



New Marlborough 5 Village News

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Clayton • Hartsville • Mill River • New Marlborough • Southfield

MUSIC & MORE

Much, Much More

By Larry Burke

What may have seemed months ago to be quite a feather in the cap of the New Marlborough Village Association's Music and More series – to have landed Garrison Keillor of *A Prairie Home Companion* fame as the guest speaker for the 2019 season finale – turns out to have been the spark that ignited a local controversy that continues to smolder weeks after the event itself.

On October 2, just three days before the Award-winning Author's talk was to take place, a posting on maggies-list advocating a boycott of the event almost instantly triggered a response from others in town who were in opposition to an appearance by a public figure who had been in the national spotlight for allegations of sexual misconduct.

While the great majority of follow-up posts came from women – and a few men – who were opposed to providing Mr. Keillor with a platform, a number of maggies-list contributors spoke, not so much in defense of Keillor, but in favor of free speech. (In the interest of brevity, this article will not go further in the details of the on-line debate, but readers are encouraged to view the stream of posts on maggies-list in order to understand the extent of strong feelings engendered by the Keillor visit.)

The torrent of posts caused the Board of Directors of the New Marlborough Village Association to engage in its own internal debate as to whether to cancel the event in a gesture of respect to the sensitivities of the citizens who felt offended by the prospect of Keillor's appearance, or to go ahead as planned. The outcome, as stated in a letter signed by Ben Harms, vice-president of the organization, appearing on maggies-list on October 3, was that the Board, following "a robust discussion... ultimately voted to go ahead as scheduled." The letter continued, "Our decision to do so does not diminish the serious nature of the accusations made against Mr. Keillor." The letter then concludes with, "Thank you for speaking out on both sides of the issue that confronts us today. This debate will only strengthen our efforts in future years."

On the morning of the event, October 5, *The Berkshire Eagle* ran a story on the controversy, and, on the off-chance of some sort of disturbances outside the Meeting House or of disruptions within, the *Eagle* sent two reporters to cover the proceedings that afternoon. (Follow-up articles in the *Eagle* appeared on October 9 and October 15.) As show time neared, and as the Meeting House filled to capacity with fans and curiosity seekers, there was a certain air of tension mixed

continued



Garrison Keillor in conversation with Simon Winchester at Music & More's Award-winning Authors program on October 5

photo by Larry Burke

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Music & More, continued

with anticipation. Mr. Keillor himself moved up and down the aisle repeatedly, perhaps to dispel his own unease, or perhaps to gauge the tenor of the crowd.

At the appointed time, John Schreiber, the newly-elected president of the Village Association, welcomed the crowd. Dr. Schreiber did not shy away from speaking of the controversy that had arisen surrounding Mr. Keillor's appearance in New Marlborough, and he spoke of the Board's wrestling with the dilemma, its discussions, "mirroring the passion and disagreements that are circling in our community about this engagement." He went on to say that the decision of the Board to "let the community listen, learn, and decide on their own" has hurt some people and created some divisiveness, and to those people Dr. Schreiber offered his sincere apology, saying, "Certainly it was not our intention to do that."

Over the course of the next hour, Mr. Keillor and his interlocutor, Simon Winchester, engaged in a conversation of a sort, with Mr. Winchester pursuing a line of questioning and Mr. Keillor responding. The questions were designed to give us a chronology of Keillor's life, and his answers were a combination of straight-forward, droll, or broadly humorous. The audience learned the details of Keillor's early life in Minnesota, within a conservative, evangelical religious sect called the Plymouth Brethren. Keillor left the sect when he was twenty, no longer able to abide a world "in which the men ruled." He had gravitated instead toward his eighteen aunts, "women who had a sense of humor." Mr. Winchester attempted to draw Mr. Keillor out on the relationship with his father, but only elicited a bit of wordplay on the word "sorted," which Mr. Keillor chose to hear as "sordid."

When Mr. Winchester queried Mr. Keillor about his high school experience, Keillor replied that he graduated, "... with a B-." He went on to say, "Back then, I was a very quiet kid, and this was, at the time, assumed to be a sign of intelligence.... Nowadays, they would say, 'high functioning end of the autism

spectrum.'" This was one of many observations during the course of the talk that drew a big laugh, perhaps because of its kernel of truth.

Mr. Winchester then did a flash-forward to a detailed cross-examination of Mr. Keillor's "wife number two," as Winchester referred to her. The woman, who remained unnamed in this conversation, had been an exchange student from Denmark at Keillor's high school, and they met again and fell in love at their twenty-fifth graduation reunion in 1975.

Returning to the timeline, Mr. Winchester led Keillor through a recitation (replete with plenty of quips and pleasing turns of phrase) of his college career, his first experiences in radio, first publication of his writing in *The New Yorker* in 1969, and the beginnings of *A Prairie Home Companion* on Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) in 1974. Mr. Winchester cited *The Writer's Almanac*, Mr. Keillor's longtime segment on National Public Radio, as his personal favorite aspect of Keillor's work. Mr. Keillor deflected the praise by speaking of the many poets, especially the many female poets, he had been able to bring to a broader public's attention over a period of twenty-five or more years.

Perhaps the single funniest moment of the afternoon occurred next, when Mr. Winchester, attempting to segue to the next topic, wandered into the telling of a macabre story of Alistair Cooke's body being robbed from its grave, at the end of which Garrison Keillor exclaimed, "That is the part of this whole afternoon that everyone is going to remember!"

The moment in the afternoon's proceedings that everyone in the room was anticipating then arrived, as Simon Winchester asked Garrison Keillor to describe the day of November 28, 2017, when Minnesota Public Radio pulled *A Prairie Home Companion* from the airwaves. Mr. Keillor began by saying it didn't affect him that much, since he had already retired at the age of seventy-five. He then gave his take on the events and persons who had brought this all about – a lawsuit



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drawn by a man, “not a woman, although he enlisted a woman,” and this man demanded a million dollars of MPR, or “he would tell what he knew.” Keillor went on to say that the woman had been a friend of his for twenty years who worked as a researcher for him for about eight years, up until the time he retired. Keillor’s perception of her was that she had fallen into a tough set of circumstances in her life, needed money, and was therefore vulnerable to the promise of monetary enticements by the man bringing the suit. Keillor said he would have been willing to have his lawyers make a settlement, but MPR “panicked and they did not want to be in print with the words ‘sexual harassment.’”

“The payment for this is steep,” Keillor continued, using the second person format, “Your publishing contract with Viking Press is immediately cancelled and your column in *The Washington Post* is cancelled and all your speaking engagements stretching ahead are all gone.” He followed on, “I don’t mind that. To me it’s injustice, but it’s injustice on behalf of a good cause, and a cause I believe in.” And then, “My wife does not agree with me.” He added that his wife had experienced sexual harassment many times during her career as a violinist in New York, “where sexual harassment was a part of everyday life. So, my wife is not sympathetic to #MeToo. My wife says you have to know how to say ‘no,’ how to say ‘get your hand off me.... And if you can’t do that, then you shouldn’t be in this line of work.’ That’s my wife’s attitude.”

Coming back to what he wanted the audience to know about his own feelings in the age of #MeToo, Keillor said he feels the way change comes about is through fear, not the law, nor by education, and the way you create change is “to whack prominent men as hard as you can with a two-by-four, and it changes behavior. When the host of *A Prairie Home Companion* gets whacked, it gets people’s attention.”

Mr. Winchester wrapped up the topic by reading a maggies-list posting, highly critical of Garrison Keillor,

lumping him in with Donald Trump, and saying how hurtful it has been for the people of New Marlborough for Mr. Keillor to have been given this public platform. Asked for his reaction, Mr. Keillor said that, while the post’s claims were not true, he wishes he had been able to talk about it directly with the writer.


From there, Mr. Winchester turned to a few questions on what Mr. Keillor has in his future, and that turns out to be a memoir and a fantastical musical starring his *A Prairie Home Companion* regulars, Dusty and Lefty. He then gave the appreciative audience a chance to ask a few questions, which led back to further praise of the woman poets Mr. Keillor featured on *The Writer’s Almanac*, and, in particular, the recently-deceased poet Mary Oliver. In what became the appropriate stopping point for this afternoon of remembrance, Garrison Keillor quoted Oliver’s poem, *Wild Geese*, which begins,

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees

For a hundred miles through the desert repenting.

In the days that have followed Mr. Keillor’s appearance, reverberations of the visit have continued. The maggies-list stream has morphed into a debate on the very nature of a democracy. John Schreiber has resigned as president of the New Marlborough Village Association, with all good will towards his former board members, and with the hope that the Music & More programs in future years will be affirmative and bring people together. Louise Yohalem has also resigned from the board. Ben Harms has reassumed his position as president of the board. Vice President Judith Friedlander says she has met personally with several of the women who were strongly opposed to Keillor’s presence in the Meeting House, and she hopes that at least one of these women will agree to join the board. She also says that the guest for next year’s Award-winning Author’s talk will most certainly be a high-profile woman writer. □



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September 23: The Board, with all three members present, put off reviewing the September 9 minutes, moving instead to the second item on the agenda, the formation of an Affordable Housing Committee, as proposed two weeks ago by Selectman Richard Long.

