



Westminster Historical Society NEWSLETTER

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March 2011

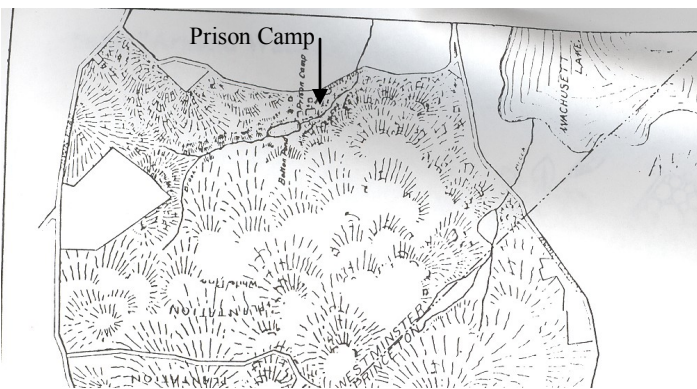
With this issue of the newsletter we begin an effort to print new articles of historical interest. Perhaps you have an event or topic you would like us to research, or maybe you've already got a story to share with our readers. Please let us know!

I relied on several sources for this article on the prison camp, including Warren Sinclair's *Wachusett*, (on sale in our Gift Shop) and photos given to the Society by Eva Coombs Lord, whose father-in-law was a superintendent of the prison camp. I wish Warren Sinclair was still alive. I would have asked him to lend me some of these Wachusett Reservation reports he used in his book; I bet he had them. I had a hard time finding them, even with the miracle of the internet.

Betsy Hannula

THE PRISON CAMP IN WESTMINSTER

Did you know there was a prison camp once located off Bolton Road? It all came about because of the Wachusett Mountain State Reservation Commission which was established in 1899 to secure land on and about Wachusett Mountain in Princeton and Westminster for the Commonwealth. By 1914 the land comprised about 1,500 acres.



This map, taken from Sinclair's book *Wachusett*, shows the prison camp located in the northern part of the Wachusett Reservation in 1915. The road on the north boundary is Bolton; on the west is West Princeton Road, and on the east is Mile Hill Road.



Several buildings were constructed for the fifty prisoners living in the prison camp.

There was a lot of work to be done on this new State Reservation – building roads, repairing the summit house, creating communications systems and establishing ways to prevent forest fires. There were few employees so the commissioners thought of the idea of employing convicts from the Worcester County House of Correction to help get some of the ground work done. One prison official would be put in charge of the experiment.

In the beginning – about 1912 - there were no buildings for shelter so the first superintendent of the prison camp, a Mr. Warner, boarded at Mrs. Luna Black's house at the corner of West Princeton and Lanes Road. The first several prisoners also boarded there. The land chosen for the site was nearby, situated on Bolton Road, north of Bolton Brook, near its outflow from Bolton Pond, directly across from the Niemi farm.

In his book *Wachusett*, Sinclair states, "The Wachusett Mountain Reservation Commission Report of 1913 read, '... The camp, comprising bunk-house, reading room, dining room, dispensary and other necessary buildings, was laid out and constructed in a healthful location, with excellent water supply – and about 10 acres

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**2010-2011
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<i>House Director</i>	Bob Feeley
<i>Housekeeper</i>	Christy Lombardo
<i>Newsletter Editor</i>	Patricia Gendron

MEETINGS

Meetings are held September through June on the 3rd Tuesday at 7:00 pm at the House, and are free and open to the public.

HOUSE & GIFT SHOP HOURS

The Historical Society House is open Mondays 7-9 pm and Fridays 9-12 Noon and other times by appointment.

MISSION

*Our mission is to collect, preserve, and interpret
Westminster's past
for present and future generations.*

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Members,

Since our last newsletter in January, we have weathered several snow storms. Thanks to Bob Feeley, our House Director, the walkways in front of the Historical Society house were shoveled. Parking on the street has been a challenge with all the snow and increased traffic detouring through town. However, even with all the snow, our programs have been well attended.

