CARLISLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Est. 1933

Newsletter Fall 2024

Tales of April 19th

by John Troast III, Board Member and Curator for the Society

On the morning of April 19, 1775, the American nation was born right in our backyard. Ordinary farmers and tradesmen from the District of Carlisle, as well as many surrounding towns, rallied against British tyranny, igniting the American Revolution. Given the significance of the day, it is no surprise that it has taken on a certain mystical aura within our national epic. Many stories and legends of Carlisle's role in the Concord fight, not all of them entirely true, have come to be part of the common lore. In honor of the 250th Anniversary next year, local historian John Troast, a Member of the Society's Board and a Curator of the Society's holdings, casts a critical eye on some of these historical anecdotes. Readers can judge for themselves what lore to believe.

The Alarm

Everyone knows the story of Paul Revere's midnight ride, made famous by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem. However, Revere made it only as far as Lexington before he was captured by the British Regulars. Fellow rider William Dawes, who had ridden ahead, fled back to Lexington, and only Samuel Prescott managed to make his way to Concord with news of the advancing British army. Upon arriving in town, his warnings were met with skepticism by Concord's militia leaders. Major John Buttrick, Commander of Concord's Minutemen asked Reuben Brown to ride to Lexington to verify Prescott's report. Bronw arrived shortly after dawn and witnessed the first shots fired at the Lexington green. He returned to Concord, telling Buttrick to prepare for a bloody confrontation. He was then dispatched to warn the neighboring communities, starting with Concord's northern district of Carlisle. Samuel Heald of the Carlisle Militia, told his grandson, Carlisle historian Benjamin F. Heald, that "Reuben Brown and Deacon Parkman, well mounted, were sent to alarm the adjacent towns… [and that] the people of the neighborhood were [then] summoned by Timothy Wilkins with his drum and James Kemp with his horn."

The Carlisle Minutemen & Their March to the Old North Bridge

Around 6:30 am, Carlisle's Minutemen gathered at the meetinghouse (the current site of the First Religious Society), having been summoned by Wilkins and Kemp. The exact identities and number of those who marched from Carlisle is subject to debate. Benjamin F. Heald writes that those marching from the church numbered 21 strong, and were under the command of the "old Indian fighter" James Russell. George Tolman of the Concord Antiquarian Society claimed it was 16 men who marched from Carlisle center. However, archival research by Carlisle Bicentennial Committeeman Robert Thompson in 1975 could only verify 13 men. It is the names of these men who are immortalized on a bronze tablet next to the church, who are as follows:

Sgt. James Nickles, Pvt. John Nickles, Pvt. Joseph Nickles, Pvt. John Nickles Jr., Pvt. Ebenezer Hardy, Pvt. William Kemp, Pvt. Nathan Munroe, Pvt. Aaron Monroe, Pvt. Jonas Monroe, Pvt. Josiah Heald, Pvt. Jonas Robbins, Pvt. Nathanial Parker, Pvt. Asa Spalding Jr.

A further point of disagreement is the route by which these Minutemen marched. Benjamin F. Heald's research suggested that the company proceeded down Concord Street to Hildreth's Corner where they met up with the Acton Minutemen. However, Thompson's research suggests that the men likely took the more direct route down Concord Street, cutting across Clark Farm, and then marched through the Estabrook Woods meeting the Acton regiment at the foot of Punkatasset Hill. Unfortunately, we will likely never know for certain which route those departing from the meetinghouse traveled.

In addition to the men who marched from the church, we know that several Minutemen, having learned of the alarm, joined the march at different points or set out for the bridge on their own to meet up with their respective companies. David Hartwell, Lieutenant John Heald, and Private Simeon Barrett met up mid-march with the rest of the Minutemen who had departed from the meetinghouse. Thaddeus Blood, who resided on Prospect Street near the Concord border, set out down the old Two Rod Road. Another Minuteman, Issachar Andrews of Maple Street, likely took that route as well.

What is known for certain is that all the men from Carlisle arrived at the North Bridge well before 9:30 am, when the British regulars arrived. The Minutemen from Concord, Acton, and the District of Carlisle were the first on the scene to confront the adversary.

