

A Journal of
The Treaty of Paris - 83
as Kept by
John F. Denis
of the
Concord Minute Men

Friday, 19 August 1983

This is the great day for the Concord Minute Men, the day which sees nearly three years' preparation come to its realization in the departure for "Europe '83." The families of Capt. Gary Puryear and Sgt Major Bob Childs have already set out for Scotland on the 16th so that Bob and Gary might have the chance to look after assorted details such as the handling of our muskets by customs.

The Company's rendezvous was at the parking lot of Concord-Carlisle High School, where by 4:30 PM a large portion of those traveling had already gathered. It was a sunny afternoon but not uncomfortably hot. Luggage was lined up alongside one of the wire fences, and new arrivals were quickly questioned by bus captains Rene Robillard and Skeezie Viles about their passports. A photographer from the Beacon papers was hovering about for special shots for next week's edition.

The only thing lacking was a bus. Loading was to have begun around 4:15, but it was not until 5:05 that two Commonwealth Coaches arrived.

Boarding went smoothly, and by 5:20 we were en route to the town green for our formal send-off, only a half an hour behind schedule. Making our way through the rush hour traffic, we pulled up along the north side of the green, where fifty or sixty well-wishers were waiting. Most of this crowd was comprised of family members or minute men who could not be with us.

Someone was passing out canned soft drinks, which were most welcome. Then around 5:33 we were called to gather near the obelisk to hear a valedictory address by Rev. Dana Greeley, in which he mentioned that we would be the first Concord delegation to visit Odell in twenty-five years. Jim , Chairman of the Board of Selectmen made a brief statement about how proud the town was to have the Company act as its representative. Ensign Adjutant Vern Potter — commanding officer of our group while in transit and brevet-Lieutenant for the course of the trip — expressed the Company's thanks; and finally Father Rogers offered his best wishes.

It was just after we had reboarded the busses that we found that VIP #5 — the second and non-smoker bus — would not start. VIP #11 then swung around the green and backed up so as to be able to provide a jumpstart. At 6 o'clock precisely we were able to move out for Logan Airport.

Our drivers took us out Cambridge Turnpike and Rte 2 to Rte 128, and then into Boston along the Mass Pike. Even with the absence of toll booths the bottleneck of the Callahan Tunnel caused us delays, and it was nearly 7 o'clock when we approached the Northwest Orient terminal.

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But our wayward bus had yet one more trial to offer us. While the lead bus (#11) took an offramp too early, our driver quite properly followed the signs to Northwest only to find the overhead clearance too low. As we hummed "You take the low road, and we'll take the high road," Frank Cannon got out and worked at stopping traffic so that old #5 could back all the way down to that original ramp. Be it noted that few Boston drivers seemed to care that Frank was signaling them to go around the bus, and one woman drove at him to within a foot before stopping. A medal of some suitable sort to Past Captain Cannon for efforts above and beyond, intrepidity, and conspicuous etc.

By 7:10 the second bus was unloading on the lower level. Happily all of our heavy luggage was to be sent directly by bus for loading onto the plane. Furthermore, our boarding passes had already been filled out with seating assignments, and so we easily went straight ahead through security and into the waiting area at Gate 20.

The boarding process began on time and went smoothly with Rene and Skeeze again checking us off on their lists as we passed by. The minute men appeared to have drawn most of the seats in the center portion of the 747.

There was plenty of time for us all to settle comfortably and then yet more time for us to grow uncomfortable. Eventually we were informed that the delay was being caused by the amount of traffic typical of a Friday evening.

At 8:32 we began to taxi away from the gate, but it was not until 9:03 that we lifted off. Once aloft I was easily able to make out the Bunker Hill Monument off to port, and Fenway Park was easily distinguished in the distance. Within minutes I could only guess at the landscape below.

The drink cart slowly made its way toward my row — I'm always at the wrong spot for this kind of service. Then just as we were being served, about 10 PM, turbulence hit to such a degree that the cart was quickly hustled away and the stewards and -esses were battered down for the while. I found that with a Scotch in hand and a Dvorak symphony on the headphones I really didn't care about the weather.

Eventually matters calmed and the meals began to be served — a choice of breast of midget chicken or a seafood newburg. As such things go, the meal was not bad.

