



The Stow Minutemen

Issue 105 No. 3

September 2007

Captain's Notes

...the view from the front

Ask not, what the Company can do for you...

To paraphrase President John F. Kennedy's famous speech and the ideals behind it I ask you to think about "*what you want to do for the Company*". Where do you think we should go from here? Are we doing too many Events a year? Are we not doing enough? Should we try to solicit more paid gigs or are we doing enough of those? Encampments - do we want, as a unit, to go to more of them or are they too much work and we should keep it to what we are currently doing?

I've been very pleased and somewhat amazed at some of the turnouts we've had for our events to date. I've had more than one person tell me how good we're looking and sounding out there!! These aren't just the "public" either, MANY people within the hobby have commented to me on how sharp we've become and that we are a force to be reckoned with out there in the reenacting world.

Yes there are always ways that we can do things better; more authentic dress, period shoes, hairstyles, etc... but on most fronts we do well. So again I ask: Where do we go from here? Many of you know that we are currently working towards becoming a Incorporated entity. This will help us in many ways both financially and to help protect us legally. We'll also be looking towards making some more purchases of Company assets and supplies to help us with the current membership and also to better help us setting up new people to our ranks.

The year has flown by and within four months we'll be having our Annual Company Meeting. I hope that you will all be there to help make this fine organization even better. The Stow Minute

men were re-formed a little over forty years ago, I'd like us to start thinking about the NEXT forty years and where we'd like to see ourselves then.

I remain your most humbled and obedient servant,

Rick Lawson, Capt.

Upcoming Events

(more details can be found on our website www.stowminutemen.org)

September

15th-16th - Billerica Yankee Doodle Days
Sat. 29th - Sudbury Colonial Faire

Notes from the Stow Tavern

Who the heck is John Barleycorn?

By John Willoughby

One of the standard songs that the Stow Minutemen play is John Barleycorn. Who was John Barleycorn, and where does the song come from? The fife and drum version of the song is actually an adaptation of an old traditional English folksong of the same name. Many modern artists have recorded versions of the song ranging from folks groups like Steeleye Span and Fairport Convention to rock groups including Traffic and Jethro Tull. Traffic's version of the song was featured on their album "John Barleycorn Must Die".

John Barleycorn is not a real person but rather the personification of the barely crop which is treated to many indignities on its way to eventually becoming beer. John Barleycorn is buried in

the earth but surprises everyone by coming back to life again and growing tall. Having failed to kill him by burying him, they cut him down and then beat him savagely (separating the barley). As if that wasn't bad enough, the miller then grinds him between two stones. The final insult is when they stuff him into a vat (to be brewed). In the end, however, John survives by living again as home brewed ale.

John Barleycorn is a favorite harvest-time song and takes us through the cycle of the crops from planting through the harvest and ultimate consumption of the fruits of the harvest labor. Many different theories have been put forward about the symbolism of the song linking it to different meanings from Pagan to Christian and even revolutionary themes, but it is really just a humorous celebration of the stages involved in making beer. Some people simply don't know enough to recognize a good drinking song when they hear one.

How old is John Barleycorn? The earliest reference I could find was to a version of the song that was included in the Bannatyne Manuscript of 1568. George Bannatyne (1545-1608) was a collector of Scottish poems and eventually created a manuscript of them consisting of over 800 pages which still exists today. There are references to other written versions of the song dating from the 17th century. Robert Burns (1759-1796), the Scottish poet and lyricist, published a somewhat longer and embellished version in 1782. Jack London gave the title John Barleycorn to his 1913 autobiographical novel that tells of his struggle with alcoholism.

The different historical versions, and the various ones used today, all differ slightly but keep the same basic theme. In one version from the early 17th century, we are first treated to an explanation of the need to kill John Barleycorn as revenge for becoming drunk (from drinking too many bowls of beer):

Sir John Barley-Corn fought in a Bowl,
Who won the Victory,
Which made them all to chafe and swear,
That Barley-Corn must dye.

And in another one we see John Barleycorn (as malted beer) having his revenge on the Miller for having crushed him by making the Miller too drunk to stay on his horse:

Mault gave the Miller such a blow,

That from his horse he fell full low,
He taught him his master Mault for to know
You neuer saw the like sir.

And at the end of the Burns version we are told how important and useful John Barleycorn is and, despite being treated so badly, how much he can do for us.

