



Town of Groton

THE AMERICAN STORY CONTINUES

First settled as a trading post with Native Americans, Groton was America's original frontier. By 1655, Groton Plantation was established, encompassing much of today's Merrimack Valley region. Early settlers were attracted to Groton because of its bountiful farmland, wildlife, rivers, and its many lakes for fishing.

As America grew and expanded farther west, Groton was an important stop along the wagon trails from Boston north to Canada. The original Groton Inn, built in 1678, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the oldest Inn in America. Destroyed by fire in 2011, the Inn has been fully restored to its original grandeur.

The Groton story has connection to America's history. A Groton resident has helped author every major chapter of the story that makes up America's history, from trapper John Tinker, who helped found the original Groton Plantation, to Col. William Prescott, who led the American forces at Bunker Hill, to George Boutwell, former Massachusetts Governor and U.S. Senator, ardent abolitionist and Cabinet Secretary to Presidents Lincoln and Grant, to the Lawrence brothers — Abbot, Amos, and William — who dramatically changed the textile manufacturing that led to America's first Industrial Revolution, to Marion Stoddart, who has led the charge to restore the Nashua River from its polluted state and helped inspire a national, indeed international, environmental

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movement that continues to this day.

Groton has long been recognized for its rich history, extraordinary landscape, and small-town character. A commercial crossroads from the beginning, Groton became the third-largest community in the state, behind Boston and Cambridge. A seat of government and education, the town also emerged as a center of the arts and culture that have thrived here to the present day. Over these many years, the arts, culture, fine dining, recreation, conservation, historic architecture, education, farming, and hospitality have built Groton's reputation as a "destination."

Two years ago, a small working group organized by the Groton Business Association (GBA) set out to study the arrival of a major new cultural venue coming to town: Groton Hill Music Center. Now open, Groton Hill Music is a world-class music education and performance venue that will attract increasing numbers of people to the town. The question back then was, How does a small town prepare for the challenges and the

opportunities this change will bring?

The GBA Working Group produced an in-depth report that engaged town residents, researched other destination locations to learn from their experiences, and proposed to the Town Manager and the Town Select Board that a committee be formed to address the challenges raised and promote the opportunities while preserving the wonderful character of Groton.

The Select Board did just that, creating the Destination Groton Committee (www.destinationgroton.com), with the charge to engage all Town stakeholders in a series of public forums to better prepare for an increase in visitors, and, through a series of strategic partnerships, to ensure that Groton and the entire Nashoba Valley region will benefit from increased tourism. More visitors will benefit local businesses and many non-profits throughout the region, as well as increasing tax revenues to the Town, thereby helping to fund public services such as schools, police, and the fire departments.

In 2030, Groton will celebrate its 375th anniversary. The DGC is using that time horizon to accomplish its goals: to create a greater sense of community, maintain the town's quality of life, and celebrate its civic pride.

Today, Groton looks to the future as a welcoming community for visitors to explore its many wonders and embrace its quintessential New England charm.

Today, Groton is truly a gateway for the Nashoba Valley. ⇨

MARION STODDART:

The grande dame of the Nashua River

By Anne O'Connor

Meandering through the valley, the Nashua River cuts through conservation land, runs under bridges and is a popular destination for kayakers and fishing aficionados. Even in the more rural areas like Groton, evidence of past industrial use remains. Stone structures and old dams dot the waterway.

When Marion Stoddart arrived in Massachusetts in the 1960s as a young woman, the river presented an entirely different aspect. Poisoned by paper and metal manufacturing upstream, the river flowing north into the Merrimack River was, well, nasty. Portions of the river were dead, unable to support any life but sewer worms.

Dismayed by the pollution and its effect on wildlife, Stoddart started grassroots organizing, as so many young people did during the 1960s. She connected with like-minded community members, government officials and environmentalists with a goal of improving the river to the point that it could be used for recreation.

"The river is the asset Marion intended it to be," said Bill Flynn, mayor of Fitchburg from 1968 to 1971.



Marion Stoddart enjoying the fruits of her labor by kayaking in the Nashua River in her 90s.

