



We blinked and now it is Summer 2014– the most anticipated season of the school child's year! Be sure to take along our newsletter to read while you are on vacation - relaxing on the beach, after a hike in the mountains, or while camping. We hope you enjoy the lazy days of Summer with your friends and family.



ANNOUNCEMENTS & UPCOMING EVENTS!



The Avon Historical Society's properties are now open on Sundays from 2:00-4:00 p.m. through September. Please visit the 1810 Derrin farmhouse located at 249 West Avon Road to see how an early farm family lived and the 1865 Pine Grove Schoolhouse on the corner of Harris Road and West Avon Road. The school house also has a new informational kiosk on the grounds.

This spring the Town of Avon was awarded a Maintenance & Repair Grant of up to \$10,067 from the Connecticut Trust for Historical Preservation for the restoration of the 14 windows (112 panes of glass) from the 1865 Pine Grove Schoolhouse. The Avon Historical Society was the co-applicant and raised a match of over \$8,000 for the project from many local businesses, former students and residents. The Reller Family of Avon donated period glass for replacement of any of the panes that may break during the restoration. The work is being done by F.J. Dayhill Co., Inc. New Haven, CT. It is expected that the project will be done by August. As 2015 will be the 150th anniversary of the opening of the School, there will be an Open House Party on June 2, 2015 to celebrate all the fine work that has been done on the schoolhouse over the past twenty years.

This summer will see the restoration and placement of the 1949 cupola of the former Towpath Elementary School that once stood on Simsbury Road by Sperry Park. When the school was demolished in 2006, the Society requested that the weathervane and cupola be spared. Since that time the 20' high and 15' wide, 8-sided cupola has been in storage. Superintendent of Schools, Gary Mala, heard about this gem and offered to have it restored and placed on the front lawn of the Avon Board of Education office on Simsbury Road, which also happens to be the site of the original 1879 Towpath School. The Farmington Canal and later New Haven RR went through the same property as it was the commercial center of Avon. A bench, landscaping and informational kiosk will be added later in the year. Thanks to the Board of Education for bringing the cupola back to life!

Please visit the Avon Historical Society's booth at Avon Day, Saturday, September 27, as we will be marking our 40th anniversary and have a few surprises for everyone. We also invite you to share with us your stories of living, growing up or just visiting Avon over the years. Our mission is not only to preserve buildings and artifacts, but also oral histories of people, places and things and make up our collective history. Our booth will be open 10am—5pm. Stop by, say hello and have a birthday cookie on us!

THE HISTORY CORNER...

The Shepherds of Clatter Ridge Farm

On a pleasant Sunday morning I met for coffee with two ladies who own Clatter Ridge Farm. The farm's name was inspired by its location in the formerly named Clatter Valley section of Farmington- so named after the noise made by stagecoaches rumbling by in the early days. The proprietors are Anne Foss and Bobbie Emery and they got into the sheep business as a sideline to their main occupation, that of historic preservation construction.

The flock of 40 sheep are pastured on the property of Hillstead Museum. As you are leaving Farmington via Route 4, you can see the sheep keeping the vegetation in check to your right past the old barn on the fieldstone foundation. I learned a lot about sheep over our cup of coffee and a lot about preserving a bygone way of life. I was curious as to when was the right time to shear them, especially given this past winter's erratic weather. They explained that even though a sheep was shorn, it still had enough coat not to freeze to death. I learned that the wool was taken to a Connecticut mill that processed that specific wool to guarantee it would be returned to the owner of that sheep. I was enlightened about the different textures and qualities the wool had based on the type of sheep that is was from whether it was from a Shetland sheep which is a heritage sheep.



This Spring has been fruitful and the flock was blessed with some new additions-adorable lambs. I got to see two, month old lambs named Neko and Nottingham when they were brought for exhibit to Stanley Whitman House recently. Cute is an understatement! The ladies tell me that each season the new additions get names continuing in alphabetical order. This year's young'uns have names beginning with the letter 'N'. Bobbie gave me an interesting mini-history lesson relative to sheep. Apparently there was The Wool Act of 1699 whereby it was unlawful to import sheep or to export wool products other than to the Mother Country. The intent was to increase taxation.

