

A WORD FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR...

I am both honored and humbled to have assumed the role of Chair of the Friends of the Morrill Homestead this past January. Having served on the board for the past seven years, joining shortly after retiring and moving from Maryland to Vermont, I have grown a strong attachment to the Homestead and have enjoyed planning, volunteering and participating in many of our events.

Perhaps what makes me most apprehensive about assuming this new role is filling the very large shoes of our past Chair, Cameron Speth. Cameron has been an exceptional leader of our organization over a number of years, always cheerful and inspiring our board to achieve excellence. This was particularly evident in the past year with the resignation of our previous director... planning and executing the 14th Amendment Exhibit and “We the People” event at the Strafford Town House in August... and organizing and leading what was a very successful search for our new director, Tracey McFadden.

Indeed, 2018 was a very eventful year for the Friends. The board, and the entire Strafford community, owes Cameron a great debt of gratitude for all of her efforts and contributions. I am exceptionally pleased that Cameron has agreed to remain on the board and will continue, in a leadership role, her commitment to our mission and ongoing vitality of the Homestead. Thank you, Cameron!!

It has also been a real pleasure to welcome Tracey McFadden as the new Director of the Friends of the Morrill Homestead. Tracey was the unanimous first choice among a number of very qualified candidates by our search committee and she brings numerous talents and experience that will benefit our organization and efforts in the years to come.

As we look to the coming Homestead “season” the Friends look forward to even more closely aligning our programs and events with the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, the Homestead’s owner. Elsewhere in this newsletter you will learn of a number of challenges the state faces in preserving the Homestead and we are committed to be fully supportive of their efforts. Our goal is the same: to assure that the Morrill Homestead remains one of the premier historic sites in Vermont for years to come.

On a recent day I met with Tracey McFadden at her office at the Education Center and she had a message on her phone which she listened to on a speaker. It was a gentleman calling from Austin, Texas requesting information regarding 2019’s Annual Apple and Cheese Festival in September. That reminded me of working the admission desk at that event over the past few years and welcoming folks from England, New Zealand as well as all over our own country. It is a testimony to the quality of the Homestead, our events and our unique community that is attracting a growing number of visitors who annually find their way to us!

In closing, none of our efforts would be possible without the financial and volunteer support we receive every year from our contributors, sponsors and friends. On behalf of the entire board of the Friends of the Morrill Homestead, we hope you will continue to view our work as important and will continue your support of our organization. It is deeply appreciated!

Peter Floeckher
Chair, Friends of the Morrill Homestead

GARDEN REPORT

Meet AJ Zwikelmaier, our new head gardener at the Homestead. She is an 8th generation Vermonter, who learned to love gardens and the outdoor landscape from her father and grandfather.

AJ grew up in Utica NY and trained to be a physical therapist, her career for 44 years. From New York, she and her husband traveled to Denver in an old VW bus; headwinds and mechanical problems prevented them from continuing on to Alaska.

They eventually returned east and settled in Vermont where she worked for the VNA, then the Hartford schools for 22 years.

She became a Master Gardener in 2016 and found her way to the Homestead as a garden volunteer shortly



after completing the course.

AJ says she loves gardening at the Homestead; the site, the therapy of the gardens, meeting with visitors and working with other volunteers. There’s always something new to learn and to grow; maybe that’s why she always has a smile on her face.

Please consider joining AJ for garden volunteer days. The annual “Wake up the Garden” day took place this year on Saturday, May 18, before this issue went to press. But we’ll be “Putting the Garden to Bed” on Saturday, October 5. Look for announcements in local publications and on the listserv.

Margie Carpenter
Board Member, Friends of the Morrill Homestead

Friends of the Morrill Homestead

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The Justin Morrill Historic Site, one of nine State-Owned Historic Sites and National Historic Landmarks, is maintained and operated by the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, which encourages the discovery and appreciation of the state’s rich heritage through the stewardship and interpretation of the historic sites. In partnership with the Division, the Friends of the Morrill Homestead fosters an awareness of the life and legacy of Sen. Justin Morrill with programs, events, and public outreach to enhance the visitor experience.



www.morrillhomestead.org

The MORRILL HOMESTEAD
Chronicle

News and Information from Vermont’s First National Historic Landmark and State-Owned Historic Site
POST OFFICE BOX 98 • STRAFFORD, VERMONT • 05072
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HOMESTEAD FACES A HIDDEN THREAT!

Perched on the side of a hill, a stone’s throw from the Strafford Common and 200 feet above the West Branch of the Ompompanoosuc River across the road, Justin Morrill’s Gothic Revival cottage would seem to be well insulated from flooding issues that could threaten its ongoing viability.

