

THE SANDSFIELD TIMES

Tribunus



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THE BLEAK WINTER

HISTORIC SANDSFIELD FARM BUILDINGS COME DOWN

By Ron Bernard

Overcast skies and damp, freezing conditions prevailed in the first days of 2026 when a dinosaur-like excavator chomped its way through four venerable if dilapidated buildings, all survivors of the former Adams-Hawley-Rowley farm and mill on Cold Spring Road in the Beech Plain section.

The 900-acre property, along the shores of Lower Spectacle Pond, was “taken” by the Commonwealth by eminent domain in 2007 and incorporated into Otis State Forest for the purposes of preservation and public use.

In this heritage-rich state, the place was remarkably significant in Massachusetts history for several reasons, but one in particular. It may have been the longest continuously operated farm **under the same family ownership** – 1760s-1970s.

THE BUILDINGS COME DOWN

The centerpieces of a group of surviving buildings included a farmhouse and a section of an English-style barn, both pre-Revolution. Another house across the road and two utility buildings were early-to-mid-19th century



1999 aerial view of intact Rowley Farm compound, Cold Spring Road. Photo: Rowley family.

vintage. Also, there is an abattoir (slaughterhouse), c.1820s. Several 20th century summer cabins on the pond also survive albeit in ramshackle condition. Ultimately only the abattoir will remain.

The dreary atmosphere of January 6-7 seemed appropriate for the unceremonious fate of this beloved Sandisfield heritage, due to likely unavoidable decisions by the Mass. Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). The crew hired to demolish the first group of structures were aware of the significance of the moment and went about their tasks somberly.

A DCR representative and observer remarked to a reporter that being the last person to stand in the oldest house on the property was a moving experience. “A hard day,” he said.

OPPOSING PLANS

Matriarch Ruth Snow Rowley was the last family member to reside on the property. She died in 2004 at age 93. Her descendants had dramatically different ideas about what should be done with the place, ranging from preservation to development. After a builder stepped in with approved plans for modern upscale houses around the pond, the State, with consent of the Sandisfield Select Board (a two-to-one vote) moved to purchase the estate.

By then, except for Mrs. Rowley’s house, none of the buildings had been in service or maintained since the family concluded its sawmill operations almost thirty years before.

Cont'd on p.10

Board Votes to “Take” Fire House #2

LONG CONTROVERSY CLOSER TO RESOLUTION

By Bill Price

The vote of the Select Board to proceed with the eminent domain “taking” of Sandisfield Fire House #2 was, at the end, anticlimactic.

After months and even years of disputes between the Board and Sandisfield Fire Department, Inc., (SFDI) the final “taking” step occurred merely as Item 5 on the January 12 agenda. It took only minutes for all three Selectmen to vote “Aye,” followed by brief discussion with audience members and an offer to two SFDI members in attendance. And then the Select Board moved on to Item 6 and the rest of the Town’s business. However, the dispute with SFDI had not yet been resolved.

The dispute over the Sandisfield Fire Department had come to a head at a mid-November Special Town Meeting, at which residents voted overwhelmingly to pay up to \$560,000 through eminent domain (pending a new property appraisal).

Many of our readers may be more than familiar with the dispute. For those who may not be, see the November 2025 Sandisfield Times. The dispute raged on through December and early January, with the Board and SFDI exchanging letters, but reaching no agreements.

Subsequently, a new appraisal downgraded the property value to \$299,000, due in part to the buildings being zoned residential rather than commercial. Sandisfield has no commercial zoning, so a residential assessment was required. Factors contributing to the downgraded property value include the septic system, which failed its Title 5 inspection, with an estimated cost of \$80,000; the system had been improperly installed, as well. Also, the heating system is expected to fail soon, with replacement cost of some \$60,000. The inspection also cited other building code and safety violations. The earlier appraisal had not taken any of these factors into account.

NEGOTIATIONS?

In a December 15 letter, SFDI’s new president, Dan Andrus, wrote that its board had voted to accept the offer at the full appraised value of \$560,000, as approved at the STM. He discussed the steps to be taken and added a final sentence: “To move forward, the Sandisfield Fire Department, Inc. will require an immediate public rescission of the Letters of Disassociation that were issued by the Select Board and Town Manager of the Town of Sandisfield, Mass.” (The Board had formerly disassociated the Town with the non-profit SFDI, which had been originally organized to support the Fire Department.)

The letter was delivered an hour before the December 15 Select Board meeting, allowing for no discussion before the meeting. John Field, the selectman conducting the negotiations with SFDI,

read the letter aloud, adding that he didn’t understand since twice SFDI’s leaders had verbally told him they wanted no money.

In its reply to SFDI, the Board cited the lowered appraisal and propose that SFDI accept the \$299,000 as a friendly eminent domain taking to avoid further dispute. It also asked SFDI to vow not to sue the Town for more money moving forward. The Town also declined SFDI’s request to partner again, adding that the Select Board would not repeal the letter of disassociation with SFDI.

In response to that letter, SFDI hired a new attorney to lead their efforts. In his first email the new attorney wrote that his understanding was that SFDI had built the fire stations with their own volunteers at the station and had provided EMS and fire services to the town for over 50 years. Select Board Chairman Steve Seddon replied, with a lengthy response “to enlighten him to the actual events that transpired and what got us here.”

Ultimately, on Monday, January 12, the Select Board adopted the order of taking for the fire station in the amount of \$299,000.

NEXT STEPS IN THE “TAKING”

The next steps will include Sandisfield’s town counsel recording the taking with Berkshire County registry of deeds. Once this is done the Town will own the building, following a process of about one week. Then SFDI is presented with two documents and will need to decide which to sign. One is a friendly-taking agreement where SFDI can chose to agree with the amount offered (fair cash value) for the exchange of property with the guarantee not to sue the Town in the future for more money. The other document is termed a “pro-tonto” document, which states that SFDI will be reserving its right for the next three years to sue the Town for more money.

Once either document is signed and notarized, SFDI will be given payment from the Town Treasurer.

At the Select Board where the taking was approved, SFDI members Dan Andrus and Teagan Abear were present. The Board reminded them they have the option to do a friendly taking or gifting the building to the Fire Department. And that they are also welcome to use the proceeds as a donation to the Fire Department.

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TWO AMBULANCES, ONE TOWN

A MAJOR MILESTONE IN EMERGENCY CARE

By Mike Grillo, Fire Chief

Since placing our recently purchased ambulance into service, the Sandisfield Fire Department temporarily removed the older unit to complete much-needed repairs and maintenance. Just after Christmas, the repairs and refurbishing were finished and both ambulances were fully in service. Both are now actively responding to 911 calls for the Town of Sandisfield.



