

# Country Journal

Devoted to the Needs of the Hilltowns

Ashfield, Becket, Chester, Chesterfield, Cummington, Dalton, Easthampton, Florence, Goshen, Granville, Hawley, Haydenville, Hinsdale, Huntington, Middlefield, Montgomery, Peru, Plainfield, Russell, Southampton, Washington, Westfield, Westhampton, Windsor, Williamsburg, Worthington

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## CHESTER

# Chester on Track set for May 16

By Wendy Long  
Correspondent

The 35th annual "Chester on Track" will be held rain or shine on Saturday, May 16 from 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Events take place throughout the downtown area for children, adults, families and history buffs, including at the Chester Railway Museum, a National Historic Landmark on 10 Prospect St. The Railway Museum is housed in an 1840s era railway station. Visitors can tour the station and grounds, which include freight cars from the 1920s, a wooden caboose and the "children's boxcar."

This year's Chester on Track will mark the grand opening of the museum's most recent acquisition: a 1946 Pullman Coach that had been repurposed as a dining car, previously located at Bernie's Dining Depot in Chicopee. Across the road from the museum is the historic Chester Granite Saw on Emory Street, which also merits a visit.

And while in Chester, consider a self-guided hike to the first American cluster

TRACK, page 7



Submitted photo

This is the Chester on Track parade from a prior year, taken from the West Branch of the Westfield River. This year the event will be held Saturday, May 16 from 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

## BLANDFORD

# Reduced polling hours voted on

By Mary Kronholm  
Correspondent

The Town Clerk's office asked that the polling hours for the Annual Town Election on Saturday, June 13 be reduced from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. instead of 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

The board was reluctant to change the hours even though there will be vote by mail ballots. Chair Jackie Coury said, "There is a lot of controversy with this vote," and with possibly four candidates for Select Board she was concerned about anyone believing they had been disenfranchised. The polling hours for this election remain 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

## 250th anniversary flag and plans

Executive Assistant to the board Joann Martin received permission to purchase a 250th

VOTED, page 6

## HUNTINGTON

# Chairman receives 'special pen'

By Wendy Long  
Correspondent

Select Board Chairman Roger Booth opened their Thursday, April 16 meeting by thanking Selectman John McVeigh for his gift of an extremely large, black "clickable" pen.

The oversized pen was a gag gift because Booth's colleagues have noticed that he tends to "click" his retractable pen at an increasing pace if meetings take a stressful turn.

Booth's face will remain unmovable, but his thumb will click the pen at a faster and faster rate. Selectmen McVeigh and Bill Hathaway were both present for the 8:30 a.m. meeting, along with Town Administrator Jennifer Peloquin. This was an extra meeting scheduled to wrap up some outstanding or timely items.

The board voted unanimously to award the town's Internet tech Services bid to Northeast IT Systems, Inc. of West Springfield for

a three-year contract that starts at \$50,328 for Fiscal Year 20'27 and increases about 3% a year for FY '28 (\$51,837.84) and FY '29 (\$53,392.92). Those figures will be adjusted a bit as the town will be opting to pay for its own Microsoft Office licensing; as such, a portion of the IT contract will move under the software line in the budget and the Northeast IT contract reduced accordingly. The only other bidder was Bredy Network Management, LLC from Woburn, who started their bid for FY '27 at \$115,434.40.

The board had also hoped to award work on the North Hall Rot Repair and Painting request for written responses, which had six bids ranging from \$28,700 to \$44,500 for the project. "John and I had a bad feeling that this was going to come in a lot higher when we approved funding for this last year, due to prevailing wage," Booth said.

The lowest bid from Life In Colors Painting, Inc. out of Milford was \$13,700 over the funding allotted in the town's budget. As they do not have enough funding and cannot guarantee they'll get more for the project at the Special Town Meeting

CHAIRMAN, page 3



Turley Publications photo by Wendy Long

Huntington Select Board Chairman Roger Booth demonstrates his gag gift from fellow board member John McVeigh: a large, retractable pen. Booth is known for "clicking" his pen during meetings and he clicks more frequently and faster if stress or conflict is involved.

## HILLTOWNS

# Saturday offered perfect conditions for wildwater races

By Wendy Long  
Correspondent

The 71st running of the Westfield River Wildwater Races took place on Saturday, April 18, with the Expert Race kicking off at 9:30 a.m. from Knightville Dam and the Classic Race starting at 11 a.m. from the Rt. 112 MassDOT maintenance yard in the center of Huntington.

The Expert Race ended at the Route 20 pulloff across from the Hilltown Community Health Center in Huntington, and the Classic Race ended in Woronoco Center. There were 22 boats registered in the Expert Class (the number in the Classic Race was unknown at press time). Competing were solo canoes, tandem canoes, kayaks and Stand Up Paddleboards (SUPs). A full 272 athletes had registered ahead of race day with walk-ins registering on Saturday.

Race organizer Harry Rock welcomed the expert racers with a cautionary warning. "If there are beginners here, or even lower intermediate paddlers, you don't belong here," Rock said. "This is expert only."

RACES, page 2



Turley Publications photos by Wendy Long

First to finish: Sue Vollrath and John Kazimierszyk bring their canoe to shore after running the expert race.



