

The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc.

Annual Meeting

September 27, 2026

AGENDA

1:00 pm

Annual Business Meeting for Members

Introduction of Board of Directors

President's Report

Approval of Minutes – 2025 Annual Meeting

Treasurer's Reports

Committee Reports

Communications and Outreach

Business Development

Building and Grounds

Heritage Center

Audit Committee

Volunteer Coordination

Bylaw Change: Add At-Large Members to the Board of Directors

Reports from the Beekeepers – Allen Valli & Mark Bell

Report on the Bluebird Project – Sheryl McMullen

Presentation of Volunteer of the Year Award

1:45 pm

Adjournment of Business Meeting

1:45 pm – 2:45 pm

**Guest Speaker - Dan Hayden, Executive Director,
New England Civil War Museum**

"Seth, Joseph, Lizzie, and George"

*Stories of the Civil War told through the eyes of four people
from Connecticut who lived different lives through the conflict but
shared a common humanity.*

2:45 pm – 3:15 pm

Refreshments

President's Report

For the period July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026

by Jeremy Geller, President

The '25-'26 fiscal year marked the third season of operation of the Valley Falls Farm and Heritage Center. We continue to refine operations as a volunteer-run museum and cultural institution. We extended our "open house" days to mid-October and happily, visitors kept coming! We tallied record attendance at our Spring Wildflower, Bird, and Tree Walks, including the hardy folks who showed up in the rain for our History Walk. While operation of the Heritage Center is consuming, we haven't lost sight of a founding impetus – this report's theme – to preserve nature at Valley Falls as a resource for our town residents and visitors and, importantly, for wildlife.

We continue to transform the Farm to a pollinator-friendly environment through plantings and invasive control. We have made a plan, and budgeted funds, for a new rock garden beside the Ice House to honor late co-founder, Ginny Gingras. We continue to nurture tree swallows, wrens, and bluebirds on the Farm, and six beehives remain active. Friends of Valley Falls (FVF) members Sheryl Mc Mullen and Jeff Carlson have been instrumental in field-checking and assessing the ephemeral vernal pools recorded in 2005 that are essential to breeding for some of our local amphibians.

Years ago, FVF was instrumental in hiring and supporting experts to do ecological surveys for Valley Falls Park and environs. This year, in light of overuse concerns, FVF organized a committee to develop a habitat-based management plan. The project is being done in collaboration with the Town. FVF obtained grants from the Rockville Bank Foundation and the Bafflin Foundation of Rhode Island to fund the natural resource studies needed for the plan, which upon completion in 2028 will be shared with the Town and the community as a guide for managing the landscape at Valley Falls Park.

Historic buildings require constant care, and old facilities put to new uses require adaptation. The Northford Timber Framers completed stabilization of the Red Barn roof, and FVF volunteers and friends spruced up the lower level by removing abandoned lath from the ceiling, and more. As always, our work in the Red Barn is approved by the Town. We have planned and budgeted for work now underway to address deterioration of the Farmhouse back porch and to improve comfort and efficiency for our tenants, who have explicit stewardship responsibilities.

The FVF endowment is healthy, and membership is steady, but most importantly, we are rich in heart, expressed through the dedication of volunteers and generosity of members and friends. In the coming year we'll be planning for the future of the organization: to assure continuity, to meet and maintain professional standards, to determine whether and how to grow, to nurture partnership with the Town of Vernon, and to carry forward the founding mission and ethos: to preserve history and nature at Valley Falls.

Secretary's Report

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of September 28, 2025

Acting Vice-President Nancy Steffens served as Chairman of the Annual Meeting. She opened the meeting at 1:14 p.m. and welcomed members and guests. The Annual Reports were distributed to the audience. The Chairman noted that the report is dedicated to the collaborating organizations with whom the Friends have worked in recent years, including the Vernon Garden Club, the New England Civil War Museum, the Town of Vernon Parks & Recreation Department and the Northford Timber Framers, among others.

The Chairman called for a motion to waive the reading of the 2024 Annual Meeting minutes and to approve the minutes as written in the Annual Report. The motion by Jean Merz and second by Maryann Levesque was approved by members present.

