



THE FRIENDS OF VALLEY FALLS, INC. NEWSLETTER

Volume II Number 2

Summer

August 2003

THE PLANS FOR VALLEY FALLS BARN: A COMPROMISE OF PAST AND FUTURE

BY DAN WRIGHT, ARCHITECT

Any project that plans to utilize a building or facility for a purpose that differs from its original use, yet retain the original appearance and character of the building, faces a number of decisions. These decisions deserve careful consideration and often require compromises to achieve a solution that will be practical and functional, but still respect the original character and function of the building. This is the case in the creation of the Valley Falls Nature Center in the existing barn in Valley Falls Park.

Recognizing the inherent beauty and the unique setting of the old dairy barn, the Friends of Valley Falls, in collaboration with the Vernon Parks and Recreation Department, determined that the proper direction for the building would be to preserve the upper level of the barn in its original form. The lower level would best suit the purpose of a year-round Nature Center, which would serve as a facility for interpretative study and nature programs that could be used by the Friends, town residents and the Vernon school system.

These decisions imposed certain requirements and certain constraints on the design plans. The upper or main level of the barn is a superb example of a post and beam structure, with all of the structural elements - post, beams, columns, braces and joints - clearly visible. The fact that this portion of the building is practically in its original form and is in excellent condition triggered the decision to retain the upper level of the barn intact, and to undertake the necessary repairs to maintain the character, structural clarity and beauty of the original structure.

With these basic directions determined, the decision criteria were established, and the task of decision-making for the nature center level was tackled. These criteria were set:

- Retain the original exterior appearance of the barn;
- Retain, as much as possible, the interior character of the nature center level;
- Provide a nature center usable year round;
- Provide the following spaces in the nature center
 - a large open space for lectures, classes, meetings, and round table discussions
 - a small laboratory area for study and analysis
 - toilets
 - a small office area
 - an area for displays and announcements.

Since the program and directions were established, the following progress has been made on the project.



- The wood shingled roof has been replaced, including the cupola roof; repairs to the cupola have been made.

- The area around the building has been cleared to expose the original layout and location of the foundations of the original farm structures in the immediate vicinity of the

See *Plans*, page 2

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Plans, continued from page 1

barn.

- A stone wall and fencing were built at the front entrance of the building;
- Some re-grading around the barn has been done to control water problems



that threatened the structure;

- The original deteriorated windows that had been boarded up have been replaced with new energy efficient windows that have the multi-pane pattern of the original windows;

• Design plans for the nature center have been prepared, including lighting

and heating designs;

- Options for water service and a sanitary disposal system are being identified and evaluated.

Many thanks go to the Vernon Recreation Department Director Bruce Dinnie and his staff for the accomplishments to date. With the overall plan determined, and the continued cooperation of the Friends and the Department, progress will continue toward the realization of the Valley Falls Nature Center in the barn in Valley Falls park.

***Editor's Note:** Dan Wright is an architect with offices at 49-C Hartford Turnpike in Vernon. Dan is also Vice-President of the Friends, and has contributed many, many hours of his time preparing the architectural drawings for the nature center and guiding the decisions and efforts that have been made to date on the barn. We are ever-grateful for his dedication and appreciation of this historic structure.*

VALLEY FALLS FARM

LAND MANAGEMENT

Due to the high cost of mowing last year, we are trying a new approach in the management of the fields and grounds of Valley Falls Farm. We are aiming for the look of a farm, not a closely cropped lawn. The area around the stable and other buildings has been mowed as before. The slopes have been left untouched to halt erosion and to encourage grasses such as Little Bluestem, whose seeds benefit migrating song birds. The field has been mowed less frequently and while the appearance in early summer was attractive, that look has changed and we need to rethink the mowing frequency. Further, attention has not been given to necessary trimming (weedwhacking). Volunteers, we sure could use your help!