On the left, the new one.

This means that either ambulance may be dispatched to a 911 emergency, and on multiple occasions, the Sandisfield Fire Department has simultaneously operated both ambulances on separate 911 calls within town at the same time. Over the past 14 days alone, we have handled multiple incidents where each ambulance was committed to a different emergency call—a significant operational milestone for our department.

When one ambulance is already on a call, the second ambulance is staffed and immediately available through a combination of volunteer firefighters, EMTs, and per-diem personnel. This ensures that 911 coverage is maintained even during overlapping emergencies, dramatically reducing response times and improving patient care.

This capability allows us to provide the highest level of emergency medical service possible to our residents. Sandisfield is now one of only two municipalities in South County with two ambulances fully staffed and responding to 911 calls.

This initiative has been in development for several months, requiring extensive planning to ensure we could safely and reliably staff both ambulances for emergency response. Today, we are proud to officially share this achievement with the community.

We also want to thank the town for its support. While this effort required additional staffing resources and innovative policy decisions, that investment has directly resulted in improved emergency services for Sandisfield residents.

We are equally proud of our members and their dedication to training and professionalism:


100% of department members are medically trained as Massachusetts EMTs, Paramedics, or First Responders.

95% of our membership holds Pro Board Firefighter I certification, the national standard for entry-level structural firefighting.

That same 95% also holds Pro Board Hazardous Materials Operations certification, qualifying them to operate at hazardous materials incidents.


This accomplishment reflects countless hours of training, planning, and teamwork. We are grateful for the continued trust and support of the Town of Sandisfield as we continue moving forward.

One Town. One Team. One Mission.

Check out more at sandisfieldfire.com 

Fire Academy Graduates

by Times Reporters

Four members of the Sandisfield Fire Department – Omar Mohamed Barkry, Cianna Ferraro, Cameron Maynard, and Douglas Miner – are the first members of the current department to graduate from the Fire Academy. A ceremony was held at the Fire House on a sunny December 14, Fire Chief Mike Grillo said, “We’re excited to have these individuals on board. Their dedication, hard work, and commitment to our community have helped us set a new standard of excellence.” For all those who came out to support them at the reception, he added, “A special thank you. Your presence made the celebration even more special.” 



The graduates, kneeling, Douglas Miner, Omar Mohamed Barkry, Cianna Ferraro, and Cameron Maynard. Second row, standing, other members of the Sandisfield Fire and EMS Department.



Neighbors, residents, and family members attended the ceremonies.

Knox Trail 250

TOWN RECOGNIZED FOR ROLE IN HISTORIC EXPEDITION

By Ron Bernard

A colorful re-enactment of Col. Henry Knox's epic "Noble Train of Artillery" proceeded through the snowy streets of South County towns, Alford, Egremont, and Great Barrington on Saturday, January 10. The march concluding in front of the Town Hall and across from the Mahaiwe Theater where ceremonies followed.

Exactly fifty years ago a similar re-enactment continued over State Route 23 through even snowier Monterey and Otis. The route that year bypassed Sandisfield, and for a good reason. The Sandisfield section of the original 300-mile route, then as now, is impassable except by foot or horse. In many places, then as now, you'd have to get off and lead the horse.

Knox's amazing feat of endurance and resolve involved hauling some sixty tons of captured British artillery from Fort Ticonderoga, New York, for 56 mid-winter days to deliver them to General Washington who had the city of Boston under siege. With the cannons, Washington forced the British to abandon Boston, altering the beginning if not the course of the War.

The Knox contingent passed through Sandisfield on January 12-13, 1776. To visit this trail in the deep "Greenwoods" and walk in the footsteps of the Knox teamsters (as well as earlier military expeditions), is a moving experience. Think of our trail as American history sacred ground, a window into 1775-76 when much of the route through the Berkshires appeared as the Sandisfield section is today.

The section in Sandisfield is about five miles long. Secluded and unmarked, until now it has been a virtual 'secret,' even from historians. That, together with protection of the Otis State Forest, has spared it of development of any kind. The Sandisfield trail is the longest undeveloped section of the colonial-era road from Boston to Albany known by more than two dozen colloquial names including "Ye Trodden Path" and "The Great Road."

Thanks to two years of planning by expert committees under the banners, "Massachusetts 250" and in the Berkshires, "Knox Trail 250," Sandisfield has finally joined the chain of towns that proudly



Selectman John Field, left, accepts the Knox Trail plaque for the Town. Ron Bernard of the Sandisfield Historical Commission holds the Governor's Citation.

Photo: Jean Atwater-Williams

claim connection to one of the most critical yet largely overlooked events of the Revolution.

The 680-seat Mahaiwe Theater was nearly at capacity and buzzing with excitement by reserved seat-only visitors before dignitaries and event planners from New York and Massachusetts took turns honoring Knox and the brave Patriot-teamsters who risked injury to themselves and their animals and equipment in the brutal winter expedition.

Handsome wall plaques and Governor's Citations were accepted by representatives from Alford, Egremont, Great Barrington, Monterey, Sandisfield, Otis, Blandford, and Russell. Each spoke briefly about their town's special connection to the Trail and the significance of these ceremonies and their plans to commemorate the 250th.

Over the years, as more and better information was gained about the actual route taken by the Knox caravan, markers or sign posts were installed or relocated. In recent times, 57 prominent markers were placed at historic sites along the trail.

Sandisfield does not have a marker but that is going to change because the State has promised to see that Sandisfield finally has a monument. The marker is proposed to be installed at the 'nose' between the two Spectacle Ponds, near the site of the legendary Henry Spring Tavern which hosted the teamsters.

The hope is that one day the Sandisfield section will be improved for both hiking and educational purposes by the Mass. Department of Conservation and Recreation. Moreover, it is not out of the question that our trail could be considered for recognition by the U. S. Park Service/National Register of Historic Places. It is, after all, a national treasure. The events of this month and increased public awareness and commitments from the State about a marker will do much to raise awareness and outside interest. Until then, hikes are conducted periodically by trail expert and cartographer, Tom Ragusa of Otis, and the Hilltown Hikers club. For information, go to westernmasshilltownhikers.com.

Knox Trail Commemoration Book

By Times Reporters

A new book about the Knox Trail, *Ye Trodden Path: A History of the Knox Trail & Examination of the Longest Original Section of the Trail in Berkshire County, Mass.*, will be published soon by the Berkshire County Historical Society and the Knox Trail 250th Committee.

