



The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc. Newsletter

www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org

Volume XXV Number II

SPRING/SUMMER 2016

ANNUAL MEETING

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25TH AT 1:00 PM

IN THE RED BARN, 350 VALLEY FALLS ROAD

The “Bear” Facts at Valley Falls

A presentation on “Black Bears in Connecticut”

by Paul Colburn, Master Wildlife Conservationist

Would you like to get the “bear” facts about the black bears that were roaming the Valley Falls hillsides this spring? Join us for our annual meeting and presentation by **Paul Colburn**, Master Wildlife Conservationist (MWC), on “Black Bears in Connecticut.” Mr. Colburn will talk about the natural history of black bears in the state, and their habitat, diet, behavior, and reproduction. He will also talk about current research efforts and how to coexist with our black bear population. A display table with various bear artifacts will be available. The talk is intended for ages 12 and up.

Paul Colburn is a certified Master Wildlife Conservationist and a graduate of an interesting program at the CT

Department of Energy and Environmental Protection called the Master Wildlife Conservationist Program. The program trains participants in the fields of wildlife management, natural history and interpretation. The purpose of the program is to develop a volunteer corps

capable of providing education, outreach, and service for state agencies, environmental organizations, libraries, schools, and the general public.

Paul is the consummate volunteer! In addition to his work as a MWC, he volunteers for the Red Cross, Wesleyan University Admissions, and The Travelers

Championship. He has served on the Board of Directors of Special Wishes Inc., an organization devoted to assisting families facing life threatening childhood diseases. He is past President of Residents Advocating Conservation, has been active in local politics, youth athletics and served on many local boards and commissions. His interests include the outdoors, nature,

hiking, biking, politics, and travel. Paul holds a BA from Wesleyan University and served honorably in the United States Army. ☎



Paul Colburn, Master Wildlife Conservationist

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ANNUAL MEETING...MORE

The business meeting will begin on September 25th at 1:00 pm with a welcome from the president and reports from the Board of Directors. **Allen Valli**, our beekeeper, will give a report on honey production. This year there are three additional hives, for a total of five. Allen will begin harvesting the honey from the beehives about mid September. If you would like to purchase some, contact him at 860-871-4410, and/or stop by his home at 13 Skinner Road. ☎

OUR NEW TENANTS IN THE FARMHOUSE

Among our many responsibilities as owners of Valley Falls Farm is managing the two rental apartments in the farmhouse. To date we have been very fortunate in finding tenants who “get” this unique place and understand its place in our local history.

In February we were pleased to welcome our most recent

new tenants, Nicolai and Lauren. Nicolai is from Denmark and is employed at Lego in Enfield. Lauren is a UConn graduate and is working on her MSW. She says, “I love it here. It’s awesome that we’re located within walking distance to the trails, live in a quiet area, and have the best neighbors we could ask for. Everyone that we encounter here at the farm is so friendly that we really felt at home very quickly.” Recently married, Nicolai and Lauren are enjoying their first experience with gardening, and share the coldframe vegetable garden with Tom and Barbara, our other “best tenants ever!” ☎



*Nicolai and Lauren on the front steps of the Farmhouse.
Photo by Luke Wayne Photography*

VALLEY FALLS PARK SPRING WALKS A SUCCESS

We were pleased to welcome an enthusiastic audience to our “Three-Walk Weekend” in Valley Falls Park on May 14th and 15th. We thank **Denise Animani**, **Don Sierakowski** and **Ginny Gingras** for leading the walks. Denise gave her usual excellent bird walk on Saturday morning, which she has done for us for over 13 years. Later that day Don led a walk that focused on the history and geology in Valley Falls Park. Then, on Sunday morning, Ginny brought attendees to the various hidden areas in Valley Falls Park where she knows wildflowers bloom each spring. ☎



*Walk leader Ginny Gingras points out an area of wildflower bloom.
Photo by J. Roe*

THE TWO NATIONAL REGISTER SITES IN VALLEY FALLS PARK

Few people are aware that there are not one, but two, National Register of Historic Places sites in Valley Falls Park! The two sites are the **Christian Sharpe's Trout Hatchery**, and the **Valley Falls Cotton Mill**.

