

# WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Volume LXI, No. 2 — Spring 2025



## Special Color Edition Celebrating the 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution

### *“Concord’s Wright Tavern: At the Crossroads of the American Revolution”*

a lecture by  
**Thomas Wilson**

**Thursday, April 10, 7:30 pm**

Weston Public Library Community Room  
Refreshments  
Free. All are Welcome.

Built in 1747 in the center of Concord, the Wright Tavern has witnessed the evolution of America for over 200 years. The Minutemen met here the morning of April 19, 1775, and a few hours later, the British Redcoats searched for the munitions and supplies of the rebels before being defeated in the Battle of Concord. The building has been used as a tavern, inn, bakery, bookseller, and office as it witnessed the transformation of the town from a frontier agricultural community to a bustling commercial center and commuter hub. For most of the last forty



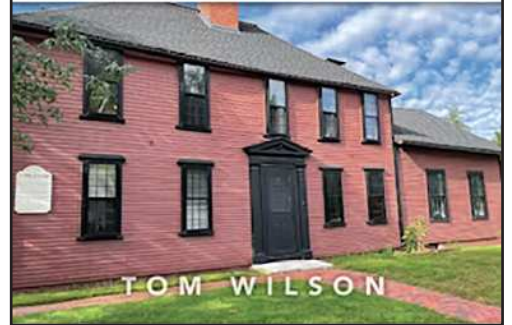
Tom Wilson in front of the Wright Tavern.  
Photo by Laurie O’Neill, The Concord Bridge.

years, it was closed to the public. In 2021, the Wright Tavern Legacy Trust was established to oversee the restoration and renovation of the building. From modest beginnings under Amos Wright to the Battle of Concord, author Tom Wilson uncovers the fascinating history of this National Historic Landmark. Tom is a management consultant and author who oversaw the Wright Tavern restoration and is now chair of the Wright Tavern Legacy Trust.



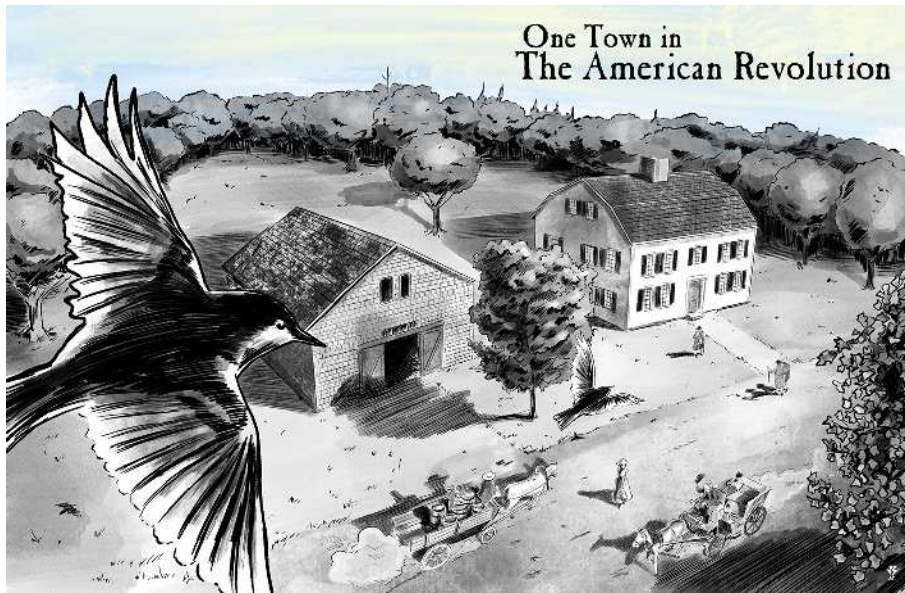
### CONCORD’S WRIGHT TAVERN

AT THE CROSSROADS OF  
THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION



### *Save the Date, May 17*

The fourth annual **Celebrate Weston** community festival will be held **Saturday, May 17 from 11 to 3** on the Town Green. We invite you to visit the society at the JST, check out our Town Center photos and Jones family exhibit, and **get a free copy of the book *One Town in the American Revolution***. Enjoy music and entertainment, children’s games, the Weston-Wayland Rotary Children’s Business Fair, and activities at the AIC. Rain date Sunday.



