

BATTLE ROAD: No Turning Back?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND REFERENCES

In addition to physical documents, I was able to contact and have conversations with several people associated with Minute Man National Historical Park. These include:

Brian Donahue, Professor, Brandeis University, author of *The Great Meadow*
Teresa Wallace, Curator, Minute Man National Historical Park
Lou Sideris, Chief of Planning, Minute Man National Historical Park
Reference Librarians at both Cary Library in Lexington and the Concord Free Public Library

Written materials that added immensely to the research for this study are cited in the course of the paper; however, key documents include:

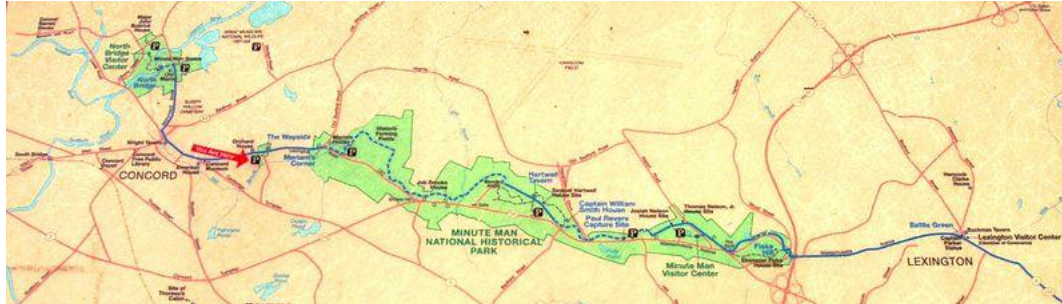
The Great Meadow, Donahue, June 2007
Cultural Landscape Report, 1993, prepared for the National Park Service and Minute Man
Administrative History of Minute Man, July 2010
Boundary Study and Natural Resources Assessment for Minute Man, August 2007
Natural Resource Assessment for Minute Man, January 2010
Sacred Ground, by Linenthal, 1991
Interim Report of the Boston National Historic Sites Commission
In Praise of Sweet Corn, Parish, 1996

INTRODUCTION

"The Shot Heard Round the World" is a familiar phrase for those interested in American history, and the events that took place in Lexington and Concord in 1775 are etched in history. What we can easily forget is that the participants in that series of skirmishes - on Lexington's common on April 19, 1775 at the North Bridge and during the retreat on "Battle Road" - were ordinary citizens, mainly farmers. Their call to duty was brave and patriotic, and many suffered the consequences of that bravery.

The general focus of this paper will be on the agricultural aspects of the land in Minute Man National Historical Park (MIMA), which was created officially in 1959 but was certainly part of the national interest and tourist industry for decades before that date, and indeed since 1776.

My investigation will go back to how the land was used in pre-colonial times, during the Colonial Era, and in the two and a half centuries that have followed. How has the land been changed by human activity? What effect did the landscape of the 1950's have on the park's founding and operation? How did the landscape affect the events of April 19th, 1775? In that



vein, the best and most significant aspect of park visitor appreciation is related to the

agricultural landscape – does it have the look and feel of the time period? If landscape changes were necessary to recreate such an effect, how much variation is acceptable while still preserving the cultural landscape of MIMA?

With the creation of the park in 1959 I will explore the specific aspects of preservation that were established. Restoration of agricultural practices was very much a part of that plan, since that was the predominant use of the land at that time. But did the 1959 law intend to recreate the “original” time and place, a “freeze frame” of history, or was it something else?

Much of our semester has been taken up with the variety of cultural landscapes from around the world, and more particularly here in the United States. One key criterion is whether a landscape is significant for its pattern of use, or whether it is significant for other reasons. In the case of Minute Man, we originally have significance tied to a specific day in history, but revisions to the law in 1993 led to a broadening of the park's mandate, as we will see later.

Minute Man National Historical Park is a veritable petri dish for heritage and cultural landscape study. Heritage landscapes can be described as those that are the result of human interaction with the land – and how its natural resources influence the changes wrought by man on that land. At MIMA, not only is there a classic use of the landscape based on Anglo-Saxon agricultural practices, but then one may also overlay its cultural history, in its role as a memorialized piece of “sacred ground”. How the land has been used in this context – and whether to “go back” to the way it was – will prove to be an excellent topic for discussion.

HISTORY

Minute Man National Historical Park is a small strip of land that runs from a westerly location in Concord, MA, where British soldiers of the American Revolution were first shot and killed – the proverbial “Shot Heard Round the World” (Ralph Waldo Emerson) - to an easterly end in Lexington, MA

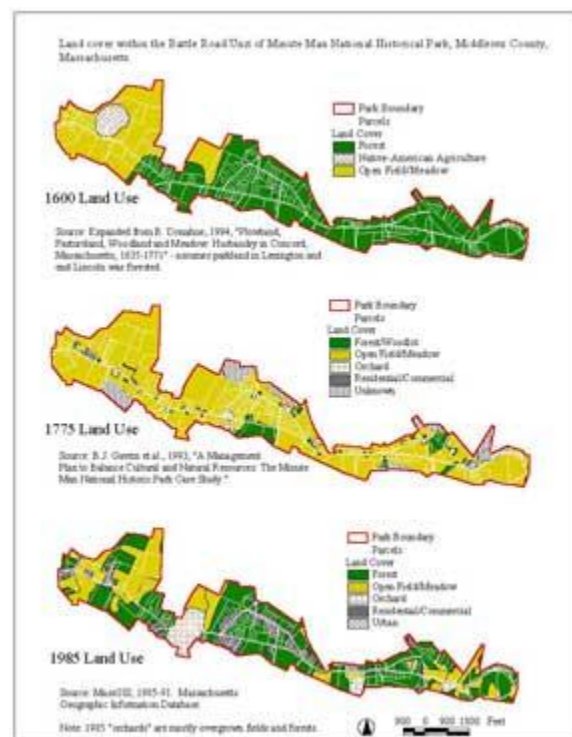
at Fiske Hill, which represents the final organized conflict in this part of the battle. The British had set out from Boston much earlier that day in hopes of confiscating and destroying a cache of arms held by the colonial militia, precipitating the famed “Paul Revere’s Ride” and the subsequent events of the battle. There were 700 British soldiers in the march, and after the opening shots on Lexington Common in the pre-dawn hours of April 19th British soldiers proceeded on to Concord and the North Bridge, then retreated through Concord, into Lexington, and then on to Boston. It is this series of skirmishes between British and colonial militia that was commemorated with the creation of Minute Man Historical National Park (MIMA) in 1959.

