

JOIN US FOR TABLESCAPES!

## TABLESCAPES

30 CREATIVE & ORIGINAL TABLESETTINGS

MAR 23 + 24, 2018 - 10AM TO 5PM

THE NORTH HOUSE,  
BELLE BALLROOM, ROUTE 44, AVON, CT



Tickets: \$20 in advance / \$25 day of event

Tickets may be purchased at:

Horan's Flower Shop, 926 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury  
Moscarillo's Garden Shoppe, 2600 Albany Avenue, West Hartford  
The North House, Corner of 1 Nod Rod & Rt 44, Avon

For more information or to purchase tickets please contact:



Mary Harrop, 860 670 3225, mcharrop@yahoo.com

Sharon Genovese, 860 559 2263, moldit16@aol.com

www.avonhistoricalsociety.org

AVON HISTORICAL SOCIETY FUNDRAISER

Welcome to Spring! Just in time for our TABLESCAPES event to benefit the Avon Historical Society on March 23 & 24 at the North House. There is still time to buy your tickets in advance from our website Gift Shop or by visiting any of the locations listed above. This event, similar to ones held by the Society over 30 years ago, will be visually stimulating, showing how creative you can be with your own table settings! We look forward to seeing everyone there and hope you will take advantage of being at this very historic site and enjoy lunch or dinner in the North House Restaurant before or after your visit! Tickets can be purchased at the door as well. Bring your friends and neighbors! See you there!

PO Box 448, Avon, CT 06001-0448, 860.678.7621 • [avonhistoricalsociety.org](http://avonhistoricalsociety.org)



## History related events/exhibits in 2018

Each two-month exhibit is on display in the History Corner of the Avon Free Public Library

March/April: ***The Prolific Life of Edgar Maurice Woodford: Surveyor, Civil War Soldier, Politician and Abolitionist*** – Edgar M. Woodford (1824-1862) was a man engaged in the affairs of his time. He was a typical subsistence farmer as well as a self-educated civil engineer. He became a Hartford County surveyor and cartographer of many maps during his career. His most famous is the “Smith” 1855 full-color map of Hartford County. Mr. Woodford also served the Town of Avon in various capacities as recorded in historic newspaper articles that will be in the exhibit. Not well known about Woodford was that he was an ardent abolitionist. He was one of three men from West Avon who went to Kansas in 1856 to keep it from being a slave-holding state. He was part of a group known as “The Connecticut Kansas Colony.” Join noted local author and Civil War blogger, John Banks accompanied by Janet M. Conner of the Society’s Special Projects Committee, in a presentation on the life of Edgar Maurice Woodford on Saturday, March 31 beginning at 1:30pm in the Community Room of the Library.

May/June: ***Revolutionary War Era Homes and Farmsteads of Avon*** – The focus of this exhibit will be historic homes along Huckleberry Hill Road that were built before the American Revolution. Imagine if the walls could talk! A presentation on architectural history will be held at a date to be announced.

July/August: ***Early Mills of Avon and the Waterways that Powered Them*** – Learn how waterways in Avon created the power needed for gristmills, lumber mills, carding and fulling mills and distilleries. This forgotten energy source provided life to the residents of Northington and Avon. A presentation on this important form of energy will be held at a date to be announced.

## Public History

During a recent WNPR radio program it was announced that on March 27-30, 2019, our state will host the annual conference of the **National Council on Public History** at the Convention Center in Hartford. But just what is “public history” and does it relate to us? Indeed it does! As was explained, Public History is the way to make local history accessible to the general public. It is how we, as local historical organizations, create a sense of place in order to make connections in our daily lives with firsthand accounts of those who came before us.

A prime example is the Avon Historical Society which brings local history to the people in our community through continual events, exhibits and school presentations. This engagement through maintaining historic properties, telling the stories of people and events that came before and evoking an appreciation for what was, is all part of Public History.

On a state level, there are many ways this is done. The *CT History Review* is a scholarly journal, published quarterly, of our state’s history. *CT Humanities* has just announced a blog entitled “This Day in Connecticut History” where anyone can find out what happened on any day on the calendar. *CT Explored Magazine*, in conjunction with *CT Humanities*, has an ongoing and growing set of podcasts called “Grating the Nutmeg.”

These are only just a few of the many ways our state and local history is available to the public in a variety of formats for every generation. So it is fitting that this national conference is coming to where history is more than alive – it is an ongoing story!

## Announcements and Accolades

It is with great enthusiasm that we announce that the grant proposal by the Avon Free Public Library, with support from the Avon Historical Society and others, submitted to the *American Library Association* (ALA) in partnership with the *Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History* entitled "Revisiting the Founding Era" was won! As the grant states, "a series of events will take place from June through September 2018 examining the social and political impact of the fourth estate: freedom of the press, and its influence in American culture and how it has evolved from the Founding Era to post-modern America." Topics and speakers (and one early American re-enactor) have been chosen in anticipation of winning the grant. The Avon Historical Society, Avon Senior Community Center and Avon High School will be active partners in this four-month community discussion project that will include book talks, historical reenactors and a film series. Dates and locations to be announced.

