

# First Anniversary Issue!

# THE SANDISFIELD TIMES

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*Plebis*

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Volume II, Number 1

April 2011

## STRIKE UP THE (BROAD)BAND!

A momentous decision has to be made next month at our Annual Town Meeting. **Debbie Harris** investigates the background, the cost implications, the benefits and the complexities behind our critical vote on whether to welcome or to turn our backs on the hitherto mysterious new phenomenon known as *Wired West*.

In 2008 the Massachusetts legislature voted to extend broadband services to all towns in the state, especially those in Western Massachusetts. This is to be done in three phases (or, as it has been dubbed, three miles).

The first mile, which is the state's responsibility, is complete – bringing broadband wiring to several large hubs. The closest hubs to Sandisfield are Albany and Springfield. The second mile is the responsibility of the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) and will bring high speed fiber-optic broadband wiring to major places within each town. These places include schools, libraries, town halls, fire stations, etc. This second mile is expected to be completed by June 2013.

The third and final mile is the purview of *Wired West* and will bring the wiring to individual homes and businesses. It is anticipated that this “final mile” will be completed about 6 months after the “middle mile” is done.

In order for a town to become part of the *Wired West* project it must vote, in two separate votes at least 60 days apart, to establish a “municipal lighting plant” (see the March 2011 issue of the *Sandisfield Times* for details). This is especially important for Sandisfield, which is one of 13 towns in Berkshire County with no access to broadband. Our first vote will be at the Annual Town Meeting on May 14, with the second vote expected to be at a special town meeting in mid-July. If either vote fails it will be two years before we can try again.

The *Wired West* network will simply provide the wiring for broadband. It will not, in and of itself, bring services (i.e., internet, telephone *Cont'd p.4*



Photo: Setsuko Winchester

## Tripping the Lights Fantastic: The Multifarious Stories of Walter Linkovich

By Val Coleman

Walter Linkovich is a most remarkable man. Born and raised in Sandisfield, the 84-year-old Walter is a monument, living up on top of the hill, sitting high in the cab of his big, old white Ford pickup. I watch him going by as regularly as the passage of the sun and the moon. This is his story.

First of all, he lit up the town!

“I expect,” he said, “that I’ve wired up almost every house in Sandisfield, most of the businesses, the Arts Center, Town Hall, Pete’s Store, the Post Office, the American Legion, the Nursing Home, you name it!”

There’s no “r” in Linkovich, and he’s not just our electrician, he has a noble history that begins with the Tsar’s troops burning down his father’s house in eastern Poland in 1912. Young William Linkovich came to America, docked in New York *Cont'd p. 6*



Photo: Margaret O'Clair

## Down in the Woods, a Big Surprise

By Chester I. Minnows

Experts from the Massachusetts Department of Wildlife Analysis have concluded that the mysterious bird-animal spotted last spring in the York Lake forest was in fact a griffin, an extremely rare creature hitherto thought only to exist in Ancient Greece.

Urgent efforts will be made this summer to capture the beast, and accordingly the forest will be closed to the general public, aside from road access to York Lake itself, which will be protected and patrolled by members of the state National Guard.

This unprecedented chain of events follows the now-confirmed sighting of the beast by Margaret O'Clair, a former Health Board chair and bird columnist for the *Sandisfield Times*.

Mrs. O'Clair was in a hide deep in the woods, looking for evidence of an equally rare visiting bird, the Purple-chested Loon, which had last been seen locally in 1993, hiding behind a beer keg at the rear of the Silverbrook Café. On this occasion events began shortly after 5:30 am on April 1st. It was still half-light, and the sun *Cont'd p.2*



In a tragedy that will be very hard for our community to bear, two of Sandisfield's oldest stalwarts, Philip and Anne Hoffman, died in the hospital of injuries sustained in a traffic accident in Great Barrington. It had been hoped that Anne, 88, might survive the March 2 accident in which her 90-year-old husband died; but on March 19 she also succumbed to her injuries.

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE HISTORIANS OF OUR HISTORY

By Ron Bernard



Photo of Norton Fletcher  
by Ron Bernard

The Sandisfield Historical Society was formally organized on May 16, 1970. The first meeting was at the home of Robert & Alfreda Rushmore. The founders (known as "subscribers") included Mr. & Mrs. Rushmore, Ida Lambert, Emily Clark Vogellus, Tash Anton, Barbara Newsome, James & Rosalie

Becker, Henry Bohlen, Harold Smith, Mrs. Harold Stokes, Magda Kaeler, Mr. & Mrs. Ervin Kern, Philip Wexler and Mrs. McKinley. Ida Lambert, Temporary Clerk, submitted a draft of the by-laws including a corporate seal, the "Crown of the House of Sandys" (Sandisfield was named in honor of Lord Samuel Sandys, who was president of the Boston Board of Trade when the Berkshires were settled). Most of the early members and supporters had been active in the Sandisfield Taxpayers Association and were involved in planning the Town's very successful Bicentennial celebration in 1962. They learned that the community had to have an organization dedicated to preserving Sandisfield's heritage.

The first order of business was to secure a permanent physical home, and a candidate quickly surfaced -- the circa 1857 "Philetus Osborn House" in West New Boston. It had been in the same family since 1885

but the last member, who lived out of state, could no longer support the property. So in 1963 the Town had to foreclose. The house sat empty and deteriorating for seven more years until voters approved the sale to the new Society for back taxes. The easy part was over. The daunting tasks of raising money and restoring the building then became the focus of the organization.


Led by gifts of valuable early American furniture by famed pianist Vladimir Horowitz - who was a friend of one of the Society's founding members, and was an known to have performed at the New Boston Inn - along with fundraising galas and benefits, over \$12,000 was raised. The money was soon spent on infrastructure repairs to stabilize the building. Enthusiastic volunteer workers under Sam Wilbur did their best too, but the project proved to be overwhelming for a fledgling organization.

So by 1977 the Society itself was in danger of being foreclosed. Founding member Harold Smith of South Sandisfield reluctantly accepted the post of president "on a temporary basis." He would remain at the helm for seven years. Smith was an avid amateur historian and did much to create awareness and interest in the town's history. He was determined to establish the Society as a lasting and important institution. But

first they had to deal with the distracting problem of the Osborn House. In 1979 it was put up for sale. Meanwhile Smith secured a 99 year lease on the long inactive but historic Congregational Meeting House (1909) in South Sandisfield as a new permanent headquarters. Then he redirected the group's energy towards historical activities.



The Sandisfield Historical Society Meeting House,  
formerly the Congregational Meeting House

A good example was the Society's 1983 project to assist antique home owners to prepare histories of their houses. Almost 50 participated and each was given a handsome, permanent exterior plaque, a replica of the crest of the House of Sandys designed by Ruth Freeman. 

## Down in the Woods, a Big Surprise

Cont'd from p.1

Mrs. O'Clair. "I remember thinking to myself how very lucky I was, seeing a bald eagle here in Sandisfield - they are really so rare. The last time I saw one it was carrying away a sheep. Well, I thought it was a sheep, until we all heard about Hubert, Joanne's missing West Highland Terrier, back when she lived on Dodd Road. But I'm getting away with myself.

"What happened next just blew my mind. I was peering at the eagle's head, when suddenly I saw that the rest of it wasn't eagle-like at all - for there, crouched behind the head was the body of a very big cat. It had a mane. It had a big tawny back and two enormous wings, the kind of things Ben Luxon uses when he does angel impressions at the Christmas party. It also had four lion-legs, all clutching onto the branch. Claws and all. Crazy animal. Never seen anything remotely like it. I looked it up in my Peterson, but there was nothing.

"And then I heard its call. It is such a distinctive screech - I'd never heard one before, but all the Greek bird books have it in the mythology section. I'd never heard anything so dreadful. It sounded like *Hyrckvich! Hyrckvich! Hyrckvich!* Three cries in quick succession, just like that. It's quite blood-curdling.

"So I just remained very still. I was terrified, I tell you. I took another quick tot of Stag's Breath, the whisky I like and which I had been sipping all night to keep me warm. I took several photographs. Only one seems to have come out, as I kept dropping the camera. I was struck at first by how similar it looked to a small rhinoceros.

"And then, just after I had another wee dram, the creature looked directly at me with an awful Segrin on his face, gave what I can only describe as a chuckle, cried out what sounded like *Annecharico! Annecharico!* and lifted off and flew deeper into the woods. I remember being struck by how non-aerodynamic its body looked,

was just coming up, when she saw a sight that made her, quite literally, freeze.


"At first I thought it was an owl - then when I saw its beak, it was obviously an eagle," said

the lion part just sagging under those wings, and the way its paws kept hitting the upper parts of the branches. It must have really hurt, because I heard it crying out in pain as it flew away."

