

Local yokel

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

West
Stockbridge
September
2026

*State Primary
Election
September 1*

SERVING OUR COMMUNITY SINCE 2004

Sunflower. Photo by Lear Levin

Pets of West Stockbridge



Tibou, my goldendoodle, and I go on our regular morning walk around town. Her favorite stop is at Baldwin's Hardware, to greet Amanda and Matthew.

From Marjorie Hoog

Rocco, 13, is a gentle rescue who loves swimming, squeaky toys, and everyone he meets. He's proof that the sweetest souls often get a second chance.

From Sara Scoco



⇒ Calling All Pets! ⇐

If you would like your pet to be featured in a future issue of the *Local Yokel*, please email us at info@thelocalyokel.org. Include a color photo of your pet, your pet's name, your name, and something you'd like to share about your pet for a short caption: 25 words or less, a Word document or in the body of your email.



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 may 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 Special Meeting Minutes Feasibility Study for New Public Safety Building July 6, 2026

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

Chair Keresey opened the meeting at 6:00 PM.

Kathleen made a motion, seconded by Toby, to approve the minutes from the June 22, 2026 meeting. All were in favor, and the motion was approved.

Appointment of Michael Renton as Police Chief:

The Board thanked Officer Renton for his continued professionalism while serving as Acting Chief for the past seven months. The Board noted that he has been an asset to the Town while filling the position.

Kathleen made a motion, seconded by Andy, to appoint Michael Renton as Police Chief. All were in favor, and the motion was approved.

Conservation Commission Update – Chair David Evans

David reported that the Commission now has a full membership and an agent, Shannon Poulin. He noted that Ms. Poulin is highly knowledgeable and has been invaluable to the Commission, bringing significant experience and guidance from her work with other towns. He stated that the Commission is becoming more professional and timely in carrying out its duties and responsibilities to residents. David also reported that the Commission had been

in contact with several other towns about hiring a shared full-time agent. A draft agreement had been prepared; however, the other towns subsequently withdrew from consideration. Kathleen suggested that David work through the Select Board so the Board could reach out to other interested towns and serve as the appropriate body to sign any agreement. David thanked the Board.

David stated that the Commission would benefit from cloud storage so that all Commission documents are accessible to all Commissioners. Toby and Marie noted that, now that the Town has moved to Microsoft 365, this is something that can be addressed.

David also noted that the Commission has benefited from the assistance of Mark Stinson from the Department of Environmental Protection. Mr. Stinson has been an asset to the Commission, providing guidance on many issues over the years. David reported that Mr. Stinson is retiring and that it is not yet clear whether someone will be hired to replace him. He thanked Mr. Stinson and expressed hope that the position will be filled soon, noting that the Commission has relied on him extensively for direction and advice.

David requested the Board's assistance with outreach to help the community better understand the Conservation Commission's duties and responsibilities. He stated that he plans to submit an article to the Local Yodel on this topic and welcomes any additional suggestions from the Board. Toby stated that the FAQ section on the website is a strong starting point and suggested placing the FAQs under the list of Commission members to make them more visible. David said he would like to update the FAQs first, and Marie stated that she can make the website change once David provides the updated version.

...continued on page 5

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Stockbridge Grange Dinner Sunday, September 13

Roast pork, apple or chocolate cream pie
Take out only/pick up - 12-1:30pm - Cost \$17
Grange Hall, 51 Church Street, Stockbridge

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(413) 443-4352 or (413) 243-1298**

Thank You, Marie!

By Anne Roy and Joe Roy, Jr.

Marie Ryan recently resigned her post as town administrator, a position she held for seven years. Before that, she was the town clerk in Great Barrington for 13 years. From time to time, Marie also served as clerk for the towns of Richmond and Monterey.

Along with her multiple duties as town administrator, she is most proud to have facilitated the Hazardous Mitigation Plan as well as the Emergency Management Plan. Marie also helped facilitate getting the West Stockbridge flag displayed at the State House in Boston. She secured multiple grants for our town during her tenure. One of Marie's last duties here was to shop and replenish the stock for our town's food pantry.

Marie is very excited to begin her new job at the Stockbridge Town Hall. She will serve as their "administrative floater" and help their new town clerk while also assisting and training other Stockbridge Town officers as needed.

West Stockbridge thanks Marie for her years of dedicated service. She will be missed!

Marie said she will miss the residents of West Stockbridge, the various town board members, and especially the staff at the Town Offices.



Photo courtesy of Marie Ryan

A stylized illustration of a stick figure walking towards a bright, glowing doorway. The figure is casting a long shadow. The background is dark with some birds flying in the sky.

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Community News & Events

Stockbridge Grange Dinner

The Grange dinner will be on September 13; see the ad elsewhere in this issue for details.

Council on Aging

We will be making bird cards

on Tuesday,
September 1,
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.

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Vision Committee Scrims – Joe Roy, Jr. and Frank Landsberger

Joe stated that the Vision Committee would like to place scrims around Town to celebrate West Stockbridge residents and community life. He then introduced Frank Landsberger, who presented information regarding the proposed scrims.

Frank shared examples of what the scrims could look like and said that the project would use frames previously created for the Town's scrims. The display could be placed at Town Hall near the green entrance area and possibly near the Old Town Hall on Main Street.

Joe informed the Board that the cost of the scrims would initially come from the Vision Committee's budget. He noted that, if the project is successful and the Town wishes to continue it, additional Town funding could be considered in the future.

