

BUY
PHOTO
REPRINTS
ONLINE

SUBSCRIBE TO
THE GAZETTE
ONLINE
OR IN PRINT

GAZETTENET.com

Amherst Bulletin | The Recorder | Valley Advocate | Pioneer Valley | Many Hands | Hampshire Life

Sign out | Account | Trouble finding something? | Contact us | Classifieds

Daily Hampshire Gazette - Established 1786

news search

Local News | State/Region | U.S./World | Obituaries | Sports | Business | Schools | Colleges | Politics | Opinion | Entertainment | Health | Living

Filmmaker finds local farm a perfect period setting

By CATHERINE BAUM
Staff Writer

Email this page

Printer-friendly version

Wednesday, June 24, 2009

WESTHAMPTON - A Northampton filmmaker is tackling a project he's contemplated for a decade, one that delves into issues of brain and behavior based on a famous 19th-century accident.

This week, Richard A. "Chip" Roughton brought a crew to Westhampton to shoot scenes for his historical film "Phineas Gage."

Built in the late 1800s, Hanging Mountain Farms in Westhampton seemed a perfect backdrop for Roughton's film, which tells the story of a New England railroad construction foreman whose behavior changed after an iron rod penetrated his head.

The resulting injury influenced 19th-century thinking about the localization of the brain's functions. Gage's accident is the preface to Roughton's full-length film on the rise and fall of lobotomies - neurosurgical procedures that cut connections to and from the brain's prefrontal cortex.

Roughton's research indicates about 40,000 lobotomies were performed from the 1930s to the 1950s to treat mental illnesses and disturbing behaviors, including schizophrenia, clinical depression, anxiety disorders, moodiness and youthful defiance.

Roughton says people were trained in 10 minutes to do lobotomies without licenses or medical boards.

"I'm so fascinated by this," said Roughton, who owns Rough Pictures in Easthampton.

The \$40,000 budget for "Phineas Gage" does not account for the dozens of local camera crew volunteers and acting extras Roughton networked with online and by word-of-mouth.

Meanwhile, actors took their places this week in Springfield, Westhampton and Sturbridge to kick off work on a film Roughton has been plotting for more than 10 years. People from Los Angeles and New York City came to Westhampton to produce and act in the film.

"We're having a lot of fun," Sean McCormack, 28, of Brooklyn, said as his makeup artist lightened his skin and darkened his eye Tuesday in the Strawbale Cafe at Hanging Mountain Farms.

McCormack, playing Gage, spent the previous day at a Westfield quarry filming the accident scene. Dressed in prosthetics and blood, McCormack imagined what the experience was like for Gage, who was in his mid-20s at the time and lived for more than 10 years after his accident.



PIONEER VALLEY STORE *Click Here Shop Now!*
Where EVERYTHING is 30% Off EVERYDAY!

RATES STARTING FROM \$59
LUXOR LAS VEGAS **BOOK NOW!**

Popular stories

- Huntington man, 34, accused of statutory rape
- Cow deaths probed in Plainfield
- Herman Dietz Jr., had construction company
- Court backs Northampton veteran's housing claim
- Chemical spill forces cleanup in Amherst

"It's so strange to think somebody survived that," said McCormack. "It's hard to wrap your head around, no pun intended."

Town's role

Westhampton stands in for the Vermont town where the accident occurred.

In a scene shot in Westhampton, New York actors Peter Judd and Suzan Perry read about Gage's accident in the newspaper while peeling potatoes with a 19th-century knife.

Judd in trousers and vest and Perry in a bonnet and dress, the pair sat in front of 1,500 old-fashioned sap buckets stacked inside the red barn. They recited lengthy, formal sentences that were actually written 100 years ago, which Roughton found in an old newspaper.

"I'm very honored they came; this is such a little town," said Anita Aloisi, who owns the farm with her husband, Leo. "It's amazing the people we get to meet along the way."

Roughton, who frequents the North Road farm for breakfast at the Strawbale Cafe, said the environment appealed to him for the film.

On Wednesday, cameras rolled in Sturbridge Village, the setting for the Massachusetts General Hospital surgical theater where Gage's doctor, John Harlow, presented Gage's personality changes to a group of physicians.

Roughton has produced documentary films for 20 years for outlets such as National Geographic, Public Broadcasting Service and A&E, but this piece is the first film he's taken on as director.

He is looking into various film markets and continues to raise funds for the film. Its script earned him a \$7,500 Massachusetts Cultural Council grant.

Catherine Baum can be reached at cbaum@gazettenet.com.

Filed Under: [arts](#) [local](#) [local news](#) [news](#) [westhampton](#)

Comments

Post new comment

Your name:

[Catherine Baum](#)

Subject:

Comment: *

Input format

Filtered HTML

- Web page addresses and e-mail addresses turn into links automatically.
 - Allowed HTML tags: <a> <i> <code> <cite> <div>
- Lines and paragraphs break automatically.

Full HTML

- Web page addresses and e-mail addresses turn into links automatically.
- Lines and paragraphs break automatically.

[More information about formatting options](#)



[Local News](#) | [State/Region](#) | [U.S./World](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Sports](#) | [Business](#) | [Schools](#) | [Colleges](#) | [Politics](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Health](#) | [Living](#) | [Sci/Tech](#)
[Blogs](#)

[Copyright Notice](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Help Center](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Subscribe to the Gazette](#) | [Advertising](#)

Daily Hampshire Gazette © 2008 All rights reserved