The work is the collaboration of five local historian-authors: Bernard Drew of Great Barrington, a foremost authority on both Berkshires history and the Knox Trail; Gary Leveille of the Great Barrington Historical Society; Rob Hoogs, Monterey Historical Society; Ron Bernard, Sandisfield Historical Commission; and Tom Ragusa, Otis Historical Commission.

The book was underwritten by the Society in conjunction with the semiquincentennial anniversary of our nation's founding.

Two chapters of the book concentrate on the seven-mile, mostly undeveloped segment through Otis State Forest in Sandisfield, extending into the town of Otis. This is the longest surviving

original stretch of the one-time colonial "military road" that connected Boston and Albany.

The impetus for the book was a true map of this unspoiled section compiled by long-time DCR employee Tom Ragusa. Tom devoted more than two decades of meticulous research including early documents he discovered in State archives together with modern survey techniques. The result is a definitive map of the road as it was in the 17th and 18th centuries.

A chapter is devoted to Tom's fascinating journey and why what he did is important. His map will be included in the book, in color, as a six-foot fold-out.

Ron Bernard writes about the history of the former Indian trail before it was a military road and its many colloquial names. Also included are his original research findings about five Sandisfield taverns along the "Great Road" which welcomed the Knox teamsters as they passed through on January 12-13, 1776.

Watch for announcements about the book's availability. For more information contact Lesley Herzberg, Berkshire County Historical Society, at berkshirehistory.org.

HENRY KNOX AND THE NOBLE TRAIN

By the summer of 1775, the war in Massachusetts had settled into a stalemate. British forces clung to Boston, while American troops surrounded the town but lacked the heavy artillery needed to force a decision. When George Washington took command of the army outside Boston, he knew that cannon captured months earlier at Fort Ticonderoga offered the only solution.

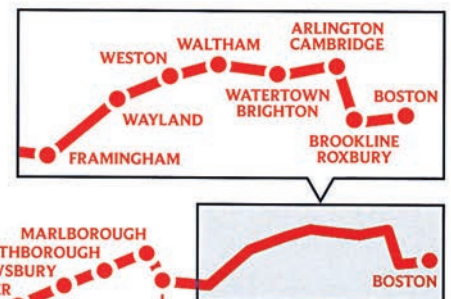
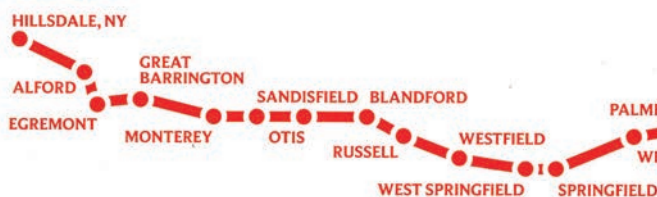
To retrieve them, Washington turned to Henry Knox, a 25-year-old Boston bookseller whose self-taught mastery of artillery and fortification had already impressed him. In November 1775, Knox set out on a mission that would test endurance as much as ingenuity: hauling sixty tons of cannon nearly three hundred miles in the dead of winter.

From Fort Ticonderoga, Knox's "Noble Train of Artillery" began its slow descent southward. The guns were floated across Lake George in fragile boats lashed together against snow, wind, and gathering ice. Sleds creaked under their crushing weight as teams of horses and oxen dragged iron

through deep drifts, over frozen rivers, and across valleys where a single misstep could send cannon and team plunging through thin ice. In the Berkshires, steep climbs and perilous descents forced Knox to improvise constantly, recruiting fresh teams and devising ways to brake the sleds on narrow mountain roads.

By January 1776, the battered train reached Massachusetts, astonishing towns along the route. In March, Knox's cannon were hauled onto Dorchester Heights overlooking Boston Harbor. Faced with guns commanding both town and fleet, the British evacuated the city.

What the sword and the cannon had not yet accomplished was effected by patience, perseverance, and the stern hand of winter. Through deep snows and over rivers bound fast by ice, Henry Knox conducted his noble train, surmounting every obstruction by diligence and contrivance. Men labored, beasts strained, and the cannons themselves seemed to submit to their resolution. In this arduous passage were displayed the virtues upon which free states are founded—fortitude, industry, and an unyielding attachment to liberty. By such means was the way prepared for the first great victory of the American Revolution.



MASSACHUSETTS

OUT ON A LIMB



Town Hill Speedway A COUNTRY ROAD BECOMES A HIGHWAY

By Hal Holt

This is a story of how a once quiet dirt road is slowly becoming a major route and could become a deadly one, if attention is not paid sooner rather than later.

When I started working on our house on Town Hill Road in 1989, things were generally pretty quiet, traffic wise. This probably had to do with the fact that the northern half of the road was unpaved and, at times, unpassable.

Drivers in the area were either unaware of the road at all or had made a decision to avoid it because there were paved road alternatives.

In the early 2000s, the Town decided it was time to pave Town Hill Road up to the Otis line. We were in favor of this, as it made trips to Lee and Great Barrington much easier for everyone, particularly in “Mud Season.”

Predictably, having the road paved brought more traffic, but the increase was not significant as the new traffic was mostly local drivers who certainly enjoyed the improved roadway.

Years later, we started to notice a dramatic increase in the volume of traffic on the road.

Navigation apps such as Waze, Google Maps, and Apple Maps started to be omnipresent on cellphones and in vehicles. I was surprised when I searched for driving directions with these services between such cities as Bridgeport, Connecticut, and Toronto, Canada, that the route frequently included Town Hill Road!

This route was suggested because it was the shortest mileage. Of course, the results would shift based, for example, on the time of day. Very often, however, all of the navigation providers would use Town Hill Road as part of a routing.

This change not only brought more traffic, but changed the nature of that traffic. Now we frequently see large trucks that are obviously not doing local deliveries.

Also, passenger vehicles seem to be driven at much higher speeds, as if the drivers are impatient and frustrated with having been routed up or down this narrow country road.

Driving on Town Hill Road, cars have passed me or my wife Pam on many occasions. Once, we were run off the hard surface by drivers taking a turn wide. We even had a pickup truck drive onto our lawn as it passed another car in front of our house.



Town Hill Road past the Holt place.

Pam has had to jump off the road while walking as cars passed each other. She won't risk walking on the road anymore.


I bought an inexpensive radar gun and have measured traffic in front of our house at over 60 mph. Interestingly, some of the navigation providers don't show a speed limit for Town Hill Road at all.

I suspect that these drivers would much rather be on Route 8 where there are paved shoulders, markings, reflectors, and guard rails designed to keep them safe. Routing traffic from New Boston to Lee via Route 8 is a mile and half longer than via Town Hill, but takes the same time, or less if speed limits are observed. We have contacted town officials on many occasions with little result.

