



# The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc.

## NEWSLETTER

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SPRING

May 2011

### VALLEY FALLS BARN — 100 YEARS OLD!



**T**he red barn at Valley Falls is the most imposing structure on the hillside. It anchors the farmland setting of this scenic corner. And it deserves a celebration of its 100 (plus) years.

While we don't know the exact date that the original barn was constructed, we do know that a significant reconstruction to the building was done in 1911 by the owner at the time, Hans Munchow. A carving in the lintel above the barn door cites the date 1911.

The barn is a type of structure known as a "bank barn". (Bank

barns are built into a hillside, such that the second level can be accessed from the ground at one end of the barn, while the lower level is accessed from the ground at the other end.) It is a late timber frame structure with a gambrel roof, a style most common in the late 1800s. The second level of the barn was used for storage of hay. This level also has a grain room. The dairy cattle were in the lower level. A dairy production room, or milkroom, still remains on the lower level.

The barn was kept in showcase condition during its ownership by the Dr. Charles Beach family, from 1915 to 1958. The family sold the property in 1958. Thereafter the barn was no longer used as a dairy barn and was no longer maintained. In 1972, the barn and surrounding 63 acres were donated to the Town of Vernon, expanding Valley Falls Park to 193 acres.

By the mid-90's the barn's condition was dire. Enter Carol Burke of the Friends! Carol stepped in to lead an amazing effort to save the structure from irreversible decline. With assistance from the Town, uncountable hours of volunteer time and fund-raising efforts, the barn received its first coat of paint/stain in decades, a new floor in the basement level, and repairs and structural stabilization. Carol herself did a great share of the painting, even scaling the ladder to the great heights of the barn's interior. The barn was saved, and this Valley Falls icon continues to quietly grace the hillside. It surely deserves a 100-year celebration!



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## CT TRUST GRANT FOR PLANNING FOR OUR FUTURE - COMPLETED!

Our strategic planning work with consultants Jennifer Eifrig and Donna Baron of Musevue 360 was completed in February. Funded by a grant from the CT Trust for Historic Preservation, the work involved several intensive workshops that took us through mission development, strategic planning, recommendations for building use, and definition of the next immediate steps we need to take.

A 40-page final report documented the process and our progress. We simplified and revised our mission statement to better reflect the fact that we own the farm, and are responsible for its care. Some of the important considerations we were challenged to determine:

- Do we want to continue to support both the Park and the farm? Where will we have the most impact?
- How do we want to operate Valley Falls Farm? Is it a historic site, a museum, a working farm, or a landscape preserve?

Some of the immediate steps that were recommended are (1) update, improve and make better use of the website; (2) establish a committee structure around key areas of activity; (3) establish a community advisory board composed of representatives of key partner organizations (Vernon Arts Commission, Parks & Recreation, Vernon Garden Club, etc.); (4) focus public communication on recruitment of volunteers.

The consultants did excellent work, and a yeoman's job of engaging our Board. Now it's our turn to start putting their recommendations into action.



## Nature Notes

### THE CASE FOR NATIVE PLANTS AND THEIR ROLE IN OUR ENVIRONMENT

Our native plants supply food, namely insects. Many animals and birds depend partially or entirely on insect protein. Alien plants have no enemies to control their spread and can (and are) displacing native plants.

The **Norway maple**, planted for shade at the edge of the Valley Falls Park parking lot, is an example of a non-native tree that does not support wildlife as a food source. Unfortunately, it is now the most common shade tree in the U.S., introduced by John Bartram in 1756 to the Morris Arboretum in Philadelphia. It is also considered invasive.

