

## Welcome to Summer – Check out these upcoming events!

Wednesday, July 3, 7:00pm – ***Early Avon Mills and the Waterways That Powered Them*** will be presented by Janet Conner and Alan Perrie, retired geography teacher from Northeast Middle School, Bristol to coincide with the opening of an exhibit by the same name in the History Corner of the Avon Free Public Library open from July through August. Event will be held in the Community Room. Reception will be held after to meet the speakers.

You are invited to the events below sponsored by a grant from the American Library Association and the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History and the National Endowment for the Humanities. The overall theme is *Freedom of the Press*. All of these will be held in the Community Room of the Avon Free Public Library.

Wednesday, June 20, 2:00pm – ***The Alien and Sedition Acts*** presented by Francis Coan, Chairman, Social Studies Dept. and Professor of History, Tunxis Community College

Tuesday, June 26, 2:00pm – ***The Enigma of Benjamin Franklin*** presented by Stephen McGrath, Professor of History at CCSU.

Wednesday, Aug. 15, 2:00pm – ***Discovering Katherine Graham*** presented by Aimee Pozorski, Professor of English at CCSU. Graham's book, *Personal History* (1997), was made into the movie *The Post* (2017) which is being shown at the Library on July 20! Her book is available at the reference desk and suggested reading for this discussion is pages 375-530.

Tuesday, August 21, 2:00pm – ***"We Hold These Truths": The Declaration of Independence, A Single Page that Change the World*** presented by Bev York, Education Director for the Windham Textile and History Museum. Please read the Declaration of Independence before attending.

Wednesday, Sept. 12, 3:00pm – ***The Bill of Rights for High School Students*** presented by Stephen McGrath, Professor of History at CCSU.

Thursday, Sept. 13, 3:00pm – ***The Popularity of Alexander Hamilton*** presented by Bev York, Education Director for the Windham Textile and History Museum.

Monday, Sept. 17, 6:30pm – ***Social Media, The Press and Us*** presented by Professor Karen Ritzenhoff, Communication Department, CCSU

Stay cool this summer and join us for our *Examining the Freedom of the Press* Friday film series! A few (noted with \*) will have discussion after with Bob Kagan, Professor of Communication at CCSU and University of Hartford. They will all begin at 1:30pm. Refreshments will be provided.

June 22 – ***His Girl Friday*** (1940); June 29 – ***Good Night and Good Luck*** (2005); July 13 – ***Spotlight*** (2015); July 20 – ***The Post*** (2017); August 3 – ***Broadcast News*** (1987)\*; August 10 – ***Network*** (1976)\*; August 17 – ***Newsies*** (1992); September 20 – ***All the President's Men*** (1976)\*



**Pine Grove Schoolhouse open for the summer visitor season  
Sundays, June through September from 2:00 – 4:00pm Donations accepted.**



The Pine Grove Schoolhouse, built in 1865 as Schoolhouse No. 7 and still standing in its original location, is owned by the Town of Avon. It was in use as a school until 1949 when it became a branch of the town library, nursery school and meeting place for the Boy Scouts. The Avon Historical Society restored the building in 1976 and is interpreted as a schoolhouse of 1900 with bolted desks, hand slates, textbooks, and other educational memorabilia of the time. New this year will be a scavenger hunt for young visitors highlighting many of the historic items in the school house. Also new will be a display of several of the teaching aids used by teacher Anna Coleman in 1932. These were donated by her family members as a way of showing current students the simple, yet revealing way a teacher taught about the environment, seasons, historic events, etc. Bring your family and friends to this wonderful little bit of the past right here in town.

**Recent donation of a granite headstone**

A recent donation was made to the Society in form of the top half of a well-worn granite headstone from East Avon Cemetery. The stone was broken in the middle and is almost unreadable. However, thanks to a search by Nora Howard, Town Historian, we know the stone read:

*Jeanette  
Daughter of Edward &  
Lavinia Miller  
Died April 4, 1843  
Age 8 mos. 12 days*

Subsequent research by Nora showed that Jeanette was one of 11 children, born in Simsbury. Her father, Edward, lived from 1802-1892. Her mother, Lavinia Goodwin Miller, lived from 1809-1865. He was 41 and she was 34 when Jeanette was born.