Treasurer Bob Letendre presented the Treasurer's Report for the fiscal year July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025, as reported on pages 9 - 12 of the Annual Report. He commented on highlights of the organization's financial position and noted that the organization remains debt free.

The Chairman directed the audience to the Committee Reports on page 4 and cited highlights from each committee. In particular, the publication of an events calendar had been very popular, the FaceBook page visitors continued to grow, and the website was updated to enable online donations. Spring walks in Valley Falls Park were well attended. The key project for the Building & Grounds committee was repair of the stone wall in the icehouse, at a cost of \$18,850. The Business Development Committee noted an increase in membership this year. For the Heritage Center, a schedule change to have fewer open days during July and August, but to remain open through September and October worked well. Successful and well-attended docent training sessions were held in May.

Beekeepers Mark Bell and Allen Valli reported on the current summer season, 2025. Mark noted that the bees had been affected by parasites, viruses, pollution and poor nutrition, and that there was no honey produced at the farm. He also said that a 50% loss of bees had been counted nationwide last year. Sheryl McMullen reported on the Bluebird Project she managed at the Farm and at Valley Falls Park. She her team cleaned and prepared 15 birdhouses in spring 2025. Data was taken every two weeks at each birdhouse. From 2023 to 2025 she said our boxes fledged 46 bluebirds.

Election of the Board of Directors was held. Ann Letendre, Chairman of the Nominating Committee, presented the slate of officers and directors:

Officers - Jeremy Geller, President; Ann Noel, Secretary; Bob Letendre, Treasurer

Directors: Ryan Ramos, Karen Prewo, Bruce Dinnie, Ann Letendre

Chairman Letendre called for nominations from the floor. Hearing none, she asked the secretary to cast one ballot for the slate, per Roberts Rules of Order.

Awards: A plaque was presented to Ann and Bob Letendre in recognition of their efforts to preserve history and nature at Valley Falls Farm.

Chairman Steffens called for a motion to adjourn the business meeting at 2:14 pm. Motion by Maryann Levesque, second by Bob Letendre, all approved.

Respectfully submitted,
Annie Noel, Secretary

Guest Speaker, Karen Monger of "The 3 Foragers" gave a presentation about mushroom identification. She then led members on a mushroom foray on Valley Falls Farm. Refreshments followed.

Committee Reports

For the period July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026

Community Outreach

Publications

Due to its popularity last year, we reprinted the large postcards promoting our scheduled events during the fiscal year. This year a map showing the trail from the Valley Falls Parking lot to the Red Barn was added. The art work was done by Dorothy Hall. Seven hundred copies were made and distributed at various local community events, and at several locations around town. Several hundred copies of the one-panel promoting the Heritage Center and Valley Falls Park were left at the CT Welcome Center in Willington, and in other area locations.

Twice-yearly hardcopy newsletters were mailed to approximately 238 members and contributors, while electronic E-news publications were sent quarterly to members and visitors to the Heritage Center. The Annual Report was published for the annual meeting and mailed to members who did not attend the meeting.

Social Media and Outreach

The analytics show that the Facebook Page continues to grow and now has 1,344 followers. Over 18,000 views were recorded during the past month. Again this year we featured special reports and photos about the "Birds of Valley Falls" that showcased volunteer efforts to increase the bird populations at both Valley Falls Park and Farm.

The website provided continual updates on events. Copies of the newsletters, Annual Report, and other publications were posted as published. The new donation and membership button for those who prefer to support the Friends digitally was utilized by about 20 people.

We continue to work with Patch and local newspapers to publish events and open house dates, and distribute posters around town to promote the Heritage Center. Two articles and a half-page ad promoting events were published in *Vernon Voice*. According to our visitors, the top three ways they heard about the Heritage Center are Facebook, Patch calendar, and street signage.

Events

In July 2025 we hosted the annual pot luck picnic in the Red Barn for the Vernon Volunteers Collaborative (VVC), attended by 23 people. Parks & Recreation Director, Marty Sitler, gave a brief talk about the department and the facilities it manages. The FVF are one of twelve Vernon organizations that belong to the VVC. The purpose of the VVC is to facilitate networking and collaboration among the twelve organizations. It meets quarterly throughout the year, and is attended by a FVF Board representative.

