



THE HISTORIAN



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SUMMER 2017



Jacob Thompson House 1811



Fuller House 1869

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings:

I am writing to you in the middle of the third heat wave of the summer. Ouch! It has been very quiet at the Historical Society and everyone is either on vacation or planning one. Fuller House and Jacob Thompson House have not been cooperating — oil tank leak, air-conditioner malfunction, computer cables down.

Sorry about the cancellation of the historic home and garden tours, which were due to unforeseen circumstances.

We were going to do an article about another area in town like we did last month, but Mary found something very interesting during her archiving, which I thought you would all enjoy. Please read about the little-known victory of a local boy.

Dennis

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Do you need information about the history of Monson?
Write, call or email us. We may be able to help.

Mission Statement

To obtain and preserve historical data and articles pertaining to the town of Monson, Massachusetts, and to encourage and develop the pursuit and expression of such interests in all suitable ways.

THE DAY IN 1871

A MONSON FARM BOY IN THE FIRST GRADUATING CLASS OF MASSACHUSETTS AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

HELP SET NEW WORLD'S ROWING RECORD

By Dennis Swierad

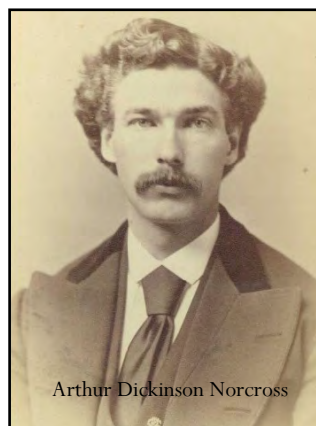
George Leonard Captained the Men Who Defeated Harvard and Brown at Ingleside, July 21, 1871 and Established a New World's Rowing Record.

In 1870, the year before the first class graduated from the college, Massachusetts Agricultural College (MAC) students formed a boating association, acquiring a Spanish cedar shell from a Springfield rowing club in which to practice. In their first and only race that year, they took on the newly established crew at Amherst College, winning a three mile race in the Connecticut River near Hatfield.

The following year, the MAC club joined the newly organized Rowing Association of American Colleges, along with Amherst, Bowdoin, Brown and Harvard. The team purchased another better second hand shell, this time from Amherst College, who had used it with their freshman class in a race on Lake Quinsigamond, Worcester, in the summer of 1870. The crew was not allowed to purchase a new shell due to the financial constraints put on them by the college treasury. On the whole, it was a good racing boat, except for being a little hard to steer. It was 50 feet in length, 19 inches wide, 14 inches deep, and weighed 130 pounds.

Why, you may ask, am I writing about a rowing regatta that happened in 1871 in Amherst, Massachusetts? Well, let me tell you. Arthur Dickinson Norcross, who was born in Monson, November 7, 1848 and attended our public schools and then the Monson Academy, went on to further study and completed his education at the Massachusetts Agricultural Col-

lege, Class of '71. I think a little known fact about Arthur D. is that he was part of the greatest six-man rowing team in America, setting the world's record covering 3 miles at 16 minutes, 46 1/2 seconds.

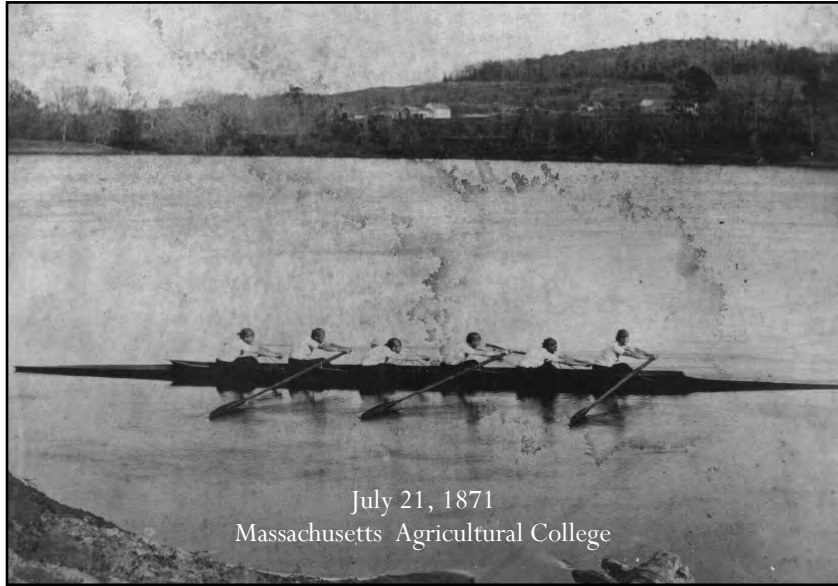


Arthur Dickinson Norcross

University Photograph Collection, Special Collections and University Archives, UMass Amherst Libraries

