



Preserving History and
Nature at Valley Falls

Website: friendsofvalleyfalls.org

Facebook: The Friends of Valley
Falls, Inc Vernon CT



To All Our Wonderful Members, Website and Facebook Followers,

We are so excited to be planning and preparing for a second season at the Valley Falls Heritage Center. As we begin 2024 (with cold temperatures and frozen car doors!) several events are already in place

for the spring, including our popular bird walk at Valley Falls Park.

For those who were able to visit the Heritage Center in 2023, we hope you will come back since we plan to have some special exhibits and speakers every month. For those who have not had the opportunity to stop by, we look forward to seeing you. There are six buildings to explore, filled with items once used on the farm. And the beautiful grounds are perfect for a picnic lunch, reading a book, or just enjoying nature – including the bluebirds nesting in the newly-refurbished houses.

Thank you for your support – financially and emotionally – as we remain committed to preserving the history and natural beauty of Valley Falls Farm and its Heritage Center, and to sharing this unique property with others.

Friends to Hold Three Spring Walks in May.

Our three annual Spring Walks will begin on **May 5** with our popular "*Birds of Valley Falls*" walk with Denise Animani. A lecturer with UCONN's Department of Allied Health Services and Director of the Diagnostic Genetic Sciences Program, Denise has been leading our bird watching walks for over 20 years. Her walk typically reveals up to 40 birds and hopefully an encounter with our resident Blue Heron. The walk begins at **8 am** and often runs for two hours, although participants have the option of a shorter time frame.

On **May 19**, two walks are scheduled with our "*Wildflower Walk*" being offered from **10-11 am**. Dr. Carol Hatch, a retired pediatric neurologist, is also an experienced gardener who will guide us onto some of her favorite paths to discover and identify hard-to-find flowers often found



On our 2023 bird walk at Valley Falls Park, over 40 species were identified

at Valley Falls Park. Attendees are welcome to bring identification apps. At **1 pm**, join Don Sierakowski as he leads us on an hour-long "*Rocks, Rails and Industry*" history walk. Don, a long-time educator and a member of Vernon's Historical Properties Commission, will share

his knowledge about the geology of the area, the trains that once traveled the cliffs of Valley Falls, and how these elements helped form the industrial development of the area.

Admission for all walks is free; meet at the Pavilion at Valley Falls Park, 300 Valley Falls Road, Vernon. Any event updates will be posted to our website at www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org and our Facebook page: The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc Vernon CT.

A Peek in the Stable: Winter Sleigh Riding at Valley Falls

Our new column offers a closer look at the interesting items exhibited in the Heritage Center. Most of these items were either found in the buildings of Valley Falls Farm, or were once used on the Farm. Today we focus on the sleigh, a 1900 Portland Cutter. It is on display in the carriage room of the Stable, the main exhibit area of the Heritage Center. Come visit once we reopen for the season and enjoy this beautiful piece of history in person.

The hills at Valley Falls made for lots of winter fun for children and adults who once lived here. In our research for the Heritage Center we

came across an anecdote of a “memorable sleigh ride,” as told by Olga Darico in a 2003 recorded oral history.



Olga was the wife of one of the five Darico children who grew up in the Valley Falls farmhouse. The ride took place in 1943 on a clear, cold winter night. Sleigh bells rang through the hills in the quiet of fallen snow. “It was a lovely, gorgeous night,” Olga said, “everyone should experience it.”

Hitched to two horses named Sally and Teddy, the sleigh took them up and down Hatch Hill, Brandy Hill and Reservoir roads. The roads were not “tarred” or plowed back then, Olga noted in the recording.

The sleigh on display in the Heritage Center is a “Portland Cutter” also known as the “one-horse open sleigh.” Made by the Wisconsin Carriage Company of Janesville, Ohio about 1900, this popular cutter model was intended for leisurely riding for one or two people. Though it was not the sleigh used in Olga’s sleigh ride, it was owned by the Darico family and probably had origins at Valley Falls. Stored in Tom Mason’s barn on Reservoir Road, in later years it was dusted off and used as an annual holiday display on Andy Darico’s front lawn on South Street. A life-size Santa sat in the seat. It was gifted to the Friends for the Heritage Center by the Darico family, for which we are grateful.

Wet Weather, High Winds at the Park

This winter’s high amounts of rain and wind have caused some challenges at Valley Falls Park. This downed tree along Railroad Brook, a

tributary of the Tankerhoosen River, caused significant damage to a large metal sign located along the Braille Trail at the park. The sign is part of a part of a \$50,000 Braille Trail restoration project the Friends of Valley Falls undertook in 2009.

Unfortunately, it has been determined that the the sign, which provides information in both braille and print, can not be fixed. We are working with a local sign maker to make a new sign for the area.



The rains caused Railroad Brook to flow over its banks at times



The rain has also caused flooding along Railroad Brook, making it at times difficult to walk over the bridge and around the pond. The Friends are working with the Parks and Recreation Department to assess damage to the area and make repairs to this beautiful park which offers a wonderful spot for hiking, fishing, swimming and enjoying nature.

The Friends Need Volunteers!

Thanks to those who visited the Valley Falls Farm and Heritage Center this past summer! We hope you enjoyed exploring the farm property,



Ann Letendre shows school children some of the artifacts in the stable during a tour of the Heritage Center. Being a tour guide is just one volunteer opportunity available.

touring its buildings, and learning about this unique turn-of-the-century gentlemen's farm. If you love history and nature and want to help preserve Valley Falls Farm and Heritage Center, please think about volunteering with the Friends of Valley Falls. Your help is needed when the museum and farm reopen in the spring!

Volunteer opportunities include:

- Museum greeters and docents
- Publicity and newsletter assistants
- Exhibit assistants
- Grant writers
- Clerical and computer assistance
- Building cleaners and maintainers
- Landscape and garden maintainers
- Periodic clean-up projects
- Touch-up painting of buildings
- Carpentry and exterior building maintenance

Interested or need more details? Contact Volunteer Coordinator Lynn Lusardi by phone or email. Reach Lynn at: 860-930-2451 or llusardi9@gmail.com

Thank you!

Help Us Preserve History and Nature!

Thank you for supporting the Friends in its mission to preserve the history and beauty of Valley Falls Farm and Park, and the Heritage Center, which will begin its second year of events this spring.

Want to help the Friends even more? Here are some ways you can help:

- Contribute to the Friends Building Fund.
- Make a memorial donation or commemorate a notable event.
- Designate Friends of Valley Falls in your will or give the gift of stock.



Artists Day 2023 was just one event that your support helps make possible.

- Hold a fundraiser to celebrate your birthday, special event, or retirement, and designate the Friends as the recipient.
- Consider a tax-deductible contribution when compiling your list of annual charity donations.

- Check with your employer to see if it has a matching gift program.
- Contribute from your Required Minimum Distribution (RMD).
- Give a membership gift to a friend! Download a membership form from our website (under the membership tab). Membership levels include Senior, Student, Individual, Family, Preservation Partner and History Hero. Lifetime memberships are also an option.

And please continue to stay in touch via our website and Facebook!

Website: www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org

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Photo Finish

Thanks to Maryann and Rob Levesque, this year our holiday wreath on the stable was lit by a spotlight. It was a wonderful sight to see it at night when driving by on Bolton Road. A huge thank you to Ron and Maryann. Both are active volunteers with the Friends and Maryann also serves as President of the FVF.
