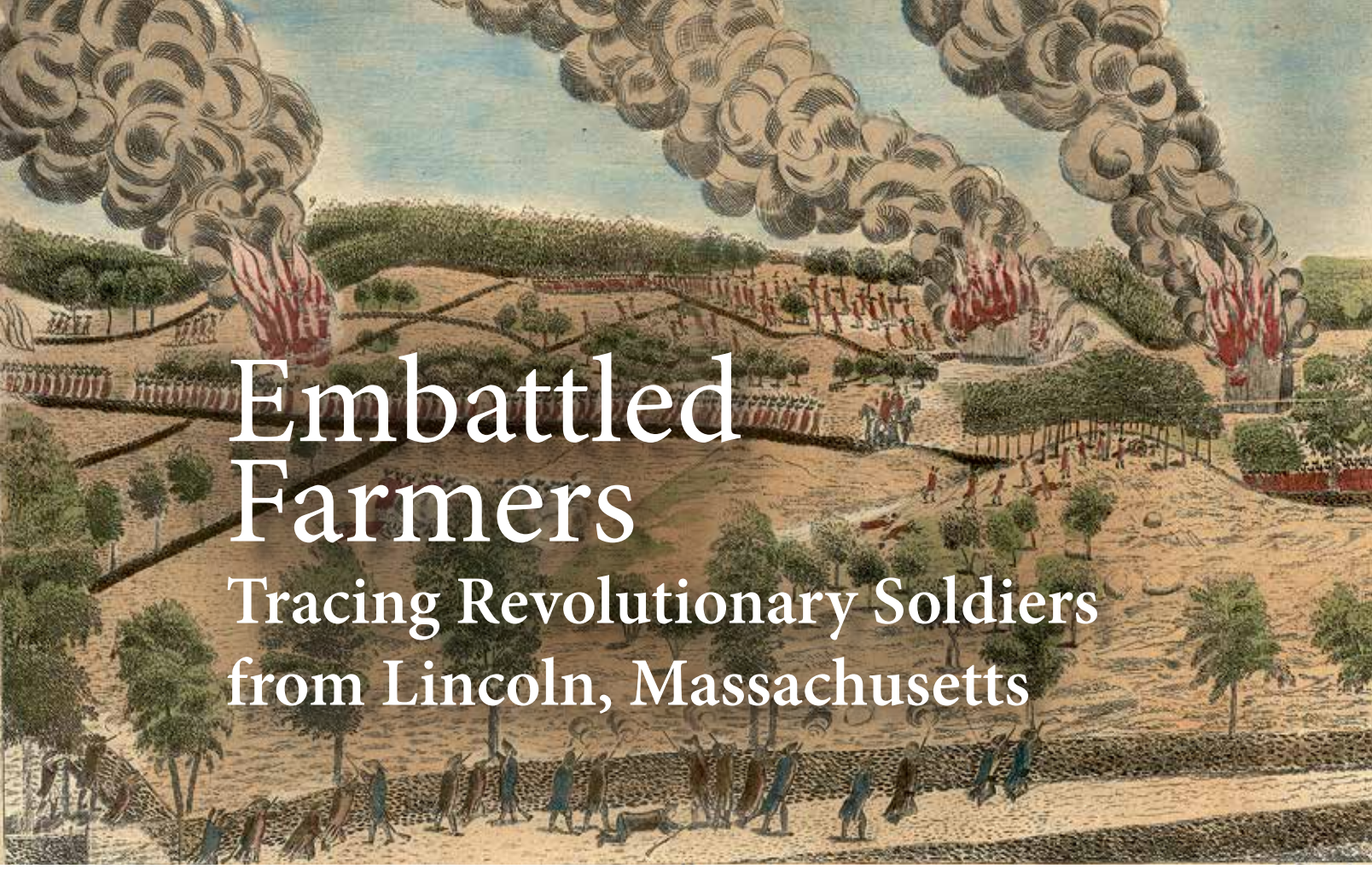


Embattled Farmers

Tracing Revolutionary Soldiers from Lincoln, Massachusetts

Amos Doolittle's 1775 *View of the South Part of Lexington* (Doolittle Print Plate IV) depicts the British retreating towards Boston while colonial soldiers continue to fire in the aftermath of the Battles of Lexington and Concord. Courtesy of the Lexington Historical Society.

