

Edmund Munroe
A Brief Biography
By Bill Poole

Edmund was born in Lexington, MA on February 2, 1736, the eldest of the six surviving children of William and Sarah Mason Munroe. William and Sarah had lost a child earlier on October 23, 1724.¹ Like all the other Munroes of Lexington, Edmund was a descendant of the immigrant ancestor, William Munroe, who came to Massachusetts in 1651 as an indentured servant. Edmunds father, William, was the grandson of the first William, and Edmund was a great grandson. [For more on William the immigrant, see the Corporal John Munroe Biography on this site.]

Edmund's father, William, died August 18, 1747, when Edmund was eleven.² On February 17, 1752, just after Edmund's 16th birthday, his uncle, Thomas Munroe, then proprietor of the tavern in Concord that would come down to us as the historic Wright's Tavern, posted a 300£ bond on February 17, 1752, along with the innkeeper, Abijah Brown, so that Uncle Thomas could assume the guardianship of Edmund.

We, Thomas Munroe, Gentleman and Abijah Brown Innholder both of Concord are holden and firmly bound and obliged . . . in the full sum of Three Hundred Pounds in Lawful money of the Province of Massachusetts Bay . . . the condition of this Obligation is such that the above bounded Thomas Munroe Nominated and Allowed to be Guardian unto Edmund a minor in his seventeenth year of age son of William Munroe late of Lexington in the County of Middlesex Deceased, shall do well and truly perform and discharge the Truth and Office of Guardian unto the said minor . . .³

It is thought that Edmund went to live in Concord with his Uncle Thomas who supervised him while he was learning the trade of cordwainer (shoemaker)⁴



Historic Wright's Tavern in Concord center, once owned by Thomas Munroe

Edmund entered into military service at the age of twenty-one, serving five years during the Seven Years War, known in America as The French and Indian War. He was Sergeant Major and then Ensign in Roberts Rangers in 1758 and kept a regimental journal for a while from August 27 to November 9, 1758.⁵ From March 18 to November 17, 1761 he held the rank of Ensign in Captain William Barron's company. From November 18, 1761 through November, 1, 1762 he served as Ensign in Captains John Nixon's, Job Williams and Timothy Hammant's companies while during the same period holding the position of Adjutant in Colonel Jonathan Hoar and Colonel Richard Saltonstall's regiments at Crown

Point. He received a promotion to Lieutenant, and from November 2, 1762 to July 31, 1763 he was in Captain Edward Blake's company "Westward" which may have meant to Montreal.⁶

Edward continued with the Massachusetts forces at Crown Point, Ticonderoga and in that vicinity until peace. "He was presented, as a reward for his bravery, a sword captured from one of the French officers. This interesting relic is now in the possession of one of his descendants, Mr. E.S. Fessenden of Arlington."⁷ [The sword later was placed into the custody of the Lexington, MA Historical Society.

With the war ended, Edmund took advantage of his knowledge of the route to Crown Point to undertake a trip back there in the summer of 1763 driving sheep and cattle and "bringing shoes and other articles the officers there had commissioned him to procure for them." "Egge (Ignatius) Merriam and (Phillip) Burdoo* helped him drive the cattle and sheep. He brought back furs and . . . Abraham Bradshaw made up some for hats of the skins brought back."⁸

In 1765 Edmund made another trip to the north accompanied by Phillip Burdoo, driving horses, cattle, and sheep to Lake Champlain to sell to the army at Skenesborough, New York. "Phillip accompanied him on other trips, such as two in 1868 where they carried oxen, sheep, groceries, and shoes to Crown Point to trade. They returned with furs of moose, deer, racoon, beaver, musquash, and sable."⁹ Edmund had been living with John Raymond at his tavern for a short while but in 1768 he began to board with John Buckman, then running the tavern that would later become Munroe Tavern. The two entered into the business of making potash and established a "works" at the tavern. Edmund collected the ashes and conducted the business, but it soon failed.¹⁰

Shortly thereafter, Edmund married on August 31, 1769, Rebekah Harrington, born in Lexington, February 17, 1751, died March 16, 1834 in West Cambridge, daughter of Jonathan Sr. and Abigail Moore, Dunster, Harrington¹¹ [Jonathan and Abigail were the parents of Jonathan Jr. who would die on Lexington Common April 19, 1775. See Jonathan Jr.'s biograph on this site]. Rebekah and Edmund made their home at the junction of Woburn and Lowell Streets in Lexington where he practiced his trade of cordwainer.¹² Abigail gave birth to their first child, Pamela, on September 17, 1769. If the dates are correct, Abigail would have been eight months pregnant when they married. Little Abigail died just over a year later on September 29, 1770.¹³