Yet it turns out that just the opposite is true!

For years, the Justin Morrill Historic site has been plagued by drainage issues that have adversely affected all the structures on the property. Of greatest concern is the main house, where poor drainage and water infiltration have actually caused damage to the foundation.

The cause appears to involve a number of factors: Morrill’s original plan for the property included a system of underground pipes and conduits leading from the pond at the top of the property, to supply water to the gardens and the main house itself. Over the years, the precise location of these conduits has faded from memory. In addition, rainwater and snowmelt from the steeply pitched roof have contributed to surface and ground water that at times has overwhelmed the existing drainage systems, some of which have been in place for more than 150 years.

In addition to structural damage to the brick and stone foundation, the drainage issues have resulted in extremely high levels of relative humidity throughout the building. This threatens not just the Homestead’s interior furnishings and finishes, but also the remarkable collections of historic furniture, and fine and decorative art that’s housed there.



Plans to create seasonal exhibits highlighting collections, such as textiles and clothing from the Morrill family, have had to be put on hold. In addition, Senator Morrill’s books have been moved out of the house library and into temporary storage, until environmental conditions inside the building can be stabilized.

Fortunately, the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation is taking steps right now to alleviate the situation.

Experts from Rutland-based Marble Valley Engineering, PC have already begun a study to determine how surface and ground water move across the site.

An accurate written description and map of the existing underground utilities and drainage systems (including those that are functioning and those that are compromised) will be developed. The initial phase of the project will also document the extent to which the foundation has been damaged.

Subsequent phases will involve the development and implementation of plans for a future drainage system to alleviate the threat and stabilize the site.

Just as it took years for this problem to surface, a great deal of time, effort and money will be needed in order to mitigate its impact. So, as our special project for 2019, the Friends are partnering with the VHDP to help fund the initial phases of the effort. As we’ve done over the years, with the development of interpretive signage on the property, the restoration of Morrill’s Orchard, and last year’s 14th Amendment Exhibit and event, the Board has determined that this is an appropriate way to enhance the preservation of the Homestead at this critical time.

All readers of the Morrill Homestead Chronicle are encouraged to join us in this effort to literally preserve the Homestead and Justin Morrill’s legacy. Please use the postage paid envelope enclosed with this issue to send us your tax-deductible contribution today. Thanks!

REPORT FROM THE STATE OF VERMONT

Historic Sites staff at the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation anticipate another lively and productive season at the Justin Morrill State Historic Site. We are thrilled to report that all our Tour Guides from last season will be returning this year to share their knowledge and enthusiasm for Senator Morrill’s story with the visiting public.

This year we are also pleased to be moving forward with several important projects at the site. Perhaps the most crucial of these is the study currently being undertaken by Marble Valley Engineering to explore drainage issues around the Morrill house and elsewhere on the property. The result of their work will be a comprehensive plan to address these issues which, over the years, have caused damage to the house foundation and very high levels of relative humidity in the interior spaces.

Another project that will be wrapping up this spring is the restoration of the skylight above Morrill’s personal library. A leak developed in the skylight last fall, prompting a thorough evaluation of this lovely architectural feature of the 1858 addition. The evaluation uncovered condition issues affecting both the exterior skylight structure and the beautifully engraved glass laylights. Window restoration experts with S.A. Fishburn, Inc. have been working to restore the skylight and were scheduled to reinstall it in May.

Also in the library, work has been progressing on repairs to the impressive built-in bookcases. Restoration specialists from Heritage Environmental Projects, Inc., have removed and replaced broken glass and reglazed all the bookcase doors.

In these and all our activities at the site, we continue to be grateful for the remarkable support offered by the Friends of the Morrill Homestead. We are fortunate to have such dedicated partners in the ongoing stewardship of Justin Morrill’s beloved Strafford homestead.

Tracy Martin
Historic Sites Section Chief
Vermont Division for Historic Preservation

14TH AMENDMENT EXHIBIT GOES DIGITAL

The groundbreaking 2018 exhibit **And Justice For All: Justin Morrill and the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution** is now up on our website for all to see. If you missed the exhibit last season, you can view it by clicking “And Justice For All” at the top of our webpage, morrillhomestead.org. The Friends are delighted to share this resource with educators and others interested in Sen. Morrill’s role in drafting the 14th Amendment... legal decisions based on the Equal Protection Clause... or Reconstruction in the aftermath of the Civil War.

