

# THE SANDISFIELD TIMES



RELIABLE. REGULAR. RELEVANT.

Volume VII, Number 10

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## Moreover...

## Live, On the Set

By Simon Winchester

*(Editor's Note: It's very rare when the stars fall into place and a movie is actually made of a book. But that rare thing is happening right now to a Sandisfield author (in fact, one of the founders and the first editor of this paper). Simon reports here about visiting the film set in November with his wife, Setsuko.)*

It was the Irishman driving the crane who brought home to me the amazement of it all.

A large, burly fellow from County Cork, he was behind the wheel of an orange monster with a boom and a jib that reached sixty feet into the clear night sky. Suspended from its peak like a gorgeous tropical flower was an immense light, shrouded in off-white fabric, which illuminated all of us below on the cobblestoned Dublin alleyway with an unearthly wash of color, signifying for the movie cameras the glow of Victorian gaslight on the streets of a London slum.

I never came to know the name of the crane driver. But he was there that night, and on many other nights, along with more



than a hundred colleagues performing a thousand or so equally mundane and specific tasks – from running tape recorders to making bacon sandwiches for the crew to tamping gunpowder into Sean Penn's pistol – did

I really write that? – to teaching an Australian celebrity how to get his tongue around the trials of speaking in lowland Scots accent.

*Cont'd p.13*

## The Pipeline Approval Situation

### MASS AG CAVES BUT NOW TRIBES, WATER REGS IN THE WAY

By Times Reporters

These pages have been quiet recently about what's going on with Tennessee Gas' (TGP) proposed 3.8-mile long pipeline extension across Otis State Forest and the Beech Plain section of Sandisfield.

Much to the chagrin of TGP and its parent, Houston-based energy giant Kinder Morgan, the project is more than one year behind schedule.

Legal challenges fueled by grass roots opponents, environmental challenges, an uncooperative state legislature, and a motion by the Massachusetts Attorney General have produced delays. The heart of the issue is the company's disregard of Massachusetts Constitutional Article 97 which is supposed to provide permanent protection to Otis State Forest land near Spectacle Pond against egregious encroachment like this. Two miles of the 3.8 mile extension through Sandisfield lies within this conservation section.

### IT ALL STARTED ...

It all started in August, 2013 when a company representative contacted Sandisfield private land owners seeking permissions to "survey" the right of way on their properties for a vague purpose. The gas company proponents assumed that this relatively small, isolated project would sail thorough the permit process just as the two existing lines had in 1951 and 1981. After all, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) approves these projects "99% of the time," according to a FERC staff attorney.

A concerned landowner, who reached the FERC office by phone in 2013, was advised

by the staff attorney to "not waste your time" (fighting the incursion). The attorney pointed out that the 1938 Natural Gas Act and the Supremacy clause of the US Constitution, with its ironclad enforcement mechanism called eminent domain, usually results in rubber-stamped approval for pipelines so long as there is demand and that regulations are met. Practically nothing else matters.

The FERC lawyer was correct. For almost 80 years serious challenges to the system have been rare. Successful challenges, even delays like what has happened here, are virtually unheard of.

Yet, delays caused by environmental groups and Commonwealth agencies challenging the pipeline significantly impeded the construction timeline.

*Cont'd p.14*

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# The Water is Back ...For Now

By Bill Price

Last month, The Times reported on the summer and fall drought that adversely affected several Sandisfield homeowners whose water was drawn from hand-dug wells. Several wells had gone dry. Neighbors were pitching in to provide water.

Then, mid-December, it rained. According to the National Weather Service, as much as 2-3 inches fell across much of the Berkshires, most of it over a few days mid-month. The dry wells in Sandisfield, for the most part, filled up again.

One homeowner who had been hauling water for nearly three months, Laureen Pease of New Boston, said that her well was back in business before Christmas. "Everything water-wise is back to normal," she said. "But I want more rain next year. Just not in June." In June, her son Chuck will marry his fiancé, Jennifer Florek. An outdoor wedding is planned.

The hand-dug well at Doug and Katy Rocco's place on Rood Hill Road had also gone dry. The drought hit the Roccas especially hard. They not only had no water for the house, but neither did they have water for their five horses. All fall they hauled water in 55-gallon drums from the drilled wells of generous neighbors.

Katy reports that after the December rains they have house water again, although they are conserving and using much less. "We're very careful with it now, for sure," she said. So far they are still hauling water for the horses.

If the drought returns next summer, expect more wells to be in trouble. 🗞

## Watch Out! BE CAREFUL AT HOME

By Mary Anne Grammer

We did everything we were supposed to. During the summer, we had the pellet stove and the chimney cleaned. We were ready for the winter, bring it on.

At the beginning of winter, after we started using the stove, there were signs I ignored.

When I was working outside there was an odor. What was it? Were the neighbors burning garbage? Did a diesel truck drive by? What is that smell?

I'd go inside, and I didn't smell anything. I'd forget it.

# Garbage Rumor Is Garbage

By Times staff

A rumor circulating in our town hinted at garbage skullduggery.

To wit, that although we may separate our recyclables from our household trash and dispose of the two separately at the town transfer station, our efforts are wasted because the trash hauler mixes the two when it disposes of the contents of its trucks.

Fortunately, a call to the trash hauler, The Master Garbologist, Inc., in Great Barrington, revealed that this rumor is without basis.

A spokesman for the company said that whereas Sandisfield's household waste goes to a transfer station in Canaan, Connecticut, and from there to a trash-to-energy plant, the recyclables are packaged separately and go to the MRF (Materials Recycling Facility) in Springfield, where they are, in fact, recycled.

According to MRF, recycling just one aluminum can saves the equivalent of a half a gallon of gasoline, and each bottle recycled saves enough energy to power a 100-watt light bulb for 4 hours.

So pitch in, do your part, and rest easy that your efforts aren't wasted. 🗞

**New Phone System Installed at  
Town Hall Annex.  
See page 14 for details.**

But the pellet stove didn't seem to be putting out as much heat as it used to. It was using less fuel. It would go off and on and off and on.

I kept cleaning it and trying to figure out what was going on with the darn thing.

But when I went upstairs, that smell from outdoors was very strong.

Then the carbon monoxide alarm went off. Yep, there was a blockage and carbon monoxide was coming into the house. I turned off the stove and opened the windows and doors.

We had electric baseboards which we used as back-up heat. (We haven't gotten the bill for that yet.)

We waited two weeks before a technician could come to the house. Winter is a busy time of year for pellet stove mechanics.

## ALL BOARDS MEETING

- Tuesday, January 17, 7 p.m.
- Old Town Hall, 3 Silverbook Road
- All committee and board members should attend. All town residents are welcome.

## Birds at Stone Bridge Farm

By George Wheeler

In early December a couple of red-breasted nuthatches passed through our yard, on their way to somewhere else. We didn't get a photograph. Our bird guru, Margaret O'Clair, told us that red-breasted nuthatches are not commonly seen in Sandisfield, so, after Christmas, when the nuthatches passed through again we had a second chance. Here is one of them. 🗞



When he pulled the stove out, he said that it looked like it had never been cleaned. The chimney didn't look that great either. I hadn't watched while the stove was being cleaned during the summer.

So, learn from my experience.

Make sure you have a carbon monoxide alarm. Make sure it is working.

If you smell something strange, it could be carbon monoxide.

Don't ignore signs such as the stove not working efficiently, get it checked out.

And, I know workmen hate it, but watch while your stove and chimney are being cleaned. Make sure the stove is pulled out and that it has had a good cleaning.

Pellet stoves create carbon monoxide and carbon monoxide can kill you. 🗞

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

## AN ERROR CORRECTED

In The Times print edition in December, the editor announced a Special Town Meeting. The announcement was premature, with the wrong date and time.

The Special Town Meeting is expected to take place in February, date not yet determined. Watch for announcements from Town Hall.

Just in case anyone showed up on the wrong date, your editor asked our good friend and distributor, Val Coleman, to wait outside Old Town Hall in order to offer explanation and apologies. Val did that on what turned out to be the blizzard day of December 17.

Val described his experience:

“By 9 a.m. the snowstorm was pretty serious. The road was full of snow and I had one hell of a time getting out of my driveway. At 10 miles an hour I eventually got to Old Town Hall. It was bleak and empty at 9:30. I parked and turned on the radio and listened to some groovy Neil Diamond stuff.

I got out of the car (note that I was braving the storm) and taped a notice on the door that the Town Hall meeting had been cancelled. I hadn't met another soul to interview as you had instructed. So I just sat there trying to think profound thoughts. The best I could come up with was ‘what the hell am I doing here in a snowstorm at age 86 in a little town in the lower-left-hand corner of Massachusetts?’”

I was glad that no one showed up for my phantom meeting, and that Val remained safe in the storm.

But the fact that no one showed up suggests that either (1) no one reads The Times, (2) no one believes The Times, (3) the word got out that the notice was in error, (4) nobody was coming anyway, or (5) that the blizzard kept everyone home except my Honorable Lookout, who is a Noble Person of Quality Who Keeps His Word despite deep snow.

