

I'd like to begin with a few words about Bob Slechta, who passed away this winter. For many years, Bob served Bedford in many ways, especially here at this very historic site. His passion for Bedford's history, his commitment, and his friendship are sadly missed.

This is the town's original and, until 1849, the town's only graveyard. Buried here are the founders and first defenders of the town. We are particularly proud of those who served in the war of the American Revolution. You will shortly hear a roll call of their names. But that was not the first war in which the men of Bedford did military service. There was an earlier war that I'd like to mention briefly. It was the first truly global conflict. The part of it fought in North America is what we the French and Indian War. From 1754 to 1763, it was a struggle between the French and their Indian allies on one side, and the British and their Indian allies on the other, for control of North America. Bedford men served, fought, suffered in this war in places far from home: in what are now New York State, Maine, northern Vermont, Canada, and elsewhere. Among the Bedford men who served, to name just a few, were Hugh Maxwell; Josiah Fassett; Rev. Nicholas Bowes, Bedford's first minister, who contracted a fatal illness when he was serving as a chaplain; and Nathaniel Merriam, who died at Lake George when he was only 19. The war ended with the French driven out of North America, and with the British deep in debt—and in need of tax revenue from their colonies. We know how that story ended. But let us not forget, when it was time to take up arms for the American Revolution, the older men of Bedford knew, from their own experiences, just what it was to go to war. They were getting into. It makes their courage and their sacrifice all the more honorable.