

Minute Man

NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK • MASSACHUSETTS

Early on the morning of April 19, 1775, a long column of 700 King's Regulars drew near the village of Lexington. Gen. Thomas Gage, Governor of Massachusetts, had ordered Lt. Col. Francis Smith to proceed from Boston to Concord and destroy the military supplies collected there by the Provincial Congress "for the avowed Purpose of raising and supporting a Rebellion against His Majesty." This march, and its consequences, marked the end of the long political battle and the beginning of the shooting war.



Earlier, Paul Revere and William Dawes had brought word to Lexington of the Regulars' march. Joined by Dr. Samuel Prescott, the party was stopped by a British patrol in near-by Lincoln. Although Revere was captured and Dawes was forced to flee, Dr. Prescott escaped to carry the alarm on to Concord.

At dawn in Lexington, part of Capt. John Parker's militia company drew up on the green to await the approaching British. Realizing he was outnumbered, Parker ordered his men to disperse as the Light Infantry left the road and moved onto the green. A shot rang out, and the lead British soldiers, out of control of their officers, fired and then charged with their bayonets. In a few moments, 8 Americans lay dead and 10 were wounded. After a resounding cheer, the British regrouped and continued their march.

Without further incident along the way, the British soon arrived at Concord and began to search for and destroy provincial supplies. While this work went on, eight companies of Light Infantry set out on Gage's order to secure the North and South Bridges, approaches the rebels would use if they advanced from the west. Only one company went south. Seven proceeded to the North Bridge and, while three companies took up positions between the bridge and a number of aroused Americans who had retreated about 1 mile beyond, four companies advanced to the farm of Col. James Barrett, where more supplies were stored.

Militia and minute companies from nearby towns, brought out by the alarm, now joined the Americans gathered on the slopes of Punkatasset Hill. Their strength doubled, the provincials marched to a hill overlooking the North Bridge, forcing the British to retreat to the causeway beside the bridge. As they stood on the hill and looked down on the bright-red coats, the provincial leaders must have weighed an attempt to enter town and save the supplies against the gravity of an assault upon their King's troops. Smoke was then seen rising over the center of Concord, and the Americans set out marching, but with orders not to fire first. As Maj. John Buttrick led about 400 provincials toward the river, the 100 or so British on the west bank retreated across the bridge. A few Regulars fired on the Americans marching over the causeway, but these warning shots hit no one. Then the British volleyed and, as two members of the Acton minute company fell dead, Buttrick ordered his men to fire.

The Americans advanced, killing two redcoats, fatally wounding a third, and hitting nine others, including half the officers. The rest now broke and fled toward Concord. While some of the Americans withdrew to the hill from which they had come, others, satisfied that the town was in no danger of burning, cut cross-country eastward to Meriam's Corner to await the British return march. The size of the American force at Meriam's Corner increased with the arrival of companies from other towns. When the British

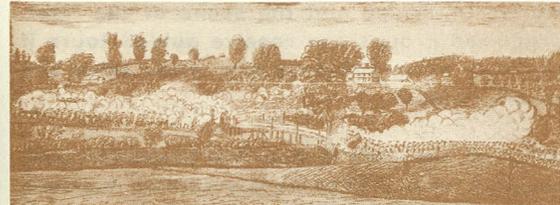
arrived, shots were exchanged. The Provincials were no longer waiting for the British to fire first, but cutting through the fields near the road, they continued the fight wherever cover could be found. Fired by the stories of the bloodshed in Lexington, new companies and individuals were joining the fight.

In Lexington, the spent British were met by troops from Boston under Lord Percy, and thus were saved from complete defeat. Ahead of them lay more fighting, all the way to Charlestown. Wrote one British lieutenant:

We were fired on from all sides, but mostly from the rear, where people hid themselves in houses till we had passed, and then fired. The country was an amazing strong one, full of hills, woods, stone walls, etc., which the rebels did not fail to take advantage of, for they were all lined with people who kept an incessant fire upon us, as we did too upon them, but not with the same advantage, for they were so concealed there was hardly any seeing them. In this way, we marched...miles, their numbers increasing from all parts, while ours was reducing by deaths, wounds, and fatigue; and we were totally surrounded with such an incessant fire as it's impossible to conceive; our ammunition was likely near expended.

News traveled far and fast that defense of self-government and liberties was being conducted by arms rather than petitions, protests, and political action. Soon thousands poured into Cam-

bridge, and the British found themselves besieged in Boston. In July 1775, a Virginian, George Washington, took command. A year later the struggle had a new goal—Independence. The American cause had been launched. Every blow struck for liberty among men since the 19th of April 1775 has echoed the shots of that eventful day.



