



**BEDFORD FLAG TRAIL - APRIL 19, 1775**

**The Bedford Flag Trail (BFT) Guide.**

**This document is provided free of charge by BSA, Troop 194, Bedford, MA with cooperation and support from members of the Bedford Historical Society, the Bedford Minutemen, the Bedford Free Public Library, and numerous Bedford officials and citizens.**

## **THE BEDFORD FLAG**

A colonial militia flag preserved in the Bedford Free Public Library, Bedford, Massachusetts.



The Bedford Flag is believed to be the oldest complete flag still existing in the United States. It is celebrated as the flag carried by the Bedford Minuteman, Nathaniel Page, to the Concord Bridge on April 19, 1775, the beginning of the American Revolution, but it was already an antique on that day. It was made for a cavalry troop of the Massachusetts Bay militia early in the colonial struggle for the continent that we call the "French and Indian Wars."

The flag is a piece of crimson silk damask measuring about 27" long by 29" wide. This small square shape indicates that it was meant to be used as a cavalry flag. Into the rich red damask is woven a pattern of pomegranates, grapes, and leaves. The design is painted on both sides of the flag, mainly in silver and gold. The emblem consists of a mailed arm emerging from clouds and grasping a sword. Three cannonballs hang in the air. Encircling the arm is a gold ribbon on which the Latin words "VINCE AUT MORIRE" (Conquer or Die) are painted.

On the reverse of the flag, the design is slightly different: the sword extends in front of the ribbon instead of behind; it is held left-handed; and the motto is read from bottom to top instead of top to bottom.

A narrow area to the left of the emblem would have been stitched to make a sleeve for the pole to go into. Some of the holes the needle made are faintly visible. A silver fringe which is thought to have originally edged the flag has been lost to history.

## **THE ORIGIN OF THE FLAG**

Exactly who made the flag and when it was made are not known, but recent reframing and conservation work has made further research on it possible. The floral pattern woven into the damask has been dated by textile experts as appropriate to the early 1700s. The width of the fabric and the fact that the pattern repeats three times across it suggest it was woven in Asia and subsequently imported to America. Testing of the crimson dye used in the silk may soon lead to further conclusions.

Displayed with the flag in the Bedford Free Public Library is an original commission dating 1737. It names Minuteman Nathaniel Page's father John "Cornett of the Troop of horse." A cornet was the cavalry officer just below lieutenant whose duty it was to bear the flag. In fact, Nathaniel's father, uncle and grandfather are all mentioned within the Bedford and Billerica Town Records as "Cornet Page," indicating that a Page had been carrying the flag for the local militia troop at least as early as 1720.

The emblem, an arm holding aloft a sword, is a common one during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and is not unique to the Bedford Flag. A microscopic and spectroscopic analysis of the paint used on the emblem reveals a pigment called "Prussian blue" that did not exist before 1704, so the flag cannot date from before that year.

## **THE FLAG'S ROLE DURING THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR**

The flag was still in the possession of the Page family at the time of the American Revolution, and it is believed in Bedford that Minuteman Nathaniel Page took it with him to the battle at Concord. Nathaniel told the story to his grandson, Cyrus, and it was written down after his death by the nineteenth century historian, Abram English Brown. This account says "Our people were not surprised when the messenger reached this house... We had agreed at the last drilling to meet, in case of alarm, at the tavern in the center 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 at our preparations, and were soon at the tavern."

A. E. Brown continues, "On the arrival of the [Bedford] Company at Concord, they assisted in removing the stores to places of greater safety. Tradition says that Cornet Nathaniel Page laid down his flag and went to work, and when returning to

look for it ‘found the boys had got it and were playing soldiers.’” He took it up and went to face the British regulars at the North Bridge.

In 1838, the battle at the North Bridge was vividly memorialized by poet Ralph Waldo Emerson in his famous Concord Hymn:

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

With acknowledgment and many thanks to **Sharon Lawrence McDonald**.

View the Bedford Flag exhibit at the Bedford Free Public Library.

Bedford Free Public Library  
7 Mudge Way  
Bedford, Massachusetts 01730  
781-275-9440

