

Local yokel

(n.) a country folk living in a quaint neighborhood community

West
Stockbridge
February
2026

SERVING OUR COMMUNITY SINCE 2004



Downtown reflections. Photo by Emily Weiland.

Cardinals and Coyotes Break the Winter Silence

By Carol McKenna

Although a lot of winter still lies ahead, every February I perk up when I hear two signs that indicate spring is not too far off: northern cardinals singing to each other early in the morning and the increased calls of coyotes at night.

Cardinals are around all winter long, brightening the landscape with their striking red plumage against an often-snowy backdrop. But by the end of February, they start to test my patience when they wake me up at first daylight with their songs. Before I let myself get too annoyed, though, I tell myself to be glad to be hearing their rich, flutelike songs because they are a harbinger of spring.

Male cardinals sing back and forth to each other at this time of year to establish and defend their territories and to attract mates. Female cardinals are among the more vocal female North American songbirds, and when one pairs up with a male, they sing duets to reinforce their bond.

Cardinals start building their nests as early as February. They typically raise one to two broods per season but have been known to raise three. They rarely use the same nest twice.

The cardinal was once a more southern bird. It gradually spread north in the 20th century, with the first nesting in Massachusetts recorded in 1958. Experts believe the main drivers of this expansion were a warming climate and the growth of suburbs in the eastern United States that increased the amount of edge habitat that cardinals prefer. The widespread use of bird feeders may have played a part, too.

Cardinals get their brilliant red feathers from carotenoids in their food. Carotenoids are the plant pigments responsible for the yellow, orange, and red colors in many fruits and vegetables. Cardinals love the native fruits that are packed with these pigments, such as winterberry, dogwood berries, and mulberries. Female cardinals have genes that regulate pigment conversion differently, resulting in a more muted color.

The redder a male cardinal, the more successful he will be in the wild. Redder males gain higher quality territories, pair up with earlier breeding females, and have more offspring in a breeding season.

Cardinals also eat grain and seed and a wide variety of insects. They even eat maple sap from holes in trees made by yellow-bellied sapsuckers!

The cardinal is a much loved bird that carries symbolic meaning. Many people, including me and some of my family members, associate them with messages from heaven or from a departed loved one, another reason to feel happy when the cardinals' "birdie, birdie, birdie" song wakes you up early on a late winter morning.

It's all about courtship and mating, as it is with the increased calls of coyotes this time of year. Coyotes, like northern cardinals, are generally monogamous and form strong pair bonds for several years.

Coyotes are one of the most vocal mammals. You can hear them year round in the Berkshires, but during breeding season, between late January and early March, you may notice more calls and a broader range of vocalization.

Female coyotes whimper and whine when they are close to being in heat, and coyote pairs howl and yip to let other coyotes know they have an established territory and to keep away. Other nearby pairs may then respond, announcing their own territories. At such times, it can sound like many more coyotes are in the area than actually are there. Also, coyote howls often echo against hillsides. This acoustic trickery is another reason why people may overestimate the number of coyotes nearby.

Researchers have identified about a dozen coyote vocalizations that serve a variety of functions, from alarm to warning to socialization. I was surprised to learn that coyotes do not howl to announce a kill because this behavior would attract other wild animals, and coyotes in more urban areas vocalize less because they find it easier to survive in those settings by being quiet.

Although negative encounters with coyotes are rare, the opportunity for human-coyote interaction is highest during breeding season. Make sure to keep pets directly supervised on a leash when outdoors, never feed coyotes intentionally or unintentionally, haze any coyotes that you see in your yard by yelling or using an air horn, and physically chase the coyote(s) off your land.

One winter night when my daughter was a toddler, she called me into her bedroom to tell me she was awakened by "a broken-down fire engine" in our back field. What she heard, of course, was the yip-howls of a pack of coyotes. I remember being hesitant to tell her the sounds were from wild animals that were close by. Today, as a young adult, she said she loves to hear coyotes at night and be reminded of the untamed aspects of our world.

If you hear the calls of cardinals or coyotes this month, enjoy the sound show, and remember: spring is only a few weeks away.

*Photos courtesy of Scott Santino/Mass Audubon
top to bottom: Female Northern Cardinal; Northern Cardinal; Eastern Coyote*



Select Board Meeting Minutes

[Editor's note: At the town administrator's request, the Select Board minutes here are reprinted verbatim with no editing of text. Official board minutes are available at the West Stockbridge Public Library and on the town website, <https://www.weststockbridge-ma.gov/>. Select Board meetings are on Zoom and February be viewed by clicking on the link in the meeting agenda posted on the town website calendar. Residents can receive email notification of town events and meeting agendas by subscribing at <http://weststockbridgema.virtualltownhall.net/subscriber>].

Select Board Meeting Minutes December 8, 2025

The quorum was present remotely, consisting of Select Board members Chair Andrew Krouss, Kathleen Keresey, and Toby Casey, as well as Town Administrator Marie Ryan.

Chair Andy Krouss opened the meeting at 6 PM.

Kathleen moved, seconded by Toby, to approve the minutes from November 24, 2025.

All were in favor, and the motion passed.

Citizen Speak:

None

Town Administrator Update:

Marie informed the Board that the new Police Officer, Courtney Linkingel, has passed her Massachusetts certification test and is now fully certified, and began work on December 8th. The Police Chief has also renovated the copy room space previously used by the Human Resources employee. The area is fully contained with a locked door and looks great. This allows the department's Chief's office to be used as a larger locker space for officers.

Approval of 2026 License Renewals:

Liquor Licenses:

Kathleen moved, seconded by Andy, to approve the Liquor License for Baldwin Farm. Toby abstained. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

Kathleen moved, seconded by Toby, to approve the Liquor License for;

Truc Orient Express	WS Public Market
Queensboro Wine 7 Spirits	Luigi's (AMICI)
Heirloom Lodge	The Foundry
Acquevo LLC	

All were in favor, and the motion passed.

