



The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc.

NEWSLETTER

Volume V Number 1

Spring

April 2006

VALLEY FALLS FARM

Building Renovations

The new roof and siding on the farmhouse was completed, as reported in our September newsletter. Fall work focused on reducing heat loss during the winter. Thanks to **Paul Gingras, Tony Caruolo and Bob Letendre**, a new boiler was installed, storm windows were replaced on the four front windows, and a new front door was installed on the porch entrance. Trim painting and other smaller projects will be done during the spring.

With the most pressing work on the farmhouse completed, we are now turning attention to the stable. Much work needs to be done on this wonderful building, the largest of the farm outbuildings. While this building is basically a very sound structure, it does need window replacement or repair, exterior and interior painting, some clapboard replacement, and plumbing upgrade. We are planning a major fall fundraising event to help support these renovations. (*See Artists Day, below.*)

Bluebird Trail

A bluebird trail will be installed at the edge of the woods at the Farm. Connecticut DEP provided a bundle of rough-cut lumber that will make 15-20 houses. Volunteers are needed to build the boxes, install them, and monitor them. We will install some of the houses this year. The entire trail will be installed for the next breeding season. Please call Ginny at 875-9865 if you can help.

Focus on the Farmhouse Buildings - The Stable

In our spring '05 issue we initiated a regular feature in the newsletter on the six farm outbuildings. This issue's focus, the stable/carriage barn, is the most striking and the largest of the six structures. It sits proudly near the crest of the hill overlooking the rest of the property. The most unusual exterior feature is the windowed 'point and ball' cupola. The 1½ story building was constructed in

the late 1890s by Count Munchow, purported to be a Hungarian nobleman. The Count was known to take



great pride in his team of fine horses, which he regularly pranced through the streets of Rockville. Much attention to detail and quality was lavished on the construction of the stable. The interior walls, including the horse stalls, are finished in matchstick board. The stalls even have custom-worked wrought iron hay feeders. During the 1960s, the hayloft of the stable was converted to a tavern-type room. Many stories are told of the good times that were had there by the Darico family in that era of this building's history. Today, the room is used in the summer for our Board meetings (minus the tavern accoutrements!).

As to its future – we continue to plan for use of the stable/carriage barn as a museum to display the many pieces of old farm equipment acquired by the Friends when the property was purchased.

ARTISTS DAY AT THE FARM! SEPTEMBER 9, 2006

We are planning an event for local artists to set-up their easels and paint scenes on the farm, one of the most picturesque sights in Vernon. The all-day program will begin at 8:00 a.m. The public is invited to watch the artists as they create their work, which will be auctioned for YOU to take home. The auction and a reception begin at 5:00 p.m. More details will be announced. The proceeds will benefit the buildings and grounds at Valley Falls Farm.

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Lisa Letendre 633-7666

Welcome to our new Director - Dr. Hubert Bush. Hugh has been a long-time member of the Friends of Valley Falls Park. He lives in the neighborhood of the Park and is pleased to be taking part in its stewardship.

CORRECT THE RECORD, PLEASE!

One of our tenants in the farmhouse, Jane Seymour, is an appointee to the Vernon Inland Wetlands Commission. During a recent Town Council discussion of her re-appointment, two councilpersons, Jason McCoy and Christie Vale, voted against Jane's reappointment, citing a 'conflict of interest.' As reported in the Journal Inquirer, Vale and McCoy claimed conflict of interest because the Friends of Valley Falls 'frequently appear before the Commission.' This statement is absolutely INCORRECT. The Friends has never, in its 35-year history, made a statement before the Inland Wetlands Commission. We do not take local advocacy actions for or against public issues.

We received several phone calls from you, our supporters, asking about this conflict of interest assertion. We want to assure you that our mission is focused solely on "promoting the betterment of Valley Falls Park and Farm. The ONLY instance in which we might make an appearance before this Commission – or any other agency - is if either the Park or the Farm would be directly threatened by a proposed action.

Since several of our Board members are active community leaders, we can understand an incorrect perception – BUT, we surely wish that Mr. McCoy and Mrs. Vale had checked the facts, or called us, before presuming a 'conflict of interest' situation for Jane and the Friends.

VALLEY FALLS PARK

Friends Receive Another Grant Award!

