

THE SANDISFIELD TIMES



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Volume X, Number 9

December 2019

Unsung Local Holiday Legend

EVER HEAR OF HENDRICK RODEMORE?

By Lorraine German

Hendrik Rodemore, whose grave lies beneath the trees in an Otis cemetery, is hardly a household name

But for die-hard collectors of antique Christmas ornaments like me, he is almost as well-known as F. W. Woolworth.

That's because folklore credits this former Hessian soldier with putting up the first documented Christmas tree in Connecticut and possibly New England.

Born in Germany about 1742, Hendrick became one of the thousands of mercenary soldiers brought to America to fight on England's behalf during the American Revolution. He might have had no choice in the matter since many of his countrymen were conscripted and sent to America, their services sold to King George III.

In August 1777, Hendrick's regiment was sent to Vermont to take part in General Burgoyne's foraging raid on Bennington. They were met on the New York border by American forces led by General Stark in what is known as the Battle of Bennington. The colonists prevailed and some 700 British and Hessian soldiers were taken prisoner, including Hendrick who was sent to Pine Meadow, Connecticut (now known as Windsor Locks).



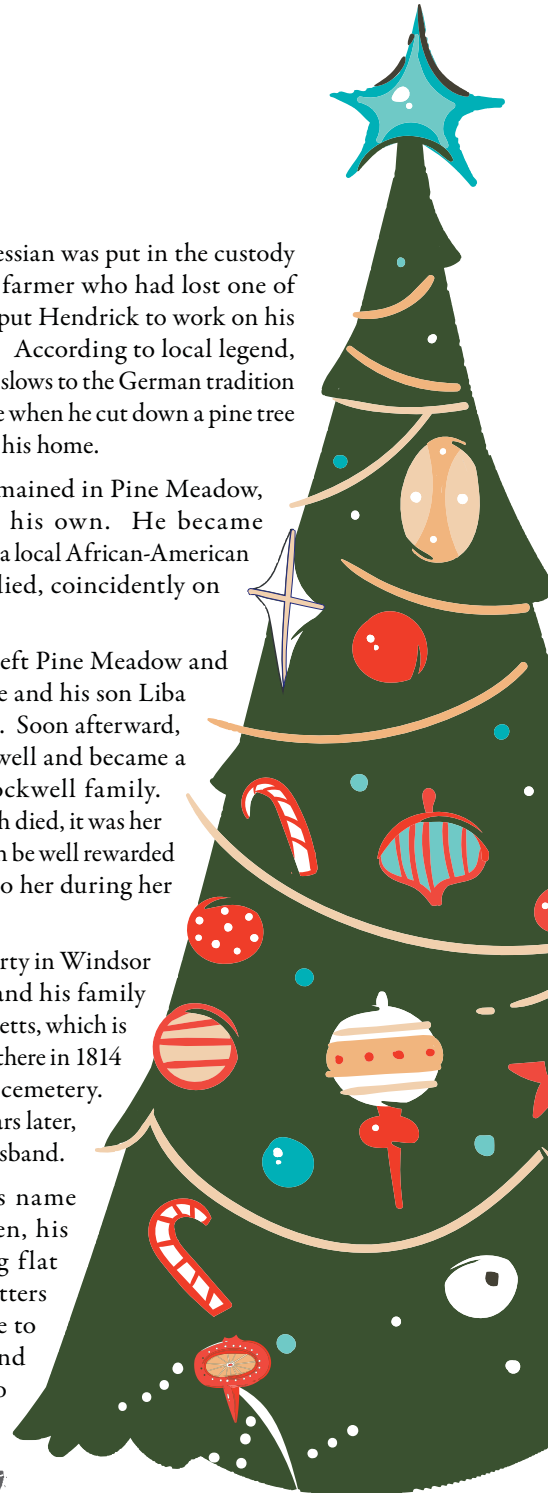
Once there, the captured Hessian was put in the custody of Samuel Denslow, a local farmer who had lost one of his sons in the war. Samuel put Hendrick to work on his farm and built him a cabin. According to local legend, Hendrick introduced the Denslows to the German tradition of decorating a Christmas tree when he cut down a pine tree that first year and set it up in his home.

After the war, Hendrick remained in Pine Meadow, adopting this country as his own. He became known as Henry and married a local African-American woman named Polly who died, coincidentally on Christmas Day 1790.

After Polly's death, Henry left Pine Meadow and moved to Windsor, where he and his son Liba served as the town shepherds. Soon afterward, he married Susannah Rockwell and became a beloved member of the Rockwell family. When his mother-in-law Sarah died, it was her wish that Henry and Susannah be well rewarded for their extreme kindness to her during her illness.

In 1800, when Henry's property in Windsor was sold for back taxes, he and his family moved to Loudon, Massachusetts, which is now part of Otis. Henry died there in 1814 and was buried in the local cemetery. When Susannah died five years later, she was buried next to her husband.

Today, Henry Rodemore's name has basically been forgotten, his untended gravestone lying flat on the ground, its carved letters worn after years of exposure to the weather. But his legend lives on with those of us who treasure antique Christmas ornaments and the origin of a sweet holiday tradition. ♡



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SPECIAL LETTER TO THE EDITOR

POT FARM CONTROVERSY CONTINUES

Editor's Note: When Ms. Jennifer Pilbin, formerly of South Carolina, purchased property on West Hubbard Road last summer with the intention of building a cannabis-growing facility if town and state permits are granted, some of her neighbors objected to the proposal, feeling a threat to their way of life in Sandisfield.

Since then, Ms. Pilbin has met twice with the Select Board (October 21 and November 4) to clarify required procedures for her to construct a house on the property. Minutes of those meetings are available at Town Hall Annex or online at www.sandisfieldma.gov.

Below, some of her neighbors have presented a Special Letter to the Editor in response to a letter in last month's Times and in which they ask that the Town address the issue of pot farms.

Thank you for the viewpoint expressed in last month's letter to the editor regarding the pot farm proposed for West Hubbard Road.

No one is "summarily dismissing" Ms. Pilbin per se. Her intentions are only the catalyst for the town of Sandisfield to now consider the issue of banning versus allowing cannabis-growing facilities, with proper commercial zoning regulations. The majority of other municipalities in Berkshire County have already put such regulations in place.

We could not agree more that the citizens and leadership need to do their "due diligence," which is exactly what this process involves. There is certainly merit to the fact that such industries would produce needed tax revenue for our town. That said, there must be ways to do so without negatively impacting the homeowners who live in close proximity to such facilities. We are not sure others understand our concerns, since they currently do not have a pot farm planned 300 feet from their property.

