

110 Main Street, P.O. Box 177, Westminster, MA 01473

March 2012

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THE CIVIL WAR – WESTMINSTER VIEW By Betsy Hannula

This is the first in a series of articles on the Civil War. It's always been a dream of mine to write a curriculum for children in our town to learn about the Civil War through the eyes of the Westminster men who fought in it. I didn't know if it were really possible; did our men participate in enough battles that we could actually get a good picture of the whole war?

This winter I decided to begin my exploration on a road trip to Florida and back with my husband. I first asked our resident veterans expert, Mark Landry, if he would gather information for me on each of the regiments in which our men fought, a list of all the men from town in each, and a listing of the places they went during their time of service. I mapped out a plan to visit a dozen or so battlefields on our trip.

I was amazed to discover that Westminster natives were involved with nearly every event of the Civil War – from August 1861 until the Confederate surrender at Appomattox. Several were imprisoned; two survived Andersonville, and two are buried there. One regiment even spent their service time traveling by steamship around Florida to New Orleans and participating in the Louisiana campaign! This was a story that will grab us all – young and old – not only for children, but for all of us - the bloodiest war the United States ever had – and on our own soil.

This first article will focus on the first regiment to form with Westminster men - the 15th Infantry. Their Colonel was Charles P. Devens, for whom Fort Devens would eventually be named in WWI. An often quoted description of the 15th is, "Few Massachusetts units had as gallant a history as the 15th Infantry."

The three year tour of duty began on June 12, 1861, when they were organized in Worcester, MA and mustered in. The events of the following 3 years were:

NEH GRANT AWARDED

We are very excited to announce that the Westminster Historical Society has been awarded a Preservation Assistance Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities in the amount of \$6000. Funds from NEH are specifically for assistance with the care of collections. This grant will be used to hire two consultants - a conservator specializing in objects and an archivist specializing in paper and books - to conduct a general preservation assessment of the Society's collections and to help plan for their long-range care.

The Society is currently planning renovations to the Upton School building to be its headquarters and the entire collections will eventually be moved there. The consultants will help develop plans for the arrangement and storage of our collections in the new space with goals to recommend methods for controlling the environment for the safest long term care of the collections and to create visible storage for objects. Project Director, Betsy Hannula, was delighted with the prospect of utilizing this advice from professionals.

The Historical Society's collections document the history of Westminster from 1737 to the present. They include furnishings, textiles, clothing, tools, equipment, photographs, books, and archives. The NEH-funded assessment will help the Society create a plan to unite its collections, now dispersed among four sites in town, into the new Upton Center. This NEH grant will be a good step toward applying for future funding from other sources, demonstrating our desire to use professional advice to achieve our goal of safe environment for those items entrusted to us.

We are required by NEH to state "Any views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities."

(Continued on page 4)

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MEETINGS

Meetings are held September through June on the 3rd Tuesday at 7 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

The Westminster Historical Society's mission is to save and share Westminster's past.



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Members:

Usually the March letter from the president contains reports on the winter events. Unfortunately, due to the lack of cold weather, cancellations were the rule. After a postponement, the Ice Fishing Derby was canceled. The ice on local ponds never became thick enough to be safe. A new event, the Ice Out contest was also canceled due to lack of ice. Beside the disappointment of the members who worked so hard to plan the programs, (I hope everyone saw the ice fishing score board on the Society lawn) the funds which we hoped to raise did not materialize.

If you have not sent in your annual appeal contribution yet, please take a moment to do so.

On a brighter note spring is not too far away, and upcoming programs include a Maple Sugaring Demonstration on March 17 and a History Detective presentation on April 17. Annual events in the near future are the Perennial Plant Swap on May 19 and the Town-wide Yard Sale on June 16. Details for these and others can be found on our Web Site.

For those of you who have access to the February 29th *Gardner News*, check out the local history section on page 2. In February of 1912, the Westminster Town meeting approved \$15,000 for the construction of a new high school. Mr. Frank Fenno offered the town a site for the new building. This became the Upton building, which is now the future home of the Westminster Historical Society.

