



“Reporting at Cambridge,” *My Ride to the Barbecue*
BY ALEXANDER BOTELER, 1860.



“The Morgan Springs,” *My Ride to the Barbecue*
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“Thy spirit, Independence! let me share,
Lord of the lion-heart and eagle-eye;
Thy steps I follow with my bosom bare,
Nor heed the storm that howls along the sky.”

This line from Tobias Smollett’s “Ode to Independence” was found written on a scrap of paper among George Michael Bedinger’s belongings. He is pictured here from Danske Dandridge’s *George Michael Bedinger: A Kentucky Pioneer*, 1909.

The BEELINE MARCH

— THE JOURNEY TO —
Cambridge & the Birth of
the United States Army

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

On August 11, Stephenson’s men reached General Washington, and Michael Bedinger recalled that “*It was near Cambridge College that our outfit first saw him and presented their arms to him as he slowly rode by us looking attentively and affectionately at the soldiers from his native state. When he shook hands with our captain, it was said they both shed tears.*”

The appearance of these frontiersmen from the Virginia backcountry is said to have caused a sensation. Washington Irving wrote in his “Life of Washington” that “Nothing excited more gaze and wonder among the rustic visitors to the camp than the arrival of several rifle companies, fourteen hundred men in all, from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, — such stalwart fellows as Washington had known in his early campaigns. Stark hunters and bush fighters; many of them upwards of six feet high, and of vigorous frames; dressed in fringe frocks, or rifle shirts, and round hats. Their displays of sharpshooting were soon among the marvels of the camp. We are told that while advancing at quick step they could hit a mark of seven inches in diameter, at the distance of two hundred and fifty yards.”

Stephenson’s men spent the winter encamped at Roxbury and saw very little action in their first year, as Washington lacked the men and ammunition necessary for an attack on Boston. The British abandoned the city in March 1776, and Washington, mistakenly believing them to be moving toward New York, sent the Virginia riflemen to meet them there. After the surrender of Fort Mifflin on Manhattan Island in November 1776, many of Stephenson’s company were kept prisoner for several years. Henry Bedinger spent four years in this capacity, and some of this time was spent onboard the notorious prison ship *Jersey*, nicknamed “Hell.” A large number of the men from Mecklenburg died not in battle, but from the horrific conditions in British prisons.

REUNION AT MORGAN’S SPRING

As one of the most populous towns in the region, Mecklenburg was a major mustering point during the Revolution. In all, seven companies were raised there from 1775-1783. On June 10, 1825, Daniel Morgan, son of Abel & Elizabeth, hosted the 50-year reunion for Stephenson’s company. Though five of the men were still living, only Henry and Michael Bedinger made the journey (from Martinsburg, VA and Blue Licks, KY, respectively), as Judge Robert White of Winchester, VA and General Samuel Finley and William Hulse, Esq. of Ohio were not well enough to travel. A few of the men who fought later in 1776 came to the event as well.

Two days later, the *Harpers Ferry Free Press* reported that: “Soon after the party had partaken of the elegant dinner given by Mr. Daniel Morgan, Captain Harper, with a detachment of artillery, was seen at a distance advancing with colors flying and music playing, to pay suitable honors to the occasion. The sound of the music, and the appearance of the martial column, being unexpected, must have struck the minds of this remnant of Revolutionary veterans with alternately joyful and gloomy reminiscences of times long past...”

“The saluted were then gone through, and the very interesting ceremony of presenting one of Stephenson’s Company, Major Michael Bedinger, to the sons and grandsons of his compeers in arms; he passing through the ranks and shaking each cordially by the hand. Whilst this was performing, and the eyes and attention of the spectators were intently fixed upon the touching scene, guns were fired, at a signal previously agreed upon, by a detachment of artillery stationed on an eminence for that purpose. Afterwards a number of national airs were played in the first style by the band, and two patriotic songs were sung by Major Michael Bedinger (69 years of age), he being earnestly solicited, — the very same that had been sung at that spot fifty years before.”

PRESERVATION

Henry and Michael Bedinger both passed away in 1843. Daniel Bedinger passed away in 1818, before the reunion at Morgan’s Spring. Their letters (the Bedinger-Dandridge Family Papers) are now housed at the special collections library at Duke University. Henry’s journal is printed in Danske Dandridge’s *Historic Shepherdstown*. Millard Bushong’s *Historic Jefferson County* includes muser lists from the Revolutionary War, as well as Richard Morgan’s company in the French & Indian War.

The Morgan’s Grove Historic District was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1999. It includes:

- *Springdale*, William Morgan’s home, built c.1760
- *Rose Brake* (also know as *Poplar Grove*), which is believed to incorporate Richard Morgan’s c. 1745 home and later belonged to Daniel Bedinger’s descendants, including Danske Dandridge
- *Morgan’s Spring* (“the old stone house”), built by Dr. Abel Morgan, c. 1785.
- The Morgan springhouse
- The marker placed by the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1932 honoring Stephenson’s company and the Beeline March

On September 17, 1988, Secretary of the Army John O. Marsh spoke at a ceremony in Morgan’s Grove honoring Stephenson, Morgan, and the Beeline March. He spoke of the “tremendous significance” of the site to the United States Army as one of the few places that could be identified as an encampment site before the formation of the Continental Army.





“The battle of Lexington,” published by John H. Daniels, Boston, 1903. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.



“Washington and His Generals,” by Alexander Hay Ritchie, c. 1870. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.



“North America from the French of Mr. d’Anville improved with the English surveys made since the peace,” published by Sayer and Bennett in London, 1775. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS. The towns Henry Bedinger recorded passing through are marked with their present-day names. Open circles indicate towns found on the map.