It was a simple task that turned out to be not so simple: as captain of the modern company of Lincoln Minute Men, I had a list of Revolutionary War soldiers buried in Lincoln cemeteries that needed verification.

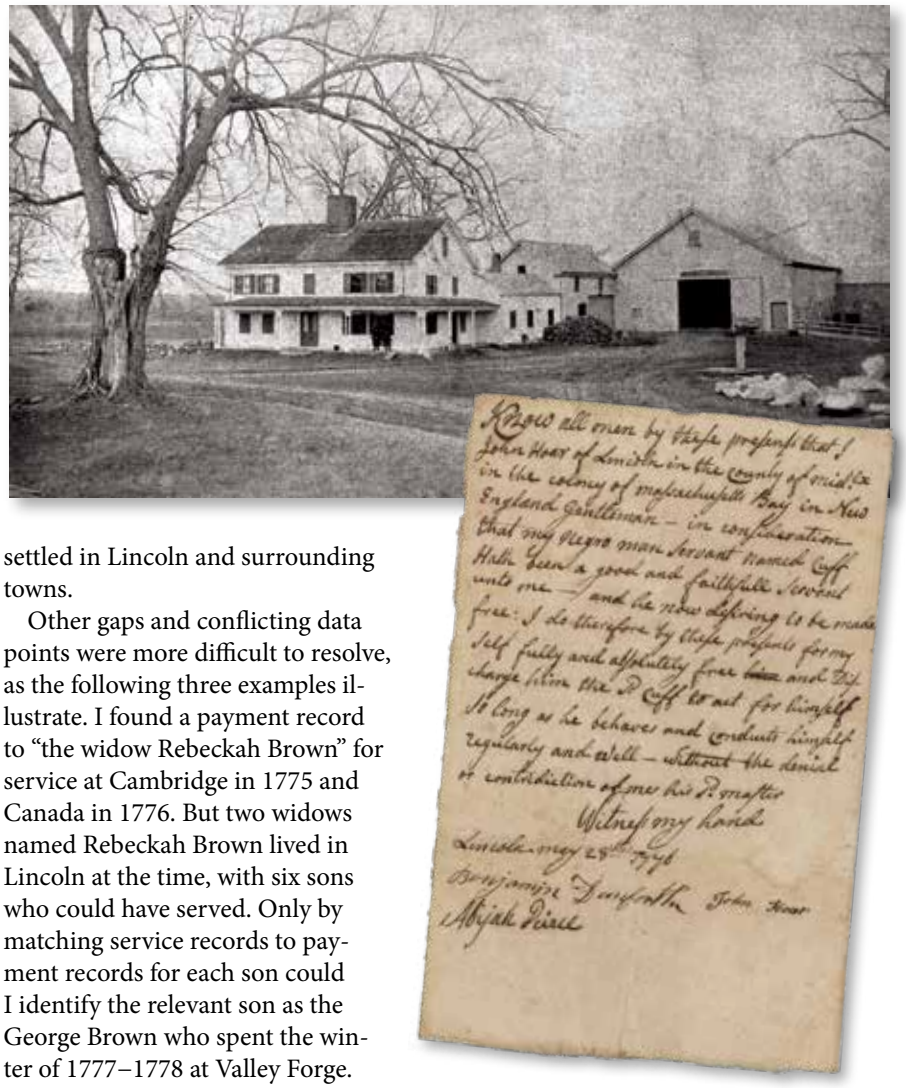
The year was 2006. The list was of unknown provenance and accuracy, but the Lincoln Minute Men had been using it ceremonially for forty years. Had these individuals really served in the Revolution? If so, where had they served? Were they really buried in Lincoln? Were other deserving local patriots not on the list and thus going unrecognized in our April ceremonies?

To my surprise, I found that reliable data about service by Lincoln residents in the American Revolution was scattered and not easily accessible. I had assumed (naively, as it turned out) that this information would be readily available, already carefully compiled and chronicled by preceding generations of historians.

The town of Lincoln, after all, is justifiably proud of its rich April 19, 1775, history. Located between Lexington and Concord, Lincoln was the scene of much of the action that day. In the early morning hours, about 110 men responded to Paul Revere's Alarm—in two companies, one of minute men and one of militia—and marched to Concord. These men were the first to arrive in Concord that morning. They participated in the fight at the Old North Bridge and in the running battle during the British return march to Boston in what became the opening events of the American Revolution.

