

# WESTMINSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Post-Boy

Spring 2025 — Special 250th Massacre Anniversary newsletter

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Links to many of the documents mentioned in this newsletter can be found on our website, [WestminsterVtHistory.org](http://WestminsterVtHistory.org).

### The Westminster Massacre

#### Why does it matter?

By Jessie Haas, Pres., Westminster Hist. Soc.

The Westminster Massacre stands at the end of one phase of the American Revolution. Between 1765 and 1775 Britain tried to tax the colonies to pay for its long war with France, a war that had given it the greatest empire in world history and historic levels of debt.

But New Englanders, having paid for Britain’s empire with their blood, resented and resisted the taxes, ultimately by throwing East India Company tea into Boston Harbor in 1773.

They resisted the closure of the port of Boston in 1774, sending livestock, grain, and cash to the hungry city.

That summer and fall they closed all courts in Massachusetts with massive, nonviolent protests, filling the streets of towns like Northampton and Worcester with thousands of farmers armed only with sticks.

In September 1774, when a rumor spread that the British had shelled Boston, they marched for the city, 100,000 strong, armed and eager for revenge. Meanwhile the Continental Congress enacted a trade embargo against Britain, ratified by every colonial government except New York. (Westminster was then part of New York.)

Cumberland County towns (present southeast Vermont), met at the Westminster courthouse in late 1774, voting to support Massachusetts and uphold the embargo. With New York in violation, people felt that their voices were being ignored, and they feared economic consequences. The county court was in the hands of Tories, and the Whigs feared their political enemies were taking advantage of the economic turmoil to seize their farms through bankruptcy proceedings.

In December 1774, Whig militia stole the powder and guns at Ft. William and Mary in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. On February 26, 1775, Whigs stood off a British regiment attempting to seize military supplies at Salem, Massachusetts. Less than two weeks later, Whigs in Cumberland County

### Events, March 13-15, 2025

#### Westminster Massacre 250th anniversary

→ [Watch our website for details.](#) ←

- ◆ **March 13**, Thursday **3:30**  
Gathering at the house site of Azariah Wright. Walk to Courthouse site at **4:00**.
- ◆ **March 14**, Friday, **4:00**.  
Gathering at the Courthouse site
- ◆ **March 15**, Saturday, **7:00 pm**  
at dusk. Candlelight vigil at William French’s monument. Our museum will open at 6:00.



William French Monument in the Westminster Old Cemetery

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

made the decision to close their own court. The result was the Westminster Massacre.

The Massacre stands at the hinge of two phases of the Revolution. The occupation of the courthouse was the last non-violent event. Miraculously, all the ferment of the past few months had taken place without loss of life, and nobody inside the building expected to die on March 13. But that night protesters were shot at point blank range by members of their own government. William French of Brattleboro and Daniel Houghton of Dummerston died of their wounds. The killings, and the brutal way French was treated as he lay dying on the cell floor led to a furious reaction that ended New York government here forever.

This could have been the beginning of the war. New York appropriated funds to take back control, General Gage loaded firearms onto a ship—and on April 19, in another foolhardy attempt to seize gunpowder, the British kicked off the battles of Lexington and Concord, lighting the flames of revolution.

Before April 19, the Westminster Massacre was “a dangerous insurrection,” as acting New York Governor Colden called it in a letter to Lord Dartmouth. After Lexington and Concord, it mattered much less. The scene shifted to Boston, where colonists (including a dozen from Westminster) confronted British regulars at the Battle of Bunker Hill, and startled the British and themselves by their own military prowess. It was Game On, and we all live in the country that was the ultimate result.

The Westminster Massacre was not just a Westminster event. Major players were from Westminster, including Crean Brush, who made Westminster the political center of gravity in this area, Captain Azariah Wright, leader of the Whig militia, and the Willards, William and his son Billy,

who boasted of having been French’s killers. But the protesters and posse members came from all over what’s now southeast Vermont, western New Hampshire, and northern Massachusetts. They took back the court house without further violence. Every member of county government was jailed except the coroner. New York government had been deposed. The root cause had nothing to do with the New York-New Hampshire dispute, and everything to do with the American Revolution.

