

## A New Look at Francis Robert Schell

Schell's obituary is a surprise; not merely for its brevity, but also for achievements mentioned and lifetime markers left out. The four sentences reveal the influence of Dwight L. Moody on his life and the importance of his gift of Schell Bridge.

### FRANCIS R. SCHELL DEAD.

**Benefactor of Northfield, Mass., Dies at His New York Home.**

Francis Robert Schell died Wednesday night at his home, 21 East Sixty-second Street. He spent his Summers for the last forty years at his estate, Birnam House, in East Northfield, Mass. Mr. Schell was a friend of the late Dwight L. Moody, through whom he became interested in the Northfield Schools. In 1902 he built and gave to the town of Northfield the bridge leading across the Connecticut River to East Northfield which bears the name of Schell Bridge.

*The New York Times*

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Schell was a man of the late nineteenth century "gilded age". He became a wealthy merchant and capitalist, a board member of the New York Historical Society, appeared in the New York Social Register, traveled throughout Europe and came to Northfield in 1890 hungry for the teachings of Dwight L. Moody.

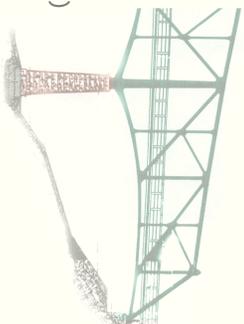
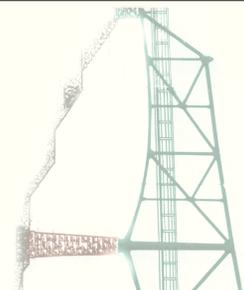
"Visually, this is a striking bridge. Cantilever style bridges usually appear over larger bodies of water. This is a pleasing change from the usual to find such a bridge on a river the size of the Connecticut River in this area. Perhaps the most noteworthy visual asset is the stunning gothic portal bracing design, which is unlike any designs found on other truss bridges. The beauty of the bridge is also enhanced by extensive lattice and v-lacing on the various members, chords, and bracing on the bridge. Tall stone piers and abutments complete the image, creating a scene of beauty that should be a crime to destroy." (historicbridges.org)

FRIENDS OF SCHELL BRIDGE  
P.O. BOX 27  
NORTHFIELD, MA

### SUPPORT THESE AUCTION-DONOR BUSINESSES!

- |                               |                              |                               |
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| Jeanne Sisson (fabrics)       | Ray Harris                   |                               |
| Lane Construction             | Pelia Farm Market and Grille |                               |

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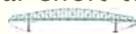
*Vision: A beautifully-restored historic bridge across the Connecticut River that serves both as a premier recreational link for a network of hiking and biking trails in the tri-state region and as a centerpiece for a series of linked riverfront parks for Northfield and area residents.*

## Thanks for a Great Auction Event

Thanks to all who contributed in various ways to make the live auction on Oct 23rd a fine success – both in terms of community spirit and pumping up the FSB coffers. Many people commented on how much fun they had; how good the soups were, and what a great job Michael Humphries did as auctioneer.

The bidders were enthusiastic and generous – thanks to you who came, participated, and happily carried away gift certificates and a wide array of items. Thanks also to those who offered for sale everything from antiques to hot sauces to a home energy audit to golf lessons, brought soups, and helped to organize and staff this event.

A very special thanks to the many Northfield and area businesses who so generously contributed items for the auction. The list of these businesses appears elsewhere in this newsletter. The auction committee hopes that you will take a moment to thank these businesses and to make a special effort to patronize them.



## Etruscan Peasant Soup

The soups at the auction were all well-received; here's a recipe for one of them:

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1# Italian or Turkey Sausage (cut into 1/2" pieces)
- 1/2# boneless, skinless chicken breast
- 3/4 cup chopped onion
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 cups fresh spinach, no stems, rough chopped
- 14 1/2 oz can no-fat chicken broth
- 14 1/2 oz can diced tomatoes
- 1 can of cannelloni beans
- 1/2 tsp. crushed red pepper or dash of Tabasco
- 2 tablespoons Parmesan, grated

Brown sausage, chicken in olive oil. Add onion, garlic and stirfry. Add other ingredients - heat to boil and simmer 15-20 minutes.

Sprinkle with Parmesan. 4-5 servings.