### **THE EVENTS SURROUNDING APRIL 19<sup>TH</sup>, 1775:**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Event</u>
April 18, 1775	5:00pm	General Gage sent officers on horseback to patrol the road between Boston and Concord.
April 18, 1775	8:00pm	The British patrol rode through Lexington toward Lincoln.
April 18, 1775	10:30pm	Paul Revere sent word, “One if by land, two if by sea”, to have lanterns hung in the Old North Church. Revere went to his boat in Boston Harbor and was rowed across by two friends. 700 British soldiers began their journey led by Lieutenant Colonel Francis Smith of the 10th Regiment and Major John Pitcairn of the Marines.
April 19, 1775	12:30am	William Dawes arrived at the Hancock-Clarke House and went to Concord with Paul Revere. The alarm was sounded on the bell in the Belfry on the Lexington Green where 130 Minutemen led by Captain John Parker assembled. Dr. Samuel Prescott caught up with Dawes and Revere on the way to Concord. Revere, who was riding in front of Dawes and Prescott, was captured by British officers. Dawes turned and rode back to Lexington and Prescott escaped to carry the warning to Concord.
April 19, 1775	2:00am	The sound of the hoof beats of the British soldiers and their prisoners woke up Josiah Nelson, a Lincoln Minuteman. It was Nelsons job to warn Bedford that the British were coming. Nelson asked the officers what was going on. An officer answered him by hitting Nelson in the head with a sword, making a long cut on his head. This was the first blood drawn. Nelson was taken prisoner and then let go. He spread the alarm to Bedford. Concord was warned by Dr. Prescott. Reverend William Emerson, grandfather of Ralph Waldo Emerson, was the first to respond to the alarm. Three companies of Minutemen and an alarm company met at Wrights Tavern in the Town Square. They began to hide supplies that had not already been sent away. The British soldiers finally left Charlestown after waiting for as long as three hours for their provisions. This delay gave the Colonists valuable time. Paul Revere was released near Lexington.
April 19, 1775	4:30am	The Minutemen were summoned to the Lexington Green by the beating of the drum. 77 Minutemen waited on the Green for the arrival of the British. Paul Revere and a clerk went to Buckman Tavern to remove some of John Hancock’s papers. They saw the British troops marching to Lexington on their way to the tavern. Major Pitcairn ordered his troops to form battle lines. Captain Parker gave his famous order: Stand your ground! Don’t fire unless fired upon! But if they mean to have a war, let it begin here! Pitcairn yelled at the Minutemen and told them to put their arms down. Because they were outnumbered, Parker told his men to leave. Before they could depart, a shot rang out and a volley came from the British. There was another volley and then the Redcoats charged with their bayonets. Eight men were killed. Ten who were wounded got away. The rest of the British came to the Green where they shouted in victory. Meanwhile, the Lincoln, Acton, Groton, and Bedford Minutemen all began to arrive in Concord.
April 19, 1775	6:30am	The 150 Minutemen from the various companies that were already assembled in Concord marched off toward Lexington. When they saw the British Regulars and realized that they were outnumbered more than 4 to 1, they returned to town.
April 19, 1775	7:00am	The British commander, Colonel Smith, ordered his troops to cut down the liberty pole and then marched into the middle of the town. The Minutemen returned to Ripley Hill where they had previously gathered, which is about half a mile from town directly opposite the North Bridge.