**Announcements and Accolades**



Congratulations to Janet M. Conner, Society member and Head of Special Projects for the Society for the past six years who decided to step down and close the committee in order to pursue many other historic-related activities and research. Over the past six years this committee has been responsible for bringing to the community, and ALL the schools in Avon, a large amount of exhibits and presentations on topics such as former one room school houses in Avon, stone walls, a series of lectures on farms, long forgotten Sleepy Hollow, church bells and more. They brought us speakers on everything from slavery to the state's connection to the Hunley submarine and even the geology of our town. But we all know Janet best for her whimsical and happy stories of Abigail Field Mouse who made her serial debut in the Society's Spring 2012 newsletter. Since that time over 30 stories in the series have been written by Janet and are available on our website. We will miss Janet, but most importantly, we hope she will continue to share Abigail with us in future newsletters!

Congratulations to Tina Panik, Director of Adult Services, Avon Free Public Library for being named Citizen of the Year by the Avon Lions Club at their Program of Awards dinner on June 6. She was recognized for the tremendous increase in programming at the Library which, in her ten years there, has seen over 1,700 events bringing in over 50,000 attendees and patrons. She thanked everyone for the partnership to allow her to do this including the Avon Historical Society and Avon Senior Center.

## THE HISTORY CORNER...



### Exploring the site of a former distillery on Huckleberry Hill

It isn't too often that the Avon Historical Society gets the opportunity to go 'out in the field' to examine historic sites. But thanks to the generosity of retired State Archaeologist Emeritus, Dr. Nicholas Bellantoni, and the kindness of the owner of a historic property in the Huckleberry Hill section of Avon, the Society was grateful for this chance.

This old distillery site was located on the property of Romanta and Hannah Woodruff. Romanta was a merchant who sold his farm products in the West Indies in the early 1800s. He sent his apples, butternuts and products of his distillery from the port of New London. He produced cider and cider brandy which he also sold in Hartford and Wethersfield. Romanta kept diaries for many years that are a wonderful primary source, not only about his life, friends, and neighbors, but also about his distillery operations. These notations, combined with what is learned from the field expedition, will go a long way in piecing together more about the story of the distillery.

The team who volunteered for this venture, in addition to Dr. Bellantoni, included Nora Howard, Avon town historian and her husband, Terri Wilson, president of the Society, Rebecca Goldberg, AHS member and inspiration for a field study, and Janet M. Conner of the Society who acted as secondary photographer and reporter. Bradford and Cara Smith, current owners of the private property, were wonderful to allow the Society access to his property and we thank him for his strong support of our efforts to learn more about the Woodruffs.

The property is located near Hawley Brook; named after other early Huckleberry Hill residents. Apples were grown in orchards and piles of apples were left on the ground to ripen. They contain natural yeast that, within 12 hours, pressed cider ferments to become alcoholic. When cider was heated in a copper pot still over a wood fire, cider brandy is produced after aging in wooden barrels. Water from the brook was used in the process and probably for cooling the copper coil/worms.

There are some artifacts still visible on the ground in some locations and we expect other artifacts below ground. Dr. Bellantoni will do a visual inspection of these and any remnants of stonework where a building may have been. He will then decide, pending permission of the property owner, if the use of GPR (ground-penetrating radar) is justifiable to see what lies underneath without disturbing the historical integrity of the site.

Through these new findings and modern photographs, we hope to bring our readers exciting news in the AHS Fall newsletter after additional research is concluded. We know that in 1814 Romanta had sold 341 gallons of cider brandy. On his death, the distillery passed to his son David, who in 1860 reported an annual production of 50 barrels of cider on the agricultural census! Combining information from a variety of sources will add extra dimension to what we currently know about Romanta's distillery operations, and we expect, augment it.

