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COLONEL WILLIAM PRESCOTT;

AND

GROTON SOLDIERS IN THE BATTLE  
OF BUNKER HILL

BY

SAMUEL ABBOTT GREEN

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# COLONEL WILLIAM PRESCOTT;

AND

## GROTON SOLDIERS IN THE BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL

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AT a meeting of the MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY held in Boston on Thursday, November 11, 1909, Dr. SAMUEL A. GREEN read the following paper :

The French and Indian War was the school where the chief actors in the Revolution learned their first lessons. Artemas Ward, who was the commander-in-chief of the American army until the arrival of Washington at Cambridge, on July 3, 1775; Richard Gridley, the engineer who laid out the works on Bunker Hill and planned the fortifications around Boston; and William Prescott, the commander at the Battle, — these officers and many others received their early military education during this period. The French and Indian War was the last and severest of the intercolonial struggles, and the Indians fought on each side, though mostly with the French and against the English. The first conflict of arms took place in May, 1754, and the war continued until a treaty of peace was made in February, 1763.

Among the manuscripts belonging to the Historical Society is a paper which gives the names of twenty-five men who were enlisted by William Prescott in a regiment to be employed for the removal of the Acadians, though no place of enlistment is given. To any one familiar with the home of Prescott the omission to mention the place of enlistment

is of little importance, as the family names of the men furnish the desired information. Without doubt they all belonged in Groton and its neighborhood, and there are many descendants still living there. Job Shattuck, whose name appears in the list, thirty years later became a conspicuous character in Shays's Rebellion. It has long been known that William Prescott was a lieutenant in the Provincial army sent in the spring of 1755 to remove the neutral French from Nova Scotia; but this record shows that he had already been active in enlisting men for that purpose. At that period of time the township of Groton spread over a much larger territory than it now covers, but since then by legislative enactment it has been materially dismembered and has lost several towns from the original grant. One half of the men mentioned in this list served in the War for Independence; and, of course, during these intervening years others had died.

The aforesaid paper is found in a volume marked on the back "Winslow Papers 1737-1755" (p. 87); and the list of names is as follows:

A List of the Men Inlisted by William Prescott in a Regiment of foot to be Employed for the Removal of the French Incroachments in North America Whereof His Excellency William Shirley Esq<sup>r</sup>. is Colonel and John Winslow Esq<sup>r</sup> Lieutenant Colonel

Isaac Green	Phineas Barron
William Spaulding Jun <sup>r</sup>	James Lessley
Eleazer Spaulding	John Lessley
John Kemp Jun <sup>r</sup>	George Lessley
Jabez Kemp	Amos Whiting
Jonathan Shedd	Eliphalet Dinsmore
William Shedd	Asa Dinsmore
Eleazer Whipple	Jonathan Melvin
Isaac Williams Jun <sup>r</sup>	Job Shattock
Samuel Fisk	Simeon Lakin
Nathaniel Sartwell	Abraham Boyenten
Simon Lakin	Moses Woods

Oliver Eliot

February 28<sup>th</sup> 1755

It was in the spring of 1755 that the territory of Acadia, or Nova Scotia, fell under British authority; and the conquest was followed by a terrible act of cruelty and violence. The simple Acadians, unsuspecting of any untoward designs of the



English leaders, were assembled in their churches in obedience to military proclamation; and thence, without being allowed to return to their homes, were driven at the point of the bayonet aboard ship to be scattered through the English colonies in America. This was done with so little regard to humanity that in many instances wives were separated from husbands and children from parents, never to see one another again. It was upon an incident connected with this act of tyranny that Longfellow's poem of "Evangeline" is founded. Our pity for these unfortunate people will be stronger when we reflect that in their exile they were miserably poor, among a race who spoke a strange language, followed other customs and abominated their religion.

In the report of a Committee, dated April 18, 1761, which was appointed by the General Court to distribute French Neutrals among the towns of Middlesex County (Massachusetts Archives, XXIV.468) it is stated that they have assigned to

Groton	Rain Bobbin	[aged] 37
	Marg <sup>t</sup> his wife	39
	John his son	13
	Matturen D <sup>o</sup>	11
	Joseph D <sup>o</sup>	8
	Eliz	5 weeks
Pepperil	Marg <sup>t</sup> Marichal	18
	Mary Bobbin daugh <sup>t</sup> of Rain Bobbin	3
Townsend	Paul Oliver Bobbin	7
	Peter Bobbin son to Rain Bobbin of Groton	5

The surname, perhaps, is spelled wrong, as people in those days were not used to writing foreign words; very likely it should have been Beaubien. Other families were sent at the same time to Dunstable, Westford, and Littleton.

In connection with the reference in this paper to William Prescott, it may be of interest to note a fact that bears closely on the question of the commandership at the Battle of Bunker Hill. The circumstances surrounding the army at the beginning of the Revolution were such that there may have been only slight formality in assigning a command, but there is no evidence that Prescott ever received any order from others in that memorable engagement, while he himself acted under orders from General Ward. In modern times certain

captious critics have tried to deprive the old Revolutionary soldier of the credit of this command; but it was the universal testimony of his army comrades, that the supreme authority in that action rested with him alone. The fact alluded to at the beginning of this paragraph is found in a letter from General Ward to John Adams, written four months after the battle was fought; and by the courtesy of the Adams family I am enabled now to print it, as follows:

ROXBURY CAMP, October 23, 1775.

