

Ebenezer Munroe Jr.
A Brief Biography
By Bill Poole

Ebenezer Munroe Jr., was, like all the other Munroes in Lexington, a descendant of the original immigrant, William Munroe. Charles Hudson, in his *History of the Town of Lexington*, devoted more than three pages to the history of the Munroe family, over three times as much introductory space for any other family.¹ [This is the Hudson single volume issue, from which some information was left out and other added in the 1912, two volume, revised edition.]

Hudson traced the family back to Scotland, referring to it as “among the most ancient and honorable families in the north of Scotland.”² He made no claim that William was of noble origin, but that he did at least descend from the Munroe clan in Scotland. However, Munroe family tradition asserts that he was “the son of Robert of Aldie, and is the 18th in direct descent from that first Donald who, in the eleventh century, founded the Clan Munro.”³ Again, according to tradition, William was one of the Scots captured at the Battle of Worcester and shipped to the American colonies. There were five vessels carrying the prisoners, and it is claimed that William was one of the 271 crowded on board the *John and Sarah* first shipped to London on November 11, 1651 and then to Massachusetts. The list of prisoners has three Munroes, Hugh, John and one other whose first name is obscured, but is thought to be William. The prisoners were to be placed in the custody of Thomas Kemble of Charlestown to be disposed of as directed for a period of servitude.⁴

Millwright John Adams purchased William’s indenture. Adams was from the area of Cambridge, MA known as Menotomy. Later William would work for Joseph Cooke of Cambridge from whom he also rented land.⁵ Whatever William’s term of servitude, it was not too lengthy for by 1657 he is already referred to in the Cambridge records. About 1660 he settled in the northeasterly part of Cambridge known as Cambridge Farms, now Lexington. His home was near the Woburn line, and for many years the area was known as Scotland, undoubtedly in deference to William and his numerous family. He was made a “freeman” in 1690. In 1694 he was a selectman of Cambridge and he continued to hold numerous important offices. William married about 1665, Martha George, daughter of John and Ann Cutler George, born about 1636.⁶

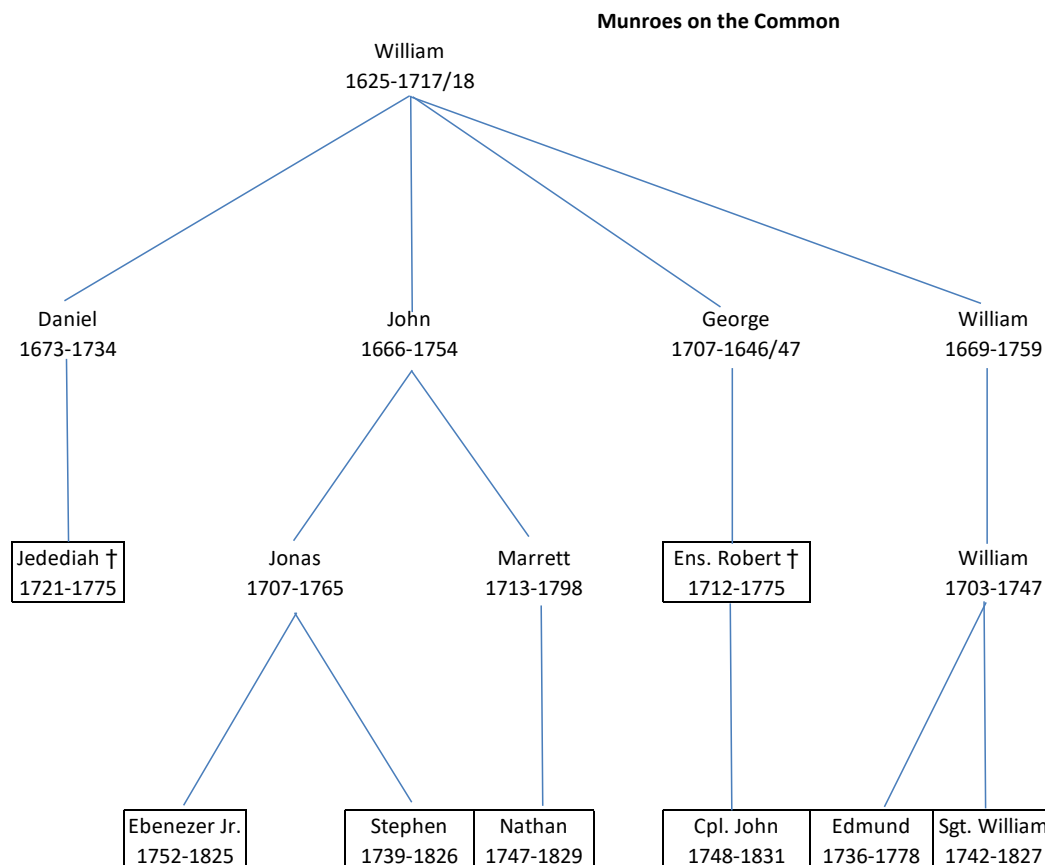
William and Martha had four children, 1. **John, born March 10, 1666 and the Grandfather of Ebenezer Jr. the subject of this essay**; 2. Martha, born November 2, 1667, 3. William, born October 10, 1669 and 4. George, born before 1672. Martha died about the time of George’s birth, perhaps of childbirth complications. John, George and William would have descendants who participated on April 19, 1775 in the engagement on Lexington Common.⁷ In 1672, William married Mary Ball, a young woman whom William and Martha had taken in. [For a story of seduction, deception, abandonment and redemption, read Mary’s story in “The Rhode Island Runaway,” in Diane Rappaports, *The Naked Quaker, True Crimes and Controversies from the Courts of New England*.]⁸

