



WESTMINSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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

www.WestminsterHistoricalSociety.org

(978) 874-5569

Fall 2021

Facebook: Westminster Historical Society

We often receive curious donations for the Attic Treasures Sale and this year was no different. One was a collection of pottery “sherds” housed in a very old shoebox. (Sherd is the English version of shard.) What to do? We knew that there was a Federal law that provides a process for museums to return certain Native American cultural artifacts to descendants and affiliated Indian tribes. Was our donation included? Judd Olshan, one of our new Board members, agreed to undertake the task of researching what we should do.

Our pieces of pottery in Westminster were recognized as ancient and most likely originating in several sites in the Southwest. That raised the question, what is our obligation? How do we as an organization with a mission to preserve history proceed? We set them aside and decided to first determine if we had a legal obligation.

The short answer is no. We did not collect these items and do not know exactly where they come from except that they came from the American Southwest. The story of how these sherds got here to Massachusetts simply amounts to vacationing in the Southwest. We can place our neighbors in context with millions of other Americans who loved vacationing in the Southwest. Americans flocked to the National Parks; they are beautiful spaces and fun to explore. Our Westminster neighbors lived in a past where collecting was normal. They collected interesting finds along with millions of other visitors.

The problem is when artifacts are moved from where they were found without documenting the location and surrounding context, history is lost.

Removed from their home they are mildly interesting but can't add much to the story of a particular people or location.

Pottery from any culture provides archeologists with many types of evidence. The size and shape of a ceramic piece speaks to its purpose. The designs and symbols on pottery reveal clues about culture and history. Some clues are generalized such as how animals are hunted or representations of stories. Some represent a specific family lineage or event. Archeologists might note how symbols change over time or when new foods are introduced. With a substantial number of sherds at the same location over time archeologists might discover when a technology advanced or when the occupants simply changed, one culture replacing another. The residue inside the jars can be analyzed for the composition of drinks or meals. Pottery found far away from its origin speaks to trade or cultural connections with other peoples.



According to the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), museums, including historical societies, are under legal obligation to return items such as human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony” to affiliated modern tribes if a tribe demands it and successfully goes through a repatriation process. Museums all over the world bought up massive collections during their boom years to add to local prestige. Hiring “agents” to collect for museums in the last century amounted to hiring looters as museums sought American artifacts for their collections. Since 1990 nearly 55,000 individuals and nearly 2,000,000 objects

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**2020-2021
OFFICERS & BOARD MEMBERS**

<i>President</i>	Betsy Hannula
<i>Clerk</i>	Ann Williams
<i>At Large</i>	Bob Feeley
<i>At Large</i>	Ali Manion
<i>At Large</i>	Phil Marysz
<i>At Large</i>	Judd Olshan
<i>At Large</i>	Patty Schmid

STAFF

<i>Administrative Assistant</i>	Nadine Leger
<i>Building & Grounds Manager</i> .	Judd Olshan
<i>Curator</i>	Betsy Hannula
<i>Newsletter</i>	Betsy Hannula
<i>Registrar</i>	Open

MEETINGS

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

Until conditions are safe again, please get onto our website WestminsterHistoricalSociety.org to see what is happening and how you can join us!

HOUSE & GIFT SHOP HOURS

The Historical Society House is open Fridays 9-Noon and by appointment.

MISSION

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



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

November 20, 2021

Dear Members and Friends,

The Westminster Historical Society celebrated its 100th anniversary on October 25, On that date in 1921 people gathered at the old Library to create the organization which would care for the collections and staff the museum that was then on the second floor of the Library As was described in the last newsletter, we've come a long way from that first meeting.

After reaching a low during the Covid crisis, we are now working on building a stronger organization to continue the important work of preserving our history and sharing it with others. It's a joy to be together again!

We are beginning a new chapter at the Historical Society—and will build on the foundation laid before by our ancestors. As we organize and plan and come up with new ways of thinking and doing, we will be calling on our members and friends to join us. We already have welcomed two new board members and have more interested! Thank you!

Our future is in the hands of everyone who believes, as we do, that a better future awaits those who use the past to inform the future. How do we fulfill our mission to save and share our past? How have people in Westminster been part of our nation's history? What can we learn from what has happened here? What should we be doing today to ensure better lives for our children and grandchildren? What can we do at the Historical Society to help our residents and friends and neighbors understand how events have shaped our thinking today?

These questions are important to consider when we think about the direction in which our organization is moving. Every program, every activity, even every fundraising event should promote our mission to preserve our past and use it to better understand what's happening today.

