

WESTMINSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Post-Boy

Fall 2025 newsletter

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3651 U.S. Route 5

Trustees 2025-2026

Dan Axtell, Ruth Grandy, Barbara Greenough, Lonnie Lisai, Obe Lisai, Jessie Haas, (pres.), Patricia Haas, Chris Harlow, Fletcher Proctor, and Barbara Taylor

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Upcoming WHS events

2026

June 13, 2026 - gravestone cleaning (see page 3). Tentative start: 8:00am

July 2026 -Museum and Bradley Law office open on summer Saturdays, 2:00-4:00.

2027

January 15, 250th anniversary of our state's independence, declared in the Westminster Courthouse.

President's Message 2025 in review

Westminster Historical Society had an auspicious year in 2025. We spent the first quarter getting ready for and putting on a **commemoration of the Westminster Massacre**. That began with drafting a resolution which was introduced by our member and representative in the Vermont House Michelle Bos-Lun. I was able to be present for the second reading of the resolution in the House chamber, and we have received a copy of the resolution for our archives.

On **March 13**, thanks to the generosity of member Greg Gay, 50 people gathered at his farm on Westminster Flats, the old Azariah Wright homestead. At roughly the same time that the Whigs marched up to occupy the courthouse, we set forth to walk up Court House Hill. We gathered at the marker where we were joined by about 20 more people for a reading of historic documents, including the Riot Act which was read 250 years ago in that place by Sheriff Billy Paterson. We were joined by Israel Provoncha of the Vermont 250th commission, and Jane Cadwalader, Vermont's new roving archivist.

On **March 14**, the anniversary of the nonviolent retaking of the court house, around 70 people gathered again at the marker. Ray Boas from the Walpole Historical Society talked about Colonel Benjamin Bellows, leader of the Walpole militia, who prevented further violence after the Massacre. We also heard from Laura Trieschmann of the Vermont 250th Commission.

On **March 15th**, 250 years from William French's burial, about 40 people gathered at dusk at the French/Houghton Memorial for a candlelight vigil. Michelle Bos-Lun had been expected to speak, but was unwell, and sent remarks by Facebook Messenger, which were read aloud. U.S. Representative Becca Balint sent a letter which was also read aloud. After a moment of silence, a pick-up quartet—Dan Axtell, Amy Cann, Charlotte Gifford, & Jenny Holan—sang William French's epitaph to an old hymn tune. A "V" of geese and a beautiful March sunset made the gathering especially beautiful. We are grateful to the Town Manager for all kinds of help, to the town crew for clearing the bank in front of the courthouse marker, and to the Westminster Fire Department and the Windham County Sheriff's Department for traffic calming. 250 years ago the sheriff was the bad guy, so it seemed fitting that our own sheriff's department took a prominent role in keeping us safe. Mike and Sue Smith created a video record of all three days, which you can find on our website, WestminsterVtHistory.org.

Museum, Law Office, Archives

The WHS maintains the Town Hall Museum, the Bradley Law Office nearby, and an Archives room in the Westminster Institute. In winter, there are no public hours, but the WHS is always a community resource. Please contact us through WestminsterVtHistory.org with any sort of question about Westminster's rich history.



Walking up Court-house Hill.



Candlelight vigil at the Old Cemetery.

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

In May we were back in the **Old Cemetery** for a **headstone cleaning session** led by the Vermont Old Cemeteries Association (VOCA). Our member, Gretchen Nichol, did most of the organizing for this, assisted by Lonnie Lisai. (Lonnie's detailed report with photos is on page 3.) The results are easy to see from the cemetery fence, with straight, clean, and readable tombstones. According to VOCA, this is work that will last a hundred years. We have more to do, but completed work on nearly half the stones in one morning, and had great refreshments, thanks to Allen Brothers and Gretchen.

The **museum and law office were open during the summer**, and we had a special exhibit as part of the **Vermont Schoolgirl Samplers Driving Tour**. Seven samplers sewn by girls who lived in Westminster were on display, and were visited by many people. Alice Caggiano and Obe Lisai did a tremendous job mounting this exhibit, and their work received praise from some very knowledgeable DAR members who visited this fall.

Other than these major events 2025 was focused on getting the archives in order, cataloging and filing, and in October, a **presentation by Gail Golec about the Brooks and Reed families**, historic Black families who lived in Westminster since the late 1700s. Gail presented her research at our annual meeting, held for the first time at the Westminster West church. Last but not least, at the end of October Chris Harlow and Lonnie Lisai replaced the picket fence at the Law Office.

What's next? A Bicentennial retrospective, 50 years on from 1976. We have many photographs of Westminster's lively celebration. You will certainly see faces you remember! We're also giving thought to more cemetery cleanings, and a cemetery tour with "ghosts" in period costume talking about their lives. Stay tuned!

