The Concord Bridge 250

SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL SPECIAL EDITION

By Celeste Katz Marston
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Long before the first rays of sunlight give form to our landscape and the pealing of church bells fills the air this April 19, the preparations will have been well underway — just as they were 250 years ago.

In 1775, at the dawn of the Revolutionary War, Concord was a rural settlement of perhaps 1,500 colonists clustered in what their Native predecessors had long called Musketaquid.

Today, our residents number more than 10 times that — and no one knows just how many thousand visitors are on their way here to mark with us the semiquincentennial of "the shot heard round the world."

Today, every day, Concordians live with a sense of our home's place in American lore, from the still-standing homes that bore witness to the rise of a new nation to the "rude bridge" that symbolizes our underdog stand against tyranny.

At this milestone moment, Concordians and guests gather at that bridge under the silent, sightless gaze of Daniel Chester French's Minute Man. We wear the clothes and recite the words and wield the weapons of a bygone era. Some live with the very blood of those early soldiers coursing through their veins. Some seek to add new lifeblood to our story.

It's a day of pageantry, of patriotism, perhaps of protest — a day to be memorialized, and a time to pause and contemplate what we, as Concordians, may pass without note in our travels every day.

When the parade takes its final step, the guests depart, and the sounds of the speeches and songs fade away, Concordians will stay, still the stewards of a complex legacy.

So will The Concord Bridge, poised to write the next line of the first draft of our shared history.

★ ★ ★

For Captain Davis' descendants, a day steeped in lore and pride

By Margaret Carroll-Bergman
Correspondent

"When I was 10 years old, my grandmother Harriet Parker Vanderhoof said to me, 'Scott, your middle name is Davis, and Davis for a reason,'" says Scott Vanderhoof, proprietor of Vanderhoof Hardware in Concord Center. "My grandmother was the third great-granddaughter of Capt. Isaac Davis, the first [Colonial] officer to die on North Bridge during the American Revolution."

Vanderhoof points to a framed print above his office desk. It depicts Davis and his men leaving his home in Acton for Concord on April 19, 1775. The oil painting hangs in the Acton Memorial Library.

The pair of silver shoe buckles Capt. Isaac Davis wore on his march to the North Bridge on April 19, 1775, on display at the Acton Memorial Library. Scott Vanderhoof remembers his grandmother taking him to the library as a child to view these artifacts.

"After Captain Robbins was alerted early in the morning that the British were advancing to Concord, he sent his 13-year-old son to Captain Davis' house to warn him. Once Captain Davis had mustered 30 men in his yard, they prepared to leave for Concord," Vanderhoof says. "He stopped momentarily at the road and turned to his wife standing in the doorway with four sick children, and his last words were, 'Take good care of the children.'"

Davis was shot in the chest at the North Bridge — the site of the Revolutionary War's beginnings. Moments before the 30-year-old captain died, company fifer Luther Blanchard was wounded when a bullet grazed his head.

Primed for independence

According to Vanderhoof, Davis was a farmer, gunsmith, and blacksmith. He outfitted his men with bayonets and cartridge boxes and made his own rifle. His men trained twice a week at the Davis homestead and were thought to be the best-prepared company.

"My grandmother told me, before Davis headed up to Concord, he returned home one day to find an owl perched upon his musket — a bad omen, a sign of death," Vanderhoof says.

Vanderhoof grew up 300 yards from the Davis Monument, a 75-foot stone structure located in the Acton town common. The remains of Captain Davis and Privates James Hayward and Abner Hosmer were exhumed from Woodlawn Cemetery and buried in the base of the monument in 1871.

Vanderhoof pauses before considering a black-and-white photograph of the Concord minute man. He removes it from the wall and cradles it.

"My grandmother told me Daniel Chester French [who designed the monument] wanted to find a portrait of Isaac Davis, but couldn't, so he used a descendant of Isaac Davis for a likeness," says Vanderhoof.

Davis' widow, Hannah, lived to age 95.

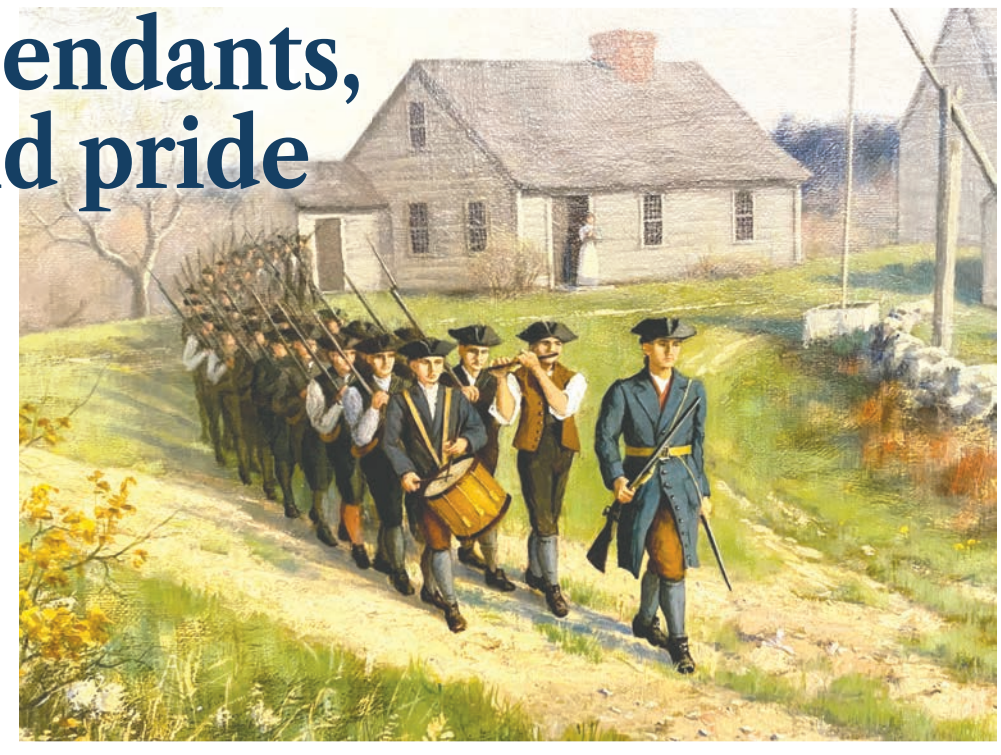
"She was compensated very late as a war widow," he says. "She did not receive a widow's pension until 1838."

Family traditions and tributes

Vanderhoof's father was for many years a member of the Acton Minutemen and a Revolutionary War reenactor. Vanderhoof's mother sewed uniforms so he and his brother could march alongside their father from Acton to Concord with the Acton Minutemen during the Patriots Day reenactment.

"I have very strong feelings for this," Vanderhoof says of Patriots Day. "It's fun to share with people that we have this connection, and my grandmother felt so strongly to keep it going. Even in grade school, when I was told to do a report, I always loved to do a report on Capt. Isaac Davis."

A high school senior in 1975, Vanderhoof didn't make it to the North Bridge during the bicentennial of the shot heard round the world" — which was also the 200th anniversary of the bullet that pierced his Colonial ancestor's heart.



