



# The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc. NEWSLETTER

Volume XIV Number 1

Spring

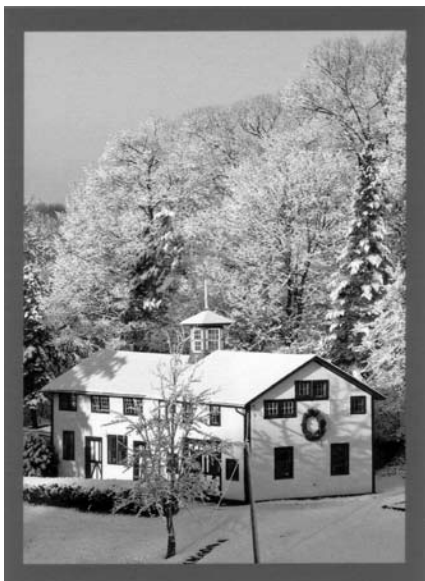
April 2010

## NEW GRANT AWARD FOR PLANNING OUR FUTURE!

A technical assistance grant of \$5,912 was recently awarded to the Friends by the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation for planning for the future use of the Farm, and for the future directions of the organization. The grant scope will provide funds for consultant services for guidance on use of the buildings to display the collection of farm tools and farm equipment that we inherited with the purchase of the Farm. The grant also provides consultant service for strategic planning for the future of the organization. We need to put in place a good foundation for the long term health and viability of the Friends. This work will evaluate our mission, including our focus on Valley Falls Park, and a look at finances (assets and liabilities), funding base, web site and public programming. The grant work is a 12-month effort that will start in May.

The grant has 1 to 1 matching requirements, but in-kind labor can also be considered. We are fortunate to have services from three local professionals in the field who donated their time for this matching requirement: **Dr. Ardis Abbott**, Director of the Vernon Historical Society, will provide a workshop for the Friends on collection assessment and cataloguing. **Allison Herrmann**, daughter of Board member Dave Herrmann, will provide guidance on interpretive displays. **Jennifer Wheeler**, our tenant, will provide assistance with implementing a strategic plan. We are very grateful to these three experts for their generous sharing of their time and talent to help us meet the grant matching requirements. We also thank the **Vernon Historical Society**, and **Bob Hurd of the Vernon Historic Properties Commission** for support of our grant application.

## VALLEY FALLS FARM



The winter passed quietly at the farm, and our attention has turned to planning summer renovation projects. Our most urgent need is a new roof on the stable, which has sprouted several leaks. Painting of the outbuildings will continue. During late fall we worked on converting the west room off the porch into 3-season livable space. Replacement of two rear windows and entrance door will complete the job this spring, thanks to our community worker and expert carpenter, Marek.

As to care of the grounds, we had two dying trees removed that posed a potential problem to our neighbor's property.

Unfortunately beekeeper Dermot Jones will not continue to manage the beehives on the property due to the cost of addressing the viruses that have been plaguing bee populations in Connecticut. He has recommended another beekeeper who might be willing to place hives on the Farm.

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## Welcome New Board Member!

We are pleased to announce that **Paula Passaretti** has joined the Board of Directors. Paula served on the Artists' Day Committee and played a major role in the success of the day. She lives in the Valley Falls area and enjoys its vistas on a daily basis. We look forward to working with her and welcome her talents.

## Interested in Joining the Friends?

Membership Dues are:

- INDIVIDUAL - \$10
- FAMILY - \$25
- CONTRIBUTING - \$35
- BENEFACTOR - \$100

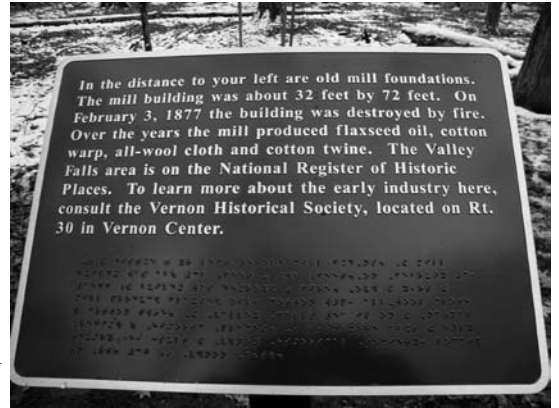
Please send checks to:

PO Box 2008, Vernon, CT 06066

# VALLEY FALLS PARK

## Braille Trail

Seventeen new metal Braille signs now mark the Braille Trail. The signs were funded by the DEP grant award to the Friends. Many thanks go to **Don Bellingham** and the Vernon Greenway Volunteers and to the Parks and Recreation Department for taking on the challenging task of installing the signs in an area heavily criss-crossed by tree roots. Two-thirds of the grant work has been completed on the Braille Trail, the remaining work will be done this summer.



In May Valley Falls Park will host a group of middle school children from the State of Connecticut Board of Education Services for the Blind (BESB). The program was arranged and planned by the Vernon Greenways Volunteers. Activities will include fly fishing, bait fishing, a tour of the Braille trail, barbecue picnic lunch and games. We are pleased to see the Braille Trail being used for this wonderful event.

## Barn Grant

We were disappointed to learn that the grant application submitted by the Vernon Parks and Recreation Department for the construction of a nature education and interpretive center in the lower level of the barn was not awarded. The Department will continue to pursue funding for the project, and we are pleased to provide assistance for these efforts.