Joseph Spalding's Shot Heard Round the World

The "shot heard round the world" has always been the subject of debate. Historians still disagree about which side fired the first round or whether this iconic shot that ignited the battle was merely someone's gun that misfired. However, one Carlisle resident claimed for years that it was he who deliberately disobeyed orders and took aim at the British Regulars. This man was Joseph Spalding, who had a farm in what is today Great Brook Park. Spalding maintained that he also fired the first shot at Bunker Hill and killed Major Pitcairn as revenge for sending the British Regulars to Concord. Apparently General Putnam was not pleased by this trigger-happy soldier. After his famous shot at Bunker hill, Spalding said,"Putnam rushed up and struck at me for violating orders. I suppose I deserved it, but I was anxious to get another good shot at Gage's men ever since our affair at Concord." The blow from "Old Put" hit me on the head, made a hole in my hat, and left [a] scar." For years after the war, Spalding would show off the scar on his head to anyone who would entertain the old man's ramblings. While it seems implausible that Spalding fired the Shot Heard Round the World in Concord, the first shot at Bunker Hill, *and* killed General Pitcairn, this did not stop Carlisle residents from celebrating their heroic forefather. In 1875, Carlisle residents unanimously approved a resolution at Town Meeting declaring," The Town of Carlisle claims upon reliable data that the man who fired the first gun upon the American side at Concord and killed the first British Soldier was born and had his home within its limits." In an effort to reinforce this claim, Carlisle townsfolk carried a large silk banner in the Concord Bicentennial parade in 1975, depicting Spalding's likeness, that read, "Joseph Spalding of Carlisle -- the man who fired the first shot at Concord, April 19th, 1775." This banner survives in the collection of the Carlisle Historical Society

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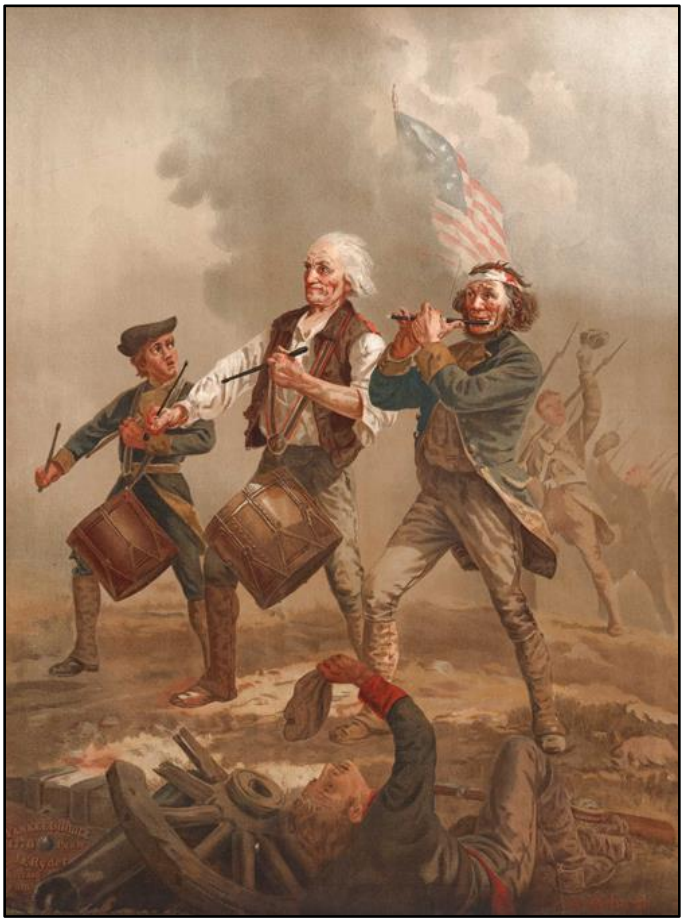
Close-up of the hand painted banner carried by Carlisle residents in the Concord Fight Centennial Parade, April 19th, 1875. The banner depicts Joseph Spalding who was said to have fired the "shot heard round the world."