These embattled farmers were the vanguard of what came to be the Army of the Revolution. I was eventually to discover that in the eight years

Richard C. Wiggin *is the Historian and past Captain of the Lincoln Minute Men and a former Executive Director of The Bostonian Society (Boston's Old State House Museum). A longtime colonial re-enactor and volunteer at Minute Man National Historical Park, he has conducted numerous educational and interpretive programs and written several articles about colonial and Revolutionary War history.*



A mid-nineteenth-century image of Lincoln's Hoar Homestead (1680), where Cuff Hoar lived (along with another slave, Brister Hoar, and three members of the Hoar family, all of whom also served in the war). Courtesy of Lincoln Town Archives, Lincoln, Mass. Manumission document of Cuff Hoar, Lincoln, Mass., May 28, 1776. Mss A 6628, R. Stanton Avery Special Collections Department, NEHGS.

following the explosive outbreak of the American Revolution, Lincoln sons served at nearly every major engagement and iconic venue of the war. But despite this proud heritage, compiled information about Lincoln's Revolutionary soldiers seemed to end with sundown on April 19, 1775.

The research process

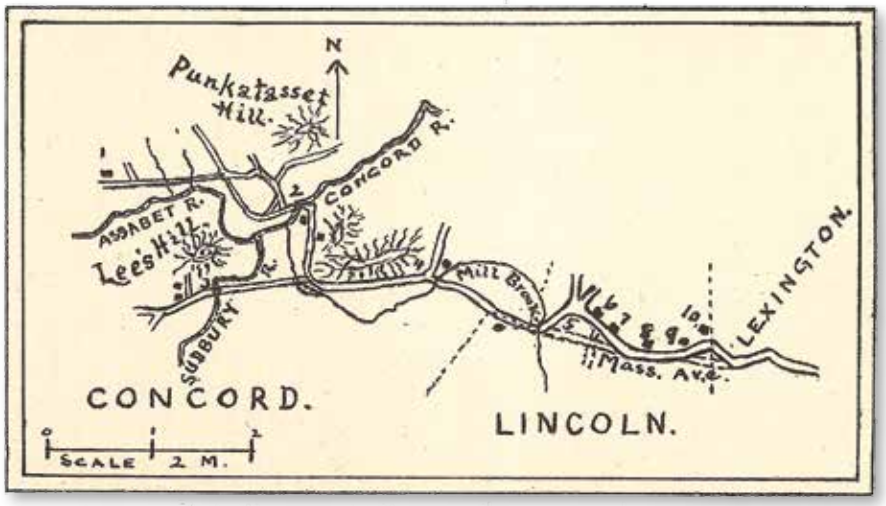
So my afternoon in the library turned into weeks and months, eventually stretching into years. My list of Lincoln soldiers grew considerably. As my investigation continued, I did find a couple of partial compilations of Revolutionary soldiers from Lincoln. But material differences between these nineteenth-century lists and the data I was generating from the records drove me to dig deeper.

The "go-to" source for Revolutionary War service records is *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War* (MSS), a seventeen-volume compilation of records in the Massachusetts Archives, published between 1896 and 1908. Despite containing data from nearly 700,000 records, MSS is less than comprehensive, and its limitations sent me looking for other sources. Federal pension records, the town treasurer's accounts (for records of service pay), local histories, and family genealogies all provided valuable information. I quickly realized, however, that identifying many of the individuals I found required pouring through vital records and other genealogical sources. Henry Bond's classic *Genealogies of the Families and Descendants of the Early Settlers of Watertown, Massachusetts* (1860) filled in many gaps. By the time of the Revolution, many descendants of those early Watertown families had settled in Lincoln and surrounding towns.

Other gaps and conflicting data points were more difficult to resolve, as the following three examples illustrate. I found a payment record to "the widow Rebeckah Brown" for service at Cambridge in 1775 and Canada in 1776. But two widows named Rebeckah Brown lived in Lincoln at the time, with six sons who could have served. Only by matching service records to payment records for each son could I identify the relevant son as the George Brown who spent the winter of 1777–1778 at Valley Forge.