WELCOME TO OUR NEW DIRECTOR TRACEY MCFADDEN

If you’re driving between Strafford and South Strafford this summer and you see a bicyclist, use caution: it might be Tracey McFadden, the new Director of the Friends of the Morrill Homestead, on her regular commute.

Like so many others, Tracey isn’t from around here. A California native, she says, “I came here for college and never left.” That was 30 years ago. After a long career teaching elementary school in South Royalton and Chelsea, and eight years as director of a summer camp in Fairlee, she retired after the summer of 2018. On October 1, she began her new role as Director, extending her career as an educator into a new direction.

She has energetic plans for moving the Friends and the Homestead forward. Any new programs, she believes, must be in keeping with the legacy of Justin Morrill. Examples might include more horticulture-oriented programming, to complement the popular Pruning and Grafting workshops. Watch for outreach to new audiences such as area schools, retirees’ tour groups, and possibly the Vermont Law School. At the same time, she wants to increase the involvement of



Chuck Ashton
Board Member, Friends of the Morrill Homestead

townspeople in the Homestead’s programs, and in fact “Invite the Neighbors” will be the theme of this year’s open house.

The Homestead itself presents its own challenges. Continuing a strong collaborative relationship with the Division for Historic Preservation is essential if, for example, the indoor environment is to be upgraded. “We have textiles in storage, articles of Morrill family clothing, that we can’t exhibit in the house because of the dampness,” she says. She also plans to look into placing markers at the trees on the property known to have been planted by Justin Morrill, such as the Kobus Magnolia on the front lawn.

Although Tracey and her two daughters have been Strafford residents for 25 years, her summer camp responsibilities kept her in Fairlee. Now, she says, she is “...thrilled to be working in Strafford. The Morrill Homestead is a treasure, every bit as magnificent as the Town House. I’m looking forward to finally being in town for the summer.” The Friends hope it will be for longer than just the summer.

SAFETY ISSUES RESULT IN TREE REMOVAL

Last month, after several years of close monitoring and long deliberations, the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation (VDHP) removed three large trees, two white pines and an ash, from along the fence line bordering the Justin Morrill Highway.

Removal of the large ash tree, before its inevitable infestation by the emerald ash borer, was decided in consultation with the Orange County Forester. The tree’s location meant that, as it began to rot, it would have become a hazard that could threaten power lines, vehicles and other private property, and pedestrians. The decision was made somewhat easier because it was clearly not part of Morrill’s design for the ornamental lawn and, in fact, shaded areas that might otherwise be restored to match his vision for that part of the property.

Removal of the large white pines was scrutinized to an even greater degree, because at least one of them may have been planted by the Senator himself, and Morrill’s planned landscape is a character-defining feature of this National Historic Landmark site. Once again, however, the determining factor was the threat they posed.



When white pines begin to fail, they often do so dramatically and quickly. Both of these trees were believed to be close to 150 years old and VDHP was not comfortable with the level of risk they presented with homes, powerlines, and a well-traveled road in such close proximity.

Morrill’s sense of perspective, scale, and proportion in his original landscape plan was also a deciding factor in the removal of the pines. The 100-foot trees had come to dwarf the historic homestead and other features of the landscape. Additionally, their shade and the acidity of the soil surrounding them, made it impossible to entertain the idea of restoring the plantings in that part of the lawn. Wood from the pine trees will be milled on-site and stored to dry in the cow barn. We hope to make use of it for a variety of projects on the property in the coming years.

It is the hope of VDHP that the removal of these large trees can be the beginning of a larger process to restore the landscape of the State Historic Site to something that Senator Morrill would have recognized.

2019 HAPPENINGS AT THE HOMESTEAD

The Friends of the Morrill Homestead’s 2019 season is off to a fabulous start! Our programming began in March with Mike Hebb’s informative Pruning and Grafting Fruit Trees workshops. Terry Dorman of Whitman Brook Orchard continued this theme by hosting guided walks through his historic orchard in Quechee. Meanwhile back at The Homestead, our new garden manager, AJ Zwickelmaier led a dedicated crew of volunteers to “Wake Up The Garden” and prepare Sen. Morrill’s picturesque grounds to welcome visitors. The Gothic Revival House recently opened for tours and, with the Friends’ support, will continue to be open Wednesdays through Sundays until October 13.

We are looking ahead to more wonderful programs starting on **June 9** with an **Open House** at the Homestead. Admissions is free at all Vermont Historic sites June 8th and 9th and you are invited to join us from 2:00-4:00 on Sunday for an ice cream social, live music with Strafford’s own “Off The Grid,” and mingling with Justin Morrill. This will be a great opportunity to view the art and other treasures in the Morrill family home and to chat with Friends’ Board members about volunteer opportunities and upcoming events.



