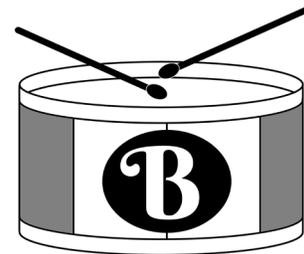


Becket Beat

Keeping neighbors connected

Vol. 3, No. 9 - October 2024



“A Murder of the Most Revolting Kind”

by Marilyn Fish



John Whalen

On a rainy day in October, 1891, A.B. Pomeroy was hunting with his dog, Jack, in a wooded area of Washington. Suddenly Jack ran toward a leaf-covered area and began digging frantically. When the hound pulled a man’s suspender out of the earth, Pomeroy, further noting the sickening odor of decomposing flesh, dashed to the telegraph office and wired authorities. Word spread quickly and reporters arrived at the scene along with a dozen villagers in time to witness Sheriff Crosby uncover a gruesome sight: the nude body of 30-year-old John Whalen of West Becket, nearly decapitated, with his skull brutally bashed in. His legs, having been crudely hacked off above the knees, were found on top of his body. The next day the Fall River Herald described in sensational detail the signs of “a murder of the most revolting kind.” The story was to be headline news for the next two years.



William Coy

When all the evidence was revealed, the public learned that Whalen, a single man, had boarded in Washington for the summer with 35-year-old William Coy, a co-worker on the Boston and Albany Railroad, and his pretty young wife

Frances Coy and her two sons. The Coys and Whalen occupied a ramshackle house near the tracks. Whalen was last seen with Coy at the Washington railroad station on August 29th at about 8 pm. According to Coy, he and Whalen had quit work at noon that day, taken the train to Pittsfield and Westfield, and visited several saloons. After returning together to Washington at about 8 pm, Whalen staggered off to the Coy house while Coy returned to Pittsfield for a few hours. During their day of drinking, Whalen had confessed that he had been intimate with Coy’s wife. He also admitted that they planned to meet in Albany and elope to Kansas. Meanwhile, Frances Coy had left home the day before, telling her husband that she was going to visit relatives.

Later that same evening, Coy returned home from Pittsfield in a drunken rage and hit a sleeping Whalen over the head with the butt of an axe, slitting his throat for good measure. He took Whalen’s valuables and attempted to carry his body to a wagon for disposal. Finding the corpse too heavy, he hacked off the legs and carried them separately to the burial site.

Three days later Coy intercepted his wife in Albany and brought her home. Alarmed by the blood-spattered walls, mattress, and rug, she refused to stay. The couple lodged briefly in the home of a neighbor and then relocated to Westfield. Not long after, a bloody coat was found in the nearby woods. This alerted

Whalen’s brother who then inspected Coy’s house, observed the bloody scene, and notified police that he suspected Coy of murder. Just one day before the discovery of Whalen’s body, Detective Pease apprehended Coy in Westfield, found him in possession of Whalen’s gold watch and \$150, and arrested him. Mr. Coy insisted that Whalen had given him the items as an appeasement for his affair with Mrs. Coy. He later admitted to the murder but claimed that it was in self-defense during a violent quarrel.



Frances Coy



Coy's House in Washington

Continued on page 2

Becket Hosts Legislative Update

by Marcia Parnell

About 40 Becket residents attended a legislative update by State Senator Paul Mark and outgoing 3rd District State Representative Smitty Pignatelli on Monday, September 9th at Town Hall. The event was also an opportunity to thank Pignatelli – known throughout Berkshire County as simply “Smitty” – for his 23 years of elected service. The two legislators took questions from the audience and Smitty spoke about his thoughts on what’s still needed to ensure a growing and thriving Berkshire economy well into the future.