SIR, — Yesterday I Rec<sup>d</sup>. your favour of the fifth Instant, a week after the arival of M<sup>r</sup> Lynch,<sup>1</sup> although I had been twice in his company before. I have indeavoured to treat the Gentlemen Committe with Decency and Politeness, I invited them to Roxbury twice. The day after I invited them M<sup>r</sup>. Lynch came to Roxbury, but did not dine with me, he being Ingaged to dine with Genl. Washington as he said. The next day I was at Cambridge, and mentioned to Washington his and the Com<sup>tee</sup> dining with me. He answered they could not untill they had finished their business and he would let me know when they would come and dine with me. Major [Samuel] Osgood informs me Gen<sup>l</sup>. Washington told the Com<sup>tee</sup> that I depended on their dining with me this day.

This day Gen<sup>l</sup>. Gates wrote to the field officers of y<sup>e</sup> Connecticut forces, that the Com<sup>tee</sup> did accept their invitation to dine with them, and accordingly came and dined with them. When they came I informed them I expected they would have dined with me, they said they thought till then, that accepting of the one invitation, was accepting the other; that is they were one and y<sup>e</sup> same invitation. I afterward invited them to dine with me tomorrow. They told me if they did not set out on their Journey they were Ingaged to dine with Gen<sup>l</sup>. Putnam. I think I have given a true state of facts, and now Judge whither, I have been deficient in inviting, and whither I have not been Ill treated. What would not some men do, to make this Colony and the Inhabitants thereof appear contemptible?

Octr. 30, 1775.

They do not boast so much of the Riflemen as heretofore Gen<sup>l</sup>. Washington has said he wished they had never come; Gen<sup>l</sup> Lee has damned them and wished them all in Boston; Gen<sup>l</sup> Gates has said, if any capital movement was about to be made the Riflemen must be moved from this Camp.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Lynch, member of the Continental Congress from South Carolina and at this time one of the special committee sent by Congress to report upon the army. The other members of the committee were Benjamin Franklin and Benjamin Harrison.

I am in great concern about the raising a new army, for the Genius of this people is different from those to the southward. Our people are Jealous, and are not Inclineable to act upon an Implicit faith, they Chuse to see and Judge for themselves. They remember what was said of them by some that came from the Southward last summer, which makes them backward in Inlisting or manifesting a willingness to Inlist.

Its my opinion we should have began a month ago to Ingage men for another Campaign. If the present armys time should be out, and no other secured I fear the Enemy will take advantage thereof. I wish Gen<sup>l</sup>. Frye might be provided for, I think him a good man for the service, and am very sorry he has not been provided for by the Continental Congress before this time.

*Some have said hard things of the officers belonging to this Colony, and despised them, but I think as mean as they have represented them to be, there has been no one action with the enemy, which has not been conducted by an officer of this Colony, except that at Chelsea, which was conducted by Gen<sup>l</sup>. Putnam. [Italics mine.]*

I am this moment informed, that Major Tupper of this Colony and off the army hath seized two vessels at the Vineyard loaded with oyl, Belonging to [Benjamin M.] Holmes, and [John] Coffin in Boston two Tories, and has Carried them into Plymouth, he having been dispatched for that purpose. He now desires to resign his command in the army, and take the command of one of those vessels, when fitted out for a Privateer.

You mentioned the scene is thickning, I hope as that thickens our deliverance approaches. I have no doubt, but we shall finally come off victorious, if we continue persevering. There has not been one action with the enemy, without a signal appearance of Divine Providence in our favour. If so what reason can we have to doubt of success more than when we began.

I should have wrote you before, but was prevented by Indisposition and frequent avocations of a publick nature, and probable you may think I had better have spent by [my] time some other way than in writing the above. I hope you will excuse all the foregoing Inaccuracies and honor me with a line, in the mean time I rest your affectionate friend and humble servant

ARTEMAS WARD.

Honorable John Adams Esq.

The pith of the evidence lies in Ward's statement that every action with the enemy thus far has been conducted by an officer of this Colony, except that at Chelsea, when Putnam was in command. The statement is found in the fourth paragraph of that part of the letter which is dated October 30,

and says inferentially that Putnam did not command on June 17. In the reprint this paragraph has been italicized. No better authority on this question could be given than General Ward, as he was the commander of the Provincial army at the time of the Battle of Bunker Hill, and continued as such until the arrival of General Washington on July 3. The skirmish at Chelsea took place on May 27, three weeks before the action on Bunker Hill.

Interested for various reasons in the town of Groton I am desirous that the record of her soldiers, who took part in the battle, should be correctly made; and to that end with no apology I offer the following facts.

