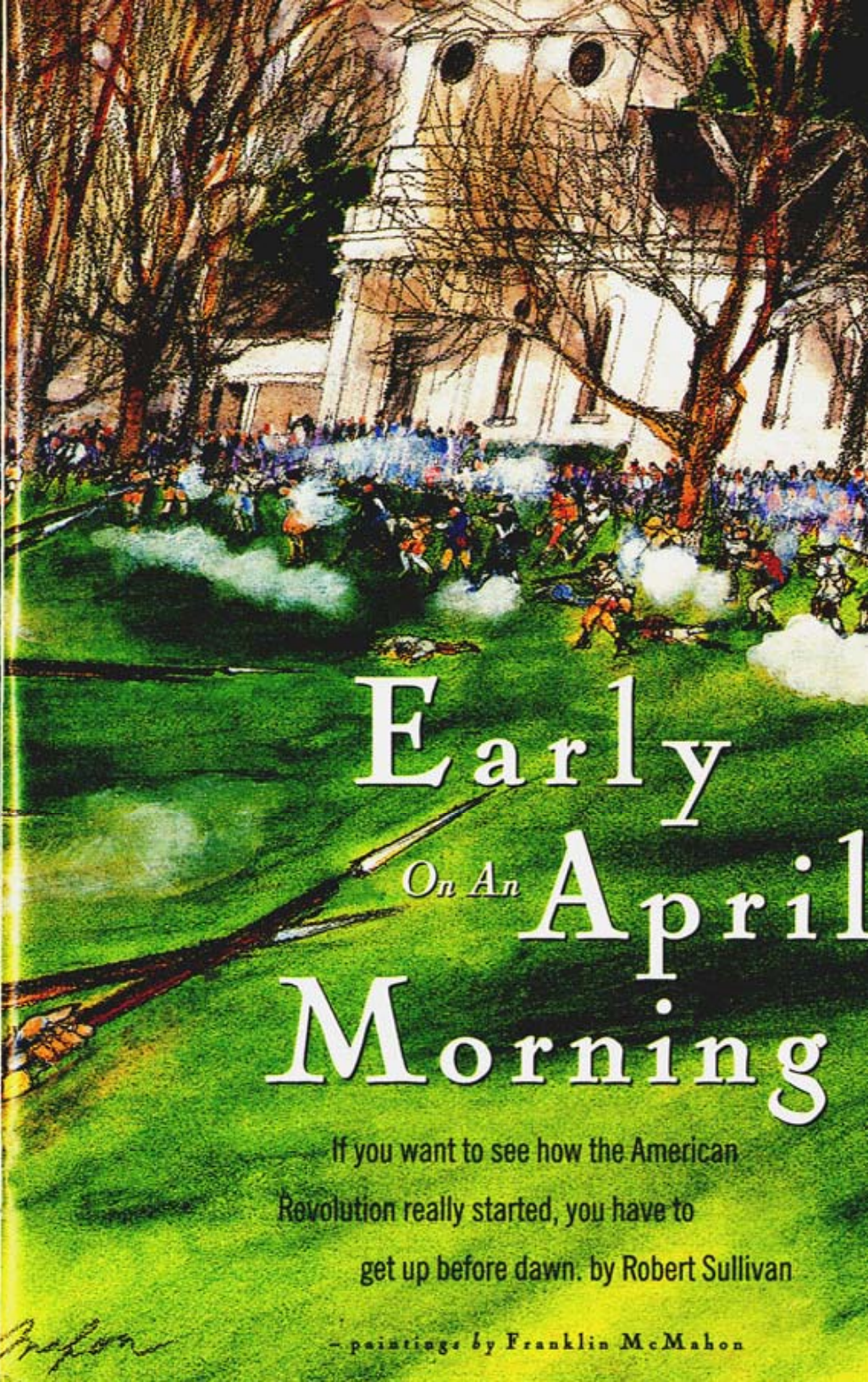




Thousands watch as
redcoats and patriots
reenact the clash on
Lexington Green.