William and Martha’s first child, their son John, served as Assessor in 1699, 1714 and 1700; Constable in 1700; Selectman in 1718-19, and 1726; and Treasurer in 1718-20.⁹ Charles Hudson in his *History of Lexington* writes that, “He, with others, had 900 acres of land granted to them in 1735 for service rendered in the Indian fight at Lamprey River, 6 June 1690 [actual date is July 6, 1690].”¹⁰ This refers to an encounter in King William’s War between Native Americans and two companies of Massachusetts Militia commanded by Captains Noah Wiswall and John Floyd on the shore of Wheelwright Pond located today in Lee, New Hampshire. The battle resulted in the death of three militia officers, Captain Wiswall, Lieutenant Gershom Flagg, and Ensign Edward Walker. Fifteen others were killed and at least seven wounded. The engagement is referred to as the Battle at Wheelwright Pond.¹¹

John Munroe married Hannah Marrett (born August 17, 1668 in Cambridge, MA; died April 14, 1716). They had ten children the sixth of whom was **Jonas baptized November 22, 1707 the father of Ebenezer Jr. the subject of this essay**. John died in Lexington in 1754. Hannah's tombstone is in Lexington's Old Burying Ground, but John's apparently is not.¹²

According to Hudson, Jonas Munroe, son of John and Hannah, "was a lieutenant in the colonial militia. His first wife was Joanna Locke, born February 2, 1711-12, died September 1748, the mother of five of his seven children, including Stephen, who would stand on the Common on April 19th,¹³ Jonas died on November 7, 1765 and is buried in Lexington's Old Burying Ground, but Joanna is not.¹⁴ When Joanna died, Jonas married Rebecca Watt; their intention was filed in Chelsea, MA, February 7, 1751.¹⁵ They had three children, all born in Lexington: 1. **Ebenezer, known as Jr., the subject of this essay**, born April 19, 1752; 2. Rebecca, baptized June 23, 1754; and 3. Martha, born September 12, 1758.¹⁶

Ebenezer Jr., on the day of his 23^d birthday, would join his step-brother, Stephen, and six other Munroes on Lexington Common on the morning of April 19, 1775.



The Eight Members of the Munroe Family on Lexington Common on April 19, 1775

Fifty years later, on April 2, 1825, Ebenezer Jr. gave a deposition providing a vivid description of what he had experienced on April 19, 1775. [I have broken the document into paragraphs for easier reading.]

"I, Ebenezer Munroe, of Ashburnham, in the county of Worcester and commonwealth of Massachusetts, in the seventy-third year of my age, on oath depose and say, that I was an inhabitant of Lexington in the county of Middlesex in the year 1775; that, during the night of the 18th of April of that year, I was alarmed by one Micah Nagels, who stated, that the British troops were on their march from Boston, and that Lieut. Tidd requested myself and others to meet on the common as soon as possible. I accordingly repaired to the common, the usual place of parade, where I found Capt. Parker, and I should think, about forty of the company had collected.

