



The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc.

NEWSLETTER

Volume VV Number II

FALL

December 2011

ARTISTS' DAY 2011

Our third “Artists Day at the Farm” again was a big success, attracting about 170 local visitors. Nineteen Connecticut *plein air* artists spent the day on the hillsides, painting scenes of the area while welcoming those who strolled by to watch them work. The day ended with an auction of the paintings. The event also featured a historic tour of the Farm, an art display and sale of other works by the artists in the red barn, and the live guitar & mandolin music of **Judy Handler** and **Mark Levesque** played from the farmhouse porch.

We have many people to thank for the day’s success: the **Vernon Arts Commission** for providing the music; the **Vernon Parks & Recreation Department** staff for facility preparation; and the Artists Day Committee for a smooth, “no glitches” event: **Betty and Bill Wardrop, Sally and Dennis Sullivan, Ann and Bob Letendre, Ginny Gingras, Joe King, Paula Passaretti, Jessica Sullivan, Jen Starrett, Mary Cross, Dave Hermann;** and **Judy Groskortenhous**. It was a superlative team effort, and the results were well worth the hours of planning and preparation. Most especially we thank the artists, who gave a full day of their time and talent. They made it happen!



An artist captures the large oak in the field at Valley Falls Farm.

NEW GRANT AWARD – VALLEY FALLS HERITAGE CENTER!

We are very pleased to report that we have received a grant from the State of Connecticut for \$150,000! The overall goal of the grant is to establish the **Valley Falls Heritage Center** in the stable.

We have always envisioned using the stable as an informational center about the agricultural heritage of the Valley Falls area. As a result of discussions with consultants (MuseeVue 360) that we hired through the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation grant last year, our vision for the center became more solidified. The consultants advised us to focus the center on the “gentleman’s farm” aspect of the area’s history, particularly the period of the Beach family ownership. They noted that the history of Valley Falls Farm as a “showplace” for a wealthy family is very unique, and would have wider “niche” appeal as an interpretive center.

The grant will fund needed interior improvements and restoration of the farm buildings, especially the stable. It will also fund improvements to the basement of Valley Falls Barn, as well as research for data, materials and interpretive displays for the heritage center. Finally, we are within sight of making the heritage center a reality! We would like to give special thanks to **Lisa Moody** of Vernon for making this award happen.



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VALLEY FALLS FARM

Buildings

We are currently repairing the structural damage to the woodshed as a result of last winter's heavy snows. The work is being done by **John Kopec**, of Duncan & Fox. Throughout the summer and fall, we continued the never-ending job of exterior painting of the farmhouse and buildings. Much of this work was done by **Dan Rossano**.

Grounds

While the farm buildings escaped damage from Storm Alfred, we did have quite a bit of tree damage, as well as a couple of fallen trees. We obtained estimates for cleanup and removal, recently completed. The large wreath has been hung on the side of the stable for the winter season. The wreath is made and hung annually by **Sally** and **Bill Katkaveck** of Ashford, and is a lovely addition to the winter scene at the farm. The herb garden and flower garden in the coldframes were a beautiful focal point throughout the summer, especially during Artists Day. We thank the **Vernon Garden Club** and **Betty Wardrop** for their dedicated attention to these gardens.

VALLEY FALLS PARK

The park has also suffered significant tree damage from Alfred. We want to make a special note of appreciation for the hard work of volunteers **George Arthur** and **Joe King** who spent many hours clearing debris from the Park trails, including the yellow Railroad Brook trail, the red main road trail, most of the Blue/Yellow loop trail, the blue Shenipsit Trail, and the pond loop trail. These two gentlemen are on the Vernon trails every day, taking care of heavy brush and debris, and making improvements to sections with terrain impediments. Without the efforts of George and Joe, our trails would not be in the safe condition that they are. We all owe them a very big thank-you!

The final task of the Friends' Braille Trail grant has been completed with the installation of the dedication sign. A formal dedication ceremony will be held in the spring. The grant project totaled \$51,000. Of this amount, \$40,000 was provided by the Recreational Trails Program, funded by the Federal Highway Administration, through the CT Department of Energy & Environmental Protection. The matching amount of \$10,200 was provided by volunteer time from the Friends and the **Vernon Greenway Volunteers**.

The grant project included building and installation of the 17 Braille signs and the dedication sign, cement and paved walkways, and clearing of invasive brush and planting of new indigenous plantings.

In early fall the pond was partially lowered so that the sediments could be cleaned from the weir that is installed at the upper end. The weir prevents Railroad Brook sediments from settling and filling the pond. About 300 yards of sediment material was removed from the weir. Without this annual maintenance work, Valley Falls Pond would fill with time and would not be a viable swimming or fishing recreational site. ☹



Jay Babina paints the stable at Artists' Day.