The Board expressed support for the idea and appreciation for the Committee's efforts.

Seasonal Communities Grant Application – Kathleen

Kathleen stated that grant funding is available to each town that has adopted the Seasonal Community Designation. Brett Roberts from Berkshire Regional Planning has contacted Kathleen about completing the application on the Town's behalf. She said that approximately \$80,000 may be available and could be used in a variety of ways. Kathleen suggested that the Select Board hold a joint meeting with Brett, the Planning Board, and the Affordable

Housing Trust to develop project ideas, vote on which projects to include in the application, and authorize Brett to submit the application on the Town's behalf. The group hopes to hold this meeting within the next two weeks, as applications are due August 3. The meeting will be held by Zoom only, and Marie will notify participants and post an agenda for the joint meeting.

HR Software – Toby

Toby informed the Board that he has been using BambooHR software in trial mode for the Town. He recommended that the Board authorize him to sign a contract for the Town to use the HR software. He stated that the software would allow employee information to be maintained in one place, including training, certifications, and time off. He noted that this would help with tracking employee availability. Toby stated that the base rate is \$250 per month for up to 25 employees, with an additional \$4 per person for any user who tracks time, such as a Department Head. For now, Toby recommended that the Town continue using Harper's Payroll system. He stated that the software can track hours worked and transfer that information to Harper's for payroll processing. Kathleen asked whether the software could store documents such as employee handbooks. Toby responded that it can, although certain features, including document storage and payroll processing, may involve additional costs that could be added once the system is in place.

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- Firewood

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Toby also stated that the software is fully HIPAA compliant and that access to employee data would be limited to properly authorized individuals.

Kathleen made a motion, seconded by Andy, to authorize Toby to sign a contract engaging Bamboo HR software systems for the Town. All were in favor, and the motion was approved.

Shared Fire/EMS Agreement with Stockbridge – Toby

Toby informed the Board that the current agreement with Stockbridge for shared Fire and EMS services does not account for the four new firefighters who need to be hired and trained before the 10-year Shared Fire and EMS Services agreement begins in 2027. The Town approved payment of 40% of the cost to hire two new firefighters; however, the current agreement does not include that provision. Toby has been working with Town Counsel and Stockbridge Town Administrator Mike Canales to create an addendum addressing the issue. He stated that, once he and Town Counsel have completed their review of the 10-year agreement with Stockbridge, he will bring that agreement to the Board for approval.

Kathleen also noted that the agreement includes an Oversight Board that requires a Select Board member from each town to participate. She has served in that role for the past several years and asked Toby to assume the position. Toby agreed.

Toby made a motion, seconded by Kathleen, to approve the addendum to the current Shared Fire/EMS agreement with Stockbridge. All were in favor, and the motion was approved.

Select Board Speak:

Andy thanked Toby for his work on completing the addendum and for his ongoing work on the 10-year agreement.

Toby stated that he spoke with Building Inspector Brian regarding the walls installed in the copy room. Brian indicated that the work did require a permit and that a plan should be prepared by a licensed engineer. Toby also spoke with BBE, the company that installed the walls. BBE stated that, at the time of installation, then-Police Chief Nicole Miller advised that the work was approved and all set to be installed. Brian's concern is that the walls may be high enough to interfere with the ceiling sprinkler system. BBE

suggested that it could reduce the height of the walls at no cost and install a rim to cap the top of the walls for a cost of \$100. After a brief discussion, the Board agreed that Toby should contact Brian to confirm whether lowering the walls would eliminate the need for a permit. Toby will report back to the Board with the resolution.

Kathleen thanked the Police Department, Department of Public Works, and Fire Department for their hard work during the recent storms. She acknowledged the significant work required due to downed trees and power outages and expressed appreciation for their efforts.

Kathleen made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Andy, at 7:06 PM.

All were in favor, and the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Marie Y. Ryan

Marie Y. Ryan
Town Administrator

Select Board & Finance Committee Joint Meeting Minutes

Zoom Only

July 8, 2026

Select Board Members Present: Chair Kathleen Keresey, Andy Krouss, and Toby Casey. Town Administrator Marie Ryan was also present.

Finance Committee Members Present: Chair Bob Salerno, Steve Sautman, Curt Wilton, Frank Landsberger, and Mark Greenlaw.

Chair Keresey and Chair Salerno called the joint meeting to order at 3:31 PM.

Chair Keresey stated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss how to cover an investigator invoice of approximately \$20,000 that had not been budgeted. She explained that, due to unauthorized spending in the Police Department, there was a funding shortfall for outstanding invoices. She further noted that the Police Department had not been fully staffed throughout the

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...continued from page 6

fiscal year, resulting in excess funds in the salary line item. Chair Keresey requested that the Select Board and Finance Committee approve a transfer of excess funds from the Police Department salary line item to the Police Department operating budget. Any remaining funds in the operating budget after all FY26 invoices are paid will be returned to free cash.

Finance Committee Chair Bob Salerno noted that both Boards would need to meet and vote to approve all year-end transfers required to cover remaining outstanding invoices once the accountant finalizes the year-end totals.

Finance Committee Vote:

Chair Salerno made a motion, seconded by Frank Landsberger, to recommend that the Select Board transfer excess funds from the Police Department salary line item

to the Police Department operating budget to cover the investigator invoice and any additional remaining Police Department invoices for FY26.