The crew consisted of No. 1 bow and captain, George Leonard, Class of '71; No. 2 Arthur Dickinson Norcross, Class of '71; No. 3 Henry Bell Simpson, Class of '73; No. 4 Gideon Hammond Allen, Class of '71; No. 5 Frederick Maxwell Somers, Class of '72; and No. 6 stroke, Frederick Cornelius Eldred, Class of '73.

The crew had some preliminary practice on improvised rowing weights in the old laboratory building, but it was not until the spring came that real heroic methods were undertaken. This long distance that separated the college from the river might have appeared a great obstacle to some, but in the end, it was made to contribute to the training. As first practice on the river was held on Saturday afternoons, the half-holiday, when the crew walked three miles to



July 21, 1871
Massachusetts Agricultural College

University Photograph Collection, Special Collections and University Archives,
UMass Amherst Libraries

the river, practiced there and then ran back to the college by a circuitous route around Mt. Warner, across country to North Amherst and thence by the highway into Amherst. As the season advanced and the team became more hardened, not a day passed without being utilized in part for training by the crew. On the days when it was impossible to go to the river, several hours were devoted to running. Finally, ten days before the race, "Old Josh" Ward, one of the five famous Ward brothers, was hired by the college to coach the crew. He moved them to quarters at Ingleside and devoted the whole time to training and practice.

Ingleside was a considerable resort for people from Springfield and the surrounding places. There was a hotel there which did a large business entertaining both summer and winter parties.

The course for the collegiate race was a three-mile straight-away, starting above Ingleside and ending just north of the Chicopee bridge.

Newspapers throughout the land reported on this event, the following are excerpts:

[Special Dispatch to the Boston Journal]

A BLEST AND MEMORABLE DAY.

In the first place the river was really gay to-day. Dull in many aspects as the Ingleside regatta has been, Friday, the unlucky day of the calendar, has certainly been blest and memorable.

IMMENSE ATTENDANCE AND GREAT EXCITEMENT

The excitement has been at white heat, and poison ivy has been disregarded by the thousands who thronged the banks. Springfield seemed to have reserved itself for the College Regatta, and three thousand persons passed over the Chicopee toll-bridge alone.

ALL SERENE

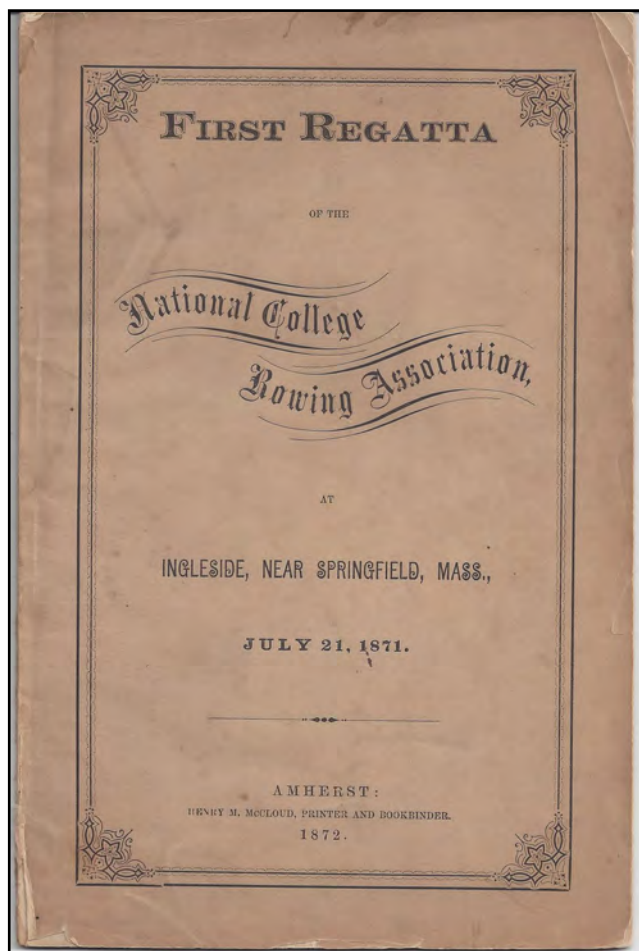
The winds had gone to sleep. The water was as smooth as a crystal mirror, and great fretted rifts of sunshine played gloriously on the shaggy sides of the far-off mountains.