Obtaining "National Register" status is a lengthy and time consuming process. The application is made to the US Department of the Interior. It requires detailed research and documentation in making the case for this national status. It usually requires the hiring of an expert to complete the application requirements. We are grateful to the **Vernon Historical Society**, which has overseen this process for the two sites at Valley Falls Park, and for the several other National Register sites in the Town of Vernon.

The **Sharpe's Trout Hatchery** was an ambitious, state-of-the-art hatchery that operated from 1871 to 1874. It was located along Railroad Brook (formerly Box Brook) in Valley Falls Park. The hatchery was on the verge of becoming the country's largest trout producer when it abruptly closed down after the unexpected death of its owner, Christian Sharps. Born in 1810, Sharps is perhaps better known as the inventor of the first successful breech-loading rifle, one of which is on display in the **New England Civil War Museum** in Rockville.

At the hatchery site, Sharps had also built a hatchery house and caretaker's cottage. Some of the remains are still visible today. The hatchery is significant for its association with two important historical patterns: the development of fish and wildlife conservation and management methods, and the establishment of a new industry in that time period by private entrepreneurs.

The **Valley Falls Cotton Mill**. Valley Falls Park is the site of the first known mill in Vernon. The first recorded use of the site for industrial purpose was a sawmill, built in 1740. Existence of a dam at that time is also noted in the records. In the 1790s, the property was acquired for use in manufacturing linseed oil. The exact location of the sawmill and oil mill are not known.



*Walk leader Don Sierakowski at the cotton mill foundation.
Photo by J. Roe*

In the mid-1800s the property was acquired by the Valley Falls Company to construct a cotton mill. The remains of the cotton mill foundation and the waterwheel location are visible today. The area is one of the interpretive sites on the Braille Trail in Valley Falls Park. It is located just below the Valley Falls Park entrance, and can be seen from Valley Falls Road in winter. 🗺️

SUMMER TOURS 2016

Though not as well attended as last summer, our Wednesday afternoon tours of the farm were enjoyed by all. Visitors came from neighboring towns, as well as Vernon. We continue to be surprised by the number of people who bring a past memory or share a connection with the Farm. It reaffirms our conviction that the preservation of Valley Falls Farm was the right thing to do! It has saved a piece of our history, and given the community a "sense of place." This year we had on display some of the artifacts we culled out from the building contents that were relevant to the Farm's past history. Our consultants for the Heritage Center, **Musevue 360**, helped us to identify and select the items. 🗺️



The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc.
P.O. Box 2008
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Spring/Summer 2016
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NATURE NOTES

Connecticut's Black Bears

Black bears have made a comeback in Connecticut. First evidence of their return was seen in the 1980s. During that time, the State of CT DEEP Wildlife Division had evidence of a resident black bear population. Since then, sightings have increased annually. Their return is due, in part, to regrowth of forestland throughout the region following the abandonment of farms in the late 1800s.

The Black Bear is the smallest North American bear. Males normally weigh from 150 to 450 pounds, and females range between 45 to 100 pounds. Adults are 5 to 6 feet long. The black bear's coat is typically glossy black or brownish black, except for the muzzle, which is tan.



The Black Bear, Ursinus Americanus

and abundant food resources. Bears are omnivorous, i.e. they eat grasses, fruits, nuts and berries, as well as insects (ants and bees). They also scavenge carrion, and raid bird feeders and garbage cans. Occasionally they will prey on small mammals, deer and livestock.

If you see a bear on your property, you can either leave the bear alone and wait for it to leave, or make loud noises from a safe distance to try to scare the bear away. After the bear leaves the property, remove anything that may have attracted it to the area.

To learn more about the black bear, join us at our Annual Meeting, Sunday September 25th! *

Black Bear habitat is forestland, streams, swamps and rock ledges. They prefer a thick understory vegetation

**From the CT DEEP "Black Bear Fact Sheet." Read more about black bears on the DEEP website at: www.ct.gov/deep/, search on black bears.*