*Bill Price  
West New Boston*



## TOWN NEWS

*By Bill Price*

### SHARING PEOPLE

Sandisfield's Select Board will attend a January 23 meeting in Sheffield with ten other South County boards to discuss collaboration across towns in sharing financial services, personnel and human resources, emergency and public safety personnel, and other operations.

Representative Smitty Pignatelli, who has been urging town's to share resources for several years, wrote last summer: “Just as [the Berkshire's have had] to shift how we personally sustain ourselves economically, we need to shift how we run our towns.”

Sandisfield is already on board with the idea. Part-time Town Administrator Willie Morales and part-time Treasurer Terry Spohnholz recently began filling those same roles in Monterey.

Willie, part-time administrator in Sandisfield since August, was hired as part-time administrator by Monterey in November. Then, in December, Monterey hired Terry as part-time treasurer. She has served that role in Sandisfield since June.

When Sandisfield hired Willie it was with the idea that he could also be hired part-time by another town, with Monterey as the logical possibility. The idea was encouraged by the Select Board.

Anyone who has done a part-time job knows that the work often expands. Worse, two part-time jobs can add up to a full-time job-and-a-half.

A full-time job is not only preferable but more remunerative. In fact, Willie was recently considered for one.

“I'd only been at Sandisfield a couple months when a full-time administrator position presented itself in Northfield, Mass.,” he said. “Northfield's former administrator reached out to me as a suitable candidate to replace him, and I emerged as one of the finalists. The position went to the other candidate who had several years more experience than I did. As a part-time and ‘at will’ employee, the contractual guidelines which provide oversight for town administrators and managers don't preclude me from seeking full-time employment. As head of household for my family, I have a personal responsibility to eventually secure a full-time position.

“That said, I'm proud of the solid progress we're making across several front in Sandisfield. I'm committed in heart and spirit to the hard work that the staff and elected officials have dedicated to the town.”

Of her two part-time jobs, Terry said that working in Monterey as well as Sandisfield is an opportunity to “help both towns run more efficiently and effectively from a fiscal perspective. Both towns have similar accounting systems and governmental structure, but each one looks at economic development differently. They're unique that way. It's challenging, but I love a challenge. It's extremely rewarding personally.”

She added, “Besides, a woman can never have too many great hats!”

Terry was senior auditor in Anchorage, Alaska where she conducted federal and state audits serving government, school districts, and organizations. Her third part-time job is as Sandisfield's librarian. She's busy, but so far, so good.

### BROADBAND

For an update on the state of broadband in Sandisfield, see Alice Boyd's comments “Around Town Hall” on page 4.

For many of us, the process of investigating, selecting, and building the systems that can deliver broadband internet – along with other electronic services now available in many locations (but not yet the small towns in Berkshire County) – is difficult to explain and, if explained, may be even harder to understand. The complications are countless and tangled and often impenetrable.

This stuff is not easy to explain, but for a fairly lucid explanation of what is happening at our neighboring town of New Marlborough, see the Broadband Update “Another Reversal of Fortune” in the New Marlborough Five Villages News for January. The article, by Barry R. Shapiro, details the struggles that town has gone through after nearly coming to an agreement with Frontier Communications. You can find the Five Village News at locations in New Marlborough or, if you have access to the internet, online at [www.nm5vn.org](http://www.nm5vn.org).

### TOWN MAY BE SUED

Last month a lady driving north on Rt. 8 slid on black ice and wrecked her car. Fortunately she was not injured. She called a Sandisfield official and said she planned to sue the town. While the ice she slid on and the tree she hit were both in Otis, she wanted to sue Sandisfield because that was where the snow that partly obscured her windshield fell on her car. Maybe someone will talk her out of it. 🍷

# AROUND TOWN HALL

By Alice Boyd, Chairman, Select Board

## A Lot Going On

Happy New Year! Here at Town Hall we've got a full plate for the upcoming twelve months with progress being made on many fronts.

### BROADBAND:

One year ago we had no options for broadband services. Today it appears that we may have multiple solutions. Thanks to the work of town staff we now have the required "Green Light Letter" from the state allowing us to proceed, and we have a mechanism to fund broadband services.

Our regional broadband committee has issued an RFP (request for proposals) for broadband services seeking a company to design, build, and operate a fiber-to-the-home network for Tolland, Monterey, and Sandisfield. We anticipate that at least one company will bid, and we are hopeful that we can secure a service contract for television, fiber, and phone.

The RFP was issued by each towns MLP (Municipal Light Plant) and will allow us to sign a contract for up to 15 years immediately. The RFP is available through Sandisfield Town Administrator Willie Morales.

Other Broadband options may also come to fruition. The Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) has issued an RFP for the entire region and one potential bidder has contacted us. We are hopeful that we'll have an announcement and information for residents by early spring.

Finally, thanks to Representative Smitty Pignatelli our four-town region (including

New Marlborough) will be meeting with Peter Larkin, the President of MBI's Board of Directors, to work through the logistics of receiving our broadband design and construction grants. Sandisfield's grant is for \$1.2 million.

### TOWN HALL:

Our new phone system has been installed and is saving taxpayers money. Call 413-258-4711 to reach staff or leave a message for any department. Our new website is still being refined with a Department Directory in the works. Staff will receive additional training in late January and we're working out the kinks for staff to use the site effectively.

We are committed to providing maximum transparency by posting all meetings and minutes and by offering the community an opportunity to comment and participate. By late January we should meet that goal.

### FISCAL:

We are in a transitional period wrapping up FY16 with the help of a consultant. There have been unanticipated costs to bring our town into compliance with state and federal law. As a result we'll be holding a Special Town Meeting in February to deal with IRS (Internal Revenue Service) and other shortfalls. Your Select Board, staff, and Finance Committee members are working on the FY18 budget with an eye toward keeping taxes down while improving services.

### LOGGING:

Over the coming months you'll see Bill Riiska's trucks logging the town cemetery across from the Transfer Station. This project provides revenue to the town and will remove the White Ash trees that are dying throughout our region. A Forestry Management Plan has been filed with the state for Yanner Park thanks to Bob Tarasuk and Adam Brown. We


anticipate logging Yanner Park next year.

### REGIONALIZATION:

Your Select Board is meeting with Selectmen from Sheffield, Monterey and New Marlborough to find ways to save our towns money through shared resources and services. Whether it is a shared piece of equipment or staff member, we're all open to providing the best possible services within our means.

### MASTER PLAN:

In March we intend to hold a working meeting for all residents interested in the town Master Plan. We have a great group of volunteers, a defined scope of work, and a goal of wrapping up our planning and implementing the first projects in 2017.

As with any systemic change there are challenges but we are making real, sustainable progress. Our goal, as always, is to keep taxes down, provide the best possible services within our limited means, and make our town a place that you're proud of. More to come. 



## Back to the Future? The Lowell Sun

Lowell, Mass. Monday February 21 1938

### Sandisfield Blazes

### New Trail in Economy

Sandisfield, Feb. 21 (AP) -

Economy was the watchword today at this Berkshire town's annual meeting.

The tax-collector and his clerks must continue to use pencils and pens as it was voted not to buy a typewriter or an adding machine.

Bids will be asked on a job to repair a hole in the town hall floor (estimated cost - \$5).

Chairs will be bought for the town hall from the proceeds, estimated at \$39, of the sale of the town's road machinery as junk.

- Submitted by Lorraine German



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# View from the Arts Center

## Arts Center Elects New Board Members and Keeps a Few Veterans

The Sandisfield Arts Center began the new year by warmly welcoming six new members elected to the nonprofit center's 23-member board of directors: Ed Brozman, David Hubbard, Bogart Muller, Roseanne Skrip, Terry Spohnholtz, and Susan Van Sickle.

Seven members whose term expired last year were nominated and re-elected for another term on the Board: Alice Boyd, Eva Blachere, Val Colman, Mary Anne Grammer, Abbie Lombard, Adam Manacher, and Marcella Smith.


The Board elected the following new officers: Susie Crofut and Sandy Parisky to serve as co-presidents; Roseanne Skrip as vice president; David Hubbard as treasurer; and Mary Anne Grammer as clerk.

Although the lights and the heat are off at the Arts Center, the pipes drained and the doors locked, our volunteers – who really deserve some time-off over the winter – have hardly “gone into hibernation.”

In fact, they are busy researching and planning the 2017 season and have identified and are considering several very exciting programs and special events.

Program planning for the coming season is a time-consuming and complicated process – assembling and evaluating choices, balancing costs and scheduling with the desire to offer the widest variety of programs that will attract and entertain an audience with a just-as-wide variety of interests.

We have already received many ideas from the community and always welcome more. If you have someone or something you'd like to recommend please send your ideas to [info@sandisfieldartscenter.org](mailto:info@sandisfieldartscenter.org) Even if your suggestion cannot be accommodated this season we are always looking to the future.

Watch for the publication of our 2017 brochure. 

## Another Road Show THE “FUNNY, CLASSY AND CHARMING” SANDISFIELD PLAYERS

By Times staff

Following their successful road tour last summer of taking “Our Town” to Cornwall, England, the Sandisfield Players went on the road again in December.

