

Robert Munroe A Brief Biography

By David Kemper

And Bill Poole

Robert Munroe, like all the other Munroes in Lexington, was a descendant of the original immigrant, **William Munroe, Grandfather of Robert**. 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 as for any other family.¹ [This is the single volume issue, from which some information was left out and other added in the 1912, two volume, 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.

“London this 11th : of November 1651: Capt. Jno GREENE Wee whose names are under written freighters of your shipe the John & Sarah doe Order yow forthwith as winde & weather shall permitt to sett saile for Boston in New England & there deliver our Orders & Servants to Tho : KEMBLE of Charles Towne to be disposed of by him according to the orders wee have sent him in that behafe & wee desire yow to Advise with the said KEMBLE about all that may concerne that whole Intended vojage using your Indeavors with the said KEMBLE for the speediest lading your shipp from N.E. fit for the West Indies where yow are to deliver them to Mr. Charles RICH to be disposed of by him for the Joinet accout of the freighters & so to be retourned home in a stocke undevided thus desiring your Care & industrie in Dispatch & speed of the vojage wishing you a happy & safe Retourne wee remajne your loving friends⁴

The prisoners were considered indentured servants who were to labor for a specified period of time before being eventually freed. “Some of the Scottish POWs sent to New England were sold as a group to work in the Saugus Iron Works or the saw mills of Berwick Maine. Others went to York as servants. Still others were sold individually.”⁵

Whatever William’s term of servitude, it was not too lengthy for by 1657 he was 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 called 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 1636.⁷

They had four children: 1. **John**, born March 10, 1666; 2. **Martha**, born November 2, 1667; 3. **William**, born October 10, 1669, and 4. **George, the father of Robert, the subject of this essay**, born before 1672. Martha died about the time George was born, perhaps from complication of the birth. John, George and William would have descendants who participated on April 19, 1775 in the engagement on Lexington Common.⁶ 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 Chapter 2, “The Rhode Island Runaway,” in Diane Rappaports, *The Naked Quaker, True Crimes and Controversies from the Courts of New England.*]⁸

Between 1673 and 1699, Mary and William had ten children of whom only their first, **Daniel**, would have one of his children, **Jedediah**, stand on Lexington Common on April 19, 1775. Mary died in August, 1692 at age just 41. William then married Mrs. Elizabeth Johnson Dwyer, widow of Edward Dwyer and daughter of William and Elizabeth Johnson. She would die on December 14, 1714 at age 79.⁹

William died on January 27, 1717/18 at age 92. He, Mary and Elizabeth are buried in Lexington's Old Burying Ground.¹⁰ I do not know where Martha was buried.



Here Lyes ye
Body of
Mr WILLIAM
MUNROE; Aged
about 92 Years
Decd Jan'y. 27th 1717/18

HERE LYES YE^E
BODY OF MARY
MUNROO WIFE
TO WILLIAM
MUNROO AGED
41 YEARS
DIED AUGUST 1692



Here Lyes ye Body of
M^{rs} Elizabeth Munroe
wife to M^r william
Munroe & former
wife to Mr EDWARD
Wier of Charltowne^{ne}
Aged 79 years. Died
Decemb'r ye 14th 1715

George Munroe Father of Robert

George married **Sarah Mooers** before 1700. He was a tithingman in 1719, and Selectman in 1728. He was generally known as "Sergeant George." Sarah and George had nine children: 1. **William**, born January 6, 1700; 2. **Sarah**, born October 7, 1701, married Stearns as she is referred to in her father's probate records as Sarah Stearns; 3. **Dorothy**, born November 19, 1703, died April 20, 1705 aged 1 year four months; 4. **Lydia**, born December 13, 1705, married Jacob Watson and she is referred to in her father's probate records as Lydia Watson; 5. **George**, born October 17, 1707; 6. **Robert, the subject of this essay**, born May 4, 1712; 7. **Samuel**, born October 23, 1714; 8. **Andrew**, born June 4, 1718; 9. **Lucy**, born August 20, 1720, married in Lexington between 1740-43, Jonas Parker who would die on Lexington Common on April 19, 1775.¹¹

