



Derrin House c. 1810
249 West Avon Road



Pine Grove Schoolhouse c. 1865
3 Harris Road



1st Company Horse Guards Barn c. 1880
232 West Avon Road



Schoolhouse No. 3, 8 E. Main Street
Headquarters Avon Historical Society

The Avon Historical Society Fall 2015 Newsletter

Once again the Autumn season is upon us with all the majesty of Nature's beauty and bounty. We at the Society have a lot of exciting events listed below that we hope enhance your appreciation of Avon's heritage. In addition, we hope you find this newsletter informative about the news and accomplishments of the Society, as well as, enjoy reading a story about days gone by and one about more recent times. It is time to savor the beautiful kaleidoscope of colors and seasonal flavors and we hope to see you soon at our upcoming events!

HEAR YE, HEAR YE....UPCOMING EVENTS!

Now through October— "A Canal Runs Through It—Faith, Commerce and Education in Old Avon Center" exhibit outside the Marian Hunter Local History Room at the Avon Free Public Library now through end of October. An extensive display of photos, artifacts, memories of life in the original Avon Center from the time of the Farmington Canal through to today! Included is a very detailed exhibit on the Towpath School from 1949 to 2006. There is a lot to see, so plan to spend some time and bring the whole family—kids will love some of the many artifacts and yearbooks.

AVON DAY, Saturday, September 26 — Stop by and visit the Society's booth, pick up some merchandise for gifts or yourself. Special photo opportunity for kids to 'meet' a stand up larger-than-life Abigail Fieldmouse in a replica of the Pine Grove Schoolhouse where Abigail lives!

Saturday, September 26 – You are invited to attend the first lecture in the series 'One Square in Avon's Heritage Quilt History-The Derrin Family of West Avon.' Our guest speaker will be Lisa Johnson, executive director of the Stanley Whitman House Museum in Farmington. Her topic will be 'Early Settlers of Nod/Northington.' The lecture will be at 7:00 p.m. at the Avon Senior Center, 635 West Avon Road. Refreshments will follow and there will be some photos of historic West Avon homes on display. The year long lecture series is being sponsored by the Avon Historical Society, the Avon Senior Center and with a donation by the Avon/Canton Rotary Club.

Friday, October 16— Join us for the GREAT PHOTO HUNT #2 from 1:00—4:00 pm in the Marian Hunter Local History Room at the Avon Free Public Library. The Society is seeking to expand its collection of "Avon specific" photographs of people, places and things from Avon over the past 100+ years. Of particular interest are images of remnants of the Farmington Canal, local farms, mills, industry, Cherry Park fairground, schools, people, stores and shops, gas stations, homes of all ages, office buildings, little league games, scouting events (camps), local parades, parks, open spaces, etc. Anything up to the present, including the last 40 years, is encouraged and welcomed. However, the older the photos the better as those images are disappearing from our landscape!

Events continued...

Saturday, November 7th— Join us for the second lecture in the 'One Square' series presented by Janet Carville, owner of the Pickin Patch, will talk about the history of the Woodford farm on Nod Road that will celebrate its 350th anniversary in 2016. She will compare it to a small subsistence farm like the Derrin families operated on West Avon Road. The event will be held at 1:00 p.m. in the Avon Library History Room. Please RSVP by leaving a message for the Society at: 860-678-7621. Light refreshments will be served after the talk.

November through December— 'Early Clothing Production and Mills in West Avon' exhibit located outside the Marian Hunter Local History Room of the Avon Free Library. This exhibit is in conjunction with the November 5 lecture previously listed. It will feature the process of raising sheep for wool, processing the wool, local mills, and getting to the finished article of clothing or blankets. Antique artifacts will be on display related to spinning and weaving as well as wool products from sheep at Clatter Ridge Farm in Farmington.

Saturday, November 14— Back by popular demand is local author and historian, John Banks, who will present a talk from his new book "Hidden History of Connecticut Union Soldiers" at 1:00pm in the Alsop Community Room of the Avon Free Public Library. John will showcase many of the unknown stories about our state's soldiers during the long four-year battle. Books can be purchased and signed after the talk during a reception. This talk is generously sponsored by the Avon Free Public Library.

Saturday, December 5th— Join us for the third lecture in the 'One Square' series presented by Robert M. Thorson, Professor of Geology at the University of Connecticut. His talk is entitled 'From Bedrock to Bedroom Community-The Evolution of Avon.' It will be held at the Senior Center, 635 West Avon Road at 7:00 p.m. Refreshments will be served after the talk.

January through February 2016— 'Antique Valentines' will be on exhibit outside the History Room of the Library from the collection of Elisabeth Neff, local resident and Avon Historical Society Trustee.

