



WESTMINSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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

(978) 874-5569
www.WestminsterHistoricalSociety.org

Summer 2022
Facebook: Westminster Historical Society

On Memorial day the Historical Society opened its first exhibit in the house after a long time. Because of a lovely gift from Lawrence Hicks this spring, we decided to feature his family military items in our exhibit. They included photos and medals from three generations of his family!. Thank you to Mark Landry and Betsy Hannula for organizing this exhibit and to Sophie Landry for arranging the military uniforms. And thank you to Lawrence Hicks for donating these family items for preservation.

THREE GENERATIONS OF THE GATES AND HICKS FAMILIES MILITARY SERVICE

The gift which inspired this exhibit was the plaque which Lawrence made from the root of a California tree near his home. It displays medals from the Civil War, World War I, and World War II.



Eugene Gates 53rd Regiment War of the Rebellion — Campaign Medal
Willard Gates US Army — American Forces Medal, Good Conduct Medal, European, African, Middle East campaign medal, WWII Victory Medal
Douglas Hicks USAAF WWII — Purple Heart, Mother's Gold Star, Air Force Flight pin, Flight Engineer's pin
Arthur Charles Hicks US Navy WWI — Ribbons and pin from Mass. State Guard, Anchor Cap Badge
Lawrence Hicks US Marine Corps WWII — Mass. State Guard ribbon and pin, WWII medal, Sharpshooter award

*We also received information about **Raefield Hicks** from his daughter, Susan (Hicks) Yraola.*

MEMORIAL DAY GRAND RE-OPENING OF HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Sammi Dawley and Candi Hitchcock manned the booth with items from the Society Shop.

The grand re-opening of the Historical Society took place on Memorial Day, a welcome event after two long years of Covid disruptions. The Historical Society building looked terrific with new red, white and blue bunting on the windows, and a new exhibit in the meeting room.



Mark Landry, Sophie Landry, and Betsy Hannula along with a mannequin attired in a WWII uniform.

Before and after the parade, guests were welcomed inside the house to view the exhibit and partake of free refreshments. Thank you to Sammi Dawley for organizing this event!

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

2021-2022 OFFICERS & BOARD MEMBERS

<i>President</i>	Alison Manion
<i>Vice President</i>	Open
<i>Secretary</i>	Mike Volmar
<i>Treasurer</i>	Judd Olshan
<i>At Large</i>	Sammi Dawley
<i>At Large</i>	Bob Feeley
<i>At Large</i>	Candi Hitchcock
<i>At Large</i>	Phil Marysz
<i>At Large</i>	Mike Meyer
<i>At Large</i>	Charity Parrott

STAFF

<i>Administrative Assistant</i>	Nadine Leger
<i>Assistant Treasurer</i>	Lisa Nalewski
<i>Building & Grounds Manager</i> .	Open
<i>Curator</i>	Betsy Hannula
<i>Gift Shop Chair</i>	Sammi Dawley
<i>Newsletter</i>	Betsy Hannula
<i>Membership Chair</i>	Candi Hitchcock
<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.

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.



Need photo of Candi.

We welcome Candi Hitchcock to the Board of Directors! She brings a variety of operational skills and a Masters degree in Applied Anthropology from American University. She also was the merchandise manager for a chain of large department stores in the Washington DC metro area, and a research analyst for one of the top ten research companies in the USA, as well as the COO for a national nonprofit.

A native of Westminster, she states that her love of Westminster and the history of the town comes from being embraced by the Finnish community in the early 1960s. She looks forward to developing a vibrant membership for the Historical Society and is eager to help the WHS move forward with its plans.

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EUGENE GATES

Eugene Gates was born on January 2, 1839 in Westminster to Leonard and Martha Gates on the family farm on Beech Hill. Eugene was mustered into service on October 17 at Camp Stevens in Groton as a Private in Company A, 53rd Massachusetts Infantry Regiment of Volunteers.



Eugene Gates and his wife Helen

On Nov. 29, 1862, the regiment left for New York, on Jan. 17, 1863, embarked on the steamer "CONTINENTAL" bound for New Orleans and went into camp at Carrollton. Here it was assigned to Gooding's (3d) Brigade, Paine's (3d) Division, 19th Corps.

The Regiment was sent by steamer to Baton Rouge, March 6, to join the force which was being assembled for operations against Port Hudson. They arrived in Alexandria May 8 and found a Union fleet in possession of the town. The regiment began its return march, and arrived May 22, and rejoined the brigade. Eugene's brigade was near the head of the column guarding the engineer corps.

