

July 2023

HALIFAX NEWS

DAVID STONER GAITHER: “*BEARDED GENIUS OF HALIFAX*”

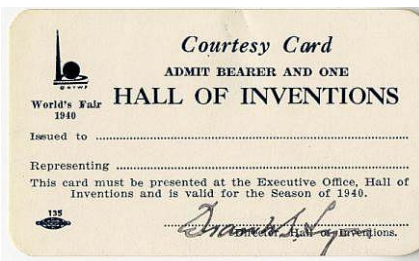
– Constance Lancaster, *Halifax Historical Society*



On a wall in the all-purpose room at the Halifax Fire Station hangs a framed black-and-white newspaper photo of a bearded man. A copy of the same photo is on display at the museum next door in an exhibit celebrating the life and works of artist Kyra Markham. The man in the photo is Kyra’s husband, David S. Gaither. Instrumental in the organization of the Halifax Volunteer Fire Company in 1948, Gaither served as its chief and also as health officer of the town. Gaither was elected Town Meeting Moderator from 1951 through 1956 and served as an auditor for three years. He set up the sound system for the Halifax jamboree fund-raisers. Wayne Courser remembers David as a very tall person who drove a jaunty red jeep that needed to be rescued on more than one occasion.

Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1897, David was the only child of Francis Eugene and Elizabeth [Stoner] Gaither. His father, a patent attorney, died at age 45. David graduated from Allegheny High School in Pittsburgh and went on to the

Carnegie Institute of Technology. His studies were briefly interrupted when he was drafted into the Army on November 4, 1918. However, he was discharged 19 days later when W.W.I ended. He graduated with a degree in building and design, and within a few years was recognized in the theater world for his brilliant stage sets. In one instance, a critic encouraged folks to attend a particular play if for no other reason than to view David S. Gaither’s artistry. Eventually, he moved to New York City where, in 1927, he met and married Kyra Markham.



Starting in 1938, he was involved in the design and construction of buildings in the 1939-1940 New York World’s Fair, among them the Fair’s renowned “Hall of Inventions.”

1940 marked the 150th anniversary of the founding of the U.S. patent system with which David was very familiar. Until the patent office ran out of space to store them, inventors were required to submit scale models with their applications. David arranged to display patent models at the fair, and he

ran a contest seeking the oldest living U.S. inventor. At the end of the fair, he and Kyra moved to Darien, Connecticut, where he worked at The Cherry Lawn School.

Gaither was hired by Marlboro College in 1946 to teach arts and crafts. In that year’s *Brattleboro Reformer* there appeared a short notice. *July 12, 1946: Mr. & Mrs. David S. Gaither of Pennsylvania have bought the so-called David Tucker farm for a permanent residence.* When they moved to Halifax, David was forty-nine years old; she was fifty-five. Biographical details of his years in Halifax are sparse; there are no children to consult, and most close family, friends, and neighbors are no longer alive leaving local newspapers as the primary source of information. Both David and “Mrs. David Gaither,” as Kyra was known in town, immersed

themselves in community life. She pursued her artistic career. He continued to design and build. Reports would occasionally surface in the *Reformer*: *June 24, 1949: T. Duane Roddy and family of Bloomfield, NJ, have come to Rockridge for the summer. David Gaither is building a garage for*





Mr. Roddy. The garage as it appears today is pictured with a close-up of the keystone molding. When Rev. Ernest Sommerfeld, whose family owned the Thurber house on Collins Road, met Kyra, he invited her to exhibit at his church. *May 11, 1950: Mr. & Mrs. David S. Gaither spent*

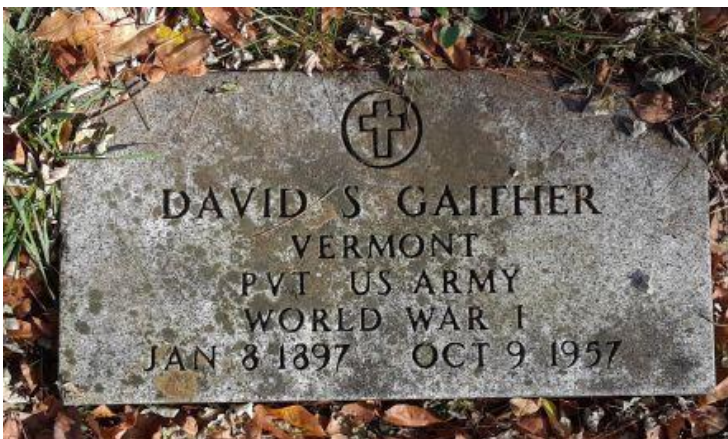
the week-end with Dr. & Mrs. Ernest Sommerfeld at Springfield, Mass. There will be an exhibition of Mrs. Gaither's paintings at the Church of the Unity for the balance of the month.