Speaking of programs, don't forget the Perennial Swap on Saturday May 28. I am on the Perennial Swap Committee, so this annual event is near and dear to me. If your garden is overrun with plants, too many lilies, Echinacea, or Hosta, this is the day to share these plants with other gardeners. In turn, you can pick up some new plants for your garden. On Perennial Swap Day, the front lawn of 110 Main Street turns into a central meeting place for fellow gardeners. Please mark your calendars for May 28 from 9 to noon to swap plants or just socialize with people who like plants. I hope to see you there.

The Westminster Garden Club will be joining the Laurelwood Garden Club of Leominster for a meeting on March 12 at the public library. The topic is Landscape Design with Laura Bibler. The Westminster Garden Club evolved from the Perennial Swap. A few years ago during one of our Swaps, we asked people who were interested in joining a garden club to sign up. There definitely was interest! The garden club is an informal organization, no set rules or agenda. If something interesting related to gardening comes to our attention, an E-mail is sent out for anyone to sign up. Some meetings are held at the historical society headquarters, but most events take place off site. We generally carpool to our destinations to save on gas, but the truth is, it is more fun to travel with fellow gardeners. Anyone can join the Westminster Garden Club by contacting the Historical Society office.

Last issue we advertised for a new tenant for the Historical Society apartment located in the back of the house. Prior to renting the apartment our Cleaning Team went into action (Darlene Johnson, Joan Longcope and I). We went to the apartment armed with cleaning products and cleaned the bathroom, refrigerator, stove and shelves. Bob Feeley and his son-in-law vacuumed and did some touch-up painting. The big job of installing new carpeting in the living space, stairs and bedroom area. was left to Lowe's. Thanks to team effort, the apartment is in tip top shape.

As I finish this letter, it is raining outside. It will be nice to see green grass and leaves on the trees again. I spotted several red-winged blackbirds at my bird seed station a few week ago – a sure sign of spring.
Sincerely,

Roni Beal, President

CURATOR'S CORNER

Thank you to the following people for donating items to the Historical Society for safekeeping:

Ceil Burgess: collection of class photos

Kathleen Carroll: collection of letters, certificates, pins news articles on Austin Carroll, Austin Carroll, Jr. and Kathleen Carroll.

Steve Davis: \$5 Confederate note and button from Civil War MA regiment uniform

Betsy Hannula: collection of photos of Redemption Rock and Black family gravestones

Keith Harding: DVD for "Your Voice" program on the History of Westminster

Ann Honkonen: collection of class photos

Craig Mailloux: shoe making form from Italy & Dante Arcangeli's WWII uniform

William Miller: history of Miller's gold headed cane

Vicki Ricker: collection of class photos



This school seat for two was donated by Brenton MacAloney this past winter. We've been documenting it for our collections and noticed the carvings on the back. Isn't it funny how something that was most certainly destructive in an early period of time is now looked upon with great interest? Who were these children who carved their initials long ago?

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Saturday, March 19, 1-3 pm. Maple Sugaring.

Meet at Eddie Snyder's house at 258 West Princeton Road to watch maple syrup being made. Sample the maple sap on ice cream. Yum!

Saturday, April 16, 1-3 pm. Farm Visit.

Come to Maple Heights Farm on Howard Road this Spring to see baby chicks and goats, cows, and chickens, and maybe even see a milking demonstration. Refreshments at the Hertel's "Camperdown" Elm. Park in the driveway, on the road, or at the mid-state trail at the bottom of Howard Road for those who enjoy a short hike up the road. Hosted by the Hertel Family.

Tuesday, May 10, 7 pm. Hand Pumper Restoration
Clay Swenor will tell the history of the restoration of the hand pumper at the Westminster Fire Department meeting room, 7 South Street.

Saturday, May 28, 9-Noon. Perennial Swap.

Share your extra plants and pick up someone's else's donations! Held on the Historical Society front lawn.

Saturday, June 18, 8-3. Town Wide Yard Sale.

Sign up as a home holding a yard sale, or plan to get some bargains at each house on the circuit. There will be deals for everyone! Maps will be sold at the Historical Society on the day of Yard Sale for \$1.00. Held Rain or Shine. Sign up applications are available at the Historical Society or on our website @ www.westminsterhistory.org

Tuesday, June 21, 7pm Juhannus.

