



Westminster Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

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 www.WestminsterHistoricalSociety.org

Fall 2026
 Facebook: Westminster Historical Society

The right of citizens to vote is a sacred privilege in the United States of America. Following our successful revolution in 1776, enlightened statesmen from all 13 states created a constitution in 1787 that laid out this right and responsibility.

With our mid term elections arriving soon, let's step back to the last century to see images of how past elections were held in Westminster.



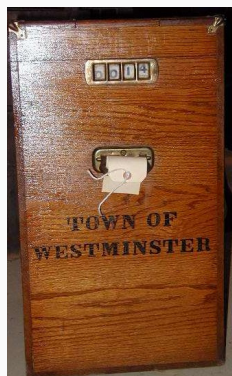
With the construction of the Loughlin school building in 1936, voting took place in the new gymnasium.



During this time official ballots were delivered to the Town Clerk's home, which was where the office of the Town Clerk was located. At this time Esther Hicks on Bacon Street, and

then Marion Noble on Pleasant Street were the Town Clerks. The Town Clerk got an office in the old town hall in the 1970s, when the town's population had grown and town business required more personnel and regular hours.

The voting machine had an automatic counting mechanism which helped to count votes so they could be reconciled with voter lists.



After being checked in at the gymnasium by the Town Clerk's staff, residents placed their votes into the voting machine, which was operated by hand.



In later years, the booths were replaced with more modern structures in the gymnasium.

Ron Zeiner and George Lane took their turns volunteering on voting day



Checkers, one from each political party, kept track of residents who had voted. Here Darlene Johnson from the Democratic Party and Sylvia Ahlin from the Republican Party worked at the polls.

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2026-2027 OFFICERS & BOARD MEMBERS

<i>President</i>	Betsy Hannula
<i>Secretary</i>	Nick Langhart
<i>Treasurer</i>	Jeremy West
<i>At Large</i>	Nancy Bombard
<i>At Large</i>	Bob Feeley
<i>At Large</i>	Jeanne Keena
<i>At Large</i>	Ken Marien
<i>At Large</i>	Phil Marysz
<i>At Large</i>	Jacob McCloud
<i>At Large</i>	Greg Moran
<i>At Large</i>	Melissa Wintturi

STAFF

<i>Administrative Assistant</i>	Wendy Scofield
<i>Assistant Treasurer</i>	William St. Peter
<i>Building & Grounds Manager</i>	Open
<i>Curator</i>	Betsy Hannula
<i>Newsletter Editor</i>	Betsy Hannula

MEETINGS

Our monthly program meetings are now on the 3rd Sunday at 2 pm from January through June.
These meetings are free and open to the public.

Look for us on our website:
WestminsterHistoricalSociety.org and on Facebook
for the latest on upcoming events. Contact us at
WestminsterHistoricalSociety@gmail.com or
at 978-874-5569 for more information.

HOUSE & GIFT SHOP HOURS

The Historical Society House is open
Tuesdays—Fridays 9am-Noon



MISSION

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

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

September 28, 2026

Hello friends and neighbors,

Our Historical Society is constantly on the go!

The highlight for me this summer was having two additional volunteers working in addition to 4 other volunteers who have been coming here weekly for years. They have been working on the items that have been given to the Historical Society to preserve. When items are donated to us, volunteers clean them, research information about them, and enter all the information into a database. More than 20,000 items have been entered into the database called Pastperfect since 1999! We are very grateful for the time and expertise our volunteers have given for this project.

With this huge volume of photos, archives, objects and books, the Historical Society is initiating the process to get our collections on-line this fall. Everything we've done so far be will accessible at home to anyone who is researching Westminster persons, events, houses, or is just curious about something in our town. It's a big deal!

We have inserted a membership form in this newsletter. Our new plan is easy. You may support us in any amount you can afford and receive the benefit of 10% off in our Gift Shop and reduced fees for workshops.

However, this plan has an important option. If you can donate \$100 for a membership, you also receive a membership in the North American Reciprocal Museum (NARM). NARM gives you free entry into over 1500 history museums, botanical gardens and outdoor museums nationally and internationally. More than 100 are in Massachusetts to explore.

We are thankful to the many volunteers who serve on our boards and committees and come to work at our fundraising events throughout the year. We could not operate without you. We are also grateful to scores of people who support the Historical Society through monetary donations, which help pay for our operating expenses.

With appreciation,
Betsy Hannula, President

Www.WestminsterHistoricalSociety.org



VOLUNTEERS

We were to pleased to have two new volunteers join us this summer. Logan Wright from the Leominster School for Excellence and Holden Devlin from Monty Tech focused on recording information about servicemen and women in WWII and genealogical information on families who lived in Historic houses in town.