Finally, on page 3 in this newsletter is an article about the contents of an August, 1946, issue of the *Fitchburg Sentinel*. While going through the paper, I found several interesting bits of information such as grocery prices, medical fees, and information about a swimming lake and bathhouse in Gardner. What struck me was that if I had been looking for specific information, there would be no way to find it short of looking through extensive archives unless the data was cataloged and indexed. This is exactly one of the tasks of the Historical Society, to organize an index of items in our collection in digital form. This allows for quick searches to locate artifacts and/or archives containing information of interest.

The point of all this is that the Society depends on volunteers to perform this data input. If you have some time, and can use a computer keyboard, we could use your help. If you are interested, call 874-5569 or e-mail us at WestminsterHistory@Verizon.net.

Sincerely, Jim Biglow President

CURATOR'S CORNER

Thank you to the following people who have given items for preservation.

Joan Parks: copies of school photos of her classes as a kindergarten teacher.

Don Foster: collection of historical objects and books, and cookbooks

Beulah Howard: collection of documents related to her life.

Nancy Kangas: collection of Volksmarch medals from the 1980s in Westminster.

Carol & Richard Lehtola: wooden washing machine

and rinser

Sometimes the Historical Society receives items that are not related specifically to the history of Westminster. However, they can be very useful in our education programs. Such is the case with a recent gift from the Lehtolas – a wonderful washing machine and rin-



Washing machine and rinser donated by Carol and Richard Lehtola.

ser from at least a century ago. It's beautifully made – a triumph of modern inventions certainly, when the women in the household had to wash all the family's clothes by hand. NOW, there was a machine that would make it so much easier! How much easier, we ask? Take a look and think about the logistics of washing clothes in this!

UPTON SCHOOL UPDATE

The Board of Directors and Capital Campaign Committee have been hard at work this winter planning for the fundraising campaign. The brochure has been printed and presentation packets are being prepared.

A sub committee is making a list of all the persons who were students in the Upton School. We already have over 3,500 names! We need help in making sure the lists are accurate. If you can help please call the Society. We meet on weekday mornings. We will be hosting meetings of each class to help in this process. We look forward to it!

Late Summer, 1946. Remember It?

(A newspaper discovery by our President Jim Biglow)

In August, 1946, someone was trying to solve a draft problem before another Westminster winter set in. The old rough cut planks making up an interior cellar wall had shrunk with age and 1/2 inch cracks had appeared between the boards. The solution was to nail cardboard over the outside of the wall and, when that ran out to use some old newspapers to finish the job. Sixty five years later I ran across those papers while trying to coax a cat down from above a ceiling. After the cat decided to get down on her own, I decided to remove the newspapers to see what we had.

There were fragments of four papers: *The Fitchburg Sentinel* from Friday, August 9, 1946, *The New York Times* Business section from Sunday, August 11, 1946, *The Vermont Phoenix* from Friday, July 26, 1946, and *The Boston Post* from Wednesday, August 14, 1946. It was an interesting time in the United States. The War had been over for less than a year, and the country was still adjusting to peacetime. The cold war was on the horizon, and Russia had replaced Germany and Japan as the great adversary.

You could buy a copy of the Sentinel for 4 cents. The main local headline was the burning of the abandoned Green's ice house on Ashby Road. The article reported that several thousand people watched the spectacular blaze, and arson was suspected. The national news reported on the problems the Russians were causing in the Paris peace talks, and President Truman had finally signed a law giving veterans their terminal pay. Sharing the front page was an article about 800 members of the Knights and Ladies of Kaleva arriving on a special train from Chicago for their national convention.

The only Westminster mention in the surviving fragment was notice of the town band concert on the school grounds scheduled for that night.

