

JUSTIN MORRILL’S STRAFFORD BROUGHT TO LIFE VIA MONTHLY WALKING TOURS

“Morrill transferred to the larger scene the experiences and the motives of the smaller one he had left, projecting into national affairs the habits and principles learned in the village”
Biographer William Belmont Parker

Justin Morrill’s upbringing in Strafford shaped the man he became... a man who went on to shape our nation. What better way to learn about Strafford’s influence on Morrill (and conversely, Morrill’s influence on Strafford) than to tour the village itself? This season, the Friends sponsored monthly walking tours of Morrill’s Strafford Village led by local history buff John Freitag. Amazingly, every building but one in the village today was here in Morrill’s time, making it easy as you stroll through town to envision the Strafford that Morrill called home.

Justin grew up in the shadow of the Town House where his family’s home and blacksmith shop still stand. He received his early education in Strafford, but had to leave school at age 15. Unable to afford further formal schooling, Morrill turned to books for his education, at first borrowing books from Judge Jedediah Harris, his mentor and future business partner. Sen. Morrill’s passion for books lasted a lifetime and was reflected in his involvement in two important libraries: Strafford’s first, The Harris Library, which was gifted by Morrill to the town in 1883... and the Nation’s first, The Library of Congress, the development and expansion of which became one of the signature achievements of Morrill’s long career.



Morrill named the Harris Library in honor of his mentor and built it right between Judge Harris’ home and store. Today it is home to the town clerk’s office. The only post-Morrill building in the village is the Morrill Memorial and Harris Library, built in 1928 with funds from the will of Justin’s sister-in-law to house his personal library and art collection along with the books from the Harris library. Justin would be pleased to see what a vital part of our community the library is today.

At age 15 Justin began working in Jedediah Harris’ Brick Store and was full partner by age 24. Today the Brick Store houses the Strafford post office and Historical Society, but one can still see the original shelving, door lock, and sign. The country store played a central role in Justin’s formation and was the ideal training ground for the future statesman. Business and accounting experience served him well when he sat on the House Ways and Means Committee and later chaired the Senate Finance Committee. A country store in those days was not only a place of commerce, but also a social and intellectual center where Morrill often discussed national current events and the great political questions of the day.

After visiting the Town House and other relevant village structures, the walking tour ends at the Morrill Mausoleum overlooking the village he so loved. As Morrill once said of Strafford, “Here to me even the stars, the planets, and the moon shine more brightly than elsewhere.”

Tracey McFadden
Director, Friends of the Morrill Homestead

A WORD FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR...

It’s hard to believe that summer 2019 is drawing to a close, but fall in Vermont is definitely in the air! Our 19th Century Apple and Cheese Harvest Festival, scheduled for Sunday, September 29, is rapidly approaching, and it is my hope that many of you reading this issue will plan to attend what has become one of the Homestead’s most popular annual events!

In addition, The Friends of the Morrill Homestead’s Director, Tracey McFadden, is soon to complete her first year in her role; under her leadership, the season has been a tremendous success as measured by both the quality of and attendance at our events and programs. We are most fortunate to have her!

Also contributing to that success is the hard work and dedication of the many volunteers who support our work in so many different ways, and the many donors whose generosity supplies the wherewithal that enables us to carry out our mission.

If you are already one of those volunteers and/or donors, our entire Board of Directors joins me in extending heartfelt thanks and gratitude. We couldn’t do it without you! And if you haven’t yet had occasion to become a “Friend,” I encourage you to do so. We’d love to welcome you to our team.

PUTTING THE GARDEN TO BED Saturday, Oct. 5, 9am – noon

Please join us for the annual autumn “putting the garden to bed” day at the Homestead. We could use your help cleaning up the kitchen garden and ornamental garden beds and preparing them for the winter and the next growing season. All Welcome!

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Friends of the Morrill Homestead

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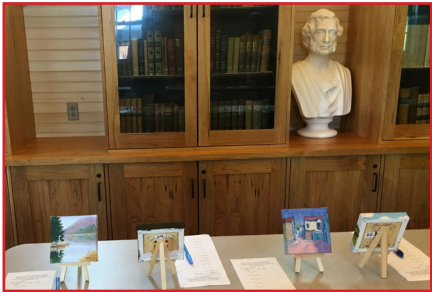
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The Justin Morrill Historic Site, one of nine State-Owned Historic Sites and National Historic Landmarks, is maintained and operated by the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, which encourages the discovery and appreciation of the state’s rich 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
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Fall 2019: VOL. 13 No. 2

APPLEFEST TO CLOSE OUT HOMESTEAD’S 2019 SEASON

The air is crisp when I wake up these mornings and that means that fall has arrived, school has started, and the Friends of the Morrill Homestead are set to host our annual Apple and Cheese Harvest Festival on September 29.

