

Stephen Munroe
A Brief Biography
By Bill Poole

Stephen Munroe 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 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 know 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, John, born March 10, 1666, Martha, born November 2, 1667, William, born October 10, 1669 and 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 that 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. 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, and the mother of five of his seven children, was Joanna Locke, born February 2, 1711-12, died September 1748.¹³ Jonas died on November 7, 1765 and is buried in Lexington's Old Burying Ground, but Joanna is not.¹⁴ Their third child was Stephen, the subject of this essay, born in Lexington on October 25, 1739.

Hudson has Stephen as a member of part of Captain Parker's Company "who were called to Cambridge, June 17 and 18, 1775."¹⁵

There is Stephen Munroe listed from Concord in Captain Abishai Brown's Company, Colonel John Nixon's (5th) Regiment; order for advanced pay signed by said Munroe and others, dated Cambridge June 10, 1775, also, list of men returned as serving on main guard under Lieutenant Colonel L. (Loammi) Baldwin at Prospect Hill, dated July 26, 1775. This Stephen also is listed on a muster roll dated August 1, 1775; enlisted April 27, 1775; service 3 months and 12 days. His name also appeared on a company return dated September 30, 1775 and in Captain Simon Hunt's company, Colonel Brook's regiment; company return (year not given); said Munroe reported missing.¹⁶

There are no Stephen Munroe's listed in Concord's Vital Records, births, marriages or deaths. It does appear that sometimes Lexington men were listed for Concord for some reason or other, but it is impossible to determine if this individual and the Stephen from Lexington are the same.

Our Lexington Stephen was included as a member of Captain John Bridge's command at Roxbury March 4, 1776 to March 8, inclusive. This was the fortification of Dorchester Heights and the placement there of the cannon brought from Fort Ticonderoga by Henry Knox. This would eventually force the British to evacuate Boston.¹⁷

Stephen also served six weeks at Providence, Rhode Island in August 1778. This was the Battle of Rhode Island that resulted in the abandonment of the siege of Newport by Continental forces under General John Sullivan and is notable for having not only Lexington Militia involved, but also the men from Lexington serving in the 15th Massachusetts Regiment in General John Glover's Brigade.¹⁸

Hudson in his *Genealogies* volume did not write much about Stephen Munroe other than his birth and death dates, that he "served in the French War at Lexington and Bunker Hill," that "he probably resided at Woburn and subsequently in Maine," and he married Nancy Perry at Woburn on July 8, 1766. Even the details of Stephen and Nancy's children are scanty.

This is all Hudson had to say about Stephen and Nancy's children.

"Nancy, m. () Caldwell of Woburn
Stephen, lived at Concord
Johanna, m. Daniel Russell
James, supposed to have been murdered"¹⁹

I was able to find a few details to expand on Hudson's information. There was a Stephen Munroe listed in the 1790 Federal Census for Pownalborough, then in Massachusetts now in Maine. The 1800, 1810 and 1820 Federal Censuses for Dresden, Lincoln County, now in Maine, list Stephen and Stephen Jr.²⁰

The Vital Records of Woburn, MA gave the marriage on October 24, 1789, of Nancy Munroe of Pownalborough to Joseph Caldwell.²¹ This appears to confirm Hudson's assertion that he resided "subsequently in Maine." This also seems to indicate that the family moved to what would become Maine and that his children, Nancy and Stephen Jr., also resided there.

Stephen and Nancy Perry Munroe's third child, Joanna, married in Boston on October 11, 1798, Daniel Russel Jr., Rev. William Walter officiating.²² I have not found any other information concerning Daniel and Joanna Munroe Russell, nor have I yet been able to find any detail of James and his supposed murder. Stephen Sr. returned to Lexington and died in the month of July 1826 at age 87, but I have not found his place of burial.²³

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.

³James Phinney Munroe, "A Sketch of the Munro Clan also of William Munro who, deported 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; Mackenzie, Alexander, *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.

⁶Charles Hudson, *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, p. 85.

¹³Hudson, *Genealogies*, p. 453.

¹⁴Brown.

¹⁵Hudson, *History*, p. 425.

¹⁶Massachusetts 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. 219.

¹⁷Hudson, Charles, Bi-Centenary Edition of the History of the Town of Lexington, Middlesex County, Massachusetts from Its Settlement to 1868, Revised and Continued to 1912, by The Lexington Historical Society, Volume I *History*, pp. 425-26

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 429-30; Bill Poole, "Lexington's Role in the Battle of Rhode Island," unpublished essay for the Lexington Minutemen.

¹⁹Hudson, *Genealogies*, p. 459.

²⁰1790 United States Federal Census, Maine, Lincoln, Pownalborough; 1800, 1810, 1820 United States Federal Censuses, Lincoln, Dresden, Maine.

²¹Vital Records of Woburn, MA to the End of the Year 1873, Marriages, at <https://ma-vitalrecords.org/MA/Middlesex/Woburn/>

²²Boston Marriages 1751-1809, on line at American Ancestors.

²³Vital Records of Lexington, MA to the End of the Year 1897, Deaths, at <https://ma-vitalrecords.org/MA/Middlesex/Lexington/>