In keeping with the 1950's fad of naming property at Halifax Center, the Gaithers dubbed their farm Gay-Mark and sent hand-made Christmas cards with a drawing of a red cape-style house surrounded by pine trees and snow with the greeting, "Merry Christmas from Gay-Mark." Also, Kyra used stationary imprinted with "Gay-Mark Halifax Vermont Telephone Jacksonville 6 Ring 5."

It is worth noting that the Gaithers contributed their time and talents to Whitingham as well, especially to the Homecoming Celebration of August 1956. David helped write the pageant and played the role of "The Narrator." David Christie found a copy of the play, "The Town Clerk Remembers," and there's been some discussion of holding a revival.

David Gaither's final architectural project was huge. He designed and engineered the construction of buildings at Santa's Land in Putney. The project was completed in August 1957, two months before his death. On the eve of the park's opening, this editorial appeared in the *Reformer: August 9, 1957: When you visit Santa's Land tomorrow, what you won't see is the energy, hope, work, and inspiration that Mr. Poppele put into this act of creation. Nor will you see the dreaming of the talented David Gaither (the bearded genius of Halifax) whose mind's eye conceived the line and color of the buildings that were to have their wonderful land hewed out of a piece of Vermont forest.*

Gaither died at Greenfield (MA) Hospital on October 9, 1957, from complications of cancer treatment. Mary Sumner noted that David planned, with pastor George Butler, his own memorial which was held at Whitneyville Cemetery in Halifax. Kyra did not attend and asked that the procession to the cemetery use County Road rather



than pass by her house on Tucker Road. In August 1959, Kyra commissioned auctioneer Paul Lawton to sell the contents of their home, which the Christies had bought. The list of contents included a set of Indian (backpack) pumps for firefighting. It was not until a month before Kyra died in Haiti in 1967 that Cemetery Commissioner Floyd Canedy applied for a military gravestone marker for David (pictured). The application indicates that Canedy would pick up the completed stone in Milford, NH. A family member must have provided Gaither's information which included exact dates as well as David's army serial number.

TOWN NEWS

FIRE DEPARTMENT.

On May 29 two personnel responded to a home on Brook Road for a woman with difficulty breathing.

On June 1 six personnel responded to Hubbard Hill for a fire alarm sounding. Possible faulty detector.

On June 2 nine personnel and one truck responded to Amidon Road for a man fallen down stairs. A landing zone was set up at Gates farm on Jacksonville Stage Road for helicopter transport; Whitingham ambulance transported the patient to the landing zone which proceeded down to Bay State Medical.

On June 2 10 personnel responded to West Dover for a structure fire in a mutual aid call.

On June 5 four personnel and two trucks responded to a cover call to Whitingham. One truck went to the scene and the other truck was turned back. On the same day, one truck and nine men responded to a man down in the village of West Halifax; he was transported to the Brattleboro hospital.

On June 24 one man responded to Shearer Hill Road for a medical call.

It's summer – the Clam Bake is coming (August 5)! Tickets available at the Firemen's Auction, July 1, and thereafter from any fireman: \$20 for half a chicken, coleslaw, corn on the cob, salad, and watermelon; \$50 adding lobster & clams. Come to the Auction 7/1/2023 – 10 o'clock start time

Burn Permits are Required – call before you burn. Dennis (802) 368-7809 or Malcolm (802) 368-2484

HALIFAX ROAD CREW APPRECIATION

Several town representatives dropped by the Town Garage to bring the Road Crew lunch and offer them thanks for taking care of our challenging roads. The Road Crew is pictured below – Mike Fournier, Ben Barnett, Blake Janovsky, Keith Stone, and Wade Janovsky.



Above: Presenters Mary Brewster, Gary Rand, Alison Crossley, Pete Silverberg, Linda Swanson, Laurel Copeland. Photos by Andrea Rand.

SENIOR MEAL IN HALIFAX – FRIDAY, JULY 21, AT 12:00 NOON

Friday July 21st is the next meal at the Halifax Community Hall, 20 Brook Road, West Halifax, Vermont. We serve at noon. Menu for our annual indoor picnic: Hamburgers, cheeseburgers, hot dogs, rolls, homemade baked beans, macaroni salad, potato chips, pickles (sweet & dill), and dessert. All are welcome. Seniors 60 or older \$3.00, under 60 \$4.00. An advance call to Joan is appreciated 802-368-7733.

REMEMBER: NO Senior Meal in Halifax in August.– *Joan Courser*

HALIFAX CAFÉ. Mark Halverson, pictured on June 1st, was the first customer in the just-opened Halifax Café. The café is open Thursdays and Saturdays, from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM, in the Community Hall at 20 Brook Road in West Halifax. Staffed and provisioned by volunteers, it offers coffee, tea, and bakery items and is donation-supported. Stop on by this new community gathering space. Share your ideas for how to develop it.



