



The Avon Land Trust

QUARTERLY E-NEWSLETTER

Summer 2021



Summertime, summertime...the most favorite season for any school student. Remember when we were school kids counting down the days till the start of our 'endless' summer? Those summer days were filled with swimming at a pool or park, fishing, riding bikes, roller skating, catching fireflies in a jar, being barefoot, eating drippy popsicles, and trips to the seashore. Avon Land Trust invites you to enjoy the beauty of our Town and perhaps visit one of our trails or our Oakes Preserve land parcel for a picnic lunch. See our website for information: www.avonlandtrust.org And, see our upcoming events on last page. Happy Summer!

Historic photo at left is Countryside Park, Huckleberry Hill Road, courtesy Connecticut Digital Archive/Avon Free Public Library

Avon Flora and Fauna ~

If A Tree Falls In The Town...

By Janet M. Conner, Historian Laureate



Photo: Janet M. Conner, ALT

Okay, I admit it...I am a tree hugger. I have literally done that; it's not for everyone. But I have always loved trees and now as a Historian, I am particularly partial to historic and majestic trees in our Town.

The tree in center of photo at left, is a white oak and towers over 75 feet tall. This does not have any known historic significance, however, it is impressive for its sheer size and spread. There is a small park bench underneath it for contemplation. This tree in East Avon, has to be over a century old, based on the size of its circumference. Some historic trees are called "Witness Trees" because they were there when historical events took place. (See: National Park Service Witness Tree Protection Program)



Photo credit: Janet M. Conner, ALT

There are other impressive trees in town that are valuable aesthetically and/or in a historical context listed on the 'Connecticut Notable Trees' website for Avon. See: http://oak.conncoll.edu:8080/notabletrees/Process_SelectTown.jsp For instance, there *were* two large maple trees in front of the historic Avon Congregational Church, until recently. See photo at left. A Church member told me the tree at left in photo, had to be taken down as it was health compromised. Those two trees made a lovely 'frame' for the Church. I decided to look into the history of trees on this property. I found that in 1938, when a hurricane blew through Avon, another tree was broken and had to be replaced. See historic photo below left, with two ladies posing in front of the fallen tree. In 1939, it appears that a new tree was relocated outside of the Church.



Photo credit: AFPL/CTDA

If this was the last tree planted in that location, that would have made it 82 years in that spot and if we assume it was at least 20 years old when planted, we have unfortunately lost a century old tree. If a tree falls in the town...will we remember its former glory of the spectacular colors in Fall? Will old-timers remember Church picnics under that old tree? You see, a tree is not solely a plant. A tree occupies a physical place and has its own lifespan timeline. If the tree happened to mark a historic



Photo Credit: AFPL/CTDA

occasion, then *that* becomes part of the tree's heritage. Other trees may have personal

significance by bringing back memories of our childhood of climbing certain ones, or swinging from a rope swing. In a way, a tree can be a part of our own lifespan timelines, metaphorically. I guess that's the tree hugger in me speaking!

The Avon Land Trust has stewardship 35 land parcels comprising 297.5 acres of property, mostly woodlands. This is an investment in retention of our Town's natural beauty and habitats for future generations.

"There is something about gnarly, old trees that captures the imagination. Just knowing that the living, breathing, life form in front of you has stood witness to decades and centuries of history stirs the mind." – National Park Service <https://www.nps.gov/articles/silent-witnesses-old-growth-trees.htm>

