



Preserving History and
Nature at Valley Falls

Website: friendsofvalleyfalls.org

Facebook: The Friends of Valley
Falls, Inc Vernon CT

Spring Walks Start in May; Heritage Center Opens June 14!

Dear Members and Friends,

We officially welcomed Spring at 5:01 am March 20. But you also know winter is over when we start talking about our annual Spring Walks! The first of three is **May 4** when Denise Animani leads us on our popular "*Birds of Valley Falls*" walk. In addition to volunteering as a docent at the Valley Falls Heritage Center, Denise is with UCONN's Department of Allied Health Services and the Diagnostic Genetic Sciences Program. Her walk typically reveals up to 40 bird species that are migrating this time of the year. The walk begins at 7:30 am and often runs for two hours, although participants have the option of a shorter timeframe. Please bring binoculars if you have them, and your bird identification apps.

An hour-long "*Rocks, Rails and Industry*" history walk will be held 9:30 am **May 17**, led by Don Sierakowski. As a long-time educator and a member of Vernon's Historical Properties Commission, Don has plenty of stories about the people who lived in the Valley Falls area. He will also

share his knowledge about the geology of the area, the trains that once traveled the cliffs, and how these elements helped form the industrial development of the area.



Carol Hatch (far left, front) helps the group discover early season wildflowers at the park.

On **May 18**, our "Wildflower Walk" will be held 10:30 am with Dr. Carol Hatch, an experienced gardener who will guide us onto some of her favorite paths to discover and identify hard-to-find spring flowers often found at Valley Falls Park. Last year many of us explored for

nearly two hours and we were lucky to enjoy hundreds of Lady Slippers in the wooded park areas. Attendees are encouraged to bring identification apps.

Hope you can join us at one or all three walks! We've been busy this winter planning for the 2025 season, and in addition to our annual walks, the Heritage Center will open June 14. Following opening day, the museum and grounds will be open every other Sunday, June through October. We've extended the season to take advantage of those beautiful autumn days when the Farm looks its very best.

To see our complete list of events [Click Here](#)

Friends of Valley Falls 2025 Calendar of Events

<p>May 4 Sunday 7:30 am</p>	<p align="center">Spring Bird Walk Join Denise Animani in this popular walk, which often results in identifying over 40 birds in the park during spring migration. Valley Falls Park</p>
<p>May 17 Saturday 9:30 am</p>	<p align="center">History Walk Don Sierakowski leads a "Rocks, Rails & Industry" walk that explores the history and development of industry in the Valley Falls area. Valley Falls Park</p>
<p>May 18 Sunday 10:30 am</p>	<p align="center">Wildflower Walk Carol Hatch will help us find spring wildflowers often overlooked in the park; we often discover Lady Slippers! Valley Falls Park</p>
<p>June 14 Saturday 1-4 pm</p>	<p align="center">Opening Day, Valley Falls Farm & Heritage Center Museum includes an elegant stable, 1911 dairy barn, root cellar and 3 additional historic buildings. Items are original to the 8-acre property; interpretive information panels, tools and household items that tell the story of a Gentleman's farm, its former owners and the Valley Falls area. One-hour guided tour offered at 2 pm. 345 Valley Falls Road, Vernon</p>
<p>June through October</p>	<p align="center">Sundays at the Heritage Center The Heritage Center, grounds, garden and picnic areas open 1-4 pm on these Sundays: June 29, July 13, July 27, Aug. 10, Aug. 24, Sept. 7, Sept. 21, Oct. 5, Oct. 19. Self-guided tours with one-hour docent-led tours offered at 2 pm. 345 Valley Falls Road, Vernon</p>
<p>Sept. 7 Sunday 12-4 pm</p>	<p align="center">Artists Day at the Heritage Center Local artists paint in the "Plein Air" method to capture the farm's scenic views. Finished paintings for sale, as well as other works by the artists. Music by "Handler and Levesque" from 1-3 pm; tour all 6 museum buildings; and enjoy watching artists at work and asking questions. Picnic lunches and sketchpads encouraged. 345 Valley Falls Road, Vernon</p>
<p>Sept. 28 Sunday 1-3 pm</p>	<p align="center">Friends of Valley Falls Annual Meeting All welcome; you do not need to be a member to attend. Brief business meeting followed by nature-themed presentation. Red Barn, 345 Valley Falls Road, Vernon</p>

Nature walks meet at park pavilion. Event cancellations due to weather posted one hour before start time on our Facebook page: The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc.,

Vernon CT. Founded in 1972, the Friends of Valley Falls, Inc. is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving history and nature.

www.friendsofvalleyfalls.org

What Is It?

This question from visitors at the Heritage Center prompted us to initiate a series of articles in our newsletters about the most unusual exhibited items at the museum. Most items are over 100 years old, and all were either found at Valley Falls Farm or were once used at the farm.



The Rat Trap

This unusual item is a rat trap, patented 130 years ago, in 1895. It was found on the first floor of the stable. Basically made of wood and tin, it is designed to capture rats without the use of pesticides. It is a rare, hard-to-find trap. Our reading indicates that the Smithsonian has an example of a model like ours.

