



WESTMINSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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

(978) 874-5569
www.WestminsterHistoricalSociety.org

Summer2019
facebook: Westminster Historical Society

*Summer is finally here! We have a lovely story for you about **Blueberry Summers**, written by Bette Roy. Her grandparents, Toivo and Hilja Nikki, grew blueberries for commercial markets. Those memories are seared in her mind and she's sharing them with you!*

My grandparents came from Finland and settled in Westminster. They owned about 50 acres of land, most of which were low bush blueberry fields. I never thought having to spend every summer raking wild native blueberries was unusual. It's what my family did. The whole family.



When the berries were ripe, we all did our part every day. There was no dawdling, especially on those days when the sun beat down on us unmercifully. Everyone wanted to get as many berries picked before it got too brutally hot. Depending on which part of the pasture needed raking, I'd ride in the old blue farm truck or I'd walk. Empty baskets, handmade carriers, wooden crates, and blueberry rakes filled the back of the truck. Before I was old enough to venture out on my own, my mother and grandmother would keep tabs on me. But I had my own blueberry rake and was five years old when I raked a full crate by myself. Thirty two quarts was a lot of berries for a little kid. I guess that was the day I was fully initiated into blueberry summers.

I got to know every inch of the land... where the biggest berries grew, the plants that bore darker sweeter berries, the random aromatic bayberry

bushes that fascinated me, an occasional praying mantis or snake that entertained me, the wild tiger lilies that shone like bright orange beacons in a sea of blue. I loved that land. And as I got older, I'd wander off by myself to pick. The blue truck would

always be stationed somewhere in the pasture and at lunch time, we'd load up our carriers and crates and bring them to the barn to clean the berries later.

We always had a problem with people trespassing. Because the power lines ran through the property, people assumed the land didn't really belong to anyone, even though it was posted. Every summer we'd come across people picking berries. Most of the time the trespassers took our concerns and warnings without complaint after it was explained that this was a commercial business. But other people weren't so nice. A man once pulled a gun and threatened my grandfather. A woman who spent hours picking a bucketful became argumentative with my mother, who then dumped the entire bucket on the ground. The woman was not happy her hard work was for naught. I rarely saw my mother get mad but she talked about that incident years later.

And I had to confront people, also. When I was 9 or 10, I came upon a member of the local clergy. When I told him he was trespassing and couldn't pick berries, he became irate, and insisted he had a right to the berries. I, becoming more agitated, said he was stealing and shame on him. He finally left begrudgingly and I thought, gee, a little kid has to tell a minister to not steal.



A blueberry carrier, handmade by the Nikkis, and a blueberry rake in front.

**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

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<i>Administrative Assistant</i>	Nadine Leger
<i>Assistant Treasurer</i>	Christine Carey
<i>Building & Grounds Manager</i> .	Luther Bradley
<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 8:30-10:30am,
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

June 30, 2019

Dear Members and Friends,

As Board members we are all committed to doing the best we can to fulfill the mission of the Historical Society—to save and share Westminster’s history. It takes time and energy and money from all of us. It also requires that every one of us contributes our own little bit of expertise or knowledge or experience we have acquired in our lifetimes and share it with the organization.

Today we are asking you, if you have a few hours a month to give to the Historical Society to help all the work that needs to get done. What do we need?

Do you have any bookkeeping skills? We need someone to be on the Finance Committee. Do you like to input data into a computer program? We need volunteers to enter information about items in our collections into our database. (And you can learn about Westminster’s history at the same time!) Do you like to socialize with others? We need persons to brainstorm ideas activities for the Cracker Festival. Or maybe you’d like to help plan and guide our work by being on the Board of Directors. We’re always on the lookout for new ideas and fresh energy. There’s much to do and we’d love to have you with us! We can set up times that are right for you.

We have a full schedule of activities that engage large audiences. We hope you can come and check them out, and then ask any of us how you can help. Our town of Westminster is a special place and you can help us promote it by saving it and sharing it with your neighbors and the people all around us.

Gratefully,

Your Board of Directors,

Linda Malizia

Betsy Hannula

Bob Feeley

Tom Marien

Phil Marysz

Patty Schmid

Ann Williams

CURATOR'S CORNER

We are grateful to the following people for donating items to the Historical Society collections. They will be very effective in telling future generations about our lives in this town they can be handled and experienced.