But there is more! On the same day of the announcement of the ALA grant, the Library and Society also were awarded a grant from *CT Humanities* entitled "From Congregation to Constitution." This will be a series of five programs from October through December 2018 to commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Constitution of 1818 that dramatically changed the political structure in our state going from 'church rule' to 'citizen rule.' Using readings from the book *Original Discontents* by Richard Buel, published in 2007, there will be community discussions, presentations, and even music from the period performed by State Historian Emeritus Walter Woodward's "Band of Steady Habits." Dates and locations to be announced.

Congratulations to Janet M. Conner, Society member and Head of Special Projects for once again having detailed research published in the spring edition of the *CT History Review*. It is entitled, "A Farmington, Connecticut Wool Manufactory's Industrial Transitions Compared to Other Wool Manufactories in Connecticut in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century." This research paper is a comparative analysis of five early CT woolen mills to determine what factors led to success or failure to ascertain any commonality or trends. The other four mills were contemporaries of Stephen Brownson/Bronson operating their mills at the same time in history. He outlasted the others and this study delineates how he was able to do that. The *CT History Review* is a publication of The Association for the Study of Connecticut History.

The Avon Free Public Library has announced that, with the help of several volunteers in the Marian Hunter History Room, the collection of historic and special maps has been digitized and available to the public through Connecticut Digital Archive at the following website: <http://collections.ctdigitalarchive.org/islandora/object/150002%3A4122> This new source is available to all researchers/students who want to learn more about our town's surroundings at various times in history.

### **The Old Romanta Woodruff Distillery on Whortleberry Hill – by Janet M. Conner**

This may be putting the cart before the horse, as the old saying goes, but for local historians, it is just too exciting to wait. It has long been known in our town history, that there were several distilleries in different locations, not counting illicit stills for 'moonshine'. The distillery operation run by a well-to-do early resident of what was Whortleberry Hill, later known as Huckleberry Hill in 1817, has many clues to offer. Romanta Woodruff ran a profitable trade with the West Indies shipping apples grown in his orchard, butternuts that were wild, and barrels of hard cider (cider brandy) made at his distillery. Fortunately, as was the custom of the day, Mr. Woodruff kept journals for many years in which we find mention of his cider sales transactions and other related entries. In his 1839 estate will inventory (Romanta died in 1837), we find mention of his cider mill house, mill, and still house [distillery] including

6 large cider tubs, 1 still and worms, and 800 gallons of cider brandy! In addition, we know from Farmington town records in 1807 he states "reserving to myself a nursery of apple trees now growing on said land..." The farm had over 220 acres, both improved and unimproved land. The 1850 U.S. Census of products and industry provides information about the farm's production left to his son Daniel R. Woodruff. By 1860 Henry O. Humphrey, son-in-law of Romanta, is recorded as operating the distillery. All of these primary source documents give us insight into his distillery business. But there is more!

The Special Projects Committee of the Society is planning on collaborating with an archaeologist and other colleagues, with permission of all of the property owners, to do a visual on-site inspection and make a photographic record of the old Woodruff distillery site in the late Spring. We are also working with UCONN to obtain pre-existing LiDAR scans that were done of this area to give us some visual feedback. If there is enough evidence to justify the expense, it is also possible that the archaeologist may call in a GPR (ground penetrating radar) team to see what lies beneath. This is all very exciting! This kind of technology, interfacing with the historical record, enables historians to delve deeper into the understanding of historical places. The data retrieved and analyzed will add new dimension to the story that we are able to tell and add to the current historical record for future historians to build on. It is the integration of these many sources of information that help historians put the components together to understand the past.

The May/June upcoming exhibit in the History Corner of the Avon Free Public Library will be titled 'Historic Homes and Farmsteads on Huckleberry Hill' and one of the featured homes/farm belonged to Romanta Woodruff. In the following exhibit, July/August, titled 'Early Water-Powered Mills and Waterways of Avon' will include Mr. Woodruff's distillery. We hope you come see what we have learned about this fascinating historic property.



**The Great Church Search**  
A program to support the upcoming 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of two Avon churches

**Saturday, April 28, 2018**  
**10:00 am-2:00 pm**

Avon Library: *Marian Hunter History Room,*  
*281 Country Club Rd., Avon, CT 06001, 860-673-9712*

**Bring your** vintage photographs, objects and archival materials about the Avon Congregational Church and the West Avon Congregational Church and their neighborhood. Items can be scanned on the spot and returned to the owner, or can be donated to the library or one of the two churches. Multiple items brought that day may have to be left for review. Not every item brought to the event will be added to the collections.