The anecdote regarding the farm in Sheffield (which has zoning regulations) is in fact just that. In fact, Ms. Pilbin's property has been "visited" such that she has installed a large metal gate to prevent unwanted guests from entering the property. Not the most attractive or welcoming addition to a rural, mostly forested country road.

Marijuana "farms" typically involve huge metal buildings and industrial size greenhouses, which also come equipped with lights, exhaust fans, security systems, chain link fences and such. The odor coming from pot farms has been described as skunk-like. There would be increased traffic including heavy trucks and trailers during the building phase and beyond. Given that West

Hubbard Road was just newly paved with chip seal, we can predict a much shorter lifespan with this increase in usage.

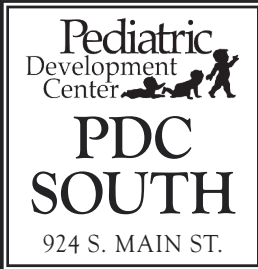
It is unfortunate that Sandisfield did not proactively respond after marijuana use and growing cannabis were legalized in Massachusetts. If there is a benefit to the town, it should not come with great sacrifice to other tax-paying residents. As one of our citizens has said, "I don't think any amount of income the town may get from a cannabis farm is worth losing the perfect place to raise a family."

The citizens of Sandisfield deserve to have input regarding their desire for such businesses, either by permitting them in areas designated for commercial zoning or through an outright ban. Allowing one individual to do whatever they please with their property is taking advantage of our lack of foresight in anticipating an interest in using available property for commercial purposes. It is our hope that the Board of Selectmen and Planning Boards will act to consider the arguments and the town's options as quickly and efficiently as possible. 🇺🇸

West Hubbard Road Neighbors:

- Chris Bragdon and Michael Bragdon*
- Karen and Edward Brozman*
- Paul Carbone*
- Leslie and John Garwood*
- Lorraine and Jay Greenwell*
- Steve Kahn*
- Laurie Kanter*
- Barbara Lynn*
- Michele and Vincent Mauro*
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	Shotgun	Dec. 2 – Dec. 14
	Primitive Firearms	Dec. 16 – Dec. 31
Cottontail Rabbit		Oct. 19 – Feb. 29, 2020
Snowshoe Hare		Oct. 19 – Feb. 29, 2020
Gray Squirrel		Sept. 9 – Jan. 2, 2020
Bobcat		Dec. 20 – Mar. 7, 2020
Coyote		Oct. 19 – Mar. 7, 2020
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Opossum		Oct. 1 – Jan. 31, 2020
Raccoon		Oct. 1 – Jan. 31, 2020

For more information, go to www.eregulations.com/maccachusetts/huntingand fishing/

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Our Thanks to You

As this issue goes to press, Sandisfield is digging itself out from under the early December 2019 snowstorm. Winter is here fiercely and in force. We'd like to have reported on what happens, but that's one of the risks of publishing monthly. We're often too early or too late.

But through storms and even in good weather, we like to think The Times helps keep the Town informed and connected. We need your help to continue doing that.

We're a bunch of volunteers. Our costs, chiefly, include professional design and printing and they add up. Our online edition, free to readers, has a substantial cost.

Advertising revenue helps, but varies from month to month. (When you patronize our advertisers, please mention that you saw their ad in The Times.)

Mail subscriptions are important, but are essentially a service as postage and printing costs almost equal the income. (As a matter of fact, we like paying postage. We support our local post office.)

So, as a matter of fact, your donations are critical to the paper's survival.

We're grateful to our readers who have responded so far to our year-end appeal and to all those who contributed through the year. Some of you have been with us since our beginning, ten years ago. And some are contributing now for the first time.

Again, our appreciation to those of you who have already responded to our annual appeal. If you haven't yet, please send your year-end donation to The Sandisfield Times, PO Box 584, Sandisfield, MA 01255.

Happy New Year to all of Sandisfield and, as well, to our neighboring towns.

Seth Kershner Bill Price
Sandisfield Center West New Boston



"The Neighborhood" on Christmas Morning

When I cry my left eye leaks
And my shoulders tickle
And Mr. Roger's train comes round the bend
Full of grave and funny things,
Princesses and lions,
Mailmen, even X the Owl,
All singing softly in my living room
When I am pretty young.

It all tastes like chocolate
And looks like a careless upstairs room
Untended, just a little brazen
For a boy my age.

But there it is!
All the tears and trains
And Lady Elaine is scolding sweet
On every Christmas morning
... Just a little indiscreet ...

Val Coleman
West New Boston

Author's note: The truth is I was born in 1930 making me just a little too old to fully appreciate Mr. Rogers' wisdom and innocence. But there I was ... sneaking into the living room to join my son Charlie (born in 1968) whenever the train honked and Mr. Rogers sang. The recent interest in him and his neighborhood, in the press and on film, has me all childish again.

A More Energy Efficient Town Hall

IMPROVEMENTS FORCED TEMPORARY CLOSURE OF ANNEX

By Tim Brooks

The Sandisfield Town Hall Annex closed for normal business during the week of November 11 in order to complete an energy efficiency project. That was bad news for anyone who wanted to pay taxes at the last minute because the building was first closed Thursday, the 7th, tax-due day.

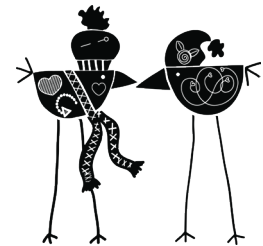
The good news? Closing enabled a contractor to remove old insulation from the building's attic and basement, replacing it with new insulation which will result in reduced overall energy costs for the building.

The project had been on the Town's Green Committee's agenda since last February when the committee first began to discuss how to spend its portion of state-awarded Green Communities funding. Over the summer, the Town received bids for the project from three companies, the winner being Double R Insulation of Falls

Village, Conn., whose bid came in at just under \$14,000.


An unexpected issue arose immediately after work began on Wednesday, November 6. When the contractor began removing old insulation from the attic, residue from the disintegrating fiberglass began to seep through the roof tiles, covering the surfaces of employees' desks and work areas. This made it just about impossible for the staff to safely work in the building. The building was closed and taxpayers found a "Closed for Construction" sign at the door.

Although an analysis of the residue determined that none of the particles were toxic, the town's building inspector decided to err on the side of caution and on Sunday, November 10 issued an order closing the building. Once Double R finished the job and cleaned up the residue, Town Hall Annex reopened for regular business on Monday, November 18.