Soon after the clearing of the trays there began a showing of the Richard Pryor-Jackie Gleason film "The Toy." Oddly there was not a charge for either the headsets or the film. I tried a few minutes of the show but decided that I needed sleep more. In the end I got very little of this.

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When the movie had started, we were requested to lower the shades on all of the windows to reduce the interference from the rising sun. I was skeptical, but just after the closing credits I found that the sun was indeed up, and we were making our approach to Prestwick, Scotland.

Even though most of the passengers aboard were heading for Gatwick and London, by some mystery of stringpulling Flight 48 had been rescheduled so as to land first at Prestwick for the benefit of the Company.

Promised flight time had been 5 hours and 26 minutes, and we were but slightly late when we touched down at 7:36 AM local time.

At Prestwick there are no fancy disembarking devices and one must walk across the open concrete to reach the terminal. But the cool, damp air was just the thing to revive us. Our baggage was immediately available on the conveyor belt, and we were quickly cleared through the passport check. The men at the customs tables all but ignored us.

In the main lobby Gary Puryear was waiting to greet us all and direct us to the two waiting busses. There was a little delay while many of us cashed travelers checks. Then at 8:43 we moved out for Edinburgh with Gary following in the Ryder rental lorry with all the luggage.

The guide on our bus — the non-smoker — introduced himself as Chris Fagin and explained that we would be taking a brief side trip at first to the birthplace of Robert Burns in Alloway, which was just up the road apiece. There we left the coaches in a car park and strolled the half block to the Burns cottage, which is on a lovely street. One of the villagers proudly displayed his fine flower garden and engaged Colin Chisholm in conversation. Several of our number found an open shop and purchased refreshments.

Within about fifteen minutes we were back aboard and moving out for Edinburgh. The morning was sunny and it was not long before some of us were drowsing in the warmth. We had to backtrack some through the city of Ayr and then headed out through Kilmarnock.

There had earlier been inquiries about a breakfast stop, and now somewhere along the A71 — in the vicinity of Newmilns, I think — our driver pulled into the lot of a small roadside "truckstop." Chris Fagin stepped in first to see if the proprietor was prepared to face our numbers, and from the way the lights inside the restaurant flashed on we could tell the answer.

Here we spent about half an hour. The food was simple but very tasty, especially the hot Danish with cream. The payment was on the honor system with the tally being taken after the food had been eaten.

On the next leg of the trip most of our party fell asleep. Although at first I was determined to see all that I could, eventually I too dozed off. The route took us through the city of Hamilton, where I began to notice that some shops really take their time in opening up on a Saturday morning.

By the time we had reached the outskirts of Edinburgh, the sky had a definite overcast. I began to notice quite a few youngsters wearing sweaters or scarves of maroon and white, and I later learned that they were in fact fans of a particular football club.

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The Caledonian Hotel, located on Lothian Street near the corner of Princes Street, is an old establishment in the grand style. Over the past couple of years it had undergone extensive renovation, and it was now quite impressive. For most of us there was little difficulty in signing in, but some had been assigned rooms which were found to be still occupied.

Judy and I had room 522, which was on the back part of the building and faced west. These quarters were rather interesting as the bathroom seemed nearly as large as the bedroom. From our windows we could look out across the roofs of our neighbors to the several church steeples which chimed hours and quarters.

By coincidence Judy's mother was traveling with another tour, which was in Edinburgh for this one day, and so she was at the Caledonian just as we arrived. Despite our weariness it was agreed that some of this "free" afternoon ought to be used in shopping and exploring. Following the advice of Marcia Puryear we took a cab to the Abbotsford pub on Rose Street for our lunch. This place was quite crowded, but it was well worth the effort to get in and find seats.

Most pubs stop serving lunch at 2 PM and our first worry was that we would miss the deadline. In fact we were well within the time limit, but several of the favorite dishes were no longer available. Since the steak and kidney pie was gone, I ordered the curried eggs — hard-boiled eggs in a mild curry sauce on a bed of rice. Draft Guinness stout goes very smoothly with curry.

As I expected, there were only communal tables, and we were lucky indeed to get three seats located together. To one side sat a fiftyish gentleman and to the other a chap in his early twenties, and soon we were all swapping bits of conversation as if old acquaintances.

It was around 2:30 when we finished dining and the waitresses were closing up the food service. Stepping out onto Rose Street we made our way westward and then crossed over to check out some of the department stores which front on Princes Street. But our weariness some overcame us, and we began to walk down Princes Street in a light rainfall before securing a cab back to the hotel.

