



WESTMINSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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October 2017

Facebook: Westminster Historical Society

We continue our reporting on World War I veterans in this issue of the newsletter, with Roger Battles and Arthur Charles Hicks. Thank you Mark Landry, our Veterans Agent, for contributing this article.



Roger Bartlett

Roger Willard Battles was born in Westminster on January 25, 1888 to Alton and Emma E. (Cummings) Battles and lived in Westminster his whole life, a fifth generation son born at the homestead which was the third home built in Westminster. His WWI draft card stated

he was 29 years old and worked at a Garage as a mechanic. He was of medium height and build, had grey eyes and brown hair.

In WWI, Roger was an Ordnance Sergeant in the Ordnance Detachment, 301st Ammunition Train as part of the 76th Division. On July 14, 1918, he sailed aboard the ship "Ajana" from Montreal, Canada. He was also listed aboard the ship "Archangel" on August 1, 1918 in Winchester, England where there was an American Rest Camp.

The 76th Division was made up from National Army drafts from Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island and Connecticut and was stationed at Camp Devens in Massachusetts. The unit began shipping overseas on July 5, 1918 and the last units of the division arrived in France on July 31. In France, they were designated as a depot division assigned to the St. Aignan area. Here they were broken up and training cadres were formed, the personnel being used as replacements for the

combat divisions at the front. The specialized units were sent forward as Corps and Army troops. Major General Henry F. Hodges commanded the division which was popularly known as the "Liberty Bell Division." Its shoulder insignia was of a blue liberty bell superimposed upon a khaki square.

He left the European theater from Bordeaux, France on April 21, 1919 aboard the ship "S. S. Alfonso XIII" as an Ordnance Sergeant in the unit of Ordnance Casual Company Number 14. His service number was 1666300. He arrived in New York, New York on May 5, 1919.



Fort Devens

When World War II began his WWII draft card stated he was still self-employed at a garage in the rear of No. 4 West Broadway Street in Gardner. He was an ardent foxhunter, raised turkeys and operated a garage for many years in South Gardner prior to his retirement in 1947. He was a World War I veteran of the Army and a member of William Ellison Lodge, I.O.O.F. He died on July 20, 1964 in Gardner at the age of 76. He was survived by two sisters, Mrs. Arthur Eberhard of Springfield, and Mrs. Donald Bennett of Holden, a brother, Herbert, of Ashburnham and many nephews and nieces.

**2016-2017
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MEETINGS

Meetings are held November through June
on the 2nd Tuesday at 7 pm
The public is welcome.

HOUSE & GIFT SHOP HOURS

The Historical Society House is open
Mondays 7-9 pm, Wednesdays 9-11 am,
Fridays 9-12 Noon.
and other times by appointment.

MISSION

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



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Members,

Like most of you, we have a cellar. Suffice to say that through the 38 years that we have been in our house, it has become a repository for items accumulated from our families.

This year, it was finally the time to clear it out, not a small endeavor. I had stored my Grandfather Lindberg's large, oak tool chest with plans to use it someday as a coffee table. Those plans never happened. So with help, I moved it from the cellar to the historical society for our auction next year.

My maternal grandparents immigrated to Fitchburg from Sweden in 1922. Grampy was a carpenter. Grammy was a homemaker and a terrific baker. He eventually built a house for them on Electric Ave. where my mother grew up. He told me stories that during the depression, he walked to Leominster everyday with his tools looking for work. He did not take the bus because it cost 5 cents each way. Eventually, he became a general contractor but he kept his tool chest in his cellar. When he retired, he gave me several useful items including shovels, pick axes and hand tools. The toolbox remained in his cellar until my grandmother gave it to me.

I have kept several items throughout our house that remind me of my Swedish heritage and the comfortable house on Electric Ave. The toolbox can now be passed on to someone who will find a new use for it, something that would make my grandfather smile.

Think about what items you may have in your cellars or attics that can be passed on to others. Your family treasures have stories to tell and to be shared just as the historical society continues to pass on our heritage.