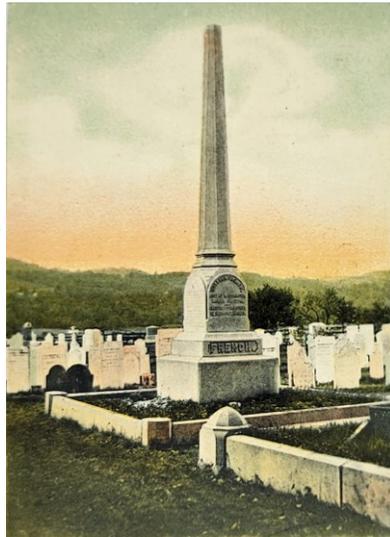
This view of the Massacre runs counter to what you’ll find in a casual internet search, or even in many recent books of Vermont history. All I can say is that, in common with many members of the U.S. Supreme Court, I am an originalist and a textualist. My understanding of the Massacre comes directly from accounts written by people who took part in it, on both sides. 250 years later, we’re doing the equivalent of cleaning gravestones, scraping away the lichen to reveal the words

and deeds of our ancestors, and letting them speak for themselves.

Why does the Massacre matter? History matters. It tells us who we are and where we came from, so it’s crucial that the stories we tell about our past are accurate. Did the Westminster Massacre ignite the American Revolution? No. It could have, but Lexington and Concord intervened, changing everything. But Westminster was the first place where the people’s struggle for their rights as British citizens met with lethal force from their own government. William French became the first martyr, Daniel Houghton the second. They deserve to be remembered.

\* \* \*

Jessie Haas authored the 2012 town history, *Westminster, Vermont, 1735-2000: Township Number One*, which won the Vt. League of Local Historical Societies’ Achievement Award that year.



Original 1873 French monument, before the 1904 stabilization with reworded bronze plaques. Hand-colored post card.



1902 Courthouse marker with plaque on Shattuck Road. From the 1941 Town History by Elizabeth Minard Simonds

### Thank You to Our Business Contributors

- Vermont Shepherd Farm
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## Past Commemorations

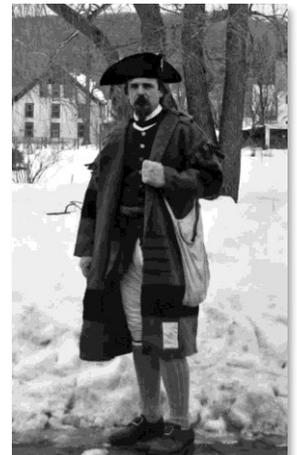
The Bicentennial celebration 50 years ago led to a years-long tradition of Westminster school children reenacting the Massacre. The children at the Center School were initially rehearsed by Pat Haas, in a play written by the Living History Association of Wilmington, Vt. The kids played the Whig side generally, and a group of adult reenactors led by James Dassati of Wilmington played the Tories. The march was from the Institute to the Town Hall, which represented the Courthouse. Local luminaries from those early years include Jon Parker, Mike Fawcett, Jennifer Latham, Asia and Clover Burns, and Jason Caggiano, among many others.

Later the reenactments were led by Patricia Whalen and Arthur and Diane Fuleihan. In recent years the tradition has fallen off. The most recent reenactment took place in 2015. Actors included historical society board members Richard Michelman, Barbara Greenough, and Bob Haas.



Most recent reenactment, September 2015, with the help of some real reenactors and a few WHS Board members. Barb Greenough waves a staff from Azariah Wright's wood pile. Richard Michelman waves as William French. The current Town Hall substitutes for the old Courthouse in modern reenactments. Obe Lisai photo.

At right  
 1984 Reenactment with the 5th and 6th grades. The schoolboys had fun with gun smoke that year. Art Stacey helped with his reenactor experience.



Below  
 1500 people showed up for the September 1902 dedication of the D.A.R. Courthouse marker. This photo comes from the 1941 Westminster Town History, captioned "Not a car in sight."



### Westminster Historical Society Membership

Please visit [WestminsterVtHistory.org](http://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 the link to join online. This is a new feature of our website.