The Physicians of Fitchburg posted a fee schedule as follows:

| Office Visit | \$3.00 |
|---------------------|---------|
| House Visit weekday | \$4.00 |
| Sunday | \$5.00 |
| Night (10pm-7am) | \$6.00 |
| Tonsillectomy | \$35.00 |

Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 1)

Aug. 1861 Washington DC to Camp Kalorama and Poolesville, MD

Aug. – Oct. Picket & outpost duty from Conrad's Ferry to Harrison's Island

Oct. – March Battle of Balls Bluff, then Harpers Ferry and Bolivar

March 1862 Charlestown, Berryville, Bolivar Heights, Fortress Monroe

April-May Siege of Yorktown

May-June Battle of Fair Oaks, Seven Pines

June Peach Orchard,

Savage Station, White Oak Swamp, Glendale

July-Aug. Malvern Hill, Harrison's Landing, Alexandria, Centreville

Sept. Battle of Antietam, Harpers Ferry

Oct.-Dec. Falmouth, VA, Battle of Fredericksburg, VA

Jan. 1863 "Mud March"

April-May Chancellorsville, Maryes Heights, Fredericksburg, Salem Heights, Banks Ford

July 2-4 Battle of Gettysburg, PA

Sep. March from Rappahannock to the Rapidan **Oct.- Nov.** Bristoe Campaign, Mine Run Campaign, Robertson's Tayern

Feb. 1864 Morton's Ford and picketing at Rapidan **May** Battles of Wilderness, Laurel Hill, Spotsylvania, Po River, North Anna River, Totopotomoy

June Cold Harbor, Siege of Petersburg, Jerusalem Plank Road

July 12, 1864 Regiment left the front
July 28, 1864 Regiment mustered out. Veterans a

July 28, 1864 Regiment mustered out. Veterans and recruits transferred to 20th Massachusetts

At the end of 3 years the losses were terrible: 14 officers and 227 enlisted men were killed or mortally wounded, and 1 officer and 121 enlisted men died because of disease. They had been engaged in 12 major battles, were present at 10 others, and took part in a dozen smaller skirmishes. Out of a total of 1,701 enrolled, only 90 soldiers were present when they mustered out in July, 1864, only 4-5% of their original total.

There were 18 men who enlisted from Westminster: *Nelson Z. Bathrick* (Joined from Ashby, MA. Died June 30, 1864 from wounds at Petersburg.)

Charles Milton Coolidge, 3^{rd} (studied law after the war, family was in politics)

John H. Craine (little known)



Monument to the 15th Regiment at Gettysburg, PA

Asaph W. Rice (resided in Leominster after the war) William Blake Whitney (of the Whitney Carriage Co. in Leominster after the war)

George Frances Benjamin (killed at Balls Bluff) Stillman William Edgell (Joined from Fitchburg; had right arm amputated after battle of Cold Harbor, unmarried, became page at the State House in Boston)

Charles E. Griswold (nothing known)

Joseph R. Houghton (captured at Balls Bluff and held prisoner for 4 months)

Nathan Porter Howard (nothing known)

Edward S. Kendall (joined from Fitchburg, discharged in 1862 because of ill health)

Francis Nichols (chairmaker) all 3 Nichols were brothers Fredric D. Nichols (chairmaker)

Lyman Nichols (chairmaker)

Joel Pratt (nothing known)

Thomas J. Scollay (Irish immigrant, died of diphtheria)

Thomas P. Tayler (nothing known)

Lowell Clark White (moved to San Francisco after war)

The following is an excerpt from a fabulous book <u>From Ball's Bluff to Gettysburg...And Beyond</u>, by Gregory A. Coco. He edited the Civil War letters of Private Roland E. Bowen of the 15th Regiment. What a writer, and I dare say, a philosopher and political observer, Roland was! Some letters are several pages long, evidence of the fact that a soldier's life often was spent waiting, time enough to write home. This excerpt is on p. 95 from a letter to a friend Guild. (Spelling, etc. is as it was.)

"McClellans whole Army was under arms at 3 this morning. I was a little puzzled to know what it meant. It looked like an attack, still I knew he was not ready as many of the fortications are not finished. I should judge by the time you get this letter all will be done. We have all worked day and night for the last two weeks and right under the enemys guns too. Yet a Journal hailing from the Empire State says, "An inglorious halt. Another season of inactivity." Now I swear such grumbling Editors as those ought to be Hung and his Press type and every thing else he has got pitched into the North River. If Horace thinks we are slow, why in the name of God don't he come down and try the shovel a few nights himself. Davis don't you patronize any paper that's down on McClellan. The *Tribune* is played out in Mc-s Army (certain). Well, Guild, things look brighter to day than ever before. New Orleans, Oh nothing, gone up thats all. Yorktown, Oh nothing, raiseing thats all. Corinth, Oh nothing, being evacuated, thats all. Richmond, Oh nothing, being surrounded, thats all."