There we rested as best we could before the evening dinner, but I don't think we dared fall asleep for fear of missing this special meal.

At 7 PM, a little late, I hurried down to a special informational meeting for all minute men and dependents in one of the function rooms on the first floor. By the time I arrived, every seat had been taken. Captain Gary Puryear was emphasizing the absolute need for punctuality over the next few days because our schedule must mesh with those of many other units. As I stood to the rear of the room listening, I was approached by one of the agents from Raymond and Whitcomb, our travel agency, who requested that I open the equipment trunks by such-and-such a time. Once again I was being taken for Bob Childs, Sgt. Major and keeper of the keys.

The evening's festivities opened in the main lounge on the ground floor with a cash bar. It was here that I first discovered what was later verified elsewhere: that British bartenders are quite vague about "Collins" drinks. Just the party of Concord Minute Men

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managed to crowd the place sufficiently to prevent the chance of overindulgence.

A little after eight o'clock we began to make our way into the main dining room. Circular tables had been set for eight each, and there was exactly enough room for the full Company. We began with smoked trout and then went on to roast lamb in wine sauce. It was all very satisfactory. The dessert was a delicious concoction of pears in butterscotch.

Then came the entertainment, complete with piper and two highland dancers. I do not recall the names of any of the performers, if they were in fact given, but there was a world champion accordion player and a drummer with the name Pete Irvine on his bass and the kilted master of ceremonies. The performances were quite pleasant, and the dancers were particularly good. At one point individuals from the audience were pressed into singing "Loch Lomond," and all were good sports about it.

By 10:30 we began to clear out of the dining room to make way for a radio show which is regularly broadcast from the hotel.

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Our official day was to begin with an 8 AM bus tour of Edinburgh, so any hope for an adequate amount of sleep was lost if one wished to get breakfast. To complicate matters another tour group was trying to get its food at the same time and place as we, and therefore there was quite a line waiting for tables.

The service was buffet, and since the serving tables went around a corner it was difficult to make reasonable choices. I started out by taking sliced ham and cheese and bread, assuming that there might be little else of interest, and ended up with a second plate filled with proper breakfast items such as sunnyside eggs, bacon, and a couple of types of Scottish sausage with black pudding. The ham and cheese I made into a sandwich for passing the time while on the tour. It was a real rush to eat and get to the bus on time.

But for all the previous night's stern warnings about punctuality it was nearly 8:20 when the busses finally moved down Rutland Street, around Rutland Square, and up Shandwick Place to Princes Street. We began with an excursion through "Newtown," an 18th century development to the north of Princes Street. Cruising along the streets and around the squares we would stop briefly before the home of such a celebrity as Alexander G. Bell or Sir Walter Scott. Our guide, a kilted young chap, had a sense of humor but became quite seriously engrossed in his presentations at specific homes. In front of Robert Louis Stevenson's place he began to go on about how Stevenson pater had designed light houses. A quizzical look crossing his face, Bob Marshall asked what a lighthouse was, and the guide had almost completed his first sentence of explanation before he realized that he was being had. At this he smiled and then pulled the sgian dhu from his hose while advising against further highjinks.

With a steady overcast this wasn't the prettiest of touring days, but the city was impressive nonetheless. We stopped briefly on Princes Street to take a look at the flowered banking at the north-east stairway leading down into the gardens. Here we waited a minute or two for the hour to strike on the floral clock and the appearance of the electronic cuckoo.

The tour then took us up by the Castle and down along the Royal Mile, past Canongate, and to the Palace of Holyrood House. Here we took a twenty minute break to stroll through the grounds and enjoy the gardens. Since the Royal Family was not in residence at this time, it would be possible later in the day to tour the royal apartments if there were time.

And there was little enough time. En route to the Caledonian there was a brief stop for photographs of the statue of Greyfriars Bobby. As soon as Doc Rooney got up to the bronze dog, he lifted his leg against the statue's base.

It was around 11 o'clock when we returned to the hotel to begin our preparations for the afternoon and our first performance. "The Presidential Suite," at the far end of the second floor, had been reserved as a kind of headquarters and depot for the Concord Minute Men. Here were the eight costume boxes containing our 18th century clothing and the three weapons crates with muskets and bayonets. Once we had changed into uniform in our rooms, we made our way down to the suite to procure our arms. Company policy would be to have

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weapons in hand only when absolutely necessary in order to maintain security and to keep the neighbors from having fits.

