

Evacuation Day (Massachusetts)

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Evacuation Day is a holiday observed on March 17 in Suffolk County, Massachusetts (which includes the cities of Boston, Chelsea, and Revere, and the town of Winthrop)^[1] and also by the public schools in Somerville, Massachusetts.^[2] The holiday commemorates the evacuation of British forces from the city of Boston following the Siege of Boston, early in the American Revolutionary War. Schools and government offices (including some^[3] Massachusetts state government offices located in Suffolk County) are closed. If March 17 falls on a weekend, schools and government offices are closed on the following Monday in observance. It is the same day as Saint Patrick's Day, a coincidence that played a role in the establishment of the holiday.^[4]

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Historical background

The 11-month siege of Boston ended when the Continental Army, under the command of George Washington, fortified Dorchester Heights in early March 1776 with cannons captured at Ticonderoga. British General William Howe, whose garrison and navy were threatened by these positions, was forced to decide between attack and retreat. To prevent what could have been a repeat of the Battle of Bunker Hill, Howe decided to retreat, withdrawing from Boston to Nova Scotia on March 17, 1776.

The British evacuation was Washington's first victory of the war. It was also a huge morale boost for the Thirteen Colonies, as the city where the rebellion began was the first to be liberated.

Establishment of the holiday

While Saint Patrick's Day parades have been held in Boston since 1876, Evacuation Day was not declared a holiday in the city until 1901,^[5] amid interest in local history that also resulted in the construction of the Dorchester Heights Monument. The state made it a holiday in Suffolk County in 1938.^[5] The large Irish

Evacuation Day



Engraving depicting the evacuation of Boston

Observed by	Suffolk County, Massachusetts and some state offices located there Somerville, Massachusetts public schools
Celebrations	Commemoration ceremony at Dorchester Heights Saint Patrick's Day festivities
Date	March 17
Next time	17 March 2018
Frequency	annual
Related to	Saint Patrick's Day

population of Boston at that time played a role in the establishment of the holiday.^[6] A 1941 law establishing the holiday in Suffolk County was signed in both black and green ink.^[4]

Observance activities

Evacuation Day activities in the areas that observe the holiday are limited. Most events of note, like the annual parade and politicians' breakfast in South Boston, are dominated by celebrations of Irish culture. The parade is officially designated the Saint Patrick's Day and Evacuation Day Parade. The Allied War Veterans of South Boston mark the day with a ceremony on Dorchester Heights.^[7] Since 1992, the participation of gay and lesbian people in the parade has been disputed, and was the subject of the 1995 U.S. Supreme Court case *Hurley v. Irish-American Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Group of Boston*. Mayor Thomas Menino boycotted the parade every year he was in office, in protest of the exclusion of GLB marchers.^[8]

Another local holiday observing an event in the American Revolutionary War is Bunker Hill Day. State workers outside Suffolk County are allowed to choose any two days off in lieu of celebrating Evacuation Day and Bunker Hill Day on the observance days. The two holidays are generally not observed by the private businesses. In Charlestown, where the Battle of Bunker Hill took place, there are week-long celebrations culminating in a road race and a parade.^[9] Some government services remain in operation, such as trash pickup in the City of Boston^[10] and all state Registry of Motor Vehicle offices. The MBTA runs a normal schedule but, due to special events, prohibits bicycles on the subway.^[11]



A Revolutionary War reenactor at Boston's 2008 St. Patrick's Day parade

Moves to eliminate holiday

In 2010, the state legislature debated eliminating Evacuation Day and Bunker Hill Day as official holidays, citing the expense of giving state and local workers paid days off.^[12] The state's FY2011 budget requires all state and municipal offices in Suffolk County be open on both days.^[13]

See also

- Patriots' Day
- Massacre Day
- Evacuation Day (New York)

Notes

- List of Massachusetts holidays
- Somerville School Calendar
- For example, the RMV offices are all open.
- "With A Signature In Green, St. Patrick's Day Became A Holiday" (<http://www.wbur.org/2010/03/12/evacuation-day-holiday>). March 12, 2010. Retrieved March 15, 2010.

5. Vrabel, p. 241
6. O'Connor, p. 124
7. Ryan, Andrew (March 17, 2009). "Happy Evacuation Day!" (http://www.boston.com/news/local/breaking_news/2009/03/happy_evacuatio.html). *Boston Globe*. Retrieved March 17, 2009.
8. Garrett Quinn (March 7, 2014). "Why are gays excluded from marching in the St. Patrick's Day Parade: A history of Boston's most important parade" (http://www.masslive.com/news/boston/index.ssf/2014/03/your_guide_to_the_south_boston.html). *The Republican*. Retrieved March 10, 2014.
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11. "Bikes on the T" (http://www.mbtta.com/riding_the_t/bikes/). July 2014.
12. "Beacon Hill Roll Call" (<http://www.wickedlocal.com/bedford/news/x2102349834/Beacon-Hill-Roll-Call>). Gatehouse Media. March 11, 2010. Retrieved March 15, 2010.
13. "Commonwealth of Massachusetts FY2011 Budget, Outside Section 5" (http://www.mass.gov/bb/gaa/fy2011/os_11/h5.htm). July 14, 2010. Retrieved August 6, 2010.

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