Logan cleaning a World War I helmet.



Holden enjoyed learning about WWI and WWII.



Robert has been with us for 4 years. He loves learning about his hometown of Westminster.



Katie joined us this past year and has proven meticulous in her work on the computer as she records names of people in our photo albums.



Cole has been volunteering here for about 6 years. We appreciate his commitment here!



Phil Marysz has been a faithful volunteer for many years, sharing his valuable knowledge of persons and events in Westminster for the past many decades

IN MEMORIAM

A long time member of the Historical Society, Sallyann Haynes Dunton, died last month in Virginia, where she has lived for many years. As a teenager, she was on the board of the Youth Center which held weekly dances on Friday nights for many years at the old town hall.

When she moved to Virginia to be closer to her daughter, she became active in many local groups there, but still connected with her hometown and continued to support our Historical Society.



Ann Sargent died this summer at the age of 100. She was a life long member of the Historical Society, as was her mother, Katherine.



This photo is of her at the age of 5 next to her playhouse on Academy Hill. She was an only child and lived what we might call a life of privilege. But she was a hard worker and considerate of others. She was a realist

and her down-to-earth comments about life revealed her Yankee humor.

Her mother's side of the family—the Fosters—were early farmers in town. We were very pleased that photos and items from her family were given to the Historical Society for research and preservation.

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The familiar quote that all politics is local has some truth to it. If we are familiar with politics in our own town, we can better understand what is happening in our state and the nation.

Did you know that town political committees are established by state law? The number of persons on a town committee is determined by the community, with a minimum of 3 up to a maximum of 35, a number set by the Secretary of State. Nominations to each committee are sent to the state where these persons are elected every four years, in the year of the primaries for national elections.

Since the formation of major parties in national politics, there has been support for both the Republican and Democratic parties in Westminster, as well as lesser known parties such as the Green Party. State law establishes if and how candidates for parties can get on the ballot. The number is based upon the percentage of persons in town who voted in the last state elections.

From the early 1900s until the 1950s the Republican Party was dominant in Westminster. The Republican Town Committee in Westminster was established to inform local residents of candidates running for offices and to raise funds for Republican candidates. At first, meetings were held in private homes and later at the American Legion Hall.

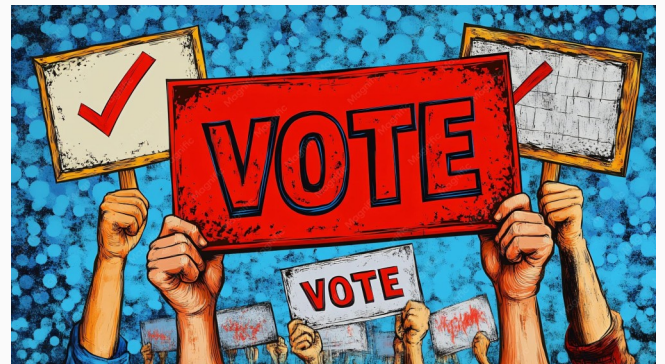
In the 1950s, the Democratic Town Committee in Westminster was revived through the efforts of Paul F. O'Leary and Austin Carroll, who had both moved to town after World War II. During Austin's tenure, the Democratic Town Committee held many old fashioned rallies, usually at the Westminster Country Club, where they would fill the hall and the outside porches. Anyone running for a county or state position was invited to come to the rally and Austin was in charge of making sure each candidate used only five minutes at the microphone for his message.

In the mid-1960s, Betty Aveni was elected chair. She presided over a very active committee, whose women members became renowned for wearing matching, handmade, red-white-and-blue dresses to campaign rallies.

The Democratic Town Committee became stronger during those years and eventually more Democrats won elections both in Worcester County and statewide, due to the efforts of people in small towns like Westminster.



Although political activism has been healthy in Westminster there were no bitter battles between Democrats and Republicans in town during the last century. Austin Carroll related the story that when he was chairman of the Democratic Town Committee his good friend Jacob Maki was chairman of the Republican Town Committee and their daughters were the same age and they were good friends as well. There was no animosity among members towards either party. Members even stood next to each other as they advertised their party's candidates when citizens went to the polls to vote.



The primary on November 3 is a time to step up and vote. No matter what you believe or what issues you want to stand up for, this is the time to show that you care. Go to the polls and cast your vote. Our democracy depends upon it!



The women on the Democratic Town Committee got a lot of attention dressed in their homemade rally dresses. Standing with the Democratic committee chairman Austin Carroll are (first row, left to right) Lucille Fitzgerald, Betty Aveni, Catherine Pisaruk, Sylvia Niemi, and Edith Testa; (second row) June Johnson, Mrs. John McCormick, and Lillian O'Hearn. Courtesy of Betty Aveni.

