



**Avon Historical Society President's Report
40th Annual Meeting, April 8, 2014
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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 DH 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 it is open by appointment until further notice.

Pine Grove School House (PGS) – Our most visited property, it is interpreted as a school house at the turn of the 20th century. Ryan Tyler, an Eagle Scout, will install 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 & 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. Work will commence in the summer. It is expected that PGS will have a grand re-opening in June 2015 for its 150th birthday!

Derrin House (DH) – This will be the 4th year the DH 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 Len Tolisano has many projects for volunteers. Last fall Justin Alessio finished his Eagle Scout project to restore the main trail at Horse Guard State Park Scenic Reserve which surrounds the DH. The entire trail behind the DH was of dead wood and debris. It was then blazed and a horse hitch was constructed for the First Co. Governor's Horse Guards. A trailhead was built with information and history on the area. Visitors to the DH this summer will be invited to hike the trail and enjoy the views at the top of the hill. Interpretation of the DH is ongoing with a new description that is being used: *The land that the current Derrin House sits on was the property of one family for over 150 years (1766-1920); this structure traces its roots to the late 18th century. One can see the progress the family made as the house was expanded again and again; currently under an adaptive-reuse, the Derrin House is testimony to a way of life that has virtually disappeared from our region; the family farm. Filled with period furniture and implements the Derrin House invites visitors to learn what life was like on a 19th century New England farm, where the weather and uneven soil always made life interesting. Many aspects of that life are on display within the house; including several interactive pieces; come join Ammi, Sarah and the Derrin kids on a trip back in time!* Last summer the Derrin Family obelisk in the West Avon Cemetery was cleaned by a professional stone restorer. In addition, ongoing Derrin Family genealogy is underway in the hopes of identifying all the Derrin families and their homes along West Avon Road.

Horse Guard Barn (HGB) – Now in the 4th year of a lease from the State Department of the Military, many donations of equipment, labor and money from the public have allowed us purchase the siding for the south wall. The lumber is on site and fundraising is ongoing to pay for the labor for the installation. All donations to this project are tax deductible.

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 newly created 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.

ACQUISITIONS TO THE COLLECTION:

Among the items donated were pictures, photos and maps from various donors. Of note are 7 highway and air sector maps of the Farmington Valley from the 19th c. to present..

AVON HIGH SCHOOL CLUB:

This is the 3rd full year that there is an Avon Historical Society Club at the school. Katie Stoll served this past year with us on the Board and organized an art contest for the creation of new notecards to benefit the Society. Of the 8 scenes of sites of Avon painted by high school students, 4 were chosen for the notecards.

FUNDRAISING:

As 2012 was the last year of the very successful Cow Chip Raffle, the Society did not undertake a major fundraiser this past year. A new fundraising committee has been established and any ideas or suggestions are welcomed.

SOCIETY ACTIVITIES SINCE THE LAST ANNUAL MEETING IN APRIL 2013:

- ❖ The Board of Trustees created new committees to (1) recommend new investment opportunities for the endowments it has; (2) recommend fundraising ideas and (3) increase membership.
- ❖ The Membership Committee did a targeted membership mailing campaign to Farmington Woods. About a dozen new members were realized.
- ❖ Old Avon Village was renamed Avon Village Marketplace in 2012 and sold to John Yates, and other partners, in 2013. As they are historic properties, Mr. Yates reached out to the Society for approval on historic colors for exterior painting.
- ❖ New notecards depicting 4 scenes of Avon, done by Avon High School art students, were printed courtesy of a private donor, and are on sale through the Society's website or by calling the Society's phone at 860-678-7621. 100% of the proceeds benefit the Society's mission.
- ❖ A "Historic Homeowners Event" was held on in May in the History Room of the library. Invites were targeted to homeowners with homes dating from 1890-1935. Eight home owners attended sharing stories of their homes, reviewing their house files or adding items to the files!
- ❖ In June a tour bus of 35 people, that was visiting sites along the Farmington Canal, stopped at Schoolhouse No. 3 to view the diorama, the outside plaques marking the crossing of the Canal and other items pertaining to the Canal that are in permanent display inside the building.
- ❖ Last summer the Society mourned the passing of Gladys August – longtime member and friend to the Society. Gladys was one of the founders of the Society and the interpreter of Schoolhouse No. 3, when it was the Living Museum, welcoming hundreds of students every year who sat on carpet pieces to hear her stories and participate in a treasure hunt around the exhibits. She was a Board member, supporter, large donor and friend to many. Donations in her honor were made to the Society for the window restoration project at the Pine Grove Schoolhouse where she attended as a child.
- ❖ 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.
- ❖ The Special Projects Committee created and had a traveling exhibit on the history of the 7 schoolhouses in Avon go to all the schools in town during the Fall. In addition they gave in person demonstrations to one school on camp life and food preparation during the Revolutionary War era. Ongoing projects and displays are underway in all Avon schools, thanks to the hard working efforts of this committee and its leader.