But before turning the meeting over to Mr. Long, Chairman Yohalem said he first wanted to recognize **Prue Spaulding, who recently retired after many years' service on the Finance Committee.** He described her as someone who embodies the spirit of volunteerism, that she not only served on the Finance Committee, but also heads up the Town's Council on Aging and is the animal inspector, while also being a regular presence at almost every selectmen's meeting. "She's volunteered to do these things not just for a short period of time," he said, "but year after year after year, and this town really owes her a debt of gratitude. Prue," he said turning in her direction, "I just want to thank you for being Prue Spaulding."

Then it was Mr. Long's turn, who began by **emphasizing how critical affordable housing is to the future of the town.** "We have an aging population, and we're tending to look more and more like a retirement community," he said. Most of the new housing that's being built is for weekenders and prospective retirees, and he worries that young families and singles in entry-level or service type jobs can no longer afford to live here. At the same time, he wonders whether the elderly, who currently have housing but need to downsize to something smaller and more affordable, will be able to do so or will have to leave the area. In short, he said, "I'd hate to see the town lose the vigor of a multigenerational community."

He said he wanted to get a conversation started to understand what the needs in the community are and how they should be addressed, both now and in the

future, and to get official Town support behind such an effort through the formation of a town-sponsored Affordable Housing Committee.

He then introduced two Construct Inc. officials, Executive Director Jane Ralph and June Wolfe, Construct's director of housing, who described some of the ways their organization is working with other South County towns, including Egremont, Great Barrington, Lenox, Tyringham, and Becket, to increase the stock of affordable housing, and how Construct might work with New Marlborough. They noted there have already been discussions with the New Marlborough Land Trust on possibly turning Rooney House on the former campus of the Kolburne School into affordable housing.

But as Ms. Ralph was quick to note, they have no specific prescription at this point for what New Marlborough should do. "We just know that towns are healthier when the people who work there can live close by and when the folks who want to live there can continue to live there, and not have their lack of income be a barrier to that, whether they are older or younger families."

They also wanted to emphasize that affordable housing is not housing for the destitute. It's based on the area median income, and it's for working people – school teachers, bank managers, firefighters, police, and the people who perhaps work at the Old Inn on the Green or at Tom Brazie's farm. "It's housing that's affordable."

There was considerably more discussion, including the fact that the state mandates that 10 percent of a town's housing be affordable. Under certain circumstances, towns that aren't meeting that mandate are vulnerable to developers coming in and erecting housing complexes that don't conform to local zoning ordinances, as long as they contain some affordable units.

There was agreement around the table the Town

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needed to be more proactive in this area, working closely with Construct, at which point Mr. Yohalem called for a vote on a motion to form an **Affordable Housing Committee, which was quickly adopted by the full Board.**

Moving on, the Board reviewed and approved the minutes for the September 9 meeting and then appointed Eugene Cleary to the Cultural Council on the recommendation of Council Chair Nancy Barbe.

Regarding the two pending commercial solar projects, Mr. Yohalem reported there's been no response from Cap Verte Energie on the Board's revisions to its performance guarantee proposal for the Knight Road installation. There also has not been any meaningful movement on the Park Avenue Solar Payment in Lieu of Taxes, or PILOT, negotiations in connection with the proposed solar installation opposite the Highway Department garage in Mill River. Those negotiations are continuing.

Separately, the Board voted to lock in the delivered price of both heating oil and diesel fuel with the Mirabito Fuel Group at \$2.3686 per gallon for heating oil and \$2.5931 per gallon for diesel fuel for the Highway Department.

In other matters, the **Board agreed to publicize the 2020 decennial census count** as requested by the U.S. Census Bureau. As Town Administrator Mari Enoch noted, the more people filling out the census form, the more the Town benefits. The Board directed that flyers be included in the quarterly tax bills as well in the annual street listing survey sent out by the town clerk; posters will be put up at Town Hall and the Library. Announcements will be made at the selectmen's weekly meetings and via the News and Notices feed, all stressing the importance of filling out the census form. In addition, the Town will provide a census access point via a computer at the library.

Affordable housing is based on the area median income, so that people who work there can live close by, and that people who want to continue to live there won't be barred by lack of income.

Under town administrator updates, Ms. Enoch announced **the Town, in partnership with Sheffield and Otis, has been awarded a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)**, by the state. The total value is \$1.26 million, with the money to be shared with the other two towns. She said Pat Mullins of Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, which will be administering the grant, will be at next week's meeting to go over next steps and the breakdown of how the grant will be shared. A year ago, the Town, in partnership with the Town of Cheshire, received a \$1 million CDBG housing rehab grant, covering repairs on up to six units in New Marlborough. The money from this year's grant will go towards additional rehab work and for design costs associated

with bringing Town Hall into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Under selectmen updates, Mr. Long reported that the human resources consultant he'd hoped to hire for \$10,000 withdrew from consideration because of other work. There were three other options, he said. One firm in Chicago was asking for two and half times that amount for the same scope of work; another was a private consultant who withdrew because of family considerations. The third is the Collins Center for Public Management at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which specializes in municipal and state government management issues, and, according to Mr. Long, is submitting a proposal.

Peter Schuyten

September 30: As Chairman Nat Yohalem observed at its conclusion, this evening's meeting would have been a model of brevity had it not been for agenda item three. Alas, agenda item three went on for a grueling hour and forty minutes.

Having established Town Hall Halloween (October 31) Trick-or-Treat time from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m., the Board

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tackled item three: a review of 2018 and 2019 Community Development Block Grant awards, a federally funded program. The Board had invited Patricia A. Mullins, community and economic development manager at Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), an organization that, among other things, manages grants for some Berkshire County towns, to guide it through the Byzantine grant process and describe its progress thus far.

Any hope that she might provide a quick summary was dispelled as Ms. Mullins took her seat with two four-inch thick binders under her arm.

First, a bit of background: In 2018, New Marlborough joined with Cheshire to win a CDBG grant of \$775,000 — New Marlborough's share, \$200,000 — to rehabilitate houses in town owned by low-income families. Another \$225,000 was awarded for "program delivery," i.e. BRPC administration. In 2019, New Marlborough, this time teamed with Otis and Sheffield, won a grant of \$1,256,000. Of this amount, the Town will receive approximately \$240,000 for a second round of low-income housing rehab. Another \$80,000 is earmarked to create a plan that will make Town Hall ADA- (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant. (In grant-speak, it's referred to as an ABR, for architectural barrier removal.)

In 2018, Ms. Mullins reported, of fourteen New Marlborough rehab applicants, five were chosen on a first-come-first-served basis. Two are 95 percent complete, two are being rebid (either because the original bids were too high or there were none); and one is just going out for bid the first time. There is a ceiling of \$40,000 per house, but some projects may not use the full amount, and so there may be space in the grant for another 2018 rehab.

Regarding the 2019 grant, Ms. Mullins laid out the eleven-step process, as prescribed by Massachusetts

law, for selecting an ABR designer. It starts with the appointment of a Designer Selection Committee (DSC), and proceeds to the development of selection procedures, the drafting and issuance of a request for proposal, interviewing, checking references, awarding and executing a contract — all involving a dizzying mix of committees and individuals.

The rehab portion of the grant must also jump through procedural hoops. Any contractor wishing to take on rehab work must be pre-approved. Ms. Mullins admitted, in response to a question from Selectman Richard Long, that in bidding on a project a contractor must file the same level of paper work as would be required on a municipal building project, a burden that has dimmed the enthusiasm of some contractors in Berkshire county for whom a \$40,000 project has limited appeal. A member of the audience asked if he could choose his own contractor — or do the work himself. The answer was no and no.

Ms. Mullins went on to describe the formation and duties of a Citizens Advisory Commission, a group of five to seven townspeople that would act as a liaison to BRPC and enter into grievance negotiations that could

The Town will actively publicize the 2020 census effort because a robust rate of participation will directly benefit the Town. Many funding decisions are based on the census results.



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not be settled at the level of the program manager or the town administrator. She detailed at length the procedure for handling grievances and then distributed a two-and-a-half-page policy statement on the subject, one of eight such handouts describing policies and progress to date with grant expenditures.

To be eligible for rehabilitation assistance, said Ms. Mullins, a homeowner must meet income-eligibility requirements; the house must be a primary residence — no second-home owners; and the cost of the project cannot exceed the value of the property. In response to a question from the audience, Ms. Mullins was dubious that a mobile home might qualify for the program: it would have to be permanently situated, and finding a contractor who could work with sheet metal, she opined, might prove daunting.

With assurances that she would be working with the Town on a regular basis to fulfill the mandates of the two block grants, Ms. Mullins departed, and the meeting moved on to the remainder of its agenda.

The selectmen voted unanimously to **discontinue use of the much-beloved wooden ballot box** in favor of a newly purchased voting tabulator (see page 13 for a look at this concession to efficiency). Nat Yohalem announced that the Board had not yet received a satisfactory performance guarantee from Cap Verte Energie, the parent company of the concern that has applied for a permit to install a solar-panel array off Knight Road. Nor has Park Avenue Solar, which wants to place a project off Mill River Southfield Road opposite the Highway Department Garage, responded to the Town's latest Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) proposal. A continued lack of response could result, said Mr. Yohalem, in denial of a permit to Cap Verte and, in

the absence of a PILOT, establishment of a property tax on the Park Avenue installation.