While the offices were closed, staff members moved to either the Old Town Hall or the Library, where they kept up with their regular duties.

Some residents may have experienced frustration or inconvenience due to the relocation of the town offices that week, by unanswered phone calls or not knowing where to go for help with town business, including paying their tax bills. The deadline for paying the taxes was, of course, moved back a bit. Signage was posted on the Town Hall Annex main entrance informing residents where to go to find the employees who had to be relocated: the Treasurer at the Library and all others at Old Town Hall.

"Despite the unexpected problems that arose," said selectman George Riley, "the end result of the work will be a more energy efficient building for our Town Hall staff to work in." 

REPAIRS TO RT. 57 TO BEGIN IN SPRING

Editor's note: In a win for the Town's Select Board and State Representative Smitty Pignatelli, MassWorks recently announced a \$2 million grant for the repair of possibly the worst section of Rt. 57.

To be divided between Sandisfield and New Marlborough (\$1 million each), the grant will provide for a full-depth reclamation with asphalt injection paving and culvert replacement (as needed) from Rt. 183 in New Marlborough to New Hartford Road in Sandisfield. (See this month's Select Board report, on page 7, for other good news regarding road repairs.)

The Times invited Representative Pignatelli to write about the project. His response follows

REPAIRING ROUTE 57

By Representative Smitty Pignatelli

I feel a great sense of pride to be able to say "I'm from the Berkshires." To me, there is no other community like ours.

As your state representative, one of the greatest honors of my job is having the opportunity to speak up for our rural municipalities and the unique set of challenges we face on Beacon Hill. One of these challenges is the consistent upkeep and management of our roads, bridges, and highways. While most of the transportation projects in the state are made possible through the state's Chapter 90 reimbursement program, in the Berkshires we still face hardships when it comes to repairs and upgrades to the hundreds of culverts in our region.


Culverts are conduits, pipes or drains that allow traffic to pass over naturally occurring small bodies of water or drainage from stormwater or snowmelt. As you can imagine, this is an expensive task which was made more difficult in 2010 when Department of Environmental Protection regulations tightened restrictions on any structures crossing certain bodies of water.

Now, consultant fees to estimate costs of replacing culverts alone have been known to exceed one-third of a town's entire Chapter 90 apportionment. This has been a serious issue for communities such as Sandisfield and New Marlborough, who have a number of aging culverts running straight down the Route 57 corridor.

Though I supported this year's successful New Marlborough/Sandisfield MassWorks grant application that ultimately secured \$2 million to address culvert repairs and the Administration dedicated an additional \$932,000 to the Berkshires' culverts through the Division of

Ecological Restorations in August, as a long-time public servant born and raised in my rural district, I know we need a more permanent solution.

This session, I introduced legislation that would alter the existing Chapter 90 reimbursement program if passed into law. Through Chapter 90, \$200 million is set aside for construction and maintenance of municipal ways. This money is apportioned to each of Massachusetts' 351 communities through a formula that takes counts each community's road mileage, population, and employment levels. This formula was created almost 50 years ago, in 1972, and has no legislative history. It says 58.33 percent of a community's funding will be based on its road mileage, 20.83 percent will be based on population, and the remaining 20.83 percent will be based on its employment levels. For communities such as the Berkshires where population and employment have seen a gradual decrease while maintenance costs soar, keeping this formula intact would be unfair. My new legislation changes the formula to the following: 69.33 percent mileage, 15.33 percent population, and 15.33 percent employment, allowing smaller communities to gain up to 17-18 percent in Chapter 90 funding.

Although larger communities could lose 13-18 percent of funding through the new formula, these towns can recoup those losses through a large diversity of funding opportunities and full-time grant writers on their staff. It is time for the Legislature to address this disparity between rural and urban Chapter 90 funding by recognizing our needs and adjusting this formula to reflect the needs of our rural communities. 

THE SANDISFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

CHRISTMAS FAIR



Many vendors selling their Holiday wares and a visit from Santa Claus!

Saturday, December 7, 2019
10 AM - 2 PM

Santa will be there 11-12:30
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207 Sandisfield Rd (Route 57)
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Sandisfield Broadband at the End of 2019

By Tom Christopher

At the Select Board meeting October 28, board members signed a Contribution and Assessment Agreement with the state of Massachusetts.

The Agreement defines the Town's share of the payment to be made to Charter Communications to fill the gap between what the Massachusetts Broadband Institute offered as a grant and the actual cost of having Charter install a system in Sandisfield, a sum of \$1,337,000. Sandisfield will be responsible for the payment of 60 percent of that sum, \$826,680. Payments are not to begin until the project is online.

The state will loan us that money, which the town will repay over a 15-year period (at 3.5 percent interest) through a reduction of the level of state aid (from the "cherry sheet").

In the meantime, Charter Communications has begun the "make-ready" phase of installation. Charter vehicles were seen driving along Sandisfield roads last fall.

The make-ready process involves collecting data from every utility pole that will become part of the network and submitting that data to the poles' owners, Eversource or Verizon, to secure permission to string fiber-optic cable from the poles. Given that there are nearly two thousand poles, this will be a long process. Charter does not anticipate beginning to install its network until, in the best scenario, early next summer, with a worst-case scenario of the installation beginning at the end of the summer.

Residents may be impatient to finally have their connections to the internet, but as Jeff Bye, chairman of the town's Broadband Committee, points out, we are finally in "a good place," in sight of that goal and making steady progress toward its achievement. To keep residents current, Bye has posted a link, "Bringing Broadband Internet Service to Sandisfield" under the "News & Announcements" section of the Broadband Committee page (www.sandisfieldma.gov/broadband-committee) of the Town of Sandisfield website. Bye promises to update this information as events unfold. 🍷



Our Thanks to All of You

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Moreover...

A Writer's Town

By Simon Winchester

How many writers do we think there are working and living in Sandisfield? I asked Amy, our delightful and polymathic charmer down at the Post Office who is so interested in us all in what makes us tick.

To be included, I said, these had to be people who she knew made their living through the scrivener's grubby trade, not occasional toe-dippers. Well, after a bit of head-scratching we came up with a total of eleven full-time writers.

We may have missed a few, but we know there are a couple of journalists, a bodice-ripping novelist, a poet, an historian, a highly successful crafter of murder-mysteries, a specialist in the Jewish canon, a broadcaster, a former employee of the

Vatican turned scribbling apostate, a paid-by-the-word dweller in the new electronic Grub Street, a blogger – and me.

