



Preserving History and
Nature at Valley Falls

Website: friendsofvalleyfalls.org

Facebook: The Friends of Valley
Falls, Inc Vernon CT



Thanks for Walking with Us!

The Friends offered five spring walks at Valley Falls Park this year, and attendance at every one exceeded expectation – so thank you for joining in on the fun! Our History Walk in May was attended by twelve determined

history lovers - despite rainy skies and brisk wind. In early April we started with a Wildflower Walk led by Carol Hatch, and in May Denise Animani guided our popular Bird Walk while Carol returned for a late spring Wildflower Walk. We were not disappointed at either – an Eagle flyover at the end of the bird walk and masses of Lady Slippers near the Rail Trail in the Park were just some of the sights we enjoyed. In June, Rose Hiskes met with one of our larger groups for an interactive walk to identify the trees of Valley Falls.

Fall Walk in October

A fall walk is scheduled for 1 pm on Oct. 17, in partnership with the Northern CT Land Trust. Karl Hasel will meet us at the Park and take us on a 90-minute hike to Echo Ridge to enjoy scenic views during this autumn season. Those who can stay after the hike are invited to walk the short distance to the Red Barn at the Heritage Center for cider and refreshments, followed by a guided tour of the museum's buildings and artifacts. A restroom is available in the barn.



Views From the Garden

The weather was perfect this year for the Vernon Garden Club's annual "Dessert in the Garden" event held at the herb gardens located alongside the Heritage Center's Stable. The gardens were beautiful, thanks to the wonderful work of the Garden Club volunteers, and many of the delicious desserts featured blueberries that were at peak

season. The Friends are so fortunate to have Garden Club members plant and tend these two beautiful gardens. Because of this long-time partnership, the views from the hill are even more stunning!

Red Barn Update



Thanks to the many hours of volunteer work donated to the Heritage Center this year, a number of projects have been accomplished to help preserve the buildings and grounds. Big thanks to Bruce Dinnie, Jeremy Geller, Jeff Carlson, Mike Baum, Robin Putnam and Joe Wall for tackling a “some day” project that was much messier than we expected! The team removed the lattice of old

furring strips attached to the original beams in the lower level of the Red Barn. At some point a drywall ceiling would have been attached to those furring strips, but the ceiling is long gone and was not consistent with the historic character of the barn. Bruce and Jeremy then painted the posts and some beam faces a creamy white, which brightens and tidies the look of the space.



Additional work in the Red Barn took place when Ann and Bob Letendre took on the task of painting a sample wall in the building with milk paint. They decided upon milk paint after researching what was best for concrete walls. It was recommended since it breathes, and it’s also the most environmentally-friendly

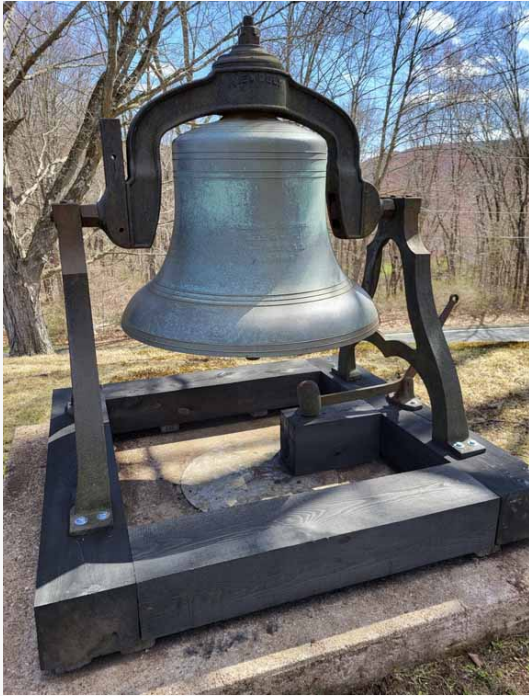
paint product available since there are no harmful chemicals and it's made from biodegradable ingredients. With just one wall done, the improvement is already amazing! Plans are to paint additional walls. We hope you can stop by and see these improvements. The Town of Vernon owns the Red Barn and has allowed the Friends to use the building for the Heritage Center through a signed agreement. As our partner in looking after the barn, the projects are being done with the approval of Vernon Parks & Recreation.



Check Out Our New Signs!

To help promote Open House Days at the Valley Falls Farm and Heritage Center, the Friends recently purchased colorful new portable signage that is placed at various town locations on Sundays when the Heritage Center is open. The new signs include our address – 345 Valley Falls Road – and the 1-4 pm Open House hours. During the 2026 season, the Heritage Center has been open

every other Sunday since our June 13 Opening Day. This year, the Center is open through October. Remaining Open House dates are: Aug. 23, Sept. 6, Sept. 20, Oct. 4, and Oct. 18. During every Open House Sunday, a guided tour is provided from 2-3 pm.