TOP: Detail from "Minutemen Leaving the Home of Captain Isaac Davis, April 19, 1775," an 1894 oil painting by Arthur Fuller Davis on display at the Acton Memorial Library. BOTTOM LEFT: Scott Vanderhoof holds a black-and-white photograph of the Minute Man statue. In the background is a print of "Minutemen Leaving the Home of Captain Isaac Davis, April 19, 1775," and a photograph of the widow Hannah Davis. BOTTOM RIGHT: "Portrait of Hannah Davis, Widow of Captain Isaac Davis" by J.L. Lansing, 1840, on display at the Acton Memorial Library. Hannah Davis died at 95. Photos by Margaret Carroll-Bergman

"I decided to stay here," he says, meaning Vanderhoof Hardware. "Still don't know why I didn't get to the bridge that year. President Ford was there. It was so long ago. There was quite a crowd."

Vanderhoof married his high school sweetheart, Jane, who also grew up near the Davis Monument. The couple have two daughters, Jennifer and Joanne, and four grandchildren.

One of his grandsons is named Jackson Davis Foster.

"The Davis name carries on in our family," Vanderhoof says.

SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL SPECIAL EDITION

A dramatic flare:

Massive lantern gets a 'focal' role

By Laura Hayes
Correspondent

Among the crowd gathered outside the Concord Museum, perhaps none were more delighted than Richard Fahlander and Bill Crosby when the giant Concord 250 lantern came to glowing life.

"Once the button got pushed, the lantern got lit; that was a good relief," said Fahlander, a key driver of the project.

Crosby's company, Crosby Design, crafted the 10-foot-tall replica of the lamps that sent Paul Revere on his historic ride. It will be featured in multiple events celebrating the 250th anniversary of the Revolution's start.

This March, cyclists retraced Revere's ride, bringing an LED torch from Boston's Old North Church to symbolically light the lantern.

"The effort was all worthwhile, that's for sure," said Art for All executive director Margot Kimball, whose group joined as a non-profit partner, taking ownership of the lantern.

"For Art for All to take this on," Kimball said, "it's like taking part in the grand tradition of artists and art endeavors to bring people together around a formed identity and stories."

ABOVE: As highly anticipated 250th Patriots' Day celebrations drew near, the 10-foot-tall, 200-pound replica of one of Paul Revere's signal lanterns stood illuminated at the Concord Museum. Photo: Ken McGagh/The Concord Bridge

The spark of an idea

Fahlander offered the idea of making a giant replica as a "focal point" after listening to conversations about making paper lanterns at a meeting of Concord250's Art, Literature, and Music Subcommittee.

After talks began in September, several iterations were created.

The 10-foot replica weighs roughly 200 pounds and could fit about 250 of the original lamps inside it. It's made of Dibond, which has plastic in the middle and thin aluminum sheets on either side, with a wood base. It comes together (and apart) with wingnuts.

Crosby shared credit for the effort: "I didn't build this thing myself. My team built it."

Practical considerations

Along the way, the team ran into challenges.

How could it be lighted to shine both day and night? How should it be navigated along the parade route? Crosby didn't want it to look like the lantern was being pulled like a toy wagon. Having two people steering it with ropes on either side could be a "disaster."

Art for All executive director Margot Kimball with early lantern iterations. Photo by Laura Hayes

In the end, a tiller was added to the back. With a nudge on either side, the lantern can be turned, said Crosby.

"Who needs a truck in the parade with something that big?" said Crosby. "With a team of people pulling it, it's even more fun. You get the party pulling the whole thing and one guy steering it from the back."

The lantern has remained on display outside the Concord Museum in the walkup to Patriots Day. After its rolling role in the parade, it will stand outside Wright Tavern. It will also be at Newbury Court, which was the project's lead sponsor, and Kimball hopes the stately replica will spend time in West Concord.

Where to next?

"Other groups, I think, will be interested in a visit from the lantern," said Fahlander.

Mass. appeal bringing Concord cousins here for Patriots Day

By Christine M. Quirk
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A special contingent from Concord — but not *this* Concord — is preparing to march through Monument Square in this year's special Patriots Day parade.

"There are 18 people marching, representing 11 Concords" in addition to the host town, Rob Morrison said.

In his three decades in Concord, Massachusetts, Morrison became curious about how many other Concords there were, and in 2015, he began visiting them. After touring 93 of the 94 Concords he discovered — he's been to Concord, New Hampshire, though not as part of this project — he's returning the favor by inviting his new friends to the 250th celebration.

"I'm matching visitors up with hosts, and some people are actually staying in their homes," he said. "I wanted them to have a second point of contact."

He said he is also hosting a welcome party, all as a big thank-you.

"People were so kind to me," Morrison said. "In each of these places, they showed me amazing hospitality."

Concord, Vermont

Vermont state Rep. Beth Quimby grew up in Concord, Vermont, 165 miles from the Old North Bridge in the Northeast Kingdom, and is on the board of the Concord Historical Society. According to vermonter.com, the town was named in 1781 for Concord, Massachusetts.

Concord was the site of the first normal school in 1823, a term formerly used for teachers' colleges. It was founded by Samuel Read Hall, credited with first using blackboards in classrooms in a move away from handheld slates.

Popular local sites, Quimby said, are "Shadow Lake, the recreation, [and] the woods."

"[I like] the nature," she said. "I come up [to Montpelier] for the week, and I'm like, 'Too many cars, too many people, take me back to the woods.'"

There are some tradeoffs to a rural lifestyle, Quimby said, such as having to travel for conveniences and not always having reliable internet, but it's a compromise she's willing to make.

Quimby and her aunt are making the trek south for the anniversary.

"The legislature will still be in session, so I'm not sure how early we'll be able to get out that day," she said. "We'll come down Friday, stay over, and be there for Saturday. … I'm looking forward to the event."

West Concord, Minnesota

Like Massachusetts, Minnesota has a Concord and a West Concord, but when the railroad came through in the 1880s — west of Concord — West Concord became the dominant town.

"We all say it was unfortunate the railroad went to the west, because the Concord area is kind of rolling, and a river goes through, so it would have been more scenic," West Concord Historical Society board president Emery Kleven said. "The actual town of West Concord kind of sits on a swamp. They have water issues all the time."

Kleven grew up in West Concord.

"We're very, very rural," he said. "We called our little town of 800 'the dairy capital of the world,' but it was more like the Upper Midwest."

Rob Morrison at the museum in Concord, Vermont. Courtesy photo

One of the town's main attractions is the museum, housed in the former West Concord High School, built in 1902. It displays 10 rooms of historical memorabilia and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

"We're pretty proud of that," Kleven said.

When Kleven comes to Massachusetts, it will be the 38th state he's visited. While he's looking forward to the anniversary festivities and exploring the area's history, he's also hoping to see a Red Sox game.

"I always wanted to go to Fenway," he said.

Concord University, Athens, West Virginia

Concord University is "absolutely gorgeous," library director Elizabeth Chandler said. "My favorite thing to do is take my lunch break and just walk around."

The school retains the name of the original town.

"The town was actually called Concord Church when it was first established in 1872," said Lindsey Byars, director of marketing and public relations for the school. "There was a postal code reason that it had to change to Athens."

Coming to Concord, Massachusetts, was on a "bucket list" for both women, and they're looking forward to the festivities.

Welcome to West Concord, Minnesota. Courtesy photo

"Our country is young in a lot of ways, and where we are, there are historical places, but we don't have historical moments," Byars said. "This makes me feel a little more connected to the origins of our country. And so I'm excited to get to be part of that."