The teamwork of the individuals involved in this project and resulting discovery will benefit generations of Avon's progeny to understand how industrious and ingenious our early residents were. These forefathers, who cleared the land, incorporated the Town, and raised their families are the bedrock of our current residents' heritage.

Photo credit of reproduction paintings: Homeowner



## The Summer Adventures of the Abigail Fieldmouse Family



Oh boy, it's summertime in Avon and the school children at the little Pine Grove one-room schoolhouse are needed on the family farms. Abigail and Seamus' four children were anxious to have some free time from their studies with some summer fun. Now what would mouse kids do for fun you might ask? Plenty! In some ways, they enjoyed summertime activities much like human kids would do-except on a smaller scale.

When there was a summer rain that left puddles in the school yard, which became their swimming pool. When they were hungry, the kids scurried across the dirt road to the nearby farm to gorge themselves on ripe, red strawberries. They came home with red paws and whiskers! Galaxy, the only boy, always played the big brother and kept a watchful and protective eye on his sisters. But sometimes he got distracted and just wanted to wander off and do boy stuff.

While his sisters were busily sitting under the shade of an oak tree in front of the school, stringing together dandelion stems to make bracelets and necklaces, he was roaming the school yard in search of small twigs. He had decided he wanted to make a tree house for himself. He had daydreamed about having a place all his own where he could have imaginary adventures like being a sea captain at the helm of his ship or being a soldier guarding the fort. Now he had found a whole pile of different size sticks and twigs. He had a spot all picked out up in a nearby tree that had three sturdy branches that would be the perfect spot for his fort. Now all he needed was help in building it!

As it happened, a neighboring chipmunk family who lived in burrows behind the old barn on the Rood farm across the road to the East, were also on summer break. There were two boys and four girls in that family. As you may know, chipmunks have extremely sharp teeth because they can crack acorn shells and they are also very hard workers. Galaxy went over to ask if the chipmunk boys, Chippy and Skippy, would help him build the treehouse. They had one condition before they agreed to help...they wanted to be allowed to play in the tree house too. It was agreed!

Now since boys will be boys, first they played a game of tag, chasing each other all around the barnyard until they got tired. Great fun! Then, they went across the dirt road back to the schoolhouse. Galaxy's sisters-Celestial, Moonglow and Stardust were now working on needlework samplers with their mother, so he knew he could go off with the chipmunk boys. The first order of business, was gnawing all the twigs and sticks...Galaxy did the twigs and the chipmunk brothers with even stronger teeth did the straight sticks that would be used to support the tree house.

Finally, they had all the work of getting the wood materials readied to build it, but they hadn't really thought about HOW to go about constructing the tree house. So, Galaxy went to ask his father Seamus if he could help them. And Seamus, the loving dad, was happy to help. First, he went down under the school house to a little storage area. He came back with a big ball of string. The boys worked as a team, because teamwork is important to achieve a goal. Galaxy tied a bunch of twigs together on a long string and the chipmunk brothers, up in the cradle of the tree branches, pulled them up. When the sticks had to be hoisted up, it took all three boys strength after Seamus tied one at a time to the string. Once they had all the wood up there, Seamus helped the boys build the framework using the sticks and tying each joint together with the string. He would bite off each piece after it was secured. Then they used the twigs tied together to make the walls of the treehouse and a door to keep out his sisters! It was going to be a great summer of fun in the tree.



The annual meeting of the Avon Historical Society was held on April 26, 2018.

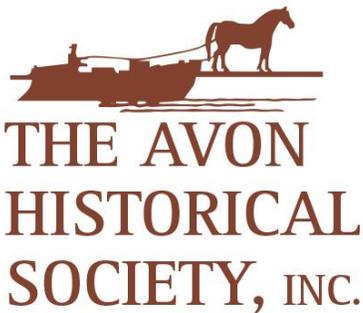
To read the Annual Report presented that evening, go to:

<http://www.avonhistoricalsociety.org/html/about/annual-reports/president's-report-for-annual-meeting-2018.pdf>



Photo courtesy of Deb Key Imagery

The Board of Trustees for 2018-2019



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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