Eleven writers in a town of 591 voters works out at a little less than two percent. Were this the national average then Brooklyn, the nearest hip place for writers, and which counts two million voters, would have some forty thousand poets, novelists and screenwriters – which it manifestly hasn't. So Sandisfield, on the strength of these metrics alone, would seem to be splendidly above average—an excellent, well-nigh favored place for the practicing of the writerly craft. This, in short, is a writers' town.

There is ample reason – suggested just now by the fact that most of the eleven of us, I suspect, will stay put here through the season, and won't flit off for southern sunshine and city lights. And this is because – aside from most of us not being able to afford such luxury – Sandisfield offers us what we most crave in our professional lives: the bliss of absolute solitude. There are just about no distractions. No annoying neighbors because, essentially – no neighbors. No tempting offerings from the internet – because, essentially, no internet. No siren calls from the local pub – because, essentially, no pub.

And if a turkey or a raccoon, a coyote or a moose or a big black bear passes by the window – something that would make a writer in Williamsburg jump out of his skin and hide under his bed for a week – well, we've seen it all before, and would merely smile knowingly to ourselves and carry on with constructing the sentence on the screen. Nature here is a comfort, not an astonishment; it is more a blessing, ensuring that those who crave to be alone are seldom truly lonely.



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I started writing a new book at the beginning of November and am due to deliver the typescript at the end of April – that's six calendar months, 182 days. The book's length is to be 120,000 words – about 350 pages – and simple arithmetic tells me I have to write, edit, polish and be modestly pleased with 660 words each and every day to remain on target. (Big penalties accrue if I don't.) So far, on November 18th, I've completed 12,781. Only if it is vitally necessary will I leave Sandisfield during these next five-and-a-bit coming months. I have turned down a trip to Jaipur in January. And killjoy that some say I am, I confess that I rather think of the holidays as interruptions to the rhythm – though I'll go and celebrate them anyway (the Christmas cakes and puddings are made already, and sit in the larder, maturing).

But if I do miss a day, having fun, it simply means I'll have to double the number of words to write on the next workday, to catch up. So if you are passing down Silverbrook Road late one night, and see my study light streaming gold through a whirling snowstorm, you know why.

And I'll bet it is much the same for the other ten of us, writing hard through the winter. And that's why we love it here, all seasons round. Merry Christmas! And a Happy New Year. 🍷

Select Board Report

We've often noted how long some projects take to come to fruition, especially when dealing with large corporations or our dear Commonwealth. A lot of patience, perseverance and steady pressure is required, while in the meantime it appears to observers that "nothing is being done."


Such has been the case with Route 57. After the work of building a coalition of five towns around this issue, we originally imagined pressing our state representatives for a grant of about \$30 million to repair this road. But many obstacles to this plan have presented themselves. Nonetheless, our work has not been in vain. We learned that Route 57 west from Springfield to Route 8 has been designated an evacuation route, and thus was paved—but only to the Tolland/Sandisfield line. What about the last section of 57 down Tolland Mountain? Well, now that will be paved by the State next spring.

The other good news is that we partnered with New Marlborough to apply for a MassWorks grant of \$2 million. We were recently notified that our application was successful. The funds, split 50/50 with New Marlborough, will enable us to repair probably the worst stretch on Route 57: the roughly five miles between Route 183 in New Marlborough to New Hartford Road. Bit by bit it's getting done.

The other long-standing road issue has been Cold Spring Road, chip-sealed by order of Kinder Morgan pipeline company and already coming apart. Many months of negotiations have ensued, with the company and with Representative Pignatelli. This steady pressure seems to be paying off, as we are close to an agreement to finally pave that road.

More good news is that our new Town Manager Joanne Grybosh hit the ground running and has already dealt successfully with many issues, including grant submissions and follow-up. (By the way, please do not attempt to contact her outside of her posted office hours: Tue., Wed. and Thur., 10 a.m.—2 p.m.)

We have been still dealing with unpermitted campers, including issuing citations and fines, and this enforcement is now yielding results. Other more routine subjects have included transfer station stickers and cardboard compactor, land use issues, cemetery questions, the Yanner Park parking lot, and possible new bylaws regarding signs, cannabis and camping. We also dealt with the terms of our broadband loan from the State, and the Green Team—using our Green Communities grant—has implemented upgraded lighting in the Town Hall Annex and Library as well as insulation of the Town Hall Annex attic. We are now in a position to save on both electric and heating/cooling costs and this was accomplished with no added expense to the Town. More energy conservation projects are in the works.

Now we are entering budget season! This complex issue will occupy much of our time and attention over the next two months, and further until Town Meeting in May 2021. We're hopeful that the new budget procedures we worked to refine a year ago will result in a harmonious and productive process. 

George Riley,

GRiley@sandisfieldma.gov

Mark Newman (chairman),

newmanmark57@yahoo.com

Brian O'Rourke,

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The Players Present Neil Simon

AND LOOK WHAT ELSE THESE DARING PERFORMERS HAVE DONE

By Barbara Penn

The Sandisfield Players under the direction of Ben Luxon put on a staged reading of scenes (some funny, others touching) from eight Neil Simon plays, including “Brighton Beach Memoirs,” “The Odd Couple,” “Plaza Suite,” and “The Sunshine Boys.”

This is risky to do before a general audience, because it asks the audience to live in two worlds—the world of fantasy, and the world of this “script-held” reading, where we step back and see how a production is put together.

In the script-held production, things like a ringing telephone or a knock on the door are executed with the performer saying “ring-ring” or “knock-knock.” Doors are open frames through which we see an arriving visitor even though we are “in” the apartment. (But there were plenty of fun period details, like Bib Bailey and Jean Atwater-Williams’ bold ‘60s print dresses and go-go boots, and Lauren Paul’s authentic two-piece knit dress.)

But as the performance on November 9 demonstrated, this can be an opportunity for the audience to see a performance in the making, to witness its birth, growth and the moment it stands up on its own two feet. This is a special opportunity for theater-goers and the Players carried it off admirably.