If you can give a few hours a month, or a couple hours a week, we can use your help. We can assure you that it is fun (because *you* choose how you want to be involved) —and on top of everything, you learn about your town—interesting bits of history to make your life more interesting. Are you curious? Do you enjoy ideas that are stimulating or thought-provoking? Are you drawn to learning things about the past that are out of the ordinary? Then you would enjoy a few hours a month at the Historical Society!

As we enjoy the holidays this season, please think about where you can help out. Thank you!

Sincerely,
Betsy Hannula,
President

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have been repatriated to current tribes. Our sherds here in Westminster are not included, to our knowledge.

A museum closer to the home of these pieces seemed like a likely place to get more answers. I found Jonathan Till, an expert in ancient Southwestern pottery, who is both an archeologist and resources manager for the state of Utah.

I sent pictures to Jonathan and he confirmed our sherds were most likely from the Colorado Plateau. We have arranged to send them to him, which is as close as we can determine is their "home." They will be used in a collection to help archeologists learn how to identify sherds as part of their educational programming. They won't regain their historical context but we feel this is the best outcome for these items.

The buying and selling of artifacts taken from Federal Lands is now illegal. Prosecutions are rare but dramatic. A Federal sting in 2005 recovered enough artifacts to fill a 2300 square foot Salt Lake City warehouse. It took five years to catalogue and includes unique objects unknown to the archeological community or current tribal professionals.

Even municipalities often have laws governing the removal of archeological material from city property. Archaeologist Johnathon Till described the reasons behind the laws as both ethical and moral. *"From the scientific/historical perspective, the undocumented collection of artifacts results in an erasure of the archaeological record, from that "big book of history" that our earth contains. I can look at a pottery assemblage out here and, if nobody has messed with it much, I can date the assemblage to within 25 years or so. But if someone picks up all the painted pottery on the surface and hauls it off for a shoebox collection, well, forget about that date. My point is this: collecting from a site erases information, just like erasing information from a history book in the library.*

On private land you own whatever is on it unless it's burial and related items. This may seem an arbitrary distinction for how to treat antiquities; it sure is for the artifact. Private property is a key pillar of our democracy, you are under no obligation to contact anyone unless you find a grave site. However, you may want to consider that you have a piece of the American puzzle worth sharing and documenting.

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PLANT SWAP AND SALE & SUMMER FUN YARD SALE

It was a wonderful feeling to be outdoors and see people looking happy to get out of the house and find some bargains. We were delighted to hold outdoor events once again. They were important fundraisers for our organization!



A variety of plants and bushes were donated for gardeners anxious to get started planting!



Bob Walker and Mella Leiter helped with the Summer Fun tables.



Phil Marysz, Karen Sargent and a friend enjoyed the day!

UPTON SCHOOL UPDATE

Thank you to all who participated in the last two Zoom meetings to discuss the disposition of the Upton building. As described in the last newsletter, it has been an arduous year and a half for the Board of Directors. Our efforts to renovate the Upton School in order to better pursue our mission were not successful. We recognized that our financial prospects were limited, our focus was too narrow for the changing population in Westminster, and the difficulties we've endured with the pandemic had made our task untenable. To safeguard the Society's financial future we had to look at other options.

The votes of our members came in and it was decisive; we will dispose of the Upton building. The Historical Society will move forward with the conditions spelled out in the deed we have with the Town. The Town has the first right of refusal; their decision will be made December 1. The next step will require us to get confirmation from the Attorney General to ensure that the intent of the Upton family is supported with our decision to sell the building. Finally, we will choose a company which will conduct the sale or auction of the building. We will of course keep the Town and the School informed of our plans as we proceed.

Meanwhile, the Board of Directors cannot lose sight of its goal to acquire more space in order to fulfill its obligations. In 1999 our Needs Assessment determined that additional space was critical for programs and environmentally safe storage for its collections. That need has not decreased, but rather increased dramatically.

The Society is exploring ways to work with diverse persons and groups whose purposes may blend with ours. We are asking questions. Perhaps others could utilize the room we need for craft workshops? What benefits can we derive from combining forces with theater groups and musicians? How can we work together with other organizations to achieve common goals? What is perceived as lacking in our town that we could provide?

We know we have to expand our approach, and thereby expand our outreach in order to achieve our goals, while ensuring the Historical Society's future is sustainable. And, we are

CURATOR'S CORNER

We are grateful to those persons who have donated items to our collections. When we can touch objects in person, we can suddenly relate to the past much more easily. We hope everyone can do his part in examining objects they're in charge of disposing, and think about how they might help tell a story of life in Westminster in an earlier time.