The ladies also told me about the Connecticut Blanket Project for members of the Connecticut Sheep Breeders Association. Member farms contribute wool that is woven into blankets that are then distributed to be sold by each farm's 'shepherds'. In addition, yarn and other woven products from the sheep of Clatter Ridge Farm can be purchased at the Hillstead gift shop. Seeing the sheep grazing at Hillstead brings to mind images of those quaint olden days when the pace of life was much slower. They are evocative of a place out of time when a gentleman would help a lady down from a carriage perhaps for afternoon tea in the sunken garden. Theodate Pope Riddle, who designed and built Avon Old Farms School, (as well as Hillstead), had a vision of preservation and animal-husbandry which were taught to the young men attending the school to become future stewards of the environment.

According to the 1850 U.S. Census Schedule of Agriculture, Avon had small subsistence farms which consisted of a few cows, a horse, a swine or two, an ox, and an occasional sheep. This Having a sheep or two provided a family with enough wool to be spun into yarn on a spinning wheel from which to knit socks or mittens, or woven on a loom for cloth or blankets. On a larger scale, the Tillotson family of Lovely Street in Avon had a flock of 140 sheep for both wool production and dairy goods. So Avon had its' own sheep history as well with the gentle creatures grazing in the fields and on the hillsides.

It is clear that Anne and Bobbie share Theodate's vision as they are not in the sheep business to get rich, but rather to enrich us. They believe in the preservation of these heritage sheep breeds, in education about sheep and sheep products, and in restoring a sense of antiquity to our high tech, modern world - one bleating sheep at a time. BAAH!

- Janet Conner

THE HISTORY CORNER (cont'd)...



Winding Trails – A World Apart

One cannot help but be envious visiting the 'office' of Miss Judy, a naturalist and educator at Winding Trails Recreation Center in Farmington. Judy works in a building known as "Nature's Porch", a building that has risen out of ruination after the storm damage of the October snowstorm of 2011. Most of the building is constructed of reclaimed wood from the property with the post-and-beam frame harvested in Andover, CT. The interior floors are wide-planked giving the room such a rustic feel along with the stone hearth. Adding some character and a visual break from all the surrounding wood, are stuffed animals representing some of Connecticut's native critters. Miss Judy pointed out these were road kill.

But Miss Judy's 'office' is not just the small space at the back of the classroom behind the curtain – her office is the great outdoors. And how great it is! The beautiful Walton Pond is just outside the front door. This pond is so tranquil with a mirror-like surface reflecting the sky and clouds broken only by the wake of a lone mallard duck named Bobby; its shoreline is home to water fowl and amphibious creatures and the pond itself to its resident sunfish, bass, mussels and snails. If this serene scene were not enough, a 180 turn brings into view a stand of towering pine trees standing majestically over the camp. What a spot! It is like you are no longer in our neighboring town but perhaps somewhere like Maine.

On a historical note, Winding Trails began as a day camp in 1947. The property was originally a part of the 3,000 acres owned by Theodate Pope Riddle on which she built Avon Old Farms school. The camp today encompasses 380 acres including the lake and ponds. Some of the original parcel was actually the Sleepy Hollow section of Avon before Theodate bought out the dozen or so property owners to build her boys preparatory school. Theodate would certainly be proud of the conservatorship of the land and the education and preservation of wildlife undertaken by Winding Trails. In addition to the camp's function as a healthy recreational venue for kids, the camp also imbues the beauty of Nature, instills the value of conservation, and imparts the responsibility we all share in preserving the delicate eco-system for future generations.

Miss Judy is a self-taught naturalist who is as at home amongst the flora and fauna as most women would be at the Mall. She is a wealth of knowledge on the various aspects of the land's history as well as its inhabitants. Camp participants learn about plants and animals through hands-on activities, arts & crafts, and in a classroom science lab-style setting. Directly outside of the building is a wall of aquariums with native animal specimens such as frogs, turtles, and fish as well as bird feeders that attract colorful birds, chipmunks, and even red squirrels!

Anyone would definitely be in awe of Miss Judy's 'office' and I'm sure she looks forward to going to work every day for she gets to commune with Nature, educate children about the beauty and fragility of plants and animals in our environment, and perhaps create the naturalists of the future.

Avon Historical Society Happenings...



The Special Projects Committee received an *Avon Achievers Award* from the Avon Board of Education on May 20, 2014 presented by Gary Mala, Superintendent and Peggy Roell, President. This award recognizes the exhibits presented at all five Avon public schools this school year and made possible by the outstanding contributions of Committee members Jeannie, Stephen, Michael, John, Gene, Karen and Janet. Thank you all!

