



# WESTMINSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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# NEWSLETTER

110 Main Street, P.O. Box 177, Westminster, MA 01473  
WestminsterHistoricalSociety@gmail.com

www.WestminsterHistoricalSociety.org

(978) 874-5569

Fall 2019  
facebook: Westminster Historical Society

*Betsy Hannula wrote this feature to help folks understand why we should take stock of our town and make stronger efforts to preserve what is special about it. The idea for the story began this summer...*

## WHAT IS A NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICT AND HOW DID WE GET ONE IN WESTMINSTER?

The Sargent house at 19 Academy Hill Road was demolished this summer. Most people were aghast when they heard about it. How could someone take down a house on the Town's Common? It was one of the six original homes surrounding this very special place which was the origin of our town in 1737. The first meetinghouse, the first school, the first minister's house, the first building housing a store and inn were all there, and the first house ever built in Westminster (and still standing!) and the Westminster Academy right nearby.



Why were folks upset? It's simple. The architecture in a town is unique; it reflects the history of the community in a way that no other attribute can **because it is so permanent**. This is true, of course, until the houses disappear. And that is what

occasionally happens – sometimes by accident and sometimes by plan.

When we lose homes that are a contributing factor to a neighborhood or to the downtown or to a street, we have lost a piece of history that can never be replaced. Even a new home built to look like an old one is just something that pretends to be old. To have the real thing – the house that really was built in 1700s – and is still lived in today, is a testament to the skills of Westminster's forefathers and to the sturdy homes they built that have survived the decades.

People asked why couldn't someone stop this travesty? Many knew that the house was listed in the National Register of Historic Places and wondered why that didn't prohibit the buyers from demolishing it. I thought it was timely to talk about the National Register and what it means.

Being listed on the National Register means that the property is historically or architecturally significant, locally, state-wide, or nationally. Unfortunately that designation does not place any restrictions on the property. It is an honor and adds value to the property but does not help save it.

The idea to seriously look at properties in Massachusetts as important to our state and to our nation was boosted as a result of the tremendous outpouring of patriotism preparing for the country's 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 1976. The Massachusetts Historical Commission was created in 1963 and the Massachusetts General Laws were amended to provide regulations enabling each town and city to create its own Historical Commission.

Each Historical Commission had to have a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 7 members. In 1976 the Westminster Selectmen chose persons for the first Westminster Historical Commission - Chairman Tom Malloy, Vice Chairman Peter Remelius, Corresponding Secretary Ann Howard, Recording Secretary Betsy Hannula, Treasurer

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**2018-2019  
Officers & Board Members & Staff**

<i>President</i> .....	
<i>Vice President</i> .....	Linda Malizia
<i>Clerk</i> .....	Betsy Hannula
<i>Treasurer</i> .....	
<i>At Large</i> .....	Bob Feeley
<i>At Large</i> .....	Tom Marien
<i>At Large</i> .....	Phil Marysz
<i>At Large</i> .....	Patty Schmid
<i>At Large</i> .....	Ann Williams

**STAFF**

<i>Administrative Assistant</i> . . . .	Nadine Leger
<i>Assistant Treasurer</i> .....	Christine Carey
<i>Building &amp; Grounds Manager</i> .	Brett Barnaby
<i>Curator</i> .....	Betsy Hannula
<i>Genealogy Researcher</i> .....	Darlene Johnson
<i>Newsletter</i> .....	Betsy Hannula

**MEETINGS**

Meetings are held November through June  
on the 2nd Tuesday at 7 pm  
and are free and open to the public.

**HOUSE & GIFT SHOP HOURS**

The Historical Society House is open  
Summer Hours  
Mondays 7-9pm, Wednesdays 9:30-11am,  
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 BOARD**

September 15, 2019

Dear Members and Friends,

Autumn is quickly approaching and the Historical Society's Board members and committees are gearing up for a busy season. With the Attic Treasures Sale on September 28 we look to members and friends to help us set up and then staff the sale areas for this largest fundraiser of the year.

That is followed by the Cracker Festival on October 19, an event which draws at least a couple thousand people to the center of town. We have carved out a little niche for the Society, by inviting people to come inside our house to watch soup and cornbread being made in the fireplace with Claudia Ewing and offering visitors free tastings. We also have a game of identifying household items that would have been used 200 years ago. Visitors can take their pictures behind face boards on the front lawn. And, we'll have a raffle of unique and fun things as well. And don't miss our Town Crier (aka Bob Feeley) walking around the festival grounds!

