



# SHAKER VOICES TO DECIDE THE future of a piece of Belmont's past

BY DONNA RHODES  
drhodes@salmonpress.com

**BELMONT** — On March 4, voters of the Shaker Regional School District will be voicing their opinions and casting their votes on a number of matters, including a \$21,739,870 operating budget, a collective bargaining agreement for the Shaker Regional Education Support Professional Association, and the addition of \$75,000 to the Facilities and Grounds Expendable Trust Fund, but three other articles on the warrant will address the Gale School building. A committee of dedicated men and women in Belmont hope to have support that night to save the historical structure.

The Gale School was built in 1894 by Cyrus Norris and named for Napoleon B. Gale, who donated \$10,000 for the



COURTESY

An old postcard shows the Gale School in its early days. Next week, voters of Shaker Regional School District will be asked to decide the fate of the iconic structure overlooking Belmont Village.

town to build a central school in the village. Until that time students attended one of the several one-room schools scattered throughout the community.

The town grew over the years and eventually a high school (now the middle school) was built out in front of the  
**SEE GALE, PAGE A11**

## INDEX

Volume 8 • Number 9  
20 Pages in 2 Section

Editorial Page .....A4

North Country Notebook A5

Local News ..... A2-3, A7-9

Obituaries .....A6

©2014, Salmon Press, LLC.  
Call us at (603) 279-4516  
email: steamer@salmonpress.com

## GALE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

Gale School. Later another school, Memorial School, was built beside it to accommodate middle school students as the population continued to rise.

By 1985, a new elementary school was constructed and there was no longer a need for the aging Gale School and it became a storage facility.

At the time of its closure, electricity and its heating system were removed to lessen any fire hazards and over time that caused some damage to the interior.

Despite years of neglect, a recent engineering study made possible through a group of volunteers known as the Save Our Gale School Committee showed it was still structurally sound though, and they have two proposals up for consideration on the 2016 Shaker Regional School District warrant, either one of which they hope will receive enough

voter support next week.

The first, listed as Article 8, will ask to raise and appropriate the sum of \$242,878 to move the building to the corner of Memorial Drive and Concord Street in Belmont as Phase 1 of a project to preserve it.

Of that amount \$5,027.79 would come from the previously established Gale School Restoration Expendable Trust Fund, \$65,000 would be withdrawn from the School Facilities and Grounds Expendable Trust Fund, and \$50,000 would be pulled from the district's unassigned fund balance.

With those funds made available, the taxpayers' cost to move and restore the building would be reduced to \$122,851, making the impact on taxes 15-cents per \$1,000 in Belmont and 11-cents per \$1,000 in Canterbury.

Diane Marden is chair of the Save Our Gale School committee and has dedicated the last several years to

the preservation of the building. She said while moving the school would make it ineligible for the national and state historic registers, it would provide many positive opportunities for both the structure and the district as well.

"Putting it on the corner of Memorial Drive would open up the area where it is now for other uses by the district. Then if they want to sell it in the future they could do so without impacting the middle school or the Memorial School building," said Marden.

The committee also believes that once restored, the Gale School would be a great location for a recreation department or perhaps even the SAU office, thereby freeing up some much-needed classroom space in the Memorial building where it is currently located. With approval of this warrant article, Phase 2 of the project would be to acquire Community Development Block Grants and loans through USDA

Rural Housing for interior restoration work.

Should Article 8 fail, the committee has a second proposal to leave the building where it is and simply convert it for use as the SAU offices. Costs for that measure would be \$187,978 and with the same proposed fund withdrawals laid out in Article 8, the cost to taxpayers would be only \$67,951, meaning tax impacts of 8-cents per \$1,000 in Belmont and 6-cents in Canterbury.

While remaining in its original location would allow the old schoolhouse a place on historic registers, Marden and the committee acknowledge there are some drawbacks to the plan, such as accessibility to the building and the fact that it would prevent future expansion of the adjacent school buildings.

"Plus, if it stays where it is it would only be used for the school district and at some point, if they decide they don't want it, then they'll raze it," she said.

Should neither of the two petitioned articles pass, Article 10 this year will request \$71,000 to demolish the historic building. Approximately \$30,000 has already been set aside to then construct a new storage building for the district on or near the site.

Ken Knowlton is another member of the Save the Gale School committee, and having previously helped with the preservation and restoration of the Belmont Mill, he said it's just as important to do the same for the Gale School.

"The people who comprised previous school boards, and those of today, have lost sight of what the Gale School was, see it only as it is presently, and have no vision of what it could be," Knowlton said recently. "The Shaker Regional School District is willing to use over \$100,000 to raze and replace the Gale School but not to expend one dime to use what it has. That \$100,000 could go a long way toward replac-

ing the foundation, roof and windows of the Gale School."

He and the other committee members said they are ready, willing and able to work with the district to find donations, grants, materials, time and energy to restore the iconic building should voters approve either Article 8 or 9.

"I've given years of my life to saving the Gale School. If it is saved, our group will see this project through until the end to make sure as much as possible will not come from taxpayers and any money that isn't spent we'll use to pay down the tax rate," said Marden.

This year, the polls will be open from 11 a.m. until 7 p.m. at Belmont High School for ballot voting on two school board seats and a district moderator. The operating budget, Gale School and all other articles will then be addressed during the Shaker Regional School District's annual meeting, which will begin at 7 p.m. in the high school gymnasium.