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Bigelow facelift

Common monument repaired

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Miroslav Maler, an employee of conservator Ivan Myjer, works on restoring the Timothy Bigelow Monument on Worcester Common last week.

(T&G Staff/PAUL KAPTEYN)

WORCESTER — On April 19, 1861, the Col. Timothy Bigelow Monument was dedicated at Worcester Common, the same place where the colonel trained with his troops in preparation for the Revolutionary War.

April 19 is the date in 1775 when Col. Bigelow departed from Worcester leading the 15th Massachusetts Regiment of the Continental Army to Concord and Lexington. So many years later, the outcome of the War of Independence is clear. However, time and the elements have been cruel to this important monument. The structure is eroding.

While the monument has been renovated twice since the 19th century, including once after it was blown down by the Hurricane of 1938 that swept through the region. Its recent state of deterioration had landed it on the Preservation Worcester list of endangered landmarks. It is now undergoing another facelift.

The monument, commissioned by Col. Bigelow's great-grandson, Timothy Bigelow Lawrence, has a granite base and is made of Tuscany marble. It consists of a Gothic spire with inscriptions of the battles the colonel was involved in. In the midsection of the spire, there are four columns and at the base of the stones below the columns are carved four rams' heads.

Col. Bigelow has descendants in Massachusetts. One is John G. Brooks, 93, of Weston, whose great-great-grandfather, Luthor Lawrence, married the colonel's daughter, according to Mr. Brooks.

"My father was very interested in our ancestor," Mr. Brooks said. "We went to the memorial together once and I was glad to know that there was such a prominent figure in my family. He seemed to be a big part of the civic structure in Worcester and to be on the right side of what was going on back then."

Worcester resident Kathryn B. Kingsbury, the senior state president of the Massachusetts Society, Children of the American Revolution, has been working along with the Timothy Bigelow Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and other individuals on behalf of this project. According to Ms. Kingsbury, reaching the established goal of a little over \$30,000 for the first stage was done through a variety of fundraising events, the sale of gift baskets, yard sales and contributions.

In 2000, a small grant of about \$800 from Save the Outdoor Sculpture!, a national preservation group, was used to hire conservator Ivan Myjer to assess the work required to bring the monument back to its original state or as close to it as possible.

"Kay Kingsbury contacted me about five years ago after receiving a small grant for an assessment," Mr. Myjer said. "In this first stage of the renovation we are cleaning and strengthening the marble with a chemical product. We are also replacing some of the lower pieces and filling cracks."

According to Mr. Myjer, the first stage will also include repairing the granite base, which was quarried in Massachusetts. The granite now is available only as pieces salvaged from other construction and the restoration of the columns, some of which have been removed and currently are replaced by wood beams.

"This is a medium-difficulty renovation due to the height of the structure, which allows for easy access. The city has allowed us to use water and electricity for the power washing.

Originally the structure was topped with a cross which is no longer there, and it's possible that in future renovations it will be replaced," said Mr. Myjer.

This stage of the recovery is expected to be finished this month, while efforts continue with the aim of raising \$100,000 to complete the restoration and pay for future maintenance.

Originally a blacksmith with a home at Lincoln Square, Col. Bigelow died in debtors' prison at the age of 51 in 1790, not long after independence was achieved.