## On the Eve of the Revolution

Weston In the early 1770s has been described as “a community of farmers who were perfectly satisfied to go along minding their own business.”

The 1771 tax list recorded the value of assets like acres of meadow and upland hay, numbers of farm animals, bushels of corn and other grains, and barrels of cider. Eighteenth-century farmers made and consumed large quantities of hard cider, and Weston had many taverns to supply.

Every year town meeting voted on whether to allow the swine to “go at large” in the ensuing year.

Most farmers supplemented their incomes making shoes, barrels, iron tools, and dozens of other trades. Women made butter and cheese, spun and wove wool and linen cloth, and practiced midwifery. There was a lively local exchange of goods and services.

Water from brooks was used to power grist and saw mills. In 1771 these lucrative businesses were owned by the wealthy and prominent patriots Samuel Phillips Savage and Abraham Bigelow.

The most important industry in the 1770s was Hobbs Tannery at North Avenue and Church Street. Transforming cow hides into supple leather required abundant water, supplied by Hobbs Brook. The tannery spawned the manufacture of shoes and boots, harnesses, saddles, belts, whips, and carriage boxes.



## One Town in the American Revolution

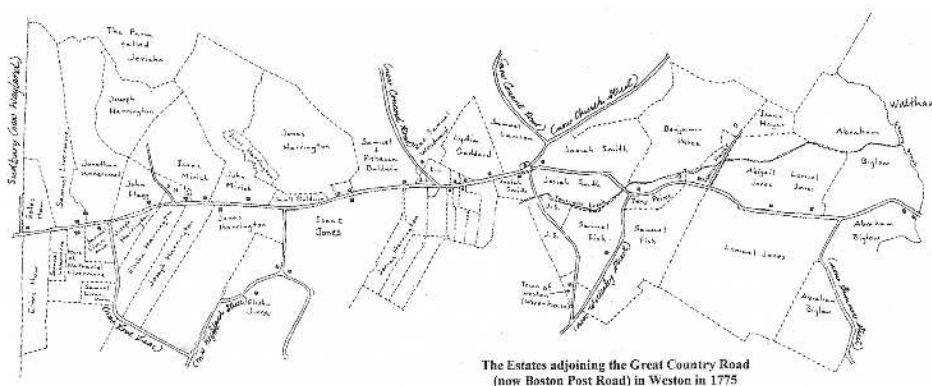
*Why was Weston known as a Tory town during the period leading up to the Revolutionary War?*

*Even as tensions escalated during the mid 1760s with the Stamp Act, the occupation of Boston, and other precipitous events, Weston remained heavily influenced by its Tory leadership, most notably one of the town’s most prominent citizens, Col. Elisha Jones.*

*Weston did not hide its Tory allegiance. It was still voting to send Elisha Jones as its representative to the General Court in Boston as late as May 1774, at a time when only five percent of local towns were sending representatives with loyalist sympathies. And despite pressure, Weston did not vote to form a Committee of Correspondence until the relatively late date of September 29, 1774—another indicator of its strong Tory ties.*

*In this newsletter we will look at Weston in the 1770s and chronicle the events that took place in the critical years 1773 to 1775, as public opinion shifted away from seeking accommodation with Britain in favor of independence. The Weston Historical Society is also preparing a series of eight short videos, in cooperation with Weston Media Center.*

*The Weston Historical Society 250th Anniversary Committee includes Jonathan Dowse, Pam Fox, Mary Marder, Amy Riedel, and Kitty Smith. Artist Jeremiah Schiek helped bring the dramatic incidents to life with his drawings.*







Around 1769, Abraham Hews established a redware pottery on Boston Post Road near Warren Avenue. Clay collected from local riverbanks was used to make crocks, chamber pots, milk pans, and jugs. Hews Pottery grew into a major business and later moved to a large factory in Cambridge.

