



Preserving History and
Nature at Valley Falls

Website: friendsofvalleyfalls.org

Facebook: The Friends of Valley
Falls, Inc Vernon CT

The Heritage Center is Open, Thanks for Stopping By!

We saw some new faces and a few returning visitors at our June 14 Opening Day at the Valley Falls **Heritage Center**. Despite many rainy weekends this year, the weather was just right for exploring the buildings and checking out our special **Christian Sharps exhibit** in the red barn welcome center. The Friends have partnered with the New England Civil War Museum to tell the story of Sharps: his work in developing the advanced breech-loading rifle and his efforts after the war to build a trout hatchery at Valley Falls Park.

Following our June 14 season opening date, the Heritage Center is now open 1-4 pm every other Sunday through October. Open dates are: July 27, Aug. 10, Aug. 24, Sept. 7, Sept. 21, Oct. 5, and Oct. 19. Buildings are open for self-tours, while a guided tour is offered from 2 to 3 pm.

The Heritage Center was part of a 260-acre Gentleman's Farm during the first half of the 1900s. It includes an elegant stable and unique

buildings filled with found items and interpretive panels telling the story of Valley Falls and the people who lived there. The eight-acre property is often called the most beautiful spot in Vernon. Park at the Red Barn Welcome Center, located at 345 Valley Falls Road.



Visitors of all ages stopped by on opening day; everyone enjoyed ringing the large bell outside the stable.

Upcoming Events – Mark your calendar!



Artist Day 2025

Artists Day at Valley Falls **- September 7; public is** **invited 12 to 3 pm**

Our signature event, held every two years, celebrates art, music and history at Valley Falls Farm. *Plein air* artists from around the state begin painting in the morning, and the public is invited during the afternoon. Space will be available in the Red Barn for the artists to display and sell other works of art.

The public is invited to stroll the fields and speak to the artists between 12 pm and 3 pm. Music will be provided by the popular guitar duo,

Handler & Levesque. Bring a picnic lunch, a blanket and your own sketch pad, if you'd like. The Heritage Center museum, which depicts life lived on this historic "Gentleman's Farm" in the early 20th century, will also be open to the public for tours.

Artists interested in taking part can call Ann Letendre at 860-875-4623, text Nancy Steffens at 860-614-9957 or email www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org. A box lunch will be provided to artists.

Annual Meeting – September 28, 1pm

The Annual Meeting will feature a presentation on "Mushroom Identification" by **Karen Monger of The 3Foragers**. Her talk will be followed by a foraging mushroom walk around Valley Falls Farm. The usual brief business meeting and election of officers will be held at the beginning of the meeting. Honey from the Valley Falls beekeepers will also be for sale.



Students on a group tour learn about life in the Valley Falls area at the turn of the century

Group Tours Available

Organizations, clubs, community groups and schools are welcome to contact us for group tours that can be provided during hours the Heritage Center is not open. Groups of at least five are preferred; please contact Ann at 860-875-4623 or Nancy at 860-614-9957 to schedule a date. This year the buildings will be open through October.

History Corner – Restoration of the BBQ Pit



Outdoor barbeque pits became a fixture in suburban backyards during the 1950s. And, yes, there was one at Valley Falls Farm, too – but it was a heap of cement blocks, weeds, and rubble. Billy Darico recently took on the task of cleaning it out and rebuilding the cement blocks. The unexpected surprise was uncovering the beautiful stone slabs around the pit, which he remembered had been there.

The pit was built about 60 years ago by Billy's father and uncles for their Sunday gatherings at the farm. Doing the restoration was a bittersweet experience, says Billy. Great memories of good times and good food, but most of the people are now gone. Thank you, Billy, for bringing a piece of Valley Falls Farm history back to life.

Preserving History and Nature through Sponsorship

It takes a village to maintain and operate the non-profit Heritage Center! Volunteer hours, membership renewals, donations and rental of the farmhouse are all vital in helping with building upkeep, landscaping and insurance. But sponsorships — both monetary and in-kind services — also play an important role in preserving this wonderful historic eight-acre property.



Lori Spielman Landscaping of Ellington donated flowers for the little garden located near the Ice House. Many thanks to Lori for her supporting Valley Falls Farm and Heritage Center

If you or your business are interested in learning more about the benefits of sponsorships, please contact Bruce Dinnie at 860-539-9648 or message us on our Facebook page: Friends of Valley Falls Vernon CT.