Can anything be done? I have contacted the navigation app providers and managed to get Waze to at least add posted speed to Town Hill Road. This may make the route less attractive.

Better signage might help. It's not very clear what the speed limit is on certain sections of the road. In fact, the speed limit is a moving target. Coming up from 57, it starts at 25, but by Jeff Marres' place there is a new 30 mph sign. When the road gets narrow and twisty by Billy O'Brian's there is a 35 sign. Later there is another 25 sign and ultimately, by Ron Kimberley's, there is an old 20 mph sign that looks homemade.

The fact is that two large trucks would have a hard time passing each other in the narrowest part. Large trucks must, as well, do a great deal of damage to a road that is famous for its potholes. More enforcement would help, but it is understood that resources are limited. Perhaps a combination of these fixes might calm traffic a bit.

With no change in the present landscape, a bad accident seems only a matter of time. 

Opinions in Out on a Limb articles are those of the authors and do not represent The Sandisfield Times.

Subjects should be of interest to most of us and have a strong link to Sandisfield, written by and for Town residents. Address either PO Box 584, Sandisfield, or email.

OUT ON A LIMB



Good News (and Happy New Year)

“I’VE BEEN WATCHING SELECT BOARD MEETINGS.”

By Zoe Nelson, Dodd Road

I have been Zooming Select Board meetings, a convenient way to keep up on our Town for this old lady who doesn't like to go out in the winter.

I get a lot of answers just by listening and learning what concerns are bothering my fellow citizens. I have also learned that people say they want transparency but usually pick and choose what they want to believe.

I guess I have been guilty of this, too, like believing there was no solution for fixing the electrical problem with our "old" ambulance. I was surprised to find out at a meeting on January 12 that we now have two licensed rigs running with a new staff of volunteers to ride them. I want to thank the guys in town (you know who you are) who always knew what the problem was and they were persistent in fixing it. Having two rigs running in Town not only keeps us safer but financially able to pay for both.

Why we are paying a nonprofit (SFDI) for a building that our donations built is really hard for me to understand. I'm also trying to understand why the new board of directors and members of SFDI, who are also taxpayers, think it is OK to charge their fellow taxpayers. If it didn't take up valuable time of our town employees who have already worked countless hours on business related to SFDI, I would ask for a detailed report on how much money we as taxpayers have paid so far to settle the SFDI case. The good news is, our Select Board followed through with the Town's vote at the STM and the Town will own the building.

At this same January Select Board meeting, our town clerk gave a report of his duties and his assistant's duties. There also was an "independent journalist" present asking for a lot of Town records because he claims he's working on an article about Sandisfield that he hopes will be printed in the Boston Globe. Can't wait for the article.

There was also a very interesting update on the Knox Trail, and the Town was presented a plaque.

However, the best news in town is that we have lower taxes, two running ambulances, more volunteers who are there for us, a food bank to help someone in need, and Selectmen and board members who work together for the betterment of our Town.

There are still a lot of unanswered questions, but moving forward in a positive way in 2026 is the only way to go. Happy New Year and cheers to our Town. 🍷

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Subjects should be of interest to most of us and have a strong link to Sandisfield, written by and for Town residents. Address either PO Box 584, Sandisfield, or email.

Board Votes to “Take” Fire House #2

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RESPONSES

Chairman Steve Seddon said later in an email to The Times: “It would be nice if this organization did the right thing and gifted the building to the Fire Department or at a minimum accepted the friendly-taking agreement not to sue the Town for more money after the \$299,000 payment is made. I think everyone can agree that if this is truly about public safety and if SFDI wants to honor its mission to fundraise and support the Sandisfield Fire Department, then it would make an honorable and symbolic choice to put this matter to bed so everyone can move on.”

Reached by phone, SFDI President Andrus said, “I believe most people have been deceived about the process. For 2026, the association [SFDI] looks forward to being more positive and open about getting our message out. We asked the Select Board to rescind its disassociation letter [from SFDI] so we would be able to give the money back to the Town. Since they haven't done so, we will use the money to reformat SFDI into an organization that we hope can find ways to help the Town.”

The issue is now making its way toward the Berkshire County Courthouse. 🍷

Chris Maccarini, PMP

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LICENSED BONDED INSURED

Sandisfield Traffic Jam


Returning home a little after 3:00 one afternoon between Christmas and New Years, Lauren Paul turned onto Route 57 and passed the New Boston Inn, nearing the New Boston Church. Four cars were stopped ahead of her and more coming the other way. Finally, she saw why. Five confused ducks were in the middle of the road, trying to figure out which way to go. Lauren wrote: "Smiling when I saw what was going on, I marveled at how patient and sweet the scene was while the ducks finally meandered to the south side and we all continued on our way." 

Photo: Lauren Paul



HOUSE RENTAL SCAM

DON'T SEND ANY MONEY TO ANYBODY AHEAD OF ANYTHING

Shauna Burke reported this scam on Connect Sandisfield/Facebook in December. Reprinted as a public service with permission.


A troubling thing happened in December. A new kind of scammer, at least to me.

My mother's house in Sandisfield is for sale. It is advertised online.

Some scammer screen-grabbed the online photos and separately advertised the house for rent.

When my husband went to check on the house last month, a gentleman showed up on the property, looking to rent the place.

The scammer had asked for a security deposit from the potential renter!

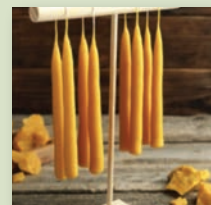
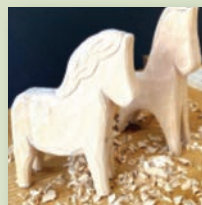
Be careful out there! If you are looking at rentals by owners – make sure that the property is not listed on for sale sites. 



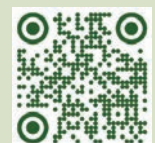
Mill River Folk School

www.millriverfolkschool.org
a Massachusetts 501(c)(3) not-for-profit

Registration for the 2026 workshop season is now open,
and the first one is on us! (February)
Space is limited, so register soon.



Blacksmithing, Woodcarving, Beeswax Candle Making,
Basket Making, and much more!



Thank You!

to all those who contributed to our appeal last month!

Anonymous

George & Anne Apostolatos

Paul Adams

Axel Aldred

Deborah Barchat

Michael Barrie

Karlene Blass

Ed & Karen Brozman

Susie Crofut

David Dean

Peter & Michelle Ebstein

Mark Fay

Cary Fleisher

David Glaser

Jeff Gonyeau & Jack Dennerlein

Antonia & Jack Grumbach

Rajarshi Guha

Wendy Gutterson

Katherine Hein M.D.