Granted, Norfolk, Connecticut, is not that far across the border from Sandisfield, but it's still a road trip.

Combining the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm, a story by Roald Dahl, and a new tale written by

Sandisfield poet Val Coleman, The Players performed their production of “Once Upon a Time” at the Norfolk Library.

Through the ancient art of the spoken word, members of The Players brought to life the magical world of *Rapunzel*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *The Frog* (written by Coleman and sure to become a classic), *The Wondrous Plant*, *The Twelve Brothers* and *Little Red Riding Hood*.

With exquisite pace and masterful declamation, Charles Fidler, Val Coleman, Jean Atwater-Williams, Ben Luxon, and enchanting children/actors Keller Westcott and Bleeker, Waverly, and Crosby Coyne delivered their often irreverent, slightly bawdy renditions of classic tales.

Recreating a household scene of olden times, Lauren Paul spun wool into yarn at a treadle



Once Upon a Time...

It's a magical world of Kings and Queens, Princesses, Witches and Evil Step Mothers, Heroes, Talking Animals in Enchanted Forests.

It's the storytelling world of the Brothers Grimm and Roald Dahl brought to life by Ben Luxon and members of the Sandisfield Players.

Don't miss it. It'll be a lot of fun.

No Charge for Admission.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18<sup>th</sup> at 4<sup>pm</sup>

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spinning wheel, while the audience imagined a roaring fire, a sleeping dog, children nestled at Grannie's knee as her bedtime whispers conjured beautiful princesses, handsome princes, wicked stepmothers, fairies, giants, castles, magic elixirs, wondrous plants, strange beasts, and enchanted talking animals.

One audience member summed up the afternoon: “Funny, classy and charming.”

Watch for productions of The Sandisfield Players during the 2017 season at the Arts Center, coming soon. 

# MEMORY LANE

## SANDISFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

# Christmas Fair, 1982

By Times staff

Sandisfield's Holiday Fair, formerly the Christmas Fair, has been an annual town event for many years. How many years, nobody knows. A fair-goer, born and raised in Sandisfield, remembers helping out at the fairs when she was a young girl. She said, "I'm sure the fairs or something like them were held in the 19th century."

In 1982 the fair was held at Town Hall, now known as Old Town Hall. Flora Rhodes, Town Clerk at the time, wrote a report on the event for *The Record*, a bi-monthly newspaper that covered Sandisfield and three other towns in the 1980s.

A couple years ago Phil Blampied, the editor of *The Record*, sent us a few yellowed copies of the paper. When we found Flora's report in the issue for December 15, 1982, we thought our readers might like to read what happened at the fair 35 years ago. Several names will be familiar to current residents.

Sponsored by the local Parent-Teacher Organization, the 1982 fair raised more than \$1,300 for the cost of a swim and gym program at the Winsted YMCA, an annual event for Center School pupils.


Flora outlined the winners in the main raffle. "Janet Adams won two bookstand tables, made by Carl McArthur; Raymond Osden Jr. won a wrought-iron pot holder handcrafted by Robert Fredsall; Hazel Plante won a goat donated by Diane Church; George Lundgren won a dinner for two at Daffer's Restaurant; and Austin Riiska won a doll handmade by Brenda Manyak."

Flora added: "In other raffles, Jack Fitzpatrick won a stained-glass Tiffany-type hanging lamp made and donated by his sister, Sheila Fitzpatrick; Lena Sandler won a baby quilt made by Cynthia Pinsky; John Cushman won a ceramic eagle lamp made and donated by Susan Murray; Audrey Riiska and Edna Leavenworth each won a

Christmas cookie tree made by Nancy Kries and Brenda Manyak; Shirley LaCasse won a Santa Claus cake baked by Shirley Spring and decorated by Marion Solgovic. A ceramic Christmas tree, handmade by the residents of the New Boston Nursing Home, was won by Hazel Plante."

Anina Brown, PTO president, thanked "all who supported the successful fair, especially those in charge of the various tables. Workers included Shirley Spring, Anita Carr, Mary Lundgren, Clare Carpenter, Laura Ziegler, Janet Adams, Pat Creem, Nancy Kreis, Diane Church, and Robert Dwyer (who donated hand-made wreaths) and Robert Carpenter (who played Santa Claus)."

Businesses from Sandisfield that donated prizes for the penny auction included: "A&M Auto, which donated an oil change and filter; Peg's Place, a dinner for two; Lone Maple Sugar House, two pints of maple syrup; Tiny's Greenhouse, two juniper trees; Mrs. Drost, a handmade evergreen wreath; Irma Pease, Avon cologne spray; Marie's General Store, Crème de Strawberry; Silver Book Grill, Arrow Peppermint Schnapps; Gunda Iden, a handmade doll; and Den of Lamps, a holly hobby pillow made by Mary Lundgren."

Flora also listed and thanked donors from Otis, Great Barrington, and Winsted, only a few of which are still in business. 



Photos: *The Record/Times archives*

*If you can identify anyone in the 1982 photos, please let us know. Robert Carpenter served as Santa that year.*

# Holiday Fair, 2016

By Laura Rogers-Castro

This year's Holiday Fair brought smiles, treats, and gifts from Jolly St. Nick to a friendly crowd from Sandisfield and our surrounding towns. The collaborative effort was spearheaded by the Sandisfield Scholarship Fund and hosted graciously by the Sandisfield Fire Department.

Many town residents, committees, and organizations helped make the event a great success.

The New Boston Church offered a delicious lunch featuring hot dogs, corn chowder, and steaming hot cocoa. There were plenty of tasty treats to purchase from the church, too, including huge gingerbread cookies. The Council on Aging sold more delicious cookies and baked goods and raffled a beautiful, bountiful basket of goods.

The large room was filled with many vendors selling homemade crafts and items from the Berkshires. Some of the featured wares included maple syrup, wildflower honey, hand-carved wooden bowls, crocheted scarves, painted measuring stick snowmen, homemade ceramic tiles, and hand-fashioned jewelry. When Pigs Fly Farm offered unique feather-filled ornaments.

A special surprise was granted to all participants of the fair who ventured outside. Zoe and Rose Nelson from Sunny Rose Farm brought their miniature horses to view, pet, and adore. This added feature will hopefully become a tradition part of the holiday event for years to come.

The Sandisfield Scholarship Fund hosted the very popular, annually-loved Penny Auction where participants could purchase 100 numbered,

auction slips for just a dollar. Lucky winners went home with all sorts of prizes donated by local businesses. Special thanks are extended to Lynn Rubenstein for gathering the prizes and organizing a wonderful crafts table for kids.


This year, the Sandisfield Scholarship Fund also hosted a traditional raffle, highlighted by a beautiful "Night Before Christmas" basket donated by the Berkshire Rehabilitation & Skilled Care Center and a hand-knitted hat donated by Karlene Blass. The Scholarship Fund would also like to thank Steven Rubenstein and high school students Janey Beardsley and Mario Castro for assisting with the tables.

The most-awaited event, of course, was the arrival of Santa Claus.

Mrs. Claus had been entertaining children and assisting them all morning with the decoration of fabulous gingerbread houses. Sandisfield Recreation Committee elves prepared a special place for Santa to greet all the good little children.

Where was Santa Claus?

Finally, to the cheers and applause of all the attendees and the delight of the little ones, Santa Claus arrived at Firehouse #2 with a big smile and a wave.

Thanks to Santa and everyone else for participating in an annual event that becomes more special each year. 



Below: Rose Nelson with her miniature horses, "Scrappy" and "Shaggy," left to right. Rose's elf helper is Alice Barrett. Photos: Ron Bernard and Jean Atwater-Williams



historia (Greek) - "inquiry, knowledge acquired by investigation" The discovery, collection, organization and presentation of information about past events.

## Elizur Spencer's Remarkable Apple Parer

By Ron Bernard

*In December, The Times received a message from Mr. Mike Viney about an article we published in 2012 (see box). Mr. Viney's question, and the article, had to do with the discovery and return to Sandisfield of an ingenious apple peeler or parer. As the author of the original article, I replied to Mr. Viney, who asked for a report he could post on his Virtual Apple Parer Museum's website. My report for the website follows Mr. Viney's letter.*

economic and social decline due to The-Really-Great-Depression of the 1870s, now mostly forgotten. For years thereafter, farms and mills and handsome old houses were abandoned or bounced around between speculators.



Today visitors are struck by the timelessness of this bucolic place of 57 square miles pretty much connected by original dirt roads through rolling reforested land.

Ironically, lack of development has been a benefit. Some one-hundred vintage properties survive as a legacy to a golden age where sturdy, fiercely independent Yankee farm families and pre-industrial age craftsmen and mill workers proudly called Sandisfield home. (A number of their houses have recently qualified for consideration for listing on the National Register of Historic Places).

In 2012, we prepared a comprehensive town history in conjunction with Sandisfield's 250th anniversary. In the process of telling the stories of the founding families and their generations, I encountered one truly remarkable settler, Elizur Spencer. He was the most skilled artisan-woodworker who ever lived in Sandisfield and probably for many miles around.