Entertainment Licenses:

Kathleen moved, seconded by Andy, to approve the Annual Entertainment Licenses for;

TurnPark Art Space	AMICI
Heirloom Lodge	The Foundry

All were in favor, and the motion passed.

Kathleen moved, seconded by Andy, to approve the Sundry Entertainment Licenses for;

TurnPark Art Space	The Foundry
--------------------	-------------

All were in favor, and the motion passed.

Auto Class II and III and Taxi Licenses:

Kathleen moved, seconded by Andy, to approve the Auto Class II and III Licenses for;

Troy's Garage	William Kie
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All were in favor, and the motion passed.

Kathleen moved, seconded by Andy, to approve the Taxi License for William Kie.

All were in favor, and the motion passed.

Town Hall Government Consultant Report: Wayne Feiden & Jennifer Tabakin

Kathleen introduced Wayne Feiden and Jennifer Tabakin, the consultants who completed an assessment of the Town Hall Government. Wayne and Jennifer thanked Kathleen and provided a summary of their evaluation, including an overview of the implementation plan.

Jennifer explained that overall, the Town is in good shape, but explained that every town can always make improvements. To implement these improvements, the town has three paths to choose from. One pathway under Massachusetts General Law Home Rule could allow for incremental changes to policies, bylaws, and the delegation of responsibilities. A vote of the Select Board and Town Meeting can make these changes. The next pathway for a Home Rule State petition would be by a special act approved by the legislature. This path would be used on a case-by-case basis and for targeted and structural changes to the town government. The final pathway for the Town to move forward is to create and adopt a Charter as its governing framework. This would be a long-term, comprehensive path.

Jennifer and Wayne explained that the next step is for the Board to discuss the recommendations and rank their priorities as they move forward.

The Board thanked Jennifer and Wayne and will discuss the recommendations at a future meeting.

Select Board Speak:

Kathleen noted that the Parks and Recreation Commissioners held their Sparkles event on Friday, which was very successful. She also stated that the West Stockbridge Helping Hands event will be held at Town Hall on Wednesday from 3:30 PM to 6:30 PM.

Kathleen motioned to adjourn, seconded by Andy, at 6:57 PM.

All approved, and the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Marie Y. Ryan

Marie Y. Ryan
Town Administrator

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Thank You,
West Stockbridge!

Santa's Wish List Donations

Our annual appeal for donations to West Stockbridge organizations appeared in our December issue. The total received this year was \$14,835. That's \$3,655 more than last year!

We thank all those who gave so generously to these important community groups that work very hard to make West Stockbridge such a special place to live. Here are the totals by organization:

Friends of the West Stockbridge Dog Park	\$150
Friends of the West Stockbridge Library	\$1,575
Local Yokel	\$3,270
Pet Partners of the Tri-State Berkshires	\$500
Town of West Stockbridge Parks & Recreation	\$850
Town of West Stockbridge Plants & Gardens	\$1,370
Town of West Stockbridge Zucchini Festival	\$1,075
West Stockbridge Farmers Market	\$1,220
West Stockbridge Fire and Rescue Services	\$2,325
West Stockbridge Historical Society	\$2,500

Total: \$14,835

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- Lawn & Field Mowing
- Fall & Spring Cleanups
- Building & Maintaining Gardens
- Firewood

**Select Board Meeting Minutes
Zoom Only Meeting
December 11, 2025**

The quorum was present remotely: Select Board members Chair Andrew Krouss, Kathleen Kersey, and Toby Casey.

Others present remotely: Mary Stodden, Administrative Assessor, Harald Scheid, Regional Tax Assessor, and Alex Lackey, Associate Tax Assessor.

Andy opened the meeting at 1 PM and introduced Harald, who also introduced Mary Stodden and Alex Lackey.

Tax Classification :

Harald and Alex shared and discussed the following presentation:

Introduction

Prior to the mailing of 3rd quarter tax billings, the Select Board holds a public hearing to determine the percentage of the Town’s property tax levy to be borne by each major property class. This responsibility and procedure are described in Chapter 40, Section 56 of the Massachusetts General Laws.

The steps in completing the Classification Hearing are outlined below. Also provided is information about the levy, property assessments, and recommendations made by the Board of Assessors.

Terminology

The following are definitions of the terms frequently used in the discussion of tax rates.

Levy: The tax levy (or levy) is the amount of property taxes to be raised. The levy amount is determined by the budget. The total amount of the approved budget less revenues from other sources like motor vehicle excise, municipal fees, and state aid is the amount to be raised from property taxation. The town will be raising \$6,588,298 in property tax revenues. The tax levy has increased \$510,175 (8.4%) over last year’s levy of \$6,078,123.

Levy Ceiling: The levy ceiling is 2.5 percent of the full value of the Town. Based on the West Stockbridge’s aggregate valuation of \$634,710,768 the town cannot levy taxes in excess of \$15,867,769.

New Growth Revenue: Property taxes derived from newly taxable properties like new construction, additions, subdivisions, and personal property. The assessors have tabulated new growth revenues of \$32,825.

Levy Limit: Also referred to as the “maximum allowable levy”, this is calculated by adding 2.5 percent of the previous year’s levy limit plus new growth revenue for the present fiscal year to last year’s levy limit. Exceeding the levy limit requires an override of Proposition 2 ½. For Fiscal Year 2026 the levy limit is \$7,437,667.

Excess Levy Capacity: Excess levy capacity is the difference between the levy and the levy limit.

The Fiscal Year 2026 Levy Limit and Amount to be Raised

The following is a calculation of West Stockbridge’s levy limit for fiscal year 2026.