Early *On An* April Morning

If you want to see how the American
Revolution really started, you have to
get up before dawn. by Robert Sullivan

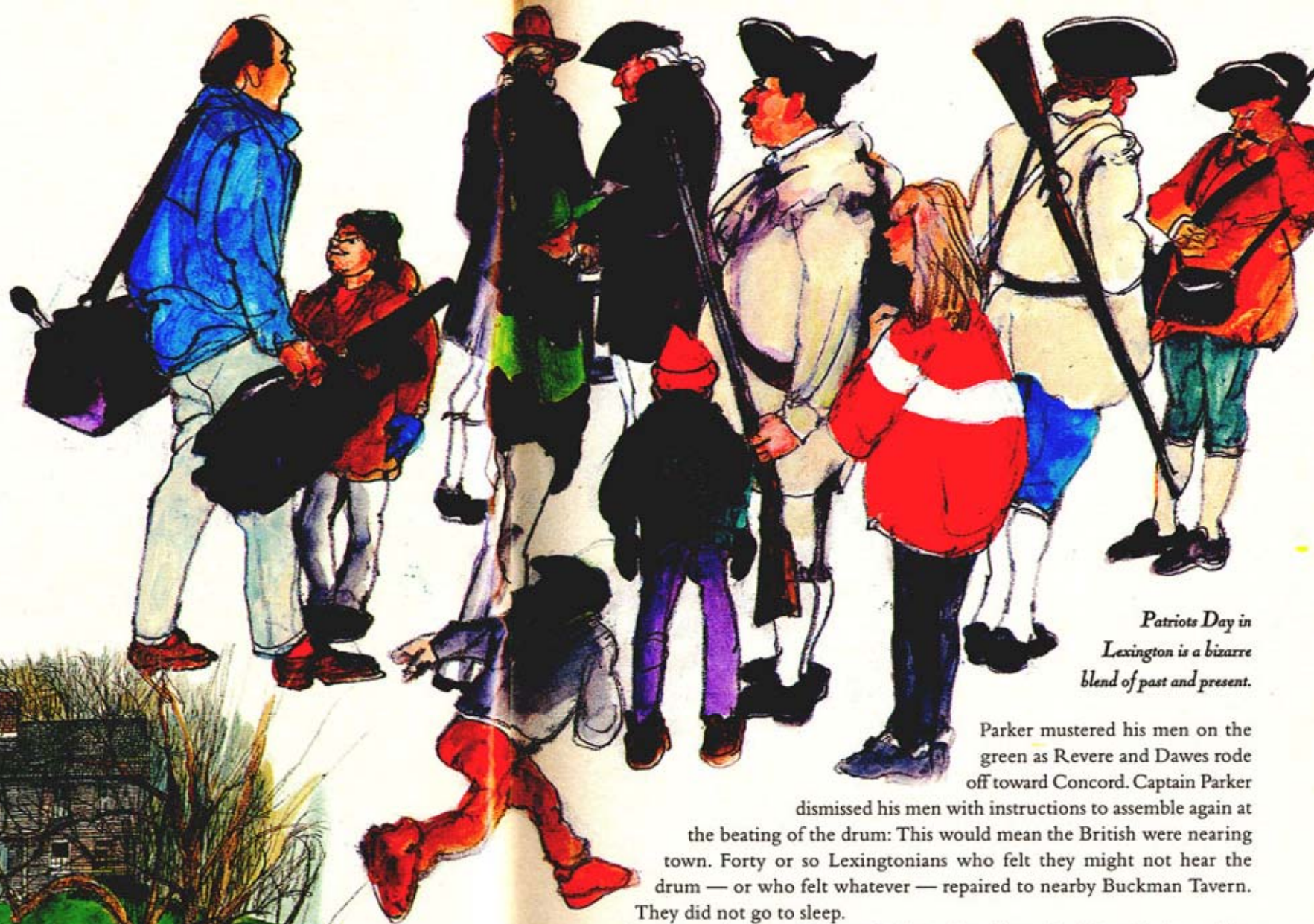
— paintings by Franklin McMahon

Once the
day

would past

Meriam's
Corner,

there was NO
turning back.



*Patriots Day in
Lexington is a bizarre
blend of past and present.*

Parker mustered his men on the green as Revere and Dawes rode off toward Concord. Captain Parker dismissed his men with instructions to assemble again at the beating of the drum: This would mean the British were nearing town. Forty or so Lexingtonians who felt they might not hear the drum — or who felt whatever — repaired to nearby Buckman Tavern.

They did not go to sleep.

Fast-forward now to 4:30 A.M., 220 years later. I've walked from Buckman Tavern to a vantage point near the rope on the southeast corner of the green. The crowd is ten to 20 deep all around the triangular patch of grass. It's a nonjostling, good-natured, all-ages crowd. A small woman of perhaps 75 years, wearing a purple wool coat and a pink knit cap, moves into place by my elbow. I offer her the space just in front, and she thanks me. "I've lived in this town for 40 years," she says, and I think: Oh no, I'm going to hear about 40 years of reenactments. "So I figured it was about time I got up and saw this damned thing!"



