
NEWBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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"Fall in, Eyes Front" Newbury Militia and the Muster Days

John Lyons

Militia Background

The origin of the militia and town government begins in the 1650s when the English began to establish colonies in North America. They adopted the town as the model of local government. Each year men of the town gathered to elect officers to govern their own affairs. Town officers who appeared corrupt or delinquent were easily removed from office, in contrast to the English system of Crown appointments. Self-government was a big change from Crown-appointed rulers.

The town served as the basis for military organization and training. Every able-bodied male in each community became a member of the militia and was required to train on a regular basis by law. While relations with Native Americans were generally peaceful, the militia provided local self-protection.

New Hampshire law of 1718 provided that all male persons, from sixteen to sixty years of age, except Negroes and Indians, should perform military service. The captain should call out his company four times in each year, and no more, to exercise them in motions, the use of arms, and shooting at marks, or other military exercises.

The French and Indian War (1754-63), The Revolutionary War, and The War of 1812 made people conscious of both the need for readiness to bear arms and to protect their homes at all times in minuteman spirit.

Each town had its own military company with each soldier, at least twice a year, "showing his gun for inspection" and the Selectmen of that town "taking" account of stock in powder and ball, and to see if the town is ready to defend its people and its homes." In addition to organizing a group of men, there were days set aside for training in military arts and displaying readiness. These days were muster days

During the Revolutionary War and the War of

1812, the militia saw much activity. When news of fighting at Lexington and Concord was received by messengers, entire regiments left New Hampshire and joined the fighting. After the revolution, the New Hampshire Provincial Congress organized a state military force using local militia.

In 1792, an act was passed stating: "A well-regulated militia is the proper, natural and sure defense of a State." It changed the age to eighteen to forty years of age and the muster days to twice every year. "There should be one standard (flag) and one suit of regimental colors," for each regiment at the expense of the State.

This new Constitution made the first battalion from companies in the towns of Boscawen, Salisbury, Andover, New London and Kearsarge Gore. The companies in the towns of Hopkinton, Warner, Sutton, Fishersfield (now Newbury) and Bradford, shall form a second battalion which shall constitute the twenty-first regiment.

In 1840, the Legislature authorized the revision of the statutes of the State by having "[t]hose in New London, Newbury, Wilmot, Bradford, and Sutton, be the Thirtieth regiment."

Muster Days and the Muster Field

After the Revolution, and again after the War of 1812, the military unit of the country was the militia, the citizen soldiers. Men from eighteen to forty years old took great pride in forming militia companies and going to the muster. It sometimes



brought great numbers of people to see the sights, and merchants and other people who had things to sell.

Regimental Muster Days were gala days. Even after the danger of wars had been removed, the militia service and Muster Days continued for many years. Old and young looked forward to them and joined "with zest" in the day's activities.

"After a forenoon of 'drill' and 'maneuvers,' contests such as wrestling matches between the champions of each company and which company could present the best band, took place on the 'Green'." The legislature stipulated that suitable meats and drinks, or thirty-four cents in lieu thereof, should be furnished each non-commissioned officer and private, within their several towns and places, on regimental or battalion musters.

Newbury's Militia and Muster

To find out more about a local muster field, I turned to the Newbury Public Library's copy of *Muster Days At Muster Field Farm, 1787-1850* by Jack Noon. Muster Field Farm is in Sutton near Kezar Lake. He writes about the muster:

Civilian military duty in NH was required by law until 1851, when the state had 42 regiments. Local companies of militia would gather annually for parade and inspection at their regiment's fall muster – often involving a thousand or more men from half a dozen towns. Food and alcohol vendors, showmen, fiddlers, auctioneers, charlatans, gamblers and several thousand spectators turned these gatherings into regional festivals...

In 1799 the Thirtieth Regiment was created and military exercises were required by state law for able bodied men. They had to provide their own weapons and equipment and had to attend at least one training day per year. A colonel headed the regiment. Jeremiah Morse of Newbury is listed on the 1858 Newbury map as Col. Morse.

