

## Ballou Memorial Park

Main Street,

42° 19'51.66"N 73° 04'59.52"W elevation 1224 feet

**Ballou Memorial Park**, part of the [North Becket Historic District](#), has four honor roll memorials commemorating the men and women who served in the Revolutionary War through the Vietnam Conflict. The park was the former site of the Ballou family homestead and grist mill. The 1927 Flood created a deep gully, 300 feet wide and 30 feet deep, along Main Street and Yokum Brook, destroying the home and mill, leaving only about 1/3 acre of land. The site was deeded to the town in 1935 by Joseph Clinton and Willis D. Ballou sons of Monroe E. Ballou.

In 1960 a **bronze marker** reading "Site of Monroe E. Ballou **Homestead and Grist Mill**" was given by Gertrude Ballou Noble, the daughter of J.C., and her husband Howard Noble.

A **second bronze marker** in 1960, was erected by the Becket Historical Society reading "**Railroad Came Through Becket, 1842.**" The opening of the Western Railroad changed the population and economic hub of Becket from Becket Center and West Becket to North Becket Village. Before the Flood of 1927 devastated the area, The Village was a thriving social, business and industrial zone.

The "**Becket**" **Railroad Station** sign measuring three feet long, made of cast iron, with gold letters set against a textured coal background had been bolted to the exterior of the Chester & Becket Railroad station on Depot Street. The station and sign were washed away in the Flood of 1927 when a 25-foot high wall of water raced down Yokum Brook from the Wheeler Reservoir. The Flood killed one, destroyed 48 buildings, 11 bridges, two miles of road and three miles of railroad in the early morning of Nov. 4, 1927. The upper basket factory, Building #1, which stood just north of the park, was also destroyed in the flood. In 2005 the sign was returned to the town by Alice Ballou Morse, great-granddaughter of J. C. Ballou. In addition, she donated three Becket baskets made at the M. E. Ballou basket mills. The Historical Commission has a Becket basket display at the [Mullen House Educational Center Inc.](#), across the street, at 12 Brooker Hill Road.

**Historical District stone** The low, grey granite stone donated by John Cascio in 1990 between the two bronze plaques, reads "[North Becket Historic District](#) National Register of Historic Places July 26, 1988." The District is a 40-acre area in the northeast corner of Becket, in the valley formed by the confluence of Yokum Brook and the West Branch of the Westfield River. It contains thirty-five contributing buildings, two parks and one site-the ruins of the Berkshire and [Becket Silk Mill](#). Most of the Greek Revival style building took place in the twenty-year period after the 1841 construction of the Western, later Boston and Albany, Railroad running through the north, flat area of town. The only major alteration to the village came in 1927 when the dam at the Claflin-Wheeler reservoir broke after days of heavy rain.

Two **mill stones** were placed in the park by Mrs. Gertrude S. Ballou in memory of her husband, J. C. Ballou in 1947; for the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 1927 flood. He was remembered as a lumberman, humorist, and hero of the 1927 Becket flood. The round mill stone, located near the "Becket" railroad station sign, was used for grinding corn in the **Ballou grist mill**. The grist mill and the Ballou homestead were both swept away by the flood. J.C. Ballou was tragically killed in February, 1946, when he was hit

by a train during a storm with raging winds as strong as 60 miles per hour. Ballou was walking in the train tracks because of the deep, drifting snow in the roads. Ballou was to board the train into Pittsfield to obtain his weekly payroll.

The second, an authentic **Native American corn mill** stone, believed to be more than 450 years old, is located at the rear along the brook, to the right of the monuments. J. C. Ballou discovered the corn mill several years ago at the base of a stone ledge in a wood lot in Peru. The stone identified the area as an Indian settlement, and located the site of its corn fields and grist mill. Ballou had the mill blasted from the ledge and brought to his home in Becket.

