



The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc.

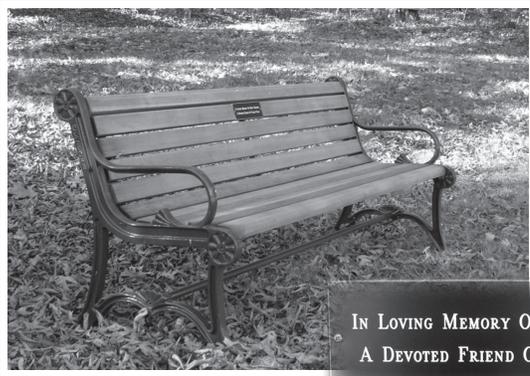
NEWSLETTER

Volume XIV Number II

FALL

October 2010

VALLEY FALLS FARM



IN LOVING MEMORY OF BETTY TEDFORD
A DEVOTED FRIEND OF VALLEY FALLS

Betty's Bench

The long-awaited bench in memory of **Betty Tedford** has finally found its place on one of her favorite settings at the Farm - by the herb garden overlooking the meadow. Betty was a founding member of the Friends, and a long-time Board member, dearly missed. Thanks to Vernon Parks and Recreation Department for help with selecting the bench. We think it's perfect.

Buildings

The stable now has a new roof and a repaired cupola. After a careful and detailed contractor selection

process, we finally chose Paul Bisi of All Seasons Contractors from Glastonbury to do the work. The four other outbuildings also need a new roof, which we'll begin in the spring. We replaced the last two old windows in the farmhouse, finally completing that project. Many thanks to those of you who contributed to our Building Fund. You have helped make this work possible. We were very pleased that the current farmhouse tenants, Jess, Jen and Jennifer, renewed their leases for another year. We couldn't have more perfect tenants!

Grounds

Thanks again to **Betty & Bill Wardrop**, and **Bobbie Orne** for tending Vernon Garden Club's herb and flower gardens in the coldframes. Due to the heat and drought this summer, this job was especially demanding, and their efforts were much appreciated. In other areas, attention needs to be given to removal of the invasive plants in the wet areas around the swale.

VALLEY FALLS PARK



Braille Trail

Work is continuing on the grant. The two unpaved sections of the steep hillside section of the trail have been completed. Pavers were installed on these sections and cobble edging was inset along the entire hillside walk. The work was done by Cropley's Landscaping. We intend to sell engraved bricks for the walk as a future fundraiser.

Milfoil in the Pond

As we reported in the Spring newsletter, an aquatic invasive, variable-leaved milfoil (*myriophyllum heterophyllum*), was discovered in Valley Falls Pond last fall. The Parks and

Recreation Department and the Conservation Commission collaborated and researched the issue with the CT Department of Environmental Protection, and determined that the best approach would be to treat the pond with a systemic herbicide, which was successfully done in June.

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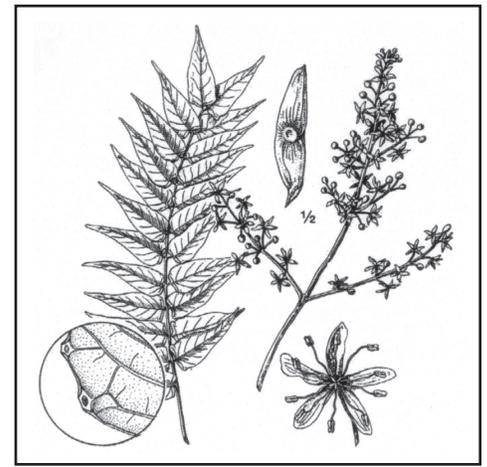
Park, continued from page 1

Pond Drawdown

In September, the Parks & Recreation Department drew down the pond to clean the sediments out of the weir, a device that collects the silts and sediments that enter the pond from Railroad Brook. The weir was installed several years ago to prevent sediments from collecting in Valley Falls Pond. Unfortunately, due to a low water table resulting from the drought of the summer, water did not refill the pond quickly. The temperature of the remaining water overheated, causing a fish kill. The pond is now filled back to its normal level.

Nature Notes by *Ginny Gingras*

On the North side of the parking lot in Valley Falls Park there is a (famous) invasive: **Ailanthus altissima** (Tree of Heaven), also known as The Tree that Grows in Brooklyn. It apparently was brought in with wood chips and was first identified by Chris Mattrick, Senior Conservation Programs Manager of the New England Wildflower Society when the Friends hosted an Invasive Plant Workshop in May



2001 for land managers and local officials. The tree 'arrived' in the U.S. in 1751 and was considered the perfect tree by town planners. It didn't need water, grew like crazy, making a shade canopy in a few years. It was oblivious to soil, water and air pollution. It soon became unwanted as it sends out suckers that can damage pavements and walls. Ailanthus resembles sumac trees. Tree of Heaven is a species from China, so named because it was often found on temple grounds. Its commercial use was food for silkworms and it produced a stronger fiber than worms fed on mulberry leaves. In Valley Falls Park, the many suckers have been cut back continuously to control its growth. It is very difficult (impossible) to eradicate.

The wood trail through the fields in Valley Falls Park is a showplace for a variety of trees, shrubs and wildflowers. I walked in late August and noted: willow, Shagbark Hickory trees, Sassafras trees, Joe Pye Weed, Jewel Weed, Iron Weed, Asters, Goldenrod, Cattails, Multiflora rose, Grapes, Turtle head, Witch hazel, Spice bush, Bindweed, Pokeweed, Burdock Dock and Clematis.