Mrs. O'Clair reported her find to Boston, and sent off her one surviving photograph. It was swiftly confirmed for what it was by Mr. Austen Riggs, the head of the Speculative Animals Research Corps, or SARC. "I can assure you that this is indeed a specimen of the Common Griffin, or *Griffinensis enigmaticus*, and we are grateful both to Mrs. O'Clair, and the distillers of Stag's Breath, for helping to reawaken the Berkshire public to the very real dangers posed by any resurgence of a Griffin population in our county.

"The creature used to be well-known here during the Greek conquest, (460BC-27AD), and it did much damage. So the National Guard will be on hand this summer to ensure that the disastrous consequences of that previous infestation will not be revisited on the people of your town ever again."

Mr. Riggs reminded anyone who does spy the animal of the best way of catching one. "Scatter small pieces of a Villa Mia pizza. Although the species is known to have originated in Greece, it seems to find pizza irresistible - particularly the margherita-style. The scent will keep it so mesmerized and distracted that it should allow one to move in close enough to capture the animal by throwing a trapping net, if you happen to have one, or even an ordinary household sheet.

"Once we get it secure we can transport the animal back to Ancient Greece, where such monsters truly belong. We don't like strangers here in Sandisfield, especially when they are as strange as a Griffin. Mrs. O'Clair is a true hero." 



## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

### *Counting our Blessings We are no Sendai, nor ever will be.*



Photo: Setsuko Winchester

I was going to devote this letter to a celebration of our first year of publication of the *Sandisfield Times*. But then came the terrible news from Japan, and considering the enormity of that event – and also considering that my wife, Setsuko, is Japanese – it suddenly seemed much more appropriate to ruminate on larger and more pressing issues, and to try to compare our lot with the lot of those who are suffering so, on the far side of the world.

Many years ago I work as a geologist, and the processes which create and destroy this planet fascinate and enthrall me. Take this story of how we came about, for example.

Imagine, if you will, an entire mountain range hurtling northwards from Africa and colliding head-on with another chain of hills sited peacefully in southern Canada. The collision would be a thing of incredible violence, it would cause immense noise and damage, millions of earthquakes, thousands of volcanic eruptions and endless tsunamis from the surrounding seas, and no living thing could possibly survive the terror and the majesty of the event.

But then, in time, the violence would slow, and eventually it would still. The rocks would cool and the rains would come, lakes and rivers would form and slowly carve out a vista of endless hills and dales. Seeds would blow in and forests would cover the land, black flies and black bears, red polls and bluebirds would crawl and flutter their way out of the miasma and, in time – a whole lot of time, to be sure – so would we. And then we would be presented with a vision of what we now know so very well: before us would be the Berkshires.

That was how we were formed three hundred and fifty million years ago, the African plate and the Canadian plate crashing hard together. And back then, there would have been a prodigious wave or two each day, there would have been a hundred volcanoes spewing lava down their flanks, there would be hours upon hours of the earth heaving and shaking itself up and down, wrecking and pillaging all in its path.

Every day in those early Berkshires would have been

much like the recent days in Sendai, or Fukushima. Every day in Sandisfield there would have been a day like Sumatra in 2004 or Krakatoa in 1883, or like any other of the times and places that are known for the great planetary tragedies now etched into human memory.

The only difference between the events in yesterday's Berkshires-to-be and today's Sendai is that single word: tragedy. Modern events are tragedies because they involve people, and because they take away existence. The events of millions of years ago, long before people came, are not tragedies at all: they are instead pure spectacle. They are the events that gave us existence - or rather, they gave us a place to exist. They are the events that gave us our home.

Such matters are worth remembering, it seems to me, as we spring-clean away the detritus of this simply wretched winter past.

How many of us, some time during the great January snowstorms, vowed to leave, to sell up, to hightail it out of Dodge and move down to Florida or to some other climatically benign and warm corner of the world?

But then, now we are becoming sensible again, how many of us appreciate how impeccably stable is the land here, the land that in the coming summertime we are all so minded to enjoy?

Sure, there are small cracks beneath Massachusetts that allow the ground to tremble a little, once in a while. Five or six trembles a year, none of them damaging more than the occasional teacup, or lifting a bit of plaster from a wall. All are the echoes of the big collision - tiny reminders, perhaps, of who or what remains in charge. Little nudges to let us know that the forces which gave us this place, can take it away at will.

Yet there is little indication that anything like this is about to happen soon. Maybe we'll get a minute vibration once in a while. But the seas around us are hardly configured for tsunamis (there was a biggish one in 1926, but it hit Newfoundland the hardest, and of course a repeat would never send even a dusting of spume across here to Sandisfield). The closest volcano to us that has any life to it is down in the Windward Islands, two thousand miles away.

And though few will forget the drubbing Great Barrington got from its one recent tornado, on Memorial Day in 1995 – it never hit Sandisfield. We have invariably survived our run-ins with ill-weather with little more than a scuffed knee or two. We have never known even the tail-end of a hurricane, a cyclone or a typhoon.

So, to all of those among us who grumble about this past three months: count your blessings, please. We will never suffer a Sendai, nor will we ever feel the terror of a New Orleans, or see the eruption of a Vesuvius.

Here in Sandisfield, all we have around us are simply geology's reminders – the soft hills and the gentle streams – that tell of giant forces, long ago, long

spent and far, far away. Their existence and how they were formed may be a tale worth noting on the first birthday of our little paper.

Simon Winchester  
Editor, *The Sandisfield Times*

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Our little small town paper is a train  
That travels near the rivers,  
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In between the trees....

Or maybe it's a stethoscope  
Pressed against the forest  
Listening to some flowers  
Deciphering the breeze.

In any case it cocks an ear  
When mighty journals scream,  
And takes its place beyond the pale  
By a gentle country stream.

Val Coleman  
Sandisfield, MA

# OUR TOWN'S STORIED PAST GOES DIGITAL

By Ron Bernard

In 1979 the Massachusetts Historical Commission performed an inventory of Sandisfield's historic assets such as antique houses, public buildings and cemeteries. Until now the report was available to the public only as photocopies held in the Town Hall, seldom seen and of limited value. But now the entire project has been posted on-line together with photographs - if the site was then visible from the street. More than 80 places were surveyed together with brief interpretations of obvious architectural features, some historical context, an estimate of a building's age, and sometimes the name of the possible original owner. The survey has been invaluable as a starting point for research for *Sandisfield Then And Now: 1762-2010*, a comprehensive history of the town which will be available in the summer of 2012. The

Commission has also been extremely helpful to us.

The survey covered the majority of our historic properties including several which have since been lost to fire or other factors. An example is this image of the magnificent "Jedediah Sage House" which burned. (No. 76 in the Survey).

The history book will include all of these properties, plus about 50 more never before profiled. Moreover,



Photo: MHC-Macris website


there will be histories --as detailed as possible -- for each based on deeds and genealogical research, old photographs, diaries and family information, etc. Note that construction dates (and likely builder/owners) indicated in this survey were estimates. Closer approximate construction dates and original owners, based on updated research, will be provided

in the book.

In the meantime you may access and navigate the survey sections on-line. Follow these steps:

1. Insert [www.MHC-MACRIS.net](http://www.MHC-MACRIS.net) into your browser
2. Select "Welcome to MACRIS" and follow instructions
3. Select "Sandisfield" and click on "Add To List" then click on "Next"
4. Select a category of interest such as "Building" or "Burial Ground" and click on "Next"

Have Fun! 



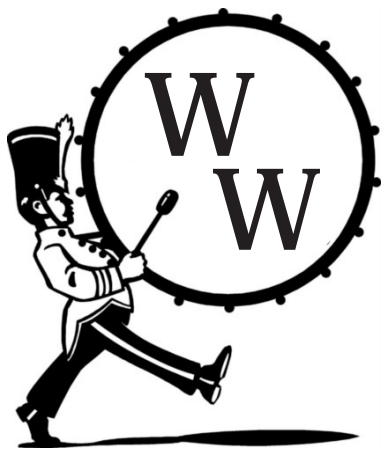
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## STRIKE UP THE (BROAD)BAND!

Cont'd from p.1




and, possibly, television) to people's homes. The network that Wired West builds will be an open access fiber network, which means that any provider (e.g., Verizon, ComCast or a host of smaller providers) can make use of the network to offer their services to individual customers. Part of a supplier's contract with Wired West will include a stipulation that rates must be compatible with those offered to the eastern part of the

state. This will enable competition and help keep prices low. According to Tim Newman, the New Marlboro representative to Wired West, as well as a member of the Wired West Steering Committee, usually the major players such as Verizon or ComCast do not choose to take advantage of this type of network but, instead, expand their own packages at lower costs. In either case there is competition that helps to keep costs to consumers down. The fiber-optic network that is planned should offer significantly lower cost of services than those available from non-fiber-optic networks. It also offers significantly higher speeds and greater bandwidth than older broadband technologies (e.g., cable, DSL or wireless) and is more reliable and less weather dependent than is satellite.