Fiscal year 2025 levy limit	\$7,220,328
Levy increase allowed under Prop. 2 ½	180,508
New growth revenue	32,825
Excluded Debt to Pay Bonds	4,006
Fiscal year 2026 levy limit	7,437,667
Levy to be raised	\$6,588,298
Excess levy capacity	\$849,369

Valuations by Class Before Tax Shift

<u>Major Property Class</u>	<u>Valuation</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Res vs CIP%</u>
Residential	592,983,713	93.4258	93.4258
Commercial	18,957,887	2.9869	
Industrial	3,837,600	0.6046	6.5742
Personal Property	18,931,568	2.9827	
TOTAL	634,710,768	100.0000	

Shifting the Tax Burden

Municipalities with a large commercial/industrial tax base often see fit to shift the tax burden to help maintain lower residential taxes. Given West Stockbridge’s relatively small commercial, industrial, and personal property tax base, it takes a CIP tax rate increase of approximately 15% to yield a 1% residential tax rate reduction.

**Stockbridge Grange
Dinner
Sunday, February 8**

Spaghetti with meatballs,
lemon and chocolate pies
Take out only/pick up - 12-1:30pm
Cost - \$17

Grange Hall, 51 Church Street, Stockbridge

**To place an order please call:
(413) 243-1298 or (413) 443-4352**

Call if the weather is iffy to see if the dinner will be moved to the following Sunday, February 15



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Keep an eye out in next month's issue
for details about the
West Stockbridge Village
Congregational Church's

**Make n' Take Irish
Corned Beef * Cabbage
Dinner**

Tuesday, March 17th



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Henry Baldwin

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Tax Rates

The estimated single tax rate for fiscal year 2026 is \$10.38 per thousand valuation.

<u>Property Class</u>	<u>FY2025</u>	<u>FY2026</u>
Residential	\$9.62	10.38
Commercial	\$9.62	10.38
Industrial	\$9.62	10.38
Personal Property	\$9.62	10.38

Note that the FY2026 rate is an estimate and may change upon Department of Revenue review.

Tax Rates History

Fiscal Year 2024	\$9.58
Fiscal Year 2023	\$10.31
Fiscal Year 2022	\$12.56
Fiscal Year 2021	\$13.91
Fiscal Year 2020	\$13.12

Tax Impacts

Examples of Typical Tax Changes Under a Single Tax Rate

<u>Property Class</u>	<u>FY25 Value</u>	<u>Average Avg. Tax</u>	<u>FY26 Value</u>	<u>Average Avg. Tax</u>	<u>Change</u>
Single Family Homes	\$671,500	\$6,460	\$671,500	\$6,970	\$510 (7.9%)

Board of Assessors Recommendation

The Board of Assessors recommends that the Select Board adopt a single tax rate to be applied to all classes of property in West Stockbridge.

Summary of Assessments (LA4)

<u>Property Type</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Residential</u>	<u>Commercial</u>	<u>Industrial</u>	<u>Personal Property</u>
101-Single Family	718	482,110,100	-0-	-0-	-0-
102-Condominiums	0	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
103,109-Misc Res	39	44,148,700	-0-	-0-	-0-
104-Two Family	15	8,170,600	-0-	-0-	-0-
105-Three Family	1	411,900	-0-	-0-	-0-
111-125-Apartments	2	1,408,600	-0-	-0-	-0-
130's-Vacant Land	205	24,222,800	-0-	-0-	-0-
012-043-Mixed Use	7	32,511,013	2,336,600	-0-	-0-
300-393-Commercial	42	-0-	15,477,000	-0-	-0-
400-452-Industrial	11	-0-	-0-	3,837,600	-0-
500-508-Pers. Prop.	230	-0-	-0-	-0-	18,931,568
600's-Forestry	14	-0-	227,240	-0-	-0-
700's-Agricultural	17	-0-	365,387	-0-	-0-
800's-Recreation	10	-0-	551,660	-0-	-0-
TOTAL BY CLASS	1,305	592,983,713	18,957,887	3,837,600	18,931,568
TOTAL TAXABLE PROPERTIES					634,710,768
TOTAL TAX EXEMPT PROPERTIES			26,080,500		

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The *Local Yokel* is published monthly. Please mail submissions to: **The Local Yokel, P.O. Box 238, West Stockbridge, MA 01266**, email info@thelocalyokel.org, or visit www.thelocalyokel.org. Copy deadline is the 15th of the month prior to the publication. Editors: **John Parker, 394-4368, john.j.parker53@gmail.com; Vicki Grayson, 232-6131, vicki.grayson@rocketmail.com; Susan Fisher, 232-4443, suefish12@gmail.com; Anne Lesser, 717-0277, anne@annelessercommunications.com**; Designer: **Kim Bradway, kim@bloominarts.com**.

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Kathleen made a motion, seconded by Andy, that the West Stockbridge Select Board votes in accordance with M.G.L., Ch. 40, Sec. 56, as amended, the percentage of local tax levy which will be borne by each class of real and personal property, relative to setting the Fiscal Year 2026 tax rates and set the Residential Factor at 1.0, with a corresponding CIP shift of 1.0, pending approval of the town's annual tax recap by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

Roll call vote:

Toby Yes
Kathleen Yes
Andy Yes

All were in favor, and the motion passed.

Kathleen motioned to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Toby.

Roll call vote:

Andy Yes
Kathleen Yes
Toby Casey Yes

The meeting was adjourned at 1:22 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Marie Y. Ryan

Marie Y. Ryan
Town Administrator

Select Board Meeting Minutes December 22, 2025

The quorum was present remotely, consisting of Select Board members Chair Andrew Krouss and Toby Casey, as well as Town Administrator Marie Ryan. Select Board Member Kathleen Kersey was absent.

Chair Andy Krouss opened the meeting at 6 PM.

Toby moved, seconded by Andy, to approve the minutes from December 8 and December 11, 2025.

All were in favor, and the motion passed.

Citizen Speak:


None

Town Administrator Update:

Marie stated that the Town has recently been approved as a seasonal community by the State. To accept this status, the Town must approve it at the Annual Town Meeting. Marie has requested that State Representative Leigh Davis discuss the pros and cons of accepting this status with the Board. She will attend a Select Board meeting in February.

Marie informed the Board that the Helping Hands event was a huge success. They distributed gifts to 27 families, totaling 70 children. They hope to do even more families next year.

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Friends & Neighbors


Come Celebrate with us!

