



**For Immediate Release**

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## **Avon Historical Society announces fire mitigation on Derrin Farm House to begin**

The Avon Historical Society Board of Trustees has chosen American Integrity Restoration LLC (AIR) of Glastonbury, CT as the company to handle the demolition, mitigation and repair the Derrin Farm House and restoration of some of the artifacts. Work is expected to begin Monday, August 15<sup>th</sup> and last up to three months.

On May 11, the 18<sup>th</sup> c. Derrin Farm House at 249 West Avon Road, Avon, suffered damage from an accidental fire that started in one of the oldest rooms of the building. The Avon Volunteer Fire Department, with mutual aid from Canton, Farmington and Simsbury, was able to contain the fire and save the structure. The fire started from spontaneous combustion from oil soaked rags left over from a staining project inside the prior day. The building has been determined to be structurally sound and restorable.

The Trustees of the Society have spent the last 10 weeks working with experts on the necessary steps toward restoration which included an environmental review to ascertain any asbestos and lead, a full inventory and documentation of the damage, including the artifacts inside and interviewing restoration companies and carpenters to determine what needs to be done to restore the building to pre-loss condition. Three rooms were destroyed and will be gutted while others will be cleaned of the soot and smoke damage. According to AIR, this process requires the use of dry ice to remove debris and ozone treatments for odor removal. Artifacts that can be restored will be cleaned and repaired, if needed, off site at a climate controlled facility and returned once the house has been cleaned.

The Society's insurance will pay for much of the work to be done, but new electrical wiring is needed and possibly water and duct work added to the building for future use. In addition some new carpentry work will be needed in several rooms. The Avon Historical Society has been restoring the

Derrin Farm House since leasing it from the State Department of the Military in 1996. Previous to that it was used by the First Co. Governor's Horse Guards, located across the street, as the caretaker's house since 1954, but later as storage for old tack and gear. The Society has been restoring the house for public viewing for twenty years and was going to commemorate the Derrin family acquiring of the property in 1766 (250 years ago) on June 12, just weeks before the fire. A new Welcome Center was being installed in the room where the fire originated. It is hoped that after this second restoration, the Welcome Center and house will be re-opened to the public and the commemoration event can be held at a later date.

Since signing the lease for the building in 1996 work has included the installation of a new cedar roof in 1998 with a matching grant from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation and the Robert August family. An electrical upgrade from a donation by the Rotary Club of Avon-Canton was completed. A new furnace was installed in 2004. Thanks to a grant from CT Humanities new windows and a poured concrete cellar was done in 2005. Thanks to numerous donations of materials, supplies and labor over the past 20 years, the house was almost ready for a full opening this year. A soft opening was held in 2009 with over 125 people attending. Since then, it has been open on Sunday afternoons in the summer months for visitors to view the ongoing work. In 2011 the c. 1880 Horse Guards Barn diagonally across West Avon Road was included in the Derrin House lease for the Society to restore it also. In 2014 the Derrin Farm House and Horse Guards Barn were placed on the State Register of Historic Places.

Just this past November 2015 over 600 artifacts found during an archeological dig by then state archeologist, Nick Bellantoni, with help from students at Avon High School in 2000 which were returned to the Society for display in the Derrin Farm House. Fortunately those artifacts were not in the house when the fire occurred. Nor was the most recent acquisition of two letters from Derrin family members from 1855. Those letters are stored off site.

As the stewards of local history, the Avon Historical Society has been focusing on the adaptive reuse of the Derrin Farm House and the Horse Guard Barn for many years. It is only through the very generous donations of time and labor from volunteers organized by long time Society member, Len Tolisano, for the past twenty years that the Society is able to now work again on restoring what was with new life and excitement. This historically accurate "Rookwood Red" colored farm house is

destined to return and be an even better example of a farm house in West Avon during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In thanking all those who have been helping along the way, Terri Wilson, President of the Avon Historical Society stated, “the overwhelming support from many in the community has been wonderful especially COSTEP-CT, the coordinated statewide emergency preparedness team specializing in responding to disasters at historical societies, museums and cultural heritage organizations. The many members of COSTEP-CT have been providing us with assistance, guidance, support, and coordination every step of the way; we would not have been able to make it this far without them.” COSTEP-CT, organized with a grant from FEMA, are specialists from the CT State Library and Archives, Yale and UCONN conservation offices, CT League of Historic Organizations, CT Historical Society, CT Trust for Historic Preservation, CT Department of Economic and Community Development and volunteers with specialization in disaster relief. They most recently responded to a flood at the Shelton Historical Society in October 2015.

Anyone wishing to make a donation toward the extra expenses not covered by insurance, the Society has a social media fundraising site at: [www.gofundme.com/derrin](http://www.gofundme.com/derrin) Or donations can also be sent to: Avon Historical Society, P.O. Box 488, Avon, CT 06001. All donations are tax deductible.

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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)***

From Steve Weir CEO of American Integrity Restoration:

American Integrity Restoration LLC (AIR,) is delighted to have been chosen by the Avon Historical Society for the restoration of The Derrin House, a landmark historical property in the heart of Avon. AIR worked with the Derrin House Board of Directors over the past two (2) months conducting a comprehensive review of this project. The timeline for completion is approximately 10 weeks. The project includes, artifacts removal, cleaning & restoration, selective demolition, interior preparation for repairs, roof, exterior framing and window repair. The final phase will involve removal of charred building materials utilizing dry ice media blasting, then fine cleaning and deodorization. This project utilizes AIR’s expertise in complicated projects involving many different specialized techniques to restore structures and the contents within to pre-loss condition or better. Work will begin on August 15<sup>th</sup> with an estimated completion date of 11/4/16.

AIR services clients in southern New England to allow building owners and occupants to return to normalcy after a disaster strikes. Please visit [www.callair.com](http://www.callair.com) for more information.