

# The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc. Newsletter



## Preserving History and Nature at Valley Falls

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

Volume XXXV Number 1

SPRING 2026

### Valley Falls Farm & Heritage Center Opens Saturday, June 13, 1 to 4 pm

Come visit this “hidden gem” of a museum on eight scenic acres at beautiful Valley Falls Farm!

We begin our fourth season on June 13 and will be open thereafter for nine select Sunday afternoons through October. (See pg. 4 for the specific dates).

The museum offers self-guided tours, with a docent-led tour at 2 pm. The tour is geared for all ages. Looking for something different to do with your family or organization? **Group tours** can be scheduled for small parties of ten or more by

contacting the Friends via the website, or calling Ann at 860-875-4623.



Visitors at Valley Falls Heritage Center. Photo by Nancy Steffens.

Our exhibits and interpretive panels tell the story of three intriguing early 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. The exhibits are displayed in six historic

buildings filled with items original to the property. Free admission; park at the Red Barn Welcome Center at 345 Valley Falls Rd. 📍

### Unique Volunteer Opportunities at the Heritage Center

Do you enjoy history, especially local history? If you’re a storyteller with an interest in history or nature and you like to meet people, come join our team of volunteer greeters and docents at the Heritage Center museum. You’ll be glad you did! Training sessions are being held as we write, but there is still opportunity to learn before we open in June. You can also work alongside one of our trained volunteers during the season to gain experience. Materials about the history of the buildings and the people that owned the Farm in the early 1900s are provided to each volunteer. If you’re interested, call Ann at 860-875-4623 for more information, or contact the Friends via the contact section, on the bottom of our website home page, [www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org](http://www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org).



Volunteer greeter Bob Letendre chats with visitors about the piggery, the building where pigs were raised; in later years it was used as a toolshed. Photo by Nancy Steffens.

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### NEWSLETTER & PHOTOS

Nancy Steffens, Ann Letendre,

Jeremy Geller

## “The Wrecking Crew” – And a Job Well Done!

The “Wrecking Crew” was hard at work in the Red Barn at Valley Falls Farm and Heritage Center. One of the “some day” projects on our long list for the Heritage Center was to restore some of the historical aspects of the Red Barn while making the meeting space in the lower level

more inviting. This task involved removing the lattice of old furring strips attached to the underside of the original support beams. At some point, a drywall ceiling had been attached to those strips, but the ceiling was long gone and inconsistent with the historic character of the barn.



The Wrecking Crew team. Photo by Jeremy Geller.

That “some day” came in April when Friends of Valley Falls Board member and Buildings and Grounds Committee Chair, **Bruce Dinnie**, convened what he dubbed a wrecking crew to remove the strips. It was incredibly messy work, and tougher than the group imagined! After much yanking, tugging, pulling, prying and cutting, a good amount of the

original beams can now be seen and the space has a more finished feel. Bruce, who hauled away two loads of waste, noted that for every strip that came down, decades of dust came with it. After waiting a bit for the dust to settle (literally!), the crew met again to finish up areas requiring a bit more finesse. A professional cleaning crew will be hired to give the room a final washing before the Heritage Center opens on June 13.



Exposed Beams. Photo by Ann Letendre.

Many thanks to **Mike Baum, Jeff Carlson, Robin Putnam, Joe Wall**, FVF President **Jeremy Geller** and **Bruce** for volunteering their time for this trying and messy task. They did an amazing job!

The Red Barn, which serves as the welcome area for the Heritage Center, is owned by the Town of Vernon. A use agreement between the Town and the Friends has resulted in a great partnership that allows the FVF and our Parks and Recreation Department to work together to maintain and preserve the history of the barn and open it to the public. ☺

## History Corner

### A NEW BASE FOR AN OLD BELL

The old mill bell in front of the stable has a new, sturdy base! Made of cement and wood, the base was originally built by the Darico family in 1964 when they moved it from the Springville Mill in Rockville. Peter and Bernice Darico were bell collectors, and the mill bell



1964 - Bell collector Bernice Darico beside the mill bell on the day it was moved from Springville Mill. Photo by Mike Darico (at age 10 years).

was a major addition to their collection. The Daricos had done their usual meticulous work with setting the bell in place, but by 2025 the wood base had become soft from rotting wood, causing the bell to be unstable. Installation of the new base was not an easy task. The bell had to be raised off the base while the new wood supports were put in place. Many thanks go to Ray Jones of East Coast Masonry & Roofing who took on the job. The new base looks solid and strong, ready for another 60 years at Valley Falls Farm.