We thank the following persons for donating these items:

Tom Torrans: history of Lombard Furniture Co., info and photo of Whitney Chair Manufacturing in Westminster and Ashburnham

Dereka Smith: Kendall Family genealogy

Keena Family: St. Edward's Youth Group cookbook

For Education Dept.: Unknown: Life Pictorial History of World War II and copy of a book written in 1833 "The District School As It Was by One Who Went To It"

We actually received this little book about a District School (noted above) covered in beautiful soft light brown leather several years ago from an unknown donor. I have read it several times because it's a delightful account of life in these district schools long ago—imagining children aged 5 to 15 in one room, with a young master or mistress trying to “keep” school with very little training.

I've had a life-long interest in schools and am fascinated that in Westminster there were once 13 district schools, one in every distant neighborhood. By the 1930s, all the schools were abandoned, but for almost 200 years it was the norm for all children.

I knew we should not keep this book. It was written about a district schoolhouse in Templeton In 1890, it was given to the Ladies Library there, and apparently at a later date was given away. At any rate, it showed up here, and all the families mentioned in it are Templeton families. So, after making a copy of it for our Education Department, I brought it to the Templeton Historical Society. Now people here can still research what it was like to attend school in the 1800s, but the wonderful little book is in its rightful “home.”

UNITED WAY DAY OF CARING



We had a wonderful response for volunteers on the Day of Caring! Four persons cleaned up the gardens in preparation for winter and a team from Aubuchons worked with a team of students from Leominster High School cutting shrubs and cleaning up a

big area in the rear of our property, getting ready for a storage unit there. We are so grateful for their services!



Judd Olshan working with a volunteer on the Day of Caring organized by the United Way



Our garden got spruced up while other volunteers began setting up for the Attic Treasures Sale.



Clearing out the back yard in readiness for a storage trailer to hold our exhibit cases and furniture for the future.

ATTIC TREASURES SALE

Thank you to our volunteers for sorting and organizing our donations for these sales!



Jeanne Keena and Ann Williams in our barn.



Bob Walker



Phil Marysz

PROGRAMS IN 2022

We are still using caution in opening up for programs at the Historical Society. If all goes well, we hope to have a few programs in 2022 in our building. We are also exploring holding a few programs through Zoom, since we had success holding two meetings this past year on Zoom, allowing people from other states, who normally could not attend, participate. It was exciting, and could be an avenue to conduct more programs available to members and friends far and wide in this country. Stay tuned!

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. Or, you can now become a member by getting onto our website! 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

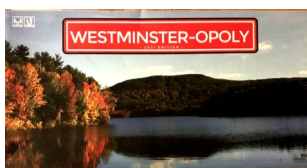
All members receive a 10% discount in the Gift Shop.

Please contact me about volunteering. These are some of my interests:

- Sorting, cleaning, and cataloging items for the collections.
- Putting data about items into our computer database.
- Helping with newsletters and brochures.

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 may find the perfect gift for the person who loves Westminster. Members receive a 10% discount on all purchases. **You can now order items from the Gift Shop ONLINE** at WestminsterHistoricalSociety.org. Sales tax and shipping costs will apply. The Gift Shop is open Fridays 9-Noon, during programs, and other times by appointment.



New!
Westminister-opoly
 featuring 29 businesses
 in Westminister.
Fun for all ages!



*We have only 9 puzzles of
 Westminister Historical
 Sites left for sale! We now
 also have posters of the
 puzzle for sale.*

Books

- Cemetery Inscriptions \$45.00
- History of Westminister, 1832 by Hudson 5.00
- History of Westminister, 1893 by Heywood. 96.00
- History of Westminister 2008 by WHS 75.00
- History of Westminister, 1961, Ed. by Tolman 20.00
- Homestead Heritage of Westminister, by WHS 50.00
- Images of America, by WHS 20.00
- Olin Warner, Sculptor, by Hyson 4.00
- 200th Anniversary of Westminister, 5.00
- Vintage Views of a New England Village—A
- Postcard Tour of Westminister, Massachusetts 25.00
- Wajusett Gatherings, by Sinclair (hardcover). 30.00
- Westminister Reflections booklet. 4.00
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- NEW Westminister-opoly game** \$40.00

