flag by its (now missing) fringe, for the banners of foot companies of the time did not employ a fringe. Both the flag of a troop of horse and the officer who carries it are called a “cornet,” just as the flag of a foot company and the officer who carries it are called an “ensign.”

Painted on both the front and the back of the Bedford Flag is an arm clad in silver armor. Its mailed fist grasps a short sword. The elbow is bent, the shoulder just hidden by roiling silver clouds that cover the hoist or staff side of the flag. This device has been interpreted to be the arm of God, signifying “God is on our side.” It is not unique to the Bedford Flag, and is known to have been used on sixteenth and seventeenth century flags of many countries, including Poland, Hungary, Algeria, the Netherlands, Bosnia, Sweden, and England. For instance, in a recent book entitled *Emblematic Flag Devices of the English Civil Wars, 1642-1660*, vexillologist Alan R. Young compiles descriptions of all of the known English

Civil War flags. Among the five hundred or so flags included, sixty-nine picture an arm, fifty of those arms are also holding a sword, and seventeen of those arm and sword emblems lie on a red background. One flag mentioned by Dr. Young that has survived to this day in Bromesberrow, England, is pictured below. It bears clear resemblance to the Bedford Flag and demonstrates again how common the emblem was.



THE BROMESBERROW FLAG,
FROM A RECENT PHOTOGRAPH.

Pictured on the Bedford Flag are three silver spheres flanking the clouds, one above and two below the arm.

The spheres have been identified variously through the years as cannonballs or bits of cloud or even glints of light, but their original meaning

is unknown. Actually, spheres, or spots, or balls on a flag could perform an important function. In 1639, it was ordered that the flags of an English army regiment were to be generally alike, so that a soldier would know his regiment, but each company's flag would have a distinguishing mark: a unique number of balls, stars, bullets, or sunlike rays. The colonial militias in America used this method of marking the flags of the companies as well. This practice is referred to in a pamphlet published in 1733 by a Major

William Brattle. With somewhat eccentric spelling he titled it *Sudnry Rules and Directions for Drawing Up A Regiment, Posting the Officers, etc. Taken From the Best and Latest Authority; for the Use and Benefit of the First Regiment in the County of Middlesex*. It instructs the companies to organize their procession by falling in according to the number of balls or spots on their flags. Unfortunately, this way of marking the different flags of a regiment seems to have been used only within the foot companies and was not required on cornets. Why, then, are three spheres

painted on this cornet? The three balls on the Bedford Flag still beg for explanation.

Flowing around three sides of the flag is a gold ribbon on which “Vince Aut Morire” is written in large black capitals. The Latin may be translated “Conquer or Die,” an uncompromising motto. Many have puzzled at the conjugation, wondering if the Latin is correct. One who is scholar enough to note that there is an error and explain why, is Mark I. Davies. Mr.

Davies saw the flag in a newspaper article and immediately noted that the third word was misspelled, although the motto as he viewed it was partly upside-down. Davies hastened to apologize for his “pedantry” but explained that he was a teacher of Latin and familiar with the verb from a favorite passage in classical literature. “The second person singular of the present tense imperative for the deponent verb *morior*, ‘to die,’ is *morere*,” he corrected, and thus the motto should read “Vince

Aut Morere.” “It is very easy to make such a mistake,” he added generously. Whose mistake was it, the person who chose the motto or the one who painted it so long ago? We will never know.

“Conquer or Die” is very reminiscent of mottoes used on cornets during the English Civil War, which include “Mors Aut Libertas” (“Death or Liberty”); “Mors Vel Victoria” (“Death or Victory”); and the cumbersome “Malem Mori Quam Tardari” (“I would prefer to die rather than turn aside”). It is also similar to a motto used on the coat of arms of the MacNeill, MacDougal, and

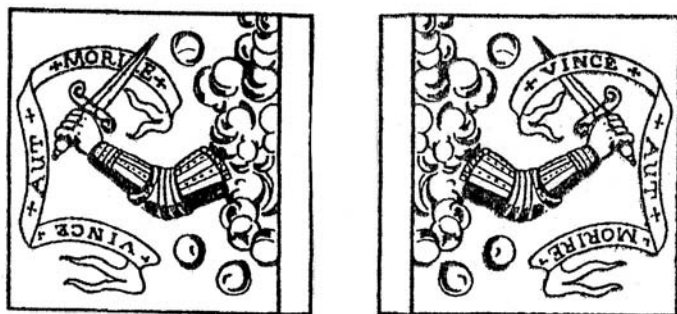


THE BEDFORD FLAG
THE FLAG IS STILL ATTACHED
TO ITS STAFF IN THIS PHOTO
FROM AN OLD POSTCARD.

associated clans, “Vincere Aut Mori.” No connection has been found, however, between this Scottish family and the flag.

Like all cornets, the Bedford Flag is two-sided. Unlike an embroidered flag, which would have a back side where the image was reversed and the motto unreadable, a painted flag has the image applied to both sides of the thick silk damask. Yet the artist had a decision to make. The emblem is not symmetrical. How was it to be rendered on the reverse?

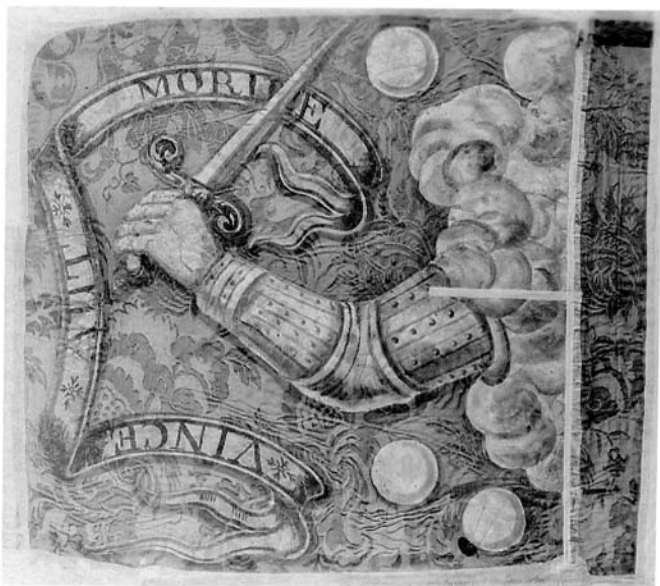
The artist of the Bedford Flag made the decision to keep the clouds on the hoist side. The arm on the reverse became the left hand, as can be seen from the position of the fingers and thumb. Now, to read “Vince Aut Morire” clockwise from left to right on each side, the motto must start at the top on the obverse and at the bottom on the reverse. As a finishing touch, the tip of the sword is behind the ribbon on the front, but in front of the ribbon on the back. These small differences from obverse to reverse have been thought to make the Bedford Flag somewhat unique in flagdom, but recent examination of the Bromesberrow flag reveals the same differences: the sword held in the opposite hand, the words placed differently



COMPARING THE REVERSE WITH THE OBVERSE.
(SKETCHES BY MICHAEL SEIBERT.)

from front to back. It might be concluded that this small variance from obverse to reverse was the custom with hand-painted flags.

The oils used to paint the design appear to be black, silver and gold, but the shading is subtle, and modern reproductions using a silk screen process have had to employ eight colors to approximate the old paint.



THE PATTERN IN THE DAMASK IS FAINTLY VISIBLE IN THIS C. 1930 PHOTOGRAPH OF THE REVERSE SIDE.
(COURTESY OF THE REV. NATHANIEL PAGE LAURIAT.)

The flag's cloth is a heavy silk damask woven with a pattern of red-upon-red leaves, flowers, pomegranates, and grapes. Why such an ornate fabric? Did the flag's tailor, not unlike Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*, rip down some draperies and use them to construct the flag? Early regulations for English flags specify the use of silk. Orders for ensigns name "taffeta" or the heavy plain silk called "sarcenet," but damask is called for in cornets. Gervase Markham's "Soldier's Accidence," printed in 1635, said "The substance of the cornet should be of Damask, and the form almost square... and fringed about suitably." The Royal Warrants of 1751 and 1768 required that "the standards of the Regiments of Horse, [are] to be of Damask embroidered and fringed with Gold or Silver." Even in 1844, the British "Regulations and Orders for the Army" continued the rule: "The standards of the Regiments of Cavalry are to be of silk damask embroidered and fringed with gold." It is thus not unusual for the Bedford Flag to be made of damask. Indeed, it was mandated at the time.

This, then, is the Bedford Flag. When it was first given to the town of Bedford in the 1880s, the flag was still attached to a staff, but in the early part of the 1900s the cloth was placed between glass panes for protection. At that time the staff was removed and has since been lost. Aside from that, and the loss of its silver fringe, the flag is bright and in remarkably good condition for its great age.

Chapter 1 Notes

🔪 PAGE 1

“A red flag sent the message...” Whitney Smith, letter to author, January 3, 2000.

“Identifies it as a cavalry standard...” Alan R. Young, *The English Emblem Tradition, V. 3 Emblematic Flag Devices of the English Civil Wars 1642-1660*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) p. xxvi.

“Foot companies carried large rectangular colours...” *Ibid.*, p. xxv.

“Did not employ a fringe...” Stephen Ede-Borrett, *Flags of the English Civil Wars, Part One, The English Colours of Foot*. 2nd ed. (Leeds, England: Raider Books, 1989) p. 9.

“Interpreted to be the arm of God...” Young, p. xli.

“Known to have been used... in many countries...” Whitney Smith, “The Bedford Flag,” *The Flag Bulletin*, Vol. X, Nos. 2-3, Spring-Summer 1971, p. 52.

🔪 PAGE 2

“Flags were to be generally alike...” Ward, *Animadversions of Warre* 1639, quoted in Major T. J. Edwards, *Standards, Guidons and Colours of the Commonwealth Forces* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Gale & Polden Ltd., 1953) p.14-15.

“Balls, stars, bullets, sunlike rays...” R. Symonds, “The Ensignes of ye Regiments in ye City of London Both of Trayned Bands & Auxiliaries... being their last Generil Mustir - 26 September, 1643,” Bibl. Harleian Society 986, British Library, London.

“Falling in according to the number of balls...” William Brattle, Major of Said Regiment, *Sudnry [sic] Rules and Directions for Drawing Up a Regiment Posting the Officers, etc. Taken From the Best and Latest Authority: for the Use and Benefit of the First Regiment in the County of Middlesex* (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1733) p. 1.

“Used only within foot companies...” Young, p. xxvi.

§ PAGE 3

“The second person singular of the present tense imperative...”

Mark I. Davies, email to author, December 8, 1999.

“Mors Aut Libertas...” Young, p. 116.

“Mors Vel Victoria...” *Ibid.*, p. 117

“Malem Mori Quam Tardari...” *Ibid.*, p. 111.

§ PAGE 4

“Vincere Aut Mori.” James Fairbairn, *Fairbairn’s Crests of the Families of Great Britain and Ireland* (NY: Bonanza Books, 1986) p. 594.

“Bromesberrow Flag reveals the same differences...” F.F. Rigby, *To Our Lady of Bromesberrow* (1970, F.F. Rigby) p. 6-7.

“Employ eight colors to approximate...” John Filios, personal communication to the author.

§ PAGE 5

“Specify the use of silk... taffeta or sarcenet” Stuart Peachey & Les Prince, *E.C.W. Flags and Colours. V.1, English Foot* (Essex, England: Partizan Press, 1991) p. 21.

“The substance of the cornet...” Gervase Markham, *Soldier’s Accidence* 1635, quoted in Young, p. xxvi.

“The standards of the regiment of horse...” *Royal Warrants of 1751 and 1768*, quoted in Edwards, appendices B and D.

“The standards of the Regiments of Cavalry...” *Regulations and Orders for the Army, 1844* quoted in Edwards, appendix E.

§ PAGE 6

“The flag was still attached to a staff...” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, (Boston: The Society, 1886) December 1885–February 1886, p. 166.

Chapter 2

Dating the Bedford Flag



On viewing the Bedford Flag, a visitor's opening question is usually "When was it made?" "Where was it made?" or "Who made it?" These first questions to be asked may well be the very last questions to be answered, for the flag's precise date of origin is still to be discovered. While a great deal is known about the flag's later history, little evidence has surfaced up to now to ascertain when it was ordered, woven, or painted.

Not infrequently, the question is asked, "Why can't the fabric be carbon-dated?" Radiocarbon dating is used only on organic substances, and the flag is of silk, so it is a reasonable question to ask. Unfortunately, the carbon-14 method is only exact to within at least plus or minus 20 or more years and is best used to determine ages over centuries or eons. Moreover, testing the period of 1650-1750 is particularly difficult because of fluctuations in the concentration of carbon 14 in the atmosphere. This makes radiocarbon dating unsuitable for the flag, to whose age every decade makes a great difference. There are other ways to research the age of historical artifacts, however. This chapter tells of two efforts to date the flag, one by comparing its fabric to others of better-known provenance and the other by analyzing its paint.

First, the fabric. The pattern of a silk damask may be interpreted by a textile expert to indicate when it was woven. About 1970, an assistant curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London was consulted. Although she had not had the opportunity to see the flag itself, it seemed to her that the damask was woven in what is called the bizarre style, a fanciful, explosive, almost outrageous design that was the fashion in European silks between about 1710 and 1720. Her judgment did not stand, however. In 1996, Susan Hay, Curator of Costume and Textiles at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum made the drive from Providence, R. I. to Bedford to examine the flag within its glass



DAMASK PATTERN RECREATED BY ADRIANA
SCALAMANDRE BITTER. (USED WITH PERMISSION.)

case. She measured the flag's dimensions, looked at the very threads with a magnifier, studied the selvages, and then examined the flower and fruit pattern woven into the damask. After an hour's work, her conclusion was unequivocal: This does not fit within the bizarre style. What can be said is that this is a fabric of the first half of the 1700s, perhaps as late as 1740 or 50.

Hay also had some theories about where the damask had been woven. She discussed these with Natalie Rothstein, former curator of the Textile Department of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Rothstein, who authored *The Victoria and Albert Museum's Textile Collection, Woven Textile Design in Britain to 1750*, agreed that the width of the fabric, which is 29" from selvege to selvege, is wider than silk the looms of Europe were commonly weaving in the early 1700s. She suggests that it was woven in China. Important, too, is the fact that there are three repeats of the design, side by side, across the damask. Rothstein concludes, "If the damask is 28-29 inches wide with three repeats in the width then it is almost certainly a Chinese export damask..."

Chinese export silks are unique, as far as I know, in having three repeats in the width.” It may well be that the fabric that was used for the flag was originally purchased from an importer, probably the English East India Company. It was illegal to use import silk in England at that time, although it was perfectly legal to re-export it to the American colonies. Susan Hay observed that there were artists of great enough skill to have painted the flag in Boston, although it is traditionally assumed that the flag was made in England. She also cautioned that, because of the great distance between source and market, Asian damasks lagged behind the current European fashion, sometimes by many years, making them harder to date.

These textile specialists gave great service in donating their expertise and offering their educated opinions on the origin of the flag. Still, the dates they declared left fifty years of margin. The flag could not even be connected to one specific generation of militiamen. Further work was needed.

The opportunity came when the flag was sent to the Textile Conservation Center in Lowell, Massachusetts during construction of the Bedford Public Library addition in the late 1990s. Under Deirdre Windsor, Director and Chief Conservator of the Conservation Center, plans were made to clean and reframe the flag. It suddenly became possible to open the glass that had housed the flag since 1907 and obtain minute samples of paint for chemical analysis. What could be more exact than electron microscopy and spectroscopy?

James Martin, the research scientist at Williams College and Orion Analytical Lab who would supervise the paint analysis, warned that there was an aspect of chance. Some pigments are datable, others are not. There would be no way of predicting which pigments would be present in the samples. Also, due to the pro bono nature of the work, the survey could not be extensive. It was the fall of 1999 when Windsor collected five tiny paint samples, and March of 2000 before they could be tested. Shirin Fozi, an undergraduate in the Chemistry Department at Williams, did the work. She found that the gold and silver paints were actually composed of gold and silver metal, perhaps gold and silver leaf.

And in a bit of dark green paint taken from the shadowing on the arm on the reverse of the flag, she found the pigment Prussian blue.

Prussian blue was discovered accidentally in 1704 by a man in Berlin named Diesbach. This means that pigment could not have been applied to the flag before 1704, and (assuming that the flag was painted all at one time) that the flag must date from after 1704. But how long after 1704? The formula for Prussian blue stayed a secret for about twenty years. At last, in 1724 in England, someone reproduced the recipe. It took years after that for the pigment to become generally available.

If one were trying to prove that the flag was painted in 1740 or 1750, this would all be very easy. But even scientific analysis finally comes down to speculation. How early could the flag have been painted? Certainly not before 1704. But by 1710? By 1720? By 1730? If the artist knew someone who knew someone who painted in Berlin—could “six degrees of separation” figure into the flag’s history?

For now, those wanting the fast answer—*is it the oldest flag?*—are destined for disappointment. And yet, is that the vital question? Dr. Whitney Smith, who has studied flags of every sort from his boyhood and who now heads the Flag Research Center, has ruminated that Americans have an urge for the superlative: we strive to have “the first,” “the oldest,” “the biggest,” “the most beautiful,” “the most important,” of everything. It is almost as if not being first means not being worth anything. The pinnacle is a precarious place to balance, as any child who has played “King of the Mountain” can attest.

In Bedford, the tradition is strongly held that the flag is the oldest existing complete flag in the United States and Canada. The exactness of phrase is necessary when making that claim. The word “existing” must be used, for there were certainly flags flown in the United States much earlier—Columbus had a flag, for instance—but these have fallen to dust or disappeared long since. “Entire flag” is specified, for in a museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico there is a fragment of a flag brought to the New World by conquistadores that may date from the late 1500s. All of North

America is never included in the claim, for a flag supposed to have been carried by Cortez still exists in Mexico City.

At the moment of this writing, the competitors for “oldest entire flag existing in the United States and Canada” are the Louisbourg Flag, a homespun linen flag painted with “Britannia” in the shape of a woman; the Moulton Flag, also linen, picturing a tree with the motto “Bello Pax Quaritur”; and the Norton Flag, linen, picturing a human face but dotted all over with eyes, with the motto “Vigilantibus.” Very little has been written about them, and the date of the Norton Flag is uncertain, but the Moulton and Louisbourg flags are thought to date from about 1745. Of course, an even older flag may be found at any time.

This book was not written to claim that the Bedford Flag is or isn’t the oldest American flag to survive to the present day. It was written to tell as much as is now known of the fascinating story of this silk, gold and silver flag. In the end, it is the story that is important, and the mysteries that surround it – “When was it made?” “Where was it made?” “Who made it?” make it all the more tantalizing. Let us turn, then, to the story of the flag, of the Page family who cared for it for several generations, and of the town of Bedford that grew up around them.

Chapter 2 Notes

PAGE 8

Fluctuations in the amount of carbon 14... Dr. Tom Higham, Deputy Director, Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand, in an e-mail to the author, March 28, 2000.

The bizarre style... Wendy Hefford, Victoria and Albert Museum, in a letter to Edwin Bitter, April 2, 1970.

Almost outrageous design... Peter Thornton, *Baroque and Rococo Silks* (New York: Taplinger, 1965) pp. 95-101.

PAGE 9

This does not fit the bizarre style... Susan Hay, Rhode Island School of Design, private communication to the author, August 1996.

If the damask is 28-29 inches wide... Natalie Rothstein, in a letter to the author, August 23, 1996.

¶ PAGE 10

It was illegal to use import silk... *Ibid.*

There were artists of great enough skill... Susan Hay, personal communication to the author, August 1996.

Asian damasks lag behind... *Ibid.*

She found the gold and silver paint... James Martin, "RE: Scientific Analysis of Samples from the Bedford Flag." Report to the Bedford Library, March 21, 2000.

¶ PAGE 11

She found the pigment Prussian blue... *Ibid.*

Prussian blue was discovered... Franco Brunello, *The Art of Dyeing in the History of Mankind* (Vincenza: Neri Pozza, 1973) [Translated from the Italian by Bernard Hickey] note p. 231.

Assuming that the flag was painted... James Martin, personal communication to the author, March 20, 2000.

Americans have the urge for the superlative... Whitney Smith, personal communication to the author, 1999.

A fragment of a conquistador's flag... Whitney Smith, personal communication to the author. The flag, showing the arms of the Peralta family, is thought to date from the Onante Expedition of about 1595. Thanks to Mary Hafer for showing the author a photograph of the flag in the Palace of the Governor, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

¶ PAGE 12

Flag carried by Cortez... *National Geographic*, October, 1917, p. 356-357

The Moulton, Louisbourg and Norton flags are discussed by Howard M. Chapin, "Notes on Colonial Flags," *Old-Time New England, The Bulletin of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities*, April, 1934, pp. 139-140. Courtesy of Anne M. Donaghy, Curatorial Assistant, SPNEA.

"Bello Pax Quaeritur"... H.W. Williams, "The Moulton Flag," *Old-Time New England*, April, 1934, pp. 132-133.

Date from 1745... Dave Martucci, (President, North American Vexillological Assn. and Secretary/Treasurer, New England Vexillological Assn.) e-mail to the author, September 29, 1999.