SORROW

Laura “Susie” (Furlon) Putnam (September 3, 1937 - June 8, 2023) died at the age of 85 at her home in Jacksonville. She was born in North Adams, MA. Susie worked as a rural route carrier and also inside the Halifax, VT Post Office. She was a member of the Ladies Aid, loved crafts, and was an avid knitter, quilter, sewer, canvas painter, and member of the Red Hatters. She was predeceased by her husband Raymond Putnam whom she married in Readsboro on May 26, 1956. They raised their family in Halifax. Susie is survived by her children, Jeff Putnam (Marylee), Lori Marchegiani (Paul Poissant), and Timothy Putnam, all of Halifax, 6 grandchildren, 4 great-grandchildren, and 4 great-great-grandchildren.

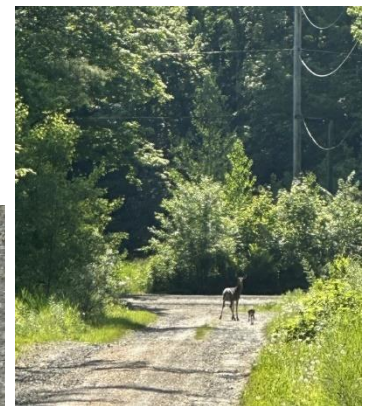


JOAN’S SIGHTINGS.

Lots of birds at the feeders two pair of Baltimore Orioles, two pair of Red Breasted Grosbeaks, Blackbirds, Bluejays, Sparrows, Mourning Doves, Woodpeckers love watching them feed the young ones, Titmice, red squirrels, and a bear! We had a medium-sized bear visit our feeders, not especially wanted, but I guess he likes a treat now and then. But the bad thing was my family had just given me this so special feeder that shows me what is visiting it on my computer! It is really special to be able to see the birds, squirrels, and other things at that feeder! It did not show a picture of the bear –must be he is camera shy! The bear did not ruin it, but he did not help it either. We were able to straighten it up some, but he left his tracks on it! Now I hang rags soaked in ammonia near it; so far so good! We saw the bear the next day as we were eating our supper. It walked next to the fire station, crossed the road, and kept going up towards Kirk Crosby’s. It is a little nerve-wracking going to the chicken coop just before dark; I don’t care to meet him face to face! I make noise and carry a ski pole with me!

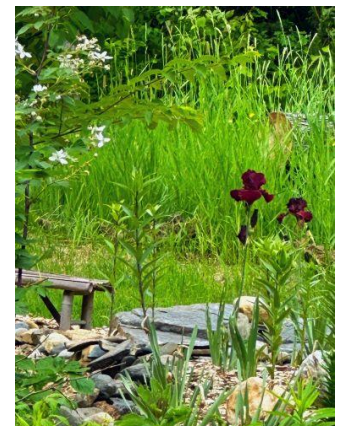
– Joan Courser

Elsewhere Around Town. Walking down my driveway the first week of June, I spied a deer. She was looking at me. Then the tiniest fawn I’ve ever seen walked out of the brush. It was the size of a cat! I snapped a rather bad photo of them before they disappeared from view. In the photo, the fawn’s head is down, and it is facing away from me while the doe is looking at me head-up. On June 1st, the Vermont Old Cemetery Association (VOCA) and Halifax Cemetery Commissioners hosted a work party in the West Halifax Cemetery. We spotted a Giant Eastern Crane Fly on one of the tombstones. June is when the Blue-Eyed Grass and Lesser Centaury—grass with magenta flowers—bloom. Look closely at grass to see these tiny marvels.



My daughter, KC Ferris, is visiting this month from Holland, and my mother turned 97, inspiring Gregg Orifici to write her age in lobelia and portulaca flowers. A turkey came up the lawn to check out the homage. KC snapped its picture.

At right – Zeber’s maroon irises with blackberry blooms
In other animal society news, Vincent Labozzetta reports seeing a bear around the Deer Park neighborhood—



especially when he is barbequeing. Len Derby reported a healthy-looking young black bear crossing Hatch School Road near the beaver pond before Butterfield Road. Edee Edwards sent a video clip of a large black bear scrambling up a tree at remarkable speed. Keep your distance from bears—they are fast movers. (And don’t leave food or food waste out—a fed bear is a nuisance and liable to be shot.)

There are a lot of butterflies to enjoy now. Pictured are Red-Spotted Admiral – a butterfly with black wings with blue margins and orange and white spots; a Viceroy – looking like a Monarch with an extra slash across the bottom of the lower wings; and a Yellow Swallowtail casting a shadow as it sips a hawkweed.



