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## Friends of the Morrill Homestead

*State-Owned Site and National Historic Landmark*

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## A WORD FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR...

As I sat down to draft this article, I was excited to see that Vermont's governor had just announced a time table for returning to "normal" activities in this age of Covid. While the July 4th date is

subject to change, it is encouraging to think that, after a long year of isolation, many of us can anticipate being able to again gather at events, and socialize with family and friends who we have missed so much. Indeed, the light at the end of this tunnel appears to be getting brighter!

As the Friends of the Morrill Homestead, working closely with the state, have been planning our events and activities for our upcoming season, we have and will continue to adjust our plans to assure the safety of all participants and we will do what is appropriate for whatever the environment may be.

Our organization is extremely fortunate to have an active Board of Directors who are always willing and able to roll up their sleeves to pitch in and do whatever it takes to assist our dedicated Director, Tracey McFadden, in assuring that our various programs and activities are successful. Many of our board members have been involved for a number of years, and we were fortunate to add two new members, Greg Colling and Jameson Davis, in 2020. It is always terrific to have new ideas and perspective in our work – and we could use even more of that! If you are interested in the Homestead and would like to be considered for a volunteer board position, please reach out to either Tracey McFadden or any one of our board members listed on the front page of this newsletter.

To all of our neighbors, friends, contributors, sponsors and directors – Thank You for your continued support of our work! Be well, and I hope to see many of you at the Homestead this coming summer!

*Peter Floeckher  
Chair, Friends of the Morrill Homestead*

## Who's Who on the Board...



## JOHN ECHTERNACH "CAN DO, WILL DO."

John Echternach describes himself as a "hands on, nuts and bolts guy" - the kind of person who takes pride in solving problems that others might not even have noticed. On the day we spoke, he was late for our meeting because he was building nine portable dental chairs he designed for a state-sponsored, school-based pilot program. At other times he is the keeper of the tower clock in the Strafford Town House.

John and his wife Judie came to Strafford from his native Pennsylvania by way of a 40-year stint in New Hampshire, and for a very straightforward reason: "I always wanted to live in northern New England; I always wanted to live where there were mountains and snow." So when he graduated from dental school in Philadelphia

in 1975, he loaded up the trusty '65 Buick and headed north. After some looking around, he bought a house in Henniker, NH and set up his practice.

Fast forward to 2016 when he sold the practice and he and his wife moved to South Strafford, midway between their two grown children in northern Vermont and southern New Hampshire (and still with plenty of mountains and snow).

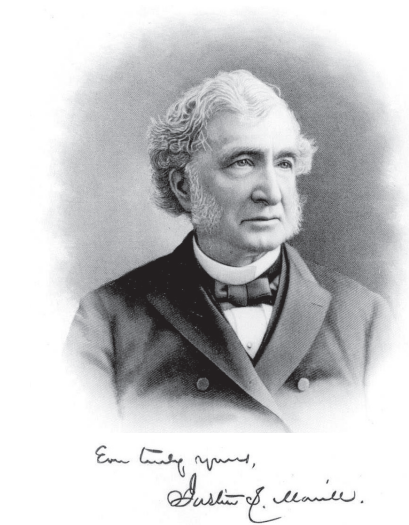
John's interest in history led him to join the Friends in 2018. Last year, it was his suggestion that the Friends re-orient itself to, in the words of our recently revamped Mission Statement, "...educate ourselves and others about the shortcomings and unfulfilled promises of some aspects of [Morrill's] work and to acknowledge that the lands awarded to states for the creation of the Morrill Land-grant College Act were originally seized from Native Americans." The upcoming speakers' series *The Abenaki Experience: Prehistory to Present* will be the first of our projects to reflect this new approach – thanks in no small part to "Mr. Hands On." We'll look forward to seeing you there!

*Chuck Ashton  
Board Member, Friends of the Morrill Homestead*

## LEAVE IT TO SENATOR MORRILL TO SET A POSITIVE EXAMPLE !



While most of the staff at VDHP continue to work from home, Flat Justin has been holding down the fort at the Montpelier offices. He is currently enforcing mask-wearing and social distancing at the door of the meeting room that bears his name.