In the assault on the Confederate works, May 27, the 53d was engaged and performed especially hazardous duty in the front line of trenches, losing two killed and three wounded. On June 5th it was sent with an expedition to Clinton about 25 miles to the northeast to drive away a body of Confederate cavalry, returning on the 8th to its position in the trenches by Port Hudson.

The 53d participated in the assault of June 14, being heavily engaged, and losing 18 killed or fatally injured, and over 68 wounded. The regiment remained in front of Port Hudson until its surrender, July 9. On August 12th, the regiment embarked on the steamer "METEOR" for Cairo, arriving Aug. 19, and there took a train for Massachusetts, reaching Fitchburg Aug. 24.

Eugene was discharged from his service on September 2, 1863. He and Helen's children were Luella F. born in 1864 and Albert E. born in 1871.

ARTHUR CHARLES HICKS

Arthur Charles Hicks, known to most people as just "Charles," was born on November 29, 1890 to Lewis M. and Carrie E. (Willis) Hicks in Hawley, MA. Sometime before World War I, the family moved to Westminster and lived at 50 Main Street.



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

The Aztec was originally a steam yacht built in 1902 that was leased to the U.S. Navy in June of 1917. Charles began at the rank of Fireman 2nd Class. He was released from active duty on September 24, 1919 and honorably discharged from reserve duty on May 9, 1921 after four years of service.

Upon his return to civilian life, Charles worked at a box shop as a "chauffeur." He married Esther Helen Gates of Westminster on June 21, 1921.

They lived on Bacon Street and had three children, Raefield, Douglas and Lawrence, who all served in World War II.



Nick Langhart and Susan and Pete Yraola came to see the exhibit, which focused on Susan's ancestors—the Gates and Hicks families.

MAPLE SUGARING THIS SPRING!

The Historical Society started out the new year with a busy schedule of programs—on our way to having a full schedule of events—with safety precautions in place. It felt great!

Adam and Sherry Bean invited us to their farm at 10 Harrington Road to see their maple sugaring process. We had visitors from towns all around Westminster—on a beautiful day.



The Historical Society gives a special treat to visitors—vanilla ice cream with maple syrup on top. Yummy! Here, Susan and Bob Walker dished it out that morning!



GIRL SCOUTS

Junior Girl Scout Troop 74893 came to the Westminster Historical Society to learn about early days in Westminster as part of their Local Lore Badge. Betsy Hannula led them through an exercise where they had to mark the number of years old they were on a paper going around the room, and then mark when certain events happened in the past. It became apparent that the town of Westminster was founded a loooooong time ago!



On another day, the girls met at the Woodside Cemetery and we searched for the gravestone of the first person to be buried there—a 15 year old boy. On the same day we stopped in front of the first house that was ever built in Westminster. It is amazing that it is still standing, a tribute to how well these early houses were made.

PLANT SWAP AND SALE

This spring was the start of the gardening season and we had lots of plants for sharing this year on the front lawn. The Crocker Pond Committee members also set up their tent and registration table for Westminster residents to obtain their free Crocker Pond stickers for the summer season.



Many thanks to Phil Marysz, Mike Meyer, Bob Walker, and Betsy Hannula for making this happen, and thank you to Sammi Dawley for the Mothers day bouquets we also had for sale!



COLONIAL DAY WITH 3RD GRADERS

It's always a day of fun when the Westminster Elementary School sends its third graders around town to learn about the Colonial life in Westminster. For many years, the Historical Society has hosted the children in our “fireplace room” where volunteers talk about cooking in the 1700s. The finale is when we make waffles with an antique waffle maker over the open fire, and then children get to eat a piece of a waffle as a treat.

This year Betsy Hannula was happy to find three volunteers who came to learn how to do the cooking demonstration. This will ensure we can



continue this wonderful program into the future!



JUHANNUS PROGRAM AT FARMERS CAMP

Every year the Westminster Historical Society conducts a program on some aspect of Finnish history because a large percentage of our immigrant population came from Finland in the first half of the 20th century. It is always held at the Westminster Farmers Cooperative building, which was built in 1933 to support the many Westminster farmers who brought the cooperative movement here.

This year the program was on the Westminster Farmers Cooperative youth group. Mary Lyons created the Powerpoint program and Betsy Hannula presented it and discussed the important concepts which enabled the Finnish farmers to be successful in this country. The audience was appreciative and it was a delight to have a lot of questions. Everyone enjoyed Finnish-themed refreshments afterwards. Many thanks to all the bakers' contributions!



TOWN WIDE YARD SALE

The Historical Society is pleased to be able to produce the Town Wide Yard Sale every year. It has become a very popular event evidenced by the number of people who sign up to hold yard sales and the number of people who go around town looking for bargains. The town is hopping on this day!

