

ANNUAL FLAG RAISING CEREMONY



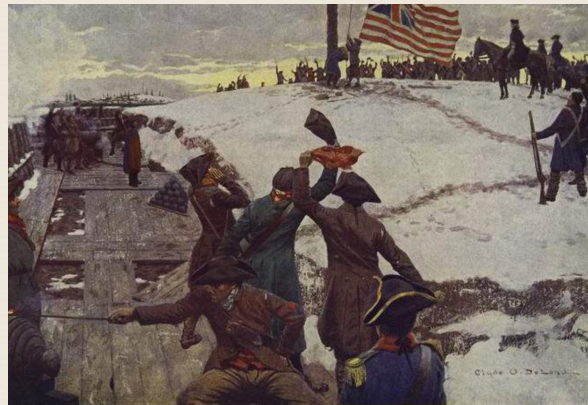
Since the Bicentennial in 1976 Somerville has developed a unique tradition to commemorate the first flag raising in 1776 atop Prospect Hill. Starting in 2000 the event was significantly expanded, so that now on the first day of each new year, the people of Somerville and surrounding communities gather together and march from City Hall, led by a George Washington impersonator on horseback, to the foot of the Prospect Hill Tower. This is followed by a ceremony including remarks from local officials, historical readings, patriotic music, and the participation of local veterans' groups and reenactors dressed in Colonial era clothing. Warm refreshments and lively exchanges ward off the chill. It's a splendid opportunity to celebrate our community's rich and proud history and its role in the formation of the United States.



THE FIRST FLAG



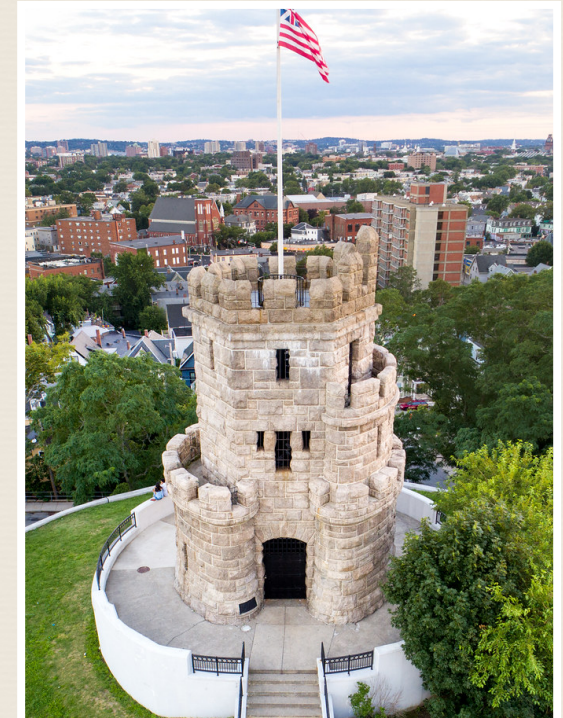
The flag flying above the Prospect Hill Tower looks a little different from the stars and stripes that would eventually be commissioned by Congress in 1777. “The Grand Union Flag” features thirteen stripes, representing the thirteen colonies, but with a British Union Jack in canton (meaning, in the upper left corner). This early flag represents the strong ties the colonists still had to the British empire at this early point in the war. At the same time, it is a flag of unity for the disparate colonies, which, prior to this point, used a variety of their own flags or even the British ensign. This was the first symbol that tied together all of the separate struggles and focused them toward what would eventually be the birth of a new nation.



Painting of the raising of the first flag— courtesy of Harper's Weekly.

PROSPECT HILL TOWER

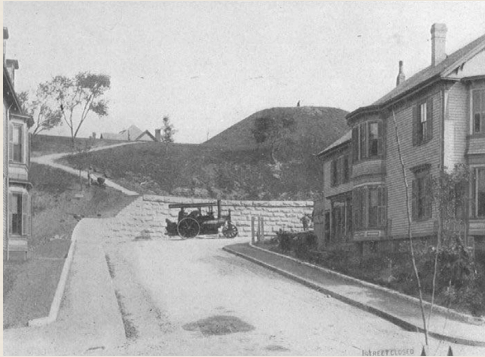
EST. 1903



Prospect Hill Tower commemorates the site of the raising of the first official flag of the United Colonies —the Grand Union Flag — by George Washington on January 1st, 1776 during the rebels' year-long siege of the city of Boston. Parts of the hill were leveled in the nineteenth century and used to fill in Back Bay in Boston. The tower itself was constructed in 1903. The height of the tower and the flag correspond to the original height of the hill and flag during the siege.

Photo courtesy of Eric Kilby

SITE CONSTRUCTION



Construction of Prospect Hill Parkway, then Stone Avenue, circa 1902.

Construction of the tower at Prospect Hill began in 1900 with a regrading of the hill. Parts of the hill had been leveled in 1873 and 1874 and used to fill in Millers River, which used to flow through Somerville. The tower was completed in 1903 and stands four stories tall, constructed of iron and stone. The lower deck offers scenic views of the cities of Somerville, Boston, and Cambridge. It has been maintained by the city of Somerville, including the addition of a retaining wall in the 1950s due to advanced erosion, and a new overlook in 1982. More recently, funds from the Community Preservation Act have enabled further stabilization of the tower in 2017 and extensive improvements to the park beginning in 2019.



Dedication of Prospect Hill Tower, October 29th, 1903.

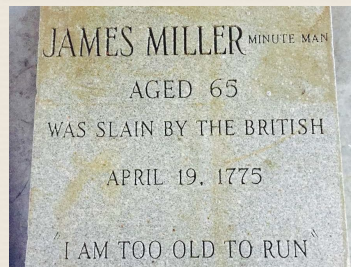
REVOLUTIONARY WAR

Boston was the site of one of the most important conflicts during the early period of the Revolutionary War, and Prospect Hill played an important part in the strategy of the colonial army. Following the battles of Lexington and Concord, which included a brief skirmish at the Hill, the rebels settled into fortifications stretching eight miles around Boston, from the Mystic River to Dorchester Heights. A protracted siege resulted, with Prospect Hill becoming one of the most heavily fortified defensive works. By the time General George Washington arrived to take command, it had become known as “The Citadel.”



LEXINGTON AND CONCORD

The first battle of the Revolutionary War started on April 19, 1775, when British forces moved to seize colonial arms supplies and were subsequently ambushed by throngs of minute men hurrying to the commotion. The ambushes continued while the British retreated back to Boston, though the ambushers were quickly swept away. On Prospect Hill, however, one older



minuteman resolved to stand his ground and fight and his last words, “I am too old to run,” now adorn a marker at the base of Prospect Hill on Washington Street.

THE SIEGE OF BOSTON

Over the course of the eleven month siege, thousands of colonial soldiers were stationed around Boston. A vicious battle was fought at Breed’s Hill in 1775 and defenses and fortifications were constructed all around the city. General Israel Putnam made his camp at the “Citadel” on Prospect Hill. George Washington arrived to take command in July and ordered further fortification, but by that point the conflict was a stalemate.

FLAG RAISING AND EVACUATION

At the time when Washington directed the raising of the flag over Prospect Hill, the soldiers of the Continental army had been fighting for eight long months, their enlistments were almost over, and they had not been paid. But they held together, and by the end of January, Henry Knox arrived with his “noble train of artillery,” 60 tons of supplies and big guns which had been seized from the British at Fort Ticonderoga and laboriously transported to Boston, in part by crossing a partially frozen Hudson River. This artillery was a game changer, and by mid-March, the British army had been forced to evacuate Boston by sea.



Lord Howe organizes the British evacuation of Boston in March 1776.