Come celebrate this special Finnish holiday celebrating the longest day of the year at the Farmer's Camp on Leominster Street. A map of the world and a map of Finland will be displayed for everyone to place a marker on the place their ancestors came from. The program will be sharing family stories of the first immigrants in everyone's family to arrive in America. Bring photos of your grandparents to share. Sample some Finnish food specialties.

ANNUAL APPEAL

The annual appeal is an important piece of income that we depend upon to pay the Society's regular operating expenses. In these difficult economic times it is even more appreciated. Thank you to ALL who donated this winter!

We thank the following people who donated to the 2010 Annual Appeal:

IC Federal Credit Union, W.E. Aubuchon Hardware, Roni Beal, Jim Biglow, Chris Bjurling, Depot General Store, John & Beth Bowen, Eleanor Brogan, Elaine Brown, Kathleen Carroll, Carole Christensen, Irene Cook, Melody Gallant, Eddie & Betsy Hannula, Lawrence Hicks, John Howard, Darlene Johnson, Philip Kearns, Jr., Jack & Jeannine LaCoss, Ed Lafortune, Mark & Linda Landry, Patricia Lasky, Jessica Leger, Anne Lockhart, Joan Longcope, Dennis & Mary Lyons, Anna MacAloney, Tom & Brenda Malloy, Laila Michaud, William Miller, Donald Nyman, Sandra Ouellette, Gilbert & Joan Parks, Sally Pelletier, Katherine Pelullo, Julie Scapparone, Sandra Slack, Roger Smith, Sheryl Vaillette, Marilyn Van Saun, Allan & Elaine Waronen, Bill Wilen, and Peter & Susan Yraola.

(Continued from page 1)

of arable land were apportioned to its use for farming purposes...” These camp buildings were erected for about fifty prisoners.

The men under supervision of foremen appointed by the Superintendent did all the manual labor on the Reservation. The Commission report continued, “During the season about 1,000 bushels of potatoes and other vegetables were raised by the prisoners for their use through winter at the House of Correction at Worcester...” An important part of their work was constructing the roads on the Reservation, including blasting rocks and running the stone crushing



Jesse Coombs cutting wood at the prison

plant. They cleared trails, chopped wood, and planted about 28,000 white pine and spruce seedlings in old unproductive pastures. They also built a new pavilion

Sinclair continued, “The report of the Wachusett Reservation Superintendent Everett W. Needham, dated January 1913, mentions a small gang of prisoners starting



Jesse and Florence Coombs lived on the grounds of the prison camp along with fifty prisoners so hanging laundry must have been a common sight.

work in June 1912 on the new road and working until Dec. 10. ‘...They worked eight hours a day, with Saturday afternoon and all holidays off. We were able to complete nearly a mile of road at an expense of \$2000, and some of this road was in a very rough country, necessitating heavy fill and great amount of blasting. In August a second-hand stone crusher was purchased, and was started up at the Ox Box, (probably Ox Bow) about the middle of September. About 3,000 feet of Mountain and North Roads were covered with a heavy coat of crushed stone at an expense of about \$1200...’ In this report Needham advised buying a steam roller or compressed air drilling outfit and horse roller.”

In the 15th annual report of the Wachusett Mountain State Reservation Commission of



Jesse Coombs with his son Francis and the chicks.



Pigs provided meat at the prison camp.

on the Mountain House trail – 40 feet long by 20 feet wide and on 15 posts with seats and tables for picnic parties.

After Mr. Warner, Jesse F. Coombs, a Civil War veteran, came to take over the office of superintendent in 1913. He lived at the prison camp with his wife Florence and while there, their first child, a



Florence Coombs after picking apples.



In the days before electrical refrigeration food was kept cold in ice boxes. Therefore this ice cutting operation at the prison camp was an important activity every winter.

