



# AVON LAND TRUST

## Winter 2022 E-Newsletter



Welcome to our Winter E-Newsletter. We hope you and your family enjoy visiting with family and friends, and being cozy during this magical time of year. Winter brings not only cold temperatures, but also magnificent snowy scenery. As you can see in the photo at left, one of the bears in our neighborhood, stopped by for some takeout! The Land Trust invites you to read about our upcoming guest speakers and events below. We welcome volunteers, new memberships, and donations.

### NEWS & EVENTS

Since our previous e-newsletter, several improvements have been made at Oakes Preserve. A new sign was added to the entrance, to make it clearer how to proceed to the parking lot and gazebo. A new trailhead sign was added, to better mark the trail entrance point. Trailmaster Scott Lewis improved the footing on our side-hill trail overlooking the pond, and added a number of new trail markers as well. The performance of our wildlife webcam is much more stable now, and plans are being made to provide you with even more close-up footage of our abundant wildlife at Oakes.

The Avon Land Trust wrote a letter of inquiry to the 1772 Foundation, and hopes to be invited to apply for a grant for our circa 1820 barn that we received from the estate of Marge Dubiel earlier this year. We will also be applying to have the 200-year-old barn added to the State Registry of Historic Places. Fingers crossed! In early December, volunteer Ed Roy led a small work crew, which winterized the open bays of the barn against the winter elements. The old pastures were restored, and a bluebird nest box trail has been mapped out for implementation before their return in spring.

The Avon Land Trust is holding another fundraiser event with Puerta Vallarta restaurant on **Thursday, January 5**. Please mark your calendars, and come out for great food, great drinks, great value, and a great cause! Tell your server you are there to support the Avon Land Trust. Our previous fundraiser in September was a huge success, and helped us raise money for wildflower seed for our new pollinator gardens to be established at Old Wheeler Lane and Huckleberry Hill Road, plus an electric chainsaw to help keep our vast network of trails clear, plus provide some benches for hikers to sit and take in the views.

## HISTORY BENEATH OUR FEET –



### A Walk Along Farmington Canal Heritage Trail

By Janet M. Conner, Historian Laureate

In mid-November, a friend and I walked the segment of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail between Brickyard Road and Thompson Road. The weather was clear and rather cold, so we had to keep up a good pace to keep warm. I should say my friend kept up a good pace, and I had to take a few breaks! But those breaks were not in vain as I got to stop for some lovely photographs, and to visually survey the terrain and enjoy the surroundings. This trail follows the path of the old Farmington Canal, ca. 1822-1848, that was subsequently the railway bed for the New Haven and Northampton Railroad Co. You can read more about the history of the canal and railroad and the transition from 'rails to trails' at <https://fchtrail.org/history/>.

According to the website, the old railroad bed was sold to private developers who petitioned for the right-of-way to be converted into a recreational trail. In turn the formation of The Farmington Canal Rail-To-Trail Association was created. The section 'Farmington Valley Greenway' was paved in 1994 between Simsbury and Farmington, which includes the Avon sections. Converting the old railbed into a walking trail not only provides walking and biking opportunity for residents; it also preserves land and habitat located adjacent to the pathway. Along this particular segment, Thompson Brook runs thru the woodlands. Woodlands provide important habitat for mammals, birds, insects and fungi. There is also marshland that provides habitat plants and wildlife. The Avon Land Trust functions in a similar fashion as the FCRTTA, with volunteers working together to acquire land for public enjoyment while safeguarding woodlands and wetlands and their inherent ecosystems. Our efforts, along with the Town of Avon, help insure a balance between development and preservation of open space for future residents.

During our walk I was nostalgic thinking about how I was walking in the very spot that canal boats were pulled along the towpath of the canal. As a Historian who has researched the history of the canal, it was a very gratifying experience. I felt sad in a way that the quaint canal had been replaced. Then I pondered that the railroad was also historic. I thought about all of the immigrants that came to this Town in the early days. They came to work at the mills and factories including the Climax Fuse Company in the late 1800s. Immigrants came from Germany, Poland, Italy, and other countries to our Town's train depot, and remained here to raise families and to contribute to our Town's heritage.

## IF THE WOODS COULD TALK –



Photography: Michael Go

### Oakes Preserve - Setting for ALT's First 'History Talk & Walk'

By Janet M. Conner, Historian Laureate

On a crystalline, blue-skied day in mid-October, the inaugural 'Avon Land Trust History Talk & Walk' was held at Oakes Preserve. The weather was perfect and the nature preserve did not disappoint in showing off her magnificent Fall foliage. About twenty-two were present for a history talk, followed by a hike around the parcel's Lake Erie. The preserve is located at 65 Chidsey Road and is 17.25 acres.