Chapter 3

Bedford Receives a Relic



For more than the last hundred years, the flag has been owned by the Town of Bedford, and hence is known as the Bedford Flag. Cyrus Page presented the flag to the town on October 19, 1885, saying:

I hold in my hand a flag whose history dates back towards a century before the incorporation of the Town of Bedford. In fact, we cannot give at this day the precise date of the origin of this banner. Suffice it to say, it was designed in England for the use of one of the regiments of the troops of Massachusetts colony. It has been in the Page family for some generations. It was carried by a member of the family as the flag of the minute-men on the memorable 19th of April, 1775, and is a relic highly valued this day.

As the Town of Bedford has recently taken steps for the purpose of having a building for the Public Library of this town, in which building will be kept, for the inspection of the public at all proper times, relics of by-gone days, I have decided to give this flag to the Town of Bedford, with the understanding that it shall be in the custody of the trustees of the Library and be so placed within the building, that all may look upon it. I now surrender it into the hands of the Chairman of the Selectmen.



CYRUS PAGE
(COURTESY OF THE REV.
NATHANIEL PAGE LAURIAT.)

Chairman Oliver J. Lane, Esq. replied,

I accept this flag you have now presented us and assure you that we feel highly honored in being the recipients of so valuable a relic. We know the spirit which prompted you to thus favor us --a spirit of pure patriotism and a love for your native town; and I assure you, that we, your fellow townsmen, will cherish and care for it, remembering that it has been borne by your ancestors through perilous times which tried men's souls and through whose valor and sacrifice we today are living in the grandest republic on which the sun ever shone.

Cyrus is vague about the age of the flag; "...we cannot give at this day the precise date of the origin of this banner," he says. It had been in his family for "some generations" and its history "dates back toward a century before the incorporation of the Town of Bedford." Bedford was incorporated from the east part of Concord and the south part of Billerica on September 23, 1729. Did Cyrus believe that the flag dated back into the 1660s? Clearly, that date is much too early.

Yet Cyrus owned the document that commissioned his great grandfather a cornet in 1737. In his presentation speech, he repeats what that document says: that it was the flag of a Massachusetts regiment. That it was a militia flag, and not a private one, indicates that evidence for it could be found in public record. Had Cyrus wanted to research it, he could have read the Billerica Town Records of the late 1600s and early 1700s. His Page ancestors were mentioned in those times, purchasing land and serving in public office, but the first record that connects them with a flag is dated 1720. On April 4 of that year, Cyrus' great great grandfather, Cornet Nathaniel Page, was paid two shillings for "walking the Lexington line." Cornet Page? Five years before, he was mentioned as quartermaster, the supply officer for the horse troop. By March of 1719, Simon Crosby had replaced him as quartermaster. A year later, as Page was paid for reviewing the boundary of his town with Lexington, the town records refer to him as cornet, which is the militia officer just below lieutenant whose duty it is to carry the flag for his company. We are left to conclude that soon

before April 1720, Nathaniel Page came into custody of the cavalry flag for his troop of horse.

This does not precisely date the flag, but it does date the association of a flag with the Page family. It is a leap of faith that the flag Nathaniel bore in 1720 is the same one that Cyrus presented to the town 165 years later. As has been stated, textile and paint experts have suggested only that the flag dates from the first half of the 1700s. It may be that the flag Bedford prizes so highly is the one borne by Nathaniel's sons, who were also commissioned cornets about 1737. The story of the flag is interwoven with the story of the Page family. To learn about the flag, one must study the family, and so, for the next few chapters, we will go back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Chapter 3 Notes



PAGE 14

"I hold in my hand..." George Dimond, "The Bedford Flag" [draft], c. 1933, Charles E. Lauriat papers, The Rev. Nathaniel Page Lauriat's private collection, p. 13.



PAGE 15

Oliver J. Lane, Esq. was the chair of the selectmen. "The Cornwallis Surrender," *Concord (Mass.) Freeman*, Friday, 23 October 1885, p. 1.

"I accept this flag..." Dimond, p. 13–14.

"Cornet Page walking the Lexington line..." *Billerica Town Record*, April 4, 1720.

"Quartermaster Nathaniel Page..." *Ibid.*, 7 March, 1714/15.

"By March 2 of 1719..." Throughout this book, the new style dating system will be used (*e.g.* 1719 instead of 1718/19) except in endnotes.

"Simon Crosby had replaced him..." *Ibid.*, 2 March, 1718/19.

Chapter 4

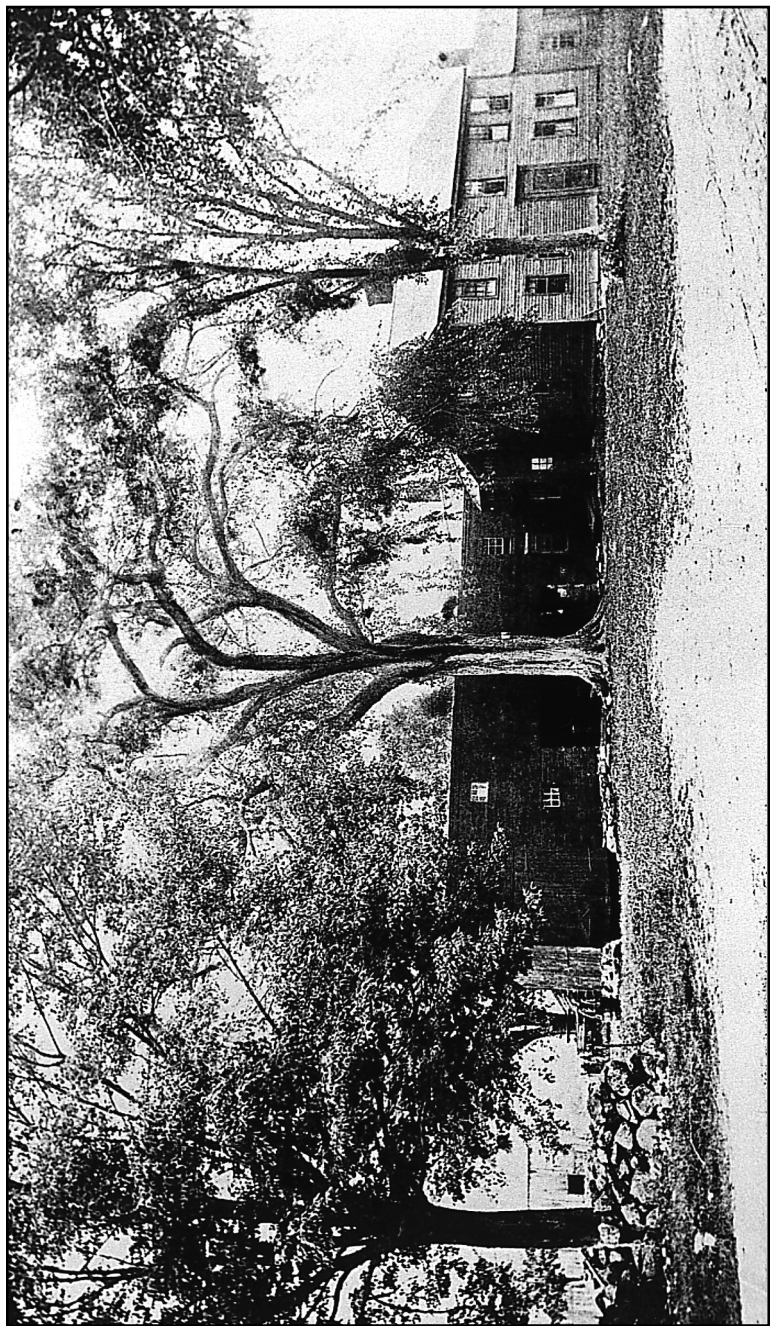
The Page Family Comes to Billerica



Nathaniel Page (sometimes spelled Paige), the first of his family to serve as cornet, was born in England in 1679, and emigrated to the Massachusetts Bay as a young boy. He came with his father, also named Nathaniel, his mother, Joanna, and his two younger sisters, Elizabeth and Sarah. On August 2, 1686, Nathaniel's father was granted a license to keep an inn in the town of Roxbury, near Boston. Nathaniel Sr. must have been well known and a man of prominence at that time, for Governor Dudley had just appointed him one of two marshals of Suffolk County that same summer. His duties would have included making arrests, keeping the jail, and carrying out the sentences of the court, as well as collecting the taxes. Whether he was replaced a few months later when the new governor, Sir Edmund Andros, arrived from England and completely reorganized the government is unknown.

Nathaniel Sr. must have also been a man of means, for he set about acquiring land. He negotiated with the Native American sachems to buy territory, first seventy miles west of Roxbury in what is now the town of Hardwick, then in Squabage (near Worcester), and then in Dedham. These properties he held for speculation, but in 1688 he bought 250 acres in Billerica from a farmer named George Grimes, and soon after left innkeeping in Roxbury and moved his family twenty miles northwest to Billerica to farm. (The family left behind the grave of an infant son and brother, James. The church records of the First Religious Society of Roxbury note both James's baptism and his burial.)

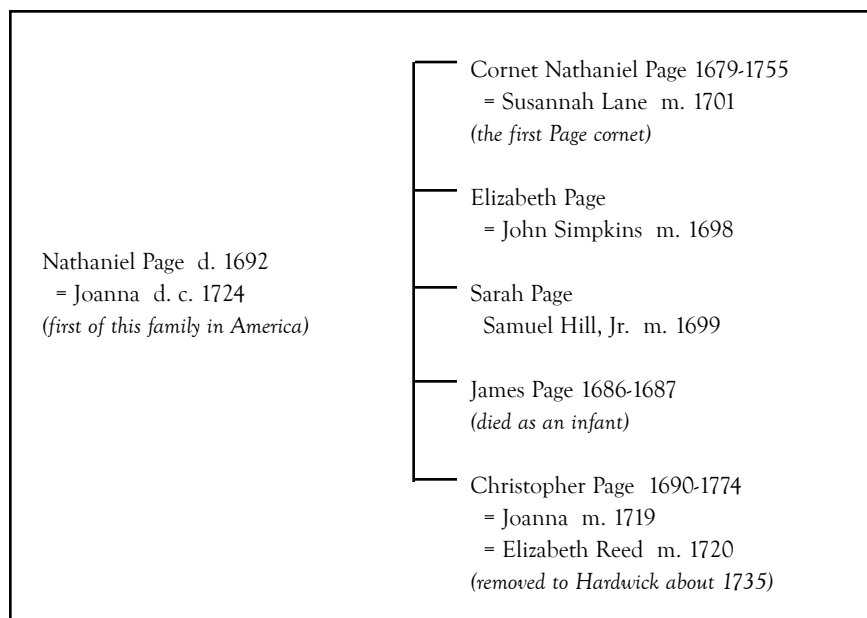
How did they choose Billerica? It can't be known for sure, but the Suffolk Deeds Index lists Nathaniel Page as witness for a real estate transaction involving the Shawsheen House in Billerica in March of 1686. Page must have visited the old house overlooking the Shawsheen River at that time and liked the area. The land



THE PAGE HOMESTEAD, CIRCA 1890.
(COURTESY OF BARBARA LEARY.)

across the river from the Shawsheen House is what the Pages bought from Grimes about two years later. The riverbank slopes up slowly to a low hilltop about a quarter of a mile to the west. The Page homestead stood on that elevation for over 200 years, its chimney smoke just visible from the Shawsheen.

Nathaniel Jr. was about nine years old when his family moved from Roxbury to Billerica. The neighboring town of Lexington had not yet been incorporated, and was still called the Parish of Cambridge Farms. Burlington hadn't yet been formed either, and that part of Billerica was bounded by Woburn. It was not wilderness or the frontier, but certainly would have been an adjustment from England or even from busy Roxbury. The twenty or so families clustered in Billerica center, and the church that the Pages were required to attend every Sabbath, were five miles north, up the road that led past Michael Bacon's mill. (Mr. Bacon complained mightily to the selectmen about the intrusion the public road made through his land.) Flowing across the Page lands was a brook which originated in springs that were supposed to be



THE FIRST TWO GENERATIONS OF PAGES IN BILLERICA.

curative; Native Americans traveled miles to drink from the waters. In an area that today is annoyed by skunks, raccoons, and the occasional deer, Nathaniel had to be watchful for wolves. There was a bounty of ten shillings for each wolf's head, and the town paid it again and again—five wolves killed in 1693 alone.

Nathaniel Page Sr. took the oath as a freeman in Billerica in 1690. This gave him the right to vote in town meeting, and be elected to a town office, and indicated that he owned land in the town and was a member of the church. Did he have the flag at this time? In the same list of new Billerica freemen, John Lane was recorded as the cornet. In 1691, the town records mention Nathaniel and his neighbor to the south, Patrick Fassett, proposing to buy land, but Page is called "Mr.," not "Cornet." In 1692 and 1693, John Sternes is mentioned in the town records as cornet. For the Pages, there is no connection to a flag yet.

In 1691, the name of Nathaniel Paige appears in the Calendar of the Suffolk Court. His writ is against William Bolderson, a Boston brewer. Evidently, when Nathaniel left innkeeping in Roxbury, the brewer owed him money, and he had to take him to court to collect. In the record, Nathaniel is called "husbandman," indicating that at that time he was not considered gentry, but a farmer.

He was a well-to-do farmer, however. The Page farm was extensive, with horses, milk cows, oxen, sheep, pigs, steers, and a bull. Their land spread a mile west from the Shawsheen River to what is now called Springs Road; from what is now Carlton Willard Village, it stretched a half a mile south toward the present Great Road. There was more work than young Nathaniel and his parents could manage, and the family owned a servant. This may have been an African-American slave. However, Abram English Brown is in error when he writes in his *History of Bedford* of seeing a receipt, which read "Nathaniel Tay sold his negro to John Page for twenty pounds in money and six pounds in bill. Nathaniel Tay, 1691." Nathaniel Tay had been the innkeeper in Billerica, and he moved to Woburn about that time, but there was no John Page in Billerica in the 1690's. There was a John Lane, and his papers are preserved in the Bedford Historical Society.

Among them is a note reading “Nathaniel Tay of Billerica sells his negro, Tony.” It was doubtless John Lane, not Nathaniel Page, who bought Tay’s servant.

After fewer than four years at the farm, tragedy struck. Nathaniel’s father apparently suffered some kind of accident or illness. It was so dire that on April 11, 1692, he made his will. His neighbor, John Lane, witnessed it. In it, he described himself as “Nathanael Paige of Billicay [sic], in the county of Middx, New England, Yeoman, being sick and weake of body but of Sound and perfect mind and memory.” The next day, he was dead. According to the Vital Records of Billerica, he died in Boston; perhaps he had been taken there for a doctor, but he was beyond medical help. Where he was buried is unrecorded.

The widowed Joanna was named executor of the will. She inventoried all of her husband’s possessions—real estate, livestock, farm tools, some rye and 40 bushels of Indian corn, the furniture (including two beds), clothing, a library of 25 books, guns, two pistols and a cutlass, and the servant man, who was valued at eighteen pounds six shillings. (No mention is made of a flag.) The estate inventory is one of a prosperous farmer. He left thirty pounds and half the land at Dedham to his daughter Elizabeth when she became of age or married, and the same to Sarah. Two thirds of the land at Billerica and Squabage he left to thirteen-year-old Nathaniel, Jr. The remaining one third went to two-year-old Christopher. The will stipulated that his “beloved Joanna” was to have a third of the estate during her lifetime to provide her a “comfortable subsistence,” and also the “use, benefit and improvement of my children” until they came of age. In colonial times, widows and widowers commonly married again within a short time of their spouse’s death. Surprisingly, Joanna didn’t remarry. It appears that, although she was left alone with her four young children with no other relatives nearby to help her, she had the resources to manage the farm. In describing a road that was being built soon after, the town records refer to the estate as “Mrs. Page’s farm.” Soon, she increased its size by purchasing more land.

Life for Joanna and the children can’t have been easy, however. Most terrifying, the struggle for the North American conti-

ment that raged among the English and French and the Native Americans for almost a century, with acts of great cruelty on all sides, was flaring up again. There had been an uneasy peace since Metacomet, known as King Philip, had been killed fifteen years before, but white settlers continued to encroach relentlessly on Native American homeland. Just three months after Nathaniel Sr. died, two houses in North Billerica were attacked by Indians. These were probably of the Abenaki tribe, inflamed by the French to leave their villages in what is now Maine and terrorize the English frontier towns. In both homes, the mother and her oldest and youngest child were killed.

For the Page family, newly fatherless, hearing of this attack—not to mention the raids on other nearby towns—we can only imagine the impact. Why didn't they return to the relative safety of Roxbury, or even England? The 1699 law that prevented residents from deserting towns “more open than many others to an attack of the enemy” (and the law names Billerica as one of these exposed towns) had not yet been written... Joanna, however, kept the family on their farm in Billerica, determined to stay in spite of the danger.

Following the attack, the militia immediately met, both horse troop and foot company, and set up a schedule of close watch on the town that continued for many months. John Lane was the Lieutenant at that time, and in his papers is this instruction: “...Impress eight Troopers out of yo' troop and yo' command, well appointed with arms and ammunition for his majesty's service; four of which are to be daily Employed as a scout about yo' town...” (“Troopers” here means specifically mounted militia men.)

But it wasn't just the militia who were involved. In retaliation to this and other attacks on New England towns, in 1694 the Province of Massachusetts enacted a law “encouraging the prosecution of the Indian enemy.” A bounty of fifty pounds was paid to any white person who killed an Indian or took one prisoner. Ten years later, the bounty was increased to a hundred pounds for each Indian scalp. Both sides were quick to kill, whether in anger, revenge or fear. A story is preserved in the Lane family of Lt. John Lane's daughter, Mary. Mary was a few years younger than

Nathaniel, and lived on the next farm to the west. When she was a girl, she was left in the Lane house with a soldier to protect her. Through the upper window, she thought she saw an enemy behind a tree stump, but could not persuade the soldier to shoot. She took his gun from his hands and fired it herself, indeed killing an Indian. Her act was viewed not as murder, but necessity. The story does not recount whether she claimed the bounty.

Chapter 4 Notes

§ PAGE 17

“Born in England in 1679.” Evidence of his birth date is from his tombstone.

“Nathaniel’s father was granted a license...” Lucius R. Paige, *History of Hardwick* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1883) p. 433.

“Appointed him one of two marshals...” *The Massachusetts Civil List for the Colonial and Provincial Periods 1630-1774* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1969). The other marshal was Samuel Gookin.

“His duties would have included...” Oliver Perry Chitwood, *A History of Colonial America* (NY: Harper & Bros., 1961) p. 150.

“Acquired land in Squabage, Hardwick, and Dedham.” Paige, p. 433.

“Bought 250 acres in Billerica...” Abram English Brown, *History of the Town of Bedford, Middlesex County, Massachusetts, From Its Earliest Settlement to the Year of Our Lord 1891...* (Bedford: A. E. Brown, 1890; reprint, Bedford Free Public Library [1976]) genealogy, p. 26.

“Both James’s baptism and his burial...” Church Records of the First Religious Society of Roxbury, quoted in *Vital Records of Roxbury, Massachusetts to the end of the Year 1849* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1925). James was baptized 28:9m:1686 and buried 31:5m:1687.

“Nathaniel Page as a witness...” *Suffolk Deeds* (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill) Vol. XIII, p. 470.

§ PAGE 19

“Twenty or so families clustered...” Henry Allen Hazen, *History of Billerica* (Boston: A. Williams & Co., 1883) map, endleaf.

“Mr. Bacon complained mightily...” see *Billerica Town Record* 1680, 1686, 1687.

“Springs that were supposed to be curative...” A. E. Brown, *Bedford*, p. 41.

§ PAGE 20

“Five wolves killed in 1693...” *Billerica Town Record*, 1693.

“Took the oath as freeman...” *New England Historical Genealogical Record*, [CD-ROM] (Boston: NEHGS, 1996) Vol. 3, October 1849, p. 349.

“Proposing to buy land...” *Billerica Town Record*, 1691.

“John Sterns mentioned...” *Ibid.*, 1692, 1693.

“In 1691, the name of Nathaniel Paige [sic]...” *Suffolk County Supreme Judicial Court, Index to Calendar Index* (located at Massachusetts Archives, Boston) #2620, 2 June, 1691.

“Horses, milk cows, oxen...” from Nathaniel Page’s will, Suffolk Probate Record #16323 (Suffolk County, Massachusetts).

“Nathaniel Tay sold his negro...” A. E. Brown, *Bedford*, p. 31.

“Tay had been the innkeeper...” *Billerica Town Record*, 1686.

“And moved to Woburn...” *Ibid.*, 1691.



PAGE 21

“Nathaniel Tay sells his negro, Tony...” Lane papers, Bedford Historical Society, Bedford.

“Nathanael Paige of Billericay...” Nathaniel Page’s will.

“He died in Boston...” *Vital Records of Billerica, Massachusetts to the Year 1850* (Boston, NEHGS, 1908) p. 381.

“Where he is buried...” Nathaniel’s grave is not recorded in cemetery records of Billerica or in the South, Hill, or Corner Cemeteries in Boston.

“Beloved Joanna...” The details of Page’s probate is from his will.

“Mrs. Page’s farm.” *Billerica Town Record*, 1693.

“She increased its size...” *Ibid.*, 1694.



PAGE 22

“Attacked by Indians...” Hazen, p. 127-8.

“Probably of the Abenaki tribe...” Steve Rajtar, *Indian War Sites: A Guidebook to Battlefields, Monuments, and Memorials* (Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland & Co. Publishers, 1999) p. 114.

