



Avon Historical Society ANNUAL REPORT

43rd Annual Meeting, April 24, 2017

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AVON HISTORICAL SOCIETY MISSION: to identify, collect, preserve, utilize, publish, display, and promote the history and heritage of Avon. (Approved by the AHS Board, Jan. 10, 2001)

The Society was incorporated in 1974 by a group of forward thinking individuals who wanted to make sure the history of Avon was not forgotten during the celebration of our nation's Bicentennial in 1976. This report will show that we have that same spirit with us today.

NOTE: FOR SUMMER 2017 ONLY - THE PINE GROVE SCHOOL HOUSE WILL BE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC ON SUNDAYS FROM 2:00 – 4:00 PM, JUNE – SEPTEMBER (Derrin House is closed until further notice)

School House No. 3 (SH3) – built 1823, relocated 1985 (formerly called Living Museum) – As the Society's "headquarters" it maintains and stores the archival collection of the Society. In 2012 the Trustees voted to close the building as a museum due to lack of annual visitors. The only semi-permanent display is about the history of the Farmington Canal. In summer 2016, the fencing around the property was removed by the owner of the property adjacent, Lumani's Barber Shop, in order to open up the view of the building. The fence has been in disrepair for many years. For now, it will be used for housing the cleaned artifacts from the DFH fire, therefore, there is no room for visitors or meetings until further notice. On March 1, 2017, the Town of Avon applied for a \$15,000 matching grant from the CT Trust 1772 Foundation to repair and restore the windows of the building. If granted, the Society will match it with funds from the Yandow Trust contribution. Announcement on the grant expected mid-May. If won, work will begin summer 2017. This is the first step toward continued restoration for the building's 200th birthday in 2023. This is the oldest building owned by the Town of Avon, but not in its original location. It is on the State Register of Historic Places.

1865 Pine Grove School House (PGSH) – At 152 years old this year, this school house is interpreted as from the turn of the 20th century. The summer of 2016 saw few visitors; lowest attendance since opening in 1976. More work needs to be done to draw attention to the property. In addition, thanks to the Yandow Trust donation, it is hoped that the interior can be painted this coming year as that will be the last item needed to complete another restoration. This is the oldest building owned by the Town of Avon still in its original location and is on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Derrin Farm House (c. 1810) (DFH) – On Wednesday, May 11, 2016, an accidental fire broke out early in the morning destroying three of the oldest rooms in the house – 2 downstairs and one upstairs. The Avon VFD, along with mutual aid from three other towns, were quick to respond and were able to put out the fire within one hour of it being called in to the station. The fire happened just

one month before a celebration was to be held there, with a new Welcome Center, marking the 250th year since the Derrin Family acquired the property. The Board of Trustees, working with advice from a statewide group of volunteers who help culture heritage sites with disasters, hired American Integrity Restoration, Glastonbury, and with insurance proceeds, was able to have the house remediated and repaired by November 4, 2016. As of this writing, the Trustees are working on raising extra funds to continue repairs to the interior, not covered by insurance, in order to re-open it in the future. The future use of the building is still being debated. Some artifacts were saved and cleaned and are in storage in SH3. A four-part lecture series by historians donating their time just completed as part of that fundraising effort. A GoFundMe page was established the day after the fire and will remain active as fundraising continues. The Derrin Farm House is on the State Register of Historic Places.

Horse Guard Barn (c. 1870) (HGB) – Now in the 7th year of a lease from the State Department of the Military, the Society has been successful in obtaining many donations of equipment, labor and money from the public and private foundations, including two barn grants from the CT Trust for Historic Preservation over the years to replace the roof in early April 2015 and fix the back wall which was damaged when the winter storms collapsed the attached annex built in 1954. And a donation of paint from Maher’s was used to paint the south exterior and back walls. This has finalized the “envelope” of the building making it dry and sound. A joint fundraiser on April 30, 2016 was held with the Friends of the HG, that netted approximately \$1,500 for both the Barn and the upkeep of the Horse Guard. A boy scout, working on his Eagle Scout, reconstructed the horse stalls that used to be in the ground floor of the barn using repurposed lumber that was used to build a temporary south wall several years ago. It was planned that this area would be used to showcase various large pieces of farm equipment now housed on the grounds of the Derrin House. The HGB on the State Register of Historic Places.

