



WESTMINSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Summer 2021
Facebook: Westminster Historical Society

On October 25, 2021, it will be 100 years since the Westminster Historical Society was founded! We'd like to celebrate by sharing our history in this newsletter. See if you recognize any of the persons in the photos. We hope all our past membes would be proud of what has been accomplished!

Our origins are closely tied to the Forbush Memorial Library. Charles Forbush, who donated the funds to build the Library in 1901, explained that the upper hall was “designed for a repository of relics or artifacts suggestive of the early history of the town and its people.” As people donated items to this museum, the accumulating collections needed care, and since this was not the primary concern of the librarians, a historical society was created.



Library museum when first open in 1901

When founded in 1921, the purposes of the Historical Society were to “collect and preserve manuscripts, letters, books, pamphlets, papers, historical relics, facts, anecdotes, legends, etc. relating to the history of Westminster ... to locate sites of historical interest... and ... to stimulate research into the local history of the town and its people.”

Meetings of the Historical Society were held regularly in the Library and in people’s homes during the 1950s and 1960s, and later at the American Legion Hall. In 1960, the Westminster Historical Society was officially incorporated as a non-profit organization in Massachusetts.



A meeting in the Library Museum to hear Mark Landry's talk on Westminster's Civil War soldiers.

In addition, from the very beginning members enjoyed “pilgrimages by automobile” to other historical societies and private homes. Attending state-wide meetings and hosting progressive suppers were also very popular.



An ice cream social on the common in 1974 was a hit—enjoyed by Winn Dunn, Bud Young, Joyce Hannula and Tom and Janet Connell and their children

Programs in the early days often consisted of historical papers written by members about buildings, businesses, roads, places, or events in town, and it is these recollections and stories of old Westminster that have helped us understand what life in this community was like in those days.

Once formed, the Historical Society took on some important tasks for the Town. In 1922 they voted to compile a record of the Westminster Boys who were in the World War and they placed a marker on the site of the old Westminster Academy. They also purchased the first fire engine

**2020-2021
OFFICERS & BOARD MEMBERS**

President Betsy Hannula
Clerk Ann Williams
At Large Bob Feeley
At Large Phil Marysz
At Large Patty Schmid

STAFF

Administrative Assistant Nadine Leger
Curator Betsy Hannula
Genealogy Researcher Darlene Wildes
Newsletter Betsy Hannula
Registrar..... 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

June 11, 2021

Dear Members,

The Board of Directors has been meeting this past year and a half throughout the pandemic, at first with zoom on the internet, and more recently in person at the Historical Society.

Like all of you, we have experienced huge changes in our lives. The new dynamics of social interactions—the absence of face to face in-person meetings and the increased reliance on the internet and other social media have forced us to see a new way of life around us and to imagine a new reality for the future. How much things have changed in so few years!

Our Board members have had thoughtful discussions about our organization and how to best fulfill its mission. We've continued working on the collections, making every effort to save the history that every item brings with it. We've made changes to keep us all safe with our programs, enabling us to share the history we've been saving. And, despite holding limited fundraising events (only the Attic Treasures Sale and creating a new Westminster Historic Sites puzzle in the Gift shop) , we've managed to keep the organization afloat. Thank you all for supporting your organization through all of this!

The most important responsibility the Board has is ensuring the long term sustainability of the organization itself. How do we pursue our mission with our woefully inadequate space—the perennial issue which has hampered our activities for 20 years?

The pandemic has compelled us to explore all options for the future. How can we navigate the road ahead to a more secure financial position considering the upheaval in our economy and the uncertainty of the way we even communicate with our members about this?

Please turn to the insert in this newsletter to read about our thinking this past year. We will discuss the Board's recommendation to its members in June at a Zoom meeting, and then in July will have a meeting to make some important decisions. This is *your* organization and we want to hear from you.