Avon Natural Resources~

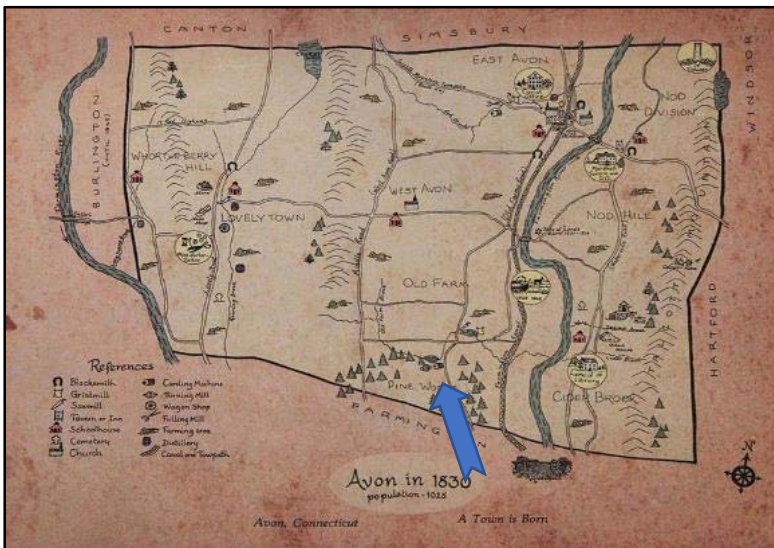
A Wood Turning Shop in Avon's Former 'Sleepy Hollow'

By Janet M. Conner, Historian Laureate



A small wagon wheel hub in the collection of the Avon Historical Society most likely manufactured by the Turning Shop in Sleepy Hollow. Photo credit: Avon Historical Society

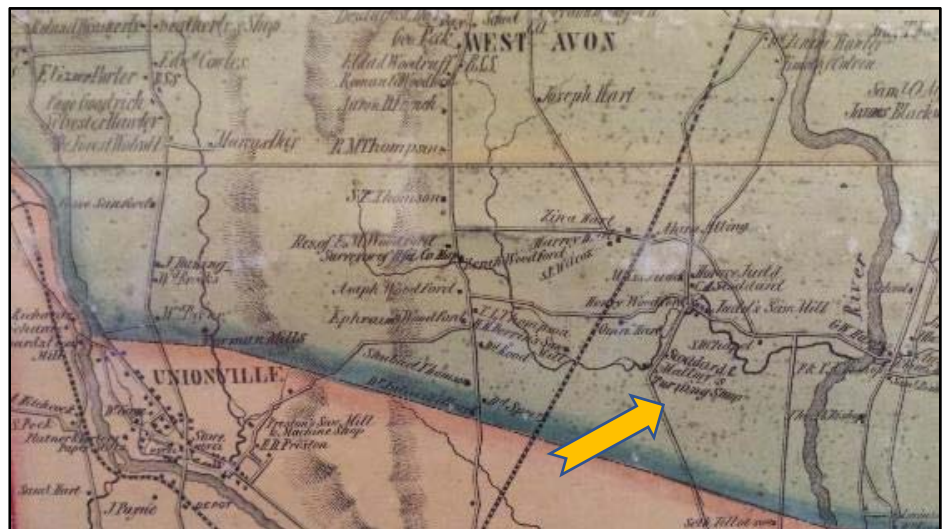
'Sleepy Hollow' was a small community that existed from the 1820s to the early 1900s. It was generally located where Avon Old Farms School is today. Its residents lived along Old Farms Road, part of Scoville Road, and part of Burnham Road. It was a farming and milling community that had a grist mill, saw mill, a wool carding machine, and a wood turning mill. The turning mill, also known as the 'manufactory' in land records and the 'Hub Shop', came into existence in the early days of our Town.



The shop is denoted on the 1830 Town of Avon map at left, and may have been owned by Henry Woodford at that time. (Avon Land Records, Vol. 3, pg. 336) In 1847, Erastus Washburn and Francis Woodford sold to Horace Judd "a certain shop with machinery" near a dam, with water privileges (Avon Land Records, Vol. 3, pg. 316).

'Avon in 1830', drawn by Marian Anderson from the book 'Avon, Connecticut-An Historical Story' Frances L. Mackie, The Avon Historical Society, 1988.

By the 1855 Hartford County map Anthony Mallory, a wood turner craftsman, and David Stoddard a wheelwright according to census record, are the owners. The 1855 Hartford County map below shows the 'Stoddard & Mallory Turning Shop'.