Marilyn Dunn: collection of items from her parents' and her brother Mike Ruuska's estate including weights and measures,

John Gronroos: collection of Finnish books, postcard,

Phil Marysz: collection of items from his parents' store, "Johnny's Market" including the large outdoor



sign which used to hang on the front of the building, and other items from the earlier period stores at that same site, 104 Main Street: a lovely vintage thread chest, country store light fixture.

Darlene Wildes: menu from the Homestead Restaurant on Rt. 2 in Westminster.

WESTMINSTER'S COUNTRY STORES

We had a great night taking a look at the old country stores starting with the first one in the first house built in Westminster at 2 Old Worcester Road. With few roads and no easy access to supplies, homeowners sold necessities from their homes. Soon enough buildings were actually constructed specifically to be a store, until there were more than 20 country stores in town!



The Red & White store which once stood on Main Street.



Edgar Fenno in George Bruce's store.

One was at 104 Main Street, owned in turn by the Nye family, Edgar Bruce, and then John Marysz.

MAPLE SUGARING—A SURE SIGN OF WINTER COMING TO AN END!

Adam and Sherri Bean once again agreed to co--host the public at their Sugar Shack at 10 Harrington Road. The event had to be postponed for a week because it was too cold during the days for the sap to run earlier! Finally the sap was running, and it was collected and brought to the Sugar Shack where it was boiling in their fancy boiler. The steam coming out of the roof was a sign everything was up and running.



Sugar Shack at the Bean's home.



Ann Williams and Bob Feeley served ice cream with maple syrup to visitors that day!



The F.A. Merriam Store and the Westminster National Bank

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My grandmother always cooked a substantial meal at noon time. My grandfather worked hard and she fed him -and us - amply... sometimes spaghetti, but usually a meat and potatoes kind of meal. Or fish and potatoes. Or hot dogs and potatoes. (Potatoes are Finnish mainstay and if you're lived there or visited, you know a potato grown in Finland is heavenly and like no other.) Depending on the weather, how much work we had done, and how much more raking had to be done, my grandmother would give us a small dish of ice cream - vanilla or her favorite, strawberry. I still have one of her ice cream dishes as a special memory.

And we would be treated to soda. My parents never had soda in the house, but my grandmother always did. It was a real treat to go to Leominster Home Beverages to watch and listen to the bottles clink and clank as they went along their noisy mechanical route to their final destination in wooden crates. My grandmother always had orange soda, ginger ale, and sometimes strawberry soda for us. My grandfather was diabetic and they had "dietetic" soda he could enjoy. If I was lucky, I'd get to pick out some birch beer, too, to fill the last slot in the crate.

After lunch, we'd all either hop onto the truck, now filled with yet more empty crates to be filled, or we'd walk out to the pasture again, rakes in hand. If it was REALLY hot, we'd stay out there for only a couple more hours and my mother would bring us in the big old black '49 Buick for a "quick dip" at our camp at Wyman's to cool off. After swimming, we'd have sandwiches for early easy supper and head back to the barn to clean the day's harvest.

As the blueberry season came into full force, the wooden barn floor became bluer and bluer with dropped berries scattered about. The scent of blueberry was unmistakable. With the first few truckloads of harvested berries came the almost insatiable urge to eat them but as the summer wore on, we all had had our fill of blueberries.

My grandparents had a blueberry cleaning machine, a brightly painted blue contraption, several feet long. Berries would be dumped in, basket by



Toivo and Hilja Nikki, immigrants from Finland, who settled in Westminster in 1926. He also worked a full time job at Crocker Burbank in Fitchburg.

basket, and a fan would blow leaves and smaller unripe berries out through a window. The berries would then drop onto a conveyor belt with a big turnstile at the end which held baskets. In late afternoon it was a relief to clean the berries; the barn always seemed cooler than the hot pasture. It was always a big deal to be the one dumping the berries into the machine. There was a rhythm to it; too few berries on the belt was inefficient, too many all at once usually meant the belt had to be stopped so the people picking through the berries had a chance to inspect the berries thoroughly. There were usually three

people on each side of the belt and the brake was a big wooden handle that would be pulled. Someone, usually my mother, would be at the end, filling the baskets two at a time, turning the turnstile and making sure each basket looked good, often topping them off with extra berries. The baskets would then be placed in cardboard crates ready for market.

