

AVON LAND TRUST

Spring 2023 E-Newsletter



Happy Springtime! We welcome you to this edition of our E-newsletter and hope you enjoy it. While this winter wasn't as hard as others, it is always so joyful when the first signs of the season arrive. Bulbs are pushing up through the soil, buds are on the trees, wildlife is awakening or returning from migration, and there is a feeling of renewal and a sense of inner peace. We hope to see you at our upcoming events this year, and we welcome volunteers!

ALT NEWS

- Board member recently Scott Lewis made significant improvements to the side-hill trail at our Oakes Preserve!
- In March, ALT participated again in the 'Tablescapes' event, sponsored by the Avon Historical Society. This year, our Historian Janet M. Conner designed a table to commemorate the land trust's 50th anniversary by paying homage to Ostrom Enders, a founding board member of the Avon Land Trust, as well as a CT business magnate, and an avid outdoorsman.
- The Avon Land Trust is very grateful for the financial support it has recently received. Connecticut Water Company awarded us a grant for \$500. American Eagle Financial Credit Union gave us a grant of \$250 for chainsaw safety equipment. Our Puerto Vallarta Restaurant fundraiser in February was very successful too – thank you to all who supported us! Another Puerto Vallarta fundraiser will be held on 4/20/23.
- The ALT co-presidents erected a total of 6 blue bird and tree swallow nest boxes in Marge's Meadow on Huckleberry Hill recently. A barred owl box and bat house have been purchased for this parcel. Tree swallows are migrating north and have been seen in southern CT returning from their migration. With volunteer help from Victoria Discenso and owner Dr Diedre Galbo, 4 bluebird/tree swallow nest boxes were erected at Kindness Matters Farm Sanctuary -- our good neighbor across the street from our Enders Reserve on Bishop Lane. 3 of the nest boxes became occupied by bluebirds within one week!

UPCOMING ALT EVENTS

April 1st, at 10:00 a.m. The Avon Land Trust will be leading an Avon Parks and Rec hike at Huckleberry Hill Recreation Area. Assemble at the Countryside Park parking lot located at 335 Huckleberry Hill Road. The hike is free, but registration with Avon Parks and Rec is encouraged. Learn a little about the history and natural history of Huckleberry Hill while being immersed in nature!

April 11th, at 11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. Horizon Wings, a raptor rehabilitation facility located in Ashford, Connecticut will present '**Birds of Prey**'. Learn about raptors, owls, and meet birds of prey-you will even get to see a bald eagle! Register online at Avon Free Public Library, co-sponsor of this event. All ages welcome, but this program is best for ages 5 and up.

April 22th – EARTH DAY! Several cleanup events are being planned, in partnership with the Lions Club. Details to follow!

May 15th at 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. '**Enders Reserve' Talk & Walk.** Please join us at 125 Cider Brook Road for a talk by our Historian Janet M. Conner. Mrs. Conner will speak about one of our founding trustees, Mr. Ostrom Enders, who donated this 2.65 acres of land to ALT. He was a Cider Brook resident, gentleman farmer, retired banker, outdoorsman, and breeder of rare waterfowl. We will then take a walk northerly on Cider Brook Road, to the oldest house in Avon. On the walk back, we will see the site where Ostrom's house was, then head down Bishop Lane to see the still extant Samuel Bishop house, the site of Avon's first library. As a special treat, we will visit Kindness Matters Animal Sanctuary that rescues farm animals and meet its owner. Refreshments will be served.

Other events in the works are presentations on **Beekeeping**, a **Lichen Walk**, and **Invasive Jumping Worms**.

IF THE WOODS COULD TALK

THE LITTLE RED BARN THAT COULD
By Janet M. Conner, Historian Laureate



Photo credit: Liz Neff, Connecticut Barns

You have most likely driven by it many times over the years, and never noticed it. That is because it has been there so long, it has become an integral part of the landscape. Also because it is an unassuming, small red barn. This ca. 1820 New England bank-style barn, along with 8.5 acres of land, was lovingly donated to the Avon Land Trust by the late Marge Dubiel. Mrs. Dubiel enjoyed wildlife and appreciated Avon's land and history. It is

through her generous gift that the Trust is able to preserve this property in perpetuity. This property has woodlands and open grasslands, a portion of which have been named 'Marge's Meadows' in honor of Mrs. Dubiel. We made some wildflower/pollinator plantings near the road, and erected 6 bluebird/tree swallow nest boxes. We plan to install a barred owl nest box, and a bat house in the near future. Let us step back in time to explore some of this property's early history.

The earliest homeowner of the adjoining Colonial-era home at 155 Huckleberry Hill Road, was Sarah Woodford in 1830. The Woodfords were early settlers on what was then called Whortleberry Hill. By the 1850s, Orson Woodford and his wife Cornelia were the owners. They had two children. Mr. Woodford died as the result of a gruesome sawing accident. A *Hartford Daily Courant* newspaper article dated April 28th, 1855 reported that Mr. Woodford was using a horse-powered circular saw that broke free of its housing, nearly severing his arm, and he died shortly thereafter. The article noted that Mr. Woodford told his wife that he had dreams about having a saw mishap on the three

successive nights leading up to his fatal accident. It is regretful that the timber from Orson's woodlands that were part of his livelihood, unfortunately caused his demise. It appears he died without a will at the age of only 40, and his estate inventory listed 85 acres that were sold to Jared Butler for almost \$700. His personal estate was sold at auction to pay off debts.