“Inflamed by the French...” *Ibid.*, p. 125.

“The 1699 law...” *The Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of Massachusetts Bay* (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1869) 1699-1700, Chapter 22, p. 402. (Referred to hereafter as *Province Laws*.)

“Watch on the town that continued...” *Billerica Town Record*, 1692/3.

“Impress eight troopers...” Lane papers.

“A bounty of fifty pounds...” *Province Laws*, Acts 1694, Chapter 10, Section 4, p. 176.

“The bounty was increased...” *Ibid.*, 1704.



PAGE 23

Mary Lane’s story. A. E. Brown, *Bedford*, p. 21.

Chapter 5

Nathaniel Page, 1679–1755: the First Cornet



In Massachusetts Province, men between the ages of sixteen and sixty were required to serve in the militia. Nathaniel Page turned sixteen in 1695, and in August of that year, Indians attacked Billerica again, killing fifteen people including one Mary Allen Toothaker, whose husband was away at Salem, pursuing the witchcraft hysteria there. This time, Nathaniel would have been involved in patrolling his town, for only a few essential men, like the minister and the miller, were exempted from this duty.

Orders to John Lane indicate that the troop was also prepared to go to the assistance of other towns. Major Tyng wrote to Lane on August 14, 1696:

You are therefore required to order ye one half of your troop to be in a readiness always, and at a minute's warning, if possible with three days provision, to go and give relief to any place that may be attacked.

Hereof you may not fail.

If not at first, then certainly by 1706, Nathaniel was serving with the mounted troopers. The troops were a more elite corps than the foot soldiers, and took their membership from the well to do. Indeed, one could not be in the horse troop without an estate worth at least a hundred pounds. At his death, Nathaniel, Sr.'s estate had been valued at more than five hundred pounds. Nathaniel Jr. had inherited almost two thirds of that, including the homestead, and so was more than eligible. As a trooper, Nathaniel provided himself with a "good, serviceable horse of five pound value not less than fourteen hands high." (A commissioned officer was to measure the horse to be sure.) He must also have "a carbine, the barrel not less than two foot and a half long, with a belt and swivel, a case of good pistols, a sword or cutlace... one

pound of good powder, three pounds of sizeable bullets, twenty flints, and a good pair of boots and spurs.” His name is among those listed by John Lane (who’d been promoted to Captain) as “Troopers which served under my command to the relieve of Dunstable, July the fourth, seventeen hundred and six, being twenty-nine men, two days, with the sustenance.” Samuel Adams Drake’s *The Border Wars of New England* provides the reason for this service: another company of horse, relaxing at a garrison house in Dunstable on July 3 after a day of fruitless scouting, was attacked by a huge party of Mohawks and the French. Immediately, Captain Lane’s troopers, including Nathaniel Page, rode the 20 miles northwest to their aid, but the enemy had moved on to raid other towns, and the militia troop returned home the next day.

At age 27, Nathaniel was not yet listed as a militia officer, but he did begin to serve Billerica Town in public office, being elected constable in 1708. Nathaniel had married Captain Lane’s daughter, Susannah, and they had three sons: Nathaniel Jr., named after his paternal grandfather, was born in 1702; John, named after his maternal grandfather, was born in 1704; Christopher, named after his paternal uncle, was born in 1707.

Two daughters, Susannah and Joanna, named after their mother and grandmother, were born in 1711 and 1714 respectively, into relative peacetime. Nathaniel was assigned a pew in the Billerica meetinghouse right next to his brother-in-law Job Lane’s seat. He went on to serve as quartermaster of the troop of horse, and tithingman for the town. As tithingman, he was expected to inspect the taverns to be sure they were not selling unlicensed liquor, and apprehend idle, drunken, or disorderly persons, “prophane cursers or swearers” and Sabbath breakers. Then, in 1720, at the age of forty-one, he appeared again in the Billerica Town Records, this time as the cornet of the cavalry troop.

A cornet in the Massachusetts militia was a commissioned officer, appointed by the governor. His pay was easily twice what a sergeant earned. He not only carried the flag, but also was responsible for leading and disciplining the troops under the lieutenant and the captain. It is hard to know how long Nathaniel served, for he

was called by the title of Cornet Page for the rest of his life, and it is even written on his gravestone. Whether the flag he carried was the existing Bedford flag, or its antecedent, has not yet been proven. It is also difficult to know whether he actually saw any action as Cornet. He served during the era of the French and Indian Wars called Governor Dummer's War, but at that time most of the fighting had moved away from the farms and dooryards of his area. It was the area far to the northeast, which was to become the state of Maine, which suffered most now. Indian fighters were going deep into the wilds of Maine to kill the enemy and take their scalps back for the bounty. A famous sortie was that of Captain Lovewell, of Dunstable, who led a particularly fierce attack in 1725 in the area that later became Fryeburg, Maine. There were men from Billerica listed in his muster rolls, and Eleazer Davis of Concord (later Bedford) was among the wounded, crawling back to Berwick, Maine with his right hand shot off and a ball lodged in his abdomen, surviving only by eating a fish he'd caught with his mocasin thong, but living to tell the tale. To his good fortune, Cornet Page was not on that muster roll.

Chapter 5 Notes

¶ PAGE 25

"Men between the ages of 16 and 60..." *Province Laws*, 1693-93, Chapter 3, Section 1, p. 128.

"Only a few essential men..." *Ibid.*

"Indians attacked Billerica again..." Hazen, p. 129-31.

"You are therefore required..." Lane papers.

"An estate worth at least a hundred pounds..." Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, MD., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England* (Boston: W. White, 1853-54) Vol. 4 (1663), p. 97.

"A good, serviceable horse..." *Province Laws*, 1693-4, Chapter 3, Section 6, p. 129.

¶ PAGE 26

"Troopers which served under my command..." Lane papers.

"Another company of horse," Samuel Adams Drake, *The Border Wars of New England* (Boston: Scribner's, 1897) p. 218.

"Being elected constable..." *Billerica Town Record*, 1708.

“Married and had sons and daughter...” A. E. Brown, *Bedford*, genealogy p. 26.

“Assigned a pew...” Ina Mansur, *A New England Church, 1730-1834*. (Freeport, Me.: Bond, Wheelright Co., 1974) figure 12, p. 37.

“Served as quartermaster and tithingman...” *Billerica Town Record*, 1715.

“He was expected to inspect the taverns...” *Province Laws*, 1693–94, 2nd Session, Chapter 20, Section 9, p. 155.

“His pay was easily twice...” Jack Sheldon Radabaugh, “The Military System of Colonial Massachusetts 1690–1740,” Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1965, chart p. 444.

“Was responsible for leading and disciplining...” John Page’s Commission, 1737, Bedford Historical Society.



PAGE 27

“Most of the fighting had moved away...” Hazen, p. 140.

Account of Lovewell’s War, Samuel Sewall, *The History of Woburn, Middlesex County, Massachusetts from the Year of Its Grant to Charlestown, in 1640, to the Year 1860*. (Boston: Wiggin & Lunt, 1868), p. 195–203.

“Not on that muster roll...” *Ibid.*, p. 195–96.

Chapter 6

Nathaniel Page, and the Founding of Bedford



In the 1720s, the Pages, along with several other families that lived in the area, began negotiating with the Massachusetts Great and General Court to split off from the town of Billerica and, with the eastern part of Concord, form a new town. The Billerica petition does not survive, but the Concord petition read in part “Our distance from your place of public worship is so great that we labor under insupportable difficulties in attending constantly there as we desired to do. In the extreme difficult seasons of heat and cold we were ready to say of the Sabbath, Behold what a weariness is it.” Billerica was opposed—probably it did not want to lose the two mills in the area, or the tax money from fine farms such as the Pages’. Still, the Great and General Court granted incorporation to the forty or so families who had petitioned it, and the town of Bedford was chartered on September 23, 1729.

Cornet Page was one of the founders of the new town. He gave money and land “to the encouragement of the town.” He was chosen as one of its selectmen at the first town meeting. (Bedford historian A. E. Brown says that it was Cornet Page’s son, the third Page to be named Nathaniel, who was selectman, but as the son was only 27 at the time, that is highly unlikely. This does point out the difficulty inherent in the custom of so many generations reusing the same first names, however. Usually, in the first half of the 1700s, the father, who was born in 1679 and married Susannah, is called “Cornet Nathaniel Page,” and his son, who was born in 1702 and married Hannah, is called “Nathaniel Page, Jr.” When this son becomes cornet in the 1730s, he is referred to as “Cornet Nathaniel Page, Jr.” until his father dies in 1755. Cornet Nathaniel, Jr.’s son Nathaniel dies young, but Cornet Nathaniel, Jr.’s brother, John, names his son Nathaniel, and this

nephew becomes “Nathaniel Page, Jr.” Indeed, every generation through the 1800s contains a Nathaniel. It is a mighty job to keep them straight, and most Bedford histories have errors.)

But returning to 1729: Cornet Page (1679-1755) signed the covenant to form the church and was on the committee to see that the meetinghouse was “perfected and finished.” He was also on a committee to provide the first minister, Nicholas Bowes, and then to plan a “faire” to celebrate the Rev. Bowes’ ordination. Because he was then more than fifty years old, when the Bedford church building was finished Nathaniel was one of the first to be assigned a pew. His pew was located just inside the door on the south side, and would have gotten the sun rays in the winter, a small warmth quite welcome in an unheated church.

The military conflicts that had consumed the attention of the colonists previously were quieted now. Early Bedford town records do not mention the militia, but are absorbed with issues of church,



CORNET NATHANIEL PAGE'S GRAVESTONE IN THE BEDFORD BURYING GROUND.

schools, taxes and roads. Nathaniel had skills as a surveyor, and had formerly served Billerica in that office. After the new town was chartered, he was for many years one of Bedford's elected surveyors of highways. He helped to lay out many of Bedford's major roads, like the one from the meetinghouse past Benjamin Kidder's house north to Ensign James Lane's house, which later became North Road. The proposal would come to town meeting to be accepted, and often would engender considerable debate or perhaps be tabled to the next meeting while the details could be worked out with the landowners. (Shall the road go to the south or north of Mr. Kidder's house?) Then all of the townsmen would be required to work on the construction, lending their backs and their oxen to the cause. Nathaniel, while still addressed as Cornet Page, was focused on domestic, not military, issues.

Through the years, Cornet Nathaniel continued to serve the town as a selectman, on the committee to provide a schoolmaster, and as surveyor. His wife Susannah died in 1746, and he married Mary Grimes, but they had no children together, and it is Susannah that his grave lies beside in the old Bedford cemetery. The lichen-encrusted slate stone reads,

*Here lyes Buried
the Body of Cornet
Nathaniel Page,
Who Departed this Life
March ye 2nd, 1755, in ye
76th Year of His Age.*

Chapter 6 Notes

¶ PAGE 29

“Our distance from your place of public worship...” Mansur, p. 11-12.

“The town of Bedford was chartered...” *Province Laws*, 1729-1730,
Chapter 1, p. 527.

“To the encouragemēt [sic] of the town...” A. E. Brown, *Bedford*, p. 10.

“It was Cornet Page's son...” *Ibid.*, footnote p. 10.

“Cornet Page signed the covenant...” *Bedford Town Record*, 1729.

¶ PAGE 30

“Committee to see the meetinghouse perfected...” *Ibid.*, 1729.

“Committee to plan a Faire...” *Ibid.*, 1730.

“Because he was then over fifty...” Mansur, p. 28-29.

“His pew was located...” *Ibid.*, figure 7, p. 30.

¶ PAGE 31

“Formerly served Billerica as surveyor...” *Billerica Town Record*, 1703/4 and 1723/4.

“He was for many years surveyor...” *Bedford Town Record*, 1732, 1733, 1735, 1739.

“Past Benjamin Kidder’s house north to Ensign Lane...” *Ibid.*, 1733.

“His wife Susannah died...” A. E. Brown, *Bedford*, genealogy, p. 26.



SUSANNAH PAGE'S GRAVESTONE IN THE BEDFORD BURYING GROUND.

Chapter 7

The English Militia and Its Flags



In the English tradition of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the role of the flag was vital, and the cornet or ensign risked his life every time he carried it into battle. The flag's movements could relay the captain's orders through the noisy melee on the battlefield; it identified the company, and was a place for them to center and refocus. Thus, it would be the location for the fiercest fighting. But a flag did more than identify the company. It was the very identity of the company. A soldier swore loyalty to his flag. Deserting it was punishable with death. Allowing the flag to fall trophy to the enemy was the greatest dishonor and could signify the loss of battle. The flagbearer was often killed under his flag, but the flag could not be allowed to drop, and would instantly be taken up again by another.

The flag remained precious even after it was discharged from service. The colonel, by ancient right, retained the flag. He might hang it in the parish church of his town in England, or even request that it be buried with him after his death. In some cases, he would present it to the flagbearer as commendation for outstanding service. Captured flags, too, were hung in churches and castles as trophies, and detailed descriptions were made of them and circulated, to the humiliation of the defeated army.

Manuals of war of that time are very specific about the flagbearer:

He must show himself dreadful and terrible to the Enemy with his drawn sword in his right hand, and in his left the Ensign bravely displayed and vaunced.....

"If in fight the Ensign be broken, and the Enemy carry it away a part thereof, doth the Ensign-bearer lose thereby his reputation?"

"No, not a jot: for that he keepeth the very trunk of the staff in his hand."

"Theorke and Practike of Modern Warres," 1598

The Words of Command for the Gentlemen of the Horse

Subdivisions by Fours.

Wheel to the Left, and Form a Rank intire.

To reduce them to their Marching Order again.

Subdivisions by Fours.

Wheel to the Right.

Ranks wheel to the Left.

When they are in a Rank intire, in Order for Exercise; their Carbines being hung with a Swivel to their Shoulder-Belt, the Muzzle hanging down to the Toe of their Right Boot.

Lay your Right Hand on your Sword.

Draw your Sword

Place your Sword in your Bridle-Hand.

Join your Right Hand to your Left Pistol.

Cock your Pistol

Present.

Fire.

Return your Pistol

Join your Right Hand to your Right Pistol.

Draw forth your Pistol.

Cock your Pistol.

Present.

Fire.

Return your Pistol.

Lay your Right Hand upon your Carbine.

Mount your Carbine.

Cock your Carbine.

Present.

Fire.

Sink your Carbine.

Recover your Sword.

Return your Sword.

FINIS

FROM "MILITIA DISCIPLINE," BY W. P. GENT. BOSTON, 1733.

The Cornet of Horse must be courageous. In absence of the Captain and Lieutenant he commandeth the company. His place of march is in the front, before the first rank, yet behind the Captain... In fight [he] strove to break the standard upon his enemy, which being broken and falling to the ground, he was not to regard to get it up again (especially not to alight for it). If he were to charge a flying enemy (whether horse or foot) he was also to assay to break his standard.... But if the enemy should get the cornet unbroken, then it were a great disgrace.

“Militarie Instructions for the Cavallrie,” 1632

...in the day of Battle, seeing he carries the honour and Ensign of his country, rather than to lose them, he ought to make them his winding sheet.

“The Principles of the Art Militarie,” 1637

Who ever runs from his colours, be he native or foreigner; and does not defend them to the uttermost of his power, so long as they be in danger, shall suffer death for it....

Whatsoever Ensign bearer shall fly out of any place of battery, sconce or redoubt and before he hath endured 3 assaults, and receives no relief, shall be punished as before.

“Swedish Discipline,” 1632

Many stories are told of the bravery of flagbearers. One that is particularly affecting concerns the Battle of Fountenoy. The captain's own son was the cornet. This cornet was tied into his saddle, and his flag lashed to his leg, so that if he were killed, still his flag would not fall. His father instructed him that, if he were to lose his flag, he was not to return. Happily, he survived that battle.

The fate of the flag was terribly important, even in defeat. At Saratoga, in 1777, the colonel of the defeated 9th Regiment stripped the colors from their poles and hid them. He managed to get them back to England, where he presented them to his monarch, George III. The King, with ceremony, acknowledged them and returned them to the colonel. The battle was lost but not the honor of the colonel.

The traditional European way of waging battle had to be adapted to a whole different situation in the Americas. The com-

plicated maneuvers that were still practiced on the training grounds were often useless in the thick forests, and the warrior code of the Native Americans baffled the English, who called them “savages” and treated them with the utmost savagery. The French did not always meet the colonists as gentlemen on the battlefield, but encouraged—and themselves practiced—a terrifying “hit and run” guerilla tactic on their homes.

In large part, England did not send regiments of soldiers across to the colonies to protect exposed Massachusetts frontier towns like Deerfield, Groton, and Haverhill, which had suffered devastating attacks. Neither did it send the provincial army to those towns. England expected the colonists to form a militia for their own protection. British regulars were deployed for major campaigns like Louisbourg or Quebec; otherwise, they were busy in Europe fighting the French. The provincial army, too, was reserved for major campaigns, and then, as it was seen as inferior to the British Regulars, it was usually used as scouts and light infantry.

Accordingly, each town had its own company of militia, commanded by a captain. The company might number sixty men at full strength, if the town’s population would support that. Some areas had cavalymen within the foot company. More populated areas had a horse troop in addition to the foot company. Early on, the number in a separate mounted troop was thirty, but as the population grew, the number in the unit grew to one hundred. Each company was expected to train regularly, assembling on the muster ground more frequently in time of threat and less frequently in time of peace.

Many towns came together to form the regiment. The whole regiment assembled less often. There might be three years between the times that the whole regiment mustered. But then, the whole regiment was not expected to fight together except in very unusual circumstances.

The militia was not like an army, which would live and serve together for the duration of a whole campaign. It was a trained band of men from which would be selected a few—probably the best—soldiers to serve for a very short time and then return to

their duties at home. The soldiers thus called away did not necessarily operate as a unit with a full cast of officers. When Lt. John Lane named eight men to scout the town, four at a time, in 1693, the patrol probably did not have the flag with them. When Lane took twenty-nine men to Dunstable in 1706, a quartermaster and a corporal are both listed in his muster roll, but no other officers—specifically, no cornet—rode with his troop. Sometimes, to spread the burden more fairly among the towns, a unit would be formed by taking a few men out of each of several companies. In those cases, whose flag would be flown?

In North American frontier skirmishes, the enemy was hardly focused on the flag. The role of a militia flag here was quite different from that of a flag in Europe. This may be why the Bedford Flag has survived in such good condition, neither battle-scarred nor sunstruck.

In the English tradition, it was the colonel who chose the flags for his regiment. He would not use his own coat of arms, lest defeat under the flag should dishonor him, but often the colonel's family badge or crest would be used. The flag would thus change when the colonel changed. Who was the colonel in command of the Upper Middlesex Regiment? In the earliest 1700s, it was Colonel Jonathan Tyng of Chelmsford, and his son followed him in that office. Surprisingly, books of coats of arms reveal no pedigree registered at all for any member of the Tyng family. However, very early deeds transferring land from a man named Wanalansett to Jonathan Tyng bear wax seals with the image of a bird called in heraldry a "martlet," and this may have been the emblem he used. Of course, there is no bird on the Bedford Flag. It appears that the emblem used for the flag was not Tyng's crest.

Sometimes a cavalry troop used the captain's crest. The captain of the Billerica area horse troop from 1716-1725, which includes the time the first Cornet Page bore its standard, was John Stearns. Again, the crests recorded for Stearns are a griffin, a falcon, or a cock starling, not an arm and sword.

When John Page was commissioned in 1737, he served under Captain William Reed. There are many crests recorded for the

Reed family: a tower, a griffin, a man resting a hammer on an anvil, an arm holding an oak branch—but no arm and sword. At that time the colonel was Joseph Varnum; for the name “Varnham,” quite similar, Fairbairn records an arm holding a crown, or an eagle preying on a rabbit.

Because the flag is so closely associated with the Page family, we should look at their crests, even though it would be most unusual to use the cornet’s crest, and there is nothing to associate the Bedford Pages with the branch of the Page family that held the coat of arms back in England. The fact remains that the Page crests that appear most often were a horse or a griffin, and the family motto is not “Conquer or Die,” but “Spe Labor Levis,” meaning “Through work, hope.” The emblem used for the Bedford Flag most probably was not an officer’s personal crest.

Chapter 7 Notes

PAGE 33

“The colonel, by ancient right...” Edwards, p. 123–24.

“Buried with him after his death...” *Ibid.*, p. 127.

“He must show himself dreadful...” quoted in A. R. Casavant, *Flags and Rifles* (Chattanooga: ARC Products Co, 1975) p. 71–72.

PAGE 35

“The Cornet of Horse must be courageous...” John Cruso, *Militarie Instructions for the Cavall’rie 1632*, facsimile edition with notes by Brigadier Peter Young (Kington: The Roundwood Press, 1972) p. 12.

“In the day of battle...” Henry Perham, quoted in Casavant, p. 74.

“Who ever runs from his colours...” Adolphus Gustavus, quoted in Casavant, p. 73.

“The captain’s own son...” Edwards, p. 103.

“At Saratoga, in 1777...” *Ibid.*, p. 124.

PAGE 36

“Warrior code of the Native Americans...” Radabaugh, p. 5.

“Hit and run guerilla tactic...” *Ibid.*, p. 33.