During my walk, I met two people from Coventry who walk every day in the Park. They have seen Pileated woodpeckers, Barred owl, Tanagers, Great Blue Heron and Belted Kingfishers - to name a few species. I asked them to keep a record of their sightings, and would like to request that others do the same and send their findings to the Friends. Valley Falls is a jewel of a park and enjoyed by residents of many surrounding towns.

Correction: *Dr. Ardis Abbott is the Museum Director of the Vernon Historical Society, not the founder, as we incorrectly stated in our Spring newsletter article about our grant from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation.*

THE BRAILLE TRAIL – A LOOK BACK

As we continue the work on upgrading the Braille Trail, we thought we would take a moment to recall and thank those who had the original vision in the 1990s, and then made it happen. Many times, sight of these efforts gets lost as time passes.

The idea of the Braille Trail was originally developed by **Brad Stewart** of Vernon Troop 223 in 1996, and built as an Eagle Scout project. He planned and organized the trail, and with the help from a veritable army of supporters, constructed the first section of the trail in the lower level near Railroad Brook, including signage, posts and roping. Those volunteers and organizations that provided their expertise were: Bill Erhardt, Gloria Deske, Sherri Adams, Bob Lougee, Jane Robinson, Bruce Stewart, Tony Caruolo, Tom Smith, Greg Smith, Gaye Stewart, and Ginny & Paul Gingras; Boy Scouts Dan Kinsman, Brian Chamberland, Jeff Goric, Jeremy Goric, David Sexton, John Murphy, Andy Murphy, Chris Symonds, Ricky Kinsman, Mike Diette, Jared Ramsdell, and Eagle Scouts Bill Butter, Steve Carty, Glenn Wright. Organizations that provided support were the Friends of Valley Falls, United Technologies, Mice Enterprises, David Goric and the Vernon Volunteer Firefighters Association, Bob Konopka and Oak Hill School for the Blind, Nick's Hardware, Vernon Historical Society, Kelly-Fradet, Charles E. Stewart, and Parks & Recreation Department staff.

Access to the trail from the upper pond and parking lot area was needed. In 1997 the Friends received a Greenways Grant through the CT Department of Environmental Protection, funded by the National Park Service to build this difficult hillside section of the trail. This second phase of the trail was designed by the Friends of Valley Falls and constructed by the Parks and Recreation Department. **Mark Lucas** of the department did some excellent stonework on this section and made creative use of the old patio on the hillside where the Beach family once had a swimming pool. Additional signage and roping, and some redirection of the existing trail was also done in this phase.

Most recently, the Vernon Greenway Volunteers, led by **Don Bellingham**, have put many, many hours of volunteer work into removing invasive plants and replacing them with native plants in the Braille Trail area, rerouting the trail where needed, and installing new posts and new roping. The Lions Club sponsors this section of the trail for the Vernon Greenways Volunteers. The Friends received a grant from the CT DEP Recreational Trails Program to fund new metal signs and a concrete and paver surface on the steep hillside trail.

The volunteer effort that has been behind the Braille Trail since its inception has been phenomenal. We are grateful to all of those who have given of their time and talent to make this unusual trail the success that it is.

VERNAL POOL IN YOUR BACKYARD?

Do you think that there might be a vernal pool in the fields or woods near your home? (*See discussion of vernal pools, what they are, and the critters that inhabit them in our Spring Newsletter, Nature Notes column by Jane Seymour.*) The Vernon Conservation Commission is continuing its work on identifying, validating, and mapping officially classified vernal pools in Vernon. Classification as a vernal pool must be done by a qualified biologist, using a certified testing protocol. In 2005, the Commission conducted a study in which 29 vernal pools were identified in Vernon by Scientist Ed Pawluk. Two of these pools are in the Valley Falls area: one is in Valley Falls Park and one abuts the park.



Leopard Frog - An endangered wetlands species that requires vernal pool habitat. Photo Credit: Peter Picone, DEP Wildlife Department

There are likely many more undocumented vernal pools in Vernon, and the Commission would like to continue the study. There is only a short period of time in the spring (about March 15 to April 15) during which identification of vernal pools can take place. If you suspect that there may be a vernal pool on or near your property, and you are willing to have a biologist look at it in the spring, please call **Tom Ouelette** of the Vernon Conservation Commission at (860) 872-6180.

OTHER IMPORTANT NOTES...

ARTISTS DAY

We regret that we had to cancel our Artists Day this year – BUT we are looking forward to an even bigger and better event next year. The Vernon Arts Commission has supported Artists Day in the past and has generously offered help for Artist Day 2011. We desperately need help with this popular fundraiser – so please let us know if you would like to be on the committee, or to assist in any way. Call Ginny Gingras at (860) 875-9865.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF THE FRIENDS

As we reported in the spring newsletter, we were awarded a grant from the CT Trust for Historic Preservation to plan for the future of our organization, and for the future the Farm. The work has begun! We hired consultants Jennifer Eifrig and Donna Baron from the firm Musevue 360. To date we have had a half-day workshop on mission development, and a full day-workshop on October 28th for strategic planning. We'll keep you posted as we go through this interesting process.

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