Identifying Provincetown's *Revolutionary War* Soldiers

During the Revolutionary War, Provincetown, Massachusetts (founded in 1727), was little more than a fishing station—a remote enclave of just thirty-six families and twenty dwellings. Due to a devastating 1877 fire that destroyed the old Town Hall and many of the town's earliest records, almost no information about Provincetown's role in the war survived into the modern era.

While working with the Provincetown Cemetery Commission and conducting research for *Provincetown's Historic Cemeteries and Memorials: Where the Town's Fabled History Can Be Traced and Tribute is Paid to Its Most Notable Citizens* (2017), Amy Whorf McGuiggan discovered that some of the men buried in the historic Winthrop Street Cemetery were of the right age to have served in the Revolutionary War. An NEHGS member and the Project Coordinator for the Provincetown Revolutionary War Veterans Project, Amy was intrigued by the notion that Provincetown might be able to reclaim some long-lost history. She reached out to the Cape Cod-based Captain Joshua Gray-Jonathan Hatch Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. The chapter hired our Research Services team—and thus began a multi-year project to memorialize the town's Revolutionary War patriots.

Amy sent us a list of fourteen men buried in the Winthrop Street Cemetery whose birth years made them candidates to have served in the War. Our initial research into these individuals was broad, and consisted primarily of examining genealogies, vital records, and works on Revolutionary War soldiers, particularly *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War* (1896–1908). Upon completing this first step, we placed these men into three preliminary groups: likely to be patriots (four), more research needed (five), and unlikely to be patriots (five).

During the next phase of the research, we found multiple individuals with the same name born within the same decade in Provincetown and surrounding communities. At the time, Provincetown's relatively small population was composed of intermarried families. The result was relatively few unique surnames. In 1790, of the ninety-seven households recorded in Provincetown, thirty-four were headed by individuals who shared a surname with our target patriots.

To address this challenge, we searched probate records and created extended family charts to map out the various similarly-named men. We also searched Provincetown deeds to determine if any of these men had sold land during times when records indicated a patriot with that name was away serving in the military. If so, we eliminated the sellers as possibilities. We also created timelines for the similarly-named men using land, probate, and census records, which allowed us to exclude additional individuals.

In the eighteenth century, ages were recorded in more approximate terms. We often had to consider whether the age on a gravestone was merely imprecise—and could possibly apply to our patriot—or whether that age eliminated an identification with our patriot. To resolve this problem, we used a variety of records to attempt to prove that our subjects buried in Winthrop Street Cemetery were the patriots who had served.

After reviewing our research for the original fourteen men, Amy and the Cape Cod DAR chapter authorized additional time, allowing us

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Left: Dedication ceremony with Wareham Minutemen and Militia at Winthrop Street Cemetery, Provincetown, April 16, 2018. *Right:* Detail from Thomas Jefferys's *The Provinces of Massachusetts Bay and New Hampshire (southern section)* (London: 1776). David Rumsey Map Collection.

to focus on the ten potential Revolutionary War soldiers most likely to be accepted as patriots by the DAR. We then studied town records, including meeting minutes and council records, from Provincetown and nearby communities, including Wellfleet and Truro, to determine where the patriot had lived. We also used the "Hepburn Files: Grave Locations of Revolutionary Soldiers and Sailors of Massachusetts and Maine," a compilation of gravestone records and Revolutionary War service files created by the Massachusetts Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, available on microfilm in the NEHGS library.

For this phase of the project, we delved more deeply into military service and war records to develop more detailed timelines. These records included pension records, bounty land grants, and published naval documents. Because *Soldiers and Sailors* often provided the names of the ships on which a patriot served, we could use the naval documents to determine the location of those ships at particular times.

After two more rounds of detailed research, we had strong evidence to submit applications for gravestone markers for ten patriots. The Daughters of the American Revolution sets an extremely high standard for eligibility, now requiring both proof of service and evidence verifying that the submitted individual completed the service. After reviewing the Cape Cod DAR chapter's applications, the DAR Historian General initially chose not to recognize five of the men; existing documentary evidence could not definitively link the men—all of whom had common names—to a corresponding service record.

However, Amy persisted in her efforts and while three cases are still pending and in need of additional documentation, two others were ultimately verified by the Historian General. One of these cases, that of Elisha Freeman, had some serendipitous help from NEHGS when, in the summer 2017 *Mayflower Descendant*, NEHGS member Gregory Weinig published a scholarly article, "Elisha Freeman of Provincetown, Massachusetts (ca. 1758/9–1825)," which convinced the DAR of his service (see Christopher Child's April 16, 2018, "Belated Recognition" at Vita-Brevis.org).

To date, gravestone markers have been authorized for the following seven patriots:

- **Samuel Atwood (1735–after 1810)** served as a private with Captain Joseph Smith's Company in defense of the seacoast. He also served as Provincetown Town Clerk and Treasurer. According to the DAR, civil service, as a town officer or selectman during war years, constitutes patriotic service.
- **Stephen Atwood (1733–1802)** served as a selectman for Provincetown from 1772 to 1780.
- **Solomon Cook (1737–1819)** served as a selectman and assessor in Provincetown in 1775, 1776, and 1781.
- **Elisha Freeman (ca. 1758/9–1825)** served five tours as a private from July 1775 to September 1778. He was in several companies and regiments, including Capt. Joshua Higgins's Eastham Company and Major Zenas Winslow's Regiment.
- **Alexander Gross (1757–1828)** was a private in Captain Ebenezer Hamlin's Company, under Colonel John Bailey of the 2nd Massachusetts Regiment of the Continental Army. Gross participated in the Battle of White Plains and the Battle of Harlem Plains, both in New York. His military service lasted for twelve months plus an additional six weeks of volunteering.
- **Joshua Atkins Mayo (1758–1816)** served for seven days from September 6 to September 13, 1778, on alarms at Bedford and Falmouth in Captain Joshua Higgins's Eastham Company.
- **Seth Smith (1743–1802)** served as Lieutenant and Second Lieutenant in Captain Joseph Smith's Company in the 18th Massachusetts Regiment. He was also a Lieutenant in Captain Isaiah Higgins's Company in Major Zenas Winslow's Regiment, assisted in the defense of the coast at Truro, and participated in the alarm at Falmouth.

After being authorized by the Historian General of the DAR to mark appropriately the graves of these seven previously unrecognized Provincetown soldiers, the Provincetown Cemetery Commission and the Captain Joshua Gray-Jonathan Hatch Chapter held a dedication ceremony on Patriots' Day, April 16, 2018. The Research Services team is pleased to have contributed to this effort to identify and honor these Provincetown patriots. ◆