## FRIENDS OF THE MORRILL HOMESTEAD

Peter Floeckher  
*Chair*

Chuck Ashton  
*Vice-Chair*

John Dumville  
*Secretary*

John Reese  
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John Echternach

Cameron Speth

Jon Stableford

David Taplin

Andersen Thorp

Roger Walke

Ingrid Webb

*Ex-Officio*

Tracey McFadden

Laura Trieschmann

Tracy Martin

(Vermont Division for Historic Preservation)

*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.*



Photo by Scott Miller

[www.morrillhomestead.org](http://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

Spring 2021: VOL. 15 No. 1

## CRITICAL YEAR AHEAD FOR THE HOMESTEAD'S GARDENS

Justin Morrill laid out the gardens for his mid-nineteenth century Victorian landscape to accomplish two objectives: he wanted decorative flower beds in front of the house in an area referred to as "the pleasure ground"... and he wanted a garden behind the house to serve as a working laboratory to test for plant cold hardiness.

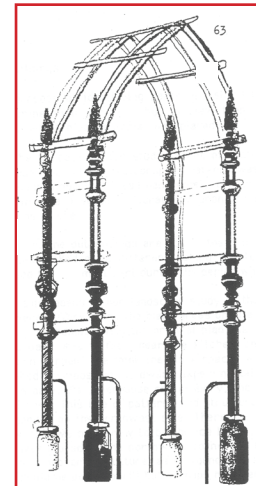
The arabesque beds in front of the house were planted in colorful, decorative patterns using annuals grown in Morrill's greenhouse. The large rectangular garden behind the house, referred to as the kitchen garden, was used as the plant lab. These beds were laid out in a grid, using a block and path design for easy access. Morrill filled this garden with perennials, herbs, berry bushes, apple and other fruit whips.

When we started rebuilding the kitchen garden in 2006, we used Morrill's hand-drawn planting plan as a reference, along with a planting plan from a 1990 document created by Primavera Landscaping, in Barnard, VT entitled: *The Ornamental Landscape. A Study with Site Plans for the Restoration of the Justin Morrill Historic Site.*

We laid out the beds and the paths... bordered the garden with appropriate shrubs... and populated the beds using plants that Morrill had listed along the margins of horticulture books in his library.

Today, however, the Homestead's gardens are mature gardens. Although lovingly tended by Head Gardener AJ Zwikelmaier and her loyal band of volunteers, change has occurred over time. Some plants have not thrived and need to be replaced; others have thrived too well and expanded beyond their borders. Beds and paths need to be shored up. Invasive poison parsnip has become so pervasive, entire sections of the garden need to be dug up to eradicate it.

Given the potential for onsite disruption next year as a result of the water mitigation project described on page 3, the Friends have determined that we need to make an all-out effort this year to put the gardens in the best shape possible.



As a result, a number of shrubs have been added to the list of annuals normally purchased every year. In addition, we have developed a wish list of improvements needed to both continue to adhere to Morrill's vision for the gardens, and make maintaining them easier for our volunteers.

Paramount on this list is a second water faucet, one that would access the pleasure ground in front of the house. With extreme weather brought on by climate change, last summer's drought made watering all the gardens from one faucet very difficult and time consuming. Believe me, hauling those hoses long distances in the heat was no picnic!

A second improvement, long overdue, is to reproduce the ornate arch at the entrance to the kitchen garden. The Primavera report includes this drawing of a simple Gothic arch using lathe turned wood to simulate iron.

And finally, we must address the kettle, a decorative feature filled with water in the center of the kitchen garden. Although we don't know its origins, the iron kettle is a real attraction for visitors, even though it is rather unsightly. Iron has leached into the water and turned it orange. Incredibly, water plants continue to grow, and every year two or three fat frogs call it home. The kettle needs to be drained, lined with plastic to prevent leaching, and replanted. (Presumably the frogs will return.)

All readers of the Morrill Homestead *Chronicle* are encouraged to join us in this special effort to keep Justin Morrill's garden legacy thriving. Please visit our website [morrillhomestead.org](http://morrillhomestead.org) to make a tax-deductible contribution today. Thanks!