Spencer was born in 1779 about 20 miles south at New Hartford, Conn., to Nathaniel and Lois Steele Spencer. In 1803/04, Elizur and his bride Mary(?) bought an existing farm including an approximately 15-year old, 2½-story Federal-style house on 70 acres, a typical farmstead at the time. The recorded purchase price was \$588, a princely sum in an era when cash in the countryside was very scarce.

They raised three daughters: Eliza, born about 1803; Frances, 1805; and Sophronia, 1809. Mary, who was called Polly, died in 1822 of an unknown cause. Elizur apparently did not remarry despite his tremendous family burden. After daughter Eliza's death in 1851, by then in his early 70s, Elizur removed with Frances and Sophronia and her husband, Asa Smith, to Trumbull County, Ohio, apparently to join his relatives there. Mary Spencer

and her daughter Eliza rest together in the historic Sandisfield Center cemetery.

By all accounts Elizur, a humble man and a helpful and generous neighbor, was a wonder. Town historian George Shepard in 1885 remembered him as a prolific, first-rate craftsman who made important things to improve everyday life.

Shepard wrote that Spencer made "spinning wheels, quill wheels, reels, swifts and paring machines." He added that Spencer "used a small stream to the south to power his turning shop."

A dam and small reservoir and remnants of Spencer's shop survive on the site. The US census of 1820 lists his occupation as "wheelwright." Consider however that Spencer, like all his contemporaries, was of necessity a farmer. But unlike most others he was with neither sons nor a wife. Imagine how demanding his life was.

Spencer's house stands today remarkably well preserved with above-average original interior fabric and features including wonderful paneling, a Palladian window, and beaded-trim mantels, almost certainly his own handiwork.


Between 1804 and 1807, Daniel Sears, a neighbor and customer who was known for fastidious accounting, recorded Spencer's work for him to that point in a ledger. Among the varied things Elizur had made for Sears were, "a basket for helping me make a sled;" "a wagon for a child;" "a handle for a dung fork;" "a small chest;" "a hilted sword;" and "a desk."

However, Elizur's most important legacies are his exquisite, museum-grade spinning wheels, also called back then "walking wheels." At least three are extant in town including one at the historical society and two in private residences. Considering that few of the multitude of mundane but essential household items made by hand from wood centuries ago survive, especially with a maker's attribution, Sandisfield is fortunate to have these beauties.

Unfortunately, no examples of Spencer's other marvelous labor-saving devices, particularly his parers, were known to remain here.

Then in 2012, thanks to George and Cindy Short of Compton, New Hampshire, Sandisfield once again became home to a genuine Elizur Spencer apple parer in excellent condition.

The Shorts acquired the Spencer parer with its original label at an antique shop in their area. Research into Sandisfield and Elizur Spencer led them to me.

Because of their awareness and generosity, they donated this precious item to the Sandisfield Historical Society where it joined its "big cousin," a Spencer spinning wheel, in time for Sandisfield's 250th anniversary celebrations in July of 2012. 

### To The Editor

I accessed the June 2012 on-line issue of your newspaper. An apple parer made by Elizur Spencer is pictured in that issue. The article indicates the parer was gifted to the city and has its original label.

I was wondering if it is possible to obtain a picture of the label? I have an on-line museum for apple parers and continue to research their origins and diversity. Don Thornton's book *Apple Parers* only mentions that some parers are known to be marked with the name Elizur Spencer but, no images are provided of the parer or label.

Mike Viney

Virtual Apple Parer Museum  
(<http://appleparermuseum.com>)

Dear Mr. Viney:

Most likely you have never heard of our town which lies in the extreme southwest part of the state bordering Connecticut.

That would not be surprising. In fact, the unofficial town motto is "Where The Hell Is Sandisfield?" One may still run across the slogan on bumper stickers which suggests that folks here do not take things too seriously.

Nowadays Sandisfield is a rural community of about 900 full-time residents plus a sizeable seasonal population. Only vestiges of our agricultural tradition remain, although a trend towards small-scale farming is encouraging.

Like many small towns in the Berkshire hills, Sandisfield has not recovered from the protracted



# Holiday Open House

The Berkshire Rehabilitation & Skilled Care Center, located on Rt. 57 in New Boston, held its 45th Annual Open House in early December.

Providing short- and long-term care as well as respite and hospice care for military veterans and other members of the community, the Center also offers skilled rehabilitation services, including physical, occupational, and speech therapy. The majority of the 57 residents, all male, are veterans.

A penny auction table helped raise over \$500 for the resident's holiday fund. Entertainment included guitarist Peter Poirier and a saxophone-playing Santa. The Berkshire Bachelors Chorus Group, comprised of Center residents, sang holiday songs.




## Wild Women of Tolland

*Dorrie Toni and Susan Moore, members of the Wild Women of Tolland, presented the Center with poinsettias and holiday gifts for all residents.*

*Photo: Cindy Faggioni*

Former resident Donald Vitkus returned to discuss and sign copies of his memoir, "You'll Like it Here." Veterans of American Navy Seabees Association visited and presented a generous donation. The association, formed in the 1940s during WWII, has over 100 members. In what has become an annual visit, guests arrived from Litchfield with gifts and filled stockings for each resident.

Families and members from the community dropped in throughout the day and enjoyed festive music and a delicious dessert bar buffet. 



# Not a Friendly Gesture

By Zoe Nelson

Walking in Sandisfield is one of my favorite things.

Besides providing good exercise, we have wonderful trails and roads to walk and see and enjoy. Visiting with friends as we walk and meeting others from town along with their dogs can be an enjoyable social event.


Most of the time.

After a beautiful walk with a dear friend on Silverbrook Road in December, I returned to my car and started toward home. I encountered a couple parked on the road with two dogs loose. I waited in my car for them to round up their dogs and get them in their car safely, since they were on my side of the road.

When all was safe I proceeded to pass them. As they pulled onto the correct side of the road, the man felt it was necessary to make a very unfriendly, obscene hand gesture at me.

I would like to remind everyone that most of our roads in town are open to the public and none of us want to see leash laws enforced. We live in a unique town where we let our dogs run and enjoy themselves as much as we can.

Please remember to be courteous to one another and share the pleasures, privileges and freedom of our beautiful town with our two- and four-legged friends.

Happy New Year to all. 

## Out on a Limb: an op-ed

*Subject should be interesting to most of us and have a strong link to Sandisfield, written by and for Town residents. The Times does not accept Out on a Limb contributions submitted anonymously, but if the author identifies him or herself to the editor and asks not to be named in the article we may agree to withhold the author's name on a case-by-case basis.*

*Send to Editor, Sandisfield Times, P.O. Box 584, Sandisfield, MA 01255 or by email to editor@sandisfieldtimes.org.*

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# Cellars in the Woods

## MUCH MORE THAN JUST HOLES IN THE GROUND

By Tom Christopher

I may not know my – you name it – from a hole in the ground, but I am learning, thanks to our local historian, Ron Bernard.

Ron has been teaching me the lore of cellar holes, those mysterious, stone-lined pits that mark the sites of vanished houses.

Several of these vestiges are within a short walk of my house on Sears Road; not a surprise, really, as it's hard to get far away from cellar holes in Sandisfield.

You'll find them along almost every woods road, though maybe not in the spring or summertime, when they can be hidden by the woodland foliage. They re-emerge when the leaves fall in autumn, adding a flavor of nostalgia to fall and winter

hikes. Who lived here? Who moved and fitted such massive stones? What sort of house capped this foundation? When and why did the owners leave? When did the woods take back this land?

Such questions remained in the realm of idle speculation, until I mentioned them to Ron. He reacted with a keen interest, and over the last several weeks, I've learned why.

Ron began by suggesting that I map all the cellar holes I commonly encounter on my woodland walks. My wife Suzanne, as a geologist, is an expert at mapping and provided me with her help, a compass, and a U.S. Geological Survey contour map of our patch of woods, the "Tolland Center Quadrangle, 7.5 Minute Series." (Note: USGS contour maps can be purchased on-line at the USGS Store, <https://store.usgs.gov>.)

Together, Suzanne and I soon located seven cellar holes within a mile's walk of our house. The number surprised me, as we had selected our house site in large part for its seclusion – today there is only one house within the same distance of our home.

### Identifying Our Former Neighbors

When I brought this newly annotated map to Ron, he began comparing it to historic maps of the town, which he has collected from sources as diverse as libraries, the county deeds office, and even private collectors. The oldest of these maps, one dating to 1858, showed houses as having existed then at all the sites where we had located cellar holes, houses belonging to such early Sandisfield families as Belden, Seymour, Thorpe, Twining, and Denslow.

These houses may have been old even then; in fact, cellar hole evidence (I will get to this) suggests that at least one of them dated to the pioneer era. The 1858 map had been drafted at the end of Sandisfield's golden age, a boom period in the 1840s and 1850s.

Apparently the population of my neighborhood had been considerable then, for the map also showed, in addition to dwellings, schoolhouses at either end of this neighborhood, convenient for the many farm children of the day. Suzanne and I had not found the schoolhouse foundations, which very likely were simpler and didn't include a cellar.

Ron next checked an 1876 map, which showed considerable change in our neighborhood.