[Extracts from Report o New York Tribune]

THE START AND THE RACE

At 7:04 o'clock, "Are you ready?" is answered affirmatively, the crews receive the word, and while Amherst seems to catch the water first, both Harvard and Brown strike together, and away they go to decide the question of superiority. The Amherst men, who seem to have improved their ten days of

Josh Ward, and understand his old catch at the start, display remarkable skill and speed at 47 strokes per minute; and, almost before the start is fully realized, they dash ahead of both rivals, foot by foot, slowly but surely. The Harvards make a magnificent start, pulling at their usual rate, steadily and effectively, while Brown does not seem to be so cool, nor do they work so evenly and calmly as they might, though they gain a slight advantage on Harvard, which may be due in part to their having the outside position. Notwithstanding Amherst is outside, her crew, from whom so little was expected, are constantly forging ahead, and the real struggle is between the Harvards and Browns, the latter retaining their slight lead for about three-fourths of a mile. In three or four minutes from the start of the race is



plainly visible from the heights at Ingleside, and when the crews are directly opposite, with Amherst still leading, and Harvard and Brown about even, excitement runs high, and the scene beggars description. Amherst

men, who had collected here in large numbers, were well nigh frantic, and could not restrain their outbursts of enthusiasm. Wide maroon bands, striped with white, adorned their hats, which were tossed high in the air, and they sent up such shouts as victorious soldiers in a forlorn hope do when the odds have been fearfully against them. They immediately become invested with a peculiar interest in the eyes of the general spectators, who soon catch their spirit of rejoicing, and, while the ladies show white clouds of handkerchiefs, staid old gentlemen, with gold-bowed spectacles and heavy canes, forget their rheumatism for the nonce, men in their prime wave their hats encouragingly, small boys dance in every direction, and long faces are only visible among disconsolate Harvard and Brown men. The betting takes a different phase, and not a few want to hedge, but find it impossible.

Meanwhile the crews pass rapidly over the smooth, placid surface of the river. Amherst, it is apparent, must win, and it is likely to be a bad beat if she continues to gain at the same rate which has been kept up to the beginning of the third mile. The Harvard-Brown contest is very exciting, both the latter boats being together during nearly the whole of the second mile, neither appearing to have any perceptible advantage over the other. Then Reed shows what has evidently been his policy — to pull vigorously at first, but with a little reserve strength for the last mile; and Bass and his fellows pair out handsomely, and creep ahead inch by inch in spite of the manly efforts of the Luther Brothers, the Little Giant, and the rest of the gritty Browns. Amherst gained faster on the Harvards than the Magenta did on Brown, Leonard having perfect command of his men, whose work must have made Josh Ward proud of his coaching. And so it continued, Amherst gaining on Harvard, and Harvard on Brown. All that is needed to make the race, perfect, as a struggle, being closer work between Amherst and Harvard. The spectators on Chicopee bridge have a splendid view of the race on the home stretch. A few Harvard and Brown men and many Amherst students are among them, or are collected with their respective judges on the beach opposite the stake-boat, which indicates the end of the three miles. When the boats are first seen, everybody is anxious to know which has the lead. The eager,