*Margie Carpenter  
Board Member and Head Gardener, 'Emerita'*



## HAPPENINGS AT THE HOMESTEAD

This summer we have much to look forward to at the Homestead. We are expanding on the outdoor programs that were successful last year... bringing back favorites canceled in 2020... and offering exciting new events for 2021. Although the season will get a late start when the site opens in July, a lot will be happening late summer and early fall. Visit [morrillhomestead.org](http://morrillhomestead.org) for all the details.



The season kicks off on July 2nd with *Minis for Morrill: Possibilities*, an online auction of miniature paintings from over 50 artists.

On the 3rd Saturday of each month, John Freitag

will lead *Walking Tours of Morrill's Strafford Village*. Morrill's birthplace, his father's blacksmith shop, the Town House, and the Morrill family mausoleum will all be included

Talks for garden enthusiasts include *Morrill's Landscape Design* with Landscape Historian and Master Gardner Margie Carpenter, and *Gardens For Our Bees And Other Pollinators* with beekeeper Sheri Englert. Reflecting Morrill's commitment to his orchard, Terry Dorman will lead a *Guided Walk of Whitman Brook Orchard*, a

100-year-old reclaimed heirloom apple orchard. Former Friends director, Michael Caduto will lead his popular walk and talk on wild edible, medicinal, and poisonous plants: *Fiddleheads, Lamb's Quarters, Nettles, and Nuts*. Other new workshops for 2021 will cover *Beginning Beekeeping* and *Fiber-Dyeing with Natural Materials*.

Justin Morrill's love of art carries on with children's camps and workshops for artists of all ages. Jennifer Brown will be setting up in the gardens to teach *Painting Botanicals* and lead *Drawing & Watercolor Camp* for ages 6-12. Scott Miller will teach a *Creative & Technical Photography* series and a *Photography Camp* for ages 8-11. *Multi-Media Story Camp* will bring teens together to create documentary videos using cameras, drones, audio recorders, and digital editing tools. In all cases, the unique gardens, architecture, landscape, and history of the Homestead will provide an ideal inspiration for artistic creativity!

On Sunday afternoons in September the Friends will host *The Abenaki Experience: Prehistory to Present*, a speakers' series designed to foster an understanding of the



long and complicated history of the indigenous people of this area. We will look not only at the conflict and misunderstandings of the past but also the vibrancy of the Abenaki community today. Discussions will include *"Archaeological History of the CT River Valley"* with Vermont State Archeologist Jess Robinson... *"The Vermont Abenakis: Un-writing History"* with Professor Fred Wiseman... *"We Are Still Here"*



Jesse and Joseph Bruchac

with Joseph and Jesse Bruchac of the Nulhegan Abenaki Nation... and *"Our Stories Remember"*- Abenaki musicians and storytellers sharing traditional stories for the whole family.

The 2021 events season will wrap up with the return of our *19th Century Apple & Cheese Harvest Festival* (aka AppleFest) on September 26. Come enjoy music, games, animals, heirloom apples, artisan cheeses, pressed cider, and tasty treats!

As we look ahead with much excitement to the upcoming season, the Friends would like to thank all the volunteers, business sponsors, and donors whose support makes it all possible.

Tracey McFadden  
Director, Friends of the Morrill Homestead

## WATER MITIGATION PROJECT MOVING FORWARD

Wonderful news! Plans to alleviate the threat posed by water intrusion into the Homestead are well under way.

As readers of the *Chronicle* will no doubt recall, water damage has been an issue for the house for decades. In addition to structural damage to the brick and stone foundation, drainage issues have resulted in extremely high levels of relative humidity throughout the house. This threatens not just the interior furnishings and finishes, but also the remarkable collections of historic furniture and fine and decorative art that's contained there.

Following the 2019 study conducted by Marble Valley Engineering, the VDHP has developed a multi-part plan to address the crucial damage to the foundation and structure caused by excessive water-related conditions. The project will reduce the downslope flow of surface water reaching the house... effectively direct high ground water away from the foundation... collect and channel run-off from the roof... and install alternative draining around the foundation.



