

Corporal John Munroe Jr.
A Brief Biography
By Bill Poole

John Munroe Jr., who was a Corporal in Captain John Parker's militia company, 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.

"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 Toun 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 Joint 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. They 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 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*.⁷

Between 1673 and 1699, Mary and William had ten children of whom only their first child, Daniel, born August 12, 1673, would have a descendant who was on the 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. William died on January 27, 1717/18 at age 92.⁸ He, Mary and Elizabeth are buried in Lexington's Old Burying Ground. I do not know where Martha was buried.⁹

William's son, George, and his wife, Sarah Harrington?, had nine children, the fifth of whom, **Robert, born on May 4, 1712, was the father of John Jr. the subject of this essay**, and would meet his death on Lexington Common on April 19, 1775 at age 63. Robert married Anna Stone on July 28, 1737. They would have six children, the fifth of whom, **John, known as Jr., the subject of this biography**, was born on June 15, 1748, and would serve on April 19th.¹⁰

John Jr. married on December 17, 1772 in Lexington, Rebekah Wellington, born in Waltham on November 6, 1752, died February 6, 1838, daughter of Thomas and Margaret Stone Wellington. They had five children: Peggy, born July 31, 1773; Polly, born September 28, 1774, died August 27, 1775; Rebekah, born May 30, 1776; Polly, born April 30, 1779; and Philina, born May 27, 1782.¹¹

1774 Lexington Tax

Name	Personal Shilling	Personal pence	Real shilling	Real pence	Total shilling	Total Pence	Rank
Munroe, John Jr.	0	3	0	0	0	3	154 of 194

1775 Lexington Tax List John Jr. ranked 79th out of the total 222 tax payers

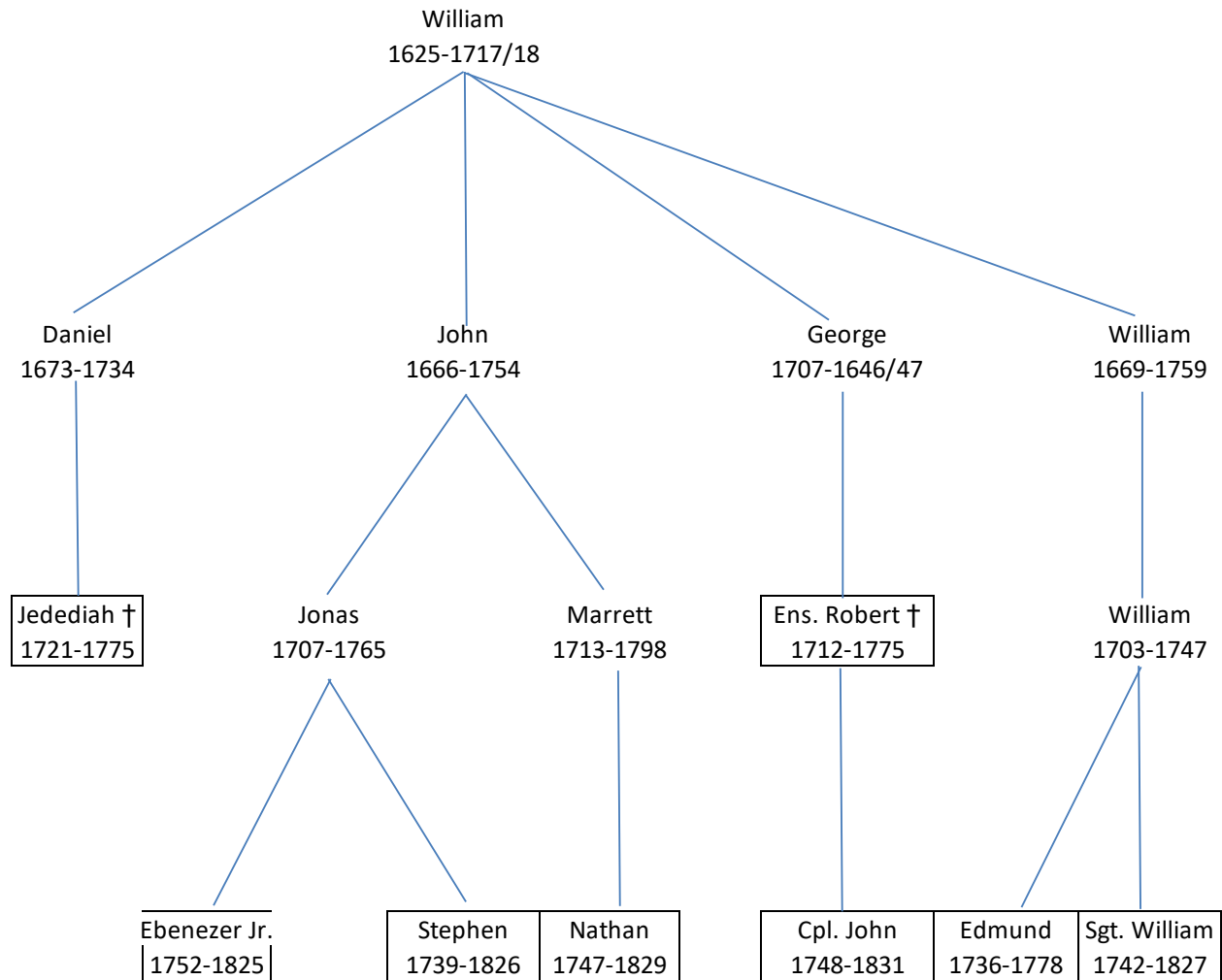
Rank	Last Name	First Name	Poll	Personal	Real	Total
			s p	£ s p	£ s p	£ 3 p
79	Munroe	John Jr.	5-5	0-01-03	0-10-8	0-17-04