Which is what the Sandisfield Players have always



*“The Stamp Collection.”
Tina Sotis with Gabe Lessor.
Photo: Peter Baimonte*

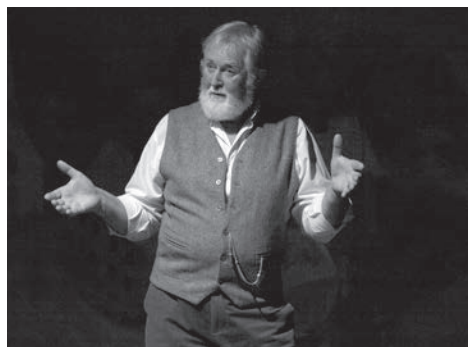
done, beginning in 2012 with “Rascals and Others,” the fully staged “Our Town,” performed both here and at the Minack Theatre in England, the difficult-to-do-well Dylan Thomas play in poetry, “Under Milkwood,” the brilliant “Jack and the Beanstalk,” “Shakespeare Unchained,” “A Christmas Carol,” to Val Coleman’s gem, “The Stamp Collection.” Earlier this season, with the amazing and brilliant production of



“Our Town” featured (from left to right) Jean Atwater-Williams, Sasha Nadler, as Emily, and Mary Anne Grammer.

“Charlie and the Chocolate Factory,” even the sets became characters. Through all these and more, this group of community actors, directed by the masterful Ben Luxon, have been consistently good and sometimes even great, a shining jewel in the Sandisfield Arts Center’s crown of extraordinary programs. A standing ovation and bravo to the Players and founders Ben Luxon and Susie Crofut!

The cast for “Celebrating the Work of Neil Simon” included both long-time Players Jean Atwater-Williams, Lauren Paul, Bib Bailey, Ben Luxon, Evers Whyte, Mary Anne Grammer, and Adam Manacher. Debuting as Players were newcomers Abbie Lombard, Linda Mironti, and Chris Corradino, with music by Bogart Muller on the 12-string guitar. As I sat watching Simon’s sketches, I saw not only the “skeleton” of how a play is constructed, but also a walk through the past years’ productions, each so deftly and wonderfully done by this group of terrific, talented actors. We can all look forward to what will come next from this troupe, knowing it will be interesting and original, bursting with dynamism and joy! 🍷



“Our Town,” Ben Luxon directed and played the stage manager.



“The Odd Couple” excerpt, by Neil Simon. From left, Adam Manacher, Bib Bailey, Evers Whyte, and Jean Atwater-Williams.



After “Under Milkwood,” director Ben Luxon applauded by Val Coleman, right front, and cast members.



“Under Milkwood” performed “on the road” at the Norfolk Library.

Sandisfield Arts Center 2019 in Review:

CHARLIE, COMMUNITY, CULTURE, AND CELEBRATIONS

by *Hilde Weisert*

“Charlie and the Chocolate Factory” was the hands-down (applause up!) highlight of the 2019 season at the Arts Center, and, in its pure theatrical magic, probably a highlight of our entire 24-year history. Sets that dazzled, singing that soared, costumes that carried you to another world – the Sandisfield Players young and older under the direction of Ben Luxon and Jesse Howard brought a classic musical to vivid life for three performances in mid-June.

With their versatility and range, the Players are a Sandisfield treasure, as also shown this season when they gave us scenes from Neil Simon plays (November 9) and even poetry (“Today’s Poets in Conversation with the Masters,” September 28). A special thank you from me to Ben Luxon and the Players Tina Sotis, Jean Atwater-Williams, Mary Anne Grammer, and Val Coleman for joining us poets to make that a most memorable and moving program.

I’ve heard that our fall fundraising letter makes the claim that our variety of programs is the widest in South County. 2019 shows this is no exaggeration: Fun with Crosswords (thank you, Michelle Arnot); stimulating and timely talks from our scholars Bill Cohn and Val Coleman (Val paid for copies of the U.S. Constitution at his inspiring and passionate lecture, “The Constitution Alive”); Dr. Robert Maryks presented “Fascism and Racial Laws in Mussolini’s Italy” (preceded by a free showing of “The Garden of the Finzi-Continis”).

Food for thought – but we also offered food for the soul, with music ranging from the Wanda Houston Band, the Blackstone Valley String Quartet (thank you, sponsors Steve and Lynn Rubenstein), Evening of Song with Linda Mironti and others, and world-class classical artists Fred Moyer with his MoyerCam, and Ed Arron and Jeewon Park (cello and piano). We’re delighted that Fred (with even more jazz) and Jeewon will be back next year.

We had more free community events than ever, with Bogart and Riley Muller continuing their summer Free Family Movie nights, an October Open House and Barbecue honoring our



“Charlie and the Chocolate Factory,” Jesse Howard starring as Willy Wonka.


volunteers (and recruiting new ones!), and the season closer, “Open Mic Plus Grown Up Show and Tell” on November 22, a true celebration of Sandisfield spirit and scope. Start polishing up your act now; you’re on again next year.

Local writer Jana Laiz gave a children’s book reading and with the Sandisfield Cultural Council’s help we were able to donate selections of her books to our Library and to the Farmington River School. Finally, master photographer and teacher Thad Kubis’ free Smartphone Photography workshop was such a hit that he’ll be back next year with four free sessions on each gallery-opening day.

Which brings up the Gallery—seven first-rate shows, paintings, sculpture, photography, always with a free opening reception.

Two local treasures brought us unique programs: Cider expert Tom Christopher with “Hard Cider Tasting” provided a delicious education in cider’s New England history and current revival, and Hannah Fries shared poetry and photos from her book “Forest Bathing.”

On May 18, our “The Best Little Performance Space in South County” Spring Fundraiser proved that a season sneak preview is a keeper – we hope to work it in every year.

All of this was possible and continues to be possible only because of our volunteers, our donors, and the Sandisfield Cultural Council. Watch our website www.sandisfieldartscenter.org for what’s coming next year, when we are “25 in 2020!” And consider a year-end gift to keep this diversity and our historic building on solid footing into our next 25 seasons. 



News from the PTA

FARMINGTON RIVER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

By *Linda Curtiss and Aimee Magovern*

Farmington River Elementary held its first annual Quarter Auction on Friday evening, November 8. Nearly \$2,000 was raised to benefit students' and classroom accounts.

Parent and PTA member Jenna Bessey did an amazing job organizing and auctioneering the event, and Kendra Rybacki prepared and served a delicious dinner prior to the auction. A special thank you goes to teachers Mrs. Hamill, Mrs. Higgins, Mrs. Maxton, Mrs. Martin, Mrs. Tracy, and Mrs. Silk, who worked with their students to create fun-themed baskets for the auction. And thanks very much to all the parents, teachers and community members who donated items, and those who came out to support us. We could not have done it without you!

