



Spring 2011 Newsletter

President's Message

SPRING EVENTS 2011:

Month of March—Visit the Avon Free Public Library to see the first of several displays on the Civil War. This first set of displays will have artifacts, broadsides, and photos. It will be available for viewing for the entire month. (see page 4 for photo)

Monday, April 11, 1:00 p.m. —"A Tribute to Civil War Quilts" held at Avon Senior Center. Open to the public.

Wednesday, April 13, 6:00 p.m. — Avon Historical Society Annual Dinner Meeting. See attachment for full details. Speaker will be Virginia Vocelli, Director, Avon Free Public Library. (see attached)

Wednesday, April 27, 6:30-8:30 p.m. Antiques Appraisal Clinic Fundraiser—see story on Page 3 for details.

Saturday, April 30, 9:00 a.m.—4:30 p.m. Historic Barn Tour—visit historic barns in Simsbury and Granby. Contact Farmington Valley Visitors Association for details and to register: 860-676-8878.

You are cordially invited to attend the 37th Annual Dinner Meeting of the Avon Historical Society on **Wednesday, April 13**, at the Avon Congregational Church, 6 W. Main Street, on the corner of Routes 10 and 44 in the old center of Avon. The Society Board will provide the main meal and refreshments. Anyone attending is invited to bring an appetizer, salad or dessert. Full details are attached.

The Annual Meeting is open to all members of the Avon Historical Society as well as the general public. A business meeting will follow the dinner. Our speaker this year will be Virginia Vocelli, Director of the Avon Free Public Library, who will give a brief history of the library followed by a review of all the renovation and addition plans for the

new facility. This is the perfect time to hear about the expanded Marian Hunter History Room and how you can help in this project. The Society expects to work with the Library on expanded displays, research and other activities in this new space.

On **Sunday, June 5**, I encourage you all to attend our Opening Day events at any or all of our three buildings (see story below). Author, Peter Wright, will sign copies of his new book, *AVON Then & Now*, at the Living Museum. You will also have a chance to participate in a treasure hunt on our historic properties in town and on the open space maintained by the Avon Land Trust.

Terri Wilson, President

June 5 - Opening Day, Book Signing and Geocaching Event

Sunday, June 5 marks the season opening of the Living Museum, Pine Grove School House and the Derrin House, with expanded hours of 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. There will be a special book signing by local author, Peter Wright, on the same day. Books will be available for \$22. The Society has joined with the Avon Land Trust to plan a "GEOCACHE" event from 1:00 to 5:00p.m.,

culminating at the Living Museum. What is "geocaching"? It's a worldwide treasure hunt using a GPS or other handheld device which take hikers to open spaces, historical sites, mountains, rivers in search of treasure left by other geocachers. Full details will be made available soon.

Please join us for a full day of activities and visit all three of our properties that day!

Avon in the 1800's - Underground Railroad & Map Making

Avon in the mid 19th century was a farming community of just over 1,000 residents. But shortly before the Civil War broke out in this country, a very studious Avon resident was plying his art of map-making and doing quite well. Edgar Maurice Woodford was a farmer and part-time surveyor, but he became quite a popular figure in map publishing. He surveyed and then published at least 40 New England town and county maps. He made three large wall maps of Hartford in 1855, Wind-

Ham in 1856, and Tolland in 1857. He was born in Avon in 1824 and died as a soldier in the Civil War in 1862. A website about his work has just been created: www.old-maps.com

During this time, there was also a secretive movement going on in this country and Avon was part of it. The Underground Railroad moved fugitive slaves from the south to the north and this part of Connecticut was more involved than many thought. Thanks

to another new website, we can now see there were over 130 sites in Connecticut used for this purpose. While no site in Avon has been formally documented, there are anecdotes about at least three of them. More work needs to be done on this to verify it; but in the meantime, visiting the new Connecticut Underground Railroad website is a good start: www.ctfreedomtrail.org And you will see how it is tied to the struggle African Americans had in this country, at the time.



