



The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc.

NEWSLETTER

Volume *VVII* Number *II*

FALL/WINTER

December 2013

ARTISTS' DAY 2013

Our fourth "Artists Day at the Farm" was again a successful event, attracting about 130 visitors. Ten Connecticut *plein air* artists spent the day painting scenes of the Farm, while at the same time welcoming those who strolled by to watch them work. The pleasant afternoon was enhanced by the live guitar and mandolin music of **Judy Handler** and **Mark Levesque**.

The event also featured a historic tour of the Farm, and an art display and sale of other works by the artists in the red barn. The Strong Family Farm also joined our



display area this year.

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 great team effort: **Karin James, Sally and Dennis Sullivan, Ann and Bob Letendre, Ginny Gingras, Marilyn Steele, Joe King, Mary Cross, Dave Herrmann**. Most especially we thank the artists, who gave a full day of their time and talent. They make it happen! ☺

VALLEY FALLS FARM

A plethora of work was accomplished on the buildings and grounds this summer, and we have many people to thank for these efforts. We are very grateful to those we hire, and to our volunteers who give that extra effort to the Farm, in recognition of the special place that it is, and the value it brings to the community.

Buildings

Painting and repair work was done on all of the outbuildings, thanks to our property caretakers

P&D Construction. A good cleaning was needed in the stable, and we were fortunate to find **Julie Randall**, owner of **Paragon Natural Cleaning** (www.ParagonNaturalCleaning.com; email info@paragonnaturalcleaning.com, 860-870-3878). We highly recommend her services, a new Vernon business. In addition to the stable, we also tackled the cold cellar. The humid summer, as well as a broken vent, led to the growth of a strange fungus on the interior wall. Vent repair and a good washing took care of the problem, thanks to **P&D**.

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Farm, continued from page 1

We've finally begun to bring some attention to the interior of the farm outbuildings. All of the buildings are still filled with old tools, equipment and miscellanea collected by the former owners. We need to cull through these items, label those that are relevant to the farm's heritage, and discard what is not relevant. If you have an interest in helping with this effort, please let us know.

Grounds

Many thanks especially go to **Ellie Fiske**, our gardener who took detailed care of the grounds around the house and buildings. In addition to Ellie's efforts, the herb garden in the first cold frame flourished under the care of the **Vernon Garden Club**. The flower bed in the second cold frame was cared for by **Betty Wardrop**, and husband **Bill** groomed the hedges. This year we restored the third cold frame, dug out old plantings and invasives, brought in new soil, and established a vegetable garden for use by our tenants. UConn student **Ian MacDonald** helped with this work. Lastly, **Joe King and George Arthur** spent 3 days removing trees, brush and debris from the grounds.



NATURE NOTES

SNAKE WORMS

If you have you seen a large, lively worm in your garden, lawn, or woods lately, then you have seen *Amyntas agrestis*, an Asiatic invasive, known as snake worm. I have not checked Valley Falls Farm or Park to note its presence there, but I have seen the worm on my property. I first became aware of the worm a few years ago at the Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary in Monson, MA. The worm was a feature of Worm Day, an event sponsored by the UConn Master Composter Program held in

October at the Tolland County Agricultural Center. One of the speakers, Dr. Josef Gorres from the University of Vermont, spoke of his research of the worms' destruction of Vermont's woodland soils and forest understory. William Cullina of the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens said in an interview in "Fine Gardening" that the invasive worms are the worst problems that people are dealing with. The worms have become ubiquitous in nurseries and eggs or worms may be in the pots of the plants purchased.

The worms poke up out of the ground and crawl away as a snake. They leave a large amount of castings on the soil and are voracious, consuming all the leaf litter and duff lying on the soil surface so rapidly that the layer of leaf mold, an essential component of soil chemistry – is eliminated when the worms are present in sufficient numbers. The castings do not hold moisture as does naturally decaying leaf matter and in the excessively aerated soil they create, plant roots can dry out. The snake worm is an annual worm – it completes its life cycle in one growing season, the eggs are in the castings and overwinter in the soil. They may be controlled by removing the castings and the top inch of the soil below and placed in a plastic bag to kill the eggs. To kill the worms – place them in a solution of one part vinegar and four parts water.

