

October 2023

HALIFAX NEWS

Otis Weekend in Halifax, Vermont Sept. 8- 9, 2023

– Carol Otis



The first purpose of the Otis Weekend was the **Otis Gravestone Dedication** ceremony for newly carved gravestones installed at the recently discovered gravesites of my great-great-great grandparents, Stephen Otis (9/30/1738 - 12/7/1831) and Lucy Chandler Otis (6/21/1738-3/4/1837), a Mayflower descendent. They lived the last 30 years of their long lives (well into their 90's) at their son Stephen Jr's home on Perry Road where they helped raise 6 grandchildren, including Elisha Graves Otis, the inventor of the safety brake for elevators.

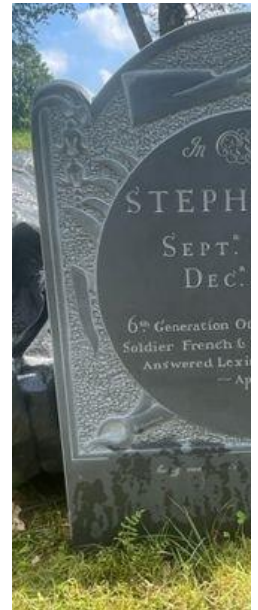
I started looking for these gravesites in the late 1970's. Interest in the Otis sites in Halifax kindled after Andrew Carroll visited the Otis Homestead in 2009 and included it in his book, **Here Is Where**. I finally connected with the Halifax

Historical Society (HHS) in 2017; they had some records. I kept looking, and after a 45-year search, my husband Roger Goldingay and I went to Halifax in August 2021 to see potential sites. With the help of the HHS and the Halifax Cemetery Commissioners, we found the graves and fragments of their gravestones under 6 inches of Vermont loam! A photo from August 2021 (left) shows the fragments and the initials LO and SO. At left is what the stones looked like for the past two years. Note the large tree behind the stones. The Cemetery Commission removed 32 trees this year and repaired stones cleaved by falling branches over the years.



The new stones for the replacement gravestones, it was decided by the stone carver, should be slate, sourced from a New England Quarry. They were designed in consultation with my sister, Kelly, and myself, and carved by professional colonial era stone carver David Gillespie of Pumpkintown Primitives (www.pumpkintownprimitives.com), a process that took 1 ½ years. During that time, the Halifax Cemetery Commissioners obtained funds from the Town of Halifax to restore Whitneyville Cemetery where the Otis stones were discovered. They removed trees, cleaned and mended and reset gravestones, added signage, and more. After the Otis stones were painstakingly carved by hand, they were shipped from South Carolina to Brattleboro and installed by Abbiati Monument Company a week before the dedication Ceremony. They passed the week covered by a tarp. A very special cemetery commissioner, Laurel Copeland, carefully collected from the forest patches of sod and moss and ferns and placed that bit of the forest in front of the gravestones to landscape and honor the bare ground and to make a natural setting for them. Notice the sweet planting in front of the stone.

The Dedication ceremony was 9 months in the planning and included all the contributors to the “quilt of Halifax History and life” and special contributions by DAR and the military communities. Programs were printed and shared. A local newspaper, the Deerfield Valley News, ran a story about the upcoming ceremony, with photos of myself and my sister Kelly Otis Hazen and a portrait of Seth Otis, another son of Stephen and Lucy Chandler Otis. One very dedicated and hardworking man, Gary Rand, worked with volunteers to get all the work done and even carved a new sign for the cemetery. He was out there the day before setting up canopies as it had been very hot and raining most of the summer. Chairs, a porta-potty, and two canopies plus coolers for beverages were set up. His wife, Andrea Rand, spearheaded the Halifax Cemetery Restoration Team, cleaning 100s of stones in Halifax cemeteries. Pictured: My sister Kelly, Andrea Rand, me (Carol), and Gary Rand in front of Stephen & Lucy's new stones.





The night before the ceremony there was a huge rainstorm with thunder and lightning and power outages!! Fortunately, the new day was absolutely lovely.



