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Friends of the Morrill Homestead

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The Justin Morrill Historic Site, one of ten 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

Spring, 2023 VOL.17 No.1

LOOK WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE HOMESTEAD!

The Friends of the Morrill Homestead have a full calendar of exciting events planned for this season! Visit morrillhomestead.org for all the details. We have something for everyone!

Looking for family fun? Join us in June. First up is our *Open House* on Sunday, June 11. Be our guests for an afternoon of guided house tours, Strafford Organic Creamery Ice Cream, and a puppet show with No Strings Marionettes. The following Sunday, June 18, we are hosting *Nature Play with Little Ones* age 1-6 and their families.

Are you a history buff? In August, to commemorate Morrill's gift of a library to the town of Strafford, Julius C. Jefferson will speak on *"The Morrill Acts and Historically Black Colleges: Libraries & Literacy."* In September (Vermont Archaeology Month), UVM Archeologists will reveal what they found and learned from last summer's dig on the grounds of the Homestead. And each month we lead historical *Walking Tours of Strafford Village* from Justin Morrill's birthplace to his mausoleum.

Interested in arts and crafts? We have workshops for you! *A Tapestry Felting Class* in June, a *Watercolor Workshop* in July, and *Printmaking*



Scott Miller sharing techniques with photography Campers

and *Basket Making Classes* in August. Young artists can find inspiration in the

Homestead's beautiful grounds and architecture at *Photography Camp and Drawing & Watercolor Camp*. Art enthusiasts will enjoy the *Gallery In The Garden* gala opening of "Art As Voice" exhibit and kickoff of the "Minis For Morrill" online auction.

Prefer to explore nature? Come enjoy a *Tree Walk with a Forester* in June, a *Regenerative Agriculture for Gardeners* talk in July, and a *Walk with a Naturalist* in September.

The Homestead season wraps up with *AppleFest*, a festival that has a little of everything! Live music,

farm animals, cider pressing, heirloom apples, artisan cheeses, Vermont ice cream, homemade apple pie, period games, wagon rides, crafts, exhibits, and more!

The Homestead grounds and gardens are always open for you to enjoy and Justin Morrill's Gothic Revival house will be open for guided tours Thursday-Sunday, 10:00-5:00 through October 8. Whatever your interest, we look forward to seeing you at the Homestead!

Tracey McFadden
Director
Friends of the Morrill Homestead

A REPORT FROM THE STATE

Hello *Chronicle* readers! My name is Victoria (formerly Anderson) Sample, and I'm very excited to be the new Historic Sites Section Chief. I began this position on February 1st, 2023 starting remotely from Mississippi where I was working at Mississippi State University as the Recruiting and Events Coordinator for the MBA program.

Prior to moving to Mississippi for my husband's graduate program, I worked for over ten years in public history as a Museum Educator for various historical institutions in the Dallas Metroplex and in San Angelo, Texas. I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in History from Angelo State University in 2015, Masters of Arts in History from Sam Houston State University in December of 2019, and recently completed a graduate certificate in Historic Preservation at Mississippi State in December of 2022. In my spare time, I am an avid reader, a home chef, and mother to a very spoiled tuxedo cat named Gus.

In preparation for the season's kick off on Memorial Day weekend, the VDHP team arrived to "wake up" the Homestead on May 12 and 15. The protective sheets were taken down and stored away, while paintings and other artifacts were carefully placed back for our visitors



Victoria Anderson-Sample
VT Division for Historic Preservation

to enjoy. Later that week, a representative from Clover, the state's new POS processing provider, installed the ticketing software that will be utilized for admissions this season. This software has been tested by other State Historic Sites this past season, with lots of positive reviews! (Please note, as in previous years, we still cannot process American Express credit cards.)

Director of Preservation James Duggan is working with the state contracting department on a request for proposals for work on the Morrill water drainage system, with a goal for proposals to be received by the state on July 1, 2023. The major goals of the project are control of water intrusion into the house and to address crucial damage caused by excessive water-related conditions to the foundation and structure. The project approach is multi-method: reduce the downslope flow of surface water reaching the house; effectively direct high ground water away from the foundation; collect and channel roof runoff; and install affirmative drainage surrounding the foundation.

Watch this spot for future updates on our progress!

Victoria Anderson-Sample
Historic Sites Section Chief
Vermont Division for Historic Preservation

A WORD FROM OUR CHAIR...

We are looking forward to our upcoming season at the Morrill Homestead with many events planned for 2023. The Board of the Friends has been working for several months now preparing for these events. They are a great, dedicated, and hardworking team focusing on making this 2023 season as enjoyable and meaningful as possible.