Richard Long reported that **Mary Aicardi of the Collins Center, a department at the University of Massachusetts that has agreed to assist the Town in developing a human resources policy, agreed to meet with the Board on October 7.** Tara White said that representatives from the eight member towns of the Berkshire Hills and Southern Berkshire Regional School Districts met over the question of consolidation and decided that they did not need to be joined by representatives of the two school committees until it came time to select a facilitator. She said that the eight-town committee would meet again October 15.


Finally, a set of financial warrants were signed by all three selectmen, and the meeting adjourned. The Board doesn't hand out gold stars for citizenship, but it might be noted that residents Prue Spaulding and Tom Stalker sat, otherwise unbidden, through all two hours and fifteen minutes of the meeting.

Joe Poindexter

October 7: With all three board members present, Chairman Yohalem began the meeting at 5:38 p.m. by welcoming Mary Aicardi of the Collins Center to discuss its proposal to assist the Town in its comprehensive human resources review.

Created by the state legislature in 2008, the Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management has as its mission the improvement of government efficiency with a particular focus on local municipal and state government operations. Ms. Aicardi provided the Board with a proposal in the amount of \$15,000 for a wage and classification plan for about twenty positions, and the development of employee policies and procedures

The Town, in partnership with Sheffield and Otis, has received a Community Development Block Grant. New Marlborough's portion will cover additional housing rehabilitation efforts, as well as the design costs for bringing Town Hall into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.



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to include best practice recommendations for benefits, leave administration, and performance evaluations.

Under the proposal, employees will receive a questionnaire and an in-person interview, which will be used to produce position descriptions. The Center will then perform market surveys and make recommendations regarding classification and compensation structure.

The Center, Ms. Aicardi indicated, would also review policy decisions, which include raises based on ranges, merit, grades, or steps, and provide tools for performance evaluations. Ms. Aicardi stated they can also help develop policies for recruiting, terminating, and retiring, along with a review and recommendations of present personnel policies. She went on to explain that it can help determine stipends, hourly salaries versus wage structures, comp time, and flex time. She further stated they can advise the Town so it keeps up with the legality of HR practices.

Ms. Enoch asked where the number of twenty positions came from, and Mr. Long indicated he tried to guess at the number of positions and came up with about twenty. Ms. Enoch clarified there were different kinds of employees throughout town and asked if all positions would be included in this study. Ms. Aicardi said she understood and would provide Ms. Enoch with a document to fill out, listing all Town employees and their positions for her review.

When asked for a completion date, Ms. Aicardi said, based on the Center receiving all the data right away, it could be completed by the end of January. But after further discussion, it was determined that the information gathering would add a couple of weeks, so the completion date would move out a bit further.

Mr. Yohalem stated he felt this was the direction the Town needed to take and as he understood it, the Town had just received a grant for the project. He asked for

a motion to approve the proposal, which Ms. White moved, specifying that the \$15,000 be paid in two installments, \$5,000 when interviews are conducted and the remainder when the project is completed. Mr. Long seconded and all voted in favor.

After Ms. Aicardi left, Ms. Enoch announced that the Town had indeed received a grant from the Community Compact of the state's Bureau of Local Services in the

amount of \$15,000 for a human resources project. Mr. Yohalem made a motion to authorize Ms. Enoch and Mr. Long to execute the grant, which Ms. White seconded and all voted in favor.

The Board then spent about fifteen minutes correcting the minutes of September 30, 2019, approving them as amended.

In other matters, Mr. Yohalem reported he had received a revised agreement from Cap Vert Energie and that he had made revisions to its version, adding back some items

they had omitted and returned the agreement for its approval. He then noted that Park Avenue Solar has still not contacted the Board regarding the solar PILOT, or payment in lieu of taxes, agreement.

Next on the agenda was an application for a one-day malt beverage and wine license to be issued to Big Elm Brewery of Sheffield in conjunction with The Farm New Marlborough for its Harvest Festival celebration from noon to 8:00 p.m. on Saturday, October 12, which the Board readily approved.

Town Administrator Enoch then updated the Board with the news that County Sheriff Thomas Bowler's office is currently sending four inmate trustees from the Berkshire County Jail and House of Correction who will be spending a total of four days weed whacking around Town's guardrails and that the Town would like to express its thanks to Sheriff Bowler. Highway

The Collins Center for Public Management of the University of Massachusetts provided a proposal to the Board to develop a wage and classification plan, employee policies and procedures, and to conduct a thorough review of the Town's human resources plan. The Town has received a grant to cover the cost of this project.

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Superintendent Mr. Loring stated he thinks they will be able to weed whack around approximately 50 percent of the Town's guardrails.

Separately, Mr. Yohalem praised Pete Wilson of the highway department, who often acts as a mechanic there, and who recently saved the Town some money repairing the new grader when it was slightly damaged backing into a utility pole.

Under Selectmen's updates, Ms. White informed the Board that she'll be attending the next school consolidation meeting set for Tuesday, October 15. Mr. Yohalem noted that Monday, October 14, is a government holiday; Town Hall will be closed and there will be no Board meeting. Mr. Yohalem did state, however, there is a board meeting scheduled for Wednesday, October 9, at 2:15 p.m. to address a single item, a payroll withholding error that needs to be dealt with immediately, and that the next regular meeting of the board will be October 21.

Mr. Yohalem asked if there were any comments from the audience and Sandra Walker, who happened to be covering the meeting for the *New Marlborough 5 Village News* and who also worked extensively in developing the new Town website, suggested that a webmaster be assigned to make sure the new site is updated regularly and that the links all work. She said a number of people have contacted her recently about links that didn't work, particularly links from the calendar to the agendas.

Ms. Walker then requested a copy of the July 1 minutes which were approved on August 12, but to date had not been posted online. These minutes report the awarding and conditions surrounding the 5 percent salary increases for five members of the Town Hall staff.

Administrative Secretary Sharon Fleck responded she had the minutes but wasn't sure which version of them are the correct ones and wanted to run them

by the Board again before disseminating. Ms. Fleck advised she would submit what she had to the Board the next day to confirm she had the right minutes and would make them available after the Board concurred that they were correct.

Finally, Mr. Yohalem stated all the warrants had been signed, and that there being no further business at hand, adjourned the meeting at 6:52 p.m.

Both parts of the Community Development Block Grant require dizzying amounts of procedures, committees, and individuals. The paperwork requirements have dimmed the enthusiasm of some contractors for bidding on a rehab project capped at \$40,000.

October 9: Chairman Yohalem and Ms. White were present at this meeting, with Mr. Long absent. Mr. Yohalem opened the meeting at 2:17 p.m., stating they were meeting to address a problem concerning the medical insurance withholding from paychecks of some town employees.

Mr. Yohalem continued that on Friday, October 4, two employees brought it to the Town Administrator's attention that they believed the amount being deducted for their

contribution to medical insurance was lower than what was deducted in May. After researching the issue, Ms. Enoch discovered the though the full amount of medical insurance was being paid monthly by the Town, employees had underpaid their premium contributions since July 1.

Ms. Enoch advised that a group of employees now owe the Town for their share of medical insurance in amounts ranging from \$112.95 to \$490.50. The reason for the differences in amounts is because plan costs are based on single or family coverage.

Mr. Yohalem stated that when this issue was brought to the Board's attention, the town's treasurer, who was unaware of the problem, agreed there was a problem and a deficiency. The Board offered the employees a period of time to pay back the money owed starting with the next payroll, and recommended dividing the amount owed by each employee by the remaining number of paychecks for the fiscal year and then using that amount



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as a deduction from their remaining paychecks.

Mr. Yohalem continued that the problem has been discussed with every employee and they understand the problem. He stated the goal of today's meeting is to approve a plan to add the appropriate deductions for each individual starting with next week's payroll. Mr. Yohalem added that this week's payroll has already been corrected and the appropriate medical insurance deductions are now being taken for each employee.

Mr. Yohalem also added that if any employees terminate their position, for any reason, before they've reimbursed the Town, the amount would become due and payable immediately. He offered that if an employee wanted to pay it sooner rather than weekly, they also would have the right to do that.

Ms. Enoch offered a clarification to Mr. Yohalem's earlier statement about the employees who came to her on Friday, stating they said their medical deduction was too low but did not compare it to May. Ms. Enoch discovered as part of her investigation that May was the last time the correct medical deductions were made from the paychecks.

Ms. White asked if the employees involved will be signing an agreement of some type. Ms. Enoch responded yes, and that she needs an authorization from the Board to write a memo, providing each employee with the exact amount they need to pay and how they plan to pay it through payroll, because this is a pre-tax payment. Ms. Enoch stated there were requests from some employees to accelerate the payment and others to wait and start later. After a brief discussion, both board members agreed that as long as the funds were reimbursed by the end of the fiscal year, an employee could start payments a bit later instead of next week.

Mr. Yohalem stated the town screwed up and the employees affected should be allowed to set up each plan individually. It will mean more accounting because each paycheck must be handled individually until the medical deductions are fully reimbursed.

Ms. White made a motion to have eleven town em-

ployees who were affected by the erroneous withholding sign a memo stating they would pay back the amounts due by June 30, 2020, through payroll deductions and if anyone terminates their employment before the amount is paid in full, the balance would be due and payable immediately. Mr. Yohalem seconded the motion and the Board approved the memo to be written by Ms. Enoch.

