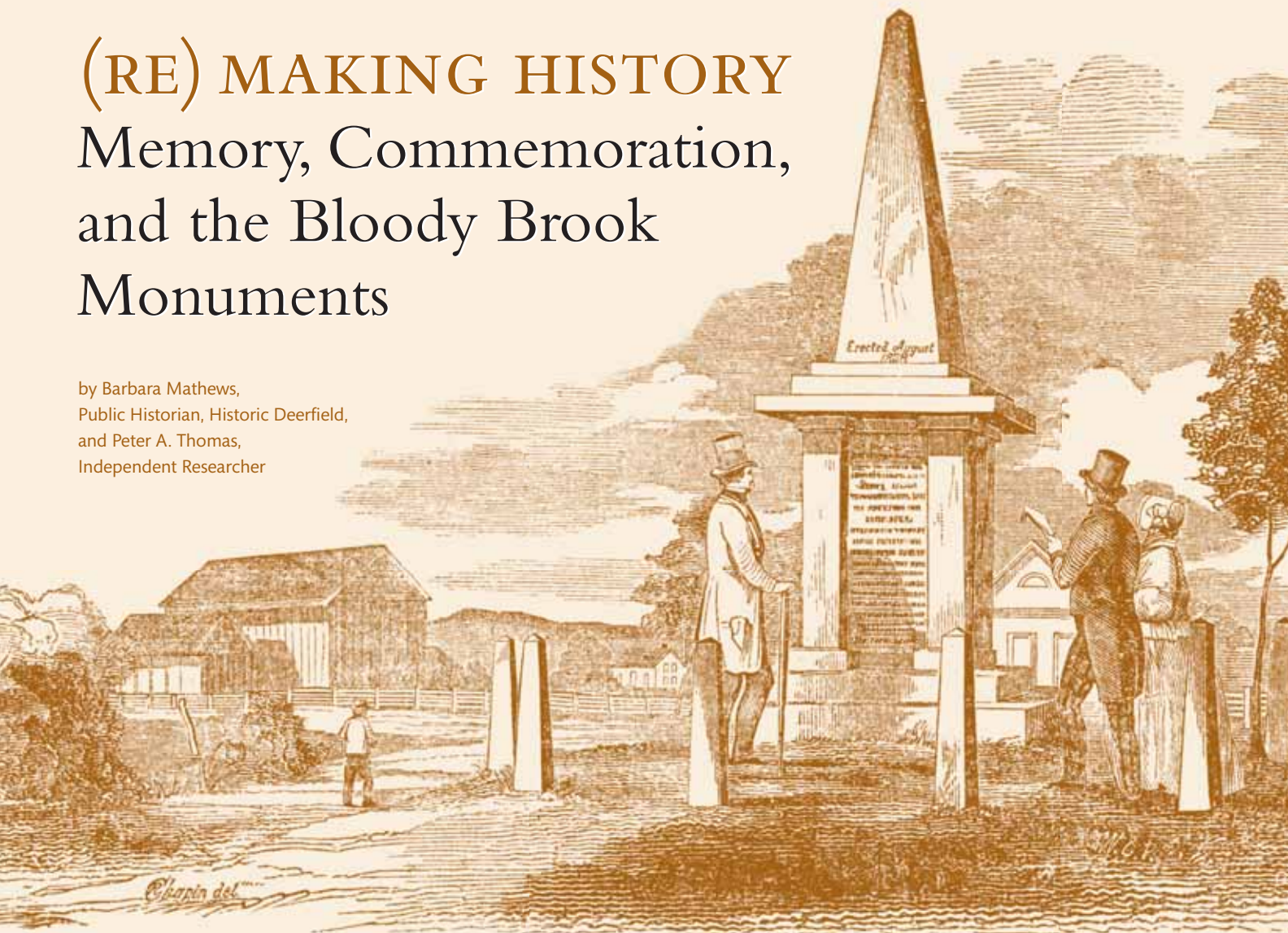


(RE) MAKING HISTORY

Memory, Commemoration, and the Bloody Brook Monuments

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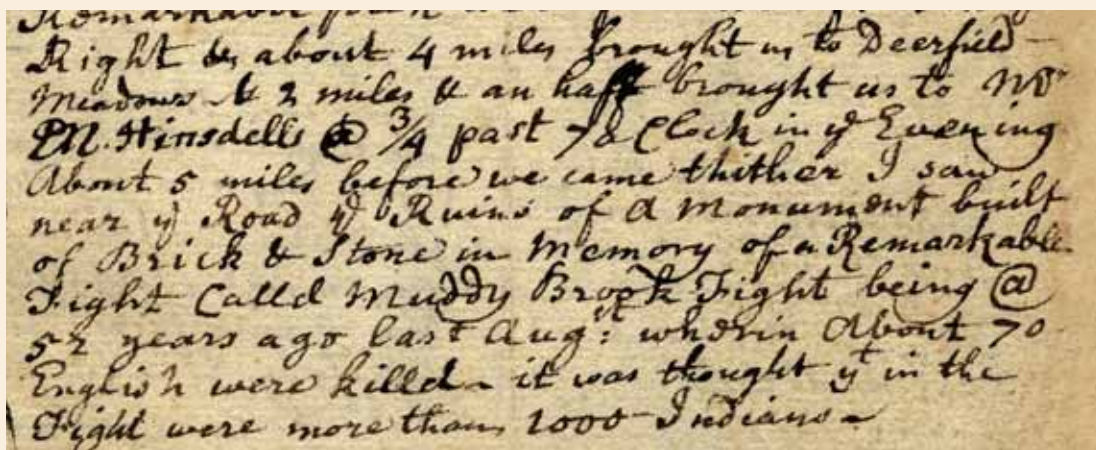
THIS IS A TALE OF TWO MONUMENTS at the site of a 17th-century battle in South Deerfield, Massachusetts. Each is a memorial to the military engagement at Muddy Brook (later called Bloody Brook) that took place on September 18, 1675, during Metacom's, or King Philip's War. Placed over a century apart—one at the turn of the 18th century and the other in 1838—each monument reflects Anglo-American views, ideologies and cultural beliefs of their time.

Subsequent gatherings at the battle site at Bloody Brook included bi- and tercentennial gatherings in 1875 and 1975. These and other memorial-focused events highlight the complex nature of evolving historical narratives and memory making. As successive generations re-visit and re-interpret in their turn the events that the monuments were erected to commemorate, they have actively engaged with the past, modifying or discarding preceding narratives deemed irrelevant, erroneous, or incompatible with their current-day concerns and historical perspectives.

Context • King Philip's War bears the unenviable distinction of being the most brutal and devastating conflict fought on American soil, leaving a legacy remembered for generations by both Indigenous and colonial communities. Indigenous inhabitants and settlers braced themselves for the violence they expected and feared. The total population of seven small English towns spread along 66 miles of the mid-Connecticut River Valley numbered approximately 350 men and women, and roughly 1,100 children. Their Native American neighbors had consolidated into two fortified settlements of some 80 to 100 families—the Norwottuck in a fortified village located on a high bluff above the Connecticut River between Northampton and Hatfield, and the Agawam in another fort on Long Hill just south of Springfield.

Above: Visitors to the monument as pictured in August 1851. *Gleason's Pictorial Drawing Room Companion*, Boston. Historic Deerfield Library.

Passage from the diary of Dudley Woodbridge describing his visit to the site of an early monument at Bloody Brook. Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society.