Marian Hunter History Room (HHR) – The Hunter History Room at the Avon Free Public Library is staffed by volunteers (more are always needed!) and provides a much-needed and well-used service for those interested in genealogy, historic houses, viewing of old maps, the general history of the town, its citizens and businesses past and present. Ongoing exhibits are installed in the History Corner of the library just outside the History Room. This area was designed to allow the Society to utilize the large glass display case, the flat display case, bookshelves and wall space for historical-themed exhibits. In January 2016, the Avon Free Public Library won a National Endowment for the Humanities Grant a \$5,553 Preservation Assistance Grant to fund a project that will provide a formal preservation assessment of the Marian Hunter History Room, which is curated jointly by the library and the Avon Historical Society. Grant funds were used to hire a consultant to assess the condition and storage methods of a collection that consists of books, serials, photographs, postcards, maps, deeds, and other memorabilia related to the history of Avon. The consultant prepared a detailed, formal report with prioritized recommendations for improving the preservation of these important artifacts. In addition to the planned assessment, the grant will enable library staff to attend a workshop on the preservation of paper-based materials. The report contained many recommendations underway: (1) reorganization and proper storage of artifacts in the Archive Room; (2) removal of files from cabinets and placement of files in archival storage boxes on shelving placed in the room; etc. More work is being done based on that report. A college intern is being hired for the summer of 2016 to continue work on this project under the direction of the Library Director.

SOCIETY ACTIVITIES SINCE THE LAST ANNUAL MEETING IN APRIL 2016:

- ❖ With the approval of the Board of Trustees, the Finance Committee added another \$5,000 to the year old e*Trade account for the Society including an increase in the number of investment stocks. The total initial investment is \$10,000. Annual earnings has been approximately \$750.
- ❖ In order to supplement the Society's most important book on the history of the town entitled "Avon, Connecticut...an historical story" by M. Francis MacKie, which was published in 1985, a project to gather the contemporary history of the town from 1985 to present, was started by volunteers in the History Room. This project is ongoing. In addition, the Trustees voted to form a committee to investigate various methods for reproduction of the book as the hard cover supply is low. The option chosen is "print on demand" with an online presence via various bookseller websites. The Trustees also approved to hiring of the Connecticut Urban Legal Institute at the UCONN Law School to handle all legal aspects of the project. There is a minimal fee for the service on an annual basis. As of this writing, due to marketing efforts to find volunteers to assist in this project, over six residents of the Valley have joined! It is expected this project will take 6-8 months to complete.
- ❖ For the third year, the Society has been providing students in grades K-8 with their own Avon Historical Society newsletter. It is distributed through the Board of Education central office e-mail system to all families.
- ❖ To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the US entry in to WWI, the Society mounted an exhibit Jan-Feb. 2017 outside the History Room. Included was a book talk by Dave Drury on his recently published book *Hartford in World War 1*.
- ❖ Since the last Annual Report, the Special Projects Committee completed the following:
 - Avon High School-repurposed exhibit 'Northington Public Library' in gallery.
 - Thompson Brook School-gallery bulletin board 'The Building of Avon Old Farms School' including construction and biographical information on architect.
 - Avon Middle School-presentation to 8th grade Social Studies students on 'How to Conduct Historical Research Using Primary and Secondary Sources Using Derrin Research as a Model'.
 - Avon Day-theme 'The Spirit of the Derrin Farmhouse'; showcased photos of the farmhouse fire and restoration efforts. Had raffle for 'fairy garden', netted \$50. Also children's 'clothespin toss' game for younger kids.
 - Pine Grove Elementary School-presentation titled 'Theodore Roosevelt Visited Farmington and Avon' including interpretation of State Dining table and game. Made Victorian costume to add historical context.
 - Roaring Brook Elementary School-read children's storybook to 2nd and 3rd graders to teach local history- 'The Adventures of Abigail Fieldmouse-A Trip to Sunnybrook Farms in the Olden Days', written and illustrated by JMC.
 - Research and writing of AHS newsletter and AHS Kid's newsletter
 - Six months research and writing of academic paper for the Association for the Study of Connecticut history presented on behalf of Avon Historical Society at Southern Connecticut State University in November 2016.
 - Submitted 'collection review' to Connecticut History Review for publication in Spring 2017 on archaeological artifacts found at Derrin Farmhouse.
 - Presentation to 'Silver Sneaker' members at Healthtrax on the Pine Grove Historic District and the work of AHS to preserve history.
 - Talk at Avon/Canton Rotary Club on the Special Projects Committee's work on behalf of the Society.
 - Hospitality at AHS events including room set up with tablecloths and fresh flowers; ancillary displays as needed.
 - Site visit with Nora Howard and Nick Bellantoni at old Cider Brook mills; possible future public presentation on early mills in Northington (Avon). Research in progress.
 - Workshop on 'How to Write a Work of Historical Fiction' using my storybook as an example at Thompson Brook School in conjunction with teachers and library for 5th grade students.