Corporal Joe's Brave Stand

Another sensational tale about one of Carlisle's Minutemen is the story of Joseph Munroe, who is said to have accompanied his kids and grandkids into battle, playing a drum. Joe would have been over 80

years old at the time. As the story goes, British shots on the bridge caused the militia's drummers to falter. When one commander called for assistance, Corporal Joe stepped forward and exclaimed, "I am so old it will not matter if I am killed," and he struck up a lively rhythm. Although this story is questionable, Corporal Joe did live to be over 100 years old, and our town's vital records confirm this.



Carlisle's Munroe family long claimed that Corporal Joe Munroe was the elderly drummer depicted in Archibald Willard's famous painting The Spirit of '76

Corporal Joe's descendants claimed that this local tale influenced artist Archibald Willard when he created the now iconic painting "The Spirit of 76." They claimed that Munroe is the man depicted carrying the drum. Munroe's house once stood near the present-day Munroe Hill Road which is named in his honor.

Enslaved Patriot

Few people realize that slavery existed in Carlisle during colonial times, a practice that was not abolished in Massachusetts until 1781. Wilkins family tradition has long held that an enslaved black man named Toby accompanied his master Issac Wilkins in the Battles of Lexington and Concord. Little is known about Toby's life or whether he willfully chose to fight for freedom that he would never live to experience for himself. He was supposedly killed in the course of the day's fighting, somewhere along Battle Road.

The Last Minuteman

By the year 1835, only one man who participated in the Concord fight -- Thaddeus Blood of Carlisle -- was still alive. Blood lived on a small farm on what is today Prospect Street. In an effort to preserve for posterity the story of the famous battle, Ralph Waldo Emerson interviewed Blood, carefully transcribing his oral history of the fight. This interview would later inspire Emerson's famous poem, *The Concord Hymn*.

In their discussion, Blood sought to push back against narratives that sensationalized the battle and its participants. He argued that those who fought were ordinary people, many of whom, having no way to foresee the outcome of the battle or of the ensuing war, were scared deep down by the prospect of fighting the British Regulars. In his interview, Emerson pressed Blood for key details about the battle, but the elderly Minuteman responded wearily that even he couldn't fully separate the truth of what happened that day from the myth and legend that had emerged over the years. "The truth will never be known," concluded Blood.

Blood's blunt observation still resonates to this day. People tend to think of history as the unbiased and true story of the past, when in truth it is often an amalgamation of facts, half-truths, conjecture, exaggerations, and myths. The stories of Carlisle's role in the famous first battle of the American Revolution are proof of this historical tapestry. J.T.

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Old Home Days Remembered

by Susan Richardson, Board Member and Archivist for the Society

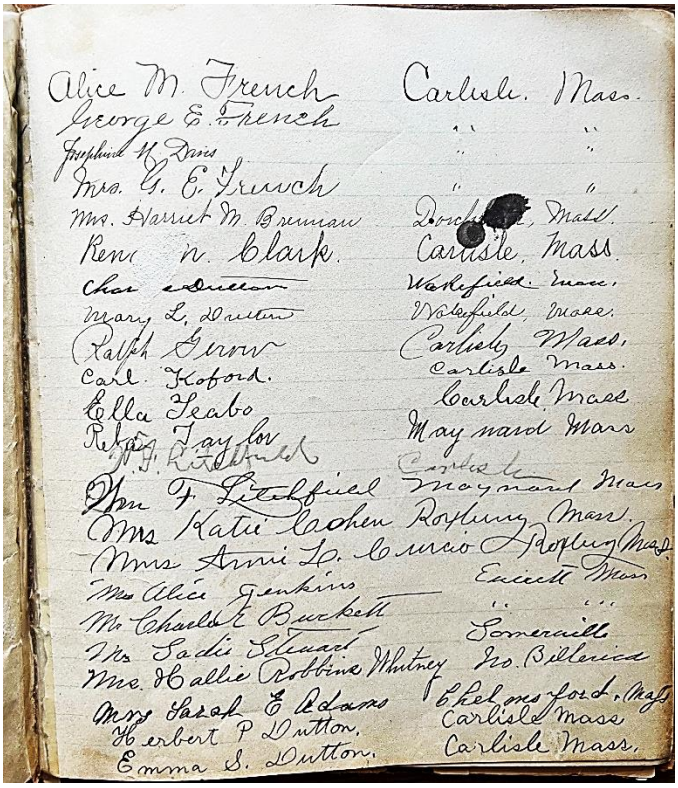
Since joining the Historical Society in February of this year, it has been my pleasure to act as Archivist, a previously neglected position. I discovered a backlog of accessions that needed attention, which I provided, but more interesting have been new accessions that keep my interest piqued. So far this year, the Society has received four new gifts of historical material. With each donation I learn something new about the history of Carlisle.

