

= Isaac Davis ( soldier ) =

Isaac Davis ( February 23 , 1745 ? April 19 , 1775 ) was a gunsmith and a militia officer who commanded a company of Minutemen from Acton , Massachusetts , during the first battle of the American Revolutionary War . In the months leading up to the Revolution , Davis set unusually high standards for his company in terms of equipment , training , and preparedness . His company was selected to lead the advance on the British Regulars during the Battle of Concord because his men were entirely outfitted with bayonets . During the American advance on the British at the Old North Bridge , Davis was among the first killed and was the first American officer to die in the Revolution .

Davis is memorialized through the Isaac Davis Monument on the Acton Town Common . He was also the inspiration behind The Minute Man ( 1875 ) , the sculpture at the Old North Bridge by Daniel Chester French . The sculpture , which French attempted to model after Isaac Davis , is now an iconic national symbol .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early life and family = = =

Davis was born February 23 , 1745 in the village of West Acton to Ezekial Davis ( b . 1717 ) and Mary ( nee Gibson ) Davis ( 1725 @-@ 1773 ) . He married Hannah Brown ( born 1746 ) on October 24 , 1764 . They had four children ? two boys and two girls .

= = = Preparations for war = = =

During the early 1770s , many inhabitants of the Province of Massachusetts Bay protested taxation policies established by British Parliament . These protests eventually resulted in the military occupation of the provincial capital of Boston , Massachusetts which , consequently caused further unrest . In September 1774 , the military governor , General Thomas Gage , dissolved the Massachusetts General Court , placing the province under martial law . Citizens of Massachusetts formed an extra @-@ legal Massachusetts Provincial Congress to govern the province outside of the rule of the King . In October 1774 , the Massachusetts Provincial Congress recommended that each town establish a company of Minutemen ? specially trained militia who could be ready at short notice in the event that the British Regulars in Boston attempted any warlike movements .

In November 1774 , Acton formed a company of Minutemen , and Davis was elected captain . He was determined that his company be as well @-@ equipped as the British soldiers . Most provincial Minuteman companies , unlike professional soldiers , were not equipped with bayonets for use in close combat and they typically re @-@ loaded using powder horns , a slow method more suited to hunting than to battle . Davis employed his skills as a gunsmith to outfit nearly every man in his company with a bayonet and saw that his men were supplied with cartridge boxes , allowing his company to re @-@ load as quickly as the British . Finally , Davis emphasized marksmanship , training his company on an improvised shooting range behind his house . These high standards in terms of equipment and training made the Acton company one of the best prepared in Massachusetts .

According to tradition , Davis was a superstitious man who believed he had seen numerous omens that indicated that he would die if forced into battle . In 1851 , Rev. James Woodbury , Acton 's representative to the Massachusetts General Court , delivered a speech about Davis to the House of Representatives . During this speech , Woodbury described an incident that allegedly took place a few days before the Battle of Concord in which Davis and his family returned home to find an owl perched on Davis 's musket . According to Woodbury , " It was an ill omen , a bad sign . The sober conclusion was that the first time that Davis went into battle , he would lose his life . "

= = = Concord = = =

During the early spring of 1775 , Gage planned an expedition to confiscate a large stockpile of gunpowder and weapons kept by the provincials in Concord , Massachusetts . On April 15 , he issued orders to hand @-@ picked companies of British Regulars in Boston , relieving them from their usual duties . Concluding that a British movement was imminent , Paul Revere , a messenger for the provincial Sons of Liberty , was sent to Concord on April 16 to warn the inhabitants . Most of the supplies were removed from Concord , and the Minuteman companies were on alert days before the British marched from Boston .

On the night of April 18 , 1775 , Gage dispatched approximately 800 British Regulars under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Francis Smith . The Sons of Liberty in Boston were convinced that the British troops would also attempt to capture the provincial leaders , John Hancock and Samuel Adams , who were in Lexington , Massachusetts . Messengers Paul Revere and William Dawes therefore rode again on the night of April 18 to warn Hancock and Adams that the soldiers were marching from Boston . In Lexington , the British force encountered resistance from the Lexington militia , and a skirmish ensued on Lexington Green ; eight provincials were killed , and one British soldier was wounded . Following the action on Lexington Green , the British marched on to Concord .

Word of the British movement reached Acton just before dawn on April 19 , most likely delivered by Dr. Samuel Prescott , a resident of Concord and one of the Sons of Liberty . As the alarm spread , the Acton Minutemen began to gather at Davis 's home . While waiting for others to arrive , the men made paper cartridges and some powdered their hair with flour so as to appear more like gentlemen when they met the British in battle . As the Minutemen prepared , Davis 's wife noticed that he seemed especially somber and said very little . As some of his men joked about getting shot at by a British soldier , Davis rebuked them , reminding them that some of them would soon be killed .