Thanks to the hard work of Ryan Tyler, soon to be Eagle Scout from Troop 274, there is a two-sided handsome and informative kiosk on the grounds of the Pine Grove Schoolhouse. The kiosk tells the history of the schoolhouse along with its' environs. It was designed to blend into its surroundings and offers visitors a wonderful sense of time and place. Special thanks to Jeannie Parker and Jennifer deSimas for their assistance in gathering the information contained on the kiosk.

Honored guests pose for a photo at the Roaring Brook Elementary School in May at the opening of an exhibit entitled 'The History of Lovelytown.' The school sits on property formerly a part of a large farm located in Lovelytown, then known as District 4, complete with its own shops and a school. The exhibit includes a diorama and 12 supportive posters teaching children about this little community from Avon's past. Pictured are Larry Sparks, VP, RBS, Paul Kramer, Karen Volinski, and Lisa Johnson, Exec. Dir. Stanley Whitman House.



The Society's website, www.avonhistoricalsociety.org, is being updated! Be sure to check often for listings of upcoming AHS programs in the Events section. Also you will find some interesting reading in the "Stories from Avon" section. And don't forget to check out the Gift Shop for something special for the history buff you know!

Happy 40th Birthday to Us! This year the Society is celebrating its 40th Anniversary. We are very pleased with all of our accomplishments over the years in preserving and promoting the Town's collective memory and heritage. A celebratory event will be held in early Fall. Details are forthcoming.

Just in time for "Back to School," an exhibit of Avon's early One-Room Schoolhouse models that toured all of Avon's public schools in a traveling exhibit last year will be on display for the general public in the glass display case outside the Marian M. Hunter History Room at the Avon Free Public Library. In addition the exhibit will display some early school artifacts and historic photographs. The exhibit will open September 1st and run through October.

A Civil War commemorative exhibit entitled 'Sacrifice' will be on display at the display area outside the History Room of the Avon Free Public Library during November & December. It will profile the 16th Connecticut Regiment which had several Avon men and suffered greatly during the fall of 1864. Events will coincide with the exhibit. This newsletter will feature all the details later in the summer.

The Avon Historical Society and the Avon Free Public Library are teaming up with the Gildo T. Consolini VFW Post 3272 to recognize the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II with exhibits and programs from May through August in 2015. This will be an important collaboration to honor those past and present who gave their all for us. The Post is also going to commemorate their 70th anniversary with special exhibits and events.

SPOTLIGHT ON...



There is a person in our town that is the very definition of the word humility. Other words come to mind as well...community service, selflessness, kindness, cheerfulness, loyalty, and integrity. She goes out of her way to find answers to questions, is tireless in working for the benefit of others, is always there to lend a hand at social functions and is actively involved in her church as well. She is soft spoken but has a mischievous glint in her eye and a droll sense of humor. She is there at the bedside of an ailing friend and there with words of encouragement or ones that get you through the night if you are alone and afraid. How could one person be imbued with so many admirable qualities you might ask? I think the answer lies in a couple of places. One is coming from one of Avon's ancestral families with a tradition of service to others for the good of the Community. The other is just born that way and never got over it! This person never asks for anything in return but graciously accepts a word of thanks. We at the Avon Historical Society are truly blessed to have her as a member and we as a town are all the richer to have her as one of our own. Knowing her humbleness, I will only give you her initials...JTP. Angels really do walk among us!

DID YOU KNOW?



The Avon Historical Society, with guidance from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, has applied for nomination of the Derrin farmhouse at 249 West Avon Road and the Horse Guard Barn for the State Register of Historic Places. This would be a real feather in our caps if we are granted inclusion on the Register for one or both properties. A small team of AHS members worked with the Trust to submit the necessary paperwork in May. To qualify for nomination, a property has to meet certain criteria most important of which is historical significance. The Derrin farmhouse meets the criteria as it represents the classic vernacular style of the early farming days of Avon ca. 1800s. The Horse Guard Barn is an English bank-style barn of which increasingly few remain and both buildings were submitted together as they are both owned by the Department of the Military, State of Connecticut and are now leased to the AHS. As soon as we find out if the nomination is accepted, we will let you know as this can be a stepping stone to even bigger and better things to come for the Derrin farmhouse and/or Horse Guard Barn. The AHS is currently in the process of restoring the farmhouse to show how an early Avon farm family lived and will be holding a fundraiser for on-going repairs to the Horse Guard Barn. Keep your fingers crossed!

