

Blandford Historical Commission Meeting Minutes August 16, 2023

Present:

Katy Milford, Ryan Stafford, Nicole Daviau, Linda Barnard

7:02 BHC Meeting opened

Minutes from 07/19/2023 - Approved

New Date Meeting approved - 3rd. Wed of each month @ 6:30

Shepard Farm -

08/07/2023 the BHC shared with the Blandford Board of Selectmen the following information, see memo attached. The BHC will be stepping away from the Shepard Farm buildings as an historical building, two experts have stated the historical value is limited to minimal items, due to numerous changes to the original building.

The Blandford Fair were at the same BOS meeting and shared they are willing to remove the back barn and reconstruct at the Blandford Fair in the Shepard name. The Fair is willing to do this in leu of payment by demolishing the old barn and putting it into a dumpster the town would provide. The BOS asked when this would happen and the Fair stated in the Spring of 2024.

The BOS were very happy with the outcome of the two boards working together.

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission - Shannon Walsh submitted Blandford Town Center Inventory to MASS Historical Commission. This report did not meet some of their requirements - Shannon will continue working on this, BHC will support her efforts as needed.

The board agreed to work with Shannon on next inventory suggestions from previous suggested list, Farm Homes & Nye Homes

Town Common Project - No recent action

Watson park - Need to encourage marking of boundaries, need to see RFP for gazebo repair.

7:49 BHC Meeting closed

MEMO TO: Blandford Board of Selectmen
FROM: Blandford Historical Commission
DATE: July, 2023
RE: The buildings at Shepard Farm

Our board has completed its recent re-inspection of the house on the Shepard Farm property with two experts recommended by Shannon Walsh, historic preservationist at Pioneer Valley Planning Commission who continues to work closely with us.

In follow-up to his initial viewing of the house some years ago, historian Dennis Picard, former director of Storrowton Village Museum, returned to look at the building more closely. And Eric Gradoia, an architectural historian formerly of Historic Deerfield Village & Museum and the Massachusetts Historical Commission who currently serves with an architectural firm specializing in historic preservation, also conducted a site visit for the purpose of identifying significant historic value within the house.

The farmhouse has been documented on an inventory form entered into the Massachusetts Historical Commission's registry. According to the experts, this is an important process to record and preserve the information. Ultimately though, the overall opinion on the building by these historians determined that due to alterations to the house over time, the structure no longer holds prominent historic value as a whole.

However, some individual historic aspects remain from the building. In order to protect and conserve those, our board is collecting samples of items that were indicated by the experts to be examples illustrating earlier building features. This will allow us to save these historic pieces for display and educational purposes.

We plan to have most of these items housed at the historic Blandford Fairgrounds in the Agricultural Hall since the Fair directors have expressed interest in exhibiting and storing them. Plus, that would bring these articles to the center of town. That location will also highlight and honor the Shepard family's long involvement with the Blandford Fair.

Some of these materials could also be displayed at the Historical Society building's museum and perhaps at the historic back barn at Watson Park if it becomes a museum of early Blandford agrarian objects—this time making the link between the Shepard family and their agricultural work in town over generations.

Depending on future plans for the Shepard Farm property, if there is interest in using/displaying in a protected space some of the larger portions of the building such as posts, beams, rafters, etc. in a possible educational gathering spot, such repurposing of these materials would be possible, as well.

As for the barn, the Blandford Fair personnel are willing to undertake the demolition of the front portion of the structure in lieu of payment for removing the back portion which they would place at the fairgrounds as part of their restoration efforts to preserve that historic site. This would again reinforce the Shepard family connection to the Fair.

Hopefully, the Shepard Farm property itself and any plans for using/highlighting the environmental setting and varied features of the landscape will help emphasize and bring focus to the value of that location to Blandford's past.

Likewise, with all the attention our board has given to the farm over the years in working, where possible, toward the general historic preservation charge by the state for municipalities, we believe archiving several key items with noteworthy characteristics from the farmhouse is important.

This will not only respect the efforts provided by past and present Historical Commission members who have volunteered their time and expertise for the town, but it will also recognize the contributions of multiple generations of the Shepard family and their significant impact on Blandford's agrarian history and culture.