An Irish family, the Larkins, had bought out the Seymours – the mid-19th century was a period of Irish immigration to Sandisfield as many of the first families pulled out after a proposed railroad link failed to materialize in the 1870s. Overall, this was a period of decreasing population, and one of the houses shown on the 1858 map was missing on the 1876 map, an indication of probable abandonment. One of the two schoolhouses was gone by then, too.

The other schoolhouse is not evident on the 1904 map. In that year R.W. Keene now owned both the Belden and the Larkin houses while two others had disappeared from the map.

Sandisfield had not yet reached its nadir, which quite likely came in the 1930s and the Depression of that era, when the town population dropped to



*Suzanne O'Connell standing in a former cellar near her home in South Sandisfield.*

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412 (1930 US census). This must have accounted for the abandonment of the last four houses. Unfortunately, no detailed maps were made at the time.

**Learning More**

To see what else might be learned from a cellar hole, Suzanne and I next measured the foundation of the Belden homestead at what had been the northwest corner of this little community.

Its dimensions are just 33½ feet by 24 feet. That was a smaller footprint, Ron explained, than a classic Federal period house of the early 19th century, and the off-center placement of the chimney, whose foundation was closer to the east wall than the west, suggested that the house had been a Cape-style structure. If so, it probably dated back to the late 18th century, not long after the original settlement of the town.

More, according to Bernard, remains to be learned from the Belden cellar hole, but that will wait until the snows melt and he can come over and

inspect the site himself. A visit to the South Berkshire County Deeds Office in Great Barrington is also in order. These, however, are subjects for future communications.


Meanwhile, my geologist wife has introduced a high-tech note: from a colleague at the University of Connecticut she has obtained a map of our area compiled by Lidar (“Light Detection and Ranging”), a technology that uses laser pulses from overflying airplanes to penetrate the tree cover and create finely detailed maps of the ground surface and terrain.

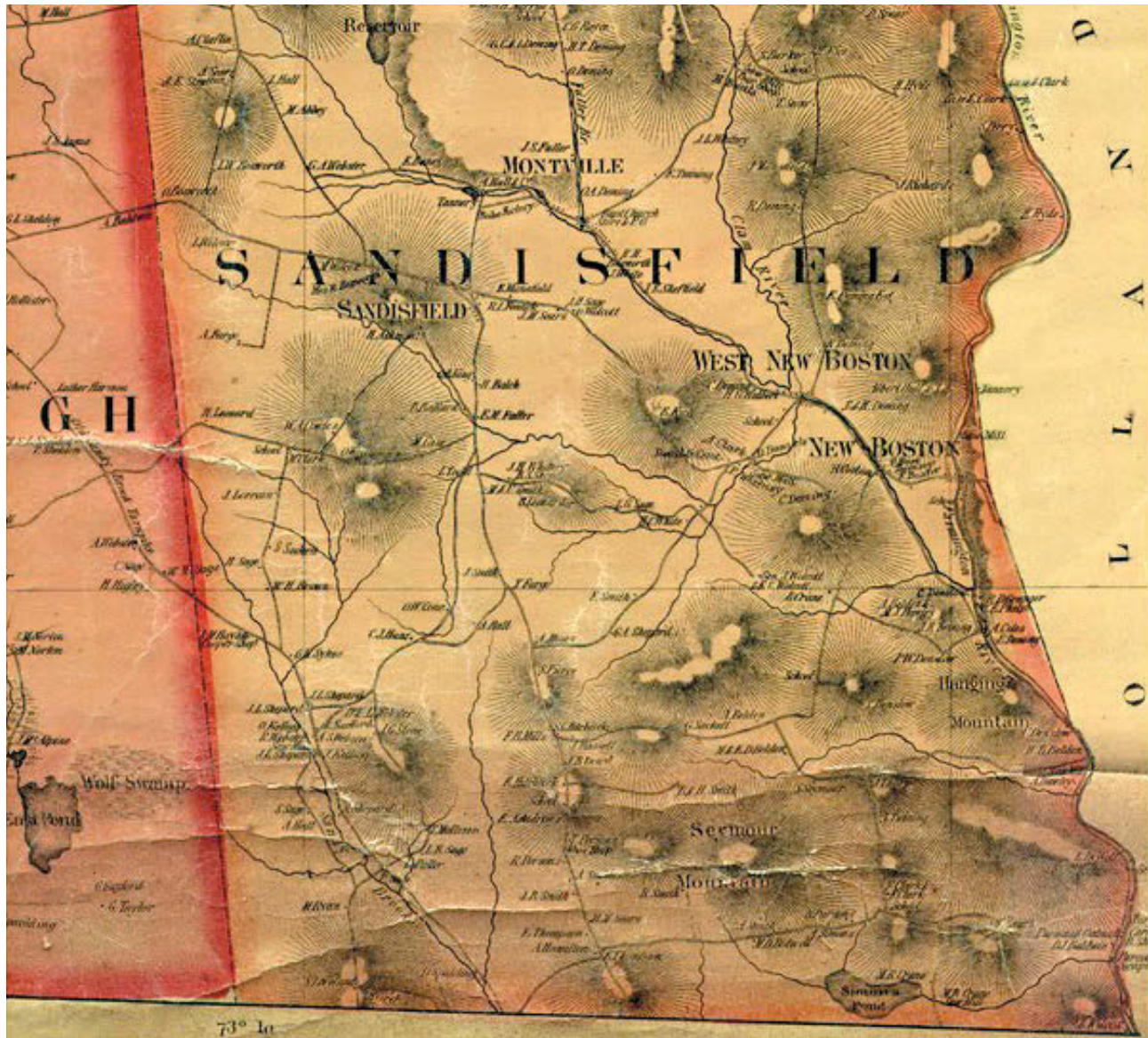
On the map for our area she has located not only all our cellar holes but also associated features such as foundations for barns and outbuildings and the patterns of stone walls that enclosed what were once surrounding fields. With this map, we can see the cellar holes in context. We see our corner of Sandisfield busy and densely cultivated, much as the residents of 150-years ago saw it.

But let Ron Bernard describe the lasting importance of cellar holes: “They are exceedingly important heritage assets, not just forgotten holes in the ground. To historians and preservationists they are almost sacred. Cellar foundations are legacies from our forebears. They are often the only tangible physical evidence of early settler families who built and shaped the town we enjoy today.”

Too often, he lamented, they fall prey to thoughtless treasure hunters and builders in search of stone. “They should be protected,” he said. “If cellar holes/ foundations are on state land, they are strictly protected under state law and regulations.”

“Witnesses to history,” he sums up, “they are now sentries for Sandisfield’s heritage and agricultural tradition.”

As well, of course, as the spice for a fall or winter walk. 



*This 1858 map of Sandisfield indicates where houses were located and who owned them. Only the southern portion of town is shown.*

# Shhhh ...

## DON'T TELL ANYONE ...

By Mary Anne Grammer

Let's keep this our little secret.

The Otis Recreational Center is a great find. Sometimes I just don't want to drive to Great Barrington for a workout.

Yes, living in Sandisfield you drive, but sometimes you just say, not today, please, not so far.

The Otis Recreation Center is fairly close by. It's not glamorous but you can get a good workout at a reasonable price. My husband and I go (one of us gets a senior discount and I'm not saying which one) for a quick workout, especially when the weather is awful and we've been sitting in the house most of the day.

Plus, the classes are great. Sandisfield's Barbara Penn is a Tai Chi master who will help you find your inner Chi. Connie Wilson's Chair Yoga class is a great strengthening, stretching class, and you don't sit in the chair at all. Those are the classes we take but there are many more.

Call the Center at (413) 269-4541 or check out the website: [www.townofotisma.com/Pages/OtisMA\\_Rec/GYM/RecCenterGym](http://www.townofotisma.com/Pages/OtisMA_Rec/GYM/RecCenterGym).

As an added plus, Patricia Richard, the Center's program supervisor, will answer all your questions and is one of the nicest people you'll ever meet. There is no need to feel intimidated at this gym.

But, shhhhhh ... As Yogi Berra said (sorry Red Sox fans), "It's too crowded, nobody goes there any more." This is our little secret. 🤫

## Fire/EMS Calls:



### Fire:

#### November 2016

Building Fire	1
Outside Fire	1
Power lines down	2
Standby for Colebrook	1
False Alarms	4

#### December 2016

False Alarms	2
Assist at Motor	
Vehicle Accident	1



### EMS:

#### November 2016

Motor Vehicle Accidents	4
Standby at	
Tolland DPW Fire	1
Assist Person	1

#### December 2016

Medical Calls	6
Motor Vehicle	
Accident w/Injuries	2
Motor Vehicle	
Accident No Injuries	1

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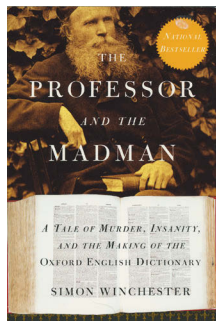
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## Live, On the Set

Cont'd from p.1

All of them were earning I daresay a good wage – some of them millions of dollars – and most of them were scores or hundreds and even thousands of miles from their various homes.