Other

- Wachusett Mountain charcoal print 60.00
- Calligraphy sampler 12.00
- Cracker Factory print by Dana Vickery, signed 45.00
- Map of Westminister 1855. 6.00
- Downtown Westminister 1831 by Peckham 30.00
- Postcards 50
- Photo of Wachusett Mountain by M. Lyons 10.00
- Westminister Tapestry wall hanging 35.00
- Soup Mug with Spoon 10.00
- Historic Sites Puzzle (18"x24"), 500 pieces) 49.00
- Historic Sites Poster, incl. frame (14"x17") 20.00
- Historic Sites Poster, incl. frame (18"x22") 25.00
- Historic Sites Poster, incl. frame (21"x29") 30.00

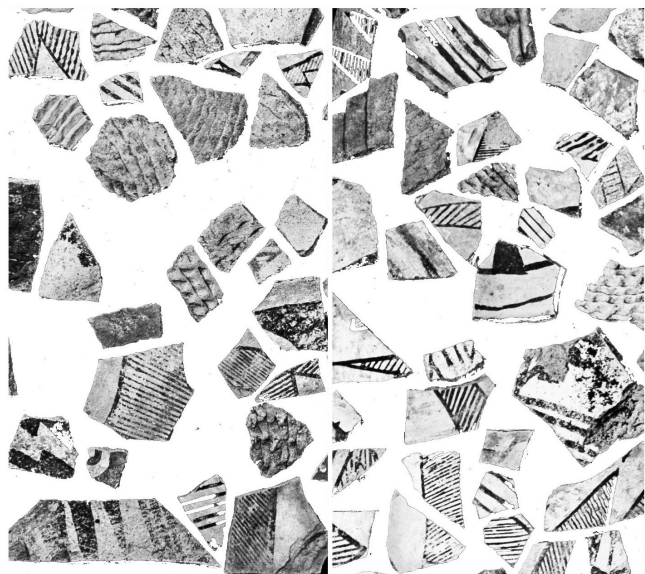
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The human urge to collect things is mighty. I assume the membership of a historical society is filled with both collectors and preservationists. These two historical impulses are a paradox of sorts. I asked Johnathon how he, as a resources manager working for the government, asks people to curb the impulse to collect American antiquities while encouraging positive use of public lands.

I like to steer people toward a "catch and release" ethic: find things and take pictures of them, but leave them for someone else to find in their natural environment (better than losing them in a shoebox in your attic). That way the historical narrative stays intact and someone else can come along and read the text from that book after you've already checked it out. There's that joy of discovery, made available again by the generous finder a generation before."

If you do find Native American artifacts you don't want to keep, consider contacting experts in a museum to help point you in the right direction.

This is a picture collage of our donated sherds before they were returned "home" this week. Have some fun with colored pencils and trace the rough outlines, the designs, the curves you see while you contemplate the mystery of a mostly lost American past.



This is link that can help identify sherds in greater detail. ceramics.nmarchaeology.org . You can also read more here: Craig Child's book Finders Keepers and Chip Colwell's Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits.

CRACKER FESTIVAL

Visitors to the Historical Society were surprised to learn that the fire in the fireplace was actually cooking soup in the pot! Yes, it was made from scratch, and was so good that it was all gone by the end of the afternoon.



Our resident Town Crier (aka Bob Feeley) was patrolling the streets during the Cracker Festival ringing his bell for all to hear!



The Colonial Artifacts game in the room next door kept a lot of people guessing. It was a fun day all around!



The Historical Society participated in the Westminster Dog Show, a fundraiser for the Cracker Festival and the Westminster Village Foundation. We hosted the Aubuchon Hardware Company's dog which was painted by Chuck Heidorn.

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

Dec. 4, 9 -2 Christmas Flea
Market
Dec. 5, Noon-4 Christmas Flea
Market
Jan. 14, 6pm Annual Meeting

WESTMINSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING DATE SET

The Westminster Historical Society Board of Directors invites all to attend the Annual Meeting on January 14, 2022 at 6 pm. Details of the meeting will be sent to everyone by email, if you have given us your email address, and by regular mail, if you haven't.



We will celebrate the 100 years since the Historical Society was created October 25, 1921, and honor those who have brought us to this point in our history. Please join us as we recognize members who have served on the Board of Directors and Committees in the past.

CHRISTMAS FLEA MARKET

Join us the first weekend in December, **Dec. 4, 9-2** and **Dec. 5, Noon-4** for our Annual Christmas Flea Market! Come in and sit by the fire while you sip apple cider or coffee and munch on cookies. Think about gifts you might purchase in the Historical Society Gift Shop for your friends and family who love Westminster, especially the new *Westminster-opoly game!*



Meanwhile, the rooms are filled with holiday decorations, Christmas ornaments, tree trimmings, candles, and special items for holiday entertaining, all at bargain prices! This year we've also added vintage gifts. Come in to see!