The weather being rather chilly, after calling the roll we were dismissed, but ordered to remain within the call of the drum. The men generally went into the tavern adjoining the common. In the mean time, persons were sent toward Boston to get some intelligence, if possible of the regulars. The last person sent was Thaddeus Bowman, who returned between day-light and the sun-time, and informed Capt. Parker, that the British troops were within a mile of the Meeting-house. Capt. Parker immediately ordered the drum to beat to arms. I was the first that followed the drum. I took my station on the right of our line, which was formed from six to ten rods back of the meeting-house, facing south.

About seventy of our company had assembled when the British troops appeared. Some of our men went into the meeting-house, where the town's powder was kept, for the purpose of replenishing their stock of ammunition. When the regulars had arrived within eighty or one hundred rods, they hearing our drum beat, halted, charged their guns, and doubled their ranks, and marched up at a quick step. Capt. Parker ordered his men to stand their ground, and not to molest the regulars unless they meddled with us.

The British troops came up directly in our front. The commanding officer advanced a few rods of us, and exclaimed "Disperse, you damned rebels! you dogs, run! - - Rush on my Boys!" and fired his pistol. The fire from their front ranks soon followed. After the first fire, I received a wound in my arm, and then, as I turned to run, I discharged my gun into the main body of the enemy. As I fired, my face being toward them, one ball cut off a part of one of my ear locks, which was then pinned up. Another ball passed between my arm and my body, and just marked my clothes.

The first fire of the British was regular: after that, they fired promiscuously. As we retreated, one of our company, Benjamin Sampson, I believe, who was running with me, turned his piece and fired. When I fired, I perfectly well recollect of taking aim at the regulars. The smoke, however, prevented my being able to see many of them. The balls flew so thick, I thought there was no chance for escape, and that I might as well fire my gun as stand still and do nothing. I am confident that it was the determination of most of my company, in case they were fired upon, to return the fire. I did not hear Capt. Parker's orders to his company to disperse.

When the British came up in front of the meeting-house, Joshua Simonds was in the upper gallery, an open cask of powder standing near him, and he afterward told me, that he cocked his gun and placed the muzzle of it close to the cask of powder, and determined to "touch if off," in case the troops had come into the gallery. After our company had all dispersed, and the British had done firing, they gave three cheers. After they had marched off for Concord, we took prisoners, who were considerably in the rear of the main body, carried their arms into Buckman's tavern, and they were taken by

some of our men, who had none of their own. I believed at the time, that some of our shots must have done execution. I was afterward confirmed in this opinion, by the observations of some prisoners, whom we took in the afternoon, who stated, that one of their soldiers was wounded in the thigh, and that another received a shot through his hand.

Ebenezer Munroe

Middlesex, ss. 2d April, 1825, - - Then personally appeared the aforesaid Ebenezer Munroe, and made oath to the truth of the aforesaid statement, before us,
Stephen Parch,
Justice¹⁷”

What Ebenezer did not relate in this deposition was recorded in the deposition given by Corporal John Munroe on December 24, 1824.

After the first fire of the regulars, I thought, and so stated to Ebenezer Munroe Jun. who stood next to me on the left, that they had fired nothing but powder; but on the second firing, Munroe stated they had fired something more than powder, for he had received a wound in his arm; and now, said he, to use his own words, "I'll give them the guts of my gun." We then both took aim at the main body of British troops the smoke preventing our seeing anything but the heads of some of their horses and discharged our pieces.

The fact that there were two Ebenezer Munroes in Lexington at that time was the reason that Ebenezer was called Jr., to distinguish him from the other who was the son of Robert and Anna Stone Munroe, born November 15, 1744.¹⁸ Since this Ebenezer was the older, he was known simply as Ebenezer. The elder Ebenezer, whom I will designate as Sr., was only 31, and quite eligible for military service, as was Ebenezer Jr. at age 23. Hudson, states that Ebenezer Jr. served in the campaign to the Jerseys in 1776, and Ebenezer Sr. he also credited with service “in the Jersey campaign.”¹⁹

Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors in the Revolutionary War has a number of entries for “Ebenezer” but only one for “Ebenezer Jr.”

MUNRO, Ebenezer, Concord. Private, Capt. Charles Miles’s co., Col. Jonathan Reed’s regt.; pay abstract for travel allowance, etc. from Ticonderoga, sworn to Feb. 16, 1777; 190 miles travel allowed said Munro

MUNRO, Ebenezer, Lexington. Private in a detachment from Lexington militia co command by Capt. John Parker; service, 5 days; detachment reported on command at Cambridge from May 6 to May 10, 1775, by order of Committee of Safety.