Chandler plans to take a poll amongst the attendees on pronouncing Concord correctly.

"I'm not from the area, so I say 'Con-kerd,'" she said. "But everyone here says 'Con-cord.' I'm interested to see what everyone says."

"Remind me at the welcome party," Morrison joked. "We'll split the room."

SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL SPECIAL EDITION

Mute witnesses to the Revolution, houses display flags for 250th

By Laurie O'Neill
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If only these walls could talk.

What would they say about having watched and heard the British Regulars marching by in their startling scarlet coats during the early hours of April 19, 1775?

These are the Witness Houses. Some are more familiar than others, such as Wright Tavern, Orchard House, and the Colonial Inn.

Most are private homes that reflect the devotion and commitment of the owners who serve as their stewards. The stories of these places are colorful and sometimes complicated. In one lived a midnight rider, and another was a saddlery and leather shop that was looted by the retreating British.

As a project of Concord250, many of the Witness Houses, which the Regulars passed as they moved through Concord, are displaying flags designating them as such. So are many of the town's 1775 Houses (though some are older than that), which are situated away from the British route but stood during the war.

Witness House flags depict The Minute Man statue, and 1775 House flags bear an image of one of two lanterns that were hung as a signal in the belfry of the Old North Church in Boston on the night of April 18, 1775.

Faye Allen, a member of a subcommittee of Concord250 whose purview is community participation, designed the flags with the input of Acton printer John MacKinnon and Holly Cratsley, chair of the subcommittee.

Anne Clifford, Concord's senior planner, last year provided a list of 24 Witness Houses and 51 1775 Houses, using the Battle Ground Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan of 2021 with input from Minute Man National Historical Park, though the National Park Service houses are not included.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Maria Fitzgerald and her daughter, Erin, at the Ephriam Potter House (1752); John and Marilyn Brady, owners of the Brown/Beaton/Heywood House (1719); L to r: Susan Ellsworth, Rich Feeley, Karen Mone, and Bre Vader, who live in the multi-unit A and J Moore House, some of which dates to 1740; Jeff and Maryann Street at the Jonathan Fiske House, which was built "before 1724," according to records. Photos: Laurie O'Neill/The Concord Bridge

A former saddlery

Jeff and Maryann Street have lived in the Jonathan Fiske House for 35 years, raising their two sons there. The handsome home, with its wide board floors, low ceilings, and five fireplaces, is shaded by a pair of gracious maples. It backs up against a ridge on which Concord's Liberty Pole, a symbol of the town's defiance of British authority, stood before the British destroyed it.

Also known as Reuben Brown Saddler's Shop, it's one of several Witness Houses situated along a stretch of Lexington Road referred to as Concord's American Mile.

The house plaque reads "before 1724" and it could be as old as 1687, says Street. According to town records, it was built on a lot that was part of the Peter Bulkeley estate, and Fiske was a saddler living there in 1725.

Reuben Brown ran a saddlery in the building later on and lived next door, in a house that dates to 1720, according to town records. Having witnessed the advance of the British just outside the center of Lexington, Brown had raced back to Concord on horseback to report what he saw to Maj. John Buttrick.

Though his saddlery had struggled, Brown's shop prospered when Massachusetts began preparing for war. He supplied the militia with leather items, including holsters, belts, and cartridge boxes.

Emerson's cigar

Marilyn Brady says she gets "goosebumps" when she sits in the dining room of her and her husband John's 1719 home known as the Brown/Beaton/Heywood House on Lexington Road. "I think about who sat in this room before us," she says.

The Bradys moved into the home 32 years ago, drawn to the town's school system and the house's proximity to the center. They did considerable restoration work, including stripping 10 layers of paint from the wainscoting. The home has rare lapped, beaded siding and a lack of corner boards, which help date it to the early 18th century. An adjacent barn was built in the early 1800s.

The home's many owners have included its namesakes John Brown, a blacksmith; John Beaton, a local merchant and town treasurer; Jonathan Fay, an attorney who married Lucy Prescott; and Dr. Abiel Heywood, town clerk for 38 years. The Bradys' son and daughter-in-law — after some lobbying by Marilyn — named their baby Lucy Prescott Brady.

Marilyn shares a story about the house that involves Ralph Waldo Emerson, who lived nearby from 1835 to 1882. Emerson enjoyed a good cigar, but his wife, Lidian, did not want him to smoke it while he was walking into town. When he left his house, Emerson would tuck the cigar into the fence that used to line the front of what is now the Brady home.

A midnight rider

Frank "Rich" Feeley and Susan Ellsworth live in the A and J Moore House further east on Lexington Road. It contains four connected units. The oldest part of the structure dates to 1740, and Ellsworth's unit, which she purchased 33 years ago, dates to 1839.

The house is an example of how complex the history of a 17th-century structure can be. It sits on a lot granted to "the first settler," Francis Fletcher, records say, and was sold to Abel Prescott in the 1770s. Prescott's son, Dr. Samuel Prescott, was one of the famed "midnight riders." A plaque on the stone wall in front tells his story.

Samuel learned of the British approach while in Lexington, courting a young woman, and he rode to alert Concord. Stopped by the British, who are said to have threatened to "blow his brains out," Prescott spurred his horse, cleared a stone wall, and escaped while the officers were arresting Paul Revere.

'How it used to be'

Maria Fitzgerald's home, the Ephraim Potter House, lies about a mile from the town center, close to Route 2, and has an unusual claim to fame. It is considered to be the oldest "pest house" in the country, used to quarantine people afflicted with diseases such as smallpox or cholera.

The home dates to 1752 and was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1977. It displays a 1775 House flag.

Before the Revolution, Potter is said to have stored supplies, such as tents and canteens, for the militia. His wife, Sarah, died of smallpox in 1792 and is buried in a graveyard across the road.

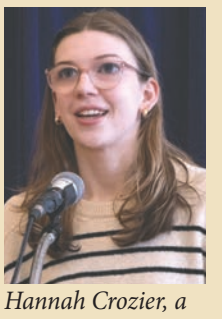
Fitzgerald and her husband, John, had lived in antique homes before moving to the Potter house 30 years ago. John, who passed away last year, was passionate about history, and he and his family participated in reenactments. He was a member of His Majesty's Tenth Regiment of Foot in America, a historically re-created infantry unit founded to portray the service of the British Army during the Revolutionary War.

One of their two children, Erin, is a geologist who, as a third grader, conducted an archaeological dig in the yard with her father. They unearthed marbles, an iron hook, pottery pieces, and a gold thimble engraved with the letters CEP that may have belonged to Corinna Prescott, who married the house's second owner, Elbridge Hayden, in 1842.

John's dream was to protect and preserve the home, Maria says, and that is what she continues to do. The house has four fireplaces, and Maria loves to have a fire going and "think about how it used to be" when the home's early occupants kept warm that way.

Student creates virtual 'waysides' for Witness Houses

It was while taking a course called U.S. Public History at Concord Academy that senior Hannah Crozier realized "how much I love local history and all of the stories it has to offer."



Hannah Crozier, a Concord Academy senior, is making virtual signs for the town's Witness Houses. Photo: Laurie O'Neill/ The Concord Bridge

Her teacher, Kim Fredrick, had heard that Concord250 wanted to get people involved with the Witness Houses, and "we discussed my doing an individual study," Hannah says. They decided that Hannah would create virtual signs, which they are calling "waysides," for several of them.