January 1915 it was noted, "...it was a successful operation for the past three years." Sinclair stated, "A 1915 report stated that the prisoners with rare exception proved themselves fair, average men in both the quality and the



There was a pond located on the grounds of the prison camp.

quantity of their performance. '...The important consideration is, however, the effect is beneficial to the men themselves and the community at large.' "

Once the roads on the mountain had been completed the Coombs family left and settled in downtown Westminster and the prison camp closed about the same time, in 1916. The superintendent of the prison camp at the time of the report for that year was Everett Needham of Princeton, so it may be that the operation of the prison camp was incorporated into the larger work of the Wachusett Reservation. There is certainly opportunity for more research to be done here.



This photo, taken on Sunday, July 15, 1913, shows a group of people sitting on the ground; perhaps it was a church service for the prisoners.

FIREARMS PROGRAM

Our January 18 program was cancelled because of yet another snow storm and was postponed to February 15. The day arrived, and the skies were clear! Seventeen people attended, and as expected, many men were in the audience. However, there were also several women, two teenagers and even one child Civil War enthusiast in the group.

Jim Biglow gave an informative program on the development of firearm technology that held everyone's attention. Jim used both slides and actual historical firearms to show how the firearms technology has changed.



A 1950s rifle in the Historical Society collections.

Firearms have been in use for the last 600 years, and during that time have produced expressions and sayings that have become a part of our standard vocabulary. The following article by Jim Biglow describes some clichés in our English language from the history of firearms. Did you know these?

From the beginning there were three major parts to a gun: The lock, which composed the firing mechanism, the stock, which represented the wood mounting for the other parts, and the barrel, which carried the bullet and power charge. The phrase "Lock, stock and barrel" has come to mean a thing in its entirety with nothing omitted.

Until the 1800s firearms used black powder as the propellant. It was carried in powder horns and loaded

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MEMBERSHIP

If you're not a member, please consider joining today. It's easy. Just fill out the form below and send it along with your check to the Historical Society. We thank you!

Thank you to all who have renewed their membership this past year. If you are unsure of your status, just call Liz at the office (978-874-5569) and she'll let you know. You will want to be a member in order to take advantage of the ten percent discount on all items in the Gift Shop! By the way, membership is free to persons over 75 years of age.

WESTMINSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____ Fax _____
e-mail _____

Individual	\$25
Family	\$40
Senior (over 65)	\$15
Contributing	\$50
Friend	\$100
Honorary (over 75)	0

All members receive a 10% discount in the Gift Shop.

Please contact me about volunteering.

These are some of my interests:

- Sorting, cleaning, and cataloging items.
- Putting data about items into a computer database.
- Helping with newsletters and brochures.

FLEA MARKET

It's almost time for spring cleaning! If you find items with some use still left in them, you could drop them off at the Historical Society barn for the Flea Market next September.

Just remember: All items **MUST** be in boxes which can be closed and covered because the boxes will be piled up in the barn. If something is broken and unusable, please put it into your trash bin at home, so we don't have to throw it away here. We **cannot** accept any elec-



tronic equipment including TVs, computers, or monitors; they are too costly to dispose of.

Please call ahead if you have large furniture items. It is better for us if you can hold onto furniture until the day before the Flea Market, usually the third Saturday in September, and we can keep in the tent just overnight. Any questions please call the Historical Society at 978/874-5569.

NEWSLETTER CHANGE

The Board of Directors is looking to the future and voted to start "*Going Green*" by eliminating the free newsletter we've been sending once a year to every household in Westminster. Instead we will make our newsletter available on-line at www.WestminsterHistory.org. Current members of the Historical Society will continue to receive paper publications of the newsletter four times a year in the mail, and a limited supply of them will be available free for persons who do not have access to computers at:

- Westminster Historical Society, 110 Main Street
- Forbush Library
- Senior Center at Legion Hall

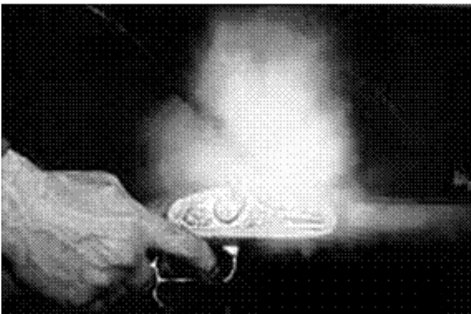
FACEBOOK

The Historical Society is now on FACEBOOK!! It's easy to follow us if you have a facebook account. Search for Westminster Historical Society, click the "LIKE" box at the top of the page, and every time it's updated you will be notified!!

