



The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc. Newsletter

www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org

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FALL 2019

ARTISTS DAY 2019 AT VALLEY FALLS - ART, MUSIC, HISTORY AND LEMONADE - ON A HOT SUMMER AFTERNOON!



Artist Jane Burr signs her work.
Photo by Tom Griswold.

Every two years we invite *plein air* artists from across the state to paint at Valley Falls Farm. This year we welcomed six artists, who also set up beautiful displays of their works in the basement of the red barn.

Thanks to those who made the day happen. History tours of the farm were given by **Jon Roe**. The guitar-mandolin duo **Judy Handler** and **Mark Levesque** provided wonderful, relaxing music. An inviting table of free lemonade and cookies was set out by **Sandy Justin** of the Vernon Arts Commission. **Marcie Lavoie** and **Tom Kaminski** sold the honey they produced at the Farm, while Marcie talked to visitors about beekeeping. Many

thanks go to friends **Ron Levesque**, **Rose and Anna Gallichio**, Marcie and Tom, and our dedicated Board members who organized the event, cleaned the barn basement and moved the tables in place, (and then moved them again - and again!), groomed the lawns and fields, provided parking lot shuttle service, and managed the sales table.

We had fewer artists and attendees this year, we think due to the hot, humid day. The good news is that we sold more artists' pieces than in previous years. We currently are talking about holding our next event in 2021 in September-October, when we might have a different color backdrop and cooler weather. ☕



Completed pieces by Jane Burr. Photo by Ann Letendre.



The basement of the Red Barn worked well as a display area. Thanks to Jean Merz for her flower arrangement.
Photo by Ann Letendre.



Inviting lemonade and cookies, by the Vernon Arts Commission. Photo by Ann Letendre.

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ANNUAL MEETING

Our Annual Meeting, held September 29, was a very different, but truly enjoyable, event! We were fortunate to have engaged the Connecticut State Historian, Walt Woodward and his “Band of Steady Habits” who presented their program on CT history through music and song. The six-member band came together as a group in 2014 to share their love of music, and to use their talents to help create a new kind of public history presentation. In



Walt Woodward's Band of Steady Habits. Photo by Jon Roe

addition to our hard working Board members, we thank friends **Jon Roe**, **Ron Levesque** and student **Stefanie Schmelter** who helped keep the event running smoothly.

The annual business meeting was held prior to the performance. Members in attendance elected the proposed slate of officers and directors for a two year term: President, **Joe King**; Vice-President, **Karen James**; Secretary, **Jean Merz**; Treasurer, **Bob Letendre**; Directors, **Ginny Gingras**, **Ann Letendre**, and **Maryann Levesque**. 🌿

IN MEMORIAM – RONALD BURKE

We were saddened to learn of the passing in November of Ronald Burke, teacher, historian, and friend of Valley Falls. Ron and his wife Carol have been great supporters of the Friends, and have worked tirelessly to preserve the history and character of the Valley Falls area. In the late 1990s, Ron authored a lecture/study “Valley Falls Farm Historic District,” a comprehensive report of property ownership in the Valley Falls Farm area from 1740 to present. He thereafter presented this report at the Friends annual meeting. Ron was also instrumental in assisting Carol’s dedicated – and dogged – efforts to save and restore the Red Barn in the late 1990s. Our kindest regards go to Ron’s wife, Carol, and his three daughters. 🌿



*We wish you all a
wonderful holiday
filled with good will, a
spirit of giving, and happy times
with friends and family!*



A REMINDER – HEADING SOUTH FOR THE WINTER?

We’d like to remind you that we mail our newsletters using “bulk mail” rates. If you will be away for the winter and plan to have your mail forwarded, remember that bulk mail is not forwarded by the post office. If you would like our mailings sent to your winter address, please call us at 860-875-4623, or email Janice at fournijs@gmail.com.

A PEEK INTO THE PAST: SNIPPETS OF HISTORY FROM VALLEY FALLS

In our last issue we introduced a new feature highlighting interesting facts or events that contributed to the rich history of the Valley Falls area. Much of this information we found in our research for the Heritage Center. In this piece we give you some insight into Mary Batterson Beach, and her love of flowers.

Mrs. Beach's Rose Garden



Mary Batterson Beach purchased Valley Falls Farm in 1915, and thus began a fascinating dynasty in the Valley Falls area that lasted until 1958. She and her husband, Dr. Charles Coffin Beach, had an enormous home on Woodland Street in Hartford, but Valley Falls Farm was their “play place,” a summer retreat where Dr. Beach could fish to his heart’s content, their grandchildren could run freely through the farm and fields, and she could enjoy her family away from the demands of Hartford society.



Wendy and Ray Hollworth visit Valley Falls Farm, a part of Wendy's childhood. Photo by Ann Letendre.

Shortly after purchase, Mary Beach began construction of a large summer home on Bolton Road, using architect Edward Hapgood. She later had homes constructed on the property for her four children and their children. A prominent feature of the property was a huge rose garden that ran along Bolton Road between the main house and their chauffeur's house at the corner of Valley Falls Rd. The garden can be seen in the 1934 aerial survey and is estimated to be about 25 feet wide by 200 feet long.

In a 1995 oral history, two of Mary Beach's granddaughters recall that one of their grandmother's great pleasures was a home filled with

flowers. On a daily basis in summer, she would have fresh flowers brought in from her gardens, create trays of arrangements, and would then instruct her servants as to exactly which vase should go in which room, including in her children's homes!

We recently met Wendy Warren Hollworth, who grew up on Bolton Road in a home directly abutting the Beach property, between 1946 and 1962. The Beach home was a fascinating place to a youngster. Wendy especially loved flowers too. She recalls that she and a neighborhood friend would often “detour” through Mary Beach's garden just to see the colorful display, and smell the roses. She describes it as a long, narrow garden, with grass paths between sections of flowers. She says no one ever complained, and we suspect that perhaps Mary Batterson Beach fully understood why they were there! – Ann Letendre



Mary Batterson Beach.



An antique watering barrel, found at the farm, likely used to water Mary Beach's gardens. A future display piece for the Heritage Center.



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THE GARDEN IN THE SILO – by Jean Merz

*Note: And more on gardens! (So nice to think about during these winter months!) The overgrown, weed-filled silo foundation behind the red barn will now sprout a colorful flowerbed, thanks to Board members **Jean Merz** and **Maryann Levesque**, and friends **Ron Levesque**, **Marcie Lavoie** and **Tom Kaminski**.*



Each time we are getting ready for a public event, we freshen up the basement of the barn, dust away cobwebs, and move chairs in place. Then, we scurry home to gather some flowers of the season. Maryann and Marcie thought – wouldn't it be great to have seasonal bouquets to pick right there in the yard at the barn? And – wouldn't the silo foundation make a perfect garden location! We got to work. Marcie and Tom enhanced the silo foundation with stones found around the barn to form a neat circular perimeter. Ron filled the newly created space with topsoil, and Marcie, Maryann and Jean brought perennials from home to see what would grow in the new sunny location. Voila! A silo garden! Beginning in spring of 2020 you should see foxglove, daisies, Rudbeckia, Japanese iris, and perhaps a mum or two. Enjoy! 🍂

Silo garden, at the Red Barn. Photo by Ann Letendre.