fragmentary talk of the collegians indicates better than hat-band or streamer their hopes and fears. "Brown is sure to win to-day," exclaims one, who thus shows his desire. Judge Rice is certain that Harvard is ahead, the wish being father of the opinion, and remarks it is too bad the crew lost his services by sickness. "That must be Reed in that leading boat," says another anxious Harvard man. "It is Reed," somebody shouts, and Harvard stock bounds up like gold in war times. "Brown is second," mildly asserts a nearsighted man from Providence. "Is not Amherst ahead?" somebody queries, upsetting the cup of joy which has just touched Harvard lips. "By Jingo!" It is Amherst, as sure as you're born!" yells the short, bright-eyed, auburn-haired Commodore of the Amherst Rowing Club, as he begins to recognize the six men whom he selected for the contest. The crews come nearer and nearer. It is plain that Amherst is winning. The Commodore catches the gleam of Leonard's spectacles, and jumping up and down in the sand, perfectly wild he yells to Leonard, "Sock it to her, Georgie!" "Sock it to her, Georgie!" But Georgie does not need the encouragement, for he and his crew score 42 strokes per minutes, and seem as fresh as Dexter is at the end of a half mile. The Harvard thermometer falls several degrees below zero, though one little fellow venture to assert that it be "a sickener for Brown with Harvard six lengths ahead." And so, while the eager multitude all stare in one direction, from bridge, bank and beach, while the college men indicate their university by the joy or sorrow depicted on their faces, and just as the sun is setting, the great University Race of 1871, is ended, Amherst winning the coveted prize, and Harvard winning the second place of honor.

Even the President of the College, William Smith Clark, could not escape the excitement of the event. It was reported that he splashed into the river to congratulate the crew personally and then rode back, on his horse, to campus at full speed to spread the news.

[Excerpt from Hartford Courant]

THE AMHERST FARMERS

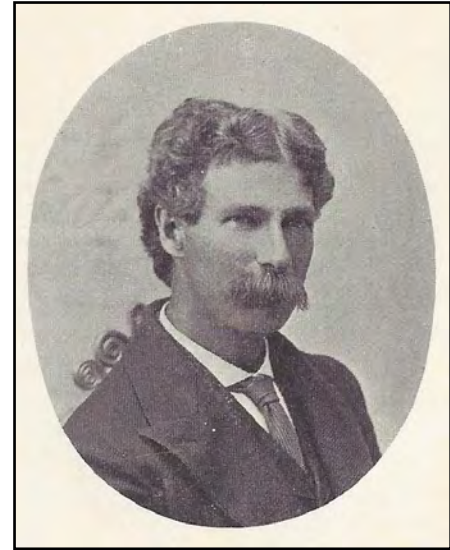
We used to hear a theory elaborated a few years ago, when Harvard was beating Yale in race after race, that

the victory in rowing was due quite as much to brain as to muscle. We were told that there was a great deal in blood, a great deal of breeding, and insinuation was that while Yale could show very good limbs, and sinews and backs that one might approve, she somewhere lacked a culture (nobody thought then that it was agriculture she lacked), for want of which she must be inevitably beaten. You see, blood will tell, said the sagacious theorists, and the college that has the most culture, that puts the most brain power into the stroke, is bound to win. But Harvard went on winning, and there was no way to disprove the theory. If the theory had been that parting the hair in the middle was the indispensable element of victory, there would have been no way to disprove that, so long as Harvard continued to carry off the colors.

But what shall we say now? Here come the Farmers, about whose culture we have heard nothing, whose blood is very likely red, who may not part their hair at all, who may never even have seen the Charles nor the Back Bay, and row right away from a boat full of Harvard brains. It is an audacious and revolutionary piece of business, and makes necessary a reconstruction of a good many theories. On what meat have these Amherst Caesars fed, that they have grown so strong? We had come to believe in a sort of traditional ability to row, transmitted in a university, as it seemed to be for years in Oxford; and as it also seemed to be in Harvard, except when Harvard met the longer line of transmitted power of Oxford on the Thames and yielded to trained antiquity. But here are the Amherst farmers, right out of the hayfield, without any rowing ancestors or any traditions of glory with the oar, who pull like sons of Neptune, and exhibited an endurance and a tenacity that we fondly believed belonged to birth.

