



THE AVON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT

45th Annual Meeting, April 24, 2019

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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 2019 – THE 1865 PINE GROVE SCHOOL HOUSE WILL BE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC ON SUNDAYS FROM 2:00 – 4:00 PM, JUNE – SEPTEMBER
(The Derrin Farm House and Schoolhouse No. 3 are 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. Currently it is storing the cleaned artifacts from the DFH fire, therefore, there is no room for visitors or meetings until further notice. On March 10, 2019, the Town of Avon applied for a \$8,000 matching grant from the CT Trust for Historic Preservation's 1772 Foundation to replace the windows of the building. In addition, the Town will apply for the Neighborhood Assistance Act Program for a grant to install energy efficient siding, windows and HVAC system. The Society and the Town of Avon have begun an adaptive reuse of the structure for its 200th birthday in 2023 with the goal of opening it as a museum again. 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 154 years old, this school house is interpreted as the turn of the 20th century. The summer of 2018 saw more visitors than in recent years – over 25 visitors on a Sunday in July! New last summer was a scavenger hunt created for use by visitors to find various historic items in the house. It was very successful. 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. 1740 - 1810) (DFH) – On Wednesday, May 11, 2016, an accidental fire destroyed 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. The fire happened just one month before a celebration marking the 250th year since the Derrin Family acquired the property. The Board of Trustees, with insurance proceeds, had the house remediated and repaired by November 2016. As of this writing, a plan is emerging to reopen it as a community space by summer 2021 (if possible) in partnership with another organization. The Derrin Farm House is on the State Register of Historic Places.

Horse Guard Barn (c. 1870) (HGB) – Now in the 9th year of a lease from the State Department of the Military, the Society had the roof replaced in early April 2015 and fixed the back wall which was damaged when the winter storms collapsed the attached annex built in 1954. This has finalized the “envelope” of the building making it dry and sound. No plan has been made to open it to the public at this time. 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 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. Following the instructions of a detailed report by a professional archivist in 2016, much work has been done to create a working space for researchers inside the room. In addition, volunteers have successfully digitized several important photographic collections of Avon’s past and uploaded them to the CT Digital Archive website for public use. Outside the HHR is the **HISTORY CORNER** consisting of space available for the Society, or other organizations, to mount history-themed exhibits. The Society maintains the calendar of each two-month exhibit and has developed guidelines, with the Library, for use of this large space. Organizations interested in mounting a history-themed exhibit of their organization, can request the space from the Society.

SOCIETY ACTIVITIES SINCE THE LAST ANNUAL MEETING IN APRIL 2018:

- ❖ The Society continues to have a representative attend the monthly meetings of the Historic Sites of the Farmington Valley, an independent 501(c)(3) organization. This regional organization of historic sites is an important way for all our historic-based organizations to share best practices and events happening.
- ❖ The 15 pop up banners entitled “A Moment in Avon’s History,” with specific themed topics, have been on a tour of lobbies around town, thanks to the efforts of longtime Society member, Norm Sondheimer. In 2017 the Society partnered with the Avon Free Public Library and received a grant from CT Humanities to create the banners. Thank you certificates were presented to the owners of the sites in appreciation for their displaying them in their establishments. The banners are available for use, free of charge on an ongoing basis, by contacting the Society directly.
- ❖ The Avon Historical Society again donated \$500 to Avon Dollars for Scholars to go to an Avon High School student studying history at college. The donation is made in the name of William Yandow.
- ❖ The Society is being recognized by the Avon Congregational Church and West Avon Congregational Church for its small participation in the creation of their book to be published Fall 2019 on the history of the two churches on their respective bicentennials.
- ❖ The Society authored two pages (about Avon) of the 2017 book entitled, *Connecticut 169 Club: Your Passport and Guide to Exploring Connecticut*, edited by Marty Podskoch.
- ❖ Trustee Carolyn McGrattan continues to increase the presence on Facebook of the Society by boosting some of the events and keeping it up-to-date with notices.
- ❖ The families of Anthony O’Neill and Carl Candels have been very generous in donating items from their father’s extensive collections of ephemera and artifacts. The Society and Library’s Local History Room will be the final place for the items.
- ❖ As has happened in the past, The Avon Free Public Library, with support from the Avon Historical Society and Avon Senior Center, applied for and won two grants to run a large variety of public programming from June-December 2018. The first was to the American Library Association for programming related to “Freedom of the Press” under their national “Revisiting the Founding Era” grant. And the other was to CT Humanities to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Connecticut Convention of 1818 which created the modern form of government we have today. Events were held at the Library, Senior Center and both Congregational Churches. A banner on the 1818 Convention was made and exhibited during those events.

- ❖ TABLESCAPES, a new two-day fundraiser by the Society, co-chaired by longtime members Mary Harrop and Sharon Genovese, ran from March 22-23 at The North House's Belle Ballroom. There were 150 visitors who came to see 30 decorated tables just time for Spring. And we had 12 sponsors in three categories. A third annual event will be held for the same weekend in 2020.
- ❖ In time for the 100th anniversary of the passage and ratification of the 19th amendment to the US Constitution granting women the right to vote, the Library, Society and Senior Center are preparing on a few grants for a series of events/exhibits/book talks/presentations, etc. to run 12 months, Nov. 2019-Nov. 202, on the topic with both the anti and pro sides presented.
- ❖ On Veterans Day 2018, the Society was a recipient of a generous donation from the Abigail Phelps Chapter of the DAR in Simsbury to recognize our joint mission of historic preservation. The award was given to various community entities in the region on the 125th anniversary of the founding of this chapter of the DAR. The Society will use the funds as part of a matching grant for the 100th anniversary Suffrage events continuing both our missions of education of local history.
- ❖ The Society was also the recipient of several generous donations, including a generous sponsorship of Tablescares, by the Garden Club of Avon over the past year for our joint mission of community involvement. These donations will be earmarked for future garden-themed events the Society is planning in the future. The Garden Club of Avon is the organization that places holiday greens with red ribbons on our historic properties around town every December. We are grateful for their recognizing the Society in so many ways.
- ❖ The Society is the recipient of a \$2,000 donation from American Eagle Financial Credit Union which opened an office on West Avon Road in April 2019.
- ❖ With the untimely passing of two uber local historians in March 2019, Paul Kramer and Cliff Alderman, the Society will be receiving artifact and ephemera donations from the families.
- ❖ The Society, belatedly, created a plaque that will hang in the Local History Room honoring the volunteers who created the archives of the History Room from 2000-2012. They were devoted to the process and we thank them: Carol Dunn, Helen Muszynski, Ann Mains, Jennie Boswell and Larry Murphy.
- ❖ Since 2000, the Society posts events in the locked display case at the Avon Post Office, courtesy of the family of Anthony O'Neill, owners of the building.

While the Special Projects Committee of the Society disbanded after the last annual meeting, it's chairperson Janet Conner has continued to represent the Society, personally, in various other ways such as:

- mounting exhibits and providing presentations on various local history topics at Avon's elementary and middle schools.
- organizing a presentation, along with two other Society members, about the work the Society does in the schools for the upcoming CT League of History Organizations annual conference in June. The Society will also have a table at the event and will showcase several of the banners on local history.
- working under the direction of Prof. Kathy Hermes at CCSU to create a Digital Avon website of historic sites of interest for visitors, to be uploaded this year.
- managing the Avon History page of the newly published *AVON TODAY* magazine being delivered to all Avon residents on a monthly basis.

Thank you for attending the 45th Annual Meeting of the Avon Historical Society.

If you have any questions, please leave a message at 860-678-7621 or e-mail at:

info@avonhistoricalsociety.org