Although John Jr. was above the median level in wealth (1775), he was taxed at a low rate (1774)

John Jr. was on Lexington Common with the rank of Corporal in Captain Parker's company of militia. Standing with him in the ranks were his father, Robert; four second cousins, Ebenezer, Edmund, Nathan, and William; and a half cousin once removed, Jedediah. [See the spreadsheet on page 3 .] The Battle on Lexington Common was what most would characterize as a skirmish. It took place early on the morning of April 19, 1775 at daylight and perhaps lasted no more than ten to fifteen minutes. The arrival of the British force caught the Lexington militia not completely assembled. Men were still arriving on the Common when the firing began. They had formed, it is related, in two ranks.

To the oncoming Regulars, their vision constrained by the nearby Buckman Tavern and its outbuildings on one side of the narrow road, and the large meeting house on the other, as they peered in the not yet full daylight at the militia across the Common, they seemed a formidable force, drawn up in military fashion. The Regulars hurried on to the Common and faced off against the wavering militia. Who then fired the first shot has never been determined, but fired it was, and the battle began.

Munroes on the Common



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

Corporal John left a dynamic description of what followed in a deposition he swore much later in life on December 24, 1824.

“I, John Munroe, of Lexington, a collector of tolls for the Middlesex Turnpike, being in the seventy-seventh year of my age, on oath do depose and say, that I was a corporal in the Lexington company of militia, which was commanded by the late Capt. John Parker, in the year 1775; that for some weeks previous to the 19th of April of that year the company was frequently called out for exercise, and desired to furnish ourselves with arms and ammunition, and to be in constant readiness for action.

On the morning of the 19th, at about two o’clock, as near as I can recollect, Francis Brown, who was sergeant in the same company, called me out of my bed, and said, the

British troops had left Boston, and were on their march to Lexington. I immediately repaired to the place of parade, which was the common adjoining the meeting house, where sixty or seventy of the company had assembled in arms. Capt. Parker ordered the role to be called, and every man to load his piece with powder and ball. After remaining on parade for some time, and there being no further account of the approach of the regulars, we were dismissed, but ordered to remain within call of the drum.

About day-light, Capt. Parker had information that a regiment of British troops were near, and immediately ordered the drum beat to arms. I took my station to the right. While the company were collecting, Capt. Parker, then on the left gave orders for every man to stand his ground until he should order them to leave. Many of the company had withdrawn to a considerable distance, and, by the time sixty or seventy of them had collected, the drum still beating to arms, the front ranks of the British troops appeared within twelve or fifteen rods [66 to 82.5 yards] of our line.

They continued their march to within eight rods [44 yards] of our line, when an officer on horseback, Lt. Col. Smith, who rode in front of his troops, exclaimed, 'Lay down your arms, and disperse, you rebels!' Finding our company kept their ground, Col. Smith ordered his troops to fire. This order not being obeyed, he then said to them, 'G--d damn you, fire.' The front platoon then discharged their pieces, and, another order being given to fire, there was a general discharge from the front ranks.

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.

After the second fire of the British Troops, I distinctly saw Jonas Parker struggling on the ground, with his gun in his hand, apparently attempting to load it. In this situation the British came up, run him through with the bayonet, and killed him on the spot. After I had fired the first time, I retreated about ten rods, and then loaded my gun a second time, with two balls, and, on firing on the British, the strength of the charge took off about a foot of my gun barrel.¹²

The militiamen were driven off the Common suffering eight dead and nine wounded. The Regulars were called to reform just as they were about to break into the nearby homes. They gave a Huzzah! and marched off to Concord. The dazed militia returned to find their townsmen lying dead or writhing in agony from wounds they had received. To his horror, John found his father was one of those who had died. He had been on the opposite end of the line and probably had not seen him fall. Surely the death of his father and the wounding of cousins, Ebenezer and Jedediah left him traumatized.

The agony must have been made greater 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.¹³ I do not know if John Jr. was among those who followed the British to exact retribution at what is known as Parker's Revenge in Minuteman National Historical Park.