8:30 Sunday Mass
followed by
Coffee Hour

St. Patrick Church
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Marie updated the Board that Sampson & Weston Consultants are very busy putting together the necessary documents for the Safety Building Feasibility Study. The Town received a municipal Vulnerability Grant to pay for this study. The Consultants have spoken with Curt regarding Highway needs, Police Chief Nicole Miller regarding Police requirements, and will soon meet with the Fire Chief in the coming weeks to gather the information needed for the Fire Department portion of the building. Sometime in February, Marie hopes to finalize all plans and conduct community outreach to gather additional information. She will keep the Board updated.

Marie stated that she hopes to include two special articles in the Annual Town Meeting warrant. One article is to pay the Town's share for a new, wheelchair-accessible van. She explained that the previous van, which the Town gave to the Tri-Town Connector, was nearing the end of its useful life. She and Tate Coleman, Director of the Tri-Town Connector, have submitted a grant application to purchase a new van that will be

wheelchair-accessible with a lift. If West Stockbridge receives the grant, the town's share of the van's cost would be approximately \$19,000.

The second special warrant article she would like to include is to purchase software to track and manage short-term rental properties. Once the Attorney General's office accepts the new bylaw in late February, this software will make it much easier and less time-consuming to monitor and track. The cost will be around \$10,000.

Marie stated that the website will also be upgraded, so the budget line item will increase by approximately \$800.

Vision Committee – Joe Roy

Joe Roy explained that the Vision Committee would like to sponsor and hold a candidates' forum in April, before the Annual Town Election. He said several people had expressed interest in having this after the last election to get to know the candidates. The Committee expected this to be a non-political forum in which candidates would speak only about themselves, their qualifications, and priorities, so voters could get to know them. Andy suggested that the Committee gather all their information on the process and what would be required, and come back to the Board with more details. Joe agreed, noting he just wanted to ensure the Board was comfortable moving this forward. Andy and Toby both agreed this was a good idea. Joe thanked the Board and will return to the Board with additional details.

Police Department Update – Chief Nicole Miller

Andy explained that Nicole was unable to attend and will be on the next agenda.

Discussion and Review of Consultant's Report

Toby suggested that, since Kathleen was unable to attend, the Board hold off on this discussion until the next meeting, when Kathleen is present. Andy agreed.

Select Board Speak:

None.

Toby motioned to adjourn, seconded by Andy, at 6:18 PM.

All approved, and the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Marie Y. Ryan

Marie Y. Ryan
Town Administrator

Winter Parking Ban



The West Stockbridge Winter Parking Ban will be in effect from NOVEMBER 15 to APRIL 1, between 11 pm and 7 am for all town roads.

Violation of the ban may result in a \$25 fine for parking in a prohibited area, as well as a \$50 fine for impeding snow removal. The vehicle may also be towed at the owner's expense for impeding snow removal.

Municipal parking is located on Hotel Street and on Center Street. Snow removal in these areas will be between 7 am and 8 am.

* Thank you for your cooperation! *

West Stockbridge Police Department (413) 232-8500

**BRIDGE
OPEN**

**The Baker Street bridge
is now open to traffic!**

Phone Scam Alert for West Stockbridge Residents

By the West Stockbridge Police Department

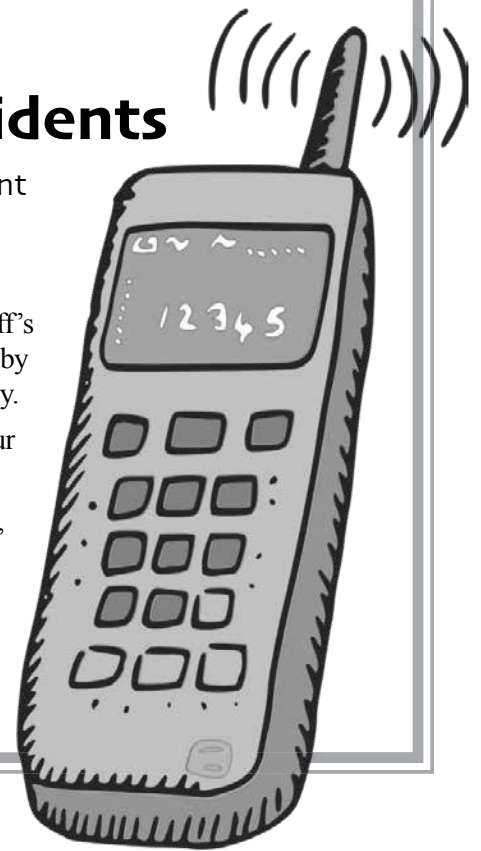
Please be advised of an increase in reported scams in Berkshire County.

Residents may receive phone calls from individuals claiming to be from the “Sheriff’s Department,” stating that you have a warrant and the matter can be handled “civilly” by paying a fine. This is a scam. Do not provide any personal information or send money.

Additionally, callers may pose as realtors or prospective buyers interested in your property. Do not share your banking information or any other personal details.

If anyone requests money over the phone or asks you to transfer funds using Venmo, PayPal, or other payment apps, do not do so. If a caller claims to be from your bank or the Sheriff’s Department, hang up immediately and report the call to the Police Department.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the West Stockbridge Police Department at (413) 232-8500.



Bring the family for a fun afternoon playing



Saturday, February 21, 4:00–5:30

Town Offices Community Room

Host: Friends of the West Stockbridge Library

****Snow Date: February 28****

Snacks and Prizes!



HOME MODIFICATION LOAN PROGRAM

Are you or a loved one looking for ways to make your home accessible as you age-in-place? Are you a person living with disabilities looking for ways to remain in your home? The Home Modification Loan Program (HMLP) may be for you!

HMLP is a 0% interest, deferred payment loan program that provides modifications for home accessibility improvements that could help you or a loved one live more independently. Possible modifications include bathroom and kitchen modifications, ramps, stair lifts, accessory dwelling units, and more.

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission at
HMLP@berkshireplanning.org.