# The buildings of the Westminster Massacre along the King's Highway.

None remains in 2025



←  
Norton's Tory Tavern, from *History of Eastern Vermont*, 1857, p. 221, possibly by Larkin Mead, Jr.  
"The Royal inn of the village."  
↙



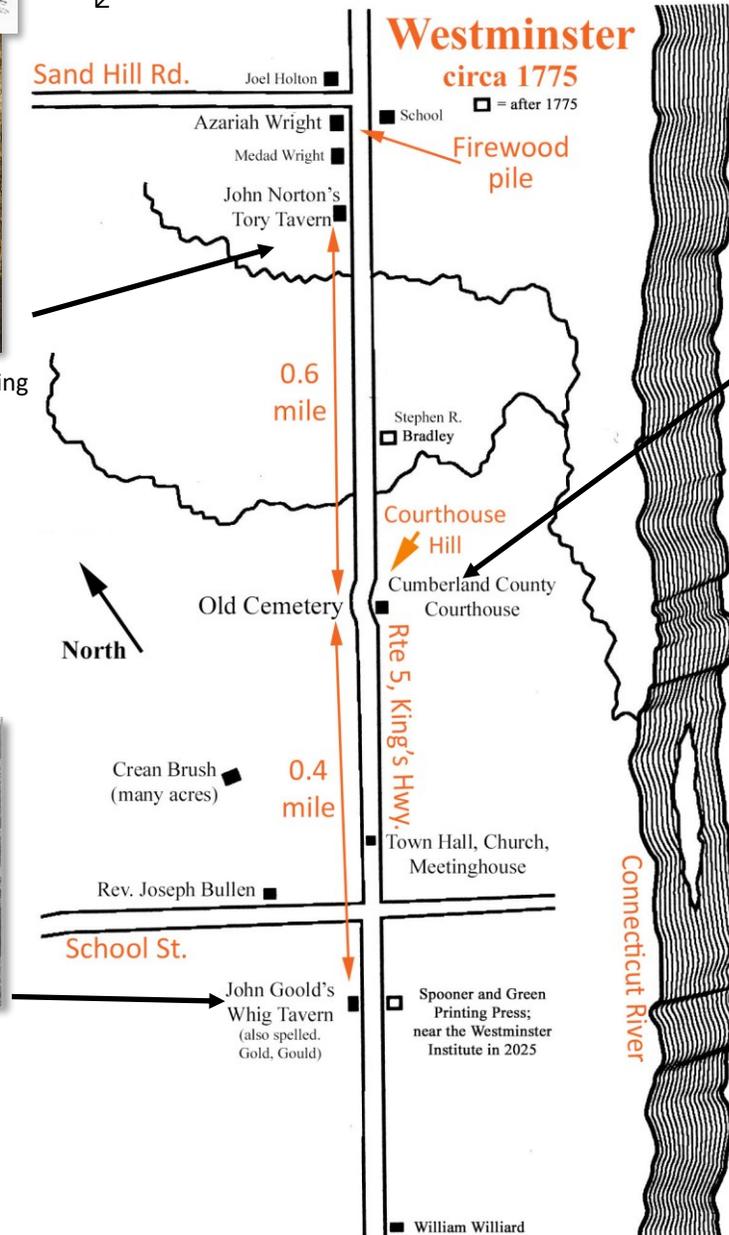
Early photo of Tory Tavern showing gambrel roof in contrast to the similar Whig Tavern.



Westminster Courthouse, from *History of Eastern Vermont*, 1857, p. , possibly by Larkin Mead, Jr.



Whig Tavern, or "People's Tavern." Torn down September 1940



## Courthouse, Meetinghouse, Town Hall, Church.

Let's clarify this confusion in 2025.

All four of these 18th century buildings were originally in Westminister Village, but never more than two had these functions at any time. For instance, the original 1770 Meetinghouse was also the Church and Town Hall. To make things more confusing, none of these buildings are in their 18th century location.

The **Meetinghouse** did not play a role in the Massacre. It was still in the middle of the King's Highway 165-foot-wide right-of-way at the time. It was moved to present location of the Town Hall shortly afterward. The beautiful building, 17 years older than the Old Rockingham Meetinghouse, burned in 1888. In 1890, the new Town Hall was designed to evoke the old Courthouse. However, it is not the Courthouse and it is not even the location of the Courthouse.

The 1772 **Courthouse** stood 80 rods north of the Meetinghouse, on the bluff of Courthouse Hill. It was built on the "non-travelled" east side of the broad right-of-way. The road wound steeply down to the west, as shown on some old maps. In 1787, the county seat was moved to Newfane, making the Courthouse obsolete. In 1806, it was sold and dismantled. The road was straightened and graded over time, most recently when it was paved in 1929. About halfway down Courthouse Hill, you're driving completely under the historic building.