Corporal John was among those who were members of a detachment of Captain Parker's Company called to Cambridge and served from May 6 to May 10, 1775. He also served in a part of Captain Parker's Company who were called to Cambridge, June 17 and 18, 1775. It is difficult to determine if the John Munro mentioned as a member of "Captain John Bridge's Company in Colonel Gardner's Regiment on command at Roxbury from March 4, 1776 to March 5 inclusive," was Corporal John,¹⁴ nor if the two other entries in Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary pertained to him.

MONROE, John. Corporal, Capt. Hezekiah Whitney's co., Col. Josiah Whitney's regt.; Entered service July 22, 1777; service 2 days; company marched to Rhode Island on an alarm.

MONROE, John. Corporal, Capt. Samuel Farrar's co., Col. Reed's regt.; engaged Sept. 29, 1777; discharged Nov. 7, 1777; service 1 mo. 10 days, at the Northward; company detached from Col. Eleazer Brooks's regt. to reinforce army under Gen. Gates.¹⁵

Captain Hezekiah Whitney was from Harvard in Worcester County, MA, so perhaps the John Monroe might have been someone different. However, Captain Samuel Farrar was from nearby Concord, MA, and this might have been Corporal John who would witness the surrender of General John Burgoyne.

Note: The Munroe family has caused difficulty for both historians and genealogists. The repetition of names and the designations used to distinguish one from the other present a challenge to those attempting to trace the activities of a single individual. None causes more confusion than the numerical listing according to age of those with the same first name. Initially it seems to work—calling the eldest Senior, the next in line, Junior and the remainder identified numerically, third, fourth, etc. However, the practice of renumbering each time one individual died can mystify a researcher.

With the case of Corporal William, he was known as Junior, since a cousin by the same name was older. So, in recording the births of his children, the first child was listed as "Peggy, d. of John Jr. and Rebekah," while with his other four children the Jr. was dropped and they were just listed as children of John and Rebekah. On April 25, 1775, he gave a combined deposition with thirteen other militia members in which he signed as John Jr.¹⁶ But, his later deposition was given in the name of John Munroe and he described himself as a corporal and the son of Robert Munroe who had been killed on the Common. Some have thought that Corporal John and John Jr. were two different individuals, but they were not.

John died on April 3, 1831 at age 32, and Rebekah on February 6, 1838 at age 85.

Corporal John was a second cousin of Sgt. William Munroe in whose tavern the explosion shortened musket was for a long time displayed. The musket is now held by the Lexington Historical Society in its Archives and Research Center.



Munroe Musket Image 1

The Munroe Musket shown in comparison with a comparable if not precise copy illustrates how shortened it became as a result of the bursting of the barrel through overloading with two musket balls and probably also a larger charge of black powder.

The musket barrel is 30" in length from breech to muzzle compared to a typical American musket's 44" length. The muzzle diameter is 11/16' or a little over 17 mm corresponding to a .69 caliber weapon.



Munroe Musket Image 2



Munroe Musket image 3

The second and third images show the repair made to the musket in order to return it to a functioning weapon.

“The forward portion of the stock below the barrel is joined to the rear portion with an L-shaped juncture. The forward portion may be a replacement for a part of the original stock damaged when the muzzle of John Munroe’s musket burst in the fight on Lexington Common.”⁶

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, Departed 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/>

⁷ Rappaport, Diane, *The Naked Quaker, True Crimes and Controversies from the Courts of New England*, Commonwealth Limited Editions, Carlisle, MA, 2007, pp. 15-27.

⁸Hudson, Volume I, *Genealogies*, p. 449; Vital Records of Lexington, MA to the end of the year 1897 at <https://ma->

vitalrecords.org/MA/Middlesex/Lexington/<https://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/how-scottish-pows-were-sold-as-slave-labor-in-new-england/> - comments

⁹Brown, Francis H., M.D., *A Copy of Epitaphs in the Old Burying Ground of Lexington, Massachusetts*, The Lexington Historical Society, 1905

¹⁰Hudson, Volume I, *Genealogies*, p. 450 and 456; Vital Records of Lexington, MA to the end of the year 1897 at <https://ma-vitalrecords.org/MA/Middlesex/Lexington/>

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 467; Vital Records of Lexington, MA.

¹²Kehoe 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.

¹³ Letter of Elizabeth Clarke, daughter of Reverend Jonas Clarke, written to her niece, Lucy Ware Allen on April 20, 1835, describing the events of April 19, 1775 and the burial of the victims, collection of the Lexington Historical Society.

¹⁴ Hudson, Charles, Volume II, *History*, pp. 424-26.

¹⁵*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 10, p. 883.

¹⁶Kehoe, pp. 89-90.

¹⁷Denis, John, Unpublished manuscript, John Denis Collection, Lexington, MA Historical Society.