By 1869 Frederick Konold, who immigrated from Prussia/Germany, was the owner. This was just at the beginning influx of Eastern Europeans into Avon to work at the mills and early factories. Immigrants came to work at the Climax Fuse Company in Avon in the 1880s and the Collins Company, makers of sharp-edged tools, was a major employer in Collinsville. Many workers lived on Huckleberry Hill in the late 19th century. Mr. Konold, Sr. worked at the Collins Company. His son, also named Frederick, was a feed, grain, coal, and ice dealer in Canton. The Archambeault/Archambeaus family from Canada, were the next owners into the early 1900s. James

Colonial fireplace during Marge Dubiel's ownership. Note birds on mantle and wildlife below. There is even a cow on the chair, perhaps a nod to the barn's days as a dairy barn. Photo credit: Rebecca Goldberg



Archambeault also worked at Collins Co.

If the woods could talk, the descendants of those ancient trees of almost one hundred and seventy years ago, would tell us about the barn when it was used for dairy cows and later for storage. They would tell us of the transition from the old farming days with crude implements to the preindustrial era and mechanization. And they would tell us of all the generations of people who lived in the house and utilized the barn for so many years. It is a true relic of yesteryear, and the Land Trust is pleased to be the caretakers of it, and its land, for generations to come.

HISTORY BENEATH OUR FEET



THE LEGACY OF COTTAGE FARM By Janet M. Conner, Historian Laureate

Edgar Maurice Woodford was "a great strapping man" [1] according to a nephew. He was the Hartford County Surveyor known to come "over the hills with his [surveying] instruments over his shoulder..." creating an impressive sight. Mr. Woodford would create many maps during his short life, including an 1855 map of Hartford County. His other maps can be viewed online at the Library of Congress website. Beyond his surveying and cartography skills, he was a self-taught civil engineer, a Justice of the Peace for Avon, served as a Juror, was a staunch abolitionist, and a Civil War soldier. But there is one more title to add to his credentials, that of gentleman farmer. Mr. Woodford owned the house, still standing as of this writing, at 645 West Avon Road and named his farm, Cottage Farm.

Photograph owned by John

Ayrshire Stock for Sale.

ONE Cow eight years old, imported by the late Richard S. Griswold, Esq.

Also, one Bull, "Governor," two years old, from Mr. Griswold's celebrated imported cow, "Lady Rose."

Specimens of stock from the above named animals, may be seen at the residence of the subscriber.

E. M. WOODFORD.

Cottage Farm, West Avon, Ct., April 1, 1850—It.*

Mr. Woodford was a farmer who also raised Ayrshire cows according to an 1850 newspaper advertisement. He also wrote a letter to the '*The Cultivator*' publication inquiring the best sun advantage for his grapes he grew on his fence. Mr. Woodford's house, according to the Connecticut Historical Commission's 1997 Architectural Survey, is dated to ca. 1830, the year of Avon's



Connecticut Digital Archive

incorporation. The survey noted the house was Greek Revival style, with a brownstone foundation, gable roof, post and beam construction. In 1860 his property included twenty-five acres with outbuildings, valued at \$5,000 in his estate. He owned an additional thirty acres in West Avon. A rather unique detail of the house is the second story, half windows. The front porch has large white-painted support pillars and there is a wishing well on the south lawn. Edgar even owned property in Kansas so that he could vote against it becoming a slavery state.

Edgar did more than wish, he took action. He enlisted in the summer of 1862 as a private with the 7th Connecticut Regiment. He would die at age 38, as a result of hoisting men out of the water onto a ship, when his heart ruptured from the exertion. According to a friend [General Joseph R. Hawley], who was with him, his last words were, "I have no fear for myself, but oh! my dear wife and children." [3]

Cottage Farm no longer exists except for an acre and a half or so of open field behind the house. The balance of the land would eventually become the Sycamore Hills Recreation Center in Avon. As I walk on the grounds near this former farm, I like to think of Mr. Woodford. I think about how benevolent he was in his service to the community, and to the county, as a civil servant and to the country fighting for his beliefs. And, I also muse about what his farm may have looked like nearly two hundred years ago. Edgar's altruistic life, is the legacy of Cottage Farm...

[Editor's note: The Town of Avon is considering buying the property and demolishing this historic house. Edgar Woodford was Avon's equivalent of George Washington. Both were big men, surveyors, gentleman farmers, and soldiers defending freedom. A Public Hearing on this is scheduled for Thursday, 3/30/23 at 7 PM in the Town Council Chambers at the Town Hall.]

