

Amos Doolittle, *A View of the South Part of Lexington, 1775* (detail)

“the Melancholy news . . . that General Gages troops had fired on our Contrymen”

The Diary of Matthew Patten of New Hampshire, 1775-1776

SELECTIONS

Matthew Patten came to America from Ireland in 1728 with his Scotch-Irish family. Appointed in his early thirties as a probate judge for Hillsborough County, New Hampshire (and later as a justice of the peace), he regularly noted his judicial business in his diary along with farming records and family affairs. His entry for April 20, 1775, records the “melancholy news” of the Battle of Lexington and Concord on the previous day. He soon became a member of the county’s Committee of Safety to prepare for the coming war and records its prosecution of Loyalists. In May 1776 he learned that his son, John, had died of smallpox while fighting in Canada with the Continental Army.

For Patten, his diary was not a place to work out his thinking on the issues of the day or record his emotional ups and downs. It was simply a bare-bones documentation of his daily activities. Thus the drama of the moment is muted. We can get at the passion of those days in Bedford only through our imaginations. What was said at the town meeting? What emotions would lead a band of farmers to confront a professional army? What must it have been like to see your son and those of your neighbors march off to confront the British?

APRIL 1775

1st I went to Capt Moors mill and got the Meal of the Rie I took there on the 30th Ult and I had the Toal and as I was coming home I took the acknowledgement of a mortgage Deed from John Manoughan to Thomas Boies of Hugh Campbells place that he sold to said Manoughan Day before yesterday for which Manoughan Gave me a pistereen and I could not give him the change and he gave me y^e overplus

rie: rye
Ult: ultimate;
of last month
toal: toll, milling fee
pistereen: pistereen, an
old Spanish coin

3^d Jamey helped his uncle John and Bob & David and I cut wood split two pine trees for wood

y^e: the

4th I Went to Amherst [NH] to Arbitrate between William Gordon and Thomas Murdough with Col: Lutwyche and Esqr Fletcher and we adjourned at Murdoughs Request till Thursday for his bringing some papers from Hisborough which was occasioned by Gordons laying in a demand of Two notes which had been Settled before

Esqr: Esquire, title
indicating a man
of property and influence

5th I writ a Deed from Enos Bradford to Calvin Johnson of three 50 lotts in Bedford and a Mortgage of the same to Bradford for security

- 6th we met and on the 7th and finished the arbitration Murdough fell 32-7-10½ Debt the cost of Rafferance was 3-5-0 the cost of court to be taxed at court Murdough paid my Expences at Hildreths I Recd Two Dollars for my time from Col: Lutwyche for Mr Godon I sit the Remainder of the days in the Sessions and finished the Session and I paid Lieut Hildreth 2-2-6 Bay old Tenor being the Remainder of james Vose and my Expences at the Superiour court last September and came home in the night
- 32-7-10½: 32 pounds,
7 shillings, 10½ pence

Recd: received

Bay old Tenor: paper
money issued by
Massachusetts Bay
- 9th I paid james McClure a dollar toward what shoes he made for us
- 10th I went and Run the lines of jacob Freezes lott and William Barnett is to pay ¼ by Gelding my calves lambs &c and Nathan shad is to pay another ¼ and Freize is to pay the one half I charge ½ a dollar in all and fjames Orr mended the Straps of my Spade
- 11th I finished drawing one of the leases of the School lotts to Hugh Campbell and he promised to pay me I could not have time to Write the other And I went to David Sawyers in Goffestown and I measured off six acres of josiah Woods land to Sawyer and I measured off sixty acres to Timothy johnson of the lott No 11 in the 5th Rang on the South side of Piscataquog Sawyer owns the Remainder and I got 4 Gallons of Molasses from Sam^l Moor at 17/ Bay old Tenor pr Gallon The Kagg and molasses and a long Strap weighed 54 £
- 17/: 17 shillings
£: pound
- 12th was a tedious Storm of Snow and hail and some Rain the wind Northeasterly and cold the most tedious storm we have had this long time if any to equal it all winter every cirmnstance considered
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- 14th I writ a lease of john Monaughns place to john Glene for which Monaughan paid me 1½ pistereen with 1/6 Bay old Tenor that he overpaid me when I took the acknowledgement of his Mortgage deed to Thomas Boies made the two shillings for the leases today & I got 4 bushell of Rie from Rob^t Alexander and got it Ground at Capt Moors and I had the Toal
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.
- 1/6 Bay old Tenor: 1 pound,
6 shillings in Massachusetts
Bay paper money
- 20th I Recd the Melancholy news in the morning that General Gages troops had fired on our Contrymen at Concord yesterday and had killed a large number of them our town was notified last night We Generay met at the meeting house about 9 of the Clock and the Number of twenty or more went Directly off from the Meeting house to assist them And I came to Sheds and james Orr made me a great wheel Spindle of my Steel and he mended the Ear of a little kittle and finished the chain for my cannoe he found iron for near a quarter of the chain the rest was mine And our john came home from being down to Pentuckwett and intended to Sett off for our army to morrow morning and our Girls sit up all night bakeing bread and fitting things for him and john Dobbin
- 21st our john and john Dobbin and my bror [brother] Samuell two oldest sons sett off and joyned Derryfield men and about six from Goffestown and two or 3 more from this town under the