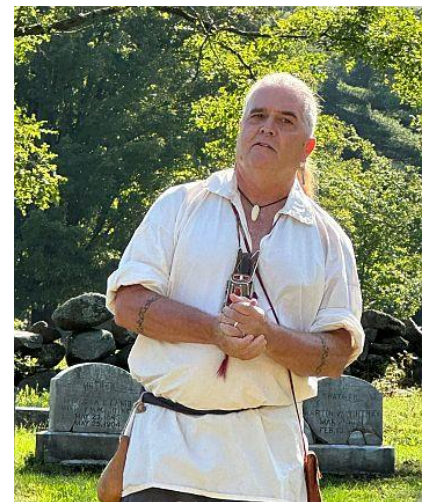
To open the dedication, local Bagpiper Eric Goodchild piped in the American Legion Honor Guard from Brattleboro Post 5, with a Gold Star Mother carrying the American flag in honor of war veteran, Stephen Otis. Bugler Lois Sturtevent from the American Legion Post in Newport New Hampshire is saluting the honor guard at left in the photo.



I welcomed everyone and thanked them for all the work they did to get ready for this day. Perhaps a bit of emotion there?!

Tribal leader of the Abenaki Rich Holschuh gave first remarks reminding us of our connections with all life and all peoples.

Halifax Historical Society member and historian extraordinaire Connie Lancaster summarized the history of the area and the Otis family and the cemetery. Her research, record keeping, memory, and experience in all of the 21 Halifax cemeteries are what allowed us to find the gravesite.



Members of the Brattleboro DAR with Regent Carolyn Handy and Chaplain Patsy Bemis, led the



main dedication and Pledge of Alliance. The honor guard folded the flag and presented it to me after a three-volley salute (for a deceased veteran) and then “Taps” was played. In an emotional moment, I received the flag from Sgt Ralph Louttit in front of the Otis gravestones; the flag was presented to me in their honor.

David Gillespie of Pumpkintown Primitives discussed the carving of the stones and the meaning of the images and inscriptions. The original fragments of carved slate stone that we found in 2021 were placed behind the

newly carved gravestones. Local volunteers planted grass seed and brought in sod to enhance the newly placed terrain. Pastor Doug La Plante of Jacksonville Community Church gave the benediction.

The next day at the Community Hall, Abenaki craftspersons and David Gillespie demonstrated craft skills of the 18th century. In searching for Stephen & Lucy's stones, we had also found another fragment marked "MO" and knew it to be that of James Madison Otis. He was a grandson of Stephen and Lucy Otis who died at age 6 in 1813. He was the first Otis in this cemetery. David Gillespie, on inspecting this fragment of slate more than 200 years old, saw not only the initials "JMO" but also the numbers and letters "6y 6m" describing his age at death six. David Gillespie re-carved these characters at the workshop at the Hall.

Initials and age are now carved a bit deeper into the James Madison Otis stone. From left: Historian Connie Lancaster, Kelly Otis Hazen, David Gillespie, Carol Otis, Roger Goldingay with the final carved JMO stone.



Laurel Copeland and her 97-year-old mother Lynda laugh together at the carving workshop, carrying one of David Gillespie's books which he signed for them.



My last view of the gravestones was two days after the dedication ceremony. The stones look very much to be where they belong, in tune with

the other gravestones. It is a peaceful early evening; the sun will set in about half an hour. Just the birds, a few dragonflies and butterflies, and the wind are with me, Stephen and Lucy and James Madison.

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Open House Retirement Party for Lewis Sumner. Join us in honoring Lewis Sumner for his 50+ years of service to the Town of Halifax.
Date: Saturday, October 14, 2023, from 12:00 - 3:00pm.
Place: Halifax School Multi-Purpose Room.
 Come prepared to share a favorite story. For more details, please call 802-368-7390 or 802-368-7160.