THE AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPE

The park today consists of 966 acres of flat plains and rolling hills, is 52% forested, 26% open fields, orchards and agriculture, 17% residential and urban areas, and 5% wetlands.¹ Here is a link to the area as it exists today:

https://www.google.com/mapmaker?ll=42.46165,-71.313629&spn=0.066739,0.219727&t=h&z=13&lyt=large_map_v3

In 1775, however, the scene was much different: 6% forest, 63% open fields and agriculture, 5% residential and approximately 26% unknown – and almost all of it acted upon by man. Horticultural Indians were living along the rivers when the English arrived in Concord in the early seventeenth century.² Very likely the indigenous population practiced a combination of tilling the soil along the river and burning the woodlands that were prevalent in the area. Corn yield has been estimated at forty bushels per acre, which could supply an Indian family for the year, “especially since the Indian fields were producing squash and beans from the same soil.”³ The land was likely allowed to grow up in forest over the course of twenty-five to fifty year periods before being cleared and planted again. There was a mixture of grassy meadows, marshes, swamps and bogs associated with the river plain, while rocky soil and denser forests were prevalent in the upland areas. “The native people relied on five major ecosystem complexes: the waterways; the wetland meadows and swamps; the horticultural lands and pine plains; the dry, open forest of pitch pine and oak; and the closed upland forest...The juxtaposition of sandy upland planting grounds and low meadows thus created a convenient working landscape for Indian gardeners and

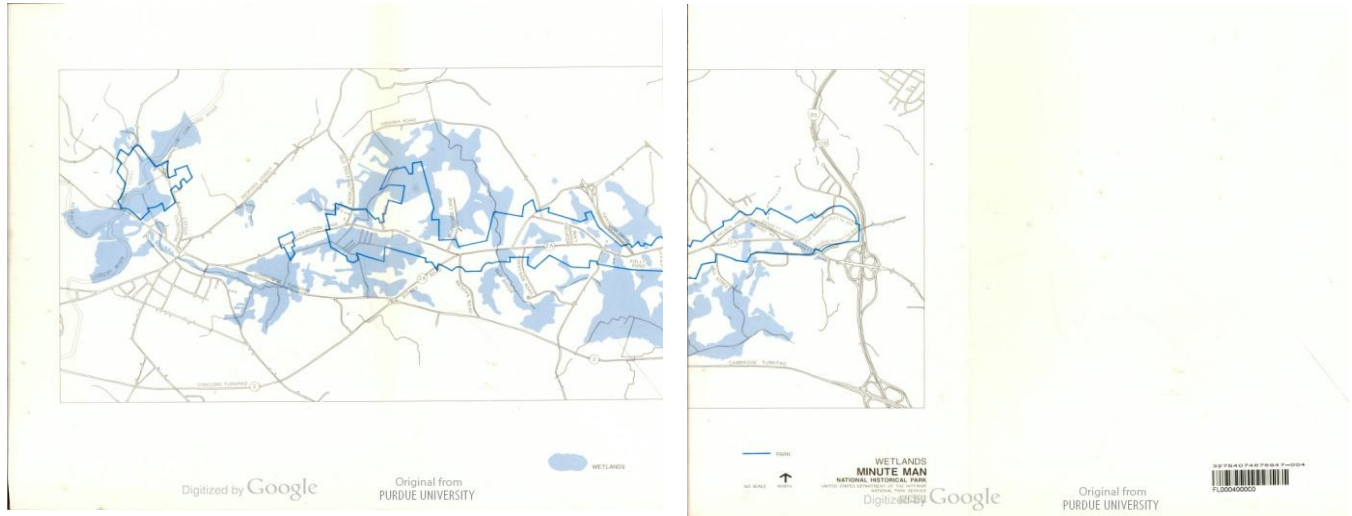


¹ Gavrin, B. J. (1993). Identification, assessment and management of agricultural and natural resources in cultural landscapes.

² Donahue, B. (2004). The Great Meadow: Farmers and the land in colonial Concord. New Haven: Yale University Press.

³ Ibid.

foragers, just as it later would for English husbandmen and herdsmen, although in a different way....”⁴ This description of fields tilled by Indians with concurrent burning of forests represents an efficient use of natural resources and the landscape, and corresponds with evidence presented by William Doolittle⁵ and by William Cronon.⁶



Wetlands area in MIMA

The Massachusetts Historical Commission lists “12 aboriginal sites within or adjacent to MIMA’s boundary”⁷ and local artifact collector Ben Smith “estimates that he has found over 35,000 Native American artifacts in Concord.” (*Concord Patriot*, 1977)

Donahue tells us that we cannot know how sustainable the environmental practices of horticultural Indians was, but that “the key issue is population growth and the capacity of the land to both absorb an expanded shifting cultivation cycle and at the same time continue to provide a wide range of other resources.”⁸ Population growth will become a key factor when we get to the mid-18th century.