We hope you can attend our Annual Meeting on November 1. Be sure to sign up for it! The program will be "Building the Wachusett Reservoir" and will be an interesting comparison to Quabbin Reservoir.

Then Christmas will be upon us. We'll again host a Christmas Flea Market and Open House on Sat. Dec. 7. Stop in with your family for hot cider and a cookie!

We are all earnestly doing our best to fulfill the mission of the Historical Society—to save and share Westminster's history. We are looking for people to bring their ideas and expertise to our Board and Committees. Please think about joining us!

Gratefully,

Your Board of Directors,

*Linda Malizia*

*Betsy Hannula*

*Bob Feeley*

*Tom Marien*

*Phil Marysz*

*Patty Schmid*

*Ann Williams*



## HOUSE AND GARDEN TOUR A SUCCESS!

It was the hottest day of the year—a day where nearly everyone was home staying cool! Yet, there were die-hard house tour fans who braved the sweltering heat and humidity to take advantage of the opportunity to view people’s gardens and take a look in their homes.

We appreciate the families who were able to share their beautiful homes and the history about them. Westminster is fortunate indeed to have some very special historic homes and gardeners who can achieve amazing results with the areas surrounding their homes!

Thank you to Bob and Emily D’Onfro, Lloyd and Joyce Hannula, Brian and Jill Mygatt, Chris and Jody Mossman, Tim and Ina Carey, Samuel and Kathy Stacy, Eddie and Betsy Hannula, Rene and Yvette Rameau, Arelindo & Jane Alves, and Marylouise and Margherita Altobelli. It was a great day!





*Continued from p. 1*

Brenton MacAloney, Ruth Lockhart and Dolly Dawley.

One of the primary responsibilities of each Historical Commission is to identify all buildings, monuments and bridges that are historically or architecturally significant and then to make plans to preserve them. At that time, the guidelines were to include homes built before 1875. (Today that date has changed to 1925.) The Westminster Historical Commission's task was made easier because the Westminster Historical Society had already begun to identify important buildings in Westminster.

At this point, we should make clear the difference between the Historical Commission and Historical Society. The Westminster Historical Society is a private non-profit organization whose mission is to save and share the history of Westminster. It has a membership of about 200 members, unlike the Commission which by law can only have 7 members.

A group of longtime Society members had been researching for several years homes that were historically or architecturally significant, using forms supplied by the Massachusetts Historical Commission. They had more than 300. The next step was to examine all the buildings and see if they could be grouped in any way to form a district.

The Historical Society then gave all the information to the Historical Commission and they continued with filling out the application for the State Register, a step which precedes the step of applying to be on the National Register.

