

A new cannon for Plymouth: Military group donates replica of Guernsey Falcon for Burial Hill

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For 65 years, two cannon stood guard on Burial Hill, ceremoniously protecting the site of the first fort of the Plymouth Colony. Next spring, if all goes as planned, a replica of one of them will be returned to its watch position above Town Square.

The Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company of Massachusetts delivered the newly forged cannon to Plymouth on Thursday. Town officials and state legislators were on hand to take possession of the 1,500-pound bronze ordinance, which will be stored at Pilgrim Hall Museum until the dedication ceremony next year.

“This is like payment for a job well done,” said John Mitchell, who has spent the last 10 years working toward this moment. “The idea of a replica cannon was first proposed in 2010. We started planning it six years ago. Now it’s here. I’m on cloud nine!”

Mitchell is a member of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company and also serves on the Plymouth 400 committee. Several people within the organization – the oldest chartered military company on this side of the globe – played parts in making the cannon happen, but it has been his decade-long dream to make it a reality.

“We were an all-volunteer militia in 1638, and we still are today,” he said. “From the oldest chartered military organization in the Western Hemisphere to the oldest continuously operating public museum in the United States, we are honored and humbled for this partnership, and we hope history will someday reflect back and recognize this wonderful and historic day.”

Two cannon were placed on Burial Hill in 1920 to mark Plymouth's 300th anniversary. They were sent to Plymouth as a gesture of friendship by the Honourable Artillery Company of England, from which the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company descends. Founded in 1537, the British group is the second oldest chartered military organization in the world.

In 1985, Plymouth returned one of the cannon to Guernsey, where it originally defended a castle in the mid-16th century. During World War II, the island off the coast of England was occupied by the Germans, who confiscated all cannon at the castle and melted them down for military purposes.

Also in 1985, Plymouth took stock of the remaining piece – a minion cast in 1544 – and realized it was too valuable to leave exposed on Burial Hill. It was transferred to Pilgrim Hall Museum, where it resides today.

The Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company, which has historic ties to Plymouth, decided the town needed to have one cannon back on the hill above Town Square. The group worked with the Honourable Artillery Company in England to get exact measurements of the Guernsey Falcon, as the returned cannon is known, and commissioned Gillmor Ordinance of Ohio to cast a new one in bronze.

The Massachusetts company undertook the project and raised the funds necessary to construct an accurate reproduction. It was supposed to have been installed on Burial Hill during Plymouth's 400th anniversary commemoration, but those plans have been delayed because of the coronavirus pandemic. Instead, the cannon will reside at Pilgrim Hall Museum until a proper unveiling can be conducted.

"This is a proud day for Plymouth," Pilgrim Hall Executive Director Donna Curtin said after it was moved into the museum. "I'm already looking forward to next year when we can have the ceremony to dedicate this wonderful cannon on Burial Hill."

Michele Pecoraro, executive director of Plymouth 400 Inc., echoed those sentiments. "We are grateful to the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company for donating the Guernsey Cannon to Plymouth. I can't wait until we can have a proper dedication for this gift."