Dave Matthews Tribute Band on tap. Page 1a

The Conway Daily Sun

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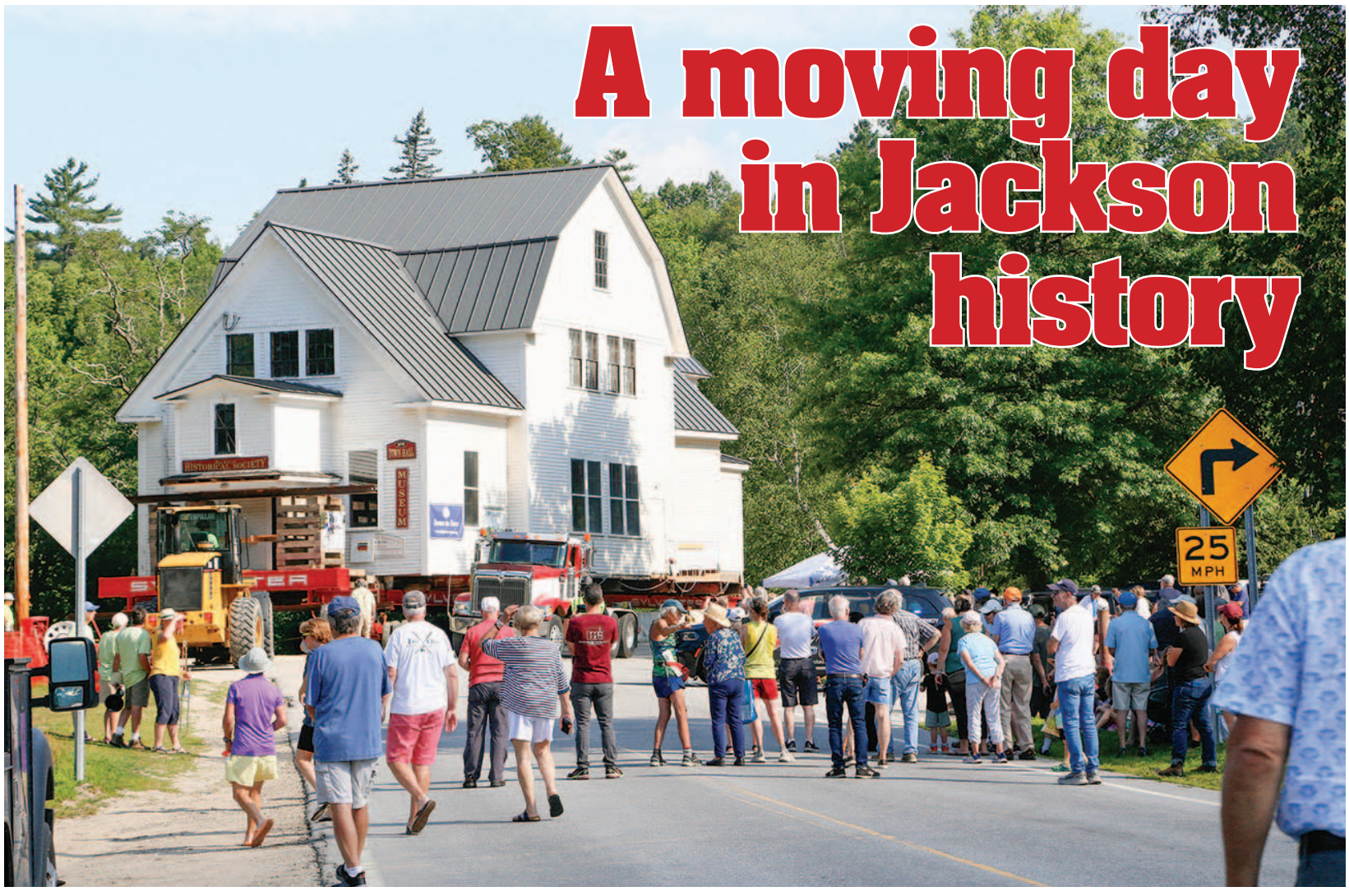
A moving day in Jackson history



Jackson's old town hall took the final 150-foot journey to its forever home on Tuesday, with up to 300 people watching. See story, page 2. (RACHEL SHARPLES PHOTO)

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Old Jackson Town Hall gets its forever home

By Tom Eastman
THE CONWAY DAILY SUN

JACKSON — Three hours. That's how long it took to move an important piece of 19th-century history 150 feet Tuesday morning in Jackson, inch by inch.