Other Updates from the Society:

- The Society thanks the Avon/Canton Rotary Club for it's \$150 donation toward the speaker costs of the "One Square" lecture series running from September through June. A grant will be applied for the remaining costs associated with the year long series.
- The Avon Patch online blog named the 1865 Pine Grove Schoolhouse a "Top 5" pick to visit this summer! It must be working as attendance on Sundays has increased this summer. Thanks everyone!
- One year ago, due to the small return on its long term CDs, the Board of Trustees of the Avon Historical Society decided to move some of its funds into an e*Trade account. To date the return has been more than realized with traditional CDs. A report on the progress of the account will be provided at the next Annual Meeting in April.
- A student newsletter with special stories and fun historic-specific games is being distributed to all school households via their Virtual Backpack system four times a year. The test run last spring proved successful with good feedback from parents and students. To read these newsletters, visit the Society's website at: <http://www.avonhistoricalsociety.org/NewsletterArchives.htm>
- The Society thanks the Garden Club of Avon for a donation of \$100 with unspecified purpose. At this time it is expected that it will be used to buy materials needed for painting of the fence in front of Schoolhouse No. 3 this Fall.

Updates continued...

- The Society encourages anyone who has a handmade vintage or new quilt to loan it to the Avon Congregational Church's Harvest Quilt Festival, October 24 & 25, featuring international award winning quilter Christine Fries, Master hand quilter Betsy Henebry, and national award winning quilt artist Susan Vassalo. For more information on loaning a quilt contact Sue Elliott at shsellott@sbcglobal.net.
- This past June we celebrated the 150th anniversary of the opening of the Pine Grove Schoolhouse. Below are many photos of the event which featured visits with former students of both the schoolhouse and the nursery school that ran in the building after it closed in 1949. A ceremonial ribbon cutting was held, a few speeches made and lots and lots of great conversation and memories were shared. In addition a donation of hand made year books was made which are prized for their content and drawings by the students of the time. It was a grand event and we thank Jeannie Parker for her inviting the many who attended! *All photos below courtesy of Deb Key Imagery*



Truck owned by Jim Mutch whose mother was the last teacher at PGSH before it closed.



Jeannette (Petersen) St. Peter (student)



Carol & Ray Griffin (student)



From L-R: Jeannie (Thompson) Parker, Gloria (Garrett) Engelke, Ray Griffin, Elda (Garrett) Cleary, Jim Mutch, Nancy (Osborn) Quimby who attended PGSH Nursery School.



Nancy (Case) Dandrea donated handmade yearbooks to PGSH. Accepting is Jeannie Parker.



Handmade PGSH yearbooks from the 1930's and 1940's with lots of student drawings and writings.



Jim Mutch talks with a visitor about his mother who was the last teacher of PGSH.



Jeannie Parker talks with another Glenn Reller another former student



A ceremonial ribbon cutting with current 1st grade student at new PGS Sara Robertson, Glenn Lawrence (who attended PGS Nursery School,) Jeannette St. Peter, Nancy Quimby, Elda Cleary, Gloria Engelke.

THE HISTORY CORNER...

The Avon Country Estate Known As 'HillandDale'



In the mid-1920s, a large country estate was inherited after the passing of her mother by Miss Nellie Woodford Williams. She was the daughter of Roswell Carter Williams and Ellen "Nellie" Sophia Woodford. "Aunt Nell" as she was called by her Avon relatives, was actually born in Brooklyn, New York in 1870. According to the 1910, 1920, and 1930 census records for Avon, she was living on Cider Brook Road and employed a house servant. She never married but was a world traveler who visited many countries in Europe, also Bermuda and Hawaii. On her passport application she listed her occupation as 'gentlewoman' and was well-to-do.

When her father passed away in 1898, her mother no longer wanted to live in the city and had the home built on the estate at 226 Avon Mountain Road. The estate was named 'HillandDale' and there is a photo album in the Marian M. Hunter history room (Local History) at the Avon Free Public Library that was donated by her relatives. The black and white photos were taken in the 1920s and show how the home looked then—much like a mansion one would see near the ocean in The Hamptons with its cedar shake exterior.



One photo in the album shows a lady sitting in the formal garden who may indeed be 'Aunt Nell' Williams herself. The photos personify elegance with a manicured lawn, shrubs and graceful trees. There was an upper terrace reserved for the playing of croquet, a tennis court, and a lovely garden gazebo that appears to be made out of natural vines. Aunt Nell took much pride in her beautiful garden and even designed the fountain herself. There were also grape vines



from which wine was made and jams and jellies also. The vegetable garden provided both fresh and home-canned produce year round. There were fruit trees on the estate and Aunt Nell liked to graft different trees branches onto others with what was described in a letter from her nephew as good results. She also had a much-admired sea shell collection from her trips to the shoreline that were displayed in glass topped drawers on the landing of her stairwell.