In another case Jeduthan Bemis tells us in his pension record that he participated in the Battle of White Plains [October 28, 1776] and that he was discharged at "the Cedars of Canada" in December 1776. These data points are so clearly incompatible that in a subsequent review of his service, the Acting Commissioner for the pension records dismissed his White Plains service with the notation, "I did not say anything about the Battle of White Plains as the time covered by that was in the expe[dition] to Canada."[1] But the documentary evidence of Bemis at White Plains was unimpeachable, and making allowance for his not correctly remembering his discharge date from the Cedars, I began to fit the pieces together. The Cedars was a portage point on the St. Lawrence River, about thirty miles west of Montreal, the scene of an ill-fated effort in May 1776 to build and garrison a stockade fort. Bemis was taken prisoner during the skirmishing. By the terms of the prisoner exchange ten days later, he could not return to the ranks, so he was discharged and sent home. Thus, he was back home in September when he was drafted to support the New York campaign, during which he participated in the Battle of White Plains, and was afterwards "sent with the wounded."[2]

Finally, Cuff Hoar served with seven other Lincoln men on a mission to Worthington, Massachusetts, in 1777. This mission was to resupply the expedition escorting Burgoyne's captured "Convention" army from Saratoga to Cambridge, where the British soldiers were to await repatriation. Hoar was a slave who became a free man before his death in 1781, but his status on the mission to Worthington remained a mystery—until the discovery of his



"Battle Road through Concord and Lincoln." Frank Warren Coburn, *The Battle of April 19, 1775 in Lexington, Concord, Lincoln . . .* (1912), 100.

manumission document dated 28 May 1776 in the NEHGS collection.[3]

Lincoln's community of soldiers

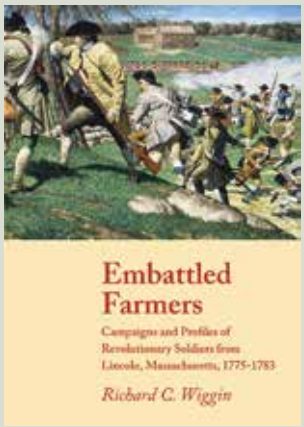
By the time I finished, I had found 256 individuals, including more than 50 completely new names, and I had to "de-list" 21 who had been previously credited with service but for whom I could find no corroborating record. Each individual was connected to Lincoln through residency (before, during, or after the war), or had enlisted to the credit of the town, or had been paid by the town for his service. This work became my award-winning book, *Embattled Farmers: Campaigns and Profiles of Revolutionary Soldiers from Lincoln, Massachusetts, 1775–1783* (Lincoln Historical Society, 2013). Fitting the classic definition of a prosopography, or collective biography,[4] *Embattled Farmers* is believed to be the only comprehensive compilation of all known Revolutionary soldiers from a single community anywhere in the nation. My book profiles each soldier with detailed information drawn from multiple sources, and follows the course of the war through the soldiers' footsteps and experiences. This collective portrait expands our understanding of the Revolutionary period and, because Lincoln appears representative of rural New England towns during this period, allows us to assemble a good composite picture of a typical Revolutionary soldier from New England.

The unexpected reward, however, was discovering the human details and the individual stories that brought these men to life as real people. The personal stories of these men provide, in the words of National Park Ranger Jim Hollister, "a highly personal view of the war through the service of ordinary citizens." An estimated 75 to 80 percent of Lincoln's service-age male population served during the war. This number is much higher than the participation rates that historians have typically reported, and suggests that historians may have significantly underestimated the extent to which colonial Americans supported and participated in the Revolutionary War effort.

The data also shows that Revolutionary service cut through broad cross sections of the community. Among the identified soldiers were farmers, housewrights, coopers, cordwainers, tanners, mill operators, woodworkers, innkeepers, merchants, blacksmiths, laborers, stonemasons, and carpenters. More than a dozen Lincoln slaves and free blacks served. The 256 Lincoln boys and men ranged in age from 11 to 68. And not all were patriots—four remained loyal to the king and served against their neighbors.

The research results confirm the romantic notion of eighteenth-century New England farm villages as tightly knit communities where virtually everyone knew and was related to everyone else. I was able to connect more than 120 Lincoln Revolutionary soldiers to one another through a web of primary relationships no further removed than first cousin. The chart diagramming these familial ties runs for nine pages in the book. So for many a Revolutionary soldier, at least from New England, the man beside him was likely to be a brother, father, son, uncle, nephew, cousin, or in-law. It's easy to imagine that this extended kinship accentuated a sense of purpose for these soldiers and may have contributed to a broad sense of common cause.

