



Selectman Mark Siegenthaler

Good morning and welcome to Bedford's 51st Pole Capping ceremony.

Some of you may know that it's been my privilege to wear this white cockade and speak to you at Pole Capping a number of times. As tempting as it might be to read again, something you don't remember that I already said many years ago – instead I want to talk briefly about a particular aspect of what is happening here today.

By the way, I am happy to say that just like the last time I reported it to you, if you look for Pole Capping on the internet, this event still leads the search results!

By my count, there are over a dozen Minutemen Companies, regiments, marchers, musicians and other assemblages here today; and of course, the dreaded British Regulars. We could have a commemoration of Bedford's role in the Revolutionary war and other colonial times without the pageantry but it wouldn't be the same.

You can stand in Willson Park anytime and it's possible to imagine those Minutemen headed off to Concord. It's possible to imagine a number of historical events throughout history and throughout Bedford.

(Actually, you may have to adjust your sights from Willson Park. Some of the homes are reproductions and the gas station and car dealership were never a livery or a tavern. But if you close your eyes you can always imagine history.)

Not just the Minutemen on their march to Concord; maybe wagons carrying soldiers off to the Civil War, or trolleys on what is now Great Road, and trains traveling through Depot Park to Boston. Imagine shops and schools and farms; lots of farms. You can see them in your mind but they are richer when there are real people, and objects and activities going on.

That's what makes reenactments are so compelling. Next weekend's Patriot's Day programs, the recent Civil War commemorations, the annual turning of Old Ironsides in Boston Harbor. These are reenactments that serve to demonstrate, not just describe, the events that have occurred throughout our varied history.

It's not just reenactments of events that are important but also recreated places, large and small, like Plimoth Plantation, our own the Job Lane House, the Minuteman national Park, Sturbridge Village and Historic Williamsburg.

Central to the reenactments and recreated places though is the addition of people, objects and artifacts like our participants bring to today's event. That's what truly brings history to life and what I would like to acknowledge today.

Whether it's the minutemen who are here, their families, women and children or our own Sharon Macdonald and Reverend Gibbons – adding people to these events adds a human element to why we are here.

Now did the original Sons of Liberty actually climb a pole to signal their meetings? If it was supposed to be a secret signal I doubt they marched into a clearing carrying the pole! But that's not the important point. The real point is that because of the time and dedication of our participants, we aren't standing here gazing at a pole and picturing the history only in our minds. Our event has a life and memories of its own in honor of the history and the people we long to remember.

So, I have three simple messages this morning:

Thanks to the Almighty and Mother Nature that spring is finally arriving!

Thanks to you for coming out this morning to remember and celebrate a bit of Bedford and American history, and

Sincere thanks to all the active and costumed participants. All of you are historians of a sort who not only help us remember our past but bring it alive for at least a few hours at a time. It adds meaning and life to these important events and benefits us all.

Thank you