For thirty years, from 1740 into the 1770s, Elisha Jones ran a store dealing with all manner of goods and services. He also served as a banker, loaning money and taking merchandise as credit. As Weston's richest and most powerful citizen in the pre-war years, Elisha is a key figure in understanding why Weston was a Tory town.

In the 1770s, the population of Weston was just over 1000. The church was the center of community life, and church attendance was mandatory at the long Sunday services.



*Drawing of the 1722 Meeting house with the tower added in 1800 and the horse sheds on either side.*

There was no separation of church and state. Town taxpayers paid for building and maintaining the meeting house.

Congregants paid for their seats in the pews, with the highest payers up front. The wealthy also paid to erect sheds next to the church, to shelter their horse and

carriage on Sundays.

For 31 years, including the war years, Rev. Samuel Woodward served as beloved minister to the Weston church, now known as First Parish. His house at 19 Concord Road had fine woodwork, as befitting his status as the minister. Every year, town meeting voted to grant Rev Woodward his yearly salary and to make provision for his firewood.

Decisions on town governance were made at Town meetings, held in the church meeting house. Voting was limited to men who owned property of sufficient value.



*Above: Rev. Samuel Woodward House (1752); Below: One Chestnut Street (c.1696), has long been considered the oldest remaining house in Weston. It was originally just one room over one.*



In 1773, 12 men are listed in tax records as owning enslaved persons, including Elisha Jones (2), Braddyll Smith (2), Josiah Smith (2), Samuel Phillips Savage (1) Isaac Jones (1), and John Flagg (1).

The 1771 tax list records 105 houses. Most were small, either one story or one room over one.



*Artist Leslie Evans created this watercolor for the 2022 WHS exhibit "History Under One Roof," based on information from architect Al Audelott and builder Henry Stone. It shows what the Josiah Smith Tavern would have looked like when first built, before the east addition and porch.*

In 1774, Weston had five "Reading and Wrioting" schools where pupils were taught for two months during the winter.

Weston was located on the principal route west from Boston, now known as Boston Post Road.

In the 1770s, taverns served the community and also travelers along the Post Road. Josiah Smith's tavern was built in 1757. His son Joel added a large addition about 1805, with a second-floor meeting room that we now call the ballroom. Josiah was a selectmen and prominent patriot in the years leading up to war.

The Golden Ball Tavern was built in 1768. Proprietor Isaac Jones had loyalist sympathies.

The Flagg Tavern operated from the Revolutionary War years until 1812. It was here that George Washington stayed overnight in 1789.

The era of stagecoach travel began in 1772, when regular passenger service began between New York and Boston. Stages stopped at taverns to change horses and allow travelers a frugal supper and a few hours of sleep before setting off in the early morning hours. Service was suspended during the Revolutionary War and resumed in 1783.

## **Elisha Jones**

### **The “Tory Squire” of Weston**

Weston was slow to evolve from a loyalist to a patriot community, due primarily to the influence of Elisha Jones, a wealthy, respected, and sometimes feared citizen.

Elisha was a shrewd businessman. For decades beginning in the 1740s, he ran a store providing a variety of merchandise and services. His ledger is preserved at the Golden Ball Tavern Museum. He carried out a large business in Weston and vicinity and with prominent Boston merchants. He loaned money to farmers and tradesmen, taking their goods on credit.

Items recorded in his ledger included axes, bricks, shingles, lemons, molasses, fish, clothing, hats, yard goods, all necessary items for funerals, and hundreds of gallons of “West India Rum.” He bought and sold large quantities of timber and made money carting logs to the sawmill. A man of many talents, he also charged for pulling teeth.

In addition to owning a mansion house and 274 acres in Weston, Elisha was one of the first to recognize the potential value of land in Western Massachusetts. At the time of the Revolution, he owned thousands of acres.