Do you note the sarcasm here?

TEA PARTY AT FITCHBURG ART MUSEUM

We hear a great deal about tea parties these days via the media, but here is a story about a tea party that actually served tea in a teapot. Four members of the Westminster Garden Club participated in decorating tables for a scholarship fundraiser sponsored by the Laurelwood Garden Club of Leominster. This was the second year they sponsored a tea party at the museum. All the tickets for the tea were sold, raising over \$1,000 for a high school senior who will be attending college to pursue a degree in agricultural studies. The high schools included Oakmont, Fitchburg, Leominster and Lunenburg.

Darlene Johnson, Karen Sargent, Roni Beal of Westminster and Janet Sponagle of Harvard, volunteered to decorate a table. Each table had a theme, such as Hearts & Flowers. Queen's Jubilee and Emerald Isle. The Westminster table was called "Hen Party" because the theme was chickens. Roni made a square table cloth using fabric with chickens and



"Hen Party" Centerpiece

napkins with chicken and rooster appliqués. The centerpiece had a winterberry branch with a birds nest, provided by Darlene Johnson. The centerpiece was contained inside a picture frame with ramekins filled with hen & chicks, dried ornamental grass and chickens made of wire, ceramic and bark with nests and wooden chicken eggs. Rosemarie Boyd of Leominster donated a chicken creamer and sugar bowl to complete the table theme.

The tea party was held on January 28 from 2:00 to 4:00 pm in one of the street level rooms at the Fitchburg Art Museum. The menu consisted of sandwiches, scones, preserves, lemon curd, Devonshire cream, desserts and Irish breakfast tea. Music was provided by Jan Wilkins, piano and Rosemarie Boyd, played the harp. Everyone who attended the tea commented that it was a wonderful event and they look forward to next year's tea party.



Karen at the Tea Party

HISTORY DETECTIVES

Have you ever watched the History Detectives show on TV? A question about an object will bring experts together to find the answers. The research trail is always interesting and often takes twists and turns. We're beginning a History Detectives series with the case of Thomas Scollay, a Union soldier who was declared a deserter in 1864. Who was he? Where did he live? Was he really a deserter?



Thomas Scollay

Thomas Scollay was in the first group of volunteers from Westminster to go to war in 1861. He was a member of the 15th Regiment and fought in some of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War, including the 3 day battle of Gettysburg.

The April 17 Historical Society program will

feature the first History Detectives program. Darlene Johnson and Deenie Burgess will describe their research on Thomas Scollay and report to us at the meeting. The results will also be printed in this newsletter in the next issue.

MEMBERSHIP

If you're not yet 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. Your membership support is essential to us.

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

WESTMINSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERHSIP FORM

| Name | | Individual | \$25 |
|---------|---------|-------------------|------|
| Address | | Family | 40 |
| Phone | Fax | Senior (over 65) | 15 |
| e-mail | | Contributing | 50 |
| | | Friend | 100 |
| | | Honorary (over 75 | 5) 0 |
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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.

Please send form to Westminster Historical Society, Membership Committee, P.O. Box 177, Westminster, MA 01473.

WISH LIST

- Snowblower
- LCD monitor

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 2011 Annual Appeal: Ellen Baker, Roni Beal, Juliette Bedard, James Biglow, Elaine Brown, Melody Gallant, Theresa Grenier, Eddie & Betsy Hannula, Joyce Hannula, Darlene Johnson, Jeanne Keena, Constance Kotoski, Mark & Linda Landry,



Margaret Malenfant, Tom & Brenda Malloy, Sandra Ouellette, Gilbert & Joan Parks, Jean Popik, Douglas & Karen Sargent, Dr. Stephen Weedon, Eleanor Young, and Peter & Susan Yraola

VISITING ANTARCTICA



Lloyd & Joyce Hannula

The Historical Society program in January was about a place much colder than Westminster—especially this winter with the warm weather. Joyce Hannula presented a slide program of a visit that she and her husband Lloyd and John and Beth Bowen took to the southern most continent. It was an adventure!