After Arthur's college years, he returned to Monson, accomplishing much during his lifetime and holding many positions of honor and trust. He was employed by Merrick & Fay for two years, when he became clerk in the post office. He retained that position about seven years. He was then appointed postmaster, holding the office for four years. About two years after his appointment he went into the general mercantile business

with his brother, under the firm name of Norcross Brothers. This business was burned out in November, 1893, at which time he retired. He was a member of the school committee four years and chairman of the selectmen six years. He was a water commissioner and helped develop Monson's first public water supply. He served three terms as president of the Eastern Hampden Agricultural Society. He was a trustee of the Savings Bank and Monson Academy and was a director of the library association. He received a musical education and sang in many churches, not only in Monson, but also in Worcester and Boston. He was also leader of the Monson band when that organization was said to be the best of its kind west of Worcester. He was also a State Senator. Of some interest, he was also first cousin to Emily Dickinson, the poet.



Bibliography

Monson Illustrated. Published by Carpenter, Cady & Thresher, Monson, Massachusetts, 1897

History of Monson Massachusetts Compiled by Monson Historical Society 1960

First Regatta of the National College Rowing Association, at Ingleside, Near Springfield, Mass., July 21, 1871. Amherst: Henry M. McCloud, Printer and Bookbinder. 1872.

Springfield Daily Newspaper clippings

University Photograph Collection. Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.



University Photograph Collection. Special Collections and University Archives, UMass Amherst Libraries

NEW ACQUISITIONS



Remembrance Album for Louisa M. Smith, Monson 1837

(purchase)



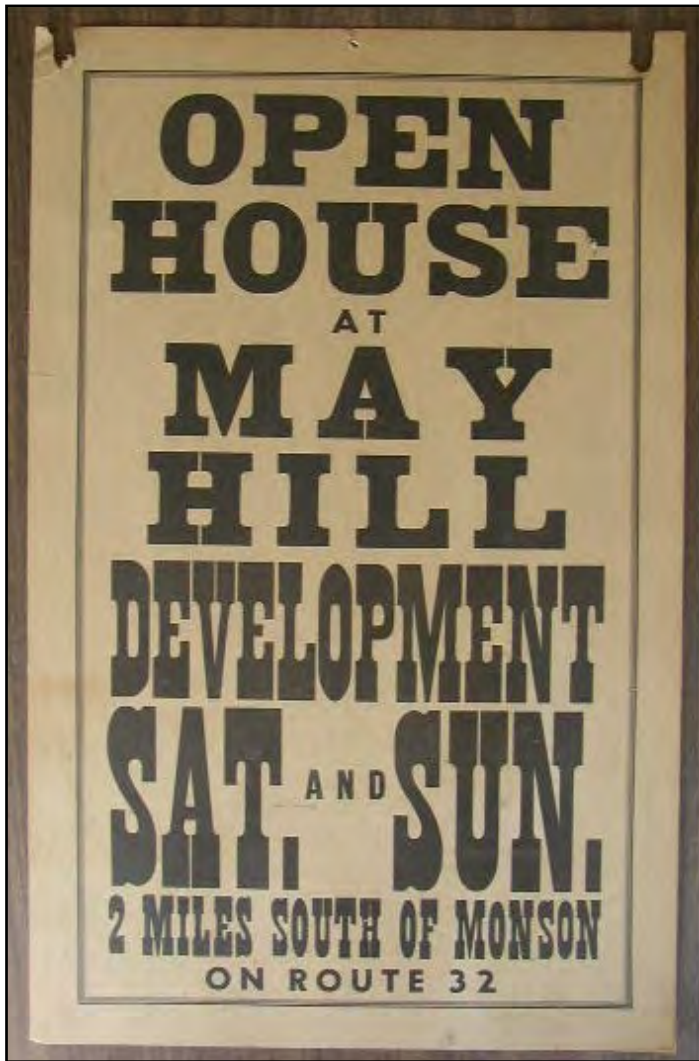
Advertising Ashtray

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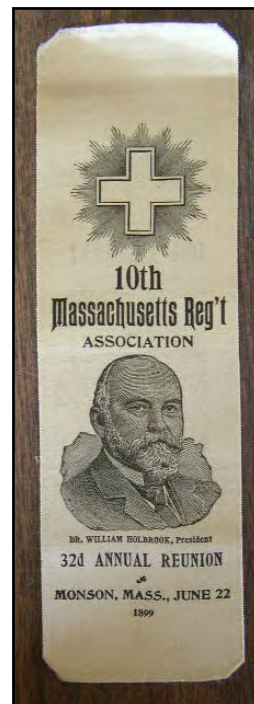
Tickets to events held at Memorial Hall

(donation)



*Poster circa 1950's
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*10th Massachusetts Regiment
Association
32nd Annual Reunion Ribbon
1899
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10th REGIMENT

Mass. Vol. Inf'ty.