Gradually our numbers made their way through the main lounge, out past the gazebo, and into the back car park, where our busses were waiting. Around 12:50 all were aboard and we were on our way to the staging area. Gary had given us the good word that the organizers of the parade had decided to locate us just eight units behind the parade's front division so that we might have an opportunity to watch the parade when our march was finished.

Our busses took us around to Princes Street and then eastward toward Regent Road. Along the way we caught the notice of many pedestrians. I noticed how many gentlemen were sporting kilts even though not certainly connected with parading units.

Around 1:15 our busses dropped us off on Regent Road just opposite a memorial edifice to Robert Burns. A large, portable sign identifying us was waiting for us here. What surprised me most about the Festival Cavalcade Parade was that rather than being traditionally Scottish it contained elements more fitting to Mardi Gras in New Orleans.

On the Europe '83 Expedition the ladies and the children were to be active participants in all phases. Today they would parade with us just behind the muskets.*

Now the Captain called us to fall in on the street in a column of threes, and Sgt. Major Bob Childs assigned to the musket men the positions which they would take during each performance through Paris. The left file was headed by Sgt. Bob Bowen, the right by Past Captain Frank Cannon, and the center by me. Ensign Adjutant Vern Potter, acting-Lieutenant for the duration of the expedition, was at the head of the muskets. In front of him stood our five fifes — acting-Music Master George Kinney, Quartermaster Fred Donnelly, Ensign Paymaster Jim Kelly, Don King, and Pat Ferrante — and our two snares — Jerry Revere and Jay O'Neil — and our one bass drum — Larry Mounce.

To the front of the music marched the color guard with the addition of Skeezie Viles carrying the Bedford flag which was on loan from the Bedford Minute Men. And the Captain and Sgt. Armorer Jack Chisholm with the guidon led the whole procession.

Rather than waste the period of waiting, Bob Childs decided that the contradancers should take this opportunity for a practice session. Jerry Revere, George Kinney, and Pat Ferrante warmed up with a tune which George had put together for our dancing, and the dancers lined up for a go at "Fisher's Hornpipe." We started out well enough, but between the noise of nearby float-lorries and the music of the pipe band behind us we soon lost the beat of our own music. Only by shouting out a cadence could we recover somewhat, and we soon gave up the effort.

The parade appears to have started on time for it was very shortly after 2:30 that we began to move out. There were two or three delays, the last and longest running a good three minutes or more, presumably to allow floats to settle into the line of march.

But once we hit the straightaway on Waterloo Place, there was but a single further delay. And what a parade! Spectators filled the sidewalks from curb to storefront, yet no one attempted to get

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onto the road. Perhaps the police officers stationed every twenty yards or so had much to do with this orderliness. Yet beyond their good manners the spectators displayed rousing enthusiasm. They clapped along with "Yankee Doodle," sang along with "The Battle Hymn," and went crazy for "British Grenadiers." I later heard that the locals were particularly taken with our ladies and the children.

The sun had begun to shine through the haze just as we had first stepped off, and it remained with us the whole way. As we passed the Royal Scottish Academy, we gave "eyes left" salute to the parade officials on the front steps. One of these "dignitaries" was Ronnie Corbett of the "Two Ronnies" show, which had run on PBS a couple of years back.

At the end of Princes Street the parade turned left onto Lothian Road and passed by the Caledonian Hotel. Tex and Gladys Jones had taken great vantage points in the windows of our Presidential Suite and got tape recordings as well as photos of our performance.

Again we turned left onto the downward path of King's Stables Road for the final leg of the parade. This road runs down into a kind of valley with the slopes of the castle hill to the left and a multilevel parking garage to the right. As we approached the tunnel beneath Johnston Terrace bridge, I noticed all of the spectators on the slope above the tunnel's mouth, kept from falling down onto us by a chainlink fence.

Once out of the tunnel I began to notice more spectators who were dressed like participants, and so I guessed that we must be rather near the parade's end. A number of clowns were cavorting in the street and challenging us to mock battle. And a short way beyond our column turned left into the terrace called Grassmarket and halted to hear the Captain's words of praise.

