



Derrin House in
Fall

Horse Guard Barn in
Summer

Pine Grove School House in
Spring

The Living Museum in
Winter



THE AVON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2012

Welcome to our new look!

Welcome to the Summer 2012 edition of the Avon Historical Society newsletter. We have changed and updated ourselves with exciting events planned to keep you and your family in touch with Avon's rich historical past and to educate today's youth about our town's interesting heritage. Please join us as we commemorate important milestones in Avon's history and rededicate important features. Please let us know what you think.



HEAR YE, HEAR YE...UPCOMING EVENTS



- ⇒ The Derrin House and Pine Grove School House are open for the summer on Sunday afternoons from 2-4 p.m. through September. Please visit us and bring your friends!
- ⇒ Through August – Come see the exhibit entitled 'Women on the Home Front' in the beautiful new display case outside the Marian L. Hunter History Room at the Avon Free Public Library. The first display features an authentic Civil War era dress and a comfort bag for Civil War soldiers. In September a new display about Avon men who fought in the Battle of Antietam will be showcased.
- ⇒ September 8th—The Avon Free Public Library will be sponsoring Antietam Day at the Library. Bring the family to learn some interesting facts about Avon's participation in the Civil War. Local resident and Civil War historian, John Banks, will make a special presentation.
- ⇒ September 29th AVON DAY—Visit the Avon Historical Society booth and say hello. We will have cow chip raffle tickets available, gifts and local history books for sale, and more!
- ⇒ October 6th— 5th Annual Cow Chip Raffle at Simmons Family Farm on Tillotson Road, Avon. Join in the fun as we see which cow hits the spot, hopefully on your square!

www.avonhistoricalsociety.org

THE HISTORY CORNER....

On June 28 the Society dedicated two plaques on either side of Route 44 (E. Main St) showing the crossing of the Farmington Canal in 1829.

IMAGINING A SUNDAY AFTERNOON RIDE TO AVON ON THE FARMINGTON CANAL

Many folks know the story of the Farmington Canal, the hand dug 'little ditch'* that mostly followed the same route as the Farmington River from New Haven, CT to Northampton, MA. Let's just ponder what a Sunday afternoon ride might have been like. We can imagine one of the colorful packet boats docked in Farmington. Perhaps it was the 'James Hill-house' named after the noted New Haven lawyer. This particular boat was said to be the most comfortable as it had a box for the ladies and a box for the gentlemen.



Photo credit: Painting by R.J. Holden Farmington Library

It is a sunny summer day and all the leaves on the trees are a lovely shade of forest green. After all are boarded, one of the little boys who rides the tow horse unhitches the mooring rope from the boat and they are off! The canal is full because of the recent rains and the boat is swiftly gliding up the canal. They pass by old Stephen Hart's gristmill with its gears turning under the water power of the river grinding wheat into flour. Just ahead are some Canadian geese in the canal that startle into flight when they see the canal boat approach. On board the ladies sip tea and eat small pastries as the boat skims along on its way with only the clip clop of the horse's hooves on the dirt towpath to break the silence. A red-tailed hawk swoops nearby for a look at this tranquil scene and small frogs jump back into the water after sunning as the boat nears.

Ahead is the agrarian village of Avon with its stunning unspoiled beauty. They are about to pass over the aqueduct....oh what a thrill that must have been....up in the air being pulled by a horse across this bridge in the sky! On the other side of the Farmington River, the boat journeys a little further past Pine Woods and onto its destination to the middle of town where the canal crosses the Albany Turnpike in Avon. It is now a bustling little community thanks to the new commercial trade created by the advent of the canal. The ladies and gentlemen disembark to spend a lovely afternoon visiting friends in Avon. The passengers bid adieu to Mr. Dickinson until the next packet boat arrives for their return trip later that imaginary day.

