



# WESTMINSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# NEWSLETTER

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August 2015

*We're pleased to present this article to close our series on the 150<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the Civil War, which ended in April 1865 at Appomattox, Virginia. It's amazing to realize that there were five Westminster men at the scene. Mark Landry, the Historical Society's champion of Westminster veterans, gathered this information for us.*

## WESTMINSTER MEN AT APPOMATTOX

**Brevet Major General Nelson A. Miles** was in command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Corps, Army of the Potomac.

Miles was born in Westminster in 1832 and moved to Boston where he enlisted when the Civil War began. He quickly moved through the ranks and became one of the famous "boy generals" of the War.



A Distinguished American General.

### Report of Bvt. Maj. Gen. Nelson A. Miles, U. S. Army - April 20, 1865.

*COLONEL: I have the honor to submit the following report of the operations of this division during the late campaign:*

*...April 8, marched at 6 a.m. through the enemy's works (he having abandoned them during the night) to a point near Holliday Creek on the stage road, halting at 4 p.m. At 9 p.m. moved forward again about five miles and bivouacked. The negotiations of this day, by flag of truce, looking to the surrender of the rebel army, were carried on through the skirmish line of this division.*

*April 9, at 6 a.m. marched as on the day previous, preceded by a skirmish line. After advancing about six miles a flag of truce from the enemy was observed, and the command halted. A suspension of hostilities un-*

*til 2 p. m. was ordered. At 2 p.m. the order had been given to advance, when I was directed to halt until further orders. Soon afterward the surrender of the rebel army was announced.*

*Very respectfully, your obedient servant,*  
**NELSON A. MILES,**  
*Brevet Major-General,  
Commanding.*

**Aaron Wood Merriam** was born in Westminster

on August 11, 1834 to Jonas, Jr. and Prudence (Miller) Merriam. He enlisted and was sworn in at Boston October 8, 1861 for 3 years' service on Gardner's quota at the age of 28. He was a Musician of the 28th Infantry Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers. He was at Fort Pulaski, Georgia in April, 1862 and was discharged by an act of congress reducing the number of regulation bands on August 17, 1862. He re-enlisted and joined the band of the 2nd Brigade, 1st Division, 20th Army of the Cumberland under General W. T. Sherman. He was in the Atlanta campaign and "March to the Sea," and afterward through the Carolinas to Richmond. He was finally discharged on June 13, 1865.



**Aaron Wood Merriam**

He was a musician, a mechanic, and a chair maker by trade. He was married at the time of his enlistment to Sarah A. Whitney. He and Sarah had

*(Continued on page 4)*

**2014-2015  
OFFICERS, BOARD MEMBERS**

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<i>Vice President</i> .....	Beth Bowen
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<i>House Director</i> .....	Rob Johnson
<i>Newsletter Editor</i> .....	Patricia Gendron
<i>Registrar</i> .....	Joan Longcope

If you've ever had an interest in being on a committee or the Board, we're looking for additional members. Call Heather to talk about it.

**MEETINGS**

Meetings are held September through June on the 2nd 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 9:00-11:00 am and 7-9 pm, and Fridays 9-Noon.

**MISSION**

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



**LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT**

Dear Members,

This is the time of year when flower and vegetable gardens are a source of joy and a labor of love. The Society's Annual Perennial Plant Swap was well attended this year, and we swapped almost all the plants that were donated. I am working on a wooden sign project to simplify plant categories for next year's plant swap. In the past, we have used small signs with the names of plants on plastic plates stapled to wooden stakes. These signs take up a lot of storage space in the barn and break easily. My hope is the wooden signs will last many years and reduce repairing old signs.

The historical society will be sponsoring a Westminster Gardens Tour on September 12 from 10 am to 4 pm. This will be a one day event featuring a walking tour of gardens along part of Main and Pleasant Streets, in addition driving to gardens in other parts of town. There are more details about the Westminster Gardens Tour in this newsletter.

The Society is making plans to remove the old cupola from the Upton Building. The Board of Directors asked the Upton Building Committee to recommend three construction companies for bids to remove the cupola and cap the roof to prevent leaks. The Board hopes to have the project done while the elementary school is closed for summer vacation.

Another construction job is rebuilding the frame around one of the front windows at Society house on Main Street. The window frame is completely deteriorated from rot and must be restored to prevent further damage to the house.

Membership letters will be mailed soon for September 1 renewal date. The Board of Directors thanks everyone for their support and generosity.