Westminister Meetinghouse, c. 1857, from Hall's History, p. 211, possibly by Larkin Mead, Jr. It was still standing when this was drawn.

The Meetinghouse was also the **Congregational Church** at first. A schism prompted the building of the current Congregational Church in 1835. So, there were two separate church buildings in the Village until the Meetinghouse burned in 1888.

The Meetinghouse was also the **Town Hall**. Early on, the physical building was moved about 100 feet to the west, off the right-of-way. A lightning strike burned it down on June 6, 1888. Here the confusion thickens. It was replaced with a building meant to look like the historic Courthouse. The front steps are a good place for Massacre reenactments, but it's not the original Courthouse and it's 80 rods south from the actual location.



Approximate location of the Westminister Courthouse, dismantled 1806. The courthouse image is the possibly Larkin Mead, Jr. drawing, c. 1857, from Hall's History of Eastern Vermont. Overlay and 2022 photo by Dan Axtell. See article (next page) on the courthouse's uncertain location.

## A 1775 Glossary for 2025

- Whigs** were people who protested against British tyranny. Other names they used were **Patriots**, and **Liberty Boys**. (The last were members of Azariah Wright's Whig militia.)
- Tories** were people who supported remaining in Great Britain--also known as **Loyalists**. Some Loyalists were critical of the government and wanted it to treat the colonies more fairly, but they still wanted to remain British.
- Yorkers** supported **New York government control** of the (pre-1764) New Hampshire grants (i.e. modern day Vermont). You could be a Yorker and also a Whig; an example is Medad Wright, Azariah's brother
- Riot Act** was a 1715 **act of Parliament** which allowed local authorities to declare any group of 12 or more people to be unlawfully assembled, and order them to disperse. If the group failed to disperse within an hour they were guilty of felony, punishable by death. Government officials could kill or injure members of the group without fear of punishment. The Riot Act had to be read aloud by an official, as Sheriff William Paterson did in Westminister.

Under the provisions of the Riot Act, the killings of French and Houghton were perfectly legal. However, the protesters had been promised that they could stay in the courthouse without being attacked. That and the brutal treatment of French ignited an anger that blew right past the legalities of the Riot Act. See the Riot Act box on page 11.

## Images of the Westminster Courthouse

*None was drawn while it was still standing*

The most common image of the Westminster Courthouse comes from the 1858 *History of Eastern Vermont* by Benjamin Hall. His father was born in Westminster and his grandfather, Lot Hall, was an early settler and Justice of the Vermont Supreme Court.

In the preface, 26-year-old Benjamin gushes about the help from 75-year-old William C. Bradley, especially for “the many personal recollections and family papers he has placed at my service.” At the time, Bradley was still an active lawyer and working from his Law Office. Benjamin was a brand new lawyer.

This was in the spring of 1857, just after the 21-year-old Larkin Mead, Jr. (1835-1910) created his Recording Angel ice sculpture on New Year’s Day. That youthful stunt got Mead a commission for a bust of William C. Bradley.

The preface goes on, “To the skilful pencil of Larkin G. Mead Jr., Esq., of Brattleborough, I am indebted for the drawings from which have been engraved several of the illustrations which adorn the work.”

So, Larkin Mead, Jr., worked on the Bradley bust just as Hall was finishing up his book. The helpful staff at the Vermont Historical Society noted that all the unsigned drawings in Hall’s book look similar, so it makes sense that they are by Mead. Unfortunately, with the translation to engravings, you can’t reliably compare the style to known Mead drawings. These drawings have never been attributed to anyone else, but the best we can do is “possibly Larkin Mead, Jr.”

Charles James Brasor (1864-1930) of Brattleboro was not a professional artist. This drawing is decades later than Mead’s. It is undated and not, seemingly, done for a book.

Edwin J. Meeker (1853-1929), professional illustrator from New Jersey, had no family ties to Vermont. His drawing comes from Walter Hill Crockett’s *Vermont, the Green Mountain State*. Like Mead, Meeker illustrated for Harper’s Weekly, but decades later.

If you know of other Courthouse images, please contact us.



Unsigned, possibly by Larkin Mead, Jr. c. 1857. From B. Hall’s *History of Eastern Vermont* (1858), p. 185. The view is the south side, where the shooting occurred. The chimney is missing. Shown same size as in the book.