By August 16, militia companies had taken to the field to scout out the enemy, with absolutely no success. Native families at Norwottuck soon fled. During a separate engagement, Captain Richard Beers and 20 of the 36 men in his company were killed during an attempt to evacuate the northern-most English settlement at Northfield. Realizing that this campaign was very likely to drag on for months, commanders faced with feeding some 350 colonial troops, Mohegan auxiliaries, and frightened refugees looked to Deerfield, where settlers had managed to cut and stack a considerable quantity of wheat. Orders were given to thresh and bag as much grain as could be transported south. Captain Thomas Lathrop took his Essex County militia company north to Deerfield, where they loaded ox carts with wheat and a few household goods. Lathrop's company and carts driven by local teamsters set out for Hatfield on the morning of September 18, 1675.

A large Native American force of at least several hundred warriors laid a well-planned and executed ambush as approximately 67 English militia, 17 local teamsters, and slow-moving ox carts crossed Muddy Brook, a gently flowing stream bordered by a wet floodplain and surrounded by thickets. By all accounts, most English participants, including all but one teamster, were dead within minutes of the attack. Fighting soon continued following the arrival of roughly 60 Massachusetts Bay militia under Captain Mosley. He was later reinforced by 100 Connecticut militia under Major Treat, and 60 Mohegan auxiliaries under Attawamhood. The extended engagement only ended as night came on. Deerfield was abandoned three days later.

Stories of the slaughter of Deerfield's fathers and sons and Lathrop's company would be told in Connecticut River Valley towns for generations to come. According to oral tradition, confirmed by 19th-century exploration, Lathrop's men and the teamsters who fell near Muddy Brook were buried the next morning in a mass grave along the trail south of the brook. Of the 17 men from Deerfield, only one survived; eight left widows and 26 children. Nothing in

the written record pertains to the killed or wounded among the Indigenous forces, purportedly led by Mattamuck, Sagamore Sam, Matoonas and One-Eyed Jack of the Nipmucs; Anawan, Penchason and Tatason of the Wampanoag; and Sangumachu of the Pocumtuck. Mourning and subsequent remembrance of those killed during the engagement were undoubtedly felt and heard throughout the Native communities.

Commemoration • The first surviving reference to a monument dates to 1728, the year two young Harvard graduates, Ebenezer Hinsdale and Dudley Woodbridge, traveled from Cambridge to Deerfield. Luckily, Dudley kept a journal that included drawings and enthusiastic descriptions of everything that caught his attention on the trip, including this relevant passage: "... I saw near ye Road ye Ruins of a Monument built of Brick & Stone in Memory of a Remarkable Fight Call[e]d Muddy Brook Fight being @ 52 years ago last Augst: wherein about 70 English were killed—it was thought yt in the Fight were more than 1000 Indians." Dudley Woodbridge's description is the earliest known reference to what is likely the oldest European-style monument to a military engagement in British North America.¹

The ruins Woodbridge described were in a wooded area, miles from any settlement, but strategically located and visible to all who might pass between Deerfield and Hatfield. The monument consisted of a tabular stone placed on a rectangular brick base. No record of who erected it or exactly when has yet been found. Its deteriorated condition by 1728 suggests it was likely constructed between the 1680s and the early 1700s. The stone, which still survives, measures 37 inches wide, 84 ½ inches long, and 4 inches thick, and was chiseled from a distinctive, medium-grained, Valley sandstone. Although shaped, cut, and polished, the stone was neither decorated nor inscribed. The import of the monument would have depended entirely on a visitor's memory, or personal, family, and community accounts of events on that fateful fall day.

