



THE FRIENDS OF VALLEY FALLS INC. NEWSLETTER

Volume II Number 1

Spring

April 2003

VALLEY FALLS PARK

THE PARK

Our long winter has finally lost its hold as we are delighting in the sights and sounds of spring.

- The sound of the tiny **Spring Peeper**: Barely an inch long, the volume of its song is totally out of proportion to its size. The males call their ladies from shrubs and trees near the water. Their chorus can be heard nightly throughout April and May. Females lay their egg masses in water after mating in May.
- The songs of **wood warblers** in late April and early May: Naturalist Roger Tory Peterson called them “the butterflies of the bird world. They pass through the park in great numbers as they head north along their migratory routes. The best time to observe warblers as they flit about the tops of trees feeding on insects and caterpillars is just before the leaves “pop. Male warblers do the singing and have the bright colors. To identify them, look for wingbars and characteristic head markings. Each species has its distinctive song.
- The **wildflowers** making their appearance: Skunk Cabbage, Hepatica, Trailing Arbutus, Trillium, Bloodroot, Marsh Marigold, Jack in the Pulpit, Lady Slippers...

NATURE WALK GUIDES

If you enjoy the park and want to share your interest with others, consider being a nature walk guide – for both children and adults.

Training sessions for people interested in being Nature Walk Guides will be held Mondays from 9:00 – 10:30 a.m. Meet at the Pavillion on April 14th. Participants will be given materials and a list of reference books. We will walk the trails weekly in April and May to gain familiarity with flora and fauna with the aim of developing a group of leaders who will be willing to lead nature walks in the park, similar to the role of a docent in art museums.

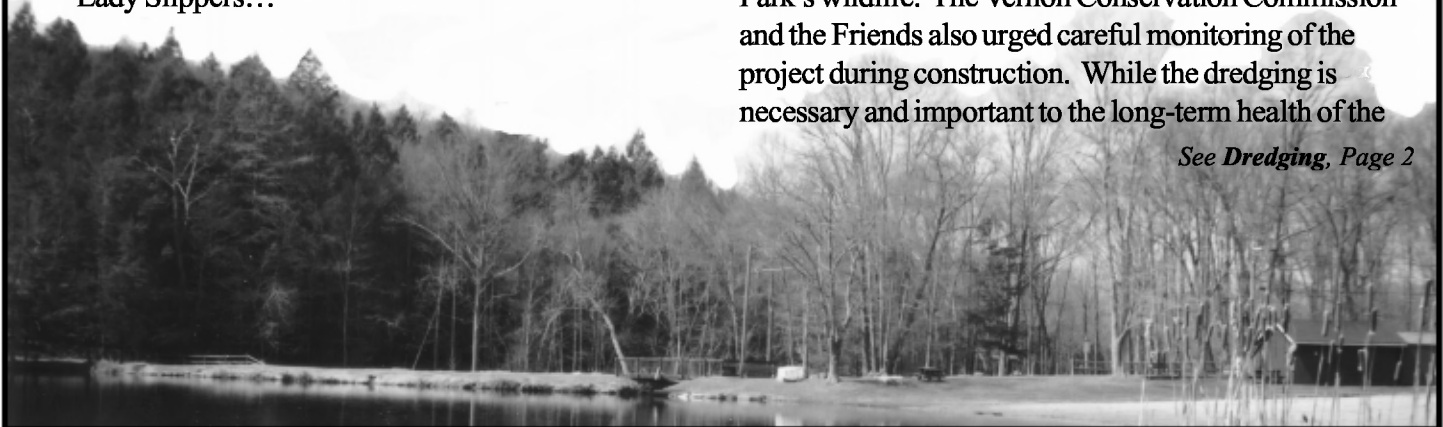
To register for the sessions, call Ginny Gingras (875-9865) or Betty Tedford (875-3673).

DREDGING OF VALLEY FALLS POND

The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection held a public hearing for a dredging permit March 19th at the Senior Citizen’s Building. Representatives from the engineering company, Baystate Environmental Consultants, Inc., presented the plans for removal of pond sediments to the DEP, to local officials, and to the public, including several members of the Friends.

Work will be undertaken at a time of year that will have the least impact on the reproductive cycle of the Park’s wildlife. The Vernon Conservation Commission and the Friends also urged careful monitoring of the project during construction. While the dredging is necessary and important to the long-term health of the

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Valley Falls Farm - former ice house

Dredging, continued from page 1

pond, in the short term it will be a major intrusion on the area. The consultants estimate that it will take about three years for full recovery of disturbance to soil surface and plant life.