Sincerely yours,

Roni Beal  
President

## CURATOR'S CORNER

We are grateful for the following people who donated items for preservation in the Historical Society collections:

**Anita Dube:** set of town reports and Oakmont Regional High School yearbooks

**Flea Market donations:** Senior Girl Scout resource book, Barron Adams Insurance Agency bag, 1911 telephone directory, set of 27 World War I postcards

**Paul Guerard:** leg trap found in town

**Robert Hager:** Louie Miller's autograph album

**Betsy Hannula:** trunk and chair made in Westminster given to Betsy by Smith family, 2 photos, 3 books. Miniature Hitchcock chair

**Frances Hayward:** collection of photos

**Jeanne Keena:** tee shirts from Vincents and Westminster Star

**Brenda Malloy:** photos of celebration of moving hearse house to cemetery

**Michael May:** three Westminster Elementary class photos

**Neysa Miller:** collection of photo albums, meeting minutes and treasurer's reports from the Westminster Senior Citizens Friendship Club

**Purchase:** The Poorhouses of Massachusetts

**Wayne Walker:** Harry Walker's American Legion certificate and photo of sawmill operation

Sometimes we receive items which are not clearly identified. This photo of a saw mill operation, owned by Harry Walker and given by his son Wayne, was somewhere in Westminster. Was it Merriam's sawmill on State road East or was it the Smith's box shop? Or was it one of the many smaller sawmills located throughout the town?



## CROCKER POND TOUR

Tom Torrans, a member of the Crocker Pond Committee for many years, has been fascinated by the history of the area, and wanted to learn more. He came to the Historical Society to do some research and discovered so much that he wanted to share it with others!



*Above: Tom Torrans entertained guests with historical tidbits about the Crocker Pond area.*

*Below: Tom Torrans pointed out features of the dam at Crocker Pond.*

He offered a tour of the area on trails going along the road and everyone on the hike learned about the early settlers of that area. It was fun to see the evidence of people's activities there.

He hopes to conduct another tour with more information next year!



(Continued from page 1)

two girls before he went off to fight and after the war they had two more girls. His grandson, Robert M. Denton, noted "In his later years he spent a great deal of time walking. He would walk many miles in various parts of the town, often stopping to chat with the people who lived in the house where he was born. He always walked at a brisk pace, and usually carried a cane, not to aid him in walking, but swinging it in a very dapper manner." He died on February 19, 1913 and is buried in Mount Pleasant Cemetery in Westminster. The following is from the editorial notes in the Athol and Worcester West Chronicle dated February 27, 1913:



*Jennie L. and Katie E. Merriam*

"We deeply regret to learn of the death of Aaron W. Merriam... He leaves three daughters to mourn the loss of a loving father, Mrs. G. F. Hillman of Northampton, Mrs. Katie Dawley and Mrs. L. F. Denton of Westminster, and a host of loyal friends, who held him in high esteem for his noble traits of character. He was one of nature's noblemen in the truest sense, - honest, generous, truthful, and his friends and friendships were sacred to him.

He wrote a diary while serving under Sherman on his march to the sea and a portion of it follows here:

Monday, April 10th.

Morning cloudy. Reveille was blown at 2 1/2 A. M. but the troops did not leave camp till daylight. Soon after leaving camp, it began to rain and kept on raining all day. The troops were in fine spirits, however. After marching 8 miles, our advance encountered a squad of rebs who left without showing much resistance. They destroyed a bridge over a small creek before leaving, which delayed us a little. Two miles farther on, they made another stand; this time they stood a pretty smart fight. They were compelled to fall back, destroying another bridge before leaving, compelling our troops to wade a small stream. Soon after, we went into camp for the night. Rained all day, roads muddy. Marched 15 miles.

Tuesday, April 11th.

Morning cloudy and cool. Reveille at 5 o'clock. Left camp at 11 o'clock A. M. The 2nd Div. in the advance. Passed several nice plantations. Went into camp at sunset. Quite warm. Marched 14 miles. Encamped outside the town of Smithfield.

Wednesday, April 12th.

Morning clear and pleasant. Reveille at 5 o'clock. Just after breakfast, a dispatch was received by Sherman from Grant, stating that the rebel Gen. Lee had surrendered his entire army. The glorious news was received by the troops with the wildest joy. Cheering, yelling, throwing up caps, hats, breadboxes, etc. Bands playing the National Airs, officers danced, everybody was all but crazy with excitement. The troops were in the best of spirits. Left camp at 7. Marched into the town of Smithfield with colors flying and bands playing. Halted in front of Gen. Sherman's quarters and remained for an hour.

