



THE AVON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT

44th Annual Meeting, April 26, 2018

www.avonhistoricalsociety.org

email: info@avonhistoricalsociety.org

P.O. Box 448, Avon, CT 06001 / 860-678-7621

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 incorporated in 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: FOR SUMMER 2018 – THE 1865 PINE GROVE SCHOOL HOUSE WILL BE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC ON SUNDAYS FROM 2:00 – 4:00 PM, JUNE – SEPTEMBER (Derrin House is closed until further notice)

School House No. 3 (SH3) – built 1823, relocated 1985 (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. Currently it is storing the cleaned artifacts from the DFH fire, therefore, there is no room for visitors or meetings until further notice. On March 1, 2017, the Town of Avon applied for a \$15,000 matching grant from the CT Trust 1772 Foundation to repair and restore the windows of the building. It was denied. Therefore the Society and the Town of Avon have begun an assessment plan for restoration for its 200th birthday in 2023. This is the oldest building owned by the Town of Avon, but not in its original location. It is on the State Register of Historic Places.

1865 Pine Grove School House (PGSH) – At 153 years old this year, this school house is interpreted as from the turn of the 20th century. The summer of 2017 saw more visitors than in recent years. More work needs to be done to draw attention to the property. This year visual teaching aids were donated to us from the family of Anna Coleman who was a teacher at PGSH in 1932. Some of them will be on display on a rotating basis. This is the oldest building owned by the Town of Avon still in its original location and is on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Derrin Farm House (c. 1740 - 1810) (DFH) – On Wednesday, May 11, 2016, an accidental fire destroyed three of the oldest rooms in the house – 2 downstairs and one upstairs. The Avon VFD, along with mutual aid from three other towns, were quick to respond and were able to put out the fire. The fire happened just one month before a celebration marking the 250th year since the Derrin Family acquired the property. The Board of Trustees, with insurance proceeds, had the house remediated and repaired by November 2016. As of this writing, the Trustees are still discussing the future use of the building. The Derrin Farm House is on the State Register of Historic Places.

Horse Guard Barn (c. 1870) (HGB) – Now in the 8th year of a lease from the State Department of the Military, the Society had the roof replaced in early April 2015 and fixed the back wall which was damaged when the winter storms collapsed the attached annex built in 1954. This has finalized the “envelope” of the building making it dry and sound. 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 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. Following the instructions of a detailed report by a professional archivist in 2016, much work has been done to create a working space for researchers inside the room. In addition, volunteers have successfully digitized several important photographic collections of Avon’s past and uploaded them to the CT Digital Archive website for public use. Outside the HHR is the **HISTORY CORNER** consisting of space available for the Society or other organizations to mount history-themed exhibits. The Society maintains the calendar of each two-month exhibit, by request, and has developed guidelines, with the Library, for use of this large space.

SOCIETY ACTIVITIES SINCE THE LAST ANNUAL MEETING IN APRIL 2017:

- ❖ The Society continues to have a representative on the Historic Sites of the Farmington Valley Committee who attends monthly meetings. This group is an independent organization, formed by the FV Historic District, that recently received it’s 501(c)(3) IRS status.
- ❖ Trustee Eric Thronson has organized a volunteer committee to begin the editing of the 1982 book by M. Frances MacKie entitled *Avon, CT...an historical story*, which is running out of hard copy soon. The goal is to have the book available online, with some updating. The committee will be working on this as time permits.
- ❖ Trustee Deb Key led the Society on a yearlong project to create a new website. Hundreds of hours of design and writing was done by a committee and professional services were hired for final design and coding of the new site. It was launched officially on December 1, 2017, supported by the William Yandow Trust.
- ❖ The Town of Avon was unsuccessful, two years in a row, in receiving a grant from CT Trust for Historic Preservation to restore the windows of School House No. 3. The Society and Town are undergoing a four year assessment and restoration plan to fix structural issues inside and outside. The partnership between the Town and the Society, with an anticipated mini-capital campaign and many grant applications will be used to have the building restored for its 200th anniversary in 2023 and opened again as a museum.
- ❖ Longtime Society member, Norm Sondheimer, conceived of a way to share the history of Avon through portable pop up banners for use in public areas around the town such as lobbies, entry ways of stores, banks, schools, etc. The Society partnered with the Avon Free Public Library and received a grant from CT Humanities to create 15 banners. They were written by members of the Society and Library and debuted at an event in July. They are now on display, rotating every two months, around the town at various locations. They are free for the public to use.
- ❖ The Avon Historical Society again donated \$500 to Avon Dollars for Scholars to go to an Avon High School student studying history. It is in the name of William Yandow.
- ❖ The Society was at Celebrate Avon (formerly Avon Day) with two booths – one for the Society in general and one for kids to play games and have their photo taken with Abigail Fieldmouse’s family. The Board of Trustees voted not to participate in future Celebrate Avon Day events.
- ❖ Pine Grove School House was the only building open to the public in the summer of 2017 with a larger attendance than previous years and more items sold and donations made on site.