Roll Call Vote:

Bob Salerno	Yes
Curt Wilton	Yes
Frank Landsberger	Yes
Steve Sautman	Yes
Mark Greenlaw	Yes

All members voted in favor, and the motion was approved by the Finance Committee.

Select Board Vote:

Chair Keresey made a motion, seconded by Andy Krouss, to accept the Finance Committee's recommendation and transfer excess funds from the Police Department salary line to the Police Department operating budget to cover the investigator invoice and

any additional remaining Police Department invoices for FY26.

Roll Call Vote:

Kathleen Keresey	Yes
Toby Casey	Yes
Andy Krouss	Yes

All members voted in favor, and the motion was approved.

Chair Keresey made a motion, seconded by Andy Krouss, to adjourn the Select Board portion of the meeting at 3:45 PM.

Select Board Roll Call Vote:

Kathleen Keresey	Yes
Toby Casey	Yes
Andy Krouss	Yes

All members voted in favor, and the motion was approved.

Chair Salerno made a motion, seconded by Steve Sautman, to adjourn the Finance Committee portion of the meeting.

Finance Committee Roll Call Vote:

Bob Salerno	Yes
Curt Wilton	Yes
Frank Landsberger	Yes
Steve Sautman	Yes
Mark Greenlaw	Yes

All members voted in favor, and the motion was approved.

All members voted in favor, and the meeting was adjourned at 3:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Marie Y. Ryan

Marie Y. Ryan
Town Administrator



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The familiar Hotchkiss Gallery at 8 Center Street in West Stockbridge, filled with whimsical and contemporary mobiles, inside and out! Photo by Robbi Hartt

Reprinted with permission from The Berkshire Edge.
July 27, 2026; edited for length

<https://theberkshireedge.com/business-monday-spotlight-on-hotchkiss-mobiles-in-west-stockbridge/>

BUSINESS MONDAY: Spotlight on Hotchkiss Mobiles in West Stockbridge

The beloved West Stockbridge gallery and studio is celebrating 50 years of creativity and success—and open to whatever the future brings.

Written by Robbi Hartt
July 27, 2026

Joel Hotchkiss, founder and owner of Hotchkiss Mobiles, admits he’s “always had a lot of creative energy.” As a kid, he was “always into lines,” sketching and making figures. That fascination turned into a love of kinetic art 50 years ago—and became a lifelong passion and career, first on the West Coast and, later, here in the Berkshires. He recalls, “When I was 26, I told my mother that I wanted to move to California and make mobiles, and her advice was simple: ‘Go do it.’”

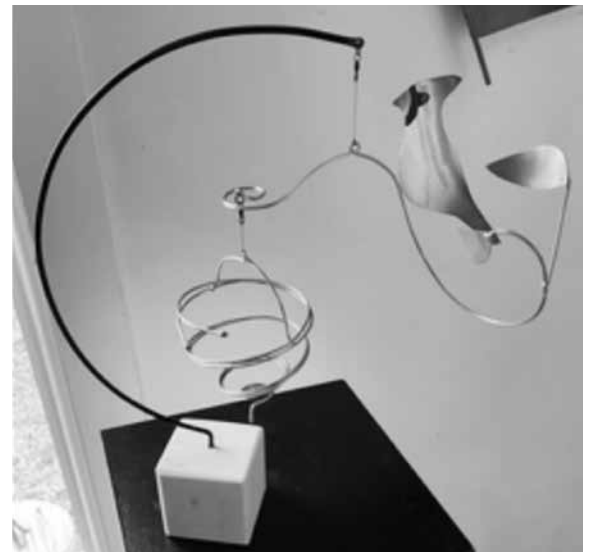
Hotchkiss studied design and film at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, graduating in 1972, and then took a job as an art director in Boston. His father (DeWolfe Hotchkiss, known as Hotch) also worked in advertising, with BBDO, a highly acclaimed, award-winning global advertising agency in Manhattan. But in his spare time, he was an artist, a painter, an illustrator. “He attended Pratt in the 1930s, and I was there in the late 1960s, including a semester in Rome, Italy,” Hotchkiss notes.

An escape that grew into a passion

In Boston, Hotchkiss began creating mobiles in his apartment as an escape—and fell in love with contemporary kinetic design. He relocated to Oakland and the San Francisco Bay area soon after, where he pursued his dream of being a mobile artist. “California was key,” he says exuberantly. “It was freedom land—the air, the light, the open-mindedness. You could do what made you happy.”

After learning to weld and studying the art of mobile-making at Kinetic Objects Studio in San Rafael, and selling his work at Don Conard Mobiles Gallery in Giardelli Square and other places in San Francisco, he founded Hotchkiss Mobiles in 1981. His “visual poetry in motion” is now widely known and loved, sold in his West Stockbridge gallery/studio and on his website. “At one point, I sold my mobiles to many museum stores throughout the country—including Guggenheim, Art Institute of Chicago, Boston Fine Arts Museum, and San Francisco MOMA,” Hotchkiss notes. In 1988, he created a design called “Director” and sold it to the high-end lifestyle retailer, Sharper Image. In turn, they sold 1,000 units and received great customer feedback. “People have continuously written emails and letters thanking me for my work,” he adds, gratefully. “Mobiles bring people joy.”