The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc. recently received a \$20,000 Recreational Trails grant from the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection Recreational Trails Program for improvements to the Railroad Brook Trail in Valley Falls Park. The frequent use of this popular trail has caused erosion problems along the streambed. The funds will be to construct bridges and boardwalks over wet areas, and to relocate some trail sections.

New Park Facility

A new building is in the design-and-planning stages in the Park. The building will house restroom facilities, as well as park equipment. The current building will be taken down. Most recently, Dan Wright has been selected as the architect by the Town of Vernon to design the building. Dan also designed the renovations for the environment education center planned for the basement of the red barn.

Dogs in the Park

We consider it a **privilege** that we have this park available for public use. Unfortunately, we have noted of late several dogwalkers who abuse this privilege. PLEASE - if you know of anyone that walks their dogs in the Park - remind them to keep their dogs leashed, and to use a 'pooper scooper' bag to pick up after the dog!

On the Trails...

We want to again express our gratitude to **George Arthur** and to **Joe King** for their ever-vigilant eyes on the Park. They do yeoman work in maintaining the trails, and keeping them safe and free of debris.

HELP FROM THE EAGLE SCOUTS!

We have been extremely appreciative to the Eagle Scouts for their very ambitious and valuable contributions to the Park and the Farm. Two projects were completed last fall:

Tim Callahan of Manchester Scout Troop 25 refinished the wooden Braille signs on the Braille Nature Trail. Due to weathering, the signs had been badly damaged and were unreadable. The signs were sanded, stained, newly inscribed and installed – a big job! At the Farm, Tim also uncovered the old stone steps on the steep slope leading from the house to the stable. The steps, about twenty of them, were barely visible and had been almost completely covered with years of eroded soil. A piece of the old landscape has been restored - thank you, Tim!

Will Boutwell of Vernon Scout Troop 11 cleared brush and debris from the area around the historic mill ruins near the Nature /Braille Trail. The site was originally a sawmill, one of the first mills in Vernon. The ruins are an intriguing element of the nature walk, and the clearing has enhanced this aspect of the trail. Will and his troop also donated their remaining project funds slated for the project (\$700) to the Friends! Thank you, Will!



Eagle Scout Will Boutwell presents a check to Ginny Gingras, FVF President.

NATURE NOTES



photo by Brenda Cataldo

FISHER (*Marates pennanti*)

A large member of the weasel family. It seldom eats fish. The name may have been derived from “fitch, the European polecat. The French call the pelt, which is valuable, “fiche. In the 19th Century, fishers became scarce due to forest logging, clearing for agriculture, and overexploitation. The fisher has been seen in the Valley Falls area. They are found throughout eastern Connecticut where the habitat of coniferous or mixed hardwood-softwood forests contain large trees for denning. Fishers seldom travel in open areas and tend to be nocturnal. Their diet consists of: squirrels, rabbits, mice, voles, carrion, fruits, mast (primarily beechnuts), porcupines, birds, and frogs.



HEPATICA (*Hepatica americana*)

This plant with its lovely blue blossoms can be found on rocky hillsides in late March. It is a rare plant. There are a few growing deep in the woods of Valley Falls Park. The flowers bloom before the new leaves open.

PLEASE JOIN US!

NATURE WALKS

All walks begin in the parking lot at Valley Falls Park.

May 13, Saturday 8:00 a.m.

BIRD WALK - led by Denise Anamani.

May 21, Sunday 2:00 p.m.

WILDFLOWER WALK – led by Ginny Gingras and Irene Gay.

September 23, Saturday 1:00 p.m.

MUSHROOM FORAY– led by Irene Gay.

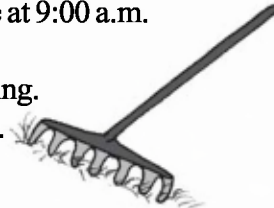
WORK DAYS AT THE FARM

We have set the following weekends as work days. Please arrive at 9:00 a.m.

April 22 & 23 – Clean-up and land-management projects.

April 29 & 30 – Install windows in the STABLE, clean the building.

May 6 & 7 – Install windows in the STABLE, clean the building.



MUSEUM WORK DAYS

Help identify and catalog items to display in the farm museum. Join us on these days beginning at 9:00 a.m.:

April 25, May 2, May 9 and May 16.

Please call Ginny if you can assist with any of the above work. We need you!

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