

Before & After

Rust removed, bullet hole filled, hand-painted, new post.

300th Anniversary Marker, Main St., Northfield, 1930.

PHOTO ESSAY

Restoring Massachusetts' 1930 Tercentenary Signs

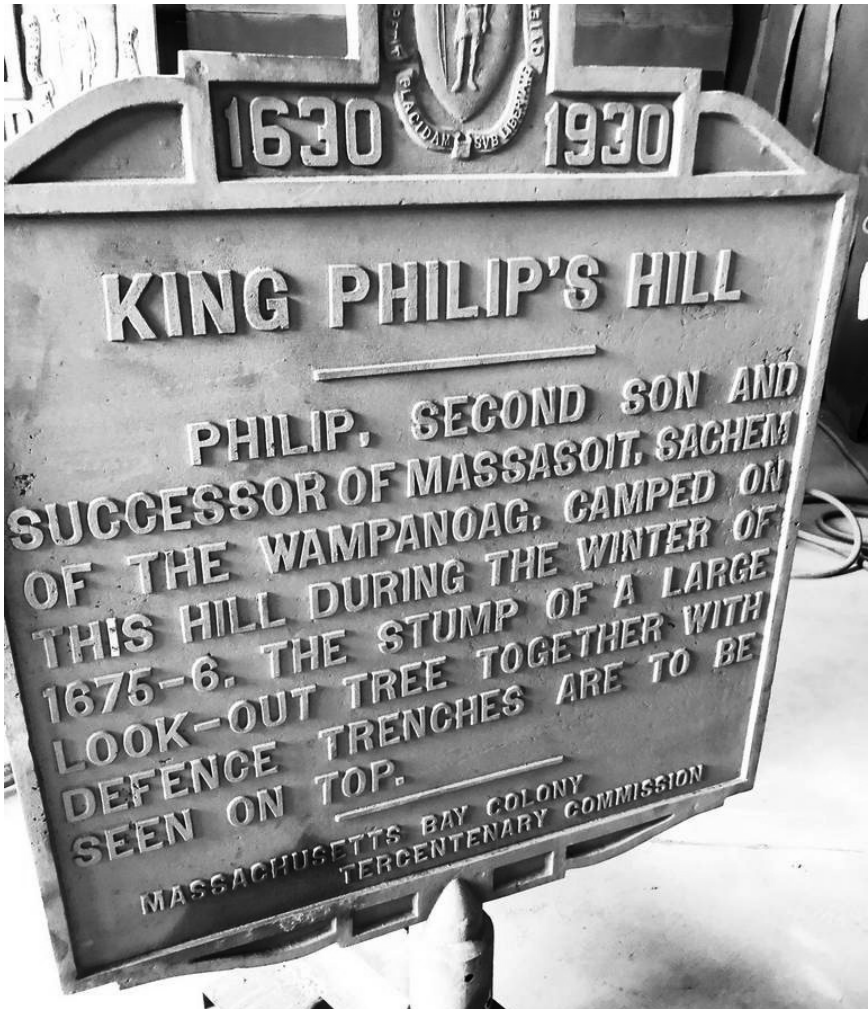
ALESSANDRA FRANK



Editor's Introduction: *The previous article criticized the decision of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) to repair and restore some of the 275 highway markers which had been erected in 1930 to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. These roadside signs memorialized events from the colonial period that were deemed to be of historical significance in 1930. Common sites included the houses of prominent men, the location of the first structure in a town (whether fort, church, house, or market), and colonial pathways. However, the largest single category related to "Indians." Nearly one-third (86) of the roadside signs referenced the presence or actions of the colony's Native American inhabitants. Most, however, marked the site of an alleged and seemingly unprovoked attack or other atrocity inflicted upon innocent colonists. Thus, instead of creating an opportunity to re-envision the past, the MassDOT decided to refurbish these signs, giving these historical distortions a new lease on life. Despite this critique, the process through which the signs were restored is fascinating. Alessandra Frank is a WSU graduate student in Social Work.*