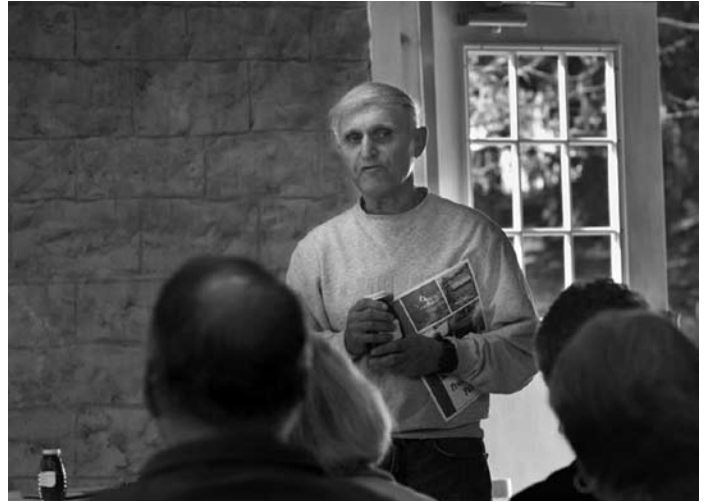
BEEHIVES AT THE FARM – A SUCCESS THIS YEAR!

In 2009, local beekeeper, Dermont Jones set up two hives of bees on the Farm. When one of the hives failed, he called upon **Ira Kettle***, State Bee Inspector from the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station to determine the cause. He found that the bees had succumbed due to a disease called “American Foul Brood”. Mr. Jones decided to discontinue the hives, due to the cost of replacement.

We searched for a new beekeeper and were pleased to find **Allen Valli** of Vernon, also a member of the Friends. Allen is an organic gardener who sells organic vegetables from his stand at 13 Skinner Road. In order to improve vegetable production, he began using bee scent to attract bees. This success led him to an interest in beekeeping, described below.

Mr. Valli installed two hives at the farm, which successfully produced 25 pounds of honey this fall! Allen sells the honey from his home on 13 Skinner Road. If you would like to purchase some of his honey, you can stop by or call him at 871-4410. The honey sells quickly, but he still has a few pounds remaining.

** Sad Note: We learned that Ira Kettle died December 3rd of a heart attack. He was our guest speaker at our Annual Meeting, October 2008. For the past several years he has presented a program for the Vernon Garden Club’s Junior Gardener program at Lake Street School.* ☹



Beekeeper Allen Valli discusses beekeeping at the Annual Meeting.

Nature Notes

BEEKEEPING

Allen Valli began his beekeeping venture by joining the Eastern Connecticut Beekeepers Association, and enrolling in the course at the University of Connecticut. The course covered all aspects of beekeeping, how to get started, diseases, and building equipment.

A new hive requires a “package” of 10,000 bees and a queen to start. The number of bees will build to 50,000 for a mature hive. In early spring, Mr. Valli purchased two hive boxes and two “packages” of bees for the project at the Farm. He then consulted with Ira Kettle, the State Bee Inspector to discuss means of protecting the bees from the virus that killed the previous bees on the site. He was advised to sprinkle the powder form of Terramycin, an antibiotic, on the brood boxes and around the area.

The bees were installed in April and Mr. Valli began feeding the bees immediately: 5 lbs. sugar dissolved in 1 gallon of water, heated slowly to form a 50:50 mixture. The bees were fed once a week until May 1st, when they could feed from the nectar and pollen of wildflowers and numerous mint plants growing in the swale at the Farm. Bees will travel up to two miles for their nectar and pollen.

The honey was harvested in September. Once the honey was harvested, the bees had to be fed again with the sugar mixture though November to replace the honey taken. Next year, the honey will be harvested from the mature hive in July. As Allen noted at the Annual meeting, money, time and knowledge are needed to be a beekeeper. We are very pleased that he plans to continue with the project at the Farm.

More information on beekeeping can be found at: http://www.ctbees.com/beekeeper_info.htm



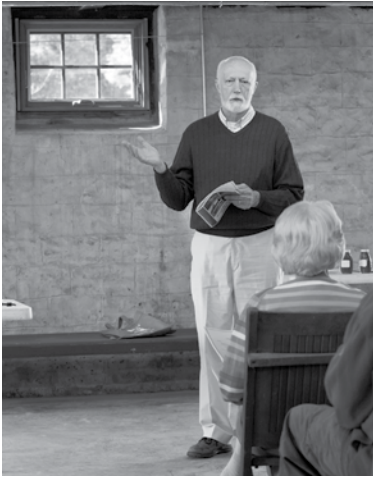
ANNUAL MEETING 2011

Our Annual Meeting was held in the basement of the red barn on October 2nd, and was well attended by about 60 members. The topic for the keynote speakers was “The Tankerhoosen River Valley: Its Special Features, Present and Past”. We thank

speakers **Don Sierakowski** and **Jon Roe**. Don gave an intriguing talk on the history of Vernon Depot, and Jon provided an excellent presentation about unique places within the Tankerhoosen River Valley.




Speaker Don Sierakowski discusses the history of Vernon Depot.



Bob Letendre gives the treasurer's report.

During the business meeting, members elected Officers Ginny Gingras (President), Dave Herrmann (Vice President), Marilyn Steele (Secretary), Bob Letendre (Treasurer), and Directors Karin James, Joe King, Ann Letendre, Paula Passaretti,

Sally Sullivan. We are very pleased to welcome **Karin James** as our new Board member. 



The Friends of Valley Falls wish our members and

contributors a happy holiday season!

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