*Hartford Courant 1826 'The Ill-Fated Farmington Canal' by Ellsworth Grant

To get a sense of how the canal crossed Rte.44, find the red sandstone plaques on E. Main Street—one outside daCapo's Restaurant and one next to the Living Museum, 8 E. Main Street.

AVON'S CONSTITUTION OAK

The Historical Society receives many questions about the big tree on the corner of Old Farms Road and Route 44 very near the canal marker by daCapo's. Did you know that this tree is a Pin Oak (*Quercus palustris*) that was planted in 1902? It is a Constitution Oak that is one of the original 168 which were given as seedlings to each representative member from a Connecticut town who attended a Constitutional Convention in Hartford that year. The seedlings were secured from the U. S. Dept. of Agriculture, Bureau of Plant Industry by then Senator Joseph R. Hawley of Farmington to commemorate the event. As of 2002 there were only 74 trees still living and Avon's tree was the largest at 70 ft. tall and with a trunk circumference of 14 ft., 6 inches. The Avon Historical Society nominated the tree in 1987 as a Connecticut Notable Tree and now, 25 years later, it is still standing tall and proud. For more information, visit: oak.conncoll.edu:8080/notabletrees/2002PinOakSurvey.jsp



AROUND TOWN.....

Grand Opening Celebration of the Avon Free Public Library and Rededication of the Marian Hunter History Room June 10, 2012



The parking lot was filled to capacity on this pleasant day to celebrate the grand opening of the new Avon Free Public Library. In the reception area the refreshment table was set up with quite a large celebratory sheet cake as well as some cookies, brownies and lemonade. Musical entertainment was provided by Avon High School students. People came in to the History Room and stopped to view the historic photographs of Avon framed on the left hand entry wall. Several people were interested in seeing the original wooden cabinet where the first library's books are contained. The Avon Historical Society greeted visitors and answered questions. There were several folders from the collection laid out on the tables for people to peruse including one on the Fire Department, on Marian Hunter herself and a small album of Hadsell photographs.

In attendance for the rededication were representatives of Mrs. Hunter's family including a great-grandchild. Mrs. Virginia Voccelli, Library Director, gave opening remarks recounting how the original Marian Hunter room was located on the second floor of the old building. She told of how the room's holdings were now a collection of both the library's archives and the Avon Historical Society's holdings and she felt that the gathering and sharing of these materials are an important part of the library. Mrs. Voccelli also mentioned the collaboration between the library and the AHS to try to get as many of the requested items in the room as possible. The room, which is now on the first floor, includes large tables for working, a microfiche reader, large file drawers for maps and large documents, a bank of file cabinets for folders, two computers, a wall of books on local history and genealogy, the wooden cabinet with the original library's books and a storage room.

Terri Wilson, President of the Avon Historical Society, also gave a short speech thanking everyone for their interest in the new history room as well as the volunteers who staff the room and members of Mrs. Hunter's family for attending. She also thanked Pam Fahey, Vice President of the Avon Historical Society who is now coordinating the volunteers for the Room.

It was apparent that the new Marian Hunter History Room was well received and as one speaker remarked, her spirit could still be felt. She was surely smiling upon her new and improved history room!



Photo credit: Jeannie Parker

The Hunter Family at the Reopening of the Marian Hunter History Room - (L-R)- Jennifer Bates Norris, Stephanie Bates, Ralph Bates, Jane Hunter Bates, Mike Tine, Betsy Hunter Tine, Lily Tine (asleep), Bill Tine, Ginny Voccelli, Library Director

New to this newsletter is a **KID'S PAGE** (see page 5)

Here are the answers to the Trivia Questions:

1. The town of Avon was founded in 1645 but not incorporated until 1830.
2. There are 2! A steeple is a tower plus a spire: Avon Congregational Church & St. Matthew's Lutheran Church.
3. Avon High School, Avon Middle School, Thompson Brook School, Pine Grove School and Roaring Brook School.
4. A canal boat being towed by a horse on the Farmington Canal which passed through Avon.
5. Sycamore Hills Pool

Here is the answer to the Riddle:

Heublein Tower is located on Talcott Mountain in Simsbury but the park includes Avon and has 50 miles of panoramic views.

