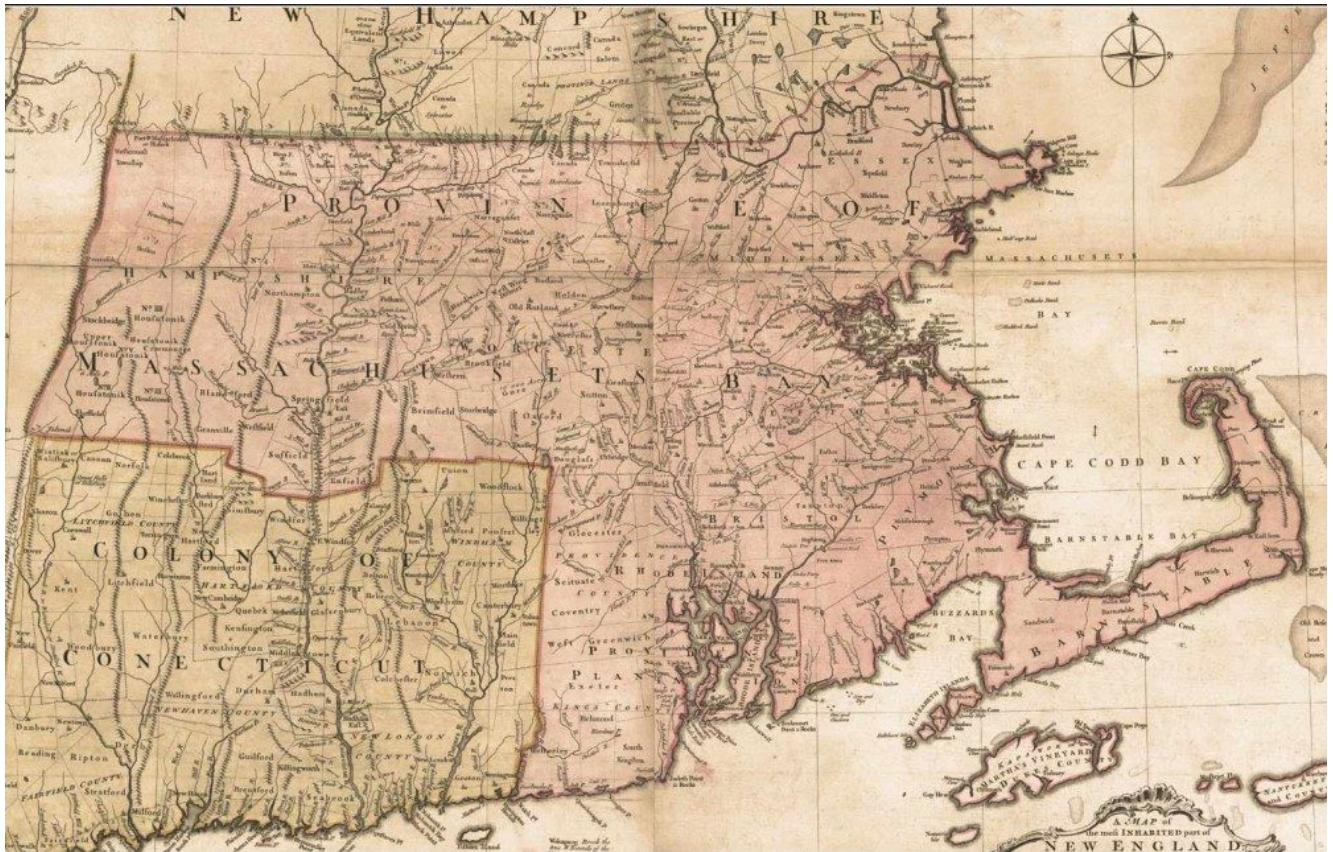# Why Do We Observe Patriots' Day? A Candid, Informal Stroll Down History Lane

If you were to randomly ask many locals on the street to explain why Patriots' Day is a state holiday and so many have it off, they would struggle. I mean, ask them without allowing them to access their smartphones.

Most know that it has something to do with the military or soldiers. They aren't exactly sure if it's a sort of Memorial Day where we remember those who have fallen in service, or if it's something similar to it. So, why do we celebrate the holiday? Does everyone in the country celebrate it? Is it a celebration of New England's Football team?

