

# Westford Recollections

## Westford's Mysterious Knight - Fact or Fiction

by June W. Kennedy

### PART I

About a half-a-mile north from Westford Common at the turn of the road on Depot Street, vicinity Abbot Middle School, is located a large rock containing a punched out picture carving. Who decorated the rock and what the design was intended to signify offers many theories. Is it truly Westford's Mysterious Knight or is it Indian Rock? Material lends support to both theories. Draw your own conclusion. This week's article features the fact of Westford's Mysterious Knight; next week's article debunks the fact and emphasizes the fiction of the theory.

The following are excerpts taken from a resource paper prepared by student, Stuart Carlson, of Westford. He supports Lawrence F. Willard who in 1958 featured an article in Yankee magazine captioned "Westford's Mysterious Knight." With detailed bibliography the Westford student relates his thoughts entitled "The Amazing Knight of Westford, Massachusetts."

"It was somewhere around the year 1390 when Niccolo Zeno set sail from Venice, Italy to see the world. Before Niccolo arrived in England he encountered a fierce storm which blew him off course far to the North of England to the Faerol Islands. The inhabitants of these islands were fierce, so when the ships and the sailors invaded their land they attacked them and prepared to take the goods and kill the sailors. Before the savages could do any harm, an unexpected visit from Prince Henry Sinclair, the Earl of Orkney, and his armored men quickly dispersed the savages and Niccolo and his sailors were saved. A friendship between the two men ensued. With Niccolo's help the Faeroian Islands were brought under Sinclair's rule. In 1391, Antonio Zeno joined his brother and Henry and the three explored many islands including Greenland. Niccolo became ill; the party returned to the Faerol Islands. Before his death in 1396, he related to his brother and Henry the story an old Faroese Fisherman had spoken. In the story the old fisherman along with a few companions, were shipwrecked for twenty years in what is now America.

The story of the new land fascinated Henry and in 1395 preparations to to to this new land were made. The trip ran smoothly into the early part of July, but then a terrible storm held the sailors in its grip for eight long days. When the storm ended, Sinclair's exploring party was minus eight ships and a large number of sailors. They encountered hostile inhabitants on an island in the North Atlantic named "Icarus". From this island they sailed further west to a land known as Estotiland (Nova Scotia). This land was most appealing to Sinclair and his followers and Sinclair himself wanted to stay here and build a city. However, many of Sinclair's followers wished to return to the Faeroe's because winter was approaching. He himself remained with a few men who wished to stay. Antonio reluctantly led the fleet back to the Gaeroes. HE WROTE SEVERAL LETTERS OF HIS ADVENTURES BACK TO Venice to his other brother, Carlo. They were published in 1558.

In these letters nothing was mentioned as to how long Henry Sinclair and his handful of followers stayed in America but we know he left before 1404 because in that year Henry Sinclair died in the Orkney Islands.

At this time some questions could be asked concerning this exploration of Henry Sinclair. How long did he stay there? Did he make any attempt at exploration during his stay? Or did he simply settle for a time in Nova Scotia? How did he get back home? Did some of his followers return for him? Or did he build a ship to take him back?

The only one of these questions that can be answered with any degree of certainty is the second. Sinclair did wander south at least as far as Westford, Massachusetts. Yet why did he go to Westford and not Carlisle or Billerica? The answer is a simple one if you know how to read Geographical maps because the center of Westford where this rock is located is on what is called Prospect Hill. (ele. 465') This hill is the highest in Eastern Massachusetts and is the highest between the seacoast and Mountains of New Hampshire. From the top of Prospect Hill on a clear day you can see well over sixty miles in every direction. That means if Henry Sinclair was traveling down the coast of what is now New England he could have seen this hill far off in the distance. From Boston Harbor

this is especially true as I myself have seen Prospect Hill, at a distance of 32 miles.

Being the explorer that Sinclair was he might have wanted to explore this hill. At the time he could have arrived at the hill from two different routes. First he could have followed an Indian Path to the summit (a two day's hike)...or he could have sailed up the Merrimack River and then branched off on a stream which is now Stony Brook. This brook would have (and still would) brought him directly at the base of the hill. The hike from the stream was (and still is) slightly more than a mile to the location of the rock and about a mile and a half to the summit of Prospect Hill.

There are several reasons why the Earl of Orkney would have ventured so far inland. One is that the view of the land is one of the finest in the area so he could have scanned the land for many miles in all directions. Secondly, since he was an avid explorer the mere sight of such an outstanding physical object would have lured him to the hill. Thirdly, if he was looking for a place to build a community, here atop the hill was an area which offered a fine view and the steep hills made it a fairly good defensive location.

Now the final four questions can be asked concerning the Westford Knight: What is it? Why did they make it? How did they make it? Who discovered it?

The person who fully uncovered the Knight was a man named Frank Glynn from Clinton, Conn. His attention was first aroused by two pictures published in a book: *The Ruins of Grant Ireland in New England* by William Goodwin. The pictures showed a sword somehow engraved into a rock somewhere in Massachusetts. Glynn sent a copy of the book to T.C. Lethbridge, (Professor of Archeology and Ethnology), Cambridge, England. Lethbridge urged Glynn to locate the rock.

It took Glynn two years to find the rock and one day in May of 1954, Glynn finally found what he was looking for. At first all Glynn saw was a punched out picture of a sword in stone, but then when he stripped back some of the small bushes and moss on the ledge there before him was portrait of a Knight in full armor, complete with chield bearing heraldry. Flynn then made a very accurate sketch of what appeared to be a knight and sent it to Lethbridge. Soon he got a reply from Lethbridge and he said that this picture was of the heraldry of the Sinclairs of Orkney, and more than likely a kin to Henry Sinclair, probably his brother David who went on the trip. It is in the class of what is known as Military Effigies. The function of a military effigy was to mark the sight where a knight fell. Repeated efforts to find the burial have failed.

Why then was this effigy made on a trail up Prospect Hill? Glynn says, "If we went on an expedition, we wouldn't take an undertaker and a tombstone cutter along, but we would have an armorer to repair our weapons. If one of our men fell, we'd turn to him. Accustomed to working these symbols in iron he might try to reproduce them by a series of punches in stone." Glynn had done this in stone with tools that could have been found in a 14th century blacksmith's case.

The entire effigy is six feet tall and it is made entirely of punch marks which vary in size from a finger tip to that of a head of a pin. The reason for such a difference in size is that being so far away from the ship

the blacksmith most likely brought only a few tools and after punching holes in the hard Gness rock his tools became dull causing the difference in the hole sizes.

Some of the various ornaments that are punched out on to the ledge include the following. All of them have been proven by Glynn and Lethbridge to be of the 14th century and specifically characteristic of the Orkney Family. A sword held vertically in front of the man, a lion located on the handle of the sword, a falcon located on the armor above the sword and a shield held in the left hand. The symbols on the shield include the following: A crescent moon, a five pointed mullet, a buckle and a ship with furled sails. The furled sails represent a journey's end.

In conclusion, even though many people have tried to disprove the travels of Henry Sinclair the reason that they have failed is the factual evidence (The Westford Knight) and the historical records all fall in together from a puzzle which cannot be broken; even though many people have tried."