

Nathan Munroe
A Brief Biography
By Bill Poole

Nathan Munroe was a member of the extensive Munroe clan that descended from the immigrant ancestor William Munroe 1st, who according to family tradition was captured along with three other Munroes at the Battle of Worcester in 1651. They were marched to London and sentenced to be transported to America. The four were assigned to Thomas *Kemble of Boston and sent on board the ship John and Sarah arriving in Boston in 1652. The manifest of the John and Sarah* was badly damaged and while the names Robert, Hugh and John Munroe remain legible the fourth does not but it is believed that this was William. His indenture was purchased by millwright John Adams from the area of Cambridge, MA known as Menotomy. Later William would work for Joseph Cooke of Cambridge from whom he also rented land.¹

For thirteen years, he remained single, eventually marrying Martha George in 1666. Martha and William had four children before she died sometime prior to 1672.² William then married twenty-year-old Mary Ball. Mary had experienced a troubled life. She had been employed by Michael Bacon a married man from Bedford, MA with whom Mary fell in love and became pregnant at age eighteen. She was abandoned by her lover and deserted by those who had formerly supported her during her pregnancy. With Michael's encouragement and assistance, she fled to Rhode Island to her uncle's home where Michael promised to join her. However, he had no plan to do so, refused to answer her pleas for help and was eventually hauled into court and forced to provide for the child he had fathered.³

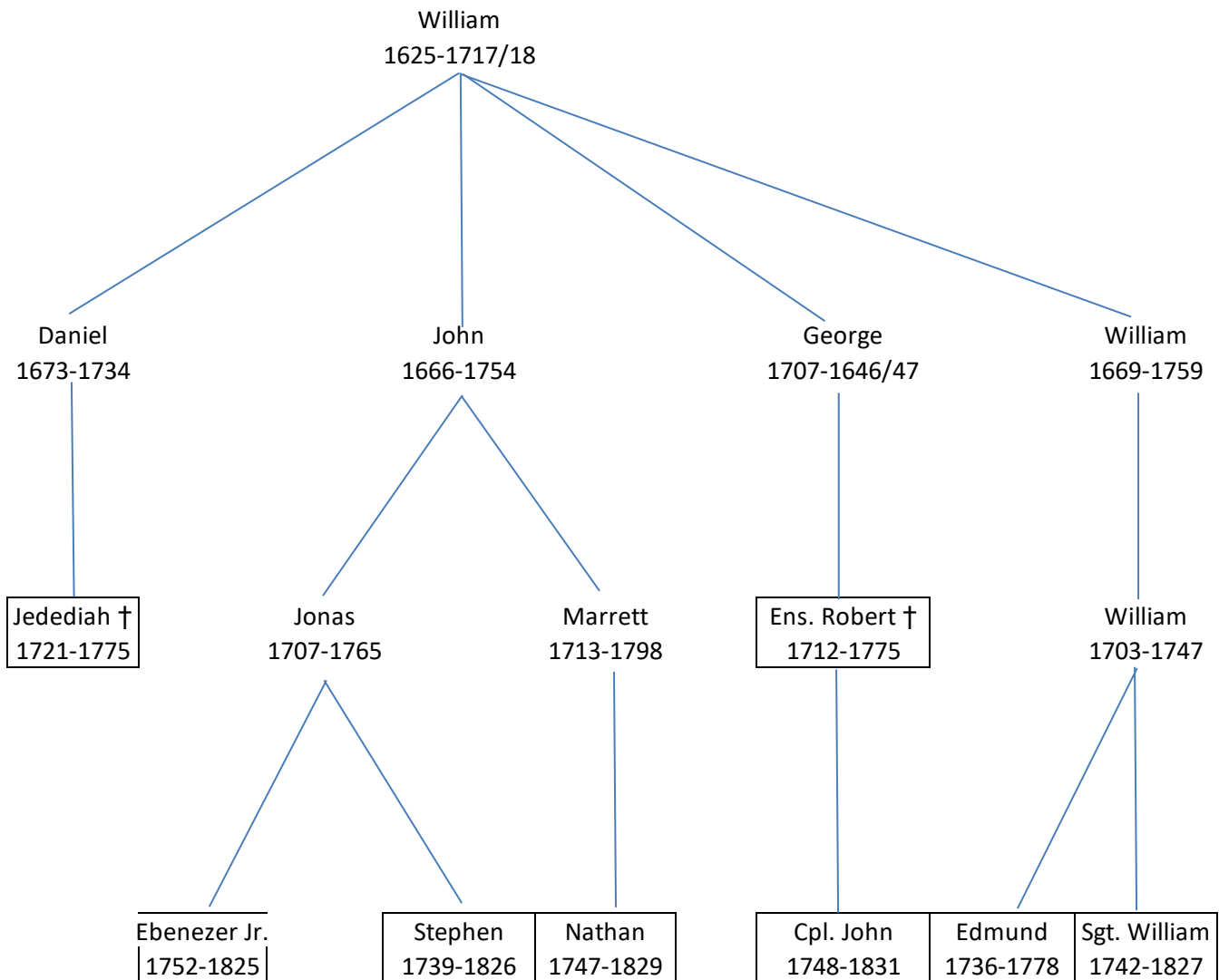
The only people who had any sympathy with her plight were Martha and William Munroe who took her into their home sometime in 1671. Shortly thereafter Martha died and in 1672 William married Mary. For the next twenty years Mary presented William with a child every two years, dying in 1692 at the age of forty-one.⁴ With William's four children by his first wife, Martha, and ten with Mary he had fathered a total of fourteen children. William settled in the Northeastern part of Cambridge Farms, MA, now Lexington, and there he and his sons purchased a good deal of property. With his children settled around him the area took on a definite Munroe flavor to the extent that it soon became known as "Scotland." William married again, Mrs. Elizabeth Johnson Dwyer a widow of a Scots tailor from Charlestown. She died December 14, 1714.⁴ [William died January 23, 1717/18](#), surviving three wives, however, it is William and Mary who lie side-by-side in Lexington's Old Burying Ground.⁵