WEST STOCKBRIDGE PUBLIC LIBRARY

21 State Line Rd | West Stockbridge, MA 01266 | In the Town Offices
weststockbridgelibrary.org | 413-232-0300 ext. 308

Mon., Wed., Thurs., and Sat. 10 am–3 pm | Tues. and Fri. 2–6 pm | Sun. Closed

It's February, and many of us might be in a hibernating mood. Studies show that a good romance novel is just the right choice to read this month!

In January, an artistic time was had by all at **The Kids Craft Crew!** See you there on **February 9 at 4:30 pm in the Town Offices Community Room.** Dig into your creativity by making a hedgehog? Come and see what it's all about! Email weststockbridgelibrary@gmail.com with any questions, or drop by the library for more information.

December at a glance:

- 602 hardcopy items were borrowed and renewed;
- \$10,500 was saved by library users because they borrowed instead of buying;
- 513 eBooks, eMagazines, and streaming audiobooks were borrowed

We look forward to seeing you @ the library! Vicky, Rachel, Brad, and Francesca

NEW ADULT FICTION

- Cleeves, *The killing stones*
- Connelly, *The proving ground*
- DeMille, *The tin men*
- Desai, *The loneliness of Sonia and Sunny*
- Farley, *Who knows you by heart*
- Fredericks, *The girl in the green dress*
- Irving, *Queen Esther*
- Roberts, *The seven rings*
- Schaefer, *Town & country*
- Sycamore, *Terry Dactyl*

NEW ADULT NONFICTION

- Dalrymple, *The golden road*
- Esperanza, *Detained*
- Smith, *Bread of angels*
- Sorkin, *1929*
- Ypi, *Indignity*

NEW DVDs

- F1; A Minecraft Movie; Sinners*



Scrapbook Questions/created by Paula Farrell TEST YOUR TRIVIA KNOWLEDGE!

1. What did the Board of Health mandate some property owners to do in 2015?
2. What was the objective of the Farm to School (FTS) program?
3. Who is the longtime resident, past library exhibitor, and a self-taught artist in West Stockbridge?
4. Who is the multi award-winning photo journalist who worked almost exclusively for *National Geographic*?

1. Hook up to the town sewer.
2. Educate students about healthy food choices and nutritional health through classroom education.
3. Gary Schieneman
4. John Stanneyer



This program is supported in part by a grant from the West Stockbridge Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

February History Quiz Question:

When settlers from Connecticut moved into our area, West Stockbridge was a farming community with the Williams River providing power for small mills to cut timber, grind buckwheat, and card wool. The mills were small enterprises, employing a few people to support local families and only providing subsistence support. But by the early 1800s, the economy changed as enterprises with a larger workforce prospered as mineral deposits were discovered, specifically marble, limestone, and iron.

The town grew and entered the early industrial age as labor was needed for the quarries. We became known for high-quality "West Stockbridge marble," and many small quarries sprung up to take advantage. But the marble industry was short lived, ending just after the Civil War. The marble quarries became sources for lime, and although marble had a better brand image, lime was more profitable, easier to ship, and a major component in building materials.

Iron was the least glamorous of the three minerals, but it had the most impact on the town and its future. How did it impact the town then and even today?

(Find the answer somewhere in this issue!)

When friends, neighbors, or relatives move, downsize, or just clean house, *please* ask them to think of the West Stockbridge Historical Society before they discard any old books, pictures, postcards, letters, or memorabilia of the Town of West Stockbridge. Email info@weststockbridgehistory.org or call (413) 232-4465.



**West Stockbridge
Historical Society**
Incorporated in 1994

An Invitation to Veterans

Since November 2023, the *Local Yokel* has produced a series of profiles of local veterans to honor their service. We invite all West Stockbridge veterans and their families to share their stories. We will continue sharing these profiles as they become available. If interested, please contact Renee McCormick at drreemccormick@gmail.com or text her at (914) 629-6314. We look forward to hearing from you and telling your story!

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Source of image:
<https://www.visitweststockbridge.com/churches-library>

News from the Pews

St. Patrick's Church

Hello, Yokels! As of this writing, the Christmas season is officially over, at least liturgically. If you would like to keep your lights on and decorations out, go for it! The church, however, is entering "Ordinary Time," the 33 or 34 weeks outside Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter. Although we may look at it as the cold, dark days of winter in the Berkshires or the long dog days of summer, it is when the church emphasizes Christ's public ministry. It is the everyday "get'er done" time that we all deal with for most of our lives.

Oh! I keep meaning to mention: to meet the publishing deadline of the *Local Yokel*, all articles must be submitted by the 15th of the previous month. This explains why some items

seem like old news and some require a glimpse into our crystal ball! We're trying to let you know what is happening down the road and then share how things went. Maybe this should be "overviews from the pews."

Speaking of our crystal ball, as I gaze into mine, I see that, back by popular demand, is the amazing Chicken, Sausage, & Polenta Dinner, sponsored by Unico and Gene Dellea. It is scheduled for Sunday, February 15, at 2 pm in the St. Patrick Parish Center. It is right in the middle of winter and before Lent; Ash Wednesday is February 18. So, chow down and give yourself a lift from the midwinter doldrums. Tickets (\$30 each) can be purchased by contacting Kathleen Davis at (413) 822-0360. Last year was a big success with 120 dinners sold. The Parish Center only holds 90, so takeout is also available. If you want to eat in, reserve your spot as soon as possible.

That's it. Don't forget coffee hour is every Sunday after our 8:30 Mass. Be sure to spend much of your "Ordinary Time" with those you love. Until next time, see you in the pews!