This event is in anticipation of the upcoming 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the construction of the West Avon Congregational Church meetinghouse (1818) and of the Avon Congregational Church meetinghouse (1819).

To mark this event, in 2019 the two churches will jointly publish A Tale of Two Meetinghouses & Their Communities. The book will feature photographs from both church's archives as well as the Avon Free Public Library's collection.

Questions? Contact Patrice Celli @ the Avon Library, [pcelli@avonetlibrary.info](mailto:pcelli@avonetlibrary.info), or call the West Avon Congregational Church Office, 860-673-3996





## A SPRINGTIME ADVENTURE OF AN ABIGAIL FIELDMOUSE FAMILY MEMBER



After a long winter of being cooped up inside the one-room Pine Grove School House in Avon, Connecticut, the children of Abigail Fieldmouse and Seamus Graymouse were SO happy to go outside and play in the warm Spring sunshine! The air smelled especially sweet with the scent of hay from across the road at the Sunrise Farm. Around the school house the big oak trees leaves were a bright spring green color and wildflowers such as bluebells and buttercups were adding color to the landscape.

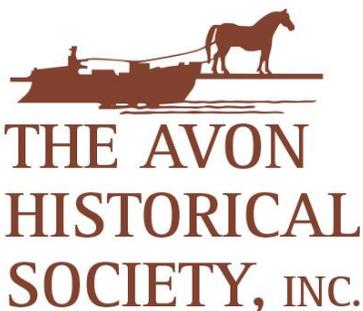
The children, Celestial, Moonglow, Stardust and Galaxy, played in the school yard on the first weekend of Spring as by Monday, the local farm children would be coming back to school. In those early days, just after the Civil War, children walked a long distance to school or were dropped off by wagon. Abigail's children had to stay out of sight, under the floor boards of the school when class was in session and they learned lessons from the teacher right along with the human children.

Of course, Galaxy, the only boy, had little patience for sitting still for his studies. So sometimes he would sneak away to go exploring. Galaxy was born with an abnormality, called a club foot, but that didn't stop him from getting where he wanted to go! On this fine Spring day, he was dying to go see what critters and treasures might be found at the water spring behind the farm to the north of the school house, known as Cold Spring Farm. So off he went, while his sisters stayed home to learn their lessons. He snuck out between the boards of the siding on the school house and made his way across the dirt road and down to the water spring. He was instantly rewarded by discovering pollywogs (baby frogs) swimming in the water. Then a big dragonfly came and landed on a nearby twig. Galaxy was bemused by this insect's strange multi-faceted eyes. Then off it flew out of sight in a moment! Galaxy spied a painted turtle sunning itself on a rock on the edge of the water. He wanted to get a closer look at the turtle as he thought it would be awesome if he could climb on its back and go for a ride. But with his eyes on the turtle, and not where he was walking, suddenly Galaxy found himself stuck in the soft mud near the waterline. He tried very hard to pull his legs out, but he couldn't. He got very frightened and cried out for help.

A passing ruby-throated hummingbird heard Galaxy's cries and stopped in mid-air, as those incredible birds that fly like modern-day drones can, then went down closer to see what the problem was. The hummingbird saw that she could not help him herself and Galaxy pointed excitedly to the school house across the road. The hummingbird flew to the school in the blink of an eye, as they are amazingly fast-flying birds. She saw the mouse boy's dad, Seamus, outside in the school yard and hovered over him with her wings beating frantically. Seamus knew something was wrong and followed the hummer across to the water spring where he found Galaxy stuck in the mud! His dad was a strong mouse and was able to pull his son out safely. Seamus told Galaxy that it was dangerous to go exploring without telling him, but then he gave him a big daddy hug. It turned out to be a lovely Spring day after all!

**You are cordially invited to attend  
the 44<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the  
Avon Historical Society  
Thursday, April 26, 2018  
At the home of the Miller Foods family,  
308 Arch Road, Avon, CT.**

**We will begin with coffee and dessert at 6:30pm  
followed by a business meeting and elections at 7:30pm.  
Time will be available for open discussion and sharing.  
Members will receive details in the mail soon.  
We hope you will join us!**



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.

2017-2018 Officers and Board of Trustees

Officers:

Terri Wilson, President  
Dr. Helaine Bertsch, Vice President  
Carolyn McGrattan, Secretary  
Satvinder Mayall, Treasurer

Trustees:

John Forster  
Mary Harrop  
Ben Isaacson  
Deb Key Mundair  
Cal Miller-Stevens  
Sebastian Saraceno  
Eric Thronson

**Do you shop Amazon? If you do, please go to: <http://smile.amazon.com> and CHOOSE the Avon Historical Society, Avon, CT to have .5% of your purchase donated to us! It's simple and free.**

PO Box 448, Avon, CT 06001-0448, 860.678.7621 • [avonhistoricalsociety.org](http://avonhistoricalsociety.org)