Bob touches up paint on a door that frames a pretty outside view

Volunteer Extraordinaire

Whether it be balancing the books, paying the bills, or filing the tax paperwork and state-required reports, Bob Letendre is the person behind all of this responsibility. As Treasurer for the Friends, Bob not only sits on the Board of Directors, but he volunteers additional time as a Building Greeter during open days at the Heritage Center. He also donates hours of his time to painting, landscaping and providing handyman services at the property.

A Friend since 2000 when he helped us get through the wickets of the Valley Falls Farm purchase, Bob has dedicated countless hours to maintaining and improving this beautiful eight-acre property. Thank you, Bob, for your dedication to preserving this community treasure!

Thank you, Vernon Garden Club Members!

While the emphasis of the Heritage Center is to showcase the history of the area and the families that lived on the Valley Falls Farm, the mission of the Friends is to preserve history AND nature. The Vernon Garden Club certainly helps to fulfill that mission by planting and tending two wonderful gardens at the top of the hill near the stable.



Vernon Garden Club members work on the hillside garden

The gardens are established in two cold frames that were built circa 1915 when Mary Batterson Beach and her family spent the summer season at their country estate, Valley Falls Farm. They enjoyed it as a "Gentleman's Farm," a place that provided healthy outdoor living and the benefits of fresh vegetables, fruits and dairy products for the family.

Mrs. Beach was well-known for her beautiful rose and flower gardens that graced the estate. The Vernon Garden Club keeps the tradition alive with volunteers dedicated to growing and caring for a wide variety of flowers and herbs.

July is membership renewal month!

Good news! You can now renew your membership, become a new member, volunteer or sponsor an event online on our website,

at www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org, then "Support the Friends" tab.

Reminder renewal letters go out this month if you still want to mail-in your renewal. We hope you will continue to support the Friends' mission to preserve history and nature! We value all of our members and thank you for your incredibly important support of this non-profit.

Memberships range from \$20 to \$500 with a one-time lifetime donation of \$1,000 now offered. In addition to sharing the Valley Falls Heritage Center with the public, the Friends of Valley Falls are committed to protecting the natural resources at Valley Falls Park. We also provide educational nature walks in the park, along with the popular Artists Day at the Heritage Center.

Summer's Natural Decorations

FVF volunteer Brian Dinnie occasionally writes about nature in the Valley Falls area. His most recent essay comes to some conclusions about a reluctance to decorate during the summer months.

I have noticed a pattern in my home decorating over the past few years. When September brings a few cold days, I am quick to get out autumn-scented candles and gourd decorations. By October I have decorated full Halloween in my living room and three-season porch. In November I begin transitioning to winter vibes, and by December, candles are filling the house with pine scent and doors are covered in pine garlands. After taking down the Christmas decorations, I'll keep the winter berries and evergreen branches. Then Easter arrives along with the artificial flowers.

For eight months I experiment with my decorating and try to put a little something into each season. But when the Easter eggs are put away, I stop decorating. April and May pass and the house stays unchanged. This has happened enough for me to take notice. Do I get distracted by the sunshine and outdoors? Is my energy spent after two and a half seasons of housekeeping hustle? I even bemoan to my friends, "The neighbors across the

street have great summer decorations! Look at that display on their front door!" Just last week I saw a great front-door wreath in the Tallwood neighborhood of blue azalea flowers; a great way to welcome the beauty of summer. Yet my front door stays unchanged; an unflattering "D" for Dinnie nailed to the center of it. What gives?

As I drive the roads around the Tankerhoosen River in the evening when going to and from practice, I notice wildflowers blooming every week in the Bread and Milk Road fields. The most recent standout looks like a Texas bluebonnet; last week it was a pale yellow flower with dainty petals. I drive past homes with faded rhododendrum flowers and healthy hosta. Rose of Sharon bushes bloom with proud, defiant faces. The Mountain Laurel out in the wild have just finished their blooms and bright green leaves now extend from scraggly limbs. And after encountering my first tiger lillies at the Phoenix Dam last week, they are now dancing in the breeze as my truck passes by open fields and manicured yards. Tiger lily, that symbol of high summer, with its pure orange and striped visage, standing out among all this green. How can I compete with that? I will continue to admire those who decorate for the summer season and maybe next year I'll have it in me to do so. But for now, I'll let the season do the job for me.

Photo Finish



The Tack Room in the Stable, filled with vintage harness and equine items, is a step back in time. Photo courtesy of Denise Letendre.

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