



THE AVON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER FALL 2012

Welcome to the Fall edition of the newsletter. This is such a magical time of year in Avon. Pumpkins, mums, and scarecrows appear in yards all over town. The air is crisp and the sky is crystalline blue which is the perfect backdrop to the stunning color of the tree leaves. So sit back, enjoy a mug of hot apple cider while reading the newsletter.



HEAR YE, HEAR YE...UPCOMING EVENTS!



Tuesday, September 4th thru November—Civil War Exhibit at the Marian Hunter History Room entitled "Avon Men in the Civil War: Connecticut's Sacrifice at Antietam." This exhibit will feature a reproduction of a Union uniform, several original artifacts of the time, images of the battle, maps showing the movement of the troops, photos of the battlefield, a reproduction of a regimental flag and other important articles. Of particular interest will be the story of 24 Avon men who served in one of three units at the battle – Connecticut Volunteer Infantry Regiments 11th, 14th and 16th.

Saturday, September 8th—Antietam Day at the Avon Free Public Library. There will be Civil War reenactors, toys and games from the era, and Civil War songs all sponsored by the Library. At 1:00 p.m. John Banks, creator of John Banks' Civil War Blog, will present a talk for high school age and up. From 2:00-3:00 p.m., the Avon Historical Society and John Banks invites all to the West Avon cemetery, across the street, to hear stories about the lives of several of Avon's Civil War veterans who fought in that war.

Saturday, September 29 - AVON DAY 11:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. between Thompson Brook School and Pine Grove School. Come visit our booth for games and cow chip raffle tickets. We'll also have books and items from our gift shop for sale.

Saturday, October 6 - 2:00 p.m. - Fifth Annual Cow Chip Raffle at Simmons Farm on Tillotson Road in Avon. Each ticket is \$5 and proceeds benefit the restoration of the Old Horse Guard Barn on West Avon Road. Each ticket 'buys' a square on a grid and if a cow makes a deposit in your square, you could win \$250, \$100, or a \$50 prize....tours of the barns available upon request!

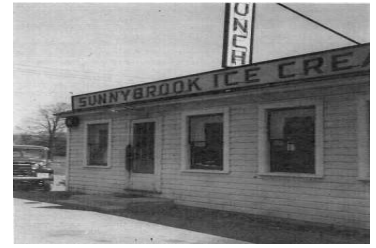
Saturday and Sunday Oct 13 and 14—Harvest Quilt Show at Avon Congregational Church. Quilts will be on display from local area, Avon residents and a few historic ones from the Society's own collection. Register to show your quilt by September 15th at www.avon-church.org



THE HISTORY CORNER...

Sunnybrook Farms 1950s Era

Farm Fresh Ice Cream



1951 view of ice cream bar

Longtime residents recall days of their youth when families coming from nearby towns visited the ice cream bar operated by Sunnybrook Farms in Avon in the 1950s. The historic photo from the Marian Hunter History Room at the Avon Free Public Library shows the ice cream bar which was then located where Carmon Family Center is today on the corner of Country Club Road and West Avon Road. For the past 35 years, Sunnybrook Farms, across the street, has operated as a plant nursery and garden center. The owners were kind enough to share some of the history of Sunnybrook Farms. It was originally a dairy farm with a large barn, a silo, and a building (currently the sales office) that was used to pasteurize the milk. In front of this building there remains a concrete ramp that was used to roll the milk canisters up and down. Also extant, just below the surface of the ground, are the remnants of the barn foundation and the silo foundation.

On display in the window of the sales office are two original glass milk bottles that remind us of those days when Avon was a farming community. The ice cream bar showcased a product created start to finish on the farm; literally "hot off the cow." Talk about farm fresh! The ice cream was obviously worth the drive as folks today still remember how good it tasted!



Historic Cider Mills in Avon



During Avon's agricultural heyday, there were at least four cider mills. According to Fran Mackie's book 'Avon, Connecticut', Chauncey Lusk had a cider mill and distillery on Roaring Brook in the western section of Avon. He made sweet cider and also hard cider and high wines which he sold at his Tavern. In this same book, there is also mention of two more cider mills located on Whortleberry Hill, now Huckleberry Hill Road. And, in the historic photograph collection at the Marian Hunter history room at the Avon Free Public Library, there are photos of Ben Miller's cider mill.