Thank you to Ann Williams, Linda Malizia, Bob Walker, Mike Meyer, and Betsy Hannula for making it all happen, and of course, Nadine Leger for producing and printing the map which all the bargain hunters appreciate!

We are grateful to the Boy Scout Troop 33 and their Scout masters who volunteered this year to help after the sales were over. They organized the donations that were brought to the Historical Society barn; they will be recycled again at the Historical Society Attic Treasures Sale in September. Their help was much appreciated!



DOUGLAS HICKS

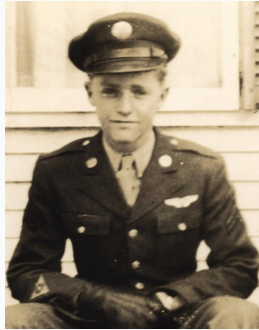
Douglas Elwood Hicks was born in 1924 to Arthur "Charles" and Esther (Gates) Hicks. The family first lived at 50 Main Street but moved to 15 Bacon Street in 1928.

Douglas graduated from Fitchburg High School in 1942. The yearbook said the following "He thinks before he speaks.....Everyone likes Dougie who always says bright things. He was in the Westminster and high school band, and liked dancing, especially the old fashion kind."

After basic training, Douglas was assigned to a B-17 heavy bomber combat crew as a flight engineer.

Critical to the operation of the plane, the engineer had to know all of the intricate mechanical workings and structure of the B-17. If battle damage severed control cables, caused a fuel leak, knocked out the electrical system, started a fire or any malfunctions, it was the job of the engineer to find the problem and fix it. The engineer also assisted the pilots to monitor the plane on take-off and in flight. They had a control panel located behind the pilot. During combat, the engineer stood on a platform between the cockpit and the bomb bay to man a rotating turret on the top of the plane with twin 50 caliber machine guns. They had to be smart and on their toes during the entire mission.

Sgt. Hicks made his first bombing mission on July 29 and the group continued heavy bombing raids all summer. September 28th was a tragic day for many bomber crews. Twenty-eight 303rd bombers and two borrowed Pathfinder



Douglas Hicks

Force planes took off that morning headed for the Krupp Grusonwerke A.G. at Magdeburg, Germany. Sgt. Hick's crew was flying a B-17 nicknamed "Bouncing Betty II." They encountered moderate and accurate flak at Hallendorf and Gardelegen. As pilot Walter J. Mayer was turning to approach the bomb run on the tertiary target, the group was in excellent formation when about 40 enemy ME-109 and FW-190 fighters attacked the formation. They were determined, efficient and experienced.

After encountering a lot of enemy fire, they headed towards the home base alone. The plane was badly damaged with holes throughout and the electrical system was knocked out. The bomb bay doors were stuck open after the bombs had been dropped to reduce weight. A B-17 cannot land with the bomb bay doors open and they would create a lot of wind drag so Lt. Mayer directed Douglas to go back and see if he could close them manually if necessary. Douglas walked out onto the narrow catwalk between the racks where the bombs are stored and proceeded to try using a crank handle to close the doors.

Ernest Tuescher, the radio operator on that flight, survived and had this to say:

"MURDER NEAR MAGDEBURG

I was radio operator on the Walter Mayer crew. We were shot down on September 28, 1944 on the mission to Magdeburg. We had our two right engines shot out and made it back to seven miles on the U.S. side of the front lines, in Luxemburg, where we bailed out. Douglas Hicks, our engineer, had bailed out near the target. Two German storm troopers went to pick him up. They began beating him up. Some slave laborers went to his aid. When the two SS men saw they were outnumbered, they shot and killed Hicks. Three missions after Magdeburg, we crash-landed at a fighter strip in Belgium where we smashed up the B-17, a B-24 and two fighter planes. Ernest Tuescher, 358th Radio Operator"

Ernest also told Mark Landry in an interview about Douglas, "He was the type of guy that any mother would love to have their daughters marry. He was the nicest guy. There was nothing that he did that you would be ashamed of." Pilot Walter Mayer told Mark Landry in an interview that "surgeons normally issued whiskey to crews that came back from tough missions but Douglas never took any."

The VFW Post 7389 in Westminster is named for Douglas E. Hicks.



WORLD WAR II VETERANS

We are very pleased to have the diary of Willard Gates in our collection. It details his service in the Army Air Force. He fought in French Morocco, Sicily and Normandy. It has been digitized for anyone interested in learning about his experiences.

