

Colonial Navy of Massachusetts Marks 250th Anniversary with Fife and Drum Performance at State House

Gabriella Galbadis

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BOSTON, MA.,--- In celebration of the 250th anniversary of the Colonial Navy of Massachusetts, the Fife and Drums Corps brought history to life with their performance this morning at the Massachusetts State House, reminding the audience of the state's role in American heritage.

Governor Maura Healey and Lieutenant Governor Kimberly Driscoll presented the Colonial Navy of Massachusetts with a citation to recognize their historical significance and contributions.

“I know that there's nothing like the Fife and Drum Corps to get us in the mood for the revolutionary spirit and celebration of America 250 and Massachusetts 250 which will continue this year,” Healey said.

On December 29, 1775, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress formed the Colonial Navy to protect its coasts from the British after the Battles of Lexington and Concord. Massachusetts was the first of 11 colonies to do so. It was, by far, the largest Colonial force with over 41 warships.

Healey recognized Massachusetts' leading role in the American Revolution, as the birthplace of the United States Navy as well as the National Guard, the Coast Guard, and the Marines. She praised the Colonial Navy for continuing people's appreciation and reverence for the military.

The Fife and Drums Corps group, active for 250 years, has participated in events across the state, the country, and even internationally. Many current members of the group are descendants of original Colonial Navy members.

The group, consisting of about 20 men and women, stood in Colonial Navy garments. Some wore blue coats lined with medals and tri-cornered hats, while others wore red and white striped shirts, neckerchiefs, and smaller, black hats. Men in the front of the group stood holding flags.

The music from the fifes, which are wooden flutes, and the drums, both snare and bass, echoed triumphantly through the Grand Staircase. With each note, the Colonial Navy spread the pride they have for their history.

The group opened with a sea shanty and performed a variety of different songs with historical significance. A few of them included “The World Turned Upside Down,” an English ballad that legend says was played by the British when they surrendered at Yorktown, “Garryowen,” the theme song of the 7th Cavalry Regiment, a U.S. Army unit famous for its role in the American West and the “Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

The audience consisted of about 45 people and also some press members. Those watching bounced their heads and swayed to the beat of the tunes.

“It was very emotional, actually,” said audience member, Joseph Rebelo. Rebelo is a retired broadcaster. “It is important to preserve the history ... and honor the sacrifices that those have taken upon themselves to provide what we have in the future.”

Representatives from Senate offices and the House of Representatives also presented the group with citations in recognition of all of the work that they do to conserve history.

Pamela Burlingame, the commodore and commanding officer of the Colonial Navy of Massachusetts, said she was honored to receive these citations, especially from the governor.

“To have the governor's recognition of our group and what we do, and to support us in the things that we do is just amazing,” Burlingame said. “She gets her voice heard, so it’s good to get that out there.”

When asked about why these performances are so important, Burlingame emphasized the value in honoring the past.

“Especially in these days, we find actually that as time goes on, a lot of our history can get lost ... It's great to get people re-energized and re-interested in history,” Burlingame said.

As they marched out in lines of two to “Frosty the Snowman,” the Colonial Navy left the State House echoing with holiday cheer and a renewed appreciation for the history of the nation and of Massachusetts.