Cider was such an important drink as it was inexpensive to make and served at every meal. When the apple cider is allowed to ferment, i.e., not pasteurized, it turns to hard cider. On top of that, spirits such as rum were added to give it that extra mule kick!

The process started with apples being mashed and then the pulp, or pomace, was laid out in layers on screens. When there was a stack of about ten screens, they were pressed and the liquid apple cider came out. During Fall, nothing tastes as good as cold apple cider and a warm donut!



DID YOU KNOW?



The Old Poultry Market

As you whiz along West Avon Road, just past Burnham Road heading west into town, there is a small dark red with ivory trim garage-like building on your left. Mistaken as a barn of long ago, a 2001 study proved that it is a 19th c. storage building. But, did you know that in the mid 20th c. the building became a poultry market selling both chickens and fresh eggs? A sign from a historic photo from c. 1945 says: 'Dressed poultry, As you like it' and 'Eggs'. On the left is a modern day photo of the building. It is an unpretentious building that blends in with the homes located nearby, but now you know about it's interesting history!



WHERE IS IT?

This is a photo of some piece of an Avon building, object or structure. Whoever correctly identifies what this is and its location will win a set of AHS notecards. The winner is the first one to email correct answer to: ahs.mail.1830@sbcglobal.net
Happy hunting! Hint: Use the Internet to search :-)

KIDS CORNER **Word Search**

W L A X C O R N S T A L K S
 Z M E B R T N O P L E I J U
 H A Y R H A R V E S T X T N
 X I N R U L O A C X N A E F
 A Z M P U M P K I N S W I L
 P E M O U L A J D W X I I O
 P L A X M W I X E O J T L W
 L N T B T S C A R C R O W E
 E X P N A W R N I X J S D R
 S L O X Z C O S T U M E S R
 L A T O P M W Z A R I J I T
 Q R I T N W S C H O O L A X



Joke: Why did the scarecrow stop eating?

Riddle: What has a trunk but is not a car or an elephant?

Question: What kind of tree will grow if you plant an acorn?

Unscramble: E A V H N F U N I L O S H C O

Challenge: What vegetable family does pumpkin belong to?



KID'S STORY PAGE



Abigail the Pine Grove School House Mouse – Fall 2012

These are the continuing adventures of Abigail Fieldmouse who we learned in the last edition, is a small brown mouse in post-Civil War period clothing, that lives under the floorboards of the Pine Grove School House.

There is much activity at the school house now at the end of summer as the children will soon be returning to class after a long summer vacation. The teacher, Miss Eckleston, has opened all the windows to let fresh air in, dusted off the desks and bookshelves, and is readying her lesson plan book for this year's teachings.

Abigail is busy as well as summer draws to a close- she knows she must start gathering food to store under the floor to carry her through the long winter. Abigail loves the Fall –she anticipates not only the school room being filled with the sounds of children again, but also of the coming seasonal changes. She loves the beautiful colors of the oak and maple trees on the school grounds and of course, all those luscious acorns! The air will be crisp and tickle her whiskers with the first hint of frost in the early mornings.

Across the street to the east, the farmer is cutting the hay field and making up bales both to sell and as food and bedding for his livestock. Abigail takes a risk crossing the dirt road this time of year to help herself to some hay to keep her warm in the winter in her nest under the floor. If she ventures to the farm to the north of the school house, she helps herself to a special treat from the hen house – an egg! She knows that after all the other eggs in a clutch have hatched, any remaining are duds. Oh what a sight to see Abigail rolling a wobbly egg back across the dirt road to her house!

Sometimes Abigail gets a little too daring as she ventures out on these excursions. With the approach of Fall, many vegetables are now ripe in the fields. Abigail can't resist the lure of fresh squash and tomatoes. But on this particular day, Abigail gets a little too far from the school house as she went into the field behind the tree line west of the school. She didn't even notice how deeply she went into the pumpkin patch and now it was beginning to get dark. Abigail got all turned around and began to panic. She dropped the pumpkin flowers that she was so looking forward to eating that night and began to run this way and that. Poor Abigail!!!