On a scorcher of a summer day with temperatures in the 90s, 250-300 people of all ages came out with beach chairs and summer hats to watch history on the move as an eight-man crew from Gary Sylvester's Building Movers and Excavators of Falmouth, Mass., brought the Jackson Town Hall to its new site about 200 feet closer to the village center.

The building was moved down the hill on Black Mountain Road to protect it from the Wildcat River, which threatened its foundation when it flooded twice in recent years.

During the day, which had all the trappings, including music and police presence, of a grand public event, the crowd cheered and clapped, and pulled out their phones to take photos and videos as the building slowly reached its destination.

Former Bartlett Police Chief Hadley Champlin played a celebratory tune on trombone at the start and nearly three hours later, Jackson Police Chief Chris Perley let out a blast on his siren as the building was gently set down on cribs placed in a dug hole that will house a new foundation.

In addition to the Sun, a reporter from New Hampshire Public Radio was on hand to cover the historic scene.

Bottles of water, brownies and popcorn were handed out by JHS volunteers to try and keep everyone hydrated and satiated as they watched history in the making.

"It went about as well as well as I could have hoped for," said Gary Sylvester, who learned his craft from his father on Cape Cod and who with his son and sons-in-law has continued the family business of moving large historic buildings throughout New England.

Those moves included the June 2009 relocation of the former SAU 9 office building from Pine Street in North Conway to its current location across from the Eastern Slope Inn on North Conway's Main Street and which is now home to Designed Gardens.

A truck from Gary Sylvester's Building Movers and Excavators functions as the brakes for the old Jackson Town Hall on moving day for the historical society's building on Tuesday. The building was moved to keep it safe from Wildcat River surge. (RACHEL SHARPLES PHOTO)

Asked about the adage that if done properly, one ought to be able to move a building without spilling a glass of water on a table inside the moving structure, Sylvester replied, "Yes, that's true. And we did just that — slow and steady."

Sylvester wore one of the official green T-shirts that identified key members of the operation.

The shirts were also sold for $20 at a table set up across from the new site. They show a sketch of the town hall on wheels being pulled and the words, "Jackson, N.H. Jackson Historical Society. Moving History Forward."

Sylvester's wife, Kim, was among those watching the building on its red "Sylvester" equipment make the journey to its forever home. She said they have a second home in Center Conway and that three generations of the family were involved in Tuesday's relocation project.

The move began at 9:08 a.m., with the graceful, white circa 1879 structure pulled by a hydraulic winch on a front-end loader as a large tractor-trailer served as a brake on the back end.

If anyone was hoping to come and see a train

see **MOVE** page 3

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Jackson Historical Society board members (from left) Jackie Connors, Dawson Winch, Stephen Weeder, Martha Miller, Leslie Schomaker, Huntley Allan, Anne Pillion, Anne Frost and Wendy McVey stand near the side of the old Jackson Town Hall, resting on cribbing over the new foundation, on Tuesday. (RACHEL SHARPLES PHOTO)

MOVE from page 2

wreck, they left disappointed (as well as, probably, sunburned — there was very little shade out there on the lawn). Although exceedingly slow and at times about as exciting as watching grass grow, the move was accomplished steadily and smoothly with lots of nervous tension (pun intended) and a lot of community spirit but very little drama.

That was a relief to the members of the Jackson Historical Society, which since 2009 has leased the building from the town and which is conducting a $1 million fundraising campaign to pay for the relocation to the site, which is further away from the swiftly flowing river.

"It was quite a party — it was a great turnout, and great to see everyone there," said Leslie Schomaker, president of the historical society, in a followup interview.

"We're pleased it went so smoothly and that everyone turned out to see 'history on the move.' So, that's done — but we've still have a lot to do," she said.