“I met my wife, Sandra, in Oakland when she picked me up in a bar,” Hotchkiss shares with a smile. They were married in 1983 and enjoyed living in their California woodframe cottage in Oakland for 10 years. After a while, it became too expensive, so they decided to move back east, where they both were from. Remembering passing through the Berkshires on his way from Sherman to Boston in his early years, he persuaded Sandra to check out the region, and in 1993, the couple and their two daughters, Shaina and Larisa, relocated to West Stockbridge. “We hit the bull’s eye with this location,” he acknowledges, referring to the gallery.



“Nesting Cardinal,” part of the tabletop mobile collection. Photos courtesy Hotchkiss Mobiles

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Sandra is the buyer for all non-mobile merchandise and manages the office end of the business. “She plays an enormous role,” Hotchkiss admits. She also had her own clothing store, Zoftique, and, for a while, a cafe, Perks in the Berks. “Our daughter Larisa is also very artistic,” he says, noting, “Her line of earrings and boxes (Larisa Grace, sold in Hotchkiss Gallery) is very popular.”

“We rarely beat our own drum. But by word of mouth, my work has gained momentum. Most sales go to homes, but I also sell mobiles to hospitals, businesses, and more.” In fact, he sells and ships mobiles throughout the country. “We used to be bigger, but now we’re in this cool, gentle stage, which feels like a nice pace. We do what we can do, fabricating our own art, and we’re happy doing it,” he says.

The optical trance

“When people come into our gallery, they look, look, look at all the mobiles, think they’ve decided on one, and then look at something else. The mobiles create an optical trance. In fact, they’re often recommended for therapists and psychologists for their calming effect,” he points out.

“They’re all original pieces created from scratch, using raw materials, and there’s a story behind every one,” he continues, pointing to “Maestro”—a conductor surrounded by colored musical notes. “That one was designed 25 years ago based on watching the back of Seiji Ozawa’s head as he conducted at Tanglewood.”

“My mobiles have a simple, whimsical feel. I try to keep them from getting too detailed or precious. I love the fact that I can change direction, choose another scale, type of material, or color,” he explains. “I’ve kept a very narrow lane, very contained,” he adds. “Because of that, my mobiles have remained extremely unique, unfettered. I create from everything in my 3,600-square-foot studio and sell right here from our gallery, and I’ve had a good time.”

I arrived last Wednesday, anticipating a relatively quiet afternoon. Instead, what I heard and saw was the steady ring of the front door’s sleigh bells each time the door opened, with another customer or a small group of intrigued visitors stopping in. The magic is obviously still alive. “This season is a bit of a transition point,” he confides. “At 76, I’m ready to scale back if the time is right.” They currently have the building listed for sale with Sotheby’s in Lenox. “We’ll see what happens,” he says.

If you haven’t been to the gallery in West Stockbridge, plan a visit soon—and be sure to give yourself plenty of time to browse all of the gallery spaces. I guarantee you’ll find something that lifts your spirits and makes you smile. The challenge will be deciding which mobile to take home.

<https://theberkshireedge.com/business-monday-spotlight-on-hotchkiss-mobiles-in-west-stockbridge/>



The studio in the back of the gallery, where all of the work is created (left), and a corner of the gallery (right), offering a small sampling of the visual feast found at Hotchkiss Mobiles. Photos by Robbi Hartt



A collection of wall pieces (often painted on metal) and tabletop designs by Joel Hotchkiss. Photo by Robbi Hartt



West Stockbridge Grange
will be presenting

Quilts of Valor

on Sept. 21st at 6:30pm

at Stockbridge Grange 51
Church St Stockbridge.

**Vic & John D'Aniello will be receiving
these for their Military Service.
All are welcome to celebrate this special
occasion with them, especially Veterans.**

The Grange meets the
1st or 3rd Monday at 6:30 PM
Call to verify the day/date



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51 Church St.
Stockbridge, MA 01262

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September Donor Roll Call

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Larry Parnes
Tom Platten
Sandy Smith
Louise Wasserberg

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**West Stockbridge Cultural Council
Invites 2027 Grant Proposals**

Application Opens: September 1, 2026
Deadline: October 15, 2026

For specific guidelines and complete information and application forms, visit massculturalcouncil.org/communities/local-cultural-council-program. Click on your local Cultural Council of West Stockbridge to apply. If you have questions, please contact any Cultural Council member or Marjorie Powell at (413) 429-7053.

SOUTH COUNTY CONNECTOR Schedule Change

To keep our service safe and reliable during a temporary staffing shortage, we are adjusting our daily service hours.

Hours will change from 6 am to 9 pm daily to 6:30 am to 5 pm. We expect the reduced hours to remain in effect at least through September 30.

Trips between 6:30 am and 5 pm are not affected. The change reduces early-morning service before 6:30 am and evening service after 5 pm.

Questions? Please contact South County Connector Dispatch at (413) 591-3826 during service hours or email transit@townofgbma.gov.

We know how much reliable transportation matters to our riders, and we're working to restore our full schedule as soon as possible. Thank you for your patience and continued ridership.

September History Quiz Question:

Daily life in the so-called good old days of the 19th century wasn't always so great. Tasks we accomplish quickly now took up a good part of the day (and night) back then. Probably the most time-consuming/labor-intensive tasks were cooking and keeping the house warm in the winter. Fortunately, we now enjoy many labor-saving appliances, although we still panic when one doesn't work or the power goes out.

Appliances we know today didn't exist then (e.g., dishwashers, toasters, and air conditioners). However, the one common appliance in almost every home was a stove. Most people had at least one for cooking and possibly another for heating.

