

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE COMPANIE

1 Colonial Origins

In 1653 the Sudbury town meeting voted to dispose of 1 1/2 acres of town land to provide funds for the purchase of a drum and halberd for the town militia. The halberd was to provide visual commands to the militia, and the drum to provide aural commands. Fyfes were added later to augment the drum, to add musical interest, and to encourage the troops on the march. And indeed, on the morning of 19 April 1775 Col. Ezekial Howe, proprietor of Howe's Tavern (now Longfellow's Wayside Inn), led the Sudbury Militia to Concord and participated in sending the British redcoats scuttling back to Boston.

2 Modern Times

In 1963 the Sudbury Companies of Minute and Militia were reformed to prepare for the upcoming bicentennial events, and shortly thereafter, the Sudbury Ancient Fyfe and Drum Companie had its rebirth as well. Like the Sudbury Militia, the Sudbury Ancients dress in the ordinary civilian clothes of the era, and do not wear "uniforms" per se. Each participant prepares his or her own clothes either by sewing from scratch using shared patterns or by purchase from colonial era outfitters. No two outfits are exactly alike, and each reflects the participant's vision of himself/herself as a colonial farmer, tradesman, or artisan.

3 Patriot's Day

The defining event for these groups is the reenactment of the Patriot's march from Sudbury to Concord of April 1775. This reenactment takes place every year on the 19th of April, regardless of the placement of the corresponding holiday declared by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The march starts at about 6 in the morning and covers the 12 miles from Sudbury Center to the Old North Bridge. Since the exact historical route is not known, the route is varied each year, but always in agreement with some theory as to how it might have been.

Initially there were few participants in the Sudbury Ancient Fyfe and Drum Companie, and with a scarcity of competent instructors, it was a bootstrap operation to get it going. The aim was always to play the music of the Revolutionary War period, and to play it in the style of that era. Much research went into locating authentic tunes and drumbeats and much effort into learning to play them acceptably. However, by the time of the Patriot's Day bicentennial, the number of participants had increased and the quality of the music had improved to such a degree that the Companie was asked to provide a "halftime" show for the Boston Pops in Symphony Hall commemorating the bicentennial. Their reception was so enthusiastic that many are still basking in remembrance of the glow of that evening.

4 Bicentennial Reenactments

After the Patriot's Day bicentennial, the Sudbury Ancients accompanied the Fourth Middlesex Massachusetts Militia (formed from members of the Sudbury Militia) on many other bicentennial reenactments, ranging from Quebec to Georgia, and culminating in that grand victory at Yorktown. However, for this last event, both the Militia and the Fyfe and Drum were forced to masquerade as French soldiers, members of Rochambeau's 85th Regiment de Saintonge. The organizers of the event had a superabundance of colonial militia and badly needed more French soldiers, who, after all, outnumbered the Americans at the original battle. Uniforms were actually uniform, white with green

piping, and meticulously tailored, mostly by members or members' wives. In addition, new drum beats and tunes were learned appropriate to the French military tradition. What was most important was to be there, even if in disguise.

5 Fife and Drum Musters

There has long been a history of fifing and drumming in the Connecticut River valley, with many groups organized right after the Civil War from returning veterans. These groups keep the art of fifing and American rudimental drumming alive by sponsoring musters throughout the summer months, where the various corps gather to share their differing styles and music. After participating in many of these, the Sudbury Ancients decided to host an annual muster of their own, which is now held on the grounds of Longfellow's Wayside Inn in Sudbury on the last Saturday of September. The event is combined with a Colonial Faire, sponsored by the Sudbury Militia, and boasts exhibits of American colonial crafts, militia encampments, bucolic pleasures, and fife and drum groups from all over the northeast.