*The house still stands
at Meriam's Corner,
where the war began.*

This is so marvelously akin to the thinking that brought me to this place that I say, "Me too!" She looks at me, determines for a certainty that I'm not much more than 40, takes me for a nut, and turns to face the green.

That guy with the horse comes blowing into town at this point, hootin' and hollerin'. I realize that he's the scout who has come to warn

Did they know what had just occurred? Surely it was all a horrible surprise...

us that the British are imminent. The game's afoot! The drum is beaten and minutemen pour forth from the tavern and surrounding white-clapboard houses. The men line up in a double row just as a glimmer of blue sky cracks the darkness to the east. "They stood there," wrote the historian, "having the destiny of the country in their hands."

Major Pitcairn's lobsterbacks stride boldly up Main Street and assemble on the green, opposite the minutemen. "Stand your ground!" shouts Captain Parker to his authentically ragtag and constantly shifting troops. "Don't fire unless fired upon! But if they mean to have a war, let it begin here!"

Pitcairn confronts Parker's men: "Lay down your arms, you damned rebels, and disperse!"

They do neither, and suddenly, from somewhere, a shot rings out. In truth, no one knows who fired first, and the Lexington production does not seek to answer the question.

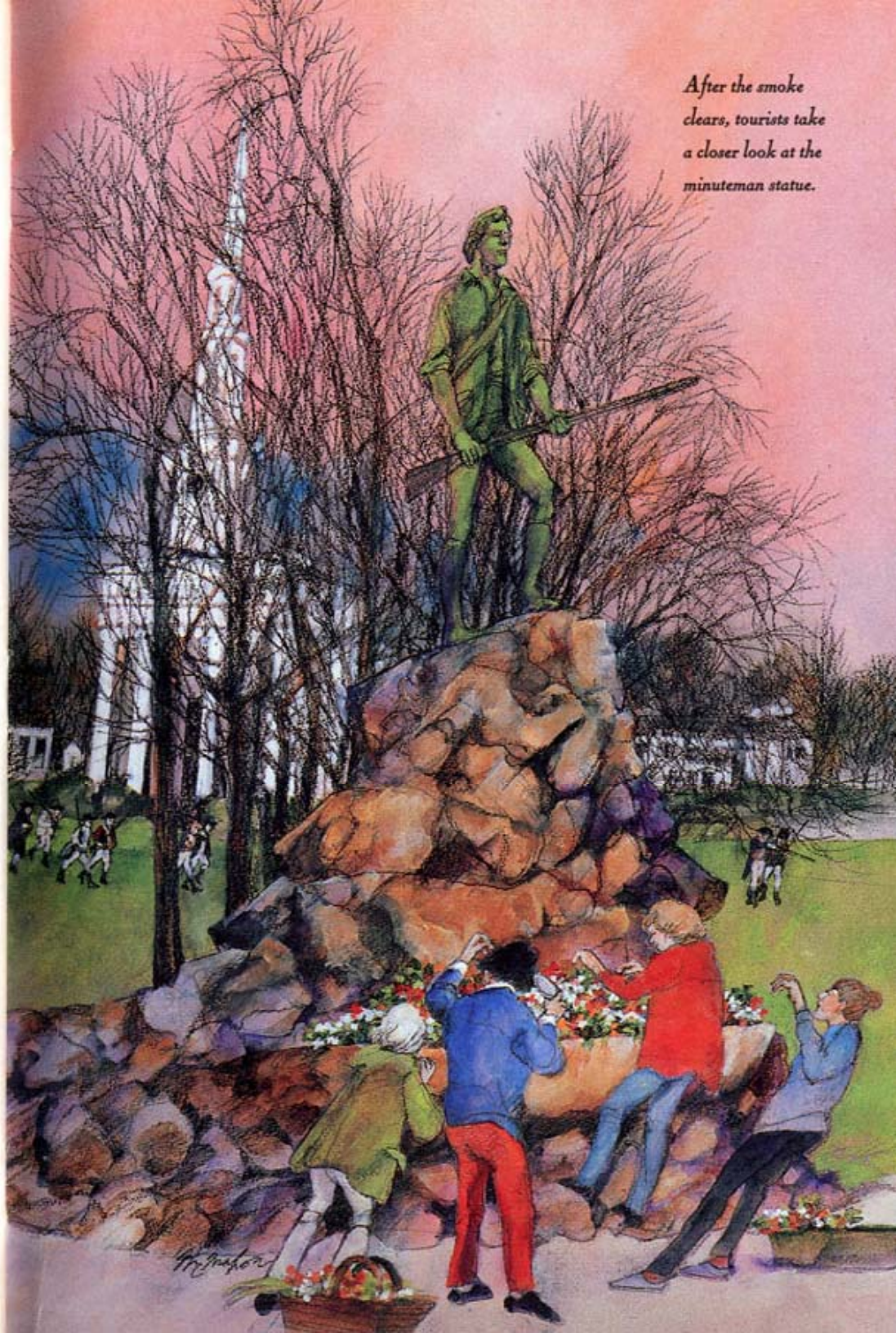
The British charge with bayonets leveled. It's a melee; there's shouting and smoke, and it really seems, in the grayness of dawn, dark and frightening. It's over in a flash; moments after the first shot, the women of Lexington are on the green tending to the dead — there are eight — and wounded. The British are marching out of town, on their way to Concord. We who watch this cast our gaze back elevenscore years and wonder: Did they know what had just occurred? Surely it was all a horrible surprise. Surely they were scared.