In the 1800s, cast-iron and steel coal stoves replaced the old masonry fireplace. Although they required constant tending, they were more efficient. And by the end of the Civil War, likely every home had a coal stove.

But where in West Stockbridge could you purchase your stove? Furniture stores, home goods, or appliance centers didn't exist. Traveling to Pittsfield or Albany to shop for the day was not that easy or practical. But we did have a specialized retailer, and he sold the most advanced coal stove of that era. Who was he, and where was his store located?

(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

The Art of Fine Art Restoration: Art Evaluation Roadshow!

Join the West Stockbridge Historical Society for an interactive evening with master conservator Troy J. Amuso on Saturday, October 3, 2026, 6:30 to 8 pm, at the Old Town Hall, 9 Main Street.



Inspired by the *Antiques Roadshow*, this hands-on program invites attendees to submit their own oil paintings for live evaluation—not for monetary value but to explore condition, restoration possibilities, and conservation techniques. Through before-and-after images and stories from museums,

historical societies, and private collections across New England, Amuso will explain what causes paintings to deteriorate and how to protect artwork at home. The evening wraps up with an audience Q&A followed by a reception with light refreshments.

Tickets are \$20 for WSHS members, \$30 for non-members, with all proceeds benefiting the West Stockbridge Historical Society. Space for painting evaluations is limited to five submissions. All are welcome to submit their art for evaluation. The event is open to everyone.

Register here: <https://www.weststockbridgehistory.org/>

Photo courtesy of Troy Fine Art Services

September Art Calendar

Guild of Berkshire Artists | BerkshireArtists.org | infoberkshireartists@gmail.com 2026

September 3, 5-7pm, Urban Sketching Meetup. Hosted by Jill McLean. See Live Update Board for more details: <https://tinyurl.com/5n9ymf93>

September 3-27, "Beneath the Canopy: Celebrating Berkshire Woodlands" Art show featuring works by 5 local artists. Art on Main Gallery, West Stockbridge, MA.
Reception: Saturday September 5, 2-4PM

September 20, Berkshire Photo Gathering. See web: berkshirephotogathering.com/online-meetings

Daily, 10am-1pm, Plein Air. Join other Plein air artists to create work on site. Various locations. See more info and link to sign up on website.

Upcoming Workshops:

Tuesdays, Sept 29 - Nov 10, "Drawing with Ann Getsinger" A fresh overview of basic traditional drawing skills and materials at Berkshire South. See Guild website for all details and signup link.

Thursdays, Sept 24 - Oct 15, "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.

Mondays Sept 28 - Oct 19, "Explorations in Cold Wax" with Carolyn Abrams at Berkshire South. 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!

Beneath the Canopy: Celebrating Berkshire Woodlands

September 3 - 27, 2026

Beneath the Canopy invites visitors to step into a celebration of the Berkshire woods through the work of 5 artists, mirroring the layered experience of the forest.



Carolyn Abrams | Joan Gluck | Jill Kantor
Margie Skaggs | Lisa Townson

Reception: September 5, 2-4pm

Art on Main

38 Main Street, West Stockbridge

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Monument Mountain AP Program Expands Access While Sustaining Exceptional Achievement

By Peter Dillon, BHRSD Superintendent

Five years after Monument Mountain Regional High School (MMRHS) transitioned to a de-leveled 9th-grade curriculum to promote equity and open enrollment, newly released Advanced Placement (AP) data confirms the policy has achieved historic academic success. The 2025 and 2026 results definitively prove that widening classroom access lifts the entire student body without sacrificing the highest levels of achievement.

“Opening our doors to twice as many AP students only works if you have educators who are willing to completely reimagine how they teach,” said Berkshire Hills Regional School District (BHRSD) Superintendent Peter Dillon. “Our teachers didn’t just take on heavier grading loads and larger classrooms—they used their non-teaching time to provide extra help, rewrite lessons for mixed-ability groups, and instill absolute confidence in kids who never thought they belonged in a college-level course.”

This success is underscored by the school’s official recognition at the state level. According to the Advanced Placement Performance Report from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Monument Mountain’s academic performance **ranked #12 statewide in Massachusetts** for the 2024–25 academic year.

MMRHS achieved this milestone as the **only school district in Berkshire County** to make the elite top-15 list, solidifying its position as a regional vanguard of academic achievement in a state widely recognized for leading the nation in AP education.

The primary goal of the open-enrollment initiative was to dismantle barriers to advanced coursework. The data demonstrates a massive expansion in student participation alongside near-universal passing rates over the last two years:

- **Massive program expansion:** The number of AP students grew to **72 in 2025** and skyrocketed to **107 in 2026**, representing a 91% enrollment spike from 2023.
- **Unrivalled student success rates:** An incredible **95.83% of AP students in 2025** and **92.52% of students in 2026** earned a passing score of 3 or higher on at least one exam, securing vital college credit.
- **Surging exam volume:** The total number of AP exams administered jumped from **120 in 2025** to **179 in 2026**, with an overall exam pass rate of **92.7%** in the most recent cycle.

Critics of early high school leveling up frequently argue that mixed-ability classrooms hold back top-tier academic learners. Monument Mountain’s 2026 data dismantles this narrative, showcasing an elite ceiling of performance:

- **Perfect scores:** The school produced **32 perfect scores of 5** across its curriculum in 2026, meaning 18% of all tests taken achieved the highest possible designation.
- **Subject-level mastery:** Department standouts for the 2026 testing cycle were **English literature** (16 perfect scores of 5 of 26 exams), **Calculus AP** (6 fives of 11 exams), and **US History** (6 fives of 8 exams).