Photo by Scott Miller

Major elements of the plan will include a trench drain and cut-off wall upslope from the house, to capture surface and ground water from the adjacent 228 acre watershed before it can reach the foundation. In addition, a new perimeter drainage system will be installed around the house to collect both high ground water and run-off from the roof. New gutters and downspouts will be connected to the drainage system, and drywells and discharge piping will convey water away. The site will also be re-graded to direct water away from the foundation, and the basement hatchway and holes in the foundation to facilitate utility access will be waterproofed.

It's a big and costly project – one that will take perhaps up to 24 months to complete. But grant applications have already been submitted and preliminary work has begun, with much of the major construction slated for next summer.

Upcoming issues of the *Chronicle* will keep readers apprised as the project moves forward.

## 2021 MINI AUCTION GOES BACK ONLINE: LET THE BIDDING BEGIN!

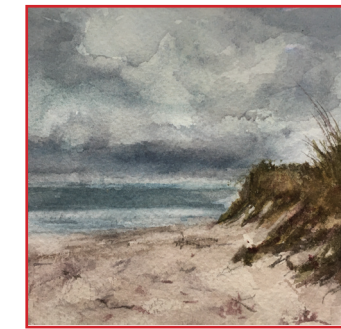
Spring, the season of renewal and hope, arrives once again under the pall of an epidemic. Last year the Friends of the Morrill Homestead maintained naive hope nearly to May that we could go forward with our annual Gallery in the Garden art show, party, and auction of mini paintings; fortunately, in the end we were able to salvage an on-line version of our traditional auction. By January of this year, the Friends decided to proceed cautiously with another on-line auction and aim for a full celebration in 2022 when there has been time for vaccinations to reach everyone. We all see light at the end of the tunnel: our theme for this year's auction is *Possibilities*.



Andy Newman - "Rue Des Capucins (Uzès)"

In a wonderful surprise, last year's auction was enormously successful; and now with a year of Zoom classes, meetings, reunions, and seminars under

our belts, on-line bidding should be a cinch for most people. As always, this year's auction will raise money for our educational programs, some of which we were able to run last year, safely outdoors and masked; this year we will be offering an expanded slate, and in 2022 we expect to be back to normal.



Debby Patrick - "Storm Clouds"

On-line bidding this year will begin on Friday, July 2 at 6:00 and extend to 6:00 pm on Sunday, July 11. Potential bidders (and the merely curious) will be able to see the minis in two ways:

- on-line at our web site (see below) partially as the minis arrive in late June, then the entire collection throughout the auction period;
- in-person, masked and socially distanced, at the Homestead's Education Center between 3:00 pm and 5:00 pm on July 2, 3, 10 & 11.

To begin the process of viewing or bidding, go to: [biddingowl.com/JustinMorrillHomestead](http://biddingowl.com/JustinMorrillHomestead)

This year's auction is sponsored by Dr. Alicia Willette, DDS; Chippers Inc; and Mascoma Bank.

Jonathan Stableford  
Board Member, Friends of the Morrill Homestead

## REPORT FROM THE STATE OF VERMONT

This spring, staff at the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation (VDHP) cautiously proceeded with plans for the reopening of six State-owned historic sites. While we knew these sites would be operating with many COVID precautions still in place, there was a distinct feeling among team members that brighter days were ahead. Our plans for the Sen. Justin Morrill State Historic Site called for the house to be open for public tours on Saturdays and Sundays from July 3 through October 10.

Much of our focus at the Justin Morrill site for this season will be on improving the visitor experience outdoors, in the gardens and on the grounds. After being confined to our own houses for much of the past year, many of us are ready to get outside and explore, visit new places, and see new sights. What better place for those pursuits than the bucolic landscaped grounds of Justin Morrill's Strafford home. An additional

staff person will be onsite during our open hours to greet visitors and help direct them to points of interest around the property. New trail signage and additional outdoor seating will encourage people to linger and make the most of their visit.

Another goal for the current season is to complete a comprehensive base plan map. That map will be used to guide the big water mitigation project planned for 2022. As one might expect, additional surveying of the property will be a key part of the mapping work. A more unusual aspect of the work will be the use of ground penetrating radar (GPR). It is our hope that GPR technology will enable us to identify underground features of the historic drainage system constructed during Morrill's ownership of the site.