New Base for the Bell

Those who have been to the Heritage Center this season may notice that the historic Springville Mill bell in front of the Stable received an upgrade. The old mounting base was replaced with a sturdier version. A new concrete pad and foundation will ensure years of safe bell ringing. Manufactured in New York, for many years the bell

topped Rockville's Springville Mill. In the 1960s, Valley Falls Farm property owners Bernice and Peter Darico added to their bell collection by installing the circa-1880 bell on the hillside near the stable. Mr. and Mrs. Darico were avid bell collectors who reportedly had over 150 bells on display at the property. We are fortunate to have several bells from their collection in the Stable.

Plein Air Painters Visit the Farm

Our next biennial "Artists Day" during which the Friends host plein-air artists on the Heritage Center grounds, is scheduled for Fall 2027. However, we were fortunate to have members of the Wethersfield Art League, Plein Air Painters Group visit the Heritage Center on June 28. Artists captured some of the beautiful scenery the farm offers, including the Red Barn and the views from the Stable. We are always happy to open the Heritage Center to groups and offer private tours to groups (typically 10 or more). Organizations, friends or family groups, or schools are welcome to contact us via our website or Facebook page to request a special tour.



Annual Meeting in September



The Friends will hold their Annual Meeting on September 27 in the Red Barn. Hope you can join us at 1 pm for a brief business meeting followed by a guest speaker and refreshments.

All are welcome; you do not need to be a member of the Friends of Valley Falls to attend.

Notice of Bylaws Change

A vote on a new bylaw to allow for expansion of our Board of Directors will be taken at the Annual Meeting on September 27. Changes to bylaws require a four-week notice to members, so this article constitutes the notice. The new bylaw adds the category "Director at Large" to the Board of Directors. It allows more time flexibility to a Board member who wishes to play a continuing role in Friends of Valley Falls activities, but has time limitations. The actual text for the addition is below:

Add to Article IV, Section 4.1 of the Friends of Valley Falls bylaws:

Director at Large. *The Board may appoint one or more Directors at Large, who shall have the same voting rights and fiduciary responsibilities as other members of the Board. Directors at Large may attend and participate in meetings of the Board but shall not be subject to the regular attendance requirements otherwise applicable to members of the Board. The absence of a Director at Large from a meeting shall not, by itself, constitute grounds for removal.*

Help Us Grow Our Membership

If you know someone interested in joining the Friends (or if you want to give them the gift of membership) please download a membership form on our website at www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org or join online and save a stamp! Membership levels include Senior, Student, Individual, Family, Preservation Partner and History Hero. Lifetime memberships are also an option. The support of our community is vital to the Friends' mission of preserving history and nature.

Grants Awarded for Park Management Plan!

In our spring Enews we said we'd keep you updated on the habitat-based management plan for Valley Falls Park. We have great news: two of the three grant applications the Friends made to fund this project were awarded!



The Rockville Bank

Foundation and the Bafflin Foundation of Rhode Island each awarded us \$5,000, which enables us to hire qualified scientists to research the park environs and provide science-based

information needed for the project. So, what is a habitat-based management plan, and what does it mean for the park? Simply, it is a document with science-driven guidelines that allow for recreational use of the park while at the same time protect the areas where unusual plants exist and where certain wildlife lives and thrives. Likely it will mean limiting access to some park areas, diverting or eliminating some existing trails, removing invasive plant species, and treating trees impacted by disease.

The project was prompted by observations from long-time park walkers that several species of plants and wildlife are no longer seen, or rarely seen. As a result, creating a habitat-based management plan for the park was a “to-do” item for the Vernon Conservation Commission and the Parks & Recreation Department in Vernon’s 2020 Plan of Conservation & Development. To jumpstart the project, the Friends of Valley Falls took the lead and organized a volunteer committee to determine steps needed to do the project. We should give a shout-out to the volunteers who are committing their time and talents to this project! Members are former and current Vernon Conservation Commissioners Jeff Carlson, Jeremy Geller, Ann Letendre, Sheryl McMullen and Tom Ouellette; Director and Assistant Director of Parks and Rec Marty Sitler and Amy Watt; and Jane Seymour of CT DEEP, who is advisory. Jeff Carlson, current Vice-Chair of the Conservation

Commission, was appointed to represent the commission.

The project is expected to be completed by April 1, 2028. The committee is coordinating with Annie Geitner of the Vernon Planning & Development Department, who manages the town's SustainableCT program. It is anticipated that a final habitat-based plan and the work completed by the committee will be included in the Town's August 2028 application for SustainableCT "gold" standing. We see it as a win-win! Our beautiful Valley Falls Park will get some much-needed attention, and the Town of Vernon gets points toward retaining its gold SustainableCT standing.

Photo Finish



As part of the Rockville High School community service program, Josh Rowe has now been volunteering at the Heritage Center for three years. He often sets up our PowerPoint presentation, greets visitors and helps with never-ending gardening and weeding projects. Big thanks to Josh and ALL our wonderful volunteers! If you are interested in volunteering, please stop by during an Open House Sunday, or contact us via our website.