



Introducing the Bedford Flag



The Bedford Flag is probably the oldest existing flag in the United States. It dates to the early 1700s. Legend has it that this flag was carried into the Battle of Concord at the beginning of the Revolutionary War

on April 19, 1775, by Nathaniel Page, cornet of the Bedford, Massachusetts Minutemen. The flag remained in the Page family for many years and now resides in the Bedford Free Public Library in its own climate controlled case for preservation.

Bedford Flag: The Bedford Flag is a red piece of silk damask approximately 27” by 29”. Its square shape indicates it was a cavalry flag. A mail covered arm protrudes from a cloud holding a sword, while a banner with the Latin words “Vince aut Morire” (Conquer or Die) furls down the other side. Three cannon balls float in the air by the arm.

Bedford Flag Legend: The Bedford Flag was allegedly carried into the first battle of the American Revolution at Concord on April 19, 1775 by minuteman Nathaniel Page of Bedford, Massachusetts. Page was the Bedford Minutemen’s elected cornet. The cornet in colonial militia carried the flag for the unit. This was an important position. The cornet would stand next to the captain at all times so he could accurately convey the captain’s messages to the troops.

Early on the morning of April 19, 1775, before the first shots were fired at Lexington, Captain John Parker sent out couriers to towns around the area to call their minutemen to arms. Benjamin Todd and Nathaniel Monroe went into Bedford as couriers. They knocked on the door of Nathaniel Page early that morning

shouting, “Up, Mr. Page, the regulars are out!”

Nathaniel Page and the other 25 members of the Bedford Minutemen gathered at Fitch Tavern, a tavern still located in the center of the town, that was owned by Bedford Militia Sergeant Jeremiah



Fitch Tavern

Fitch. The Minutemen gathered around the fireplace in the tap room and Lydia Fitch served them cold cornmeal mush and hot buttered rum. The men then marched toward Concord, joining with 50 others on their way.

According to Cyrus Page, Nathaniel’s grandson, who is also the primary source for the legend, when the Bedford Minutemen arrived in Concord they assisted others in removing the remaining military supplies from their storage place to greater safety. Nathaniel said he laid the flag down to help in moving the supplies. Page then took the flag and the company marched to the Olde North Bridge to engage the British Regulars.

Some historians discount the story because of the lack of corroborating accounts. There are, however, some facts that at least indicate that the story might be true.

Shortly before his death, Cyrus Page gave the Bedford Flag to the Bedford Free Public Library and asked them to keep it as a “relic of by-gone days” to be “kept for the inspection of the public at all proper times.”

Today you can visit the Bedford Free Public Library and see the original Bedford Flag in its climate controlled vault.