A database that contains information on every home in the state became the foundation of Hannah's research. A simple Google search often followed, but she also used sources including historical blogs, journal entries, and newspapers, and she visited Special Collections at the Concord Free Public Library. Once she collected sufficient material, she summarized it and composed the text for the signs.

Her project is a work in process, and so far Hannah has chosen seven houses. They include The Old Manse, the Bullet Hole (Elisha Jones) House, and the Colonial Inn.

Hannah, who lives in Newton, wanted the information on the waysides to be engaging — as if each was providing a story that most people wouldn't already know.

Augmented reality

The virtual sign for the Old Manse begins with the question, "When was the time you felt the most scared?" and goes on to describe a terrifying moment for Phoebe Bliss Emerson Ripley, Ralph Waldo Emerson's grandmother.

Late on the night of April 19, 1775, Hannah writes, Ripley was awakened by one of the enslaved men at the house who was holding an ax and "yelling" that the Redcoats were coming. Ripley "fainted on the spot."

The virtual signs will work like this, Hannah says: "People will go to the Visitors Center on Main Street, and use the Wi-Fi there to access the free Hoverlay app, a program we used with augmented reality software that combines digital aspects with the space around you."

Then, she adds, "They can go out into Concord and look for the houses included in the project" and there will be a symbol for the app. "If they hold their phone up to it, they can read about the house and in some cases, view a short video."

Hannah's goal, she says, "is to get people of all ages engaged in the history of Concord. If I can tell an interesting story that is accessible to a wide range of people, I've done my job."

— Laurie O'Neill

What to do, where to go, how to get there

By Dakota Antelman
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Show up early and know what you want to see.

So advises a Concordian who remembers the last time the town held an event of similar scale to Saturday's landmark 250th anniversary of the Revolution's start.

As the crowds put organizers' plans to the test, officials are directing visitors toward FAQ pages, maps, and other online information — and readying an army of volunteer ambassadors.

The extra-special Patriots Day parade may be a highlight for many — and Concord honored citizen and Independent Battery member Lowell "Sandy" Smith says visitors should expect to stay mostly put once they've picked a viewing location.

What's the plan?

Here's Saturday's schedule:

6 a.m.
Dawn Salute, Old North Bridge

8:30 a.m.
Parade begins at Emerson Field

9:30 a.m.
Old North Bridge ceremony

1 p.m.
Block party begins in Concord Center

8:15 p.m.
Drone show at Concord-Carlisle High School

Photo: Ken McGagh/The Concord Bridge

"If the crowds materialize the way that people expect, it's going to be very hard to walk along the parade route," Smith said.

Change of plans

Organizers had envisioned a drone show over Monument Square, but changed course at the eleventh hour after realizing crowds wouldn't be able to see the full display. Moving the show to CCHS forced them to update promotional materials that had been circulating for months.

Getting around

Road restrictions start at 6 p.m. on Friday and ramp up overnight. Closures cover most of Concord north of Route 2 and will remain in place until 11 p.m. on Saturday. Residents of those areas got placards allowing them to drive past roadblocks.

Expect a townwide on-street parking ban from 10 p.m. on Friday to 10 p.m. on Saturday as officials hope to funnel people toward satellite lots.

Officials urge out-of-towners to take the Commuter Rail, which will be running extra service on April 19. People can also park at one of seven satellite lots, where buses will ferry them to The Concord Museum or the North Bridge visitor center at Minute Man National Historical Park.

Another shuttle will run from Concord to Lexington Center.

And yet another system will serve Concord residents at 12 local pickup locations.

Most buses will run from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m., meaning they won't be an option for getting to the Dawn Salute. Officials are planning an early morning bus route between the MCI-Concord lot and North Bridge, but riders had to reserve a spot, and nearly half the 100 seats were taken as of April 11.

Bikes are banned on the Commuter Rail. Officials are bringing in bike racks for people who want to ride into town.

Do's and don'ts

Beyond the events, Saturday's amenities include food trucks open from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., hydration stations, and portable toilets in roughly 40 locations.

A jumbotron on Stow Street will stream the parade and the North Bridge ceremonies.

Officials urge guests to bring seethrough bags to events. All bags are subject to search. Police will be a visible presence as they prepare for protests, counterprotests, and other challenges.

VIP list?

Fifty years after President Gerald Ford came to Concord for the 200th anniversary of the start of the Revolution, rumors have swirled about this year's dignitaries.

Barring last-minute surprises, Gov. Maura Healey is the expected keynote speaker for the North Bridge festivities. Officials invited current and former presidents, but did not announce any affirmative responses as of press time.

Spirit of (19)75

Smith was part of the independent battery in 1975 and remembers startling the event's many protesters with the early-morning Dawn Salute cannon blasts. Those who have never seen — or heard — the guns go off should be prepared.

"It's a lot louder than they expect," Smith said.

This year, Smith said those bent on seeing the parade roll through Concord Center will need to stake out their spots ahead of time. Space will also be limited at North Bridge.

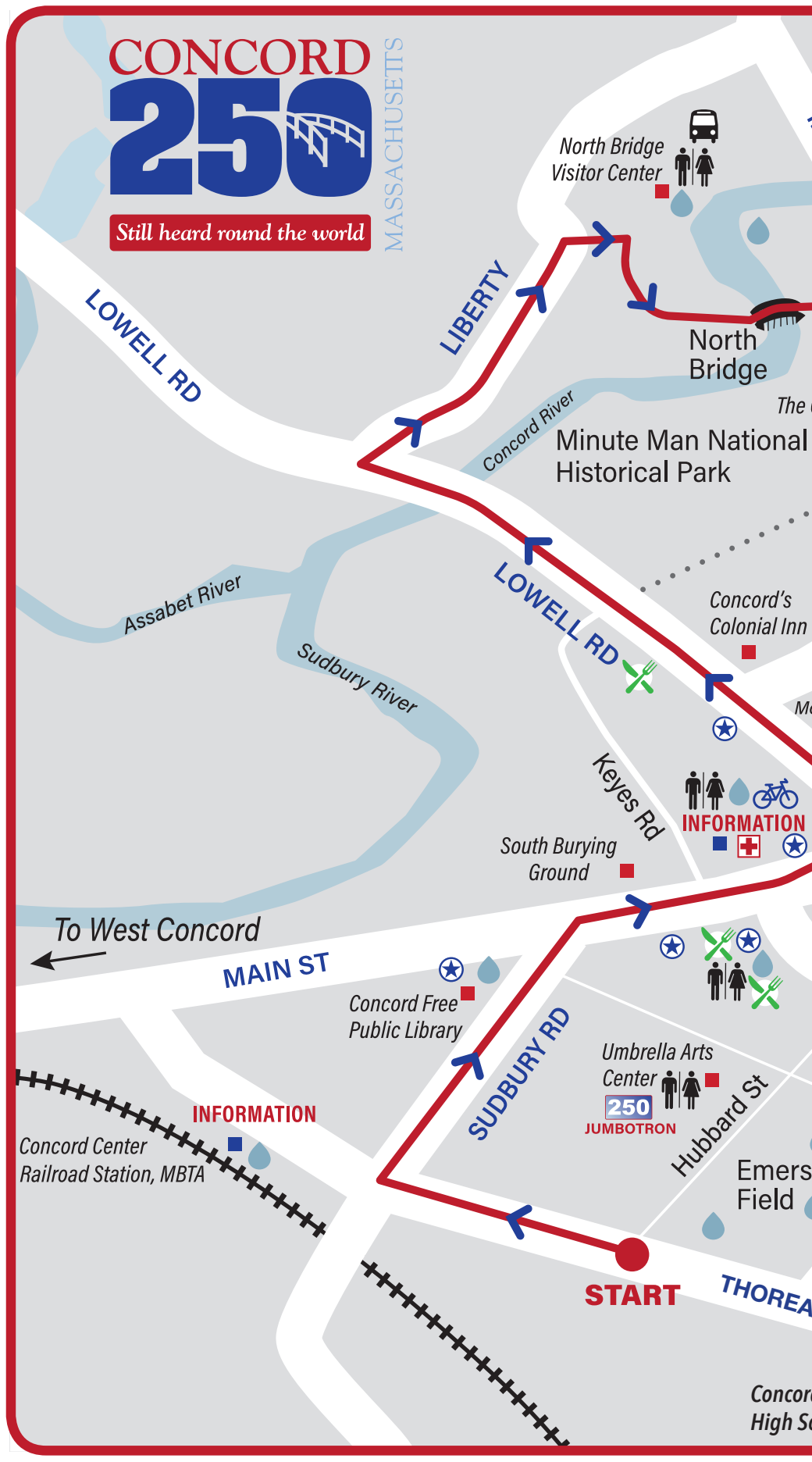
Interested in getting a good parade view but agnostic about the setting?