When Mr. Yohalem asked if there were any questions, this reporter asked how the error in deductions happened and who was responsible. Mr. Yohalem stated they really don't know but that on July 1, 2019, everyone on the family plan went to a \$75 deduction. He stated the treasurer is responsible for deducting these payments, but the treasurer notifies the payroll company and whether there was notification and the payroll company failed to follow instructions is not known.

Ms. White interjected that the month of June was a "premium holiday" because the medical insurance had been paid up for the fiscal year and therefore the employees had no deductions taken in June. In July, there were salary increases so paychecks were changed, but she wasn't sure how the medical deductions were made incorrectly. This reporter asked if the Board had documentation of correspondence between the treasurer and the payroll company, as this information is normally transmitted in writing, not by a phone call. Mr. Yohalem stated he hadn't seen anything and to understand the Board cannot discuss employee performance. This reporter clarified that she was not discussing personnel, but asking the Board if they are looking into the documentation between the treasurer and the payroll company to further investigate why this error occurred. Ms. White stated she assumed they were doing that and Mr. Yohalem stated the Board will try to find out why it happened.

And with that, the meeting was adjourned at 2:36 p.m., one of the shortest board meetings this reporter has ever attended. □

Sandra Fusco Walker

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View from the Board WHAT DO YOU DO?

You just won a seat on the Finance Committee. You ran because you wanted to contribute something to the town you love. After all, you've lived here for years and never volunteered for anything. Now, you ran for public office and won. It's budget time and the school budget has gone up about 2 percent. Not bad, even though it amounts to about a \$320,000 increase overall, \$64,000 of which is the Town's share. Again, not bad but the Fire Company is asking for a new truck and the Highway Department wants money to pave the worst roads in town. All this is necessary, no question about it. Except your own taxes will go up about \$100 a year. What do you do?

Move forward three years: you are now a selectman. A company wants to put a solar project on vacant land near your property. Solar energy is good for the environment, and the income to the Town from property taxes will exceed \$45,000 a year, but – and it's a big but – the solar panels are ugly, and having them so close to your property could adversely affect the value of your home. It takes a unanimous vote of the Board to grant the special permit the solar company requires. What do you do?

Next on the Board's agenda is the issue of recreational

marijuana businesses. Should they be permitted in town? The tax revenue could be substantial and the town's voters overwhelmingly approved recreational usage. But you personally don't approve of it. Now, it's your turn to vote – yes or no. What do you do?

There was a vacancy on the Planning Board. Planning for the future is something you believe is necessary for the Town's survival. You applied and were appointed. But it turned out to be a lot more work than you expected: numerous meetings with your fellow Board members and many hours spent drafting and redrafting proposed changes and additions to the Town's bylaws. The changes must be approved by the voters at the annual town meeting. The problem is that the voters like the town the way it is and don't approve the changes. You love the town, too, but believe change is inevitable. Should you stay on the Planning Board and keep on trying or give it up and try something else? What do you do?

You are the Town's representative to the eight-town school consolidation committee, charged with recommending whether or not the Southern Berkshire and Berkshire Hills Regional School Districts should merge. You have a daughter in third grade at New Marlborough Central. Even though it is in need of substantial repairs and lacks certain facilities, she loves it and so do you. The advantages of consolidation, ranging from more class offerings to eventual lower costs and taxes, are numerous. Still, you are happy with the way things are. Now it is time for committee members to vote. What do you do?

When you sit on a board or a committee, there will come times when you must choose between what is best for you and what is in the best interests of the people you serve and represent. If it were you – what do you do? For me — and I like to think for all of us in town governance — there is only one answer. Either you act in the best interests of the people you serve or you resign. □

Nat Yohalem



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THE PLANNING BOARD

Chipping Away

October 9: With all four members present, Chairman Peter Tiso first welcomed the one audience member, Robert Hartt, who has recently become a resident of Mill River and who was pondering the possibility of offering to join the Planning Board to fill out its membership. The Board quickly turned to its work for the evening – a line-by-line review of its latest draft of the by-laws concerning medical marijuana and marijuana research facilities, which the Board expects to bring to the 2020 Annual Town Meeting. In similar fashion to the September 28 meeting, Board member Daniel Doern led his counterparts through the details of the draft, which, at this point in the process, runs to six-and-a-half single-spaced pages. The pains-



Flanked by Planning Board members Eric Schaefer and Mark Carson at the October 9 meeting, Board Chairman Peter Tiso shows the quiet intensity that has characterized his tenure. Mr. Tiso is leaving the Board – and New Marlborough – at the end of October. photo by Larry Burke

taking exercise resulted in many tweaks and a few major additions and deletions to the document, including an expanded listing of definitions, a consensus on what types of structures determine whether growing is indoors or outdoors (permanent greenhouse versus temporary hoop house), a determination of which Town boards would be responsible for annual inspections of cannabis sites, and a strengthening of the language governing discontinuance of cannabis enterprises.


continuation of cannabis enterprises.



Toward the end of the two-hour meeting, Mr. Tiso said that a new person from the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, Philip Arnold, would be taking over the work previously done by Zach Feury. The evening's changes to the document would be sent on to Mr. Arnold, and the expectation would be for Mr. Arnold to attend the October 23 meeting with the revised draft in hand. Mr. Doern said that the Board now had ten weeks remaining before needing to put out advertising for a public hearing on the bylaw draft. He felt the Board was in a good position now to accomplish whatever remains in that period of time.

Mr. Tiso reminded his fellow Board members that the October 23 meeting would be his final one, as he is leaving New Marlborough for an unspecified length of time. He encouraged Board members to consider whom amongst them might take over the chairmanship, and to be ready to make that change at the next meeting. □

Larry Burke

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CONSERVATION COMMISSION

September 21: Members Freddy Friedman, Dave Herrick, John Schreiber, and Nanci Worthington convened the meeting.

The Commission started by approving the minutes for the August 20 meeting after one minor edit, and then welcoming new Commission member, Ms. Worthington, to the team.

First on the agenda was Chris Tryon of Berkshire Geo-Technologies presenting a Request For Determination (RDA) for the Lake Buel Association. Mr. Tryon explained that the association would like to clean up the debris downstream from the Lake Buel dam along the Konkapot River. He noted that the work would not involve mechanization and that no vegetation would be cut. After some discussion, the commission concluded that no further permitting was necessary and gave the permit a negative determination.

Next, Molly Crine, as a citizen of New Marlborough, addressed the Commission to share information on the Berkshire Scenic Mountain Act and on the act's value for New Marlborough. Ms. Crine was well-informed and fielded several questions from the Commission. The Commission agreed to review the topographical data

for the town and to assess how the act might apply to New Marlborough. Ms. Crine offered to connect the Commission with an advisor, Shep Evans, who is available to meet with the Commission for further information. The Commission thanked Ms. Crine for her initiative and promised to follow up.

Next up, Robert Hartt of 829 Mill River Southfield Road informally addressed the Commission regarding landscape work he would like to do in his backyard. The Commission advised that he gain clarity about the work proposed and the associated resource area. The Commission thanked him for taking responsibility for his obligations as a landowner to the Massachusetts Wetland Protection Act.

Finally, member John Schreiber reported that he and Mr. Friedman met on site at the New Marlboro Preserve with Ian Devine and Martha Bryan of the New Marlborough Land Trust. The group walked the loop trail and suggested trail upgrades at two stream crossings.

After the mail was reviewed, the meeting adjourned. □

Martha Bryan

IN WITH THE NEW *And (Not Quite) Out with the Old*

The future has arrived — or is it just that the past has finally departed? At around 10:00 a.m. on October 8, a somewhat forbidding looking black box, a voting tabulator, was rolled into Town Hall. It replaces the burnished wood contraption that has, with an assist from a human turning a brass crank, been receiving voters' ballots for as long as anyone can remember. The \$5,700 ImageCast, manufactured by Dominion Voting Systems, will debut in New Marlborough on Super Tuesday, March 3, 2020, when ten states hold presidential primaries.

Some voters may miss the ballot box, but Town Clerk Kathy Chretien is not among them. The ImageCast automatically reads the ballot and tallies each vote cast, leaving only a count of write-in ballots to be done by hand. Previously, the hand count would take hours, running election day well past mid-



The Town's new voting tabulator shoulders the ballot box into retirement.
photo by Joe Poindexter

night for Ms. Chretien and her vote-tabulating crew. With the ImageCast, she hopes to wrap things up by 8:30 p.m., a half hour after the polls close. The machine can assist voters, too: a screen next to the slot that accepts the ballot alerts voters to over- or under-voting and asks if they would like to amend their ballot. Of course, the "ding" as ballots were cranked into the old ballot box will be a thing of the past, but Tax Assessor Marsha Pshenishny suggested that Ms. Chretien could buy a bell and supply that bit of reassurance manually.

The ballot box is not going into retirement quite yet. The number on the counter had to be preserved between elections, but now that it has been replaced, it is eligible for the town caucus. Nostalgia buffs take note: the caucus will be held in late March. □

Joe Poindexter

HARVEST FESTIVAL

On October 12, The Farm New Marlborough hosted its first Harvest Festival, attended by an estimated two hundred participants. Under a crisp autumn sky, vendors of food and drink, handmade jewelry, pocketbooks, Mexican curios, pottery, embroidered place mats, and more set up tables just outside the farm store on New Marlborough Southfield Road.