The scenario anticipated by Wired West is that, sometime shortly after the town hall meeting season ends in June, those towns that have voted twice for broadband will become founding members in the Wired West cooperative. Other towns will join the cooperative as they pass their second votes. (While June 30 has been set as the tentative cutoff date for founding members, this is not set in concrete and, according to Tim Newman, it is likely that if Sandisfield holds its second vote in mid July it will not be a negative in establishing services here.)

Once the founding members of the cooperative have been established, two towns (one in Berkshire County and one in the Pioneer Valley) will be chosen for a pilot project. While all of the criteria for choosing these towns have not been determined, the completion of the middle mile by MBI (largely dependent upon the condition of existing telephone poles where the new wiring will be strung) and the projected subscription rate (i.e., the percent of homes/businesses in the town that indicate that they would definitely subscribe to the service) will likely be major factors. It is expected that these two towns will have fiber-optic service within the next year to 18 months. These two towns will then serve as "poster children" for getting other towns on board, and thereby provide the basis to obtain funding for the remainder of the project.

The two most notable advantages to bringing high speed, fiber-optic broadband to Sandisfield are education and property values. These days it is almost impossible for any school child, at whatever level, to complete homework assignments without access to a high speed internet connection. Sandisfield children are currently at a distinct disadvantage. And, of course, as any of us who has tried to sell (or even rent) their home knows, one of the first questions asked is "do you have broadband access?" and if the answer is no then the potential buyer/renter is likely to go elsewhere. Other advantages include such luxuries as teleconferencing into business meetings (or even town meetings, which would allow more residents to participate in their town government). Ultimately the list of possible applications is limited only by human imagination. In other words, high speed, fiber-optic broadband will allow economic development while maintaining a rural quality of life.

So, Sandisfield, let's strike up the (broad)band and come out to vote on this most important issue! 



# TOWN BUSINESS

## February and March

Rhee Kasky

### THE SELECTMEN

**February 7 - Selectmen attending: Patrick Barrett, Richard Campetti, Jeff Gray. Also attending: Dolores Harasyko, Administrative Assistant**

Selectmen voted to promote David McCuin of the Highway Department to equipment operator in training, effective February 14.

Discussed bill for Highway Department uniforms. The company that uniforms were purchased from thinks the town owes them \$189. Patrick will follow up.

Discussed need for a veteran's representative to attend monthly meetings, usually held in Great Barrington. Patrick will place an article in the *Sandisfield Times*.

Patrick suggested that the Highway Department plow the openings to Yanner Park and West Lake so that the people can access them for cross country skiing, snow shoeing, walking, etc. Need to check if West Lake is state owned.

Rhee Kasky asked about a grant writer for the town. Patrick will contact Alice Boyd of South Sandisfield Road to see if she's interested.

Mail reviewed, warrants reviewed and signed.



**February 15 - Selectmen attending: Patrick Barrett, Richard Campetti, Jeff Gray. Also attending: Steve Harasyko, Road Superintendent; Dolores Harasyko, Administrative Assistant**

Highway Department updates: working on runoffs, opening ditches to improve drainage; Steve is meeting with Monterey Road Superintendent to review bids and bidding process; Rick and Anita Wirth of West Street called to compliment the Highway Department and especially David McCuin, on the work they've done during this difficult winter; Geri Porter from the group purchasing program called to commend the department on the conditions of Rte 183; discussed mowing quotes for FY2012. Steve will obtain three separate bids, one for spring cleanup, one for fall cleanup and one for mowing town property. Cutoff date for bids is March 15, 2011.

Discussion on Wired West. Jean Atwater-Williams came in representing the Technology Committee. (See the "Let There Be Light" article in the March issue of the *Sandisfield Times* for details on Wired West, the community organization working to build a municipal fiber-optic network in Western Massachusetts).

Sandisfield will need to establish a municipal energy department (as did several other towns) with an administrator and a budget of \$1,000. The Selectmen would be charged with overseeing the department. Two written ballot votes, no sooner than 60 days apart, are necessary to move ahead with this program. The earlier a town enters the program the higher up it will be in the wave of installations. Due to the time lines imposed on posting special town meetings (where the first vote would be taken), it is not possible to have that vote before the Annual Town Meeting. Therefore, the Annual Town Meeting will be the first voting opportunity, with the second vote 60 days later. Both votes must pass by 2/3 vote.

Four proposals from the Fire Department Compensation Committee (committee convened to examine compensation for fire fighters and EMTs) were presented. Patrick Barrett (volunteer fireman) recused himself from the meeting. Proposals: 1) \$15 per hour for a total of \$33,270; 2) 2 or 3 full time EMTs plus fire fighters for \$95,920; 3) \$250,000-\$300,000 for contracted services; 4) no ambulance service at all. The Selectmen would like a week to review the proposals.

Ralph Morrison and John Burrows requested permission from the Selectmen to pursue collections on balances owed from ambulance services (several years ago the Selectmen agreed not to pursue the balances). Selectmen granted permission.

Discussed hazardous waste collections. We will have the tire collection this year and, if feasible, hazardous waste as well.

Discussed Selectmen's salaries. They will be level-funded again this year.

Reviewed FY2012 department budgets, mail and warrants.



**February 22 - Selectmen attending: Patrick Barrett, Richard Campetti, Jeff Gray. Others attending: Jeremia Pollard, Town Counsel; Dolores Harasyko, Administrative Assistant**

Two public hearings took place prior to convening the Select Board meeting this evening. Before the hearings started Richard Campetti recused himself from the discussions as he is the co-owner of one of the properties and an abutter to the other property. He will, however, return to the meeting to vote, invoking the Rule of Necessity that entitles him to do so. Dolores reported that both hearings were advertised for two consecutive weeks in the Berkshire Record. All abutters, and their abutters within 300 feet were notified by certified mail using the most updated abutters list from the Board of Assessors. Abutting towns, the Board of Health and the Planning Board were also notified.

*Public Hearing for Francis Deming's application for a permit to operate a farm stand:*

Discussion regarding safety and liability issues as

this stand would operate on the same property as Southern Berkshire Fuel, about 300 feet up on Rte 8, 50 feet back from the edge of the road and in the area where the bridge construction is to take place. There will only be one lane on the bridge and traffic will back up. There were also questions about liability if someone eats a bad piece of fruit or falls on the property. The conversation went on for a while with varying points of view about the safety of the area during construction. Jeremia Pollard (Town Counsel) advised that the town is not liable for problems that might arise at the farm stand, that liability falls on the property owner and the business owner. He asked Francis how many customers he expected per day. Francis responded that he would be open Fridays from noon until dark, Saturday and Sunday from 10am until dark and he expected about 25 customers a day. Patrick asked if the state had the ability to stop new businesses from opening until the bridge project is complete and Jeremia responded that they did not.

Patrick is uncomfortable with signing off on a permit with the possibility of injury, unless there is a stipulation that they could re-address the permit. When the Selectmen first reviewed this application there were no such concerns as the bridge project wasn't a part of the scenario. Jeremia responded that the bridge project liability issues would be the responsibility of the state. Patrick reminded everyone that the town's Building Inspector and Police Chief reviewed the area and approved the site at the last hearing.

Discussed the start date of the bridge project, possibly not until September. Jeremia explained the process of continuing the hearing until the Selectmen can get further information as to when the project is actually going to start. Francis responded that if they wait until November he would be closed for the season anyway. Richard was invited to return to the room for the vote after which he will leave again as the next item on the hearing agenda is presented.

Motion made and passed that, "Based on the fact that we do not believe that the applicant has not proved that the traffic is not going to be an issue, we are granting the permit with the condition that the stand not operate once the bridge replacement construction has started".

Jeremia asked if anyone that was not an abutter wanted notification of the decision and no one responded.

*Public Hearing for Roseanne and Steven Hoekstra to operate a bed and breakfast at 3 Tolland Road, Sandisfield (their home):*

Ellen Croibier asked about parking. Roseanne said there will be 2 additional cars at a time and they will be in the driveway, not in the road. The Board of Health did a Title V inspection and water testing and both are fine. A fire inspection was done and a Certificate of Compliance was issued. Selectmen approved the issuance of a special permit for the bed and breakfast.

Jeremia asked if anyone that was not an abutter wanted notification of the decision and no one responded.

# The Gardeners' Almanac



Sue Tarasuk

## THE KINDEST CUTS OF ALL

Pruning is the first of our yearly garden tasks. It should be started once the cold has begun to ebb away, and need not be an unduly complicated chore

The reason we prune is not to control growth of overgrown trees/shrubs – in fact hard pruning often stimulates growth. If you have to prune a shrub or tree hard to control its growth, you probably have selected the wrong plant for the site. The main aim is to realize the plant's maximum ornamental effect or to obtain optimum crop yield (as in fruit trees).