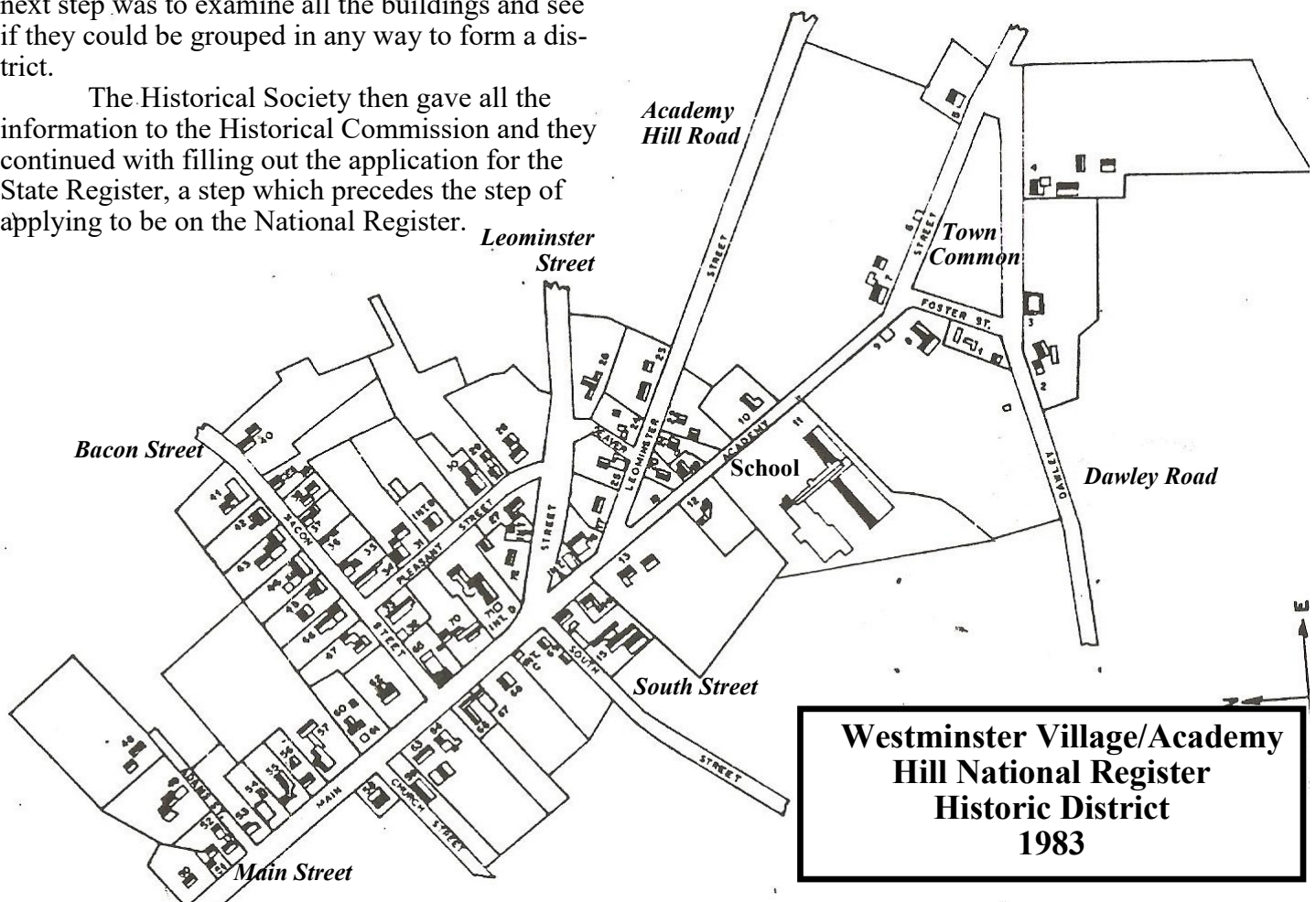
They also determined which buildings were "intrusions," in other words, were more modern structures which did not qualify as historically or architecturally significant.

They submitted the application forms to the Massachusetts Historical Commission. They were approved there and were then submitted to the federal Department of the Interior, which has jurisdiction over the National Register of Historic Places in the country.

In 1983 the town of Westminster received the good news that the application was approved; the **Westminster Village / Academy Hill National Register Historic District** was a reality. It includes 92 acres of land in the downtown area with 72 structures. A celebration was planned to commemorate the event the next year, 1984, which happened to be the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the incorporation of Westminster.

This is a distinct honor - national recognition that these properties are significant. Indeed, several architectural historians who have visited Westminster declared how unusual our downtown is. It's a wonderful mix of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Colonial style buildings, and then a large number of Greek Revival buildings.

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	NAME	ADDRESS	DATE
1		3 Foster St.	Pre-1855
2	Eager House	18 Dawley Rd.	1849
3	Town Pound	18 Dawley Rd.	1910
4	Parson's House	6 Dawley Rd.	1815
5	Emerson Tavern	34 Academy Hill Rd.	1793
6	Meetinghouse Marker	Academy Hill Rd.	Erected 1935
7	Squire Dustin House	22 Academy Hill Rd.	1810
8	Foster House	19 Academy Hill Rd.	1829
9	Westminster Academy Marker	Academy Hill Rd.	Erected 1923
10	Deacon Robert Peckham House	12 Academy Hill Rd.	1820
11	Upton School	13 Academy Hill Rd.	1912
12		5 Academy Hill Rd.	1870
13	Penniman Tavern	5 Leominster St.	C1776
14		3 Leominster St.	C 1762
15	Cracker Bakery	1 Leominster St.	1842
	Intrusion – gas station	Leominster St.	
16		6 Leominster St.	1818
17	Isaac Miles INN	8 Leominster St.	1800
18	WWI Marker	Corn Leominster & Academy Hill Rd.	Erected 1920
19	Albert Howard Cottages	6 Academy Hill Rd.	C1890
20	Albert Howard Cottage	11 Leominster St.	1892
21	Albert Howard Cottage	13 Leominster St.	C1890
22	Albert Howard Cottage	15 Leominster St.	C1890
23		16 Leominster St.	C1827
24		14 Leominster St.	C1827
25		10 Leominster St.	Post 1870
26		2 Seaver St.	Pre 1855
27		4 Pleasant St.	1840
28		1 Pleasant St.	1837
29		3 Pleasant St.	1840
30		5 Pleasant St.	1850
31		7 Pleasant St.	C1930
32	Spanish American War Monument	5 Bacon St.	Erected 1946
33	Town Hall	5 Bacon St.	1839
34		7 Bacon St.	1838
35		9 Bacon St.	1837
36		11 Bacon St.	1836