MUNRO, Ebenezer, Lexington. Private, in a detachment from Lexington militia co. commanded by Capt. John Parker; service 2 days; detachment reported on command at Cambridge from June 17 to June 18, 1775, by order of Committee of Safety

MUNRO, Ebenezer, Jr., Lexington. Private in a detachment from Lexington militia co. commanded by Capt. John Parker; service 2 days; detachment reported on command at Cambridge from June 17 to June 18, 1775, by order of Committee of Safety.²⁰

It appears that sometimes Lexington men were credited to Concord, even though you will not find any of their names in Concord’s Vital Records under births, marriages or deaths.

There are two entries for service in the Ticonderoga campaign that Hudson did not give credit to either of the Ebenezers.

MUNRO, Ebenezer. Capt. Miles's co.; company receipt, given to Edmund Munro, dated Lexington, Feb. 18, 1777, for mileage and travel home; service on campaign at Ticonderoga.

MUNROE, Ebenezer. Private, Capt. Samuel Farrar's co., Col. Reed's regt.; enlisted Sep. 29, 1777; discharged Nov. 7, 1777; service 1 mo. 10 days; company detached from Col. Eleazer Brooks regt. to reinforce army under Gen. Gates at the Northward.²¹

I do not know who to credit for the majority of the military service. Both Ebenezers were members of Captain Parker's militia company that served at Cambridge on June 17 and 18, 1775 and thus are distinguished in the listing. For the other entries, it could have been one or the other.

Ebenezer Jr. married on April 10, 1780 in Lexington, Mrs. Lucy Simonds of Woburn. They had one child, Charles born in Lexington before the family moved to Ashburnham, Worcester County, MA. Their children were:

Charles, born in Lexington, September 12, 1781

Lucy, born in Ashburnham, March 21, 1783

Ebenezer, born in Ashburnham, February 25, 1785

Jonas, born in Ashburnham, May 27, 1790

John, born in Ashburnham, October 4, 1793

Rebecca, born in Ashburnham, June 7, 1798

Herrick, born in Ashburnham, October 17, 1801²²

Ebenezer Jr. became a celebrated figure in Ashburnham. He was referred to as Lieutenant, and received prominent notice in Ezra S. Stearns' *History of Ashburnham*.

"Ebenezer Munroe, who removed to this town about 1782, where he lived highly respected until his death May 25, 1825, was a prominent actor in the engagement at Lexington, which is clearly established by the depositions of those who were engaged on that occasion."

Stearns then quoted extensively from the deposition Ebenezer Jr. had given in 1824, five months before he died. Ebenezer Jr. was sure he had fired the first shot of the engagement, and Stearns gave him credit for that as have many others since. Stearns also recorded that even though Ebenezer Jr. had been wounded,

"he mounted a horse and rode from town to town alarming the people and carrying with him the convincing proof that the war in earnest had begun."²³

Ebenezer continued with his military activities. He was a member of the militia in Ashburnham. The unit was designated the Seventh Company of the Eighth Regiment, and on "May 2, 1787, Daniel Putman was commissioned Captain, Ebenezer Munroe, Lieutenant, and John Abbot, Ensign." "Lieutenant Munroe and Ensign Abbot were not promoted. These titles became permanently affixed to their names." [This is seen on Ebenezer Jr.'s' burial monument.] Ebenezer's name was included in a list of the twelve members with more than seven years' service in the unit but with no date given. During the War of 1812, in response to increased British Naval activity in the Summer of 1814, the unit, now called the Ashburnham Light Infantry, was mustered into service on September 9, 1814. It was stationed in South Boston and Dorchester serving for fifty-one days, and being discharged on October 14, 1814.²⁴

Ebenezer Jr.'s son Charles served with his father and later went into the chair manufacturing business in South Ashburnham²⁵ and another son, Jonas. opened a store in South Ashburnham in 1822.²⁶

Ebenezer Jr. died on May 25, 1825 at age 73, and Lucy died May 28, 1839 at age 77. The transcription of the Ashburnham record of Ebenezer Jr.'s death begins with a somewhat sanitized version of his statement made on Lexington Common.