Jerry & Dassy Herman

John & Lynn Huydic

Daniel Keener

Seth Kershner

Matthew Lissak

Adam Manacher

George & Tina McDowell

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INTERNATIONAL REALTY

The Bleak Winter

Cont'd from p.1

DCR understood the historic significance of the farm, a superb, authentic example of 19th century agricultural tradition in New England. The estate was also said to be the most environmentally important, unspoiled large tract of land in Massachusetts and a rare opportunity for the state.

What to do with the farmstead was the subject of debate in the DCR for years. One idea was to lease the land and useable buildings to an on-site caretaker for small-scale farming. The Rowley house was considered as a potential local DCR office.

The English-style barn, one of the last of its kind, also had educational potential. Several years ago, the failing roof was patched up and the sagging west wall braced while alternatives were evaluated. Ultimately it was decided that all but one building was beyond salvage, and that included the barn.

ONE FAMILY, 200 YEARS

The Richard Adams family of Connecticut pioneered the Beech Plain section in the 1760s. They operated the first mill in the area, on the Clam River near the Lower Spectacle Pond outlet.

In 1855, William Hawley of Dalton acquired 200 acres of established farmland and buildings from his brother-in-law, Harry G. Adams. He was the great-grandson of Richard and husband of Lucy Hawley, William's sister. Harry died a few months later, only 37. Hawley expanded the farm and established a very productive sawmill (200,000 board feet in 1886). William's granddaughter, Ada Hawley married Alford Rowley of Tolland in 1908. After William Hawley died in 1909, the family enterprise continued into the 1970s as Rowley Bros. Farm & Saw Mill, Inc.

A long-time resident of nearby West Otis, Nancy Rowley Loring grew up on the farm and attended the one-room grade school on Cold Spring Road. When asked by The Times for her thoughts and reflections about the demolition, she said, "I went over there. I had to see it. We knew this day was coming ... it was inevitable, I guess. There are no words to express how I feel."



The original late-18th century farmhouse, 1890



1961




2011

GOODBYE TO WHAT WAS HERE

Much time and attention were paid to saving the great barn, but DCR structural consultants ultimately advised against it. Soon it will also come down along with the summer cabins leaving only the abattoir.

Considered a unique example of an early-19th century Massachusetts slaughterhouse, the abattoir was recently restored by the DCR. The project incorporated siding and other fabric salvaged from the original house. The building stands both as a tangible witness and educational resource to inform future generations about a much different way of life here long ago and the extraordinary family at this place. A tip of the hat to the DCR which recognized the significance of the abattoir, probably the last of its kind, and made it a priority for preservation.

Additional fabric from the original house and certain interior features like a mantel were saved. Also, the barn is thought to have a considerable amount of reuseable material so the demolition and salvage will proceed carefully. Material will be stored in expectation of restoration projects at other DCR properties around the state. The granite sills of the foundations of the major buildings will be saved in place. An historical display in the abattoir about the long history of the farm is under consideration. 



Photos this page:

Top two: the 19th century Rowley house, across the road, as it appeared in 1930 and 2015.

Bottom two: January 6, 2026. Original farmhouse under demolition. View of 18th century English-style barn from the ruins of the Rowley house.



Monday, 9:00 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

Wednesday, 1:00 p.m.–7:00 p.m.

Thursday, 2:00 p.m. - 6 p.m.

Saturday, 10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Closed Tuesday, Friday and Sunday

Phone: 258-4966

sandisfieldlibrary@gmail.com

www.sandisfieldlibrary.org

Events at the Library this Month:

FOOD PANTRY AT THE LIBRARY

Low on budget? Need a little helping hand? Please stop by any time the library is open and browse nonperishable grocery items on our shelves in the lower level.

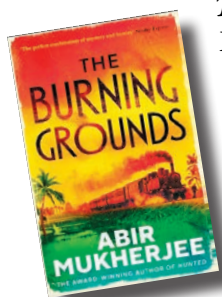
Donations of NON-perishable food items can be dropped at the Sandisfield Library during regular library hours as well.

Our thanks to EVERYONE who has graciously donated to our little food pantry. You know who you are. We greatly appreciate your help and kindness.

Latest Additions to the Library Shelves:

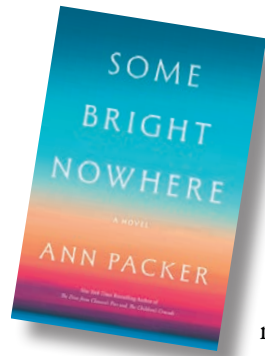
ADULT FICTION

Return of the Spider. An Alex Cross thriller by James Patterson.

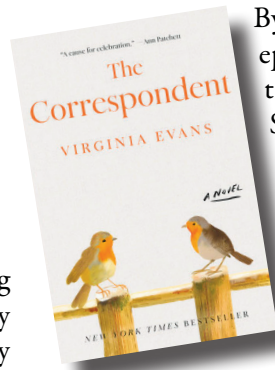


The Burning Grounds. By Abir Mukherjee. The Sixth historical mystery in the Wyndham and Banerjee Series, set in 1920s Calcutta.

Evensong. By Stewart O'Nan. A novel that follows a group of women of a "certain age" who band together to help one another as they face the challenges of their golden years.



Some Bright Nowhere. By Ann Packer. The novel, an Oprah's Book Club pick, explores love, marriage and mortality through the story of long-married couple, Clair and Eliot, as they face the end of Clair's life after a long battle with cancer.



The Correspondent. By Virginia Evans. An epistolary novel, told through letters of Sybil's life. The novel explores the themes of the power of literature, finding connection, the wisdom of age and the importance of forgiveness.

The White Hot. By Quiara Alegria Hudes. A debut novel told as a letter from a mother, April, to her daughter, Noelle, explaining her sudden abandonment of her family for ten days, which turns into a decade-long absence, exploring themes of female rage, generational trauma, and the search for self-discovery through a spiritual and lyrical journey.

Need a Notary? The Library can do that too! Give us a call for an appointment or stop by during regular hours.

Museum Passes: Don't forget the Library has passes to several local museums!!

- Springfield Museums – all FIVE!
- Clark Museum
- Hancock Shaker Village
- Norman Rockwell Museum



Pruning Workshop

FREE!

Sat., January 17

10:00 a.m.