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Massachusetts' tercentenary markers stand scattered across the Commonwealth. Made of cast iron, they weigh from 165 to 200 pounds each and measure three feet wide and between 35 and 45 inches high. In 2019, MassDOT restored twenty-one of the original markers. Among the two companies hired for the restoration project was Cassidy Brothers of Rowley, Massachusetts. Founded in 1965 by Maurice Cassidy, Cassidy Brothers remains one of the foremost New England blacksmith shops. This photo essay reveals the steps in each sign's painstaking restoration.



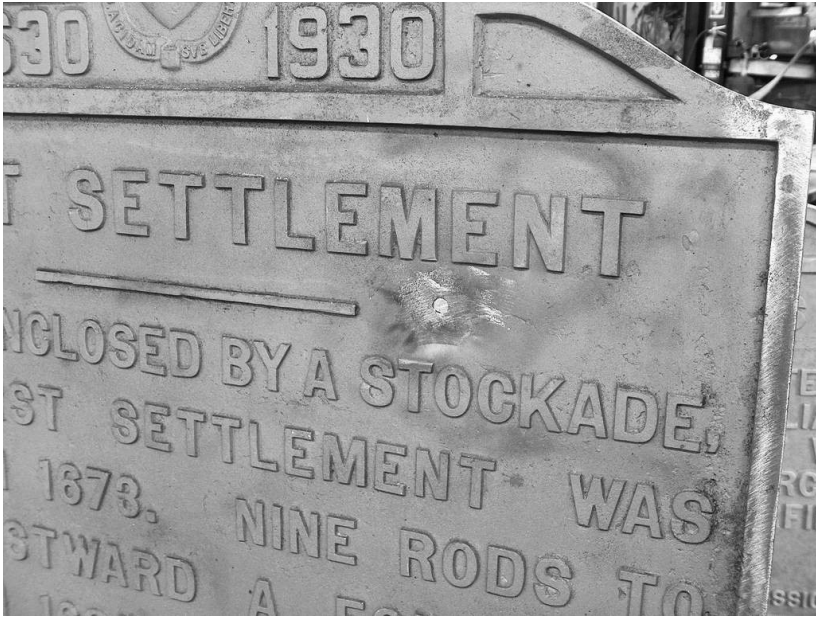
Paint & Rust Removed for Inspection & Repair

After the signs were removed from their posts, they were transported to Cassidy Brothers' shop in Rowley, MA. They were first checked for lead paint, but none was found. They were then sand-blasted (a misnomer for the process, which actually uses particles of ground-up steel). The blasting removed any remaining rust and paint scale.



The blasting process revealed many hairline cracks that had been covered by paint. Imperfections in the signs' surface were ground down with an angle-grinder and then re-filled through a process known as brazing. Below: Defects in the lettering were corrected using a brazing rod.





This sign had a bullet hole, which was similarly filled with a brazing rod.