Old Court House, Westminster, Scene of Westminster Massacre of 1779

E. J. Meeker c. 1920. From Crockett’s *Vermont, the Green Mountain State* (1921) p.400f. View is from the west, across the street. The street winds steeply down the hill, as it should.



Charles Brasor, date unknown, possibly c.1900. West view, no obvious errors.

## How do we know the Courthouse location?

*Well, we don’t know the precise location anymore*

- ◆ The authorized location in 1772 was the east side of the 10-rod right-of-way on the “non-travelled” area between lots 61 and 62. That is consistent with other clues.
- ◆ A March 1895 Bellows Falls Times article noted that the foundation of the chimney was still apparent.
- ◆ The 1902 Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Marker was intended to mark the location of the Courthouse. It is 290± feet from the William French monument (using a 100-foot tape measure in the snow).
- ◆ The 1873 French Monument states that the Courthouse was 17 rods (280½ feet) away.
- ◆ We know the DAR Marker was removed during the 1929 earthwork and paving of Route 5, but we don’t know if it was actually moved from the original spot. By tape measure, it appears to have been moved 10 feet further away.
- ◆ It’s historically described as on bluff—a bluff long gone. That cupola must have had a terrific view to the north.

## Timeline of Events around the Westminster Massacre

- 1735 -1764** Westminster is granted by Massachusetts, then New Hampshire, then the land west of the Connecticut is declared part of New York. Most settlers here are from Massachusetts and Connecticut. New York creates Cumberland County, the area east of the mountains and south of Tunbridge.
- 1768** Reacting to unrest in Massachusetts, Azariah Wright, a radical Whig, starts a 'pure Whig' militia in Westminster, which drills at his house near Sand Hill Road.
- 1771—72** New York grants Crean Brush, Tory lawyer, 20,000 acres of Westminster land. Brush uses his connections to have Westminster made the shire town; the courthouse is built near his home. Lawsuits proliferate; people fear losing their farms to foreclosure.
- 1774** Brush elected to the New York Assembly. British take over Massachusetts government following the Boston Tea Party; protestors armed only with sticks force all Massachusetts courts to close. The Continental Congress embargoes trade with Britain, and with any colonies that don't sign onto the embargo. All do except New York.
- Oct. 1774-Feb 1775** Meeting in Westminster, Cumberland County towns vote to uphold the embargo, shun Tories as 'loathsome animals', and embrace nonviolence. They are concerned that Congress will not know of this vote, and will punish them for violating the embargo.
- March 10** Forty Whigs from Rockingham visit chief judge Thomas Chandler at home to persuade him to close the court, as a way of signaling their views. He agrees to meet with them when court opens on the 14<sup>th</sup>, and promises no arms will be brought against them. Later he and other officials decide to have Sheriff William Paterson seize the courthouse on the 13<sup>th</sup> to keep the Whigs out. The Whigs learn of this plan.
- March 13<sup>th</sup> Afternoon** 100 Whigs gather at Capt. Azariah Wright's farm, then march to the courthouse armed only with sticks from his woodpile.
- 4 pm** Whigs enter the courthouse.
- 4:30** Posse arrives. Many of the 40+ men are armed. Paterson reads the Riot Act and promises to "blow a lane" through the protestors if they don't leave. A standoff follows.
- 7 pm** Judge Chandler arrives. Promises to disarm the posse. Posse and officials go to Tory Tavern to eat, drink, plan. Whigs draw up a list of demands. Westminster men go home; those from other towns remain on guard overnight.
- 11 pm** Moonlight on musket barrels alerts the guards, who rush to the east door. Paterson marches his men close and orders them to fire. After two volleys they rush the courthouse. Some Whigs are wounded, several captured; the rest flee. William French of Brattleboro, shot four times in the head, is dragged into a cell with other prisoners. The Tories mock his dying moans. Already inebriated, they continue to drink at the courthouse bar. Meanwhile Captain Wright sends couriers in all directions to rouse nearby militias.
- March 14 Morning.**  
French dies. Officials declare court open and write up their version of Monday's events. Local people go to the courthouse to view French's body, still on the cell floor. Some press their handkerchiefs into his blood.
- Afternoon** 400-900 armed militia, including from New Hampshire and Massachusetts, gather on the street. Some want to shoot all the Tories inside. Colonel Benjamin Bellows of Walpole, a Whig, secures the courthouse door to prevent violence.
- 4 pm** Two Whigs enter the courthouse and suggest that Tories surrender. They do, and are placed in the cells.
- March 15** Green Mountain Boys arrive. Militia arrest all members of local New York government. An inquest is held on French's death: verdict, Murder. French is buried. Tories send couriers to New York to alert Crean Brush and the government. The violence is already being called a 'massacre.'
- March 21** Daniel Houghton dies of his wounds.
- March 23** New York Assembly votes 1,000 pounds to send arms and restore order.
- April 5** New York acting governor Colden writes to Britain, firmly linking the Massacre with uprising in Massachusetts. General Gage prepares arms for New York to put down the insurrection.
- April 19** Lexington and Concord. All colonies in open revolt. People in Cumberland County begin to say that the first bloodshed of the revolution occurred at Westminster.