1855 Hartford County map by Hartford County Surveyor, Edgar M. Woodford

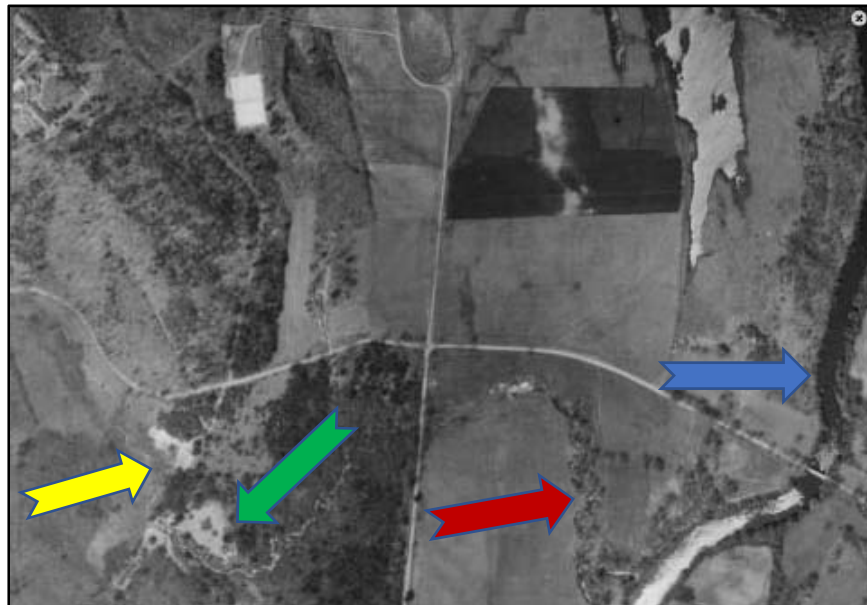
On the 1869 Avon Business Directory map, the shop is listed as owned by 'O.T. & S. Bishop'. This was Oliver T. Bishop and Samuel Bishop. By 1885, the shop was owned by Robert J. Holmes and his brother James A. Holmes, known as 'Holmes Bros. Wood Turners' on their company stationery. In 1900, the Holmes Brothers sold to the last owner, Freeman Wilcox (Avon Land Records, Vol. 11, pg. 205).



1869 Avon Business Directory Map/The Avon Historical Society

This turning shop ran off water power from Beaver Dam Pond. This type of operation only required low velocity water power for belts to rotate a shaft to turn lathes for shaping wood. Wood products included spindles for stairways, furniture making such as turned table legs, and spokes and hubs for wagon wheels. The craftsman was very skilled in how much pressure to apply, using sharp hand tools, as the wood rotated to create the desired decorative effect. Avon hardwoods provided the raw material natural resource for the shop, as well as, to the sawmill for making lumber. Years ago, chestnut trees were prolific and there are still historic homes in our town today with chestnut flooring and beams.

Below is a 1934 aerial view of Avon which shows the Farmington River, Old Farm Brook, and the upper and lower ponds that supported the mills. In the upper left corner, the campus of Avon Old Farms School is visible, as well as the school's athletic field at the top center. Note that 'Sleepy Hollow' was located in the Pine Woods section of early Avon. Near the ponds you can see that many trees have been cut for the mills and also clear cut for farmland.



1934 Aerial photo of Avon from Connecticut State Library

Blue arrow=Farmington River, Red arrow=Old Farm Brook, Green arrow=upper pond, Yellow arrow=lower pond

I never thought about the craftsmanship that went into my own kitchen table and captain's chairs set that has been in my family for over fifty years. I now look at all the turned spindles, seventeen on each of the four chairs, plus the turned cross-braces between the four turned legs on each, and I marvel. Now, I can appreciate the labor involved in felling those trees, hauling them by oxen to the mill, sawing the trunks and limbs into log segments, and then turning these pieces on lathes with precision two hundred years ago. Many locals have such furniture made by the historic Hitchcock furniture company in Riverton/Barkhamsted using water power from the Farmington river. Lambert Hitchcock died 1852 and is buried in Farmington; one of his sons married into an Avon family. I plan to pass my table and chair set onto my daughter someday. Hopefully, she will remember our family sitting around this table for meals, as I remember my parents and sister sharing meals and holidays around it. There is something so timeless about wood furniture. And when you stop and think about the value our hardwoods had for our Town's early families, it makes those early tree's descendants we have today, all the more endearing.