Smith said the stretch of Lowell Road between Concord's Colonial Inn and Liberty Street has historically had smaller crowds. He also flagged the area across from First Parish Church as an elevated vantage point.

Questions? Call a town-run non-emergency information line at (978) 318-2500 from 4 to 8 p.m. on Friday and from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m. on Saturday, or visit Concord250.org.

While the planning has had hiccups, Concord250 co-chair Gary Clayton said at one recent community question and answer session that organizers feel good.

"We've been at this for about three years and it is coming together," he said. "We are ready."



Concord sightseeing isn't just for tourists

By Victor Curran

Something we Concord tour guides are often asked is, "How long should I allow to see Concord?"

I always suggest at least two days, because there's so much to see. But we who live here don't have that time pressure — and because we're so accustomed to living among our history, we often fail to see what's right before our eyes.

Concord's spectacular celebration for the 250th anniversary of "the shot heard round the world" is likely to bring tens of thousands of tourists to town. It's also a great excuse for us locals to take in what we've been missing.

You've probably seen Daniel Chester French's iconic "Minute Man" statue at the North Bridge, but have you viewed his other sculptures in town?

French's "Mourning Victory" is the centerpiece of the Melvin Memorial in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery on Bedford Street. He also made a larger-than-life marble statue of Ralph Waldo Emerson that's on display at the Concord Free Public Library at 129 Main Street.

The 'Bullet Hole House'

The next time you're on your way to Monument Square, stop by the Elisha Jones House at 242 Monument Street. It's known locally as the "Bullet Hole House," thanks to a hole in the western shed's facade made by a musket ball in 1775. (It's a private home, though, so it's best to view the hole from across the street.)

Speaking of the Monument Square area, many of us may pass the Wright Tavern at 2 Lexington Road every day without pausing to reflect on its place at the heart of Concord history. It welcomed delegates to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress that met in Concord in 1774 to plan their resistance to British Rule. In 1775, Minute Men gathered there before taking up their position at the North Bridge, and later Redcoats commandeered the tavern as a field headquarters.

The tavern isn't regularly open to the public now, but it has guided tours and special events and is being transformed into an educational center and meeting place.

Concord, of course, has outstanding museums — and this month, we inaugurate a brand-new one: The Massachusetts National Guard

CELEBRATE WITH US

APRIL 19, 2025

PATRIOTS' DAY

TIMELINE

6:00am:
DAWN SALUTE

5:45am:
Muster at Buttrick Hillside
6:00am:
Dawn Salute

8:30am:
PARADE BEGINS

9:30am:
NORTH BRIDGE CEREMONY

Mid-day:
PARADE ENDS

Post Parade:
CONCORD250 BLOCK PARTY

CONCORD-CARLISLE HIGH SCHOOL
7:30-8:45pm:
CONCORD250
"PATRIOTS LIGHT"

8:15pm:
DRONE SHOW

CONCORD MUSEUM:
Free admission all day

MINUTE MAN NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK:
Events happening all day

A list of Concord National Guard commanders who served in wartime in the collections room at the Massachusetts National Guard Museum. Photo: Ken McGagh/The Concord Bridge

Concord has no shortage of historical experiences to unlock, including at sites like the Wright Tavern. Photo: Laurie O'Neill/The Concord Bridge

Museum is housed in the Concord Armory at 91 Everett Street. The museum will be open on Patriots Day, and thereafter, every Thursday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Some exhibits are close to home: Visit the new museum's permanent collections to see medals and field equipment that belonged to Concord's Michael Dee, who commanded the 26th Military Police Company in France during World War I. There's also the bullet-riddled pith helmet of Concord-born Otis Whitney, who escaped enemy gunfire at Guadalcanal during World War II.

Ambling and rambling

If outdoor recreation is more your style, try the Emerson-Thoreau Amble, so called because it connects Emerson's house on Cambridge Turnpike with the Walden Woods, where Thoreau lived for two years by the shores of Walden Pond.

Wear sturdy shoes and prepare for a bracing walk of about a mile and three-quarters. You'll go through Hapgood Wright Town Forest, where scenic highlights include Fairyland Pond and Brister's Spring. The latter takes its name from Brister Freeman, who lived in those woods as a free man after having been enslaved in Concord. A stone marker shows where his house stood.

Beyond the house site is Thoreau's Path, where the author's words in granite and bronze inspire thoughtful reflection. Across Route 2, the amble continues into Walden Pond State Reservation to Thoreau's house site.

Indoors or out, this celebratory year is the perfect time to treat yourself to some Concord experiences that aren't overrun by tourists.

The author is a Concord tour guide and historic interpreter.

SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL SPECIAL EDITION

Filmmakers walk Concord's history for new Revolutionary War miniseries

By Christine M. Quirk
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When Ken Burns was 19 in 1972, he spent a summer in Concord, teaching at Concord Academy and tutoring an inmate at MCI. Now, more than five decades later, Burns and his team from Florentine Films, Sarah Botstein and David Schmidt, are wrapping up work on "The American Revolution," a 12-hour, six-part miniseries written by Geoffrey C. Ward, scheduled to air on PBS in November.

Producers and co-directors David Schmidt, Sarah Botstein, and Ken Burns. Photo by Stephanie Berger

"As a student of history, and I still am a student of history, even before I began this project, Lexington and Concord have particular significance on April 19," Burns said. "It's a big, big, important date."

Traversing the past

Many here have learned about the Revolutionary War, perhaps even taking a middle-school field trip to the North Bridge and buying a tricorn hat.

"I think a lot of people tend to bury it in nostalgia and in kind of a gallant, bloodless myth," Burns said. "It's a much more interesting and much more complicated story."

For authenticity, Schmidt said, there's nothing like being in the place where history happened.