The old mill bell sits proudly on its new base. Photo by Ann Letendre.

The bell was made by the Meneely Bell Company in Troy, NY in 1887. Mill bells were important in the daily life of mill workers in the late 1800s. They called workers to their shifts, and they rang for wake up time, lunch time, and sleeping time. First time visitors to Valley Falls Farm & Heritage Center are given the opportunity to pull the lever and ring the big bell. Come visit during this 2026 season and give it a try! 🇺🇸

### Want to Help Preserve History and Nature at Valley Falls? Become a Sponsor!

It takes a village to maintain and operate the non-profit Heritage Center and to preserve this wonderful 8-acre historic site. Our new **sponsorship program** offers the **opportunity for businesses** to play an important role in covering the costs of building upkeep, landscaping and insurance on this scenic property. Depending on the level of sponsorship, benefits include recognition in our newsletters and social media, a link to your business from our website, and recognition in the Heritage Center tour guides and exhibits. And, since we are a 501(3)(c) organization, there is always the advantage of tax deductibility. For information, contact us via our website homepage, [www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org](http://www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org); or message us on our Facebook page, Friends of Valley Falls Vernon CT; or call Bruce Dinnie: 860-539-9648. 🇺🇸

### A Habitat-Based Management Plan for Valley Falls Park

In spite of all the work involved with maintaining Valley Falls Farm, we still manage to take on the other half of our mission, to preserve nature at Valley Falls Park.



Team members inspect a vernal pool on Box Mountain.

In concert with the Vernon Conservation Commission and the Parks & Rec Department, we have formed a committee of local conservationists to work on the project. The committee has made great progress throughout the spring, including revisiting vernal pools that were certified in 2005. Stay tuned for more details in upcoming newsletters! 🇺🇸



The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc.  
P.O. Box 2008  
Vernon, CT 06066

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## Spring 2026

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

### 2026 Calendar

#### Spring Walks

**May 30, 10 am** - “Rocks, Railroads & Industry,”  
History Walk in Valley Falls Park, led by  
Don Sierakowski

**June 6, 10 am** - “Tree Identification Walk in  
Valley Falls Park”, led by Rose Hiskes

#### Heritage Center Museum

**June 13, 1-4 pm** - Opening Day, also CT Open  
House Day

**Sunday Open Dates**, 1 to 4 pm: June 29; July 12  
& 26; Aug 9 & 23; Sept 6 & 20; Oct 4 & 18.

#### Annual Meeting

**September 17, 1:00 pm** - Annual Business  
Meeting & Guest Speaker (TBD)

#### Fall Hike

**October 17, 1 – 3 pm.** A hike to Echo Ridge in  
Valley Falls Park, led by Karl Hasel;  
followed by refreshments in the Red  
Barn, and a docent-led tour of the  
Heritage Center, led by Karen Prewo.

### Spring Walks in Valley Falls Park

Our spring walks are currently in progress and have been enjoyed by many. Thanks to our walk leaders Carol Hatch for the wildflower walks, and Denise Animani for the bird walk. There is still time to catch the May 30 history walk “Rocks, Railroads and Industry,” led by Don Sierakowski, and the June 6 Tree Identification Walk led by Rose Hiskes. And don’t forget our new fall hike and museum tour, organized in collaboration with the Northern CT Land Trust. The hike is scheduled for October 17 (see calendar for details). 🌿

### Friends of Valley Falls at Healthfest

The Friends of Valley Falls hosted a booth again this year at the Holistic Healthfest, sponsored by the Town of Vernon and held on April 25. The event sponsors up to 96 vendors and community organizations focused on health, exercise and holistic options. Our volunteers at the table, **Nancy & Bob Steffens, Jeremy Geller, Ann Noel, and Karen Prewo** had a great time handing out event schedules, answering questions about the Heritage Center and Valley Falls, and meeting some fantastic people. 🌿