	NAME	ADDRESS	DATE
37		13 Bacon St.	1850
38		15 Bacon St.	1849
39		17 Bacon St.	1830s
40		19 Bacon St.	C1836
41		18 Bacon St.	1830
42		16 Bacon St.	C1800
43		14 Bacon St.	1850
44		12 Bacon St.	1814
45		10 Bacon St.	1834
46		8 Bacon St.	1840s
47		6 Bacon St.	C1830
48		10 Adams St.	C1845
49		6 Adams St.	1845
50		90 Main St.	1764
51		94 Main St.	1780
52		98 Main St.	C1820
53		100 Main St.	1829
54		104 Main St.	Pre-1855
55		106 Main St.	1841
56		110 Main St.	1805
57		112 Main St.	1870
58		113 Main St.	C1820
59	First Baptist Church	117 Main St.	1863
60	First Baptist Parsonage	116 Main St.	Pre-1855
61	Daniel Miles Marker	116 Main St.	Erected 1918
62	Forbush Memorial Library	118 Main St.	1901
63	The Brick Store	121 Main St.	1829
64		123 Main St.	C1830
65	Intrusion B.	128 Main St.	1825
66	Old Universalist Church	127 Main St.	1822
67	Central Engine House	129 Main St.	C1840
68		133 Main St.	1814
	Intrusion C.	135 Main St.	1973
70		134 Main St.	1823
72	Intrusion -First Congregational Church	138 Main St.	1942
72	Jabez Bigelow House	142 Main St.	1766
	Intrusion E	144 Main St.	1909

Continued on p 6

## 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 Nadine 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	\$30
Family	45
Senior (over 65)	20
Contributing	60
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.

## CURATOR'S CORNER

We are pleased that the following persons have donated items for the Historical Society to preserve for future generations to learn about our past:

*Lawrence Hicks:* postcards, photos, large collection of Willard Gates badges, pins, patches, diaries, and paraphernalia from World War II,

*Richard Spencer:* a Magic Lantern with 24 slides for viewing (see ad for it below!)

*Chrissy Girard:* Westminster Elementary School 3rd grade class photo,

*Unknown:* collection of photos of Howard farm, Digital Equipment Corp. coffee mug, tintype,

*Oakmont Regional High School:* classes of 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2013 yearbooks,

*Lunenburg Historical Society:* deed of land from Josiah Lane to Stephen Marsh,

*Charles Allen:* album of information on Charles Wilfred Allen I, who once owned the tavern in Westminster.



## VOLUNTEERS WELCOMED!

We were pleased to have Olivia Young as a student volunteer this summer. She has wonderful research skills and utilized them in examining a trunk full of documents and account books from the Grand Army of the Republic Women's Relief Corp. and the Veterans of Foreign Wars Women's Auxiliary.



These items had been stored upstairs in the old town hall, and it was good for them to see the light of day and be cataloged and placed in the Historical Society database for anyone to research.

Olivia will return to her second year of school in Great Britain at the end of this month. She is attending the London School of Economics and Political Science.

We are always looking for people who can give a few hours a month here. You could help catalog items (and learn a bit of history too!) or bring your interest and expertise to one of our committees. Please give us a call.



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We can tell the history of our town by the buildings that remain to tell the story. In Westminster, the period of greatest prosperity was before the Civil War when chair manufacturing was the predominant business. There were more than 30 chair companies in town and people making money wanted to demonstrate their wealth by building houses in the new style popular at that time – Greek Revival, with the gable end of a house facing the main road. Westminster has an abundance of them, especially in the downtown.