Rat traps were needed on farms to reduce rat populations that were continually attracted to feed bins.

This particular rat trap has a complex design that catches and drowns the rat in a metal box filled with water, often evoking a “ewwww” from our visitors when they are told how it works. And now probably from readers, also!

The trap is designed with a door at the entrance of a narrow passage that leads to the top of the tin box. The passage is about the same

width as a rat, for a purpose. Bait is placed inside the front entry, enticing the rat to enter the passage. Once the rat is inside, the trap door shuts. The rat cannot turn around and is forced to continue moving forward in the passage to the top of the metal box, and then into the water. The trap door is triggered to reopen as the rat moves along the passage, so several rats can be caught at one time.

Interestingly, we found a YouTube video about this very rat trap, taken by Shawn Woods. Because no desiccants or pesticides were ingested by the rats, he notes that they can be taken to a wildlife area and left there as food for wildlife that survive on rodents like mice, moles and rats. You can find the video by searching on Shawn Woods "Catching Rats with a 123-year Old Trap."

Looking Forward to Spring!

The following essay was submitted by FVF volunteer and Vernon resident Brian Dinnie.

"March is the worst month of the year!" So declares a close friend. But many other people like March, with the lengthening of the days and the return of bearable daylight. That's true, the light is nice. But what is there beside that? March is gray, the temperature is never comfortable, and there's dismal rain instead of pretty snow.

I do understand their perspective. A few years ago I welcomed March as the start of Spring. The lack of snow and generally warm winter hurried my anticipation along. My friends and I even had a fire hangout on the equinox. But in the end I was disappointed with the month. I saw no buds or flowerings; The closest physical sign of Spring I saw was a tiny single purple sprout of skunk cabbage growing along the Tankerhoosen.

That year I started looking forward to April instead of March; the third

month now appeared to be a false Spring. But after the quick 28 days of February, the 31 days in March really add to the vernal wait time. Maybe March *is* a tougher month than I thought!

As it turned out, the winter of 2024-2025 was the coldest we've had since 2017-2018. And though we didn't have much snow in December, January and February gave us plenty, and we entered March with snow on the ground. However, the last few days of February were warm enough to melt some snow.

On February 27, I met a friend for a hike at Belding. It was raining, and the walking still a bit precarious on the impacted, melting ice of the trail. After hiking, I drove past Valley Falls Farm. The yellowed grass of the property was completely clear of snow cover despite it still lingering in surrounding forests. Behind the red barn, robins were digging in the earth.



Brian Dinnie captures the mist over the pond during a late winter morning at Valley Falls Park

The vista next to the barn had a clear view of Valley Falls Park below. The beach and fields were snowless and the pond remained covered in ice. The morning drizzle created a mist above the frozen water.

Only in March, after a long winter, could a sight like this be seen. A transition of the seasons. The promise of warmth soon to be realized. Yes, March can be a grueling month. But it has its charms.

Help Keep Our Bluebirds Thriving!

Last year the Friends were excited to see 16 Bluebirds hatched and fledged in the 14 boxes at the Farm and Heritage Center. This year, Friend and volunteer extraordinaire, Sheryl McMullen has expanded the project, with 11 more refurbished boxes at Valley Falls Park. This brings the total number of boxes to 25!



Long-time members and FVF volunteers Sheryl McMullen (right) and Jane Seymour confer about bluebird boxes at the farm.

The boxes in the park were brought back to life with the help of Mark Lucas from Parks and Rec who cleared out the thorny Multiflora Rose bushes so the boxes could be accessed, and to Sheryl's husband, Tim, who assisted in the expansion project.

Currently this nature project is completely managed by Sheryl, who is a wildlife rehabilitator.



She is hoping a few additional volunteers can help, and also learn more about these beautiful birds. Box inspections, data gathering, reporting and photography are some of the duties. A walk of the fields to check boxes is done twice a week for about 30-35 minutes (although any time commitment is

welcome). Help is needed March-August. It's a great way to enjoy nature and help increase the area Bluebird population. If interested,

please contact Sheryl at: stmvernon@comcast.net

Judy and Phil Help The Friends Preserve History

We can't thank Judy and Phil Grindal enough for donating several vintage photos of Valley Falls Farm and Heritage Center. The couple lived at the Valley Falls farmhouse in the '80s and have many wonderful memories of living in the circa 1850 home.



While browsing at Savers thrift shop one afternoon, Judy was surprised to find this color photo of the property. A typed label at the bottom has

the date October 1998 and notes it won first prize in a photography contest.



Judy and Phil also donated this aerial photo that was taken when they lived at the farmhouse and held a picnic in the backyard. Vehicles parked for the picnic are definitely classics today!

Phil had the photo hanging in the couple's basement. They even gifted us the receipt for the photo; it was tucked behind the frame! Just some of the history you can see when the Farm and Heritage Center opens for the season.

Photo Finish



The view from the Red Barn at Valley Falls Farm
and Heritage Center shows an icy pond and the promise of Spring.
Warmer weather will soon make for a much greener view!

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The friends of Valley Falls, Inc Vernon CT