"You have to walk the ground," Schmidt said.

Crews filmed at Minute Man, North Bridge, the Old Manse, the Barrett House, and along Battle Road.

Schmidt noted that camera crews must often avoid power lines and other modern tells when shooting a period piece. While Minute Man's open space offered the historical feel of the 18th century, there were still adjustments to be made for legitimacy.

"There's a road that runs behind it, and statuary … we had to aim our cameras in such a way that you wouldn't pick up on that, or wait till the traffic passed," he said. "We wanted to be sure we weren't filming the public."

The series shows what it was like to lead an 18th-century army into battle — with the resources available at the time. Schmidt said local reenactors were key to that, faithful to the period in uniforms, equipment, and musketry.

"[They] were so committed to getting it right," he said. "I think it will help for those watching the film to just be able to see human activity and animal activity and imagine what kind of an undertaking this really was."

Authentic voices

Burns called the miniseries "intimate and personal" and said the filmmakers drew on "hundreds of first-person voices."

"I think in the case of New England in particular, the literacy rate was so high that we really are able to hear from a wider variety of the people … who lived in 18th-century North America than you might find in other situations," Schmidt said.

A film crew at the Barrett House. Photo by Shyala Jayasinghe/Florentine Films

One of those voices is Hannah Davis, whose husband, Issac, was the first colonial officer to die in the Revolution. Concord's Scott Vanderhoof (*see page 1*) is their direct descendant.

"It's amazing to think about what she was thinking seeing him out the door and what she was thinking seeing him come home at night with the bodies of two other men from town," Schmidt said.

The documentary includes stories of women, people of color, and Indigenous patriots, Burns said, such as the Haudenosaunee — or the Iroquois Confederacy — the Stockbridge Indians, and enslaved Black men.

"We just want to tell a good story. So we're like umpires calling balls and strikes," Burns said. "Including everybody's story makes everybody's story better."

'The most significant'

Burns first considered this project in 2015; it was serendipity, he said, that the premiere will coincide with the 250th anniversary.

"You don't plan for these things, and all of a sudden you realize … oh, my goodness, we're going to come out in 2025 and that's 250 years," he said.

Burns said that telling the story of a war is always complicated, but it would be hard to overstate Concord's role in the American Revolution.

"The first episode is all the setup, and it climaxes with Lexington and Concord, and that day, April 19, where the world was changed forever," Burns said. "The American Revolution, and the subsequent formation of the United States, is the most important event in the last 2,000 years. If you're counting on what, after the birth of Christ, was the most significant event, I don't think you could argue that it was not the American Revolution."

★ ★ ★

'Minute Man' marks 150th birthday where 'embattled farmers stood'

By Laurie O'Neill
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A town eager for a monument to the farmer-soldiers who routed the British.

A reluctant young sculptor.

And a dedication that drew tens of thousands — but not the sculptor himself.

All are part of the story of "The Minute Man," the bronze figure created by Daniel Chester French that has stood on the west side of the Old North Bridge since 1875.

Details about the sculptor and his statue make for a sometimes surprising account.

Whittling turnips

Ralph Waldo Emerson was among the Concordians complaining that the site of the skirmish was marked only by an obelisk installed in 1836 where the enemy stood but not on the other side, where Americans fought and fell.

Farmer Ebenezer Hubbard owned the land around the bridge and left $1,000 in his will for a new monument and another $600 to repair the bridge. In 1872, a committee formed at Town Meeting was tasked with deciding on a statue.

French, a largely unknown Concord sculptor in his early 20s, created small pieces, mostly animal figures, medallions, and busts of his siblings and friends. He had lived here since 1867, when his family moved from Exeter, New Hampshire.

At Massachusetts Institute of Technology, French proved ill suited for academia. He failed three courses and came home to work on the family farm.

He had been demonstrating artistic talent since boyhood, writing of "whittling and carving things from wood and gypsum, or even from turnips." May Alcott, Louisa's youngest sister, encouraged French and gave him clay and modeling tools.

Too fierce at first

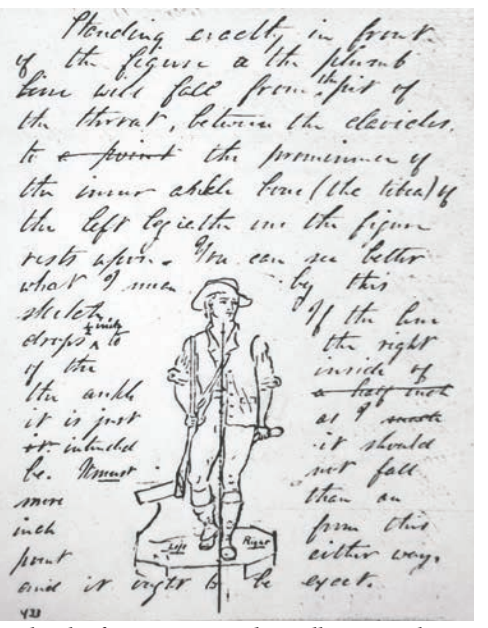
After reviewing proposals, the committee commissioned French to create a larger-than-life figure honoring the minutemen. Despite his being relatively unknown in the art world, the committee liked that French was a hometown boy who appreciated Concord's history.

Though Emerson and others had faith in him, the sculptor was reluctant to take on the project, biographer Harold Holzer wrote. For one thing, he had never created a life-size figure; this one was to be 7 feet tall.

French filled his Sudbury Road bedroom with statue models before moving them into the barn. The committee rejected his first attempt, calling it "too fierce looking." Member John S. Keyes pronounced it "pretty bad," according to Holzer. French was inclined to agree.

French labored in Concord and then in a rented space in Boston with ceilings high enough to accommodate the figure.

He was inspired by copies of Greek sculptures he saw at the Boston Athenaeum, particularly one of the "Apollo Belvedere," which would influence the pose of "The Minute Man." He studied and sketched antique buttons and tricorn hats, and a musket, plow, and powder horn.



A sketch of a minute man by William Merchant French, Daniel's brother, possibly as a suggestion for the statue, c. 1870-71. From the Chesterwood Archives, Chapin Library, Williams College

The sculptor used live models — including himself. One Revolutionary figure the statue is said to be based on is Capt. Isaac Davis of Acton, who was killed in 1775 after he led his company into the conflict at the Old North Bridge. Davis is the fifth great-grandfather of Concord hardware store proprietor Scott Vanderhoof (*see page 1*).

In 1873, the committee approved a new model, a "brawny yeoman soldier in shirtsleeves, clutching a musket, his discarded coat thrown casually over the nearby plow," writes Holzer. French used Davis' plow, which is displayed in the Acton Town Hall, as a model for the one in the sculpture.

The plaster cast of "The Minute Man" went to a Chicopee foundry six months before the April 19 dedication. Due to the high cost of bronze, former U.S. Attorney General Ebenezer Rockwood Hoar of Concord helped push through legislation to provide 10 decommissioned Civil War-era cannons to be melted down for the project.

Where's Daniel?

"The Minute Man" was unveiled at the bridge in 1875 on a blustery day. Among the estimated 30,000 to 50,000 attendees — a "monumental traffic jam" was reported on the rail lines to Lexington and Concord — were governors, generals, and Supreme Court judges.