So, I want to encourage every reader of the Morrill Homestead Chronicle to take advantage of what we're offering this season. If you're "local," meaning a Vermonter or a Granite Stater, why not plan a visit for the Open House... Gallery in the Garden... or AppleFest? Or sign up for a nature walk or crafts workshop? And even if, like 32% of our readers, you're from "away," you can nevertheless take part in the Minis for Morrill auction online and/or attend Julius C. Jefferson's lecture on August 13 via Zoom. Check out our website for details.

I also want to recognize the fun group of volunteers who work tirelessly with the Board, at our events, and in the gardens that were so important to Senator Morrill. If you would like to be a part of preserving this Strafford treasure, and making it a more welcoming place for visitors of all ages and interests, please reach out to our director, Tracey McFadden. Help us bring arts and history into our community!



Volunteers Wake Up the Garden

Ingrid Webb
Chair, Friends of the Morrill Homestead



John Crock, UVM Archaeologist, reveals underground discoveries

GALLERY IN THE GARDEN- 2023



On Friday evening June 30, the Friends will host our annual *Gallery in the Garden* party for community members and devoted patrons of the Morrill Homestead historic site.

The evening will begin in the Carriage Barn at 5:00 with an opening ceremony to honor the 18 artists whose work will comprise a show with the theme Art as Voice. In the upper section of the Carriage Barn there will be a “feature” showing of work by two of the artists – Sherry SaintGermaine and Mary Louise Pierson. Visitors can view the show from June 30 to July 16 any time the historic site is open – 10:00 am to 5:00 pm, Thursday through Sunday.

Here is a complete list of all artists:

Gerry Bergstein • Todd Binzen
Gail Boyajian • Jennifer Brown
Matt Brown • Kelly Coffin
Dierdre Dennis • Kate Emlen
Oona Gardner • Jean Gerber
Jo Levasseur • Jeanne McMahan
Michael Moore • Andy Newman
Mary Louise Pierson • Celia Reisman
Enrico Riley • Sherry SaintGermaine



“Summer Field”
by Mary Louise Pierson

The social aspect of the evening will begin at 5:30 with food and drink and conversation on the lawns and gardens. Guests will be able to see live a display of the small paintings we call “Minis for Morrill,” that later will be featured in an online auction beginning at 7:00 that evening and lasting a full week. To participate, visit BiddingOwl.com/JustinMorrillHomestead.

This year we expect to offer 50-60 minis painted by our show artists, by professional artists not in this year’s show, and by community members and friends with artistic talent. All have been donated by these generous people, and the money raised by the auction helps pay for our programming throughout the year.

And, speaking of the generosity of artists, this year we will pay special tribute to the late Ed Koren with a display of a few of the many minis he has donated to our auction in the past.

Please join us at the opening!

Jonathan Stableford
Board Member, Friends of the Morrill Homestead



“Rhododendron”
by Sherry SaintGermaine

Who’s Who on the Board...

EMILY HOWE - ALMOST LIKE FAMILY

Do you recall the tour guide who looked like she lived at the Morrill Homestead - dressed in appropriate 1800’s attire often with two little boys who played on the porch or rolled a metal hoop around the yard? That is our Emily Howe.

Emily grew up in Tunbridge - for a time, off the grid with no indoor plumbing - and was home schooled by her mother, a former teacher. She remembers well studying art, history, English, music, and dance with her mom.

She married early and had two little boys. She tried to make a career out of photography and dance while being very active in the local historical society and often did reenactment of events, because history was a passion.

John Dumville hired her as a tour guide at the Homestead beginning in 2012. By then she was a single parent who was delighted to work close to home and to bring her young sons to work when babysitters were not available. The boys became familiar with every nook and cranny of the home,



met many wonderful folks in the history world, and learned so MUCH about the Senator and his time. The Morrill home became their home away from home. The Morrills were like family.

In 2015, Emily married her dearest friend and neighbor, John O’Brien. John was a filmmaker and sheep farmer, living in the house he was born in, just up the road from where Emily grew up. Together they turned their farm into a wedding venue in 2016.

John is now also a State Representative, leaving Emily to run the show when the Legislature is in session. May through October, they host anywhere from 12-15 weddings. And of course, they still raise a large flock of English Romney sheep, as well as chickens, horses, and the ever-popular Mookie Betts, a droll highland cow who personally blesses every wedding dress before the ceremony!

When their wedding business grew and the responsibilities on the farm became more time consuming, Emily found it impossible to work at the Homestead between events, so she reluctantly hung up her beloved costumes and feathered hats. But her eldest son, Eli, at 18, was hired as a tour guide last summer and greatly enjoyed the return to his favorite childhood memories.

As a Board member, Emily still feels part of a place she cherishes deeply. And her commitment to the Homestead is cherished by the Board.

