



THE FRIENDS OF VALLEY FALLS, INC. NEWSLETTER

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Spring

April 2005

VALLEY FALLS FARM

FARMHOUSE RENOVATION

As of our last newsletter we had completed most of the interior work, and we welcomed our two new tenants – BUT we were also having some frustrating problems with the water system (high levels of iron, iron bacteria, manganese and a hydrogen sulfide odor). After four months of testing and numerous consultations with well companies, water treatment companies, even the State Department of Public Health, the problem was solved. Thanks to Gene Orłowski, our Town Health Officer, who sent us to **Ray Frosti of H2O Equipment Company**. Within two weeks, Ray had resolved all the issues, and good water is now running through Valley Falls farmhouse! Thanks also to **Courthouse Plus** who provided shower facilities to our very patient tenants until the problems were resolved.

The cold and snowy winter was tough on the older front section of the house. We were faced with some roof and chimney leaks, and a drafty, cold kitchen area. **Bob Letendre and Tony Caruolo** did some temporary repair work, but it was evident that we have to bite the bullet and replace the roof. After a bidding process, we contracted with Tracy Brothers to install a new roof. Thanks to our new Board member, **Joe King**, for getting us through this process. We will also



be replacing the clapboards on the front of the house, and painting the house. At long last, we're finally getting to the building exteriors, which you all see!

FOCUS ON THE FARMHOUSE BUILDINGS – THE ICEHOUSE

Did you every wonder how all those white buildings on the property were once used? Each of our upcoming newsletters will feature one of these outbuildings.

There are six outbuildings at Valley Falls Farm: the ice house, the woodshed, the stable, the piggery, the manure shed, and the cold cellar. This month's focus is the icehouse. This building (pictured below) is located at the foot of the driveway, to the left of the woodshed.

In the days before refrigeration, ice was 'harvested' from nearby lakes and ponds, cut into approximately three cubic-foot blocks, and stored in cold areas for use during the summer. The blocks of ice were actually cut by a handsaw.

Some of these blocks were used in the kitchen 'icebox', the precursor to today's refrigerator.



The ice at Valley Falls Farm was 'harvested' from Valley Falls Pond in the winter, and stored in this icehouse. The building is built into the hillside and thus three sides of the building are completely surrounded with the cool earth. You will notice in the photo that there are also two Norway spruce trees next to the building. These trees were planted to provide shade and additional cooling to the building.

We are fortunate to have the original tools that were used in the ice harvesting operation on the Farm, including the saw that was used to cut and shape the ice blocks. It is our intention to display these tools as part of our farm museum exhibition at some time in the future.

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VALLEY FALLS PARK

The park is scheduled to be closed for the month of June for the completion of the pond dredging. The Pavilion in the park now has a cement floor it was put in last fall and is a vast improvement over the dirt floor.

VERNAL POOLS Vernal pools have been mapped in the Town of Vernon and there are a few in the park. The largest vernal pool in the area is on the former Knapp property, now owned by the Northern Connecticut Land Trust, along the Valley Falls Road, just beyond the boundary of the park. A vernal pool is a temporary pond which fills with water in the spring (vernal means spring) and usually dries up during the summer months. Because the pools do not hold water throughout the year, fish cannot live in them. Many amphibians take advantage of the unique predator-free environment and use vernal pools for breeding. Some species are totally dependent upon vernal pools for their survival. These species are known as obligates, that is, they are obligated to the vernal pool habitat. They only breed in vernal pools. They include the wood frog (*Rana Sylvatica*) and six species of salamanders.

LOCAL HISTORIC PROPERTY DESIGNATION FOR VALLEY FALLS FARM

Shortly after the Friends purchased Valley Falls Farm, we asked the Historic Properties Commission (HPC) to initiate local historic property designation for Valley Falls Farm. The draft application has

just been completed. Thanks to **Bob Hurd** and **Ardis Abbott** for their excellent work, as always. The application has been reviewed by the CT State Historic Commission, and will now go through public hearings for the local approval process, including the HPC, Planning and Zoning Commission and final approval from the Town Council.

“It is important to preserve the agricultural history of Vernon and to save the buildings on this parcel, Ardis Abbot noted. We fully agree, and indeed preserving the lore surrounding this unique ‘gentleman’s farm’ has been one of our main goals. Having this designation will ensure that the buildings will retain their historical appearance, as viewed from public rights of way. In the future, any proposed changes to the exterior that can be seen from the roadway will require approval from the Historic Properties Commission.