CALENDAR

July 1 at 10:00 am (Saturday): Firemen's **Auction** in West Halifax at the Fire Station begins.

Pie By The Slice next door at the Halifax Historical Society

Ice Cream Wagon (Halifax Community Club) across from the auction

July 1-31 (Saturdays 10:00 am-1:00 pm): Ongoing at the Halifax Historical Society: **Art Exhibit--Kyra Markham: Actress, Artist, Muralist** (and Halifax celebrity)

July 8 at 11 AM (Saturday): Dorothy Christie memorial service at the Halifax Union Society

July 11 at 10:00 AM (Tuesday): Free **Yoga** at the Community Hall in West Halifax (last one of this series).

July 15 at 1:00 (Saturday): **Annual Meeting of the Halifax Historical Society** followed by **A Presentation on the Life of Kyra Markham**. Halifax Community Hall, 20 Brook Road, West Halifax.

July 29 1:00-4:00 (Saturday): BEEC and the Conservation Commission will lead a talk about beavers and a field trip to a beaver pond.

Aug. 5 (Saturday): **Halifax Firefighters' Clam Bake!** Serving 1-3pm at the Old Cody Farm on Old County Road in Halifax. **Tickets must be purchased in advance** from any fireman (\$20 for half a chicken, coleslaw, corn on the cob, salad, and watermelon; \$50 adding lobster & clams).

Sept. 8 at 9:30 AM (Friday). Tentative schedule: gather at the Hall in West Halifax to carpool up to Whitneyville Cemetery where fine hand-carved reproduction headstones will be revealed during the **Otis Family Commemorative Headstones Dedication** (10:00-11:30 AM, Whitneyville Cemetery, 1470 Old County Rd). Elisha Otis' introduction of the safety elevator in 1857 enabled us to move safely to & from great heights and ushered in the era of skyscrapers. This celebration of a notable son of Halifax are hosted by his descendant, Carol Otis.

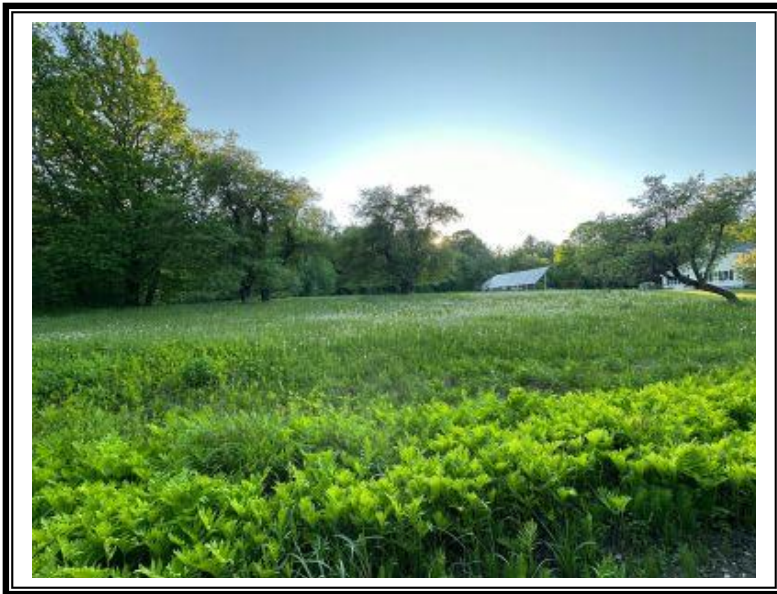
Sept. 9 at 9:30 AM (Saturday). Tentative schedule: gather at the Hall in West Halifax to carpool up to the south end of Perry Road for the **Otis Homestead Hike** and subsequent visit to the old Otis Mill on lower Perry Road, time permitting. **At 1:00 PM at the Community Hall, David Gillespie** of South Carolina will demonstrate the traditional, 18th Century method of carving headstones. He will also sign copies of his book, "A Brief Treatise on Tomb and Grave Stones of the Eighteenth Century." Final events and schedule TBD.

VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE STARTS ANNUAL TURKEY COUNT

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department wants you to be a citizen scientist counting turkeys! In July and August, everyone is invited to contribute to the state count of flocks of turkeys. They want to know how many adults and how many young turkeys you see. If you see turkeys in July or August, you can report them online at their website, <https://vtfishandwildlife.com/get-involved/citizen-reporting>. The Fish & Wildlife webpage on "citizen-reporting" has information about bears, bats, flying squirrels, and rare and unusual species, too. More info about the turkey count is at <https://vermontdailychronicle.com/vermont-turkey-brood-survey-starts-july-1/>.



Gary Rand (right) works with fellow VOCA member Charlie Marchant to level a family marker in West Halifax Cemetery



An interesting sun effect on a June afternoon

Halifax News

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