## The various claims of “First” in the American Revolution

engraved in stone or local memory

All before the shooting war started in Concord, Massachusetts.

Also two oft-cited notorious events (Boston Massacre and Portsmouth, NH)

Date	Event & Place	Historical Claim	Description
1770-01-19	Battle of Golden Hill, New York	First Blood in the War of the Revolution	A liberty pole or “Tree of Liberty” was cut down in New York City prompting an uprising against the British soldiery. Some British soldiers were bruised and townsfolk wounded by bayonet
1770-03-05	Boston Massacre	First Martyr of Liberty; First Blood Spilt to Freedom; First victim of the struggles between the Colonists and the Crown which resulted in Independence	British troops were present to enforce law and order. Townspeople harassed them, throwing stones and insults. Five died by gunfire. Generally taught in the U.S. as the first death of the American Revolution.
1771-05-16	Battle of Alamance North Carolina	First battle of the Revolutionary War	Disaffected “Regulators” fought the troops of Colonial Governor Tryon and lost. Later, the incident was cast as fighting an oppressive government.
1772-06-09	Royal Schooner Gaspee incident, Rhode Island	First British Naval vessel destroyed; First British officer wounded	The Gaspee was enforcing trade laws when it ran aground and was attacked and burned. The commander was wounded by a musket shot. Celebrated annually in Pawtuxet, RI
1773-12-16	Boston Tea Party	Escalation in tension between Loyalists and Patriots; Not revered until the 1830s.	The Boston Tea Party along with similar disturbances in Charleston and Philadelphia were revolutionary “incidents” with no bloodshed. It was not used to further revolutionary sentiment.
1774-10-10	Battle of Point Pleasant, Virginia	First Battle of the American Revolution	This decisive battle between the Virginia Militia and the local Indians allowed westward expansion. Also called “Lord Dunmore’s War,” it’s seen by some as a western battle front in the Revolution.
1774-12-24	Capture of Fort Wm. and Mary, Portsmouth, NH	One of the first overt acts of the American Revolution	A gunpowder incident, like Salem two months later, intended to prevent insurrection, but sparking it instead.
1775-02-26	Salem Gunpowder Raid, Massachusetts	First Armed Resistance to Great Britain. First setback to the British military in the struggle for independence.	Also known as Leslie’s Retreat, unarmed Salem townspeople got “pricked” with British bayonet. Only one townsman had a musket, but several militias were <i>en route</i> when Col. Leslie retreated. So, technically armed, not very threatening, but retreat-worthy given the advancing help.
1775-03-13	Westminster Massacre	First martyr (or bloodshed) of the Revolutionary War	Colonists were carefully unthreatening while preventing the New York (and hence British) courthouse from convening. Two unarmed colonists were killed by gunfire at close range. British control was permanently ousted from modern eastern Vermont.
1775-04-19	Battle of Lexington and Concord	First major military campaign of the Revolutionary War	After the start of a shooting war, there were no additional claims of “first,” mercifully. So many firsts!

-compiled by Dan Axtell, inspired by the Golden Hill article, in the November 1895 Colonial Magazine article, page 123.