Artists Day 2025, our feature event of the fiscal year, was held in September. Rainy weather caused a rescheduling of the event to a later date. Guitar duo Handler & Levesque played in the Red Barn, while twelve plein air artists painted on the hillsides. History tours were given of the Heritage Center. About 50 visitors enjoyed a day of art, music and history at Valley Falls Farm.

The September Annual Meeting was attended by 30 people. The election of Board of Directors took place, during which Jeremy Geller was elected as President. Guest speaker Karen Monger gave an interesting talk on mushroom identification and later led a mushroom foray around the farm.

A record number of 86 people attended our spring walks in Valley Falls Park this year. Two wildflower walks were scheduled, led by Carol Hatch, as well as the bird walk led by Denise Animani, a history walk led by Don Sierakowski and a tree walk led by Rose Hiskes.

During the fiscal year we took part in three community events (Healthfest, Seniorhood and Volunteers Day at the Senior Center) that provided opportunity to hand out information about FVF and speak with people who were interested in joining or volunteering for the FVF.

Business Development - Ann Letendre, Chairman

Fundraising: This fiscal year we received a total of \$18,731 in dues and contributions, an increase from the previous fiscal year of \$1,466. Three grant applications were submitted to fund the habitat-based management plan project that the FVF are doing for Valley Falls Park, and two were awarded. Funds from Rockville Bank Foundation for \$5,000 were received in this fiscal year, for which we are grateful. (Funds from Bafflin Foundation, also of \$5,000, were received in FY 26-27.)

Investment Subcommittee: The committee is comprised of the Treasurer and two members of the Friends of Valley Falls. It normally meets twice a year. In light of robust performance of the investment portfolio, it was determined that no changes to the portfolio were needed, and therefore no meetings were held.

Membership: As of June 30, 2026, we have 152 members (individuals or families). Another 21 individuals, families or entities made contributions. The total number is 173, down five from the previous year. These generous supporters are listed on pages 6 and 7 in this Report.

Buildings and Grounds Committee – Bruce Dinnie, Chairman

In the weeks leading up to the '26 Heritage Center Opening Day we assembled a "wrecking crew" to remove old lath and fiberboard remnants of a long-gone drop ceiling in the Red Barn lower level, unleashing copious debris. This was followed by a professional cleaning and some judicious painting of posts and beams. The space is objectively cleaner, and we think it is noticeably brighter. The wood base of the historic mill bell collected by Bernice and Peter Darico was badly deteriorated. We had a new base of stout timbers installed before the visiting season began.

We have installed insulation under a section of the Farmhouse floor in anticipation of converting an unheated room to year-round use, and we have arrived at a plan for heating it. Significant repair of the back porch has been planned and budgeted. We undertook an energy audit of the Farmhouse as well.

Invasive house sparrows, the bane of our bluebird project, invaded our buildings. The solution has been to apply mesh to openings in the Red Barn, Stable, and Piggery, to keep them out. A fair amount of green and white paint has been renewed on all of the Farm buildings on the hillside. Small carpentry fixes are fairly regularly undertaken, particularly in the Piggery. "As long as you got a dime, the music will never stop," because we had the jukebox in the Stable repaired.

The Vernon Garden Club continues to maintain the beautiful cold frame gardens. We have planted redbud trees in the swale. We have pulled invasive plants in front of the Red Barn, in the swale, and elsewhere on the property. Eradicating them requires persistence over a period of years. Two cubic yards of mulch provided by the Town was spread. All field and lawn tasks, except regular mowing, were done by volunteers.

Heritage Center Committee – Ann Letendre, Chairman

A total of 277 visitors came to the Center during the 2025 season, an increase of 51 people. Of this total, 116 came to our open Sunday afternoons, and 161 were hosted in private tours or events. We extended the open days into September and October again this year, and noted it was a positive move, resulting in nearly twice as many visitors in the fall months than in the summer months. We were open eight Sunday afternoons, with one cancellation due to weather. Seven private tours or group events were held, including the annual Vernon Volunteers Collaborative potluck picnic, a memorial event for past president and founder, Ginny Gingras, Artists Day, the Annual Meeting, a private family picnic and tour, and a group tour for a Mansfield organization called the UConn League. The 2 p.m. docent-led tour on open days continued to be a popular venue by visitors.