ANSWERS TO KID'S PAGE

Questions: 1. toad 2. turtle 3. flamingo

Word Unscramble:

Suntan, beach, watermelon, ice cream, bicycle



The Summertime Adventures of Abigail Fieldmouse



Hooray! It is summertime, Abigail's favorite season of the year. You know that Abigail is a small brown field mouse that lives under the floorboards of the Pine Grove Schoolhouse in Avon in the late 1800s. Today is a bright, sunny day and first on Abigail's to-do list is to go out to the farm field and find a nice ripe red strawberry. Abigail loves strawberries even though they stain her paws and whiskers pink when she eats them! Of course she must keep a watchful eye on the sky for predators like hawks and falcons.

Abigail grabs her little wicker basket, puts on her sun bonnet, and heads out to the field across the street at Cold Spring Farm. On her way she passes the hen house and says hello to Gladys, Prudence, and Hester who are sitting on their nests full of eggs. She arrives at the vegetable patch and finds the strawberry bushes. Being so small, she can't bring home a very big strawberry and must find a small one to fit in her basket. She is in luck and finds a luscious berry just ready for picking. Now she heads back home to enjoy her treat along with some cookies.

After her breakfast, she wondered what to do for some summertime fun? Then she got an idea....Frog Rodeo! Just up the road was Tasker's Pond and in the summer the woodland creatures and amphibious creatures get together to play games. For the frog rodeo, whoever could stay on the frog's back the longest when he jumped from lily pad to lily pad, won. Abigail climbed on to the back of a big old bullfrog known as Vrooop, because that is the sound he made when he croaked. She hung on to his ears (yes frogs have ears) and off they went leaping and leaping competing against the other bullfrogs and their riders. Other animal spectators on the shore were cheering them on. All of a sudden, while in mid-jump, Vrooop got distracted by a passing dragonfly, and dumped Abigail into the pond. Oh my!

Abigail was not a good swimmer and started to sink down into the water and was in a panic. Luckily a snapping turtle was nearby and swam to her rescue and brought a very wet field mouse with her droopy bonnet back to the shore. She was safe and after everyone realized she was okay, they all started to laugh at her funny appearance. Abigail laughed too! All in all it had been an eventful day and Abigail was now tired. She bid her friends good-bye and headed back home to her nest under the floorboards. She washed her fur in the wash basin, dried off, and changed into her night gown for bedtime. Tomorrow would be another day of adventure for Abigail in the summer sunshine.

SNEAK PEEK: Read the upcoming Fall 2014 Adventures of Abigail Fieldmouse when she will take a trip up to Heublein Tower!



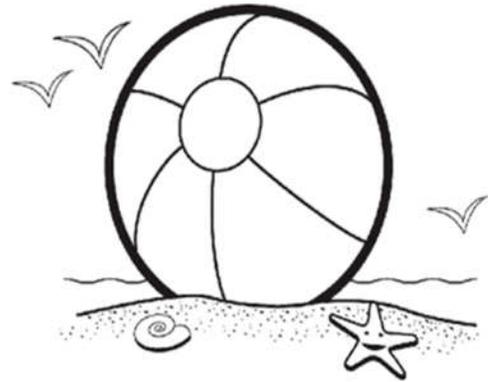
Kid's Summer Fun Page



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Guess the animal from the descriptions:

1. What has brown skin, big black eyes with gold trim, hops, eats bugs, and can be found in the garden? _____
2. Which animal can live on land but is a good swimmer, carries a shell on his back and suns on rocks? _____
3. What kind of bird has long legs, can stand in shallow water, and eats small fish and is pink? _____



Unscramble these summer words:

N U S N T A _____

H E C A B _____

M L O W A R T E L E N _____

E C I M R C A E _____

B C I Y L E C _____

A note from the President of the Avon Historical Society

Sometimes circumstances arise that might alter one's path in life. Conversely, other circumstances come to light that push one back onto the original path for the good of the whole. So it is with my term as President of the Avon Historical Society. Although I reported that I was stepping down when my term expired in April 2014, I revisited my thinking and, after reflection and careful consideration, I decided to stay on for at least one more year. This past year has seen many new challenges and adventures with grants, events, new Trustees joining the Board and projects that I want to see through to their completion. With all this and more going on, I thought it wise to continue in this position through these exciting times in our development and to stay the course. I appreciate the support of the Society and your trust that we keep it running smoothly.

- Terri Wilson



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.

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