1. Finlay, Nancy, October 21, 2022, Avon, Civil War and Reconstruction 1850-1877, Environment, Slavery and Abolition, "A Noble and Precious Life": Edgar M. Woodford, Civil Engineer, Abolitionist, and Soldier, ConnecticutHistory.org
2. Ibid
3. "The Grave of Edgar M. Woodford: Was Marked by General J.R. Hawley" in *Hartford Courant*, June 11, 1913, p. 11

AVON NATURAL RESOURCES

Symbiosis – The Connectivity of the Land to Natural Fiber

By Janet M. Conner, Historian Laureate



Photo: Clatter Ridge Farm.
Used with permission

Viewing Avon today with its modern houses, stores, and busy roads, it is hard to envision earlier, simpler times in Avon history. Since Avon residents today don't live off the land, but *on* the land, our early historical roots are unseen. Being this is Spring, it seemed like an opportune time to write about sheep, which are so fitting for this season.

The 1850s, sheep were the heyday of our agricultural forebearers. Many folks today would be surprised to learn of the number of sheep that once grazed land that today shows no vestiges of this. For instance, on Lovely Street, there still stands a house that once belonged to the Tillotson family. Their farm supported a herd of 150 sheep noted in the 1854 estate inventory of Shubael Tillotson! The farm acreage totaled about 85 acres plus additional holdings. According to the website Sheep101.info: "Managed or prescribed sheep grazing is good for the environment. A grass-covered sod is the best protection against soil erosion and runoff. The vegetation and soils from grazing lands are a large reservoir for organic carbon. Properly managed grazing lands help reduce atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide and may reduce greenhouse gas accumulation. Private grazing lands provide habitat for two-thirds of our wildlife, water for urban and other users, and visually-appealing open space." The sheep also needed water, another natural resource, and there are two ponds fed by Roaring Brook, located near this Lovelytown farm. The sheep in turn, supplied wool. This natural fiber was an absolute necessity for surviving the cold New England winters.

There were also farms with sheep on Huckleberry Hill. One farm, belonging to Martin Hawley, had 17 sheep and produced 50 pounds of wool! That is astonishing. At the Stanley Whitman House Museum in Farmington, a floor loom from a historic home on Huckleberry Hill, is on display. Our lives are so busy today, it is hard to imagine that long ago, people spent many long hours spinning wool and weaving cloth, instead of watching TV. Today we just purchase these goods, without a thought about how these necessities of life were bought with hard labor.

The Avon Land Trust preserves valuable land that, while no longer used for farmland and livestock, preserves the symbiotic relationship between ecosystems and the land. We steward over three hundred acres as open space that will never be developed. This acreage includes woodlands, wetlands, and meadowlands that support a wide variety of plant, tree, and animal species. The work done by our all-volunteer group of individuals is made possible by the generous support of both individuals and grant funding. The organization's motto is: They may not remember our names, but they will be glad we were here. Please support Avon Land Trust in its 50th year in protecting and preserving Avon's natural beauty. We welcome monetary donations, bequests, and donations of time. Thank you kindly!

AVON FLORA AND FAUNA



The Blue Heron of Oakes Preserve By Janet M. Conner

According to the Connecticut Audubon Society's website, Great Blue Heron can be found in all 169 towns in Connecticut. That surprised me, as when I have seen them, they are always alone on a pond or in a wetland. However, thanks to our unique land trust webcam, we have seen two heron co-existing together at the land trust's beautiful Oakes Preserve [photo left], located at 65 Chidsey Road. I read that herons are wading birds that can also float like a duck, and they eat mostly fish but also frogs, snakes, insects and even small mammals. These birds are a blueish gray in color with a blue stripe running from above its yellow eyes to the back of its head. "Individual birds can be up to 63 inches tall and weigh up to 5 ½ pounds," according to the Audubon website article, authored by Mike Aurelia.

The Audubon Society website lists the Blue Heron's conservation status: "According to Cornell's "The Birds of North America," Great Blue Herons were probably impacted by hunting for feathers, eggs and meat in the late 19th century. Subsequently, the loss of habitat and the impact from several industrial chemical contaminants like mercury and PCBs certainly reduced their numbers in the 1950's through 1970's. Since the 1970's, however, it appears that Connecticut's population of Great Blues has been stable or increasing slightly."

The Avon Land Trust owns Oakes Preserve, which is 17 acres in size, and includes a pond that is historically named Lake Erie. This pond, and its adjacent buttonbush wetlands, is a natural environment perfect for blue herons and their food sources. It is an ideal habitat for waterfowl, birds, amphibians, woodland animals, and vegetation that will be protected by the Land Trust perpetually. I have seen great blue heron multiple times, but he or she gracefully will fly off if you ever try to approach the edge of the pond. I read that herons nest where there is "appropriate habitat and food" so perhaps someday we will see baby herons! Wouldn't that be a glorious sight to behold!

[You can watch the live feed by our trail cameras at Oakes Preserve on YouTube under Avon Land Trust, Connecticut](#)



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 our properties. - To provide public access to appropriate properties for the public enjoyment of nature. - To actively seek wetlands, woodlands meadowlands and ridgeland which have unique scenic, historic, scientific and ecological significance for Avon.