"I'll give them the contents of my Gun. Lexington. Apr. 19, 1775." Lieut. Ebenezer Munroe, May 25, 1825, a. 73.²⁷

There is an imposing monument in the Meetinghouse Hill Cemetery in Ashburnham marking the gravesite of Ebenezer and Lucy.²⁸



**The base of the monument is inscribed
LIEUT. MUNROE**



Lieut. Ebenezer Munroe Died May 25, 1825 AE 73 Lucy his Wife Died May 28, 1839 AE 77

Footnotes

¹Hudson, Charles, *History of the Town of Lexington from First Settlement to 1868 with a Genealogical Register of Lexington Families*, Boston, Wiggan and Lunt, Publishers. 1868, pp. 144-47.

²Ibid, p. 147.

³Munroe, James Phinney, "A Sketch of the Munro Clan also of William Munro who, departed from Scotland, settled in Lexington, Massachusetts, and of some of his Posterity, Together With A Letter From Sarah Munroe to Mary Mason Descriptive of the Visit of President Washington to Lexington in 1789," George H. Ellis, Printer, Boston, 1900, pp. 19 – 26; Alexander Mackenzie, *History of the Munros of Fowlis with Genealogies of the Principal Families of the Name: To Which Are Added Those of Lexington and New England*, A. W. Mackenzie, Inverness, 1898, pp. 559 - 563.

⁴Monroe, James Phinney, *Sketches*, Pp. 22-23.

⁵Rappaport, Diane, "Scots for Sale: The Fate of the Scottish Prisoners in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts," New England Historical Genealogical Society, 2004.

⁶Hudson, Charles, *History of the Town of Lexington, Middlesex County, Massachusetts from Its First Settlement to 1868, Revised and Continued to 1812*, Two Volumes, Lexington Historical Society, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York, 1913, Volume II, *Genealogies*, p. 449.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Rappaport, Diane, "The Rhode Island Runaway," in *The Naked Quaker, True Crimes and Controversies from the Courts of New England*, Carlisle, MA, Commonwealth Editions, 2007;

⁹Hudson, *Genealogies*, p. 449.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 449.

¹¹"A Short History of Lee, New Hampshire," on line; "Gershom Flagg at Wheelwright Pond, 6 Jul. 1690," on line.

- ¹²Hudson, *Genealogies*, pp.449-50; Francis H. Brown, M.D., *Lexington Epitaphs, A Copy of Epitaphs of The Old Burying Ground of Lexington Massachusetts*, The Lexington Historical Society, 1905.
- ¹³Hudson, *Genealogies*, p. 453.
- ¹⁴Brown, *Epitaphs*.
- ¹⁵Baldwin, Thomas W., Compiler, *Vital Records of Chelsea, Massachusetts to the Year 1850*, Wright & Potter Printing Company, Boston, Mass., 1916, p. 434.
- ¹⁶Hudson, *Genealogies*, p. 453.
- ¹⁷Kehoe, Vincent J.R., "We Were There April 19, 1775 The American Rebels," Self-Published, January 1, 1975, "Deposition of Ebenezer Munroe," pp. 244-45.
- ¹⁸Hudson, *Genealogies*, p. 467.
- ¹⁹*Ibid.* pp.459 and 467.
- ²⁰ *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War, A compilation from the Archives Prepared and Published by the Secretary of the Commonwealth in Accordance with Chapter 100, Resolves of 1891*, Boston, Wright & Potter, 1896-1908, Volume 11, p. 208.
- ²¹*Ibid.*, p. 216.
- ²²Hudson, 459-60; *Vital Records of Ashburnham, Massachusetts, To the End of the Year 1849*, Published by Franklin P. Rice, Trustee of the Fund, 1909, transcribed by Dave Swerdfeger, at http://dunhamwilcox.net/ma/ashburnham_b2.htm
- ²³ Stearns, Ezra S. *History of Ashburnham, Massachusetts from the Grant of Dorchester, Canada to the Present Time, 1734—1886 with a Genealogical Register of Ashburnham Families*, Ashburnham, Mass., Published by the Town, 1887, pp. 177-78.
- ²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 425 and 428.
- ²⁵*Ibid.* p. 409. Ashburnham became well known for its wooden-chair manufacturing industry. When a portion of Ashburnham and other towns was set off to create the town of Gardner, the latter became known as "The Chair City of the World."
- ²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 399.
- ²⁷Vital Records of Ashburnham, MA
- ²⁸<https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/2205890/meetinghouse-hill-cemetery>