A temporary stage served as an elevated platform for music and entertainment. And there were, of course, farm tours for more than a hundred people, piloted by The Farm's Tom Brazie, the last of which surveyed his farmland under an almost full moon. It felt like the start of a great new tradition. □

Joe Poindexter



Jean Pollock grilled burgers and hot dogs.



Festival-goers take a lunch break.



Kerry Sullivan converted apples to cider.



Henry Tirell had a brew for every taste.



The fun-filled embroidery of Linda Brazie



The return of the farm tourists



Travis Brecher of sourdough-bread fame

photos by Joe Poindexter

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: A WORLD-CLASS COMPETITOR

By Joe Poindexter

There is excellence tucked away in the villages and valleys of New Marlborough, but none, perhaps, more esoteric than at the Canaan Valley Road residence of Stuart Lawrence and his wife Diane Nerwen, a celebrated video artist who has shown internationally for over two decades. This, however, is not a story about art, but about sport. Stuart Lawrence has just closed out the 2019 season as one of the top ten croquet players in America. He is ranked in the mid-fifties worldwide. Better yet, his best years may be ahead of him. “After almost thirty years, I am still improving,” he says.

Stuart discovered croquet as a high schooler in Dobbs Ferry, New York, where he and a few classmates got together in a bit of what he calls “anti-jock rebellion” to form the Dobbs Ferry Croquet Team. “A lot of crazy things occur to you when you’re in high school,” he says. The team had no extramural competition and, aside from a photo in the high school yearbook, left no trace except as a launchpad for Stuart’s mastery of croquet.

He honed his game during a legal career in New York City, stealing off during vacation time to world championships as distant as New Zealand and Australia. With his retirement two years ago, he is now able to get away to any tournament that piques his interest. This year he won both the Berkshire Invitational and the New England Regional Championships, both held at the Lenox Croquet Club. Last month, he was on the U.S. team, in a competition with Great Britain for the Solomon Trophy, a not-quite-annual event, held this year in Pinehurst, North Carolina. (The Americans were overtaken on the final day of an agonizingly close test.)

Tournament croquet, which is to the backyard variety as the NFL is to a pickup game of touch football, is better established in Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand than it is here, where there are, according to Stuart, fewer than a thousand players who compete in sanctioned tournaments. (For one thing, a croquet lawn is mowed at least three times a week, to keep the grass at



Stuart Lawrence sizes up a shot at the 2017 U.S. Nationals in West Palm Beach, Florida.

photo by Jeff Soo

a height of an eighth to a quarter of an inch — how often do you mow yours?) About the dearth of female players in the top ranks of the sport, says Stuart, “Women don’t have as much time as men for useless activities.”

Then, too, croquet doesn’t fit the typical American definition of a sport. Stuart calls it “a tactically rich game played with sporting equipment.” Rather than strength, say, or speed, a croquet player’s greatest asset “is problem-solving, seeing patterns, an understanding of physics.” He describes as essential the deliberative ability to unknot an initial problem so as to pave the way for all the following shots. A good player minimizes tactical errors, or as he puts it: “Part of the skill of croquet is to make it easy.”

Stuart is a long-time member of the New York Croquet Club, and more recently the Lenox Croquet Club. “We chose this area,” he says of their purchase of a home in New Marlborough, “in part because of its proximity to the Lenox Croquet Club.” Next stop on the tournament circuit: Melbourne, Australia, in February for the World Championships. And maybe a notch or two higher in the world rankings. □



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YOUR TURN

NMV5VN has established a place for our readers' stories. We encourage you to share your experiences, incidents, or thoughts through this space. Reviewing the rules: Up to 1,000 words, but short and succinct is best; no politics; points of view are welcome but civility is mandatory; editors reserve the right to accept, reject, and edit. Send your story to Joe Poindexter at joepoindexter@earthlink.net.

A Chance To Give Back

By Robbi Hartt

“Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back... the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred.... Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it... Begin it now.” – William H. Murray, Scottish mountaineer.

I came across this quote by accident seven years ago and have carried it with me ever since. At the time we were house-sitting for a friend during a nine-month stretch when my husband was starting his own business. She opened her home to us with unimaginable generosity and made us feel as if we were helping her out. Since that time, we have been looking for an opportunity to replicate her kindness and pay it forward. Three years ago, on the heels of two watershed moments in our lives, Providence did in fact move in, and my husband and I started to take our dream more seriously. All of this is simply to say, buying the Mill River Village House didn't happen by chance but rather was the culmination of many years of planning.

Whether you know the property by its original name, or as the Stanton house, the group home, or more recently, “the big empty house next to Ormsbee's Garage,” it's likely you know the house I mean. By the time we found this property, we had dog-eared hundreds of pages in the *Berkshire Real Estate Guide*, walked through dozens of houses with Bill O'Leary, and spent many nights by the fire refining our vision. In many ways, the village house renovation mirrors our own journey. The pace and purpose of our lives along the busy shoreline corridor of Connecticut, where we lived, started feeling strangely empty, and we, too, needed to move in a new direction to rejuvenate and rebuild.

The inspiration for our idea — a place where parents of children undergoing cancer treatment could find respite — came to us following a six-month period in which both Bob's mother and my mother lost almost identical battles with cancer. We were drained emotionally. The only way to move forward seemed to be by creating something tangible to carry on their care and compassion. Bob's mom, Kay, was one of the first hospice nurses in the country, helping patients transition and providing loving support to their families for thirty-five years. Her caregiving was one inspiration.



My mom, Evelyn, experienced firsthand what it was like to care for a child with cancer when my brother Tommy was diagnosed with a brain tumor in 1968. Following his surgery and months of treatments, she wrote to her sister, “After seeing these children and their parents—well, I don't think my values could ever be the

Mill River Village House before the renovations began. photos by Robert Hartt

same.” Her empathy for children and families dealing with cancer was the other inspiration. Our goals were to create a place that would “wrap its arms around you” the way our family homes did for us, and to provide parents a brief but comforting reprieve from the exhaustive pressures of caregiving. The two guest units will bear our mothers’ names and, we hope, share their love. The remaining unit will be our new home.

Last spring when I described our idea to Kenzie Fields, she encouraged us to take a look at the village house, noting that there was a “specialness” to the property. Although it was cold, mold-infested, and abandoned at the time, it was obvious that the house, as well as the barn, yard, and stream were unique and filled with potential for exactly the kind of use we had in mind. It wasn’t hard to imagine groups of parents facing similar challenges supporting each other while enjoying that setting. When we discovered all of the unexpected bonuses of that location — Jess and the general store, walks to Umpachene Falls, and picnics at Tanglewood — we knew the house would provide the kind of beauty we have found so restorative in the Berkshires. We haven’t worked out every detail for this new endeavor, but we are grateful to have found some wonderful partner organizations in Connecticut and an incredibly welcoming community in Mill River.

In spite of her great potential, it’s safe to say we had no idea of the extent of the needs hidden behind walls and under floorboards of the village house. She was full of “known unknowns and unknown unknowns.” We walked through dozens of times just trying to make sense of the labyrinthian layout.

Fortunately for us, we knew Brian Hazelton of Wood to Stone and were confident in his ability to orchestrate a plan. His vision for the restoration has continued to bring us clarity throughout the project. Without getting overwhelmed by the permits, inspections, and layers of efforts needing coordination, he and Chris Nelson began work overseeing the project last April. While the initial improvements weren’t visible from the outside, by midsummer many residents detected the resuscitation efforts and began wondering who had bought the house and for what purpose. Intrepid neighbors popped in to ask the workers what they were doing and inspect the progress.

About this time, Hal Crine met us on a Sunday morning pouring our coffee at the general store and circled back a few minutes later to put us in touch with Pat Nourse, who grew up in the old farmhouse. Pat was thrilled that someone had bought the house but hesitant about ever stepping inside again. It held so many memories from when she and Howard lived there. However, she has shared pictures and details about the history of the house that have guided us (in particular, restoring the front windows to their original porch-like state). Throughout this process, she has urged us not to get discouraged, saying, “She’s an old lady, but she deserves to be loved.” Recently, I’m excited to say, Pat changed her mind about seeing the end result, smiling, “Now I can’t wait to see how it looks!”