And they were all gathered there in Ireland because some twenty years ago, up here in the hills, I had written a book.

It was last November. I was in Dublin, invited to be on the set for the shooting of the film of *The Professor and the Madman*, a true story I had told in a slim volume published back in the fall of 1998. Few supposed the book would ever sell – after all, a tale of Victorian dictionary-making, even with a murder and a spectacular incident of self-mutilation thrown in – *come on!*

But for a curious slew of reasons it did sell, all around the world, and in remarkable quantities.

Mel Gibson – the aforesaid Australian – ramped it all up by buying the movie rights soon after the book came out and insisting that one day soon, *one day*, he would translate it into celluloid (back in the day when that was the movie-making medium).

But as months and then years went by, the excitement started to fade. Skepticism turned into cynicism. When people would come up to me at parties and ask *isn't your book going to be made into a movie* I'd remind them who owned it, and they'd recall his episodes of disagreeable behavior back in Hollywood, and in an instant they'd understand, and cluck sympathetically.

Until one hot Tuesday last August. I was outside the Rite Aid chemist's in Great Barrington, and my phone chirped. It was the *Hollywood Reporter*, with an exclusive yarn claiming that Mel Gibson and Sean Penn, no less, had at last fashioned a deal. They had secured financing. They had a star director – Farhad Safinia, who had made the all-Mayan language movie *Apocalypto*, a critical triumph.

And in their first instance of thespian collaboration, Mel and Sean – as I would soon be calling them – would act in the picture together.

For a few days, and from all sides, the story was pooh-poohed. No one believed it.

But then the production director called me from California. Yes, it was happening, he said. Forget the naysayers.

He put the director on the phone. We shoot for forty days in Dublin, he said, starting September. *Come on over*, he added. *We'd be honored.*

*The only thing: we'd love your comments and your advice. Just – how I can say this politely? – just don't interfere.*

And so one Monday in early November Setsuko and I boarded the new daily Aer Lingus service from Bradley to Dublin and fully immersed ourselves for one unforgettable week in the unreal, amazing world of film-making.

(The genial mood of the week in the world's most genial country, Ireland, began promptly on our arrival. We got to Dublin airport at five on a pitch dark morning. A production car sped us to the hotel. The front desk gave us the key to the room in which we'd live for the next seven days. We crept quietly up to the fourth floor, unlocked the door, set our suitcases down, only to find a *man, a stranger, fast asleep in the bed. Back down to the desk. Jesusmaryandjoseph I'm so sorry* said the clerk, handing us the key to another room right away. But then he smiled, impishly. *Look at it this way, he said. This is a fine hotel, don't you agree? Much better than over in America. Here we even pre-warm your bed for you.*)

The specifics of the shoot have to remain half-private; and no photographs allowed – that was the deal.

But suffice to say that Mel and Sean were great fun, skilled and focused and utterly charming; Natalie Dormer and Steve Coogan and Eddie Marsden were entirely wonderful too; I was only sad that Jennifer Ehle, with whom I've been in love for thirty years, ever since she played Elizabeth Bennet in the BBC production of *Pride and Prejudice*, was away that week.

But the director was there, and the sound man, and the cinematographer, as well as the extras – eighty-five of them in one court scene we saw – and the grips and the best boy and on one day 117 technical people, and the dialect coach (who taught Mel how to speak with an admirable Teviotdale accent) and the armorer (who filled Sean's murder-weapon with black powder for each of a dozen takes).

And we listened, time after precious time, to the First Assistant Director shout her barked commands: *Rolling! Up to speed! Background! Stand by! Action!*

It was all, for me, quite new, once-in-a-lifetime, just amazing.

And never more so than when I met the crane driver, with his sixty-foot boom and his massive linen-covered lamp lighting the frost-covered cobblestones in an alley outside the Guinness brewery. He was there, his cranes were there (he had two, and a third in reserve), everyone else was there – and all because of my little book, written so long ago up here in the green hills of New England.

Only I can't say more. And so, as I learned at the end of the day before we flew back home, I am obliged to say: *Cut!* And finally, *It's a Wrap!* 🍷

## “It's a Tragedy” Is a Comedy

### LOCAL AWARD-WINNING PLAYWRIGHT

By Bill Price



Steven Otfinoski

A Sandisfield resident, Steven Otfinoski, has won a prestigious award in a competition conducted by the Radius Playwrights Festival of Great Barrington.

His play, “It's a Tragedy,” is one of six short plays that will be pro-

duced January 27-28 at the recently opened Saint James Place performance space in Great Barrington, under the auspices of the Berkshire Playwrights Lab. The plays will be staged readings with local actors and directors.

Steven and his wife, Beverly Larson, bought a second home two years ago on Tamarack Trail in the Sandisfield portion of Otis Woodlands. They divide their time between here and their other home in Stratford, Connecticut, where Steve is an adjunct professor at Fairfield University and the University of Bridgeport. He has written more than 180 books for young adults and, through his own theater company, History Alive, brings one-person plays about American history to schools. He also reviews plays at Shakespeare & Co. and Barrington Stage for the New England Theatre Journal.

In “It's a Tragedy,” Will Shakespeare makes his first visit to the States where a Hollywood producer, planning a production of “Hamlet,” has some ideas about script changes. Steve said, “Needless to say, this doesn't thrill old Will.”

“It's a Tragedy” will also be performed – only a week before its Great Barrington performance – in Sydney, Australia in the annual Short+Sweet Festival, the world's largest international festival of short plays.

The January 2017 performance will mark the first theatrical production in the much-anticipated performance space at Saint James Place in downtown Great Barrington, located in the historic St. James Episcopal Church at 352 Main Street. The performances will be on Friday, January 27 at 7 p.m., and again on Saturday at 3 and 7 p.m. See Calendar on page 19 for details. 🍷

## The Pipeline Approval Situation

Cont'd from p.1

And here we are almost four years later and this supposedly easy project that was to have begun delivery of natural gas to Connecticut distributors by November 2016 is still in limbo and running at least 16 percent over original budget.

### AND HERE WE ARE ...

Fed up with the challenges that had impaired the issuance of permits and certificates, the company spent much of 2016 doing end-runs around regulations and seeking exemptions, over-rulings, and dismissals. The company had little success except in one final, important case.

Because the legislature failed to act in time or definitively in the last session, a Massachusetts Superior Court judge disallowed the Commonwealth's appeal for an exemption to the Natural Gas Act in order to protect the conserved land. TGP then filed an eminent domain action against the Massachusetts DCR, overseers of Otis State Forest. The ruling was in favor of TGP. The gas line could proceed, but payment had to be made to the state to mitigate the loss of conserved land.

On December 29, Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healy and Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Matthew Beaton announced a settlement with the company. Details are unclear but an increased payment to the state of \$640,000 (bringing the total payment to the state to about \$1,200,000) for the land mitigation effectively eliminated Article 97 as an obstacle to the project.

In 2014, then Select Board Chairman Patrick Barrett said to a packed special town meeting that if the project were to go forward it "would make Article 97 a joke." Events may prove him right.

An announcement by the Attorney General's office tried to put a good face on the state's capitulation. But the settlement is a negligible amount for this company that continues to stiff the Town of Sandisfield over promised reimbursement of legal costs and provision for likely damage to roads, reportedly \$1 million.

Current Select Board Chairman Alice Boyd said, "It doesn't look good for Sandisfield, but we are still engaged in the final discussions. Representative Pignatelli has done a terrific job representing us, but he's been up against a huge corporation that usually gets its way."

### BUT TWO NEW ISSUES LOOM ...

Although it has been reported in the local press that all issues would be resolved in court or otherwise by early 2017, this may not yet be the end of the turmoil and the trees may not yet fall

On January 3, a representative of the Narraganset Indian Tribal office representing a coalition of seven different tribes filed an objection with FERC over impending "destruction and desecration of probable ancient ceremonial stone landscape features."

The complaint claims that at least 73 documented sites or potential sites are at risk. Kinder Morgan had earlier informed the parties that it would not avoid the destruction of one-third of these sites. The tribes say they were not given adequate or timely notification of the company's intent to bulldoze sacred places, citing provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act.


So the situation has grown cloudy again and may not be easily or quickly be resolved.

An important historic pre-European era Indian trail, best known today as the Knox Trail, runs through Otis State Forest. It is very near the modern-day

pipeline corridor. One land owner has unearthed arrowhead artifacts within a few feet of the 1951 side of the right of way.

Another unresolved thorny issue relates to the company's fulfillment of requirements under U.S. water quality acts 401 and 404, the latter being the purview of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Water quality issues are perhaps the most serious of all environmental concerns and regulations.

An adjudicatory hearing of appeals made by environmental and civic groups, including Sandisfield Taxpayers Opposing the Pipeline (STOP), will be held at Massachusetts DEP regional offices in Springfield on January 18. The company has moved to dismiss but as of publication time the hearing remains scheduled.

A final Mass DEP decision is expected on April 3. 

## A Road Trip. And How!

By Ron Bernard

C'mon, admit it. Haven't you dreamed of one day taking a big trip out west to see this tremendous country, especially our amazing national parks?