At the Sandisfield Orchard

101 New Hartford Rd.
Sandisfield

Learn how to prune semi-dwarf and larger-sized apple trees for tree health and fruit production from the perspective of a commercial orchardist.

Everyone is welcome and there is no fee to attend.

Please email joe@sandisfieldorchard.com to RSVP if you would like to attend.

If there is inclement weather, a notification will be sent to those who have registered.

Simon Honored

His New Book, *THE BREATH OF THE GODS*

By Tom Christopher

Local literary celebrity Simon Winchester was honored by the Sandisfield Arts Center at the end of November with a public interview concerning his latest book, *The Breath of the Gods: The History and Future of Wind*.

Arts Center co-president Suzanne O'Connell, herself an environmental scientist, shared an on-stage conversation with the author about topics ranging from the genesis of Winchester's interest in the wind to his various experiences with it and how he had assembled a cohesive and entertaining narrative about such a broad topic.

As Simon describes in his book:

Wind must have been truly inexplicable to those who first felt and experienced it. Not least, of course, because it couldn't be seen. ... But the unseen force – how to explain and understand this invisible, mysterious, and, in its power, often frightening entity.

The event attracted a diverse audience of townspeople and residents of surrounding communities, all of whom wished to hear about Winchester's new, critically acclaimed exploration of one of the most powerful and complex forces of Nature.

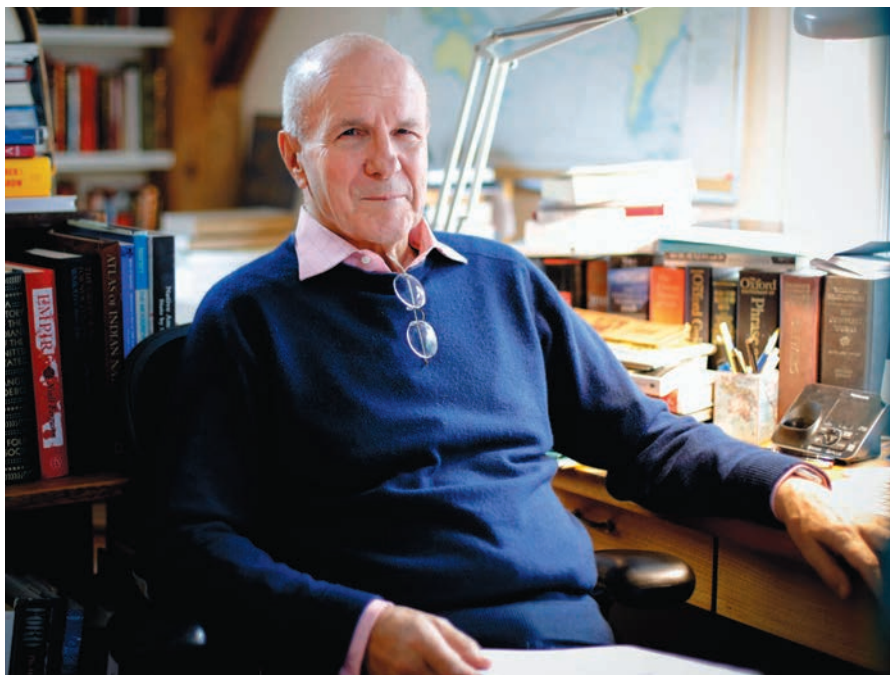


Photo: Stephanie Zollshan, The Berkshire Eagle

Judging from the many questions contributed by audience members, interest levels were high. Certainly, the sales of signed copies of the book at the end of the event were brisk. A 25-year resident of Sandisfield, Simon was the founder and first editor of The Sandisfield Times in 2010.

This year the Arts Center reinforced its commitment to making its events available to all residents of Sandisfield by instituting a policy of low-cost community tickets for most of its events. In this instance, no admission was charged at all. Generous donors in the audience, however, made sure that the Arts Center didn't lose by its inclusiveness, contributing \$500 in cash contributions at the event.

Residents may look forward to a rich series of programs in 2026. When the schedule is finalized, it will be posted on the Sandisfield Arts Center's website at www.sandisfieldartscenter.org and in a report in The Sandisfield Times. 🇺🇸

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KNOX HAPPENINGS

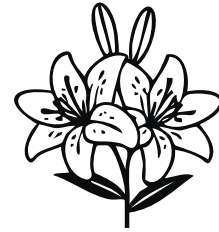
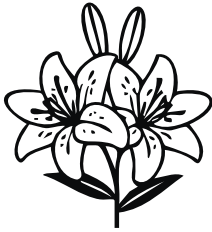
JAN 3RD COLD SHOT 8PM
JAN 9TH DAVE O'CONNELL 6PM
JAN 16TH BRETT POTTER 6PM
JAN 17TH D-ROD BAND
JAN 18TH HILLTOWN BLUES JAM 2PM
JAN 23RD NATE MARTEL 6-9PM
JAN 24TH THE MONDAY PROJECT 7PM
JAN 30TH MELISSA BRINTON 6PM
FEB 1ST PAINT & SIP PARTY 2PM
FEB 7TH ROCK 201 8PM

♥ FEB 14TH VALENTINES DAY ♥
WITH FRANK SINATRA TRIO TRIBUTE

FEB 20TH BRETT POTTER 6PM
FEB 21ST EVEN IT UP BAND 8PM
FEB 28TH FANNY PACK BAND 8PM

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Comings and Goings



HELEN MEISL

1930-2026

Helen Meisl, 95, passed away peacefully at home on January 3. A Sandisfield resident for more than 50 years, Helen's first home here lacked electricity and running water.

Helen was born on October 9, 1930, in Obertiefenbach, Gottschee, Slovenia. She came to the United States in 1948 after her family lost everything during WWII. She settled in Ridgewood, N.Y., where she met her husband of 50 years, Josef Meisl. They went on to have six children and in 1972 moved out to Sandisfield, where she has remained since.

Helen was known for her feisty spirit, strong work ethic, and unwavering love for those around her. A devoted wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, she found her greatest joy in time spent with family. She was always present in the lives of her entire family. From family gatherings, birthday parties, holidays, graduations, recitals, gossiping with her grandchildren, and more, she showed up for everyone. She was, and always will be, the heart of the family.

Helen also loved to garden, work outdoors, and was amazing in the kitchen. Many happy and loving memories come from hanging in the kitchen baking, cooking, or just enjoying food with Grandma Hatzy, as she is known to her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Her recipes are shared throughout the family and will live on for future generations to enjoy. She will be remembered for her faith, spirit, generosity, and the love she shared so freely.