One of these gifts is a manuscript book of signatures of those attending Old Home Day during its first eight years, from the first celebration held in 1912 through 1919. These signatures breathe the spirit of real people into the record of this celebration. Carlisle has had an Old Home Day almost every year from 1912 onward with a few years suspended during the two World Wars.

Over the years, Old Home Day has featured pancake breakfasts, patriotic ceremonies, parades, games, races, music, pie-making contests, art shows, greased pig catching, frog jumping, corn shucking, rocket firing, local celebrity dunking and, in 1972, an unexpected stampede by three horses down and then back up School Street, chased by police. The Fire Department's part in the parade, as their trucks drive through town throwing candy to the children, and their wonderful barbecue at the end of the day have been happily repeated every year.

If any readers are interested in helping in the archives, we have jobs both large and small waiting to be done. I would be happy to discuss volunteer work with anyone who is interested in this fascinating aspect of the Society's activities. My email is srichardson0141@gmail.com.

The event day has varied from June to July 4th to September. The number of events keeps growing and the program for this year spanned activities from Thursday to Sunday. We own several programs for the event, including the first one, as well as ribbons, medals, and other artifacts that attest to the long and happy history that this event has played in our town.



Page from the 1912 Old Home Day Guest Book. *Notable signatures include Rena (Carr) Clark, who grew up in the Heald House and was the mother of Guy Clark, the longtime proprietor of the Clark Farm. Another interesting signature is that of Ralph Gerow. At Old Home Day in 1912, he performed as a member of the Bingville Band, which led the town parade.*

Open Houses at the Heald House

The Society's Heald House Museum is open on the third Sunday of each month, 2:00 – 5:00 pm, every month throughout the year. It can also be opened by appointment. To make an appointment, please call President Phil Drew at 508-517-4793 (cell phone).

Our Generous Donors

We are grateful for the generosity and good will of the following donors during the past year – all who responded to our Annual Appeal during 2023 and all subsequent donors through October 2024. Please notify our Secretary Annie Luttmann (annieluttmann@gmail.com) of any errors or omissions.

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A Banner Year for the Society

by Donna Vienneau, Board Member

Twenty twenty-three marked the 90th Anniversary of the founding of Carlisle Historical Society. The Society provided a yearlong celebration, culminating in May of this year with a fundraising gathering of donors at Michael and Maureen Ruettgers's barn on Bedford Road (pictured below). But there were many other special events to celebrate the Anniversary as well, as recapitulated here.

John Kaag (standing at the right), a Carlisle resident and Professor of Philosophy at UMass Lowell, speaking at the Fundraiser in May about his new book,* The American Bloods, *which tells the stories of Carlisle's first English settlers who would go on to shape the nation's development.

- A walking tour of old stone walls guided by renowned landscape ecologist Richard T.T. Forman.
- On Memorial Day, a special open house at Wilson Memorial Chapel in Green Cemetery.
- On Old Home Day, a tour of the Old Brick Schoolhouse featuring a special exhibit of school-related artifacts.
- Two popular historic architecture lectures, one on the Bauhaus movement with Wendy Hubbard and Debbie Bentley and the other on early American architecture with Elizabeth Paliga.
- For children, a special program with period games and samplings of early American foods.
- In the Holiday Season, a festive wine-tasting event at the Heald House with examples of early Christmas trees and their evolution over time.
- In the early spring of 2024, we partnered with tour group *HisToury* to organize a bus tour to various historical homes in the community.
- As part of the Carlisle Investigation Project, created for third graders in the Carlisle Public School, dozens of youngsters visited the Heald House Museum.
- On another occasion, students from the Fenn School also visited for special field trip.in connection with their Civil War studies.