Many trees and shrubs need annual pruning to remain healthy and productive. Do annual cutting out of old wood to get the best results for a number of ornamentals – roses for example produce larger blooms and bloom more frequently on young wood. Some shrubs produce more colorful stems on new wood. Dead, damaged and diseased shoots and branches should be cut back to sound wood and destroyed. Don't leave them lying around to re-infect otherwise healthy plants.

We often wonder when is the best time to prune as each plant has a critical pruning period where the most desired results can be achieved. The main pruning period for many plants, including roses, soft fruits and most tree fruits is from late winter to early spring.

Many shrubs that bloom early in the season, for example, Forsythia, Deutzia, Kolkwitzia (Beauty Bush), Ilex (holly), Spirea, Lilac, and Viburnum are pruned immediately after they flower to give new wood time to develop and ripen before winter. With these shrubs we cut about one in three well-placed stems yearly to promote new growth and to avoid huge, overgrown and tangled shrubs.

Some shrubs bear flowers on current season's wood and are also pruned in the spring to promote vigorous growth. We cut these plants down to 6" – 1" in early spring. Among these are *Hydrangea paniculata* (not *macrophylla* or mop head & lace cap Hydrangeas which bloom on second year stems; generally those buds do not survive the winter here), *Buddleia*, and *Caryopteris*.

Another group of shrubs which are pruned in the spring are shrubs grown mainly for the appearance and interest of their foliage. Some cultivars of *Sambucus* (Elderberry or American Elder) or the purple-leaved smoke bush (*Cotinus*) have beautifully colored or finely cut leaves, and enhanced stem coloration as in the dogwoods (*Cornus alba* or *Cornus stolonifera*) or willows grown for colorful stems. You could cut these shrubs back hard – leaving 1-2 feet of stem – or if this seems an impossible task, cut back half the stems to 1-2 feet and trim the remaining branches.

Most broad-leaved evergreen shrubs require very little pruning. These include the Rhododendrons (Azalea), *Pieris*, and Mountain Laurel. As with all shrubs,

you may need to cut out dead, diseased or damaged stems, but no other pruning is necessary. After Rhododendrons flower, however, it is important to deadhead these shrubs to produce vigorous new growth.

Drastic pruning sometimes is necessary to rejuvenate a neglected shrub. This should be a last chance effort because it is very stressful on the plant and can kill it. Increasing food and water to the plant will help its survival. Never attempt this late in the season. Early spring is the best time even if it means you will sacrifice a year of bloom.

Fruit trees need special and professional care in pruning. There are special classes offered in how best to prune fruit trees. That would take an article unto itself. I will say that most fruiting trees are pruned in late winter, early spring around here.

Roses are another group of shrubs that would require an article alone to talk about their pruning needs. Pruning is done in the early spring and how you prune depends on which type of rose you have, (shrub roses, old rose, multiflora rose, tea rose, etc.)

I thought the last thing I should talk about here is the Clematis. There are three groups of Clematis. First, the late summer or autumn flowering Clematis (*C. terniflora*), which should be pruned back to the



Photo: Myrna Carson

lowest pair of strong buds in early summer. This may mean cutting off green, healthy shoots, but the plant will reshoot from the base and be better for it. The second group is the spring flowering (*C. alpina*, *C. macropetala* & *C. montana*) These should be pruned or sheared back after flowering. They can tolerate a hard prune. The third group of Clematis are the large flowering Clematis that flower on old wood. A good way to deal with these plants is to keep up with yearly maintenance. Immediately after the first flowering has finished, cut a quarter to one third of old stems to within one foot of the ground. Do not prune varieties with double flowers unless absolutely necessary, as they produce double flowers only on old wood.

I hope I have helped you understand what and when to prune your plants. When in doubt, cut only the dead and diseased stems, step back and look at your plant. Keep the integrity of the plant by avoiding – at all costs - the dreaded "shearing" off the tops of your shrubs, except in the case of certain hedges.

Please feel free to email me if you have questions. I am in the greenhouse at Snow Farm most of the season or email me at [Susantarasuk@gmail.com](mailto:Susantarasuk@gmail.com).

## Walter Linkovich

Cont'd from p.1

City and followed a family "scout" to Sandisfield. There he met and married Rose Serbinsky. They had four children; Mike in 1919, Stanley in 1920, Ellen in 1923 and Walter, the youngest, born on September 20, 1926.

The Linkovichs ran a beautiful and prosperous farm at 182 Sandisfield Road at what was then called Sandisfield Center, where Walter lives to this day. (His house was once a bank.) He remembers 8 cows, 1 bull, 2 horses, 2 pigs, hundreds of chickens and ducks and one dog. And he also remembers the Depression, "the truth is we were OK and had plenty of food because we were a farm. Dinner was running around in the back yard."

His first school was a badly heated one room schoolhouse slightly down the hill opposite the entrance to Silverbrook Road. The stove blew up and burned the school to the ground when Walter was in the fourth grade. He finished grades 4 through 8 in the South Sandisfield schoolhouse and then went to Lee High School, graduating in 1945. He was drafted immediately into the army and served honorably at Fort Devens, MA and at Fort Knox in Kentucky.

Following his discharge in 1947 Walter landed in Meriden, Connecticut where he worked in a factory while he went to trade school, graduating as a professional electrician in 1950. He worked for an electrical contractor for 15 years, returning to Sandisfield in 1967 upon the death of his father.

That's when Walter became the town's electrician that we know and love.

At one time or another, Walter has spliced or plugged or fixed most everything in Sandisfield: lights of all sorts, generators, power supplies, small motors, large motors, signs, toys, anything that comes with wires or a battery. In his early years he specialized in chicken coops, a subject close to his heart.

"Once upon a time there were literally thousands of chickens in Sandisfield. We were a big source of eggs for the entire county. Chicken coops were all over the place, huge chicken coops, some two stories high and 100 feet long. I had to build and maintain the lights, the feeders and the time clocks."

And then there is another Walter Linkovich story beyond the industrious, thoughtful artisan. And it's a grand story.

Walter is a world traveler, an aficionado of automobiles, a hunter, an ice fisherman, a water skier and most of all, a dancer. He loves to dance. Square dancing, ballroom and polka dancing for hours at a time. "I went dancing all over," he told me. "Hartford, Las Vegas, New York, Hawaii, and don't forget that there were the three dance halls in Sandisfield! I met a lot of people that way!"

He is also a raconteur. On a winter afternoon he told me marvelous things about Sandisfield, stories about the local characters, celebrities, felons and fools who passed through our town. He knows our secrets about marijuana and floods, our lives and our deaths.

Walter has a secret passion for Cadillacs. He bought his first one back in '67 and there's an '02 parked in his garage today. "I provided *high class* electrical service," he said, "I used to arrive at a job with my tools in the trunk of a Cadillac."

And he loves to travel. In no particular order he told me a few of his favorite destinations: England, Italy, Germany, Disneyland, Austria, Branson (Missouri), California, Mexico and best of all that daily "progress" in the elegant pickup through the center of our town.

# TOWN POSTPONES RIGHT-TO-FARM LAW

By Larry Dwyer




The proposed Right to Farm by-law will now not be on the warrant for Sandisfield's Annual Town Meeting on May 14. Members of the Planning Board derailed the proposal at the last minute, saying they needed more time to study its implications.

RTF by-laws were envisioned to allow farmers to conduct farm operations without the fear of nuisance complaints brought on by offended neighbors. As urbanites migrate to agricultural zoned areas, the intrusion of city life into the rural life inevitably leads to conflict. However, while protecting small farmers, loopholes in RTF By-laws can also protect agribusiness, which can do great harm to small communities. Sandisfield is zoned for agriculture, and has approximately nine small businesses that would benefit from RTF. There has been very little opposition to small farm operations in Sandisfield, as there have only been two formal complaints in the last twenty years. However, no Sandisfield resident has voiced support for agribusiness operations in the Town.

Originally, the RTF by-law was brought up at the 2009 town meeting, but was tabled because the by-law wasn't fully understood, and some objections were raised by Sandisfield residents. In 2011, the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, a State agency, recommended that the Town of Sandisfield adopt the by-law. The earlier version of the by-law seemed innocuous enough, but according to Tom Linzey, chief lawyer for the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF), a nonprofit group that supports family farming, and author of *Be the Change: Taking Back Your Community*, the Massachusetts State "model by-law" could open the door to agribusiness.

At the request of the Sandisfield Planning Board, the draft by-law was revised with legal help from the CELDF. Thomas Linzey worked with the Town pro-bono and drafted provisions to restrict agribusiness for the Town of Sandisfield. The revised ordinance was drafted and all seem to be going on as planned. But very late in the process, the Planning Board decided it was "unable" to forward the by-law for placement on the Town warrant.