Benjamin Cilley was commander of the Newbury Rifle Corps in the old militia days according to *The History of Merrimack County* by D. Hamilton Hurd.

On page 45 of Noon's book, there is an 1802 listing of the 62 men of the Company of Calvary in the Thirtieth Regiment. The men from Fisherfield were: Joseph Bean, John Baker, Benjamin



Chandler, Nathaniel Cheney, Jr., David C. Eaton, John Gillingham, Samuel Jammison, Philip E. Chase, and Samuel Robie.

Their uniform was scarlet coats, buff pants, and black shakos plumed. Shakos are cylindrical or conical military hats with a brim and a plume or pom-pom. There is a mention of a muster in Newbury on page 70. The Sutton group began planning for that muster at Herrick's Tavern on September 8th, 1838 to "ensure that the men had what was required of them."

They were ordered to appear on parade on Wednesday, September 12, 1838, "uniformed and equipped as the law directs" and "near Jacob Gipson Esqr's in Newbury." That location was to be one of the Thirtieth Regiment's muster sites for 1838. There were also musters other years in New London. Muster Field Farm in Sutton was often the site.

Where was Newbury's muster field? The "Jacob Gipson" mentioned in the book I suspect was Jacob Gibson who was in a number of deeds I've reviewed. Born in Henniker in 1784, he was in the 1830 census of Bradford. In 1837 he bought near Lake Todd part of lot 25, 10 acres with buildings bordered by Jeremiah Morse. In an 1847 deed, Jeremiah Morse to Gibson, he was referred to as Squire Gibson; one boundary was the muster field. My best guess it was in the area of what today is the intersection of NH Route 103 and Morse Hill Road, the south end very near Colonel Jeremiah Morse's home.

Newbury's Muster Field

Muster days were often in different locations. The town map of 1775 shows a small plot of land near what today is the intersection of NH Routes 103 and 103 A called "Parade". This

(Continued page 5)

(Militia Continued)

Parade was in many towns and served as the muster place for the militia. Today it is near the Center Meeting House and across from the Lakeside Cemetery.

The Newbury Historical Society conserves the Orderly Books of the town militia. These record the dates, names, and places of the town militia musters. The Orderly Book of Capt. Harvey G. Morse, 1849-1857, lists officers Walter J. Colburn Liet?, Seth A. Morse, Ens.

Captain Morse writes an order dated April 1, 1849, to a list of militia members of Newbury "... to appear at Sewel Clark's inn in Newbury on the fifteenth day of May at one o'clock in the afternoon with arms and equipment required by law for military duty."

The militia members at this muster were Richard Johnson, James Dodge, Samuel Shaw, Alfred Clark, George W. Simmons, Thomas M. Craig, John Richardson, Moses K. Felch, Samuel Bagley, Benjamin R. Morse, Bainbridge Gillingham, Oliver Perkins, C. Twist, Albert Brown, Daniel Hart, Albert Eastman, as attested to by Frederick S. Muzzey.

End of an Era

While a large portion of the people favored the law, there were others opposed to it. Some opposed it on the score of its expense; others were against it for the alleged immoral tendency of military parades; and still others because, as they said, war and all its accompaniments were an evil.

In 1851 the militia was abolished and the muster was no longer required. At the beginning of the American Civil War, the militia was virtually nonexistent. The State had to raise volunteer regiments, such as the 6th New Hampshire Volunteer Infantry, to aid in the war. In 1879, New Hampshire designated the militia as the New Hampshire National Guard prior to the mandatory name change required by the National Defense Act of 1916.

Selected Sources:

Daniell, Jere R. (1981). *Colonial New Hampshire*. Hanover and London: University Press of New England
Noon, Jack (2005). *Perrystown 1749-1784*. Concord N.H.: Town and Country Reprographics
New Hampshire Argus and Spectator, Newport, N.H., November 7, 1873 and November 29, 1878

Report of the Board of Directors

After a quiet start because of the pandemic, the Newbury Historical Society resumed in-person board meetings in July of 2021. We were able to plan and hold an annual meeting in October, which featured Thomas M. Hardiman, Jr., a "Keeper" at the Portsmouth Athenaeum. He discussed his book, *MONEY, REVOLUTION, AND BOOKS: A multi-generational perspective on the Portsmouth Athenaeum's Library of John Fisher of London*.