*John Barleycorn was a hero bold,
Of noble enterprise;
For if you do but taste his blood,
'Twill make your courage rise.
'Twill make a man forget his woe;
'Twill heighten all his joy;
'Twill make the widow's heart to sing,
Tho' the tear were in her eye.
Then let us toast John Barleycorn,
Each man a glass in hand;
And may his great posterity
Ne'er fail in old Scotland!*

So the next time you raise a glass, think of poor Sir John suffering the various trials he went through to produce that beer. As Robert Burns encourages us to do in his version, have a toast to John Barleycorn!

Let's end with a look at the lyrics of one of the versions of this traditional song. I have included below the lyrics from the version recorded by Steeleye Span.

John Barleycorn

Traditional (as sung by Steeleye Span)

*There were three men
Came from the west
Their fortunes for to tell,
And the life of John Barleycorn
As well.*

*They have laid him in three furrows deep,
Laid clods upon his head,
Then these three men made a solemn vow
John Barleycorn was dead,
John Barleycorn was dead.*

*They let him a-lie for a very long time
Till the rain from heaven did fall,
Then little Sir John he sprang up his head
And he did amaze them all,
He did amaze them all.*

*And they let him stand till the Midsummer Day,
'Till he looked both pale and wan.*

*Then little Sir John he grew a long beard
And he so became a man,
He so became a man.*

*So they have hired men with
The scythes so sharp,
To cut him off at the knee,
And they have rolled him and they tied him
around the waist,
They have served him barbarously,
They have served him barbarously.*

*And they have hired men with the crab-tree
sticks,
To cut him skin from bone,
And the miller he has served him worse than
that,
He ground him between two stones.
He ground him between two stones*

*And they've wheeled him here, and they've
wheeled him there,
They've wheeled him to a barn,
And they have served him worse than that,
They've bunged him in a vat,
They've bunged him in a vat.*

*Well they have worked their will on John Barley-
corn
But he lived to tell the tale,
For they pour him out of an old brown jug
And they call him home-brewed ale.
And they call him home-brewed ale*

Adjutant Notes

By Jenn Siegel, Adjutant

As we head toward the end of our busy season, I just want to thank everyone for their participation in the events of the last few months. I've gotten many compliments from the organizers, not just for our wonderful music, but also for how friendly we are as a group. Old Sturbridge Village in particular was quite pleased with how willing we were to interact with visitors. So thank you all!

Safety: Everybody's Business

By Rick Lawson, Captain

There was an incident recently at an Encampment in Ohio where a Native American Reenactor was severely injured when the cartridges in his cartridge pouch started exploding. Seems he did not have the required wooden block in his pouch, the pouch was worn very high up on his chest (not around back), AND it did not have a heavy flap to keep the other cartridges away from sparks. He fired a round and when sparks fell from his pan right into the pouch ... "**pht pht pht pht**" ... he went up like a Fourth of July display. There is video of this happening on the www.CNN.com website (search in the Video section for "*Musket Accident*"). The man was injured and had to be taken via Med-Flight to the regional Burn Unit!

So some of you are wondering why I'm mentioning this in our newsletter. You say to yourself; "I'm not one of the people firing a musket, I play the Fife (Drum / Carry a flag)". Well, safety is everyone's business. This can not be stressed enough that it's up to each and every one of you out there as Members of the Company to always be on the look out for things that might be unsafe and to bring them to the attention of the Officers and Staff. If we're at an event hosted by another Unit then we need to make them aware of the unsafe condition.

Several years ago the Stow Minutemen were at an event where there was a tomahawk throwing contest. Then afterwards the tomahawks, target and such were left unattended and unsupervised children started throwing the axes around!!! At that time some of our group spoke up and we stopped going to that event.

The weapons we use are real, the knives and belt axes are real, the fire is real (don't ya just love it when the public asks us that?!?) and the injuries we could sustain, if we're not always vigilant, are VERY real!

Future Events

(More detailed event info can be found at www.stowminutemen.org)

SEPTEMBER

Sat. Sept. 15-Sun Sept.16 - Billerica, MA - Yankee Doodle Days

Sat. Sept. 29 - Sudbury, MA - Sudbury Colonial Faire

OCTOBER

TBA - Salem, MA - Haunted City

DECEMBER

Sun. Dec. 2 - Maynard, MA - Maynard Christmas Parade

Sat. Dec. 8 - Maynard, MA - WAVM/Beacon Santa Telethon

JANUARY 2008

Sat. Jan. 2 - Stow, MA - Annual Company Meeting

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