These Lincoln soldiers were not, however, poor, subsistence farmers. The popular myth of the humble origins of the American Republic notwithstanding, good scholarship over a period of years tells us that the American colonies



How to order

Embattled Farmers: Campaigns and Profiles of Revolutionary Soldiers from Lincoln, Massachusetts, 1775–1783 by Richard C. Wiggin was published by the Lincoln Historical Society in 2013. "This work has set the bar for heavily documented research into the military as well as daily life of hardship and tedium of the 18th-Century citizen soldier, from enlistment to discharge and beyond. Simply Outstanding!"(Art Fossa, Aide De Camp Military Books & Prints, York, Maine) The 574-page book is available in hardcover or paperback from LincolnHistoricalSociety.org, AmericanAncestors.org, Amazon, and other booksellers.

The modern company of Lincoln Minute Men.

at the time had one of the highest standards of living and one of the highest literacy rates in the world.

Even without modern transportation systems, colonial Americans were surprisingly mobile and well traveled. Many of the Lincoln soldiers were born in Maine, Rhode Island, or other parts of Massachusetts. Young people—and whole families—moved to and from various towns all over Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine. On April 19 alone, Lincoln men were in minute and militia companies from seventeen different towns, including Mason and New Ipswich, New Hampshire. And excluding their war deployments, Lincoln soldiers can be traced to 185 other locations in eleven states and seven foreign countries.

Stories of individual soldiers

Charles Russell, for example, one of Lincoln's leading citizens before the war, received his education in Scotland. He was a Loyalist, however, and he abandoned Lincoln for the protective custody of the British garrison in Boston after April 19. As a doctor, he tended British casualties from the Battle of Bunker Hill, then moved his family to Antigua, where he died in 1780.

Jonas Hartwell was the youngest of five brothers, four of whom responded to the Alarm of April 19. In 1776, Jonas enrolled at Harvard but took several leaves of absence from his studies, claiming "mental disorders," during which time he enlisted at Dorchester (2½ months) and in the Continental Army (cumulatively, 9 months). After the war, he became a merchant trader, plying the reopened Atlantic trade routes. The endeavor was short lived, however; a year later, during a stop at Bilbao, Spain, he was imprisoned and tortured to death at the hands of the Spanish Inquisition.

My favorite rogue was Benjamin Cleaveland, who was living in Rhode Island when the war broke out. After recovering from serious wounds suffered at the Battle of Bunker Hill, he enlisted in 1777, in a Continental Army regiment. This enlistment was credited to Lincoln, but his connection to the town is unknown. Cleaveland also enlisted in another Continental regiment at the same time, a common scam to collect multiple bounties. Then he fathered a child out of wedlock. He eventually married the child's mother but apparently never informed her of the duration of his enlistment. After three years (the normal enlistment term), she began making inquiries about him, and only then learned that he had enlisted for the duration of the war. Cleaveland reportedly participated in the storming of Stony Point, the Battle of Cowpens, and the siege of Yorktown, and then settled with his family in upstate New York.

John Whitehead of Lincoln had seven children under the age of 14 when his wife died in 1773. He remarried and moved to Weston. He participated in the Boston Tea Party and was in-arms at Concord with his Lincoln neighbors as the war began. Two years later, in January 1777, he joined the Continental Army for a three-year enlistment as a lieutenant in a company of artificers. A month later, he brought his 12-year-old son, Daniel, into service with him and, a month after that, his 17-year-old son, Elisha, joined them. The obvious supposition that the boys may have been having difficulty at home with their stepmother is given credence by a notice that John placed in a Boston newspaper a few days later: "I, John Whitehead, of Weston, for several Reasons, forbid all Persons trusting ANNA, my wife, any Thing whatsoever, on my Account; as I declare I will not pay any Debt she may contract after the Date hereof."[5] Tragically, Elisha and Daniel both died in service before the summer was out. Devastated, John Whitehead resigned his commission, but seven months passed before it was accepted. He left the army in March 1778, never to serve again.

Joseph Wheat and his stepbrother Jesse Smith served as minute men on April 19, 1775. Then with another brother, Benjamin Wheat, they joined the Massachusetts Provincial Army in Cambridge. Jesse and Benjamin participated in the Battle of Bunker Hill. All three served with the Continental Army, and Jesse became a member of General George Washington's Life Guard. Their sisters, Betty and Mary

(continued on page 62)

OBITUARIES

Timothy Field Beard, 1930–2015

Distinguished genealogist and NEHGS member Timothy Field Beard died in Roxbury, Connecticut, February 13, 2015, aged 84. He was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, December 19, 1930, the son of Stuart-Menteth and Natalie Sudler (Turner) Beard.

