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Mission statement of Spring Hill Farm: to preserve and promote the legacy of Muriel Church through the continuance of agricultural operations and the stewardship of both open land and forests, while providing educational and recreational opportunities to the public.

Issue
NINE

Spring Hill Farm –FALL 2023

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International Harvester Model IH464

Judy Blomquist

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An
Issue!**

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Wetlands at SHF

As the seasons change, so do the appearances and the activities of the wetlands.

Spring Hill Farm is fortunate to have wetlands, unique natural gifts that enhance its ecosystem. An immense variety of species of microbes, plants, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, fish and mammals abound in wetland habitats. Wetlands dissipate stream energy by slowing the release of stored water, filter contaminants and sediment, provide wildlife habitat and store water and nitrogen. Their plants and soil also store carbon preventing its release into the atmosphere as CO₂.



SHF FUN FACT:

In the book *IN THOSE DAYS The Life and Times of Muriel Church* as told to Ronald Baptiste, Muriel talked of haying the many acres she owned. The fields were cut using horses and the hay was not baled. The loose hay was brought by wagon to the barn and loaded into the lofts. "So that we probably were putting in 60 to 75 tons up in the barn, maybe more. It packed it in so hard, that we had to use a hay saw oftentimes to get it out of the barn." Muriel did the haying along with one or two men who helped, as well.

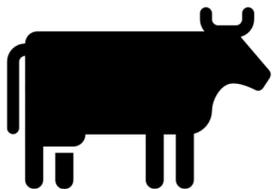


Signs of the season

On the Horizon

Mark your Calendars...

Annual
Winter Festival
Date TBD.... In Feb



The names "autumn" and "fall" are both used to describe the season following summer. AUTUMN is thought to be slightly older, appearing in the 1300s. The word FALL first appeared around the 1500s in reference to the leaves falling off trees. An even earlier name for the season was HARVEST.

The weather just went from 90 to 55, like it saw a state trooper.

--- Unknown



Chickens are helping out at the farm

The Farmer's Porch - News from Geary Farms

Have you seen the chickens moving along the hay field at Spring Hill Farm? They're doing an important job other than just laying eggs. They are using their natural ability of scratching and manure making to improve the hay field!

Every morning, the chickens are moved to a fresh patch of grass. Doing this daily ensures that they don't go too far with their scratching and digging. They are then given a 5-gallon bucket of compost to scratch through. They spend their day spreading the compost throughout the chicken run, which adds nutrients and microbial life to the fields. They are also depositing a large amount of nitrogen through their manure! Their scratching aerates the soil and stirs up dormant grass seed to promote germination. With the sandy soils present at SHF, it's extremely important to field health to continuously add organic matter. The chickens leave behind a blanket of scratched grass that will break down over the winter to add organic matter and create a thicker layer of topsoil. They have an impressive amount of skill amassed in a little chicken package! Happy chickens and healthy fields; at Geary Farms that's a perfect combination.

After a whole day of scratching, the patch of grass they are on appears a little worse for wear, which can be concerning at first, but it doesn't stay that way for long. After only one week the grass starts to look like it did before the chickens' hard work and after two weeks it's looking quite lush and green! We'll cover as much of the field as we can before the snow flies, but we are leaving a control area where we are not moving the chickens so we can compare the difference. We are excited to see the improvement they make and will share another update in the spring!



New Life to an Old Tractor

If a tractor could talk, what would Spring Hill Farm's 1973 International Harvester 464 tractor have been saying to passersby while it sat unused and neglected for so many years? Maybe something like: "Give me another chance and I'll show you I'm the strongest tractor on this farm."

While the farm's two Kubota tractors were given VIP parking spots undercover, the old International was left outside in the elements. Even the hay-ride wagon was shown favoritism over the old International and got a spot in the equipment shed.

The IH464 sat in one place for close to 10 years. Its factory red and white paint job continued to fade, rust started accumulating on almost every metal surface and the mice and hornets took advantage of its nooks and crannies that provided them with shelter. One might say the IH464 was beginning to slip to the point of being not worth repairing.

Luckily for the IH464, there were a few individuals around that remembered it from back in its earlier years. These memories sparked many conversations of bringing it back to life. Although it is 50 years old, its usage meter only read 586 hours which is very young for a machine of its quality. Clearly, a machine worth saving.