comand of Capt John Moor of Derryfield they amounted to the No of 45 in all Sunkook men and two or three others that joined them marched in about an hour after they to 35 there was nine more went along after them belonging to Pennykook or thereabouts and I went to McGregores and I got a pound of Coffie on Credit

- 22d I was wakened in the morning by Mrs Chandlers comeing with a letter from the Comitee of the Provincial Congress for calling another Congress of the Province immeadeately and I went with it as fast as could to John Bells but he was gone to our army and both the others also and I went to Robert Alexanders and got 4 bushell of Rie on Credit and took it to Capt Moors mill and got it ground and I had it the Toal and I had ½ a bowle of Tody at McGaws for which I paid ¼ Lawful
- 24th my neck was so stiff that I could not do anything with a cold I had got
- 25th I went and notified on the River Road to meet at the meeting house in the afternoon on our publick Distress and I went to Col: Goffes to ask his advice and met toward evening and acted on what we thot necessary and my Brors jos helped me with their 3 pair of Oxen to cross plow
- 26th I went at the desire of the town to Col Goffes and Merrils and MacGregores and Cautioned them to take Special care of Strangers and persons Suspected of being Torys [Patriots] Crossing the River to Examin and Search if they judge it needful and I got a pound of Coffie and nine flints from MacGregore for which I paid him 11/8 Bay old tenor
- . . .
- 28th I began to Stock Capt Blairs Gun and I went and got Jamey Orr to forge me a Screw nail for the breach of the Gun and I fitted it and cut the screws and he made me a burning iron all of my iron
- 29th I worked some at Stocking the Gun and the boys planted Potatoes

tody: toddy, hot drink,
often with alcohol;
perhaps mulled cider

Lawful: i.e., money that must be
accepted in payment for goods
and services; legal tender

__MAY 1775__

- 1st the boys planted potatoes and I worked at the Gun and William Barnet gelded 3 lambs and a Boar for us and our John and John Dobbins came home
- 2d Shed forged a Guard and some Rods for pinning on the Quills and Stock on the Gun and I attended a Meeting of the town on our affairs of the country and Capt Moor had a training and our John and John Dobbins came home
- 3d I finished Stocking Capt Blairs Gun and the Boys got our Dung and planted some at Potatoes
- . . .
- 14th . . . From the 15th to the 20th Inclusive I fished at the falls I got 106 Ells and how may shad I cant Remember on the 19th we finished planting corn on the 16th we had a town meeting in Bedford at which we Voted to Shut the meeting house against Mr Houston¹ and I was chosen to attend the County Congress next wednesday at Amherst [NH]
- . . .
- 29th I went to Amherst and met the Rest of the Comitee and we took the care of the Goal² and took from under his hand to Deliver it to us the first Tuesday in July next and I came home at Break of day next morning my Expences was 19/6 Bay old Tenor . . .

¹ Rev. John Houston, pastor of the Presbyterian church of Bedford, preached loyalty to Britain and was dismissed soon after the Battle of Lexington and Concord. "The meeting, which was called for the 16th of May, voted to shut the doors of the church against the pastor, and to stop the payment of his salary till he should come to a sense of his duty. Mr. Houston made a statement of his position to the town, but it was declared to be unsatisfactory. On the 15th of June, 1775, the town voted his dismissal, and adopted a strong resolution condemning his course." The Town of Bedford, *History of Bedford, New Hampshire from 1737* . . . , (Concord, NH: Rumford, 1903), p. 288.