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Thanks to everyone who has donated to WSLY. We couldn't do it without your support! Keep the *Local Yokel* coming. Please send your gift today! (See response form on page 21)



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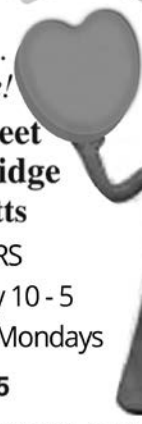
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Meet the Candidates Night: April 9, 2026

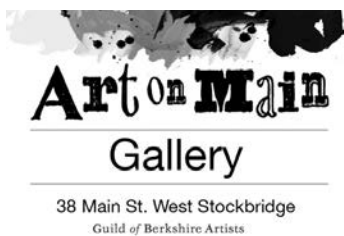
The *Local Yokel* is hosting an open forum for townspeople to hear candidates talk about their ideas for the direction of West Stockbridge.

The event will be held at the Town Offices,
21 State Line Rd., on Thursday, April 9, at 7 pm.

Unlike a formal debate, the event will be an opportunity for those running for elected office to share their ideas and answer questions from fellow citizens.

Townspeople are encouraged to participate in what is hoped to be a lively and informative session.

Anyone interested in volunteering to help the organization committee, please contact Karen Carmean at kcarmean@gmail.com.



Small Works Show Extended Open Saturdays 11 to 3 Through February

The Guild of Berkshire Artists is happy to announce that the Small Works show will continue through February.

Carolyn Abrams, Sue Aiken, Lori Bradley, Anne Ferril, Caryn King, Christine Koldys, and Deborah Schneer will fill the gallery with their unique works of art in painting, ceramics, photography, and fiber.

Carolyn Abrams

My work in oils and cold wax reflects my connection with my creative spirit and the world around me, most especially Mother Nature in all her beauty and her challenges.

Sue Aiken

My approach to painting can change with the subject, with the intention to impart a sense of place and local colors in landscapes, or playfulness and whimsy with little flower arrangements. Overall, it is to give the viewer a moment to relax with a sense of peace.

Lori Bradley

Birds are a favorite subject of mine to paint as they act in ways similar to humans, so I started painting them to tell stories about human interactions and relationships. I also enjoy their subtle but intricate forms, colors, and shapes.

Anne Ferril

Each ceramic piece I create, no matter the size, is shaped by my hands, so while its form may be familiar, every object remains unique. The diverse elements, minerals, chemicals, and firing methods all contribute to a piece's personality. These smoke-fired pinched vases are gilded for the holidays.

Caryn King

Clay, paint, and mixed media collage—my art comes from pure joy in creating and a deep love that comes straight from the soul. Animals, people, and the natural world all find their way in!

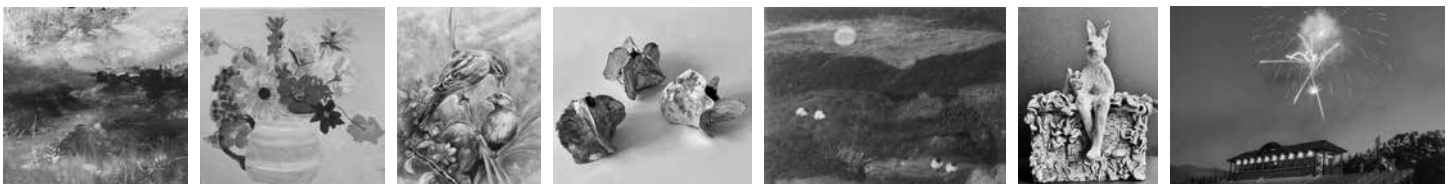
Christine Koldys

I am a free spirit artist working in several different mediums, and this is one of my needle-felt pieces. My work is inspired by the beauty of nature and my imagination.

Deborah Schneer

In my artwork and life, I look for color and light, and from these create a balance that is beautiful to my eye. It is one way I manage the chaos of our times.

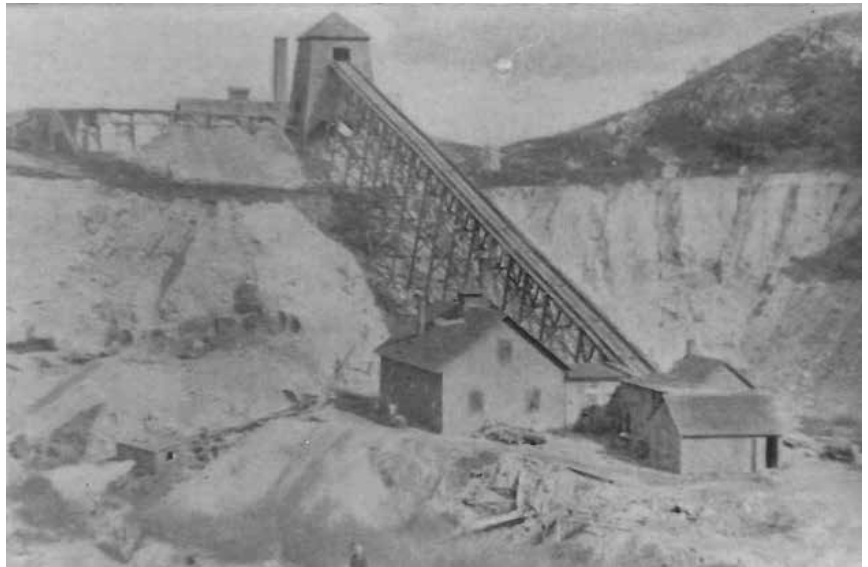
*Images courtesy of the artists (left to right):
Carolyn Abrams, Sue Aiken, Lori Bradley, Anne Ferril,
Christina Koldys, Caryn King, Deborah Schneer*



History Quiz Answer:

Iron was actually the first mineral discovered in West Stockbridge, before marble or lime. Williamsville had the first iron furnace processing low-quality bog iron (porous iron ore that forms in wetlands). The mineral was sourced from nearby farms and smelted down to make tools and iron bars. At that time, finding iron on your property was significant. Iron was important, necessary for farm and building tools. Importing the tools from overseas or even the Hudson River Valley was expensive. It was far better and more practicable if you could make the tools at home using your own iron.