When asked for specifics, the Planning Board said that they did not have enough time to meet all the requirements required for approval by the State Attorney General. Whenever a Town by-law is adopted or changed, approximately 12 items have to be satisfied, including holding two Town hearings and advertising for two weeks in a local paper. The Select Board was disappointed that RTF was not able to make the warrant, and said it will most likely be on the Town warrant next year. 

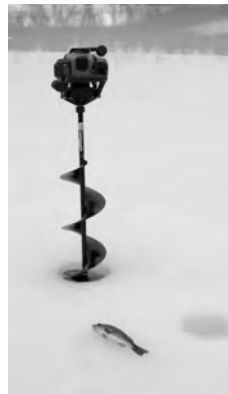
# The Icemen Cometh, but the Fish Stayeth Away

Article and Photos by Larry Dwyer

It's been a pretty tough year for ice fishing. Access has been one problem: with all the snow that fell this winter, it has simply not been possible to get to many of the well-known ice fishing areas. Only in early March, when the conditions began to improve, did a few brave souls – like the three who ventured out onto the ice at West Lake that first slightly warmer weekend - venture out to test their skills.




But, unfortunately, there then came another, unanticipated problem – the fishing wasn't very productive. Just one little bass was hauled in by two anglers who drove here to West Lake from Springfield, and they and their brother-icemen all reported that not much else seemed to be biting. These two were working the south side of the lake, and measured the ice thickness at a pretty remarkable thirty inches, instead of the normal twenty. And they claimed that their bad luck was caused specifically by the depth of the ice, and a consequent lowering of oxygen levels in the water, which, not surprisingly, causes fish to die off.



The technical explanation for this depletion of oxygen centers around the curious inversions that extreme temperatures cause in some lakes – with the slightly warmer but more dense upper waters diving below the cold and oxygenless waters at the lake bottom. Fish do not like to live – indeed, cannot live – in this replacement upper water if there is no oxygen in it, and they either go elsewhere or they die. Whether this was the reason for the bad luck of those few fishermen who came is the subject of impassioned fish-bar room debates, but to most it seems as good a reason as any to blame for their meager haul.

One other lone angler was working the north end of the same pond. However, the rising temperatures and a slight drizzle created conditions too hazardous for your normally fearless correspondent to investigate. A pair of ice cleats – not in his possession - would have been needed, ensuring some protection against him attaining a sudden, and probably painful, horizontal position. No cleats, no inquiry; many regrets.

And then a further journey, this time down Cold Spring Road, showed conditions to be no better. No one could be seen fishing along the shores of Lower Spectacle Pond - reinforcing the idea that, for the early 2011 season, ice fishing has been, to put it mildly, something of a bust. 



# PATRIOTISM, PIETY AND PRESERVATION – The Story of Beech Plain's ‘Amen Farm’

By Ron Bernard

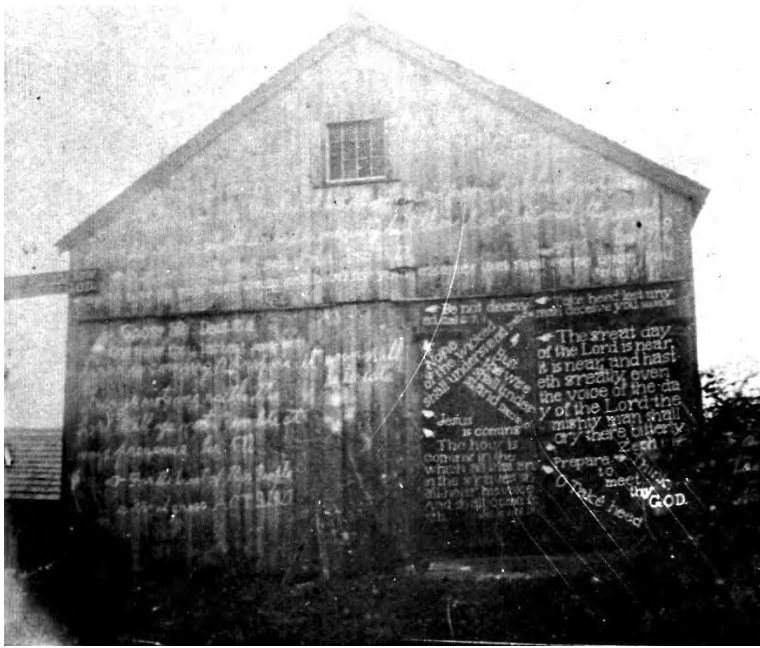


Photo: Sandisfield Historical Society Archives

In 1768 Lt. Ichabod Crittenden, the 47-year-old “son of an old Irish sailor” from Guilford, Connecticut, paid original Sandisfield town settler Thomas Brown £35 for two parcels of land in the Beech Plain, in the extreme northeast section of town. According to uncorroborated legend the Crittendens operated a tavern here on the “Knox Trail,” – the route taken by Colonel Henry Knox’s valiant men who trudged by on January 12, 1776 with captured Ticonderoga cannons, headed for General Washington in Cambridge.

However, there was an important Inn, also on the Knox Trail, operated by neighbor Henry Spring. It was called the “Continental Tavern.” Regardless, the patriotic Crittendens certainly would have extended all the hospitality they could to Knox and his men, whether they ran an inn or just an ordinary farmhouse.

*other buildings and nearly all the fences are now covered with Scriptural quotations. Mr. Waters has spent over two years on the work and is still at it.”* Locally his place became known as “The Amen Farm” or “The Scripture Farm.” Even timbers in the barn were chiseled with biblical aphorisms and apocalyptic warnings and curious sayings like “none of these things move me.” (Above, c.1906. Sandisfield Historical Society collection).

The barn was removed in 1949. All inscriptions had completely faded. Today the impressive intact foundation is an inviting family outdoor gathering spot. (below)

In 1933 the property was bought by George E. Sokolsky (1893-1962), a nationally known author, journalist and radio broadcaster. He was one of the most famous residents in Sandisfield’s history.

In 1864 the property was sold out of the Crittenden family to Lyman Waters (1828-1924), likewise from a large family with branches in both Otis and Sandisfield. Married twice, both times to Pennsylvania girls, he raised at least nine children here. Eldest son Frank (1868-?) assumed management of the farm around 1890.

Frank Waters was “an Adventist” and became extremely devout after his wife Ida died in 1896. A Winsted newspaper account in 1906 described Mr. Waters’ unconventional life style this way: “The pretty farmhouse, the barn and

World-wise, brilliant and influential, Sokolsky was a peer of the likes of Walter Winchell and Hedda Hopper. He was a staunch anti-communist in the McCarthy era and an intimate of J. Edgar Hoover. Roy Cohn, his close friend, was a frequent visitor as was actor Ward Bond and prominent Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio.



The Sokolsky family was here until 1966. (Sokolsky’s biography appeared in the July, 2010 issue of the Sandisfield Times).

This 243-year-old farm has one of the most fascinating and colorful histories of any in town. Current owners and loving stewards since 1986, Ted and Judy Goldsmith of Long Island, have meticulously renovated the house and grounds. The Goldsmiths feel they are indeed fortunate to live in a community with a rich heritage, great natural beauty, and filled with interesting and committed people. “Amen” to that! 🍷



Photo: Ron Bernard

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# Town Business

Cont'd from p.5

Select Board re-convened for its regular weekly meeting.

Discussed previous week's request by Ralph Morrison and John Burrows that the town pursue back collection of money owed for ambulance fees. Selectmen approved pursuing balances starting February 22, 2011.

Discussed previous week's proposal for fire fighters/EMTs compensation. Patrick recused himself. Richard asked Ralph which proposal the Fire Department Compensation Committee considered the best option and he responded that the preferred option was the one that pays \$15 per hour. Selectmen voted to accept the option and include it as a warrant article for FY2012 for \$33,270.

Discussed "Right to Farm" bylaw. The Planning Board is working on it with George Riley but they are not going to have it ready for this year's Annual Town Meeting. They feel there are more variables to the by-law than they originally thought. They asked for and received permission to contact Town Counsel to discuss it further.

Patrick asked Chris Rines if he would be interested in being the town's veteran's representative. He will think it over.

Reviewed budgets for FY2012, and signed warrants.

*Selectmen's meeting for February 28 was cancelled due to weather.*



**March 7 – Selectmen attending: Patrick Barrett, Richard Campetti, Jeff Gray. Also attending: Steve Harasyko, Road Superintendent; Dolores Harasyko, Administrative Assistant.**

Emergency Management Director John Burrows reviewed mutual aid agreements from MEMA for public safety and fire mutual aid. The state has inventoried all equipment from participating towns. We will be able to borrow or lend equipment in case of emergencies. Selectmen approved.

Steve Harasyko reported on bids for mowing and cleanup: Bogart Muller, \$12,978, includes spring and fall cleanups; Robert and Patrick O'Brien, \$19,600 for mowing plus \$3600 each for spring and fall cleanup; Gary O'Brien, \$1,200 each for spring and fall cleanup plus \$649 per mow starting May 15, ending October 27, 2011. Steve will further review and make a recommendation at next week's meeting.