Sincerely,

Barry E. Roy

President

CURATOR'S CORNER

By Betsy Hannula

More items are being donated to our collections as people realize they can't keep everything they've been given or acquired. We are grateful that some people realize that it's a good idea to give certain things to the Historical Society so that we can save them and help people better understand the past.

Karole Messier: industrial sewing machine used by the Kultis, who were upholsterers.

James Holman: ephemera from the estate of Peg Baker.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7389: Bible owned by J.P. Rice and used at VFW meetings.

William Miller: collection of Miller family items: Sons of Veterans pins, Frank Rice's autograph book, Soldiers monument dedication booklet, Old Mill menus, letter and postcards from Guy Miller during WWI, Union Daughters documents, Westminster 150th anniversary booklet, Miles ribbon, 1909 Anniversary ribbon, William Miller's drafting set, photo album, 1874 town report.

The Education Department also acquired items:

Myrtle Walker: Boy Scout hat

Laila Michaud: album of phonograph records, 45s from the 1950s and 1960s.

Betsy Hannula: wooden bas relief plaque and takana woven on a loom in Finland

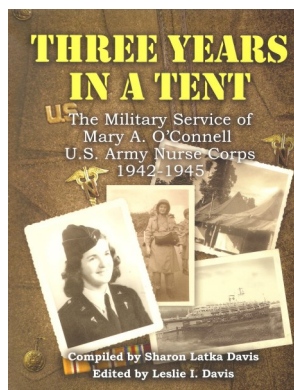
Occasionally we purchase items that we believe should be in the collections because they give us an important perspective about our past. Such is the case with a recent purchase, a book, [Three Years in a Tent: the Military Service of Mary O'Connell](#) by Sharon Latka Davis.

Here's the story. In the spring of 1942, five young women nurses volunteered to serve in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps. After basic training they boarded a train to cross the country, traveled by boat to Australia, and later to New Guinea, where they cared for the injured during the Japanese invasions. These five nurses insisted on staying together during their service (living in a tent), and Mary O'Connell and Lempi Tuomi became very good friends.

Fast forward to 2015 and Mary's daughter, Sharon, a retired librarian, decided to write the history of her mother's service. The problem was she had no personal material to "flesh out" the story so she reached out to as many relatives of the other four women as she could locate. With an odd name like "Lempi"

she figured she could find an obituary on line, and she did. In Lempi's obituary, it said she was a long time member of the Westminster Historical Society, so she contacted us. What a surprise when she learned that Lempi Tuomi was my mother! It was a lucky day for her because my mother wrote a letter to her boyfriend (my father) every day during her entire service – literally hundreds of letters – and also recorded events with her camera. I lent Sharon lots of letters and photos and she was able to "flesh out" her own mother's story.

It was fascinating to learn that histories of nurses in World War II are rare; Sharon did a good job in documenting events for this one.



Reading her mother's story will shed a light on a woman closer to home: Lempi Tuomi Aalto, who went from tending the sick and wounded in Australia and New Guinea under battlefield conditions to overseeing 800 children at Westminster Elementary School for 28 years, retiring in 1976.

This book was also purchased by the Forbush Library and is available for lending.

JUHANNUS PROGRAM

Our annual Juhannus program was held at the Westminster Farmers Camp on Leominster Street in June. This year's theme was Finnish crafts, and on display were wooden bas reliefs of traditional Finnish scenes, weavings, and more. Betsy Hannula also gave a brief account of the anniversary of Finland's independence from Russia, 100 years ago on December 7, 1917. Also available for review was research being collected for a future History of Finns in Westminster. Traditional Finnish refreshments were served.



UPTON UPDATE

The slate roof is finally repaired! With over a thousand new slates, it is now weatherproof and expected to last several more decades. Steve Quinn of Skyline Engineers, a long-time local company specializing in slate roofs, completed the job in July. As part of the process, the two old air shafts above the roof were removed, making the cupola much more visually striking. The air shafts inside the building will be used for the HVAC equipment in the future. The Upton Building Committee is now determining the best way to repair the cupola; the members will be recommending the best way to strengthen the structure and make it easy to repair in the future.