We know that not every decision in life has to make economic sense. Sometimes there is something bigger at stake, like the risk of a neglected old house being torn down or the greater risk of missing out on a chance to give back. At this stage in our lives, preserving the past and paying it forward are the right priorities. We’re thrilled that we found such a fitting house and village for our dream, and we look forward to putting down roots here. Mill River Village House has had a long history, and we believe it has a bright future! □

Mill River Village House with renovations well under way



NEIGHBORS

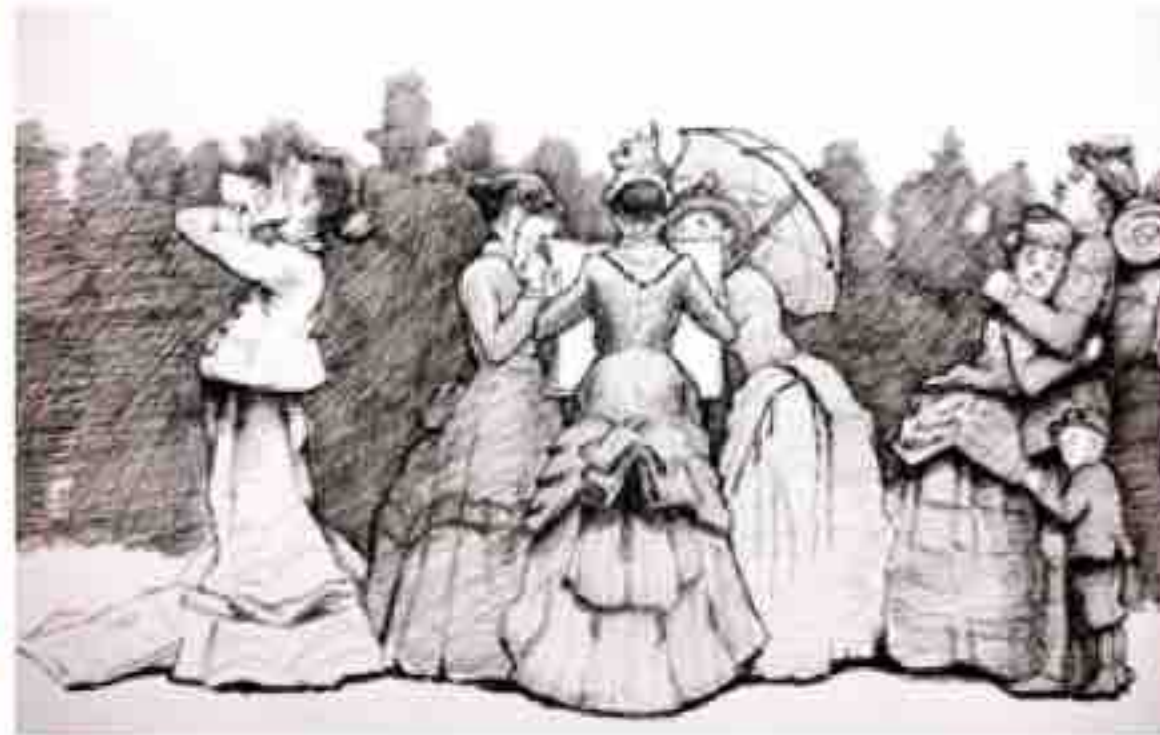


Former Mill River resident **Adele Holman**, who with her late husband Alex, owned the church above Town Hall for decades, called to report that **Janet Brown**, former long-time resident of Canaan Valley Road in Southfield, recently celebrated her ninety-ninth birthday in Topsfield, Massachusetts, where she currently lives. Three friends invited her to lunch in honor of this occasion, but one friend said she couldn't make it to lunch. She owns an art studio, and suggested that Janet stop by to see some changes she had made recently. When Janet opened the door, there were forty of her friends from Topsfield for her surprise birthday party.

Two or three years ago, Adele's family had a party for her ninetieth birthday in Portland, Maine. Janet was still driving at that time, and drove the eighty-five miles from Topsfield to Portland to join the celebration.

One further note: Janet is determined to live beyond her 100th birthday, because she **MUST** be here to vote in 2020!

photos by Debbie O'Brien



Left, Shawn's presentation Above, An illustration from the book on the public reaction to President Lincoln's assassination. (Courtesy Shawn Fields) Right, Shawn autographed books for purchasers



Twenty-five people gathered at the New Marlborough Library on October 19 to hear Mill River artist **Shawn Fields** discuss his first experience as an illustrator and in the publishing business. His book is *Monument Maker: Daniel Chester French and the Lincoln Memorial* by Linda Booth Sweeney, which has just been released.

As an artist, Shawn values making all the decisions in creating a work of art; it was hard to get used to having clearly defined roles of author, illustrator, editor, and publisher. "I know I unwittingly violated those norms often, but I didn't know," he said with a smile.

Shawn also described the process of illustrating – extensive research to determine content, making decisions about perspective, light, shadow, and contrast, helping to move the story line along, and to enhance it.

Following his presentation, Shawn was available for questions and discussion, and to autograph the books. □

compiled by Barbara Lowman: deeuell@yahoo.com


photo by Alvin Stalker



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OUR WILDLIFE NEIGHBORS

photo by Don Beauchamp



A titmouse sits atop a sunflower head

In the first week of October, **Tom Sachs** wondered aloud, “Where are all the birds?” Tom is deeply attached to the avian population that comes to his birdfeeders in Mill River year-round. These days the feeders stay full of seed much longer than he has ever seen.

On October 13, **Katherine Bouton**, who lives over by Lake Buel wrote, “Larry, has anyone mentioned to you an absence of birds? For the past three or four weeks, our birds have almost totally disappeared. We usually have flocks of finches and nuthatches and chickadees as well as woodpeckers and cardinals that stay all winter.

“I’ve hardly seen any and haven’t refilled the bird feeder in what seems like weeks. I don’t remember it ever being like this in the fall.”

And on October 18, **Don Beauchamp** wrote, succinctly: “Very few birds, but saw half-a-dozen blue jays Wednesday in the yard and a pair of titmice feeding off a sunflower head. Even the crows are not around.”

These three observations mirror those of many others, including this writer, not just here in New Marlborough but across the North American continent, and they are consistent with a recently published report in the journal *Science*.

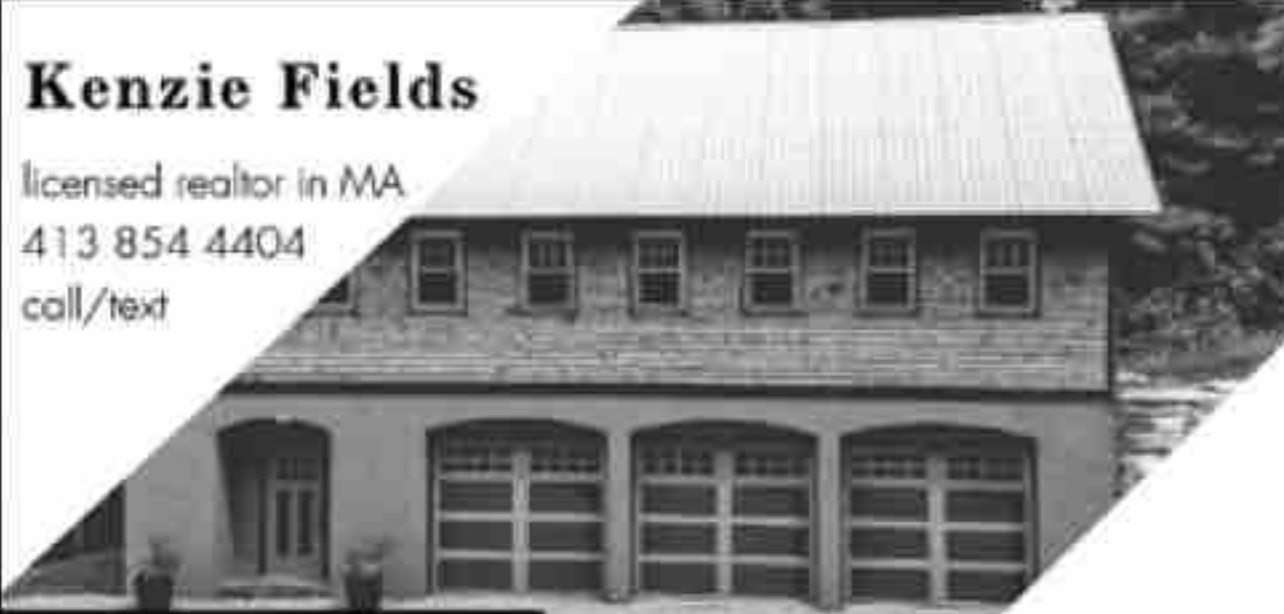
In that study, the scientists have determined that the bird population of Canada and the continental United States has diminished by 30 percent since 1970. There are three billion (yes, billion) fewer birds in this part of the world than there were fifty years ago. The international study was led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology conservation scientist Ken Rosenberg, who summarized the findings by saying, “These bird losses are a strong signal that our human-altered landscapes are losing their ability to support birdlife. And that is an indicator of a coming collapse of the overall environment.”

According to the study, more than 90 percent of the loss of birdlife comes from twelve avian families, including sparrows, blackbirds, and finches, and this finding in itself goes a long way toward explaining the relative absence of birdsong in the woods and fields around New Marlborough. The red-winged blackbird population is reduced by more than two-thirds; 862 million sparrows have been lost; 618 million warblers have been lost. The evening grosbeak has been reduced to one-tenth of its 1970 population.