Aunt Nell had a neighbor, who also had the Woodford surname before marriage, who owned one of the few automobiles in Avon at that time. According to 'Avon-Connecticut-An Historical Story by Fran Mackie [available through AHS] the neighbor didn't drive so the ladies had John O'Neil who lived in Avon Center, chauffeur them. Years later the neighbor learned to drive and she and Aunt Nell took a trip to Sanibel Island, Florida. On the return trip home, they stopped at a motel in Pennsylvania where Aunt Nell died of a heart attack in her sleep at the age of 78. She is interred in the town of her birth, Brooklyn, New York in the lovely garden setting of Green-Wood Cemetery. Aunt Nell would be pleased.

Much of the descriptive information about the house, gardens, and Nellie William's personal interests were obtained from a letter written by one of her nephews in 2003 to the Avon Library Director and is on file at the history room along with the photo album for public access. The house is still standing but the estate altered after the reconstruction of the base of Avon Mountain Road after 2005. It is a wonderful gift to the Town when family donates personal letters, artifacts, or photographs that freeze those moments in time for us in later years to learn about and enjoy. The Society is grateful to the family of Aunt Nell for this keepsake album preserving the memory of a place out of time, once known as 'HillandDale'.

SPOTLIGHT ON...

A lifelong resident of our town Janet Carville, nee Read/Woodford , whose family is an original settler family dating back 350 years ago, has an ordinary hobby with an extraordinary twist. This pleasant lady is a knitter-she is currently working on a patchwork afghan that looks more like a quilt, except of yarn instead of fabric. But her signature 'pieces', because these could be considered textile art, are sweaters which she creates her own designs for.

I was recently a guest at her home where she went to an antique bureau and started taking out one sweater after another and telling me the inspiration for the patterns or for which holiday or season she made them for. I was astounded as the stack grew higher and higher-perhaps three feet tall! I asked about how long it took her to knit just one. She replied she usually turned out ten to fifteen sweaters a year! Wow!



They were all lovely but one in particular stopped me in my tracks-the complexity of the pattern, the interplay of the colors, the visual interest created by color shading and stitch textures....but more than this, it was the subject of the sweater that spoke to me. It was quintessentially Avon! The scene on the sweater, knitted in the 1990s, freezes a moment in time as it represents the Woodford Farm on Nod Road. When I asked what Janet called this sweater, she plainly said it was the 'farm sweater'. What a fitting name. As you will notice in the photo at left, there are various crops representing those grown on the farm such as pumpkins, squash, blueberries, raspberries, strawberries and of course, sweet corn.

In the foreground the Janet's farm tractor plowing the field. Janet color yarn color represents freshly tilled pressed down soil. The sweater is a



late husband Don portrayed riding a explained to me that the darker brown soil and the lighter tan color was the 'painting' of the Pickin Patch Farm on

In the background about chest high on the photo at right, the black line represents Nod Road and your eye follows a tree line with gradients of green color creating a 3-D perception of depth. Beyond the trees, Avon Mountain and its crowning glory-the Hueblein Tower presiding over the Valley-are set against a backdrop of sky blue and white clouds.

This sweater IS art and it IS history. It is a like a historic photograph made out of yarn. What a unique way to immortalize a part of Avon's history by paying homage to the state's tenth oldest farm and a personal tribute to Janet's late husband. Simple put...the sweater is stunning!



Did You Know?

Acquisition of Two Derrin Family Letters!



We are pleased to announce the acquisition of two letters written by a Derrin family member in 1855. The envelope is addressed to D. D. Derrin (Dan D), a former State Representative for the town of Avon and a member of the Whig Party. The letters are written by his brother, Harvey H. Derrin.

The first letter is addressed to Harvey's sister Mary and the second to his brother Dan. These letters, along with their transcriptions, will be framed and put on display at the Derrin farmhouse in the future.

The letters are charming in that their content is just a conversation about daily life-the weather, going to Church, the operation of the saw mill and mentions specific members of the Derrin family including the other brother Ammi Derrin and his wife Sarah who lived in the Derrin Farmhouse at 249 West Avon Road.



These letters are a wonderful addition to our collection as they personalize the Derrin family and give us a glimpse of their lives in Avon in 1855.

We wish to thank Board of Trustee member Mr. Ben Isaacson for securing these treasures for the Society's collection and donating them to bring them back home where they belong. We, at the Society, are just over the moon about having something tangible of the Derrin family to share with the community.



Avon Historical Society
P.O. Box 448, Avon CT 06001
www.avonhistoricalsociety.org
ahs.mail.1830@sbcglobal.net

Officers: Terri Wilson, President
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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.