

# Light history

## Folklore, fact and fiction from Chris Columbus to Crazy Amos

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**T**he most recent holi day was Columbus Day, but it wasn't celebrated today, the day that Christopher Columbus was the first to set foot in the New World almost 500 years ago. History has been switched a bit, so we celebrated the dubious event this year on Monday

Did he really discover America, or did the Aztecs and Incas discover "Cristobal Colon"? These advanced civilizations were already here.

I really don't recall in what grade in the Frost School that I was told Chris was sort of the world's greatest hero - perhaps more important than the Pilgrims who landed much later 45 miles away from Westford, in Plymouth. I paid strict attention to my history lesson, and why not. Wasn't Oct. 12 sort of a holiday?

We were not told that Chris and his band were perhaps the first "colonial imperialists," nor that the Europeans who followed brought to our Indians such unwelcomed diseases as measles, smallpox, typhus and yellow fever, surely things they could do without. At last the Organization of American States is pushing an effort to redress 500 years of abuses against the Indians.

In trying to reconstruct parts of Westford history for the past century or more, I find at times I try to blame my typewriter for passing out misinformation. Memories get hazy after a stretch of years. I forget and I find my informants can have a lapse of memory, too. Also, delving in old manuscripts, newspaper clippings and even town records, some of the facts and events don't always check out the first time

### No Indians here

I found myself showing friends a hole nearly two feet deep in a ledge off of Lowell Road as an Indian mill where our Indians would grind corn. And because one lip of the hole was worn smoother than the rest, the squaw who did the grinding with a pole, stirring around a round rock over the grain, was left handed!

This old story eventually seemed to me improbable. I consulted a highly respected geologist to give his opinion. It didn't take Dr. John Salisbury but a minute to recognize it is a pothole, formed during the Ice Age.

An amateur archaeologist, Frank Glynn of Clinton, Conn., caused quite a stir in town some 30 years ago when he announced that Vikings left marks on a ledge in front of 17 Depot Street a century before Columbus hit the beach on Hispanola. To prove his point, he outlined in chalk what he was sure was the figure of a Scottish knight in full armor.

What he was looking at was nothing more than scratches made by that old guy, the Great Ice Glacier, scratched there some 15,000 years ago, as it now turns out to be.

The staid *Christian Science Monitor* picked up the story on Oct. 2, 1957, and the *Yankee Magazine* later headlined its story "Westford's Knight in Stone."

The story I know best is mine. As a boy I often played on this ledge, perhaps waiting for the street car to go by. Yes, there were markings on the soft gneiss rock, one of which looked like an Indian peace pipe. I asked Mrs. Adeline Fisher Buckshorn (who lived there) what they were. Her reply was they were tapped into the soft rock by her broth-

ers, of which there were several. The Fisher boys are all gone, but I'm still here in town, working on my stories.

They say that Europeans visited America long before Columbus arrived. Evidence of this sort is readily dismissed by most established anthropologists as hoax, misinterpretation, or unfounded supposition. Believers of the Scottish Knight have erected a most attractive marker right alongside this main thoroughfare, well protected by granite posts and chains. I suggest you use good judgment should you visit this spot.

### On Thanksgiving

I have a good friend, a fellow publisher who lives in Virginia. He insists the first Thanksgiving celebration was in his state. By no means I argue, being a true Bay Stater.

Shall we return to an oft told legend which has persisted for nearly 150 years? This is the tale of Crazy Amos and his horn.

A New York farmer, turned self-professed evangelist, proclaimed the world would be consumed by fire, that his true believers would rise into Heaven, be received royally and guaranteed a better life. There would be no IRS men around, plenty to eat and drink and dancing forever on the clouds. Jim and Tammy Bakker were never in on this glorious deal.

There were many believers in Westford who also felt the Day of Judgment was at hand. Since they were to spend the remainder of their years in heavenly luxury, why did they need property and wealth on earth? So they gave away their worldly goods. They were meeting in neighborhood homes and in open fields, thrilled with optimism and trust. They called themselves Millerites.

Evangelist Eddie Miller named Ascension Day as March 30, 1843. When nothing happened, the day was advanced to April 3. The Westford clan was ready. The believers had gathered at the Wright-Bancroft house at the Common (the present site of the J.V. Fletcher Library) well prepared for the momentous event.

### Waiting for the signal

Dressed in white robes and holding Bibles (sold by Miller), they were singing hymns and praying, when a trumpet blast sounded from the head of the Common.

Excitement reigned. They rushed out in great anticipation. They were stopped by the sight of Crazy Amos Hildreth, a local character, with horn in hand. Some more loud toots on the instrument and then he belowed, "You are all fools! Go home and plant your potatoes. Angel Gabriel won't do it for you!"

This story has hung around for a century and a half. Samuel Law Taylor, whose amusing statements often appeared as written in the local *Westford Wardsman*, in 1911, sent this item to the publisher.

"I recall the annual Millerite camp meetings near Burge's Pond and they had a chapel near Nutting [North Burying Ground] Cemetery in a house [then occupied by Ernest Dane]."

"The refusal to harvest the autumn crops, in which the overseers of the poor interfered, the selling and giving away of all property, and congregating at one house and awaiting marching orders from the Lord, who has been detained on more important and sensible business and hasn't got around yet the camp meetings gathered every extreme of belief and conduct."