



# The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc. Newsletter

[www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org](http://www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org)

Volume XXXI Number 1

SPRING 2022

## MAY WALKS AT VALLEY FALLS PARK MAY 7 AND MAY 21

**W**e are delighted to be able to continue our well-attended series of spring walks in Valley Falls Park. Come join us, bring friends, it's a wonderful way to welcome spring and learn about the treasures of Valley Falls Park.

### **May 7th, 7:30 AM - "The Birds in Valley Falls Park", led by Denise Animani**

Denise Animani will share again her wealth of knowledge about our feathered friends. We'll meet at the pavilion in Valley Falls Park early enough to get a good glimpse of the wonderful array of spring birds who frequent—or fly through—the park in the spring. Denise will identify the birds, and spot them for those of us struggling to get the caps off our binoculars. Bring your binoculars, any bird apps (Merlin), your bird lists, and suitable shoes. Fun for everyone, moms too!



*Nesting Bluebirds, VF Park  
Photo by Tom Ouellette*

### **May 7th, 1:00 PM - "Valley Falls: A Look Back in Time", led by local historian, Jon Roe**

Did you know that there are three sites at Valley Falls that are on the National Register of Historic Places? Or that a 1740 sawmill that was located in Valley Falls Park is thought to be the earliest mill in Vernon? Or that the Park was once part of a magnificent country estate, or "gentleman's farm"? Come join us and find out all the details! Bring friends!

### **May 21st, 10 AM - "The Trees of Valley Falls Park", by Nicholas Cranmer, MS candidate, UConn Department of Natural Resources and the Environment**

We scheduled this walk later in the month, when the trees would be leafed out. Again, meet at the pavilion. Nicholas will take you on an easy walk around the pond, pointing out notable trees found in the Park, and how to identify them. Bring family and tree ID questions! 🌳

## ANNUAL MEETING - SEPTEMBER 2021

### **Guest Speaker**

Held last September, our Annual Meeting was well attended. Members and guests enjoyed a talk by local historian, Jon Roe about the nefarious "Count" Munchow, one of the prior owners of Valley Falls Farm. Jon provided an entertaining update on the whereabouts of the Count after his hasty exit from Vernon in 1915.

### **Election of Board of Directors**

Members also elected the Officers and Directors of the Friends for a two-year term until June 30, 2024. Officers are **Karin James** (president); **Maryann Levesque** (vice-president); **Nancy Steffens** (secretary); **Bob Letendre** (Treasurer). Directors are **Ann Letendre**, **Joe King**, **Ginny Gingras**, **Jean Merz**. 🌳

## FRIENDS OF VALLEY FALLS BOARD OF DIRECTORS



### OFFICERS

#### PRESIDENT

Karin James 872-0684

#### VICE PRESIDENT

Maryann Levesque 872-6420

#### SECRETARY

Nancy Steffens 614-9957

#### TREASURER

Robert Letendre 875-4623

### DIRECTORS

Ginny Gingras 875-9865

Ann Letendre 875-4623

Bruce Dinnie 539-9648

Joe King 871-2357

Jean Merz 875-7381

### SUPPORT

#### INTERIM ADM. DIRECTOR

Laurie Bajorek (203)751-2423

#### ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Janice Fournier 423-2892

#### GRAPHICS DESIGNER

Lisa Letendre 633-7666

#### NEWSLETTER & PHOTOS

Ann Letendre

## ARTISTS DAY 2021 – A GREAT SUCCESS!



Artist David Turkington paints a landscape

of season for their artwork, and the full venue of activities took place without a hitch.

