



Avon Historical Society President's Report
41st Annual Meeting, April 9, 2015
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AVON HISTORICAL SOCIETY MISSION: to identify, collect, preserve, utilize, publish, display, and promote the history and heritage of Avon. (Approved by the AHS Board, Jan. 10, 2001)

The Society was founded in 1973-1974 by a group of forward thinking individuals who wanted to make sure the history of Avon was not forgotten during the celebration of our nation's Bicentennial in 1976. This report will show that we have that same spirit with us today.

NOTE: PGS AND DFH ARE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC ON SUNDAYS FROM 2:00 – 4:00 PM, JUNE - SEPTEMBER

Schoolhouse #3 (formerly called Living Museum) – As the Society's "headquarters" it maintains and stores the archival collection of the Society. In 2012 the Trustees voted to close the building as a museum due to lack of annual visitors. The only permanent display is about the history of the Farmington Canal. The building is open by appointment until further notice.

Pine Grove School House (PGS) – At 150 years old this year, this school house is interpreted as from the turn of the 20th century. Last summer Ryan Tyler, an Eagle Scout, installed an informational kiosk outside the building with the history of the property. The Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation awarded a grant to the Town of Avon & the Society to restore the 14 windows (112 panes of glass) of the schoolhouse – some dating back to 1865! Thanks to many private, memorial and corporate donations, the match for the grant was made. The windows were completed in August 2014. In order to keep the UV light from damaging the interior in the winter months when the sun is low, a donation of curtains was made for the windows on the south side. The PGS will have a birthday party when it opens on Sunday, June 7, 2015!

Derrin Farm House (c. 1814) (DFH) – This will be the 5th year the DFH will be open to the public for a summer season! It was leased to the Society in 1996. Continued restoration on this 19th c. farmhouse is on-going and being overseen by Len Tolisano and John Forster with many projects for volunteers. Interpretation of the DFH is ongoing with a view to a grand re-opening in 2016 for the 250th anniversary of the first Derrin Family settling in Northington (later Avon.) The CT Trust for Historic Preservation placed DFH on the State Register of Historic Places in 2014.

Horse Guard Barn (c. 1870) (HGB) – Now in the 5th year of a lease from the State Department of the Military, the Society has been successful in obtaining many donations of equipment, labor and money from the public and private foundations, including two barn grants from the CT Trust for Historic Preservation over the years to replace the roof in early April 2015. As of this writing, the final touches are being completed and it looks terrific! The ventilator on the top has been painted a dull silver giving it a professional, yet historic look and feel. The 1954 annex behind the barn collapsed due to snow weight just prior to the roof replacement so the Society will embark on fundraising for the materials and labor to replace the back wall that was damaged due to the collapse. While the lumber for the south wall was purchased previously with donated funds, the Society now needs to finance the

replacement of that wall. A temporary wall has been in place for several years. This will finalize the “envelope” of the building making it dry and sound. The CT Trust for Historic Preservation placed the HGB on the State Register of Historic Places in 2014.

Marian Hunter History Room (HHR) – The Hunter History Room at the Avon Free Public Library is staffed by volunteers and provides a much-needed and well-used service for those interested in genealogy, historic houses, viewing of old maps, the general history of the town, its citizens and businesses past and present. Ongoing exhibits are installed in the History Corner of the library just outside the History Room. This area was designed to allow the Society to utilize the large glass display case, the flat display case, bookshelves and wall space for historical-themed exhibits. This past year those included many relative to the Civil War commemoration and some of local interest. A new policy on the use of the History Room was developed between the Avon Historical Society and the Avon Free Public Library. The approved document is on both organization’s website for use by the public.

ACQUISITIONS TO THE COLLECTION:

Among the items donated to the Society this year included a collection of 12 pieces of clothing from the family of Mary Caroline “Carrie” Case Wheeler (1847-1897) such as aprons, chemises, underclothing, etc. These will be archived into the collection and stored in archival boxes in SH3. The Case family homestead was just north of what is now Riverdale Farms. She is buried in East Avon Cemetery.