*Francis Schell, continued ...*

In 1903, Schell built a “Chateau” at the end of Highland Ave. and developed 125 acres of manicured grounds and a half-mile-long artificial lake. During lavish weekend house parties, he introduced Moody to wealthy individuals who helped finance the building of the Northfield Schools: Northfield Seminary for Girls and Mount Hermon School for Boys. He participated in Moody’s Northfield Summer Conferences, but was an outsider in the daily life of the town.



Coming from Manhattan, where landscape architecture was valued, Schell did not understand why it was hard for the Northfield community to accept him. To many residents of Northfield, land was meant for farming or timber harvesting – not for elaborate landscaping. Streams were for fishing or water-power – not for Sunday afternoon cruises. Many felt that Schell’s home was ornamental and impractical and having it sitting in the middle of town was no favor to Northfield.

Mr. Schell had done a much greater favor to Northfield in building Schell Memorial Bridge. One might imagine that Moody, with humble beginnings as a Northfield farm boy, might have influenced Schell before the generous offer was made to build a bridge for Northfield, but at a special town meeting on September 17, 1901, Mr. Schell’s proposal was accepted. →

*Francis Schell, continued ...*

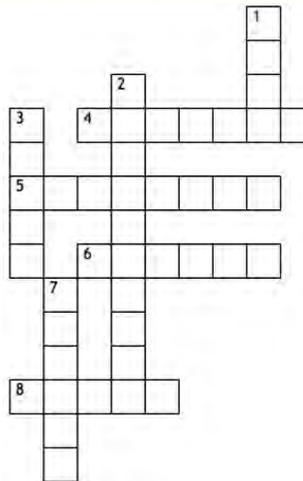
In it he said, “Desiring to leave an enduring memorial to my honored father, Robert Schell, in Northfield and also desiring that a bridge be built across the Connecticut River...I covenant and agree to pay to said town the cost of said bridge not to exceed thirty-two thousand dollars.” He went on to say, “I make this offer in order that the town of Northfield and the Northfield Seminary may be permanently benefited; and I desire no formal or informal opening of the bridge to take place when the bridge is done; simply begin to use it.” (Parsons, *A Puritan Outpost*, 441)

His gift of Schell Memorial Bridge was a demonstration of Moody’s teachings: to show understanding of the community’s needs and to give without expecting anything in return.

*“The bridge is barricaded with metal plates across the portal ends, and weeds are growing up around it, yet it has the same type of air about it that one might ascribe to a grand palace left to ruin - of the long-ago aspirations of great men.” (HAER, 1990)*



### Schell Bridge Crossword Puzzle



#### Across

- 4 The location of the FSB office
- 5 End supports for the bridge
- 6 What happened to the bridge in 1985?
- 8 The main bottom structural member

#### Down

- 1 A stone support for the bridge
- 2 The bridge construction style
- 3 A possible use for the bridge
- 7 The unique portal design style

*most puzzle words appear somewhere in this newsletter - solution in next newsletter*



FSB is a nonprofit 501(c)3 corporation  
for more information  
visit [www.schellbridge.org](http://www.schellbridge.org) or call 413-498-4364

### Hats Off to Janice Starmer!



FSB is long overdue in recognizing Green Trees Gallery owner, Janice Starmer for helping FSB become a visible presence in Northfield. Several years ago Janice generously offered

FSB office space, and when Northfield Coffee and Books opened she moved the office to a prime spot in the gallery complex.

Experienced with community building and fundraising in Warwick, as a fairly new FSB board member Janice has made an immediate impact on the organization. She is generous with her time, never misses an opportunity to promote the FSB mission with the Northfield business community, contributes creative ideas for fundraising events, and works tirelessly. She is fun and light-hearted, but is not afraid to raise controversial and difficult issues and pushes board members for needed decisions.

Members can join FSB in thanking Janice by visiting the gallery on December 11<sup>th</sup>, the business community *Special Day in Northfield*.



### That time of year again

It’s time to write those end-of-the year tax deduction checks. If you have not already recently renewed your FSB membership, what better time than before 2011 rolls around; use the membership form on the enclosed FSB-addressed envelope. If you have already renewed – thank you.

2011 could be a watershed year for the bridge, with the gelling of both town and college plans. The FSB newsletter will review for members the impacts that all this will have on the future of the bridge.