*Photo Courtesy of Susan Edwards,
Board of Directors, Nashua River
Watershed Association*

flowed downstream, affecting all the water and land along the Nashua River.

"The key thing is Marion's vision," Flynn said. "We saw a dirty river."

The 50-year-old Nashua River Watershed Association, with Stoddart as the founding director emerita, brings her vision to the 21st century.

The nonprofit protects the land and water in the 32 communities channeling its water. Volunteers and staff monitor water quality, work to conserve the surrounding land and do outreach in the communities.

"Most people felt that the river could never be restored, it was so bad," Stoddart said in a video for the NRWA. The dynamic leader proved the naysayers wrong. The Nashua River went from one of the ten most polluted rivers in the country to having sections and tributaries included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. National Geographic did a feature article in 1992 celebrating the reclamation of the waterway.

For Stoddart, "it was never about the river. It was about the people using it," said Carolyn Sellars, a conservationist and friend of Stoddart.

W*The river
lives.*

Thank you, Marion."

Marion was a regular visitor to his office in the city with the headwaters of the river. The factories in the city used their water rights, taking clean water in and discharging toxic waste to the river. That pollution and untreated sewerage



Photo Courtesy of Susan Edwards, Board of Directors, Nashua River Watershed Association



Four miles from the headwaters of the Nashua River, the water is clear and exuberant. Before 1970, this same section of the river was full of paper sludge, toxic chemicals used in metal factories and even sewage. Marion Stoddart was a key player in restoring the river all along its course.

Photo Anne O'Connor



A mural in Fitchburg celebrates the reclamation of the Nashua River and the role that Marion Stoddart takes.

Photo Anne O'Connor



Marion Stoddart, right, and Carolyn Sellars on the bridge leading to Riverfront Park in Fitchburg on the banks of the Nashua River.

Photo courtesy of Rebecca Wright

“All of it is absolutely beautiful,” said Jeff Gordon, broker/owner of EXIT Assurance Realty in Groton. As the president of the Groton Business Association and the vice-chair of the Destination Groton Committee, he is in tune with what people want in their community.

The conservation efforts provide not only opportunities for activities in and on the water, but a place for everyone to experience the natural beauty of the

region. “It’s the constant exposure and improvement of the trail system along the rivers,” Gordon said. He credits “Marion’s perpetual efforts” in keeping up the “beauty and sanctity of the river.”

The grande dame of the Nashua River does not rest on her laurels when it comes to the watershed. Even into her 90s, she is leading by example. She kayaks on the water and contributes to videos the NRWA is preparing to commemorate the founding of the association.

Even when she is not on-site, Marion Stoddart stands guard from a mural overlooking the river she nursed back to life. The water, once so thick with paper making effluent that small animals could walk across, so foul smelling that families rolled up their car windows as they got close and where only sewer worms thrived, now supports the healthy fish portrayed on one side of the artwork.

The river lives. Thank you, Marion. ➔

WILL GROTON BECOME THE NASHOBA VALLEY'S "DESTINATION" TOWN?

By Joanne Smith

Photo Lawrence Libby

To quote the inimitable Yogi Berra, "If you don't know where you're going, you'll end up someplace else." With the arrival of Groton Hill Music Center, we now know where that "someplace" else is: Destination Groton!

Rich in history, culture, and natural resources, Groton is poised to become Nashoba Valley's "destination town," with the much-anticipated opening of Groton Hill Music Center. Already, residents and visitors alike enjoy the 100-plus miles of maintained trails, (fifty percent of the town is held in conservation lands), the 12.5-mile paved Nashua River Rail Trail, canoeing and fishing on the Nashua and Squannacook rivers, Grotonfest — attracting thousands in late September— Grotonfest Winter, the prestigious private schools, and the fine dining, to name just a few of the many reasons people come to the town.