SOCIETY ACTIVITIES SINCE THE LAST ANNUAL MEETING IN APRIL 2014:

- ❖ The Membership Committee continued its targeted membership mailing campaign to Farmington Woods during the year (over 1,000 piece mailing) with some new memberships added.
- ❖ The Finance Committee created an e*Trade account for the Society and the Board of Trustees elected to put \$5,000 in to two stocks as investment.
- ❖ In order to supplement the Society’s most important book on the history of the town entitled “Avon, Connecticut...an historical story” by M. Francis MacKie, which was published in 1985, a project to gather the contemporary history of the town from 1985 to present, was started by volunteers in the History Room. This project is ongoing. In addition, the Trustees are investing various methods for reproduction of the book as the hard cover supply is low. These options include print on demand, digital, online via website, etc. More due diligence will be done in the coming year before a final decision is made.
- ❖ Janet Conner, head of the Special Projects Committee, received a citation from the Avon Board of Education in June 2014 for her outstanding work within the schools in the previous year.
- ❖ During this past school year the Special Projects Committee completed the following:
 - Avon High School Fall 2014 – Asian ceramics exhibit to welcome Chinese educators to Avon and exhibit on Yung Wing, former Avon resident who founded the American Missionary Association.
 - Thompson Brook Elementary School Nov/Dec. 2014 – Bulletin board display about ‘Sleepy Hollow’, West Avon’s former milling community
 - Thompson Brook Elementary School January 2015 – ‘The History of the Towpath School Cupola’; an exhibit of historic newspaper articles, photographs, and a scale model of the cupola
 - Pine Grove Elementary School February 2015 – ‘How the Farmington Canal Affected Avon’s Economy’ was presented in a glass display case exhibit as well as an in-person presentation to the entire school.

- Roaring Brook Elementary School March/April 2015 – ‘Stone Walls – More Than Meets the Eye’. This will be a scavenger hunt design between a bulletin board and glass display case. The case will depict a pastoral scene with a young girl on a tree swing with a stone wall nearby. Numbers relating to different aspects in and around the wall will correspond to the bulletin board with photos and text.
 - The Committee, on behalf of Roaring Brook School, won a grant from the Avon Education Foundation to develop flipbooks of information for the nature paths behind the school.
- ❖ Avon Day 2014 was a success as our booth was once again on a corner and well decorated. The theme was the 40th anniversary of the Society and contained photos of past events on display.
 - ❖ Ongoing exhibits and remarkable events marking the commemoration of the Civil War 150 years ago were presented by the Sesquicentennial Committee.
 - ❖ The Cupola that was on top of the now demolished Towpath Elementary School (1949-2000) was painted by a group of volunteers and permanently placed on the front lawn of the Board of Education on Simsbury Road near to where the school once stood. Currently a boy scout, working on his Eagle Scout, is building an informational kiosk (like the one at PGS) and bench to be placed next to the Cupola for visitors to learn about the original center of Avon, the canal, the railroad and the two Towpath Schools that were there. Both will be installed late summer/early fall 2015.
 - ❖ A reunion of the Girl Scout Camp Gertrude Bryant was held in the fall of 2014 with over 100 women attending who were once campers at the facility that ran from 1944-1965. The Society was the recipient of some of the wonderful memories and photos of the camp for the archives of the History Room.
 - ❖ The Society was the recipient of a bequest of just over \$21,000 from William Yandow who lived in Avon most of his life until retiring the Florida. The use of his generous donation is under discussion by the Finance Committee and will be making recommendations to the Board of Trustees this fall.
 - ❖ The Society was saddened by the loss of William (Bill) Goralski this year. He was the author of 5 short books on growing up in Avon that provide much contemporary history of the last 75 years. He was also an active member of the Society and will be missed by many for his wit and wisdom and big smile!

SAMPLE OF PROJECTS/GOALS (not inclusive) FOR 2014-2015:

- ❖ Focus on marketing the Society in order to: (1) increase membership and gain more volunteers for our projects, (2) sell our merchandise creating a steady stream of income, (3) focus on fundraising for the south and rear walls of the HGB, (4) continue the efforts in teaching local history in Avon schools, and (4) continue to be a strong, community organization and partner.
- ❖ Continued participation in the Farmington Valley Visitor Association’s Historic Sites Committee’s board and events.

Thank you for attending the 41st Annual Meeting of the Avon Historical Society.

If you have any questions, please leave a message at 860-678-7621 or e-mail at:

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