

National Trust for Historic Preservation Names Minute Man National Historical Park and Environs, *Concord, Lexington, Lincoln and Bedford*, One of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places

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CONTACT: Marty Pepper Aisenberg, Save Our Heritage, 978-369-6662
National Trust Office of Communications, 202-588-6141

Heavy air traffic, unchecked noise and visual intrusions from a busy regional airport are taking a devastating toll on many important landmarks – especially this national park on the site where the American Revolution began.

Washington, D.C. – The **National Trust for Historic Preservation** today named Minute Man National Historical Park and its environs, the historic towns of Concord, Lexington, Lincoln and Bedford, to its 2003 list of *America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places*, due to the past and threatened future expansion of the adjacent Hanscom Field civilian airport.

The park includes the Old North Bridge, where “the shot heard round the world” was fired on April 19, 1775, and the historic Battle Road, scene of that day’s bloody running battle from Concord to Boston, which marked the beginning of the American Revolution. Other historic sites in the four surrounding communities include Thoreau’s Walden Pond and Walden Woods, widely acknowledged as the birthplace of the American environmental movement; Orchard House, where Louisa May Alcott wrote *Little Women*; Emerson’s Old Manse; Hawthorne’s Wayside; and over 1,000 other National Historic Register sites, all located within three miles of the civilian airport at Hanscom Field.

These nationally important sites, drawing more than 1.6 million visitors a year from around the world, have been heavily impacted by the tripling of corporate jet flights since 1996 and the recent opening of the airport to commercial airlines. The Massachusetts Port Authority, which owns and operates the civilian airport, has actively promoted this growth, despite unanimous community opposition. As New England’s second busiest airport, Hanscom has long subjected the park and the other historic sites to increasing levels of noise, ground traffic and visual intrusions. Massport’s expansion plans would dramatically worsen these problems, and the increased vehicle traffic would require major structural changes to the Battle Road – the only public access road to the airport – such as additional lanes and traffic rotaries, which would destroy its historic authenticity.

“It is time for the unnecessary commercialization and expansion of Hanscom Field to come to a halt,” said **Anna Winter**, executive director of Save Our Heritage, the citizens’ group that nominated the area for the designation. “Responsible and enforceable guidelines for the operation of the airport are essential to prevent noise, traffic and pollution from overwhelming these vitally important places.”

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“Minute Man National Historical Park and the towns surrounding it include more than 1,000 sites of enormous historic significance,” said **Richard Moe**, president of the National Trust. “This is not an urban area – in fact, most of the historic sites are located in undeveloped or sparsely developed areas. The natural quiet of this rural setting is an integral part of the visitor experience, an experience that is shattered by the constant sound of jets blaring overhead.”

Members of Save Our Heritage’s national advisory board agreed with these assessments. “Concord is being threatened by the expansion of a nearby airport. And this expansion has to be stopped,” said Pulitzer Prize-winning historian **David McCullough**. “Once the spell, the spirit, of these treasured places is violated or destroyed, they’re never the same again. You can’t bring them back.”

“The expansion of Hanscom Field is one of the worst threats to historic Walden Woods,” said recording artist and Walden Woods Project founder **Don Henley**. “If we can’t protect Thoreau’s Walden, the birthplace of the environmental movement, we risk losing all our national parks and all our monuments of freedom to commercial development and corporate greed.”

And historian **Douglas Brinkley**, director of the Eisenhower Center for American Studies at the University of New Orleans, said, “We talk of defending freedom and democracy around the world, but we are doing very little to safeguard the very cradle of those ideals here at home.”

Documentary filmmaker **Ken Burns** hailed the designation as a breakthrough. “Now that the National Trust for Historic Preservation has recognized the serious threat airport expansion poses to so many irreplaceable historic treasures, Massport and the state government must finally come to understand that the preservation of these resources is not a local issue, but a matter of significant national concern – just as the proposed Disney theme park at the Manassas battlegrounds was,” he said. “In light of Massport’s aggressive plans for a commercial/corporate jetport at Hanscom, as revealed in its latest environmental report, concrete action to protect these sites from airport expansion must proceed without delay.”

Added actor **Christopher Reeve**, “We’re already ruining so much of this country by our carelessness. This above all others, the place where we began, must not be destroyed. If you don’t care about the place where our country was created, then what else should you care about?”

“We will be calling upon all concerned parties to work together in the coming year to find positive, creative solutions,” said Save Our Heritage’s **Anna Winter**. “Possibilities include federal legislation, like the law that currently regulates sightseeing flights over national parks; an enforceable agreement among the towns, Massport, and the FAA to limit airport growth; or transferring Hanscom from Massport to an alternate authority that would be accountable to the communities and that would have the protection of historic sites expressly included in its mission statement.”

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a private, nonprofit membership organization dedicated to protecting the irreplaceable. It provides leadership, education and advocacy to save America’s diverse historic places and revitalize communities. For more information, visit the Trust’s web site at www.nationaltrust.org.

Save Our Heritage is a nonprofit citizens’ group based in Concord, Massachusetts whose mission is to protect the birthplace of the American Revolution, the cradle of the American environmental movement, and the home of the American literary renaissance. For more information, visit Save Our Heritage’s web site at www.saveourheritage.com, or call Anna West Winter at 978-369-6662.

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