Elisha was the most powerful political figure in town. By 1774, he had served three terms as town treasurer, five as selectman, and 11 as representative to the General Court, having been elected even in the turbulent years 1773 and 1774. He was a justice of the peace, a deputy sheriff of Middlesex County, and one of the last magistrates to serve in British courts. For two years, in the 1750s, he held six elected offices simultaneously.

Elisha was also a Tory, meaning that he was loyal to the King of



*Elisha's mansion, built in 1754, was the largest and most elegant in Weston. It was later moved twice, from its original location on Highland Street to Boston Post Road in 1883, then to 22 Church Street in 1888.*

England. He was the type of loyalist called a “Reformer,” working for greater home-rule and needed reforms. But in the politically charged atmosphere of the mid-1770s, this moderate position was not embraced by either supporters of the King or activists seeking independence.

### **The Boston Tea Party**

Why did tea become a symbol of colonial oppression? What did tavern owner Isaac Jones do to provoke the “Weston Tea Party,” where angry men ransacked the Golden Ball Tavern?

Protest over the taxing of tea began in the 1760s, when Britain turned to the colonies for income to replenish its treasury and bail out the East India Company. In the early 1770s, Boston established a Committee of Correspondence, part of an underground communication network of patriot leaders throughout the colonies. The Committees rallied opposition to British policies.

In December 1773, the patriot group called the Sons of Liberty gathered at Old South Church in Boston to protest the tax on tea. Samuel Phillips Savage, Weston resident and prominent patriot leader, moderated this fateful meeting,

The activists proceeded to dump 342 chests of tea into Boston Harbor— tea reportedly valued at \$1.7 million in today's dollars. In punishment, the British Parliament enacted the “Intolerable Acts,” a series of laws taking away colonial self-governance and rights. Angry colonists protested, vowing to abstain from drinking British tea.

Weston, still a Tory town, was slow to join in these protests. In January, 1774, more than a year after the Boston Committee of Correspondence was formed, the subject of forming a Weston Committee of Correspondence was brought up at town meeting. By then, all the adjoining towns had done so. But in Weston, the moderator was Elisha Jones, who presumably influenced a majority to vote against the motion.

## **Isaac Jones**

### **The Weston Tea Party**

Isaac Jones was a cousin of Elisha, about 18 years younger, and also a successful merchant. In 1768 he built the handsome Golden Ball Tavern. Isaac was a loyalist, but unlike his cousin, he tried to keep quiet and avoid political trouble. This proved to be impossible.

Hostility toward Isaac was sparked by his serving tea at his tavern. In March, a story in *The Massachusetts Spy*, signed “Rusticus,” reported that Isaac had obtained a large quantity of tea and bragged of selling it to his good customers. Isaac defended himself, saying he had bought “Dutch tea” in Albany—tea not

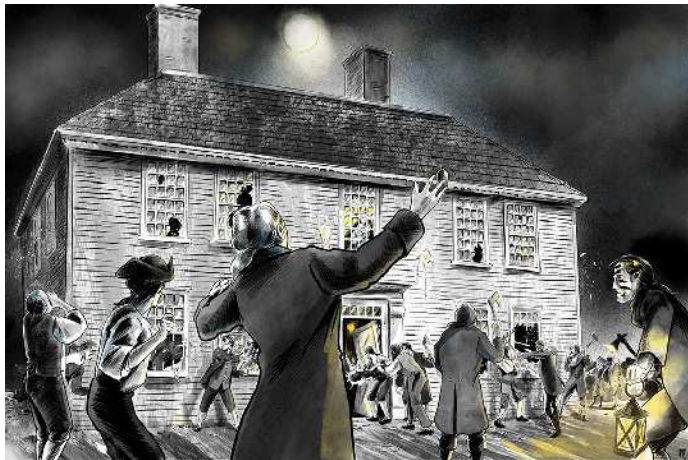


subject to the hated British tax. This explanation did nothing to appease his critics.

On March 28, 1774, a crowd of some 100 men gathered in front of the tavern, which was also the family home. Disguised with paint and paper masks, they broke down the door and entered the house, looking for Isaac.