We’d also like to thank all the vendors who each donated two items to the auction. And we send a big thank you to the local businesses for their generous donations. Be sure to support them, as they support us: Berkshire Paint ‘n Sip, Perry and Son, The Knox Trail Inn, L&M Auto, New Boston Crane Service and Sleds, Papa’s Food and Fuel, Otis Gazette, Lyon Aviation Inc, and Applebee’s.


UPCOMING EVENTS

Next PTA meeting: Wednesday, December 4 at 3:15pm in the school library. Open to community members! Child care provided.

This year’s Holiday Shop will be held Thursday, December 12, and Friday, December 13, at the school. The Holiday Shop allows our students in grades K-6 to hand-pick inexpensive gifts for their family members, teachers, friends, and pets. The PTA seeks donations of local handmade items (such as maple syrup, jams, hot sauces, honey, jewelry, hair bows, ornaments, etc.) to be sold at our Holiday Shop. If you wish to volunteer to help run the shop, please notify frrsdptatreasurer@gmail.com by Friday, Dec. 6.

The FRRSD school ski program begins Wednesday, January 8. Registration is taking place online only. Register before December 9 to receive the discounted rate. Go to OtisRidge.com/Wednesday-night-program-frrsd/ to register.

Christmas school break will be from December 23 through January 1.

As always, email us at pta@frrsd.org with any questions. 

Police/Fire/EMS Logs

NOTE: North Main Street is Rt. 8 north of New Boston Bridge; South Main Street is south of the bridge.



POLICE

October 2019 Incidents

- October 1 Tree down, Stump Road
- October 1 911 hang up, West Street
- October 1 Investigation, West Street
- October 1 Suspicious motor vehicle, North Main Street
- October 1 Theft, Sandisfield Road
- October 5 911 hang up, Beech Plain Road
- October 7 Animal call, Beech Plain Road
- October 8 Animal call, Beech Plain Road
- October 8 Suspicious activity, Sandisfield Road
- October 10 Animal call, Beech Plain Road
- October 10 Medical call, Sandisfield Road
- October 10 Wires down, Silverbrook Road
- October 11 Medical, Sears Road
- October 13 Attempted suicide, Sandisfield Road
- October 14 Animal call, Sandisfield Road
- October 15 Medical Sandisfield Rd
- October 15 Motor vehicle accident, North Main Street
- October 16 911 hang up, Beech Plain Road
- October 17 Tree on wires, Coldspring Road
- October 18 Medical, Sandisfield Road
- October 19 Motor vehicle accident, North Main Street
- October 21 Medical, Sandisfield Road
- October 21 Bylaw enforcement
- October 22 Bylaw enforcement
- October 22 Animal call, Sandisfield Road
- October 24 Bylaw enforcement
- October 24 Medical, Beech Plain Road
- October 25 Fire call, Lower West Street
- October 25 Runaway child, Jamie Lane
- October 26 Traffic hazard South Main Street
- October 28 Medical, Jamie Lane
- October 28 Suspicious motor vehicle, South Main Street
- October 29 Medical, Sandisfield Road
- October 31 Well-being check, Smith Road
- October 31 Citizen assist, Beech Plain Road
- October 31 Domestic disturbance, Jamie Lane



FIRE

October 2019 Incidents

- October 8 Assist homeowner, water in basement
- October 13 Smoke in house, vent house to clear out smoke
- October 16 Assist EMS at medical call
- October 19 Assist EMS at scene of motor vehicle accident
- October 25 Assist EMS at medical call



EMS

October 2019 Incidents

- October 4 Medical, Otis responded, transport to Fairview Hospital, Great Barrington
- October 5 Medical, mutual aid to Otis, no transport
- October 6 Medical, transport to Fairview Hospital
- October 8 Medical, transport to Fairview Hospital
- October 10 Medical, transport to Fairview Hospital
- October 12 Medical, mutual aid to Tolland, transport to Fairview Hospital
- October 13 Medical, transport to Berkshire Medical Center, Pittsfield
- October 16 Medical, transport to Fairview Hospital
- October 18 Medical, patient transport by family
- October 18 Medical, transport to Fairview Hospital
- October 19 Motor vehicle accident, North Main Street
- October 24 Medical, no transport
- October 21 Medical, transport to Fairview Hospital
- October 25 Medical, transport to Fairview Hospital
- October 26 Medical, transport to Fairview Hospital
- October 26 Medical, mutual aid to Tolland, no transport
- October 29 Medical, transport to Fairview Hospital

Council on Aging

By Nina Carr

The first week of December will be busy for COA members.

By the time most of you read this report, several of us will be recovering from a trip to the casino that took place on Dec 2. After many requests COA has decided to sponsor trips using the SBETC van to a casino about every three months. Stay tuned for the next trip!

Then, on Wednesday, December 4, members will enjoy our annual Holiday Luncheon. This year we're going down Rt. 8 to "Mario's" in Winsted.

Also, we plan on attending a Holiday gathering at Berkshire Rehabilitation from 1:30 to 3:30 on Thursday, December 5. They invite us every year to enjoy music, raffles, a "penny auction," dessert, and coffee. What a week.

Our usual monthly activities will continue as well: our business meeting will take place on December 4, Pizza and Cards on the 18th, and the wonderful Chair Yoga classes every Wednesday at 2:00 p.m.

Currently we are trying to find a new "foot care" nurse. If you know of anyone who would qualify, let us know.

We also want to alert seniors to the Senior Lunch available at the Farmington River Regional School every Tuesday. The cost is \$2. The menu is online if you are interested.

We will continue our outreach program for seniors in town with the help of Tina DeManbey.

And we hope everyone will be happy and healthy in the New Year! 🍷



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The Librarian's Corner

By Terry Spohnholz

HAPPENINGS AT THE LIBRARY

The Sandisfield Free Public Library will be closed for Christmas, Monday December 25th.

Library Hours:

Monday and Tuesday from 9am until 12:30 pm

Wednesday from 2pm until 5pm

Thursday from 5pm to 7pm

Saturday from 10am until 1 pm.

Sunday, December 14th from 1 to 2:30 pm is Arts and Crafts with Kids (every second Saturday of the month). This month will feature snow globes in keeping with winter in New England.

NEW BOOKS IN THE LIBRARY

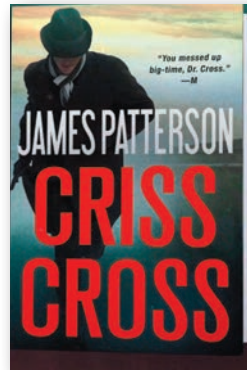
Nothing to See Here by Kevin Wilson. A moving and uproarious novel about a woman who finds meaning in her life when she begins caring for two

children with remarkable and disturbing abilities. A laugh-out-loud funny book.