“Seen as inferior to the British Regulars...” Brenton C. Kemmer, *Freemen, Freeholders, and Citizen Soldiers: An Organizational History of Colonel Jonathan Bagley’s Regiment, 1755–1760* (Bowie, MD.: Heritage Books, Inc., 1997) p. 5.

“Each town had its own company...” Radabaugh, p. 5.

“The company might number sixty men...” *Ibid.*, p. 5.

“More frequently in time of threat...” *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¶ PAGE 37

“It was the colonel who chose the flags...” Edwards, p. 38.

“Often the colonel’s family badge or crest...” *Ibid.*, p. 21.

“The image of a bird...” NEHGR Vol. 31 January 1877, p. 66.

“Sometimes used the Captain’s crest...” Young, p. xxvi.

“John Stearns, Captain...” *Billerica Town Record, 1716–1725 passim.*

“Crest recorded for Stearns...” Fairbairn, p. 452.

¶ PAGE 38

“Crests recorded for the Reed family...” Fairbairn, *Book of Crests of the Families of Great Britain and Ireland*, (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co.) reprint of the 4th ed. p. 467.

“For the name ‘Varnham’...” *Ibid.*, p. 565

“Page crests that appear most often...” Charles Nash Page, *History and Genealogy of the Page Family from the Year 1257 to the Present* (Des Moines: Charles Nash Page, n.d. [about 1910]) p. 24–30.

Chapter 8

The Later Generations of Pages 1735–1774



As has been mentioned, Nathaniel Page was not the only Page to serve as cornet for the Massachusetts troop of horse. Two of his sons were also commissioned by the governor to be cornets in their turn. The date of Nathaniel Jr.'s, commission must be inferred by the year when the Bedford Town Record started to refer to him as Cornet Nathaniel Page Jr. That was in 1738. However, his younger brother John's commission still exists and is dated 1737. This old document, complete with the official seal, was passed down through the Page family until 1983 when Cyrus Page's granddaughter, ninety-three year old Dorothy Page Miller, presented it to the Bedford Historical Society. With the flag, it is preserved in the Bedford Free Public Library for all to read:

*Province of the Massachusetts Bay, Jonathan Belcher, Esq;
Captain General and Governor in Chief in and over His
Majesty's Province of the Massachusetts Bay in New England
&c.*

To John Page, Gentleman, Greeting.

*By virtue of the Power and Authority, in and by His
Majesty's Royal Commission to Me granted, to be Captain
General &c over this His Majesty's Province of the
Massachusetts Bay aforesaid: I do (and by these Presents)
reposing especial Trust and Confidence in your Loyalty,
Courage, and good Conduct, constitute and appoint you the said
John Page to be Cornett of the Troop of Horse under the com-
mand of Captain William Reed in the [left blank] Regiment of
Militia within the County of Middlesex whereof Joseph Varnum,
Esq. is Colonel.*

*You are therefore carefully and diligently to discharge the
duty of a Cornett in Leading, Ordering and Exercising said Troop
and your self to observe and follow such Orders and Instructions
as you shall from time to time receive from Me, or the*

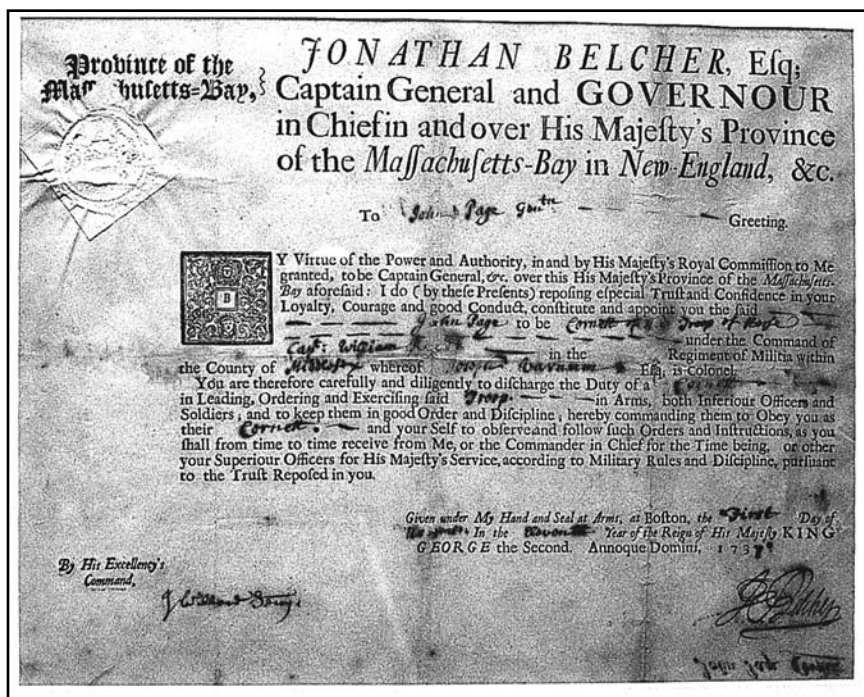
Commander in Chief for the Time being, or other your Superior Officers for His Majesty's Service, according to the Military Rules and Discipline, pursuant to the Trust Reposed in you.

Given under my hand and Seal at Arms, at Boston, the First Day of November. In the eleventh Year of the Reign of His Majesty King George the Second. Annoque Domini 1737.

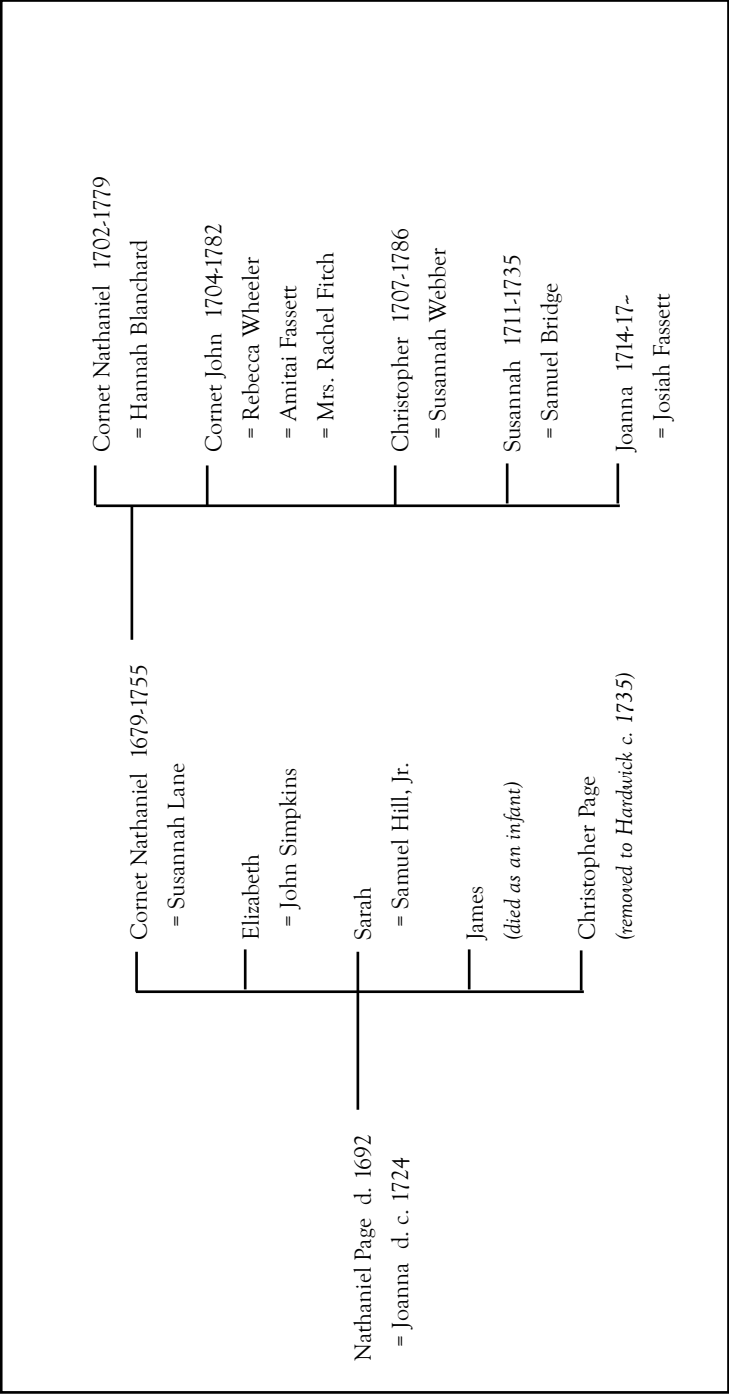
J. Belcher

This document is vital. In the first place, it says clearly that the unit John belonged to was a troop of horse in the Middlesex Regiment. In the second place, it specifically states the date that John became cornet, 1737. Some theories about the flag make it the flag of the much earlier Three County Troop, but here we find that, in 1737, John Page was carrying the flag of a Middlesex Regiment horse troop.

It may be remarked that this troop was not composed solely of Bedford men. William Reed, the captain, was from Lexington.



JOHN PAGE'S 1737 COMMISSION, WHICH HANGS IN THE BEDFORD LIBRARY. (WITH PERMISSION OF BEDFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY.)



THE FIRST THREE GENERATIONS OF PAGES IN BILLERICA

Also, it was not the only troop of horse in the area at the time. Preserved in the John Adams Library is a commission of almost exactly the same wording but dated fifteen days later, appointing John Butterfield of Chelmsford the Captain of a troop of horse there, also under Colonel Joseph Varnum. Chelmsford was just nine miles away. Five miles to the west, another troop, referred to as the first troop of horse and quite likely the grandparent of the others, had existed in Concord since 1669.

Beyond its military significance, John Page's commission also reveals something about his social status. It refers to John as a gentleman. This is interesting. John's grandfather had called himself a yeoman in 1692. Now John (not even the head of the family, for his father was still alive) is called a gentleman. The distinction was an important one. A yeoman was the lowest of the landed gentry, owning land that he labored on himself. One called a gentleman did not work the land with his hands, but employed others. The Pages were rising in station.

Bedford tax lists from 1737 do not exist, but a later list records that John's brothers Christopher and Nathaniel Jr. were assessed the third and fourth highest taxes in the town in 1761. (Deacon Job Lane, so often chosen to moderate town meeting, had the highest.) John's tax rate was seventeenth out of ninety-two heads of households. Presuming that their taxes are a fair indication of their wealth, we conclude that the Pages were among the wealthiest people in town, and could be called "gentlemen farmers." The marriages the Pages made also indicated they were in the upper rung of local society. Christopher's daughter, Mary, married Nathan, Captain William Reed, Esq.'s son. In a previous generation, Nathaniel (1679-1755) married Susannah, Captain Lane's daughter. Still, it is not only wealth and position that make the gentleman. The Pages had long valued education, as may be seen from the fact that the first generation Nathaniel had twenty-five books in his house when he died. The second generation Christopher had subscribed to a magazine called "Prince's Chronology" in the early 1700s, which places his name among the "literati" of New England at the time.

Sadly, the Pages did not leave any diaries or papers from this time. We must look at public records to follow the family. The Bedford Town Records continue to name the three Page brothers of the third generation in the business of the town: Cornet Nathaniel Jr. was for years the sealer of weights and measures for Bedford, but also served several terms as selectman. Cornet John took his father's place as surveyor of highways, and later served as a selectman. Like Nathaniel and John, their younger brother, Christopher, took a turn at walking the boundaries of Bedford. All three of this generation were claiming bounties from the town, not for wolves or for Indians, but for the crows, blackbirds, rats, and squirrels who were depleting the grain stores in Massachusetts Bay. Now the deadliest enemy to the townspeople was not wolves or war, but the epidemic of throat distemper that raged through Bedford in 1754, taking among its victims three of Christopher's children.

Although the two elder brothers, Nathaniel and John, served as cornets, the muster rolls in the Massachusetts State Archives have not revealed any active service by them, either in the militia or in the provincial army. In 1745, a huge army was raised in Massachusetts and sent to fight the French at Louisbourg, Nova Scotia. A Sergeant Nathaniel Page does appear in one roll, but it is for Colonel Dwight's regiment, which came from western Massachusetts and was not likely to include a Bedford man. "Sergeant Nathaniel" must have been from another town. Nathaniel was not an uncommon name, and there were many Page families in America at that time. For example, the index to muster rolls of 1754–63 at the Massachusetts Archives list Nathaniel Pages living in Boston, Haverhill, Leominster, Lunenburg and Newbury.

Another Sergeant Page is mentioned in the journal of Bedford townsman Thompson Maxwell. Describing his service in the French and Indian Wars in 1758–1759, he says, "Being exhausted, I reached a stream and Page swam across with me on his back with his gun and my own. I could not swim." Maxwell was about sixteen years old at that time. "In 1759 our suffering from cold and hunger cannot be described; thirty seven of our number died on the banks of the White River in Vermont, where Royalston is

now built. Sergt. Page was with us and a very stout man. He helped me or I doubt how it would have fared with me.”

Which Page was he? The record does not say. Judging from his age, it could well have been Christopher Page (1707-1786), youngest son of the first Cornet Nathaniel. Back in Bedford, his farm was less than half a mile down the old road to Billerica from the Maxwell farm.

No military service is recorded for any Bedford Nathaniel Pages until the very end of the French and Indian War, when a muster roll lists a Nathaniel Page of Bedford in Captain Benjamin Edwards’ company. This muster roll lists men from Woburn, Lexington, Boston, Dunstable, Groton, Pepperell and Bedford. They served from March 25 to November 15, 1762 on a campaign to Crown Point, on Lake Champlain in New York, under Bedford lieutenant Hugh Maxwell. Nathaniel is listed as a private. Leonard Butterfield of Dunstable was the ensign. Because the French and Indian War had virtually ended on this continent, Nathaniel’s tour of duty at Crown Point was a dismal few months guarding the fort. Disease was prevalent in the provincial army at the time, and soldiers could suffer diarrhea, dysentery, scurvy, fever, measles, bloody purge, pains in the limbs and chest, broken bones, sprains, and bruises, or camp fever. Nathaniel’s health must have remained good, for the muster roll notes that he was paid an extra pound for carrying two sick men’s knapsacks home from Crown Point.

The rest of Nathaniel’s pay was detailed:

Wages, 15 pounds, 3 shillings and 3 pence.

Billeting home, 8 shillings a day

Sutler, 1 pound, 14 shillings

Beer, 15 shillings and 3 pence

Baking of bread, 6 shillings

Balance, 12 pounds, 8 shillings and 3 pence

His pay was given to his father, for Nathaniel was not yet twenty-one and could not receive his own pay. This detail verifies that it was indeed Nathaniel Page, the son of John Page of Bedford, who went to Crown Point. Unlike his father, he served in the provincial army, not a militia troop of horse, and he was not carrying the flag.

Chronology

King Philip's War ends -1676
The Pages move to Billerica-1688
King William's War begins-1689
The Three County Troop is disbanded-1690
Billerica is attacked-1692
Billerica is attacked again-1695
King William's War ends-1697
Queen Anne's War-1702-1713
Nathaniel Page² becomes Cornet-c. 1720
Gov. Dummer or Lovewell's War-1722-1726
Bedford is incorporated-1729
John Page becomes Cornet-1737
Nathaniel Page³ becomes Cornet-c. 1738
King George's War-1744-1748
Last French and Indian War begins-1756
Nathaniel Page⁴ serves in the Provincial Army-1762
French and Indian Wars end with Paris Treaty-1763
American Revolution begins at Lexington and Concord-1775

It was this same Nathaniel, born into the fourth generation of his family in America, who would serve again a dozen years later as a Bedford Minuteman on April 19, 1775. Like him, many of the "embattled farmers" who fought in the Revolutionary War already had some military training gained during the previous war.

Chapter 8 Notes



PAGE 40

"The date of Nathaniel Jr.'s commission..." *Bedford Town Record*, 1738.

"Cyrus Page's granddaughter..." Dorothy Page Miller was the daughter of Cyrus's eldest son, Cyrus A. Page.

"Province of the Massachusetts Bay..." John Page's Commission, 1737. The words in italics are handwritten in ink on the original.

¶ PAGE 41

“William Reed was from Lexington...” A. E. Brown, *Bedford*, genealogy, p. 28.

¶ PAGE 43

“A commission of almost exactly the same wording...” quoted in Wilson Waters, *History of Chelmsford, Massachusetts* (Lowell: Courier Citizen, 1917) p. 155-56.

“Another troop had existed since 1669...” Shurtleff, p. 439.

“Called himself a yeoman...” Nathaniel Page’s will.

“Assessed the third and fourth highest...” *Bedford Tax List for 1761, Bedford Town Record*.

“Christopher’s daughter, Mary, married...” A. E. Brown, genealogy, p. 28.

“Christopher subscribed to ‘Prince’s Chronology’...” NEHGR Vol. 6, April 1852, p. 196.

¶ PAGE 44

“Nathaniel Jr. was sealer of weights and measures...” *Bedford Town Record* 1740-43, 1745, 1747-50, 1752.

“Several terms as selectman...” *Ibid.*, 1747-49, 1756.

“Cornet John surveyor of highways...” *Ibid.*, 1737, 1739, 1740.

“Also served as selectman...” *Ibid.*, 1750, 1758.

“Walking the boundaries...” *Ibid.*, 1765.

“Bounties for birds and squirrels...” *Ibid.*, 1741.

The law providing for these bounties was *Province Laws*, Chapter 24, p. 1057. Blackbirds were worth 3 shillings apiece, crows were worth sixpence, while squirrels and rats brought fourpence.

“Throat distemper raged...” A. E. Brown, genealogy, p. 26.

“Sergeant Nathaniel Page...” NEHGR Vol. 25, 1871, p. 266.

“Being exhausted...” Journal of Thompson Maxwell quoted in A. E. Brown, *Bedford*, p. 22.

¶ PAGE 45

“His farm was less than half a mile...” *Ibid.*, p. 99.

“A muster roll lists a Nathaniel Page...” *Massachusetts Archives* Vol. 99, p. 256.

“Diarrhea, dysentery...” Kemmer, p. 53.

Nathaniel Page d. 1692

= Joanna

Cornet Nathaniel 1679-1755

= Susannah Lane

Cornet Nathaniel 1702-1779
= Hannah Blanchard

Nathaniel 1729-1751

Thomas = Anna Merriam

Hannah = Jonas French

William = Parre Hill

David = Abigail Jones

2 more children

Cornet John 1704-1782

= Rebecca Wheeler

John (*went to Hardwick*)

James (*went to Hardwick*)

Ebenezer (*Bedford militia*)

Susanna (*died young*)

Timothy (*Bedford militia*)

Minuteman Nathaniel 1742-1819

= Sarah Brown

8 more children

Christopher 1707-1786

= Susannah Webber

Christopher (*Sergeant of Minutemen*)

Mary = Nathan Reed

Susannah (*died young*)

Job (*died young*)

Susannah (*died young*)

Lucy (*died young*)

THE FIRST FOUR GENERATIONS OF PAGES IN BILLERICA/BEDFORD

Chapter 9

Nathaniel Page, 1742–1819: Minuteman



This fourth generation Nathaniel wasn't the eldest son. In fact, he was the sixth of John and Rebecca Page's fourteen children. It was he, however, who came to live on the homestead. His brother Ebenezer had his own home south of the homestead, and Timothy lived down the road we now call "Page Road," about halfway to Springs Road. His sister, Susanna, died young. His two oldest brothers, John and James, didn't stay in Bedford. (Perhaps they found it too crowded sharing the Page farm with their large extended family. They moved to Hardwick, Mass., joining their great uncle Christopher's family who had gone there in the 1730s to live on the land that the first Nathaniel had bought when it was still wilderness. Over the years, the Page family contributed greatly to the town of Hardwick, and when its history came to be written in the 1890s it was a Page descendant, the Rev. Lucius Paige, who wrote it.)



MINUTEMAN NATHANIAL AND SARAH PAGE'S BIBLE
(COURTESY BEDFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY)

Beyond his service to Crown Point, little is known of Nathaniel's early life. He was engaged to marry a young woman named Sarah Pollard when he was twenty-seven. Their intentions went as far as two readings of the banns in church, but the engagement was broken off. Church records give no explanation.

He married Sarah Brown when he was about thirty-two years old. Just three months later, at the March 1775 town meeting, Bedford followed the example of so many nearby towns and established a minuteman company that could respond quickly in the growing conflict between the colonies and the mother country. The motion is recorded in the records of the town meeting for March 1775: "to pay twenty-five 'minute-men' one shilling per week until the first of May next,—they to exercise four hours in a week, and two shillings to be allowed two officers, they to equip themselves according to the advice of the Congress." Nathaniel was one of the minutemen, and his cousin Christopher Page, Jr, was a sergeant of the company. Nathaniel's brothers Ebenezer and Timothy, and his cousin William Page, were all privates in Bedford's standing militia company, which had just been brought up to strength and numbered fifty-two men. Within a month, the famed midnight alarm came, and Nathaniel Page hastened away into the night, leaving his wife Sarah behind. On that eve of the revolution, Sarah was just a few weeks pregnant with their first child, who would be born in the fall and named—what else?—Nathaniel.

Chapter 8 Notes

PAGE 49

"Ebenezer had his own home..." A. E. Brown, *Bedford*, p. 99.

"Timothy lived down the road..." *Ibid.*, p. 101.

"They moved to Hardwick..." Paige, p. 435.