MUSTERED IN JUNE 21st, 1861.

ENGAGEMENTS.

1862.

- Siege of Yorktown . . . April.
- Williamsburg . . . May 5.
- Fair Oaks . . . May 31.
- Cold Springs . . . June 15.
- Chas. City Cross Roads . . . June 26.
- Marye's Hill . . . July 3.
- Antietam . . . Sept. 17.
- Fredericksburg . . . Dec. 11-15.

1863.

- Mad. Campaign . . . Jan. 20-25.
- Marye's Heights . . . May 3.
- Salom Heights . . . May 24.
- Franklin's Crossing . . . June 7-10.
- Gettysburg . . . July 1-4.
- Rappahannock Station . . . Nov. 7.
- Mine Run . . . Dec. 1.

1864.

- Wilderness . . . May 5-6.
- Spotsylvania . . . May 8-8.
- North Anna . . . May 24.
- Cold Harbor . . . June 2-12.
- Perryville . . . June 11.

Last Fight at Petersburg, June 11, 1864.
MUSTERED OUT JULY 1 AND 6, 1864.



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*Keep Family Artifacts
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*First Congregational Church donation calendars
1943
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1960 History of Monson Book CD

The history of Monson, written in 1960 for the Bicentennial of the formation of the town, is now available in PDF format on a CD.

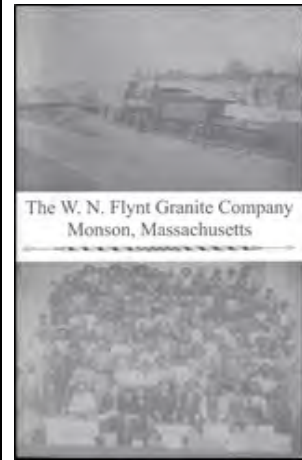
If you are currently a member of the Monson Historical Society, the fee to obtain the CD is \$15.00. For non-members, the fee is \$20.00 which includes 1 year free membership and our quarterly newsletter "The Historian". Shipping costs for the CD are included in the fee.

Please indicate whether you are a member or not and mail your request to:



Monson History CD
 Monson Historical Society, Inc.
 1 Green Street, Suite 1
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Please include your email address to receive newsletter.



Also available is the 12-page booklet about the W.N. Flynt Granite Co. Cost is \$3.00 which includes shipping.

WHERE IS THIS?



This image was caught during a lazy summer afternoon 125 years ago of pond boats sailing on a body of water in downtown Monson. Do you know where? Answer will be in next newsletter.

**** ARE YOU UP TO DATE ON YOUR MEMBERSHIP DUES??****

Membership renewals occur on May 1st of each year and are good through April 30th of the following year. (For example, a "5/1/2018" membership means you have paid from 5/1/2017 to 4/30/2018). If you receive our newsletter through postal mail, please check the date on your mailing label. If your label reads "**5/1/2018 (or later)**", your membership is **current**. If your label reads "**5/1/2017 or earlier**", you need to renew your membership to be up-to-date.

If you receive your newsletter via email, please check the subject matter. If it reads "**Monson Historical Society Newsletter**", your membership is **current**. If it reads "**Monson Historical Society Newsletter/Renewal**", your membership has expired and you will need to update it. Please read the text in your email for renewal instructions.

Please consider taking the time today to complete the membership form and mail it back, along with your check, to the address listed on the form. Your membership will be updated.

If you receive the newsletter via e-mail, please be aware that all newsletters will be forwarded from this e-mail address, info@monsonhistoricalsociety.comcastbiz.net, with the subject matter regarding Monson Historical Society.

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Address _____ Town _____ State _____ Zip _____

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Please indicate a membership category & enclose a check made out to "Monson Historical Society, Inc."

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