Helen was the youngest of five children and was preceded in death by her husband Josef Meisl; her parents, George and Anna Stefandl; her brother John Stefandl; her sisters, Anne Neu, Josephine Ahrens, and Mutchie Kromer; as well as her sons-in-law, Michael Concannon and Christopher Sullivan. She is survived by her six children, Edeltraud Thomason and her husband Robert, Josef Meisl and his wife Brenda, Irene Concannon, Katherine Meisl and her partner Helen McDermott, Stephan Meisl and his wife Kellie, and Nancy Sullivan and her partner Robert Hawley; 11 grandchildren, Josef Meisl and his wife Annie, William Meisl, Liberty Meisl, Lantana Meisl, Bobbi Thomason, Hope Thomason, Keith Thomason and his wife Heather, Stephanie Regan and her husband Chris, Brigit Nastro and her husband James, Michelle Ingrassia and her husband Jim, and Benjamin Meisl; 12 great-grandchildren, Josef Meisl, Emery Thomason, Elsie Regan, Tessa Regan, Patrick Nastro, Mary Jane Nastro, Helen Ingrassia, Agnes Ingrassia, Layne Thomason, Brayden Thomason, Paige Thomason, and Gracyn Thomason; and many nieces and nephews.

Funeral services for Helen Meisl were held January 8 at the Birches-Roy Funeral Home in Great Barrington with Fr. Robert Miskell officiating. Burial was in Sandisfield Center Cemetery. Condolences may be made through the funeral home's website.

Marcella Smith, a former President of the Sandisfield Arts Center, died in New York City in early December. An obituary/tribute will appear in our March issue.



Thank You, Neighbors


By Times Reporters

The Thanksgiving fire that destroyed a historic barn at the Blachere's home on New Hartford Road drew ten fire and rescue departments from surrounding towns. The Select Board sent a letter to each of them, acknowledging that "The combined efforts of Sandisfield firefighters and our mutual-aid partners were vital in establishing a reliable water supply, protecting nearby structures, containing the brush fire, and bringing the situation under control."

The letter continued: "We are especially grateful that so many of you answered the call on Thanksgiving Day—taking time away from your own families and celebrations to support our community. Your dedication exemplifies the commitment and compassion that define the fire service, and it did not go unnoticed."

"Thank you to the eight mutual-aid departments who responded and to every firefighter who contributed time, effort, and resources. Your partnership strengthens our region and ensures that no community stands alone in moments of need."

The mutual-aid departments that responded included:

- Colebrook Engine
- Great Barrington Engine
- New Hartford for Station Coverage
- New Marlboro Engine and Tanker
- Monterey Quint and Engine Tanker
- Norfolk Fire Department
- North West Medic
- Otis Tanker, Rescue, and Engine
- Riverton Tanker
- Winsted Fast Team 



Letters to the Editor

Report on Barn Fire

Tom Christopher's thoughtful article on the terrible loss of the Blachere's beautiful historic barn in the December issue of The Times was fine writing. Though it is a tender time for Eva and JP, we're thankful Tom's detailed piece strikes a compassionate tone and was not in the least sensational.

Tom included that because "of the measures regarding the fire department adopted at Sandisfield's recent Special Town Meeting, what ensued was tragic, but far better than it could have been." We're grateful Tom shared this very important reminder with readers when reporting on the Blachere's loss. The STM showed that votes have a direct effect on outcomes and in this case, as Tom reported, it thankfully affected that outcome positively.

Superb reporting takes skill, experience, and often times a gentle hand, especially when dealing with tragedies, and those involved are one's good friends and neighbors. Tom proves a gifted writer can inform the public without injecting additional drama into an already emotionally fraught situation.

The Times is fortunate to have Tom Christopher on its staff. Well done.

Melissa and Jeff Bye
New Hartford Rd.

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Sandisfield Scholarship Committee

PENNY AUCTION RESULTS

By Elaine O'Brien

Our scholarship fund-raising tables at the Annual Holiday Fair were such fun again this year.

We added two new tables this year. A Silent Auction Table added \$300 to the scholarship fund, and a separate Kids Only (12 years and under) table in addition to the regular Penny Auction Table, when combined, added \$286, and plus two \$\$ donations that made the total towards the Scholarship Fund \$601.

So, thank you so much if you were there and purchased a number envelopes or bid at the Silent Auction.

A special thanks to all who donated the items for these tables, some of which were homemade goods, unique craftsmanship items, gift certificates for all sorts of activities and unusual products.

The Sandisfield Scholarships are offered to all qualifying Sandisfield high-school seniors to help defray the costly expenses of furthering their education at either a two-or-four-year college or a vocational school.



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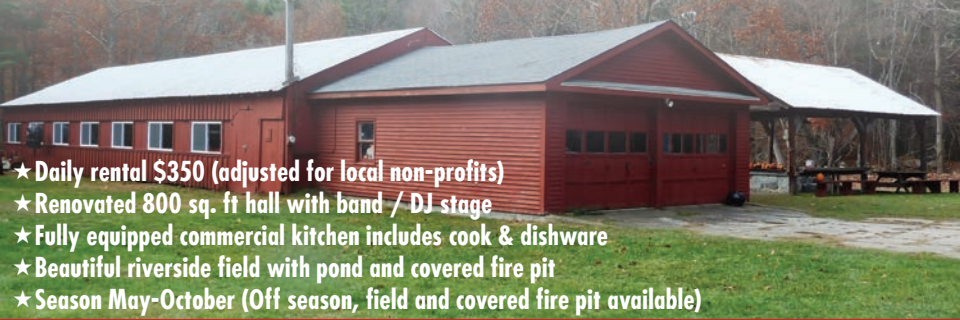
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CRITTER CORNER

Posing for a Portrait: Another Hawk

Last month we published an image of a red-tailed hawk taken by Cindy Flint-Ragusa of Otis through her kitchen window in November. On January 4 this year, another hawk perched on her deck and sat patiently until Cindy could catch its picture through another window. This time it was a red-shouldered variety of hawk.



NEW BOSTON CHURCH SERVICES

Sunday, January 25
from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m.

Sunday, February 8
from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m.

Sunday, February 15
from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m.

All welcome.

4 Sandisfield Road
Sandisfield, MA 01255

newbostoncongregationalchurch.org

Winter Transfer Station Hours

Wednesday, 12 noon-5:00 p.m.

Saturday, 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Sunday, 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.



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- Climate Forestry




Members of the New Boston Congregational Church sang Christmas carols with residents of the Berkshire Rehabilitation & Skilled Care Center in New Boston on December 19.