This is the environment that English settlers would encounter in the first half of the seventeenth century as they moved west from Boston. When they reached Concord in 1635 and began to farm they practiced mixed husbandry, an agricultural system tied to grain and livestock along with tillage, which was “designed to make integrated use of diverse local resources largely to satisfy local needs and to secure a comfortable subsistence...”⁹ and this method of working the land prevailed into the 18th

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Doolittle, W. E. (2000). *Cultivated landscapes of native North America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁶ Cronon, W. (1983). *Changes in the land: Indians, colonists, and the ecology of New England*. New York: Hill and Wang.

⁷ Baker, V. G. (1980). *Archeological Overview and Evaluation, Minute Man National Historical Park, Massachusetts (No. 2)*. Division of Cultural Resources, North Atlantic Regional Office, National Park Service, US Department of the Interior.

⁸ Donahue, B. (2004). *The Great Meadow: Farmers and the land in colonial Concord*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

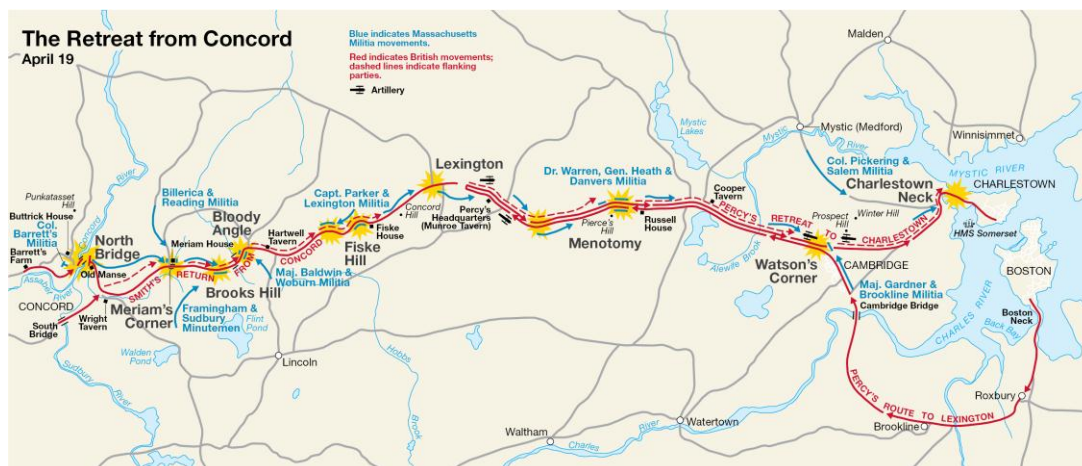
⁹ Ibid.

century. While in the first number of decades there were common areas where sheep and other livestock could graze, by the late 18th century most of the land had been parceled out among the families living in town. One difference from Native Indian agriculture - which is something that will come into play in 1775 - is that Colonial working of upland areas led to the clearing of trees and the removal of rocks and stones, which were then used as property lines.

By 1775 population growth has led to declining amounts of available open land, leaving succeeding generations to either change professions or move on to other territories further to the west. "The farms along the Battle Road in 1775 were part of a traditional agrarian society in trouble ...there was a strong sense of diminishing prospects"¹⁰ due to the ecological and economic limits of subsistence farming, a phenomenon that corresponds with the potential difficulty of "sustainability" noted above. In this regard, we have a community of farmers who find themselves not only increasingly discontent with British rule, but also experiencing concern for their own economic well-being. A proverbial powder keg was being produced.

THE BATTLE

As described earlier, British soldiers were sent from Boston to Concord to search for the cache of arms, and it is the mindset among the colonial farmers described above into which the British marched. After the initial skirmish on Lexington's town common they moved further west to Concord and the North Bridge, where the first British soldiers fell, marking the unofficial beginning of the American Revolution. It is during their retreat, however, where this particular landscape played a decisive role in the outcome of the battle.



"The historical findings of this study indicate that understanding the changes that took place in the landscape is critical to fully comprehending the history and consequences of the Running Battle."¹¹ Due to common practice and their sheer numbers, British soldiers marched in formation following the road in an easterly direction. Given the clearing of the land on either side of the road, combined with forested areas, colonial militiamen were able to position themselves behind both rolling hills and stone

¹⁰ Donahue (1993:163), Appendix A of A Management Plan to Balance Cultural and Natural Resources: The Minute Man National Park Case Study.

¹¹ James-Pirri, M. - J. August 2009. Natural Resource Assessment for Minute Man National Historical Park. Natural Resources Report NPS/NER/NRR — 2009/022. National Park Service. Boston, MA

walls along the roadside, as well as in forested cover. They did not fire at random but rather in military-style groupings and the landscape provided the architecture for the confrontations that took place – at least five of which were significant. In the end, 273 British soldiers were dead or wounded along with 95 colonists.

THE FOUNDING OF THE PARK

In “The Necessity for Ruins” JB Jackson wrote that “there has to be that interval of neglect” in a treasured landscape, that “there has to be (in our new concept of history) an interim of death or rejection before there can be renewal and reform...the old farmhouse has to decay before we can restore it”. In the case of Minute Man National Historical Park, that was more than certainly the case.

Unlike earlier aspirations to protect and/or preserve an “unparalleled landscape features”, MIMA was founded on the fear that a treasured piece of American history was in the process of serious developmental erosion. With the advent of automotive traffic and the creation of Route 2A, the period of 1900 to 1950 brought forth a growing number of commercial properties that would otherwise hardly fit into the historic landscape. While an effort was made to enact preservation schemes for the 150th anniversary of the battle, nothing was done at the time. In 1941 a military airfield (now known as Hanscom Field) was established, bringing with it much of the developmental pressures that came to bear on the land.