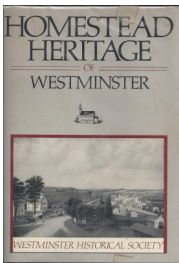
Respectfully,

Betsy Hannula

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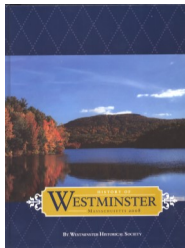
in Town to ensure its preservation. People doing genealogical research or looking for information about their homes or famous residents such as General Miles can also find information at the Society.

For the 200th Anniversary of Westminister in 1959, the Society produced a commemorative booklet and then conducted extensive research for the



History of Westminister, published in 1961. Members began an exhaustive research on all pre-1875 Westminister homes for submission to the National Register of Historic Places, all of which culminated in the publishing of the award-winning book Homestead Heritage of

Westminister in 1980. Publications produced since then include Vintage Views of a New England Village, A Postcard Tour of Westminister, and the 2008 History of Westminister.



The Historical Society is committed to preserving the history of Westminister. Many organizations through the years have donated their records to the Society for preservation. They include the *Rice Post 69 of the Grand Army of the Republic*, the *Sons of Veterans*, the *Westminister Farmers and Mechanics Association*, the *Westminister Farmers Cooperative*, the *Mineral Club*, the *Concerned Citizens of Westminister*, *Westminister Woman's Club* and the *Rotary Club*. All can be accessed at the Society!

For 75 years Society members maintained the museum on the second floor of the Library. It was open during summer afternoons on Saturdays, and often through the fall. Thousands of people enjoyed the exhibits there. Preparing exhibits has been an important outreach to the public.

We used the town hall for exhibits during Yankee Street Fairs, and prepared special exhibits for the Digital Family Day exhibit "100 Years Ago in Westminister" in 1981, the Wachusett Mountain "Window on Westminister" in 1986, the Gardner Museum exhibit "Four Towns," the "Historic Treasures" in 2006, and the Fitchburg Art Museum "Historic Treasures" exhibit.



Joan Keena, Curator of the Historical Society with Irene Mattila created an exhibit for the Gardner Museum in 1987

The Society planted a time capsule for the Town's 225th Anniversary in 1984 and were honored to have Sec. of State Connolly declare the Westminister Village/Academy Hill National Register Historic District on that day.



MA Sec. of State Connolly shoveled dirt on the time capsule buried in the front lawn of the Society in 1984.

Since 1985 we have awarded scholarships and certificates of achievement and copies of our histories from the Gift shop to Oakmont seniors and students excelling in social studies at the Elementary and Middle School.



Gary Streeter pulling the Historical Society float in 1984 parade

Members made floats to promote Westminister in several parades commemorating anniversaries in Gardner, Leominster, and Westminister. In 1984 a Society quilting group completed a "Westminister Quilt," and after that sponsored the "Westminister Heritage Quilt Guild."

With the revitalization of the Historical Society in 1972, members began seriously planning for the dream they had had for decades - having a home of their own to conduct our work in, and therefore established a House Fund in 1973. Ten years later the opportunity came. The purchase and renovation of the Miller House for their headquarters in 1984 was the biggest investment of time and money in the organization's history.



The Miller House in 1984

Townpeople were exceptionally supportive of this venture and contributed generously. John Bowen handled the purchase transaction. The Lions Club donated chairs for the meeting room, Aubuchon Hardware paint and supplies, the Rotary Club trees for the front yard, and Monty Tech the handicapped access ramp and railing. Mass Electric Co. paid for house improvements through their employee's Citizenship Grants Program. The Noble family also gave \$1000 to renovate the Exhibit Room on the first floor.

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Julie Zlotnik bequeathed the Society \$1,000 which was used for improvements. Dino Dibattista built a fireplace where there used to be one—used now for Colonial cooking! And for several years Nancy Sampson of Tobacco Shed Pottery shared the profits of her unique and beautiful pottery that was sold in the Gift Shop for the House Fund for many years

It is with great appreciation that the Society remembers the hundreds of volunteers who supported the efforts of the Historical Society during this critical time - in particular Wilho Aalto and Edward Hannula in renovation work at the house and Gary Streeter for



Vaito Eloranta funded our exhibit on General Miles in 1989 and then gave us

other key assistance. Other groups volunteered as well: the National Honor Society at Oakmont Regional High School, various Girl Scout troops, and the fifth graders who endeared themselves with their delightful assistance at the Historical Society luncheons for 17 years! And, to Vaito Eloranta, the Society is most indebted for his bequest, which allowed it to “burn the mortgage” and freed the members to devote their fund-raising efforts to other activities to be of service to this

Town.