Historian Laureate, Janet M. Conner, gave a talk about the history of land ownership of this property and physical features. In researching this land, early ownership could be traced back to the early 1700s with Thomas Thomson being one of several Farmington men each owning a sliver of the aggregate, however, not residing on the parcel. This land was owned by members of the Thomson/Thompson family up until about 1869. It is believed that prior to actual ownership, Jephtha Curtis Chidsey perhaps leased this land from Asahel Thomson, for crop land. Upon Asahel's death, the land was sold to Jephtha. Jephtha lived another five years in the former. Hence the naming of Chidsey Road!

We were honored to have our Town Historian, Nora Oakes Howard, as a guest speaker. Nora's family, as evidenced by her middle name, had a part in the Land Trust's acquisition of this parcel in 2011. Another one of the physical features of the Oakes Preserve is the remains of a Colonial-era roadbed. Originally this path led thru the parcel down to the Lord's Barn, Avon's first church, that burned down 'mysteriously' in 1751. Nora Howard wrote a book on this subject and graciously offered copies of her book at our event, with proceeds immediately going to the Avon Land Trust! Thank you, Nora. In addition, our esteemed colleagues and co-presidents, Rick Dubiel and Bob Breckenridge each spoke at the event. Rick spoke about the trail, its maintenance, and wildlife on the property and Bob spoke about the Land Trust and the addition of Oakes Preserve to our portfolio of properties.

The Avon Land Trust invites you and your family will visit Oakes Preserve. There is a gazebo for viewing the pretty lake, and a picnic table for lunch. Bring your camera as Oakes wears a different wardrobe in each season. We are planning more History Talks & Walks for 2023! We hope you will join us.

## AVON NATURAL RESOURCES

### Stub Pond-A Once Ecologically Threatened Waterway Now Supports Wildlife

By Janet M. Conner, Historian Laureate



CTDA/Hadsell Collection, Avon Free Public

The original dam was built on Stub Pond ca. 1900 (see photo left). This photo was taken by early town resident, Clinton B. Hadsell, showing the building of the dam. In early farming days, the frozen pond's ice was cut into blocks to keep food cold. The pond was also used for recreational purposes. Some of our older citizens recall ice skating on the pond in the 1940s. This pond became ecologically and environmentally threatened in the 1980s. Residents of a nearby development began to notice a foul odor emanating from the pond water. The Corps. of Engineers conducted a visual inspection of the dam on Stub Pond in 1980 as part of a survey of non-Federal dams. This resulted in a 94-page report<sup>1</sup> that included an analysis of the dam structure, along with recommendations for repairs. The report noted: "Failure of the dam

could result in the possible loss of a few lives and appreciable economic damage to seven buildings along the downstream channel".<sup>2</sup> The inspectors noted cracks in the concrete and seepage was observed.

A report by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection identified possible sources of contaminated storm water runoff which contributed to the detriment of delicate pond ecosystems, and ultimately to the health of the waterway. "These waterbodies are negatively affected as increased pollutants from nutrients and bacteria from failing and insufficient septic systems, oil and grease from automobiles, and sediment from construction activities become entrained in this runoff."<sup>3</sup> The report makes suggestions for ways in which to mitigate these problems including public awareness, and buffers<sup>4</sup> to keep toxins from entering the Nod Brook stream waterway that includes the pond, marsh, and wetlands. (See also: <http://clear.uconn.edu>)

Since the 1980s thanks to the work of the Corps. Of Engineers, environmentalists with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, the Town of Avon and its' concerned citizens, the health of Stub Pond has been turned around! Waterfowl has returned to the pond. There are a pair of geese and a swan to liven things up and I've also seen a few turtles", reported on a local fishing website in 2013.<sup>5</sup> There are also angler reports of catches of largemouth bass in 2022 per FishBrain!<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> National Program for Inspection of Non-Federal Dams, Stub Pond Dam (CT 00265), Connecticut River Basin, Avon, Connecticut, Phase 1, April 1981, Corps. Of Engineers, Waltham, Massachusetts, New England Division, Unclassified. Accessed [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org) on November 20, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, page n6

<sup>3</sup> Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection, Nod Brook Watershed Summary, <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/water/tmdl/CTFinalTMDL/nodbrook4317>, page 4. Accessed 12/12/2022

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., page 17

<sup>5</sup> CTFishTalk, <http://www.ctfishtalk.com/stub-pond-04-30-t11945.html#.Y3ztP0nMJPY>

<sup>6</sup> FishBrain, <https://fishbrain.com/fishing-reports?fishing-water=vXFKZcgl&species-ids=>



The revitalization of Stub Pond, part of the Nod Brook basin, is a remarkable testament to the power of collaborative action on the part of organizations and private individuals coming together for a common cause...preserving one of Avon's natural resources and the loveliness of our Town. The Avon Land Trust is a partner with the Town and residents in this cause.

