

The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc. Newsletter



Preserving History and Nature at Valley Falls

www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org

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SPRING 2025

Valley Falls Heritage Center Opens Saturday, June 14, 1-4 pm

Come visit this “hidden gem” of a museum on eight scenic acres at beautiful Valley Falls Farm! We begin our third season Saturday, June 14 and will be open thereafter for nine select Sunday afternoons through October. (*See pg. 4 for the specific dates.*) Also, private tours can be arranged for groups of ten or more. Contact the Friends via our website.

We are often asked - What is a heritage center? Dictionaries define a heritage center as “a museum that describes the history and culture of a particular place and its inhabitants.” And that is exactly what you’ll find at Valley Falls Farm and Heritage Center!

Our exhibits and panels tell the story of three intriguing 20th century owners of Valley Falls Farm – the self-proclaimed Count Munchow and his mysterious disappearance, the Beach family and their magnificent “Gentleman’s Farm,” and the Darico family who managed the farm and diligently cared for the land.

Have we piqued your interest? Come visit and take a self-guided tour, or join a group for a docent-led tour from 2 – 3 pm. There are six buildings to visit, filled with antique items all found on the farm and all having a story to tell. Make your first stop in the Welcome Center at the Red Barn to sign in and get informational materials. Admission is free! ☞



In Memoriam – Ginny Gingras



We were saddened to learn of the passing of Ginny Gingras, a founding member and past president of the Friends. In fact, it is highly unlikely the Friends would even exist, had it not been for Ginny’s remarkable ability to make things happen! She was a force of nature, and, in so many positive ways, added to the quality of life of Vernon citizens.

Ginny had a particular ability to see a need, and then to organize a group to address the need, which often led to the birth of a new organization. The organizations she started ranged from the Vernon Conservation Commission in the early ‘60s, to the Vernon Garden Club and a book discussion group in her retirement years. Her legacy with the Friends of Valley Falls is carried on through events that were her idea and inspiration and continue today – including our popular Artists Day and the Spring Walks in the Park. She has left her mark, and our organization and our community are all the better for it. She is missed.

Ginny was especially concerned about preserving the flora and fauna that made Valley Falls Farm and Valley Falls Park such a special place. Knowing her commitment to this purpose we dedicate this issue of the newsletter to Ginny our former president, our guiding spirit and our friend. We think she’d be pleased with what we’re doing. ☞



Ginny, leading the 2015 Annual Meeting as FVF President

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Nancy Steffens, Ann Letendre

A Message from the Board of Directors

It's spring, and the outdoors is calling! We've decided to focus this newsletter on the work we do to preserve nature at Valley Falls. As our logo byline aptly describes, "Preserving History and Nature at Valley Falls" is what we do. However, the "nature" part of our activities often gets lost in the more absorbing task of running a history museum. So read on to find out what we've been doing to take care of the land and wildlife at Valley Falls. We can always use help with this work, so please give us a call if you'd like to assist!

Some great news - we are very pleased to welcome three new appointments to our Board of Directors. **Ann Noel**, a longtime member and Vernon resident who lives near Valley Falls Farm, will serve as Secretary. We also welcome two new directors, **Jeremy Geller** and **Ryan Ramos**, who bring needed administrative and professional experience to the Board. Jeremy is retired from the University of New Haven, and is relatively new to Vernon. He has actively engaged in volunteer work as a member of the Vernon Conservation Commission, and as a docent for the Wadsworth Atheneum. Ryan came to us via Express Match, a volunteer program that matches employees of Hartford area companies with local non-profits seeking help. Ryan works for a Middletown consulting firm and has offered assistance with further development of board policies. 🐾

Preserving Nature at Valley Falls

Attracting Wildlife to Valley Falls Park

The Friends of Valley Falls recently presented a report on management of the fields at Valley Falls Park to Marty Sitler, Director of the Parks and Recreation Department. The report was prepared by Friends of Valley

Falls members Tom Ouellette, Sheryl McMullen and Ann Letendre, with Jane Seymour from CT DEEP. Recommendations related to care of the fields were made in co-ordination with Mark Lucas of Parks & Recreation.

The report updates and expands a section of the Management Plan for Valley Falls Park that was prepared by the Friends in 1995. It describes steps that can be taken to create the type of habitat certain wildlife prefer for nesting and raising young. The plan also recommends techniques to prevent the fields from evolving into forestland. The goal of the project is to offset losses of certain wildlife due to increased use of the park by encouraging other birds, reptiles and insects to make Valley Falls Park their home. The group intends to initiate an update of the entire 1995 management plan in the fall.