The Historical Society enjoys a special relationship with the Westminster Elementary School. Rita Daley and Irene Mattila conducted walking tours and town meeting experiences for students.



Making pies for Colonial Cooking

In 1982 the Society supported Betsy Hannula’s writing of a curriculum for the fifth grades at Westminster Elementary on “Life in Westminster in 1800.” An integral part of that curriculum for seventeen years was an all-day experience in Colonial Cooking at the House for every fifth grade child. It was marvelously successful, and was often recalled by the youngsters as one of the best things they did in school. With the overhaul of the curriculum frameworks in Massachusetts the study of the Colonial period was moved to the third grades, and since then the Society has conducted a fireplace cooking demonstration during the annual third grade Colonial Day.

CURATOR’S CORNER

We have been receiving items for our collections even during the pandemic. When people cleaned out their houses, they realized that some items are important to the town’s history. We have been the recipient of several interesting items, which will be carefully preserved here for future generations.

- Betsy Hannula:* collection of photos
- Merilyn Dunn:* collection of Finnish books and weights and measures apparatus
- Len Haug:* book Gamaliel Beaman His Life and Art and 3 Beaman paintings
- Medford Historical Society:* postcard
- Bette Roy:* collection of photos
- June Onischuck:* photos of Frank Onischuck
- Ida Minkkinen:* Eric Minkkinen’s 2 Navy uniforms and photos
- Jeanne Keena:* collection of photos of WHS and town activities taken by Jack & Joan Keena
- Janet Stankaitis:* “Wedlock” marriage certificate
- Unknown:* bus token for Fitchburg Leominster Street Railway and Burt’s Garage key chain
- Joanne Curtin:* early photos of her home taken by Toivo Tuominen
- Jean Popik:* Girl Scout memorabilia and flags
- Sandra Ouellette:* Finnish national costume
- Unknown Donor:* box of coasters, postcards and stickers from Summit House Gift Shop



ICE OUT CONTEST WINNER!

We had a winner for the Ice out Contest this



winter! Patty Schmid won with the closest guess for when the ice melted and the soup bowl and spoon fell into the water of Round Meadow Pond. Congratulations Patty!

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Fundraising has been a necessity with the responsibilities of owning a house added to the expenses of preservation and conservation work. The Summer Luncheons were an important source of revenue from 1986 to 1993. Society members held bake sales for Memorial Day parades in years past and at the Annual Town Meeting and at the Christmas Open Houses for years. For many years the Society conducted very successful workshops during ten weeks every summer.



Basket making workshops were always filled!

An Attic Treasures Sale was begun in 1974 and has held with items donated by townspeople specifically been held every year since then. In addition, an annual Town Wide Yard Sale was begun in 2010 and has become a fun-filled day for the whole town. The Society also celebrates historic preservation and our heritage with house and garden tours. The sale of Westminster-related items in our Gift Shop also continues to be an important source of income.

In 1974 the Historical Society asked the Selectmen to create a Historical commission, as the Nation's Bicentennial approached. Several members of the Society were charter members. The Commission and Society share common goals, with the Town's responsibility for preservation clearly outlined in Commonwealth legislation. With only seven members on the Commission, much of the preservation and conservation work in Town continues to be done by members of the Historical Society.

The care of artifacts is the biggest responsibility of a historical society. In the past 38 years the Society has invested time and money in training and education and purchasing archivally safe storage materials so that volunteers can professionally preserve and conserve the collections. The first curators appointed in 1972 were Robert and Alberta Denton, who worked tirelessly with a committee to identify and catalog hundreds of artifacts that were in the Museum. Ruth Gorman was a meticulous cataloger with Tom Malloy as an able assistant.



