



**Avon Historical Society President's Report  
42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting, April 19, 2016  
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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**

**School House No. 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 semi- permanent display is about the history of the Farmington Canal. School House No. 3 is on the State Register of Historic Places. The building is open by appointment until further notice.

**Pine Grove School House (PGSH)** – At 151 years old this year, this school house is interpreted as from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On June 7, 2015, a 150<sup>th</sup> birthday party was held for the building. One former student, who was 99 years old, attended as well as children for former teachers, teachers, students who attended the building when it was a nursery school in the 1950s as well as neighbors, friends, and others who wanted to commemorate one-room schoolhouse learning in America. Thanks to wonderful weather, the turnout was more than expected and many enjoyed seeing the refurbished windows and building once again. It is hoped that the interior can be painted this coming year as that will be the last item needed to complete another restoration. PGSH is on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

**Derrin Farm House (c. 1810) (DFH)** – This will be the 6<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> c. farmhouse is on-going and being overseen by Len Tolisano and John Forster with many projects for volunteers. Interpretation of the DFH is evolving with new discoveries, including in November 2015 a 30' deep well inside the oldest part of the house! A grand re-opening is going to be held on June 12, 2016 to commemorate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Derrin Family settling in Northington (later Avon.) The house will have a new Welcome Center with display banners about the history of the Derrin Family and the properties they owned along the street. As a lead up to this event, a series of lectures entitled " 'One Square in Avon's Heritage Quilt History –The Derrin Family of West Avon; A Look Into Avon's Agrarian Past " took place from Fall 2015-Summer 2016 with 6 lectures and a three-month exhibit in the Library. A grant from CT Humanities for \$1,198 was received to help fund

several of the speakers. The Avon Senior Community Center was also a partner in the seminar series. And the Avon-Canton Rotary Club donated \$150 toward the speaker series in the Fall. DFH is on the State Register of Historic Places.

**Horse Guard Barn (c. 1870) (HGB)** – Now in the 6<sup>th</sup> 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 and fix the back wall which was damaged when the winter storms collapsed the attached annex built in 1954. And a donation of paint from Maher’s was used to paint the south exterior and back walls. This has finalized the “envelope” of the building making it dry and sound. A fundraiser is planned for April 30, along with the Friends of the HG, that will provide additional funding for both the Barn and the upkeep of the Horse Guard. A boy scout, working on his Eagle Scout, is reconstructing the horse stalls that used to be in the ground floor of the barn. He is repurposing lumber that was used to build a temporary south wall several years ago. This area will be used to showcase various large pieces of farm equipment now housed on the grounds of the Derrin House. The HGB on the State Register of Historic Places.

**Marian Hunter History Room (HHR)** – The Hunter History Room at the Avon Free Public Library is staffed by volunteers (more are always needed!) 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. In January 2016, the Avon Free Public Library won a National Endowment for the Humanities Grant a \$5,553 Preservation Assistance Grant to fund a project that will provide a formal preservation assessment of the Marian Hunter History Room, which is curated jointly by the library and the Avon Historical Society. Grant funds will be used to hire a consultant to assess the condition and storage methods of a collection that consists of books, serials, photographs, postcards, maps, deeds, and other memorabilia related to the history of Avon. The consultant will prepare a formal report with prioritized recommendations for improving the preservation of these important artifacts. In addition to the planned assessment, the grant will enable library staff to attend a workshop on the preservation of paper-based materials.

### **ACQUISITIONS TO THE COLLECTION:**

(To be added by Annual Meeting)

### **SOCIETY ACTIVITIES SINCE THE LAST ANNUAL MEETING IN APRIL 2015:**

- ❖ With the approval of the Board of Trustees, the Finance Committee added another \$5,000 to the year old e\*Trade account for the Society including an increase in the number of investment stocks. The total initial investment is \$10,000. Annual earnings has been approximately \$750.
- ❖ 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 voted to form a committee to investigate various methods for reproduction of the book as the hard cover supply is low. The option chosen is “print on demand” with an online presence via various bookseller websites. The Trustees also approved to hiring of the Connecticut Urban

Legal Institute at the UCONN Law School to handle all legal aspects of the project. There is a minimal fee for the service on an annual basis. As of this writing, due to marketing efforts to find volunteers to assist in this project, over eight residents of the Valley have joined! It is expected this project will take 6-8 months to complete.