Mr. Beard was raised in Sheffield, Massachusetts, and graduated from Williams College with a BA in history in 1953. He served in the U.S. Air Force as a first lieutenant, working as a supply officer in France from 1954 to 1956. In 1962 he received a master's degree in library science from Columbia University and began a twenty-one-year career at the New York Public Library's local history and genealogy division. He later served as head librarian, then, in retirement, as chairman of the board, of the Minor Memorial Library in Roxbury, Connecticut, as well as Roxbury's town historian.

An active member of numerous genealogical and hereditary societies and author of the popular book *How To Find Your Family Roots* (McGraw-Hill, 1977), Beard was elected a Fellow of the American Society of Genealogists in 1977.

An NEHGS member since 1977, Mr. Beard was a Friend of the Society who contributed regularly to the NEHGS Annual Fund.

Mr. Beard married Annette Knowles Huddleston in 1963; she died in 1995. He is survived by five nieces and nephews, a great-niece and nephew, and numerous cousins.

Photo courtesy of the Hereditary Society Community of the United States of America

Elizabeth R. Bramwell, 1940–2015

Elizabeth "Liz" Bramwell, an NEHGS Councilor and noted Wall Street asset manager, died in New York City on March 7, 2015, aged 74. Born as Thyra Elizabeth Reed in New York City on December 1, 1940, she was the daughter of Clinton and Thyra (Turnblad) Reed.

Mrs. Bramwell graduated from Bryn Mawr in 1962 and Columbia Business School in 1967. She then worked on Wall Street for forty-five years. She was first employed as an equity analyst, then, in 1987, started the Gabelli Growth Fund, a top-performing mutual fund. In 1994 she founded her own asset-management firm, Bramwell Capital Management, and she continued to work for the firm after it was purchased in 2005 by Sentinel Asset Management, Inc. She retired in 2012. As a result of the many successes in her celebrated career, Mrs. Bramwell was a role model for women in the financial field.

An NEHGS member since 2005, Mrs. Bramwell was an active member of our Investment Committee and a frequent participant in our tours, including trips to England, Ireland, and Nova Scotia, among other programs. She was an effective advocate and generous supporter of our Society and will be sorely missed.

Mrs. Bramwell is survived by her husband, William Moffat Bramwell, Jr., whom she married in 1970, as well as two children, Austin W. Bramwell and Hilary F. Bramwell, two grandchildren, a brother, three half-sisters, and a stepmother.

(Embattled Farmers, continued from page 32)

Wheat, however, had married two brothers, John and Robert Semple, Boston merchants who remained loyal to the crown. The sisters went into exile with their husbands, who were officially banished from Massachusetts in 1778. The following year, their father, John Wheat, made out his will. He was a man of some means, and he provided amply for all his sons and daughters—with two exceptions. For Betty, he left "only six shillings, because she has left this state and gone as a friend to the enemies of this continent, to be paid only on condition that she return a friend to America." And for Mary, "six shillings for she has gone from this state an enemy to the country."

The individuals at the heart of these stories were ordinary men, forgotten soldiers who left us an extraordinary legacy, and as I discovered their stories, I felt compelled—indeed, honored—to bring them to life. Piece by piece, through sometimes untold numbers of hours, a comprehensive image slowly emerged. And the remaining holes notwithstanding, I found considerable satisfaction in assembling the diverse pieces into a coherent group portrait of the fathers and sons of Lincoln who became soldiers of the American Revolution. ◆

Notes

1. Letter from E. W. Morgan, Acting Commissioner of Pensions, to Mrs. C. A. Reising of Whitneyville, Connecticut, dated May 6, 1929, in Jeduthan Bemis pension record, # W17283, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
2. Muster Rolls of the Revolutionary War, Vol. 55, file L, p. 24, Massachusetts Archives.
3. R. Stanton Avery Special Collections, NEHGS, Mss A 6628. Cuff Hoar was granted freedom by John Hoar of Lincoln.
4. For a definition and discussion of prosopography, see Robert Charles Anderson, "The Joys of Prosopography," AMERICAN ANCESTORS, vol. 11, no. 1 (Winter 2010), 25–27.
5. *The Independent Chronicle and the Universal Advertiser* (Boston, Mass.), April 10, 1777.