Betty Aveni entered information about collection items into the database.

Irene Mattila and Rita Daly were curators for a number of years, taking advantage of their skills and experience as librari-

ans, with Joan Keena assisting. Betsy Hannula took on the job of Curator in 1984, bringing an educational background in the field to the task.

An accurate inventory of all items in the collections has been a major goal of the Society since 1984. In 1999 the Society purchased computers and museum software so that all records could be put into a searchable database. This is an extensive cataloguing process that, once completed, will make the collections accessible on-line. Having all the collections easily accessible was still difficult. Even with the renovation of the Society's house at 110 Main Street, we quickly realized that we did not have enough space to store the collections and conduct programs in the same space.

Many large artifacts that had been stored in the basement of the Library were moved to the third floor

of the Town Hall, and then later to the Azarian barn. In 1996 all the artifacts were removed from the Library Museum and stored during the Library renovation. Since the completion of the Library renovation,



Irene Kamila cleaned the spinning wheel after it was carried from the Library cellar.

work has continued on identifying and cataloging all the artifacts – both in the Historical Society collections and the town - that had once been in a number of places throughout town.

Meanwhile, although the Historical Society had hoped the Miller house would hold and manage all our collections and conduct programs, we soon discovered that we did not have enough room to do both. When we created the exhibit on General Nelson Miles and when we held summer workshops, 3 entire rooms were utilized and essentially disabled the house for work on the collections.

It was a difficult time—not having enough room to do what was needed. A plan was needed!! The Board hired a consultant to conduct a SWOT analysis—examining our organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. We then outlined our needs for the next 50 years, with hopes we could meet them!

In order to understand what the public expected us to do as an organization, the Board of Directors undertook a major strategic planning process. In 1997 we surveyed our membership, all the townspeople, and community leaders and compiled the data. We then

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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.
- Putting data about items into a 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!** Just go to our website WestminsterHistoricalSociety.org. Sales tax and shipping costs will apply. The Gift Shop is open Wednesdays 9:30-11am, Fridays 9-Noon, during programs, and other times by appointment.



We have only 3 puzzles of Westminister Historical Sites left for sale! We now have posters of the puzzle available also.

Books

<u>Cemetery Inscriptions</u>	\$45.00
<u>History of Westminister, 1832</u> by Hudson	5.00
<u>History of Westminister, 1893</u> by Heywood96.00
<u>History of Westminister 2008</u> by WHS75.00
<u>History of Westminister, 1961</u> , Ed. by Tolman	20.00
<u>Homestead Heritage of Westminister</u> , by WHS50.00
<u>Images of America</u> , by WHS	20.00
<u>Olin Warner, Sculptor</u> , by Hyson4.00
<u>200th Anniversary of Westminister</u> ,	5.00
<u>Vintage Views of a New England Village—A</u>	
<u>Postcard Tour of Westminister, Massachusetts</u>25.00
<u>Wajusett Gatherings</u> , by Sinclair (hardcover)	30.00
<u>Westminister Reflections</u> booklet4.00

Other

<u>Wachusett Mountain</u> charcoal print	60.00
Calligraphy sampler	12.00
<u>Cracker Factory</u> print by Dana Vickery, signed	45.00
<u>Map of Westminister 1855</u>	6.00
<u>Downtown Westminister 1831</u> by Peckham	30.00
Postcards50
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
Poster of <i>Historic Sites</i> , incl. frame (14"x17")20.00
Poster of <i>Historic Sites</i> , incl. frame (18"x22")25.00
Poster of <i>Historic Sites</i> , incl. frame (21"x29")30.00

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invited community leaders to a dinner at the House, and gave everyone a tour of the building to witness the crowded conditions.



Dave McKeehan, Executive Director of the North Central Chamber of Commerce and Attorney John Bowen thought hard about what they thought the Historical Society should do.