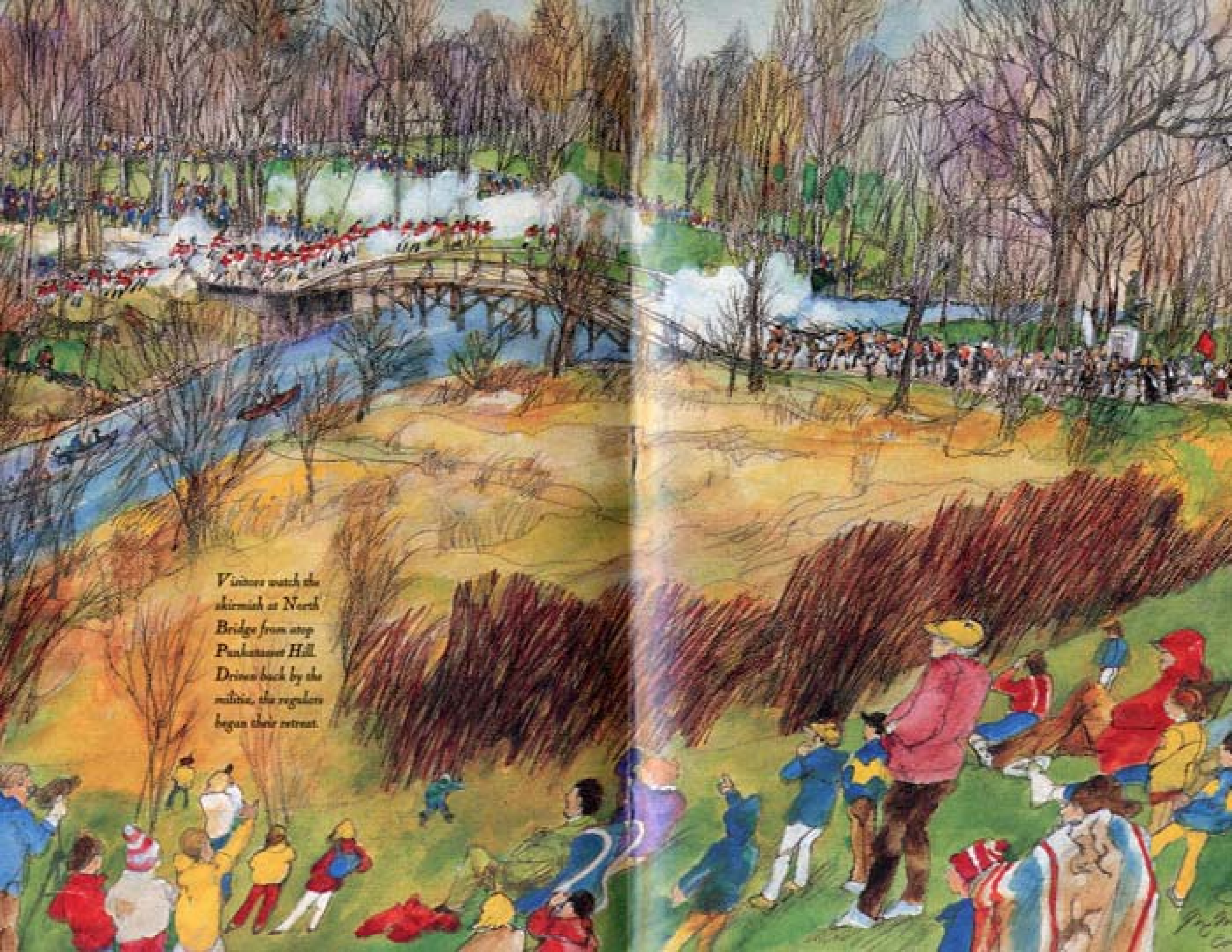
"Paul Revere" arrives to begin a day of bloody confrontation.

