



The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc. Newsletter

www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org

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Heritage Center Opens in June!



While the Stable serves as the main exhibit area, several outbuildings on the property help tell the history of the Farm.

Although the Heritage Center continues to be a work in progress, we are excited to announce that its doors will open to the public on June 10! After the Friends bought the circa 1850 farmhouse and outbuildings from the Darico family in 2001, the idea of creating a historical museum began to evolve.

In 2011, the Friends received a \$150,000 grant from the State of Connecticut to restore the buildings and create a community-based, educational representation of a Gentleman's Farm of the era. The idea was to preserve the history and natural beauty of Valley Falls Farm as a gift to the community.

By 2016, the six buildings on the property had been given new roofs and paint, and replacement windows where necessary. Much culling and clean-out of the structures left some interesting antiques and plenty of information about the people who had



Each stall in the stable tells the story of a prior owner, and how the families lived, worked and played on this "gentleman's farm."

lived on the farm. Every displayed object was found on the farm or once used on the farm and had a direct connection to the farm's past.

With the help of consultants Musevue 360 and local architect and historian, Bob Hurd, a blueprint was created to transform the scenic stable into a Heritage Center Museum. Using the grant's remaining funds, updated lighting, modern electricals, ADA accessibility and exhibit panels were put into place.



Vintage sleds used in the Valley Falls area are just some of the interesting items on display at the Heritage Center.

Each stall in the stable tells a story of the various owners of the farm, the tools they used, and the contributions they made. Follow the adventures of "Count" Munchow, the renowned Beach family, and the local Daricos – all who worked and played at Valley Falls.

We hope you are able to attend this grand opening, and welcome you to return often to go back in time with family and friends.

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NEWSLETTER & PHOTOS

Nancy Steffens

These Beekeepers Make a Great Team

Although they claim to be relative newcomers to Vernon, during their 10 years in town, Marcie Lavoie and Tom Kaminski made a positive impact on this community.

After moving to Vernon from Manchester, this nature-loving couple quickly recognized the many outdoor opportunities the area offered. In addition to enjoying Valley Falls Park, the Belding Wildlife Management Area, and hiking on the Rails to Trails, they have been active in the Garden Club and with the Friends of Valley Falls.

“We like to try new things,” Tom says, noting that rock climbing and traveling are just two of their interests. So it wasn’t much of a stretch when Marcie decided to become a Master Gardener and in 2015 they installed a bee hive in their plant-filled back yard. One bee hive led to two, and a year later they brought the hives over to Valley Falls Farm and worked alongside beekeeper Allen LaValli, who has been caring for hives at the farm since 2011.



Beekeeper Marcie Lavoie works with the bees while surrounded by flowers.

“Beekeeping has been a fascinating hobby,” Marci says, “We’re always learning. It has never been a business...we perhaps know 5 percent of what we should know.” In addition to life-long learning, beekeeping has led to many adventures. When they traveled to Paris and Ireland, for example, they met fellow beekeepers and shared tips and stories. Tom adds that beekeeping is often a technical guessing game. “Rain, drought, pollution – there are so many factors involved.”

To keep bears away from the hives at Valley Falls Farm, they worked with Allen to install a solar-powered electric fence. The decision to go with a simple strand of wire was made in order to avoid metal fences that would spoil the natural beauty of the farm.

Retaining the beauty of Valley Falls Farm has always been a primary objective for Marcie and Tom when volunteering with the Friends. The couple played a large role in restoring the silo garden located in back of the red barn.

Marcie and Tom have now started their newest adventure – a move to Georgia where their oldest son and two grandchildren live. While they look forward to being near family, they will also miss Vernon and the friends they have made.