John Munroe (born March 10, 1666 died in 1754) was William's oldest child by his first wife Martha. John served as Assessor in 1699, 1714 and 1700; Constable in 1700; Selectman in 1718-19, and 1726; and Treasurer in 1718-20. 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."⁶ 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.⁷

John married Hannah Marrett (born August 17, 1668 Cambridge, MA; died April 14, 1716). They had ten children the last of whom was Marrett, born December 16, 1713. Hannah's tombstone is in Lexington's Old Burying Ground, but John's apparently is not.⁸ Marrett served as a Selectman in 1762, 63, 64, and 67. He married April 17, 1737 Deliverance Parker, sister to Captain John Parker. Deliverance was born May 28, 1721 and died August 9, 1799. Marrett and Deliverance had twelve children, the fifth of whom was **Nathan, the subject of this essay**, born August 9, 1747. Marrett and Deliverance's graves are apparently not in Lexington's Old Burying Ground.⁹

Nathan was married on October 3, 1769 to Elizabeth Harrington (born April 11, 1750 died December 24, 1812), sister to Jonathan Harrington Jr., killed April 19, 1775 on the Common. Nathan and Elizabeth would have ten children. He was already a father of two when he stood on Lexington Common on April 19, 1775, where he was joined by seven other Munroes.¹⁰ Nathan was one of only eight of the Lexington Militia credited with firing back at the Regulars.

Munroes on the Common



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

Nathan left an account of April 19th when he swore a deposition on December 22, 1824, nearly a half century after the event.

I, Nathan Munroe, of Lexington, in the county of Middlesex and state of Massachusetts, do testify and say, that I was enrolled as a soldier in the company commanded by Capt. John Parker of said Lexington, in the year 1775; and, knowing that several British officers went up the road toward Concord in the evening of the 18th of April of said year, I with Benjamin Tidd, at the request of my captain, went to Bedford in the evening, and notified the inhabitants through the town, to the great road at Merriam's Corner, so called, in Concord, and then returned to Lexington. When arrived at the common, the bell was ringing, and the company collecting. I immediately got my arms and went to the parade. Capt. Parker gave orders to us to load our guns, but not to fire, unless we were fired upon first. About five o'clock in the morning, the British made their appearance at the east end of the meeting-house, near where our men were and immediately commenced firing, on us. I got over the wall into Buckman's land,

about six rods from the British, and then turned and fired at them. About the middle of the forenoon, Capt. Parker, having collected part of his company, marched them towards Concord, I being among them. We met the regulars in the bounds of Lincoln, about noon, retreating towards Boston. We fired on them, and continued so to do until they met reinforcement in Lexington.¹¹

Nathan's statement about part of Captain Parker's company marching towards Concord to meet the returning Regulars is the only primary documentation of Lexington's roll on that afternoon when they engaged the British at a site in Minuteman National Historical Park that has been styled "Parker's Revenge."