For as long as we can remember, my wife Jean and I talked about the possibility. *But how? And when? Where to go? What to see?* So many questions, decisions and reasons *not to act*. And the years rolled by.

Friends who had done it dangled their stories and pictures. A terrific TV documentary about the history of the national parks that PBS ran over and over, plus a big dose of publicity leading up to 2016, the centennial of the National Park Service, forced our hand. By golly, the time had come. We would find a way.

There was in Jean's family a small, 25-year old but still serviceable RV. Weekend camping trips in New York State provided basic experience. Getting braver we ventured out to Niagara Falls, then down to Jacksonville, and another time up to New Brunswick. We could do this. However we'd have to get a larger, newer motor home. Jean went on a mission determined to find a suitable, slightly used, affordable vehicle which she did in December, 2015. Planning ensued for the next three months.



We plotted an elliptical course that comprised two Canadian provinces, 25 American states, some two dozen national and state parks and landmarks and a lot of other stuff in 9,000 miles in three months. Armed with multiple GPS devices and a stack of triple-A road maps, on August 10 we buttoned-up our Beech Plain place and packed the RV with supplies enough to last three months. With two much-loved canine companions, our Keeshonds, "Zeek" and "Nellie," safely onboard we headed due north to Montreal to attend a "Rassemblement," my annual family association gathering. Then we were off on our big adventure.

The Times doesn't have room in the print edition to report what happened next (after all, it took 3 months and is a long story), but if you're interested you can read all about it on The Times website. Go to [sandisfieldtimes.org/news](http://sandisfieldtimes.org/news) and join us on this whacky and wonderful expedition. See you there. 

## Who's Who in the Police Department?

Sandisfield's Police Department, a part-time office with limited funding, is dispatched by dialing 911 for any emergency. The calls go directly to the Berkshire Sheriff's Office which provides 24/7 access to the local department. See below for non-emergency calls.

The department is led by Michael Morrison, who has been Chief of Police in Sandisfield for over 30 years. Mike also serves as Fire Captain with the Sandisfield Fire Department.

The Assistant Chief for the Police Department is Ralph Morrison, who also serves as Chief of the Sandisfield Fire Department/EMT service. Ralph has over 30 years' service with both police and fire departments.

At the December 12, 2016 Select Board meeting, two new officers, Dana Beardsley and Michael Johnson, were appointed to the Police Department. Both serving part-time and "as needed."

Dana Beardsley, who lives in Sandisfield, has completed the Massachusetts Intermittent Police Academy training. He has been an officer in Great Barrington and currently serves as a part-time officer with the Tolland Police Department.

Michael Johnson, a police officer for eleven years, is currently full-time sergeant in the Monterey Police Department.

A third part-time officer, Adam Gonska, is currently on a year's leave of absence serving as an Army medic in the Middle East.

The department includes two constables who serve the town on a limited basis, John Burrows and Nazario Sanchez. Their services include election monitoring and traffic control. 🇺🇸

### To reach the Sandisfield Police Department:

- Emergency call 911 (24/7)
- Local Police/Chief call/text 413-441-2129 (24/7)
- Email chiefsdpd1956@gmail.com
- Police fax 413-258-4467
- Non-Emergency Police/Fire 413-258-4742

## POLICE LOG

*911 Calls by Sandisfield Residents  
Submitted by Michael Morrison, Chief*

*Note: North Main is Rt. 8 north of the intersection with Rt. 57. South Main is south of the intersection.*

### October

- ▶ Citizen assistance on Sandisfield Rd. and Roberts Rd.
- ▶ Motor vehicle accidents and incidents on Sandy Brook Turnpike, North Main, and two on Dodd Rd.
- ▶ Suspicious motor vehicle on Sandisfield Rd.
- ▶ Erratic motor vehicle operation on North Main
- ▶ Medical calls on Hubbard Rd., Highland Way, East Otis Rd., Colebrook River Rd., New Boston Rd., Rood Hill Rd., North Beech Plain Rd., and two on Sandisfield Rd.
- ▶ Building alarm on Sandisfield Rd. and Hammertown Rd.
- ▶ Structure fire on Beartown Rd.
- ▶ Burglary/night time on South Main Rd.
- ▶ Burglary/daytime on Clark Rd.
- ▶ Two fire alarms on Webster Rd.
- ▶ Tree down on Cold Spring Rd. and tree on wires on South Main

### November

- ▶ Citizen assistance on South Main
- ▶ Motor vehicle accidents/incidents on South Main
- ▶ Rood Hill Rd., two on New Hartford Rd.
- ▶ Erratic motor vehicle operation on South Main
- ▶ Fire call/outside on South Main
- ▶ Medical calls on River Rd., Hubbard Rd., and Sandisfield Rd.
- ▶ Wires down on Silverbrook Rd. and South Sandisfield Rd.; tree on wires on Sandybrook Turnpike and South Main
- ▶ Tree down on South Sandisfield Rd.
- ▶ Structure fire on Colebrook River Rd.
- ▶ Mutual town assistance to a motor vehicle accident in Colebrook
- ▶ Well-being check on Sandisfield Rd.
- ▶ Fire alarm on Fox Rd. and two on Stump Rd.
- ▶ Rd. condition check on Tolland Mountain Rd.

### December

- ▶ Motor vehicle accidents on Sandisfield Rd., North Main, South Main, and Jamie Lane
- ▶ Erratic motor vehicle operation on South Main and North Main
- ▶ Equipment theft on Hammertown Rd.
- ▶ Road conditions on South Main
- ▶ Fire call on Sandisfield Rd.
- ▶ Intoxicated person on Sandisfield Rd.
- ▶ Domestic issue on Sandisfield Rd.
- ▶ Phone hang-up on Shadow Lane
- ▶ Verbal disagreement on Sandybrook Turnpike
- ▶ Medical calls, four on Sandisfield Rd. and two in Tolland
- ▶ Burglar alarm on Hubbard Rd. and Gremier and Dodd Rd.
- ▶ Fire alarms on Sandisfield Rd.
- ▶ Well-being checks on West Street, Slater Lane, and Cold Spring Rd.
- ▶ Well-being/paper work service on Clark Rd.

## Calling Town Hall? Tax Collector?

A new phone system was recently installed at Town Hall Annex.

To reach the town department or official you want – or to leave a message if the staff member is not available – dial 413-258-4711.

That number will reach any department located at the Annex (which in fact is our actual Town Hall).

A few glitches in the new system are being worked out, but it is already saving time and is a significant cost benefit to the town.

To reach, for instance, the Town Administrator, the Town Clerk, the Select Board secretary, the tax collector, or COA, dial 258-4711. You no longer need individual numbers for each department.

**The new number will lead you to a menu of options where you select a number for the right department.** If the staff member is not present you will be asked to leave a recorded message.

### YOU NO LONGER NEED INDIVIDUAL NUMBERS FOR EACH DEPARTMENT.

The former numbers for individual town officials and employees still exist, but you can no longer leave a message at those numbers. That may seem inconvenient to some residents, but it is where most of the cost benefit occurs and does bring Sandisfield closer to the technology of the 21st century. You can still talk to the person you want, you just dial their number a little differently.

NOTE: Departments located outside Town Hall, for instance the Garage, Library, and Fire Department, are not yet included in the menu of options. 🇺🇸





# The Librarian's Corner

By Terry Spohnholz

*Some people come into our lives and leave footprints on our hearts and we are never ever the same.*

– Flavia Weedn

January is always full of new beginnings.

A new year, new resolutions, one hundred and one new and creative ways to break them, new opportunities, and new adventures.

But as January's door opens, December's has slipped shut – quietly bringing an end to the old year, with mistletoe, and good cheer and old friends and family held close before roaring fires.

This year I bid goodbye to the old year and sadly a friend.

In the first days of becoming Sandisfield's librarian, a spry elderly woman came through the library door with a colorful cane and even more


wonderful stories. As she hunted down preferred authors, M.C. Beaton's "Aunt Dimity series," Lisa Scottoline, Carla Neggers, and Nicholas Sparks, she would tell me stories of her years as a teacher in Connecticut, growing up with sisters, and what fun it was to solve the mystery in a book before she came to the end of the story.

Alice MacMullen graced my library with her presence – I looked forward to her visits, helping her find a few books, and listening and laughing.

It was with sadness I learned she had fallen earlier this year and would not be wandering through the stacks any time soon. But a week before Thanksgiving Alice walked over to the library with Lisa and Grayson. She lived with her family, the Leavenworths, across the road, just up the way.

We talked and made book selections, and I was very pleased to see this 91-year-old woman with

her gracious smiles and wry humor again, and I looked forward to endless visits. But that was our last visit – Alice died shortly after that.

I mourn her loss but am grateful for the gift of having known her and having the opportunity at that last visit of saying goodbye. 

*This is not the usual Librarian's Corner – that will return in the next issue of The Times. This Librarian's Corner is for Alice.*



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# Comings and Goings



**ALICE MACMULLEN**  
1925-2016

Alice MacMullen of River Road died November 23 at Hartford Hospital. She was 91.