We started planning for 2019 shortly after the 2018 event closed. It has been such a successful celebration that it may not seem necessary to change much. But we always look for ways to improve. Early planning consisted of a debriefing from those who participated, paying special attention to advice on tweaking details. Our goal is to keep the quality but make the whole process as efficient as possible. It is a volunteer-intensive event, so everyone has an important role. There are never too many hands to help, and help is much appreciated. Actually it’s a whole lot of fun!

In early August, I sent a “Save the Date” email to the people who volunteered to work at the 2018 event. Virtually all responded positively. The biggest responsibilities are apple pressing, cheese tasting, and food.



Jon Stableford has the apple pressing down to a science. He has an old apple press; 20 bushels of apples will be picked up the day before; there will be bottles for the cider and labels; and he will have a few energetic people lined up to start the process. Once begun, it seems to hum with success and many visitors want to have a hand at turning the press handle, tasting the cider, and buying bottles to take home.

Beverly Bilsky has been in charge of cheese for several years now. And it only gets better and better. With her knowledge and contacts, Beverly secures exciting vintage Vermont cheeses from many local cheese makers. The cheese tasting table is a wonderful place to learn about different cheeses and taste them.

Cheese and apples are a great combination and the heirloom apple tasting is always popular. In fact the event is loaded with food, because a lunch of chili and apple desserts is served from 12:00 to 2:00 p.m. How many types of chili are there and how many desserts

can be made from apples? Both are interesting and tasty questions. The real dilemma is finding people to prepare them! It’s a major responsibility, and we rely on the willingness of past volunteers to achieve maximum support.

The Vermont Chamber of Commerce has chosen AppleFest as a Top Ten Events Winner in the state for four years now. And I have no doubts that I know why. What could be better than sitting on the Homestead lawn with friends and neighbors... eating chili, apple desserts, and ice cream... drinking a little hand-pressed cider... listening to lively music by Out on a Limb... and watching children playing period games and getting their faces painted!

But don’t just take my word for it. Join us on Sunday, September 29 and see for yourself!

Cameron Speth
Board Member, Friends of the Morrill Homestead



EXPLORING SCHOOL VISITS AT THE HOMESTEAD



Nationally recognized teacher Joey Hawkins works with Holly Brennan-Cook, a 3rd grade teacher from South Royalton School.

On a warm August morning, the Education Committee of the Friends brought together a number of Upper Valley K – 12 teachers for an education outreach brainstorming session.

VDHP's Historic Sites Section Chief, Tracy Martin, and founding FMH board member and teacher Andersen Thorp, first toured the educators through the Homestead. Then, nationally recognized teacher and Strafford resident Joey Hawkins led a presentation on “Common Core” and how to include the life and times of Senator Morrill and the Morrill Homestead into schools’ curriculum.

During the working lunch session, guiding questions prompted further dialogue and ideas on how the FMH and the VDHP can partner with schools and teachers to support outreach opportunities for 21st Century learners, building upon what Senator Morrill accomplished in the 19th Century.

Ann Thorp
Board Member, Friends of the Morrill Homestead

UNEXPECTED GIFT ENRICHES HOMESTEAD’S COLLECTIONS



Visitors to the Justin Morrill Homestead often remark on the beautiful monogrammed dinner service, a few pieces of which they see in the dining room, and ask about its history. Luckily a copy of the Morrills’ original receipt for the china has survived. Dated August 24, 1867, it shows that they bought their service for 24 -- white with pink trim, no surprise there -- in Paris for 824.75 francs (equivalent to \$159.88 in 1867 or about \$2,900 today).

On April 30, Friends’ Director Tracey McFadden received an e-mail out of the blue that read in part:

The senator was my great great great (I think 3 greats) Uncle. The senatorial china was passed down through my father's side... We promised my father I'd pass the china on to the Morrill Homestead when I was through with it... Is the Morrill Homestead interested in having them?



The e-mail was from Pamela Morrill on behalf of herself and her brother Kenneth, descendants of Justin Morrill's brother Sidney Smith Morrill. It was quickly forwarded to Tracy Martin, Historic Sites Section Chief, who accepted the gift on behalf of the State of Vermont the next day. Arrangements are now being made for the pieces to be properly packed and shipped from the West Coast to the Homestead.

Visitors will experience a very different dining room in 2020 when they encounter the table fully set for a Morrill dinner party. The Friends join the State of Vermont in thanking the Morrills for this generous gift, part of which can be seen in the accompanying photos.