**Abner Evander Drury, Jr.** was born on October 25, 1831 in Westminster to Abner M. and Maria (Scholes) Drury. He lived at 15 Bacon Street and enlisted on October 26, 1861 at the age of 30 on Westminster's quota for a term of 3 years. He was mustered into service on November 25, 1861 and was discharged on January 4, 1864. He immediately re-enlisted as 1st Sergeant of the same Company. He was promoted to 1st Lieutenant and was in all of the battles of the Army of the Potomac from July 2, 1862 to the close of the war, including Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, 1nd Bull Run, Mine Run, Wilderness, Laurel Hill, Spotsylvania Court House, North Anna, Cold Harbor, and all engagements near Richmond and Petersburg, receiving no injury great enough to disqualify him for duty. The surrender of the Rebel army of Northern Virginia under General Lee was made to his brigade at Appomattox on April 9, 1865.



*Abner Evander Drury*

After the War, in 1866, a company of infantry consisting of sixty-four members was enrolled, mostly through the efforts of war veterans. This company

was organized by Abner E. Drury, Ethan W. Holden, and J. Hervey Miller and was assigned a place in the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia, bearing the name of "Wachusett Rifle Company." The company was disbanded at the time of the reduction of the State Militia in 1876.

Drury was a carpenter, a mechanic and worked in a chair shop. He was on the Monument Committee in town appointed to place a Civil War monument in town. The monument was constructed and unveiled on July 4, 1868. He was also a member and Commander in 1884 of Westminster's Post 69 G.A.R. He was also on the Board of Selectmen in 1878 and on the School Committee in town for two years. He married Lydia R. Livingston from New Hampshire and had a son Eugene H. Drury. He died on October 5, 1918 at the age of 85 years. He was brought into town to be buried in Woodside Cemetery in Westminster.

### **John Williams Hudson**

was born on July 10, 1836 in Westminster to Rev. Charles and Martha B. (Rider) Hudson and moved to Lexington at the time of his enlistment. He was commissioned 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant on August 2, 1862 in the Massachusetts Volunteers and was later promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant, then Captain, Major and Lieutenant Colonel. His regiment was engaged in battle at South Mountain, Antietam, Fredericksburg, the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, North Anna, Cold Harbor, Welden Railroad, Petersburg, Jackson, Cambell's Station, Knoxville and the Appomattox Campaign. He was discharged on June 9, 1865.



*John Williams Hudson*

He attended common school and the Westminster Academy. He graduated from Harvard College in 1856 and read law and practiced in Boston. He married Sophia W. Mellen and had no children. He died on June 1, 1872 in Lexington, MA.

**Jesse F. Coombs** was born on May 6, 1848 in Monmouth, Maine to Nathaniel and Jane (Besse) Coombs. He enlisted on February 12, 1864 for 3 years of service in Augusta, ME at the age of 16. He

was mustered into service with Company M, 1st Cavalry, Maine Volunteers. This regiment was the only regiment in the Army of the Potomac armed with Henry's repeating rifle. The peculiarity of this gun was that it would fire sixteen shots without re-loading, and extremely effective weapon.

By his own hand, Jesse wrote that he was in battle at Todd's Tavern, VA, North Anna River, VA, Hanover Court House, Cold Harbor, Trevillian Station, Saint Mary's Church, Wilson's Raid, and Ream's Station. He was taken prisoner at Blackwater Stream, VA on July 2, 1864, but he escaped and returned to his Regiment in 6 days. On August 25, 1864 he was at Berryville, Opequon, New Market, Cedar Creek, Hatcher's Run, Dinwiddie Court House, Sailor's Creek, Farmville, and Appomattox. He was wounded in the shoulder by a ball and received a flesh wound through the side of his hip and the top of his knee

He had a brother Samuel E. Coombs who was in the same regiment and was taken prisoner at Sycamore church on September 16, 1864 and died in prison at Salisbury, N. C. on January 25, 1865. He married Florence G. Fairfield and their children were Francis E. and Olive (Coombs) Rivers. Before the war he was a farmer. Afterwards he was a policeman and his son, Francis also became a policeman.

In 1912 Jesse Coombs became the second superintendent at the Wachusett Mountain Prison Camp which was located on Bolton Road. The prisoners were short-timers and performed tasks of manual labor on the Reservation, such as making roads, which involved the use of a stone crushing machine, chopping work, and gardening. The produce of the garden was used to supply the Worcester County Jail.