Some highlights:

- The \$57.8 billion FY 2025 balanced budget was signed into law by the Governor on July 27, 2024, and includes investment in education, infrastructure and housing. Smitty explained that over the last several years the State enjoyed a period in which revenues exceeded expenses. But increased costs means thinking will have to switch from “nice to have” to “need to have” going forward.
- Both Mark and Pignatelli believe the five members of the Berkshire delegation work well together in building support in the legislature for funding that matters to the Berkshires. Getting attention paid to issues outside of Boston can be difficult, Mark explained, but because Governor Healey is not from Boston, she tends to consider ways to have an economic impact throughout the State, which helps.
- Housing affordability is a problem throughout the county. Smitty would like to see more subsidies for first-time home buyers and believes new housing projects should be developed on a town-by-town basis based on what makes sense for each community. He pointed to Lenox’s approval of the 63-unit Brushwood Farm project as a good example. He stressed that towns need to cover the upfront project costs (e.g., permitting, engineering) because the question posed by the State will not be “what do you need” but rather “when can you start?”
- Uninterrupted cell service and universal broadband are must-haves to keep and attract young workers and new residents who will be our next generation to grow a vibrant economy.
- Road costs have grown astronomically. The legislature’s Rural Roadway Funding Program, established last year, continues with an additional \$45 million in FY 2025 Chapter 90 funds available for towns like Becket that qualify based on a formula that captures their “rurality” (i.e., a population of less than 10,000 and population density under 500 people per square mile).

- In response to one resident’s question about why energy costs continue to increase, Smitty shared the frustration that utility deregulation hasn’t worked because utilities never pass through savings to their customers. He would prefer to see more subsidies that shorten the payback for alternative energy projects like solar, making them more attractive to homeowners and putting the savings back in their pockets.
- Public transportation, according to Smitty, has failed to serve the needs of the community. Running large buses up and down the Route 7 corridor doesn’t work because people without a car can’t get to the bus stops. The Berkshire Regional Transit Authority (BRTA) needs to think more creatively about how to move more people to more locations, perhaps by using a larger number of smaller buses. Towns contribute to BRTA’s budget and Smitty doesn’t believe they’re getting their money’s worth.

Let us know how we are doing and what we can do to become even better at being your source of news in and about Becket.



Paul Mark and Smitty Pignatelli at Becket Town Hall

A Murder, continued from page 1

Coy’s trial began on March 21, 1892. Five days later a jury found him guilty of first-degree murder and sentenced him to death by hanging. Despite two stays of execution and his lawyers’ strenuous efforts, the sentence remained unchanged. Coy believed that he would somehow escape punishment but was executed on March 3, 1893 at the Berkshire County Jail in Pittsfield in front of 300 spectators. According to news accounts, he behaved stoically while on the scaffold. His last words, directed to his former prison guard, were “good bye.” This was to be the last execution to take place in Berkshire County.

Sources: Genealogical records and contemporary accounts in newspapers including The Pittsfield Sun, The Berkshire Eagle, The Fall River Herald, and The Boston Globe.

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Community Calendar October 2024

Full listing & details: www.BecketBeat.org/Community-Calendar

see page 5
for more >>



BECKET ARTS CENTER

Tuesday, October 1: Plein Air in Becket / 10am-1pm / \$10 (free for BAC & Guild of Berkshire Artist members)

Thursdays, October 3, 10, 17, 24, 31: Yoga with Rima Sala / 9:30-10:30am / \$10 (discount for BAC members)

Friday, October 4: *Ghosts of the Berkshires* author Robert Oakes / 7:30-8:30pm / \$15 (\$10 for BAC members)

Monday, October 7: Monthly Writing Group with Jim Petosa / 7-9pm / \$5 (free for BAC members)

Tuesdays, October 8, 15, 22, 29: Intermediate Improvisation with Ken Cheeseman & Paula Langton / 7-9pm / \$45 (discount for BAC members)

Thursday, October 10: Speaker Series, "I Remember Better When I Paint" / 5-7pm / \$5 (free for BAC members)

Saturday, October 12: Wanda Houston Band / 5-7pm / Free (donations appreciated)

Sunday, October 13: "Nature is Wild" - Closing Reception / 2-4pm / Free

Saturday, October 19: Rocky Horror Picture Show Film & Fun / 7-10pm / Ages 21+ (donations appreciated)

BECKET ATHENAEUM

Tuesdays: Baby & Toddler Playgroup / 10-11am / Free

Tuesday, October 1: Book Club: The Midnight Library by Matt Haig / 1:30pm / Free

Saturdays: Storytime with Stay & Play / 10:30am-12:30pm / Free / Stay after Storytime for snacks and a chance for kids to play and caregivers to connect with each other!