Learning that he had left town, the intruders broke windows and ransacked the house from cellar to attic, stealing liquor and expensive items like raisins and a reported 100 lemons. They did not hurt his family, but had Isaac been there, he might well have been harmed.

About a week later, a letter from Isaac appeared in *The Massachusetts Spy*. He explained that he did not think that serving Dutch tea would offend anyone, but since he found that it did, he was sorry and would not repeat the offense. He added: "It is well known that I have been as much set against the dutied tea as any person whatever."



*The Weston Tea Party. Drawing by Jeremiah Schiek.*

## **The First Provincial Congress**

**May and June, 1774**

In May, Elisha was reelected as Weston's representative to the General Court. This tells us that Loyalist sentiment was still strong in Weston, despite the turmoil in Boston and attack on his cousin's tavern. Elisha was one of only a few Tories elected to the governing body by that time.

In June, British general Thomas Gage, royal governor of the Massachusetts Colony, dismissed the General Court, further angering the colonists.

**September 10, 1774**

By September, public sentiment in Weston had finally shifted to the patriot cause. A mob gathered in front of the home of Elisha Jones, where he was publicly humiliated. Here is the

newspaper account:

*A Correspondent informs us that on Saturday last about 300 men waited upon Col. Elisha Jones at Weston, and made his Mightiness walk through their Ranks with his Hat off and express his Sorrow for past Offenses and promise not to be Guilty of the like for the future.*



*Mob at the home of Elisha Jones. Drawing by Jeremiah Schiek.*

**September 29, 1774**

Late in September, Gen. Gage called for the General Court to convene in Salem. This time, Weston town meeting elected patriot Braddyll Smith, rather than Elisha Jones, to represent the town. At that same town meeting, Weston finally voted to set up a Committee of Correspondence.



**October 11, 1774, First Provincial Congress**

Gage called off the Salem assembly. In defiance of the governor and Royal authorities, some 286 delegates, led by John Hancock, met in secret in the town of Concord and formed the first Massachusetts Provincial Congress. Weston was represented by Braddyll Smith, his brother Josiah, and Samuel Phillips Savage. This illegal gathering was a landmark in the history of self-government. Delegates seized the reins of power and devised a plan for Massachusetts to separate from British rule. Here's how one historian viewed it:

*The establishment of the Provincial Congress was essentially a coup d'état: a sudden, violent, and unlawful seizure of power. The royal government, headed by General Gage, was now isolated and virtually powerless except for the presence of the army and navy in Boston.*



*Portrait of Samuel Phillips Savage, painted by John Singleton Copley in 1764, just before Savage moved to Weston. He died in December, 1797, at age 79 and is buried in Farmers Burying Ground.*

## **Samuel Phillips Savage**

Samuel Phillips Savage, has been called “Weston’s most prominent patriot.”

Born in 1715, Samuel Phillips Savage was the son of a wealthy Boston merchant and became a successful merchant and leading public figure in Boston. He was a close personal friend of radical activist Sam Adams. For a time, Savage worked in partnership with his younger brother, Arthur, selling food items from coffee and chocolate to salt-fish, pepper, and ginger. He also sold insurance to fellow merchants. The partnership dissolved in 1764, because the older brother proved to be an ardent patriot and the younger one a loyalist. In 1742, he married Sarah Tyler, daughter of a prosperous Boston merchant. The couple had ten children, seven of whom lived to maturity. Sarah died in childbirth in 1764.

After her death, Samuel Savage moved to a 75-acre farm and grist mill in Weston, where he experimented with crops and recorded meteorological and astronomical observations. Part of his house is still standing on North Avenue (It was moved to #503 in 2004). He married two more times, in 1767 to Bathsheba Thwing Johnston (d. 1792) and in 1794 to Mary Meserve (d. 1810).

In December 1773, while living in Weston, Savage moderated the meeting at the Old South Meeting House in Boston, where the infamous “Boston Tea Party” was planned. In 1774 Samuel Phillips Savage was chosen as one of the three Weston Representatives to the First Provincial Congress in Concord.

