

Welcome to Autumn in Avon - 2017

Message from the President – As you can see, we have begun the process of rebranding the Avon Historical Society with a new logo, new colors and very soon...a new website! We are very pleased by this and have to thank the generous donation by the William Yadow Trust for funding this project. It has taken us over a year to settle on all the different materials needed, but you have to admit, we look pretty good! So, this newsletter is our first attempt at a new format. This particular edition is full of stories by Janet Conner and her Special Projects Committee – with the return of Abigail Fieldmouse! The Winter edition will have more information about the Society, updates on lots of ongoing projects and full announcement of the new website. We thank you all for your patience as we move to the next generation of the Avon Historical Society.

Terri Wilson

Summer seemed to have flown by and now it is time for a New England Fall season. The school buses are once again traversing our streets taking kids to and from school, football games are being played, and apple cider is once again in the store. Now, as we return to our daily routines after the lazy days of summer, the changing of the seasons brings a certain sense of peaceful return to the natural rhythm of life. We, at the Society, have a wonderful Fall season of programs and events planned and hope you will join us as we celebrate our autumnal glory.

HEAR YE, HEAR YE...UPCOMING EVENTS!

All events below are being co-sponsored and held at the Avon Senior Community Center, 635 West Avon Road, Avon

[Saturday, October 28th](#)- *Life on the Homefront-The Story of an Avon Family during the Civil War* as told through music, poetry and historical re-enactment at 1:00 p.m. This will be a dramatic event. Refreshments will be served following the performance.

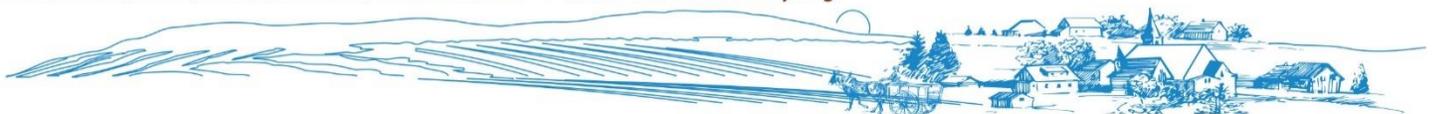
[Friday, November 3rd](#)- *Wild & Woolly Conifer World* at 7:00 p.m. presented by John and Chrissie D'Esopo. This fabulous photographic presentation of their famous gardens will be set to the music of 'The Beatles' so wear your groovy clothes; refreshments will follow the presentation.

[Monday, November 13th](#)- *An Early Distillery and Temperance in Avon* at 7:00 p.m. co-presented by Dr. Nicholas Bellantoni, retired State Archaeologist and Janet M. Conner, Avon Historical Society.

[Friday, December 1st](#)- *Industrial Revolution in Avon, Unionville & Collinsville* at 7:00 p.m. presented by Gene Macy, Social Studies teacher from Avon Middle School.

[Monday, December 18th](#)- *Historic Church and School Bells of Avon* at 7:00 p.m. presented by Janet M. Conner, Avon Historical Society. Special feature: A hand bell choir playing winter-themed music.

SNEAK PEEK: New exhibits in the Society display area starting January 2018 at the Avon Free Public Library.



AVON COLLECTIONS AND HOBBIES...

A Special Collection of Salt & Pepper Shakers in Avon



An Avon lady who was born and raised in town and continues her active life, has collected an interesting collection of salt and pepper shakers amassed over many years. In the photo at left, she estimates she has over 300 sets that she displays in her lighted curio cabinet. Some of the shakers were gifts, some were souvenirs of somewhere she had visited, and some she purchased. She has some shakers that represent different seasons, different events, various holidays, and some just because she likes them. But even with such a large collection, this lady can tell you a little story behind what each set signifies to her and where it came from. Each set is a trip down memory lane and she enjoys taking various ones out of the curio cabinet to enjoy looking at and displaying them. What is really a fun way to display her shakers is that she has a wooden, two-tier, 'lazy Susan' on her kitchen table. This decorative centerpiece can be rotated to see all the different shakers that mark the changing seasons or some special calendar date. She changes the shakers monthly as well as the placemats on the table to pay homage to the different seasons and holidays, etc.

At right is her selections of shakers she called the 'summer harvest' that is showcasing farm grown vegetable shakers. This lady grew up on a farm so these shakers harken back to her roots. There is a set of carrot shakers, green and red bell peppers, a cauliflower set, a tomato set and wooden baskets filled with produce from the farm.



The next photo at the left is what she calls her 'back to school' salt and pepper shakers for her September display with sets such as school supplies including a pen and pencil, a grand piano and bust of Beethoven to symbolize her passion for music, a unique set of a farmer riding on his tractor in memory of her late husband, sets of red barns and grain sacks.