The results were clear. The Society should continue to accept and preserve donations of artifacts and archives to preserve Westminster's history. It should continue its successful programs : provide workshops, help with research, provide programs for students and the public. But where? Our own building was too small. The town was in a state of flux; both the old town hall and the Upton School were going to be abandoned and replaced.

We held another public strategic planning session to examine our options and settled on pursuing the Upton School as our future headquarters. It would provide the additional space for programs and environmentally safe storage for our growing collections. Furthermore, we were excited to be restoring this handsome building and making it useful again.



Wayne Klemetti, Linda and Mark Landry, Dave and Janet Lauricella, Linda and Phil Manseau at our strategic planning session in 2004.

Unfortunately, the process to acquire the Upton School took many years. We overcome many obstacles, and finally acquired the building in 2010.



President Phil Manseau, Treasurer Linda Landry, Melody Smith, Jim Biglow, Roni Beal, Secretary Betsy Hannula, Denise MacAloney, Selectboard: Joe Flanagan, John Fairbanks, and Laila Michaud

The following years began enthusiastically. We formed the Upton Building Committee made up of contractors and architects with experience and skills, and then chose the architectural team of Keith Chenot and Phil Warbass who worked with us to create plans that would meet our prescribed needs. Plans were made to protect the exterior of the building first and then proceed to the interior.

A Capital Campaign was initiated to raise funds for the Upton School renovations and funds to establish an Endowment Fund which would ensure income for future operations of the Society. A consultant was hired to assist with training Board and Capital Campaign Committee members. Many loyal supporters of the Historical Society supported our fundraising efforts, which enabled us to hire the architects and then plan the renovations, Every step of the way was carefully planned with the capable Upton Building Committee: Chairman Von Salmi, Dave Turcotte, Ken Marien, Don Blood, Phil Young, and Tom Marien.

The most important project was repairing the slate roof. We celebrated its completion and are proud of the fact that it should last another 100 years! Meanwhile our fundraising efforts have not been as successful as we hoped. No one has come forward with a sizable gift that would enable us to move forward with the renovations. It has been the most difficult and agonizing decision for the Board to recommend selling the Upton building, and

A successful organization has leaders who bring the goals and objectives of the group to fruition. And so it is with the Westminster Historical Society. The Society wishes to thank those who have accepted the challenges of holding an office or working on the many committees. Our gratitude especially goes to those who have assumed the presidency of the Historical Society in the past:

- Claudia Ballard
- Charles Barron
- Elizabeth Bowen
- Diane Buker
- Carrie Estabrook
- Doris Fenno
- Frank Fenno
- Lucille Fitzgerald
- Charles Giles
- Lucy Giles
- Elizabeth Hannula
- Harry Howard
- Elaine Lawrence
- Irene Kamila

- Philip Manseau
- Cyrus Miller
- Nellie Miller
- Linda Phelps
- Catherine Pisaruk
- Fred Proctor
- Florence Rice
- Barry Roy
- Karen Sargent
- Mabel Storey
- Helen Snyder
- Elaine Tammi
- Christine Trainque
- Leon Whitney

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

!

Westminsteropoly

Yes, you will soon be able to purchase a Monopoly game based on Westminster businesses and organizations!! The Historical Society will celebrate its 100th birthday in October and we will create this board game to commemorate this occasion.

This summer we will design the game and we invite your suggestions for place names and messages. Get onto our web site WestminsterHistoricalSociety.org and click on **Westminsteropoly** to submit your ideas. Everyone who submits an entry will be entered into a drawing, and one person will receive a free **Westminsteropoly** board game!

WESTMINSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETINGS

The Westminster Historical Society Board of Directors is calling two special membership meetings related to the future of the Upton School building—July 21 and August 25, both at 7 pm.

We found it a good thing when our Zoom Annual Meeting last fall enabled persons from across the country to “attend”, and so we will hold these two meetings on Zoom. (In Massachusetts, we can continue to hold Zoom meetings for our incorporations like we did during the Covid crisis.)

Please read the enclosed letter to Historical Society members about the issues that have risen concerning the Upton School. This building belongs to all of us, and the recommendation of the Board of Directors must be voted on by members.

Thank you!