Monument Mountain’s sustained success over 2025 and 2026 cements its status as a regional leader in educational equity, proving that access and excellence can flawlessly coexist when backed by a deeply committed teaching staff.

“We’re incredibly proud of our students and teachers for sustaining such a high level of achievement on this year’s AP exams,” said Principal Christopher Barnes. “Last year’s results set an exceptionally high bar, yet our students met that challenge once again. Their success reflects a school culture where rigorous coursework, strong teaching, and student commitment come together to produce outstanding outcomes.”

“This historic success is a reflection of the hard work, passion, and brilliance of District faculty across grade levels,” said Dillon, emphasizing that while achievement is measured in high school, the preparation begins much earlier.

Looking ahead to September, Barnes remains encouraged by the growing number of students choosing to challenge themselves through AP coursework. “The strong enrollment and success of sophomores in AP Seminar demonstrates that when we expand access to rigorous learning opportunities, our students rise to the occasion. These results reinforce what we see every day: Monument Mountain students are eager to learn, and our teachers are committed to helping every student succeed.”



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**.

The *Local Yokel* 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.



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

News from the Pews

St. Patrick's Church

Garfunkel ("How great is Art!"). The neighbors were kind enough not to call the police, even though we sometimes resembled the *Bob Newhart Show* more than the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. (I nominate Steve McMahon to play Tom Poston.) That being said, new members are always welcome. If you can carry a tune in a bucket, we can use you.

From a maintenance standpoint, we need to thank the church grounds crew, who keep the outside lawns and gardens looking so beautiful. Led by Lisa Parker's design brilliance, this group of regulars tirelessly mows, trims, mulches, and weeds (and we all know how much fun weeding is!).

There is one person I would like to mention who usually goes unnoticed. When people drive by a cemetery and all is neat and groomed, how often do they say, "Wow, that's beautiful" without a thought about who is doing the work. In our case at St. Patrick's, it is Peter Skorput. He spends countless hours meticulously mowing and trimming to give that "perpetual care" to the grounds of our deceased loved ones. So, Peter, a BIG thank you from all of us.

St. Patrick's is still looking for someone as dedicated as Pete to take over his role as he heads to retirement. Please contact the rectory if you are interested.

Some clarification is needed on the Low Vision group meeting at the Pittsfield Senior Center. Although it is most often the fourth Tuesday at 10:30, it is always the LAST Tuesday (some months have five Tuesdays).

Hope you all enjoy a great Labor Day Weekend. Really liking the increasing numbers in the pews, so hope to see you there!

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Housatonic Heritage History Walk

Neighborhoods of West Stockbridge: Baldwin Farm and West Center

Saturday, September 26, 10:30–11:30 am

Join the West Stockbridge Historical Society to visit one of the original areas of town. The Baldwin Farm and the intersection of four roads was an important part of our early community and its manufacturing and quarrying activity. Today it is also the site of modern farming. An open-air reception will follow at the farmstand. The event will require about a half mile of walking.

To register, email info@weststockbridgehistory.org.

From the center of West Stockbridge, take Route 102/State Line Road and drive for about 2 miles. Turn left onto West Center Road for 1 mile. Park at the Baldwin Farmstand on the left at the four-road intersection.

Photo by Bob Salerno

Statewide Primary Election Tuesday, September 1



Polls Open 7 am – 8 pm

Town Offices, 21 State Line Road

West Stockbridge

Notes from the Village Church

By Cait Graham

August was a busy and joyful month at West Stockbridge Village Congregational Church.

We had a wonderful turnout for our bake sale in front of



Baldwin's Extracts and loved seeing so many local friends stop by for their favorite goodies. Thank you to everyone who baked, bought, and helped make it such a success!

On August 22, pianist Matthew Erickson returned for his annual summer concert, sharing beloved classical favorites and raising funds for the upkeep of our historic Johnson organ. We are so grateful for Matthew's generosity and continued support.

Our annual back-to-school collection was another success. This year we sponsored three local classrooms and provided everything on their teachers' wish lists. Mission work remains an important part of who we are and how we serve our community.

We hope you'll join us for Outdoor Chapel worship on September 20 at our beautiful open-air chapel, located at 141 West Center Road. All are welcome!

West Stockbridge Public Library Kids Crafts



Kid's Craft
Monday, September 14
4:30pm-5:30pm

Wrap a kitty (or a puppy) in a cosy yarn sweater!



Kid's Craft
Monday, September 28
4:30pm-5:30pm

We'll be making mushrooms out of egg cartons, pasta, and paint!



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FRIENDS OF THE WEST STOCKBRIDGE LIBRARY

BOOK SALE

West Stockbridge Town Offices Community Room
21 State Line Road (Route 102)

Saturday, September 19, 9 am–5 pm

CASH OR CHECKS ONLY, PLEASE!

The Friends of the West Stockbridge Library look forward to seeing you at our annual sale, offering fiction, nonfiction, biography, history, cookbooks, art books, some vintage selections, and a wide variety of children's books.

We will be collecting gently used children's, fiction, and nonfiction books—please, no dictionaries, magazines, or textbooks—at the Community Room on Thursday, September 17, and Friday, September 18, both days from 10 am to noon and from 4 to 6 pm.