Word Scramble Answers:

Derrin House
Governors Horse Guard
Pine Grove School House
Nod Brook
Fisher Meadow

DID YOU GET THEM ALL? WATCH FOR THE FALL NEWSLETTER FOR MORE FUN TO PLAY.

AHS EVENTS...



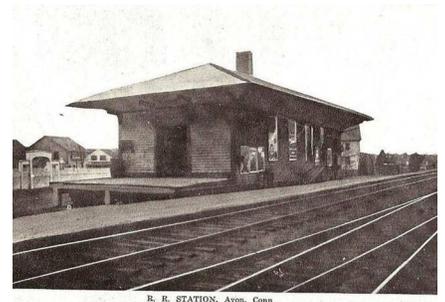
The Ribbon Cutting Ceremony at the 1865 Pine Grove School House

A jovial and enthusiastic handful of people showed up for a ribbon cutting ceremony at the Pine Grove Schoolhouse at 3 p.m. on Sunday, June 3rd. The purpose of this light-hearted ceremony was to rededicate an artifact of days gone by...the school's two seat wooden outhouse! President of the Avon Historical Society Terri Wilson welcomed all the guests and several members of the historical society's Board of Trustees were present as well as a representative of the J&A Construction Company of New Haven and Avon graciously donated labor, time and materials to refurbish the outhouse. Two beautiful, aged oak trees and one maple looked down as a shiny, red satin ribbon held across the open doorway of the outhouse was cut with giant-sized scissors. At the close of the event, Terri provided a tasteful anecdote of outhouse lore and guests left smiling and feeling that they had looked into a window in time when the outhouse was a necessary part of life.

The Pine Grove School House is open Sundays from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. from June through September and is located at 3 Harris Road at the intersection of West Avon Road. Please stop by to see what a one-room schoolhouse experience was like in post civil war days and don't forget to check out the 'new' old little outhouse!

Photo credit: JMC

SPOTLIGHT ON.....



The Old Avon Train Station Photo: Railway Stations

After the Farmington canal closed in 1846, the Canal Line Railroad came through Avon in 1848. The Avon train station building pictured above was originally located near the intersection of Routes 44 and 10 across from the Avon Congregational Church. As you can see from the photo, the building was a typical depot style with wide overhanging eaves and a platform. In its heyday, it had a telegraph, a freight and express office. When the railroad ceased in Avon in 1991, the station building was eventually purchased by the Holloway Brothers of Riverdale Farms and moved to its current location for use as an office. It is at 124 Simsbury Road and is now used as a commercial business.

WORTH NOTING.....

On behalf of Avon Historical Society, we would like to extend our sincere thanks to **Monte Hopper** who served as Treasurer for the past six years. Also thank you to **Monte and Cindy Hopper** for their generous donation to fund the beautiful display case outside the Marian Hunter History Room at the Avon Library. Thanks also to **Rachel Neuhoff** for her two-year service on the Board of Trustees. We wish her the best in her college years.

Special congratulations on a job well done go to **Rachel Koladis** and **Francis Russo**, both Trinity College students, for their excellent work on researching and combing our collections for artifacts to be used in the display case of the Marian Hunter History Room. They have created 10 themed displays which will be on exhibit over the next two years. Rachel undertook this project to fulfill her M. A. in American Studies. Please see our website for more information.



KID'S PAGE

Avon Trivia Questions (Use the Internet and check your answers on Page 5 of this newsletter)

1. What year was Avon founded?
2. How many church steeples are in town?
3. Can you name all five public schools?
4. What is pictured on the Avon Historical Society seal?
5. What is the name of the public swimming pool?



Riddle – What is this?