- April 19, 1775 7:30am Smith sent seven companies to the North Bridge, where they split up into two groups. Captain Walter Laurie of the 43rd Regiment stayed to guard the bridge with three companies while four companies under the leadership of Captain Lawrence Parsons of the 10th Regiment went to Colonel Barrett's farm in search of the hidden military stores. Having returned from hiding supplies, Colonel James Barrett, the Concord Minutemen's commander, ordered his soldiers on Ripley Hill to move to a field at the brow of Punkatasset Hill where they would wait for reinforcements.
- April 19, 1775 9:00am General Percy received orders to leave Boston with the 1000 men to aid Col. Smith. This soon became a rescue mission. The now 400 Minutemen on Punkatasset Hill moved toward the North Bridge. They saw smoke coming from the town and decided to go into town. Barrett gave the order to march but he told his troops not to fire unless they were fired on first. Captain Laurie's company, on their way back from Barrett's farm, retreated to the bridge to join the other troops. Realizing that he was outnumbered, Laurie sent a message to Colonel Smith in Concord. Smith eventually ordered out two or three companies of grenadiers. Smith's slowness in movement prevented these troops from arriving in time to support Laurie. After moving to the east side of the river, Captain Laurie ordered his men remove planks from the bridge to prevent passage by colonists. Major Buttrick told the British to stop pulling up the plank and moved to the west end of the bridge. Shots from the British troops rang out. Isaac Davis, Acton captain, was killed in the first volley. The colonials had not yet fired. Major Buttrick passionately gave the order to fire bellowing these famous words, "Fire, fellow soldiers, for God's sake, fire". There were a few return shots from the British but they were overwhelmed by the number of musket balls coming at them. Amazingly, eight British officers were instantly wounded. With so many officers down the British began to panic. For the first time the British turned and fled, leaving two men dead. The fight lasted two or three minutes. The colonial force of 400 returned back across the bridge and brought the bodies of the fallen soldiers to Buttrick's home.
- April 19, 1775 Noon After resting and reorganizing, the British began their march back to Boston. They sent flankers on the ridge on the way to Merriam's Corner. When the colonials who fought at North Bridge heard that the British were moving back toward Boston, they crossed the river and rushed to intercept the British column at Merriam's Corner. The colonial ranks now numbered at 1100 as more men from surrounding towns continued to arrive.
- April 19, 1775 1:00pm They fought for the next few hours from Merriam's Corner in Concord all the way back to Boston; the battle now was traditionally structured. The colonists hid and attacked. This kept the colonial casualties low while many British were killed. 49 colonials were killed during the day, largely by British flanking parties.
- April 19, 1775 1:30pm At one point, when the British regulars reached a curve in the road, colonials in a wooded area killed eight and wounded many more; this curve was later called the Bloody Angle. There were also colonial losses here. Captain Wilson, of Bedford and two others, were killed here.
- April 19, 1775 2:00pm Back in Lexington, the British re-encountered Captain Parker's Minutemen, now ready for action. Parker's men waited on the high ground in the Fiske Hill area. As the British approached, a heavy volley of musket balls poured down on them. As the British troops broke ranks, Colonel Smith made a desperate move to rally his troops. He stopped and regrouped. This attempt failed. British ammunition was low, casualties were high, and the men were tired. Smith was now wounded; a number of his officers were also wounded. Confusion increased as they began to run from Fiske Hill to the village of Lexington. It is rumored that Major Pitcairn asked Colonel Smith if they should surrender. Smith is said to have replied "Surrender to whom? They have no leader!"
- April 19, 1775 2:30pm The British continued to flee through Lexington, past the green, unlike the ordered approach toward the green at sunrise, where Parker first met them. As the British ran on, more were killed and wounded. The British forces were a shamble when General Percy's relief column arrived.
- April 19, 1775 3:00pm Upon reaching Percy, the men were so tired that they lay down on the ground and rested. Percy took two of his artillery pieces and shot the first cannon of the Revolution. No one was hurt or wounded but the meeting house on the green was struck and damaged.
- April 19, 1775 6:30pm After a short rest the British continued back to Boston. Many more deadly encounters occurred along the way. Colonial ranks continued to swell as over 4,000 Minutemen were in action against the combined British force of now less than 1,700. By the end of the day over 20,000 colonial forces were on the move towards Boston.

This was the end of the first day of the Revolutionary War. The British losses were 73 killed, 174 wounded, 26 missing, and a total of 273 casualties. The colonials had 49 deaths, 41 wounded, and five missing, a total casualty list of 95.

## **HIKING THE BFT TODAY:**

The BFT is a National Historic Trail. The trail today is approximately 5.5 miles long and is completely paved except for the last 150 yards in the Minuteman National Park. There are sidewalks available the entire length of the trail except for 1.5 miles in the middle. Sufficient roadside shoulders exist for safe traversing of this section of the trail. During this section all hikers should hike in a single file formation facing oncoming traffic. All youth groups should have two adults present at all times and BSA units need to have filed a Tour Permit with their respective council offices. Also, all members of the Boy Scouts of America should wear their uniforms when hiking the trail.

(See attached maps)

The trail starts at the Fitch Tavern on Rt's 4/225 & 62, The Great Road, in Bedford, MA. You can find free parking near the tavern at the Bedford Free Public Library, located just 100 yards away on Mudge Way. Since the Fitch Tavern is a private residence it is recommended that hikers do not attempt to cross The Great Road at this point. Instead it is recommended you follow the BFT west for approx 100 yards. At this point you will be at the intersections of Rt's 4/225 & 62. Continue following the sidewalk westbound on Rt 62 towards Concord. You will see a small triangular park with a Liberty Pole on the opposite side of the street. This is Wilson Park. Extreme caution should be used if attempting to cross Rt 62! Continue to follow the sidewalk on Rt 62, now Concord road. After you leave the Wilson Park area the next trail marker is about 1.3 miles. At this point the sidewalk ends. Continue westbound on the same side of the street taking care to avoid being too close to the roadway. You will soon see the Timothy Jones house. Once again, extreme caution should be used if attempting to cross Rt 62! Continue westbound for another 1.2 miles until you come to the town line. Upon entering Concord, carefully cross Rt 62 and proceed westbound on the sidewalk. Approximately 0.5 miles from the town line you will come to a fork in the road. This is where you will leave Rt 62 and continue on the BFT by taking the left fork on Old Bedford Rd. The right fork, also goes to Concord center but was not in existence in 1775. However, it should be noted that all the land to the right was open farm land in 1775 and that the minutemen that were at the bridge crossed these fields as the most direct route to beat the British to Meriam's corner and what was to become "Bloody Angle". Follow Old Bedford Road for about 0.25 miles and you will observe a road to your left. This is Virginia Road. This road was used by the colonials to "jump ahead" of the British troops on their retreat to Boston and ambush them at "Bloody Angle" in Lincoln. Continue now on Old Bedford Road for another 0.25 miles until you come to Meriam's corner. You are now in the Minuteman National Park and on the Old Battle Road. This is the point at which fierce fighting occurred when the colonials were chasing the British back to Boston. Turn right and follow Rt 2A towards Concord center. Along the way you will pass, the Wayside, The Orchard House, and the Concord Museum. If you have time, each of these offer great opportunities to learn about the local history and its inhabitants. Once in Concord center, carefully cross the street towards the Colonial Inn, and proceed up Monument street towards the Old North Bridge about 0.5 miles away. There is free parking across the street from the Old North Bridge. The BFT concludes on the far side of the bridge.