Later this season, we expect to begin archaeological testing of areas around the Morrill house and lower lawn. While the

drainage work planned for next year will cause significant ground disturbance at the site, we hope to limit that, where possible, to previously disturbed areas. In areas of higher archaeological sensitivity, the proposed work will be reviewed by VDHP archaeologists.

As we prepare for next year's work at the site, we in the Division are reminded again of our good fortune in having the support of a vibrant and dedicated partner organization in the Friends of the Morrill Homestead. Disruption of some activities at the site may be inevitable next year, but working in close collaboration with the Friends, we hope to be able to mitigate that and forge an even stronger relationship moving forward.

Tracy Martin  
Historic Sites Section Chief  
Vermont Division for Historic Preservation

## MORRILL'S ANTI-SLAVERY AND RACIAL EQUALITY LEGACY – PART 2

At the end of the Civil War and after, Justin Morrill helped pass the "Reconstruction amendments," the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments. Supporting the Thirteenth Amendment (ratified 1865), abolishing slavery, Rep. Morrill asked in House debate, "How can any man ... be opposed to the utter and complete extinguishment of slavery?"

For the Fifteenth Amendment (ratified 1870), prohibiting denial of the vote because of race, color, or previous servitude, Senator Morrill tartly reminded the Senate in 1869, four days from Congress' final adjournment, that they had to vote then or lose the amendment for that Congress. The Senate passed the amendment less than an hour later.

Justin Morrill played his most important role in the creation of the Fourteenth Amendment., which established Black citizenship and attempted to guarantee legal and civil rights to all citizens. Representative Morrill was one of the 15 members of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction, which drafted the amendment in early 1866. He was active in both the drafting and, later, the history of the Amendment, which passed Congress, amended, in June 1866 and was ratified in July 1868. (You can see the full story at [morrillhomestead.org/and-justice-for-all/](http://morrillhomestead.org/and-justice-for-all/))

After the Reconstruction amendments, then-Senator Morrill continued to work for Black

political and civil equality and advancement. From 1873 to 1890 he either introduced, or supported, bills in every Congress to create a federal "educational fund" from public land sales, for both public schools and land-grant colleges. Morrill introduced ten such bills; none passed. He made clear to the Senate in 1876 that his education bill "includes all, without regard to race or color." These bills may be what Frederick Douglass had in mind when he wrote Morrill in 1880 "I see no great or happy future for my race or for the Republic outside general education and it seems to me that you, dear sir, can do no better work for the nation than to press this idea upon the nation's heart and mind."

Morrill also condemned, in 1889, "The intimidation or fraud universally practiced in the South, by which the colored vote is suppressed, [which] shocks the moral sentiment of the northern people." He warned a remedy would be needed.

From Senator Morrill's many educational fund bills came, finally, in 1890, his second land-grant college act. His first Land-Grant College Act, of 1862, had contained no language prohibiting states from discriminating by race in admissions. While many 1862 land-grant colleges did not discriminate in admissions, after the Civil War a number of former Confederate states had created two (or more) segregated colleges with their land-grant funds. But the Morrill Act

of 1890 – which added direct federal funding to land-grant income – did contain language prohibiting discrimination: "no money shall be paid out under this act to any State or Territory for the support or maintenance of a college where a distinction of race or color is made in the admission of students."

The 1890 Act then added, however, "but the establishment and maintenance of such colleges separately for white and colored students shall be held to be a compliance with the provisions of this act if the funds received in such State or Territory be equitably divided ..." (26 Stat. 418). So Morrill's second land-grant act allowed the segregationist "separate but equal" principle to be applied to land-grant colleges.

Justin Smith Morrill was a Republican, White, of his era. He was anti-slavery. He considered Blacks full citizens, the legal and political equal of Whites, with rights to voting and education. But it appears he failed to overcome the social discrimination of his day.

Roger Walke  
Board Member, Friends of the Morrill Homestead

Note: This is the second of two articles exploring Justin Morrill's anti-slavery and racial equality legacy. The first appeared in the Winter 2020 issue.