

INTRODUCTION

On April 19, 1775, Acton men became the first to fight in the war that won our independence. Isaac Davis, Captain of the Acton minuteman company, accepted the call to lead the attack on the British troops holding the North Bridge in Concord, declaring: "I haven't a man that is afraid to go." Davis and Abner Hosmer were killed and Luther Blanchard wounded in the firing that ensued and was later memorialized as "... the shot heard round the world."

Eighty-six years later, Acton men in the Town militia known as the Davis Guards again answered the call. They joined other troops to protect the national capital after southern rebels fired on Fort Sumter. Coincidentally, on April 19th of 1861, the Massachusetts militias were involved in an action resulting in the first intentional casualties of our Civil War. Thus Acton men were there again when the first bullets flew, this time in the war that preserved our nation.

Throughout, there were examples of extraordinary personal responsibility. Men who need not have served did so, in some cases giving their lives to fulfill what they felt to be their duty. James Hayward, exempt from service because of a foot injury, went with the Acton minuteman company to Concord on April 19, 1775. Later that day, he was mortally wounded by a shot through his powder horn, which is in the exhibit. In 1861, Davis Guards Captain Daniel Tuttle was well past the age of mandatory service, but he went off on a moment's notice to lead his company to Washington in response to Lincoln's call. He was not personally opposed to slavery, but considered the firing on Fort Sumter and the move by southern states to secede treasonous and felt it his duty to serve. Many men whose enlistment had expired stayed on and fought in more battles, helping to turn the tide in the Union's favor. Some Acton men made the courageous and controversial decision to serve as officers in black (then called "colored") regiments.

In 1890, Acton native William A. Wilde built Acton Memorial Library as a tribute to the men who served in the Civil War – those who died doing so and the surviving veterans then living in Acton.

This exhibit tells the remarkable story of Acton's role in the birth and preservation of our nation through the artifacts, images and documents given to the Library. We hope you will find it educational, enjoyable and inspirational.