Coombs was the commander of "Post 69 G.A.R." in 1925 when there was only 3 members left. He died February 16, 1926 in Westminster at the age of 77 years



*Jesse and Florence Coombs*

## PERENNIAL PLANT SWAP HELD ON JUNE 4<sup>TH</sup>

This year the perennial plant swap was held the first weekend in June, which is later than previous years. June 4<sup>th</sup> turned out to be a perfect day, and gardeners were eager to swap plants.

The Annual Perennial Plant Swap is free, and everyone is welcome to participate. The Plant Swap Committee was delighted to meet people from Ashburnham, Fitchburg, Lunenburg and Gardner at the swap. The swap is mainly a Westminster event, but it wonderful to attract fellow gardeners from surrounding towns.

This year the most popular plants to swap were Irises along with a variety of herbs coming in as a close second. Thank you to everyone who brought plants for the swap or donated money in exchange for plants. All donations are greatly appreciated.



*Plant Swap Committee: Sheryl Vaillette, Marion Knoll, Roni Beal, and Joan Longcope.*

## BANNER DAY FOR TOWN-WIDE YARD SALE

It was a beautiful day for a yard sale on June 20<sup>th</sup> and volunteers working the table at the historical society were busy selling maps along with an eclectic collection of furniture. As one yard sale shopper stated, "Westminster does the best job of any town coordinating a town yard sale." The fact is volunteers at the Westminster Historical Society do the best job organizing town-wide yard sales.



*Yard-sale enthusiasts shopping at the WHS Town-wide Yard Sale and obtaining their maps.*

Sixty people signed up to be listed on the map for the town-wide yard sale this year. The map indicated where all the yard sales were held and what items were for sale. The map not only provided a hard copy of locations, but there was a telephone application available for people to upload onto their cell phones. The phone app provided driving directions to each yard sale location.

Thank you to this year's yard sale committee: Heather Bowen, Beth Bowen, John Bowen, Melanie Miller and Roni Beal for making the town-wide yard sale a success.

## SCARECROW CONTEST COMING UP!

A Scarecrow Contest will be featured as part of the first Westminster Cracker Festival on October 24, 2015. Families and businesses are invited to create one or more scarecrows which will be displayed along both sides of Main Street, Westminster from Oct. 3 through Oct. 24.

Interested persons may contact the Westminster Historical Society at [westminsterhistory.com](http://westminsterhistory.com) or [crackerfestival.com](http://crackerfestival.com) for an application form, which must be submitted by Sept. 26. Prizes will be awarded for the best scarecrows in four categories. Get your creative juices and join the fun!



## LILY GARDEN TOUR

The Annual Perennial Swap inspired some local gardeners to form an informal garden club several years ago. Yvette Rameau invited us to tour her lovely daylily garden this year and a group of fellow gardeners met there and learned that daylilies are drought-tolerant and low maintenance. Yvette and Rene Rameau's backyard is a beautiful sight to behold.

Yvette sells daylilies directly from her garden. For more information go to: [www.nedaylily.org](http://www.nedaylily.org).



*Above: Yvette and Rene Rameau's daylilies*

## MARY ROWLANDSON, COLONIAL AMERICAN WOMAN, COMING TO WESTMINSTER



*Katie Green*

On Thursday, October 13 at 7 pm in the Eloranta Room at Forbush Memorial Library, Katie Green, a local storyteller, will portray Mary Rowlandson. This famous Colonial American woman was captured in an attack by Native Americans during King Philip's War and was held ransom for 11 weeks.

This program was made possible by a grant from the Westminster Cultural Council to the Westminster Historical Society.

## SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS TO WESTMINSTER STUDENTS

The Westminster Historical Society was pleased to contribute to the Award Ceremonies at Oakmont Regional High School, Overlook Middle School and Westminster Elementary School.



Each student received a 2008 Westminster History Book. The students who received an award from the Society have excelled in history studies throughout the school year. Congratulations go to:

Oakmont Regional High School: Douglas Ciampi  
 Overlook Middle School: Rachel Sinclair  
 Westminster Elementary School: Kennedy Alexis

## COLONIAL COOKING

Westminster Elementary School third graders had their annual Colonial Day in May this year. More than 100 children and 20 adults in five classes came to the Historical Society as one of five sites they visited that day.

With our fireplace ablaze, volunteer Wendy Provencial described how cooking was different in the 1700s, and then demonstrated how to make waffles over the fire. Each class then got to taste waffles before moving on to their next session. It was a fun day!