In preparation for the 2026 season opening, four docent training sessions were held again in May and were well attended. Thirteen volunteers, including four Board members, took part in the program. A training manual was prepared for attendees. A major preparation task for the season opening is cleaning the buildings. This job was initiated by volunteers during the April Spring Cleanup Day, followed by a second Cleanup Day in May. The exhibit done in collaboration with the New England Civil War Museum about Christian Sharps, his rifle and his trout farm at Valley Falls will be available again for the 2026 season in the Red Barn, thanks to the generous offer of the Museum allowing us to retain the exhibit for another season.

The collections inventory is nearly completed. The Board continues to discuss the needed protection of the collections from the effects of humidity and changing temperatures. Several options have been researched, including window protection and dehumidifiers.

Volunteer Coordination - Ryan Ramos, Chairman

A draft of Board job descriptions was created early in the year for future Board discussion and adoption. New volunteers were solicited through three community events, the Seniorhood Fair, Healthfest, and the Vernon Seniors Volunteer Day. Those who expressed interest were later contacted to discuss interests and skills, and potential volunteers work. Eight volunteers took part in spring cleanup days held in April and May, and ten volunteers, plus Board members, signed up to help during the Heritage Center 2026 season.

Audit Committee Report

The Treasurer compiled the Friends of Valley Falls, Inc. financial reports for fiscal year July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026. The reports were assembled in a manual that was provided to the Audit Committee in early August. Committee members carefully reviewed the materials, and met with the Treasurer to resolve questions and finalize data. The Committee finds that the financial statements for fiscal year '25-'26 are accurate and in reconciliation with all receipts, bank records and monthly reports.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Strong and Janice Kneeland

Approval for Bylaw Change

The following change is proposed in Article IV, Board of Directors, section 4.1, of the bylaws of the Friends of Valley Falls:

Remove "- past members of the executive board (ex officio, without voting power). "

Add "- Directors-at-Large, who shall have the same voting rights and fiduciary responsibilities as other members of the Board of Directors; who 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; and whose absence from a meeting shall not, by itself, constitute grounds for removal."

Donors to the Friends of Valley Falls – July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026

LIFETIME MEMBERSHIPS

Cynthia Barlow
Scott & Deborah Livingston
Andrew & Joanne Myer, Jr

Malcolm & Susan Barlow
David McQuade
Karen Prewo

Maryann & Ron Levesque
Jean Merz
Nancy Strong

BENEFACTORS

Rockville Bank Foundation

The Family of Mary Glenn

HISTORY HEROES

Carroll Burke

Linda Cromwell
Jon & Jan Roe

Rosemarie Gallichio

PRESERVATION PARTNERS

Fred & Cheryl Artz
Michael Brennan
Robert & Donna Caplin
Merrilyn N Cummings
Harold & Ronalee Delisle
Matt & Gail Faherty
John & Tracy Gorecki
David & Susan Herrmann
Ray & Wendy Hollworth
George & Marge Kelly
Anne King
Mary Ellen Linderman
Brian & Penny Motola
Tom & Lisa Ouellette
Ken & Jane Peacock
Stephen Repetto
Kathy Schreiber
Geoff & Cheryl Siedor
Jack Summers
Michael & Phyllis Winkler

Chip & Madeline Bellows
Trish & Connie Buckley
Bob & Linda Carlson
William & Joan Curtis
Bruce Dinnie
Garden Barn
Eric & Daryl Gottier
David & Rose Hiskes
Lisa & Jim Irish
Russ & Judith Kelly
Suzanne Langone
Ellen Marmer, MD
Joan M. Noel
Paula Passaretti
Bill & Naomi Pomper
Andy & Diane Rhoades
Tom & Pegi Shea
Ann & Joseph Staniunas
Nancy Swanton

Ann Bonney
Jerry Bujacius
Jeff & Mary Carlson
Gary Cyr
Milton & Judith Doremus
Jeremy Geller
Jim & Susan Gusy
George Hogan
Karin & Richard James
Donald Lewie
Robert & Ann Letendre
Sheryl & Tim McMullen
Nancy Orlowski
Gordon & Amy Paterson
Glen & Jean Potter
Michael & Marcelle Ringbloom
Paul Shimer
Nancy Steffens & Bob Felber
Scott & Mandy Wieting