*Upton Building Committee
Von Salmi, Phil Young, Don*



*Upton Building Committee
Tom Marien and David Tur-*

More than 30 people volunteered to produce this event – beginning in July when we set up tables and begin unpacking donations through the day of the event and the cleanup.



Oakmont National Honor Society volunteers

Thank you to ALL volunteers!



*Bob Walker
Volunteer in the barn*

The Attic Treasures Sale

TOWN WIDE YARD SALE

It's such a pleasure to see the excitement on Main Street on our Town Wide Yard Sale day. We have visitors from all over North County enjoying the day hunting for bargains, and we help them out with maps and info about each sale.

ATTIC TREASURES SALE

We were so pleased to have fabulous weather for our Attic Treasures Sale this year! The tents in the front of the house were filled, as well as each room in the house, the connector, and the barn. We made over \$2,600, an important sum to contribute to our annual operating expenses.



United

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

WESTMINSTER CRACKER FESTIVAL

The doors of the Historical Society will be open on Cracker Festival day, Saturday, October 23. Come on in and enjoy the warmth inside and sample the soup being cooked over the open fire and the bread baked in the bake oven.

We'll have school photos from years past (1850s through 1990s) on display and welcome you to help identify persons in them. Sit at a vintage school desk and chair and try your hand at writing with an old fashioned ink pen. And, take a photo outside where a pumpkin face board and an autumn leaves face board are waiting for children's faces.

ANNUAL MEETING

Please see the enclosed invitation to the Historical Society's annual meeting on Friday, Nov. 3, 2017 at 5:30 pm at the American Legion Hall, 127 Main Street in Westminster. Sean McNally will be catering the meal, followed by a presentation by President Barry Roy on the postcard research project which led to the publication of our new book, Vintage Views of a New England Village – a Postcard Tour of Westminster, Massachusetts.

HUMMELS

Dan Friederichs has always loved hummels and now he's willing to share what he know about them at our first Historical Society meeting on November 10. He's bringing several from his large collection and will give a short history of hummels and answer questions about them.

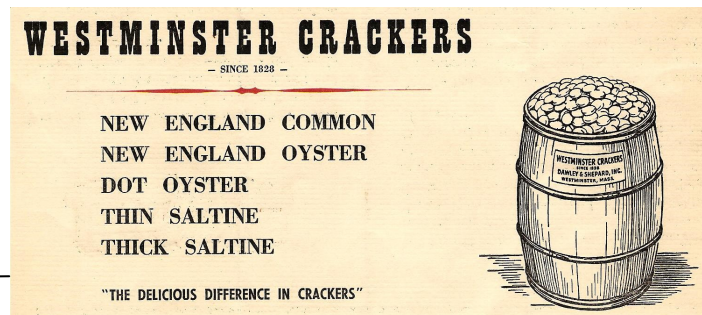


MEMBERS CHRISTMAS PARTY

CHRISTMAS FLEA MARKET AND OPEN HOUSE

WESTMINSTER CRACKER FACTORY

The Westminster Cracker Factory has a long history, beginning in 1832 as a cracker bakery in the basement of the house next door. Keith Dunn, long associated with the Cracker Factory, will give a short history of this unique landmark in Westminster on January 9, 2018.



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 Kerry 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 7-9 pm, Wednesdays 9-11 am, Fridays 9—noon and other times by appointment. Members receive a 10% discount on all purchases. These are also available on our website.

Books

Cemetery Inscriptions 25.00
History of Westminster, 1832 by Hudson 5.00
History of Westminster, 1893 by Heywood. 96.00
History of Westminster 2008 by WHS 75.00
History of Westminster, 1961, by Tolman 20.00
Homestead Heritage of Westminster, by WHS 50.00
Images of America, by WHS 20.00
Olin Warner, Sculptor, by Hyson 4.50
200th Anniversary of Westminster, 5.00
Vintage Views of a New England Village—A
Postcard Tour of Westminster, Massachusetts. 25.00
Wachuset Gatherings, by Sinclair (hardcover). 30.00