Robert Gross to Speak at Society's Annual Meeting, December 5

The Annual Meeting of the Carlisle Historical Society will be held in the Clark Room at the Carlisle Town Hall at 7:00 pm on Thursday, December 5. As in years past, the Annual Meeting consists of a very short business meeting to elect Officers and Board Members of the Society, followed by a lecture on some aspect of Carlisle's history. We are fortunate this year to have Robert Gross, Emeritus Professor of Early American History at the Untiversity of Connecticut and author *of The Minutemen and Their World.* The public is cordially invited;

Dedication of New Markers at Minutemen's Graves

Minutemen at the Dedication ceremonies at the Central Burying Ground in October

As part of the 250th Semiquincentennial Celebration, the Society, along with current Minutemen from Carlisle and other towns, dedicated new bronze plaques honoring the patriots who were buried at the Central Burying Ground and at the Green Cemetery.

Society Receives State Grants

This past year, the Carlisle Historical Society was the proud recipient of two generous grants from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In May, the Society was awarded $43,000 from the Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund. This money is being used for exterior restoration work on both the Heald Homestead and Barn. In September, the Society was proud to receive $10,000 from the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism to support projects and events to honor the 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution. Planned events include a colonial fair, a tour of historic houses in Carlisle, a parade and other activities on April 19th. More details to come.

To access this grant money, the Society is responsible for matching a portion of each grant award. Thanks to our 90th Anniversary Appeal and the generous support of our members, we are very close to having matched both grants. We hope thable us to meet our goal by contributing towards our Annual Appeal this fall!

Semiquincentennial – What?

Semiquincentennial has worked its way into the language, thanks to the U. S. Congress, which chose in 2016 to label an act to support official recognition of the 250th anniversary of the beginning of the American Revolution as the Semiquincentennial Commission.

If you haven't studied Latin, the term semiquincentennial requires some deciphering. So here goes: The latter chunk of the word – cen= tennial – is familiar. It means 100th year. The next element (reading backward) is quin. It is a shortened form of quinque, meaning five. The larger chunk – quincentennial – means 500th year. And semi means half. So there it is: semiquincentennial means 250th year. To top it all off, semiquincentennial is a sesquipedalian word, composed of Latin sesqui, meaning one and a half, and ped, meaning foot. Thus, a sesquipedalian word, when written, is a foot and a half long. I would bet that no ancient Roman, even though he knew Latin as an everyday language, ever used either word. P.D.

Special Open House, Sunday, November 17

Demonstrations by the Carlisle Minutemen of Their Military Skills
Curated Exhibit of Textiles and Other Artifacts Related to the American Revolution
Hand Weaving Lessons and Take-Home Projects for Children
The Original Sign for the Red Lion Tavern (temporarily loaned to us)

The Carlisle Historical Society in collaboration with the 250th American Revolution Celebrations Committee invites the community to a special Open House, the second in a series of events commemorating this important anniversary. The event will take place on November 17th, 2:00 - 5:00, at the Heald House Museum, 698 Concord Street. The Heald House was the home of Revolutionary War Patriot, Captain Samuel Heald, and is now home to the Society's collections of historical artifacts and archives pertaining to Carlisle.

Come and see the Minutemen dressed in full Revolutionary garb, captained by our own Scott Evans, a Minuteman since 1984. Experience a live muster including drilling and musket firing; visit our Revolutionary Collection Room to hear stories surrounding its extraordinary artifacts. In addition, we will have a number of period textiles and clothing selected from the Society's collection and displayed for the first time in recent history. These textiles were curated by John Troast, who connected the pieces directly to Carlisle's Minutemen.

You will see early woven artifacts and patterns which are still used in contemporary textiles. For the children, we are offering a hand-weaving experience and take-home project. Children will be treated to the teaching expertise offered by Nancy Kronenberg, who will also demonstrate weaving techniques on our 1800's loom. Lastly, on display will be the original sign from the Red Lion Tavern, an important site during the American Revolution. Period food sampling and other refreshments will be available.

Please go to our website: carlislehistory.org to register for this event, which is free and open to the public. Should your child be interested in the weaving project, sign up on our website. We request that each child be accompanied by an adult and be in second grade and up.

PATRIOTS' DAY 250
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