Nathan performed other military service. He was under Captain Parker's command five days from May 6 to 10 at Cambridge, and again under Captain Parker at Cambridge for two days June 17 and 18, both times as a Private. Charles Hudson has a Nathaniel Munroe serving "in the Seventh Campaign to White Plains in September 1776." His next service was in Captain John Moore's Company, Colonel Jonathan Reed's Regiment of guards from April 1, 1778 to July 8, 1778, 3 months and 2 days at Cambridge guarding the men of General John Burgoyne's "Convention Army," who had been surrendered the previous October at Saratoga. His last tour of duty was in Captain Abraham Andrews' Company of Colonel Cyprian Howe's Regiment from July 27, 1780 to October 30, 1780 "service 3 mos. 7 days, regiment detached from Middlesex Co. militia to reinforce Continental Army for 3 months, no rank given."¹² Nathan died May 26, 1829 at age 81 years, 8 months and 17 days. At present, the location of the gravesites of Nathan and Elizabeth are unknown.

Children of Nathan and Elizabeth Harrington Munroe

1. DILLY, b. 18 Nov. 1769; m. 29 Jan. 1789 ELIJAH PIERCE.
2. ARETHUSA, b. 10 Mar. 1773; m. 20 June 1793 WILLIAM FOX of Woburn, d. at Summerville 10 Feb. 1852, s. of Thomas and Elizabeth (Read); d. 20 July 1817. She had nine children.
3. BETSY, 5 or 15 Apr. 1776; m. 20 Mar. 1798 MUNSON JOHNSON.
4. JOHN, b. 15 June 1778; m. at Nantucket. 16 Aug. 1803, LYDIA MACY, b. 22 Mar. 1786, dau. of Stephen, Jr., and Phebe (Swain); d. at Nantucket 22 Aug 1864.
5. NATHAN, b. 23 Oct. 1780.
6. JONATHAN, b. 26 Mar. 1783.
7. MARY, b. 11 Jul. 1785; m. 13 Jun. 1811 THOMAS HUNNEWELL of Charlestown, b. 27 June 1785, d. 1863, s. of William and Sarah (Frothingham); d. 14 Dec. 1875. They had five sons and two daughters.
8. DORCAS, b. 31 Mar. 1788; m. LEONARD BROWN.
9. THADDEUS, b. 14 Sep. 1790.
10. HARRIS, b. 29 May 1793; d. at Dedham 1829.¹²

Footnotes

¹ Rappaport, Diane, "Scots for Sale: The Fate of the Scottish Prisoners in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts," New England Historical Genealogical Society, 2004.

² Charles Hudson, *History of the Town of Lexington, Middlesex County, Massachusetts from Its First Settlement to 1868, Revised and Continued to 1912*, Two Volumes, Lexington Historical Society, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York, 1913, Volume II, *Genealogies*, p. 449.

³ Rappaport, Diane, "The Rhode Island Runaway," in *The Naked Quaker, True Crimes and Controversies from the Courts of New England*, Carlisle, MA, Commonwealth Editions, 2007; "William 'The Immigrant' and Mary R. Ball," at: <http://freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~timbaloo/GrannyHepzibah/pages/William.htm>

⁴ Hudson, *Genealogies*, p. 449.

⁵ Francis H. Brown, *Lexington Epitaphs, A Copy of Epitaphs in The Old Burying Grounds of Lexington. Massachusetts*, The Lexington Historical society, Spatula Press, Boston, 1905, pp. 88-89.

⁶ Hudson, *op. cit.*, p. 449.

⁷Mary Pickering Thompson, *Landmarks in Ancient Dover, New Hampshire*, Durham, NH Historical Society, Printed by the Republican Press Association, Concord, N.H., 1892; Mellen Chamberlain, *A Documentary History of Chelsea, Including the Precincts of Winnisimmet, Rumney Marsh, and Pullen Point 1624 – 1824*, Two Volumes, Printed for the Massachusetts Historical Society by The University Press, Cambridge U.S. A., Boston, 1908, Volume I, Appendix, 9, pp. 178-79; John Norris McClintock, *Colony, Province, State, 1623-1888: History of New Hampshire*, Boston, B. B .Russell, 1889, p. 113.

⁸Hudson, *Genealogies*, pp. 449-50; Brown, *Epitaphs*, p. 85.

⁹Hudson, *Genealogies*, pp. 453-54.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 461.

¹¹Kehoe Vincent J.R., "We Were There April 19, 1775 The American Rebels," Self-Published, January 1, 1975, Deposition of Nathan Munroe, p. 247

¹²Hudson, Volume I, *History*, pp. 424, 425 and 428; Massachusetts Office of the Secretary of State, *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War, A Compilation from the Archives*, Seventeen volumes, Wright and Potter Printing Company, Boston, 1896, Volume 10, pp. 881-82, volume 11, p. 212.



The House of Nathan's father, Marrett Munroe, still stands on Massachusetts Avenue opposite Lexington Common



Gravestones of William and Mary Ball Munroe Lexington, MA Old Burying Ground