Now she was getting quite tired and sad as she feared there was no hope of finding her way back to the school house before she might be discovered and eaten by a red fox. Just then, she heard a small rustling sound nearby. Abigail couldn't bear to look and pulled her white apron up over her head. She thought her end was near and waited but nothing happened. She waited a few seconds more and then peeked her nose out. To her great relief, there standing before her was her older brother Fenwick. He knew just where to go searching for Abigail as he remembered her passion for pumpkin flowers. Abigail was overjoyed and the two siblings headed back to the Pine Grove School House as Fenwick knew how to navigate by the stars at night. Soon they were back safely under the floorboards sharing that coveted egg!

Photo credit:

Join us for the upcoming Winter newsletter for the next adventures of Abigail. Sneak peek: Abigail hops onto a wagon of a family headed to church and winds up in the bell tower! Oh my again!

SPOTLIGHT ON.....

James Henry MacDonald Monument



There is a monument on Avon Mountain Road on the right traveling east about halfway up before the crest. But who does this monument honor and why is it placed where it is? Some research provided the answers yet paved the way (pardon the pun) for more questions. The monument was dedicated on August 30, 1933 and it honors James Henry MacDonald. One might assume that MacDonald was born, lived or died in Avon and hence, the monument. But that is not the case. Mr. MacDonald was the first Connecticut Commissioner of Highways. He was born in 1851 in New Haven. While growing up he noticed the poor state of rural roads and this was the motivation for his activism in improving them. In fact, he was one of three commissioners appointed under the 'Good Roads Act' of 1895 that created the State Highway Commission. Mr. MacDonald eventually became the single commissioner in 1897 and served for 16 years. His job was to oversee the distribution of funds for road improvement and to insure that proper techniques were employed. In addition, he was the driving force to get many unpaved roads paved and created the interconnecting network of roadways that tied together the urban areas. He was also a member of the American Road Builders Association and American Association of State Highway Officials and League of American Wheelmen.

Now for the answer as to why the monument is located in Avon. Drum roll please....because Route 44 (Avon Mountain Rd), cut through over Avon Mountain, and was a very important thoroughfare connecting Avon with Hartford, it was formerly the old stagecoach road in the early days. MacDonald advocated for the improvement of existing roads and the creation of "trunk lines" which were roads that somewhat followed the old turnpike routes. This system became the backbone of Connecticut's state highway system. It was fitting that a trunk line (Avon Mountain Road) was chosen as an apropos site to honor MacDonald. The monument stands immediately off the right shoulder before Deercliff Road as one heads east toward West Hartford. Prior to the 1980s there was a park associated with this monument comprising 5.9 acres but it was closed due to loitering and vandalism.

The 6 x 11 ft. monument has a bas relief bronze image of the face of Henry J. MacDonald with the words 'Pioneer of Highways' across the top and his lifespan, 1851-1938, across the bottom. The stone is granite with five huge stones, each slightly smaller than the previous level. It has a black polished appearance and a plinth base. The sculptor commissioned for this work was Evelyn Longman and the monument is listed in the Smithsonian Institution's archives. How fitting that James Henry MacDonald's visage can spend eternity watching traffic go by on a road whose leadership was responsible for bringing Avon Mountain Road into the 21st century!

COW CHIP RAFFLE 2012



The Avon Historical Society is once again conducting its annual Cow Chip Raffle! What is this? Note in the first photo the white squares on the cow pasture. Each square is assigned a number that corresponds to the number on a ticket. The cows, who are generously fed beforehand, are walked around the pasture and if they make a deposit (cow chip) on the square with your ticket number on it, you win a cash prize! So DON'T FORGET....to buy your cow chip raffle tickets today which will support the restoration of the Governor's Horse Guard Barn! You do not need to be present to win but you are welcome to come watch the cows in action at Simmons Farm on Tillotson Road in Avon. You can cheer on Tullulah, Clementine and Ginger to hit your spot!

Kid's Page Answers

Joke: He was already stuffed.

Riddle: A tree

Question: an oak tree

Unscramble: Have fun in school

Challenge: the squash family

Word Search: Cornstalks, Hay, Maize, Pumpkins, Apples, Sunflower, Costumes, School, Harvest, Scarecrow



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Eric Thronson
Len Tolisano
Peter Wright

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.