² Perhaps "gaol" or jail. Nature of this entry is undetermined. It is recorded that "a special town meeting held 22 May, 1775, was the last one called in 'His Majesty's' name in Amherst. The constables were simply directed by the selectmen [delegates, including Patten] to warn the inhabitants of the town of Amherst to the next meeting, held 14 August, 1775." Daniel F. Secomb, *History of the Town of Amherst, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire* (Concord: Evans, Sleeper & Woodbury: 1883), p. 380.

JUNE 1775

. . .
19th Jamey and Bob and I went to the mouth of the brook and hauled and caught Six Salmon they weighed 76 £ I divided in equal halves with Martin and I let Stephen Frenches wife have two that weighed 24 £ And I writ all the fore part of the day in framing an answer to Mr Macgregores letter to John Bell And the afternoon I attended Matthew Littles funeral And Bob and David fished at the Setting place and got 1 Salmon that weighed 10 £ and Robt MacGregore had it toward fishing expences they got two Shad also

JULY 1775

1st I made some scoop nett bows and I sit up a pail
3^d I hooped the pail I set up the first and the afternoon I went with Sam^{ll} Vose my Bror^s and met John Bell at Adam Dickeyes And took his Wifes Deposition and James Mathies and his son Roberts of some discourse Mr Houston had to them Relating the cruel acts of Parliament³
4th I went to Amherst to the County Congress and it Rained near night and untill near dark and I tarried over night at Heldreths my Expences was 17/2 Bay old Tenor
5th I came home in the morning nothing material untill the 11th when John sett off for the Army he Rid my horse down in the time I made a pail and a washing tub and went to McGregores to See Lieut McCalley about comeing to assist as a commiteeman concerning Mr Houston but did not see him on the 10th Martain and I got Six Salmon that weighed I suppose about 60 £ we did not weigh them we gave Capt Moor one of them we had the half of the six
. . .
13th I went to Amherst to jndge Esqur Whiting for his being a Tory and I took two Salmon with me that weighed 20 £ I sold one to Mr Hildreth and I gave him the other I had 2/6 pr £ Bay old Tenor my expences was 16/6 Bay old Tenor
14 & 15th I with Deacon Boies and John Wallace apprized Matthew Littles Estate
17th There was 4 of Goffestown Committee and 4 of Merrymac and 2 from Derryfield met in Bedford by the desire of Bedford commitee to judge of Mr Houston being an Enemy to this country they judged him Guilty and confined him to the county without leave from the majr part of one of the commitees of the towns who judged him we broke up the next morning after day break
. . .
20th Was the Continental Fast⁴ and Mr Cook preached with us in Bedford he preached with us last Sabath day which was the first preaching we have had since we shut the meeting house doors agt Mr Houston

AUGUST 1775

. . .
8th I went to Amherst to meet the commitee of the County to do something between Tho^s Lancey and Silas Barron but there was none of them come but Daniell Campbell and we could do nothing and I came home in the night my expences was 5/ Bay old tenor and I took the acknowledgement of a Deed from Capt Moor to Charles Black for Blacks widow
. . .

SEPTEMBER 1775

³ See footnote 1.

⁴ July 20, 1775, was designated by the First Continental Congress as a national day of fast and prayer.

8th & 9th we worked at the hay in the meadow we got all mowed and two load in

. . .

19th I sowed two bushel of Rie and cut 2 Rail cuts and fell a chestnut tree log post beyond the meeting house and came and attended a town meeting

__OCTOBER 1775__

1st Mr Webster preached in Bedford

2^d 3^d 4th and 5th We worked at harvesting the corn

. . .

16th We sent Johns Surtute and leather breeches and striped shirt and a pound of liberty Tea to Mr Caldwell's for Lieut Caldwell's son Sam^l to carry down to John and David and I went Chesnutting and we got a bushell

surtute: surtout
man's overcoat

. . .

__NOVEMBER 1775__

. . .