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BEAVER NEWS. The Halifax Beaver Working group is looking forward, eagerly, to two October outings:

Beavers at work: a field outing. Date: Sunday, October 15 from 4-6

Meet at 2582 South Road, the visitors parking lot at Potash Hill in Marlboro (formerly Marlboro College). **Questions? Email patti@beec.org**
Naturalist Patti Smith will lead a walk to explore the beaver ponds and meadows made by the beavers she studies. Pay a visit to a beaver family and see their lodge. The walk will be about a mile, round trip. To really experience the beaver meadow, wear rubber boots or be prepared to get wet feet (this experience is optional). The walk is a gentle descent and then a gentle climb to return.



Deceiving Beavers— In the field with Skip Lisle

Date: Sunday October 29, 2-4. Meet at the Todd residence, 273 Hatch School Road

Skip Lisle has devoted his career to solving beaver conflicts. He has installed his Beaver Deceivers across the country. They save taxpayer \$, road crew frustration, and keep beavers and their wetlands in place. Skip installed a deceiver on Hatch School Road a year ago. It saved a culvert and allowed the beavers to stay in place. Learn how Skip builds them and how they work. Then take a walk to explore the beaver pond.

As part of this project, funding has been provided to install another Beaver Deceiver at a roadway-beaver pond conflict site on Jacksonville Stage Road. Stay tuned for updates: <https://www.beec.org/halifax-beaver/>

SENIOR MEAL IN HALIFAX – The next Senior Meal in Halifax is October 20, serving at 12:00 noon in the Halifax Community Hall at 20 Brook Road, West Halifax. Menu: surprises, potato, veggie, rolls and dessert. A free will donation of \$3.00 is asked for seniors 60 years of age or older; under 60 is \$4.00. – Joan Courser

HALIFAX HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEEDS A NEW ROOF. The Halifax Community Club raised over \$1,000 for the Halifax Historical Society’s re-roofing project. The money was raised at the Fall Equinox Pie Fest (Sep. 21 & 23) from the sale of delicious, homemade pies made by Gary Rand. Thank you, Gary!!

Want to help? Mail check to: **Halifax Historical Society, P.O. Box 94, West Halifax, VT 05358.** For more information, contact the HHS at HalifaxVtHistoricalSociety@gmail.com.

Elsewhere Around Town. Up on Hanson Road the grey fox visits at dusk, turkeys abound, we hear a buck snorting and coyotes howling, and the woodchuck nibbles the grass while deer eat apples. I came across a little Cooper’s Hawk on Hatch School Road. Early one morning I spotted a porcupine waddling across the fields on Collins Road. Bonnie Brown sent a pic of their “self-propelled, self-composting lawnmower!” We see blue jays, Canada geese, common yellowthroat warblers, black-and-white warblers, vireos, cedar waxwings, pileated woodpeckers, bats, crows, ravens, chipmunks, squirrels (red & grey), tiny frogs, and lots of large dragonflies. In the woods there are many red-backed salamanders and red efts.

The Cemetery Commission had a banner day last week. We found a new stone in the Hatch Cemetery! Straightening a stone in the Hall family, we dug up a footstone. But its initials, RH, did not match any of the six Hall headstones. The family monument listed Rhoda Nichols Hall—that would work. Where would you put Rhoda? Next to her husband. We poked...sounded like a stone under the earth. We started digging and prying—a large rectangle of earth suddenly lifted! We dug out the lovely marble stone and reset it. In the photo, it is the pale one on the end.



JOAN’S SIGHTINGS & FIRE DEPARTMENT.

Reports are on hiatus. Check back next month.