## Milfoil in the Pond

The discovery of the aquatic invasive known as milfoil in Valley Falls Pond prompted the Parks and Recreation Department, working with the Vernon Conservation Commission, to address the issue. George Knoecklein, PhD, of Northeast Aquatic Research was hired to survey the pond and to make recommendations for removal of the invasive. The pond was found to be infested with the non-native, invasive aquatic plant Variable-leaved milfoil (*Myriophyllum heterophyllum*). The plant forms a canopy of shoots that block light from reaching bottom waters and can dramatically reduce the degree the water mixes with the atmosphere. These two consequences lead to dissolved oxygen loss from deepest water. Because of the high recreational use of the pond, immediate action has been taken to save the pond.

Results of the survey are documented in a report prepared by Northeast Aquatic Research. If you would like a copy, call Ann Letendre, 875-4623. After significant research on potential approaches, and a public meeting held to obtain public input, the Conservation Commission and the Parks and Recreation Department decided that the best approach would be to treat the pond with a systemic herbicide. It is also the DEP-recommended approach. This work will be done in early June when it will have the least impact on aquatic wildlife.

## VERNAL POOLS

*by Jane Seymour, Wildlife Technician  
CT Department of Environmental Protection*

**Y**ou may have heard an odd “quacking” noise in the woods around St. Patrick’s Day. No, they weren’t ducks. They were frogs! Wood frogs. Wood frogs hide under the leaf litter in the forest as winter sets in and then they freeze solid. As spring approaches and the ground begins to thaw, so do the wood frogs. Then, on that first warm day of spring they arrive at the vernal pools. (Watch for amphibians migrating on rainy nights around this time.) Wood frogs spend the rest of the year foraging in the woods, but on that warm spring day, they have but one thing on their minds. The males get to the vernal pool first and call to the females. That’s the “quacky” chorus that you hear. At the Belding Wildlife Management Area, the first wood frog egg masses were found on March 18<sup>th</sup>.

Wood frog egg masses can have as many as 1,500 individual eggs which are held together as a kind of gelatinous mass. Spotted salamanders also lay their eggs in vernal pools. They head to the pools at the same time as the wood frogs, but they are not as easy to detect as they do not serenade their mates. Instead, they do a little courtship dance. Spotted salamander egg masses, which can contain up to 250 eggs, are usually attached to a submerged stick. Marbled salamanders also rely on vernal pools for breeding, but they lay their eggs in the fall, before the pools fill up with the fall rains. Spring peepers, red-spotted newts, dragonflies and damselflies will lay their eggs in vernal pools, but these species will also use other types of aquatic habitats to complete their life cycles.



*Spotted Salamander*

Wood frogs, spotted salamanders and marbled salamanders only breed in vernal pools. They do not breed in ponds or streams or marshes. Vernal pools, as their name implies, have water in the spring. They are depressions that fill up from snowmelt and spring rains, but dry up in the summer. Wood frog tadpoles and spotted salamander larvae therefore must develop quickly before the pool dries out. Since vernal pools dry up in the summer, they are easy to overlook. However, it is important to know where vernal pools are and to protect them. If vernal pools were to be filled in, this would wipe out entire populations of wood frogs and spotted salamanders. Upland habitat must also be protected for these species to complete their life cycles. Wood frogs have been found to travel as far as 1,500 feet from the vernal pool to feed in the surrounding woodlands.

The wood frog chorus has ended, but head down to the vernal pool and look for tadpoles. (The Andrew Kenneth Webster Preserve, between Valley Falls Park and the Belding Wildlife Management Area, has a pool that is easy to observe as it is right on Valley Falls Road.) Get to know your vernal pool and watch the changes that take place throughout the year in this unique habitat. To learn more about vernal pools and their inhabitants, visit <http://www.vernalpool.org/>.

**Editor’s Note:** In 2005 the Vernon Conservation Commission conducted a vernal pool study throughout Town. Sixty potential pools were identified. Of the sixty, permission was granted from 50 property owners to survey the pools and validate that they met requirements to be officially designated a vernal pool. Scientist Ed Pawluk was hired and was able to verify that 29 of the pools met requirements to be classified as vernal pools.



# SPRING CALENDAR

## JOIN US FOR Nature Walks In the Park

All walks begin in the parking lot at Valley Falls Park. Bring insect repellent and wear appropriate footwear.

### BIRD WALK

led by Denise Anamani  
May 8, 2010, Saturday  
7:00 a.m.

### WILDFLOWER WALK

led by Ginny Gingras  
May 8, 2010, Saturday  
1:00 p.m.

As you take your spring walks, be on the lookout for Garlic Mustard, an aggressive invasive wild flower. It is easy to pull. Get all the roots. Place in a plastic bag and throw it away.

Garlic Mustard was found in the Park in 2002 along the Wood Road. We have been pulling it, but it continues to come back. Since it can spread rapidly and crowd out native wildflowers, a major effort must be made to control it. It also has been found on the Braille Trail and on the Rails to Trails.



*Garlic Mustard in flower*

## SAVE THE DATE

### **Artists Day - October 2, 2010!**

Having held two events in the summer, we decided to do this event in the fall this year, producing a set of paintings with a fall palette of colors. Mark your calendars!

SPRING NEWSLETTER 2010

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