

Captain Jonathan Willson ~ Bedford's Only Casualty in the Concord Fight, April 19, 1775



Captain Jonathan Willson was laid to rest in Bedford's Old Burying Ground – In Memory of Capt. Jonathan Willson who was killed in Concord Fight, April 19th, 1775, In the 41st year of his Age

If you've celebrated Pole Capping in Willson Park with the Bedford Minuteman Company, you may remember hearing about Captain Jonathan Willson. Perhaps you remember that he went to Concord on April 19, 1775, was shot, and died along the Battle Road; the only Bedford man to die on that day.

But there is more to be told. Here is the story of Jonathan Willson:

In March of 1775, Bedford Town Meeting voted to pay 25 militiamen a shilling a week to train as minutemen. Jonathan Willson, who quite likely had experience fighting in the French and Indian War, was their captain.

The story is retold in the journal of Thompson Maxwell, Willson's brother-in-law, and elaborated by historian A.E. Brown. On the night of April 18, Maxwell spent the night at Willson's house. They stayed up late discussing the situation in Boston. After midnight, alarm riders raced through Bedford shouting the words they had dreaded: "The Regulars are out!" Willson and Maxwell went quickly to Jeremiah Fitch's Tavern in the center of Bedford, where the Minutemen Company was mustering. Captain Willson encouraged them, growling "It's a cold breakfast, boys, but we'll give the British a hot dinner. We'll have every dog of them before night!"

Minutemen and militiamen made haste to Concord. The Minuteman Company probably marched under an ancient red flag carried by Nathaniel Page. Captain Willson commanded them at the North Bridge, and, with them, rained musket shot on the Regulars all along the Battle Road. But he did not live to see the evening. In the thick fighting on the road through Lincoln, he was shot and killed.



The Colonial soldiers who died during the American Revolution

Other Bedford men served and perished in the American Revolution, but Jonathan Willson was the first Bedford man to die. And he never came home 'til they brought him home, Bedford mourned. We still mourn him but praise him as well. He was captain of all who followed, a symbol of courage and liberty in the history of our town.