It was a treat to see photos of glaciers, penguins,

and unusual ice scapes, but most of all the, the surreal beauty of a country that few humans are able to see for themselves.



UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Sat. March 17, 1-3 pm. Maple Sugaring. Meet at Ed Snyder's house 258 West Princeton Road, Westminster to watch maple syrup being made. Sample fresh maple syrup on ice cream. Yum!

Tue. April 17, 7 pm History Detectives: Thomas Scollay. This begins a new series like the popular TV show on PBS. Was this Westminster teenager— Tommy Scollay—really a deserter from the Union Army in 1863? We'll tell you what we've learned. Guest investigators: Deenie Burgess & Darlene Johnson.



Sat. May 12, 1-3 pm Farm Visit. Come to Maple

Heights Farm on Howard Road this Spring to see baby chicks and goats, cows and chickens. Refreshments at the "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. Hosted by the Hertel Family.

Tues. May 15, 7 pm. The Spite Wall. What was all the fuss about? Visit the Spite Wall at 101 North Common Road, the largest dry stone wall in New England, and then return to the Historical Society house to learn "the rest of the story." Find out about the Proctor and Morse families—one of Westminster's strangest stories - but true.

Sat. May 19, 9-12 Noon. Our annual **Perennial Swap.** Come and swap your perennials for another gardener's leftovers plants. Make a donation and pick up some plants to start your new garden. There is something new to learn about plants every year!

Sat. June 16, 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.



Tues. June 19, 7pm. Juhannus. Come celebrate this special Finnish holiday celebrating the longest day of the year at the Farmer's Camp on Leominster Street. Enjoy program and Finn foods while we see what's been gathered of the immigrant families in Westminster of years past.

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.

Books

Cemetery Inscriptions25.00History of Westminster, 1832 by Hudson5.00History of Westminster, 1893 by Heywood96.00History of Westminster 2008 by WHS95.00History of Westminster, by Tolman20.00Homestead Heritage of Westminster, by WHS25.00Images of America, by WHS19.99Olin Warner, Sculptor, by Hyson4.50200th Anniversary of Westminster,5.00Wajusett Gatherings, by Sinclair (hardcover)30.00Wajusett Gatherings, by Sinclair (softcover)20.00TapestriesCotton afghan in green, navy, burgundy45.00Tapestry wall hanging.35.00

Other

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DATES TO REMEMBER

March 17 Maple Sugaring—Snyders April 17 History Detectives May 12 Farm Visit—Maple Heights May 15 Spite Wall Program June 16 Town-wide Yard Sale June 19 Juhannus—Farmers Camp



Perennial Plant Swap May 19

Belle-Air Beach on West

Litchhurg (

offering bath-

(Continued from page 3)

Among other theaters, the Strand in Cleghorn Square was showing "Adventure" starring Clark Gable and Greer Garson. Adult admission was 25 cents

In the advertisements, First National Stores was selling 46 oz. tomato juice tins for 22 cents, a quart of mustard for 22 cents and 14 oz. of ketchup for 15 cents. Park Snows had all wool slip-ons for \$3.98.

There was an ad for Broadway in Gardner ing, boating and outings. They also had a bath house and refreshment stand

In summary, August 9, 1946 looked like a normal day. People went about their lives as

Fitchburg Sentinel from August 9, 1946. usual, good things hap-

pened, bad things happened and that is what makes history interesting.

FLEA MARKET

It's almost that time again 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 electronic equipment including TVs, computers, or monitors; they are too costly to dispose.

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 it in the tent just overnight. We will also have furniture for sale to benefit the Historical Society during the Town Wide Yard Sale on June 16.

Any questions, please call the Historical Society at 978-874-5569.