Davis formed up his company and ordered them to march at about 7 a.m. According to his wife and other witnesses , shortly after stepping off , Davis ordered his company to halt , then returned to his front door to tell his wife , " Take good care of the children . " Soon after crossing into Concord , the Acton company passed the farm of Colonel James Barrett who commanded the provincial troops in Concord that morning . A small detachment of British soldiers were searching Barrett 's farm for supplies , and Davis considered attacking them . His orders , however , were to muster with the rest of the provincial militia and Minutemen near the Old North Bridge by the Concord River . He then diverted his company off the road , avoiding the British at Barrett 's farm and marching past a tavern belonging to a Widow Brown . A boy named Charles Handley , who lived at Widow Brown 's Tavern , saw Davis 's company pass the tavern . He recalled many years later that a fifer and drummer played a song called " The White Cockade " , a reference to the white ribbon worn on their bonnets by Scots revolutionaries during The ' 45 . Tradition persists that this was Davis 's favorite marching song , but there is little evidence to support this notion . There is also a tradition that the Acton musicians played the White Cockade later when Davis 's company led the advance on the British at the Old North Bridge , although this too is not supported by primary source accounts .

Davis 's company reached the area of the Old North Bridge at approximately 9 a.m. Several other companies of militia and Minutemen , consisting of about 500 men from Concord , Lincoln , and Bedford , had already gathered on a small hill overlooking the bridge . Approximately 100 British Regulars occupied the bridge . Shortly after Davis arrived , Barrett called a council of the officers present to determine whether or not to attack the Regulars at the bridge . In Concord , the majority of the British force was searching for supplies , but they found little . When they decided to burn some wooden gun carriages they discovered , the provincials near the Old North Bridge saw the smoke and thought the British were burning the town . Barrett then made the decision to attack the soldiers holding the bridge .

Davis 's company had taken their designated position at the left of the provincial line . This would have placed the Acton company in the rear of the attack when the line advanced . The company in the lead would have been Captain David Brown 's company from Concord . When Barrett asked Brown if he would lead the attack , Brown responded that he would rather not . Knowing that Davis 's company was well equipped with bayonets and cartridge boxes , Barrett asked Davis if his

company would lead the advance . Several slight variations of Davis 's response have been recorded . His response is most often given as , " I have not a man that is afraid to go . " Following Barrett 's orders , Davis then moved his company to the right of the line . Around 10 : 30 , the provincials faced to the right and advanced on the Old North Bridge in a column of two men abreast . At the head of the column was Davis , Major John Buttrick of Concord , and Lt. Col. John Robinson of Westford . Barrett remained behind on the hill , cautioning his men as they marched by him not to fire first . The British at the bridge , watching the provincials approach , were surprised to see , as one soldier later said , that they " advanced with the greatest regularity " .

When the provincials were within about 75 yards of the bridge , the Regulars fired a few warning shots . Luther Blanchard , the fifer from Acton , was hit and wounded by one of these warning shots . The British then fired a disorganized volley . Isaac Davis was shot through the heart . Private Abner Hosmer of Acton was also killed in this volley . Seeing these casualties , Buttrick commanded , " Fire , fellow soldiers , for God 's sake fire ! " and the provincials returned fire , causing the British to immediately retreat back to Concord .

= = Legacy = =

In February 1851 , shortly after the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Concord , Rev. James Woodbury of Acton petitioned the Massachusetts General Court for funds to build a large monument to Isaac Davis in Acton . After the legislature appropriated \$ 2 @,@ 000 for the project , the 75 @-@ foot tall stone obelisk was completed that fall and dedicated on October 29 , 1851 . The remains of Davis , Hosmer , and James Hayward ( an Acton soldier who was killed in Lexington later in the battle ) were moved and re @-@ interred beneath the monument . At the base of the monument is a stone brought from the vicinity of the Old North Bridge in Concord which is , according to an inscription , the stone upon which Davis 's head fell when he was killed .

In 1875 , on the centennial of the Battle of Concord , a statue called " The Minute Man " was placed on the approximate site of Isaac Davis 's death . The statue was the first public work of sculptor Daniel Chester French , best known for his 1920 statue , " Abraham Lincoln " , in the Lincoln Memorial . Although commissioned to sculpt a generic provincial soldier , French was inspired by the story of Isaac Davis and modeled the facial features of his statue after photographs of Isaac Davis 's descendants . Davis 's plow , which is currently on display in Acton 's Town Hall , was used as the model for the plow on the statue .

On the base of the statue is inscribed the first stanza of Ralph Waldo Emerson 's Concord Hymn written in 1836 :

By the rude bridge that arched the flood , Their flag to April 's breeze unfurled , Here once the embattled farmers stoodAnd fired the shot heard round the world .

Representing Davis , the statue of " The Minute Man " with a musket in one hand and the other resting on a plow remains an iconic symbol , and can be found on the Massachusetts state quarter , corporate logos , and the seal of the National Guard of the United States .

The route of the Acton Minutemen is retraced every Patriots ' Day in April by today 's recreated company of Acton Minutemen , and by citizens and visitors . Now called the Isaac Davis Trail , the seven mile route from Acton to Concord traverses roads still in use as well as woodland trails . The path was established in 1957 by a group of Acton Boy Scouts who researched the historic route , cleared the portions of the path no longer in use , and placed markers . The trail was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1972 .