- ❖ Thanks to a Connecticut historian and videographer, a You Tube video entitled, "The Charter Oak Project," highlights all trees descended from the Charter Oak Tree and features Avon's, located at the Avon Town Hall at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXN6DR6dsk&list=PLXFLNgxDQFOtZfZWbzqWYXqI_Woy6llf_&index=20
- ❖ On November 2, the 2nd Great Photo Hunt was held in the History Room. Two residents of town attended and one, Carl Candels, donated his large poster boards with photos and newspaper articles about the Teen Center he ran in Avon over 50 years ago.
- ❖ Volunteers worked during the Fall on the grounds around Schoolhouse No. 3 and repair work was started on the fence surrounding the building that has deteriorated due to ice and snow from the state highway trucks that clean Route 44 in the winter. We can't thank our volunteers for all this work!
- ❖ John Lumani bought 10 E. Main Street, next door to Schoolhouse No. 3 and has his barber shop opening up. He is going to renovate the building and have the back part leased to private businesses as well as the upstairs apartment. He has offered assistance to the Society, as a good neighbor, with the grounds and fencing.
- ❖ Season's Magazine had an article in their Fall 2013 issue featuring the Stowe crazy quilt (c. 1890) donated a year earlier by descendants of Lena Stowe Legeyt. The article corresponded with the opening of the 2nd annual Harvest Quilt Show that featured the Stowe quilt on the altar of the church with its history.
- ❖ Avon Day 2013 was held in the rain. The Society's booth was up for only two hours.
- ❖ Ongoing exhibits and remarkable events marking the commemoration of the Civil War 150 years ago were presented by the Sesquicentennial Committee. Topics included: Gettysburg; Innovations created in CT during the War; and Recognition of the CT 29th Volunteer Infantry (Colored.)
- ❖ On Dec. 3, a talk on the midget car racing at Cherry Park in the 1950's was held and many came out to share their stories, photos, broadsides, and memories of the park and all the events that were held there.
- ❖ McDonald's Restaurant on Route 44 was renovated in Oct/Nov and had a grand re-opening in Dec. with a wall drawing featuring the Pine Grove Schoolhouse.
- ❖ The Cupola that was on top of the now demolished Towpath Elementary School (1949-2000) is undergoing a renovation by a group of volunteers and will be placed on the front lawn of the Board of Education on Simsbury Road next to where the school once stood. This is expected to happen in 2014-2015.
- ❖ The Society was represented at the grand opening of the CREC Reggio Magnet School in January 2014 as it supported its development. The school focuses on the arts and humanities for grades K-5.
- ❖ Thanks to a 3rd grant from Northwest Community Bank, the Society redesigned and printed the Avon tri-fold brochure and will be distributing it this summer at various locations in the Valley.
- ❖ The 40th anniversary of the Society was outlined in a large article in the April 2014 issue of VALLEY LIFE, which is distributed to a select demographic in several towns.

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

- ❖ Strong participation in Avon Day on September 27th.
- ❖ 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) hold a major fundraiser to support our mission during our 40th anniversary year, (4) continue the efforts in teaching local history in Avon schools, (4) review our policies and procedures with the Avon Library relative to the use of the History Room, and (5) continue to be a strong, community organization and partner.
- ❖ Identify a major fundraiser to support the HGB project since the Cow Chip Raffle is not an option.
- ❖ Continued participation in the Farmington Valley Visitor Association's Historic Sites Committee's board and events.
- ❖ Work with the Avon VFW Post 3272 as it plans its 70th anniversary in 2015. The history of Avon's soldiers is part of the fabric of our town, therefore it is fitting we participate with them on this important milestone. 2015 is also the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII. With more than 35 WWII veterans still in Avon, events to honor them and their service are planned.

**Thank you for attending the 40th Annual Meeting of the Avon Historical Society.
If you have any questions, please leave a message at 860-678-7621 or e-mail at:
ahs.mail.1830@sbcglobal.net**