In 1776 Savage was appointed to a nine-member Massachusetts Board of War and served as its president until the board was dissolved in 1781. The board was responsible for procuring provisions, cannon, arms, ammunition, clothing, and other articles necessary to carry on war by sea and land. Much of this material passed through Weston on its way to Boston and provided business opportunities for local residents. Large supplies of beef, guns, shovels, axes, horses, and oxen, as well as money, was furnished by Weston.

## **Braddyll and Josiah Smith**

Brothers Braddyll (1715– 1780) and Josiah (1722– 1782) Smith were born in the house still standing at 111 Sudbury Road, in the one-over-one west section. Braddyll (or Bradyll) was a farmer; by mid-century he was the largest landowner on the north side. Part of his land is now in Lincoln. He was also a military leader. Josiah was a successful tavernkeeper. Both men were important civic leaders. It was Braddyll who was elected as the town’s Representative to the General Court at the fateful meeting of September 29, 1774, when loyalist Elisha Jones was defeated for the position he had held for 11 terms. The brothers and Samuel Phillips Savage represented the town at the First Provincial Congress.

## **Elisha Jones flees to Boston**

**October 1774**

After the meeting of the First Provincial Congress, a military confrontation between the British Regular Army and the provincials grew increasingly likely. Many towns began to raise special volunteer companies that would train at least twice per week and be ready to answer an alarm at a minute’s notice.

**November 14, 1774**

In response, Elisha Jones raised one of the first military Tory Corps, one of only three communities in the Massachusetts colony to do so. The objective was “to learn Military Skill to defend his Majesty’s Authority” and to protect the property and lives of the loyalists. Fifty-five Weston men enlisted in Elisha’s Company. Within a few months, forty of them had signed “retractions” secured by the Weston Committee of Correspondence. Twenty-three joined one of the two Weston military companies.

**Late December 1774**

Elisha, in ill health, fled to Boston to seek the protection of the British army, leaving behind his worldly possessions. He died in Boston just over a year later, in February 1776, disappointed and heartbroken. He had adhered to his principles and lost. His six properties in Weston and all his other real estate was later confiscated and sold at auction to benefit the government. Elisha Jones was the only resident in Weston to have his property confiscated.

**January and February 1775**

The Massachusetts Provincial Congress set up a Committee of Supplies to purchase equipment sufficient for an army to take the field, stored principally in Concord and Worcester. They established a network of observers to keep watch on the British and carry the alarm if supplies were threatened.



British General Gage became increasingly worried about these military preparations. Writing to London, he asked for more money and soldiers, but his request was denied.

## British Spies at the Golden Ball Tavern

February 23, 1775

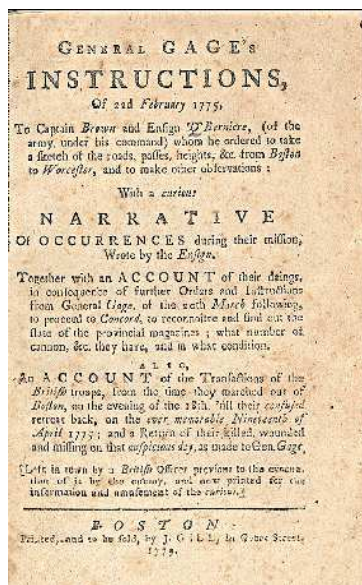
General Gage sent spies into the countryside to gain information about roads, encampment sites, and location of military supplies. In February 1775, he sent his principal engineer, Ensign Henri DeBerniere, with Captain John Brown to explore the area west to Worcester. Arriving in Weston on February 23, they stopped for a drink at the Golden Ball Tavern. Finding that landlord Isaac Jones was "not inquisitive," they decided to spend the night and later reported:

*. . . we were not a little pleased to find, on some conversation, that he was a friend to government. He told us that he had been very ill-used by them some time before; but that since he had shewed them that he was not to be bullied, they had left him pretty quiet. . .*

DeBerniere and Brown stayed two more times at the Golden Ball on their way back to Boston. On another reconnaissance mission, they gathered information about supplies in Concord. From the above report, we see that Isaac retained his loyalist sympathies, but he was not prepared to follow his cousin to Boston. He kept a low profile and was able to continue operating his tavern. Two years later, Isaac was contracting with Samuel Phillips Savage and the Massachusetts Board of War to cart military supplies for the Continental Army.