By the 1950’s, “Attractive houses in small subdivisions, farmstands, gas stations, restaurants, and other commercial establishments sprouted up where farmers had long plowed the open fields and raised livestock.”¹² While the British retreat went for almost twenty miles, from Concord to Boston, “...it is definitely impractical and out of the question to consider revival of any part of the twelve miles of the Battle Road that lies east of the circumference at highway Route 128.”¹³

As a result, efforts at preservation began to focus on the strip of land between Concord and Lexington. As the Boston National Historic Sites Commission noted, “It is important that a feasible solution to the problem of preservation...be considered without delay, as transformation of the road and its environment in the form of suburban growth and other developments, is proceeding at an alarming pace.” The illustration below shows the number of buildings dotting Battle Road in 1958. Citizens in the three towns were just as concerned about additional development, given the airfield, and approved of the park. In fact, Concord Antiquarian Society member Russell Kettell suggested expanding the idea into something more in keeping with the agrarian past.

¹² Zenzen, J. M., United States., & Organization of American Historians. (2010). Bridging the past: An administrative history of Minute Man National Historical Park. Boston, Mass.: National Park Service, U.S. Dept. of the Interior [Northeast Region History Program.

¹³ United States. (1958). The Lexington-Concord Battle road: Interim report of the Boston National Historic Sites Commission to the Congress of the United States. Boston, Mass: The Commission.



The resulting bill, Public Law 86-321 (September, 1959) dictated that “...in order to preserve for the benefit of the American people certain historic structures and properties of outstanding national significance associated with the opening of the War of the American Revolution” the strip of land now known as MIMA would be established. In order to effect this transaction, the Secretary of the Interior was “...to acquire by donation or with donated funds...lands and interests in lands within the area designated for the park.” What’s interesting about the law is that in Section 3 we have the following: “...preservation and interpretation of historic sites, structures, and properties lying along the entire route or routes where significant events occurred.” One would gather in this language that “interpretation” refers to the Historic Sites Act of 1935 (49 Stat. 666; 16 U.S.C., secs. 461-467). The bill then authorized the Secretary of the Interior to name a five-member commission to advise him on the boundaries and development of the park.

The boundaries of the park have since been expanded in both 1970 and 2007, but a key amendment to the Park’s founding was enacted in 1992 (Public Law 102-488) after a cultural landscape report was performed.¹⁴ Here we have language added to the original description of the park: “The purpose of the park shall include the preservation and interpretation of (1) the historical landscape along the road between Lexington and Concord, [and] (2) sites associated with the causes and consequences of the American Revolution.” It is significant that the word “landscape” has been substituted for the words “sites, structures, and properties”, bringing with it a broader view of the park’s mandate. The cultural landscape report instigated a new dynamic, where park visitors would not only learn about the events of the battle, but also “the rich cultural landscape and natural history and how these three forces influence

¹⁴ Dietrich-Smith, D., & Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation (U.S.). (2005). Cultural landscape report for Battle Road Unit, Minute Man National Historical Park: Volume 1 : history, existing conditions, analysis. Brookline, Mass: National Park Service Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation.

each other.”¹⁵ Though starting out at its founding in 1959 with a period of significance specific to 1775, the new language (“landscape”, “causes and consequences”) meant there could be a greater emphasis on the passage of time. The park would be rehabilitated for the visitor to reflect upon what happened in 1775, rather than try to recreate the landscape. This duality of managing the Battle Road cultural landscape had been put forth earlier by the Management Plan of 1989, which indicated that “An approximation of the historic landscape character will be directed towards creating visitor understanding of the 1775 environment and will include, where practicable, restoration of the basic land use and cover conditions present at the time of the battle. This includes open fields, orchards, and natural woodlands.” More significantly – and this gets back to the idea of a rehabilitation, or a reflection, rather than a re-creation – that report went on to indicate that “specific crops, trees, or ecological units will as a general rule not be restored” because detailed information of that kind was not available for the 1775 time period, and also because “overly restrictive requirements will reduce the potential for historic leasing and greatly increase maintenance costs.”¹⁶

Meetings were held within local communities to collaborate on how best to proceed, and there was by no means a consensus among those attending. In the end, three key initiatives would be taken:

1. Altering of the physical landscape through leasing of open fields, controlled vegetation, and removal of ‘intrusions’ such as ‘signs, utility poles, houses, and other modern structures.’ It would also determine the exact location of several stretches of the original Battle Road
2. Historic buildings would be restored and the land would be shaped as closely as possible to resemble ‘conditions at the time of the battle.’ The park ‘will work with the state officials to plan and install appropriate sound barriers...this will include vegetative screening of the sound barriers themselves. The visitor center was ‘viewed as a modern intrusion and would be removed’.
3. A 4-mile stretch of 2A ‘would be relocated’, all traffic would be barred from the Battle Road, and the ‘historic alignment and surface [of the road would] be replicated as accurately as possible.

Linenthal tells us in *Sacred Ground* that “The Park Service’s plan for MIMA stirred up a controversy between those who perceived such battle sites as sacred ground, to be venerated through restoration and preservation, and those who did not.” Frances Cabot, chairwoman of the Concord Board of Selectmen, “characterized the townspeople as being ‘shocked and dismayed’ by the plan.”

MANAGEMENT OF THE PARK – LANDSCAPE ASPECTS

In 1992 the Department of the Interior issued “Draft Guidelines for the Treatment of Historic Landscapes”¹⁷, and for Battle Road the “primary treatment is rehabilitation.” It went on to offer that rehabilitation allows for improvements to a historic property “that makes possible an efficient

¹⁵ Gavrin, B. J., Massachusetts Agricultural Experiment Station., & University of Massachusetts at Amherst. (1993). A Management plan to balance cultural and natural resources: The Minute Man National Park case study. Amherst: Massachusetts Agricultural Experiment Station, College of Food and Natural Resources, University of Massachusetts.