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into the gun before firing. Dampness would render it useless, thus the admonition to “**Keep your powder dry.**”

Matchlocks and flintlocks were fired by igniting a small amount of powder in a pan which was connected



Flintlock firing showing the flash from the pan

to the main charge in the barrel by a small powder filled hole. If the hole was not filled, the powder in the pan would ignite, but the gun would not fire. Something which was all show and having little or no

effect has therefore been called “**A flash in the pan.**”

Guns using a pan to carry the igniting charge needed the hammer pulled back to fill the pan with powder and to allow a plate called the frizzen to cover the pan to keep the powder from falling out or getting wet. It would have been dangerous to have the hammer fully cocked since the gun could be fired if the trigger was accidentally pulled. Gun makers developed a position where the hammer was pulled back but not far enough to engage the trigger mechanism. This was known as the half-cocked position and was considered safe. It occasionally failed letting the gun fire before ready, leading

to the phrase “**Going off half-cocked**” to mean taking a premature or ill-considered action.

In World War II, aircraft machine gun ammunition was provided in nine-yard long belts. Giving something “**The whole nine yards**” became synonymous with giving all you have.

In the last half the 19th century, breech loading rifles using cartridges replaced the black powder muzzle loaders. One of the most accurate of these new rifles was made by the Sharps company. These were so accurate that the name “**Sharp-shooter**” became applied to anyone who was capable of precision shooting.

ICE FISHING PROGRAM A SUCCESS!



David Cormier showed children how to ice fish at our program on Wyman’s Pond in February. And, yes, we caught fish!

WESTMINSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY GIFT SHOP

When looking for a unique gift for birthdays, anniversaries, and other holidays or special occasions, be sure to browse the WHS Gift Shop. Whether shopping for yourself or someone on your gift list, you are sure to find the perfect gift here. The Gift Shop is open on Mondays from 7-9 pm and Fridays from 9 until noon and other times by appointment. Members receive a 10% discount on all purchases. You may call or write to order any of these items and we will mail it to you.

Books

<u>Cemetery Inscriptions</u>	25.00
<u>History of Westminster</u> , 1832 by Hudson	5.00
<u>History of Westminster</u> , 1893 by Heywood.	96.00
<u>History of Westminster</u> , 1961 by Tolman	20.00
<u>History of Westminster 2008</u> by WHS	95.00
<u>Homestead Heritage of Westminster</u> , by WHS	25.00
<u>Images of America</u> , by WHS	19.99
<u>Olin Warner, Sculptor</u> , by Hyson	4.50
<u>200th Anniversary of Westminster</u> ,	5.00
<u>Wajusett Gatherings</u> , by Sinclair (hardcover).	30.00

Tapestries

Cotton afghan in green, navy, burgundy	45.00
Tapestry wall hanging	35.00

Other

Calligraphy sampler	12.00
Painted tin Christmas ornaments Limited Ed.	13.00
Cross stitch sampler Kit “Mosman”	36.00
Cracker Factory print.	45.00
New framed pen & ink of WHS house by Santora	28.00
Map of Westminster 1855.	6.00
Notepaper Westminster scenes, pkg.12	3.50
Painting of Westminster 1833 by Peckham	30.00
Postcards	3/1.00
Children’s books	7.95
Paper dolls, Assorted	5.00
Tobacco Shed pottery	priced as marked
Tote Bags	priced as marked

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**Saturday, April 16, 1-3 pm. Farm
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**Tuesday, May 10, 7 pm. Clay Swe-
nor on the Hand Pump Restoration**
**Saturday, May 28, 9-12 Perennial
Swap.**
**Saturday, June 18, 8-3. Town Wide
Yard Sale.**
Tuesday, June 21, 7pm Juhannus.



Tom Marien, Darlene Johnson, Phil Young and Dino Di-Battista attended the Feb. meeting of the Upton Building Committee.

PLANNING FOR UPTON CONTINUES

Keith Chenot and Phil Warbasse of Chenot Associates have been meeting regularly with the Upton Building Committee.