## A few items unrelated to the Westminster Massacre

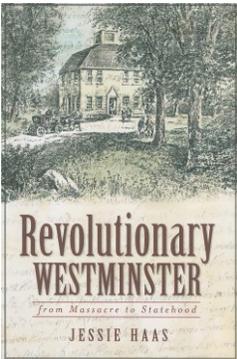
### Gravestone cleaning at the Westminster Old Cemetery, May 24th, 2025, 8:00am

*Volunteers are welcome to come learn the technique and pick a stone to clean.*

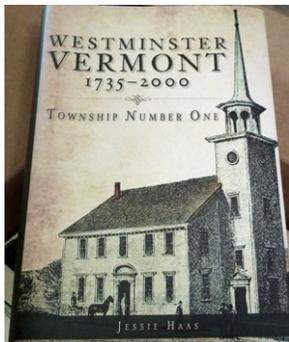
Gretchen Nichol, a member of WHS and of the Vermont Old Cemeteries Association (VOCA), is organizing the cleaning party at our historic Old Cemetery. VOCA President Tom Giffen attended the SAR event this past fall and really fell in love with our cemetery. He'll lead us in cleaning and straightening gravestones in the way that's safest for stones and people. Stones can be damaged by using the wrong materials to clean them. We will be using approved materials and methods, so this will be a great workshop for anyone who wants to tend family graves the right way. It's also a time to make the names of Westminster people readable again in time for the 250th anniversary of the founding of our country. Best of all, cleaning the stones conserves them for future generations. This is volunteer work that will have a lasting impact.

Depending on weather, you might think about bringing a picnic lunch. We'll provide cleaning materials, instructions, and donuts.

Watch our website and Facebook page for updates closer to May 24.



*Revolutionary Westminister* tells the story of our town in the Revolutionary period, focusing especially on the Massacre



The 2012 Westminster Town History is available at the Westminster Town Hall and from us for \$39.99. All proceeds from these local sales directly benefit our historical society.

### Vermont Sampler Driving Tour

After a years long Sampler Search, the Vermont Sampler Initiative has organized a Vermont Schoolgirl Sampler Driving Tour at locations around our state, starting May 30, 2025 through October. Westminster will join Grafton Historical Society and Putney Public Library in this immediate area to show some of these treasures during regular museum hours. There are twenty locations statewide included in the tour.

Westminster Historical Society has eight samplers stitched by Westminster girls in our collection. Only one of these is by an unidentified girl. You can see our samplers during regular visiting hours on Saturdays this summer or by appointment.

Details are still being worked out. More information can be found at the anniversary250.vermont.gov website. You can search for "sampler" on their home page.

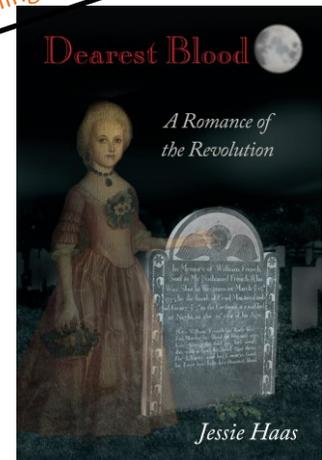
## Books for Sale

Our website now offers online ordering using WooCommerce. Visit:

[www.WestminsterVtHistory.org](http://www.WestminsterVtHistory.org)

and click on "Publications." You can find shipping rates there.

If the online payments aren't working, please contact us through our "Contact" page and we'll figure something out.



*Dearest Blood, A Romance of the Revolution*, by WHS's own Jessie Haas, views the Massacre through the eyes of Fanny Montresor, a fifteen-year-old Tory girl who lived near the Courthouse in 1775, and picks up eight years later when she returns to Westminster, only to discover that she and the Tory-hating Ethan Allen share the same lawyer.

## Our prized artifacts dating from 1775

*From an anonymous reminiscence in the Bellows Falls Times, March 1895:*

“The Eaton homestead is now owned and occupied by Mrs. Judge Stoddard and in her possession may yet be seen the old entrance door to the Court House and also the stairs perforated by bullets at the time of the massacre of young French. We think some action should be taken to procure these interesting and precious relics from the owner, and have them placed in the State House at Montpelier, or some other safe place for safety and inspection of the present and future generations.... Fred I. Lane ... has the identical drum used by Capt. Wright's company, assembled immediately after the massacre to avenge the people's wrongs and the death of the martyred French. The old drum after lying many years in an old garret is in a fine state of preservation, and will today respond as readily and sonorously to the tap of the drum stick, as it did 120 years ago, to quicken the pulses and patriotic ardor of our great-great-grandfathers.”