Sometimes, we'd be short a few crates to fill the back of the truck, and everyone would head out to the pasture a third time. I liked those times because I could stay in the barn, run the cleaning machine, clean the berries and pack them all by myself. I was a fast worker with good hand-eye coordination and could run through several crates quickly. I'd dump some berries, work the conveyor belt and fill the baskets easily. I'm not quite sure how old I was when I was entrusted to "carry on" by myself in the barn but it was in my preteen years.

Family friends often helped with the blueberry harvest. Conversations were always in Finn. The Jamsa and Engman families helped a lot; it was nice to have other people around. When relatives from Finland visited, they helped, too. An old family friend once took home movies of the pasture. It was an exceptionally good year and I remember watching the movie in my grandmother's living room. The pasture was like a massive ocean of blue.

The Old Mill used to buy our blueberries, and I set up a little blueberry stand at the bottom of my grandparents' driveway. People were happy to buy the berries at 60 cents a quart after hav-



Haymarket Square—in the background— in the 1950s, a crazy busy place where buyers for restaurants competed with families looking for the best fruits and vegetables, which had been delivered the night before by farmers .

ing lunch at The Old Mill. My mother suggested to me that they'd probably pay 65 cents and I didn't believe her. She was right.

But most of the berries went to Boston where they'd be bought by restaurants. My father and grandfather would load up the truck and one of them would drive to Haymarket in Boston. My grandparents had a stellar reputation, as they would not sell berries that were damp or past their prime; often the berries were spoken for and bought even before the old blue farm truck arrived there in early evening.

I was able to go to Boston many times and it was always a thrill. The city was so different than our little town. The sounds, the smells, the big buildings and city streets all seemed so very foreign. The ride home always involved a cold treat. There was an ice cream place in Lexington that had the best chocolate chip ice cream; hundreds, if not millions, of little pieces of chocolate would crunch in my mouth. If my father was too tired to stop there, which was a bit out of the way, we'd stop at the Howard Johnson's on Route 2 and I'd always get black raspberry ice cream. Chocolate chip or black raspberry... either was a substantial reward for a hard day's work.

So that's what my blueberry summers in the 50's and 60's were like. Though I now have a major aversion to hot summer weather, I miss those days. It was hard work, seemingly never-ending at times. But I learned to work for what's important. Those blueberry summers exemplify what I call "for the family good." We all pitched in without complaint and worked together as a unit. We had a common goal. I wonder if today's families do.

JUHANNUS CELEBRATION

We were faced with coming up with a program for Juhannus in a short period of time when we learned that the material about Ollie Manninen's life had not been completely gathered by his family.

So, we came up with the idea of focusing on two unusual customs that Finns traditionally participate in: one is "cupping" to rid the body of sickness, and the other is celebrating the New Year by telling the future. "Cupping" is an ancient custom, begun during Greek Days and brought to China and then to Finland where it has been done for hundreds of years. Cups made from horn were placed on the skin and from the smaller end, the air was sucked out, making the skin mound up in the vacuum. Then a cut is made in the skin and the blood is let out. People who practice this in Finland today use glass cups and they state they feel energized after this practice. It always takes place in the sauna, where it most sterile



It was a surprise to learn that two people in the audience have actually used the cupping procedure to draw the blood to the areas where the muscles are tight, but they do not make any cuts into the body, and the practice gives relief to them!

The New Years Eve custom requires a small pot to melt lead or tin and a bucket of cold water. Each person takes a turn dropping a little



bit of metal into the water and it solidifies immediately, creating very unique figures. The group then tries to interpret it to predict the future. Lots of small round pieces would mean that lots of money would come to the person next year.



Elaine and Paul Brown inspected a feed shape made by Patty Schmid while Irene Hales and Lisa Hales looked on.