It seems fitting to ask since today's political climate brings up the conversation about what it means to be a patriot or patriotic. For some, the definition of patriot or patriotism is something that is flexible and can be defined however one wants, e.g. I've seen people say, that you can burn a flag or step on it and it doesn't mean you aren't patriotic.

Don't worry — I abhor politics and am not going in that direction. No one needs to be told where to go for a political argument which is always divisive, seldom civil, and rarely, if ever, fruitful: it's everywhere. So, let's just keep it historic in nature.

Patriots' Day is not a national holiday, and, in fact, only a few of the New England states celebrate. Four states in total celebrate — one just started celebrating it this year and one is encouraged. Only Massachusetts, Maine, Connecticut (if you consider them as part of New England — they support the Yankees) started this year, and the non-New England state (duh) of Wisconsin, observe Patriots' Day.

What do these 5 states have to do with one another? How are they connected to this holiday and why don't the other 45 states celebrate? Is the "other" Patriot Day in September related? What's going on here? Can I get a refresh on my cup of Joe? Does coffee refills even exist any more?

Patriots' Day, which is celebrated in April, is not the one observed in September as a National Day of Service and

Remembrance as well as, a tribute to the people killed in the September 11 attacks of 2001. Today's Patriots' Day primarily came about because of a very important historical event: the Battles of Lexington and Concord which, if you paid attention in history class growing up, were the first battles of the American Revolutionary War. That happened on April 19, 1775.

But, wait. April 19th? Then why are we celebrating today, April 16th? Three New England states — only one starting this year — random Wisconsin and an "encouraged" Florida, are the only states who celebrate a holiday on April 16th that commemorates an event that happened on April 19th. Got it? Again, what's going on here?!
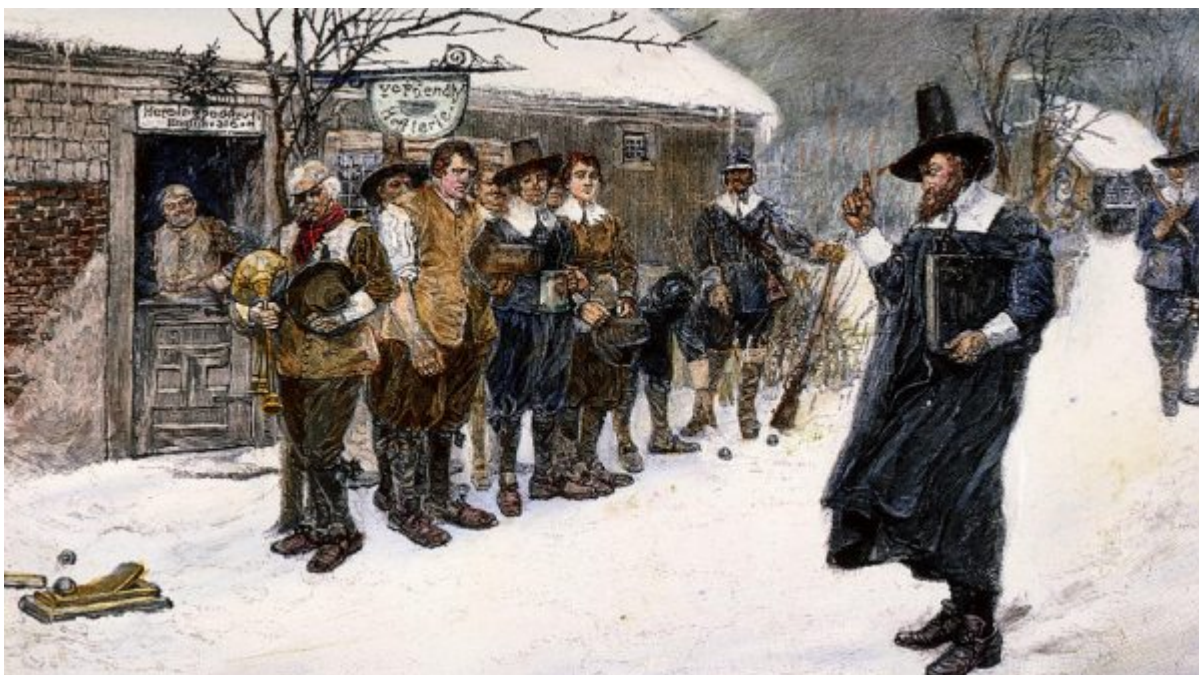
Well, state politics is what happened here. Mainly the kind for which Massachusetts has always been (in)famous. The state that has had a long love affair with complicated and bogged down rules and regulations was excited about a chance to add some red tape and complications.