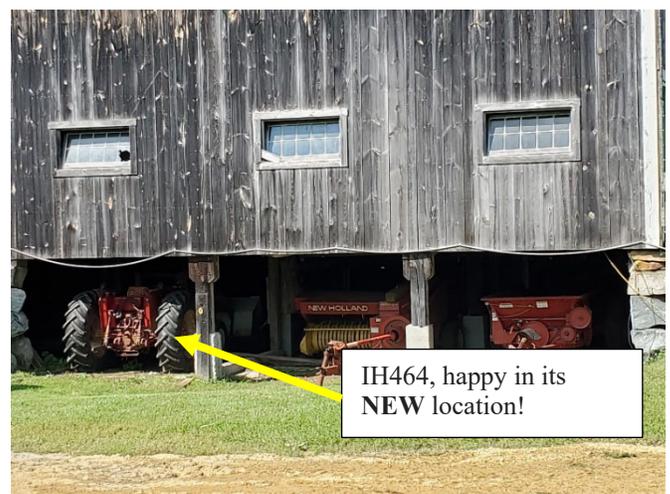
Unlike most farm tractors today which are powered by diesel engines, the IH464 is a gasoline powered tractor. The first challenge was restoring its gasoline fuel system. Thanks to a very generous donation to the farm of a refurbished gas tank, (the costliest anticipated repair) there was no excuse for not beginning the work.

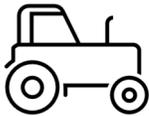
Once the new gas tank was in place, fuel was added and immediately it was apparent that the fuel lines needed to be repaired. That in turn led to the discovery of the carburetor in dire need of a rebuild, which in turn led to discovering that the fuel pump was completely inoperative and needed to be replaced. It is important to note here that you can't simply run to the local tractor dealer and buy parts for a 50 year old machine, therefore, all of the parts needed in the above mentioned chain of repairs required Yankee ingenuity - as in making due with whatever it is you can buy.

With the fuel system repaired and a charged battery in place, a turn of the ignition key brought the engine immediately to life. After a few additional minor adjustments, the motor was idling and accelerating like the day it left the factory!

Once the engine was running smoothly, all it took was some routine service and tire inflation and the IH464 was once again proudly tooling around the farmhouse grounds in all its glory!

The plan is to put it to use in the fields in 2024 doing the heavy work but for now the IH464 resides proudly and comfortably in its new prestigious location underneath the main barn.





Living proof, The IH464 is up and running!



SHF and Conservation Commission, working together

The brush pile at the Wason Pond Recreation and Conservation area had grown to a size where something needed to be done with it. Instead of exercising the typical options, burning or chipping, the Conservation Commission decided to put forth the effort to disperse the pile into nearby smaller piles which become valuable habitat for small mammals, reptiles and insects.

The Conservation Commission borrowed one of Spring Hill Farm's tractors to flip the pile a few times, making it much easier for the Conservation Commission volunteers to separate the brush and haul it away.

[Have you noticed the Beech Trees at SHF?](#)

This Fall, as we take nature walks around Spring Hill Farm, it is easy to notice all of the acorns and tree nuts on the ground. This is a great food year for wildlife. While walking the Lane Rd. trail a few weeks ago, we came across an American beech tree loaded with beechnuts. These nuts are high in protein and fat, making them a very important food source for deer, squirrels, chipmunks, mice, raccoons, grouse, turkeys, grackles, crows, jays, wood duck, and even fox and coyote. Bears, in particular, rely on a good beechnut crop. When a beech tree has a good nut crop, a bear will climb the tree, settle into a good spot and break off the branches in order to eat the nuts. It isn't until a beech tree is 40 years old before they start producing nuts, but they can live for hundreds of years.

You may identify an American beech by its bark. The light bluish-gray exterior remains fairly smooth as the tree ages. Beech trees are very shade tolerant and are prolific sprouters from their roots, especially if the trees are dying. Harvesting of beech trees also stimulates root sprouting. The dark green leaves of beech trees feature entire or sparsely toothed (serrated) leaf margins with straight parallel veins on short stalks and measure 3 - 6 inches in length. Beech trees tend to last long after they are dead, meaning they turn into important snag trees providing habitat through multiple tree cavities to serve as nesting sites for small mammals and birds.