Long-time local residents Greg Sheldon and Bob Pine approached Groton Business Association President Jeff Gordon, to come up with a strategy to leverage what Groton Hill brings to town in terms of business opportunities and revenue, while also considering the impact it could have on the infrastructure, such as pedestrian-friendly streets, trailhead parking, etc. Sheldon wondered, "Do we wait for it to happen or do we get out in front of it in a way that preserves the beauty of the town while taking advantage of the economic impact of new visitors?" Concerned that the town might be ill-equipped to take full advantage of the new situation, the Groton Destination Committee was

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— MARK HADDAD,
GROTON'S TOWN MANAGER

formed to "minimize the harm and maximize the benefits," as Jeff Gordon put it after over a year of Zoom meetings with focus groups and work groups. The group presented a 100-page report to the select and planning boards, with a recommendation that the town hire an Economic Development Director to capitalize on the opportunities. The select board agreed with that recommendation, but the town did not have the funds to hire that person. Instead, they appointed the five-person Destination Groton Committee as an arm of town government to create a strategy for encouraging economic opportunities while celebrating civic pride.

The committee met with local senators, legislators, the Nashoba Valley Chamber of Commerce, and the Massachusetts Office of Tourism and Travel (MOTT) for early input. The pace and range of people coming to town create both issues and opportunities, all of which will be discussed through



Mark Haddad, Groton Town Manager.

public hearings, town-wide surveys, and advisory groups focused on issues such as infrastructure, commercial and non-profit development, marketing, and regional strategic partnerships. The immediate challenge is how to engage residents and the public, not only for the benefit of Groton but for the whole region.

Mark Haddad, Groton's town manager, wholeheartedly supports the formation of the committee, whose charge it is to promote the town while keeping its rural character. The committee's goals serve "to have the best of both worlds," says Haddad. "People move to Groton because of its rural character," he points out, "and we want to maintain that experience".

Groton could become "The Gateway" or "Hub" to the North Central/Nashoba Valley area and Route 2 corridor, much as the town developed into a regional center after it was settled in 1655, becoming one of the original American frontiers. With Destination Groton, people will certainly know where they are going and how to get there! ➔

THE (GROTON) HILLS ARE ALIVE WITH THE SOUNDS OF MUSIC!

By David Watts, Jr.



Along Old Ayer Road, away from downtown Groton, is a bucolic expanse of hills, houses, woods, and orchards. Indeed, even as you approach the head of the driveway for the Groton Hill Music Center, there is no indication of anything out of the ordinary. That impression changes dramatically upon reaching the parking lot, when the new, nearly-completed educational and performance complex comes into full view: a magnificent building that seems to have grown out of the surrounding countryside, a part of the rolling hills and wooded conservation land that surround it.

For more than three decades, Indian Hill Music, the nonprofit organization's original name, has been a valued Nashoba Valley resource.

"It started here in Groton," says marketing and PR manager Julia Pampinella, "when a small group of musicians began their own arts organization."

In 1990, after a few years moving from building to building as they established the organization and its program, the group obtained an old farm property in nearby Littleton. According to David Leary, Director of Marketing, it "grew from a central hall into a space that had two studio classrooms. And then, in the early aughts, they added Blackburn Hall,



Studio pianos.

which was a larger concert venue there — a nice space to hear jazz and chamber music. They hosted the Orchestra of Indian Hill out of the local high school."

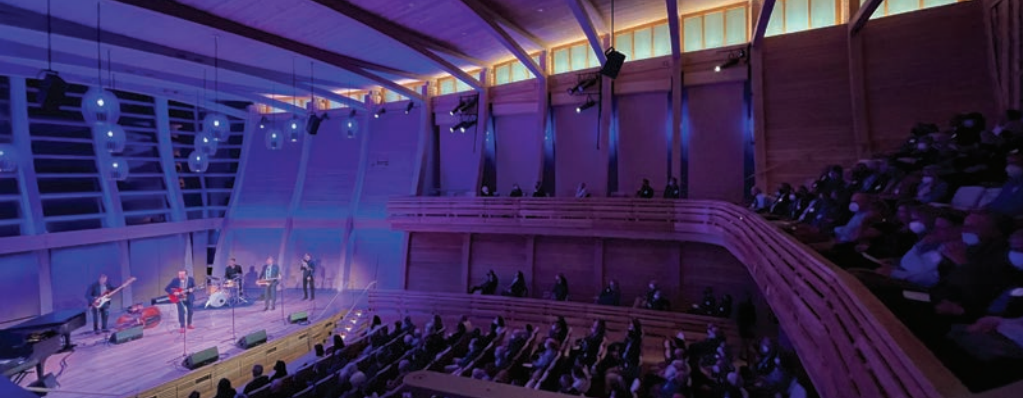
A 2014 donation from an anonymous benefactor — a lover of music, culture, and of Groton — was the game-changer for this organization. What followed was an eight-year-long journey culminating in a singular space. The wait has been more than worth the time, talent, and effort expended.