PAGE 50

"Engaged to marry Sarah Pollard..." NEHGR Vol. 63, January 1909, p. 75.

"He married Sarah Brown..." Page-Mergendahl Bible, genealogy pages, Bedford Historical Society.

- “To pay twenty-five minute-men...”** *Bedford Town Record*, 1775.
- “Christopher Page Jr., was sergeant...”** Louise K. Brown, *A Revolutionary Town*. Published in cooperation with the Bedford Historical Society (Canaan, N.H.: Phoenix Publishing, 1975) p. 232.
- “Ebenezer, Timothy, and William...”** *Ibid.*, p 256, 272, 257.
- “Numbered fifty-two men...”** *Ibid.*, p. 108. Mrs. Brown notes that not all fifty-two were listed as present on April 19.
- “Sarah was just a few weeks pregnant...”** *Vital Records of Bedford, Massachusetts to the Year 1850* (Boston: NEHGS, 1903) p. 42. The child was born October 25, 1775.

Chapter 10

Nathaniel's Story of April 19, 1775



How could the events of April 19, 1775 ever be forgotten by anyone who had a part in them? Nathaniel Page recounted his role as minuteman for years afterward. His youngest daughter, Ruhamah, and his grandson, Cyrus, both heard the story from him and passed it in their turn to the historian Abram English Brown. A. E. Brown included that story when he wrote his several histories of Bedford in the 1890s. The account is as follows:

The midnight alarm of April 18th was first received at this [Page] house. It met with a ready response from Christopher, the sergeant of the minute-men, and Nathaniel, the cornet, or flagbearer. Two others also responded. They belonged to the company of militia, and all were at the Concord Fight.

Says Captain Cyrus Page, "Our people were not surprised when the messenger reached this house. They had seen Gage's men several times riding about the town, and were kept familiar with the movements in Boston. The frequent drillings of the minute-men were good opportunities for exchanging ideas, and there was no home that was not in a state of expectancy. My grandfather's account was: 'We had agreed at the last drilling to meet, in case of alarm, at the tavern in the centre of the town, kept by Jeremiah Fitch, sergeant of the militia company. The horseman banged on the house and cried out, "Up, Mr. Page, the regulars are out." We were not long in our preparations, and were soon at the tavern, where some had already gathered, and others soon appeared. Our captain lived fully two miles from the village, but he was on hand.

Captain Willson had received a report from Boston on the previous afternoon; it was brought by his brother-in-law, Thompson Maxwell... On his way home [he] had stopped at Willson's. They sat up unusually late, discussing the condition of things. Maxwell had detected some movements that day which led them to be more anxious about the future. They

retired at a late hour, and were scarcely asleep when the alarm reached the Captain's home.

Maxwell accepted an invitation from his brother-in-law, and they both made haste to the village. Our company of minute-men, numbering twenty-six, were all assembled. Many had left their homes without any food, and refreshment was served at the tavern in a most informal manner. This done, Captain Willson gave his order: "Come on, my brave boys; this is a cold breakfast, but we'll give the redcoats a hot dinner. We'll have every dog of them before night." On we went, little realizing what was before us. The town's company of militia-men, fifty strong, was also on the way. They had met at the home of their captain, John Moore, half mile out from the village on the Concord road.

Circumstances favored an early response from the Bedford men; and we should have been remiss in our military obligations, and unmindful of our filial relations, if we had not reached Concord among the first companies, which we did. We assisted in secreting the stores, and were anxiously awaiting reports, when we saw the army approaching. That was a sight never to be forgotten, those brilliantly attired soldiers, moving



NATHANIEL PAGE'S HOUSE TODAY, LOCATED AT THE CORNER OF PAGE ROAD AND BROOKSBIE ROAD IN BEDFORD.

in perfect martial order, in solid phalanx, with their bayonets glistening in the morning sun. We went over to the other side of the river, and there fell in, according to the orders of Colonel Barrett, and marched down to the bridge. We had a share in the engagement which immediately followed, but fortunately received no injury. Whether we did any, or not, is a question that we could not positively answer. In our pursuit of the retreating enemy we were not so fortunate. When near Brook's tavern, just across the line in Lincoln, there was a severe engagement, and our brave Captain was killed, shot through the body. A comrade, Job Lane, was severely wounded. Some of us returned home bearing the dead and wounded, while the majority continued in the pursuit, going into camp at Cambridge. The place of the dead Captain was filled by Lieutenant Edward Stearns. Those who went home soon started with the loads of provisions which had been prepared during the day, and reached their tired and almost famished companies where they had lain down to rest.

Being so near home, we were continually in receipt of provisions, and fared better than many who were in camp during the command of General Artemis Ward; but two of our young men, Solomon Stearns and Reuben Bacon, died, as a result of the fatigue of the 19th and the exposure which followed. Theirs was the fate of a good many whose homes were farther away from the seat of war. Timothy Page remained in continuous service until the battle of White Plains, where he was killed. A comrade, Moses Fitch, was wounded at the same time.

And what of the flag? A. E. Brown states in his 1894 work, *Flag of the Minute Men, April 19, 1775, Its Origin and History*:

The story of the grandson of the above Nathaniel Page (Jr.), Captain Cyrus Page, who presented the flag to the town, October 19, 1885, was that it was carried to Concord by his grandfather, Nathaniel Page (Jr.); that after the Bedford men arrived there and were helping remove the stores, the boys 'played soldier with it.' Nathaniel Page (Jr.) died in 1819; Cyrus Page was born in 1801 and was therefore eighteen years old, old enough to have heard the story many times.

Chapter 10 Notes

§ PAGE 52

“The midnight alarm of April 18th...” Abram English Brown, *Beneath Old Roof Trees* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1896) p. 173–75 and 176–78.

“A ready response from Christopher...” Christopher Page was not living at the homestead, but on his own farm just to the north.

§ PAGE 54

“The story of the grandson...” Abram English Brown, *Flag of the Minutemen, April 19, 1775, Its Origin and History* (Bedford: Bedford Historical Society, April 19, 1894) p. 11.



NATHANIAL PAGE BEARS THE FLAG AS THE COLONIALS FACE
THE REGULARS IN THIS DIORAMA MADE FOR THE BEDFORD
LIBRARY BY RICHARD HAWES.

Chapter 11

The Flag in the Revolution



So much has been written about the opening scenes of the American Revolution! We can visit the Lexington Common, where the opening shots were fired, and the Concord River at the place that saw the first exchange of fire, and walk the old battle road to the spot called “Bloody Angles” where Nathaniel’s minuteman captain, Jonathan Wilson, was killed and Nathaniel’s second cousin, Job Lane, received the ball that forced the amputation of his leg. But we cannot go back in time. Did Nathaniel have with him the old banner that his father, uncle, and grandfather had borne as cornets many years before? Was the flag there at the Concord Bridge?

There are those who would question whether it was. Much as historians have searched for corroboration, no one has found a witness who saw a minuteman carrying a red flag. Perhaps this is because it was not there, or perhaps because a flag was such an ordinary thing to see, it was not remarked upon. The muster rolls offer no clues to us this time: Nathaniel was paid as a private, not an ensign or cornet, for 7 days’ service.

Let us examine such facts as we know. First, Nathaniel did not march with the Militia Company, fifty men who were already formalized as a part of the Seventh Company in the regiment, with commissioned officers and, presumably, a company flag. Nathaniel’s minuteman company had just been created by a vote of Bedford Town Meeting four weeks before. The twenty-seven men had elected a captain, a lieutenant and a sergeant, but, being ad hoc, did not have the longevity to provide themselves with a new banner.

They had had almost a month to train. There on the muster ground, probably the Bedford Common, they would have drilled four hours a week, learning to follow their new officers and act as a unit. They would have needed to separate themselves from the

familiar faces of the other Bedford company, and also, when the alarm came and companies responded from all the towns around, to keep their own identity within the mass of men.

They knew how to do this. In those days, as in centuries before, it was done by using a company flag. Even without a commissioned, paid ensign, the minutemen had real need for a flag. The old militia flag was in the Page homestead at the time. The Bedford Minuteman Company was not a Middlesex horse troop, but an independent foot company created by the vote of Bedford Town Meeting. Nevertheless, wouldn't it have been logical for Nathaniel to bring the old standard to their training and to bear it when the company was summoned for the confrontation with the British Regulars?

Moreover, isn't the one detail that survives quite telling? Cyrus does not brag that his grandfather was at the front of the colonials at the bridge waving the flag, or even that the Bedford men rallied to him when those first shots rang out. No, he recalls the very human detail of his grandfather, in haste to conceal the large cache of guns, ammunition, and food that was being stored at the Barrett's barn in Concord, setting down the flag so that he could have both hands to work, and on his return finding some children playing soldier with it.

That the Bedford Flag was there at the Concord Bridge on the morning of April 19, 1775, we cannot prove. Its importance to history does not rest on that moment in time; but it is old enough to have been there, and there is reason for it to have been there. Further, we cannot say.

Chapter 11 Notes



PAGE 57

“Paid as a private for 7 days...” *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War* (Boston, Wright and Pollen, 1896-1898) Vol. XI, p. 766.

Chapter 12

The Flag in the Nineteenth Century



It was Timothy and Christopher Page who went on to enlist in the Continental Army and serve in the war. Nathaniel returned home after those opening days of the Revolution and did not fight again, although he is recorded as raising troops for the army later in the war. His uncle, Cornet Nathaniel, died in 1779, and his father, Cornet John, died in 1782. He and Sarah raised a large family on the homestead. We are left to conclude that the old militia flag remained in the house, retired but not undisturbed. Early in the 1800s, Ruhamah Page, Nathaniel's youngest daughter, ripped the fringe from the flag to trim a dress. At the age of ninety-two, she recalled for Abram English Brown's *Beneath Old Roof Trees*, "I took that silver fringe from that old flag when I was a giddy girl, and trimmed a dress for a military ball. I was never more sorry for anything than that which resulted in the loss of the fringe." This most sincere regret may reflect less on her good life than on the importance that the flag had gained by the late 1800s.

In the early part of the century, the flag was but one of many souvenirs preserved after the war by the Americans. As the years



RUHAMAH PAGE.
(PORTRAIT BY LYRL AHERN,
FROM AN OLD PHOTO.)

passed, shoe buckles, muskets, and all manner of things that had been used in the war became treasure. "The Cornwallis," the holiday that commemorated the American victory and the surrender of the British, was marked each October 19, but for the first fifty years the events of April 19 were not celebrated in Concord and Lexington. Then, in 1837, Concord dedicated a monument on the site of the Old North Bridge to remember the opening day of the Revolution, and Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote his "Concord Hymn" for the ceremony. A group of Concord residents, including a young Henry David Thoreau, sang it to the tune of "Old Hundred":

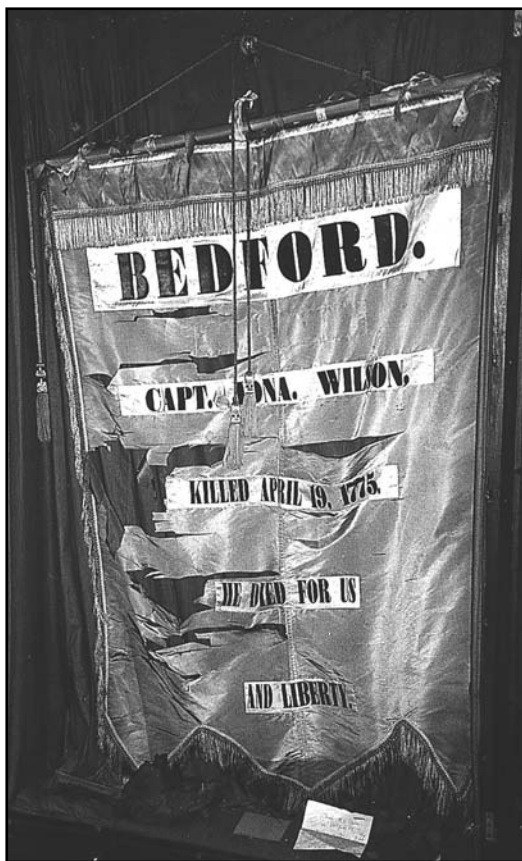
*By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here, once, the embattled farmers stood,
And fired the shot heard 'round the world.*

Waldo Emerson's grandfather, the Rev. William Emerson, had lived at the old manse that overlooks the North Bridge and had seen the battle. Waldo must have heard the story from his aunt when he visited Concord as a child. Had he ever been told of a brilliant crimson flag flying over the heads of the colonial forces? Nothing in Ralph Waldo Emerson's papers has been found to indicate that he knew there actually had been a flag or flags at the bridge on that day, but the poetic image his poem evokes is certainly the Bedford Flag.

Bedford participated in the Concord celebration in 1850. A. E. Brown says that "ten leading [Bedford] men were chosen to confer with the people of Concord in regard to the seventy-fifth anniversary" of the battle at the North Bridge. He does not record whether Cyrus Page, who, as Captain of the Bedford Company of Militia, was certainly a leading man in Bedford, was among them.

Captain Cyrus, as he was thereafter called, must have had a part in the one hundredth anniversary of April 19 in 1875, however, for he provided his family's old flag to the "good company of citizens" who marched in the procession. It was borne not by Cyrus himself, but by Isaac E. Fitch, a great-grandson of the man who entertained the minutemen in the Fitch Tavern on that

famous morning long ago. Abram English Brown marched beside him, carrying a banner to the memory of Jonathan Wilson, the minuteman captain who was killed later in the battle. That was a grand day in Concord, attended by an estimated 50,000 people, including Ulysses S. Grant, the President of the United States. The speakers' platform was so full that it collapsed half way through the ceremony, spilling the President onto the grass, and most of the visitors went home hungry, for Concord had only been prepared to feed 4,000. Cyrus's flag was carried safely though the day, however.



THE BANNER TO CAPT. WILSON
FELL TO SHREDS NOT LONG AFTER THIS
PICTURE WAS TAKEN.
(COURTESY OF WILLISTON FARRINGTON.)

The flag was now officially an historical relic. When in 1879 the Town of Bedford celebrated the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of its incorporation, the flag flew again. While the attendance did not rival that of the Concord celebration, it was certainly a momentous day for Bedford, and patriotism was running high. There were speeches, a parade, and even fireworks. Historic places were marked: the Fitch Tavern, the site of the first meetinghouse, the Lane house where Mary Lane had supposedly killed the Indian so long ago. The Bedford Flag was featured in front of the Page home. Figuring prominently in the day's recol-

A PAGE of HISTORY

To the tune of "Yankee Doodle"

The Pages are a jolly set
And date from sixteen eighty
When our Nathaniel settled here
For reasons good and plenty.

Chorus:

All the Pages were good men
In their generation;
And their sinews helped to free
This mighty Yankee nation.

When Britain's greed dissatisfied
Began to levy wages,
To frustrate, true men rallied 'round
And 'mongst them many Pages. *Chorus*

At Lexington and Bunker Hill
Our name was represented,
And all along until the end,
Till Paris peace cemented. *Chorus*

And now where e'er right is maintained,
You'll find there our relations,
The same material which made
This mighty Yankee nation. *Chorus*

This day we celebrate with glee,
With glad and smiling faces,
Our good Ancestry's deed to sing-
Let's emulate their graces. *Chorus*

WRITTEN FOR A PAGE FAMILY REUNION IN THE LATE 1800'S
BY A.W.D.
(BEDFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY. USED WITH PERMISSION.)

lections was the part Bedford, and the Page family, played in the first moments of the American Revolution. Toasts were raised, among them one to “Nathaniel Page, ensign of the Bedford Minutemen in 1775, and his daughter, Mrs. Ruhamah Lane, still living in the town with intellect unimpaired, at the age of 92.”

The Rev. Jonathan Stearns, DD, traveled from New Jersey to deliver an “Historical Discourse”:

[On the night of April 18th, 1775,] The town of Bedford probably received the news among the first. Two Lexington boys, or young men, Nathan Munroe and Benjamin Tidd, at Capt. Parker’s request, went up to Bedford, some time in the evening... It may have been one of them that waked up Ensign Page, so soon after he, with his young bride, who used to tell the story in her old age, had retired....

First, Capt. Wilson and his minute-men, who had been drilling for weeks by the town’s order, and at its expense, marched up the road and halted in front of Fitch’s tavern.... I tell the story as [my dear old uncle, Solomon Lane,] told it to me. “Capt. Wilson,” he used to say. “was a fine officer, a fine officer! I well remember him as he looked that morning. He drew his men up in front of the Fitch tavern, and said, ‘Come boys, we’ll take a little something, and we’ll have every dog of them before night!’ He was,” said Uncle Solomon, “as lively as a bird, but he never came home till they brought him home.”

Then there was the Bedford Militia, under Capt. Moore. I do not know where they rallied....

Both companies, however, were among the first on the ground. Ensign Page, it is said, laid down his beautiful flag, with its gilt fringe, on a stone, while he assisted in moving the stores, and when he came to look for it, the boys had got it and were playing soldier with it.

The story was already becoming legend, yet with tiny inconsistencies. A gilt fringe? Ruhamah said it was silver. The minutemen marched to the tavern and stopped? But Cyrus said they met there. And yet the essence of the story remains. Bedford was there, and so was Nathaniel with the flag.

It was surely out of this pride that Cyrus, the fifth and last Page generation to care for it, decided to present the flag to the

town of Bedford on Cornwallis Day in 1885. The Concord newspaper printed a full report of the festivities. All of Bedford was invited to the Town Hall to watch while “some things of historical interest” were given to the town. When the event began at 7:30 on Oct 19, the hall was packed. The schoolchildren, a hundred of them, processed, each of them holding an American flag, and sang “a greeting song” from the platform. A. E. Brown presided, and prayers and speeches were offered. With ceremony, several townspeople presented their artifacts. The newspaper does not list any but the flag, which it calls the “most valuable” artifact. Captain Cyrus Page was noted as the oldest man in town at the age of eighty-four.

How lucky we are that Cyrus gave the flag to the town. After his death in 1887, the homestead was sold out of the family, and moved a few hundred feet to the west of its ancient foundations to make room for a new house. Much of the content of the house was not passed on to Page descendants. Even the Page name did not continue in Bedford. Nonetheless, Bedford’s pride in its old flag grew.

Chapter 12 Notes

🔪 PAGE 59

“It was Timothy and Christopher Page...” *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, p. 756, 770. Timothy was killed at White Plains in 1776.

“Cornet Nathaniel and Cornet John died...” *Bedford Vital Records*, p 131.

“I took that silver fringe...” Brown, *Roof Trees*, p. 200.

🔪 PAGE 60

“Concord dedicated a monument...” “Concord Monument,” *Yeoman Gazette* [Concord, Mass.] July 8, 1837, p. 2.

“Including a young Thoreau...” Walter Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau* (NY: Dover Publications, 1982) p. 48.

“By the rude bridge...” Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Hymn” is quoted in the *Yeoman Gazette*, July 8, 1837, p. 2.

“Waldo must have heard the story...” Gary Wilson Allen, *Waldo Emerson, A Biography* (NY: Viking, 1981) p. 31.

“Nothing in Emerson’s papers...” A. E. Brown, *Roof Trees*, p. 196–97. Verified in conversation with the guides at the Emerson House in Concord.

“Ten leading men...” A. E. Brown, *Bedford*, p. 44.

“Captain of the Bedford Company of Militia...” Cyrus Page’s Commission, Charles E. Lauriat’s papers.

“Good company of citizens...” A. E. Brown, *Bedford*, p. 44.

⌘ PAGE 61

“That was a grand day...” David B. Little, “‘Twas the 19th Day of April in (18)75 and the Centennial Was Coming Unstuck,” *American Heritage*, April, 1972, pp. 18–25+.

“Historic places were marked...” *Bedford Sesqui-centennial Celebration, August 27, 1879* (Boston: Albert Mudge and Son, 1879) p. 82.

⌘ PAGE 63

“Nathaniel Page, ensign...” *Ibid.*, p. 66.

“The town of Bedford probably received the news...” *Ibid.*, p. 22–23.

“Some things of historical interest...” The report of the whole ceremony is in the *Concord Freeman*, October 23, 1885, p. 1.

“The homestead was sold and moved...” *Boston Sunday Globe*, “Old Homes, Old Families,” Sunday, August 10, 1890.

Chapter 13

The Massachusetts Historical Society Considers The Bedford Flag



Immediately after the selectmen had accepted the flag, news of the historical relic began to travel. Charles Jenks, who had inherited the Fitch Tavern, was vitally interested in history and a member of Bedford's Historical Society. He was also a member of the Massachusetts Historical Society, and, at that Society's December, 1885 meeting, spoke at length about the flag:

I have here a photograph presented to this Society at its last meeting, which I think you will agree with me deserves more notice than the mere mention of the donor's name; and perhaps some here will be glad to have their attention called to it, and to take the opportunity to look at it, for it is a representation of the flag under which the minute-men of Bedford marched to the Concord fight.

It is of red silk, about two feet square, not far (as nearly as I can remember from having seen it borne in procession once or twice) from the size of, and in general appearance resembling, the celebrated Eutaw Springs flag, which is held with such pride and affection by the Washington Light Infantry Company of Charleston, South Carolina; and it seems a pleasing coincidence that there should be in existence, and carefully preserved, two flags of such a nature, - one borne in the first battle of the Revolution, and the other carried in one of its latest conflicts.