Kiss the Girls and Make Them Cry by Mary Higgins Clark. A new thriller from "The Queen of Suspense." When investigative journalist Gina Kane receives an email from a "CRyan" describing her "terrible experience" while working at REL, a high-profile television news network, including the comment "and I'm not the only one," Gina knows she has to pursue the story. But when Ryan goes silent, Gina is shocked to discover the young woman has died tragically on holiday.

The Family Upstairs by Lisa Jewel. A page-turning novel from the best-selling author. A look inside a family's past brings buried secrets to light.

Criss Cross by James Patterson. In the latest installment in the Alex Cross series, a killer with all the skills of a master detective has made Detective Cross and his partner, John Sampson, the subject of his deranged investigation.



CHILDREN'S BOOK

It's Okay to Make Mistakes by Todd Parr. With his kid-friendly illustrations, this book shows that everyone makes mistakes – that's how you learn!

Don't forget the Library has passes to various museums – stop by and find out what's available. **These passes were made possible by a Sandisfield Cultural Council Grant.** These include the Springfield Art Museum, the Dr. Seuss Museum, the Clark, MAMO, and various Trustee sites. Go out and explore your world! 🌍

Please note that the library cannot accept donations of books, magazines or games. We appreciate your wishing to donate to our small library but we simply do not have the capacity.



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Former Rowley Farm Buildings Stabilized

STATE MOVES TO SAVE HISTORIC BARN AND ABATTOIR

By Ron Bernard

Work began early last month to stabilize two of the surviving, very early barns at the former Hawley/Rowley farm near Spectacle Pond. The work is expected to be completed by next April. This work involves only stabilization, not rehabilitation or repair.

Tucked away in the northwest corner of Sandisfield near the West Otis line, seldom visited by many town residents today, the buildings were once part of the longest continuously operated farm in town, and possibly in the Berkshires. Several of the buildings still stand despite having been open to the elements for years. The farm operated from the earliest days of Sandisfield until about 1985.

The buildings can be seen as you drive past them along Cold Spring Road. Stopping to walk in the construction site is prohibited by the Department of Conservation (DCR) which is responsible for the property.

The 900-acre property includes a large portion of Lower Spectacle Pond and a section of "old growth" forest. It was incorporated into the adjacent Otis State Forest under the auspices of the DCR when the state took title in 2007. It is widely considered to be one of the most spectacular landscapes in the state and is permanently protected under Article 97 of the Massachusetts State Constitution.

HISTORIC FARM BUILDINGS

For the past 12 years the DCR has maintained the property which includes two houses and four barns that date to the late 18th - early 19th centuries. The houses are not architecturally significant and all of the buildings are in poor condition. However, the DCR in 2017 determined that two of the barns, both historic due to construction style and their contribution to the historical character and cultural heritage of Sandisfield and the state, were threatened by imminent loss.

One of the buildings is an early abattoir (slaughter house) and the other is a large pre-Revolutionary War, English-style construction barn erected by



The Abattoir: Possibly the last surviving slaughterhouse of its kind, probably 200 years old, the building has suffered from being open to all manner of Sandisfield weather and critters.

original settlers, the Richard Adams family who arrived in Sandisfield in about 1760. The abattoir, potentially a museum-level historic structure, may be the last of its kind in this area if not in the state.

As of this summer none of the buildings had been improved or secured by the state. That is about to change which is good news for the Beech Plain section and the whole town.



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STABILIZATION WORK IS UNDERWAY

A DCR official told the Times that preserving these buildings was “at the top of the priority list” and that the entire farm has qualified for funding under the DCR’s historic curatorship program.

The DCR’s press secretary also informed the Times in an email that Clark & Green Architecture Design had been retained in July 2018 to provide plans for the stabilization of the barn and abattoir. This October the Aulson Company of Methuen, Mass., was hired to complete the project totaling approximately \$118,000.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE FUTURE?

Once stabilization of the two barns is assured, Aulson will probably close the openings with plywood. It won’t be pretty but at least the buildings will be secured from unauthorized visitors and further deterioration.

With future use of the historic barns still undecided, rehabilitation and repurposing are some time away. Suggestions have been made that the property be contracted out as a working historic farm. Another idea is to use the barns as a kind of museum for educational purposes.

The fate of the two houses and two lesser outbuildings has not been determined. The houses are not architecturally significant and do not appear to be salvageable. However, within the DCR there is still consideration to save the “red house,” the smaller of the two, which stands on the north side of Cold Spring Road.

Following stabilization work on the two barns, DCR said it plans to hire a contractor next fall to conduct building studies to determine if other structures can be stabilized and rehabilitated.

Unfortunately, half a tree recently fell across the shed addition of the red house as it is known locally. It was a dramatic if not fatal blow.

The Sandisfield Historical Commission is in touch with the DCR and will keep the Select Board and the public apprised of developments.



The Main Barn: As recently as twenty years ago the main barn still stood in four sections: the original structure with three other sections that had either been added on to or moved and attached to it. Today only two sections remain.



A storm in early November brought down the limb of a large tree onto the shed section of the red house, across Cold Spring Road from the barns.

Photos: The Sandisfield Times

THE HAWLEY/ ROWLEY FARM

When the farm ceased operations about 1985, it was the longest continuously operated farm in Sandisfield, possibly in the Berkshires. It was established as early as 1760 by the Richard Adams family of Prospect, Conn. Adams was the first to settle in the Beech Plain, a five-mile long section of Sandisfield traversed by Cold Spring Road between State Routes 8 and 23.

In 1855, William Hawley (1827-1909), grandson of another Sandisfield original settler, Dr. John Hawley, acquired the Adams farmstead from his dying brother-in-law, Harry Adams, 37. Over the next 50 years Hawley purchased adjacent farmsteads until the farm totaled 900 acres, including most of lower Spectacle Pond and much of the land contiguous to it. His granddaughter, Ada Hawley, married John Rowley in 1908 and that family continued cattle raising and timbering/milling until 1985. Matriarch Ruth Snow Rowley died in 2004 at 93. The entire property was acquired by the Commonwealth in 2007.



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Sandisfield Historical Society



VETERANS DAY MEMORIAL PRESENTATION

ANNUAL CHRISTMAS FAIR, DECEMBER 7

by Ann Wald, President

In honor of Veteran's Days and all those from Sandisfield who served in our nation's military, Ron Bernard delivered a moving presentation at our November meeting about native son Col. John Brown, a member of Sandisfield's founding family and an unheralded hero of the Revolutionary War.