For October, our collector has put out a cute display of Halloween and Fall-themed shakers including pumpkins (grown on their farm), ghosts, and pretty Fall shakers. As an added nod to whatever shakers are on display, the lady also changes her placemats to reflect the seasons as well. What a charming collection and we thank her for sharing it with our readers!

If you have a collection you would like featured in our newsletter, contact Janet M. Conner,
Email: jcmousey@comcast.net

THE HISTORY CORNER...

A View of the Architecture inside an Avon Landmark Church

In 1997 the Connecticut Historic Commission, for purposes of the Historic Resources Inventory, conducted a town wide survey in Avon of historic homes, buildings and structures. This inventory is an invaluable resource for researchers and the general public. It is available in printed form in two spiral-bound books at the history room of the Avon Free Public Library and also online. The online version was an Eagle Scout project where the entire printed version was digitized and modern-day photos of those buildings and homes, still extant, were taken and included.



While this inventory offers some historic information on former building and home owners and an architectural description of the *exteriors* of these buildings, there is scant information on interior architecture contained therein on historic public buildings. One such building, that has long been the iconic symbol of a classic New England village, is the Avon Congregational Church that was completed in 1819 and located in the center of town on the corner of Albany Turnpike and Simsbury Road. The bell was purchased in 1820 and is installed in the second tier of the steeple. The land on which the church sits was "deeded to the society" [1] by local

resident Amos Wheeler. Documentation was found listing Amos Wheeler, Thomas F. Bishop and Francis Woodford (building committee) that payment in full of \$2,150.00 was made "for building and finishing a meetinghouse for said Association (United Religious Assoc. of Farmington), on a contract made with David Hoadley [noted church architect] on the one part, & the above-named Committee...". Another document dated February 17th, 1817 lists names of subscribers who would procure the timber required for building was also found listing the names and dimensions to be furnished.

On my recent visit inside the empty church, one is struck by the garnet red carpeting that matches the color of the seat cushions complete with piping around the edges. This color is quite striking against the white painted bench-style seats with dark wood railing. When first built, there were wooden floors and I envisioned couples walking be married; I could almost hear their footsteps. sanctuary, while standing in the center aisle, there octagonal columns (not original) supporting the elegant "moulded capitals" [1] at the top. The balcony level, that support the ceiling, are even carved Scamozzi ionic capitals" [1]. These continue up into the roof area "where they carry These purlins...provide intermediate support for the [oak], part way between the plates upon which they and the pentagonal ridge-pole into which they are [1] This is a description of the roof framing and only the roof, but that massive steeple.



down the aisle to Looking around the are white, balcony with columns on the taller with "boldly columns, internally, continuous purlins, common rafters bear at the bottom framed at the top." trusses support not

THE HISTORY CORNER (continued)....



Where the balcony meets the wall is a flush, ionic pilaster for ornamental, not support purposes, trimmed at the top with cornices. This ionic columnar style is echoed on the wall behind the pulpit with two flush pilasters supporting a graceful arch with a center keystone embellishment. All around the gallery balcony façade is dentil molding and wood trim that accentuates the neo-classical design. Lining the high ceiling cove is another type of molding, more genteel than the former, that adds a finishing touch to the space.

In the center of the church, suspended from a long chain is an elegant, tarnished from age, single brass chandelier with twelve frosted glass lanterns. In early days, lighting was provided by candlelight inside the church and the electric chandelier dates from the 1940s. There was no heat in the church, then called a meetinghouse, prior to 1826 when it was voted to add a stove for some warmth. In traditional New England meetinghouses, tin boxes with hot wood embers were used to keep feet warm.



The original pews were apparently replaced with 'slips' prior to 1854 [1]. In early times, box pews were common (a holdover from Puritan days) where people were seated according to their social rank. It was called 'dignifying the meetinghouse' and a committee was appointed the arduous task to choosing who sat where.

Another interesting architectural feature is the pulpit stage (also not original) that is semi-circular, bowing out toward the seating area. In the rear of the church, the gallery balcony is also curved to mimic the stage with a white spindle guardrail in front of where the secreted pipes for the Austin organ are located. Opposite the pipe baby grand piano on the facing side, in drapes on all the windows with tie this particular sunny morning, the light sixteen windows, reflected off the the space, shine brightly off the highly the sunbeams streaming in on the east



organ, given as a gift in 1966, there is a the choir loft. There are opaque white backs to see outside and let in light. On coming in through the sixteen over mostly white-painted interior to brighten lacquered wood trim on the seating, and side, created an almost ethereal glow.