George died intestate (without a will) on January 17, 1746/47, age 73. Sarah declined being designated as executrix, and the eldest son, William, and Lydia's husband, Jacob Watson, were named co-executors. During probate, George's property was evaluated at £5,792 11 shillings and 8 pence, a considerable estate. Sarah received her widow's third and the remainder of the estate was divided among William, Robert, Samuel, Lydia, Andrew, Lucy, and the heirs of George and Sarah.¹²

Sarah died on December 4, 1752. Both she and George are buried in Lexington's Old Burying Ground.



Here lies buried
Y^e Body of M^r
GEORGE MUNROE
Who Departed this Life
January y^e 17th Anno Domⁿⁱ
1746/7 Aged 73 Years



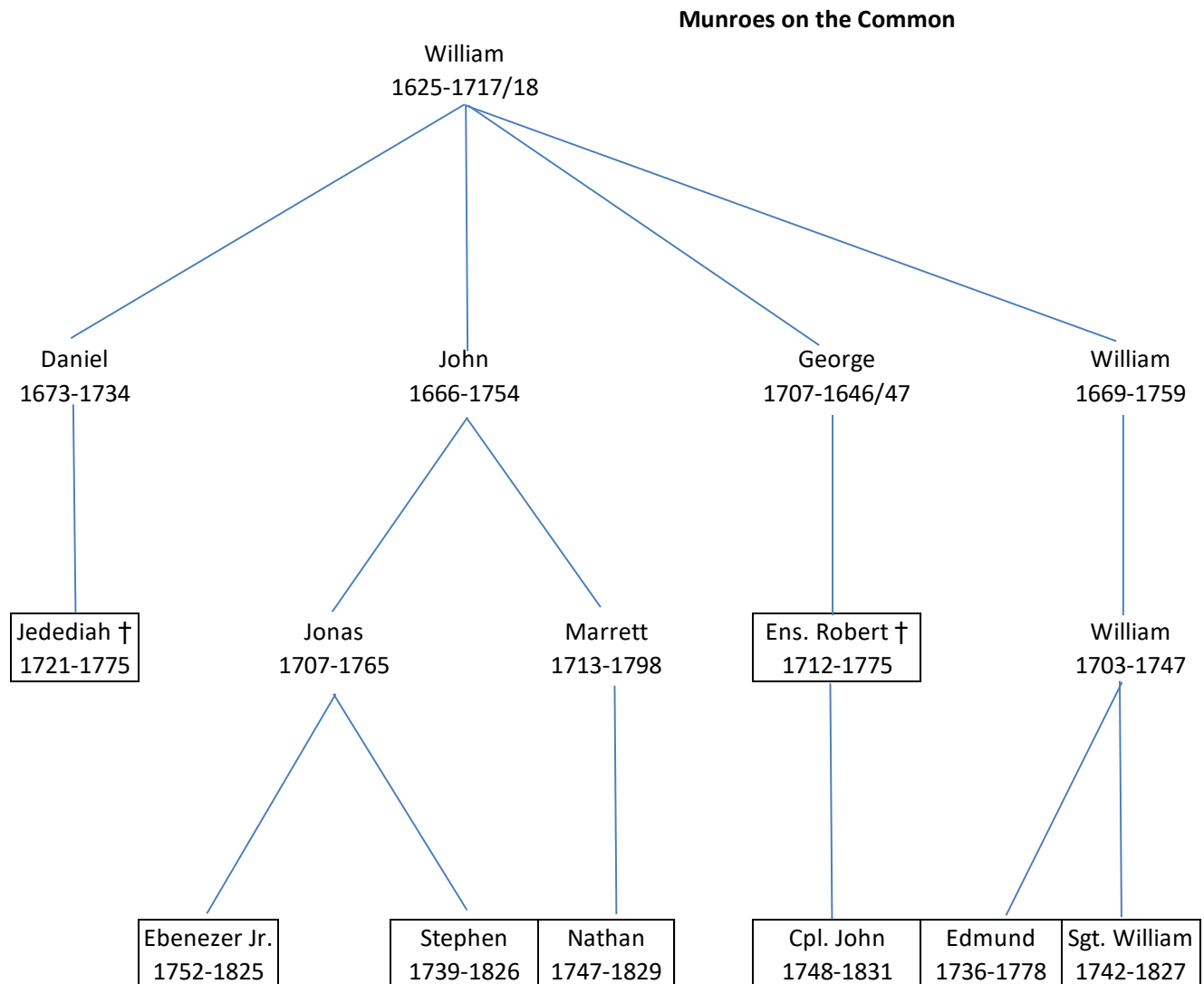
Here lies y^e Body of
M^{rs} SARAH MUNROE
Widow to M^r GEORGE
MUNROE; Who Died
Decem^r y^e 4th : 1752 in y^e
75th Year of Her Age