¹⁶ Rothweiler, Robert, Maurice Miller, and Teresa Urbanowski. "General Management Plan: Minute Man National Historical Park, Massachusetts." (1989).

¹⁷ United States. (1992). Guidelines for the treatment of historic landscapes: Draft. Washington, D.C: The Branch.

contemporary use while preserving those portions or features of the property which are significant to its historic or cultural values.”



century.”¹⁸ While some agricultural fields remained open, “most have succumbed to reforestation”, and some rehabilitation is ongoing. One of the restored buildings was Hartwell Tavern (photo, left), originally opened in 1754.

In addition, several initiatives were undertaken to effectively hide the development that had been going on around the park after 1960. A positive landscape change was the practice of plantings of trees in order to hide subdivision units that at times were only 100 feet from parts of Battle Road Trail. The landscape characteristics had been altered, but in doing so the cultural heritage landscape was being preserved. This photo, for example, shows some homes just behind the remnants of the Josiah Nelson House. The same is true with tree removal that took place; at one point in the 1960’s North Bridge had been almost completely obscured by tree growth, and by 2003 those had been removed and “trees had been cut down on 50 of the park’s 971 acres.”¹⁹



The understanding post-1993 was that the land use types and cultural landscape features should help illustrate the relationship between the landscape and the battle itself. One significant aspect of that would be the system of agriculture that existed in 1775. As briefly described earlier in this paper, tillage was at full capacity, utilizing subsistence grains of corn and rye. Cider was a local beverage, since small orchards “had proliferated across the landscape.”²⁰ Pastures that provided grazing for cattle was a

¹⁸ Dietrich-Smith, D., & Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation (U.S.). (2005). Cultural landscape report for Battle Road Unit, Minute Man National Historical Park: Volume 1 : history, existing conditions, analysis. Brookline, Mass: National Park Service Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation.

¹⁹ Higgins, R. (January 01, 2004). The Running Battle at Minute Man Park The cradle of the American Revolution faces a struggle to turn back the clock. Preservation : the Magazine of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 56, 36-39.

²⁰ See item 14, above

prominent feature for the uplands, and meadows were utilized, expanding hay production by converting some of the drier areas to higher quality English Hay. By 1850, however, we find a move from subsistence production to more commercial activity. Production of grain has gone down while beef and dairy has gone up. Some farmers prospered while others did not, and there was “an explosion of pasture clearing and hayfields across the uplands” to accommodate the need for grain to feed livestock; deforestation reached upwards of 90%, which caused increased river flooding. Some farmers could not keep up with the depleted lands, and many acres began to revert to forest and brush. Most could not perfect an economically appropriate style of commercial farming. Basically, we find a process of clearing and then abandonment.

It’s at this time period that wealthier Bostonians begin to buy up some of these properties through estate sales - and here we have a significant land use change. Because some of these larger farms were bought up, either as hobby farms or simply as second homes, it meant that not only would those properties not be farmed, but they were also not going to be broken up into ever smaller parcels of land. The farmland returns to forest.

When the 1920’s arrive we get the first real interest in preserving the land, due to the oncoming 150th anniversary. Arthur Shurtleff wrote “No effort of the imagination was needed to picture the setting of the events of the day when the troops of the King marched along this highway. Many of the dwellings of the Revolution still remained, and the roadside walls, trees, open fields, and woodlands were also essentially unchanged. The narrow winding gravel road bed retained its original character.”²¹ However, development patterns had already begun and Shurtleff’s report went on to warn against that encroachment.

With the initial establishment of the park the focus of National Park Service efforts had been on the removal of structures not conducive to the outlines established by the original Public Law. The cultural landscape report that was performed in 1992 and published a year later led to a renewed emphasis on the rehabilitation of the character of the land, but by 1992 only 10% of the park was used for agriculture. The National Park Service began to hold meetings in all three towns – Concord, Lincoln, and Lexington – looking for input or interest from locals on farming the land. At that time, 1993, there were 120 acres under cultivation by eight different landowners. However, the assessment allowed that an additional 106 acres (14.2%) were “most suitable” for agricultural reintroduction, while another 10% were “suitable” and then 15.2% were “least suitable” and therefore best left for “interpretive farming.”²² In all, the cultural landscape study found that approximately 326 acres were, in one way or another, suitable for farming. One result of these conversations, as we’ll soon see, would be the advent of Battle Road Farms.

INVOLVEMENT OF TRUSTS AND NATIONAL HERITAGE ORGANIZATIONS

One of the issues that complicates matters at MIMA is that multiple levels of agencies, private and public, have had a hand in the oversight of the park. Congress passed the **National Historic Preservation Act in 1966**, and the key elements of this law entail a recognition of “the historical and cultural foundations of the Nation”, that they “should be preserved as a living part of our community

²¹ Boston., & Shurtleff, A. A. (1925). Special report: 1925. Boston: s.n.

²² See item 14

life”, and that those historic properties “are being lost or substantially altered, often inadvertently, with increasing frequency.” It led to the creation of the National Register of Historic Places, and Minute Man is included in this designation. As noted by MIMA’s 1989 Management Plan, “actions affecting it, such as adoption and implementation of the plan, are subject to comment by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the Massachusetts State Historic Preservation Officer.” Brian Donahue noted in our conversation that “even digging a posthole involves layers of difficulty.”