VALLEY FALLS BARN

Renovations planned for the barn this year are replacement of the windows, painting of the barn (in May) and installation of utilities. The Friends will supply the paint and labor for the barn. Help is needed! Allocated funds from the state LOCIP (Local Capital Improvement Program) will be used to install heating, plumbing and complete some electrical work.

INVASIVE PLANTS

Garlic Mustard was found in the park last year. Since it can spread rapidly and crowd out native wildflowers, a major effort must be made to control it. The plant is easy to pull out. **If you are a regular walker in the park, please call Ginny (875-9865), and she will show you what it looks like. Just bring a plastic bag with you as you walk in the park to carry it away. It must be removed before going to seed.**



Garlic Mustard in bloom

VALLEY FALLS FARM



Valley Falls Farm in winter - view from Bolton Road

REGULAR WORKING HOURS!

Fall and winter have been quiet on the farm. The winter snows have been beautiful - and the view across the meadow from Bolton Road has been a breathtaking, quintessential New England scene. We continue to receive grateful thanks from the community that this property, this view for all seasons, is preserved.

But now – spring is upon us, and there is much to do. We have decided to establish a **regular weekly schedule** for volunteer work at the farm: **every Thursday morning and every Saturday morning, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. during April and May, starting April 10th.**

NATURE NOTES

The earliest color in the woodlands is from the tiny yellow blossoms of a native shrub, **Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)**, which give the hillside along the wood road a golden glow when in bloom. It is often called “forsythia of the wild” and is the host to the larva of the swallowtail butterfly. To identify the shrub, crush any part to release its lemon-like aroma. Red berries ripen in August and were used by colonists during the Revolutionary War to replace the tropical allspice that they had imported from England.



Spicebush branch with berries

Volunteers are welcome on these days. If you can't be there for the full two hours, partial work time will be appreciated. A list of tasks has been prepared. Ginny Gingras and Carroll Burke will be calling those who have offered help. Put these dates on your calendar! More time will be scheduled during the summer and fall.

FACILITIES

Board members Tony Caruolo, Facilities Manager, and Carroll Burke, Director of Facilities Planning have spent a great deal of time putting together a well thought out and very detailed work plan for the repair and future maintenance of the buildings. Tony has taken on two able assistants to help with this work: **Bill Wardrop** and **Jeff Carlson**.

Repairs need to be made to the buildings before the much-needed painting can be initiated. Priority this year will be completing repairs to the house and beginning work on the stable. Eight windows in the stable need to be replaced. An acceptable quote has been received for the job, but we have also submitted a grant to Home Depot to cover the cost, which is about \$2000. We expect to have a decision on the grant by the end of April.

GROUNDS

The snows came before the leaves could be raked last fall, so a big job is ahead once the snows melt. We look forward to seeing the herb garden in bloom again, thanks to the Vernon Garden Club. The tall red pine trees at the west end of the meadow which had succumbed to pine beetle disease have been taken down and neatly stacked on the property. Many, many thanks to Bill Wardrop and George Arthur for accomplishing this back-breaking feat!

FINANCIALS

Overall we still remain in good financial condition, but, as we mentioned in the fall '02 newsletter, we were dismayed at having received a tax bill from the Town of Vernon. This tax is a definite burden on the organization. Since we are a non-profit organization that directly supports a Town facility, both through direct funding and through volunteer work, we believe that we should not be taxed, and plan to appeal this decision. Attorney Amy Paterson

represented the Friends at a March 25th hearing with the tax review board. In the meantime, in order to keep in good credit standing with Tolland Bank who holds the balance of the mortgage, we have paid the tax bills for both this year and last year 'under protest.' Our Annual Report, presented at the October 2002 Annual Meeting provides details of financial status.

MUSEUM

During the upcoming weekly work sessions, we will begin work on cataloging, labeling, describing and photographing tools for the farm museum that we plan for the stable. **HELP IS NEEDED.** Please let us know if you would like to volunteer some time in this area.



Valley Falls Farm - Stable building and old farm equipment

MORE NATURE NOTES

Speckled Alder (*Alnus rugosa*) is a large shrub, common along streams. Look for the woody cones on the twigs. Alder wood was gathered by farmers during winter months, dried in sheds and then burned to make a high quality charcoal. The Hazard Powder Company in Hazardville manufactured black powder, which was composed of charcoal, saltpeter and sulfur. For more information consult *Images of America: Enfield, Connecticut* by Michael K. Miller.

JOIN US FOR Nature Walks in the Park

Wildflower &
Wild Edibles Walk
Sunday, May 4th
1:00 p.m.

Bird Walk
Saturday, May 18th
8:00 a.m.

Mushroom Foray
Sunday, September 21st
1:00 p.m.

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