IN MEMORIAM — ANDY DARICO

The Friends of Valley Falls are very saddened by the passing of Andy Darico in late February. The Darico family lived in the farmhouse during the 1930’s and 1940’s. Andy’s father worked as the caretaker for Dr. Beach who owned the lands that now comprise Valley Falls Park and Valley Falls Farm, and properties along Bolton Road, including main residence/estate at 507 Bolton Road. The Valley Falls Farm parcel was later sold, and then purchased by the Darico brothers in the sixties. We will sadly miss hearing Andy’s stories of the ‘good old times’ that were spent by the Daricos at the Farm.

Andy and his family judiciously cared for the property until we purchased it from them in 2001.

Andy was legendary in his careful grooming of this corner landscape. His work was appreciated by all who drove by the property, the most picturesque setting in the Town of Vernon.

TRAILING ARBUTUS (*Epigaea repens*)



It is hard to find this lovely, fragrant and rare flower, but it does grow in the park in a few places.

The Pilgrims called it the Mayflower. It trails over the woodland floors among the leaves, mosses, and pine needles in sandy or rocky shady areas. The Arbutus is the Massachusetts state flower. The blossoms are clusters of little tubed five-lobed pink flowers in April or May. The flower is famed for its wonderful perfume which you must get on your hands and knees to inhale. These once abundant flowers are now scarce because they were over picked to adorn homes and schoolrooms.

RED TRILLIUM (*Trillium erectum*)

The trillium grows throughout the park, blooming in April and May. It grows one to 1 1/2 feet in height, with three large heart-shaped leaves held at wide angles from the stem at the same level. The flower is carried on a slender stalk or peduncle. The three red or purplish petals are backed by three narrower bronze-tinted sepals that make it look like a six petaled flower. The head of the flower tends to droop over shortly after it comes into bloom, which is



about the same time the robins return, hence the name of Wake-Robins given to trilliums. The name Trillium comes from the Latin word "tres," meaning three and refers to the fact that most of the flowers have three leaves, three petals, and three sepals. The added "erectum" for this species indicates that it holds its flower face skyward at blooming time, though not always.



SKUNK CABBAGE (*Symplocarpus foetidus*)

The herald of spring - skunk cabbage is the first wild flowering plant to burst into bloom. The flowers are not spectacular. One needs to look inside the

heavy, twisting, purple streaked helmet or hood to see a thick stalk on which there is an egg-shaped, brownish-yellow pincushion. The eruptions on the pincushion are the flowers. The hood is called the "spathe" and the flowering stalk, a "spadix." The disagreeable odor of a skunk is given off when the leaves are crushed and the leaves are cabbage-like, hence the name skunk cabbage.

THE BUMBLEBEE

It has been said that spring is really here when you see a bumblebee. They are the chief pollen carriers for most of our wild flowers as well as for the clovers and other farm plants. The queen



bumblebee will be seen in early May trying to find a suitable place for her nest. The bumblebees, unlike the honeybees do not provide enough honey to sustain the whole colony during the winter. Only the mother bees, or queens, survive the cold season. She will select a cosy place, very likely a deserted nest of the field mouse to begin building her home. She gathers pollen and nectar from flowers which she mixes into a loaf as large as a bean upon which she lays a few tiny eggs and then covers them with wax. She then makes a honey-pot of wax (small thimble size) and fills it with honey for her food as she broods over the eggs. Each little bee grub burrows into the beebread, making a cave. When fully grown, it spins a cocoon, changes to a pupa and emerges as a true bumblebee. These workers gather pollen and nectar, and add to the mass of beebread. For more information, consult the *Handbook of Nature Study*, by Anna Botsford Comstock.

JOIN US FOR SPRING NATURE WALKS!

The following walks have been scheduled:

Saturday, May 14, 2005 at 8:00 a.m. - Bird Walk led by Denise Anamani.

Saturday, May 21, 2005 at 1:00 p.m. - Wildflower walk led by Ginny Gingras and Betty Tedford.

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

NATURE SIGHTINGS AT VALLEY FALLS PARK

Coyotes have been spotted in Valley Falls Farm and Valley Falls Park.

Also, a pair of Pileated Woodpeckers has been seen in Valley Falls Park in the second (back) field.

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