Outside



Inside



This courthouse door was stored for over a century in the Stoddard barn in Westminster. It was later displayed in the Brooks Memorial Library in Brattleboro. After the Institute was built it lived in the history room there, and moved to the Town Hall with the Historical Society.



The drum used by Azariah Wright's militia. The ropes and heads have been replaced, but the main part of the drum is original.



The first volley of shots from Sheriff Paterson's posse went over the heads of the protesters. One pierced this board, which was part of the lintel over the door.



Top of Liberty pole which stood beside the Courthouse



This French-made Revolutionary-era musket was owned by a member of the Phippen family, three of whom served in Azariah Wright's Whig militia.



## Vermont General Assembly Commemoration of the Westminster Massacre

(To be brought up on March 11, 2025 at 9:30 am.)

Offered by Representative Bos-Lun of Westminster

House concurrent resolution commemorating the 250th anniversary of the March 13, 1775 Westminster Massacre

*Whereas*, in 1774, the Continental Congress adopted the Articles of Association, enacting a trade embargo against Great Britain, and New York was the only province which did not ratify the Articles, and

*Whereas*, the Cumberland County, NY towns, comprising all of current Vermont east of the Green Mountains from Tunbridge to the Massachusetts border, voted to uphold the Articles, and

*Whereas*, in 1775, local Whigs (supporters of American liberty) were experiencing excessive lawsuits, resulting in their Tory neighbors acquiring the Whigs' property through bankruptcy proceedings, and

*Whereas*, 40 Whigs met with Chief Judge Thomas Chandler at his home to request that the court be closed, but Judge Chandler said he had a murder case to try and after the trial he would discuss it with them, and subsequently, the Whigs learned that the court officials planned to arrive early and deny them entry, and

*Whereas*, on March 13, 1775, 100 Whigs, armed only with staves, occupied the courthouse before Sheriff William Paterson and his posse's arrival, and the sheriff read them the Riot Act but they defied him, and

*Text of the  
Riot Act  
Is below*

*Whereas*, Judge Chandler promised the protestors they could remain in the courthouse overnight un-molested, but Sheriff Paterson returned with his posse and ordered his men to fire point-blank, which wounded several Whigs, including William French of Brattleboro (who died overnight and whose gravesite has been maintained with State financial support) and Daniel Houghton of Dummerston (who died several days later), and the Sheriff's posse retook control of the courthouse, and

*Whereas*, on March 14, 1775, 400 armed local militia, including many from New Hampshire, filled the street and recaptured the courthouse, imprisoning all the New York officials and permanently terminating New York government in Cumberland County—but refraining from any further violence—nearly two years before Vermont independence was declared in Westminster on January 15, 1777, and

*Whereas*, for two centuries Vermonters have considered the Westminster Massacre to constitute the first bloodshed of the American Revolution, *now therefore be it*

**Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:**

That the General Assembly commemorates the 250th anniversary of the March 13, 1775 Westminster Massacre, *and be it further*

**Resolved:** That the Secretary of State be directed to send a copy of this resolution to the Westminster Historical Society.

## The Riot Act

(as read to the Whigs occupying the Courthouse on March 13, 1775)

*“Our sovereign lord the king chargeth and commandeth all persons, being assembled, immediately to disperse themselves, and peaceably to depart to their habitations, or to their lawful business, upon the pains contained in the act made in the first year of King George, for preventing tumults and riotous assemblies. God save the King!”*

The Riot Act wasn't repealed in Britain until 1967.

Westminster Historical Society  
P. O. Box 2  
Westminster, VT 05158

## 250th anniversary commemoration of the Westminster Massacre

**March 13-15, 2025**

*Please check our website for the latest details.*

### *Upcoming WHS events*

#### **2025**

*March 13-15, 2025 - see front page.*

*May 24, 2025 - gravestone cleaning  
(see page 9).*

*July 5, 2025 - WHS Museum and  
Bradley Law office open on summer  
Saturdays, 2:00-4:00.*

*October 16 (tentative) - WHS Annual  
meeting, open to all.*

#### **2027**

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



Westminster Courthouse model built by Dorothy Metros of Walpole, NH, for the Massacre Bicentennial.

The model is 1:12 scale, 40" square, with sides that open to show the interior. It is on display in the WHS Museum upstairs in the Westminster Town Hall.