- ❖ Avon Day 2016 was, like in the past, a corner booth for the Society. Decorated for Fall inside and out, the Special Projects Committee designed games for kids with small prizes. Several fundraising games to benefit the Derrin House, we held. Before and after photos of the fire were on display.
- ❖ A Boy Scout, working on his Eagle Scout, built an informational kiosk box on the outside wall of the lower level dugout building at Sperry Park. It is designed for both the Avon Little League and the Avon Historical Society to use it jointly for notices, announcements, etc. The Boy Scout placed a history of Avon Little League on the Historical Society side for us.
- ❖ In addition, the Society maintains a locked display cabinet at the Avon Post Office. Since the fire, before and after photos are on display along with a flyer on how to donate via our post office box or the GoFundMe page.
- ❖ The Society was the recipient of a third bequest of \$9,410.00 from William Yandow who lived in Avon most of his life until retiring the Florida. This is the final donation. In total, Mr. Yandow donated \$140,426.26 to the Society unrestricted. The Board of Trustees have some of it invested in an e*Trade account and some has been used or earmarked for various projects not associated with the fire at the Derrin House.
- ❖ The Society is undergoing construction of a new website, schedule to be live by the end of the summer of 2017. It will have interactive search capabilities, a PayPal account for membership dues, gift shopping or donations, archives of newsletters dating back almost a decade, interaction with social media, new e-mail addresses, etc. It will be overseen by a committee who will make updates on an ongoing basis. In addition the Society's Facebook page was updated in 2017 and more than 800 views are logged monthly!
- ❖ Thanks to a grant from CT Humanities for \$2,847, eleven pop up display banners entitled "A Moment in Avon's History" will be created in order to share brief information on various topics in Avon's history such as "Transportation," "Schools," "Religion," etc. They will be 7' tall and be able to be rotated around town in storefronts, lobbies, town offices, schools, etc. A public showing of all 11 banners is set for Saturday, July 29 at 11:00am in the Community Room of the Avon Library. The public is invited to attend.
- ❖ In March and April, the Society held four lectures, as fundraisers for the Derrin House restoration, thanks to the kindness of speakers who donated their time and expertise. Over 80 people attended the 4 lectures with \$539 raised. The Avon Senior Community Center co-sponsored the event.
- ❖ The Society is planning to debut what they hope will be an annual event entitled, *Tablescapes*. It will be held early in 2018 at the historic North House. *Tablescapes* will feature over 20 decorated table settings in various themes by local artists, florists, decorators, etc.
- ❖ For the first time in recent memory, the Society's 43rd Annual Meeting is open to the public. It is designed to encourage new membership as well as showcase the assets of the Society and benefit to the Avon community at large.

**Thank you for attending the 43rd Annual Meeting of the Avon Historical Society.
If you have any questions, please leave a message at 860-678-7621 or e-mail at:
ahs.mail.1830@sbcglobal.net**