History Beneath Our Feet~

An Artifact Found on Land Trust Parcel

Cowritten by Rick Dubiel, Co-President and Janet M. Conner, Historian Laureate

Two intrepid men from Avon Land Trust, Gerry LaChance and Scott Lewis, were hiking on one of the land trust's parcels on Avon Mountain. There is an old dumping ground in these woods that has some enamelware, rusted metal buckets, old pots, and metal bric brac. The ALT men found something interesting that they believe to have belonged to a horse. One wonders if it was dropped by some early traveler's horse as they rode over the mountain. Years ago, today's Avon Mountain Road was the Albany Turnpike as it was the main route to Hartford and on to Albany, New York. It was a stagecoach route and there used to be the North's blacksmith shop at the base of the mountain. The shop's structure is still there as a part of the Avon Old Farms restaurant and has the original forge inside. Maybe the horse artifact is from a horse who was stabled at the horse shed across from the blacksmith shop? Or maybe it was from a post rider carrying mail to out-of-town folks. Or maybe it was dropped off a horse ridden by a stranger coming into town. Hmmm, an artifact like this stirs the imagination!

The woods hold many secrets, some in the form of artifacts that are relics of the past. Each artifact also has a story to tell and only those in the know - historians, archaeologists, antiquarians, etc., have the ability to unlock the story the artifact holds. It is important that artifacts found, once examined, are returned to their place of discovery. I learned from an archaeologist that artifacts are part of the historical record and their location and relationship to the property and to other potential artifacts, are all clues to that story. The horse artifact, after professional review, will be returned.



We often take things for granted in life. This year, the Avon Land Trust began a new tradition to correct that – to recognize volunteers who help us accomplish our mission. The 2020 Volunteer of the Year Award was awarded to Gerry LaChance, who helps maintain our trails. Gerry is a retired English teacher from the Avon Public School system, who has worked indefatigably so that the general public can enjoy some of our properties. Bob Breckenridge and I [Rick] recently mowed the trails at our Oakes Preserve, and we were dead tired and 3 pounds lighter afterward. It made us appreciate all the work and time commitment that Scott Lewis and

Gerry LaChance and others provide for us. THANKS! Presented by co-presidents Rick Dubiel and Bob Breckenridge

Recipe for a trail:

2 parts thought and planning, 6 parts time, 4 parts sweat, 5 parts muscle, 1 part money (power equipment, gas), 3 parts trail-marking / mapping / posting.

If The Woods Could Talk~

Avon Land Trust Preserving Our Woodlands

By Janet M. Conner, Historian Laureate



“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.” Henry David Thoreau, “Walden”

The woods speak to me, they always have; they are my muse and my calm. Have you ever just sat on a rock and observed all the activity of wildlife and the types of plants and trees nearby that you would miss just hiking past? Each of these is an ecosystem, consisting of multiple habitats all within the woodland landscape. Each habitat is a microcosm of a larger network of interconnected and interdependent biotic (living) and abiotic (non-living) parts. For instance, I was recently observing a chipmunk gorging himself till his cheeks looked about to pop, on ‘helicopter’ seeds from our silver maple tree. Now there were squirrels up in that tree munching away, and dropping many of the seeds to the ground where chipmunk waited. Many of these flying seeds were also scattered by recent wind from a thunderstorm, and will undoubtedly start seedlings of the parent tree. The maple tree is a food source for the small mammals which in turn also help spread the seeds far and wide, hence the interdependency.

The old stonewalls from our farming days run thru many woodlands today. The rocks (abiotic) comprise another habitat for wildlife and plant life (biotic). The stonewalls provide shelter for many small creatures. On the rocks, there is algae on the shaded ones, lichen on some others, and beautiful green moss across the top where the sunlight filters thru the canopy. At the base of the stonewall and all over the woods, are centuries of leaf litter, now decayed, with layers and layers of enriched soil supporting fungi and mushrooms, and providing food and habitat.