Interpreting the monument's message would have depended heavily upon the observer's view of historic events. It seems likely that Anglo and Nipmuc perspectives of the same event would have differed substantially. For 17th-century Puritans, the monument reflected the Calvinist belief that God's control over the earth and all its creatures, including the lives of men, was absolute and incontrovertible. For them, all significant occurrences, including the fate of English and Indigenous participants at Muddy Brook, were evidence of "God's providences" towards His people. In her account of her captivity following the attack on Lancaster, Massachusetts, in 1676, for example, Mary Rowlandson marveled throughout at "the wonderful Providence of God" which she saw repeatedly revealed in both her personal experiences and the entire course of the war. For New Englanders like Rowlandson, grievous losses like those at Muddy Brook were divinely appointed: "God strengthened them [Indigenous opponents] to be a scourge to his People."²

This pervasive Anglo-centric providential interpretation may help explain why the table stone marking the grave of teamsters and soldiers at Muddy Brook was left blank. The memorial, after all, recorded an event of God's making and did not require inscribing the names of the fallen. As to who was actually buried in this mass grave, the monument provided no clues.

What is clear is that the families and descendants of those who died at the "Muddy Brook Fight" periodically visited the monument and took visitors like Dudley Woodbridge to view it. In 1821, the Reverend Timothy Dwight remembered the story of the battle as "one of the most awful and melancholy tales of childhood . . . when I first passed by the spot, [I] could not refrain from shuddering at this scene of woe."³

Born in 1752, Dwight's description of the table monument as "a monument of stones" suggests its foundation had collapsed by the 1760s. By 1815, the original brick foundation Woodbridge described in his journal had disappeared completely; the table stone itself had fractured into two pieces and been moved to make room for a house. An observer noted that a second monument to replace the "two rough unlettered stones, lying horizontally on the ground" had been considered, but that such efforts had been "ineffectual." Sometime between 1815 and 1826, however, "the two rough unlettered stones" were altered and now "contained a short inscription." Disassociated from its original Calvinist context, the newly engraved table stone had been repurposed and now conveyed a different message:

"Grave of Capt. Lathrop and Men Slain by the Indians, 1675." The new inscription signaled the transformation of the Muddy Brook to Bloody Brook and the accompanying drive to erect a new monument.⁴

In contrast to the first memorial, now dismissed as a "rude monument" that "time has dilapidated," the story of the second Bloody Brook monument is well-documented. Its corner stone was laid during a jubilant celebration in 1835. The acclaimed orator and politician Edward Everett delivered an address to the throng who gathered, noting how "[t]his great assembly bears witness to the emotions of a grateful posterity."⁵

The new, modern monument would "enable future generations to point to this ground." In its architectural design, the 25-foot, white limestone obelisk on a granite base, complete with flowery patriotic inscription, contained all the elements Americans would come to expect from civic monuments. In contrast with its predecessor, the new structure was to be "surrounded by ornamental trees" and rest on land purchased for the express purpose of ensuring the monument would permanently occupy "an open space, replete with interesting associations."⁶

The obelisk form and engraved text exemplified neo-classical republican ideology by linking a colonial American landscape and military event to the ancient Roman republic

Right side of c. 1880 stereograph by Houghton & Knowlton. Museum Collections Fund. 2015.25



and another “Bloody Brook.” In the second Punic War, the Carthaginian general Hannibal launched a devastating ambush in 217 BCE, killing more than half of the 30,000 Roman troops arrayed against him and imperiling the survival of the Roman Republic. According to tradition, a stream nearby ran red for three days and was thus renamed Sanguinetto, “little bloody stream.” The inscription on the new Bloody Brook monument made the connection explicit by quoting from Lord Byron’s description of the ancient battle in his popular narrative poem, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*:

*And Sanguinetto tells you when the dead
Made the earth wet,
and turn’d the unwilling waters red.*



Bloody Brook monument dedicated in 1838 on North Main Street in South Deerfield.