The device on the flag is a mailed hand, extended out of what appears to be intended for a cloud, and grasping a dagger or small sword. Three large silver balls are on different parts of the surface, and the whole is partially encircled by a scroll bearing the motto, "Vince aut morire."

Perhaps some of our members more familiar with heraldry may explain the significance of the bearings, and tell us more about this flag. It has been kept in the family of the Ensign John Page, who bore it to Concord, and on the 19th of

October, of this year, was presented to the town of Bedford by his grandson, now in his eighty-fifth year.

The long staff to which it is attached shows plainly that it was a cavalry flag; and it is said to have been carried in the French and Indian war by a cavalry company, largely or entirely made up from this town, in which, I believe, the same Page had been ensign. When the minute-men were summoned to go to Concord, he came, and naturally brought with him the flag he had borne before; and under it they marched to the fight.

The study of the Bedford Flag was just in its infancy, and already some confusion had arisen. You will have noticed that Charles Jenks said it was John, not John's son Nathaniel, who took the flag to Concord. Others, respected Bedford town historians among them, have said that it was John's brother Nathaniel who carried the flag.

What were John and Nathaniel doing on that day? These third generation Pages were both older than 70 in 1775, and too old to serve in the regular militia. They were likely on the "alarm list" of old men and young boys and were active on that day, but their service was unpaid and hence untraceable. The Page family holds the tradition that Cornet John went to Lexington and aided in the capture of six British soldiers during the retreat on April 19. This does not appear in any of the depositions about the capture of the regulars that were made by Lexington soldiers, and so must remain oral history. We can only add that John had just recently remarried and so may be assumed to have been in reasonable health. He lived another seven years beyond the Concord/Lexington fight. He quite probably had a part in that day's activities. If the family tradition is correct, then it was in Lexington, not Concord.

Charles Jenks may have just lost his footing in the morass of Page genealogy. He and A. E. Brown are both quite clear that it was Cyrus' grandfather who bore the flag to Concord, not his great-grandfather or his great-uncle. Indeed, Jenks corrects himself in his later writings. The flagbearer, then, would have been thirty-two year old Minuteman Nathaniel, of the fourth generation.

At the Massachusetts Historical Society meeting, Charles Jenks continued:

This flag and the event with which it is connected have a special interest for me, because the house before which the minute-men assembled, supposed to be the oldest now standing in the village of Bedford, had been opened some years before by my great-grandfather as a tavern, and has remained for over a hundred years in his family (in the same name of Fitch); and it is reported that Jonathan Wilson, their captain, having drawn them up in line, addressed them, saying, "Boys, we give you a cold breakfast, but before night we will give the British a hot supper."

Wilson was killed in the Concord fight. His body was brought back to Bedford and buried in the old burying-ground. Whether there is any significance in it I cannot tell, but it is interesting in this connection to know that on his grave-stone is cut a hand holding a dagger similar to that on the flag. Perhaps it refers to his having been killed while fighting under it; perhaps there may have been in the device on the flag some personal reference. Further light upon the flag may also explain this.



So much is presumed upon that emblem of the hand holding the sword. If it is a unique emblem, unique to the Bedford Flag, then much can be concluded from it; but if it was quite a common emblem meaning "God is on our side," or "We will give no quarter," or merely "Justice," then the conclusions that swiftly followed were unfounded.

A member named W. S. Appleton put forth a momentous conclusion at the very next meeting:

At the last meeting Mr. Jenks showed a photograph, and gave a very interesting account, of the flag carried to Concord, April 19, 1775, by the company of minute-men from Bedford. The photograph did not reach me during the meeting; but afterwards, as soon as I saw it, I immediately recognized it, and recognized it as of far greater interest and importance

than was suggested by Mr. Jenks. The flag borne at Concord on the 19th of April is the flag designed in England, 1660-1670, for the Three County Troop of Massachusetts.

Appleton thus, in an instant, put the date for the Bedford Flag back into the previous century, as early as 1660. The idea has held such appeal—maybe the flag is not just antique, but the very oldest in the United States!—that it refuses to die, even when some heavy evidence weighs against it.

Chapter 13 Notes

§ PAGE 66

“I have here a photograph...” *Proceedings*, December 1885–February 1886, p. 165-166.

§ PAGE 67

“Cornet John went to Lexington...” A. E. Brown, *Bedford*, genealogy, p. 26.

“Depositions about the capture of the regulars...” Vincent J. R. Kehoe, *We Were There: The American Rebels* (Kehoe, 1975).

“John had recently remarried...” *Bedford Vital Records*, p. 92.

§ PAGE 68

“This flag and the event...” *Proceedings*, December 1885–February 1886, p. 166-67.

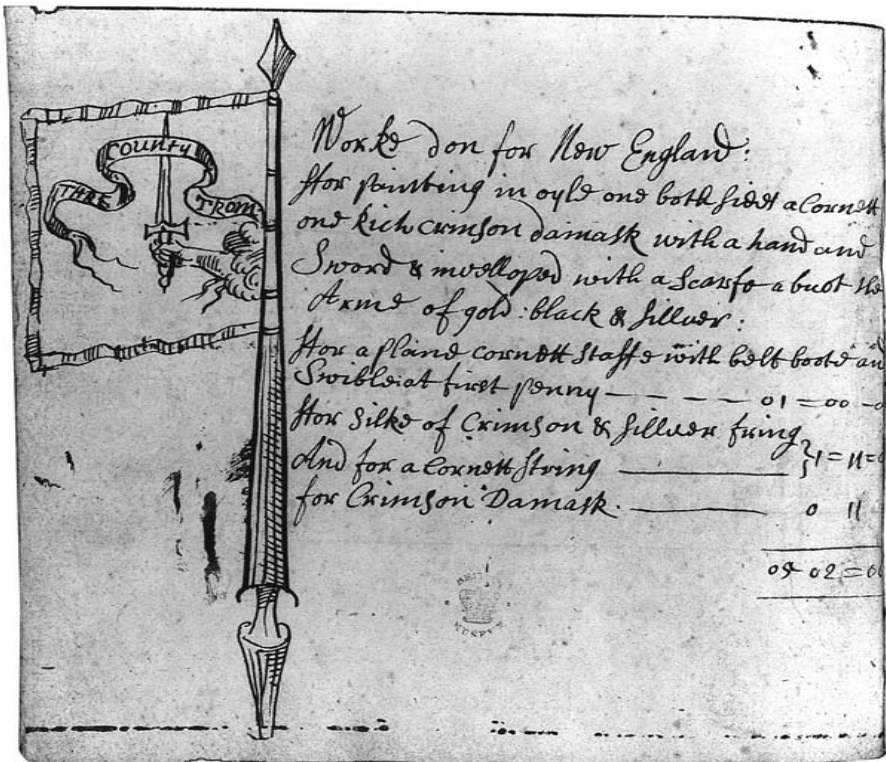
“At the last meeting, Jenks...” *Proceedings*, December 1885–February 1886, p. 199-200.

Chapter 14

The Bedford Flag and the Three County Troop



Mr. Appleton had a long memory. The Three County Troop flag had been a subject presented by W. H. Whitmore fourteen years before, at the April 1871 meeting of the Massachusetts Historical Society. At about that time, two separate Londoners had sent a sketch found in a herald's book in the British Museum to the Society. It pictured a square flag with the emblem of an arm



HERALD'S SKETCH FOR THREE COUNTY TROOP FLAG.
(BRITISH LIBRARY ADD. MSS. 26683 FOL. 31B. USED WITH PERMISSION.)

holding a sword. The arm protruded from clouds. A ribbon partly encircled the emblem, with the words “Three County Trom [sic].”

The minutes of the 1871 meeting contain information about the Three County Troop: that it was raised in the counties of Essex, Middlesex, and Suffolk about 1659, with Edward Hutchinson as its captain. It provided troopers in King Philip’s War—ten of the seventy-two troopers called out in 1676 were from the Three County Troop.

Further research has revealed more information about the Three County Troop. It was raised in Lynn, which was located in the south part of Essex County; Reading and Malden, which lay just over the eastern border of Middlesex County; and Rumney Marsh (now Revere), which was in the northern tip of Suffolk County; and most of its early members came from these towns clustered north of Boston in eastern Massachusetts Bay Province. Nathaniel Page settled in Roxbury, south of Boston, which would have required a boat ride across Boston Harbor or a long round-about gallop to reach these towns. After he moved to Billerica, even farther from the towns the Three County Troop drew from, there is no mention at all of him serving as a cornet for any troop. It does not appear possible that he carried the Three County Troop flag as cornet.

Tantalizingly, the men of the troop who rode in King Philip’s War in 1676 were commanded by a man called Nicholas Paige, who was later an officer in the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company and is buried in King’s Chapel, Boston. Was he a relative of Nathaniel’s? Abram English Brown wrote in the Page genealogy in his *History of Bedford* that they might be brothers. However, study of the parish records of St. Andrews Parish, Plymouth, England, reveals Nicholas’s birth to Joseph and Margaret in 1637 and that of several siblings, but none of them is named Nathaniel. Neither does Nathaniel appear with Joanna in the marriage records nor as a parent in the birth records in any Plymouth parish in the 1660s, 1670s and 1680s. Although families of that time tended to reuse the same names through several generations, there are no children named Joseph, Margaret or Nicholas in the Bedford Pages’ family tree. Thus, it is quite

improbable that Nicholas and Nathaniel were related, and the flag did not reach Nathaniel that way.

The Bedford Historical Society owns a copy of a very interesting paper entitled “The Standard of the Three County Troop,” written by Eben Putnam, Esq., an Essex County historian who had researched the troop thoroughly. He states that Captain Hutchinson “undoubtedly procured the colors for the troop.” As companies paid for their own flags, in 1665 Cornet William Hasey paid the captain 30 shillings for the flag and the trumpet, and the Three County Troop promised him reimbursement. At Hasey’s death in 1689, he still had not been reimbursed, and when the Three County Troop was disbanded in 1690, his heirs sued the Three County Troop for the flag. The constable of Malden took the colors from the current cornet, John Greenland, Jr., and gave them to the Haseys, but the court found in favor of Greenland. The Haseys were to return the flag or pay six pounds in court fees. Putnam says, “there is nothing to show whether the Haseys elected to hold the colors or to pay the money.”

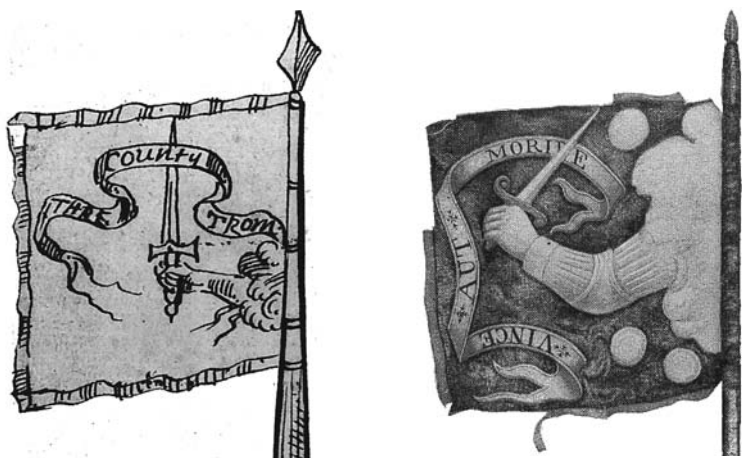
There is more to that story. The Three County Troop had split into factions. The men from Woburn had refused to serve under the captain that had headed the company for years, Captain Wade, and elected the cornet, William Greene, to be captain instead. Their petition to the Court so convinced it of their cause that the court found for them, and ordered that anyone who refused to serve under Captain Greene should return to the local foot company. One can imagine the fury of Captain Wade’s supporters, who had actually been members of the Three County Troop far longer. Clearly, it wasn’t the money, but the loyalty to the captain, symbolized by the flag, that was being fought over.

The Three County Troop was an independent troop and did not belong to any of the county regiments. By the time of its disbanding, however, it was “three counties” in name only. Most of the Essex men had removed to the Salem troop years before. For a while, what was left of the Three County Troop had been attached to the Upper Middlesex Regiment. Most of the men were from Rumney Marsh, Malden, Woburn, and Reading. They asked to be returned to their former independent organization. The Great

and General Court granted their petition in 1689, but the men who refused to follow Captain Greene were Suffolk men, and when they all left, there were none but Middlesex men, who fade from the record. The Great and General Court decreed in March of 1690, "...and the Three County Troop is hereby dismiss."

What of the flag, fought over as property in a court case in 1690? Did it somehow survive, get adopted as the flag of the Middlesex Troop, and come into Cornet Nathaniel Page's hands thirty years later, a flag then 60 years old but still in active service? That is doubtful, more than doubtful, but history does not aid us in proving or disproving it. We must turn to an examination of the paint and fabric for clues. As we have seen, experts who have looked at the flag believe it dates from the first half of the 1700s, not 1660.

Perhaps the Bedford flag is based on the Three County Troop flag. Could the image of the arm, sword, and cloud have descended through the Middlesex Troop from the time of its association with the Three County Troop? Does this flag, made in the 1700s, use the old Three County Troop's emblem? That is a question without an answer. The historians of Bedford at the turn of the century, on comparing the emblem on the sketch of the Three County Troop Flag with the Bedford Flag, began to doubt it.



A COMPARISON OF THE THREE COUNTY TROOP FLAG AND THE
BEDFORD FLAG.

In heraldry, every detail is important; yet the arm is bare in the one, but clad in armor on the other. The arm is drawn from below the elbow on the one, which referred to as a “cubit” arm; and almost from the shoulder, including the bent elbow, on the other, which is the quite different “embowed” arm. The fist is shown palm-side to on the one, but the back of the gauntleted hand is shown on the other. There are two lightening bolts on the one, and no lightning bolts on the other. The sword is rather plain on the one, and with curly hand guard on the other. The emblems are very, very similar. Still, the arm, cloud, and sword motifs are very numerous among descriptions of old flags.

This is all incredibly puzzling, and thought has flipped back and forth on the subject through the century: this is the Three County Troop flag... it isn't the Three County Troop flag.... Abram English Brown and Charles Jenks, who were so passionate about the flag, eventually decided that the Bedford Flag and the Three County Troop flag were in fact not the same. Unfortunately, all of A. E. Brown's publications about the flag were written when he still accepted the Three County Troop flag theory. These include his *History of Bedford*, published by the author in 1891; the Souvenir, also named *Flag of the Minute Men, April 19, 1775, Its Origin and History*, published by the Bedford Historical Society in 1894; and *Beneath Old Roof Trees*, published by Lee and Shepard in 1896. In the last, Brown writes with a bald certainty which must have embarrassed him later:

It is certain that the herald painter's bill made almost two hundred and twenty-five years ago identifies our flag. No modern detective could ask for more definite description....

The presence of the flag in Bedford is easily accounted for. Nathaniel Page... was the first of the family in possession of the flag. He was a military man, connected with the “Three County Troop” as cornet or bearer of the standard. This was a position held by several generations of his descendants in later military organizations...

The ancient standard was brought to Bedford by Nathaniel Page, when he settled in Shawsheen (Bedford); and being in the house, it was taken by Nathaniel Page 3rd, a Bedford minute man, and borne to Concord...

(Brown had rather less command of his facts than usual in this instance. Nathaniel was not connected to the Three County Troop, and the Three County Troop flag was not in Bedford, but about to be the subject of a court case in Malden at the time the first Nathaniel settled along the Shawsheen. The minuteman was not the third, but the fourth of that name in Bedford/Billerica.) It was not until about 1907 that Brown's opinion changed, and it is only through an unpublished correspondence between Charles Jenks and Peleg D. Harrison, author of a reference work on flags, that we know this.

Chapter 14 Notes

§ PAGE 71

"The minutes of the 1871 meeting..." NEHGR Vol. 25, April 1871, p. 138–39.

"It was raised in Lynn..." Deloraine Pendre Corey, *The History of Malden, Massachusetts 1633-1785* (Malden: University Press, 1879) p. 2.

"Nicholas Paige..." George Madison Bodge, *Soldiers in King Philip's War* (Leominster: Warwick and Churchill, 1896) p. 90.

"They might be brothers..." A. E. Brown, *Bedford*, genealogy, p.26

"Study of the parish records..." The author consulted parish records in the Devon Record Office in Plymouth and in Exeter, England in May of 1997.

§ PAGE 72

"Undoubtedly procured the colors..." Eben Putnam, "The Standard of the Three County Troop," Manuscript #B907, Bedford Historical Society.

"There is nothing to show whether the Haseys..." *Ibid.*, p. 4–5.

"Woburn refused to serve..." Corey, p. 315.

"An independent troop..." Bodge, p. 45.

"The Essex men had removed..." Corey, p. 315.

"Attached to the Upper Middlesex Regiment..." Corey, p. 313. They were attached to this regiment from 1686–89.

¶ PAGE 73

“Court granted their petition...” Corey, p. 314.

“Hereby dismiss...” *Mass. Archives*, Vol. 35 p. 348.

¶ PAGE 74

“It is certain...” A. E. Brown, *Roof Trees*, p. 199–200.

Chapter 15

Rockingham Attacks the Flag



Those letters, which are still preserved in the archives of the Bedford Historical Society, were occasioned by an attack on the flag which appeared in the “Notes and Queries” section of the *Boston Evening Transcript*. The actual identity of the author is long forgotten, but he wrote over the signature “Rockingham.” He began by airing his “reasonable doubt” that the flag was at the Concord Bridge:

What real evidence exists that this flag was ever in any battle? Reasonable doubt was excited by considering that the embattled farmers, in the then position of affairs, would hardly have thought it politic to become “terrible as an army with banners”... I got small satisfaction from examining A. E. Brown’s “Flag of the Minute Men”...

ROCKINGHAM (August 4, 1906)

“Rockingham” then went on to consider the Three County Troop flag claim, saying, “It takes a vivid imagination to identify the details of the Bedford flag with those set out in the above-named bill.”

He was inspired to restate his question a few months later:

[Other letters in this column] give welcome and unexpected support as to this flag not being carried in King Philip’s War. So I am encouraged to repeat my unanswered query of Aug. 4, 1906, viz.: “What real evidence exists that this flag was ever in any battle?” The unconvincing and contradictory testimony of the “witnesses” ... lend no light. Since this Bedford flag will doubtless be “lifted up for adoration” upon the coming 19th of April, now is the apt time for the production of any competent evidence on the authenticity of this alleged relic.

ROCKINGHAM (March 30, 1907)

Soon after, the editor of the newspaper was moved to reply:

We have received several communications in regard to the Bedford Flag, but they throw no new light on the subject, as the authorities quoted have already been mentioned in the answers to this query. One correspondent says that anyone who questions that the Bedford Flag was carried at the Concord fight "doubts the veracity of historians of national repute." We do not know what "historians of national repute" have studied the subject of the origin of the Bedford Flag, and wish that our correspondent would name them. We would remind our readers that tradition is not history.

Editor. (June 1, 1907)

Another reader joined the fray, quoting a book by Major L. A. Abbott, USA, retired, entitled *The Descendants of George Abbott*:

In a footnote Major Abbott remarks "It is absurd to suppose that the flag of any organization so frequently in the field as the Three County Troop must have been, would have lasted a century."

W. T. R. M. (n.d.)

Rockingham replied by offering an astonishing alternate theory. He proposed that the arm/sword/cloud device was uncommon, but that he had recognized it on a German coin—"A mailed arm with a sword, issuing from clouds, the inscription in French, 'All with God.' Space here fails to particularize the many and striking resemblances between the device on the Bedford flag and that on the Brunswick coin," he exclaims. He suggests that that same device was put on a flag used by a Hessian regiment from the Brunswick area at the Battle of Saratoga. When that regiment was defeated, the flag was smuggled by them to Cambridge, Mass. where their commander, Baron Riesdesel, was a prisoner of war in 1778. His wife, the Baroness, wrote letters which were preserved in the Boston Public Library, where Rockingham read them in the original German over a hundred years later. The Baroness told of being entrusted with the flags, and of hiring a tailor to make a mattress wherein the colors could be hidden. Somehow, they were lost anyway. Rockingham continues:

The German troops were quartered at Winter Hill and there had been many desertions... What more probable than that a deserter... should possess himself of one [flag]... as a safeguard against being molested... Simpler conjectures are that he had the flag packed away among his personal effects as its custodian or that he had it sewed as an interlining in his clothes... Either of these theories would account for this flag being in Bedford, a farming town almost adjoining Winter Hill...

When I had the unexpected good fortune to find that reference by Baroness Riesdesel, it became probable that this flag really was in battle—in what we call Bennington and Saratoga—but on the “wrong side.”

ROCKINGHAM (December 28, 1907)

Charles Jenks himself answered that letter, but in doing so he missed the opportunity to say that the device was not rare at all, but very common throughout Europe. He could have pointed out that Winter Hill is a section of Somerville, hardly on Bedford's doorstep. How could he have resisted pointing out that there is ample evidence to show that three Pages served as cornets in the militia between 1720 and 1740, while not a shred connects them with a Hessian flag of unknown design in Somerville? No, Charles Jenks was a gentleman, and quietly stated the facts as he knew them:

In several articles under this number, allusion has been made to the “Bedford Flag” and it seems proper to state what is believed to be its history; the claim made by the citizens of the town is that the flag was carried to Concord with



THE FITCH TAVERN, LATER THE C.W. JENKS HOME, WITH THE GEORGE BLINN HOME BEYOND.

the Minute Men from Bedford, April 19, 1775, by one of their townsmen, Nathaniel Page, Jr. The idea that the flag was that of the Three County Troop did not originate in Bedford, and a personal examination, this summer, of the record in the British Museum, referred to, has proved that while there is some resemblance between the two flags the "Bedford Flag" is not the Three County Troop flag there described.