Well, remember where I said, "Today's Patriots' Day primarily

came about because of a very important historical event…"? Well, Patriots' Day didn't exist until 1894 — a full 119 years after the Battles of Lexington and Concord. Believe it or not, since 1670 Massachusetts celebrated Fast Day:

"A day of public fasting and prayer…that had its origin in days of prayer and repentance proclaimed in the early days of the American colonies by Royal Governors, often before the spring planting. It was observed by church attendance, fasting, and abstinence from secular activities." -Wikipedia

Come 1894 the Battle of Lexington and Concord became the Battle between Lexington and Concord. The Lexington Historical Society got the idea to declare April 19th "Lexington Day" so they asked Massachusetts State Legislature to do just that. However, Concord town officials thought "Well, that's a bunch of cockamamie. Youse guys was sleeping when the Redcoats began shooting at us." Let's call it "Concord Day." The rest of the nation just wondered what Massachusetts townees were going on about and couldn't care less about the day at all.

The 38th Governor of Massachusetts, Frederic T. Greenhalge, stopped the bickering and abuse of grammar by proclaiming April 19th, Patriots' Day. There's some irony here: Greenhalge

was English, born and raised. So, while England had a hell of a time with the Battle of Lexington and Concord — they were thrashed, or in Twitter-speak, "BRUTALLY DESTROYED" — it took an Englishman to put an end to the Battle Between Lexington and Concord.

Greenhalge's decision to make April, 19th as the special day was chosen for two reasons beyond the battle in 1775: it marked the first bloodshed of the American Civil War in the Baltimore during which four members of the Massachusetts militia were slain and 36 injured. Sorry, Puritans…Fast Day got the boot.

So, why doesn't Maryland celebrate it? Well, that would make too much sense and we can't have that. Florida wants to, Wisconsin does and neither make much sense (yet), and Maryland should but shouldn't. Got it, again?

That very first Patriots' Day celebration turned out to be quite a pleasant spring day…unlike today's weather. So, people came out to celebrate and decided to head to Lexington and walk and ride to Boston. Hey, it's only 12-13 miles and you

could drink booze the whole way. Everyone counted themselves in.

It would be this walk and horse ride together that would be the inspiration for the Boston Marathon and when the 1896 Olympics rolled around…well, the rest is history. Pardon the pun. Someone connected th Olympics to Patriots' Day and the first Boston Marathon was in 1897. The tragedy of the first Boston Marathon was that a local didn't win, a New Yorker did.

In 1907, Maine who was actually part of Massachusetts until the Missouri Compromise of 1820, decided to join in. They clearly just wanted an excuse to have a three-day weekend. Wisconsin came out of nowhere and decided that they also wanted a three-day weekend and in 2001, they jumped on board. My guess is that they either really like their history or are just filled to the brim with patriotism. Any patriot is more than welcome to join in.

Connecticut felt bad since they were considered part of New England, and Wisconsin made them look bad. So they joined in in 2017 they declared April 19th, Patriots' Day too, and this year will be their first. Florida is a strange bird — just read a news headline, so your guess on why it is encouraged and what exactly that means, is as good as mine. Perhaps they are just patriotic too.

So, why are we celebrating on April 16th this year? In 1969, Massachusetts and Maine decided to officially observe Patriots' Day on the third Monday in April. I'm not even going to get into the red tape behind that, nor will I get into the other spelling "Patriot's Day," which Maine uses.

Finally, if Wisconsin celebrates and Florida kind of celebrates, how come Vermont and New Hampshire don't? I don't have the answer for that one.

Either way, the Battles of Lexington and Concord in 1775 were historically important in the sense that it was the beginning of the end for British Rule. We owe a debt to the casualties of the men who took up muskets in the first battle for our independence: 49 killed, 39 wounded, and 5 missing.

Those brave men felt that certain freedoms and liberties were worth fighting, and even dying for. If it wasn't for like-minded individuals we may still be a British territory. So, whatever it is you decide to do today, or however you decide to commemorate Patriots' Day, just pause for a moment and thank those 49 killed, 39 wounded, and 5 missing. For a day off, for fighting for our eventual independence, by dying for their principles.

Either way, they made the ultimate sacrifice for a dream of a better tomorrow for their fellow Americans. I'm grateful.