It takes a while to shake off these somber considerations, for the Lexington reenactment is so elaborate and well staged that it has moved us. But after a while I am walking across the green with hundreds of others, reading the plaques, looking at the statues, as the sun rises.

The British arrived in the center of Concord (continued on page 126)

After the smoke clears, tourists take a closer look at the minuteman statue.

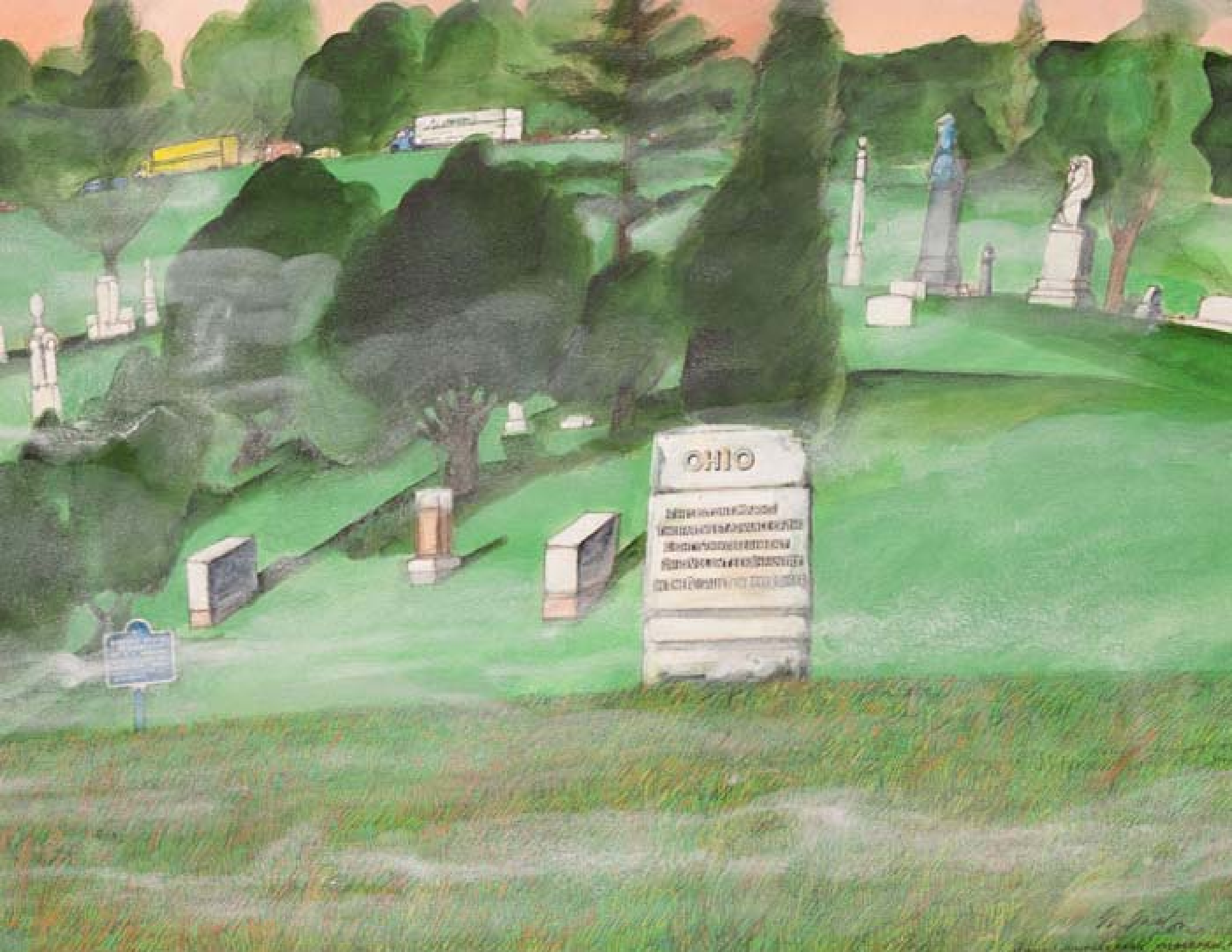


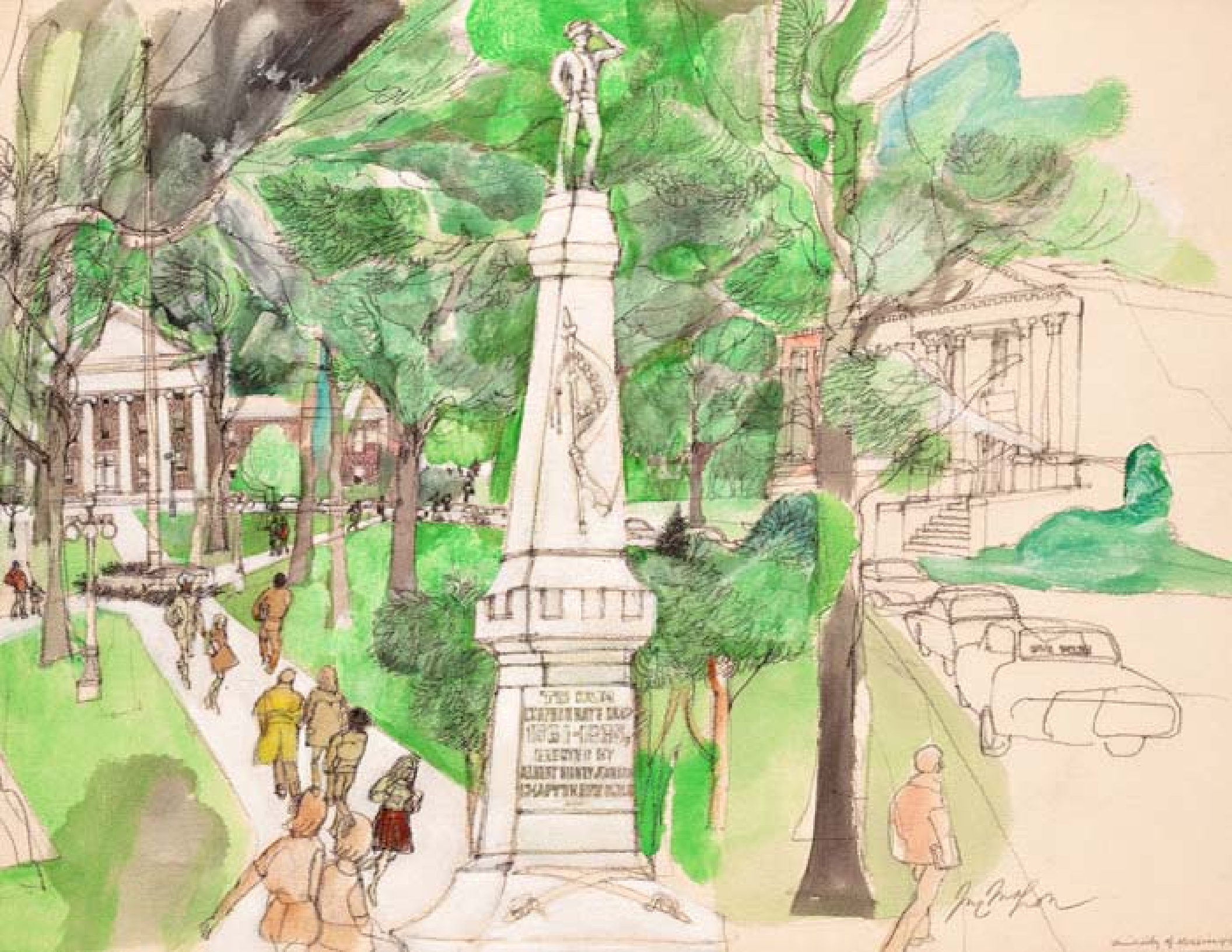


*Victims watch the
skirmish at North
Bridge from atop
Pemberton Hill.
Driven back by the
militia, the regulars
began their retreat.*

1776







THE HIGH
CAPTAIN RAY'S GRAP
1863-1865,
GIVEN BY
ALBERT BERRY JONES
CHAPTER 1000

John P. Jones

University of Mississippi