This history of the flag, as received and believed in Bedford, is based on the following facts and words of mouth. The facts are: John Page of Bedford was cornet, according to birth records, in 1739, 1741, 1742, 1750 and 1751. This would account for the standard or flag being in possession of the Page family. [His son] Nathaniel Page, Jr., is found in the list of Bedford Minute Men, as sworn to by the lieutenant.

The words of mouth are from two persons, the daughter... and the grandson...and these persons said they received the story from the bearer himself...

The story of the grandson of the above... was that it was carried to Concord... by his grandfather, Nathaniel Page Jr.; that after the Bedford men arrived there and were helping to remove the stores the boys "played soldier with it..."

The account of Mrs. Ruhamah (Page) Lane, the daughter of the same Nathaniel Page, Jr., was similar to that of Cyrus Page, but she added that her father left his newly married wife and child.... The records bear out her assertion concerning the newly married wife as Nathaniel Page Jr. was married December 15, 1774.

The flag is now in the custody of the Bedford Free Public Library Corporation and for its more complete preservation and protection has been encased between glass plates and secured in the fireproof vault of the town, where it can be seen on application to the trustees or the librarian.

C.W.J. (January 11, 1908)

It was a good reply. It was later printed in the 1907-08 and 1911-12 Bedford Town Reports and has been quoted repeatedly since when people talk about the flag. Jenks' reply, however, inspired Rockingham to sarcasm:

Would it not waste words to assail "the history of the flag, as received and believed in Bedford"? A specimen "fact" is

(after alleging a man was a cornet about 1745): “This would account for the flag being in possession of the Page family”; but this merely begs the question, nothing having been given to connect any of the family with this flag.

Unfortunately, a slip of Jenks’ pen had Nathaniel leave his wife *and* child, when he actually left his wife *with* child, i.e. pregnant. Rockingham seized gleefully on this:

A specimen of the “words of mouth” is that a Minute Man “left his newly married wife and child” on April 19, 1775, though he had been married on Dec. 15, 1774. Is it worth while thus to asperse ancestors?

ROCKINGHAM (January 18, 1908)

Chapter 15 Notes

§ PAGE 77

“What real evidence...” “Rockingham,” writing in “Notes and Queries,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, August 4, 1906. This and the following newspaper clippings are in the Bedford Historical Society Archives, and appear without page numbers.

“It takes a vivid imagination...” *Ibid.*

“Give welcome and unexpected support...” “Rockingham, writing in “Notes and Queries,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, March 30, 1907.

§ PAGE 78

“We have received several communications...” “Editor,” writing in “Notes and Queries,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, June 1, 1907.

“In a footnote...” Major Lemuel-Abijah Abbott, *Descendants of George Abbott of Rowley, Massachusetts, Vol. 1* (Boston: T. R. Marvin & Son, 1906) footnote, p. 190; quoted by “W.R.T.M” writing in “Notes and Queries,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, [n.d.].

“A mailed arm with a sword...” “Rockingham,” writing in “Notes and Queries,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, December 28, 1907.

§ PAGE 79

“The German troops were quartered...” “Rockingham,” writing in “Notes and Queries,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, December 28, 1907.

“In several articles under this number...” Charles Jenks, writing in “Notes and Queries,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, January 11, 1908.

¶ PAGE 80

“Would it not waste words...” Rockingham, writing in “Notes and Queries,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, January 18, 1908.

¶ PAGE 81

“A specimen of the words of mouth...” *Ibid.*

Chapter 16

Jenks and Brown Change Their Minds



On reading this bickering in the newspaper, Peleg Harrison, whose book *The Stars and Stripes and Other American Flags* was about to go into its third edition, immediately wrote to Abram English Brown, whom he considered the authority on the Bedford Flag.

My Dear Sir:

Since my book on American flags was published in November 1906, I have many times had in mind writing to you and proposing an appointment for meeting in Bedford. I presume you read the Boston Transcript, and have seen the attacks on the authenticity of your story of the Bedford Flag. These adverse criticisms have never shaken my faith in the reliability of your account, as I believe it was founded on facts, and the communication of 'C.W.J.' in Notes and Queries of January 11th, gives those facts, but 'Rockingham' in the Transcript of the 18th still continues to express doubts as to the authenticity of the story, and always will, I presume, but every fair minded reader will disagree with him.

Do you know who 'C.W.J.' is?

Mr. Harrison closed his letter by saying:

The third edition of my book will soon be printed, I anticipate, and I would like to be prepared to defend the story of the Bedford flag, if renewed attacks are made, which is not unlikely, and you will confer a highly appreciated favor if you can furnish the information I have solicited concerning the flag of the Three County Troop.

If you have read my book, please let me know what you think of it.

I hope there is a copy in your public library.

Hoping for an early response,

I am pleased to be

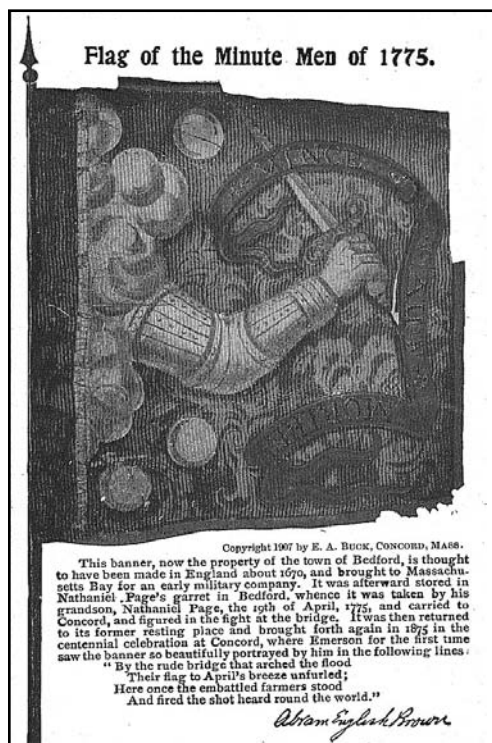
Yours very truly

P. D. Harrison.

Abram English Brown evidently responded with a note, a copy of his pamphlet *The Flag of the Minute Men* and a Bedford Flag post card. He passed the letter on to Charles Jenks, who responded as well, reaffirming the unwelcome news that he did not consider the Bedford Flag to be the Three County Troop flag. "Of course," Jenks writes, "in the light of what we know now all extracts from Mr. Brown connecting it with the Bedford flag are incorrect." He goes on to write, "George R. Blinn, one of our Library Trustees, made a personal examination of the record in the British Museum, this summer, and found the record and sketch as in the N. E. Hist. Gen. Register practically exact."

Peleg Harrison was somewhat taken aback at this reply, and wrote back immediately, protesting that everything from Brown's

books to his post card said the flag was that of the Three County Troop. Furthermore, he was upset that it was too late to correct his own book. "Of course, the error in regard to the Three County Troop standard cannot be corrected in the casts, and the only way to set the matter right is to insert a statement in the back of the book, which I will prepare after you have given me what you are able to furnish about the Bedford flag previous to the 19th of April, 1775." (Mr. Harrison did indeed insert a few paragraphs at the end of the third edition of his book correcting the text, but as



A 1907 POSTCARD DATES THE FLAG
"ABOUT 1670."

(COURTESY OF THE REV. NATHANIEL
PAGE LAURIAT.)

they are not cited in the index, it would take a careful reader to find them.)

Charles Jenks answered the next day:

Mr. Appleton's suggestion was received and believed by us till within a short time when something, perhaps "Rockingham" in Transcript "Notes" about July, 1906, interested me in looking the matter up.... I place the beginning of my doubt that the Bedford flag and the Three County Troop flag were the same about July 1906 say eighteen months ago, and my conviction that they were not the same about the last of October 1907, say three months ago. Mr. Brown has read yours of the 29th and agrees with me in this reply.

Unfortunately, this retraction was never as widely printed as the assertion, and the error often persists even to the present when the Bedford Flag is mentioned.

Chapter 16 Notes



PAGE 83

"My Dear Sir..." Peleg Harrison to A. E. Brown, January 20, 1908, Manuscript B925, Bedford Historical Society.

"The third edition of my book..." *Ibid.*



PAGE 84

"Of course," Jenks writes..." Charles Jenks to Peleg Harrison, January 25, 1908, Manuscript B928, Bedford Historical Society.

"Of course, the error..." Peleg Harrison to Charles Jenks, January 29, 1908, Manuscript B927, Bedford Historical Society.

"Mr. Harrison did indeed insert..." Peleg Harrison, *The Stars and Stripes and Other Flags*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1908) p. 414-15.



PAGE 85

"Mr. Appleton's suggestion..." Charles Jenks to Peleg Harrison, January 30, 1908, Manuscript 929, Bedford Historical Society.

Chapter 17

Protecting the Flag



In the beginning of the twentieth century, the flag was in the care of the board of trustees of the Bedford Free Public Library Corporation, including George Blinn, its president; Abram English Brown, its clerk; and Charles W. Jenks, its treasurer. (These were also the officers of Bedford Historical Society, and Brown was both its clerk and custodian of relics.) The library had been located earlier in March's store in Bedford center, and Anna March served as the librarian. When the Union School was built, the grammar school moved out of the Town Hall and the library took that space. The flag, however, was not kept in the library. It remained in the basement of the Town Hall, locked in the town vault. We can perhaps picture it, still attached to its tall staff, leaning against a wall of the room, its damask ripped now in its great age.



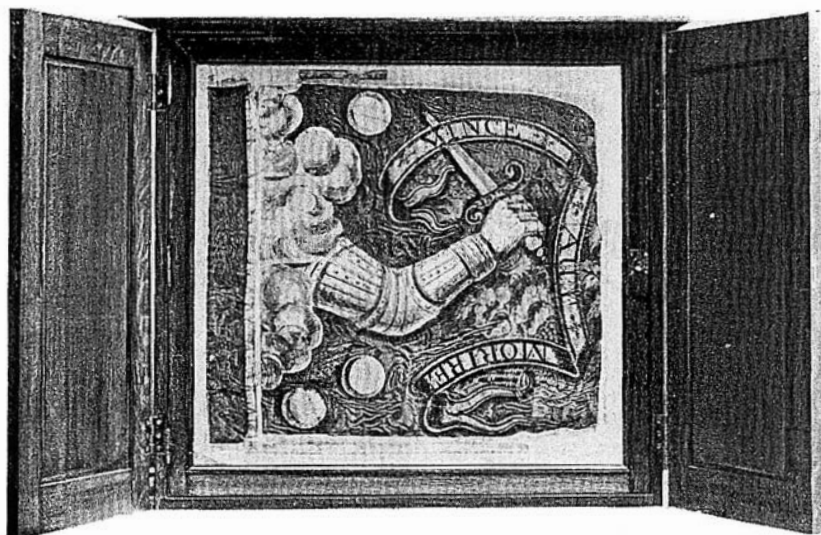
A.E. BROWN.
(COURTESY OF WILLISTON
FARRINGTON.)

The trustees were quite concerned for the flag's well being. When Concord asked to borrow it for the afternoon of April 19, 1894, so that it could be exhibited in their meetinghouse, the trustees refused, stating that the "ancient flag" was in a "very delicate state." They affirmed that "it may better and longer serve the interested public by keeping it safely from all possibility of outside harm... [by restricting its showing to] those who are really desirous of seeing it because of its great value as a relic."

Although by 1906, Jenks and Brown, at least, had doubts about the flag being the Three County Troop flag, they nonethe-

less recognized that it was historically important. The library trustees began to inquire about a better display of the colonial banner. A committee of Brown, Jenks, and Blinn was formed to investigate. By the annual meeting of the trustees in February of 1907, the committee was ready to propose a plan to the town meeting. The next month, Bedford Town Meeting approved the plan and appropriated the sum of \$50 to acquire a fireproof case. A smaller committee of just Brown and Jenks was given full power to make it so.

They accomplished this within the year. Emery Record Preserving Co. was hired to make repairs to the rips in the fabric and to install a custom-made case in the town vault. It was further protected from light by two shutters that could be opened to view the flag. Emery Record Preserving Co. was so pleased with the final product that it put a photo of the case into its new catalog. The trustees went ten dollars over budget, but could write in the minutes of their next annual meeting, "The protection for the Colonial Banner or Flag of the Minutemen discussed at the last annual meeting has been provided during the year and completed



THE FLAG IN ITS CASE, FROM AN EMERY RECORD PRESERVING CO. CATALOG. (BEDFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY. USED WITH PERMISSION.)

work may be seen in the vault [in the] Town House.” George Blinn wrote in the *1907-1908 Bedford Town Report*:

The Trustees believe that the problem of the care and preservation of the Bedford Flag has been solved. A substantial case has been made which is securely attached to one of the inner sides of the Town vault. Within this case the flag has been carefully stretched between two large pieces of plate glass, in such a manner that both its sides can be examined when on exhibition. The work has been done by one of the most skillful experts in the state, and we are assured that this priceless relic is now preserved from the ravages of insects and of time, so far as human foresight can go, and above all there is nothing further to fear from fire.

This was one of the last projects completed by Abram English Brown. At the 1909 Library Corporation meeting, the minutes of the trustees were, for the first time, in a different hand. A great man had passed away.

Chapter 17 Notes

🔪 PAGE 86

“George Blinn, its president...” Bedford Free Public Library Corporation Minutes, April 12, 1893, Bedford Library.

“Located earlier in March’s store...” Friends of the Bedford Free Public Library, eds., *The Bedford Sampler*, Bicentennial Edition, (Bedford, 1974) p. 167.

“Ancient flag...Delicate state...” Library Corporation Minutes, April 14, 1894.

“It may better and longer serve...” *Ibid.*

🔪 PAGE 87

“A committee was formed...” *Ibid.*, February 6, 1907.

“Town Meeting approved the plan...” *Annual Reports of the Officers of the Town of Bedford for the Year Ending February 1, 1908* (Boston, Worcester Press, 1908) p. 13. They appropriated \$50 in a year when the librarian’s annual salary was \$125.

“A smaller committee of Brown and Jenks...” Library Corporation Minutes, March 13, 1907.

“A photo of it in their new catalog...” Manuscript 908A, Bedford Historical Society.

“Ten dollars over budget...” 1907-08 Town Report, p. 6.

“The protection for the colonial banner...” Library Corporation Minutes, March 11, 1908.

¶ PAGE 88

“The Trustees believe that the problem...” 1907-1908 Bedford Town Report, Part 2, p. 3.

“At the 1909 Library Corporation meeting...” Library Corporation Minutes, March 1909.

Chapter 18

A Twentieth Century Passion for the Flag



Despite the passing of A. E. Brown, the town's enthusiasm for their flag did not wane. They must have been pleased to find their flag mentioned in the October 1917 issue of the *National Geographic* magazine. *National Geographic* was putting out a flag issue, within which it listed over a thousand important flags in history. Bedford's Flag received just a paragraph, but the author called it "one of the most interesting colonial flags." The Three County Troop flag was mentioned separately, and no mention was made of a connection. The paragraph did go on to compare the Bedford Flag to the flag used by the Dutch at the Battle of Ostend from 1601-1604, another flag which used the arm with sword device.

This was not the only time a connection to the Netherlands was noticed. Harry Ward, in his 1961 book *The United Colonies of New England, 1643-90*, holds that a Dutch battle flag of the late sixteenth century and the Three County Troop flag are "practically alike" and thus the first must have influenced the second. He adds "A similar flag, known as the Bedford Flag, was also probably of Dutch origin since it was found in the southern counties of England, which were overrun by Dutch refugees. Here may be the link between the original Dutch standard and the 'Three County Troop Flag' of the counties by the same name in the New World." The author appears to be unaware that the Three County Troop Flag predates the Bedford Flag by about fifty years. He is also a bit vague on where the Bedford Flag was found. The theory that the Bedford Flag is descended from a Dutch flag persists today in a book published by the Friends of the Bedford Flag. Because the two flags are similar, they conclude that the one influenced the other. A more definite connection between the two has yet to be established.

In 1917, however, the association between the Bedford Flag and the Three County Troop flag was the most persistent, despite the conclusions of A. E. Brown and Charles Jenks ten years earlier. A lovely brochure still preserved in the Boston Athenaeum evidences this. It pictures the “Stars and Stripes” on its cover, the words to the “Star Spangled Banner” on the inside right page, and on the inside left, a history of “The Flag Which Was Carried at the Concord Fight,” touting its antiquity as the 1670 banner made in England for the “county troops of Middlesex.”

The case bolted to the inside of the town vault was becoming unsatisfactory as a display for the famous flag. Security was displaced by ease of exhibition, and a special table was fashioned by Alfred Blinn of Boston—its top could open to reveal the framed flag just below the wooden tabletop. Bedford wanted its flag to be seen.

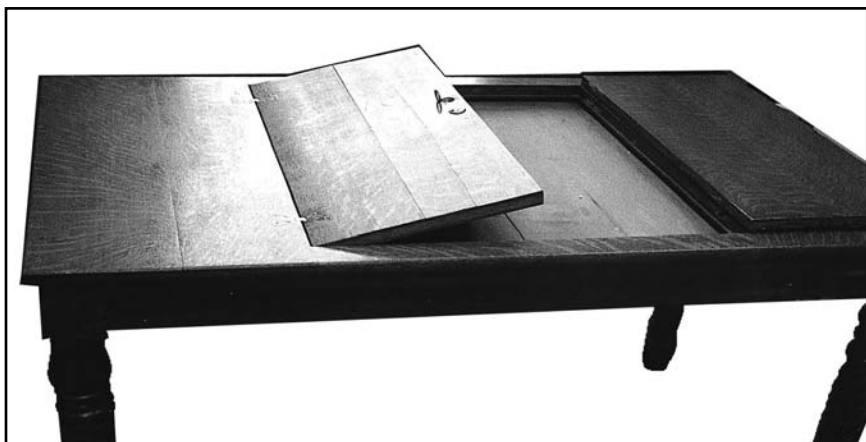


TABLE MADE BY ALFRED BLINN FOR DISPLAY OF THE FLAG.
(BEDFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY. USED WITH PERMISSION.)

In 1925, permission was granted for the flag to be removed from its case by the American Legion veterans of World War I, and carried to Concord, still framed within its glass panes, for the celebration on the nineteenth of April. Pride won out over caution that time, but it made the trip—in an open car!—quite safely and was returned to its vault. (This was the last time the flag went to

Concord for Patriot's Day. Soon after, the Legion had a replica made of the flag.)

The Bedford Flag was becoming nationally known. In 1929, thirty-six boys and girls named as winners in a contest sponsored by the United States Flag Association visited Bedford in two busses. The itinerary of their tour of historic America included a viewing of the Bedford Flag.

The pendulum then began to swing away from pride and toward prudence. While the town vault was much too restrictive, and admitting visitors within it to view the flag put town records at risk, the oak table in the library did not secure the flag from fire. Clara Blinn, who was elected president of the Library Corporation three years after her husband George's death, and Francis J. Kelley, a Bedford Selectman, discussed displaying the flag in a small safe, lighted inside and backed with a mirror to show the reverse of the flag. The safe was to be kept on the first floor of the Town Hall, within the library's rooms, and no longer in the basement vault. The town meeting of March, 1930 voted to provide \$300 for the new safe, and appointed Mrs. Blinn and Kelley to accomplish this. Blinn's report to the town at the end of 1930 shows that it was done. The report also indicates that a photostat copy of John Page's commission was hung with the flag. Clara Blinn notes that visitors continued to visit the library to view the Bedford Flag. Twenty-five adults and children came to see the flag during the month of October 1930 and several Legion men from Utah made a special pilgrimage to Bedford to see the flag that year. As the Custodian of the flag, she also thanked George Dimond for arranging to have "any sightseeing bus coming from Concord to stop and allow passengers to see 'The Flag' by appointment."

Mrs. Blinn had inherited the passion for the flag and wanted it appreciated. As she showed privately in a letter written on June 20, 1932, she did most of the work on the new safe and assumed some of its cost herself. Writing to Charles E. Lauriat, Jr., a grandson of Cyrus Page and a Boston publisher, importer, and bookseller, she says

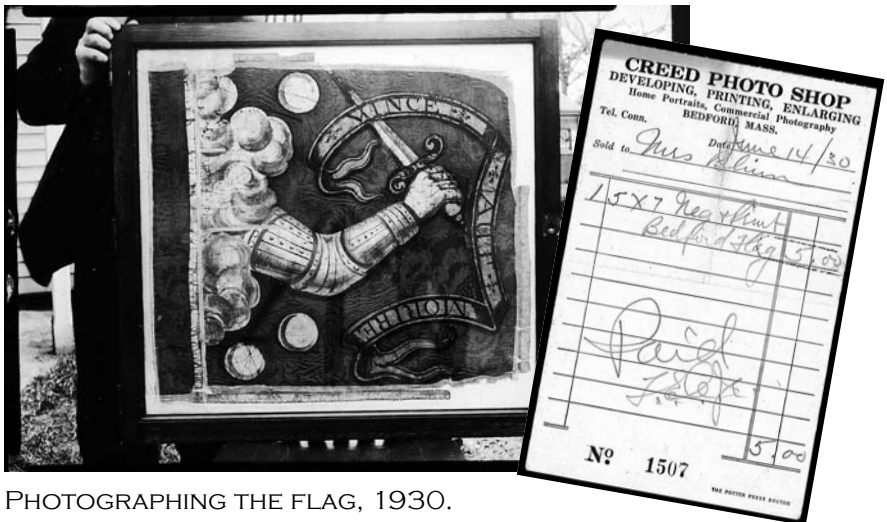
Dear Mr. Lauriat:

I really have not known what to say. As I am waiting for a guest to appear, I will send within the typed copy what is really to my knowledge the facts.