“Protecting the Birthplace of the American Revolution”, and its Advisory Board has a long list of academics, politicians and noted historians. They set their sights on one significant piece of property in particular, the Barrett Farm in Concord. In 2005 Save Our Heritage purchased the farm and the surrounding 3.4 acres from the last surviving member of the family, took several years to restore it, and then in October of 2012 “celebrated the completion of the ... restoration of Barrett Farm, and the transfer of its ownership to the National Park Service”, and specifically to MIMA. It represents an important piece of property since the farm (founded in 1705) and the original Barrett family had been integral to the events of 1775.

In keeping with the NHPA, National Historic Landmarks were nominated and designated, among them locations within MIMA. More recently, the **National Trust for Historic Places** named Minute Man one of 11 “endangered” Historic Places due to encroaching development. Sensing that danger, a local group called **Save Our Heritage** was founded whose mission statement is



Battle Road Scenic Byway was founded in 2006 as part of the **Metropolitan Area Planning Council’s** efforts to protect and preserve the historic landscapes along Battle Road. While this working group partnered with MIMA as well as several other agencies and communities, it has taken strong leadership from Superintendent Nancy Nelson to stay the course for MIMA, since their efforts are not only to preserve but also to “propose strategies to manage transportation, land use, and tourism along the Byway. The plan provides a guide for preserving and promoting Byway resources while recognizing that development pressures and opportunities exist in close proximity to these esteemed resources.” As of 2011 a Corridor Management Plan had been issued with general proposals, but so far nothing specific has changed as it affects MIMA. And lastly, MIMA is part of “Freedom’s Way”, a congressionally designated **National Heritage Area** that is part of the Alliance of National Heritage Areas.

FIRST ROOT AND OTHER INITIATIVES

At the time of the original founding of the park there were leases granted to landowners who were engaged in farming, and those have continued. On the other hand, a study done for the National Park

Service's Ethnography Program on MIMA²³ reported that an agriculture plan should take three forms: the continuation of existing farms, the reintroduction "to land not currently cultivated", and farms for interpretive purposes – as well as different management practices for each. Each was "to manage the land in ways that reinforce the historic character of the landscape." One result of this study was the creation of Battle Road Farms, through the help of Brian Donahue, the Farm School, and the Trustees of Reservations. Ms. Nelson's son had been a graduate of The Farm School (<http://www.farmschool.org/>) and she was keen on seeing that kind of sustainable farming initiative move forward at MIMA. The result, in 2009, was the establishment of First Root, a 2.9 acre tract that was founded by two farmers on land supplied by MIMA which was to operate as a community supported agriculture (CSA) initiative, using "organic and sustainable growing practices." (<http://firstrootfarm.com/>). According to Brian Donahue, First Root "has gone beyond incubation" and now operates successfully as a CSA, having added two additional farm workers since its inception. "Organic", or course, means that no pesticides are being used, again keeping in practice with the 1775 time period. Ecologically speaking, it's important to maintain this distinction for the park visitor and for the overall principles of maintaining a cultural heritage agricultural landscape. In this regard, First Root is not at all unlike the "proactive intervention" being done to support farming at Cuyahoga Valley National Park, where "the Park Service is restoring and leasing formerly defunct farms to qualified farmers committed to sustainable agriculture."²⁴

The idea behind Battle Road Farms was to "increase the amount of agricultural activity within the park and expand the agricultural interpretation and education." In addition to First Root, there are a number of working farms within MIMA, including 1) the Maplewood Farm Stand as well as 2) The Farm School and The Big Ox Farm, a 30-acre diversified farm that works under the auspices of the Farm School, with 27 acres devoted to a small herd of livestock, and a three-acre market garden "featuring salad greens, garlic, hericot vert, beets, carrots, potatoes and flowers." (<http://www.battleroadfarms.org/node/2>). In all there are approximately eight farms operating in MIMA under one or five-year leases, tilling about 100 acres, a number which has gone down from a high of 135 acres in 1996. What has changed is the variety of vegetables. Lou Sideris is Chief of Planning for MIMA, and he indicates that there has been "more diversity lately" in what's being produced, not only in terms of vegetables but also, for example, with the growing of sunflowers on one of the farms. As it happens, several Native American groups were known to plant sunflowers on the north edges of their gardens as a "fourth sister" to the better known crops of corn, beans, and squash.²⁵

Just this year, Battle Road Farms has decided to cede its responsibility for farming at MIMA to the Trustees of Reservations (TTOR), a non-profit land conservation and historic preservation organization that is dedicated to preserving natural and historical places in Massachusetts. It is the oldest such land trust organization in the world, has over 100,000 dues-paying members, and already operates a property in the park called the Old Manse. Battle Road officials feel as though a larger, more financially stable organization like TTOR has a better chance of fulfilling the dream of agricultural restoration at MIMA. Mr. Sideris relates that while there's "nothing definitive", they are "hopeful to replicate Appleton Farms", which TTOR also operates, in Ipswich, MA.

²³ Parish, S. M., National Park Service., & Boston University. (1996). In praise of sweet corn: Contemporary farming at Minute Man National Historical Park in Massachusetts. Boston, MA: National Park Service and Boston University.

²⁴ Longstreth, R. W. (2008). Cultural landscapes: Balancing nature and heritage in preservation practice. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

²⁵ ^ Kuepper and Dodson (2001) Companion Planting: Basic Concept and Resources

Nancy Nelson became Park Superintendent in 1993 and she has been recognized as a strong, innovative presence in her position as director. It has taken all of her resolve to get through good times and bad. In 2009, for example, she was able to utilize \$1.7 million in stimulus funds to remove invasive species in various parts of the park, among other things contracting with a company called Sheepskates to have 450 sheep devour the invasive plants. The program lasted three years and “visitors loved it.” (Lou Sideris) An additional 50 acres of trees were strategically removed. She also oversaw the incorporation of a new boundary with the addition of Barrett Farm. On the other hand, 2012 and 2013 have been more difficult, with budget cuts coming through at approximately 5%. The park operates on a \$2.7 million annual budget, and a cut of over \$100,000 means fewer part time park rangers, less upkeep and more difficulty in keeping up with repairs.