We could have remained here to see the rest of the parade, but the travel weariness was beginning to tell and most of the Company began the hike back to the Caledonian. Once across the parade route our path led up West Port, right on Lady Lawson Street, right again on Spittal Street, and quickly left onto Castle Terrace. As we walked along Castle Terrace, we could hear the parade off to our right. A number crossed the road and walked through the car park to join the spectators at the far railing. From this vantage it was possible to look down onto King's Stables Road, but the crowd was too thick along the rail and most of us continued then up to Lothian Road.

At the end of Castle Terrace we were standing directly in front of the Caledonian, but because of the throngs standing on the sidewalk we could not hope to make it to the front entrance. Undaunted, we began to make our way around to the rear car park, and so we returned by way of the gazebo to the main lounge.

The first order of business was the returning of our weapons and flags to our "armory." Then came high tea. The Bowens, the Rudds, Judy and I were able to squeeze onto a small collection of sofa and chairs while less fortunates had to put up with a lengthy wait in the lobby. While the others ordered tea, I took matters into my own hands and walked out to the "Pullman" bar at the other end of the lobby to get a pint — the only thing after a parade. I was

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better off, for service in the lounge was quite slow.

Order of the evening was "fend-for-oneself." Gary and Bob Childs had made reservations for a full table and more for a "Scottish Banquet" at the North British Hotel, and so around 7 o'clock several taxi loads of us headed up Princes Street for dinner. Gary had worked out a special deal so that we paid a bargain rate of £11 per person.

It was while we were in the payment line that we heard of little Cory Puryear's afternoon adventure. It seemed that on the way back from the parade he had become separated from those he had started with. There was much frantic searching along Princes Street and the calling of the police. At length it was found that Cory had simply let himself back into his room at the Caledonian and spent the rest of the afternoon there. Clearly Gary and Marcia were in need of a good night out this evening.

The dining room had a number of very long tables, some of which were not conveniently placed. Our table was so close to its neighbor that the waitresses had difficulty in getting through.

The entertainment was provided by a singing m.c. in kilts, who was backed by a three-man combo. A female vocalist appeared from time to time, and there were three ladies dancing on occasion. On the whole the show was a bit too slick. The dancing had seemed far more "authentic" the previous night.

The first course was a creamy leek soup — quite delicious. Then a piper entered the hall, skirling away and followed by a waiter with a great haggis on a platter. The platter was brought before the m.c., who then recited a Bobby Burns ode to haggis, at the conclusion of which he slashed open the steaming sausage with his dirk and we all drank the toast "slantcha" with drams of good Scotch. As soon as the toast was drunk, the waitresses rushed out of the kitchen with their own platters, from which they scooped haggis, turnip, and mashed potato onto our plates.

Now there was much giggling and the like concerning the haggis, for many of our party were ignorant of its contents. The greater question was whether the knowledgeable would eat it. Having dined on sheep's brain once, I was certainly game for giving this dish a fair trial, and I found it to be delicious. The sheep's stomach in which it is cooked is nothing more than a natural sausage casing from which the edible meat and oatmeal is taken. It looked rather like a dark brown hash and smelled wonderful. There was a light spicing, apparently pepper, and when I'd finished my portion, I was glad to accept Judy's offer of hers. Shortly the waitresses came around again to offer seconds, and again I was happy to oblige. Care is taken that there are no leftovers.

Throughout the period of the meal the band provided music. From where we sat I was able to look out through the great windows toward Edinburgh Castle and the setting sun — all quite lovely.

The main course I recall only vaguely now — a roast of some sort, I think. I know that it was very good. By the time dessert — a trifle-like custard — was served the entertainment was begun again in earnest. The female vocalist was very good, but the best of it was the piper, who was on all too infrequently.

It was around 11 PM when the evening ended. There was some talk

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of walking back along Princes Street to the Caledonian, but in the end most appeared to be taking taxis. Judy and I joined Bob and Audrey and took the walk, for it was a very pleasant night.

I should add a quote from our guide on the morning tour before I forget it. Many of our party were as ignorant of the traditions of kilt wearing as they were of the making of haggis. The question had been raised about the wearing of nether garments, to which our guide replied: "Seeing is believing, but feeling is the naked truth."

Note

- *: Several of our ladies would actually march at the head of the Company and carry the large, horizontal sign identifying "The Concord Minute Men." Apparently at one of the several halts, one reported hearing a female spectator turn to a friend and declare: "Migh-newt men? They look rather large to me!"