On the **3rd Saturday of each month** John Freitag will be leading **Walking Tours of Morrill’s Strafford** including Morrill’s birthplace, his father’s blacksmith shop, the Town House, and the mausoleum where he is buried. It’s amazing how little has changed in the village since Morrill’s time.

Mark **July 5** on your calendars for the Homestead’s annual **Gallery In The Garden** art show and silent auction! Dierdre Dennis and

lead a tasty **tour of the heirloom apple varieties** found at Whitman Brook Orchard on **August 17**.

Morrill’s love of art will be the inspiration for Jennifer Brown’s **Water Color and Drawing Workshops** for adults in **August & September** and **Children’s Art Camp July 29-August 2**. Artists of all ages will gather at The Homestead to be inspired by

Andy Newman are the featured artists for “Reflections,” an exhibit of work by artists from the Upper Valley and beyond. Enjoy wine, hors d’oeuvres, and a chance to bid on mini paintings by over forty talented artists.

We are excited to have Landscape Historian, Master Gardener (and Board Member) Margie Carpenter leading a **Garden Talk and Tour on July 28**. Learn about our famous senator’s Romantic landscape design and innovative horticultural endeavors. Based on Morrill’s commitment to his apple orchard, Terry Dorman will

the unique gardens, architecture, and landscapes found here.

Former director, Michael Caduto will make a return appearance on **September 8** to lead his ever-popular walk and talk on wild edible, medicinal, and poisonous plants: **Fiddleheads, Lamb’s Quarters, Nettles, and Nuts**.

On **September 29** the end of the season will be celebrated with the **19th Century Apple**



& Cheese Harvest Festival, once again voted a “**Top 10 Fall Event**” by the Vermont Chamber of Commerce. Bring the whole family to enjoy cider making, face painting, pie tasting, live music, period games, cheese sampling, and more! This is the perfect event to wrap up another delightful season at The Justin Morrill Homestead. Many thanks to the volunteers, business sponsors, and donors who make it all possible.

Tracey McFadden
Director, Friends of the Morrill Homestead

CALLING ALL VOLUNTEERS

The Board members of the Friends of the Morrill Homestead are volunteers who work year-round to develop and present cultural and educational programs at the Morrill Homestead, but always with the help of non-board volunteers who help out an hour or two at a time with individual events. In this article I would like to celebrate the work already performed by those volunteers and to encourage new volunteers to step forward and join them.

Why do so many people already volunteer? Well, it’s a Strafford thing, as we learned a few years ago from the community study conducted by David Grant and John Hawkins. Whether standing for public office, staffing the recycling center, reading to Newton School children, or taking a shift at the desk of the library, people understand that volunteer work builds better communities by extending services beyond those paid for by tax dollars.

Two of the many programs/events put on by the Friends of the Morrill Homestead, the Gallery in the Garden (G.I.G.) and AppleFest, illustrate well how we depend on volunteers

who have fun doing valuable work. Everyone knows that the party and auction that open the G.I.G. art show is the unofficial kick-off for Strafford’s 4th of July celebration; but are you aware that all the food is prepared and served by volunteers... that the art show is curated and hung by volunteers... and that the auction of mini paintings (which helps pay the fixed costs of our programs and events) is possible only through the work of volunteers?

The same is true with AppleFest: the face-painting and games tables for children, the tables with samples of local cheeses and heirloom apples, the chili lunch and apple pie that comes with the cost of admission, and the cider press that operates all day are possible only with the work of volunteers.

Who are these volunteers and why are they so willing to help? Some are experts, like the gardeners and arborists who have done so much to restore and maintain the Homestead’s gardens and orchard. Some are motivated by the aesthetic, some by historical significance of Morrill’s Strafford home, and some volunteer

in gratitude for Morrill’s congressional work in Washington. But mostly, people are moved by their sense of community and an old-fashioned belief in the value of pitching in. Regardless of motivation, volunteers know that working together to do something worthwhile is fun.

If you have already been a volunteer helping the Friends of the Morrill Homestead with our programs, we thank you and hope you will continue. If you have not been a volunteer and are interested in becoming one, there are two easy ways to explore how you can help with as many of our programs as you like. The first is to speak to a board member: A list of our names appears on Page 1, and any of us can describe from our own experience some of the options available to you. The second way is to email our Director, Tracey McFadden. (director@morrillhomestead.org); she will make sure that you are connected to the chair of the appropriate event.

Jonathan Stableford
Board Member, Friends of the Morrill Homestead