The new 126,000-square foot facility is situated on 110 acres of rolling hills surrounded by agricultural and protected conservation lands. A portion of the property was once owned by the late great rock, jazz, and blues musician J. Geils.

Designed by the husband-and-wife architectural team of Alan Joslin and Deborah Epstein, the facility is home to two world-class performance halls, 35 classrooms, a dining room, and a café. Each classroom is acoustically separated from its neighbors, side to side, but the hallways will be filled with the soft sounds of music from behind the doors. The crowning achievement is the two performance spaces: the 300-seat Meadow Hall and the 1,000 seat Concert Hall.

Meadow Hall opened on October 21 with a concert featuring Groton Hill's conductor and artistic director, Bruce Hangen, and the Vista Philharmonic Chamber Players. The space is reminiscent of the Epstein-Joslin design for Rockport's acclaimed Shalin Liu Performance Center, with the three-sided wraparound balcony seating and the audience's view of the outdoors through the glass panel wall at the rear of the stage.

Still under construction as of this writing, the Concert Hall will be a magnificent space with an added feature: In the summer months, the doors behind the audience can be opened to accommodate another 1,300 patrons on the grass outside — a little bit of Tanglewood coming to Nashoba Valley. The Concert Hall is



Top right: Meadow seats.

Bottom right: Concert Hall.



Top: Concert Hall; Middle left: Music Education; Middle: Saturday Youth Ensemble; Bottom: Youth Violins in Meadow Hall.

slated to open January 21, 2023 with Opening Night at the Philharmonic.

“We’re lucky to be able to say we have the same quality that Tanglewood has,” says Julie Pampinella, “Even better, I think.”

As with Tanglewood, a popular, albeit summer-season visitors’ spot, Groton Hill Music Center may well be the catalyst to make Groton – and Nashoba Valley – a year-round arts destination. To address potential problems and their solutions while preserving the small-town character of Groton, the nonprofit organization

and the town have built a collaborative relationship, primarily through the Destination Groton Committee.

Groton Hill Music Center CEO Lisa Fiorentino sums it up this way: “Our goal as a music performance and education nonprofit is to bring excellence to everything we do. We’re adding to the cultural landscape of Nashoba Valley by bringing world-renowned artists and the highest-caliber teachers into a building of unprecedented beauty. This is an open, collaborative community with a bright future ahead, and we’re proud to be part of it.” ↔

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— GROTON HILL
MUSIC CENTER CEO
LISA FIORENTINO

Groton Fest 2022

Photos from previous Groton Fest.

Groton Fest, started by the Groton Business Association in 1979 to celebrate the town's small businesses, happens once a year. This year's festival was held on September 24th. Filled with community, the event is eagerly anticipated every fall.

This selection of photos from this year's Fest shows the variety of businesses and organizations that take part.

Nashoba Valley Living's own publisher, Gary Forzese, loves to attend and participate.

To be a vendor or to volunteer at next year's event, visit www.grotonfest.com/grotonfest. ➔





Coming Up Soon...

GrotonfestWinter DECEMBER 3RD

Don't miss GrotonfestWinter on Saturday, December 3, right in the middle of this Fest-ive season! Originally known as the Winter Arts Festival, and initiated by Judy Romatelli of Periwinkle Art & Glassworks, GrotonfestWinter is designed to showcase budding and established artisans. Now sponsored by the Groton Business Association, the all-day event, held at the Prescott Community Center and the Groton Inn, features workshops with local artisans, along with all sorts of vendors, food, and live performances. The kids can even meet Santa at the Inn!