It will be a great time to stock up! All proceeds go toward funding programs, activities, and supplies for the West Stockbridge Library.



West Stockbridge Jazz Series

HOT CLUB OF NEW ENGLAND

Saturday, September 19, 2026

at 7:00 p.m.

Old Town Hall, 9 Main Street, West Stockbridge



with generous support from West Stockbridge, Richmond, and Alford Egremont Cultural Councils

TICKETS:

\$35 Members, \$40 Non-members
Card for Culture Tickets available

weststockbridgehistory.org

History Quiz Answer:

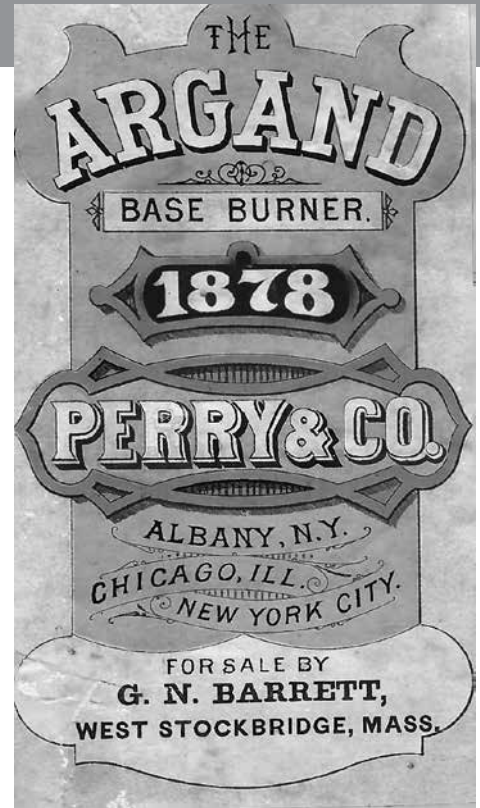
West Stockbridge in the second half of the 1800s was at its peak of population. Commercial activity was the most active. The village center had many different businesses: dressmakers, tailors, fish and oyster store, butcher, shoemaker, and hairdresser. Some businesses had multiple purposes like the drugstore serving as a bookstore and real estate agent or the local lawyer who was also postmaster and town clerk. We were a thriving self-contained community.

Although it was difficult to purchase an item as cumbersome as a coal stove, George Barrett became the dealer for the most advanced stove of its time, the Argand Base Burner. He was a Civil War veteran who returned from the war, married into the Woodruff family, and opened a tinsmith and plumbing shop in two buildings at 3 and 5 Center Street. Those spaces are now one building, the Acqua al 2 restaurant. Barrett was the only plumber and tinsmith listed in West Stockbridge in the 1875 business directory. That year he became the area dealer for the Argand Base Burner Stove.

The stove was a technical marvel at the time. It was designed to burn anthracite coal continuously. No longer did you have to get up in the middle of the night to clean out the ashes and reload it. The stove had a special grating system to allow you to clean out the "clinkers" (chunks of burned coal residue that blocked the airflow), without having to shut down the stove and reignite it. It was designed to burn continuously through the winter. It also had a special internal draft system to circulate the air and improve the heat output into the room, much like modern wood stoves today. The stove was an ornate Victorian era design with a mica glass front to show the flames and a cast-iron base with a nickel-plated top with a little figurine. It was an attractive piece of furniture for your parlor.

Originally designed as a parlor heating stove, the Argand also had a high-tech cooking model. It featured an "automatic shelf" that opened as you pulled the shelf out so you could remove your cookware without having to reach into the hot stove, making baking safer. There was a piggyback rear oven for proofing dough or warming tea and a removable top for cooking.

George Barrett died in 1880, and no one picked up the stove business. We don't know how many of these were sold in West Stockbridge or if there are any left in town. These ornate Victorian-style stoves are a collector's item now. Fortunately, we don't have to get up in the middle of the night in the winter to clean and feed the stove.



*Argand Base Burner Stove advertisement.
Image courtesy of West Stockbridge
Historical Society*

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Beneath the Canopy

Celebrating Berkshire Woodlands

September 2026

Gallery Hours: Thursday–Sunday, 11 am–4 pm

Opening Reception: Saturday, September 5, 2 pm–4 pm

The Berkshire hills are defined by their trees—towering oaks and maples, whispering birches and centuries-old hemlocks that stand as living witnesses to time.

Beneath the Canopy invites visitors to step into a celebration of the Berkshire woods through the work of five artists, mirroring the layered experience of the forest. Each artist offers a unique lens on the forests' presence and meaning as they explore the woods as both sanctuary and subject. Experience the way these artists interpret and honor the woods that shape our landscape, our seasons, and our sense of place.

Exhibition Highlights

Using different clay bodies, oxides, and glazes, the same ground and minerals that sustain the region's trees, **Margie Skaggs** and **Jill Kantor** create ceramic vessels that echo the colors and textures, the structure and memories, of the woodland. Earth and form are intertwined in vessels inspired by the forest, its shapes, and the landscape.

Paintings in oils and cold wax medium by **Carolyn Abrams**, oil paintings by **Joan Gluck**, and pastel paintings by **Lisa Townson** capture the grandeur, the shifting light, or the emotional resonance of the region's forests. From morning mists to the fiery blaze of autumn or the new growth of the understory, paintings include intimate portraits of trees and forest plants, or they translate the quiet poetry of the forest into luminous softness.