FRIENDS

Sharon Allard
George Arthur
Tom & Donna Barnas
Donald Bellingham
Jane Burr
Brett Capshaw
Joe & Audrey Courtney
Cathy Dacey

Denise Anamani
William V. Ashe, Jr.
The Beirn Family
Roger Blais
Ronald Burr
Carol Chappel
Linda Cromwell
Tom Didio

Michael & Judy Annati
Ellen Ballos
Mark Bell
Bill & Susan Bresleau
Hubert S. Bush, Jr
Richard & Julie Clay
Michael & Mary Cross
Patrick & Margaret Dubel

FRIENDS (Continued)

Teresa Duggan	Suzanne Dunlap	Corrinne Fisher
Timothy Gallup	Marilyn G. Ganley	Norm & Donna Gessay
Dana & Lisa Gregus	Tom & Kim Griswold	Viviane Guerette
Richard & Carole Guttman	Ken & Lisa Hageman	David & Carol Hatch
Robert & Betty Hathaway	Dennis Himes & Maure Briggs	Jean Hopkins
John & Maria Horan	Shirley Howe	Claire Janowski
Robert & Sharon Kehmna	David Kemp	Janice Kneeland
Sally Knisel & Sarah Myers	Ted Koch	Fred & Lisa Kopper
John & Sara Koziol	Robert & Paula Lathrop	Doreen & Gordon Lawrence
Daniel J. LeBlanc	George & Debra Lee	Lisa Letendre
Bruce & Jean Luddy	Peter & Lynn Lusardi	Robert & Katherine Lyle
Kathleen Lynch	Kathy Lynch	Carolyn Manson
Julie Martens	Barbara W. McCarthy	Garry & Deb McConville
James & Karen McWalter	David Murphy	Charles Musick
Ann Noel	Sylvia Morgan	Barbara Muldoon
Lee & Dorothy Paquette	Kathleen Perlitz	Diane Peskurich
Laura Raccagni	Marcia Reiley	Matt & Dee Reiser
Jacqui Roraback	Blanche Ross	Carl & Polly Schaefer
Lynn Schmelter	Don Sierakowski	Edward & Carole Slattery
Ann Smith	Linda Smith	Maureen & Andy Smith
Joel & Gail Sokolov	Marilyn Steele	Dennis & Sally Sullivan
Tom & Lynn Sweet	Sharon & Frank Tarala	Susann Thiel
Ann Tremont	Michael & Madeline Turk	Allen A. Valli, Jr
Betty Wardrop	Elizabeth C. Waters	Raymond & Karen Whinnem
Deborah Wilson	Dan & Margaret Wright	Lynne M. Yampanis

Lifetime - \$1000 +
Benefactors - \$1000 +
History Heroes - \$500 - \$999
Preservation Partners - \$100 - \$499
Friends - \$5 - \$99

Board of Directors – Friends of Valley Falls, Inc., as of June 30, 2026

Officers

President - Jeremy Geller
Vice-President – vacant
Secretary – Ann Noel
Treasurer – Bob Letendre

Directors

Bruce Dinnie
Ann Letendre
Karen Prewo
Ryan Ramos

Friends of Valley Falls, Inc.

Treasurer's Report

For the period July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026

The major financial highlights for the fiscal year are as follows:

- **The available cash at the end of the fiscal year is \$ \$23,822.**
- **The total investment in the Vanguard Endowment Account is \$519,733.**
- **The Capital Improvement Fund at Vanguard is \$5,000.**
- **Overall gross revenues, exclusive of the unrealized gain in the Vanguard account, increased this year [\$49,387 vs. \$42,232], relative to the previous year. Grant monies received during this year were \$5,250.**
- **Rental income from the farmhouse apartments increased slightly by 4% [\$24,475 vs. \$23,600] due to both apartments being fully rented during the year and a small increase in rental rates.**
- **Total donations to the organization in the form of memberships and various contributions increased slightly from \$17,265 last year to \$18,731 this year reflecting larger contributions by individuals since actual membership numbers decreased slightly.**
- **The Valley Falls Farm Fund, our designated fund established at the Greater Hartford Gives Foundation (formerly Hartford Foundation for Public Giving) provided an annual return of \$698.**
- **Our goal in coming years is to continue the level of contributions to the organization in order to generate a stream of income that will assist in carrying the organization forward financially in future years.**
- **The organization remains debt free.**