*Left to right, standing: Steve Pincus, Steve Hoekstra, Jean Atwater-Williams, and Karlene Blass.
Seated: Chris Park, Christine Nadelman.*

SANDISFIELD Historical Society Christmas Fair

By Ann Wald

Another Christmas Fair is packed up and put away. We had wonderful vendors and products that anyone would love to have for themselves or to give as a gift. Food prepared by the ladies at the Little Brown Church was enjoyed by everyone. Santa showed up to the delight of the children, sponsored by the Recreation Committee. The kids sat on his lap to tell him about their wishes and received an early gift from the big guy. It was a great way to start the holiday season. We thank everyone who supported this yearly event. A definite thank you to the firemen who not only prepared the firehouse for us but stayed to help us out all day. 

WINTER 2025-2026 SNOWFALL



2025-2026 Snowfall to date
as measured / estimated
at a Beech Plain back-yard
weather station.

November 2025	1 inch
December 2025	
2	6.5
10	2.0
14	2.0
19	1.0
23	1.0
27	7.0

Nov/Dec Total 20.5

January 2026

1	2.0
5	1.5
7	1.0

January YTD 4.5

SEASON TO DATE 25.0

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Dec 5, 2025 -3.1

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

JANUARY AND FEBRUARY EVENTS

Sandisfield Select Board Meetings are currently tin-person at Town Hall and via Zoom at 6:00 p.m. on Mondays unless otherwise posted. Please visit sandisfieldma.gov or call 258-4711 for information.

Playgroup on Tuesdays from 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. at the Otis Town Hall. Sponsored by South Berkshire Kids. No pre-registration is necessary. Led by Nina Carr. This fun program includes free play, crafts, stories, and songs! A great time to meet up with friends and meet new friends! For confirmation of dates, please call Nina Carr (258-3314). Free!

Coffee Hour on Wednesdays at 10:00 a.m. at the Council on Aging, Town Hall Annex. Snacks and conversation! For more information, contact Nina Carr (258-3314). Free.

Chair Yoga with Wendy Larsen on Wednesdays at 2:00 p.m. at the Old Town Hall on 3 Silverbrook Road, sponsored by the Council on Aging. For more information, contact Nina Carr (258-3314). Free.

Food Pantry on the 1st and 3rd Saturday of the month from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Sandisfield Library, lower level.

Pruning Workshop on Saturday, January 17 at 10:00 a.m. at the Sandisfield Orchard. Come learn how to prune semi-dwarf and larger-sized apple trees for tree health and fruit production from the perspective of a commercial orchardist. Everyone is welcome and there is no fee to attend. Please email joe@sandisfieldorchard.com to RSVP if you would like to attend. If there is inclement weather, a notification will be sent to those who have registered. Free.

Worship Service on Sunday, January 25, February 8 and 15 from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. at the New Boston Congregational Church located on Route 57. For more

information and to view the calendar, visit newbostoncongregationalchurch.org.

ONLINE EVENTS

A Farm and Garden Show with Sandisfield Residents Bill Taylor and Jaye Alison Moscariello streamed every Monday from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. at berkshireradio.org.

EVENTS IN SURROUNDING TOWNS

COA Coffee Social every Monday at 9:00 a.m. at the Tolland Public Safety Complex. Open to all Tolland residents and those of neighboring towns. Coffee, pastries, and good company! Free.

Chair Yoga on Tuesdays from 10:30 to 11:45 a.m. at the Tolland Public Safety Complex. To reserve a spot, please email MaryAnn (mademing67@gmail.com) or Bonnie (bonniescrivener@msn.com). Free.

Bird Walks on Saturdays at 10:00 a.m. meeting at the Berkshire Food Co-op and led by the Berkshire Bird Observatory. Register for free at Berkshirebirds.org/events.

Crafting Conversations with Susie Kandt on Wednesdays through April 29 from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. at the Berkshire South Community Center in Great Barrington. Bring your current project and work alongside others in a casual and friendly atmosphere focused on creative play and light conversations. Free.

Knox Trail 250th Celebration in Monterey with a special exhibit and programs on various days at the Bidwell House Museum. Visit bidwellhousemuseum.org/events for updated information. See related story on page 5.

Berkshire Grown Winter Farmers Market on Saturdays, January 17 and February 21, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

at the Housatonic Community Center on 1064 Main Street in Housatonic. Vendors offer an abundance of locally-grown food, including fresh greens, winter squash, root crops, apples, meat, cheese, jam, honey, and maple syrup, baked goods, and more. Local artisan crafters round out the market offerings, and each market features live music.

A Day in Revolutionary Stockbridge on Saturday, January 24 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Many activities, including First Person Interpretors, Mission House Open House, Prado del Lana's Lincoln Longwool sheep on the library lawn, wool-related activities, cooking demonstrations with Bidwell House Museum volunteers, 2nd Massachusetts Regiment, a talk by Mohican veterans, and more! Free!

Edith Wharton's Birthday Celebration on Saturday, January 24 from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. at The Mount in Lenox.

Murder on the Menu on Saturday, January 31 at 6:00 p.m. at Lenox Memorial High School. Dinner and a Show. Call 518-567-4731 or email (rbannen@lenoxps.org) to reserve your tickets. \$20.

Winter Wonders-A Cozy Indoor Makers & Grower's Market on Saturday, February 7 from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at Ventford Hall Gilded Age Mansion & Museum in Lenox.

Winterfest on Sunday, February 15 from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. at the Monterey Community Center. Enjoy hot dogs, chili, cookies, s'mores, cocoa, hot cider, music, crafts, sledding, and snow sculptures! Outdoor fire pit for warmth. Bring your sleds and lawn chairs to enjoy an afternoon of winter fun with neighbors and friends. Free!

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Please see page 9 for donor recognition.*



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 any amount are needed to ensure the continuation of this newspaper. Please send checks to: The Sandisfield Times, P.O. Box 584,

Sandisfield, MA 01255 or donate online at our website: www.sandisfieldtimes.org. Donations to The Sandisfield Times are deductible under section 170 of the Federal Income Tax Code. Donations do not include subscriptions. Subscriptions do not qualify as donations.

The Times is distributed free of charge to all Sandisfield postal address and boxes. Free copies are available at the following town locations: The transfer station (Wed/Sat/Sun), the Library, and in New Boston at A&M Auto, the Farmington River General Store, and the

New Boston Inn. The Times is also available in West Otis at the laundromat, the library, and Paige's Place; in East Otis at Katie's, Pappas, and the Knox Trail Inn. Also at the Monterey Library (outside box) and the Roadside Cafe, in Colebrook at the post office, and in New Marlborough at the Mill River General Store. Back copies are available for purchase.

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