The primary causes of these devastating losses are said to be loss of habitat, changing climate, and predation. That last cause may be the least of the three, but it is not insignificant, and the primary predator, unfortunately, is the domestic cat. Mixed in amongst all this bad news are a few success stories – bird families such as waterfowl and raptors that have prospered due to the focused attention of interested humans. One bird that has done outstandingly well (and we all know it because we see them everywhere) is the wild turkey, whose population has mushroomed by 200 percent. That is a small consolation though. In 1962, Rachel Carson wrote of the “silent spring.” And now we are faced with the silent fall. □

Compiled by Larry Burke. Send your wildlife sightings to him at lburke2@me.com

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PROGRESS ON EXPLORING SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION

On September 12, the 8 Town School Consolidation Committee 2019 was established during a meeting at the Sheffield Town Hall. This is called the town-centric group. It was attended by representatives of the eight towns from the two school districts including: Alford - Lucy Prashker, Egremont - George McGurn, Monterey - Jon Sylbert, New Marlborough - Tara White, Sheffield - Nadine Hawver, Great Barrington - Ed Abrahams, Stockbridge - Charles Cardillo, with no representative from West Stockbridge. Superintendents and one school committee member from both school districts were also invited to sit at the table. The group then selected Nadine Hawver of Sheffield as chair of the group and Jon Sylbert of Monterey as vice-chair. It was decided that neither the school committee representatives nor the superintendents will be allowed to vote. It was also stated that the body has no legal authority, but is strictly an "investigative" committee.

At the next meeting of this committee on September 25 at Stockbridge Town Hall, members of the school committees were invited to join the conversation. The 8 Town Committee considered whether the "educational group" formed between two districts should be merged with their newly formed group. The committee decided to table the idea of merging the two groups. In point of fact, there never was a formal two-district educational group formed. The two districts did have one meeting together in September but that was a conversation, not an effort to form a separate exploratory committee. The 8 Town Committee voted to look for a facilitator to guide them and that this facilitator could be shared with the two school committees.

On October 3, the Southern Berkshire Regional School District (SBRSD) School Committee heard a report of the 8 Town meetings. The SBRSD committee determined that it would be prudent to follow the guidelines recommended by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for exploring consolidation. A motion passed to establish a Regional School Planning Committee for SBRSD. No action was taken about the make-up of this group or when it would

become active. It was a procedural matter to authorize moving forward when the time is right. Berkshire Hills Regional School District has not formed such a committee as yet.

The latest news comes from the October 15 meeting of the 8 Town Committee at Stockbridge Town Hall, where invited experts informed the group about the process ahead. First, consultants from the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools described the options for forming a new region. Either of the two school committees can form a Regional School Agreement Amendment Committee and invite members of the other school district to join their committee, or each town can form a Regional Planning Committee composed of a school committee member and two others. Then these eight planning committees can come together to form a Regional School District Planning Board. This group faces an arduous process to determine whether pursuing consolidation is sound for both financial and educational reasons. This is followed by a multiyear process if the planning board decides to pursue consolidation. It takes an average of three years to go through all the hoops necessary to get approval from DESE.

The final speaker was Glenn Koocher from Massachusetts Association of School Committees, a group that supports member school districts in various ways. His message was to be sure that your communities are clear on your goals and maintain control of the process. He said that DESE and state politicians are eager for this to go forward for their own reasons but only the people of the two districts know whether it is in their best interests to pursue it.

The next meeting of the 8 Town Committee is on November 12 at 5:00 p.m. at the Stockbridge Town Hall. At this meeting, the information provided by the consultants will be discussed. All meeting agendas and minutes will be posted on town websites. It will be very helpful to the school committee if townspeople stay as informed as possible, ask questions, and make their ideas with us via emails to members. □

SBRSD School Committee Chair Jane Burke



**Berkshire
Real Estate Guide**

RECIPE OF THE MONTH

Not growing up with Thanksgiving, we have been creating our own traditions since moving here; we go to Maine with old friends, have pecan pie, do a jigsaw puzzle, and experiment with side dishes. I love sweet potatoes but our only “miss” was sweet potato casserole with marshmallows our first year in Maine. Maybe it’s like Vegemite, and you need to grow up with it. However, this sweet potato recipe from Linda Fass will pair beautifully with last year’s November recipe, leek casserole. Happy Thanksgiving. □

Fiona Kerr

My history with the Berkshires dates back over fifty years. My maternal grandparents were New York City science teachers who spent summers in their New Marlborough home overlooking the Berkshire mountains. My parents, my siblings, and I visited often and the Berkshires always held a special place in our hearts. Having been the only owners, my grandparents hoped their beloved house would remain in the family. My husband and I honored their wishes in 2015 by renovating the house and moving in full-time with our two sons and two dachshunds. New Marlborough has always felt like my true home and I can’t imagine feeling more so anywhere else.

I spent many years as the vice president of marketing and sales for a promotion agency in New York and New Jersey. When I moved to the Berkshires I started a professional pet-sitting business. I have many local clients, and I absolutely love what I do. I also enjoy cooking but as a working mom with a bustling business, I don’t always have the time nor the ingredients on hand for elaborate meals. I like to keep our food simple, yet tasty, and healthy by using organic, fresh, farm ingredients as much as possible. We limit sugar in our house but during the holidays I loosen up somewhat in order to make some traditional dishes the family has enjoyed for many years.

The following dish is a family favorite. I removed it from the menu one Thanksgiving and had several disappointed guests. Needless to say, it returned as a regular dish at our holiday meals thereafter.

Linda Fass

Sweet Potato Casserole

1-1/2 qt casserole dish, lightly greased
 3 cups baked and peeled sweet potatoes
 4 egg whites
 1/4 cup brown sugar
 1 tsp vanilla
 3 tsp bourbon
 Orange juice

Directions:

- Mix all the ingredients, except the orange juice, together with a wooden spoon. Then using an electric mixer add enough orange juice to make your preferred consistency.

Spread sweet potato mix in a glass baking dish and add the topping:

1 cup chopped pecans
 6 tbsp softened butter
 2 tbsp flour
 1 cup brown sugar

- Mix the ingredients together and spread on top of the sweet potato. Bake at 350°F for 1/2 hour or until brown on top.

Serves 6-8 people. I often make two batches to serve larger parties.

nm5vn.org

Thank You to Our Contributors:

Carol & Lance Liebman; Roger Tilles; Julie Sandorf; Bob & Mimi Winterbottom; Karla & Peter Alfano; Alexandra Eidenschenk; and Linda Buxbaum & John Graben, in memory of John Sisson, a great gentleman.

THE LOG

Police Department (selected entries)

Sept. 1	1:50 p.m.	A caller alerts the Department to a white van being driven erratically on Route 57.	Sept. 21	7:20 a.m.	A Hartsville New Marlborough Road resident reports that sometime during the previous night a driver knocked over her mailbox post.
Sept. 3	11:47 a.m.	A New Marlborough Hill Road resident reports a lost dog, but calls back six minutes later to say that the dog has been found.		4:01 p.m.	Parents are notified when a series of prank 911 calls are traced to six children.
Sept. 4	6:48 p.m.	The Highway Department is notified of a tree down on Mill River Southfield Road.	Sept. 23	6:44 p.m.	A resident complains of two dirt bikes riding back and forth past his house on Mill River Southfield Road.
Sept. 7	8:41 a.m.	A caller reports cows loose near her residence on Brewer Hill Road.		7:06 p.m.	After learning that a man requesting a ride from the Mill River General Store is wanted by the Seattle, Washington, Department of Corrections, the Department determines that there is no extradition agreement between Washington and Massachusetts and transports the man to Great Barrington.
Sept. 9	7:06 a.m.	Following a report of vandalism to a Clayton village property, an investigation implicates two youths.		7:08 p.m.	The Mill River Southfield Road resident reports that the dirt bikes have returned.
Sept. 10	4:25 p.m.	A caller reports that a truck has driven off the road near the intersection of Brewer Hill and Hayes Hill Roads and hit a rock.	Sept. 27	9:04 p.m.	Alerted by a passing motorist to a pickup truck disabled at the side of South Sandisfield Road, an officer determines that the vehicle has run out of gas.
	6:24 p.m.	National Grid notified of a tree on wires on Canaan Southfield Road.	Sept. 28	7:37 p.m.	A driver, under the mistaken impression he is in New Marlborough, alerts the Department that he is in possession of an owl that has fallen out of a tree; Connecticut authorities are apprised of the situation.
Sept. 11	2:55 p.m.	A caller complains of speeders on Canaan Valley Road.		10:05 p.m.	A caller reports a possible breaking and entering at a Mill River residence.
Sept. 12	9:43 a.m.	A caller reports the late night or early morning theft of marijuana plants from the yard of her Mill River village residence.			
	5:47 p.m.	A Mill River Great Barrington Road resident reports the theft of two marijuana plants from his garden the previous night.			
Sept. 13	8:26 a.m.	A Brewer Hill Road resident reports that cows are loose in her back yard.			
Sept. 19	3:29 p.m.	A caller reports a property dispute with a visitor to his home in Mill River.			
	4:40 p.m.	A caller complains of motorcyclists speeding noisily back and forth past her New Marlborough Branch Road residence.			

Graham Frank, Chief of Police

FIRE AND RESCUE

Sept. 2	7:07 p.m.	Cagney Hill Road CO Alarm	Sept. 19	7:34 p.m.	Mutual Aid to Great Barrington Medical Call
Sept. 4	1:00 a.m.	Mill River Southfield Road Medical Call	Sept. 23	6:07 p.m.	New Marlborough Monterey Road Fire Alarm
Sept. 8	4:17 p.m.	New Marlborough Sandisfield Center Road Motorcycle Crash	Sept. 25	1:06 p.m.	Church Road Medical Call
Sept. 9	9:35 p.m.	Norfolk Road Fire Alarm	Sept. 25	7:06 p.m.	Stand-by for Sandisfield Fire Investigation
Sept. 17	6:53 a.m.	Canaan Southfield Road Medical Call	Sept. 26	3:35 p.m.	Konkapot Road Fire Alarm
Sept. 19	2:53 p.m.	Mutual Aid to Great Barrington Medical Call	Sept. 26	5:45 p.m.	Canaan Southfield Road Fire Alarm

Fire Company President David Smith

REMINDER: Please be sure to have your chimneys and all wood-burning stoves cleaned and inspected for the heating season. In 2018, there were 556 fire incidents involving chimneys, fireplaces, and wood stoves in Massachusetts. They were responsible for one civilian death, three civilian injuries, and seven firefighter injuries and resulted in \$3 million in property damage.