Unfortunately, many American beech trees suffer from Beech Leaf Disease and Beech Bark Disease. First discovered in 2012 in Ohio, the leaf disease was first detected in New Hampshire in 2022. It has been spotted in Chester just this year in 2023. However, Beech Bark Disease has been ravaging beech trees for more than a century. Hopefully our iconic American beech trees will survive to keep producing important food and habitat for wildlife and nature. (Sources Used - UNH, Nature For My Soul, Treehugger)



Beechnuts. Bears love 'em !!



Beech Bark Disease

SHF Fall Fest in the Rearview Mirror...What a success!

Early in the morning, Towle Rd was lined with antique tractors waiting to take their position. The parking crew was lining out the hay field with parking cones, vendors were lining up to unload, and the kids' area was taking shape. With help from so many people, the 5th Annual Spring Hill Farm Fall Fest took shape early on September 23rd. What could be a better way to spend the first official day of Fall, than with a fun filled day at a small-town festival?

The Spring Hill Farm Fall Fest is held to introduce the town members of Chester to the beautiful property that Muriel Church gifted to the town 23 years ago.

The Fest offered a little something for everyone. Our vendor area was filled with 29 vendors, all offering locally handmade items from housewares, custom woodwork, jams, clothing, candles and more. The number of sticky faced children walking around demonstrated the popularity of the freeze dried candy and cotton candy booth. And the Hot Dog Lady was serving up delicious hot dogs all day! The Conservation Commission was giving exciting updates that the Moosewood Ecological company had discovered on the property during their natural resources inventory of Spring Hill Farm.

A yearly favorite, the hayrides back into the trail side of the Towle Rd property offered people, young and old, a view of the trails that are available to them all year as well as a quick peek at the pond that will be turning into an ice-skating rink this winter.

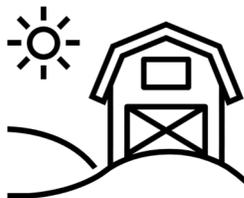
The kids' area was back with the "farm chores" giving little ones the opportunity to milk a cow, rope a steer, chop some wood and do some laundry with a washboard and antique clothes wringer. Some new games included "Can chickens fly", axe throwing, and finding a needle in the haystack for some low-tech challenging fun. Our new hands-on antique activity involved a corn sheller. Patrons were able to shell dry corn and then make some colored corn mosaics as a craft.

Our raffle booth was packed with amazing donations. This helped to raise funds to go toward the improvement of the farm buildings, notably the installation of an ADA accessible bathroom. Once this is complete, we hope to welcome guests into the farmhouse for workshops and classes and events!

This year we had some amazing demonstrations! Guests were mesmerized as Tyler Marshall, a local farrier, had some in person farrier demonstrations creating horseshoes with his portable forge. Michelle and Ian Grave were demonstrating and teaching the timeless craft and art of spinning wool and hand carving spoons. We finished out our demonstrations with Seren Maxwell from Wonderpup Dog Training doing a fascinating dog detective demonstration.

All of this was set to the music of the talented Meadowfolk Rising!

The rain held out and the day was so much fun! Over 200 guests visited the farm that day, learned a bit more about what it has to offer the town and got to experience the fun that comes with a unique small-town farm fest. We look forward to another amazing day next year on September 21st! Mark your calendars!



Images from Fall Fest 2023



Judy Blomquist



**Have you noticed the white bench at SHF?
See what Boy Scout Joey Beck has to say about it:**

Hello, my name is Joey Beck, and I want to take on the problem of plastic pollution head-on with Trex Composite Decking, a company that strives to reduce plastic usage around the United States. This project was handed on to me by a very generous Chester resident, Ann Podlipny, who has already made a huge difference in the way we handle our plastic waste. This project is also my Eagle Scout Project and I felt that my community should be educated in plastic reduction because it is important to minimize the amount of plastic we use, as a whole. For every five hundred pounds of plastic waste that is collected, Trex donates a bench. One such bench is now located on Spring Hill Farm Property.

This project, to me, is a great way to reduce how much plastic we use and hopefully change the way we think about our plastic usage. It would be greatly appreciated if you took the time to check out the Trex Website at nextrex.com to learn more about the causes and effects of plastic waste and how it can be reduced. I am super excited to continue this movement and to help educate the public on the importance of plastic reduction.



**Relax
and
Sit a Spell**