*Wendy Provencial demonstrated making waffles.*

## 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 Heather 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 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.

Please send form to:

Westminster Historical Society, Membership Committee, P.O. Box 177, Westminster, MA 01473.

### 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

<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 2008</u> by WHS . . . . .	95.00
<u>History of Westminster</u> , by Tolman . . . . .	20.00
<u>Homestead Heritage of Westminster</u> , by WHS . . . . .	25.00
<u>Images of America</u> , by WHS . . . . .	19.99
<u>Montachusett Memories</u> . . . . .	35.00
<u>Olin Warner, Sculptor</u> , by Hyson . . . . .	4.50
<u>200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Westminster</u> , . . . . .	5.00
<u>Wachusett Gatherings</u> , by Sinclair (softcover) . . . . .	20.00

#### Other

Wachusett Mountain charcoal drawing . . . . .	60.00
Calligraphy sampler . . . . .	12.00
<i>Cracker Factory</i> print. . . . .	45.00
Framed pen & ink of <i>WHS house</i> by Santora . . . . .	28.00
Map of Westminster 1855. . . . .	6.00
<i>Downtown Westminster 1831</i> by Peckham . . . . .	30.00
Postcards . . . . .	3/1.00
Children's books . . . . .	7.95
Tobacco Shed pottery . . . . .	priced as marked
Westminster tapestry wall hanging . . . . .	35.00



## JUHANNUS PROGRAM

“Favorite Finnish Foods and How to Prepare Them” was the topic for the annual Juhannus program, held this year on June 9 at the Westminster Farmers Cooperative camp on Leominster Street, to celebrate the longest day of the year.

Guests enjoyed the demonstrations of techniques used to braid coffee breads, prepare fresh salmon with dill and spices to make salted salmon, make piirakka (oval shaped rye pastries), oven baked pancakes, fresh fruit punch, and several other items.



*Amy Engman demonstrated how to braid coffee breads. Her grandsons showed how they made buns out of little pieces of dough.*

Local Finnish cooks and bakers sharing their knowledge were Amy Engman, Joyce Hannula, Liisa Wuoti, Melody Smith, Bette Roy, and Betsy Hannula.



*Visitors gathered outside the Westminster Farmers Camp before the program.*

## PRESCHOOL PROGRAM ON HATS

Hats was the topic of the day in June when eight 2 and 3 year olds and their siblings and mothers (and one grandfather!) came to the Historical Society for a program. Jana Harrison, leader of the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Program at the Westminster Elementary School, arranged with Curator Betsy Hannula, to participate in a program as their last meeting of the school year.

Betsy pulled out hats from the Education Department boxes and added several different hats she had at home, to talk about how we could tell what people did if we looked carefully at their hat. It was an enthusiastic group!



*This youngster enjoyed trying on a Girl Scout hat!*

Westminster Historical Society  
110 Main St., P.O. Box 177  
Westminster, MA 01473

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## **DATES TO REMEMBER**

**September 12, 10 - 4: Fall Garden Tour**  
**September 26, 9—2: Attic Treasures Sale**  
**October 13 at 7 pm: at the Library, Katie Green portraying Mary Rowlandson**  
**October 23, 5:30 pm: Annual Meeting**

## **FALL GARDEN TOUR**

Come join all garden enthusiasts on Sat. Sept. 12 for our Fall Garden Tour! From 10 am to 4 pm, several local gardens will be open for your enjoyment.

Tickets (including a map of sites) will go on sale August 15th. Advance ticket orders (\$20 or \$15 for seniors) will be mailed or held for pickup at the WHS house. Send check or money order to: WHS, PO Box 177, Westminster, MA 01473. Tickets orders received after Sept 1st will be \$25 (\$20 for Seniors) Tickets will be held for pickup at the WHS House.

Tickets will also be available at the WHS on the day of the event at 110 Main St, Westminster.



## **ATTIC TREASURES SALE—SEPT.26**



The annual Historical Society Flea Market is changing its name! Save Sat. Sept. 26 for the Attic Treasures Sale. This is actually a resurrection of the name we used when we first started having these sales in 1976. We think the name better reflects what our goals are – to give shoppers an opportunity to purchase vintage treasures and items that are a cut above flea market stuff.

If you have donations to offer for the sale, you may leave them in the barn as before. Household items, jewelry, books and furniture are most welcome. Just remember that boxes need to be covered since we stack them, and we cannot accept electronics, appliances, clothes, or toys. Thank you!