Iron mining got serious in town in the 1820s. Surface iron ore and soil heavy in iron oxide were found near Baker Street and in the farm fields on Maple Hill. The first large quarry was developed in 1826, north of Route 102 near Baker Street on the property of farmer Nathaniel Lette. He owned much of Maple Hill and land north of it, and his iron deposits became more valuable than the farmland. By 1850, five open pit and tunneled mines were developed in the area.



*Leete Ore Bed with cog railway.
Photo courtesy of West Stockbridge Historical Society*

South of Route 102 and West Center Road were three iron mine pits and shafts. The largest was called the Hudson Ore Bed after the company that owned it. In the mid-1800s, it employed 125 men and extracted 50 tons of ore daily (by hand!). Two other mines on the south side were smaller operations and located further up on Maple Hill.

North of Route 102 and West Center Road were two larger ore beds, the biggest near Route 102. Known as the Leete Ore Bed, it was more than 200 feet deep, with lateral tunnels extending from the pit. Ore was taken from the base in a primitive cog railway shown in the accompanying photo. The mine operated until World War I and produced about 20,000 to 40,000 tons annually. The ore bed is now on private property, filled with water and old equipment, and definitely not a safe place to swim.

A second smaller ore bed was just north of the Leete Ore Bed and marginally attached to it. It was gone when the turnpike was built, but you can still imagine parts of it when you travel over the Baker Street bridge.

West Stockbridge was a perfect spot for the iron industry. We had the iron ore, wood in the hills to make charcoal, and lime for the smelting process. Those three ingredients were necessary to smelt iron ore into usable cast iron. The three blast furnaces in the town center were fed by the iron ore, lime from the old marble quarries, and charcoal from all the trees on our hills. Richmond had the larger blast furnace that operated until 1923.

Iron had a big impact on West Stockbridge. Through the 19th century the iron mine works was the largest employer, filled with unskilled Irish immigrants. The U.S. census indicated many could not read or write. The women were listed as "keeping house" or maids, and the children were listed as farmhands. They lived in worker houses at State Line or on Baker Street. Two one-room schools were created during that period. One of them still exists on Route 102 near the Mass Pike overpass. (Early photos of the schoolchildren show many of them without shoes.) A savings bank was even set up in the Town Hall for the miners' earnings.

The influx of Irish immigrants to work in the iron mines increased the population of the town for the next 100-plus years. A Catholic Church was established here. The Irish immigrants became merchants, farmers, and business owners. They moved into town government positions; some of them became teachers. West Stockbridge was known as an "Irish iron town" in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

The iron mines closed by World War I and the open pits flooded. For a while, they were popular but very dangerous swimming holes. Swimming now is prohibited and access is limited. West Stockbridge is no longer an Irish iron town.

**Every issue costs us about \$1,500 to print and distribute!
Please help us keep the Local Yokel coming!**

With increased printing and postage costs, we need your help more than ever. To get the latest town news, please contribute to the Local Yokel. For your donation of at least \$25.00 per year we will mail each issue to you (unless you prefer otherwise). The Local Yokel will continue to be available free at selected locations as long as possible, but we hope you will contribute anything you can. The West Stockbridge Local Yokel, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) organization, and all contributions are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. Please check with your employer, or former employer if retired, for matching gift programs.

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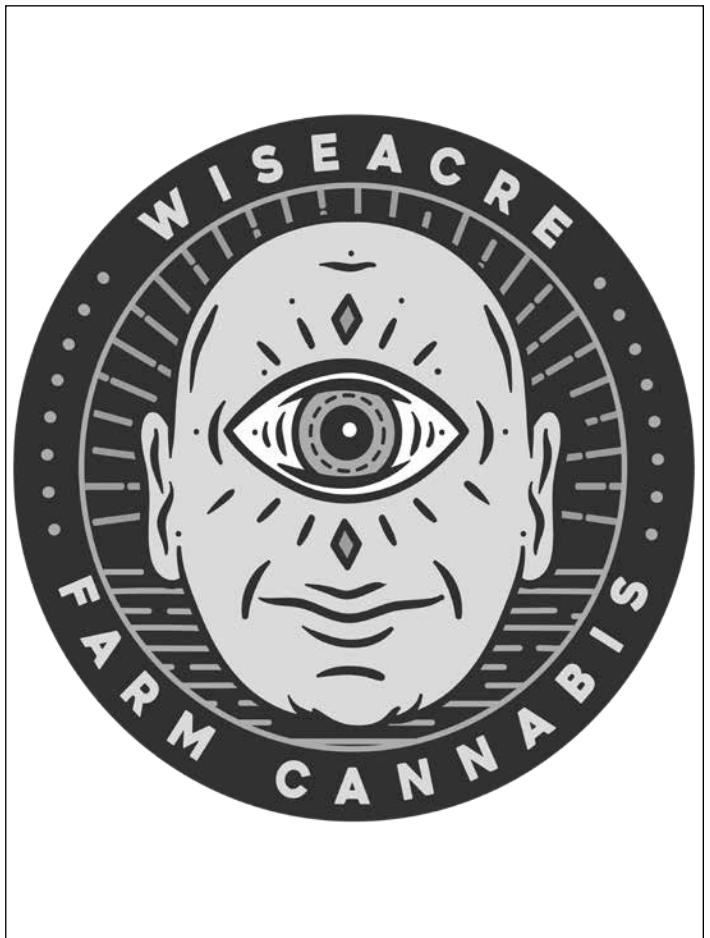
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Board of Health	<i>Earl Moffatt</i>	232-0300	ext. 314	Hours by appt. using website contact email
Select Board	<i>Kathleen Keresey Andy Krouss Tobias Casey</i>	232-0300	ext. 319	Mon.-Thurs. 7 am-3 pm Fri. 7-11 am
Town Administrator	<i>Marie Ryan</i>			
Building Inspector	<i>Brian Duval</i>	232-0300	ext. 313	Leave Message for Inquiries
Conservation Commission	<i>David Evans</i>	232-0300	ext. 300	Leave Message for Inquiries
Council on Aging	<i>John Zick</i>	232-0300	ext. 340	Leave Message for Inquiries
Emergency Management	<i>Nicole Miller</i>	528-2175		
Fire Department	<i>Steve Traver</i>	911 or 329-7153 (non-emergency)		Mon. 6:30-9 pm
Highway Department	<i>Curt G. Wilton</i>	232-0305		Leave Message for Inquiries
Library	<i>Rachel Alter</i>	232-0300	ext. 308	Mon., Wed., Thurs., and Sat. 10 am-3 pm; Tues. and Fri. 2-6 pm; closed Sun.
Police Department	<i>Nicole Miller</i>	911 or 232-8500 (non-emergency)		24 hours, 7 days/week
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Sewer & Water Commission	<i>Michael Buffoni</i>	232-0309		
Town Accountant	<i>Elaine Markham</i>	232-0300	ext. 317	Leave Message for Inquiries
Town Clerk	<i>Ronni Barrett</i>	232-0300	ext. 300	Tues. & Thurs. 1:30-3:30 pm
Town Collector	<i>Kelli Bradbury</i>	232-0300	ext. 302	Tues. 1-5 pm; Wed. 7 am-12 pm; Thurs. 1-6 pm
Town Historian	<i>Robert Salerno</i>	232-4465		
Town Treasurer	<i>Benjamin Gelb</i>	232-0300	ext. 316	Tues. 9 am-4 pm
Transfer Station	<i>Wayne Cooper</i>	232-0307		Tues. & Thurs. 10 am-6 pm and Sat. 8 am-6 pm
Tree Warden	<i>Andrew Fudge</i>	212-9206		
Veterans Agency	<i>Tom Beasley</i>	528-1580		
Zoning Board of Appeals	<i>C. Randolph Thunfors</i>	232-0300	ext. 300	