The romanticized, human-centered historical interpretation of the second monument supplanted Calvinist theology that God manipulated the outcome of all earthly events and peoples’ actions, including those at Muddy Brook on a fateful September day two centuries earlier. The optimistic belief in the progressive intellectual and spiritual improvement of mankind merged with neoclassical republicanism and patriotism to monumentalize the colonial period. King Philip’s War and subsequent imperial conflicts with the French and with Indigenous people were now understood in retrospect as colonists’ coming of age—a maturing process that would culminate in the drive for American independence and the rejection of monarchical government and society. In this process, the voices of Indigenous participants and their descendants were written out of the narrative. Although blood from combatants on both sides mingled to stain the brook in the course of the extended battle, the monument honored only militia and teamsters killed there. The outcomes of King Philip’s War were used as evidence for the purported “disappearance” of Native people from the landscape in 19th-century histories and novels, portrayed as an inevitable outcome of the Enlightenment clash between “civilization” and “barbarism.”

Everett’s lavish praise in 1835 of those paying for a “renewed memorial...On this sacred spot” belied the fundraising difficulties the monument committee encountered. Not until later that summer did the committee scrape together sufficient funds to move forward with the quarrying and design of the monument which was not dedicated until August 29, 1838, three years after the cornerstone was laid. In short order, the Bloody Brook monument became a favorite tourist attraction that travelling antiquarians stopped to admire as they negotiated the early roads of Deerfield. Its obelisk design and inscription ensured the transmission of its Enlightenment and post-Revolutionary narratives for decades to come. Meanwhile, its predecessor’s table stone faded into obsolescence, at times embedded in the front yard of a private home, incorporated into a sidewalk, moved for a trolley line, and even kept for a time in a nearby barn, until it was reset in its current location on the east side of North Main Street.

New perspectives on an old story: bi- and tercentenary commemorations • The year 1875 saw jubilant celebrations as the nation marked the 100th anniversary of the start of the American Revolution. It also marked the 200th anniversary of the “Massacre of Capt. Thomas Lathrop and the ‘Flower of Essex’ by the Indians at Bloody Brook.” The newly formed Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association and citizens of Deerfield pulled out all the stops for a day-long celebration of patriotic fervor. A splendid parade to the monument was followed by a long cavalcade of carriages

carrying event guests, dignitaries and local citizenry. A vast crowd of spectators lined the way.⁷

George Davis, President of the Day and one of the original members of the committee tasked with erecting the second monument in 1838, delivered a lengthy address that emphasized an intrinsic link between King Philip's War, the war for Independence, and the Civil War:

*There have been three great crises in the history of this country. Of two of them this is the great bi-centennial and centennial year. The first was the Indian war of 1675, known as King Philip's war, which was a war for physical existence; the second was a war of the Revolution, which was a war for national independence; the third was the late war of the rebellion, which was a war for continued national existence.*⁸

A second speaker, George Loring of Essex County, informed the thousands listening that the Bloody Brook fight's timeless significance was as "an incident in the infancy of a powerful nation, and one occurring at the critical period of the most important social and civil event known to man, the founding of a free republic on the western continent." Recognizing that Irish, eastern European, and other relatively recent newcomers to the Valley lacked genealogical connections to this 17th-century history, Robert R. Bishop urged all to remember that the "martyred blood at Bloody Brook should inspire us to do deeds of manly, patriotic devotion."⁹

The tri-centennial anniversary of Bloody Brook in 1975 reflected a significant change in peoples' minds about the significance of the monument and the very meaning of history. The connections that had seemed so clear in 1875 between the nation's colonial past and the significance of that past to the lives of present-day Americans were actively questioned or under attack. In May 1975, President Ford declared the Vietnam War at an end in the wake of President Richard M. Nixon's resignation and under the cloud of Watergate. The Civil Rights and American Indian Movements were transforming the political and ideological landscape, in the process leading many Americans to question the triumphal historical narratives they had been taught.