The descriptive information above was featured in the Connecticut Horticultural Society Newsletter written by gardener, Judith King.

~ Ginny Gingras



ANNUAL MEETING

Business Meeting

Our Annual Meeting, held October 6th in the red barn, was attended by about 30 members. President Ginny Gingras presided over the business meeting. The Annual Report was distributed and reports were discussed. The report is available on the Friends website. If a copy is desired, please call Ginny at 875-9865. The **Board of Directors** was elected: President, **Ginny Gingras**; Vice-President, **Dave Herrmann**; Treasurer, **Bob Letendre**, and Secretary, **Marilyn Steele**. Directors: **Karin James, Joe King, Ann Letendre, Paula Passaretti and Don Sierakowski**.

Beekeeper **Allen Valli** reported that the two hives were lost over the previous winter. He replaced the hives with 10,000 new bees in April and garnered 20 lb. of dark honey (the color due to goldenrod and ragweed). He was thanked for all his hard work.

Guest Speaker

Kathleen Connolly of “Speaking of Landscapes” was our guest speaker. She is a landscape designer



Kathy Connolly, guest speaker

and garden coach, as well as author of the “Green and Growing” column in the *New London Day*. Kathy gave an interesting and provocative presentation on “Native Plants for the Home and Community Landscape”. She discussed the high ecological value of native plants and their role in supporting birds and pollinators. She also discussed approaches to a managed landscape.

Kathy is a landscape designer and garden coach, as well as a prolific writer. She received a masters degree in sustainable landscape planning and design from the Conway School in Massachusetts. Interestingly, the Friends had engaged Conway School to do a landscape design project for Valley Falls Farm in 2002, shortly after we purchased the property. Visit Kathy’s website at www.speakingoflandscapes.com.

Welcome Don Sierakowski

The Friends are pleased to welcome **Don Sierakowski** to the Board of Directors! A Rockville native, Don is a former guidance director at Tolland High School, as well as a former principal at Manchester High School. Now retired, we get to benefit from his many talents! Don spearheaded development of the historic Railroad Depot park on Church Street, and is well known as a local speaker on railroad history in Vernon. He also had his own band called “Corona”, which entertained many events in the area for 30 years. He currently serves as a group facilitator for the Hockanum Valley Community Council. Welcome, Don - we’re honored to have you join our Board!



NATIVE PLANT RESOURCE INFORMATION

Many wholesale nurseries and retail garden centers now identify and promote native plants. At the same time, the Internet offers authoritative sources of information. Kathy’s personal favorite for plant identification is New England Wildflower Society’s “Go Botany” database: <http://gobotany.newenglandwild.org>. It provides a county-by-county view of a plant’s origins. For more detailed planting information, she also recommends the Lady Bird Johnson’s Native Plant Information Center: <http://www.wildflower.org>. The Connecticut Botanical Society is also an excellent resource. The book “Bringing Nature Home” by Doug Tallamy is also highly recommended by Kathy.





The Friends of Valley Falls wish our members & contributors a happy holiday season!

COME TO A VERNON HISTORICAL SOCIETY WINTER EVENT

Crystal Products of the Frost King: Ice Harvesting in New England

Vernon Historical Society, 734 Hartford Turnpike, Vernon

Sunday January 19, 2014 from 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Before the development of iceboxes and electric refrigeration, canny New Englanders harvested ice from frozen ponds. The ice was packed in sawdust, stored, and then shipped around the nation and all over the world. The now forgotten ice industry employed many throughout the region. Ice harvesting was done on Snipsic Lake. At **Valley Falls Farm**, the small building at the bottom of the driveway was once an ice house. It was constructed into the hillside, keeping the interior cool. Ice was harvested from Valley Falls Pond.

Speaker Dennis D. Picard will discuss this vanished occupation, its economic impact, and the tools and techniques for cutting, saving and shipping the frozen water. Dennis D. Picard has been a museum professional in the "Living History" field for over thirty-five years. Beginning his career at Old Sturbridge Village in Sturbridge Massachusetts in 1978, he researched and designed many public programs which are still offered by that institution today. Dennis is presently the Museum Director at the Storowton Village Museum in West Springfield Massachusetts.



Valley Falls Farm icehouse

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www.friendsvalleyfalls.org

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