Robert Munroe, the subject of this essay

Robert saw service in the French and Indian War. From April 10 to December 19, 1755, he took part in the failed expedition to Crown Point, as a member of Captain William Pierce's Company.¹² In 1758 Robert is mentioned by Charles Hudson as serving in the rank of Ensign, but it is noted that his name does not appear on the muster rolls of Massachusetts.¹³ However, in Edmund Munroe's Orderly Book entry for August 28, 1758 a Robert Munrowe, with no rank given, is listed among "the troops to fire a Rejoicing firing this evening for the success of His majesty's Arms for the Taking of Louisburg . . ."¹⁴ Hudson states that Robert was among the men from Lexington "retained in the field in 1761, particularly to watch the Indians," but the Massachusetts muster rolls do not contain this record.¹⁵

Robert married in Lexington on July 28, 1737, **Anna Stone**, born November 22, 1718, daughter of John and Mary (Reed) Stone. Anna and Robert had six children, all born in Lexington; 1. **Ebenezer**, born February 5, 1737, died on June 25, 1740, aged 3 years 4 months and 20 days; 2. **Anna**, born August 13, 1740, married Daniel Harrington, clerk of Captain Parkers Company; 3. **Ruth**, born July 20, 1742, married William Tidd, Lieutenant of Captain Parkers Company; 4. **Ebenezer**, born November 15, 1744; 5. **John**, born June 15, 1748; and 6. **Unnamed Child**, probably born and died on the same day, November 21, 1756.¹⁶

On the 19th of April, 1775, Robert was 63 years old when he joined seven other members of the Munroe family on Lexington Common.



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

Professor David Hackett Fischer in his *Paul Revere's Ride*, coined the term “cousinage” to describe the many connections among families in Lexington. All eight of the Munroes were cousins, and, as stated earlier, two of Robert’s children married members of Captain John Parker’s command: Anna, married Daniel Harrington, clerk of the company, and Ruth, married William Tidd, Lieutenant in the company. We have seen that Robert’s sister, Lucy had married Jonas Parker of Captain Parker’s Company. You would have found that nearly everyone in town was was either related, close friends or neighbors. What was about to happen that April morning would prove a tragedy for the entire town



Rev. Dr. David Kemper represents with
Honor Ensign Robert Munroe

Robert served as an Ensign on Lexington Common on April 19th. As such, he may have stood in the front rank of the militia as they faced the British Regulars on that fateful morning. When the shots rang out, Robert fell fatally wounded along with six other members of the Lexington Militia. His son, Corporal John Munroe, who, along with the others of Captain Parker's command had been driven from the field, returned to find, as he wrote later, "Isaac Muzzey, Jonathan Harrington, and my father, Robert Munroe, were found dead near the place where the line had formed."¹⁷ At age 63, Robert was the oldest member of Captain Parker's Company to die throughout that day.