Looking to the past seemed to offer no prescriptions or explanations for a country in turmoil. Some Deerfield residents did try to hold to tradition and attended a half-hour ceremony at the monument followed by a picnic lunch on the lawn of the nearby South Deerfield Congregational Church. But, as a reporter for the *Amherst Record* observed: "... the attraction has gone out of celebrations, in this eighth decade of the 20th Century. [Only] thirty-five people, most of them crowned with gray or white hair, were on hand."¹⁰ This anemic response presented a stark contrast to the healing properties with which speak-

**On this Ground
Capt. THOMAS LATHROP
and eighty four men
under his command,
including eighteen
teamsters from Deer
field, conveying stores
from that town to
Hadley, were ambus-
caded by about 700
Indians, and the Cap-
tain and seventy six
men slain, September
18th 1675. (old style)
The soldiers who
fell, were described
by a cotemporary
Historian, as "a choice
Company of young
men, the very flower
of the County of Essex
none of whom were
ashamed to speak with
the enemy in the gate!"**

Text on the south side of the monument prepared by Epaphras Hoyt of Deerfield, a driving force behind the new monument.

ers and thousands of attendees had invested the 1875 commemoration in the wake of the Civil War.

Moving Forward · As we approach the 350th anniversary of the Bloody Brook battle (2025), the future of these long-ago histories remains in flux. Having discarded both Puritan providential explanations of human events and neoclassical, Enlightenment-driven interpretations with which their creators imbued the two monuments, many Americans continue to feel cut off from histories they perceive as irrelevant, possessing little or no explanatory power and, all too often, profoundly disturbing. How might we envision, utilize, interpret these monuments moving forward?

The prominent scholar of heritage and history, David Lowenthal, recently reminded members of the American Historical Association that, "Monuments are history, visual evidence of actions and agents." In addition to marking the landscape, the Bloody Brook monument and its predecessor

are significant artifacts in their own right, helping us to access past world views, ideologies, and cultural beliefs, while reminding us that our perceptions of the past have evolved. While their inscriptions reflect outdated world views, the memorials' continued presence on the landscape and their place-based histories urge us to remember, re-envision, and re-tell. This retelling must be one in which ancestral and contemporary Native voices are clearly heard, for without them the narratives through which we interpret these events and their larger meaning and legacies will remain incomplete, opaque, and inherently flawed.

Only by recovering and re-integrating Indigenous and colonial perspectives can we truly access, restore, and incorporate the narratives of essential relevance that inform our present. Those who interact with sites and monuments like those at Bloody Brook can thus actively participate in constructing nuanced, intrinsically human-centered, and relevant historical narratives. These monuments enable the viewer to recognize and evaluate not just one of the most tragic European-Indigenous conflicts in British North American history. They challenge us to collectively re-memorialize sites of intrinsic significance to all Americans, listening to the voices of both Anglo and Native participants alike.

ENDNOTES

1. Dudley Woodbridge, *Journal*, 3 October 1728, MHS Collections Online, Massachusetts Historical Society, <https://www.masshist.org/database/156>.
2. Neal Salisbury (ed.), *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God: With Related Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2017), 105.
3. Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New England and New-York* (London: William Baynes and Son, 1823) Vol. II, 54.
4. Rodolphus Dickinson, *Geographical, Statistical, and Historical View of the Town of Deerfield, in the County of Franklin, and State of Massachusetts* (Deerfield, MA: by the author, Graves & Wells, printers), 27; Epaphras Hoyt, Sketch-book No. 11 (1838), 104. Historic Deerfield Library.
5. Epaphras Hoyt, *An Address Delivered at Bloody Brook, in South Deerfield, September 30, 1835, in Commemoration of the Fall of the "Flower of Essex," at that Spot, in King Philip's War, September 18, (o.s.) 1675*, Appendix (Boston: Russell, Shattuck, & Williams, 1835); Edward Everett, *An Address Delivered at Bloody Brook*.
6. Hoyt, *Ibid.*, Appendix.
7. *History and Proceedings of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association 1870-1879* (Deerfield, MA: PVMA, 1890) Vol. I, 281.
8. *Ibid.*, 287.
9. *Ibid.*, 290, 315
10. Michael Sherberin, "Bloody Brook," *Amherst Record*, August 30, 1975.

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