13th I went according to the Wart [warrant] that the Committee of Safty had signed for securing Mrs Heppers things to the meeting house to meet the other of the Comtee to determine who should maintain Hannah Murfeys child We did not determine but adjourned till Monday the 27th Instant to meet at my brors at ten of the Clock a forenoon we broke up between 10 and 11 o Clock at night

Instant
of this month

. . .

23^d I hewed at the Runers for the sled

. . .

28th I worked at the beams of my Sled and Jamey and David got some wood and Bob came home from Chester and there was a training in Bedford, and the Commissns under the Provincial Congress was given out for the company

29th was a moderate Thawy day the wind at S: W: and Rain Considerable the night before and I fitted at the beams of my Sled

30th Was the Provincial Thanksgiveing by order of the Congress

__DECEMBER 1775__

. . .

6th The town met at the Meeting House and there was 12 men turned out and Enlisted there was 7 Guns lacking to Equip them and the Comitt is to procure them my Brors Samuell and I borrowed John Maclaughlins gun

7th I spent the day in going to Lieut Moors and other places to procure Guns for the men that goes out of this town but got none

8th I went to McGaws to meet our men that listed to go into the army I got home the latter part of the night my Expences was a pistereen and I bot an almanack for which I paid six coppers

9th John set off for the Army and Bob went with him as far as Esqr Lovewells with the horse and Shed upsett 2 axes and tempared 2 ex hook for me And Bob brot two £ of Shugar from McGaw for which I sent 8/10 Bay old tenor

11th I took 2 bushell of corn and 1½ bushell of Rie to Col Moors Mill but could not get it ground they picking the mill

12th I went to Mill and got the grain Ground I took to null yesterday

13th I attended at McGaws at the choice of a Delegate for Merrymac and Bedford and jonathan Blanchard Esqr and my Bror Sam^{ll} paid me a Dollar that he borrowed when he went after his Cart Wheels and a Dollar more in two Dollar bill that I could not give him the change and Sam^{ll} Gibson Junr paid me 10/ Silver toward my Running lines for him Summer was a year and I got 10 £ of Redwood and 5 £ of logwood from McGaw for which I paid him 4/ Lawful money

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JANUARY 1776

1st I set out with a Slay to go to the army and Bob went with me to tarry a year and we lodged at at Harwoods

...

22^d David and I got a load of wood home and almost another cut up by Shed

23^d David and I got home 2 load of wood and we hauled a load for Shed and he shut the link of a Draft chain

24th Jamey got so well as to work and We got home a load of wood and some more cut

25th The boys got home two load of wood and cut some more and in the forenoon I writ a Deed of john Smiths place in Goffstown to Samuell Ordway and took the acknowledgement for which they paid me two shillings and in the afternoon I went to Robert McClures to a Meeting of oar Scene owners we Voted to Rais a dollar on each Right and I paid my dollar to Sam^{ll} Wallace

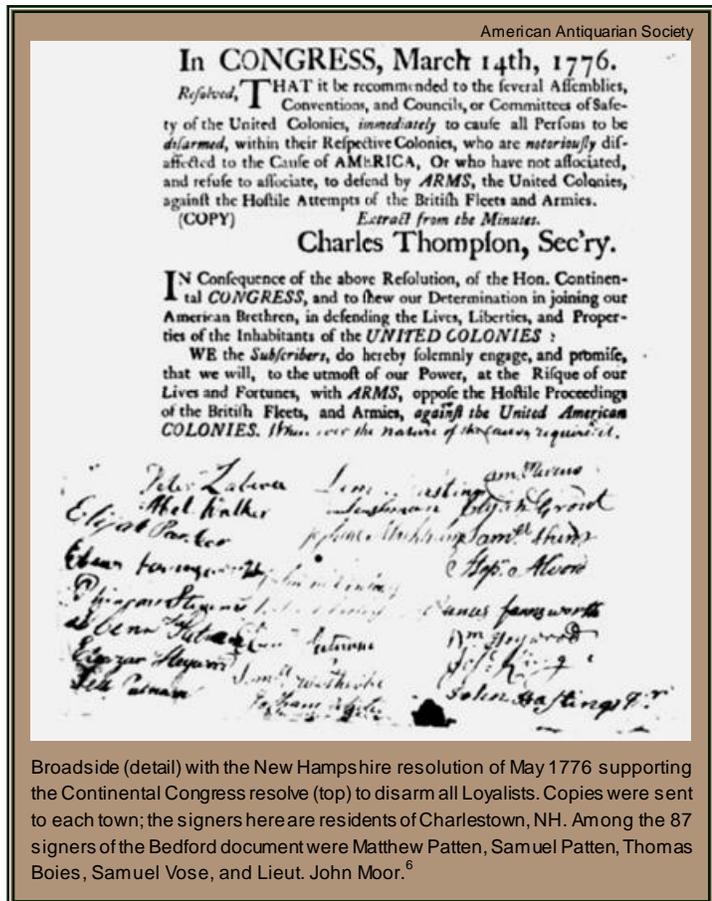
...