THE EMERGING PARK

The authorized area of Minute Man National Historical Park is composed of 750 acres in three units: Battle Road Unit, a 4-mile corridor along the historic battle road and Mass. 2A westward to Meriam's Corner; North Bridge Unit, around the Old North Bridge in Concord; and The Wayside Unit (the home of the Alcotts, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Margaret Sidney) on Lexington Road (Mass. 2A) in Concord.

Well over half of the park lands have been acquired. By removal of modern buildings and restoration of the landscape and historic houses the park scene will gradually be returned to its appearance in 1775.

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

Two areas in the Battle Road Unit and one in the North Bridge Unit are open now to visitors. The Fiske Hill information station is on Mass. 2A, just west of Mass. 128. One mile west on Mass. 2A is the temporary park headquarters with year-round information services. An interpretive station is in the Buttrick Mansion overlooking the North Bridge and the scene of the fight. Organized groups can receive guided tours if advance arrangements are made with the superintendent.

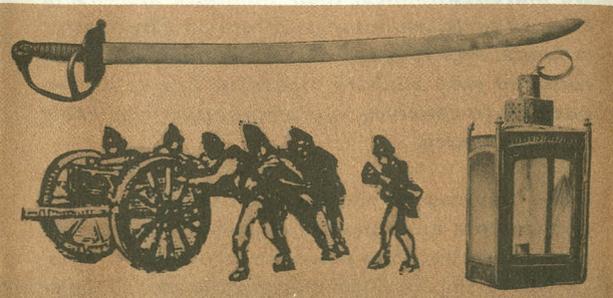
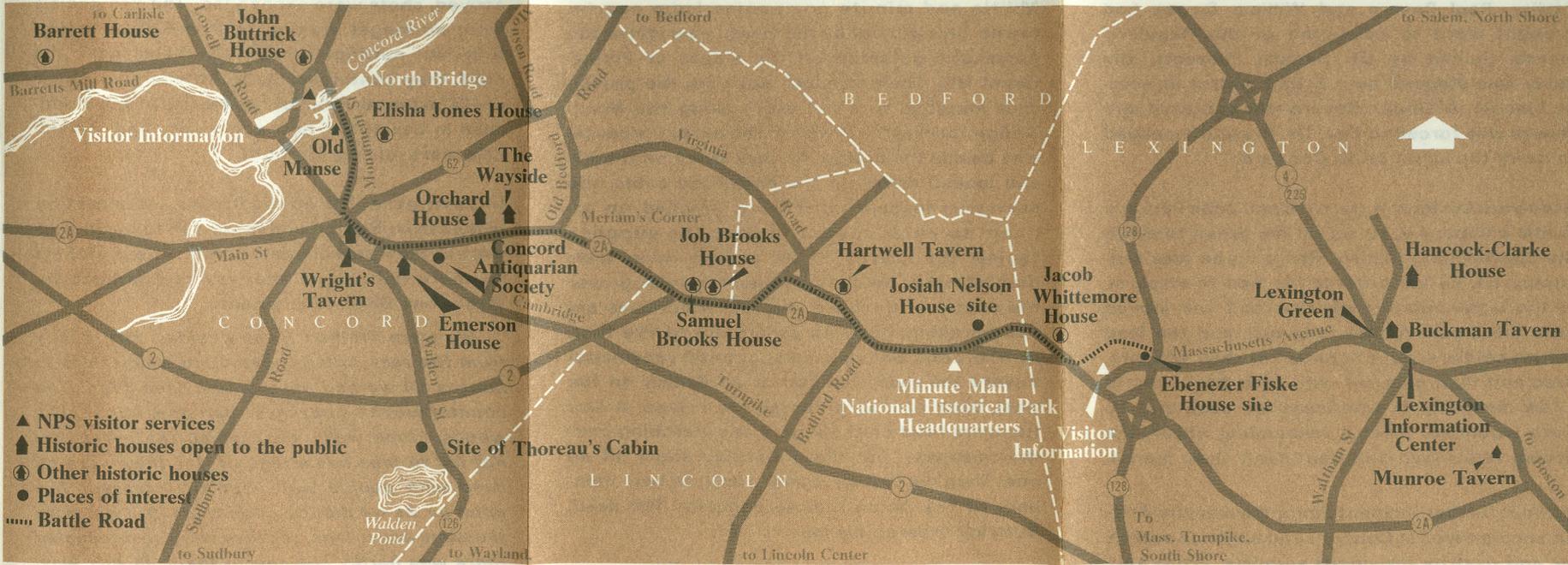
Much of the land within the proposed park boundaries is still privately owned. Visitors should respect private property rights.

ADMINISTRATION

Minute Man National Historical Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A unit manager, whose address is Box 160, Concord, MA 01742, is in immediate charge.

National Park Service

U. S. Department of the Interior



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