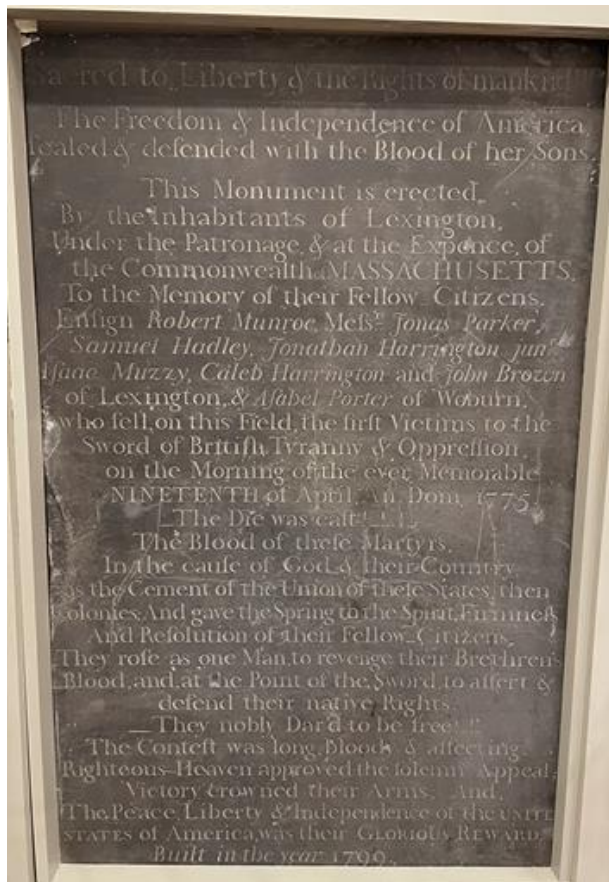
The agony must have been made greater for Corporal John to then see his beloved father first laid out in the Meeting House, then placed in a hastily constructed wooden coffin and hurriedly buried in a common grave at the rear of the graveyard. The place of internment was then covered with branches for fear that the returning Regulars would desecrate it.¹⁸

For some time, the inhabitants of Lexington had wished to erect a monument to commemorate the sacrifice of the eight men who died on the morning of April 19, 1775. "The Revolutionary War Monument" was completed and its dedication was held on July 4, 1799. It is located on the slight rise on Lexington Common that was the site of the first school house. It is has been described as the oldest Revolutionary War Monument, but that accolade belongs to the memorial to General Richard Montgomery installed in St. Paul's Chapel in New York City in 1787.

In 1835, the remains of the seven Lexington men killed on April 19th were disinterred from their burial site in Lexington's Old Burial Ground and placed in a tomb just behind the monument. The monument is thus, both a gravesite and the first memorial in the country to the ordinary men who served and died in the cause of liberty.



The Revolutionary War Monument
Courtesy of Wikipedia



Current Plaque



Original Plaque

The inscription of this plaque was written by Reverend Jonas Clarke, who served as the minister to Lexington from 1755 until his death in 1805. Due to wear, the original was replaced and is in the possession of the Lexington Historical Society. Ensign Robert Munroe's name appears first in the list of those honored.

The inscription on the plaque reads:

Sacred to the Liberty and the Rights of Mankind!!!
The Freedom and Independence of America,
Sealed and defended with the Blood of her Sons.

This Monument is erected
By the inhabitants of Lexington,
Under the patronage & at the expense of
The Commonwealth of Massachusetts,
To the memory of their Fellow Citizens,
Ensign *Robert Munroe*, and Messrs. *Jonas Parker*,
Samuel Hadley, *Jonathan Harrington, junr.*,
Isaac Muzzy, *Caleb Harrington* and *John Brown*,
Of Lexington, & *Asahel Porter* of Woburn,**
Who fell on this Field, the First Victims to the
Sword of British Tyranny & Oppression,
On the morning of the ever memorable
Nineteenth of April, An. Dom. 1775.