Highway Department updates: Due to extreme weather and heavy rains there is damage to several dirt roads. They are passable but need gravel. Washouts on the following roads: Viets, Clark, Silverbrook, North and South Beech Plain, Cronk, Rood Hill and

a major problem with the culvert on New Hartford. Steve will check into using Chapter 90 funds for this work. Talked about replacing two town trucks and Steve will meet with the Treasurer about using the Stabilization Fund for the larger one (Joe Zeller's truck). There is a major problem with Joe's truck and Steve advises that we should not spend any more money repairing it. Patrick commended the Highway Department for their accomplishments during this difficult winter.

Doug Segrin from the Board of Health requested permanent wall dividers with a locking door installed around their office at the Old Town Hall. The walls would be screwed into the wooden floor. The Selectmen explained that we need to keep everything in that building movable – otherwise there will not be enough space to hold town meetings or elections there. Selectmen suggested the Board of Health add locks to the current cabinets or replace them and the cost could be shared with the Planning Board which also occupies that space. Discussed adding more time to the alarm system. Dolores will check with the alarm company.

Kathleen Segrin, secretary to the Board of Health and the Planning Board reported that her equipment has been turned on, her chair moved, boxes moved and papers knocked onto the floor. The Selectmen asked Dolores who else has the keys to that building and she said the Police, Fire, Selectmen, Highway Department, Kathleen, Bonnie and herself. She has not signed out a key to the building in six months.

Selectmen received a letter from the Treasurer regarding the Board of Health bills and salaries. The Treasurer has not received any bills since September 2010. Kathleen responded that she is meeting with Victor Hryckvich this week and will get caught up. Jeff Gray asked her to make sure she passes in her bills and salary each month.

Letter of resignation from Elaine O'Brien from the 250th Committee. Letter of interest to be on the committee from Linda Riiska who was then appointed.

Discussed boards and committees needing space to hold meetings. They will be asked to use the buildings (Old Town Hall, Town Hall Annex and Community Center) when they are normally open for business.

Reviewed request from Animal Control Officer Kim Spring regarding a restraining order on dogs owned by Thomas Brazie of New Marlborough. Order reviewed and signed.

Selectmen then entered into Executive Session for the express purpose of discussing union contract negotiations, followed by meeting adjournment. ♡



# FARMINGTON RIVER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BULLETIN



Tara Beardsley

Farmington River Elementary will be participating in "Screen-Free Week" (formerly known as "Turn-Off-the-TV Week") from April 11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>. All students are asked to partake in the annual event. Each participant will pledge to completely (or partially for a given amount of time for the week) avoid watching TV, playing with video or computer games, etc. If they succeed with their goal, they will earn a prize for their accomplishment. Parents and siblings are encouraged to participate as well.

There will be several events taking place during the week. They include a Berkshire Co-op sponsored cooking class for grades 4-6, a Storytime/Game event at the Sandisfield Library and a Pre-school/Kindergarten Orientation night with a special mime performer- just to name a few. Please visit the school's website for a complete list of events and times.

Our annual 6<sup>th</sup> Grade fund raiser will be quite different this year. In an effort to raise awareness of energy conservation, WMECO has developed an event where students will be presented with an informative assembly regarding the subject, and then will be asked to sell energy efficient light bulbs at cost, which will save everyone money!!! Plus we will receive 100% of the profits from this sale! Everyone wins!

The "Character Counts" program will be working on the FAIRNESS trait this month.

Don't forget to add these important dates to your calendar:

- Wed. April 6 Talent Show Rehearsal, 3-5pm
- Thurs. April 7 Talent Show Dress Rehearsal, 3-4:30
- Thurs. April 7 Talent Show Performance, 7pm
- Fri. April 8 Encore performance Talent Show, 1:15pm
- April 18-22 Spring Vacation – No School
- Fri. May 5/27 Professional Day – No School
- Mon. May 30 Memorial Day – No School
- Fri. June 17<sup>th</sup> 6th Grade Boston Trip

You may find additional school information at [farmingtonriverelementary.org](http://farmingtonriverelementary.org), or by calling the school directly at 269-4466. ♡

# AVIAN NOTES

By Margaret O'Clair

## THE BLUEBIRD CARRIES THE SKY ON HIS BACK

With winter behind us we can expect the arrival of our summer visitors soon - indeed, some of our avian visitors are already here. The trinity that signals spring-the Red-winged Blackbird, the Robin and the Eastern Bluebird - were all sighted here at the end of February. That seems to be pushing the envelope a bit when one remembers the bitter cold and deep snow pack we had at the time. However, many experts believe that if these three migrate south in winter they don't go very far and many others believe they don't go anywhere, but shelter deep in the woods and we don't see them. All three are ground feeders by preference and as soon as the frost comes out of the soil and the worms and insects come up to the surface - in other words when spring arrives - the birds make their appearance on our lawns.

Robins and bluebirds are members of the Thrush family, which is a large and varied family of birds often described as having a speckled breast. Obviously neither one of these has a speckled breast - but their young do and robins don't develop the characteristic red breast until their first fall.

There are three species of bluebird in North America - Eastern, Mountain and Western - and their names pretty much describe their regional distribution. There has been some hybridization where the populations overlap.



*Eastern Bluebird*

It would appear that the Eastern Bluebird was quite numerous in the 18th and 19th centuries. Henry David Thoreau mentions in his diary that bluebirds were revisiting their nest box, which is interesting because it suggests that the good relationship between people and bluebirds goes back a long way.

The European Starling and English House Sparrow were introduced to North America in 1890 and 1850 respectively and become fierce competitors for nesting sights with the bluebird.

By 1900, the House Sparrow was the most common bird in North America and, combined with the

reduction of open farmland that began at about the same time, the Eastern Bluebird began its sad decline.

Whether because of its beauty or its charm, or perhaps because it is the harbinger of spring, the bluebird has always had many friends, and by the 1930s serious efforts were underway to save it from extinction. In 1934 a Mr. Thomas Musselman from Adam County, Illinois originated the idea of a "Bluebird Trail" of nesting boxes along country roads. He eventually set up over 1000 boxes and his good work continues to this day.

The Eastern Bluebird population is slowly but surely recovering thanks in large part to man-made nesting boxes.



*Western Bluebird*

Making nesting boxes is simple, and an ideal project for young children. The half dozen boxes dotted around my garden were made by Forest and Toby Blass when they were little boys, and the boxes are all working well today.

Whether you build or buy a nest box, be sure the entrance hole is one and a half inches in diameter, and that there is access to the interior so you can clean it out, which should be done every spring.

Wrens and Tree Swallows like bluebird boxes too, so it is probably a good idea to put out several nest boxes so you can enjoy the sight of all three kinds of birds raising their young.



*Mountain Bluebird*

Photos: Elaine R. Wilson

"Oh Bluebird, welcome back again,  
Thy azure coat and ruddy vest  
Are hues that April loveth best, -  
Warm skies above the furrowed plain."

John Burroughs from "The Bluebird"



# EDIBLE SANDISFIELD

Josephine Freedman

## OUT OF THE MELTING-POT, INTO THE OVEN

Recipes from the  
Sandisfield Historical Society Cookbook

*Half a century ago the town published a delightful little cookbook, with recipes and associated anecdotes from the then residents. Plans are now afoot to produce a new edition to help celebrate our 250th anniversary - and so we are asking readers to contribute to it with their own, new recipes. Here, in place of our usual cookery columnist are a couple of ideas from yesteryear, as a guide. Now, it is up to you! Recipes and stories for the book can be sent either to Josephine Freedman (258-4786, freedmj1@aol.com) or to Theresa Blanchard (258-4280, tblanchard55@yahoo.com.)*

### Zucchini Parmegiani

submitted by Stephanie Abramson

In its heyday, Sandisfield was possessed of a number of factories that made cheese, barrel staves and farm implements. The house of David and Stephanie Abramson, built in the 1840's, overlooks the abandoned dam of one of these factories on Sandy Brook. Perhaps the ingredients here were from local *fromageurs* - and so much-approved of by today's locavores

#### Ingredients:

2 lbs zucchini, steamed until almost cooked  
1 ¾ cups tomato paste diluted in 2 cups of water  
1 lb mozzarella cheese, thinly sliced  
1 cup freshly grated parmesan cheese  
½ tsp each basil, oregano, and rosemary

Directions: Mix herbs and tomato paste. Line a heavy casserole with tomato sauce mixture and one layer of mozzarella. Then alternate layers of tomato, zucchini, mozzarella, and parmesan. Bake uncovered, about 20 minutes or until cheese is melted. Serve hot as a vegetable, or cold as an appetizer.