We have many people to thank for the success of the day: our plein air artists for giving us their time; our speakers, **Dorothy Hall** and **Jon Roe**, for their interesting and well-attended talks; the Vernon Arts Commission for providing the music by **Handler & Levesque**, and the refreshment table; the **Vernon Explorers** and **Officer Kerry Reynolds** for help with parking; and of course, our dedicated **Board of Directors** who made it all happen! 🍷

**A**rt, music and history – and a wonderful crowd of about 80 people - were present at the Farm for Artists Day, 2021. Originally planned for August 22nd, the event had to be cancelled due to the arrival of Hurricane Henri that very day. We decided to take a chance on the weather for the fall, and rescheduled to October. The day was perfect, the artists enjoyed the change



Artist Day visitors enjoy the grounds; Garden by Betty Wardrop, Vernon Garden Club

## GRANT AWARD!

**W**e are pleased to announce the receipt of an \$8,000 grant award from Connecticut Humanities. Five other Vernon area non-profit organizations also received an award. The funds will enable these organizations to resume or expand services curtailed by COVID-19 restrictions over the past two years. 🍷

## WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBER – BRUCE DINNIE

**W**e are very pleased to welcome Bruce Dinnie as our newest member on the Board of Directors. Bruce is no stranger to Valley Falls – and, indeed, to the Town of Vernon’s recreational community. As the former Director of Parks and Recreation for the Town of Vernon, Bruce knows and understands the value that Valley Falls Park and its environs add to the Vernon community. Under his leadership, Vernon was one of the first towns in the state to develop a successful rail trail system.

Now retired from Vernon, Bruce continues his work with developing trails and engaging the community in these efforts in the towns of Ellington and Manchester. We are extremely pleased that he is bringing his time and talents to the Friends of Valley Falls. 🍷



## “THE RIP”

Our central theme in putting together the pieces to be displayed in the Heritage Center is that the items were found on Valley Falls Farm, or were once used here. One of the more unusual pieces is this approximately 11-foot long child’s sled. Though at first glance it looks like a toboggan, it is definitely a sled, with rails and a steering mechanism, and even a side rail for young ones to set their feet.

The sled was donated by **Tom and Susan Mason** of Reservoir Road. Tom and his young friends in the Valley Falls area, including the Darico siblings on Valley Falls Road, rode this sled down these hillsides during the 1940s and 50s. Can you imagine what a ride that must have been!

Tom said the sled was called “The Rip”. We don’t know why it was so-named - whether a product name, or a nickname given by its riders, we’re not certain. Given the landscape in the area, we can see how it could have come from the “Let ‘er rip!” expression! In either case, we are most grateful to Tom and Susan for their gift, and especially for sharing memories of growing up in this beautiful area. ☺

## SNEAK PREVIEW!

We continue to make progress towards the opening of the Heritage Center. Sixteen exhibit panels are in production at the print shop as we speak. We are fortunate to have **Barry Ford** of Ford Folios as our graphic designer. He is also a woodworker – and, in keeping with our “mantra” of exhibiting only items found on the Farm – he made the frames for the panels out of old boards found in the buildings. One great find was a large chestnut plank! Pictured here are draft samples of the panels. ☺



## WELCOME, LAURIE BAJOREK!

We are VERY pleased to have a new addition to our staff! As an intermediate step towards hiring an Executive Director, the Friends have contracted Laurie Bajorek as Interim Administrative Director. Laurie will assume responsibility for the many administrative and executive tasks that need doing as we continue to grow the organization, engage in succession planning and update our strategic plan.

As a very active member of the community, Laurie’s leadership talents and experience with non-profit organizations are well known. She currently heads the Vernon Education Foundation, has had leadership roles with the Lions Club, the PTA, and other organizations. She is also a past member of the Vernon Board of Education. Currently, as a very busy Mom and holding a part time job in Hartford as well, her plate is full - but we are pleased as punch that she has agreed to take on this position.

This job with the Friends is a shared position with Strong Family Farm (SFF). Since SFF has many of the same needs, we have been working together to define tasks that can be shared and worked into a single position for both organizations. Welcome, Laurie – both Strong Family Farm and the Friends are fortunate to have you on board! ☺



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**Spring 2022**

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## Friends of Valley Falls Upcoming Events

**May 7th, 21st**

May Walks at Valley Falls Park (see page 1)

**June 11th**

Connecticut Open House Day, 12:00 PM to 3:00 PM  
Join us for tours of the Farm and the Red Barn –  
and a free giveaway!

**September 25th**

Friends of Valley Falls Annual Meeting, 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM.