## AVON FLORA AND FAUNA –

### Putting The 'Flower House' Garden to Bed for the Winter

By Chrissie Desopo, edited by Janet M. Conner



Photo: The Desopos

The Desopos know a thing or two about flora and fauna! It would be hard to find a local, that doesn't know of their infamous 'flower house' on West Avon Road. It followed naturally for me to ask Chrissie Desopo for a tutorial on how they winterize their extensive garden landscape. Chrissie graciously obliged and what follows are her own words, with some minor editing on my part.

"We cut all our ornamental grasses and hostas down to the ground level and clear any leaf matter completely away. The mice and voles will huddle under debris and snow and eat all the roots and the plant will not survive. We have quite a few deer that come off the hill for a wintertime meal. Some of our trees are tastier than others to the deer, and those we must cover with deer netting. It is a two person job

to drape it over the tree properly. Once its on, you can't see it at all and for someone as fussy as me about yard details-that's a great thing!"

"Many of our shrubs get weighed down by snow and ice load and the branches will splay. We tie paracord in the internal structure of the plant to pull it together and hold it in place. We leave this cord inside permanently so once, and done. The deer enjoy rubbing their antlers on some of our deciduous trees. The velvety coating begins to shed and the deer rub their antlers on the lower branches, breaking many in the process. This process is called a 'buck rub'. It coincides with mating season which can begin in September and last through December. The damage [is] very bad for the trees and we dread it when it happens. As a deterrent, we hammer tall rebar around the susceptible trees." (Also Chrissie noted to me [Janet] that they buy a special liquid for their plants to deter deer from eating the foliage. She would be happy to supply you with the name and place to purchase.)

"We have topiaries [that] I have made into seven different, 12 foot wide, octopi. They have many arms which need to be braced on a permanent basis. This keeps the snow load from snapping an arm right off! WE all know that octopus' can grown their arms [tentacles] back, but who wants to wait?! We use rebar as our brace." We are fastidious about leaf clean up. We rake all the leaves and any cut perennials and bring them up to the top of our back hill to our colossal, mountain-size compost pile! We flip the compost to mix well for next year's use. We bring all our pumpkins to the upper area, also, and the deer and squirrels love to gobble them up!"

"We clear all the clay pots off the sidewalk. We wash and [bleach] our smaller pots but the larger pots and urns are left filled with the older 'grow-mix'. We simply replant in the old mix in the Spring. It works out great and saves on buying 20 bales of grow mix [again]. We only need 12 [bales] for the empty pots and all the hanging baskets we grow at the Nursery, 250!"

"I am a huge cat lover and have rescued over 100 cats/kittens over the 38 years we have lived here. We get them spayed and neutered and place all the kittens in forever loving homes. Well, there were a few we just couldn't get our hands on! They are our feral gang and live under our house and in our barn. So a very important winter task is to check their bedding for the winter. We have 4 of the thickest, down sleeping bags with a funnel on the opening for access under our house. They love sleeping inside and stay toasty warm! Up in the barn, we have built a large cat condo, lined with down walls and polar fleece. It can be 10 degrees below 0 degrees and the cat gang is cozy and content. We have electrically heated bowls for food and water. We also love our birds! We have 10 barn swallow nests in the barn. We clean out the nests, make sure there are no mites, and get it all ready for their return in the Spring. All the nests [in] our bird houses [around] the landscape are also cleaned. Basically, we keep it neat and tidy to prevent rodent damage, deer grazing, and insect infestation. The more trees you have, the more diligent you need to be. We have a love affair going with our trees and don't want to let them down!"



## THE AVON LAND TRUST HISTORY AND MISSION STATEMENT

The Avon Land Trust was founded on May 23, 1973 in order to conserve and hold in trust the natural resources of the Town of Avon – woodlands, fields, lakes, rivers, open spaces and the plant and animal life living therein.

By doing so we hope to retain the natural charm of our town. Future generations may not remember our names, but they will certainly be glad we were here.

**Mission:** - To preserve and protect undeveloped land in Avon- By doing so, to enhance our town's scenic beauty and its environmental and historic resources. - To promote the conservation and management of woodlands and open space. - To acquire through donations and purchases additional land which can be preserved in its natural state. - To maintain wildlife habitats on said properties. - To provide public access to appropriate properties and in so doing provide public enjoyment of nature. - To actively seek wetlands, woodlands meadowlands and ridgeland which have unique scenic, historic, scientific and ecological significance for Avon.