### Fish Au Gratin

submitted by Sigrid Stansen

Another nation represented in Sandisfield's tiny ethnic *petite marmite* is Norway. Sigrid Stansen came to this country when she was eighteen and most of the recipes she uses are Norwegian in origin.

#### Ingredients:

2 lbs. coked and boned fish  
½ cup light cream  
¼ lb. butter  
3 eggs  
¼ tsp. salt  
4 boiled potatoes  
½ cup flour

Directions: Make a cream sauce with cream, butter and flour. Then cut fish in small pieces. Cut potatoes in cubes. Mix the salt and the whipped eggs in the sauce. Pour in a buttered baking dish. Bake in a moderate oven 350 degrees for 30 to 45 minutes. Serve with melted butter. 🍴



## Country Diary

### Of Kang and Kachelofen and the Joys of Coziness

By Mick Burns

I cannot recall the first time I learned of the masonry heater. I do recall, however, being thrilled to find a picture of a k'ang (or kang), under construction, on the cover of an issue of Fine Home Building back in 1987. At that time I was full of enthusiasm for learning all I could about building houses, and things like solar systems and design wind and water power, producing one's own food, permaculture, etc, were foremost in my thinking. These were (and still are) all things which made so much sense to me. Not new things to the world, but new to me.

Burning wood for heat is a practice so long established by humans as to be almost inseparable from our lives on this planet. Discoveries in Kenya provide evidence of the controlled use of fire as long ago as 1.4 million years. The Romans are admired for their famous baths heated by subterranean fires. Perhaps less celebrated in the West, but nonetheless impressive, is the heated platform of China and Central Asia, dating back several millennia, the incorporation of a flue into which, around the 1st century, resulted in the creation of the kang. This is a heated platform, often at floor level, of sufficient mass and size both to capture and radiate heat through the use of channels constructed within and, notably, a flue to conduct combustible gases to the exterior. A similar device, known as the kachelofen, appeared in Europe

in the 15th century. More akin to a large woodstove, the kachelofen is also known as a Swedish, Finnish or Russian stove-fireplace.

In this country, owing primarily to an abundance of wood and the eventual availability of inexpensive iron, the woodstove developed from the kachelofen. Interestingly, the iron stove, combined with the use of the flue, resulted in a decrease in heating efficiency to as low as 10 percent.

Today the kachelofen is generally known as the masonry heater. The Masonry Heater Association of North America, as of 1998, defines a masonry heater as "...a site-built or assembled solid fueled heating device constructed mainly of masonry materials in which the heat from intermittent fires burned rapidly in the firebox is stored in its massive structure for slow release to the building. It has an interior construction consisting of a firebox and heat exchange channels built from refractory components." Specifically, a masonry heater has the following characteristics:

- a mass of at least 800kg (1760 lb);
- tight-fitting doors that are closed during the burn cycle;
- an overall average wall thickness not exceeding 250mm (10in);
- under normal operating conditions the external surface of the masonry heater, except immediately surrounding the fuel loading doors, does not exceed 110C (230F);
- the gas path is through the internal heat exchange channels downstream of the firebox and includes at least one 180 degree change in direction, usually downward, before entering the chimney;
- the length of the shortest single path from the firebox exit to the chimney entrance is at least twice the largest firebox dimension.

Ever since that FHB cover story about the kang, I had it in mind to build a masonry heater for myself.

In 2005 I began, finally, the construction of my own place, using an old barn timber-frame to determine the building dimensions. During the intervening years I had educated myself on the subject and had visited several homes with masonry heaters installed. I chose to use what would be called a kit, consisting of a core of interlocking parts cast from refractory cement, but which allowed the exterior to be configured and finished at the discretion of the individual builder. Over a period of three months, a trained mason and I managed to complete the construction (the chimney itself requiring most of the effort).



The heater is a joy to behold and to use. There is a bake oven incorporated so that during the heating season there is always a ready place to cook a meal, heat leftovers or bake something or other. During the first full winter of use it took some time to learn how to use it effectively: how the amount (weight) of wood burned determines the amount of heat radiated.

The heater is operated thusly: all the wood to be burned for one fueling is loaded into the firebox at once. The damper is opened and the fire lit. The burning is fast and hot – no 'damping down' here. When the fire is completely out, after 2 to 2 ½ hours, the airtight damper is closed. This is vital, because if left open the heat would be rather quickly dissipated by the flow of cold combustion air passing through the firebox. Usually the oven will reach a temperature of 400-500F, and slowly cool to 250-300F over the ensuing twelve hours. The exterior surface, save the firebox and oven doors, is never too hot to place my hand on. The heater, as a bonus, uses a relatively low amount of wood, owing to its efficiency: I will use only 4 ½ cords this winter – so instead of more cutting, stacking etc., I will have more time for all... that...shoveling! ♣

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## A Walk in the Woods

Tom Ryan

# NOW YOU SEE IT, NOW YOU DON'T

The month of April may be "the cruelest month" to poets, but it is quite dear to me, for we can now breathe a long sigh of relief as the nights and days are steadily getting warmer and the smell of spring is in the air. All the plants and animals are beginning to wake up from their long winter's nap. Should



you find yourself hungry in your travels through our woods you should take notice of some of the following edible spring ephemerals: ramps, fiddleheads, and serviceberry.

Ramps (aka wild leeks, *Allium tricoccum*) can be found throughout the woods of Sandisfield and are considered a wild delicacy. They tend to grow in dense patches found in rich mesic soils. The tender broad leaves emerge for a brief period of time in the spring and are connected to a bulb. The entire plant is edible, but I personally prefer the bulb. The flavor is quite pungent and akin to a cross between onion and garlic; a few plants will go a long way in a dish. If you decide to gather them this spring, I encourage you to be conservative as these plants may appear to be abundant but can easily be over-picked. I recommend thinning dense patches, and making sure to leave plenty behind for future propagation (and me!).

Fiddleheads from the ostrich fern (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*) can be found in town generally along sandy stream banks and floodplains; they may also pop up along road sides and near historic home sites where they were most likely deliberately planted. You will find fiddleheads for sale for a short time in the grocery stores. If you collect from the wild be sure to know what you are looking for, as not all ferns are edible. You also want to pick the fronds when they are just starting to unfurl, no more than a few inches in height; if picked too tall they will be tough and bitter. Again, you'll need to be conservative when picking and I recommend picking no more than half of the fiddleheads per plant.



Serviceberry (aka shadbush, juneberry, *Amelanchier spp.*) is one of the first shrubs to bloom and has a distinctive, beautiful, white blossom. I've been told that this shrub derived its various common names from historical associations. Allegedly, the blooming of this shrub was a sign to early colonists that the ground had thawed enough to bury the dead and have funeral services, hence 'service' berry. This shrub is also in bloom about the same time that the shad fish is migrating up rivers for spawning, hence shad bush. In the lower reaches of the Farmington and Connecticut Rivers shad fishing draws large

numbers of anglers. The fruit is also edible and ripens in late spring/early summer, hence the name juneberry.

Happy spring foraging! 🍄

(Photos courtesy Wikimedia Commons.)

If you want to know more about these three spring ephemerals and where they grow, you might want to check out these websites.

**For Ramps:** <http://theforagerpress.com/fieldguide/aprilfd.htm>

**For Fiddleheads:** <http://extension.umaine.edu/publications/4198e/>

**For the Serviceberry:** <http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=AMELA>



### PITY THE PET

I look forward every month to reading Margaret O'Clair's "Avian Notes" with her charming and informative stories about the birds that visit us here in Sandisfield. In the last issue her piece about the Cedar Waxwing reminded me of a visitor we had the summer before last.



Photo: Susie Crofut

My husband was working in the vegetable garden when a beautiful little bird came and sat on his shovel. He called me over and I saw at once it was a Cedar Waxwing, not common here at any time and an unusual visitor in the summer. As we looked at him he flew to my shoulder. Soon our neighbors Richard and Liana came over, and our little friend lit on Richard's hat and then on Liana's hand.

He stayed around us that afternoon and into the early evening when we finally had to come inside. The next day he was waiting on the tree by the deck and in the afternoon my grandson Kaylo came to visit and the beautiful bird sat in his hand.

This little fellow had no fear and though we found his behavior so charming we knew it was unnatural. We were worried. Sure enough the following day we found him dead on the lawn.

We think he might have been killed by one of our dogs. There was such sadness in our family and with our neighbors. I wrote to Thom Smith who writes a nature column for the Berkshire Eagle and he surmised that our little waxwing had been a pet.

Susie Crofut

### REMEMBER THE ERBES?

Many years ago my father, Dr. Henry Erbe, was the town doctor for Sandisfield, New Boston and Otis. He had a one-room office in Sandisfield where he treated anyone in need of a doctor's services.

I am currently writing a story of my father and mother, who taught school in Otis, Lee and other Berkshire County schools until she was 81 years old.

I am asking anyone who has recollection or stories about Dr. Henry Erbe or Mrs. Connie Erbe to please provide them to me to assist me with writing my book.