I am modest, generally, but as I have done the real work and paid much money myself to have the flag preserved I think my name should be used for future reference. I thought out the whole idea of the safe and ask [sic] the Town for \$300 to purchase same—I installed the Flag and put in mirror and electric light and paid all charges myself but, of course, I do not want money spoken of. These were my Tercentenary accomplishments for the Town. I will give you these suggestions and they can be worked over and in good form. The printed matter I clipped from my report in our Town Book. I am Custodian of the Flag and have appointed Mr. Arthur E. Carson, assistant.

*Most sincerely yours,
Clara A. Blinn*

Charles Lauriat was the son of Cyrus's daughter, Harriet Page Lauriat. He had a passion for the flag himself. He named his own son "Nathaniel Page Lauriat." He took a great deal of trouble to purchase the 1907 copyright on a picture of the flag which had appeared on a postcard sold in a shop in Concord, and, with Mrs.



PHOTOGRAPHING THE FLAG, 1930.
(COURTESY OF THE REV. NATHANIEL PAGE LAURIAT.)



A 1935 POSTCARD BY CHARLES E. LAURIAT.
 (COURTESY OF THE REV. NATHANIEL PAGE LAURIAT.)

Blinn's help, produced a new Bedford Flag post card with a new picture just after the Bedford Tercentenary. The "typed copy" to which Clara Blinn refers is possibly the text for the card, but it may be for a pamphlet that another Bedford resident, George Dimond, had written and hoped that Lauriat would publish. Quite a correspondence arose between these two Bedfordians and Charles Lauriat. Although it does not appear that the pamphlet was ever published, drafts of it survive both in the Lauriat papers and in the Dimond family. It is a fine history of the flag, and is even more valuable as

it preserves the speech that Cyrus made in 1885. George Dimond was the city editor of the *Boston Globe* newspaper, and used his journalistic skill well to check the information in his flag history with the Lauriat.

Charles Lauriat was not shy about writing back to Dimond with his corrections after reading the manuscript. He was particularly annoyed by the story that the flag had been forgotten for years in the Page attic:

Dear Mr. Dimond,

I object to having it said that, —or written, to the effect that the flag was ever kept in a 'garret' of a Bedford house. I know perfectly damn well that it never was, because I can show you the old beams in the living room, right hand side as you enter the door, of the old pegs on which the flag rested for years. I don't say they are there at the present time, perhaps the house is even remodeled, but as a youngster, and I'm over

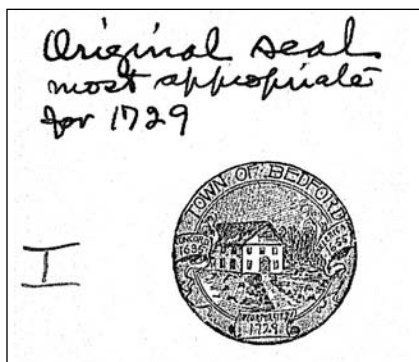
sixty, I remember my grandfather showing it to me there and my mother remembered it perfectly well too.

So for goodness sake, please delete that expression in the two or three places where it occurs in the manuscript.

There are also corrections on one draft in Clara Blinn's handwriting. She rewrote a section on how the flag was stored so that it read,

The flag was stretched on silk and framed between glass and a very beautifully carved table was designed and made of oak by Alfred M. Blinn of Boston, Architect and this Flag was placed inside this table under lock and key—Mr. Jenks, Custodian Late [sic] Then taken out from the Table and placed in the space within the vault of Town Safe but under difficulty. This was a safe guard against fire.

Lauriat, Blinn, and Dimond also corresponded about the Bedford town seal. Since the late 1800s, Bedford had used a drawing done by A. E. Brown that pictured the 1729 meetinghouse surrounded by stumps of newly cut trees. Dimond proposed to the town that, as part of the Bedford Tercentenary, it create a new town seal picturing an engraving of the flag. The motion passed at town meeting, and the invitations for the town's two hundred-year anniversary were sent out under the new seal. Clara Blinn revealed privately to Charles Lauriat that she preferred the original seal. Lauriat was more concerned that the reverse of the flag was pictured flying to the left of the staff. It seemed wrong to him, and he protested to George Dimond again in 1933.



COMMENTS ON THE TOWN SEAL (IN MRS. BLINN'S OWN HAND).
(COURTESY OF THE REV. NATHANIEL PAGE LAURIAT.)



COMMENTS ON THE TOWN SEAL
(COURTESY OF THE REV. LAURIAT.)

Did you ever get that Bedford Flag Seal straightened out, where they have the flag flying in the wrong direction from the staff? If you insist on using the old Flag cut for a town seal you ought to fly it correctly from the staff anyway, I think.

Ask some of your legislature friends if I am not right on this point. It's too bad not to have it flying right if you are going to use it for the town seal. You are pretty influential up there in the village, cannot you get it straightened out?

*Yours truly,
Lauriat, Jr.*

The matter was eventually straightened out, and to this day the flag adorns the Town Seal, flying correctly from its staff but with a tattered look that comes of drawing it ripped and with its fringe torn off. It is not only embossed on official documents, it heads the stationery used by town departments, dominates a patch sewn to the shoulder of all Bedford police uniforms, and is painted on the town's vehicles. To some, it seems unfortunate that the artist chose to portray the timeworn antique and not the proud young banner.

Chapter 18 Notes

¶ PAGE 90

“One of the most interesting colonial flags...” *National Geographic*, October, 1917, p. 348.

“A similar flag, known as the Bedford Flag...” Harry Ward, *The United Colonies of New England, 1643-90* (NY: Vantage Press, 1961) p. 83.

“A book published by the Friends of the Bedford Flag...” Barbara Hitchcock and Jan Van Steenwijk, *The Bedford Flag, A National Treasure* (Bedford: Friends of the Bedford Flag, 1998).

§ PAGE 91

“County troops of Middlesex...” This phrase, an error for the “Three County Troop,” is most probably taken from Peleg Harrison’s book *The Stars and Stripes*.

“A table whose top could open...” Thanks to Marcia Webber for her memories of the table c. 1930.

“The flag was removed from its case...” James E. MacLauchlan and David B. Reader, *The Bedford Flag: The First Flag of the United States...an Authentication*” (Bedford: The Bedford Minuteman Company, 1975) n.p.

§ PAGE 92

“The Legion had a replica made...” *Ibid.*

“Thirty-six boy and girls named as winners...” *Annual Reports of the Officers of the Town of Bedford for the Financial Year Ending, December 31, 1929* (Boston: C.H. Smith & Co., 1930) p. 176–177.

“Vote to provide \$300 for a new safe...” *Annual Reports of the Officers of the Town of Bedford for the Financial Year Ending 1930* (Boston: Smith & Co., 1931) p. 23.

“Twenty-five adults and children...” *Ibid.*, p. 196.

“Any sightseeing bus...” *Ibid.*

§ PAGE 93

“Dear Mr. Lauriat...” Clara Blinn to Charles Lauriat, June 20, 1932, Charles E. Lauriat’s papers.

§ PAGE 94

“Dear Mr. Dimond...” Charles Lauriat to George Dimond, July 29, 1937, Charles E. Lauriat’s papers.

§ PAGE 95

“The flag was stretched on silk...” Clara Blinn’s corrections to George Dimond’s manuscript “The Bedford Flag,” p. 14, Charles E. Lauriat’s papers.

“Bedford had used a drawing done by A. E. Brown...” “Resume of the Origin of the First Town Seal,” *Lexington Times*, Friday, July 5, 1929.

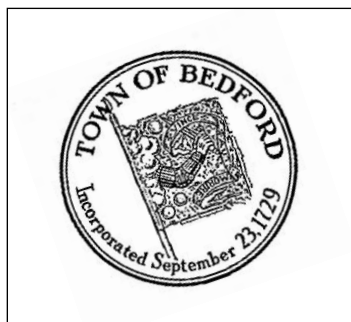
“The motion passed at Town Meeting...” Town Report 1929, p. 36.

“Clara Blinn revealed privately...” Clara Blinn to Charles Lauriat,
April 23, 1932, Charles E. Lauriat’s papers.



PAGE 96

“Did you ever get that Bedford Flag Seal...” Charles Lauriat to
George Dimond, January 25, 1933, Charles E. Lauriat’s papers.



THE TOWN SEAL AS IT
APPEARS TODAY.
(COURTESY OF RIFF
MILDGRAM.)

Chapter 19

A New Home for the Flag



The flag continued to be protected in the safe when the library finally moved into its own building on the Great Road, across from the Fitch Tavern, in 1955. A whole generation of school-children visited it there, and many in Bedford today remember going downstairs in the library to see the flag. The Bedford Historical Society, which by then had separated from the library and had its own officers, occupied the basement rooms across the hall from the flag in the little square Stearns Building.

Bedford's population was increasing, and it could no longer be called a quiet village of farmers. Its library grew, too, and all too soon the Stearns Building could not accommodate it. In just a dozen years, a new library was built within sight of the old one, set down beyond the two stone walls which had formed a lane for Fitch's cows to walk through to pasture in an earlier time. It seemed as if the whole town assembled to form a kind of bucket brigade from the old library to the new one. To the music of the Bedford High School band, townspeople and schoolchildren passed boxes of books, hand to hand, across Mudge Way, past the stone walls, up the stairs and on to the waiting shelves.

The flag, too, was moved across the street and into a room of its own in the new library. Clara Blinn's safe, with its mirror and electric light, was installed downstairs in the Bedford Flag Room. (That is where this author first saw it, in the basement of the library, beyond the locked door of the Flag Room, within an alarmed wooden cabinet, behind the steel safe door, sandwiched between the same glass panes that had protected it all these years. The library staff was trained to show it to visitors, and, as a librarian, I quickly learned the story and mastered opening the cranky safe, whose combination was, coincidentally, the numerals of my birth year.)

It was the late nineteen-sixties, and with so many people in

Bedford, and so many new people, it was time once again for the story of Bedford to be told. History found its voice in Louise Kirkegaard Brown, who was a grand storyteller. Mrs. Brown was no relation to A. E. Brown, but had been born in Bedford and went through its school system, then went on to take courses at Columbia and Harvard. She became town historian as well as secretary/curator of the Historical Society, and was the acknowledged authority on local history. She ultimately passed her knowledge down in two books of Bedford history entitled *Wilderness Town* and *A Revolutionary Town*. These were meant to be enjoyed as stories, and so she did not aggravate her audience with footnotes, but simply listed her sources at the end. Later researchers can regret her lack of documentation, but she told a lively, fascinating story of her native town.

Mrs. Brown wrote glowingly of the Bedford Flag, and included a color photo of it as frontispiece of her first book. Of course, she was aware of the Three County Troop question, and, to solve it for herself, went to the British Museum to study the c. 1660 sketch. Unlike Clara and George Blinn before her, comparing the sketch with the Bedford Flag convinced her that they were the same flag. Unfortunately, she died in 1975, and did not live long enough to have the benefit of recent studies of the damask and the paint, or her conclusion might have been different. Her influence, however, was tremendous, especially on a group of modern day patriots whose blood quickens to the rhythm of the fife and drum. This would be the recreated Bedford Minuteman Company, which popularized the story of the flag even more widely than ever.

Chapter 19 Notes

 PAGE 99

“To the music of the Bedford High School band...” Karen Ahearn, personal communication.



PAGE 100

Louise K. Brown, *Wilderness Town, The Story of Bedford, Massachusetts*, published by the author 1968.

Louise K. Brown, *A Revolutionary Town* (Canaan, NH: Phoenix Publishing Co., 1975).

“Went to the British Museum...” MacLauchlan and Reader, n.p.

Chapter 20

The Bedford Minutemen Salute the Flag



In 1964, a notice was posted on the door of the Bedford Town Hall. It was addressed “To all brave, healthy, able bodied, and well disposed young men, in this neighborhood,” and invited them to join “the troops, now raising as the Bedford Minuteman Company, to perpetuate the memory of April 19, 1775.”

The Bedford Minutemen have been mustered again! No Bedford parade since has been complete without them. The Bedford Town Meeting convenes to the thrill of their fife and drum and the ceremony of a replica of the Bedford Flag being



POLECAPPING AT WILSON PARK.
(PHOTO BY ANN AHEARN RINGWOOD.)

brought forward. They raise a liberty pole in Wilson Park each April and a young patriot shinnies up to cap it with a red knitted cap, long a symbol of defiance and freedom. They march yearly in local Patriot’s Day activities, but have traveled far to take part in Revolutionary War reenactments and ceremonies. With them always is the replica of the Bedford Flag.

From the beginning, one of the primary purposes of the

Bedford Minutemen has been to promote awareness of the Bedford Flag. Their early goal was to have a thread-by-thread reproduction of the flag made. John Ahearn, the first captain, approached no less than Franco Scalamandr , of Scalamandr  Silks, Inc. of New York, the expert in the field of historical fabrics and their restoration. Scalamandr  and his daughter, Mrs.



FRANCO SCALAMANDR 
(COURTESY OF ANN AHEARN RINGWOOD.)

Adriana Bitter, visited the Bedford Library to

study the flag. They were excited by the flag, and pronounced their opinion that "the ground fabric is a pure silk damask of the eighteenth century." Franco Scalamandr  agreed to reduce his usual fee for reproducing historic fabric. While the Minutemen began fundraising the thousands of dollars even the generous contract from Scalamandr , Inc. required, Franco and Adriana began to copy the design, thread by thread, marking carefully how the emblem lay over the pattern in the damask. In New York, jacquard looms were specially mounted and the fabric was woven. Then just twelve flags were cut and silk-screened front and back with the design and edged with silver bullion fringe. One more, the very finest, was hand painted.

How exact is the reproduction? Susan Hay, of the Rhode Island School of Design, commented when she studied the flag that the pattern in the damask was copied very faithfully, but that the weave in the copy is much finer than was possible in the original, which was hand woven before jacquard looms were invented. English military regulations used to say that flags should be retired after about twenty years. The Minutemen found

that, as they carried one of the reproductions through its first few seasons, it couldn't stand the weathering and the silk began to tear. Whether this is a characteristic of all silk or just the modern finer woven copy is still unknown, but the reproduction is no longer taken out and paraded, and a series of "all weather" flags have been used instead.

The Scalamandré reproductions are beautiful, however, and excellent for display in museums. The hand painted reproduction is framed and on permanent loan to the Bedford Library, where it hangs in the reference area. The Minutemen also presented the flags to the Smithsonian Institute, West Point Military Academy, the Maine Museum, the Ancient and Honorable Artillery, the Massachusetts State House, the Cathedral of the Pines, and, of course, the Minuteman National Historical Park. It was a thrilling moment for the Bedford Minuteman Company when a reproduction of the flag was presented to Queen Elizabeth II, during her visit to Massachusetts in 1975 for the Bicentennial of the American Revolution. The Bedford newspaper reported "The only gift that England's Queen Elizabeth II will receive from the people of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts during her visitation here Sunday will be a replica of a Bedford Flag." The suggestion of giving a thread-by-thread reproduction of the old colonial banner as the gift was made by the captain of the Minuteman Company and lobbied for by the state senator. Governor Michael Dukakis loved the idea, but, disappointingly, did not include the Bedford Minutemen in the ceremony. The Minutemen prepared a framed reproduction and an authentication of the flag written by Minutemen David Reader and Charles McLaughlin. Dukakis and the Mayor of Boston made the presentation to the Queen themselves. The Queen, graciously overlooking the tradition that colonial troops had fired on British regulars under that flag, accepted it. A newspaper editorial printed the next week, however, told that Prince Philip noticed the flag as the Bedford Minutemen passed in review later in the day, and exclaimed to the governor's wife, "Why, there's the flag you gave us!"

The Bedford Minutemen also carried the Scalamandre hand painted reproduction to the North Bridge in Concord on the occa-

sion of the Bicentennial celebration. The crowds were thick and excited, but the platform held and, unlike his predecessor, President Grant, President Gerald Ford remained safely on it during the ceremonies. The Bedford Minutemen also made him a gift of a replica of their flag.

Chapter 20 Notes

🔪 PAGE 102

“To all brave, healthy, able-bodied...” From the scrapbook of Roger Thurrell.

“Long a symbol of defiance and freedom...” *Sampler*, p. 78-79.

🔪 PAGE 103

“The ground fabric is a pure silk damask...” Adriana Scalamandre Bitter to John Ahearn, January 20, 1972.

“Agreed to reduce his usual fee...” *Ibid.*

“Jacquard looms were specially mounted...” *Ibid.*

“Copied very faithfully...” Susan Hay, personal communication.

“English military regulations...” Edwards, p. 40.

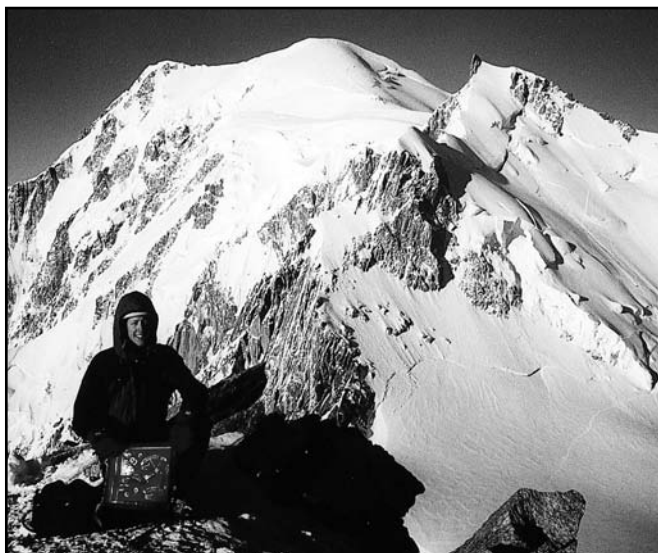
🔪 PAGE 104

“The silk began to tear...” John Filios, Bedford Minuteman Co. Flag Officer, personal communication.

Location of flag reproductions. Roger Thurrell, former Bedford Minuteman Co. Flag Officer, personal communication.

“The only gift that England’s Queen...” “A Bedford Flag, Gift for a Queen,” *Bedford Minuteman*, July 8, 1976, p. 1.

“Why, there’s the flag...” Mike Rosenberg, “On the Bedford Beat,” *Bedford Minuteman*, [Editorial] July 22, 1976, p. 4.



PETER INGRAHAM ASCENDING MT. BLANC WITH A
REPRODUCTION OF THE BEDFORD FLAG.
(COURTESY OF PETER INGRAHAM.)

Chapter 21

The Bedford Flag Unfurled



Perhaps history should be reflected upon before it is written, and like well-kneaded bread, should be allowed to sit and rise for a time before it is baked... More has happened to the Bedford Flag in the last quarter of the century. It has been shown to hundreds of interested visitors, studied, and written about. Its image has appeared on everything from car license plates and balsa airplane toys to Christmas ornaments and civic statues. Replicas have been hung on the tents of soldiers serving in the military far away, and taken in knapsacks to mountaintops on several continents. In the late 1990s, it spent many months being conserved and reframed by the Textile Conservation Center in Lowell, Mass. while a new display was created for it in the new Bedford Free Public Library building. However, we will let future historians write that chapter, and strive instead to document as much of its history up until 1975 as possible so that future researchers do not have to begin all over again.

A book was recently published which called the flag a “treasure.” A treasure it is. Bedford’s flag is precious enough to be given to royalty and worthy enough to be carried to the tops of earth’s highest peaks. It shows the pride we feel in our town as we drive with its image on our ornamental license plates, and the respect we feel for our town as we engrave it on our official town seal. It reminds us of the courage of those early settlers trying to conquer the continent, and we send their brave motto to our soldiers who also feel that justice is on their side, and that they must prevail or die trying. It celebrates men who rode forth not only to protect their own homes but to aid their neighbors, and women who found the resources to stay on alone in a frightening new world and found a family and a town. The story of the flag is not one of battle, but of courage, commitment, duty and pride. Let it never be furled and forgotten.

The Bedford Flag Unfurled

“All these stories hidden from view for so many years ... they glow with exciting word color. I recommend reading this book as a charming story and to share many little-known facets of Bedford’s great treasure, the Bedford Flag.”

—Williston Farrington



SHARON LAWRENCE McDONALD has been a storyteller and Children’s Librarian in Bedford for 36 years. She is also a member of the Bedford Minuteman Company, and has paraded with them on many occasions.

“...through the years of showing the flag, an enormous urge has grown within me to separate the facts from the myths, and to document them ... the flag is close with its secrets, and I have

been years in research. There is always more to know.”



Ms. McDonald’s extensive talents as a storyteller has borne fruit in this tale of an historic relic. This story begins when America was young, moves through many twists and turns—and continues to this very day.