- ❖ Trustee John Forster oversaw minor repair work in the cellar of the Derrin House due to water damage and stones that shifted in the foundation.
- ❖ Trustee Carolyn McGrattan increased the presence on Facebook of the Society by boosting some of the events and keeping it up-to-date with notices.
- ❖ Trustee Cal Miller-Stevens donated a year's membership for the Society with the Avon Chamber of Commerce allowing the Society more exposure with the business community.
- ❖ In thanks for the quick action to save the Derrin House during the fire in May 2016, the Society placed a full page ad in the Avon Volunteer Fire Department's 75th Anniversary Program Book due to be distributed town wide in early 2018.
- ❖ The Society received a very generous donation of Clinton Hadsell's jacket and hat from a descendent, Seth Stewart, who attended his ancestor's photography display at the Library in the Fall. Clinton Hadsell photographed much of Avon and its people from 1899-1914. Mr. Stewart also paid for professional cleaning and archival boxing of the items for our collection.
- ❖ The Avon Free Public Library, with support from the Avon Historical Society and Avon Senior Center, applied for two grants to run a large variety of public programming from June-December 2018. The first was to the American Library Association for programming related to "Freedom of the Press" under their national "Revisiting the Founding Era" grant. And the other was to CT Humanities to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Connecticut Convention of 1818 which created the modern form of government we have today. Both were won and events will be held at the Library, Senior Center and both Congregational Churches.
- ❖ TABLESCAPES, a new two-day fundraiser by the Society, co-chaired by longtime members Mary Harrop and Sharon Genovese, ran from March 23-24 at The North House's Belle Ballroom. There were 225 visitors who came to see 30 decorated tables just time for Spring. A second annual event will be held for the same weekend in 2019.

- ❖ Since the last Annual Report, the Special Projects Committee (SPC), chaired by Janet M. Conner (JMC) completed the following:
 - April/May 2017-
 - Roaring Brook School- 'History of the Gazebo on the Town Green'
 - June/July/August 2017-
 - Planned Fall lecture series/guest speakers for 'A Tapestry of Topics'
 - Planned school displays/exhibits/presentations for upcoming term
 - Revised and submitted research paper for publication in 'The Connecticut History Review'. Returned for rewrite, resubmitted December 3rd.
 - September 2017-
 - 'Faces of Sleepy Hollow' historic photograph display-Thompson Brook elementary school, September-October
 - 'Celebrate Avon Day'-tent featuring the 'Abigail Fieldmouse' family as a photo op for parents and kids and ring toss game
 - Presentation-'The Extinct Milling Community of Sleepy Hollow' with introduction by Doug Ross (descendant of early residents) and JMC
 - October 2017-
 - Presentation-'Native American Wills with an Avon Connection' by Professor Kathy Hermes, CCSU and artifact display by Nancy Najarian of American Indian Archeological Institute, Washington, CT
 - Stage production-'A Civil War Music and Poetry Program-An Avon Family during the Civil War' featured musicians, vocalists, historic re-enactors, and actors.

- Presentation-‘Early Avon in the American Revolution’ by Stephen P. McGrath, adjunct professor of history at CCSU. He is also mentoring students at Avon High for SPC.

November 2017-

- Presentation-‘An Early Distillery and Temperance in Avon’ by Nicholas Bellantoni, retired State Archaeologist and JMC
- Display of historic photographs of Avon’s transition into the Industrial Revolution.

December 2017-

- Presentation-‘Avon During the Industrial Revolution’ by Eugene Macy, Social Studies teacher Avon Middle School
- ‘Historic Church and School Bells in Avon’ by JMC; hand bell choir finale.

January 2018-

- Exhibit-‘The H.L. Hunley Civil War Submarine and its Connection to Connecticut History’ at history corner at AFPL thru February with Hunley presentation by Nick Bellantoni

February 2018-

- President’s Day commemoration at Pine Grove Elementary School consisting of display and in-person presentation to entire school on Dwight D. Eisenhower

March 2018-

- Exhibit-‘The Prolific Life of Edgar Maurice Woodford’ thru April. Guest speakers John Banks, civil war author and JMC
- Presentation on behalf of AHS based on JMC’s research paper given at Stanley Whitman House in Farmington

NOTES:

In addition, JMC researched and wrote ‘The History Corner’ articles for the Society’s quarterly newsletter; collaborated on a third-grade teacher’s resource called ‘My Town-Avon, Connecticut’ published in *Connecticut Explored* magazine; and revised an article on cultural prejudice at PGSH currently published on ‘Digital Avon’, a subset of ‘Digital Farmington’. The “Digital Avon” website will be enhanced this year under the direction of Prof. Kathy Hermes of the CCSU History Department. It will be designed to be a user friendly website for visitors to Avon.

Upcoming for 2018-2019:

- More exhibits at the Library with presentations by the SPC in summer.
- Many presentations on Freedom of the Press and CT Constitution of 1818 by Society, Library and Senior Center from June through December.
- Tablescares will be held again on March 22 and 23, 2019.
- Continued work on the updating/reprinting electronically of Fran Mackie’s book
- Commence exterior work on SH3 with Town, grants and possible start of mini-capital campaign for matching funds for grant applications as needed.
- For the 18th year, continued posting of Society events in a locked display case at the Avon Post Office, courtesy of the family of Anthony O’Neill, owner of the building.

Thank you for attending the 44th Annual Meeting of the Avon Historical Society.

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

info@avonhistoricalsociety.org