One commissioned officer and ten enlisted men, residents of Groton, were either killed or mortally wounded in the battle. The roll of honor comprises the names of Lieutenant Amaziah Fassett, who fell wounded and died a prisoner in Boston, a short time later, on July 5; Sergeant Benjamin Prescott, eldest son of the Hon. James Prescott, and nephew of Colonel William Prescott, the commander on the American side; and Privates Abraham Blood, Chambers Corey, James Dodge, Peter Fisk, Stephen Foster, Simon Hobart, Jonathan Jenkins, Robert Parker, and Benjamin Woods.

This loss was the largest suffered by any one town in the battle, and shows the patriotic character of the citizens at that period. These soldiers were serving in five different companies of Colonel Prescott's regiment, and their names now appear on the bronze tablets which have been placed near the scene of action by the city of Boston in memory of the brave men who fell in that historic engagement. It is highly probable that Amos Fisk, killed in the battle, was another Groton soldier who fell on that day, but his name does not appear in the list, as there is a trifling doubt connected with the fact. In a newspaper account his Christian name is given as Amasa, which is wrong. The name of David Kemp is given on the tablets, but for reasons stated below has been omitted by me in this paper.

Colonel Prescott, the commander of the American forces, was a native of Groton, and at least three of the Pepperell soldiers who lost their lives in the fight were also natives.

In connection with the names that are given on the tablets set up by the city, there is a singular error worth noting.

David Kemp, of Groton, is named as one of the men who was killed in the action, though fortunately he was only captured, and afterward taken to Halifax. By mistake he was reported as dying on September 10, while a prisoner in Boston, and for a long time his family mourned him as dead. It is not recorded when they first heard of his safety, but probably it was many months after the battle.

In "The Boston-Gazette, and Country Journal" (Watertown), July 29, 1776, it is said:

Last Tuesday Evening came to town from Halifax, Lieut. Scott of Peterborough, in New Hampshire Government, who was wounded and taken Prisoner at the memorable Battle of Bunker Hill the 17th of June, 1775, and has been a Prisoner ever since. He informs, That he with 13 others broke Goal about 5 Weeks ago and betook themselves to the Woods where they seperated; that Captain Martindale and his first and second Lieutenants, John Brown Rifleman Leonard Briggs of Ware [Wareham?], and himself arrived at Truro at the head of Cobbecut river, after a travel of 3 days, where they procured a boat and got to the Eastward; that Richard Carpenter formerly Barber in this town, Philip Johnson Peak, David Kemp of Groton, and Corporal Cruse of Virginia, and two others took the road to Windsor where they were apprehended and confined in irons; that Benjamin Willson of Billerica, one of the Bunker Hill Prisoners died lately in goal; and that he left Master James Lovell still confin'd, in high health and spirits.

From the foregoing newspaper account it appears that David Kemp did not die in Boston on September 10, 1775, as is recorded in the Company Return among the Massachusetts Archives (LVI. 70); and furthermore, that he was alive nearly one year after the memorable engagement. The following petition, printed in the Journal of the Massachusetts House of Representatives (page 104), September 13, 1776, gives the exact date of Kemp's escape as well as some other interesting facts:

A petition of *David Kemp*, of *Groton*, setting forth, that his son *David Kemp*, jun. a soldier in Capt. *Parker's* company, in Col. *Prescot's* regiment, was taken prisoner at the Battle at *Bunker's-Hill*, the 17th *June*, 1775, and carried to *Halifax*, where he remained till the 13th *June* last; that he was not made up in said *Parker's* roll, only to the 17th *June*, therefore praying that his wages to this time may be allowed him.

Read and committed to Capt. *Kimball*, Mr. *Ingals* and Mr. *White*.

In connection with the facts here given it may be interesting to note the action of the General Court, taken nine months after the battle. It is printed in the Journal of the Massachusetts House of Representatives (page 23), and shows the accuracy — or the inaccuracy perhaps — of an official publication, though in this case there were good grounds for the statement.

Thursday, March 21, 1776 (Afternoon).

An Account of *David Kemp*, for Loss of Cloaths and other Articles, sustained by his late Son *David Kemp*, taken in the Engagement on *Bunker's-Hill*, on the seventeenth of *June* last, and since dead.

Among my earliest recollections of boyhood was seeing a few old men who were known as "pensioners," but what that word meant, or why it was applied to them, I was wholly in the dark. Later I learned that they had served in the Revolution. For the most part such persons wore low-crowned hats with broad brims, like other old men of that period. Some of them, I remember, wore cues, but as their hair was not over-abundant, the crinal appendages were both short and thin. These recollections carry me back to the men who took an active part in the Revolution, though then they were not much older than those who served in the War of the Rebellion are now. To some of us the men who served in the campaigns of 1861-65 do not seem old, though they are no longer young. Doubtless the boys of to-day look upon these later veterans with very much the same feeling as we looked upon those of a former generation. To me the events connected with the Rebellion were burned so deeply into my very being and have left such clear outlines on my memory that they seem rather recent. I could readily believe that the first Battle of Bull Run was fought long after the Great Fire of Boston which took place thirty-seven years ago this very week.





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