PAST PROGRAMS

TOWN WIDE YARD SALE



We had successful Town Wide Yard Sale with 43 households participating. Thank you to all the Oakmont student volunteers who helped the day go well for everyone!

JUHANNUS

Karl Hakkarainen was our guest speaker at the Juhannus program at the Westminster Farmers' Camp on Leominster Street. He entertained us with an account of Martin Hendrickson, a very interesting character he has been researching,

He was Finnish immigrant shoemaker who came



to this country, became an "Apostle of Socialism," only to huckster Florida real estate and later to die in a Karelian work camp!

THE OLD TOWN HALL

Renovation and restoration of buildings are KEY to maintaining the historic character of a town. And, Westminster is lucky indeed to have a company totally focused on bringing an old building to life.

Tom Paquette purchased the old town hall from the town in 2024. Everyone who came to the Open House in May that the Historical Society hosted saw the amazing progress with renovations.



When you tour the building, you will find unique places which demonstrate Tom's focus on safeguarding the heritage of our town. Preserving the architecture and history of our town will make it unique from all other New England Towns, and that is a valuable strategy for growth in our town.

CHRISTMAS FLEA MARKET



Sat. Nov. 28 from 9 to 3 is our annual Christmas Flea Market. We have new and vintage Christmas lights and decorations, holiday serving pieces, and festive glasses for holiday entertaining. kinds of gifts for friends and family.

Our Gift Shop has a special sale on Westminster books for your reading pleasure and a new Westminster Christmas ornament for your tree! Don't miss out!

ANNUAL MEETING

You are invited to the Historical Society Annual Meeting which will be held on Saturday November 14 at 5 pm at the Senior Center 1t 69 West Main Street, in Westminster. As a non profit organization, annual meetings are of course required by law. The business part is short, acceptance of minutes of the previous meeting, and approval of the board members. We always have a program which is of interest to the general public, so we are inviting the public to attend.

The program this year is about Dr. Alfred Hitchcock of Fitchburg and is presented by local Fitchburg historian, Peter Capadoglia. This is not the infamous Alfred Hitchcock, but the real doctor who lived in Fitchburg!

We have found it a fun event to have an old fashioned pot luck meal at our annual meeting. You are welcome to bring anything you love to make or bring for sharing. Please don't make tons of whatever you choose—make just enough to feed who's coming. Rest assured, it will be enough!

It would be helpful if you could RSVP. Please click on this link. WestminsterHistoricalSociety@gmail.com Join us!



NEW "SHARE OUR HISTORY" MEMBERSHIP CAMPAIGN

We are launching a new membership campaign and we need your HELP! The Westminster Historical Society is ready to provide ON-LINE ACCESS to our collections. Volunteers have already entered data for more 20,000 items in our collections, and we are anxious to share them with you!

- ♦ Have a question about your family's genealogy? Thousands of persons are identified in our collections.
- ♦ Want info on the old house you live in? We have photos and info on 450 houses and are adding all the time.
- ♦ Doing a project in school on Westminster's activities for the last 250 years? Find info in our archives!
- ♦ Interested in how Westminster took part in our nation's wars? We've got info on all Westminster veterans.
- ♦ Looking for a photo of you in school? We've got hundreds of class photos from 1850 to the present.
- ♦ Want to know what Westminster looked like years ago? We've got lots of photos from the past!

This new on-line access platform will cost the Historical Society \$1000 for the first year, and a little less each year after that. *We can do this with your help.* Will you be one of our supporters who says, "Yes I can help?"

This NEW MEMBERSHIP PLAN is based on a \$100 one-time individual membership for the first year. This individual membership will also give your family members benefits at the Westminster Historical Society such as:

- ♦ Reduced fees at the workshops offered by the Historical Society .
- ♦ 10% discount on items purchased in WHS Gift Shop.

However, this is WHAT'S NEW for those who choose to support this new \$100 annual membership this year.

- ♦ From now on, every membership will last one year from the date your dues are received.
- ♦ We will send you a copy of the 2008 anniversary edition of our History of Westminster.
- ♦ Each \$100 individual membership will also be given ONE free membership in NARM (North American Reciprocal Museum Association) which gives the WHS member FREE visits to over 1500 cultural organizations in the country; 100 are in Massachusetts! Please visit their website www.narmassociation.org to find out more.
- ♦ Discounts on the Gift Shops and concert/lecture tickets at each of the NARM cultural organizations.

PLEASE NOTE:

- ♦ *You can still make a donation of any size for a WHS membership . We are grateful for your support!*
- ♦ *Students and seniors over 90 years old are eligible for a free WHS membership!*

MEMBERSHIP

Name: _____ ☐ I am a student. ☐ I am a senior over 90.