For the last six years, Alice lived with her sister, Edna Leavenworth, at the family home on River Road near the Rt. 57 bridge. She was an active member of the Sandisfield Council on Aging and very much enjoyed visits to the Sandisfield Library, just across the road. For a librarian's tribute to Alice, see "Library Corner" on page 16.

Alice was born in Waterbury, Connecticut, August 14, 1925, the daughter of Percival and Anna Stetson MacMullen. Raised and educated in Waterbury, she received her bachelor's degree from Teacher's College of Connecticut and a master's from the University of Connecticut. She served for many years as an elementary teacher for the North Haven School District, retiring in 1985.

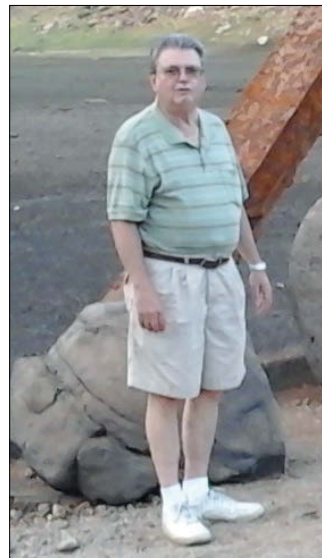
Prior to making her home with her sister, Alice resided in North Haven, Connecticut, for 49 years.

She was a member of the Association of Retired Teachers of Connecticut, the Sandisfield Council on Aging, and a past member of the Connecticut Fifers and Drummers Association, the National Education Association, Connecticut Education Association, North Haven Teachers Association, and the PTA.

Along with her sister, Edna Leavenworth, Alice is survived by another sister, Myrtle E. Ross and her husband, Ed, of Waterbury; her sister-in-law, Mel MacMullen of Texas; nine nieces and nephews; 16 great-nieces and nephews, and 17 great-great nieces and nephews.

She was predeceased by her brother, John MacMullen; sister, Lil Seeley; two nieces, a nephew, a great-nephew, and a great-great niece.

A celebration of her life was held at Grace Church at Crissey Farm, Great Barrington, in December. Friends wishing to make a donation in her memory to Covenant House or Grace Church may do so in care of Kelly Funeral Home, 3 Main Street, Lee, MA 01238.



**CHUCK BRAGDON, JR.**  
1951-2016

Charles J. "Chuck" Bragdon Jr., 65, of Hubbard Road died November 21, 2016 at Baystate Medical Center in Springfield, with his family by his side. He had lived in Sandisfield for 45 years.

Born in Great Barrington on February 9, 1951, son of the late Lillian (Tyler) Bragdon, Chuck was a graduate of Monument Mountain Regional High School, class of 1969. He worked for many years as the service manager at R.W.'s Inc. in Lee.

An avid outdoorsman, Chuck enjoyed hunting and fishing, especially ice fishing. He often fished locally at West Lake and York Pond. A large bass, caught in West Lake, was mounted on a wall at home.

A favorite family event was Friday night pizza at MJ Tuckers. For 10 or 12 years, Chuck competed in the horseshoe league organized at George Munson's home. He also enjoyed playing cards, golfing, taking trips to the casinos, and spending time with his family.

Chuck is survived by his wife of 45 years, Christine M. (Pachulski) Bragdon; two sons, James Bragdon and his wife Jennifer of Alford and Michael and his wife Donna of Becket; three sisters, Donna Mooney of Great Barrington, Sharon Nourse and her husband Walt of Sheffield, and Linda Snyder and her longtime companion Ken Guartha of New Marlborough; and four grandchildren, Sawyer, Celina, Chase and Morgan.

In keeping with Chuck's wishes, funeral services were held privately. Pallbearers were Jimmie Snyder, Jeffrey Snyder, Eric Pachulski, Ronnie Pachulski, John Palfini, and George Munson.

Expressions of sympathy in Chuck's memory may be made to the Sandisfield Volunteer Ambulance Service in care of the Birches-Roy Funeral Home, 33 South Street, Great Barrington, MA 01230.

# OUR THANKS TO ALL OF YOU

We cannot succeed without your help.

The Times is grateful to all donors who responded so generously to our 2016 appeal.

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<i>Marilee &amp; Jim Higgins</i>	<i>Sally Vaun</i>
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<i>Maggie Howard</i>	<i>June Wink</i>
<i>Jean Hrbek</i>	<i>Michael &amp; Patti Wittkowski</i>

Previous donors to this year's appeal were listed in the December issue.

# NOW HEAR THIS!

*Edited by Laura Rogers-Castro.*

*Please send notices for Now Hear This! to [calendar@sandisfieldtimes.org](mailto:calendar@sandisfieldtimes.org).*

## JANUARY & FEBRUARY EVENTS

**All Boards Meeting**, Tuesday, January 17, 7 p.m., Old Town Hall. All board and committee members should attend. All town residents welcome.

**Website Training** on Tuesday, January 24, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Town Hall Annex. Sandisfield's web host will review how to navigate and use the new town site and answer any questions participants may have.

**Blood Pressure Clinic** on Wednesday, January 25, from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at the Council on Aging Meeting Room, downstairs at the Town Hall Annex, Route 57.

### SAVE THE DATE

**Special Town Meeting**, January or early February, subjects, date, and time to be announced. Watch for Town Hall announcement.

### EVENTS IN SURROUNDING TOWNS

**Six award-winning short plays** on Friday, January 27, 7 p.m., and Saturday, January 28, at 3 and 7 p.m. at Saint James Place, 352 Main Street, Great Barrington. Short plays by local playwrights from Radius Playwrights Festival, performed by local actors and directors. Featuring "It's a Tragedy" by Sandisfield's Steven Otfinosky. Tickets \$15. See page 13 for an introduction to Steve and his work.

**Wild Cousins of Our Best Friends: Wolves, Coyotes, and Foxes** on Friday, February 3, at 6:00 p.m. at Berkshire Community College (BCC) in Pittsfield. Sue Morse, one of the top wildlife trackers in North America, will be the presenter. The program will be held at the Boland Theater on BCC's main campus. For more information, call 413-429-6416.

**The Cougar Comes East** on Saturday, February 4, at 6:00 p.m. at Mount Everett High School in Sheffield. Sue Morse, founder of Keeping Track, will provide an introduction to cougar biology and ecology in the broad diversity of habitats where she has studied them, from Alberta to the Arizona/Mexico border. For more information, call 413-429-6416.

**Full Moon Hot Toddy Snowshoe Walk** on Friday, February 10, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. at Bartholomew's Cobble in Sheffield. Members of the Trustees of the Reservation, \$5; non-members \$10; Children are free. Snowshoe rental an additional fee. For more information, call 413-298-3239, ext. 3013.

**Family Winter Olympics** on Sunday, February 19, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at Bartholomew's Cobble in Sheffield. Bring the family and head to the cobble for this fun winter obstacle course. Suitable for ages 5 and up. Members of the Trustees of the Reservation, \$9; non-members \$15; children are free. For more information, call 413-298-3239, ext. 3013.

## Winter Snowfall and Extreme Temperature 2016-2017



### October–December 2016

Snow, as measured/estimated at a Beech Plain back-yard weather station

Oct 27 . . . . .	5 inches
Nov 19 . . . . .	5.5
Nov 26 . . . . .	14
Dec 5 . . . . .	1
Dec 7 . . . . .	1
Dec 9 . . . . .	0.5
Dec 12 . . . . .	4
Dec 14 . . . . .	1
Dec 15 . . . . .	1.5
Dec 17 . . . . .	7
Dec 29 . . . . .	5
Dec 31 . . . . .	1
Total . . . . .	46.5 inches

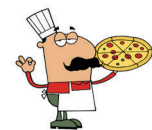
### Extreme Temperature

Dec 16 Low: -4 degrees Wind chill: -14

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*The Times is grateful to donors who responded to our annual appeal.*

*See page 18 for a list of those who responded in December. Thank you.*



*The Sandisfield Times* is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization staffed by volunteers from the Sandisfield community and funded by individual and business sponsors. Its mission is to connect the community through reliable, regular, and relevant information. The paper is published 11 times each year, with a joint January-February issue and monthly issues thereafter.

**Donations of all sizes are needed to ensure the continuation of this newspaper.**

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Farmington River Diner, and Otis Poultry Farm. Locations in Monterey include the Library, the Store, and the Roadside Cafe. Available also at the Southfield Store in New Marlborough. Back issues are available for purchase.

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We welcome submissions, comments and suggestions, including letters to the editor **BY THE 15<sup>TH</sup> OF THE MONTH PRIOR**. We may edit for space, style or clarity. We will try to publish Public Service Announcements when we have room, with priority given to Sandisfield organizations. No portion of the *The Sandisfield Times* may be reproduced without permission.

### **Editorial Staff**

*Editor: Bill Price*

*email: w.billprice@gmail.com or cell 413.429.7179*

*Advertising/Subscriptions: Ron Bernard*

*Graphic Design: Tina Sotis*

*Website: Jean Atwater-Williams*

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*Mail can be directed to*

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*If internet accessible, all letters, news events and tips, ideas, obituary and family announcements, photos (600 dpi if possible) and advertisement queries to editor@SandisfieldTimes.org.*