→ *The French/Houghton monument (foreground) was the focus of the candlelight vigil on March 15. Unarmed William French died at age 21 at the hands of his own government.*

The weather was clear for three days—days that are also the anniversary of the 1888 blizzard.

(Photos by Obe Lisai unless noted)

Addendum to the Spring 2025 "Massacre" WHS Post-Boy

The map of Westminster Village on page 4 mistakenly shows the Norton (Tory) Tavern near Sand Hill Road. That map was based on the 1869 Beer's Atlas map and the mistake was repeated in the 1981 Westminster Town History (p. 240). The real site is 0.4 miles north of the Courthouse, on the west side of the road on a slight rise, just north of the big dairy farm.

The Tory Tavern was taken down for a new house in 1880. "So pass away old landmarks," wrote the Vermont Phoenix on March 19, 1880.

Did you miss our special "Massacre edition" newsletter? You can download a PDF from our website. You'll also find links to source documents. Maybe you've wondered where to find the Ira Allen quote describing the Massacre's aftermath on as "O! Horrid scene."



← Barb (Shattuck) Greenough listened from the D.A.R. Court-House marker. Over 80 years ago, she climbed on it as a child living in her Shattuck Road home.

↓ Below, Jessie Haas speaks about the peaceful re-taking of the Court-house on March 14. (photo: Dan Axtell)



Thank You to Our Business Contributors

- Vermont Shepherd Farm
- Sharon Boccelli Auctioneers
- Stephen B. Smith, CPA

Old Cemetery Restoration, May 2025

The Town of Westminster welcomed the Vermont Old Cemetery Association (VOCA) to East Parish Cemetery for restoration work on May 24, 2025. Thirty-eight volunteers met Tom Giffin (VOCA president) and VOCA members, Gretchen and Jeff Nichol. Gretchen, who is also a member of the Westminster Historical Society, organized this event to restore and clean gravestones, as well as to instruct volunteers in appropriate maintenance methods.

THE PROCESS: Tom Giffin and Kevin Peck, VOCA, organized two teams of three or four volunteers to straighten leaning gravestones. This required crow bars, brute strength and a lot of sure pack. Tom also showed us how to repair a broken gravestone.

Gretchen and Jeff Nichol provided training to new volunteers on gravestone cleaning methods. Gretchen supplied the required tools for cleaning the gravestones, enough for 25 volunteers. The supplies included spritzers, brushes, pails, and plastic scrapers. Most of the volunteers already knew how to clean gravestones, but newcomers received instructions, as improper techniques may damage the gravestone.



East Parish ("Old") Cemetery, May 24, 2025, during the gravestone cleaning and repair.



THE RESULT: In a matter of a few hours the transformation of the cemetery was remarkable. Approximately 60 gravestones were cleaned or realigned. A casual drive by one will notice the white gravestones and the straightness of the stones. If you go inside, the inscriptions on the stones are now legible. The Westminster Historical Society plans another 'Restoration' event on June 13, 2026. It has been noticed that many people do come in and clean gravestones. Drive in any cemetery and quickly note the 'white' gravestones.

THANK YOU: The Town of Westminster supplied sure pack, purchased D/2 cleaner, coordinated traffic safety with the Windham County Sheriff, and opened Town Hall facilities.

Allen Brothers donated dozens of cider donuts and coffee. Gretchen Nichol provided pizza and homemade desserts. Jim Matteau, adjacent neighbor of the Cemetery, supplied the water.

CEMETERY HISTORY: The Old East Parish Cemetery is in the north end of Westminster village. *"The 'Old' Cemetery in the East Parish, appears to be the original 'Town' cemetery. The earliest death, marked by a head stone that is still standing, is that of 'Mr. Nehemiah McNeil who died December the 3rd 1770 in the 53rd year of his age.' On the south side of this cemetery, near the street, stood the 'hearse house.' which was removed sometime after 1940"*

June 13th, 2026 is set for the next restoration bee at the Westminster Old Cemetery. Please come if you're interested in learning how to safely clean gravestones and also how to straighten and even repair broken stones. Watch for more details. The bee will likely start at 8:00 with a lesson on cleaning stones. You can come at anytime and someone will catch you up.

Just across the road from the cemetery was the Courthouse, the site of the Westminster Massacre on March 13, 1775. Crean Brush owned much of the land on the West side of the Cemetery and below, such Westminster notables such as Stephen Czar Bradley, the Tory tavern of Norton. Ira and Ethan Allen (Green Mountain Boys) were frequent visitors to Westminster. Previous events at the East Parish Cemetery include the Massacre commemoration and two SAR events held in the cemetery. It has 43 Revolutionary War soldiers buried in the Cemetery.