## The March to Concord

General Gage made plans for 800 British soldiers to march to Concord and seize the military stores. Gage did not expect that the rebels would dare take up arms against the King.



*Title page of the only known contemporaneous account of British spies DeBerniere and Brown, published in 1779 from an actual report abandoned in Boston when the British evacuated. Original at Massachusetts Historical Society.*



*Rev. Samuel Woodward said a prayer then picked up his gun and joined the march to Concord. Drawing by Jeremiah Schiek.*

As we know, on April 18, Paul Revere rode from Boston to Lexington and Concord, spreading the alarm. In the dead of night, British troops started marching the 15 miles to Concord. News of the troop movements reached Weston on the morning of April 19. Samuel Lamson, captain of one of the two Weston militia companies, began assembling his men on a field near his house, which was in the center of Weston where Walgreens Pharmacy was located until recently.

Rev. Samuel Woodward is said to have sent his wife, children, and a cow into the woods where they would be safe. Mrs Woodward reportedly seized a skillet, telling the children they might need it. Then the parson hurried to Lamson's field, where a hundred men and three officers had assembled. He said a prayer, then picked up his gun. The smaller militia company of Captain Israel Whittemore, numbering 14 men, also marched to Concord on April 19.

Along the way, when they learned that the British had left Concord, they headed to Lexington, where they found a demoralized British army in disorderly retreat, being fired on by snipers. The Weston men joined in chasing the British soldiers back to Boston. So ended the first day of the American Revolution. The colonists had proved their willingness and ability to organize and to fight.

On the 8th day of September, 1776, from the pulpit of the Weston meeting house, Rev. Samuel Woodward read the Declaration of Independence.

And in 1896, Col. Daniel S. Lamson, grandson of Captain Samuel Lamson, reported for the Committee on Marking the Graves of Soldiers of the Revolution that 187 men from Weston had served in the war. Only 63 graves were found, the majority with no headstones. The names of the 63 men are printed in the committee's report in the 1895 *Town Report*. The committee purchased markers from the Society of the Sons of the American Revolution.

## Monuments to the Revolution



Because of its location on what we now call Boston Post Road, Weston had a front seat to history. In June 1775, George Washington passed through Weston on his way to Cambridge to take command of the Patriot Army. An historical marker commemorating the event is located next to the Josiah Smith Tavern.

In January 1776, Col. Henry Knox and his men passed through Weston hauling cannons captured at Fort Ticonderoga and used to liberate the City of Boston. The marker is located in Knox Park in the Town Center.



And in 1777, after the British defeat at Saratoga, Gen. John Burgoyne's defeated troops camped in Weston on their way to Cambridge. The Burgoyne Elm marking the site became Weston's symbol of liberty. A new "Burgoyne Elm" has been planted in its place, next to the Fiske Law Office.

### Select Bibliography

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4. Jones-Baker, D.W. "Colonel Elisha Jones of Weston and the crisis of colonial government in Massachusetts, 1773-1776" (1979), Doctoral thesis, University of London. <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1361007/>.

This 250th Anniversary issue of the WHS newsletter was supported by the Weston Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by the Mass Cultural Council, a state agency.

## The Merriam Gate

This watercolor of the Merriam Gate was painted by local artist Robert Wilson, who donated it to the Weston Historical Society in February 2025. WHS collects art depicting Weston buildings and landscapes. We are particularly glad to call attention to this gate— a unique monument along historic Boston Post Road. The gate is in need of extensive rebuilding, and voters will be asked to approve Community Preservation Act funding at May Town Meeting. Many thanks to Robert Wilson for this generous gift.



*Next time you drive  
by the Merriam  
Gate, be sure to  
notice the hearts.*



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