Together, these works create a sensory journey through the woods, honoring trees not only as subjects, but as collaborators in artmaking.



Clockwise from top: Margie Skaggs, Jill Kantor, Lisa Townson, Joan Gluck, Carolyn Abrams





Photo by Jonas Dovydenas

Richard S. Jackson Jr. and Cornelia Brooke Gilder

will talk about their
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reissued landmark book

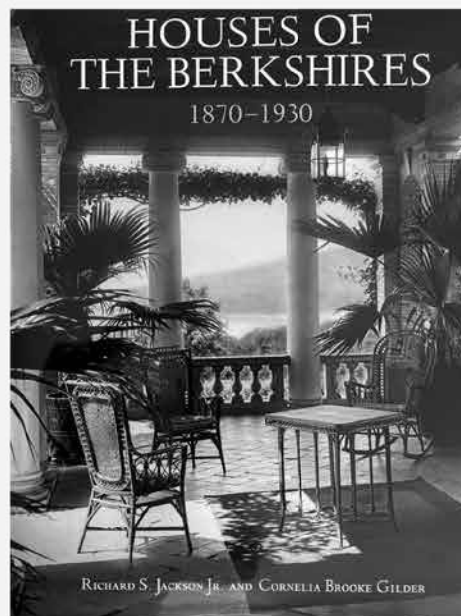
Houses of the Berkshires 1870-1930

Friday, September 11, 2026 at 7 p.m.

Old Town Hall, 9 Main Street, West Stockbridge

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A reception and book signing will
follow the event



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West Stockbridge Historical Society

Please register at weststockbridgehistory.org

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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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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>Mark Webber</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>Mike Renton</i>	528-2175		
Fire Department	<i>Vincent Garofoli</i>	911 or 717-2751 (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>Mike Renton</i>	911 or 232-8500 (non-emergency)		24 hours, 7 days/week
Post Office	<i>Randy Bates</i>	232-8544		Lobby: 7 am-7 pm; 7 days/week; Window: Mon.-Fri. 9 am-4:30 pm; Sat. 9 am-12 noon
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

Plants and Gardens Update

By Lisa Parker

After weeks of oppressive dry heat and vehicular damage, phase 2 of the new garden bed on Main Street has been repaired and completed. Phase 3 will include adding more perennial edgers and planting hundreds of spring bulbs!

This new beautification planting could not be done without the generous donations of the many townspeople who contributed to the Plants & Gardens Fund. To continue providing the materials needed for the flower plantings and containers throughout the town, we need your support.

Please send donations to refresh this fund throughout the year to Plants & Gardens Fund, Town of West Stockbridge, 21 State Line Road, West Stockbridge, MA 01266.



*Main Street island.
Photo by John Parker*



*Main
Street container*



Walking bridge container



*Vehicular damage
to plantings*



Routes 41 and 102 island

*Photos by
Lisa Parker except
where otherwise
indicated*



September						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
30	31	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	1	2	3

September Calendar of Events

9/1	State Primary Election	7 am-8 pm	Town Offices
9/1	Council on Aging Craft Group meeting	9:30 am	Richmond Town Library
9/2	Knitters Group	2-4 pm	Community Room, Town Offices
9/2	Affordable Housing Trust meeting	5 pm	Town Offices and on Zoom
9/2	Conservation Commission meeting	6 pm	Town Offices
9/2	Berkshire Lyme Alliance	6 pm	Berkshire Athenaeum, 1 Wendell Ave., Pittsfield
9/3	Farmers Market	3-6 pm	Foundry Green, Harris Street
9/7	Labor Day: Town Offices closed		
9/8	Vision Committee meeting	8 am	On Zoom: See agenda on town website
9/9	Knitters Group	2-4 pm	Community Room, Town Offices
9/9	Friends of the Library Committee meeting	3:30 pm	Community Room, Town Offices
9/10	Farmers Market	3-6 pm	Foundry Green, Harris Street
9/11	WSHS "Houses of the Berkshires" book talk	7 pm	Old Town Hall, 9 Main Street
9/11	Rosh Hashanah begins at sunset		
9/13	Stockbridge Grange Dinner: See ad in this issue		Grange Hall, 51 Church St., Stockbridge
9/14	Select Board meeting	6 pm	Town Offices and on Zoom
9/15	*** Deadline for the next Local Yokel ***		Send to info@thelocalyokel.org
9/16	Berkshire Health Alliance free blood pressure checks	2-3 pm	Town Offices
9/16	Knitters Group	2-4 pm	Community Room, Town Offices
9/17	Farmers Market	3-6 pm	Foundry Green, Harris Street
9/19	Friends of the Library Book Sale	9 am-5 pm	Community Room, Town Offices
9/19	WSHS Jazz Series: Hot Club of New England	7 pm	Old Town Hall, 9 Main Street
9/20	Yom Kippur begins at sundown		
9/22	First Day of Autumn		
9/23	Knitters Group	2-4 pm	Community Room, Town Offices
9/24	Farmers Market	3-6 pm	Foundry Green, Harris Street
9/26	History Walk: Baldwin Farm & West Center	10:30 am	Baldwin Farm, West Center Road
9/28	Select Board meeting	6 pm	Town Offices and on Zoom
9/30	Knitters Group	2-4 pm	Community Room, Town Offices
Note: Town Offices (including Community Room and Library) are located at 21 State Line Road, West Stockbridge.			