Edmund and Rebecca's children were all born at Lexington: 1. Pamela, born September 17, 1769; died September 29, 1770; 2. Rebekah, born June 27, 1771; 3. Pamela, born September 20, 1773; 4. Edmund, born October 23, 1775, co-founded the publishing house of Munroe and Francis, and died at Boston unmarried February 9, 1854; and 5. Abigail, born December 5, 1777. Pamela is buried in Lexington's Old Burying Ground.¹⁴

As the tensions between Britain and her American colonies heightened, and Colonials began preparing for the outbreak of hostilities, it was inevitable that Edmund's martial spirit would be aroused. He was a member of Captain John Parkers Company of Lexington militia, and according to Charles Hudson, "was present at the Battle of Lexington." He then was captain in command of a detachment from the Lexington alarm company on command at Cambridge from May 16 to May 20, 1775, and as a Lieutenant, serving as a private, he was a member of a detachment from the Lexington alarm list under Captain Parker's command at Cambridge for 2 days from June 17 to 18, 1775.¹⁵

Edmund's records list him as a First Lieutenant in Captain Charles Miles company, Colonel Jonathan Reed's regiment of militia also known as the 6th Middlesex County Militia Regiment where he served as Regimental Quarter Master from July 12 to November 30, 1776, drawing rations for 142 days. The regiment was called up to support the Northern Army and the next entry allowed Edmund a travel

allowance for 190 miles from Fort Ticonderoga.¹⁶ Edmund was then appointed a Captain in Colonel Timothy Bigelow's 15th Massachusetts Regiment of the Continental Army on January 1, 1777. The army was undergoing continual reorganization, and the regiment was first assigned on February 9, 1777 to the Northern Department, then on March 13th reassigned to the Highlands, and then organized in the Spring of 1777 in Boston to consist of eight companies from Berkshire, Bristol, Middlesex, Essex, Suffolk, Cumberland and Worcester Counties. Just over a month later on July 24, 1777, the 2nd Massachusetts Brigade was relieved from the Highlands Department and assigned to the Northern Department. General Glover then led the brigade, including Colonel Bigelow's Regiment with Edmund as a captain, to the North where they took part in the Battle of Saratoga.¹⁶

Edmund was with the Northern Army in September 1777 under General Gates during the battles around Saratoga. A.B. Muzzey in his *Reminiscences and Memorials of Men of the Revolution*, stated that Edward "so distinguished himself, that after the capture of Burgoyne, he was presented by his superior officers with a pair of candlesticks, a part of the traveling equipage of General Burgoyne."¹⁷

On November 7, 1777, the 2nd Massachusetts Brigade was relieved from the Northern Department and assigned to the Main Continental Army under General Washington in New Jersey. General Washington led his army into winter quarters at Valley Forge on December 18. There, Glover's brigade consisting of the 1st, 4th, 13th and 15th Mass Infantry regiments was assigned to Major General Baron Johan De Kalb's division.

Edward wrote at least three letters to his wife from Valley Forge, one in the winter of 1777 and two in the Spring of 1778.

"To be left at Mr. Cooper Tavern at Menotomy

Valey Ford, December 27, 1777.

My dear, it is with the greatest pleasure I embrace every oppertunity of writing to you as you inform me that it pleasures you to hear from me. I am in good health through devine goodness & it is my most Sincere Wish that these lines may find you & the dear Little ones in the Best of Health our Lexington men are Well & desire to be Remembered to their friends We have nothing metireal Hapned of Late I Shoud have had Some money to have Sent you if I could perswade the post to have stayd three days Longer, but I intend to come & Bring it myself If possible, my duty to our Parents & Love & Respects to all Friends I conclude wishing you the best of Heavens Blessings & am my Dear Most Affectionate Husband Edm. Munro

If you will Leave a letter at Coopers Tavern the post will take it about three weeks after you Receive this"¹⁸

That winter was a dreadful one for Captain Munro's company which had mustered 53 men when it reached Washington's Army in late October. By January 10, 1778 the company had lost twelve out of the fifty three — seven had died, three deserted, one man had transferred and another had been discharged. Only one of these twelve was a Lexington man; Jonathan Munro a private was listed as deceased on the February 2, 1778 roster. However, not all the other Lexington men escaped unscathed. In a May 17, 1778 letter to his wife, Captain Munro reported that "Levi Mead & Pomp [Pompey Blackman, a Black soldier] are not well." There may have been others who also became ill, but apparently all eventually recovered.¹⁹

In the same letter, Captain Munro mentioned he was “going on command tomorrow morning down to the Enemy’s lines, there are two thousand going on the command. I am of the mind that we shall have a dispute with them before we return.” This may refer to a May 18th order of Washington’s placing a force of 2,200 men under the command of the Marquis de Lafayette. Lafayette, surprised by a sudden aggressive move of General Howe, nearly lost his entire command. Only the delay of a British flanking movement allowed the Americans to escape. This debacle at a place called Barren Hill near the fords of the Schuylkill River leading to Valley Forge nearly cost Washington a third of his army and Lafayette his reputation. Neither Glover’s brigade nor the 15th Mass is listed as part of Lafayette’s command, so if Munro did take part, he did so in a detached capacity or as part of a picked contingent of the 15th.