Speakers included President Ulysses S. Grant, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Emerson, who had penned the "Concord Hymn," the first stanza of which appears on the statue's base. The program went on so long that a journalist quipped that perhaps more people died from exposure at the celebration than in the battle it commemorated.

French was in Italy and didn't attend. The sculptor finally saw his statue a year later when Emerson hosted a party in the Old Manse that also celebrated the sculptor's April 20 birthday.

"The Minute Man" propelled French into national prominence. He would create nearly 100 celebrated public sculptures, including his magnum opus: the seated Lincoln in Washington, D.C.

French ultimately expressed his gratitude to the people of Concord for trusting an inexperienced sculptor, adding, "This action resulted in a statue that I think I can say without blushing is better than the citizens had a right to expect."

In 1876, the town finally awarded French $1,000. Though grateful for the opportunity and the fame that followed, French vowed he would never again let a client set his fee.

In 1888, the sculptor married his first cousin, Mary Adams French. He died in 1931 at his Stockbridge home and studio, Chesterwood, and was interred in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, his gravestone inscribed with the words, "A Heritage of Beauty."

Modern Minute Men's major moment

By Gabriel Martins
Correspondent

After an early-morning skirmish in Lexington, the "shot heard round the world" rang out in Concord on April 19, 1775. The bloody defiance of British authority gave rise to widespread resistance from citizen soldiers armed with muskets and an itch for independence.

Today, some are donning the blue woolen coats of George Washington's army, hoisting muskets, and re-enacting the war's early days.

Since 1962, the Concord Minute Men have been commemorating the militias of that time. The modern-day patriots, a familiar presence in Concord parades and at other local events, will play a featured role in the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution.

The Concord Minute Men at an April 8 rehearsal for Patriots Day ceremonies at Old North Bridge. Photo: Ken McGagh/The Concord Bridge

Big day, big presence

Capt. Carl Sweeney, who has been a Concord Minute Man for 54 years, starting when he was 16, will lead the 47-strong unit on Patriots Day through North Bridge, along with a music unit. After that, they'll head to Minute Man National Historical Park, where they'll perform vignettes of the war's first battles.

Sweeney said a lot of work went into recruiting members through newspapers, social media, and word of mouth.

"We've been very, very fortunate," Sweeney said. "We've picked up some really great, dedicated, talented people, and our goal is [that] you come join us and you do what you can do to make it fun."

Drills and rehearsals

The Minute Men have been preparing assiduously leading up to the anniversary. The music company — typically playing fifes and drums — have met every Tuesday night, year round.

As for the group holding muskets, they ran three to four drills, starting in January, with different units in the area, said Doug Ellis, Sweeney's predecessor as captain.

"We'll drill with Acton, Lincoln, Sudbury, Bedford; usually we'll do it in Lincoln," Ellis said. "It's always just a better experience when you've got more people doing it."

They strive for authenticity, Ellis said. The unit will follow the 1764 royal manual of arms, a drill protocol used by the British and adopted by the Colonials.

"They drilled in 1774, same as we are now," Ellis said. "The whole idea is, we get out there, we do the drills. So we're all doing the commands the same way. We understand the commands. We understand how it's supposed to work."

Safety is paramount

A different group's musket misfired a live round through a beam in the Westford Museum during a practice in 2023, so the Minute Men exercise extreme caution to prevent mishaps.

Doug Ellis aiming his musket. Photo by Gabriel Martins

Stephen M. Vultaggio in his revolutionary garb. Photo courtesy of Stephen M. Vultaggio

"The primary key is safety because we do have live powder when we're firing," Ellis said. "An accident is not acceptable, and we haven't had one, and we don't ever want to have one."

It's no easy feat being a Minute Man — nor does it come cheap.

The typical uniform costs around $4,000, although they have hand-me-downs from former members. Maintaining authenticity standards with the National Park Service is difficult. Ellis recalled when a person from NPS accused him of having a cotton canteen strap rather than an authentic hemp one, which he had.

"They'll split hairs … over the finest details," Ellis said. "I, for example, will not participate in a national park event because of how just overbearing they are on those little things that don't matter."

Sweeney said such strict standards can discourage newcomers, which is why the Concord Minute Men won't turn anyone away who wants to join.

"We're really a parade and a celebratory unit, [and] if somebody really wants to represent the town and participate, then we're all welcoming," Sweeney said. "Come on in, and we'll make it work."

Bicuspids and tricorns

Dentist Stephen M. Vultaggio has been a Minute Man for eight years. His office is decorated in Colonial memorabilia. A tricorn hat leans against a sketch of himself in a Minute Man uniform.

A blue binder in his office traces his lineage to a foot soldier in the Revolution.

"You can't go very far without bumping into history," Vultaggio said.

He gained an appreciation for history through his grandmother, Florence Towne Bernier, who was head of the Daughters of the American Revolution, an organization for women directly descended from Revolutionary patriots, in Lexington for three decades.

Vultaggio has since joined other re-enactment groups, such as the 1812 Marine Guard, which works with the Navy and conducts demonstrations on the USS Constitution.

"I think my nickname sometimes, especially with the 1812 Marines, is 'Hollywood,' because I love getting out with the people," Vultaggio said. "I feel like one of those characters at Disney they line up to get [pictures] with. I just like making people smile."

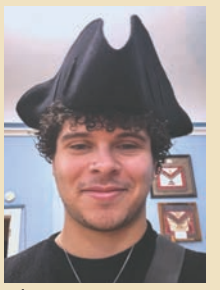
These stories are part of a partnership between The Concord Bridge and the Boston University Department of Journalism.

Freshly planted tulips and a Concord250 medallion frame the Concord Independent Battery as the group prepares to raise a new American flag in Concord Center on April 12. Photo: Ken McGagh/The Concord Bridge. ***For more photo galleries and live Patriots Day coverage, visit concordbridge.org.***

A patriot's day

We enter the Masonic Lodge in Concord and put on the gear. The black cartridge box wraps around my torso and hangs by my right hip. I hoist the 9-pound musket and place the tricorn hat on my head.

If it weren't for my modern blue jeans, I'd be ready for 1775.



The reporter tries a tricorn. Photo by Gabriel Martins

Doug Ellis, a former captain, usually marches side by side with his fellow Concord Minute Men. Today, he's got a bumbling reporter to instruct in the ways of a latter-day citizen soldier.

"Shoulder your firelock!" he orders.

In two motions starting with the right hand, he swings the long musket across his torso. Then, against his left shoulder with the lock of the gun facing away. The long weapon adds a few feet to his height.

I repeat the motion.

The musket is balanced and ergonomic. With enough training, someone might feel good about holding it. For my part, I just don't want to drop it. I also keep tapping my hat, which feels crooked on my head.

Ellis instructs me to hoist the musket in different ways, demonstrating how to present the firelock and how to properly place it by my side.

Another unfamiliar task

I embarrass myself as I try to flip the ramrod, a long steel rod meant to load a musket, down the barrel. I struggle to pull it out of its sheath and throw it down the barrel. It bounces with a ping.

"Prepare your firelock!" He orders once again.

I lift the musket and place its brass butt against my right shoulder. He steps behind me, placing his left foot along the side of my right. The barrel of his musket is parallel to mine.

"Fire!" he orders.

Normally, a flash of smoke and fire would billow about 15 feet from the mouth of the barrel. Instead, it snaps.

"Pretty cool, right?" he asks.

