
Friends of Valley Falls - May 2024 E-News



Preserving History and
Nature at Valley Falls

Website: friendsofvalleyfalls.org

Facebook: The Friends of Valley
Falls, Inc Vernon CT

Dear Members and Friends,

We were delighted to continue our well-attended series of spring walks at Valley Falls Park. It's a wonderful way to welcome spring and learn about the treasures of the park.



Wildflower Walk

We kicked off on May 5 with Denise Animani leading "The Birds in Valley Falls Park" walk. Two walks were held May 19, with Carol Hatch leading a Wildflower Walk in the morning, and Don Sierakowski giving an afternoon history walk titled "Rocks, Rails and Industry," that noted how the typography and railway system influenced development in the area.



History Walk

We are fortunate to have this beautiful park. Not only does it provide hiking, swimming, and fishing, but it was once part of a magnificent 260-acre country estate, or "gentleman's farm"

owned by the nefarious "Count" Munchow in the early 1900s. Although Munchow ended up being a fraud who made a hasty exit from Vernon in We are fortunate to have this beautiful park. The beautiful buildings he had built during his brief stay form the backbone of today's Valley Falls Farm and Heritage Center.

Heritage Center Updates



Stable stall filled with generations of vintage items.

As the Heritage Center museum opens for its second season, we hope you will visit for the first time, or stop by for a return visit. Opening day is Saturday, June 8, which is also CT Open House Day. Buildings and grounds will be open 1-4 pm, and visitors will receive a free packet of flower seeds. Beekeeper John Maston will be at the Heritage Center to talk about hives and honey, while

the Friends will have T-shirts, notecards, and posters for sale, with proceeds going to support the farm and Heritage Center. Come join us and learn how life was lived at Valley Falls in the early to mid 1900s.

There are 23 interpretive panels and six farm buildings filled with exhibit items to help tell the story!



Valley Falls Farm and Heritage Center Summer Calendar

Saturday: June 8: Opening Day (1-4 pm)

Sundays: June 16, 23, 30; July 7, 14, 21, 28; August 4, 11, 18 and 25;
September 8 (1-4 pm)

Sunday: September 29 – Friends of Valley Falls Annual Meeting, 1-3 pm
in the Red Barn

(You do not need to be a member to attend; brief business meeting
followed by a nature-themed presentation).

*Valley Falls items for sale June 8, July 14, Aug. 18, Sept. 8, and Sept.
29*

New this year, we're offering a one-hour, guided tour through the
buildings on the days the museum is open. The tour will begin at 2 pm
and will be led by a docent. Visitors can opt to take the guided tour, or
do the self-guided walking tour on their own. Check the Friends of
Valley Falls Facebook page for special events or workshops that are
planned for this summer. Find us at: The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc.
Vernon CT

Welcome, Bill Darico!

We are VERY pleased to welcome **Bill Darico** to our Board of Directors! As a long-time Vernon resident who has been a valuable volunteer with the Friends, Bill has a close association with Valley Falls. His grandfather, Andy Darico Sr., was caretaker of Valley Falls Farm in the early 1900s when it was part of the magnificent 260-acre country estate built by Mary Batterson Beach. Andy, his wife Lucia, and their five children moved into the farmhouse on Valley Falls Road when Andy took on the caretaking job. As adults, the children purchased land at Valley Falls and built homes. Bill's father purchased 7.7 acres from the Beach family in 1946 and today, Bill and his wife Pat live in a home on that parcel on Hatch Hill Road. Pat and Bill actually met when she was living in the Valley Falls farmhouse as a renter! For three generations the Darico family has cared for the land at Valley Falls. They were particularly known for the meticulous care they gave to their Valley Falls properties over the years.



Bill Darico working on the stone wall

Prior to retirement, Bill was a member of Vernon's Public Works Department. He recently donated his skills at Valley Falls Farm shoring up the ice house stone wall, helping to fill two old wells, and installing curtain drains along the farmhouse foundation.

In his newest role with the Friends, he continues the tradition of his father and grandfather – taking good care of Valley Falls Farm.

It Takes A Village!

The first cleaning of the grounds took place on April 20, with raking, pruning, picking up branches, and a cleanout of the gardens and the stable on the list. Since that time, there has been additional cleaning



Lynn, Nancy, Jean, and Maryann in the garden where a silo once stood.

for all six buildings, minor carpentry work was completed, and picnic tables and memorial benches sanded and stained. In addition, training was offered for those interested in being a museum guide, staffing the welcome center table, or serving as a greeter. But with more projects to be done, and Heritage Center help always needed, we would love to welcome you as



Debbie and Ann clean the stable.



Bob, Bruce, Bill, and Ron tackling landscaping projects.

a volunteer! If you would like to help with outdoor maintenance, publicity or events, assist at the museum, or provide administrative support, please contact Volunteer Coordinator, **Lynn Lusardi** at 860-860-930-2451 or llusardi9@gmail.com.

Volunteer Spotlight

Taking care of eight acres, an 1850 farmhouse, and six circa-1911 buildings is a never-ending process. While all of our volunteers are priceless, there is one who really shines. **Ron Levesque** continues to donate countless hours to keeping Valley Falls Farm and Heritage Center looking its best. This year alone, he has taken on three major projects. After the stonewall in front of the farmhouse was hit by a vehicle, Ron rebuilt the wall and used three bags of mortar mix to make it look even



Ron Levesque fixes the damaged stone wall

better than before! For safety and to better control the water seeping into the farmhouse basement, the Friends had a contractor fill an old well near the farmhouse that was 10 feet deep and another at the corner of Bolton and Valley Falls roads (where the old pump stands) that was 18 feet deep. The deeper well had a pump house made of stone, and Ron rebuilt the well cap and assisted with the digging.

Up near the stable, deep ruts made it difficult to access the gardens and picnic tables. Ron brought in soil, leveled it and added grass seed. Most recently he installed a curtain drain along the farmhouse foundation the fixed a long-term issue with water in the basement. A huge thank you to Ron, who is always willing to provide assistance with landscaping, cleanups and repairs, and even takes on the role of parking attendant during events at the Heritage Center.

Heritage History: The Bells at Valley Falls Farm



The bell, located in front of the stable, overlooks Valley Falls Park

Many people wonder about the large green-hued bell located on the hillside at Valley Falls Farm and Heritage Center.

Manufactured in 1887 by the Clinton H. Meneely Bell Company in Troy, NY, the bell is in front of the stable. However, it was

originally located at Rockville's Springville Mill Tower. In the mid-1960s, the bell was moved to Valley Falls Farm with great fanfare. Peter and Bernice Darico, owners of the Farm at the time, were avid bell collectors, having acquired over 250 bells. When they had the opportunity to add the Springville bell to their collection, the move was documented by their nephew, 11-year-old Michael Darico. Using his Brownie camera, he described it as one of the most exciting days in his life. Michael gave photos of the move to the Friends in 2018, before he passed away in 2021. They can now be seen at the Valley Falls Heritage Center. Young visitors enjoy using the side lever to ring the bell and hear its beautiful tone. They also like to ring several other bells displayed in the stable as well as a collection of cowbells in the Red Barn.

Photo Finish



Daffodils provide a soft contrast to the concrete walls of the Root Cellar at Valley Falls Farm and Heritage Center. With three separate underground rooms, this

building was likely built between 1910 and 1913. A root cellar, typically found on a gentleman's farm, was used for refrigeration to store farm products over the winter. Usually built into earth berms, they often faced north, like this one.

Stay in Touch! Hope you will "Like Us" on Facebook: The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc. Vernon CT and please visit us on the web: www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org

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