Saturday, October 5: Homesteading 101 with Taz Ramos Dos Santos / 3-7pm / Free / offsite / Registration required

Monday, October 7: Ways to Have a Green Holiday Season for Families / 7-8pm / Free / Zoom

Saturday, October 12: Movie Night for Adults / 6:30-9:30pm, movie starts at 7pm / Free

Monday, October 14: Cookbook Club: The Complete Autumn & Winter Cookbook by America's Test Kitchen / 6-7:30pm / Free

Thursday, October 17: Game Night / 6-8pm / Free

Thursday, October 24: A History of Shipwrecks / 1-2pm / Free / Zoom

Monday, October 28: Even More Haunted Lighthouses of New England / 7-8pm / Free / Zoom

Wednesday, November 6: Pick Up the Pen with Lara Tupper / 6pm / Free / Registration required

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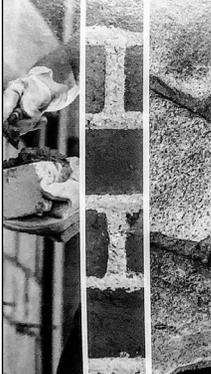
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Community Calendar October 2024

see page 4
<< for more



Full listing & details: www.BecketBeat.org/Community-Calendar

TOWN GOVERNMENT

- Wednesday, October 2:** Board of Health / 5pm
- Wednesday, October 2:** Select Board / 6:30pm
- Saturday, October 5:** Energy Committee Turbine Follow Up Meeting / 10am
- Tuesday, October 8:** Finance Committee / 5pm
- Tuesday, October 8:** Historical Commission / 7pm
- Wednesday, October 9:** Planning Board / 6pm
- Wednesday, October 16:** Bylaw Review Comm. / 10am
- Wednesday, October 16:** Select Board / 7pm
- Tuesday, October 22:** Conservation Comm / 6pm

For more on live and local music events, visit:
www.route8pub.com
www.facebook.com/PapaBobsentertainmenthall
www.thedreamawaylodge.com/events

Becket Energy Committee Notice:

The Becket Energy Committee has scheduled a follow up meeting to discuss the development and installation of a commercial small scale wind turbine to be located adjacent to the Town Hall and which will more than offset the Town Hall's electricity demand with clean, carbon free electricity.

The Committee will be presenting an update of the project to any and all interested Becket residents on **Saturday, October 5, starting at 10am at Becket Town Hall.**

CHP's Mobile Health Unit offers wellness visits, chronic disease management, sick visits, and vaccines throughout Berkshire County.

For an appointment or the Mobile Health Unit schedule, call 413.528.0457 or visit chpberkshires.org/mobile.



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COMMUNITY EVENTS

- Tuesdays & Thursdays, October 1, 3, 8, 11, 15, 17, 22, 24, 29, 31:** Council on Aging Lunch & Bingo / Becket Town Hall / 11am-2pm / \$3 for lunch
- Tuesdays, October 1, 8, 15, 22, 29:** Yoga for Seniors w/ Rima Sala / Washington Town Hall / 9am / Free
- Wednesdays, October 2, 9, 16, 23:** Yoga / Becket Town Hall / 9am / \$3
- Friday, October 4:** Free Pasta Dinner / Becket Federated Church / 5-7pm / Free
- Fridays, October 4, 11, 18:** Berkshire Mobile Farmers Market / Town Hall Pavilion / 3:30-6pm
- Saturdays, October 4, 18:** Food Pantry / Becket Federated Church / 9-11am
- Mondays, October 7, 14, 21, 28:** Chair Yoga for Seniors / Washington Town Hall / 11am / Free
- Saturday, October 26:** All You Can Eat Breakfast / Becket Federated Church / 8-10:30am / \$8
- Saturday, October 26:** HUGE Tag & Estate Sale / Becket Federated Church / 3391 Main St. / 9am-2pm