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

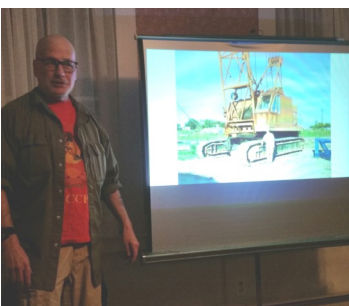
All members receive a 10% discount in the Gift Shop. Please contact me about volunteering. These are some of my interests:

- 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.

HIKING A NEW ZEALAND TRAIL AND BUILDING A GRANARY IN KAZHSTAN—WITH JIM WALKER

We have people in Westminster who have done some amazing things in their lives, and one of them is Jim Walker, son of Sid and Myrtle Walker. Jim has spent months hiking the Appalachian, Australian & Hungarian Trails and with his informative & engaging style, he's given us reports on his hiking experience.



In January Jim Walker presented a program on walking the New Zealand trail from one end of the country to the other. What a thrill to see the sights of this country "down under!"

In March Jim relayed to us his experiences for two years in the Kazakhstan, once a part of Russia. He showed us photos of the construction process of building a granary, an important part of being able to process all the grain they are growing. At the same time shared his experiences in working in a country quite different from the United States.



Jim with his mother Myrtle Walker

WAYNE FRIBERG IN WORLD WAR II



Mark Landry, our resident veterans expert gave an excellent program on Wayne Friberg, who was one of several Westminster men killed in action during World War II. He was a bomber pilot in the Army Air Force and flew on the famous air raid on the oil fields of Ploesti, Romania and was killed on one these bombing raids in 1943.

Some visiting WHS members, Elaine (Seppelin) Brown and her husband Paul, who came from Maine to see the program, were astonished to discover that Elaine's uncle, Waino Hakkinen, had been on the same plane that Wayne Friberg was on! He was lucky to have survived and given the opportunity to return home.



PLANT SWAP AND SALE

It was another successful year with our Plant Swap and Sale. Gardening books and cookbooks were a welcome attraction as well. The Crocker Pond Committee set up a tent and gave out stickers for the vehicles of Westminster residents, so they would be ready for the opening of the Crocker Pond swimming and picnicking areas.



Nancy Sampson and Michaelene Morris and Phil Marysz staffed the event.



Luther Bradley and Rollie Boucher put up the tent in the back yard of the Historical society. Now there's room to hold donations of furniture and large items until the Attic Treasures in September. Donations can be brought to the barn and tent any time.

TOWN WIDE YARD SALE

Thank you to the 46 families who participated in the Sale this year. The Town was buzzing and people had fun looking for bargains! This has become an important fund raiser and we're glad it can help families make some money too!

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, Tuesdays 1-3 pm, 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 WHS95.00
<u>History of Westminster, 1961</u> , by Tolman	20.00
<u>Homestead Heritage of Westminster</u> , by WHS50.00
<u>Images of America</u> , by WHS	20.00
<u>Olin Warner, Sculptor</u> , by Hyson	4.50
<u>200th 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>Wachusett Mountain</u> charcoal print60.00
<u>Calligraphy sampler</u>	12.00
<u>Cracker Factory</u> print by Dana Vickery, signed	45.00
<u>Map of Westminster 1855</u>	6.00
<u>Downtown Westminster 1831</u> by Peckham	30.00
<u>Postcards</u>50
<u>Children's books</u>	4.95
<u>Paper dolls, Assorted</u>	5.00
<u>Westminster Tapestry wall hanging</u>	35.00
<u>Tobacco Shed pottery</u> (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

July 20: House & Garden Tour
August 11 : Town Benefit Day
Sept. 28: Attic Treasures Sale
Oct. 26: Westminster Cracker Festival



Westminster Historical Society
House & Garden Tour
Sat. July 20, 2019
9-3

Visit 6 historic homes and 5 local gardens in full bloom.
Tickets: \$25 before Tour, \$30 day of Tour
WestminsterHistoricalSociety@gmail.com
or www.WestminsterHistoricalSociety.org

This is a rare opportunity to see some of the oldest homes in Westminster, founded in 1737 by hearty settlers in the wilderness.

We are offering history of the families who built these homes and lived in them.

If you enjoy gardens, you'll see them all in full bloom.

Order your tickets today, or pick them up at the Historical Society on the day of the tour.