One final factor affecting the land – both Brian Donahue and Lou Sideris also told me that beaver activity has been negatively affecting the landscape. There has been some flooding and farmers are “losing fields to beaver activity.” Actions are being taken to rectify the situation.

LANDSCAPE INTEGRITY

According to the MIMA Cultural Landscape Report, “Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its historic identity or the extent to which a property evokes its appearance during a particular historic period, usually the period of significance,” and that “Retention of these aspects is essential for a property to convey its significance”²⁶ The report goes on to note that National Park Service (NPS) efforts to clear woodlands have led to the rehabilitation of “historic fields and stone walls (which probably do not date to 1775, but reflect the character of the landscape at the time of the battle), [and has] improved the integrity of design and feeling.”



An important point to make in conjunction with the comments above is that the NPS and MIMA have neither set out to create a continuum landscape, nor to establish a “freeze frame.” We have taken that cultural landscape turn and, in utilizing the agricultural practices of 1775 as a guide - along with the fields that are currently available for farming - initiatives like Battle Road Farms and First Root are the ideal way to restore the integrity of the park and secure for the visitor the appropriate feel for time and place. What’s required is a careful stepping over the bounds when necessary, and continued vigilance once appropriate practices are put into place. For example, on Battle Road Trail you mainly have woods and fields along the way, but there still exists some remnants of an early 20th century time. Note this photo of a fire hydrant (above). Similarly, this tractor was parked in the visitor center parking lot on



²⁶ Dietrich-Smith, D., & Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation (U.S.). (2005). Cultural landscape report for Battle Road Unit, Minute Man National Historical Park: Volume 1 : history, existing conditions, analysis. Brookline, Mass: National Park Service Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation.

the same day. Lastly, the photo below shows electric fences being used to keep livestock in place, something which could be replaced by more historically accurate wood fencing.



On the other hand, what is going right at MIMA is the actual farming, small scale though it may be. Life in 1775 meant primarily subsistence farming, and no doubt there was bartering for goods and services going on. Homes along the main road were backed up by 1-3 acres of vegetable farming, and in the “Second Division” landowners grew grain crops. Today some of those open fields still grow grains, while First Root Farm is an excellent example of how one can mimic the agricultural practices of the time. While not specifically subsistence farming, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a very close relative of that practice, and when coupled

with other smaller farms being leased on the land one can easily get a sense of the Colonial period when visiting Minute Man.

What we have, in effect, is a perfect example of what the *Journal of Heritage Stewardship* describes as a “Living Landscape”²⁷. Minute Man fits the description of a place that 1) retains the imprint of traditional uses of the land, 2) conserves the natural environment, 3) preserves historic landmarks, and 4) tells a story of the past.

OPPORTUNITIES

There are a number of steps that may be taken in regards to MIMA and its ongoing efforts to rehabilitate the park, restore agricultural integrity, and deal with financial stress caused by government cutbacks. Here are a few suggestions:

1. As much as possible, remove obvious 21st century objects from public view, including all modern farm equipment, power lines (mainly removed already), utilities such as fire hydrants on the Battle Road Trail, and other small things like tractors in parking lots.
2. Replace electric wires with 18th century wooden fences.
3. Slow traffic on Route 2A as much as possible. Is it possible to make the speed limit 30 or 35 for this three-mile stretch?
4. While MIMA has rebuilt some stone walls, and removed a significant number of trees to open up some agricultural fields, one would also like to see some restoration of foundations at homes along the Battle Road Trail, such as the one from Josiah Nelson – creating for the park visitor more of a reminder that someone once lived there.
5. Continue to incorporate farmer’s markets into the agricultural mix, allowing farmers outside of the immediate park environment to sell their products in some set location on a weekly basis.
6. Encourage branding of the name “Minute Man”. Like Colonial Williamsburg or Sturbridge Village, it may be possible to create a brand name with MIMA that can allow product placement in local and/or regional markets, either with produce and products directly from the farms on the property or in conjunction with MIMA in a contractual agreement of authentically grown

²⁷ Barrett, B., & Taylor, M. (January 01, 2007). Three Models for Managing Living Landscapes. *Crm* : [bulletin], 4, 2, 50-65.

products. “One approach that has generated interest as an economic strategy is the use of branding as part of certification systems that makes a transparent connection between products and responsible social and environmental practices. Branding value-added products by their association with special places enables consumers to know that purchasing these products is contributing to the future of a valued working landscape.”²⁸

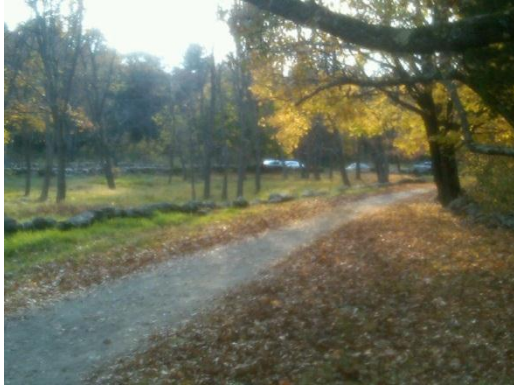
7. As suggested by Brian Donahue during our interview, MIMA would be well-positioned if it could replicate the Trustees of Reservations’ other property in Ipswich, MA, Appleton Farm. A partial description from the web site (<http://www.thetrustees.org/places-to-visit/northeast-ma/appleton-farms.html>) tells us this: “Cows graze out on pasture and are milked each morning and afternoon – their milk is processed on-site to make cheese, butter, and yogurt. Fresh eggs are collected daily from the chicken ‘tractor’ that houses our chickens, while our free-range grass-fed beef herd grazes in the Great Pasture. During the haying season, the farm produces thousands of bales of hay annually to feed the livestock, and all farm waste is composted and turned out on our fields. Hundreds of families visit the farm during the growing season to pick their own vegetables as a part of our Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. Appleton Farms is continuing the centuries old traditions started by the Appleton family [nine generations ago].”