– Joan Courser

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

Halifax Nature Camp 2023



It was a wet and wonderful summer, and Trust For Wildlife’s one week Nature Camp at the TFW sanctuary in Halifax was a truly special time. The camp is run by founding President Marshal T. Case, with the assistance of his wife, Joanne Case, along with Merritt Youmell, Halifax School teacher, and amazing volunteers Jessica and Andrea. The summer floods of 2023 marked the first day of camp and when asked what the 13 campers would like to do during the torrential rains there was a resounding, “GO OUTSIDE AND LOOK FOR FROGS!” This was perfect weather to learn about the power of water, the importance of wetlands, and the animals that live in these habitats. We witnessed the roads flooding and a beaver dam collapse. We learned that wetlands are like sponges that can absorb an entire washed-out pond, while beavers quickly restore the dam. These 13 campers of all ages were the most resilient youngsters we had encountered. No matter the weather they just wanted to be “in Nature” exploring and learning all the time (and teaching us too!) Their enthusiasm was infectious. We were fortunate to have two of our board members visit camp this summer to offer their professional expertise. Ed Metcalf brought his barred owl and discussed this amazing bird and its habitat and behavior. Will Finkel

brought a 5-pound bag of clay, and we had a creative morning on the back porch. Our longest “running” camper, Brian, held down the rock that marks our gratitude to Norris Johnson, the landowner whose widow donated the land and cabin to TFW (see “now” and “then” photos below).



Brian Now



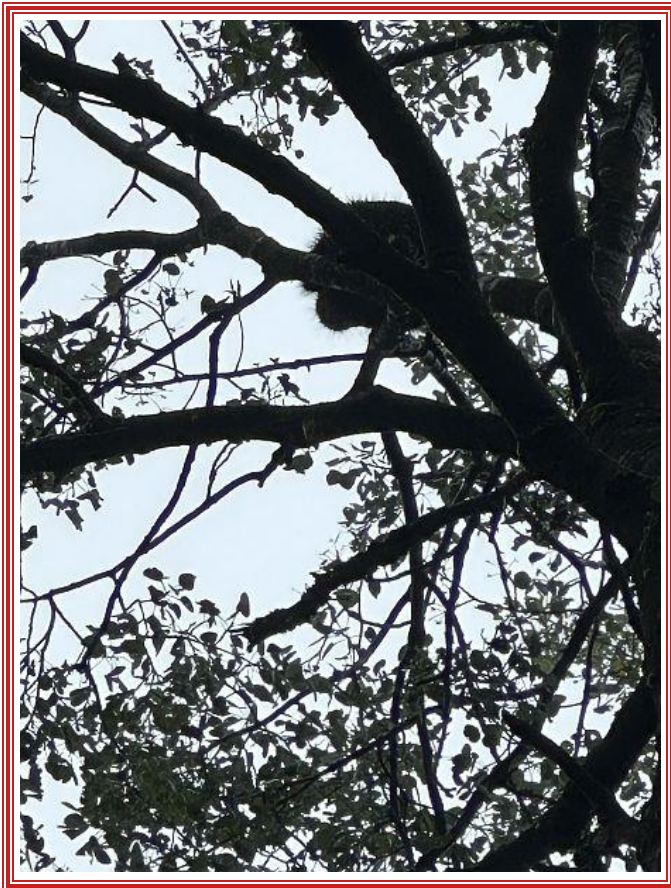
Brian 1st Year

Halifax News

OCTOBER 2023

CALENDAR

- Oct. 5** (Thursday): Halifax Café open 10:00 am – 1:00 pm.
Oct. 7 (Saturday): Halifax Café open 10:00 am – 1:00 pm.
Oct. 12 (Thursday): Halifax Café open 10:00 am – 1:00 pm.
Oct. 14 (Saturday): **Lewis Sumner Party at the School.** (Halifax Café is closed.)
Oct. 19 (Thursday): Halifax Café open 10:00 am – 1:00 pm.
Oct. 21 (Saturday): Halifax Café open 10:00 am – 1:00 pm. **Talk with the Fire Chief**
Oct. 26 (Thursday): Halifax Café open 10:00 am – 1:00 pm.
Oct. 28 (Saturday): Halifax Café open 10:00 am – 1:00 pm.
Nov. 23 (Thursday): Café will be closed for Thanksgiving
Dec. 2 (Saturday): Wrap Fest! Free wrapping paper, snacks, and fun in the Hall, 2:00-5:00 pm.



Porcupine in a Tree on Cannon Road



Self-propelled, self-composting lawnmower at Bonnie & Stephan's. Photo: Bonnie Brown

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