The trees and plants that do support wildlife are the subject of the work of Dr. Douglas Tallamy, Professor and Chair of the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware. In his book, **Bringing Nature Home**, he lists the most valuable woody and perennial native plants that support biodiversity in our area. A partial listing: oak, black cherry, willow, birch, poplar, goldenrod, asters, sunflower, joy pyeweed, boneset. Many of these exist in the Park, but wildlife needs corridors of native plants (in our yards). Consider the plants in your yard, they should be more than just ornaments. Dr. Tallamy explains that lawns which predominate many yards are not a functioning ecosystem. For a list of beneficial plants, consult <http://copland.udel.edu/dtallamy/host/index.html>. - *Ginny Gingras, Friends of Valley Falls* ☺



Norway Maple leaf; note that the leaf is wider than its height.

## VALLEY FALLS FARM

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### ***Buildings & Grounds***

The snows of this past winter created a Currier and Ives setting at Valley Falls Farm. We noted several folks with camera in hand capturing the lovely vista. Nonetheless, we still had our share of roof raking, icicle removal and repairs. The woodshed suffered support damage and will need a roof timber replacement. The stonewall on Bolton Road was hit by a car that slid down ice-slicked Hatch Hill Road, crashed through the stonewall, landing in the field. The stones were moved back, but that section of the wall needs to be reconstructed. Before the snows arrived in

January, Chris Bunce, an invasive plant specialist with the North Central Conservation District, spent several days removing the multiflora rose and other invasives that had invaded the swale area.

In the farmhouse, we did a major renovation in the bathroom of the front apartment. The low ceiling had been creating a constant mildew problem. The ceiling was reconstructed and raised, a larger window was put in, and a new tub, tiling and vanity were installed. The work was done by Monark Property Services, LLC.



*Board member Bob Letendre rakes the farmhouse roof.*

## VALLEY FALLS PARK

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### ***Braille Trail***

The final few tasks under the grant are being completed as we speak. Additional pavers will be installed leading from the parking lot to the trail, creating a safer access to the trail. Additional native plantings have been purchased to replace the invasive plants that were removed. A sign recognizing volunteers and funding sources for the Braille Trail is being created.

The Vernon Greenway Volunteers were asked by the Board of Education School for the Blind to repeat the highly successful outing they provided last year for about 30 middle school students from all over Connecticut. The event this year will be held on **May 13th**. Rockville Fish and Game Club and CT Fly Fisherman's Association have again agreed to supply equipment and people. The Braille Trail tour will include sensory stimuli such as smelling flax seed oil, etc. this year. The Volunteers will prepare a barbeque for students and volunteers, about 80 people.



### **CORRECTION: OUR APOLOGIES, DAN KINSMAN**

In our article in the last issue about the history of the Braille Trail (*The Braille Trail - A Look Back*), we regretfully omitted Dan Kinsman's name. Through an Eagle Scout project (Troop 223), Dan played a critical role in providing a safe access to the Braille trail from the parking lot. Because of the steep slope and masses of brush and rock, this was a challenging task. His work also involved exposing the historic foundations for the old patio and bathhouse that had been constructed by the Beach family during their ownership. Dan is the son of Louise and Jerry Kinsman, who has also given his time as a volunteer to the Friends during our fall cleanup. Thank you, Kinsman family.

## CALENDAR

### Bird Walk – Saturday, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 8:00 am

Join us for a bird walk led by Denise Anamani. Meet in the Valley Falls Parking lot. Wear appropriate clothing. Spotting scopes and binoculars will be available for your use.

At the same date and time Jane Seymour will lead a bird walk at the Belding Wildlife Management Area on Bread & Milk Road. Participants of both walks will meet following the walks at 10:30 am to share and compare bird sightings. For information, call 875-9865.

### Artists' Day – 2011: Sunday, August 21<sup>st</sup>!

Yes, we will be doing Artists Day this year! The public is welcome to come view the 'plein air' painters as they work from various settings around the Farm. Viewing time is 12:30 to 3:00 pm. The auction of the paintings will begin at 3:30 pm. **We desperately need help with this successful event – so please let us know if you would like to be on the committee, or to assist in any way.** The Vernon Arts Commission will again sponsor the music, and we will have artist displays in the barn. Special events to mark the barn's 100th anniversary also may be planned.

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