Unfortunately, being listed on the National Register of Historic Places does not protect a building from being demolished. That means someone can take down a house unless the town residents vote at a town meeting to create bylaws that provide some protection for these significant homes. Without protective bylaws, there is a real danger that the New England character of our town which both residents and visitors enjoy will slowly be lost. The historic buildings, rural nature, small town look and feel that make Westminster the special place that it is, will change.

What are some of the by-laws that residents can add to the Town By-laws to begin to protect our town? One of the most important is a Demolition Delay By-Law. It requires that anyone wishing to demolish a building listed as being historically or architecturally significant and worthy of preservation must wait a year.

This gives the homeowner requesting the demolition time to work with the Historical Commission to find another option for the home.

Could an addition be made to provide more space for the homeowner? Could the house be moved? Would another buyer be interested in preserving the building? At the end of a year, if no alternative has been found, the homeowner is granted permission to demolish the building.

Demolition Delay by-laws have been successful in other towns in Massachusetts, and the Westminster Historical Commission will be presenting a Demolition Delay By-Law at the town meeting in November. Please go to this town meeting and learn more about these efforts!

There are other by-laws which could be approved to help preserve the special historic aspects of our town. The Westminster Historical Commission will be researching them in the coming years and bringing them to the townspeople's attention so we can be proactive in preserving our community's historic buildings.



*A home at 6 Spruce Road that was demolished to protect Fitchburg's water supply in Meetinghouse Pond.*

## WESTMINSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY GIFT SHOP

When looking for a unique gift for birthdays, anniversaries, and other holidays or special occasions, come and browse in 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, Tuesdays 8-11am, and Fridays 9-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, 1832</u> by Hudson . . . . .	5.00
<u>History of Westminster, 1893</u> by Heywood. . . . .	96.00
<u>History of Westminster 2008</u> by WHS . . . . .	95.00
<u>History of Westminster, 1961</u> , by Tolman . . . . .	20.00
<u>Homestead Heritage of Westminster</u> , by WHS . . . . .	50.00
<u>Images of America</u> , by WHS . . . . .	20.00
<u>Olin Warner, Sculptor</u> , by Hyson . . . . .	4.50
<u>200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Westminster</u> , . . . . .	5.00
<u>Vintage Views of a New England Village—A</u>	
<u>Postcard Tour of Westminster, Massachusetts</u> . . . . .	25.00
<u>Wachuset Gatherings</u> , by Sinclair (hardcover). . . . .	30.00

### Other

<u>Wachuset Mountain</u> charcoal print . . . . .	60.00
Calligraphy sampler . . . . .	12.00
<u>Cracker Factory</u> print by Dana Vickery, signed . . . . .	45.00
Map of Westminster 1855. . . . .	6.00
<u>Downtown Westminster 1831</u> 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
<u>New Soup Mug with Spoon</u> . . . . .	10.00

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

## DATES TO REMEMBER

Sept. 28: Attic Treasures Sale  
Oct. 19: Westminster Cracker Festival  
Nov. 1: Annual Meeting  
Dec. 7: Christmas Flea Market  
Open House

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## UPCOMING PROGRAMS

November 1: **Annual Meeting:** Program will be *Building the Wachusett Reservoir* by the MA Dept. of Conservation & Recreation, Division of Water Protection, to be held at McNallys on Sargent Rd. All are invited! Invitations were emailed/mailed along with this copy of the newsletter. Be sure to send in your RSVP and if you lost your copy, the invitation can be found on our website on the "Forms" page.



*The history of the making of Wachusett Reservoir, the 2nd largest manmade body of water in the Commonwealth, will be the program at the Annual Meeting.*



The **Cracker Festival** on Oct. 19 will draw lots of people. We hope you're one of them! Plan to visit us and have a cup of soup while you try to guess what each of the antique tools was supposed to do. The Gift Shop will be open too!



The **Christmas Flea Market and Open House** will be on Sat. Dec. 6. Come in and find yourself a bargain for decorating and then enjoy a cup of hot cider or coffee with a cookie while enjoying the glowing fireplace. Also peruse the Gift Shop for your holiday giving.

### ICE OUT CONTEST

Begins in January! Watch for info on this contest to determine when our unique figure on Round Meadow Pond will fall through the ice. If you guess the closest time and day you may be the winner!!

*You are invited to attend all our public programs this coming year. The program calendar for September 2019 - July 2020 were emailed/mailed along with this copy of the newsletter, and programs are listed on our website on the "Calendar of Events" page.*