More photos and VOCA information on next page

Westminster Historical Society Membership

Please visit WestminsterVtHistory.org to learn how you can help our mission: *to collect and preserve information and objects of particular interest to Westminster, Vermont.* Click on "Join or Donate" for more information.

Membership dues: \$10 Single * \$20 Family * \$50 Business * \$200 Individual Lifetime

Gravestone cleaning and restoration, continued.

(Photos by Obe Lisai unless noted.)



Jessie Haas gently uses a plastic scraper on the gravestone of Margaret Schoolcraft Wall, a central character in Jessie's new historical novel, "Dearest Blood." Margaret is the mother of Fanny Allen who married Ethan Allen in Westminster. Unfortunately, the flat limestone is so pitted, it's unlikely to be readable again. (Photo: Dan Axtell)



The front row, visible from the Route 5, now shines.



Chris Harlow straightens a crooked stoned and will use epoxy and clamps to repair the break.



Gretchen Nichol of Mendon, Vermont organized the work bee. She's a WHS member with family in the cemetery. The town of Westminster provided the truckful of sure pack in the background.

More About VOCA

The Vermont Old Cemetery Association was founded in 1958 to encourage the restoration and preservation of neglected and abandoned cemeteries in the State of Vermont. Vermont cemeteries date back to the 1700's. They always welcome volunteers for restoration work. Discover the process and future cemeteries VOCA will restore.

From VOCA's latest newsletter:

I have been in burial grounds located miles into Vermont's woods where there was only a narrow deer path to lead the way and in cemeteries where we are on a main thoroughfare while praying our vehicles (or us) would not be sideswiped by the flow of nearby traffic.

Techniques have changed:

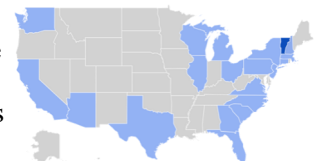
- We always used to use the available dirt in the cemetery to straighten leaning stones, which only helped for a year or two. Now we require sure pack at every work site.
- When we repair broken monuments, we would hold them in place with boards of various widths and lengths, strategically placed at a variety of angles. Now we use an assortment of clamps that keeps everything "Jeff straight".
- Cleaning monuments has evolved from the years of brutal power washing using everything from bleach to acids to using D/2, soft brushes and water.

-Tom Giffin, VOCA president

Website: VermontOldCemeteryAssociation.com
(includes link to Facebook page)

Info about D/2 biological solution: www.d2bio.com

Sure pack is a mostly-Vermont term for "aggregate base course" or just "ABC." At right is the Google Trends map for "sure pack."



Recent Acquisitions

Objects donated to our collection this past year

Again, our friends have been very generous with donations to our historical collection. Because this list is long, we are showing the donors alphabetically with brief descriptions of the objects.

Since December 2024 we have received the following: assorted textiles, Westminster Massacre souvenirs, Westminster historical town, church and business documents, objects related to former and present residents, schoolgirl samplers, books, photos, postcards and maps.

Anderson, Bonnie - Navy dress uniform hat worn by father, Hank; 2 white infant dresses and girl's "basket weave" gown c.1930.

Anonymous - Purchase orders for School District #9.

Unknown anonymous donor - Pillowcases made by Mattie (Mrs. Frank) Sawyer; crocheted collar made by Mrs. Lynn Lawrence.

Balint, Becca - Vermont House certificate commemorating the 250th Westminster Massacre anniversary; letter on U.S. Congress about Massacre.

Bellows Falls Historical Society - Typescript history of the Red Barn business; Westminster U. S. Bicentennial Festival Committee stationery; instructions regarding the "Bicentennial Album" and more.

Caggiano, Alice - Business card for Herbert E. Arnold; Westminster, Vt. 1991 first day cover of Vt. stamp.

Chickering, Levi - "Collier's" magazine, October 20, 1951, with article "We're Here to Sell Cows" about Westminster cattle auctions; Collection of personal memories of his family and the auction sales.

DiBernardo Associates - Alice Hawks drawing of floor plan of Cumberland County Court House, photocopy of Gage Basket Factory print.

Foster, John - Clay bowl of early tobacco pipe found during an excavation in Westminster West.

Grandy, Ruth - Three Constable badges used by Mrs. Grandy as town constable.

Greenough, Barbara Shattuck - Very large collection of Barber and Shattuck family records, ephemera and awards. Details will come in our fall 2026 newsletter.