Regarding Valley Falls Farm, Marcie sees it as “a refuge to an earlier time,” noting that growing up in northern Maine, she had the opportunity to enjoy the simple beauty of nature. Tom agrees with Marcie, describing the Valley Falls Farm as “a touchstone to the way things used to be.” ☺

History Corner – The Ice House

For many visitors, the beautiful stone walls of the old ice house make it one of the most unique buildings at Valley Falls Farm. Located at the foot of the driveway that leads to the stable, you quickly step back in time upon entering the ice house. As seen in the photo, the single story ice house is built into the hillside, and lined with stone, to help keep the ice cold. Converted to a garage in the 1950s, an overhead garage door can now be seen street side. At one time two Norway spruce trees shaded the building to provide additional cooling. Unfortunately, in April 2018, one was struck by lightning and had to be cut down.



The Ice House at Holiday Time. The beautiful stone walls make it one of the most unique buildings on the Farm.

When it was used to store ice, large slabs of ice cut from Valley Falls Pond were hauled up to the house by horses and sled, packed in sawdust as insulation, and stored by using a hatch door at the back of the building. Using a handsaw, the slabs were cut into smaller blocks and placed in the family ice box to keep milk, butter and other dairy products cool. The icebox and handsaws are part of the Heritage Center and help tell the story of life on the farm before today's refrigeration.

The ice house and various tools associated with harvesting of ice, are part of the Heritage Center that will open on June 10. 🇺🇸

Our Latest Grant Awards

The year began with the good news that the Friends of Valley Falls were awarded a \$6,200 grant from CT Humanities! We have already received 75% of these grant monies, with the funds being used to mount displays and exhibits for the new Heritage Center. In March, the Friends received \$650 from the CT Heritage Foundation that will be used for a Museum Collection Assessment. Additionally, the final \$1,900 from the \$150,000 state grant awarded in 2011 was provided to FVF. We will continue to apply for additional grants and always appreciate the support and contributions received from our members. 🇺🇸

We Appreciate YOU!

Thank you for supporting the Friends in its mission to preserve the history and beauty of Valley Falls Farm and Park. Want to learn more about getting involved? Message us via the Friends FaceBook page or email annletendr@aol.com.

Clean Up Day at the Farm

Volunteers get a head start on spring chores with an April 3rd Cleanup Day at the Farm. Raking, pruning and gutter cleaning were just some of the tasks taken on by the crew. 🇺🇸



Volunteers (from left): Ron Levesque, Bruce Dinnie, Bob Letendre, Ann Letendre, Jean Merz and Bob Felber. Maryann Levesque and Nancy Steffens (not pictured) were also on the job.



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Calendar of Events - Come Join Us!

Spring seems to be right around the corner, which means blossoming trees and budding flowers. As the temperatures begin to rise and days begin to grow longer, we hope you can join us at these activities at the Farm and Park:

May 13: BIRD WALK with Denise Animani, 8 am. Meet at the Pavilion at Valley Falls Park. Denise, a lecturer with UCONN's Department of Allied Health Services and Director of the Diagnostic Genetic Sciences Program, is also a knowledgeable and intrepid birdwatcher!



May 27: SPRING WILDFLOWER WALK (Rain date, May 28)

June 3 : TREE WALK (National Trails Day!) with Nicholas Cranmer at 10 am. Meet at the Pavilion at Valley Falls Park. Nicholas, a Master of Science student at UCONN, Natural Resources and the Environment, is very knowledgeable regarding the variety of trees found in the park.

June 10: GRAND OPENING OF THE HERITAGE CENTER and CT OPEN HOUSE DAY

September 10: ARTISTS DAY at Valley Falls Farm

September 24: ANNUAL MEETING in the Red Barn across from Valley Falls Farm.

Bev York presents "Rachel Carson." Born in 1907, Ms. Carson was a marine biologist, environmentalist and conservationist, and the author of several books, including 'Silent Spring' which explored the danger of pesticides. The book helped spark a grassroots effort to ban harmful chemicals.

September 30: NATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS DAY/VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION

Look for updates, time and date changes on our website: www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org and our Facebook page: **The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc Vernon CT**