



Preserving History and  
Nature at Valley Falls

Website: [friendsofvalleyfalls.org](http://friendsofvalleyfalls.org)

Facebook: The Friends of Valley  
Falls, Inc Vernon CT

### **A Great Season 3 at the Heritage Center!**

It's a wrap! More than 250 visitors came out during our third year of operation and learned about the history of Valley Falls Farm while enjoying beautiful views. This season, our guided tours were particularly popular, along with the Christian Sharps special exhibit. The Friends 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. Sharps, who bought 150 acres along Railroad Brook, hoped to sell thousands of fresh water trout to local restaurants. Unfortunately, he died before his dream could be realized. If you were not able to visit the Heritage Center this year, the museum will re-open next spring. Exhibits and items in the six historic buildings mainly focus on three families who lived on this gentleman's farm from about 1910 to 1960. All of the artifacts on display were found in the buildings and tell the story of early Rockville-Vernon life in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



*Ringling the large mill bell that is now located near the Ice House was very popular on open house Sundays! A variety of bells, found in several of the buildings, were collected by the Darico family who lived on the property.*

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### **Artists Day 2025**

With 14 talented artists attending Artists Day 2025, the fields were full of easels and creative energy on September 14. The weather was outstanding, and the finished artwork was amazing. Guitar duo Handler and Levesque played beautifully from the historic red barn, while Vernon resident Kathy King strolled the property and played her harp for the artists. Many of the artists had additional paintings in the red barn that were also for sale, and several paintings recently donated to the Friends from the estate of Ginny Gingras, a past FVF president, were also on display. Over 50 visitors stopped by to watch the artists at work, listen to the music, and tour the Heritage Center. Thanks to everyone who came out to support the event – it was a magical day of art, history, nature and music!



*Artists painting plein air at Valley Falls (from top) included Dennis Stuart, Elizabeth Courtney, Terry Cardinal, Paul Gruhn and Kathryn Bartholomew.*



## **Schedule Your Group Tour for 2026!**

A highlight of the season was when members of the UConn League arrived at the Heritage Center on a Wednesday in September for a special group tour. This community organization, formed to provide a way to explore and learn about the area, includes the "Daytrippers" group that travels monthly to interesting locations. The Heritage Center was on their list, and according to the 19 people who took the tour, the visit exceeded expectations! Volunteer Karen Prewo provided the guided tour and we all had a great time with this friendly group. We hope to do even more special tours and welcome organizations, clubs, and schools to contact us for more information. Groups of at least five are preferred; please contact Ann at 860-875-4623 or reach out via Facebook or our website, [friendsofvalleyfalls.org](http://friendsofvalleyfalls.org).



*Members of the UConn League and museum docent Karen Prewo in front of the 1888 bell that was once in operation at the Springville Mill. The bell was relocated to the farm in the 1960s by the Darico family.*

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## **Volunteer Spotlight – Ann Noel**

Ann Noel is one of our wonderful volunteers at Valley Falls Farm and Heritage Center. On open house Sundays, she is likely the first person you encounter upon arrival, since she often staffs the welcome desk in the red barn. This long-time Vernon resident actually lives in one of Beach cottages that was built in the 1930s. Mary Batterson Beach and her husband, Dr. Charles Beach, bought the 150-acre Valley Falls Farm in 1915. The prominent Hartford couple used the property as their weekend and summer home. While they built the large house on Bolton Road, over the years their children built several smaller homes on the

estate. In addition to being a Friends of Valley Falls member, Ann is on the Board of Directors and serves as its Secretary. Her knowledge of the history and people associated with the Valley Falls area has been invaluable, as have her ideas for expanding programs at the Heritage Center.



*Ann Noel (left) provides Sheryl McMullen with a porcelain Bluebird to thank her for her volunteer work to keep the birds happy and healthy at the Heritage Center. We thank Ann, too, for the many hours she donates to help the Friends.*

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### **A Successful Annual Meeting**

The focus of this year's season was volunteer and partnership building, and the Friends of Valley Falls worked hard this year to build on old partnerships and develop new ones. The [Annual Report](#), posted to our website, reflects this commitment to the community as well as our volunteers. Beekeeper Mark Bell explained the challenges and successes he and fellow beekeeper Allen Valli faced this year at the Valley Falls hives, while Sheryl McMullen walked us through the innovative ways she and fellow volunteers Jeff Carlson and Jeremy Geller have worked as a team to build the bird population at the farm and park. Following the business meeting, guest speaker Karen Monger of "The 3 Foragers" provided guidance on harvesting mushrooms that can be safely eaten and took us on a walk in the woods to look for mushrooms. The dry weather meant fewer mushrooms, but under a magnification glass, the humble mushroom became a work of art!



*Karen Monger (right) of "The 3 Foragers" and FVF members Tom and Lisa Ouellette, walk in the woods to identify mushroom varieties.*

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### **Welcome - Three New Board Members!**

We are pleased to welcome Jeremy Geller, Karen Prewo and Ryan Ramos to our Board of Directors! At our September Annual Meeting, Jeremy was elected to be our new President, and Karen and Ryan were elected as Directors. Jeremy and Ryan had been temporarily appointed to the Board during the fiscal year to replace vacant positions and are now officially elected by the membership. Other members re-elected to the Board were: Nancy Steffens, (acting) Vice President; Ann Noel, Secretary; Bob Letendre, Treasurer; Bruce Dinnie and Ann Letendre, Directors. The term of office is two years. All three new Board members have been active on Friends' programs. Jeremy has been assisting Sheryl McMullen with our Bluebird project and taking on lead roles with the Heritage Center. Karen's love of history inspired her to take on the role of docent at the Heritage Center, and she did an awesome job this year. Ryan, a business and HR consultant, has been providing great input and direction as we update our policies and fundraising strategies. He will be moving to Poland, but will continue to work with us online. We are truly pleased to have these talented, hardworking, and nice people join our Board.

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**Thank you, Ann and Bob!**



At the Friends' Annual Meeting, Ann and Bob Letendre were recognized for their years of commitment to Valley Falls Farm and Heritage Center with a plaque dedicating the stable building to them. Ann and Bob are long-time members of the FVF and had taken on the complex task of purchasing Valley Falls Farm in 2000, including raising the needed funds. For the past 20 years Bob has served as Treasurer of the Friends', and Ann as head of the Heritage Center committee.

The plaque, to be placed in the stable, is inscribed with these words:

*This building is dedicated to Ann and Bob Letendre for their many years spent in making Valley Falls Farm and Heritage center a reality. Thanks to their efforts, the preservation of history and nature will continue to be enjoyed by current and future generations.*

*2025*

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**Photo Finish**



***"Autumn carries more gold in its pocket than all the other seasons."***

**Jim Bishop**

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