After he returned home Willard wrote:

"The trip by plane was a very interesting trip, with 2 stop overs ...in Casablanca Africa, and Santa Maria, Azore Island and finally landing again in the good old U.S. at Presque Isle Maine and making the final trip by train ..., before going to Fort Devens where I received my discharge on the 28th of July 1945 after spending 3 years, 3 months and 22 days in the service of the U.S. Army from April 7 1942 to July 28 1945 and now that peace once again reigns, I sincerely hope that this will end all hostilities for everyone."



RAEFIELD HICKS

Raefield Hicks was born May 3, 1922 in Westminster to Charles and Esther Hicks. He was a carpenter by trade and worked with his father at his box shop.

Raefield enlisted in the Army on December 31, 1941 in Boston and trained as a mechanic in the Army Air Force. He was assigned to the 106th Infantry Division in Indiana and then joined the 3rd Air Force and ended up in Nebraska December 2, 1944 attached to the 15th Bombardment Squadron.



Raefield flew to Hawaii and from there to the Marshall Islands and onto Guam on June 5, 1945 preparing to see action in the Pacific. The Japanese surrendered on September 2, 1945 and on November 15 Raefield boarded an LST to Hawaii and after a long journey across the U.S. reached Fort Devens on the day after Christmas. He was discharged two days later.

LAWRENCE HICKS

Born July 12, 1927 in Westminster to Charles and Esther H. Hicks. He enlisted into the Marine Corps Reserve two months before his 18th birthday. He went through boot camp at Parris Island in South Carolina and was transferred to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina for more training. A few weeks later he was sent to Camp Pendleton, California in anticipation of being sent to the Pacific Theater.

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE REPORT

The following individuals who have been members of the Westminster Historical Society and demonstrated a dedication to the Society and the Town of Westminster have been granted honorary memberships in the Curator category by the Board of Directors June 7, 2022. The honorary title shall carry with it none of the obligations but all the privileges of membership.

David Anderson	Donald Leger
Eunice Arcangeli	Jessica Leger
Roni Beal	Leola Leger
Donald Blood	Ann MacAloney
Eleanor Brogan	Edward McIntire
John Bowen	Maureen McIntire
Elizabeth Bowen	Benda Malloy
Elaine Brown	Philip Manseau
Paul Brown	Linda Manseau
Barbara Buckman Towle	Neysa Miller
Celia Burgess	Susan Miller
Carol Cowee	William Miller
Jim Cowee	Jean Morin
Mary Dunn	Mary O'Connor
Sallyann Dunton	Sandra Ouelette
Shelby Forkey	Lillian Pearson
Patricia Gendron	Jean Popik
Roger Gerard	Peter Romano
Claire Gingras	Margaret Romano
Eddie Hannula	Ann Sargent
Joyce Hannula	Sharon Sawtell
Leonard Haug	Elianne Scapparone
Lois Heikkila	Brian Slack
Lawrence Hicks	Sandra Slack
James Holman	Roger Smith
Verna Holman	Marsha Smith
Dorcas Hurd	Geralyn Spencer
Charles Innis	Richard Spencer
Louise Janhunon	Jean Torrans
Jeannine LaCoss	Tommy Torrans
Nicholas Langhardt	Myrtle Walker
	Ruth Wellner

Additionally, the Board of Directors voted to award Elizabeth Aalto Hannula an Honorary Curator membership according to the by-laws Article V Section E for nearly 50 years of community service.

Thank you for your support and congratulations to everyone.

Candi Crane Hitchcock
Membership Chair

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 90 years of age, your membership is free!

WESTMINSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name _____
 Address _____
 Phone _____ Fax _____
 E-mail _____

Individual	\$40
Family	50
Senior (over 65)	25
Contributing	100
Honorary (over 75)	10
Complimentary (over 90)	0

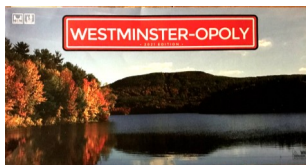
All members receive a 10% discount in the Gift Shop.

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

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

WESTMINSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY 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.



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

We have only a few puzzles of Westminster Historical Sites left for sale! We also have posters of the puzzle.