Becket Town Hall Vaccine Clinics
Thursday, October 3: 10am-12pm
Wednesday, October 16: 4-6pm
Scan QR code to pre-register





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Crispina ffrench: Getting It Together in Becket

by Marilyn Fish



Crispina ffrench in her studio. Photo credit: Malcolm Brown

Local Textilist, Crispina ffrench, is a woman of wide-ranging passions – passions that over time she has woven into a seamless fabric of family, art, education, and social responsibility. Now aged 58, she clocked many years as a textile recycling entrepreneur before discovering that contentment lay not in fame and fortune, but in merging her personal values with her work.

Crispina was born in Ireland, one of three daughters of John ffrench, an Irish ceramist, and Primm Turner ffrench, an American painter. Her parents moved the family to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, in 1969, in search of better educational opportunities for their girls. John and Primm had already landed jobs at Monument Mountain High School and once here they also produced art at home and became active members of the community. By 1970, they founded the Dolphin Studio, familiar to all who have seen their bold screen-printed calendars around the Berkshires. Growing up, Crispina enjoyed and embraced her family's interests and ethos.

Her earliest upcycling success was her Ragamuffin collection – adorably quirky dolls made from felted wool that sold so well they paid her art school tuition and led her to bigger but not necessarily better places. At age 22 she ran a commercial recycling business that employed a crew of 40 and consumed all of her time and energy. But after a number of years, feeling disconnected from her core values, she decided to change course. Now she strives to inspire environmental

stewardship as a self-employed individual by collecting used clothing, preparing it for reuse by washing and cutting it, and recombining pieces to create unique items such as blankets, potholder rugs, and clothing.

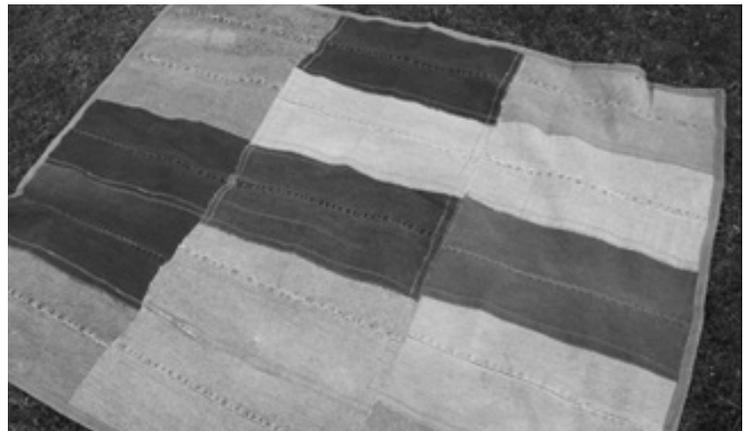
After a few years in Great Barrington and Pittsfield, Crispina and her husband, Becket Selectman Christopher Swindlehurst, moved to his childhood home in Becket with their daughters, Lucy and Violet. Crispina says that Becket is the ideal location for her life and business. "It's beautiful, it's safe, the elementary school is first-rate, and the people are wonderful," she tells us. "And I love my commute... just a few yards from our current home down a dirt road...." The former Swindlehurst home is now the art studio where Crispina gives equal time to Dolphin Studio projects (along with several family members) and textile designs.