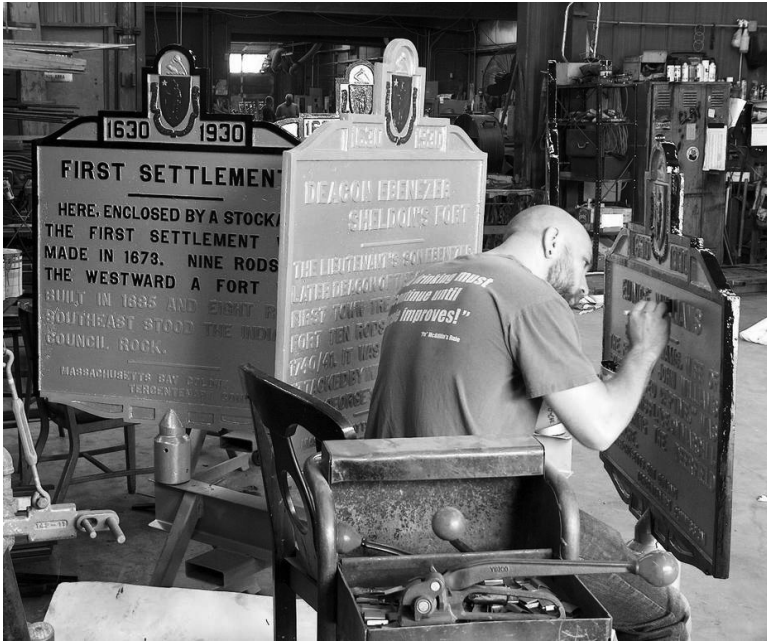


Leo Levesque uses a brazing rod to pour molten metal into the cracks. The surface was then ground down again, and sent back to the sand-blaster, so that the sign's surface would have an even texture.

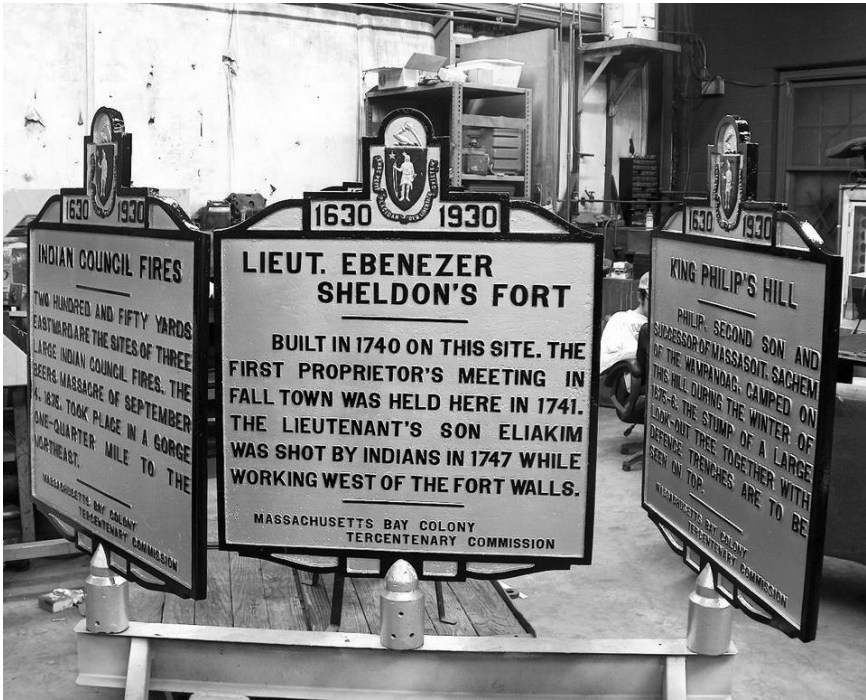


The signs were then sent back to the shop to be hand painted. A two-part marine epoxy primer was used for the base coat—the same type of paint that the US Navy uses for its ships. The signs were then painted silver with a topcoat. Below: John Francavilla hand paints the black lettering.





The Massachusetts seal at the top of the signs was hand painted, using a state-approved blue and gold paint to match the colors of the original signs.



Renovated Signs Ready for Installation

The completed signs are ready for re-installation. The final cost of the restoration was approximately \$10,000 per sign. Because each sign required such fastidious hand-detail to restore, labor costs were the primary expenditure. New signs with re-imagined text would require the creation of completely new molds, into which cast iron would be poured and set. According to Maurice Cassidy, founder and owner of Cassidy Bros. blacksmith shop, the cost to create new cast iron molds for new signs could be upwards of \$20,000 per sign. To replace all 275 signs, the bill could come to \$5.5 million. As they stand today, these refurbished signs are poised to last in their current pristine condition for 25-35 years.

HJM

Special thanks to Maurice Cassidy for his time and willingness to share both documentation photos and the details of the restoration process.