“THE SHOT HEARD ROUND THE WORLD”

In 1837, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote his “Concord Hymn,” which began, “By the rude bridge that arched the flood/Their flag to April’s breeze unfurled/Here once the embattled farmers stood/And fired the shot heard round the world.” The Battles of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775, commemorated by Emerson, marked the beginning of armed conflict between England and the American colonies. Tensions had been building for over a decade as England attempted to recoup its military debts from the Seven Years’ War by tightening its grip on the colonies.

In “Historic Shepherdstown,” Danske Dandridge says the news of Lexington reached the town on May 10. She quotes James McSherry’s “History of Maryland”: “the despatch of the blood-tidings went southward from town to town, endorsed by each Committee of Safety; the time of its receipt and its departure noted, and the solemn order given ‘Night and day to be forwarded,’ until it had penetrated the farthest recesses of the colonies.” Local militias sprang to action, and men began drilling in the vacant lot behind Entler Tavern in Mecklenburg (renamed Shepherdstown in 1798) and assembling at the Bedinger home just outside town.

Before this news reached Mecklenburg, word of another event had reached the town. The day after Lexington & Concord, Lord Dunmore, the last royal governor of Virginia, ordered the removal of 15 barrels of gunpowder from the public magazine in Williamsburg to a Royal Navy schooner on the James River. News of this event spread rapidly, and companies all over Virginia mustered in preparation for a march on the capital. Patrick Henry publicly ordered the gunpowder returned or paid for by the governor. In a letter to his brother, Henry, after the war, Michael Bedinger recalled that he and George Morgan marched from Mecklenburg to Fredericksburg to join a militia gathering there, only to be turned back when the gunpowder was paid for on May 3, stalling military action in Virginia.

MECKLENBURG, VIRGINIA

Michael Bedinger and George Morgan were members of prominent families in Mecklenburg. By 1775, it was a thriving community of about 1,000 people and the only chartered town in what is now Jefferson County. Richard Morgan, George’s grandfather, was one of Mecklenburg’s first settlers and an owner of extensive property. Henry and Magdalene Bedinger arrived around the establishment of the town in 1762. The two families were connected by marriage when Anna Maria and Elizabeth Bedinger married Abraham and Abel Morgan, respectively. The three Bedingers who served in the Revolutionary War, Henry, Michael, and Daniel, wrote to each other frequently, and Henry kept a journal during the war. The Bedingers’ writings have been preserved and serve as our best resource for the attitudes and actions of the Virginia riflemen.

The Second Continental Congress approved the establishment of the Continental Army on June 14, 1775 and requested two companies of 100 men from Virginia. Hugh Stephenson and Daniel Morgan, veterans of the French & Indian War, were chosen to lead them. Daniel Morgan (no relation to the Mecklenburg Morgans) rallied his men in Winchester, while Stephenson gathered his men in Mecklenburg. These men were requested for one year of service. Henry Bedinger wrote that “none were received but young men of Character, and of sufficient property to clothe themselves completely, find their own arms, and accoutrements, that is, an approved Rifle, handsome shot pouch, and powder-horn, blanket, with such decent clothing as should be prescribed.” As such, Stephenson’s muster list contains names of many prominent local families: Shepherd, Swearingen, Buckles, Hite, and Kearney, along with Henry and Michael Bedinger. These men had been in preparation for at least a month, and by June revolutionary fervor had reached a fever pitch. Stephenson and Morgan both raised their companies in less than a week.

THE BEELINE MARCH

On June 10, 1775, Colonel William Morgan hosted a barbecue on the family property just outside Mecklenburg in the area now known as Morgan’s Grove. The men engaged in patriotic song and pledged that all who were able would return to that spot fifty years later. They were delayed in joining Washington at the Siege of Boston only by a need for more rifles, which were being made by the Sheetz family on King Street (Adam Sheetz was among the company).

On July 17, 1775, Henry Bedinger wrote in his journal, “Set out from Potomack toward Boston and Encamped at the Mirey springs about Three miles from Sharpsburgh. Next Morning Took Leave of all Friends, Set off from thence & Marched to Stricker’s in the Mountains.” As the senior officer, Stephenson was to lead the way, and he and Morgan agreed to meet in Frederick and proceed together. After the war, Henry Bedinger wrote to Samuel Finley’s son that “Morgan, however, crossed the day before us, on the 15th of July, did not stop or wait for us at Frederick, but Continued, with every possible speed, to Cambridge. Morgan having the start we used every exertion to overhaul him, in Vain, altho’ we marched (always in single file) from 30 to 36 miles a number of days,— the weather being excessively warm, and the distance Very little short of 600 miles, a pretty trying scene, to young men who had never experienced such persevering fatigue...”

Bedinger recorded being met in many of the towns by local volunteer companies and marching through the towns together. Since the requested companies from Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania were travelling the same roads to Boston, they were often anticipated and met with a ready welcome and food. When leaving York, Bedinger noted, “At our parting, we had Shouting as Usual.” About 30 of the men “painted [themselves] like Indians” for their march through Lancaster. The only town where Bedinger recorded an unpleasant experience was Sussex Courthouse (Newton, NJ), “where the Butcher and Landlady Used the Company Very Ill.”

Despite being anxious to reach Boston, Bedinger also recorded visits with family around Hanover and York, as well as some diversion along the way (in the form of girls). At a tavern outside Lancaster, James Higgins “Shott a wad into William Blair’s Legg,” who was left behind. John Keyes got very sick and was likewise left behind. At Allentown, Robert McCann “Behaved Scandalously towards the Officers” and was put under guard. About four miles outside Bethlehem, he was court martialed, ducked, and discharged. Ninety-eight men, including Stephenson, made it to Cambridge. Though the journey seems to have been closer to 500 miles, it was no small feat to make that journey in 25 days and arrive at camp ready for war.