Books

<u>Cemetery Inscriptions</u>	\$45.00
<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 WHS75.00
<u>History of Westminster, 1961</u> , Ed. 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 Hyson4.00
<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>Wajusett Gatherings</u> , by Sinclair (hardcover).	30.00
<u>Westminster Reflections</u> booklet.4.00

Other

Wachusett Mountain charcoal print	60.00
Calligraphy sampler	12.00
Cracker Factory print by Dana Vickery, signed	45.00
Map of Westminster 1855.	6.00
Downtown Westminster 1831 by Peckham	30.00
Postcards50
Photo of Wachusett Mountain by M. Lyons	10.00
Westminster 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
NEW Westminster-opoly game	\$.40.00

GRANT AWARDED TO WHS

The Westminster Historical Society has received a matching grant from the 1772 Foundation working in partnership with Preservation Massachusetts. A grant of \$2,700 was awarded to make repairs to the front of the house, where the water table has rotted. The wood will be replaced and the lower part of the wall be made water tight so that the sill on the house does not rot, which would be a much greater problem in the future.

Erin Kelly, the president of Preservation Massachusetts, stated that the staff of this matching grant program “saw the dramatic need, exacerbated by the impact of the ongoing pandemic. Out of 64 letters of inquiry, 28 full applications were invited, requesting over \$230,000 in grant funds. With only \$125,000 to grant, the process was extremely difficult. 16 grants were recommended for funding that represented a variety of projects”

The Historical Society is honored to have been one of the 16 recipients. We will be hiring a preservation contractor who will do this repair work and we plan to make a video of the work being done to help educate people who own old houses in town and want to learn the basics of maintaining them.

Thank you to Betsy Hannula for writing this grant application!

HISTORY AWARDS TO STUDENTS

The Westminster Historical Society was pleased to be able to give a History Award to two students this June for their excellence in history. One was given to _____ a fifth grader at the Westminster Elementary School. The other was given to _____, an 8th grader at the Middle school.



Charles Black and his family traveled from Utah to bring a collections of items from his cousin Lawrence Hicks to the Westminster Historical Society for preservation. We are grateful!

UPTON SCHOOL UPDATE

In May the Westminster Selectboard sent us their decision that they do not intend to take the Upton School back for the Town. They requested that the Town be given a portion of the proceeds of the sale of the building, after the expenses incurred in upkeep and repairs of the building have been cataloged. We are in the process of compiling an accurate list., and will then negotiate with the Town.

As you recall, after two years of painstaking assessment and struggling to make the best outcome for the Society and the Upton School, the difficult decision was made to sell the building. The building was shown to three brokers and an auctioneer who were enthusiastic that the building would be a good property to sell. The Board is working to find an appropriate buyer for this beautiful building!

UPDATE ON OLD TOWN HALL

In June, the Westminster Selectboard were presented with 3 proposals for the use of old town hall. One was from a developer who intended to make apartments; a second was from a community group which planned to remove the first floor and use the two remaining floors for community purposes. The third proposal was from the Historic Meetinghouse Coalition, of which the Historical Society was a key partner. This plan intended to use all three floors, with the first floor incorporating a visitors center, meeting spaces, commercial kitchen and a coffee shop; the second floor offering a stage for concerts, recitals, and plays, and an auditorium for dances and large gatherings; and the third floor for the Historical Society collections and work spaces for volunteers.

On Monday, August 2, the Selectboard announced that they have rescinded the previous call for proposals for the utilization of the old town hall. They will issue another request for proposals and this time will make more clear their objectives in the process and the desired outcome for the use of the building.

Our Board of Directors has some important decisions to make in the near future. In 1997 we identified the extreme lack of space in our Main Street building. We have kept you, our members, informed through the past 20 years as we've worked towards achieving our goal to find additional space for the environmentally safe storage and exhibit of its collections and for public programs.

We urge you to contact us to give us your opinions and suggestions as we move forward. This is your organization, and we need your input and support as we fulfill our mission to save and share Westminster's

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

Attic Treasures Sale: Sat. Sept. 24, 9-2
Cracker Festival: Sat. Oct. 15, 9-5
Annual Meeting: Tues. Nov. 8
Holiday Open House: Mon. Nov. 29
Christmas Flea Market: Dec. 4-24

WESTMINSTER-OPOLY GAME

They've arrived! The Westminster-opoly game is on sale in the Society's Gift Shop. It's made of heavy-duty cardboard and should last a long time.

We're grateful to the 29 businesses in Westminster which signed up to be on this game board. Each business has a traditional deed card and spot on the board, as well as a reference on a chance card. It should prove fun for all ages!

They are \$40 plus tax. You can order it on our website, and we'll send it to you.



ATTIC TREASURES SALE



The Historical Society's annual Attic Treasures Sale will take place on September 24, 9-2 at 110 Main Street in Westminster.

If you have items to donate you are welcome to leave household goods in the barn and furniture and sports items in the tent behind the barn until then. You may itemize your donations and we'll send you a receipt for your income taxes.

If you want to enjoy a fun day of bargain-hunting, plan to join us!