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# HILLTOWN HIKING ADVENTURES



Tom Ragusa sights downhill looking East on where the staircase begins.



This is the 1765 Miller survey of the Knox Trail in Russell.

Submitted photos

## Traveling the Knox Trail through Russell

The last section of the Knox Trail through Russell on the Westfield line has been 85% traveled thanks to years of research by many of the local favorite hilltown historians.

As promised and ten plus years waiting, this section of the Knox Trail has always been a mystery. There is very little written history after Knox and his men arrived in Blandford, only to state the journey between there and Westfield

was to be “a great obstacle of cliffs commonly called The Devil’s Staircase.”

So much so it was even questioned, did he travel this way and how? Since January many events across the Berkshires and Hilltowns have educated us and brought the great history alive with talks, guided tours and great published news stories. At the Mahaiwe Theatre, Russell Historical’s very own Sue Maxwell broadcasted on Boston television that they would find

and document the “Devil’s Staircase” in Russell.

Located on private property, the group received permission by and took Dr. Anton along on the maiden journey with Tom Ragusa (Otis/Sandisfield), Karen McTaggart (Russell), Rob Hoogs (Monterey), Gary Leveille (Great Barrington), Rep Egremont (Alford) Tom Hoffman (Washington), Tom Berenski (Lee), Jim Moore, Greg Deily and Liz Massa of the Hilltown Hikers.

This was the year to

do it. Karen McTaggart of Russell Historical reached out to Dr. Anton of Russell letting him know “we think the Knox Trail goes through your property. Rob Hoogs of Monterey Historical studied the old maps and what has been written in history, which is a long process of “maybe this way?”

They used Lidar mapping to chart paths on Russell Mountain, often confused with logging roads and stream run offs. Overlaying these lidar images with older maps of the area they were able to get down to a few possible routes.

Bottom line, the only way to find out is to do what they do best, boots on the ground armed with paper notes, maps, live lidar mapping technology and Tom Ragusa’s compass. The group used what they had learned in the last ten years of mapping the Knox, simply what they have seen of the “Ye Trodden Path” and what it looks like. Similar in some places as a worn path strewn with boulders on each side that the “hatchet men” picked up and cleared from the “road” so that the artillery could make its way through the wilderness.

This year marks the “250th” known as

“Mass250” celebration as Massachusetts is the key state on celebrating the 250th anniversary of this country. Who was the man who lead this brave march of freedom? Henry Knox, a patriotic man. Born July 25, 1750, on Federal Street in Boston, he was the seventh of ten children. His father, William Knox, was a Scottish-Irish shipmaster, who later abandoned the family, forcing Henry to leave school at age nine to support his mother.

He worked for the Wharton & Bowes Book Co. of Cornhill, Boston, where he educated himself, learned French and developed a deep love for military literature and artillery.

He was known as a likable, well-mannered man, who was nonetheless capable of defending himself physically. He had a noticeable injury on his left hand, missing two smaller fingers from a hunting accident.

In 1771, he opened his own bookstore, which became a fashionable spot for high society. He courted Lucy Flucker, daughter of the Massachusetts Bay Royal Secretary Thomas Flucker, despite her father’s disapproval of his political stance. Henry Knox organized

the transport of over 60 tons of cannon and armaments including 58 artillery pieces from Fort Ticonderoga to Boston over roughly 300 miles. The journey used boats, horses, ox-drawn sledges and manpower across the frozen Berkshires and Hilltowns.

“From Blandford, the road descends the steep eastern side of the Berkshires over a series of drops known as “The Devil’s Staircase,” a dangerous path for his sleds and well justifying the employment of two span of oxen to control their movement.

Today’s visitor will follow Route 23 down to General Knox Road in Russell, then turn right over that to pass the Moses Boy Scout Reservation through which the original road passed beside Russell Pond, then down the successive levels to the plain on which the city of Westfield stands.” Ye Cohorn Caravan Browne 1975.

They followed his steps, sometimes bushwhacking through Monterey, Otis, Sandisfield, Blandford and now the final leg of Russell. To where the journey of documentation has just begun, surpassing all others before them solving this mystery.



Behind Tom Ragusa is a view of the mountains surrounding the Knox Trail path and the Westfield plain below. It is the same view General Knox have seen.

### Send Us Your Community Summer Events



**Turley Publications will print your Summer event FREE OF CHARGE in our Summer Fest Supplement which will be published June 3, 2026. Total circulation of 85,000 which reaches over 200,000 readers in the Pioneer Valley. Event Should Be Non-Profit & Open to the Public**

**FREE Calendar Listings Reaching over 200,000 Readers in the Pioneer Valley**

Event Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date/Time \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_

Description \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Cost \_\_\_\_\_

Contact name & phone number for more information \_\_\_\_\_

Please specify if you would like your name and number printed in the paper.

**MAIL YOUR LISTING INFORMATION TO: Turley Publications, Attn: Jamie Joslyn, 24 Water Street, Palmer, MA 01069 or email\* them to: jamie@turley.com \*Be sure to indicate “Summer Event” in the subject line of your email.**

**Deadline for Calendar submissions is May 6.**

Parents, Grandparents & Friends **SPECIAL!**

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*Love, Mom & Dad*