Chuck Ashton
Board Member, Friends of the Morrill Homestead

A BUSY YEAR AT THE HOMESTEAD



Mike Hebb instructs on the finer points of grafting during his popular workshop.



Whitman Brook Orchard Walk drew a group interested in summer apple varieties.



Reflections, an art exhibit in the Carriage Barn, displayed the works of 14 local artists.



Bidding on Morrill Minis was intense at the Gallery in the Garden auction.



Artistic inspiration was found in the Homestead gardens during Jennifer Brown's Watercolor Workshops.



Stephanie Reininger's painting was one of the 50 Morrill Minis bid on at our Gallery in the Garden.



The results of Kids Art Camp are shown off by happy campers and a proud artist/instructor Jennifer Brown.



Volunteers work to 'Wake Up' the spring gardens.



Senator Morrill made a surprise visit to our Open House.



Former Friends of the Morrill Homestead Director, Michael Caduto, returned to lead his ever popular Nature Walk.

REPORT FROM THE STATE OF VERMONT

As the air cools, the days shorten, and apples mature on the trees, staff from the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation (VDHP) are preparing for end-of-season work at the Justin Morrill State Historic Site. This year, our autumn chores will be substantially more manageable thanks to help from the Historic Sites program's newest staff member, Jamie Duggan.

Jamie holds a master's degree in Historic Preservation and has worked at VDHP for close to seven years as head of the Project Review section. Prior to his time in State government, Jamie owned and operated his own business as a preservation contractor specializing in historic masonry, plaster and window restoration. In that capacity, Jamie worked on projects at several of our State-owned Historic Sites. He has remained enthusiastic about the program ever since.

Jamie began his work at the Justin Morrill site, by stepping in to take the lead on the tree



removal undertaking this spring. He has also become our point person for the project to develop a drainage management plan for the site. We expect to see the first draft of that plan from the team at Marble Valley Engineering by early September.

With facility management responsibilities taken off my plate, I will be free to refocus my efforts on site interpretation, educational programming, exhibit development, museum collections management, and marketing. Both Jamie and I look forward to working closely with the Friends of the Morrill Homestead on our shared goals to preserve and promote the house and farm of a truly remarkable Vermonter.

Tracy Martin
Historic Sites Section Chief
Vermont Division for Historic Preservation

MORRILL'S OLD TREES GIVEN NEW LIFE

Before the start of the 2019 season, three large old trees were removed from the front of the Homestead. While these trees may no longer dominate the view in front of Morrill's house, they are being given new life in other forms.

Wood from the pine trees was milled on site and some was donated to a service project at Old City Falls led by three members of Strafford's Girl Scout Troop: Iris Chesnut, Ada Breese, and Amelia Bailey-Kellogg. The town's first settlement was in the Old City Falls area, where by 1769 a gristmill and sawmill had been erected on Old City Brook above the falls. Today Old City Falls is a popular nature preserve and picnic area. However, the Old City picnic pavilion had seen much wear and tear over the years, including carved graffiti and rot. The three Girl Scouts brought together donors and community volunteers to restore the picnic shelter for future visitors to enjoy. At their dedication ceremony, the girls were pleased to tell all that the lumber they used was from trees that grew at Sen. Justin Morrill's Homestead during his lifetime 150 years ago. What a fitting use for Morrill's trees!



The ash tree is being made into beautiful works by two Strafford craftsmen. Jeffrey Gale, a professional basket-maker, took the white ash log to his old fashioned workshop. He split out billets of wood, which he is using to make all the material necessary to weave and fashion an authentic 19th century style handmade splint basket. Don't miss Jeffrey demonstrating his craft at AppleFest and look for his donated basket at our next Gallery in the Garden Auction!

David McWilliams is also giving new life to the ash tree. David's goal is to celebrate the beautiful grain of this very old ash tree in turned bowls. He particularly likes using the crotches from a tree where the trunk has split off in two directions creating wild flame-like patterns. The tree from the Homestead had many large crotch sections to work with. The bowl has been rough turned and now needs to dry for a year or more. Then David will re-turn it, sand, and apply three coats of finish. We patiently await receiving David's beautiful bowl to be a special item in a future Gallery Auction!

The remaining lumber has been stored in the cow barn, ready for various projects around the site. At the top of the list are new picnic tables to be enjoyed by camp participants and other visitors, and we are looking forward to seeing how else Justin's old trees will take on new life at the Homestead.

Tracey McFadden
Director, Friends of the Morrill Homestead