CONCLUSION

One notes that there has been a great deal of man-made change to the shifting landscape in the area now known as Minute Man National Historical Park. When all is said and done, we have a nice “circle of life” story at MIMA. Subsistence farmers of pre-Colonial America work the fields and burn forests, creating additional agricultural land with which to work. Colonial Era farmers replicate the English yeoman life, incorporating mixed husbandry into the land use, still practicing, primarily, subsistence farming. In the 1800’s the land enters a more commercial phase with land owners clearing more woodlands to create hay fields for cattle, selling farm produce and dairy products for profit. After a few decades the land is used up, and, coupled with pressures from grain imported from the Midwest, much of the farming community becomes abandoned and the land returns to forest – something it hadn’t been since the early part of millennium. The 20th century brings development of housing and commercial interests, but preservation interests begin to recognize the problem and efforts are begun to formulate a cultural heritage national park, and MIMA is founded in 1959. With it, a plan is developed to restore a historic environment, to replicate for future visitors a sense of time and place that will allow them to experience the “Shot Heard Round the World” and the battle that took place that day. To that end, houses, businesses, and select areas of woodland are removed, again changing the land. Initially, farms are leased to local land owners, but after a cultural landscape report it is decided to be even more aggressive and take further steps to restore the agricultural landscape, bringing us today to First Root Farm and other initiatives that have been, and will be, proposed by the leadership at MIMA. CSA’s are the new Colonial Era subsistence farms, and today’s farmer’s markets are certainly replicas of the 1775 barter economy that was taking place.²⁹ Orchards are being either restored or revealed, further regenerating the landscape of the Colonial period.

²⁸ Taylor, K., & Lennon, J. (2012). Managing cultural landscapes. London: Routledge.

²⁹ Donahue (1993:163), Appendix A of A Management Plan to Balance Cultural and Natural Resources: The Minute Man National Park Case Study.



What remains the key problem with MIMA is the core piece of property, the “Battle Road Unit”, and this represents the most difficult landscape issue. When the park was first established it was understood that Route 2A would eventually be relocated and allow the north and south halves of this section to be joined. That relocation never took place and, as it exists today, automotive traffic puts a serious crimp in a visitor’s experience when cars are traveling at upwards of 50 miles per hour not one hundred yards from the main trail. They can be heard, and are an obvious intrusion on the experience. The same can be said for Hanscom Field. Even though flight patterns are east-

west rather than north-south, one can still hear quite well any of the 100,000+ take-offs and landings that take place there every year. JB Jackson wrote “the ideal landscape [should be] defined not as a static utopia...but as an environment where permanence and change have struck a balance.” In the case of MIMA, Hanscom Field and Route 2A, that balance has yet to be achieved.

It is also important to note that the creation of MIMA was a pretty amazing endeavor, given what the area looked like at the time of its founding. The specific boundaries that were proposed and enacted managed to avoid more serious development where effective change could not be made. If one looks at the park in a Google Maps environment, you can see how it would indeed be possible to transition the park from how it looked in 1959 to how it appears today. It has taken hard planning and even harder work, but the result of those efforts is quite commendable. Putting aside the disturbances caused by Route 2A and Hanscom – no small thing – one does walk Battle Road Trail and get a sense of history.

In Pitcaithley’s article about Lincoln’s birthplace³⁰, Michael Kammen was quoted as observing “We arouse and arrange our memories to suit our psychic needs.” The “psychic terrain” that is the memorialized Lincoln birthplace, with its grand neo-classical building encasing a crude log cabin, is something that can be felt when one walks up those stairs. While there is no mythos stronger than that of Lincoln and the Civil War, one could argue that the onset of the American Revolution can run a close second. American society likes to believe in its humble origins, and the mythology of the hardworking yet oppressed farmer that could no longer take suppression from the British is nearly as strong as Lincoln’s. A walk around North Bridge and down the Battle Road Trail, with markers along the way describing the events that transpired at “Bloody Angle”, Fiske Hill, and Lexington Common, helps engrain in our minds the courage and fortitude that we all wish to embrace and possess. Emerson cemented it into our literary culture with his “Concord Hymn” and the commissioning and erecting of memorials throughout the park commemorates it for all time. But while we celebrate the military deeds done that day, it is equally important to remind us that these were ordinary men, farmers for the most part, who committed themselves and their fates to the good of a new country. In this way, the ongoing rehabilitation of the agricultural countryside celebrates those deeds every bit as much as the Unknown Soldier with the musket in his hand. The



³⁰ Shackel, P. A. (2001). *Myth, memory, and the making of the American landscape*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

products of the land remind us of the simpler things in life, the simpler way of life, from which these good men came. The patient nurturing of the soil and the sweat of long labors served them well for the hardships they were about to endure. It is this kind of commitment that Minute Man National Historical Park should strive to enshrine, every bit as much as the more celebrated "shot heard round the world."

"Yet the men who first stood their ground and took the bullets in their bodies at Lexington and Concord and Bunker Hill were neither political nor commercial, nor yet a mob. They were mainly sober, responsible farmersThey were the product of a century and a half of a vigorous, self-supporting Agriculture on this continent ..." (Howard Russell, 1982:123)