

# When dinosaurs roamed GREENFIELD

Town will honor dino-track discoverer Dexter Marsh this weekend with inaugural festival



In a rehearsal for "Dexter and the Dinosaurs," put on by Piti Theatre Co., children roar as dinosaurs at the Buckland Shelburne Regional School. At rear are Everett Jones, 10, Oliver West, 9, Nola Grignaffini, 8; at front are Ezekiel Mirin, 7, Hendrick Carew, 8, and Eliza Carew, 5.

RECORDER STAFF/PAUL FRANZ



Z.Dino



By AVIVA LUTTRELL  
Recorder Staff

One of Dexter Marsh's dying wishes was that the Town of Greenfield buy his collection of dinosaur fossils for a modest sum and create a permanent museum.

Marsh, a day laborer who discovered dinosaur tracks in 1835 on what is now Bank Row, was in the process of laying a sidewalk when he noticed deep, bird-like tracks in a slab of stone he had dragged from the Connecticut River with a team of horses.

Though not quite a museum, Greenfield will honor him in a different way this weekend. The Piti Theatre will offer a tribute to Marsh when The Great Greenfield DinoFest, which will include performances, food, children's activities, a panel discussion and more, stomps into town.

This is the festival's debut on the Town Common in front of the Second Congregational Church, and attendees might even get a glimpse of a Tyrannosaurus rex, velociraptor or triceratops. It all begins Saturday at 9:30 a.m.

"(Marsh) wasn't sure what (the tracks) were," Jonathan Mirin, Piti's co-artistic director, said. "This is before the word 'dinosaur' had been invented."

Piti will present its musical, "Dexter and the Dinosaurs," created last spring during a residency with Colrain Central School. It will be performed in the Second Congregational Church's Parish Hall at 11 a.m.

"Dexter Marsh's perseverance, humility, profound curiosity and the class struggle he fought have made bringing his story to theatrical and musical life very satisfying," Mirin said.

Marsh, originally of Montague, had little formal education and worked as a laborer his entire life, including as a sexton at the Second Congregational Church, where he became friends with Rev. Lorenzo Langstroth, who is



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

**An artist's rendering of Dexter Marsh examining dinosaur footprints in Greenfield. The town will honor him this weekend with The Great Greenfield DinoFest.**

widely regarded as the father of modern bee-keeping. The church holds an annual bee festival in celebration of Langstroth's work.

"We have been inspired by seeing Bee Week become part of the cultural life of Greenfield, and thought that the rich intersection of deep time and local history might merit a new celebration around another great scientific contribution from Greenfield's history," Tim Neumann, executive director of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, said. The association helped organize the festival with Piti Theatre.

The theatre's performance tells Marsh's life story, including how he came to work with Dr. James Deane, one of the first people to write about dinosaur footprints, as well as Edward Hitchcock, who was a geologist and professor at Amherst College.

"(Marsh) developed both the intellectual understanding, the curiosity and the physical skills to go out and spend weeks at a time in the Connecticut River, using dynamite to blast rock or quarrying with a pickaxe," Mirin said.

SEE DINOSAURS C4

## IF YOU GO

9:30 to 11 a.m.: Children's dinosaur-themed activities and information for all ages on the lawn of Second Congregational Church

11 a.m.: "Dexter and the Dinosaurs," a musical theatre performance featuring Piti Theatre's Youth Troupe in Parish Hall at Second Congregational Church

11:30 a.m.: Panel discussion at the Second Congregational Church about the "Dexter and the Dinosaurs" production, local history, Dexter Marsh and his contemporaries and more

12:30 p.m.: Locally grown treats at your favorite Greenfield eatery

2 to 5 p.m.: Greenfield Historical Society will be open and highlighting Dexter Marsh with a few original dinosaur tracks and some hands-on plaster casts on display.

6 p.m.: Real Pickle Brine reception.

7 p.m.: "DinoMovies Through the Ages," a live musical multimedia event featuring cellist Wayne Smith



## Dinosaurs

FROM C1

“He liked to go to places like Barton Cove. He had a whole bunch of favorite sites up and down the Connecticut and around the watershed, and he would go there and take stuff back and either sell it to people like Hitchcock or museums or keep it.”

Eventually, Marsh built an addition onto his house to store his own collection, which was eventually acknowledged at the time as one of the finest fossil collections in the world. His wish to have the town buy his collection never came true, but his estate was auctioned off to leave his family enough money to survive without him.

“The good news is we can still see some of these finds, but there’s no museum in Greenfield,” Mirin said.

Mirin said extinction will be an important aspect of the festival and will be highlighted.

“There’s something that we can take — these giant, powerful creatures came and then went — and there are periods of extinction from that first extinction of the dinosaurs through now,” Mirin said. “My hope is that this festival can also serve as an empowering awareness-raising moment for us about extinction and what are the current drivers of extinction — humans are essentially driving it and are capable of stopping it, but the question is: Can we learn?”

There will be a panel discussion immediately following Piti’s performance. The panel will include Mirin, local history and dinosaur experts Alice Nash, an associate professor of



Children recreate the discovery of dinosaur tracks by Dexter Marsh in a rehearsal for “Dexter and the Dinosaurs put on by Piti Theatre Co.

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history at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst; Nolumbeka Project president David Brule; Dexter Marsh expert Sarah Doyle from Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association; and Fred Venne, museum educator for the Beneski Museum of Natural History in Amherst.

Children’s activities will include a

make-your-own fossil collection, Jurassic Tic-Tac-Toe, a dilophosaurus photo board, dinosaur puzzles and more. If it rains, activities will be moved inside to Parish Hall in the church.

A reception is scheduled for 6 p.m., featuring Real Pickle Brine and Katalyst Kombucha, followed by a live

musical multimedia event, “Dino Movies Through the Ages,” created by electronic musician Lysha Smith and featuring cellist Wayne Smith at 7 p.m. in the Franklin Community Co-Op’s space at 170 Main St.

Reservations for the reception and film screening are recommended. For more information and to reserve a

seat, visit: [ptco.org/dino](http://ptco.org/dino).

The Historical Society of Greenfield, 43 Church St., will be open from 2 to 5 p.m., and will highlight Marsh with a few original dinosaur tracks and hands-on plaster casts.

DinoFest is funded by grants from Mass Humanities and the Greenfield Local Cultural Council.