On June 12, Edmund addressed another letter, his last, to his wife, who was now the mother of five children, another son having been born in October of 1775 and a daughter in December 1777.

My Dear,

I send you these lines with the Most affectionate love and respects to you and the children, wishing they may find you in perfect health and prosperity. – I am well & in High spirits through divine goodness. – Lexington men are all well; news we have none except the commissioners are arrived from Great Britain at Philadelphia in order to settle the dispute between us & them. They have sent a flag of truce; what they had to offer is forwarded to Congress. – The new establishment of the army is arrived in camp; there is to be a Large Reducement of officers; but, as it has not taken place as yet, it is not known who are to be reduced. The new arrangement is on a Better footing than it was before. As it is to take place soon I will let you know my destiny by Mr. Williams who is in a fair way to Recover of the Smallpox; by him I am in hopes to send you some money. I Received your letters and a pair gloves. I hope to Reward you for the kindness to your Satisfaction. Be kind enough to let me know Whether you have Drawn a Blank or a Prize in States Lottery. My due respect to all friends.

I am my dear your most Effectionate

Husband

Edm^d Munro²⁰

Supposedly the average strength of a regiment in the Continental Army was about 728 officers and men with about 578 of those armed soldiers, and company strength would be about 90 officers and men with about 70-75 corporals and privates. Yet, in June, 1778, Colonel Bigelow reported his regiments total was 322, with 125 either sick, on furlough, or on other duty, leaving only 197 “Present and fit for duty.”²¹ The eight companies would thus have only about 25 effectives plus officers, sergeants and musicians. I have only been able to find a total of 45 officers and men, including Edmund in his company. By April 1, 1778 the number was whittled down to 36, and on June 1, about four weeks prior to the Battle of Monmouth, the number was 34.²²

The company was composed largely of men from Lexington and adjoining communities. With the company strength at forty-five there were 18 from Lexington, 7 from Concord, 4 from Woburn, 3 from Lincoln and 1 from Bedford or 73% of the total. With a company strength of 34 individuals whose service records indicate they were available for duty for the Battle of Monmouth, there were 15 from Lexington, 6 from Concord, 4 from Woburn and 1 from Lincoln for a total of 26. This meant that over three quarters

(76.5%) were from Lexington and the bordering communities. Among the members of Edmund's command, there were 5 Black soldiers, about 15% , or almost one in every six.²³

At the Battle of Monmouth, the Second Massachusetts Brigade, commanded by John Glover, was part of the left wing of the army led by Major General William Alexander-Lord Stirling. During the battle, after the Continental vanguard had been repulsed by the British, Stirling's forces formed the basis of Washington's defensive line on Perrine Hill where the retreating Continentals could rally. Sergeant Ebenezer Wild, whose 1st Massachusetts Regiment belonged to Glover's Brigade of Lord Stirling's Left Wing, wrote of the cannonade, "About 2 o'clk ... Our Division formed a line on the eminence about a half a mile in the front of the enemy, and our artillery in our front. A very smart cannonading ensued from both sides. We stayed here till several of our officers & men were killed and wounded. Seeing that it was of no service to stand here, we went back a little ways into the woods; but the cannonading still continued very smart on both sides about two hours ..."²⁴

An attempt to flank Sterling's position by the Queen's Rangers and the light infantry lacked the strength to carry it through, and they fell back. The infantry battle then "gave way to a two-hour artillery duel across the 1,200 yards (1,097 m) of no-man's land on either side of the brook, in which both sides suffered more casualties due to heat exhaustion than they did from enemy cannon."²⁵

Suddenly tragedy struck Edmund Munro's small company. A cannon ball struck Captain Munro, decapitating him. The same ball then smashed into the body of his kinsman George Munro² disemboweling him, and then crushing the leg of another man from Lexington, Private Joseph Cox maiming him for life. If Edmund and George Munro were buried near the battlefield, their graves were never marked. However, a number of the dead were buried in the Old Tennent Churchyard in Manalapan Township, New Jersey. A memorial to Edward was placed at the side of the church by his 4th great grandchildren and the DAR and SAR.