Clues: It has the best view looking down on our town, but not actually IN our town. It is made of stone and glass. You have to climb a mountain to see it up close. Can you guess what it is?

Unscramble these Avon words

RIDERN OSUEH = _____
 VGENOSROR EHORS DUA GR= _____
 INEP VEORG LOCHSOOHUES= _____
 DON KOBRO= _____
 HISFRE EDAMOW _____



Abigail – The Pine Grove School House Mouse

This is the pretend story of Abigail Field mouse. Abigail lived in the historic town of Avon, Connecticut. She was a small brown mouse who wore a sun bonnet, blue calico dress with a white pinafore and black lace up boots as was the style in Civil War days.

Abigail was a very smart mouse because she lived under the floorboards of the Pine Grove School House. Being small, she could hide behind stacks of books or in the cloak room and was never seen. She loved to learn along with the children being taught by Mrs. Case. Back in those days children did not have computers or cell phones. They sat at wooden desks and wrote their lessons on a slate with chalk. They used the Blue Back Speller by Noah Webster to learn their ABC's, spelling and writing.

What fun it was on sunny days when the children were let outside in the schoolyard to play at lunchtime. If Abigail was really lucky-and she often was-a child would accidentally drop a morsel of food from their lunch pail. Sometimes it would be homemade spice cake, a bit of juicy apple, or a chunk of cheese! Remember in those days Avon was a farming community and everything was grown and made on the local farms owned by their parents.

One day a peddler man in a horse-drawn wagon pulled up outside the schoolhouse. All the children ran to the windows to see and Abigail peered out from beneath a small basket. He introduced himself as Mr. Bigelow to the teacher and said he had some books on his wagon she may need for the children. Back then books were very scarce. Mrs. Case purchased three books for the children from the school's operating fund. Abigail loved to listen to the stories Mrs. Case read to the children from the new books. She was so lucky to live in the little white schoolhouse in the beautiful town of Avon. Oh what joy the peddler man brought to the Pine Grove School House that day!

Be sure to read the continuing adventures of Abigail in the Fall newsletter. Sneak peek: Abigail gets lost in the pumpkin patch! Oh my!

Original story and art: JMC

EXTRA, EXTRA....Read All About It...Cowpies in Avon!

The 5th Annual AHS Cow Chip Raffle 2012 tickets are on sale now for our largest fundraiser of the year! Join us Saturday, October 6th at the Simmons Family Farm on Tillotson Road, Avon. Check the AHS website for the dates and locations to purchase your \$5 tickets for a chance to win a cash prize. This is a family-friendly event so bring the kiddies to root for a cow to make a deposit on the square with your ticket number on it. To purchase tickets contact: Sharon Genovese at 860-677-4690 or on our website.



Photo credit: Peter Wright

Don't forget to wear your dung-a-rees!



NOT TO BE MISSED! Saturday, September 8, 2012 Noon-3 p.m.

The Men of Antietam: History in our Backyards-A tale of Connecticut soldiers in the Civil War, presented by John Banks, creator of John Banks' Civil War Blog, Avon Resident and Civil War historian.

Sponsored by the American Library Association, National Endowment for the Humanities, Avon Free Public Library and the Avon Historical Society.

The event will be held at the Avon Free Public Library and more information is available about the activities at www.avonctlibrary.info or call the Library at 860-673-9712.



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.

At the 2012 Annual Meeting held in June, a new Board of Trustees added four new members. Along with some replacements, below are the Trustees for 2012-2013.

Officers: Terri Wilson, President
Pam Fahey, Vice President
Wendy Zacchera, Secretary
Satvinder Mayal, Treasurer

Directors: Helaine Bertsch
Jennifer deSimas
Ben Isaacson
Glenn Lawrence
Chung Lee
Liz Neff
Sebastian Saraceno
Krystyn Hastings Silver
Mary Margaret Stoll
Eric Thronson
Leonard Tolisano
Peter Wright