Haas, Patricia - A page of "Vermont Argus and Free Press" dated October 1837 with divorce requested by Maria Haight and her attorney, J. C. Bradley; one program for the 32nd Annual Kurn Hattin Day Celebration, May 2019; Sojourns annual report with history of house and maple tree; "Chronological History of the Congregational Church, Westminster West, Vermont" by Mary Lowe Mitchell, 1992; handwritten information about "Abijah Moore's Company of Cumberland County Minute Men" by Ken Stevens from the July 1996 NEHGR; book; other books.

Kebbell, Ann and Frank - Book "The Natural and Political History of the State of Vermont, ..." by Ira Allen, 1798

Kurn Hattin Homes - B&W studio photograph of Mary (Grout) Jennison

Marchant, Charles as agent for William Thayer - 19 B&W postcards and one photograph of Westminster houses and street scenes by Porter Thayer.

Michelman, Richard - Three extraordinary samplers stitched by Westminster girls in early 1800s; many other generous donations from his extensive collection.

Scott, Sonia - Two memorial cards from the visitation and funeral of President Jimmy Carter.

Watts, Heidi - Framed B&W photo of group of people with some identities shown, most from Westminster West.

Collected by WHS volunteers - Much miscellanea about that seems recent and ordinary now. It will be catalogued and easily found 100 years from now.

Westminster (VT) Historical Society		
Financial Summary FY 2025		
	Actual	Actual
Fiscal Year ending Sept. 30,	2025	2024
Starting cash position	45,898.44	40,839.93
Income		
Dues received - annual	910.00	610.00
Dues received - lifetime	1000.00	0.00
Sales - books (incl. royalties)	700.70	344.00
Sales - inventory not books (e.g., cup plates)	0.00	0.00
Sales - items not accessioned (e.g., postcards)	60.00	70.00
Donations - unrestricted	1002.00	785.00
Donations - restricted (excl. spec. projects *)	700.00	0.00
Donations - memorial gifts	0.00	0.00
Bank interest	2079.32	1573.62
Town Contribution (includes an early pmt.)	3000.00	4500.00
Misc. income (e.g., copying charges)	0.00	0.00
TOTAL INCOME	\$ 9,452.02	\$ 7,882.62
Expenses		
Office supplies, incl. printing	612.00	0.00
Insurance	714.00	712.00
Post Office box	84.00	82.00
Postage (newsletter, annual mtg, etc)	140.00	348.00
Dues paid (Vermont Hist. Soc.)	50.00	50.00
Transaction fee (online or bank)	3.49	0.00
Museum exhibits	380.93	0.00
Hospitality	319.01	204.00
Law Office maint. (not grant funded)	169.93	0.00
Utilities (Law Office)	165.00	165.00
Acquisitions	0.00	0.00
Books for resale	244.20	0.00
Education	0.00	0.00
Conservation supplies & equipment	934.74	1263.11
TOTAL EXPENSE	\$ 3,817.30	\$ 2,824.11
Ending cash position	51,533.16	45,898.44
<i>Note: 2024 expenses were adjusted higher by \$15 conservation and \$84 postage.</i>		
<i>*Special grant-funded projects not shown above:</i>		
3-yr lease of Archives Room in Institute	15,000.00	0.00
prepared by Dan Axtell, Treasurer		

Westminster Historical Society
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The steps for cleaning Capt. Thomas Forrest's memorial stone. Forrest (spelled Forrist on the stone) was a noted 18th-century South Seas captain who wrote "Voyage from Calcutta to the Mergui Archipelago." His date of death, May 20, 1795, is a mystery everywhere except here in Westminster. Look for more about him in the Spring 2026 Westminster Post-boy newsletter and read more about gravestone cleaning in the Westminster Old Cemetery on page 3.



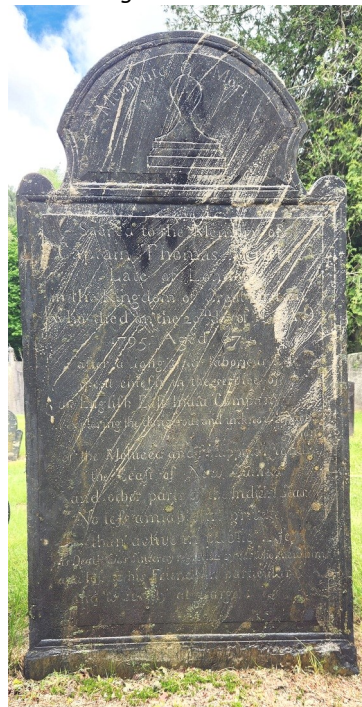
Before



After plastic scraper and soft brush for loose dirt and lichen



After applying D/2 solution and waiting 15 minutes



After rinsing. The remaining stains will fade over months.