John Fisher and his son, John, Jr., used family connections to acquire vast wealth and estates on both sides of the Atlantic. The Fisher name figures prominently in Newbury's history. In 1772, Governor John Wentworth renewed a land grant under the name of Fishersfield for his brother-in-law, John Fisher. The town was incorporated under that name in 1778 and became "Newbury" in 1837, when settlers from Newbury, Massachusetts influenced the name change.

The NHS participated in *Visual Verse – Snapshots in Time*, a volume of poetry and photographs from the collections of seven Lake Sunapee-area historical societies. The publication was the third volume created by the Literary Arts Guild of The Center for the Arts, Lake Sunapee Region. The NHS is planning to hold a program to enjoy some of the poems from the book and the Newbury and Sunapee photos that inspired them.

The Historic House Marker Project is ongoing. Our goal is to encourage research into and appreciation of the diversity of architectures in Newbury and tell about it in our programs and publications. The committee will assist property owners in authenticating the date their houses were built and any other historic information pertinent to the house and property. For more information, please visit our website.

Board of Directors: Paula Falkowski, Deane Geddes, John Lyons, Gay Sheary, Bill Weiller and Margie Weiller

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In Memoriam

It is with great sadness we report the passing in January of long-time NHS board member Ashley Geddes. Ashley was an active participant on the History Committee and a regular contributor to the newsletter. Her presence on field trips throughout the town was always welcome due to her insights in having spent winters skiing on Mt. Sunapee and boating on Lake Sunapee. Whether hiking in the woods searching for cellar holes or researching house titles, her participation will be missed.





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Newbury's Boston Post Cane

The Boston Post Cane tradition was established in 1909 by *The Boston Post* newspaper. The paper had specially designed canes made and contacted the selectmen in some 700 New England towns. The canes were given to the selectmen with the request that they be presented in a ceremony to the town's oldest living man. The custom was expanded to include women in 1930. The recipient held the honor as long as he/she lived (or moved from the town).



Violet Jones accepts the cane from Gay Sheary

Although we don't know if Newbury was actually included among the 700 New England towns, the tradition of passing a cane seems to have begun with the Sunapee Lake Grange in 1892. The most recent recipient in Newbury, Violet (Kauffman) Jones, passed away peacefully on July 19, 2020 at the age of 107 years old. She was presented with the cane in April of 2015 when she was 101 years of age. The NHS is now seeking to honor the current oldest resident of Newbury. Please send your suggestions to the Newbury Historical Society at: info@newburyhistorical.org

Center Meeting House Programs for 2022

Speaker Series: Co-sponsored by the Newbury Public Library Women Who Challenged the Norms of their Day

- June 13: *Borderland* - Documentary film, life and times of Blanche Ames Adams 7:00 pm
June 27: *Meet Lucy Stone* - Antebellum World, Abolition & Women's Rights * 7:00 pm
July 31: *Annual Meeting and Abby Hutchinson's Sweet Freedom Songs* * 4:00 pm
Aug. 29: *Civil War Soldiers' Quilts*, Pam Weeks * 7:00 pm
Sept. 12: *Votes for Women*, Liz Tentarelli 7:00 pm
Oct. 31: *The Capital Crime of Witchcraft* Margo Burns * 7:00 pm



Annual Events:

- July 9: Old Home Day, Open House 10:00 am-2:00 pm
July 10: Church Service in the Meeting House, held by The South Newbury Union Church Time TBA
Nov. 20: Thanks for Giving 2:00 pm
Dec. 4: Tree Lighting 5:00 pm

**Stay Tuned and Check our Website
There is more to come!**

<https://centermeetinghousenewbury.org>