NATURE NOTES



Late summer blooming plants are numerous and lovely. In the park, look for *White Snakeroot* (*Eupatorium rugosum*) and numerous varieties of asters and goldenrod.

Ragweed, which is always green, is the principal cause of hayfever, summer and fall! It is a very common

weed on cultivated ground and roadsides.



Jewel Weed (*Impatiens capensis*) grows in moist shady areas. The delicate yellow-orange flowers could be described as jewel-like. The plants' hollow stem

contains a juice that can be used as an antidote for Poison Ivy. (The Jewel Weed's alkaline sap neutralizes the acidic juice of the poisonous substances in the ivy). Euell Gibbons preserved this medicine by placing a



quantity of the plant in cold water, boiled it until half-gone, cooled it and placed it in ice cube trays in the freezer.

Burdock (*Arctium lappa*) is a biennial growing in fields and vacant lots - and near Valley Falls Barn. The idea for Velcro fasteners came from the way the brown burs attach themselves to clothing. The root of the plant is favorite of Japanese cooks. The leaves of the plant are large. During the second year, the basal rosette sends up a many-branched flowering stalk.

VALLEY FALLS PARK

\$8000 GRANT AWARDED TO FRIENDS FOR TRAIL WORK IN THE PARK

The Department of Environmental Protection recently announced that the Friends have been awarded a Recreational Trails Grant. The total award amount is \$8000. The grant has a 20% cost share component, which may be in form of in-kind labor. In-kind labor will be provided by Parks and Recreation Department staff and Friends volunteers. The Recreational Trails Grant program is a federally funded program that is managed by the CT Department of Environmental Protection.

The funds will be used to address erosion problems on Hemlock Hill, specifically the trail that connects the Park to the Rail Trail. Because of the steep hillside, soil is easily eroded and loosened from trail overuse and gets washed down the slope into the pond during rainstorms. Trail improvements will include a study of the trail location to be certain its siting is the least damaging to the hillside; changing the trail location, if needed; and implementation of safety measures where needed. There is also a public education component of the grant. Signage will be placed

in the park, and a brochure on soil erosion and sedimentation impacts will be created that will describe to park users the importance of staying on the trails and not disrupting the hillside terrain. Consultation on the project will be provided by the Soil and Water Conservation District.

LETTERBOXING HAS COME TO VALLEY FALLS PARK

Letterboxing is a pastime combining navigational skills (using maps, clues and compasses) and rubberstamp artistry in a charming treasure hunt. There are 511 sites in Northeastern Connecticut, two in the park. A letterbox is a plastic box containing a small notebook and a unique rubber stamp. Once a box is located, the finder inks the stamp from the box and presses it into his notebook, then inks his personal stamp and presses that into the notebook kept in the box. Letterboxers trace their hobby to 1854, when a Victorian gentleman walker put his calling card in a bottle and stuck the bottle into a bank at Cranmere Pool, in a remote part of Dartmoor. For more information, check the website: letterboxing.org and the April issue of *Smithsonian* magazine.

YOU ARE INVITED.....

FRIENDS OF VALLEY FALLS, INC.

ANNUAL MEETING

SUNDAY, OCTOBER, 12TH

2:00 P.M.

AT THE STABLE – VALLEY FALLS FARM



GUEST SPEAKER:

JANE SEYMOUR, WILDLIFE RESEARCHER

“THE BELDING WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA: A TREASURE IN OUR MIDST”

Jane Seymour has spent the last six months documenting natural resources in the Belding Wildlife Management Area for CT Department of Environmental Protection. She is also preparing a management plan to guide the long-term stewardship of this 300-acre state-owned site that abuts Valley Falls Farm. A generous private endowment from Maxwell Belding will fund a full-time conservationist to care for the area. Jane will discuss some of her findings on the property, the research techniques she uses, and the importance of the management plan to the future environmental integrity of the area.

COME LEARN ABOUT THIS NATURAL RESOURCE TREASURE!

SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2003

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