Her favorite current project is Stitcherhood, a free online community that grew out of her pandemic zoom sewing circle. She describes it as "a hub for textile waste alchemists – individuals who have a passion for repurposing old clothes, fabric scraps, and discarded textiles into innovative and sustainable solutions." Stitcherhood's following has reached more than 2,000 sewing enthusiasts. Crispina's aim is to teach them to artfully and responsibly upcycle materials that would otherwise add to overflowing landfills. Reflecting on her current work, Crispina recognizes, "my life's passions are meshing now. In more than one way, I feel I've come home."

Dedicated to Crispina's family, including her son Ben Paley (1992-2019), whose spirit continues to inspire her.



Two Ragamuffins. Courtesy of Crispina ffrench



Blanket made from recycled jeans. Courtesy of Crispina ffrench.

Keystone Arch Bridges Trail

by Jeanine McAdam

On a sunny afternoon in late August my husband and I, along with our sweet dog Desi, took a hike at the historic Keystone Arch Bridges Trail (KAB trail) located in the Massachusetts Walnut Hill Wildlife Management Area along the Westfield River. The parking area is accessed from Herbert Cross Rd, off Middlefield Rd. in Chester. Note: we couldn't find an exact street address but Google Maps brought us to the correct location. There is an upper and lower parking area, so if the top is full, drive down the dirt road to the lower lot by the trail entrance.

The KAB trail takes you to the first series of stone arch railroad bridges built in America. These stone arch bridges were among the first built without steel or mortar in the United States between 1833-1840. The trail also takes you along the first National Wild & Scenic River and the longest stretch of free-flowing river in MA.

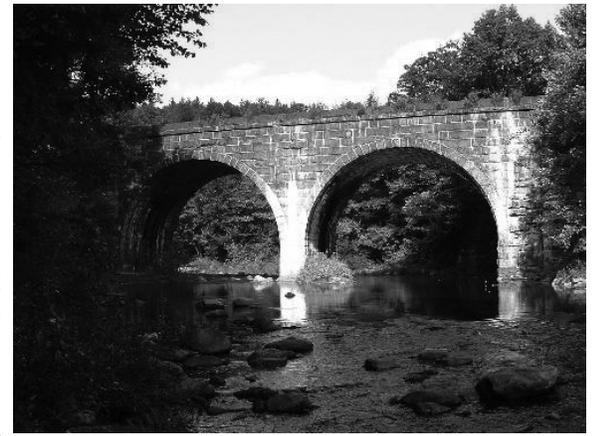


Photo from [KeystoneArches.com](https://www.keystonearches.com)

If you are planning to visit all three arches (you will take some side trails to get you closer to the river), the hike is close to five miles. To start, after leaving the parking lot, go to the left and there is a trail which brings you down to an area along the river and below the 45-ft-high double arch bridge which is still used by rail trains today.

After viewing the double arch bridge, return to the parking area and get on the KAB trail which will bring you to the other two arches. At the start, you cross a bridge (Note: It's webbed so you'll need to pick up your dog). Cross another smaller bridge and follow the trail above the river eventually bearing to the right. You are still on the KAB trail but rather than being a narrow, dirt road it turns into a hiking trail.

Eventually you come to a T in the trail. To the right is the 70 foot stone arch. To the left is the 65 foot arch. When arriving at both arches you are on top of the bridge so you can't actually see the arches. At the 70 foot arch we crossed over the bridge and found a very steep trail to the left. We shuffled down the trail holding on to trees, roots and rocks. At the bottom one can look up at the bridge and see the stonemasons' workmanship from over one hundred fifty years ago - definitely the highlight of the hike. To return, follow the KAB back the way you came. Enjoy this beautiful in and out hike and don't forget to bring water and treats for the dog!