The Die was cast!!!

The Blood of these Martyrs
 In the cause of God & their Country,
 Was the Cement of the Union of these States, then
 Colonies, and gave the spring to the spirit, Firmness
 And Resolution of their Fellow Citizens.
 They rose as one Man, to revenge their Brethren's
 Blood, and at the point of the sword, to assert &
 Defend their native Rights.
 They nobly dar'd to be free!!
 The contest was long, bloody and affecting.
 Righteous Heaven approved the solemn appeal.
 Victory crowned their arms: and
 The Peace, Liberty, & Independence of the United
 States of America was their glorious Reward.
 Built in the year 1799.

**Asahel Porter of Woburn, the eighth casualty, was buried April 21, 1775 in Woburn's First Burial Ground. A commemorative marker was placed in 1975 to honor him by the Baldwin Historical Society (no longer extant).

Footnotes

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

²Ibid. p. 147.

³Munroe, James Phinney, *A Sketch of the Munroe Clan, Also of William Munroe Who, Deported from Scotland, Settled in Lexington, Massachusetts, and 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*, Boston, George H. Ellis, 1900, p. 23.

⁴<https://www.geni.com/projects/Passengers-of-the-ship-John-and-Sara-Scots-Prisoners-of-War-1651/12051>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶Hudson, Charles, *History of the Town of Lexington from First Settlement to 1868 Revised and Continued to 1912 by the Lexington Historical Society*, in Two Volumes, Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912, Volume II, *Genealogies*, p. 449; Vital Records of Lexington, MA to the end of the year 1897 at <https://ma-vitalrecords.org/MA/Middlesex/Lexington/>

⁷Hudson, *op. cit.*, p.449.

⁸Rappaport, Diane, *The Naked Quaker, True Crimes and Controversies from the Courts of New England*, Commonwealth Limited Editions, Carlisle, MA, 2007, pp. 15-27.

⁹Hudson, *Genealogies, op. cit.*, p. 449; Vital Records of Lexington, MA, *op. cit.*

¹⁰Brown, Francis H., M.D., *A Copy of Epitaphs in the Old Burying Ground of Lexington, Massachusetts*, The Lexington Historical Society, 1905, p. 84, 88, and 89. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/15839600/william-james-munroe>; <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/15839629/mary-munroe>; <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/16639620/elizabeth-munroe>

¹¹Hudson, *Genealogies, op. cit.*, p. 450.

¹²Middlesex County, MA: Probate File Papers, 1648-1871, Volume, Middlesex Cases 14000-15999, pages 18668:1-18668:27 at <https://www.americanancestors.org/databases/middlesex-county-ma-probate-file-papers-1648-1871/image?volumeld=14464&pageName=15668:1&rid=38337118>

¹³Colonial Officers and Soldiers in New England 1620-1775, p. 258 at <https://www.americanancestors.org/databases/colonial-soldiers-and-officers-in-new-england-1620-1775/RecordDisplay?volumeld=13257&pageName=258&rid=236081452>

¹³Hudson, Charles, *History of the Town of Lexington from First Settlement to 1868 Revised and Continued to 1912 by the Lexington Historical Society*, in Two Volumes, Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912, Volume I, *History*, p. 415.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 419.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 416.

¹⁶Hudson, *Genealogies*, *op. cit.*, p.

¹⁷Kehoe Vincent J.R., "We Were There April 19, 1775 The American Rebels," Self-Published, January 1, 1975, "Deposition of John Munroe December 28th, 1824," pp. 242-43.

¹⁸Letter of Elizabeth Clarke, daughter of Reverend Jonas Clarke, written to her niece, Lucy Ware Allen April 20, 1835, describing the events of April 19, 1775 and the burial of the victims, collection of the Lexington Historical Society.