The woodland landscape supports many habitats and food sources for burrowing animals, for larger animals that live in dens, for reptiles and amphibians, and for a plethora of birds that make nests. Each species is a part of a food chain and each has adapted for survival throughout New England's harsh winters. Nature is truly amazing! This black bear (left) frequented our yard for years and was thought to have a den in a rock cliff deep in the woods on a ridgeline.

All the men and women who volunteer their time for Avon Land Trust, do so for various reasons. What we share is a passion for the natural environment, a commitment to preserving land for future generations, and a sense of public service to the Town community. We believe in the beauty and history of Avon and endeavor to retain our natural heritage. Please join our efforts if you wish to volunteer, and your membership supports maintenance of our trails and properties, and future land acquisitions. Thank you! Please visit our website: www.avonlandtrust.org

Special Feature~

'From Pangaea - with love' by Bobbie Emery, Clatter Ridge Farm-Farmington



On the very last day of 2020 I found a quartz geode laying on top of a stone wall in our pig pasture. It's small – the exposed quartz is only about two square inches, but still, I'm not sure how I never noticed it before. I thought the pigs must have uncovered it, but there is lichen on it so its been exposed for a while.

It was likely formed 200 million years ago, when our farm (along with the rest of North America) was connected to the northwest coast of Africa as part of the "supercontinent" of Pangaea. It was a time when T-rex ruled the earth and crocodiles were living, and leaving fossils for us to find, in Simsbury. It was also a time when the 30 foot long, fast moving dinosaur "Eubronte" was hunting in packs and leaving footprints in a muddy swamp in Rocky Hill. (Okay, I'll stop complaining about coyotes and bears...).

As Pangaea broke apart, Africa and North America slowly drifted away from each other and fissures developed from which molten lava oozed. (Apparently continents, like humans, are sometimes just not right for each other...). When the lava cooled and turned to stone, it trapped a bit of mineral rich groundwater in a small pocket and voila! Our geode was born.

As the fissures widened and the Atlantic Ocean was formed, the Metacomet Ridge (upon which Anne and I built our home) slipped down into a valley rift, tilting down it's eastern edge, and tilting up and exposing the still visible traprock cliffs to the west. That might have been when our geode was dislodged from it's birthplace, but it would have been subsequently buried again by the ensuing glaciers - which at one point covered our farm with a sheet of ice over a mile thick.

Eighteen thousand years ago, when the ice finally melted and our farm became part of a vast tundra where Paleo-Americans, mastodons, and saber tooth tigers lived and hunted each other, the geode was likely buried in glacial till far below.

Had the Europeans never settled in Farmington and our property never been farmed, the geode would have, probably, never come to the surface. It was the clear cutting of the old growth forest and the continuous plowing of the land that set in motion the frost heaving and erosion that brought the glacial till to the surface. Colonial New England farmland was relatively free of plow eating stones for several generations. It would have taken a hundred years or so of our farm being plowed for crops to bring our hero to the surface.

I imagine, when it did surface, threatening to damage an ox drawn plow, it was caked in mud and just tossed unceremoniously onto the wall at the edge of the field, where the pigs and I first noticed it. I like to think of the geode as a parting gift from Africa, and I am extremely pleased to have found it, but somehow after 200 million years, it doesn't really feel like mine to keep. I'll leave it there on the wall and hope the pigs come to appreciate it's historical provenance, and perhaps, at times, contemplate its inner beauty.

AVON LAND TRUST UPCOMING EVENTS!

August 24th-Thomas Wessels virtual presentation 'New England's Roadside Ecology' at 2:00-3:00 p.m.
Register at <https://www.avonctlibrary.info/event/new-englands-roadside-ecology/>

September - TBA

October 5th – Dr. Nicholas Bellantoni, State Archaeologist Emeritus presentation 'Greatest Hits in Archaeology' including sites in Avon.
7:00 p.m. Location TBA

November – TBA

WE ARE ON FACEBOOK! Visit us at: www.facebook.com/avonlandtrust/



The brush has been mown down at our Oakes Preserve. There is a short hiking loop around the pond and a gazebo for a picturesque family picnic. Enjoy!



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 it's 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 it's 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.