Sources: *Keystone Arch Bridges* (<https://www.keystonearches.com/>); *Chester Railway Station & Museum* (<https://www.chesterrailwaystation.net/>)

Sad News from the Becket Police Department



K9-Kain. Courtesy of the Becket PD

It was with a heavy heart that the Becket Police Department announces the passing of K-9 Kain. K-9 Kain has proudly and enthusiastically served as a member of the Becket Police Department since August of 2018. Born in Hungary on 8/28/2017, K-9 Kain was a dual-purpose police canine. He was certified by the North American Police Work Dog Association, a nationally recognized certification that he successfully renewed annually at a weeklong training conference. He was certified as a narcotics detection and patrol utility canine. This training and certification gave K-9 Kain the ability to locate missing parties, and individuals who fled from police after committing crimes. Additionally, he was trained to detect illicit narcotics in vehicles, buildings, and luggage. During K-9 Kain's career he has been an enormous asset to the Town of Becket and to Berkshire County as a whole. K-9 Kain has been deployed in over ten different communities in the county. He has assisted with the locating of several suspects, the locating of missing persons, individuals struggling with mental health, building searches, and narcotics detection in vehicles, buildings, and schools. In addition, K-9 Kain has participated in numerous canine demonstrations at schools, DARE programs and various community events. He truly was an integral member of our community and will be deeply missed. K-9 Kain's partner, Sergeant Hunt, and the Becket Police Department wish to extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to our community for its unparalleled support through this difficult time.

Due to the overwhelming support from the community, the Town of Becket has established a donation account to ensure the future of the Becket Police Department K-9 Unit. All funds will be used exclusively for expenses in conjunction with purchasing, outfitting, caring for, and the training of a dedicated Police K-9. Checks can be mailed or dropped off to the Becket Police Department at 557 Main Street, Becket, MA 01223. Please make checks payable to: "Kain's Legacy K-9 Fund c/o Becket Police Department."

Reminder to Vote in the Upcoming Election

Offices on the ballot: President, U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, Governor's Councillor, State Senator, State Representative, Register of Deeds, Clerk of Courts

Last day to register to vote at Town Hall: **Saturday, Oct. 26**

Last day to request a mail-ballot at Town Hall: **Tuesday, Oct. 29**

Early voting at Town Hall from 9am-5pm: **Saturday, Oct. 19** and **Saturday Oct. 26**

(Note: registration must be in person at Town Hall and there are no office hours scheduled for Oct. 20 or 27)

In-person voting at Town Hall with polls open from 7am-8pm: **Tuesday, Nov. 5**

Becket Cultural Council Grants Due by Oct. 16

Information and application at:
www.townofbecket.org/becket-cultural-council



Ordination of Linda Shaw & Kathleen Vsetecka on Sun., Sept. 8, 2024 at the Becket Federated Church (3381 Main Street)

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BECKET WASHINGTON COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP (BWCP) NEWS

Becket Arts Center - Improv, Writing, Music, Talks & Spooky Fun

There's lots to love at the BAC this October, whether you are a practitioner or patron of the arts. For creatives: Jim Petosa kicks off the first of a monthly Monday writers group on October 7, while Ken Cheeseman and Paula Langton offer a weekly Intermediate Improv class on Tuesdays. *Ghosts of the Berkshires* author Robert Oakes regales us with spooky stories and happenings on October 4, and we'll be doing the "Time Warp" on October 19 at a *Rocky Horror Picture Show* Film & Fun (21+, costumes encouraged!).

Plus, don't miss our Speaker Series "I Remember Better When I Paint" on October 10, and the Wanda Houston Band on October 12. Check our website for up-to-date news and events.



Becket Athenaeum Virtual & In Person Events

On October 5, visit the local homestead of Taz Ramos Dos Santos who you might know from the History Channel's *Alone* series. Get hands-on experience working with chickens and donkeys and discuss how these skills connect to the world of *The Bear* by Andrew Krivak – this year's Big Read title.

We are also presenting a variety of virtual programs in conjunction with other MA libraries this month. Learn about ways to create eco-conscious holiday traditions (10/7), hear from a retired U.S. Coast Guard Captain about shipwrecks and the evolution of response resources (10/24), and get spooky with haunted lighthouses (10/28).



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