INSTALLATION: A building permit is required before installing fireplaces or wood, pellet, or coal burning stoves. The Massachusetts State Building Code requires the local building inspector to inspect new fireplaces or wood, pellet, or coal burning stoves before they are used. A qualified mason should inspect the chimney and flue before the stove is used and annually. Cracks in the flue or mortar joints can allow flames and heated gases to get into living spaces.

Allow at least 36 inches of clearance around the appliance to prevent combustibles from coming into contact with a heat source. Solid fuel heating appliances cannot share a common flue with chimney flues used by another solid fuel, fossil fuel, or gas fire appliance.

PROPER USE: Most chimney fires occur because of a build-up of creosote, a tarry by-product of burning wood. Have your chimney flue cleaned before each heating season. Burn only dry, well-seasoned, hardwood to reduce creosote accumulation. Don't use flammable liquids to start a fire. Never leave children unattended near the stove.

Check that the damper is open before lighting the fire. A closed damper will result in an accumulation of smoke and carbon monoxide in the home. Do not close the damper until the fire is out and the embers are cold. Use a fireplace screen to prevent flying sparks and embers from falling on to the floor.

Install and maintain smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms to provide protection for your family. Problems with heating systems are the number one source of carbon monoxide in homes. Both types of alarms are required by law in Massachusetts.

FIRE FROM ASHES: To prevent fires, ashes that are cleaned out from the stove or fireplace should be shoveled into a metal bucket with a metal lid and placed outside on the ground away from the building. Many recent fires have been caused by ashes stored underneath a deck or porch or inside the garage or from ashes stored in cardboard boxes. A live ember can continue to smolder unnoticed.

Fire Company President David Smith

SCIENCE SATURDAYS

Jane Burke conducted a series of monthly Saturday explorations at the New Marlborough Library. For the September session, the beautiful weather allowed kids to work outdoors. They were testing the limits of the baking soda/vinegar reaction, using an acid base indicator to see if the chemicals were fully reacted. Two of the participants, Indigo and Gannon, really enjoyed it.

On October 26, a dozen children ages six to eleven worked together on a number of different experiments. Indoors, they were making crystals, testing pH, and comparing magnets. Jaiden and his group challenged each other to see how many objects a magnet could hold. □

Jane Burke



Left: Indigo testing how baking soda and vinegar make a gas that expands a crushed soda bottle. Middle: Gannon testing acid/base reaction of baking soda and vinegar. Right: Jaiden and pals test the relative strength of magnets.

ART SHOW BRINGS PARENTS TOGETHER

New Marlborough Central School (NMC) was abuzz at 5:00 p.m. on October 15. Parents were arriving with huge platters of food that were added to a sumptuous buffet on tables downstairs in the all-purpose room. Children were running around to see where their art work had been hung and appeared delighted to see all the art on the walls.

This event was presented by the New Marlborough Monterey Parent Teacher Association (NMMPTA) to provide parents with the opportunity get to know each other early in the school year. Parent involvement is a very important aspect of the success of students at NMC, and the NMMPTA makes an effort to bring parents together in meaningful ways to help build a sense of community among them.



Teacher Lynn Webster was the mastermind of the ingenious art show. Inspired by a project she saw at Mass MOCA, she assembled bags of random art supplies for children to use to make an art piece. She included directions saying they were to take their bags home, use what they wanted from the contents and add whatever else they needed to make a collage for an art show. Ms. Webster noted that teachers learned new things about each child through the finished pieces done in a non-school setting.

As the photos show, the young artists were clearly proud of their work. They were equally pleased with the pieces their friends and classmates had created. Overall, it appeared to be a highly successful evening for all in attendance.

Jane Burke



photos by Jane Burke

Top, Greta Downing, age 4, was excited to explain her piece called Butterfly Painting. She said, "I love butterflies. The squares are the road to Boston." Nina Stanton, age 9, loves art and clearly enjoyed adding to the supplies she found in her bag. Her piece was untitled. Lower left, Henry Brazie, age 7, grins as he talks about his piece called Smiley Face, and Wyatt Wilkinson, age 6, was happy with the googly eyes on his untitled piece.



photo by Larry Burke

Local talent!: On Saturday, September 28, the Meeting House was filled with the sweet sounds of the Berkshire Children's Chorus. While Artistic Director Julie Bickford cautioned the audience not to expect the chorus' finest work, as it was just beginning its new season with brand new members and without some of its veterans, the children's voices rang out beautifully through the hall with a program that included spirituals, classical works, and traditional American songs. The audience showered the chorus with applause at its conclusion of this Music & More offering.

THE WHIP SHOP - THEN AND NOW!

Who says you can't go home again? In July, I moved into The Whip Shop Cottage in the center of Southfield village, just a few doors away from my childhood home. I am a direct descendant of the founders (Cook, of Turner & Cook) of the old buggy whip factory. I was in and out of the Whip Shop complex of buildings throughout my childhood and worked in them as an adult through their numerous transformations. Coming home, so to speak, is very heartwarming. I feel a deep connection to my Southfield ancestors, and the welcome I have received from the neighbors has been deeply appreciated and comforting to me. I had to smile when I moved in my collection of buggy whips to the cottage. They were manufactured next door more than a hundred years ago, and it felt as if I was bringing them home too! □

Janice Stiles Boults



Upper right, the present-day Whip Shop and (right) the building in 1908, which some wag placed at the intersection of Broadway and Fifth



Left, The original shed behind The Whip Shop, and right, the shed today, now known as The Whip Shop Cottage

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Girls Like Us, by Christina Alger

A Tall History of Sugar, by Curdella Forbes

Lock Every Door, by Riley Sager

A Single Thread, by Tracy Chevalier

Children's Fiction

This Book of Mine, by Sarah Stewart

My Jasper June, by Laurel Snyder

The Tyrant's Tomb, by Rick Riordan

Mighty Jack, by Ben Hatke

The Scarecrow, by Beth Ferry

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DVDs

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Red Joan

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Pick a PIE



**New Marlborough Friends of the Library
will hold their annual Pre-Thanksgiving**

PIE SALE

November 23, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

PRE ORDERS ARE WELCOME

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Nov 1 - March 31

Mon. Wed. Sat. 10:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Tues. & Thurs. 1:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Fri. 1:30 - 7:30 p.m.

229-6668

The Library will be closed

November 28 & 29

▶ SAVE THE DATES!

Book Discussion Group

November 16 at 10:00 a.m.

Coffee, bagels and a lively
discussion of the book,

The Silence of Girls,

by Pat Parker.



Cookbook Club

November 20 at 6:30 p.m.

We will be cooking from

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Town Times

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Town Administrator: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Planning Board: Second and fourth Wednesday at 7:00 p.m.

Board of Health: First Tuesday of the month at 7:00 p.m.

Conservation Commission: Last Saturday of the month at 9:00 a.m.

Board of Assessors: Monday through Thursday, 8:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Fire Department training: Every Tuesday at 7:00 p.m. at the fire station

Building Inspector: Monday 5:00 - 7:00 p.m.; Thursday 8:00 to 10:00 a.m.

First Responders: Meeting/training: First and third Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. at the fire station

Cultural Council: Second Thursday at 4:15 p.m. at the library

Post Office: Mill River (413) 229-8582

Window hours: Monday - Friday 11:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Saturday 9:00 - 11:30 a.m.

Southfield (413) 229-8476

Window hours: Monday - Friday 9:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. and 1:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Saturday 9:00 - 12:00 p.m.

Town Treasurer: Monday & Tuesday 8:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Tax Collector: Monday 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Tuesday and Thursday 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Selectmen's Administrative Secretary: Monday - Friday 9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Dog and Animal Control Officer: New Marlborough Police Department 229-8161

Town Clerk: 229-8278; 7:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. weekdays; Saturday by appointment

Town Hall: 229-8116

Police: Business office: 229-8161

Library: 229-6668

Transfer Station Hours:

Wednesday: 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Saturday: 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Sunday: 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

PERMITS ARE DUE JULY 1

and can be purchased for \$125 at Town Hall, the Transfer Station, or by mail. Please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Late fee of \$150 after August 15.

Emergency calls:

**Police, Fire, Medical
911**

New Marlborough Highway Department

Located on Mill River-Southfield Rd.

Hours:

Monday - Friday 7:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

PO Box 99, Mill River, MA 01244

(413) 229-8165

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Other businesses can be listed in the Service Sector (see back page). Questions, rates? Call Barbara Lowman: 229-2369

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Mary Richie Smith. Index: Donna Weaver

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For advertising, contact Barbara Lowman, tel: 229-2369

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