Respectfully submitted,

Robert P. Letendre, Treasurer

FRIENDS OF VALLEY FALLS, INC.
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION
As of June 30, 2026

ASSETS

Operating Funds - Checking Acc't – M&T Bank	\$ 12,745	
CT Grant Funds - Checking Acc't – M&T Bank	9,201	
Security Deposit - Savings Acc'ts – M&T Bank	<u>1,876</u>	
		\$ 23,822
 Vanguard Acct – Endowment Fund	 \$ 519,852	
Vanguard Acct – Capital Improvement Fund	<u>5,000</u>	
Total Vanguard Account		<u>\$ 524,852</u>
 Sub-Total Assets		 \$ 548,674
 Land, buildings, and equipment, plus net accumulated depreciation		 <u>\$ 315,500</u>
 Total Assets		 \$ 864,174

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

Liabilities:		
Security Deposit - Rental Unit (Restricted Funds)	\$ 1,876	
 Total Liabilities		 \$ 1,876
 Net Assets:		
Net Assets, beginning of period (July 1, 2025 value)	\$ 777,951	
Increase in net assets	<u>84,347</u>	
 Net Assets, end of period		 \$ <u>862,298</u>
 Total Liabilities and Net Assets		 \$ 864,174

FRIENDS OF VALLEY FALLS, INC.
STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES
For the 12 Months Ending June 30, 2026

REVENUE, GRANTS, and OTHER INCOME

Memberships and Contributions from Individual Donors	\$ 18,486
Rental Income	24,475
Earnings from Valley Falls Farm Designated Fund at HFPG	698
Grant Income	5,250
Donations at Heritage Center	245
Sales of FVF Related Merchandise	58
Miscellaneous Income	<u>175</u>

Total Revenue and Other Income **\$ 49,387**

EXPENSES

Valley Falls Farm Maintenance & Operations	
Grounds Keeping	\$ 5,534
Farm House Operating and Maintenance Expenses	3,482
Out-Building Operating and Maintenance Expenses	7,828
Insurance	5,416
Depreciation Expense	<u>12,301</u>
	\$ 34,561
Program Services	
Newsletters	\$ 1,854
Annual Report Design, Printing, & Mailing	1,246
Annual Meeting Expenses	315
Artists Day Expenses	567
Spring Walk and Advertising Expenses	747
Website Hosting Fee	<u>193</u>
	\$ 4,922
Heritage Center Operation Expenses	\$ 3,784
Membership & Fundraising Expenses	\$ 1,696
Administrative Expenses	<u>2,365</u>
	\$ 4,061

Total Expenses **\$ 47,328**

Increase in net assets (Income less Expenses)	\$ 2,059
Unrealized Gain in Vanguard Account	<u>82,288</u>
Total Change in Net Assets	\$ 84,347
 Net assets, beginning of period (July 1, 2025 value)	 <u>\$ 777,951</u>
 Net assets, end of period	 \$ 862,298

FRIENDS OF VALLEY FALLS, INC.
STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS
For the 12 Months Ending June 30, 2026

Cash Flows from Operating Activities

Increase in net assets (income minus expenses)	\$ 2,059
Adjustment - Depreciation allowance	\$ <u>12,301</u>
Net cash provided by operating activities	\$ 14,360

Cash Flows from Investing Activities

Unrealized gain in Vanguard Account	\$ <u>82,288</u>
Net cash used in investing activities	\$ 82,288

Cash Flows from Financing Activities

Net cash provided by financing activities	<u>\$ 0</u>
Net Increase/Decrease in Cash	\$ 96,648
Cash at Beginning of Period (July 1, 2025 Value)	<u>\$ 452,026</u>
Cash at End of Period	\$ 548,674