Old Tennent Church, Manalapan, Township, New Jersey



Edmund's Memorial Marker

A last entry in Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War concerning Edmund leaves us with the sad thought that Rebekah was now left a widow with four young children, ages seven, four, two and a 6 months old infant.

The last entry for Edmund in *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors* reads:

MUNROE, EDMUND, Council warrant dated May 24, 1779 for 100£, drawn in favor of Rebekah Munro, widow of said Munroe, (late) Captain, Col. Bigelow's regt', on account of money allowed him by resolve of Feb. 6, 1779.²⁶

Rebekah never married again, but her three surviving daughters did. Rebekah married Ichabod Fessenden of Cambridge, June 7, 1795, in Cambridge and had three or more children; Pamela married James Brown, Jr. January 19, 1800 in Lexington and they had 6 children; Abigail married Joseph Locke, Jr. and they had nine children.²⁷ It would have been their descendants who placed the memorial marker at the Old Tennent Church.



There is a line of markers where Edward's was placed, and one of these is to Captain Henry Fauntleroy who was also killed by a cannon ball, perhaps in the same cannonade.



In 2013, a detachment of the Lexington Minutemen performed a ceremony honoring Captain Edmund Munroe on the Monmouth Battlefield where he died.

Footnotes

¹Hudson, Charles, *History of the Town of Lexington from First Settlement to 1868*, Revised and Continued to 1912 by The Lexington Historical Society, Volume II, *Genealogies*, Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913, p. 454.

²Ibid.

³Middlesex County, MA: Probate File Papers 1648-1871At American Ancestors, February 17, 1752;

<https://lostnewengland.com/2020/03/wrights-tavern-concord-mass-1/> and on-line at

“Wright's Tavern, Concord, Massachusetts, Date Unknown”

⁴Canavan, Michael J., Canavan Papers, Typescript manuscript, Cary Memorial Library, Lexington, MA pp. 333-4. Robert Rodgers had spent most of his money supporting the ranger companies he had raised. He had found difficulty in obtaining compensation, and coupled with a gambling habit and poor investment, he found himself in financial straits and was arrested for debts. Canavan wrote that Edmund Munroe “gave a power of attorney to someone to sue him for money Rogers owed him.” p.361.

⁵ New England Historical and Genealogical Register and Antiquarian Journal Volume 16, July 1862, Diary kept by Edmund from August 27 to November 9, 1758, pp. 217-220.

⁶American Ancestors by New England Historic Genealogical Society, “Colonial Officers and Soldiers in New England 1620-1775, Military Records.”

⁷Muzzey, A. B., Reminiscences and Memorials of Men of the Revolution and Their Families, Boston, Estes & Lauriat, 1883, pp. 135-7.

⁸Canavan, p. 333 and 355;

⁹Bellinger, Dr. Robert A., Consulting Historian For the Lexington Historical Society *Research on Black People in Lexington 17th & 18th Centuries*, unpublished, 2021, pp. 30-31; *The free Black family of Burdoo had been in Lexington even before its incorporation in 1703. Philip was the grandson and namesake of the patriarch of the family.

¹⁰Canavan, p. 378.

¹¹Vital Records of Lexington, MA to the end of the year 1897 at <https://ma-vitalrecords.org/MA/Middlesex/Lexington/>; hereinafter referred to as Lexington Vital Records; Hudson, *Genealogies*, pp. 461-62.

¹²Kollen, Richard, *Lexington From Liberty's Birthplace to Progressive Suburb*, Chicago, Portsmouth, NH and San Francisco, 2004, p. 23.

¹³Vital Records of Lexington; Hudson, *Genealogies*, p. 461.

¹⁴Ibid.; 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, p. 88.

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 11, pp. 208-9.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Muzzey, p.137.

¹⁸The letter is in the archives of the Lexington, MA Historical Society

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Lesser, Charles H., *The Sinews of Independence, Monthly Strength Reports of the Continental Army*, The university of Chicago Press, 1976, p. 72

²²Personal research, *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Bugbee, James McKellar, editor, John Wilson and Son, University Press, Cambridge, 1891, *The Journal of Ebenezer Wild (1776-1781) who served as corporal, sergeant, ensign, and lieutenant in the War of the Revolution*.

²⁵Lender, Mark Edward & Stone, Garry Wheeler *Fatal Sunday: George Washington, the Monmouth Campaign, and the Politics of Battle*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016, pp. 274-276, 318-320, and 322-24.

²⁶*Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, Volume 11, p. 216

²⁷Locke, John Goodwin, *Book of the Lockes, A Genealogical and Historical Record of the Descendants of William Locke of Woburn with an Appendix Containing A History of the Lockes in England, also of the Family of John Locke of Hampton, N.H., and Kindred Families and Individuals*, Boston and Cambridge, James Munroe and Company, 1853, p. 168.