General contractor Stephen Weeder

see **MOVE** page 4

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MOVE from page 3

of Tamarack Construction of Jackson (and VP of the historical society) shared Schomaker's overview — including the part about the work left to do in the months ahead.

He and his brother Michael have worked on several other history projects in town, including the 2009 reassembly of the former Trickey Barn that once stood where the Whitney Community Center now is. Today, the barn serves as home to the Jackson Public Library around Route 16B next to town offices.

"Gary Sylvester, as it turns out, almost seemed like he knew exactly what he was doing!" joked Weeder, noting he has not been sleeping well — but it all turned out to go fine, he said.

"The building's bones are strong," he continued, adding, "We've had to do some sill work (the first framing part of the building that sits on the foundation) and will need to do some more, but overall, the building is very solid."

According to Weeder, Sylvester's crew returned to the site Wednesday — another hot day.

"Gary is in process of removing the dollies today (Wednesday), which the building rode on Tuesday," explained Weeder. "He is transferring the building onto new cribbing under the main beams. Next, after the foundation is poured by Hoyt Construction's crews next week, Gary will lower the building onto the new foundation by using hydraulic jacks and then he will remove the cribbing, step-by-step, using those jacks. Once it sits on the foundation, that will allow him to remove the steel from underneath."

Building mover Gary Sylvester and wife, Kim, are seen mid-move with granddaughter Francesca. "It went about as well as well as I could have hoped for," said Gary. (RACHEL SHARPLES PHOTO)

Some structural work will also be done on the basement with new support beams.

"Once it sits on the foundation, that will allow him to remove the steel from underneath," said Weeder.

According to Schomaker (who has spearheaded the project along with past executive director Anne Pillion), the workers will take granite slabs from the old foundation, cutting them to fit to be placed on the exterior of the new concrete foundation to give the building an aesthetic look of historical continuity at its new location.

Also to be installed: a septic system for an ADA-accessible bathroom. And Harold Gilmore Construction, which did the initial site work, will return to backfill the foundation. Landscaping will begin this fall and should be completed in spring 2026.

Tuesday morning's move followed an initial 50-foot partial move July 10. That was as far as they could get until the final set of overhead utility wires could be moved.

According to Weeder, the initial work went smoothly, starting in June — except they discovered many boulders under the building, and all had to be moved out. Working between the Wildcat River and narrow, curving Route 16-B also made it a challenging move, according to Sylvester.

The utility wires had to be relocated before the building could be moved. The fiber optic cables required hand-splicing around 2,000 wires. The utilities involved include N.H. Electric Cooperative, Consolidated Electric/Fidium and Spectrum. The wires were buried as part of the relocation project.

With those final wires gone, the path was cleared for Tuesday's final 150-foot move to the new site, where a hole had been dug by Harold Gilmore Construction earlier this summer and footings for a new foundation poured by Hoyt Construction, both of North Conway.

see **MOVE** page 5

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MOVE from page 4

Jackson police closed off Route 16-B for crowd safety. Providing Americana roots music under a tent were The Della Valla Trio (comprised of Jackson siblings — Molly, 18, on guitar; Joseph, 17, banjo, and John, 13, on fiddle).

Also off to one shady side of the Jackson Grammar School were historical exhibits on tools used since the Egyptian days about how to move buildings, with local mason Michael Callis of Conway and Conway Public Library Henney History Room curator Bob Cottrell of Freedom on hand to provide educational background about oxen pulling buildings and the like. (For more, go to Cottrell's blog, mwvhistory.blogspot.com/2025/07/history-on-move.html).

But back to the future (and present) of the old Jackson Town Hall. Sylvester's crew determined that the structure weighs 105 tons. (The JHS had conducted a "guess the weight of the town hall" contest, with former board member Linda Little and crew member Nick Royer of Conway coming closest).

To obtain that figure, Weeder said Sylvester and his crew used a mechanism that connected to their hydraulic jacks that determines the resistance that is then calculated to give the correct weight. "It was lighter than I expected," Sylvester told the Sun Tuesday after lunch, when the crew returned to the site.

Pillion, of the JHS board, had initially raised the topic of moving the building, and Schomaker and Weeder joined on. They enlisted fellow board members' support as well as selectmen, as they needed the board's OK since the town owns the building.