The architectural treatment inside the church reflects what is seen on the outside in design motif. However, one has only to step inside to really appreciate the cohesive effect, the attention to detail, the artful design choices Mr. Hoadley was known for as evidenced by his other meetinghouses. This edifice is truly a step back in time to the days before Avon was even incorporated and still a part of Farmington. One can envision the early days of box pews with those deemed most worthy citizens seated closest to the pulpit as a sign of respect and those of lesser status, further away. But this early meetinghouse, now Church, has survived hurricanes, a fire, challenging economic times and still endures not only as a place of religion and community, but as a historic structure that is a part of the very fabric of our Town. When one looks down from Talcott Mountain to Avon in the distance, the white spire of the church steeple high above the tree tops, stands out as the epitome of classic New England. The Church building is on the National Register of Historic Places and will turn 200 years old in 2019!

[1] Source: 'Early Connecticut Meetinghouses-Being an Account of the Church Edifices Built before 1830 Based Chiefly upon Town and Parish Records' by J. Frederick Kelly, Vol. 1, Columbia University Press, 1948



THE ADVENTURES OF ABIGAIL FIELDMOUSE ABIGAIL AND SEAMUS' CHILDREN



When we last visited with Abigail she and her husband Seamus had become parents of four baby mice born over the winter season.

Abigail and her family lived under the floorboards of the old Pine Grove one-room school house in the late 1800s. During these last several months the four babies who were given names from the stratosphere because they were born at night, have become active toddlers. Each one has his or her own distinct personality, characteristics and talents just like children. They are as unique as snowflakes!

Stardust, the firstborn girl, was adventurous right from the start...just like her mother! She was always exploring, always wanting to see new places and learn about new things. She was the tallest of the mice children and she liked to wear hats...she would often borrow, with permission, one of her mother's hats which of course was too big for her head. Being so young, she wasn't allowed to go further away than the school's property but she longed to one day be allowed to venture out into the countryside.

Moonglow, the second girl, had a keen intellect and loved books from the very first time Abigail read to her. She followed along the story looking at the pictures and Abigail taught her the names of colors as they went through the book. She began to learn to read very small words and soon was never seen without a little book in her hand or sitting on a rock reading.

Celestial, the third girl, loved Nature and was always finding 'treasures' around the school house yard. She would bring her mother, whom she called "mum", small bouquets of wildflowers, tiny stones of rosy pink quartz or sparkly mica, or little creatures like baby crickets...she kept them in a small jar (with holes poked in) in her bedroom at night and the family fell asleep listening to the pleasant chirp, chirping sound made when the tiny crickets rubbed their small legs together.

Galaxy was the only boy and one might think that he was timid growing up among three sisters. Quite the opposite...he was the most spirited of the litter. He loved to climb trees, wear his father's big shoes to clomp around the house, and made everybody laugh with his funny sense of humor and antics. He could light up a room with his vibrant personality. One thing that Galaxy had that was not the same as the other mouse kids is that he was born with a club foot. This is a condition that sometimes happens where a foot is twisted inward thus making it harder to walk and not being able to run. Galaxy was often frustrated as he tried to keep up playing with his sisters but he couldn't go as fast like they could. He would often start to cry but dad Seamus knew what to do, he would lift Galaxy upward toward the sky (just like his name) and put him on his shoulders and they would both run around with the girls!

Abigail, being a loving mom, worried that one day when Galaxy would go to Mouse School (held in another mouse house) that the other children might be unkind toward him because of his odd-shaped foot. But Abigail always told him that he was made that way for a reason, that all mice folk just like human folk, had to face challenges in their life and this was his challenge. She told him never to be ashamed because the different foot was just a part of who he was and he would do wonderful things in his life.

Seamus and Abigail were proud parents raising healthy and strong young mice. They were lucky to have family members living close by to share love and family togetherness.

Life was good!

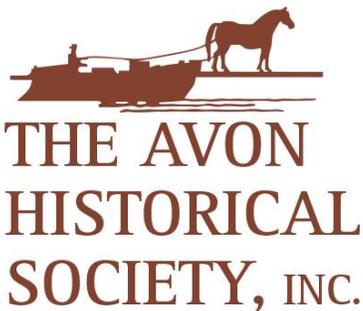
AHS Happenings...



Pictured left to right: Debbie Elcock, Janet M. Conner - Head of Special Projects, Elizabeth Braxton, Anita Marcotte and Rebecca Goldberg.

We are very pleased to announce the formation of a new 'sub-committee' of the Society's Special Projects Committee. The former committee has been primarily devoted over the last five years to bringing educational displays, exhibits and presentations at each of our public schools. The new committee, consisting of about ten members, will be devoted to the design, research, and curation of exhibits in the Society's glass display case outside the local history room at the Avon Free Public Library starting in January 2018. The topics will be in two-month intervals starting with 'The Civil War submarine H.L. Hunley and its Connection to Connecticut History'

(Jan/Feb); 'Edgar Maurice Woodford-Surveyor, Civil War veteran, Abolitionist' (Mar/Apr); 'Historic Farmsteads and Homes of Avon' (May/June); 'Early Water-powered Mills of Avon' (Jul/Aug). New members are always welcome. Contact Janet Conner at email: jcmousey@comcast.net



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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