The bravery of Brown and his company of patriots was largely responsible in 1775 for the capture of the British fort at Ticonderoga, NY. That winter the fort's massive cannons were hauled overland, including through a northern portion of Sandisfield, by Col. Henry Knox to Gen.

Washington at Cambridge Heights who trained the guns on the British navy in Boston harbor. The result was that the British retreated, Boston was not sacked, and Washington went on to lead and win the war of independence.

Brown, who fought courageously in several more battles, was the first to expose Gen. Benedict Arnold for dishonor. Brown was killed on his 36th birthday while leading a charge against great odds in the battle of Stone Arabia in New York in 1780.

Ron has offered to speak at every Veteran's Day meeting on the roles of Sandisfield and its men who served in the early conflicts.

The well-attended presentation was followed by our annual wine and cheese social.

On Saturday, December 7, the Society will hold its annual Christmas Fair from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Rt. 57 firehouse. Thirty vendors including many neighbors and friends will display their usual bounty of interesting items for sale. Santa will join from 11a.m. until 12:30 p.m. Food prepared by the ladies from the New Boston Congregational church will be available. Again this year Rose Nelson will delight children with horse rides. See you there! 

CHRISTMAS FAIR

Sponsored by the Sandisfield Historical Society
Firehouse #2 on Rt. 57


December 7, 10 a.m. until 2 p.m.

VISIT THE PENNY AUCTION TABLE

Don't miss the Penny Auction table at the Fair for some great gifts

The Penny Auction table has been part of the Christmas Fair for so many years that we've lost count. The Scholarship Committee has already received donations of a Holiday Basket donated by the Berkshire Rehab, contributions from members of the Committee, and our community.

Proceeds from the Penny Auction table help make it possible for the Scholarship Committee to offer qualifying high school seniors a scholarship to offset their expenses for a higher education.

Please make sure to save the date so you can visit the Fair and enjoy the many vendor tables, Santa, the mini horses from Sunny Rose Farm, and much more. 

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NOW HEAR THIS!

Edited by Laura Rogers-Castro. Please send notices for Now Hear This! to editor@sandisfieldtimes.org.

DECEMBER EVENTS

Playgroup on Mondays from 9:30 to 11:00 a.m. at the Sandisfield Library Community Room (library basement). No pre-registration necessary. The playgroup features a story time, too. Led by Nina Carr. Free!

Council on Aging Wednesday Weekly Gatherings from 11:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the basement level at the Sandisfield Town Hall Annex on Route 57.

Chair Yoga on Wednesdays at 2:00 p.m. at the Council on Aging, basement level at the Sandisfield Town Hall Annex on Route 57. Free.

YOGA with Ann Gadwah will be offered most Wednesdays from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. at the Sandisfield Community Center (basement of the Sandisfield Library). Bring a yoga mat or towel for this calming practice. Visit ConnectSandisfield on Facebook or contact the Recreation Committee or Library for dates and cancellations. \$5.

Sandisfield Christmas Fair on Saturday, December 7, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at Firehouse #2 on Route 57. All are welcome and encouraged to attend this friendly fair featuring handicrafts, jewelry, maple syrup, homemade baked goods, lunch by the New Boston Church, Penny Auction to benefit the Sandisfield Scholarship Fund, ponies, Santa, and more!

New Boston Church Service on Sunday, December 8, at 10:00 a.m. at the New Boston Congregational Church, Route 57. All are welcome!

Christmas Church Service on Sunday, December 22, at 10:00 a.m. at the New Boston Congregational Church, Route 57. All are welcome!

OTHER EVENTS IN NEARBY TOWNS

Sunset Stroll on Friday, December 13, from 4:00 to 5:10 p.m. at Housatonic Flats. Join the Berkshire Natural Resources Council for hot cider and a serene evening one-mile walk. Please bring water, dress in layers, and wear appropriate footwear for the weather. Housatonic Flats is located less than half a mile north from the Great Barrington Price Chopper on Route 7. Parking is on the left. For more information, email Mariah (mauman@bnrc.org) or call 499-0596.

Free Community Open House for South County Families all day on Sunday, December 22, at Berkshire South Regional Community Center in Great Barrington. Try the Center for free. Go for a swim, break a sweat on the cardio machines, hike, or bring the kids to enjoy the play equipment in the courtyard. For more information, visit www.berkshiresouth.org.

Winter Lights! Thursdays-Sundays, through December 29 PLUS Monday, December 23, and Monday and Tuesday, December 30-31 from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. at Naumkaeg in Stockbridge. View thousands of shimmering, artfully designed holiday lights. For tickets, updates, and more information, visit www.thetrustees.org.



DON'T FORGET TO BUY YOUR HOLIDAY STAMPS AT THE SANDISFIELD POST OFFICE!



Letters to the Editors

Thanks, Jeanne

Here's to another year for the Sandisfield Times. I read every word! I'm a native of Great Barrington, an admirer and kindred spirit of the Berkshires.

*Jeanne Chesanow
Cheshire, Conn.*

Unnecessary Rejection?

On November 7, I attended our town cemetery committee meeting. There were six people present (four cemetery members, librarian, and myself).

During this meeting, the chair wrote down the cell number of someone affiliated with our town cemeteries and then gave it to another member. I then politely asked to be given that number and was flat out refused, for no good reason.

Then our assistant town clerk, acting in the capacity of our librarian, said to the chair, "I give out this number at the town hall to people when they ask for it." I thanked her for saying that, but was still refused that number, again.

This type of behavior is not who we are, is totally unacceptable, and needs to stop immediately here, as well as anywhere else in town, where it may have occurred. Mind you, a life-long resident, I am the owner of two pieces of property and a plot owner at Sandisfield Center Cemetery. I would certainly hope that in the future, we can do much better, as a town, than this. Thank you.

*Ronald C. Pachulski
West Hubbard Road*



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Please see page 5 for our acknowledgement to donors who responded in November to our annual appeal.

We are grateful for your donations now and throughout the year.



*The next issue of
The Sandisfield Times
will be our annual combined
January/February issue,
due about January 15.*

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.

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Editorial Staff

Editors: Bill Price and Seth Kershner

email: editor@sandisfieldtimes.org or cell 413.429.7179

Advertising/Subscriptions: Ron Bernard

Graphic Design: Tina Sotis

Website: Jean Atwater-Williams

Now Hear This!: Laura Rogers-Castro

Founding Editor: Simon Winchester

How to Contact Us

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