April 11, 2011, marks the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the American Civil War. In the Great Rebellion, as it is often known, some 620,000 Americans, both Union and Confederate, lost their lives. When the war began, Connecticut regiments were called to arms by decrees by both President Abraham Lincoln and Governor William Buckingham, who served as the state's chief executive throughout the war. Connecticut offered 55,000 men, some 10% of the state's population. A total of 94 from Avon joined in 1864. The 1860 census showed 1,059 residents in Avon. These troops served in every engagement of the war. The state's industrial capacity, especially the

arms industry, was essential to the North's success. Yet there was considerable opposition within Connecticut to both the war and the Lincoln administration. In many ways, Connecticut serves as a microcosm of northern society during the Civil War. In order to prepare for this commemoration, the State of Connecticut, under legislative order, will kick off a five-year commemoration on April 16 & 17, 2011, at Central CT State University led by CCSU history professor Dr. Matthew Warshauer, who was chosen by former Governor Rell to coordinate all statewide events. For more information on the state's events, please visit: www.ccsu.edu/civilwar

From Avon to Appomattox: Lives and Legacy of the Civil War **Activities planned for this first year of the commemoration**

As was reported and in the local press, the Avon Free Public Library, in cooperation with the Avon Historical Society and other groups in town, have planned this year to begin the multi-year commemoration of Connecticut's involvement in the Civil War. You are invited to visit the library during the month of March to see two display cases, full of artifacts, memorabilia, maps and broadsides. **Organizers, Norm Sondheimer and Jim Genco invite any residents who have artifacts to contact them about using them in future exhibits.**

Norm Sondheimer—860-539-9335 or sondheimer@cs.umass.edu
Jim Genco—860-678-7109 or james.genco@comcast.net

On April 11th, at 1:00p.m., a local valley resident will present **A Tribute to Civil War Quilts** and bring several from that time for display. This event is being held at the Avon Senior Center, 635 West Avon Road.

On May 4th, Prof. Matt Warshauer from CCSU, will present his book **Connecticut in the American Civil War: Slavery, Sacrifice and Survival** at

7pm at the First Co. Governor's Horse Guard, 280 Arch Rd.

On Oct. 13th, Jim Genco will present the **Civil War Letters of Private Eugene Hawley of Avon**, at a location to be determined. Private Hawley was 18-years old when he went to war and fought for three years, including the Battle of Gettysburg.

In 2012, there are programs planned on Lincoln and the CT 29th African American Regiment. For details, follow our website.

Avon Veteran's Projects

Thanks to anniversaries this year of wars fought by Avon citizens, two projects are underway to tell their stories.

Due to the Commemoration of the start of the Civil War 150 years ago, the Avon VFW Post 3272 has agreed to work with the Avon Historical Society on marking all Civil War veteran's graves in Avon with a GAR (Grand Army of the Republic) flag medallion stand by this coming Memorial Day. Volunteers are working on identifying every soldier in the seven cemeteries the

VFW decorates for Memorial Day. It is hoped that this project will also make the story of local Civil War soldiers more available during this time of commemoration. Anyone who is a descendent of a Civil War veteran buried in any Avon cemetery is encouraged to let the Society know so they can be invited to place a flag on their ancestor's grave.

Due to the 70th anniversary of the US entry into WWII this December 7th, the Avon High School History Department will work with sophomores on a Civic Virtue project of videotaping interviews

with WWII veterans of the Avon VFW Post 3272. There are several Post veterans who served in many of the battles the students learn about which helps them to have a deeper understanding of the war. This December, the Society may commemorate this anniversary with a showing of the interviews. More to come!



Horse Guard Barn: grant applied for, donations needed & the first fundraiser

The Avon Historical Society has applied for a Barn Grant from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation to seek matching funds for a Conditions Assessment on the Horse Guard Barn, which was leased recently to the Society by the Connecticut Department of the Military. The goal of this grant is to hire a structural engineer to complete a conditions assessment that will guide future work. This project will create a work product that identifies the extent of damage to the barn, work needed on the roof, and stabilization of the structure. In the meantime, the So-

ciety is seeking donations of items to get some work started—straight rakes, long handled pointed shovels, picks, hasps and 3 padlocks (with 3 matching keys) and lumber for framing work areas and temporary pathways. Please contact Len Tolisano if you have any of these items to donate—860-212-8340. The first fundraiser toward these efforts will be an Antiques Appraisal Clinic on Wednesday, April 27, from 6:30-8:30pm at the Carmon Family Center on West Avon Road. Full details are below. We hope to see you at this event!!