The Bedford Free Public Library has personnel who can direct you to additional written material such as the "Bedford Sampler" on sale for \$1. The National Park Service has rangers stationed at the Old North Bridge and the Buttrick Mansion. **Also, a must see is the 1/2 hour multimedia presentation located at the Minuteman National Park's Visitor Center on Rt 2A in Lincoln, MA. This center, approximately 5 miles from both the start and end of the trail, will fully explain the events of April 19, 1775. (<http://www.nps.gov/mima/>)**

Camping options available include Hanscom Family Campground, the Bedford Hartwell Town Forest and Camp Acton. Hanscom's FamCamp is an off base Air Force facility that has allowed scouts to tent camp and does have facilities. To contact the FamCamp call (781) 377-4670 in season - (781) 377-5316 off season. The Bedford Hartwell Town Forest has two (no facilities) campsites located approx. 1 mile from the start of the BFT. To make reservations the POC is the Bedford Conservation Commission office at 781-275-6211. The second camping option, Camp Acton, has twelve (no facilities) campsites located approx. 3 miles from the end of the BFT. To make reservations the POC is the Acton Conservation Commission at 978-264-9631.

**AWARDS ORDER FORM:**

Upon the completion of hiking the Bedford Flag Trail EVERYONE, (not just Boy Scouts) has the option of purchasing trail awards. Please attach one completed copy of the BFT questions along with this page for your group's order. (The patch is 3.5" x 3.5", the medal with ribbon is 3.5" x 1.5")



I wish to purchase \_\_\_\_\_ BFT patches at a cost of (\$2.50) each: \$\_\_\_\_\_.

I wish to purchase \_\_\_\_\_ BFT medals at a cost of (\$5.00) each: \$\_\_\_\_\_.

I wish to purchase \_\_\_\_\_ BFT patch & medal sets at a cost of (\$7.00) each: \$\_\_\_\_\_.

Subtotal \$\_\_\_\_\_.

Postage: \$1.00 for 1-5 patches, \$2.00 for 6-19 patches, \$2.50 for 20 patches & up. \$\_\_\_\_\_.

Postage: \$2.25 for 1-3 medals, \$3.25 for 4-9 medals, \$4.25 for 10 medals & up. \$\_\_\_\_\_.

Make checks payable to: BSA, Troop 194 Total \$\_\_\_\_\_.

**(Do not forget to attach a completed copy of the questionnaire!)**

Mail orders to:

BFT - Troop 194  
c/o Allan Coady  
320 Concord Rd.  
Bedford, MA 01730

Ship orders to:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**BFT Questionnaire:**

1) What are the three words on the Bedford flag and what do they mean?

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2) Who is Wilson Park named after?

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3) How far is it from the Fitch Tavern to the Timothy Jones house?

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4) What year was the Town of Concord incorporated?

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5) What year was the Town of Bedford incorporated?

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6) Fill in the missing words that are carved in the stone located in the stone wall at Merriam's corner:

MERRIAMS CORNER. THE BRITISH TROOPS RETREATING FROM THE OLD NORTH BRIDGE WERE HERE  
ATTACKED IN FLANK BY THE MEN OF CONCORD AND \_\_\_\_\_  
AND DRIVEN UNDER A HOT FIRE TO CHARLSTOWN.

7) How far is it to Boston harbor from Merriam's corner?

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8) Fill in the missing words that are carved on the plaque on the cemetery wall near Concord's US Flag pole:

..... ON THE SUMMIT STOOD THE \_\_\_\_\_ OF THE REVOLUTION.

9) What soldiers are buried in a grave at the Old North Bridge?

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10) Fill in the missing words of the poem that are carved on the monument after you cross the bridge?

BY THE RUDE BRIDGE THAT ARCHED THE FLOOD, \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_. HERE ONCE THE EMBATTLED FARMERS STOOD AND FIRED THE  
SHOT HEARD ROUND THE WORLD.

**(Do not forget to attach a completed copy of the questionnaire to the order form!)**