These great volunteers and P&R staff met to present the fields report to Director, Marty Sitler. L to R: Jeremy Geller, Ann Letendre, Marty Sitler, Sheryl McMullen, Amy Watt, Jane Seymour, Tom Ouellette, Mark Lucas

Pollinator Pathway at Valley Falls Farm

The Friends of Valley Falls is working with Jane Seymour of CT DEEP to establish a Pollinator Pathway in the Valley Falls area. A Pollinator Pathway is a continuous corridor of pollinator-friendly habitats for bees, butterflies, hummingbirds and other wildlife. The goal is to connect adjacent land areas to make a contiguous pathway of at least 750 meters (about ½ mile), which is the average range of native bees. The connected areas are required to have certain attributes that provide a thriving environment for the insects,



Brian Dinnie planting pollinator-friendly CT native bushes

such as having food sources (flowers, or fruit) and a water source. They should also be pesticide-free.

In working toward this purpose, the Friends recently purchased several native pollinator-friendly plants and bushes (winterberry, meadowsweet,

cardinal flower, sweet pepperbush, and buttonbush) from the North Central Conservation District's annual plant sale.

Many thanks go to our Board member Bruce Dinnie and to Brian Dinnie for managing this project, picking up the

plant order – AND, the hard part, getting them planted in the ground along the small stream that runs through Valley Falls Farm. Thank you Bruce and Brian!

Bluebird Project Update

Bluebirds typically like to nest at the edge of an open area or meadow. The fields at Valley Falls Farm and Valley Falls Park are a perfect habitat for this colorful bird.

Three years ago the Friends of Valley Falls initiated a project to attract more bluebirds to Valley Falls Farm and Valley Falls Park. The project has been led by Sheryl McMullen, a member of the Friends and former chairman of the Vernon Conservation Commission. The work involves cleaning and repairing the boxes in the spring, and then monitoring the boxes during the 60-day period from egg lay to fledge. This year, with help from husband Tim, Sheryl expanded the project into the fields at Valley Falls Park with the addition of five boxes. Mark Lucas, Parks & Recreation staff, cleared access to the old boxes that needed repair or replacement.

The project has been a resounding success. In addition to bluebirds, three other species, tree swallows, house wrens, and chickadees, occupied the boxes, all prevalent and welcome at Valley Falls! The 13 boxes at Valley Falls Farm have fledged 94 young birds in the first two years of the project!

Sheryl's objective with the project has been to share and educate. She has been assisted this year by Jeff Carlson and Jeremy Geller, both members of the Vernon Conservation Commission. If you would like to participate in this project, please contact Sheryl McMullen at stmvernon@comcast.net. Any time commitment is most welcome! 🌱

Spring Clean-Up Day – Thank You, Volunteers!

Many hands make light work – and that indeed was the case on April 19, when 12 volunteers donated their time to spruce up the farm and heritage center before the June 14 opening. They raked, weeded, swept, dusted, cleaned windows and spread mulch. The results are amazing!

Thank you one and all – your help was so very much appreciated! 🌱



Photo caption: Volunteer Jamie Sydoriak readies the Red Barn entrance garden for the season



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2025 Calendar of Events - Please Join Us!

ARTISTS DAY 2025, 345 Valley Falls Road –
September 7, 12 to 4pm.

Enjoy a relaxing afternoon at Valley Falls Farm with art, history and music! Stroll through the fields and watch plein air artists as they paint, listen to the music of Handler & Levesque, and take a tour of the Heritage Center. Park in the parking area in Valley Falls Park.

ANNUAL MEETING in the Red Barn, 345 Valley Falls Road – **September 28, 1-3pm**



A mushroom event! Karen Monger of the 3Foragers will give a talk on mushroom identification, followed by a mushroom foray in the park or on the farm. A brief business meeting will precede the talk.

HERITAGE CENTER, 345 Valley Falls Road
Opening Day – Saturday afternoon, 1-4pm, June 14 (also CT Open House Day)

Sunday afternoons, 1-4pm – June 29, July 13, July 27, Aug 10, Aug 24, Sept 7, Sept 21, Oct 5, Oct 19

HISTORY WALK in VALLEY FALLS PARK, 300 Valley Falls Road – **May 31, 10:00 am** (rescheduled from May 17!)

Don Sierakowski leads a “Rocks, Rails and Industry” walk that explores the history and development of industry in the Valley Falls area. Meet at the gazebo in the Park.

SPECIAL EXHIBIT at the Heritage Center:

“From Firearms to Fish” – Christian Sharps is known for the rifle that bears his name and helped Union troops win the Civil War. But he also built a trout hatchery at Valley Falls! In partnership with the New England Civil War Museum, this exhibit includes the Model 1859 Sharps rifle carried by CT soldiers. **Watch for other special exhibits at the Heritage Center during the coming season!**

Free admission to all events!