Cameron Speth
Vice-Chair, Friends of the Morrill Homestead

JUSTIN MORRILL A “BOOK-MADE MAN”

Almost 140 years ago on September 22, 1883, Justin Morrill gave a speech dedicating the Library Building he had given to Strafford. It is perhaps his most thoughtful and self reflective writing, with many memorable lines including this description of his feelings about his hometown: “Here to me even the stars, the planets, and the moon seem to shine more brightly than elsewhere.”

The heart of the speech comes when Morrill asks “What will a town profit by a Library?”

Morrill then goes on to answer his own question:

“Ask the little girl with laughing eyes, who goes tripping to school, and who at home goes through a book with as much relish as she does through a dish of strawberries and cream. Ask her!”

“Ask invalids, unable to work, and slowly recovering from some acute disease. May they not have the quiet comfort of some fresh book, not to be found in the well-thumbed volumes at home, something to relieve the tedium of the passing hours?”

“Ask the boy, taken perhaps by his parents reluctantly from the school-house to the field or workshop, at the age of fifteen, feeling as I once felt, as though youthful ambition and hope had been nipped by an early frost, and who now at least request a chance to read the Life of Franklin, or of Columbus, or of Andrew Jackson or of Abraham Lincoln: Ask him!”

Morrill was fortunate to have a mentor, Jedediah Harris, who gave the young Morrill books from his small but excellent private library which Morrill devoured. For all



Harris Library c.1900

his life Morrill depended on books for his intellectual sustenance. Later in life, Morrill was to testify that his mind and nature had been formed by Harris’s library. It is fitting to note that when Morrill built and endowed this first public library in Strafford, it was left as a memorial to Jedediah Harris.

Most important of all, Morrill’s love of learning went beyond himself to a love for learners. While his own education had been thwarted in childhood, it was never for a minute forsaken. And precisely because he had to leave school so early he wanted others to have the formal education he was denied. Hence the land grant colleges, and hence his interest in the two libraries he helped create, the one in Strafford, the other the Library of Congress.

John Freitag
Historian, Strafford Historical Society

Note: This is the first of two articles exploring how love of books and learning shaped Justin Morrill’s life and career. The second will appear in the Fall 2023 issue.

THE MORRILL BIRDHOUSE

One day, while rummaging through endless nooks and crannies in the outbuildings of the Justin Morrill Homestead, we came upon a birdhouse that is a replica of the main house. In 2012, inspired by the original design, Isaac Barker reproduced that birdhouse. At the time, he was a student at Thetford Academy. Besides the excellent craftsmanship, what makes it even more intriguing is its many portals.



Replica of the Morrill Birdhouse
crafted by Isaac Barker

We immediately realized what a treasure this birdhouse is and wanted to properly display the replica for everyone to enjoy. We decided the perfect place would be a strategic spot high in the apple orchard. We take great pride in our orchard, just as Senator Morrill did, and think the birdhouse will be an additional enticement for visitors to climb the orchard’s hill. They will be rewarded! There is a spectacular view of the Homestead and the majestic steeple of Strafford’s stately Townhouse with its magnificent 1936 Seth Thomas tower clock.

The replica will, of course, be removed during the winter months, but the original birdhouse will remain on display in the Carriage Barn for visitors’ viewing pleasure.

John Echternach
Board Member, Friends of the Morrill Homestead

HOPES AND PLANS FOR THE UPCOMING SUMMER

Changing climate patterns and volunteer wrangling...

Spring has awakened the perennials that grace the garden grounds, and we look forward to a year of tending to their needs with the best practices to help them flourish: pruning, transplanting, weeding, watering, mulching, pest control...all of the work that pays off in healthy, vibrant plants!

Different weather patterns are allowing different pests to present themselves, so we will need to cultivate a watchful eye in the gardens this summer. We’ll strive to learn about the new species that pose potential threats to the vegetation we love, as well as monitor for the problems we encounter year to year.

We’ll have a great crew of garden assistants to help us continue caring for the vision Justin Morrill set forth. With just one

garden manager this season (last year the job was split between three), it will be great to focus on enticing volunteers. We plan to have at least one “Work With A Morrill Master Gardener” talk per month, where volunteers will learn about a gardening topic with a Morrill spin on it.

The first talk is “Bedding Out,” a practice Morrill employed to extend the bloom



impact of perennials by systematically planting annuals in specific patterns around them. We’ll put a call out to the community for other areas of interest and develop talks to suit community interest.

After all the work is done, we look forward to maintaining a space that will enhance the visitor’s experience as they soak up the history of the Justin Morrill Homestead.

Barbara Paulson
Morrill Homestead Garden Manager