- ❖ Two final events in the 150<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the Civil War were presented in May and June including a final exhibit.
- ❖ Later in the year two more Civil War themed talks/events took place as there is an active audience who appreciate Avon's involvement in the commemoration and are requesting we continue to provide events.
- ❖ For the second year, the Society has been providing students in grades K-8 with their own Avon Historical Society newsletter. It is distributed through the Board of Education central office e-mail system to all families.
- ❖ In conjunction with the Town of Avon's hearings and subsequent approval of a new town center to be built behind the town hall, the Society mounted an exhibit entitled "A Canal Runs Through It – Faith, Commerce and Education in Old Avon Center" outside the Local History Room of the Library. Personal invitations to view the exhibit were sent by the Society to the members of City Council and Planning & Zoning Committee in order to remember that place is important in planning and history should not be forgotten. It is unknown if any of the Council or Committee members saw the exhibit.
- ❖ A 2<sup>nd</sup> Great Photo Hunt was held in the History Room of the Library where residents are invited to bring old photos for placement in the collection.
- ❖ During this past school year the Special Projects Committee completed the following:
  - ❖ Avon High School-September/October 2015: "*Avon Roots or Transplanted-Do You Know Who You Are?*"-glass display case exhibit invited students to explore their heritage, race, ethnicity and cultural background. The display included examples of genealogical resources to inspire students to trace their heritage and document it using photographs, journals, and scrapbooks. Additionally, the exhibit featured the personal attributes the Founding Fathers held in esteem as to what should define their character and values. The companion glass case exhibit showcased "Early Avon Immigration to Present Day" to educate students on the heritage of early immigrant families in Avon, the population and demographics of our town over time, and how these families contributed to the town's aggregate residency.
  - ❖ Thompson Brook Elementary School, November/December 2015: "*Pine Grove Historic District*" featured historic photographs of the five farmsteads and the Pine Grove School House. The bulletin board display had 'history doors' that were made from color file folders. Each folder had a question printed on the front about the PGHD and children had to open the door for the answer. A companion exhibit featured historic newspaper articles, photographs and ephemera about the Pine Grove School House history.
  - ❖ Pine Grove Elementary School, January/February 2016: "Heublein Tower's Presidential Visitors" glass display case. This was a historic photographic display showing Ronald Reagan's visit in the 1950s when he was president of the Screen Actor's Guild, Dwight Eisenhower when he was encouraged to see the nomination for President at the tower, and Prescott Bush, father of George

Herbert Walker Bush. This display dovetailed with an in-person presentation by Janet M. Conner on The Reagan State Dining Table. Mrs. Conner set a beautiful replica table of a state dinner during this administration. She also conducted a memory game with 6 children chosen from each assembly to replicate a place setting from memory that they saw on the featured dining table.

- ❖ Avon Middle School, Winter 2015/2016 "*Avon Disasters*" and "*Famous People with Avon Ties*" was a photographic two display case exhibit. Historic newspaper primary source articles as well as photographs highlighted local disasters such as hurricane, train wrecks, airplane crashes, etc. The famous people display was a photo exhibit.
- ❖ An additional presentation is being planned for Avon Middle School for May 2016. If approved, we will be doing a Civil War-era music program with costumed actors and talented vocalists.
- ❖ Roaring Brook Elementary School, May/June 2016: "*Where Did Milk Come From in the Olden Days?*" We are planning to use a large, walk-in display case that is like a department store window one would see in a big city. The display will be 3D and feature cows, the historic Avon Creamery, and local farm.
  
- ❖ Avon Day 2015 was a bit different as we did not have the normal corner booth. Therefore the Town provided a 10'x10' tent by the main stage where Janet Conner re-created the Pine Grove School House with desks and chalkboards and books. The Society's booth inside one of the rows had a pictorial exhibit of the Derrin Family and various homes as a prelude to the "One Square" lecture series that began later that month.
- ❖ A boy scout, working on his Eagle Scout, built an informational kiosk (like the one at PGS) and bench on the grounds of the Board of Education on Simsbury Road for visitors to learn about the original center of Avon, the canal, the railroad and the two Towpath Schools that were there.
- ❖ The Society was the recipient of a second bequest of \$110,000 from William Yandow who lived in Avon most of his life until retiring the Florida. As of this writing, \$100,000 has been transferred to the e\*Trade account until it can be invested or used for various purposes to be decided soon by the Board of Trustees with recommendations by the Finance Committee.
- ❖ In November, retired state archeologist, Nicholas Bellantoni, visited the Society to return over 600 artifacts dug in one day in 1996 around the Derrin Farmhouse. He also gave a lecture on the dig and how artifacts such as what he returned tell a story of those who lived there.

**Thank you for attending the 42<sup>nd</sup> 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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