Please send them by mail or e-mail to my address noted below and/or I would be happy to meet you and discuss when I am in Otis this summer.

H. Pete Erbe, Jr.

1418 Ebrington Lane, Leland, NC 28451, [hperbe@ec.rr.com](mailto:hperbe@ec.rr.com)



# Comings and Goings



Photo: Courtesy Hoffman Family

## Philip Hoffman

September 12, 1920 – March 2, 2011

Sandisfield lost two of its long time and most beloved residents in a tragic automobile accident that occurred on March 2nd. They will be sorely missed.

Anne and Phil Hoffman met in a world shaped by WWII and the Cold War. They always shared a vision of a humane society and a world free of fascism and war. They were peace-loving people who were very much full of life until the end.

The son of Jewish garment workers Sam and Bess Hoffman from Czestochowa, Poland, Phil was born in 1920 in Toronto. He started selling newspapers at age five, and at 15, at the height of the depression, left school to help support his family. He joined the fight against fascism by enlisting in the 48th Highlanders. Upon returning home he graduated cum laude in chemistry from the University of Tennessee. After earning a Ph.D. at the University of Rochester, Phil worked with leading carbohydrate chemist Karl Meyer at Columbia University. He continued his research as department head at the Hospital for Joint Disease, then finished his research career at Stony Brook University.

Phil had an experimental spirit. He was known for his integrity as a scientist and strongly believed that the results of publicly funded research were public knowledge and not for private gain. He participated in discussions against pseudo sciences that gave credence to racism, sexism and anti scientific conceptions.

Anne was born in 1922 in Sandisfield, Massachusetts to Russian Jewish immigrants David and Libby Pinsky. Their farmhouse served as a boarding house for

workers and their families from NY City during the summer. Anne cherished her childhood memories sitting on the porch listening to boarders debate the social issues of the day, as well as enjoying the plays they put on. After high school Anne went to Washington DC and NY where she joined in the struggles for workers rights and against fascism. She met Phil in Toronto, and they married in 1947.

Anne graduated Phi Beta Kappa from City College and began teaching elementary school in Harlem during the tumultuous 60's, working with children deemed "non-teachable." From 1971 she taught adult literacy in the South Bronx. She developed innovative teaching methods, using her special ability to connect with her students by bringing their actual life experiences into her teaching methods, and using music and arts as tools to draw them in. Anne's creativity was profoundly political; she linked the anti-slavery struggles of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth to the struggles her students themselves faced. For Anne it wasn't just a matter of her students learning how to read, but that they also saw themselves at the center of history, becoming empowered and looking forward with profound feelings of dignity.


Phil and Anne shared a life-long love of the arts. Phil assisted Anne with the student performances that were at the heart of her pioneering teaching methods. After his research career ended, Phil refocused his efforts, teaching high school math and science in the South Bronx and drawing on Anne's pioneering work.

## Anne Pinsky Hoffman

July 14, 1922 – March 19, 2011

Their home was always a gathering place for community, family and friends. Especially important to both was providing space for their large family that extends from El Salvador to Canada and throughout the world. Retiring to the house Anne was born in, Phil thrived working outdoors, chopping wood well into his eighties, while Anne surrounded the house with her flower gardens. Anne and Phil were active in the Sandisfield Arts & Restoration Committee and the Sandisfield Historical Society. Working closely together, Anne wrote the book *Sandisfield: The Biography of a Town*. When they died they were researching the struggles of farmers, workers and small trades people of Western Massachusetts during the revolutionary period, including Shay's Rebellion.

Anne and Phil held deep feelings and concerns for their family, as well as all peoples struggling for a better way of life. They were particularly adept at providing support and guidance, while not interfering or imposing their own views. Some of the last advice Phil gave his grandchildren as they began raising their own kids was "just be sure you don't get in their way." Anne and Phil were the best of the best and had profound generosity and resilience. Their spirit will be carried on by their two sons, eight grandchildren, five great-grandchildren and all those whose lives they touched.

A memorial celebrating their lives will be held on April 30th at the Sandisfield Arts Center. 

# Now Hear This!

*If you have an event that you would like to see listed here, please email [calendar@sandisfieldtimes.org](mailto:calendar@sandisfieldtimes.org).*

*We reserve space for those events that involve Sandisfield residents or that take place in Sandisfield and neighboring communities.*

## APRIL EVENTS

**Monday, April 4, 7PM, Town Caucus,** Old Town Hall, Silverbrook Road.

**Wednesday, April 6, 7PM, History Book Committee Meeting,** Sandisfield Library. All welcome. 269-0012 We still have 2011 calendars for sale!

**Thursday, April 7** Last day to object or withdraw nomination papers

**Saturday, April 9, 11AM Historical Society Meeting followed by pot luck lunch.** Historical Society Meeting House, Rt.. 183 (Sandy Brook Turnpike)

**Wednesday, April 13, 7PM, 250th Birthday Committee Meeting,** Library. All welcome. 258-4535.

**Wednesday, April 20, 7PM The Sandisfield Book Group,** Sandisfield Library. "The Sunflower" by Simon Wiesenthal. The book group meets third Wednesdays. Next meeting May 18 "Olive Kitteridge" by Elizabeth Strout.

**Saturday, April 23, 11AM Easter Egg Hunt,** Yanner Park (Town Hill Road), sponsored by the Sandisfield Recreation Committee. 258-4615

**Monday, April 25** Last day to register to vote for the Annual Town Meeting and Annual Town Election. Registration at Town Hall Annex from 2-4PM and 7-8PM.

**Memorial Day Parade,** please note: Four \$50 gift certificate prizes to local restaurants will be awarded.

**Saturday, April 30 5-7PM Ham Supper, Firehouse No. 2,** sponsored by the New Boston Congregational Church. Takeouts available, tickets at the door. All welcome.

## ONGOING EVENTS

*Town Meetings (Info call 258-4711)*

**Selectmen,** every Monday at 7PM. Town Hall Annex.

**Conservation Commission,** third Tuesday of the month at 7PM. Town Hall Annex.

**Board of Health,** first Wednesday of the month at 9AM. Old Town Hall.

**Planning Board,** second Monday of the month 6PM. Old Town Hall.

**Board of Assessors,** second Tuesday of the month 5PM. Town Hall Annex.

**Council on Aging,** every Wednesday 11AM. Town Hall Annex. Potluck Lunch at Noon. Bingo at 1pm. Free Blood Pressure screening every fourth Wednesday.

**1st Monday, 7PM, Farmington River Regional School District meets.** Public welcome. JoAnn Austin, Superintendent, 269-4466.

**Monday, Wednesday, Friday 11-Noon, Aqua Wellness Exercise Program for Seniors and People with Disabilities.** Kilpatrick Fitness Center at Simon's Rock. \$3/each session. Even people on oxygen can participate. Dave Collopy, Facility Director, 528-7773. Email: [dcollopy@simons-rock.edu](mailto:dcollopy@simons-rock.edu) or General information number 528-7777.

**Every Monday, 9:30-11AM. Story Time followed by a craft. Farmington River Elementary School.** Led by Laura Messina. Sponsored by CHP.

**Tuesdays, 9:30-11:30AM, Community Health Program Family Network Playgroup for Kids 5 and under.** Toys, music, crafts! Parents must stay. All welcome. Old Town Hall. Call Alison Benedict for more information (413) 770-7517.

**1st Wednesday of every month, 11AM-2PM, Council on Aging,** Town Hall Annex. Monthly birthdays celebration, Pot luck lunch and Bingo.

**Tuesdays through May, Lunch for Seniors.** A community service offered by the Farmington River Regional School with assistance from 4th-6th graders. \$2 per person. Call 269-4466 on the Monday before to reserve your spot!

**4th Wednesday of every month, 11AM-2PM, Council on Aging,** Town Hall Annex. Free blood pressure screening.

**1st Sunday, 9AM New Boston Congregational Church worship service and communion.** Services suspended during the winter months! Services start up again in April.

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### A MESSAGE FROM THE FOLKS OF THE SANDISFIELD NEWSLETTER

This issue of *The Sandisfield Times* is sponsored by funds from *The Sandisfield Newsletter* (1987-2007). *The Newsletter* board feels this is in keeping with the *Newsletter* mission:

*"To promote interest and communication in our town without prejudice or favor."*

We are proud of the efforts and success of *The Sandisfield Times* and delighted that once more there is a vehicle for news in this town we all love.

*Connie Canty Donaldson, Chapin Fish, Kevin Indoe, John Yager, Roberta Myers*

This program is supported in part by a grant from the Sandisfield Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.



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### Editorial Staff for this issue:

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Contributors: Jean Atwater-Williams, Ron Bernard, Val Coleman, Larry Dwyer, Josephine Freedman, Debbie Harris, Chester I. Minnows and our regular columnists.

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