The property involves three parcels of land, all owned by the town. Selectmen voted to allow the JHS to move the building, though not specifying where.

Schomaker said: "Our first thought was to move it up the hill; however, there was not sufficient distance between the river and road. Landscape architects Nick Aceto and Cristina Campa determined the new location. There was a very small envelope where the building had sufficient setbacks from the river, road and power lines."

Jackson Historical Society President Leslie Schomaker (center) cheers as the old Jackson Town Hall reaches its new home, with fellow board member Wendy McVey, on moving day for the historical society's building on Tuesday. (RACHEL SHARPLES PHOTO)

Built in 1879 and enlarged in 1900, the building served as Jackson's town hall until 2000. It has been leased annually for $100 by the Jackson Historical Society since 2009.

The group spent $250,000 on renovations when they first began the lease, spearheaded by Schomaker's late husband, community visionary Warren Schomaker, who led several community betterment projects in Jackson, including preserving the Trickey Barn after it was dismantled to make way for the Whitney Community Center in 2009, with

see **MOVE** page 6

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MOVE from page 5

Tamarack Construction reassembling it as the town's library.

In March, townspeople raised and appropriated $100,000 at town meeting for the town hall moving project. Although selectmen did not support the article by a 2-1 vote, with only Bob Thompson in favor, they expressed backing for the project's goals.

Thompson was at Tuesday's event, calling it a "great day for Jackson and a move that helps to create more of a campus feeling for the town."

Also in attendance was fellow Selectman Frank DiFruscio, who said that although he and chair Barbara Campbell did not vote in favor of the petitioned warrant article's funding request, citing other pressing project costs such as the new fire station that was also on the ballot, he and Campbell did support the JHS and their project. "As I said at the meeting, passing this article will not be a mistake," said DiFruscio.

Warren Schomaker

Campbell was on vacation but told the Sun: "I think it's great that a 19th century building has found a new home in the 21st century.

Warren Schomaker died last February, just a month after townspeople joined him in celebrating the milestone of his 100th birthday there at the museum. Poignantly, Leslie Schomaker noted that she has interred his ashes in what will be the new foundation once it's poured under the old building at its new location.

Late Bartlett Historical Society leader and JHS member Norman Head's ashes also are being buried there, she said. Head's widow, Kathleen Sullivan Head, was among those at Tuesday's relocation effort, recording it all on her cellphone.

"So, Warren and Norman will always be part of the building," Leslie Schomaker shared.

The old town hall, in addition to serving as home base for the Jackson Historical Society, also houses the White Mountain School of Art Museum started by Warren Schomaker. It is home to the giant White Mountain School of Art painting, "Autumn in the White Mountains." Measuring a whopping measuring 78 by 135 inches, the work commissioned by Warren and painted in 2019 by local talented artist Erik Koppel.

Meanwhile Leslie Schomaker continues to drum up support for the capital campaign for the old town hall relocation project, due to some unanticipated costs. Grants include $225,000 from the state Land

see **MOVE** page 7

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Pulled by a winch (not pictured), the old Jackson Town Hall inches closer Tuesday to cribbing that will serve as its temporary resting place until the foundation is completed. The move took three hours, but lots of prep work remains over the coming months. (RACHEL SHARPLES PHOTO)

MOVE from page 6

and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP); $40,000 from the Ham Charitable Foundation; $10,000 for painting from the N.H. Preservation Alliance and $10,000 for window restoration from the Dorothy and Robert Goldberg Foundation.

Other donations have ranged from $25 to over $100,000.

"Donations are from all over the valley and beyond. Others donated due their interest in White Mountain art," she said.

Other members of the JHS board include: Martha Miller, secretary; Jackie Connors, webmaster; and members Huntley Allan, Anne Frost, Wendy McVey, Dave Moran, Dan Noren, historian/author Alice Pepper, who watched the proceedings Tuesday with fellow longtime resident Alice Proctor; Dawson Winch; and historical curator Cottrell.

To learn more, go to jacksonhistory.org. Checks may be made to Jackson Historical Society Town Hall Relocation, P.O. Box 8, Jackson, NH 03846.

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