MAY 1776

16th I set out for Exeter to attend as one of the Comtee of Safty for the Colony and arived there that night

17th 18th 19th & 20th I attended on the Exeter on the affair and set out for home the afternoon of the 20th and came to Chester and lodged at Capt Underhills I left the Gown and near 26 yards of Fustin at Mr Barkers to cloathiers to be dyed and dressed My Expences was 13/4 1/5 I bot 4/ worth of things viz [namely] 2 £ of tobacco a rub ball for my breeches and a Declaration for Independance⁵

21st I came home and went to writing letters to Crown Point for on my journey down I got an account of my johns Death of the Small Pox at Canada and when I came home my wife had got a letter from Bob which gave us a particular account it informed us that he was sick of



Broadside (detail) with the New Hampshire resolution of May 1776 supporting the Continental Congress resolve (top) to disarm all Loyalists. Copies were sent to each town; the signers here are residents of Charlestown, NH. Among the 87 signers of the Bedford document were Matthew Patten, Samuel Patten, Thomas Boies, Samuel Vose, and Lieut. John Moor.⁶

⁵ Referring to the New Hampshire resolution of May 1776 in support of the Continental Congress call to disarm all men who "refuse to associate, to defend by arms, the United Colonies, against the Hostile Attempts of the British Fleets and Armies" Such resolutions, known as "association tests," were sent to towns throughout the colonies by the Committees of Safety to be signed by all male Patriots.

⁶ *Documents and Records Pertaining to the State of New-Hampshire during the Period of the American Revolution*, ed. Nathaniel Bouton (Concord: Jenks, State Printer, 1874), vol. 8, p. 213.

them at Chambike and that they moved him to Saint Johns where they tarried but one night when they moved him to Isle of Noix where he died on the 20th day of June the Reason of moveing him was the Retreat of the army which was very preceipitate and he must either be moved or be left behind whether the moveing him hurt him he does not inform us but it seems probable to me that it did He was shot through his left arm at Bunker Hill fight and now was lead after suffering much fategue to the place where he now lyes in defending the just Rights of America to whose end he came in the prime of life by means of that wicked Tyranical Brute (Nea worse than Brute) of Great Britan⁷ he was 24 years and 31 days old

22^d I writ at letters to send to the army in all I writ four one Col: Stark one to Major Moor one to Master Eagan and one to Bob

23^d I went to Robert McGregores to meet the Post and Tarried all day but he did not come and I got a pound of Coffie from Moly McNeill and I had a bowlc of tody for which I paid her 2/2 four pence was in her hands before of it

24th I went to McGregores and waited for the post but he did not come and I got two pounds of Coffie from Moly McNeal and ½ a bowle of tody and did not pay her for want of change

25th I went set out to go to McGregores to meet the post and Met McGregores boy comeing for me on the post horse and I gave the post four letters for the carriag of which I paid him 4/ and he agreed to bring my Johns things except the Gun and accoutraments toward his doing it I paid him 8/ and I had half a bowle of tody and 2 quarts of Oats for the post horse for Which and and the two of coffee and ½ bowle of tody I had yesterday I paid 4/1 and Patrick Murfey paid me 3/ and Zechariah Chandler looked the bill and one of them handed the bill to me and I put it up in my book without looking at it

Matthew Patten died August 27, 1795, at age 76 "in a field in the south part of the town. The men were mowing, and he went to carry them their dinner. He went and sat down under a tree, where he was found dead in a short time."⁸

⁷ King George III. The following "he" refers to his son John.

⁸ *History of Bedford*, p. 268.