The **Flagpole** and brass plaque are dedicated to Pvt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Paul Allan Conner, the only Becket fatality in the Vietnam War. They were dedicated during the Memorial Day ceremony in 1984. The 20-foot flagpole and pentagonal brick base, were installed by 13-year-old Boy Scout Sean T. Mulholland, as an Eagle Scout project. Conner, in the Army's 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, was killed at age 20 during the 1968 Tet offensive. He posthumously received the Silver Star for bravery in combat after he charged the bunker of a superior enemy force, and destroyed it with a grenade. When Conner noticed a wounded companion lying in an open position, he moved to the man, administered first aid and was mortally wounded carrying him to a more secure area. The plaque reads "Pfc. Paul Allan Conner June 4, 1947 – March 18, 1968."

**Korean Conflict 1950 – 1953** The Historical Commission in 1991 was given a large slab of dark pink granite by Mr. Leslie Mitchell and his sister Miss Ida Mitchell, to be used to memorialize the Becket residents who served during the Korean and Vietnam Wars. The names of twenty-six Becket veterans are engraved on the top section of the monument, dedicated to those who served in the armed services during the Korean War.

**Vietnam Conflict 1964 – 1973** The names of forty-one Becket veterans who served in the Vietnam War are engraved on the lower section of the stone dedicated by the Mitchell family on Memorial Day, 1992. The Mitchell Family owned the Berkshire Pink Granite Company. The quarry was behind their Victorian style, "Mitchell House" in East Becket.

The [World War I](#) monument lists thirty-three Becket veterans who served during this war.

The [World War II](#) monument lists seventy-eight Becket veterans who served during this war.

**Three small monuments** toward the rear, between the large World I & II monuments, honor three Becket men who lost their lives in World War II. **Pvt. Donald McSweeney** (1912-1944), 340<sup>th</sup> Engineers, buried in the [North Becket Cemetery](#); **SGT. Ralph Gage** (1919-1944), 26<sup>th</sup> Division 328<sup>th</sup> Infantry, buried in the Luxembourg American Cemetery and Memorial; and **Staff SGT. John Runz** (1922-1944), bronze star recipient killed in Luxemburg, Germany, buried in the [Becket Center Cemetery](#). The first meeting of the Becket, McSweeney Gage Runz Post 329, American Legion, was held on October 5, 1945. The Legion meetings were held at Seminary Hall, now the [Becket Arts Center](#). The family of Staff SGT. Runz has donated the flag that draped his coffin, his bronze star and other military items to the town. They are on display in the lower level of [Town Hall](#), outside the Historical Commission office.

The **obelisk monument** is devoted to "Veterans of **Revolutionary War** 1775-1783, **War of 1812** 1812-1815, and **Civil War** 1861-1865." The Parks and Recreation Committee purchased the stone with assistance from the Open Space Reserve of the Community Preservation Fund; Ed Williams donated his

engraving skills. There are forty-four Revolutionary War veterans, two War of 1812 veterans and one hundred thirty-six Civil War veteran names. The six-foot tall stone was dedicated on Memorial Day 2015, coinciding with Becket's 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations.

<http://tangledrootsandtrees.blogspot.com/2017/05/honor-roll-becket-massachusetts-ballou.html>

A very nice webpage listing all the names honored on the four large monuments, includes photos at Ballou Memorial Park.

<http://ctmonuments.net/2013/01/war-memorials-becket-mass/>

Pictures and minimal information about Ballou Memorial Park.

By 2021 the Becket Historical Commission plans to install a new information sign for the [North Becket Historic District](#). The sign includes a map of the area, 13 highlights, a sketch of [Seminary Hall](#) and a QR code [<https://www.townofbecket.org/historical-commission/pages/historical-facts>]. A second sign at the obelisk monument, also with a QR code, will include the names of the veterans of the Revolutionary War, War of 1812 and Civil War. The Quick Response (QR) code, consisting of small squares and a black and white pattern, can be scanned by a smartphone to make a quick connection to the [Historical Facts](#) link on the [Historical Commission's page](#) on the Town of Becket website. More in depth information on Becket's historical treasures can be found at the "[Historical Facts](#)" <https://www.townofbecket.org/historical-commission/pages/historical-facts>] link.







For further information email the Becket Historical Commission:

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