Official Town Government Website: weststockbridge-ma.gov • Community and Business Website: visitweststockbridge.com

Community News & Events

Stockbridge Grange Dinner

The Grange dinner will be on February 8; see the ad elsewhere in this issue.

Council on Aging

We will be making Valentine bags on Tuesday, February 3, at 9:30 am in the Richmond Town Library. Pre-register to reserve your space and materials by calling Heather at Richmond Town Hall, (413) 553-7793. The class is free to COA residents of Richmond and West Stockbridge. It's a fun time—hope to see you there!

The Knitters Group

The Knitters Group meets every Wednesday from 2 to 4 pm in the Community Room at the Town Offices. All crafts are welcome.

Friends of the Library

The Friends of the Library Committee meets every second Wednesday of the month from 3:30 to 4:30 pm in the Community Room at the Town Offices. All are welcome.



Please send your notices for Community News & Events to the Local Yokel, P.O. Box 238, West Stockbridge, MA 01266, email info@thelocalyokel.org, or visit thelocalyokel.org.

February Art Calendar

Guild of Berkshire Artists | BerkshireArtists.org | infoberkshireartists@gmail.com

2026

January & February, "Holiday Small Works" Art show featuring small works by local artists. Art on Main Gallery, West Stockbridge, MA. Limited hours on Saturdays from 11-3 in January & February.

Feb 13-Mar 1, "Flora/Fauna/Form" Juried Art show at Berkshire Botanical Garden, Stockbridge, MA. Reception: Friday February 13, 4-6pm. Artist walk & Tea: Saturday February 21, 2-4pm.

February 15, Berkshire Photo Gathering. See web: berkshirephotogathering.com/online-meetings

Upcoming Workshops:

Tuesdays, Jan 20 - Feb 24, "Painting in Oils with Bob Watkins" Workshop on traditional painting using environmentally safe materials at Berkshire South. See Guild website for all details and signup link.

Feb 2-23, "Explorations in Cold Wax" with Carolyn Abrams at Berkshire South. See Guild website for all details and signup link.

Jan 26, "Intro to Cold Wax" with Carolyn Abrams at Berkshire South. See Guild website for all details and signup link.

June 19-21, Plein Air workshop with Chris Morel, West Stockbridge. See Guild website for all details and signup link.

See www.berkshireartists.org for all the in-person and online events offered by the Guild of Berkshire Artists!

Flora/Fauna/Form

February 13 - March 1



Leonhardt Galleries
at Berkshire Botanical Garden

Reception

February 13, 4-6pm

Artist Walkabout & Tea

February 21, 2-4pm

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8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28

February Calendar of Events	2/2			Groundhog Day
	2/2	Parks & Recreation Commission	5 pm	Town Offices and on Zoom
	2/2	Select Board meeting	6 pm	Town Offices and on Zoom
	2/3	Council on Aging Craft Group meeting	9:30 am	Richmond Town Library
	2/3	Planning Board meeting	7 pm	Town Offices
	2/4	Knitters Group	2-4 pm	Community Room
	2/5	Finance Committee	9 am	Town Offices
	2/8	Stockbridge Grange Dinner; see ad in this issue for details	12-1:30 pm	Grange Hall, 51 Church St., Stockbridge
	2/9	Kids Craft Crew	4:30 pm	Community Room
	2/11	Knitters Group	2-4 pm	Community Room
	2/11	Friends of the Library	3:30 pm	Community Room
	2/12	Finance Committee	9 am	Town Offices
	2/14	Valentine's Day		
	2/15	*** Deadline for the next <i>Local Yokel</i> ***		Send to info@thelocalyokel.org
	2/16	Presidents' Day		
	2/17	Ramadan begins at sunset		
	2/17	Select Board meeting	6 pm	Town Offices and on Zoom
	2/17	Planning Board meeting	7 pm	Town Offices
	2/18	Ash Wednesday		
	2/18	Knitters Group	2-4 pm	Community Room
	2/19	Finance Committee	9 am	Town Offices
	2/21	Friends of the Library Bingo	4-5:30 pm	Community Room
2/25	Knitters Group	2-4 pm	Community Room	
2/26	Finance Committee public hearing on FY '27 budget	6 pm	Town Offices	
Note: Town Offices (including Community Room and Library) are located at 21 State Line Road, West Stockbridge.				