Antiques Appraisal Clinic — April 27 An "Antiques Roadshow-type" event

Do you have something old in your attic or closet that you think might be of value but don't know how to find out? Join the Society at an Antiques Appraisal Clinic on Wednesday, April 27, at the Carmon Family Center, 301 Country Club Road. This two-hour "Antiques Roadshow-type" event is open to the public. Bring in your treasures and, for \$5 per item, antiques appraisers Joy Ruskin Hanes and her husband Lee Hanes of Old Lyme, CT will provide what is called a "Professional Opinion of Value" (POV) as allowed by the

Appraisers Association of America. A POV is a verbal appraisal given upon a brief inspection of an item or a range of value rather than a fixed amount and full research. Each appraisal will require a signed form acknowledging that the services performed are POV, waiving any claim against the appraiser. **The Hanes's appraisal expertise is pre-1840 with special emphasis on early American ceramics, treenware, needlework, furniture, chairs, pewter, paintings,**

silks, clothing, toys, and knick knacks. They do not appraise jewelry, rugs, glass, silver or books. If you want them to appraise large furniture, they require a photograph and, if possible, a drawer if it's a large armoire. The Avon Historical Society will use the funds raised from this event for the restoration of the newly acquired Horse Guard Barn. There is no limit on how many items can be brought for appraisal at \$5 per item. The Society will have several of its gift shop items available for sale including the newly released *AVON Then & Now* book signed by the author, Peter Wright.



Avon Historical Society
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The Mission of the Avon Historical Society, founded in 1974, is to identify, collect, preserve, utilize, publish, display and promote the history and heritage of Avon.

Officers: Terri Wilson, President
 Pam Fahey, Vice President
 Wendy Zacchera, Secretary
 Monte Hopper, Treasurer

Directors: Ben Isaacson
 Glenn Lawrence
 Liz Neff
 Rachel Neuhoff
 Jim Putnam
 Krystyn Silver
 Len Tolisano
 Peter Wright

Special Thank You's and Other News

Special thanks to **Northwest Community Bank** for once again awarding a grant to the Society for reprinting of its AVON tri-fold brochures. These brochures highlight Avon's history, while giving detailed description of the three buildings open to the public during the summer months. They are distributed around the valley and other locations, as requested.

Thanks to **People's United Bank** for a grant toward the installation of a stone marker on the grounds of the Living Museum to identify the crossing of the Farmington Canal in Avon. A matching stone already exists across Route 44 next to daCapo's Restaurant. A donation of a plaque has been secured and the installation and dedication will be held this summer.

Thanks to **Carl Candels**, local PR Man and Avon's Citizen of the Year, for donating a compilation of photos and stories about the Society's Cow Chip Raffle fundraiser held every Fall. Carl has included his collection of cow comics and other cow memorabilia, as well. Entitled "A Cuddly Cow Collection," the book will be on display at this fall's event on October 1, for all to see.

Richard Bremkamp's 5-story boxed set of CDs (or individual CDs) of Stories of the Farmington Valley is now available through the Avon Historical Society. A

donation to the Society will be made for every CD sold. The five "novelettes" are historical fiction stories of events from Avon, Farmington, Simsbury, and the Farmington Canal. The entire 5-story boxed set is \$34.99. A single CD is \$9.99. Contact the Society for more details.

If you haven't already heard, a capital campaign for the renovation and expansion of the **Avon Free Public Library** on West Avon Road by the library's board of directors and a campaign steering committee has begun to raise \$1M. The Avon Historical Society supports this effort and encourages all Society members to consider making a donation to this effort. The new Library will feature a much expanded Marian Hunter History Room that was established by an agreement between the Society and the Library in 1989, when all maps, deeds, photos, and printed materials about Avon were deposited there. It is this longtime agreement that the Society is very grateful for and the expansion of the History Room is very welcomed. To learn more about the expansion and the capital campaign, attend our Annual Dinner Meeting on April 13 or visit: www.avonctlibrary.info/expansion

GREETERS WANTED: This summer, spend a Sunday afternoon with us at any of our properties—Living Museum, Pine Grove School House or Derrin House—as a Greeter. **What is a Greeter?** Someone who welcomes visitors, hands them a walking tour brochure, and invites them to walk around to see the displays. Our buildings are open on Sundays from June through September from 2:00-5:00 p.m. If you would like more information, please contact the Society and we will be happy to tell you more.

If you haven't yet paid your membership dues for the 2010-2011 year, please do so today! Our membership year runs July 1—June 30. Please act today to make sure you aren't removed from our list! Visit our website for details on membership or leave a message at 860-678-7621.



Civil War commemoration display at the Avon Free Public Library.