Address: _____

City: _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Thank you for supporting the Historical Society's goal to get our collections data on-line. Your membership is critical to achieving our mission to share Westminster's history in this new era!

☐ I want to help with a one-time donation of \$100.

☐ I want to help with a one-time donation of \$_____.

If paying by credit card:

Card # _____

Exp. Date: _____ CVC: _____

Your Initials Authorization: _____

If paying by check,
Make it payable to Westminster Historical Society

Mail to: Westminster Historical Society,
110 Main Street, Westminster, MA 01473

WESTMINSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY GIFT SHOP

When looking for a unique gift for birthdays, anniversaries, or other 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 Tuesdays—Fridays 9-Noon, during programs, and other times by appointment.

Books

<u>Cemetery Inscriptions</u>	\$45.00
<u>History of Westminster</u> (1832) by Hudson	.50
<u>History of Westminster</u> (1893) by Heywood	96.00
<u>History of Westminster</u> (2008) by WHS	65.00
<u>History of Westminster</u> , 1961, Ed. by Tolman	20.00
<u>Homestead Heritage of Westminster</u> , by WHS	50.00
<u>Images of America</u> , by WHS	20.00
<u>Olin Warner, Sculptor</u> , by Hyson	4.00
<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>Wachusett Gatherings</u> , by Sinclair (hardcover)	30.00
<u>Westminster in 1959</u>	5.00
<u>Westminster Reflections</u> booklet	4.00

Other

Wachusett Mountain charcoal print	\$60.00
Cracker Factory print by Dana Vickery, signed	45.00
Map of Westminster (1855)	6.00
Westminster Village in 1831 by Peckham	30.00
Current Postcards	0.50
Vintage Postcards	1.00
Westminster Tapestry wall hanging	35.00
Sampson pottery (assorted)	10.00
Westminster-opoly game	40.00
Children's toys	5.00
American flags (Sm & L)	1-3.00
Cat's Meow town buildings	10.00

BIG PROJECTS AT THE WHS

We are forging ahead on some very important maintenance projects. With thanks to volunteers who scraped much of the loose paint off the house, and persons who have given us much-needed monetary donations, we are able to have the house painted this year. Hopefully it will be done in October.

Two new groups of volunteers came this summer to scrape loose paint off the exterior of the Historical Society headquarters in preparation for painting. One was a group of Oakmont students, who commemorated the 25th anniversary of 9-11 by doing volunteer work at our house.



A group of students from the Leominster School for Excellence also came to scrape loose paint off the house. We were thankful for these volunteers!

We have hired Harvey Construction to remove rest of the loose paint, and then paint the whole house. We're going with the color the house was when we purchased it in 1983. Do you remember the color it was? Watch for it!



Another huge project was bringing all the office equipment and large artifacts that have been stored at the old Digital plant for 2 years, thanks to the owner of the facility. The space was being rented out to another business so we had to purchase 2 shipping containers to fit all the items in our collections and storage pieces.

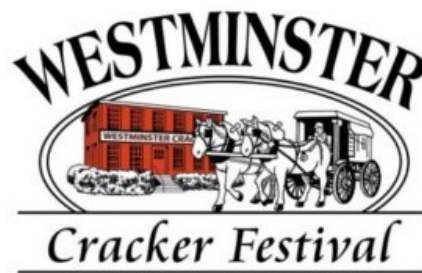
And, finally we are still working with a realtor to sell the Upton School building. We have been very patient and are hopeful to find the best buyer for this property either as a preschool or housing. There is interest, but the process requires financing and several hoops to get through. We hope to report good news soon!

Westminster Historical Society
110 Main Street
Westminster, MA 01473

October 17: CRACKER FESTIVAL 10-5
Visit us for a Raffle, hot soup cooked over an open fire,
and a quiz on what you know about Colonial life!
November 14 WHS ANNUAL MEETING
November 28: 9-2 CHRISTMAS FLEA MARKET
November 29: 11-2 CHRISTMAS FLEA MARKET

CRACKER FESTIVAL

Don't miss coming to the Historical Society on the day of the Cracker Festival! On the front lawn we'll have a tent with a RAFFLE with a fabulous assortment of items to choose from! Outdoors you can also take some unique photos with our photo boards.



Indoors we will have a collection of Colonial period items for cooking and making clothes long ago. Can you identify them?



Further into the house is our fireplace where vegetable soup will be cooking over the open fire. You're welcome to have a free bowl of soup!



The Historical Society Gift Shop will also be open.

In addition to books about Westminster, we have signed copies of the watercolor painting of the Cracker Factory by Dana Vickery