I asked him about the muskets, which he refinished himself. He walks through the details of stripping, sanding, and refinishing the walnut stock of the many firearms he's fixed up. Some barrels, he said, have rusted over time.

I'm told the other Minute Men are especially fond of the ornate weapon I'm holding.

He details his work with pride, passing his hand along the long gun as if he's refinishing it now. He talks about his appreciation for the ergonomic design and the balance of the musket, which was "remarkable" for the time.

I fire the musket one more time. Its snap echoes in the lodge.

I place the musket by a brown pew with blue cushions and remove my cartridge box. For some reason, the hat now feels comfortable.

I help him bring his equipment back to his car. Before he opens the trunk, he points at his license plate, which reads "1775."

"My two loves: masonry and 1775!" he says.

— Gabriel Martins

SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL SPECIAL EDITION

The big dance: Patriots Ball returns to the Concord Armory

By Christine M. Quirk
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They parked on Everett Street and walked to the Concord Armory in pairs and quartets. They came in colonial costume — breeches, long skirts, tricorn hats — but also ball gowns and black tie.

It was rainy and wet, and an unseasonable snow had fallen that morning, but it didn't matter. After a pandemic pause on the Patriots Ball, the party got restarted.

"This is a grand public tradition that goes way back," Laura Mullins, a Ball Committee co-chair, said as the evening began.

The Armory drill room was transformed into a ballroom with festive lights and decorations that Jennifer Lannan called "just beautiful."

"My husband and I moved here in 1991, and we have tried to go to every single Patriots Ball," she said. "This is by far the most fashionable."

Said ballgoer Jennifer Clarke, "I had been coming for years before the pandemic, and I forgot how fun the night is. I forgot how people really lean into this process."

Roseanne Swain, left, and Mary Jean Laviolette of the Concord Minute Men Fife and Drum Corps party like it's 1775 as they dance to the music of The Love Dogs.
Photo: Ken McGagh/The Concord Bridge

Reviving tradition

Concord250 Corporation president Henry Dane, sporting a tuxedo and a tricorn, said that in planning the ball's return, the non-profit "had many advantages, including a strong desire to do it, and a couple of people, Molly Bergen and Laura Mullins, who were willing to take on the task." Plus, said the former Select Board chair, "We had the ability to fund it without having to go through a lot of red tape."

The evening began with the Concord Independent Battery presenting the colors. The Concord Minute Men played the national anthem. There was a cash bar and light refreshments, though some brought their own snacks (in one table's case, pizza). The Love Dogs provided the music, and at 11:30 p.m., guests marched to Concord Center to watch "Samuel Prescott" arrive on horseback.

For some, the event brought back fond memories.

"I grew up here," Cindy Jump said. "My mom and dad always came to the Patriots Ball, so when I told them I was coming for the first time, they were so excited."

Seeing the Armory decked out made Kathy Flynn think of her parents, too.

"They used to have the policeman's ball here," she said. "My mom used to get $25 for a dress to wear to the ball. So I got sentimental when I came in."

CONCORD250 BY THE NUMBERS

1,800 PARADE PARTICIPANTS

~1,200 LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL AVAILABLE

212 PORTABLE TOILETS

196 EVENT AMBASSADORS*

55 PARADE MARCHING UNITS

33 MOBILE FOOD VENDORS

14 BLOCK PARTY VENUES

12 RESIDENT SHUTTLE LOCATIONS

7 SATELLITE PARKING LOTS

**As of April 9*
Source: Concord250 organizers

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Walden Pond. Photo: Ken McGagh/The Concord Bridge

The profound resonance of Concord's two revolutions

By Alan Lightman

Concord was the birthplace of not one revolution but two: the Revolutionary War of 1775 and, in the early to mid-1800s, the emergence of Transcendentalism — a philosophical, spiritual, and literary movement that emphasized individualism and the inherent goodness of humanity and nature.

The Transcendentalists rejected the conventions of organized religion and instead advocated for a personal connection with nature and the divine. Members of this second revolution included such people as Ralph Waldo Emerson (essayist), Henry David Thoreau (naturalist, essayist, and philosopher), Bronson Alcott (philosopher), and Margaret Fuller (journalist and editor). Other foundational writers of this period included, of course, Louisa May Alcott and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Almost all of these people were Concordians.

There were connections between the two revolutions. Ralph Waldo was the grandson of the Rev. William Emerson, who was Concord's minister at the time of the American Revolution and who fired up his parishioners after each insult by the British Parliament. Another connection: Rev. Emerson built the Old Manse, where both Ralph Waldo and Hawthorne lived.

The wonder of Walden

One Transcendentalist, Thoreau, continues to reverberate in my life. Some days, but not often enough, I manage to pry myself loose from the rush and heave of the world and take a quiet walk around Walden Pond. In autumn, the air is crisp and sharp; in summer soft and aromatic. In winter, the woods stand stiffly, silent and white, and the pond is sometimes frozen over. All I can hear is the crunching of my boots in the snow. In the spring, ducks swim in the pond. I listen to the calls of the blackbirds and chickadees and kingfishers.

For the few minutes of my walk, I have time to reflect. I have time to think about who I am, what is important to me, and where I am going in my life.

"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately," wrote Thoreau. "Our life is frittered away by detail. … Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity." Thoreau was also worried by the increasing speed of life brought about by new technologies. In Thoreau's day, that was the railroad. "We do not ride the railroad," he wrote, "the railroad rides us."

Too fast, too furious

Today, we are galloping further and further away from Thoreau's insights and the ideas of the Transcendentalists. The pace of life has gotten faster and faster, driven by the internet and the increasing speed of communication, robbing us of time for quiet reflection. In the mid-19th century, the fastest speed of communication was the telegraph, at three bits per second; in the early 1980s, the first internet, at 1,000 bits per second; today 100,000,000 bits per second and more.

Often, we have only mediated contact with nature, seen with the cameras of our smartphones and other devices. We lead frantic lives, looking at our phones every five minutes, checking off items on our to-do lists, rarely taking the time for quiet walks in the woods. The world today is not only faster. It is more scheduled, more fragmented, less patient, louder, more wired, more public — all antithetical to the ideals of the Transcendentalists.

What have we lost? If we no longer have time to let our minds wander and roam without particular purpose, what have we lost? If we and our children no longer have time to play? If we no longer experience the quality of slowness, or a digestible rate of information, or silence, or privacy?

Rest, reflect, revitalize

For one, I believe that we have threatened our creativity. I believe we have diminished the needed time for our minds to replenish themselves. And more subtly, but perhaps most importantly, I believe we have lost something of our inner selves. My inner self is that part of me that imagines, that dreams, that explores, that is constantly questioning who I am and what is important to me. My inner self is my true freedom, just as vital as our political freedom from Britain two and a half centuries ago. My inner self roots me to me, and to the ground beneath me. The sunlight and soil that nourish my inner self are solitude and personal reflection and slowness. These are all aspects of living embraced by the Concord Transcendentalists.

Alan Lightman. Photo by Michael Lionstar

And so, at this time that we celebrate the first revolution, which began in our beloved town of Concord, we should also reflect on the second. We should try to slow down our lives. We should experience nature and people directly and not through our mechanisms. And we should honor and nourish our inner selves.

Alan Lightman, a member of the Concord Bridge board, is a former physicist, writer, and professor at MIT.