Other

Wachuset Mountain charcoal print 60.00
 Calligraphy sampler 12.00
Cracker Factory print by Dana Vickery, signed . 45.00
 Pen & ink of *WHS house* by Santora 28.00
 Map of Westminster 1855. 6.00
Downtown Westminster 1831 by Peckham 30.00
 Postcards 50
 Children's books 4.95
 Paper dolls, Assorted 5.00
 Westminster Tapestry wall hanging 35.00
 Tobacco Shed pottery (last of the line!).priced as marked

Arthur Charles Hicks, known as Charles, at home was born on November 29, 1890 to Lewis M. and Carrie E. (Willis) Hicks in the small town of Hawley in Massachusetts. Sometime after 1900 the family moved to Westminster and lived in a house on Main Street.

America entered World War I on April 6, 1917 and on May 10 at the age of 26 years and 5 months old, Charles enrolled into the United States Naval Reserve Forces (USNRF). His served aboard a receiving ship in Boston Harbor until June 20, 1917 at which time he was assigned to the USS Aztec (SP-590).

Photo # NH 59578 USS Aztec in port, 1 January 1918



The Aztec was originally a steam yacht built in 1902 that was leased to the U.S. Navy in June of 1917. It was overhauled for naval duty and commissioned later in that month as the flagship of the First

Naval District, headquartered at Boston Navy Yard in Charlestown.

In addition to making inspection cruises around northern New England, she also was employed for escort and patrol duties. She also escorted submarines steaming from Boston to New London, Connecticut, as well as British troop ships sailing from Boston to Halifax, Nova Scotia. While escorting one of these convoys to Nova Scotia, Aztec was asked to assist a foundering British transport. She lowered her boats and rescued several hundred troops from the sinking British ship.

During the last three months of World War I, Aztec patrolled the Grand Banks off Newfoundland. On 24 December 1918, the gunboat steamed to New York City and, on 26 December, with Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt on board, participated in a fleet review honoring the American battleships returning from duty in European waters.

Charles began at the rank of Fireman 2nd Class. His duties were to ensure that the coal fed boilers were stoked to provide steam powering the engines of the ship. He was promoted to Water Tender, then Chief Water Tender, requiring him to take charge of the boiler room. This rank supervised the firemen, maintained, operated and repaired the boiler room equipment including pumps, condensers, etc. Charles was released from active duty on September 24, 1919 and honorably discharged from reserve duty on May 9, 1921 after four years of service.



Upon his return to civilian life, Charles was working at a box shop as a “chauffeur.” He married Esther Helen Gates of Westminster on June 21, 1921. They lived on Bacon Street and had three children, Raefield, Douglas and Lawrence. All three children served in World War II, Raefield and Douglas in the Army Air Corps and Lawrence in the Marines. Tragically, Douglas was killed on September 28, 1944 when he was forced to bail out of his crippled B-17 bomber over Germany. Charles lived the remainder of his life in Westminster. He died on September 2, 1973 and is buried in Woodside Cemetery.

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

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DATES TO REMEMBER

Sat. Oct. 21: Westminster Cracker Festival
Fri. Nov. 3: WHS Annual Meeting
Tues. Nov. 13, Hummels
Fri. Dec. 2: Members Christmas Party
Sat. Dec. 3 : Christmas Flea Market & Open House

Dec.-April Wachusett Mountain Ski Area Ticket Program. Get online before you ski! Purchase your ski ticket on line before you go and click on "coupon" and insert the code "HISTSOC". Wachusett Mountain Associates will donate \$5 for every ticket purchased this way to the Historical Society. We thank them and we thank you!

IN MEMORIAM

We were sad to learn of the death of Elaine Lawrence this summer. She and her husband arrived in town in 1953 and purchased the George Miles Farm on Carter Road. During this time the Historical Society had reached a low point in membership and a few dedicated members were meeting in their homes. Elaine was asked to become a member and thus began a long relationship with the Historical Society. It was her vitality and skills that re-energized the Historical Society.



In 1959, the Town of Westminster celebrated the 200th anniversary of its incorporation, and the Historical Society was in the forefront of it all, due to her leadership. Her home was included in the House Tour that year—a tremendous success for all. We will always be grateful for her dedication and guidance.