Preserving History and
Nature at Valley Falls

Website: *friendsofvalleyfalls.org*

Facebook: The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc Vernon CT

It's a Wrap!

This year we celebrated our fourth season of operation of the Valley Falls Farm and Heritage Center! Based on previous attendance records, we extended our Sunday open house days through mid-October, and it was a good decision - visitors kept coming! We also had a record number of people attending our spring walks, with nearly 90 attending our Wildflower, Bird, History and Tree Walks, and another 35 joining our fall hike at Valley Falls Park held in partnership with the Northern CT Land Trust. We couldn't have had such a successful year without the dedication of our volunteers and the generosity of our members. Thank you for supporting the Friends' mission of preserving history and nature; we look forward to another great season in 2027!







A Hike and a Tour

On Oct. 17 the Friends of Valley Falls and the Northern CT Land Trust sponsored a partnership event that included a five-mile hike to enjoy fall scenery and views at Valley Falls Park, followed by refreshments and a tour of the Heritage Center. After Karl Hasel of the Land Trust led 35 people to Echo Ridge

(affording a spectacular autumn view of Valley Falls), the group convened at the Red Barn for refreshments and a Heritage Center tour. FVF volunteer and board member Karen Prewo led the group



through the six historic buildings and provided stories about the families who once lived on this gentleman's farm.

Re-creating History

Another special tour was held this summer when 25 members of Vernon's First Congregational Church arrived at the Heritage Center following a picnic they held at Valley Falls Park. Research reveals that when Hans Munchow owned the farm from 1911 to 1915 with his wife Henrietta, he hosted a picnic for Congregational Church members as well. Hans, who falsely claimed to be a German Count, was always delighted to show off his wealth and generosity to the community. At the time, the property included the land we now know as Valley Falls Park, and he enjoyed providing lunch and ice cream at the pond.



The present-day picnic lunch and tour were a fun way to re-create that piece of history, and many on the tour noted they had not realized that the farm was now a Heritage Center and museum.

According to Ann Letendre, chair of the Heritage Center committee, special tour groups are always welcome. Clubs and organizations may

contact the Friends for tours, and Ann notes that several family reunions have been celebrated with a picnic at the farm, followed by a tour of the buildings. If you or a group that you know may be interested (typically groups of 7 or more) please contact Ann at (860) 305-7068 or message us on our Facebook page or website, *www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org*.

Volunteers of the Year

This season we initiated the Friends of Valley Falls "Volunteer of the Year" award, to recognize outstanding service aligned with our dual missions of preserving history and nature at Valley Falls, or service to the organization. Two people immediately came to mind, so it was decided that for this first year, we would honor both Sheryl McMullen and Jeff Carlson, both committed conservationists, as our first two Volunteers of the Year. The Friends thanked these great volunteers and presented plaques at the Annual Meeting on September 26.



Sheryl's plaque includes this quote by renowned biologist and naturalist E. O. Wilson (1929-2021): "Look closely at nature. Every species is a masterpiece."

Sheryl was recognized for leading a team of volunteers who provide countless hours and creative thinking to grow and nurture the bluebird population at the Heritage Center and Valley Falls Park.

Jeff, who is one of the team members, also volunteers his time to improve the Park and the Heritage Center. As former and current members of the Vernon Conservation Commission, Sheryl and Jeff play a critical role on our committee that is creating a habitat-based management plan for Valley Falls Park.



Jeff's plaque includes this quote by famed naturalist and environmental philosopher John Muir (1838-1914): "In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks."



Mike shows Sheryl McMullen of the Friends how tree height and diameter are taken.

Protecting the Park for Future Generations

Volunteers with the Friends of Valley Falls are part of a committee that is developing a forest stewardship plan for Valley Falls Park. The goal of the project is to protect the natural resources at the park, while allowing the public to enjoy its beauty.

Using grant funds, foresters have been hired to conduct a tree inventory at the park, which includes recording the age, height and diameter of various trees. Initial steps recently began, with Forester Mike Pellegrino of Ferrucci & Walicki, LLC measuring the large hickory tree near the pond.

What Is It?

The Friends had fun with a "What Is It" event held in the Red Barn when members of the Vernon Volunteer Collaborative got together for a potluck dinner. Several interesting items in the Heritage Center buildings were shown to the group, including this item of vintage clothing.



While people knew it was a dress, few people were able to identify it as a paper dress, and no one recognized it as an iconic "Yellow Page Paper Dress." Found in a closet at the Stable, research shows it was manufactured in 1967 in Ashville, North Carolina, and sold through the designer called Wastebasket Boutique. Made from non-woven fiber, reinforced with nylon, and treated to be fire resistant, this dress was designed to look like actual ads from the Yellow Page Book. The arm and neck holes are reinforced with a black tape and washing it was possible, but not advised, as it would then be flammable. In fact, the dress has a "Do Not Wash" instruction on the label. Since paper dresses were made in the '60s, we can only wonder if this dress was worn by any of the women in the Darico family. The size on the label is "Biggest 16 – 18" and both Bernice and Emma Darico were small women. It's origin is a mystery, but we do know from an article we read about the dress that it cost $1.25 by mail order, with a coupon!



Continuous Improvement

Part of our commitment to preserving history and nature includes maintaining the 1840 Farmhouse, as well as the circa 1910 Stable, Piggery, Manure Shed, Root Cellar, Ice House and Tool Shed. The Friends also help with the upkeep of the Red Barn, which is owned by the Town of Vernon. This year, projects included a new base for the antique mill bell located in front of the stable, cosmetic improvements to the interior meeting and reception space in the lower level of the Red Barn, adding heat and insulation to a former three-season room and improving ventilation in one of the two apartments comprising our circa 1840 farmhouse, and the latest project: renovating the side porch on the other apartment. The Friends were fortunate to receive donated time from a skilled carpenter residing in Vernon, who single-handedly shored up the porch, replaced a faulty door and window, and replaced siding and trim, all while maintaining the historic look. In addition, the Friends had new granite steps installed for access to the porch, following the cue of the existing stone steps at the front entry to the apartment. The renovations accomplished goals of improving tenant safety and access, maintaining our historic building, and improving the appearance of the property. Painting of the renovated exterior is currently underway!

Help Us Grow Our Membership

Do you know someone interested in joining the Friends? Would you like to give the gift of membership? You can download a membership form

from 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 at Valley Falls.

Photo Finish



Often called the most scenic spot in Vernon, the eight-acre Valley Falls Heritage Center is beautiful in all seasons. Wishing you an equally beautiful Thanksgiving with friends and family.

Stay in Touch!