



History

Over the past two million years, glaciers buried Avon at least four times. One thousand years ago the Tunxis people of the Algonquian tribes settled the area. Artifacts found by archeologists are stored at the Collections Repository of the State Office of Archeology and the Museum of Natural History at the University of Connecticut, Storrs. In July 2016 test pits dug south of Old Farms Road found one projectile stem fragment and 33 flakes thought to be left by Native Americans 6,000 to 8,000 years ago.

By 1754 there were 31 families in the Northington Parish of Farmington, enough to build a meetinghouse and hire a minister.

The Farmington Canal opened in 1835, and soon there was freight and passenger service between Northampton, MA, and New Haven. In the early 1800's Northington was at a busy crossroads with the Talcott Mountain Turnpike (Route 44) linking it to Boston, Hartford, and Albany, NY. Town meetings were held at both the West Avon Congregational Church and the Avon Congregational Church, located at 6 West Main Street, until the first Town Hall was built in 1891.



Photographs courtesy of Nora Howard

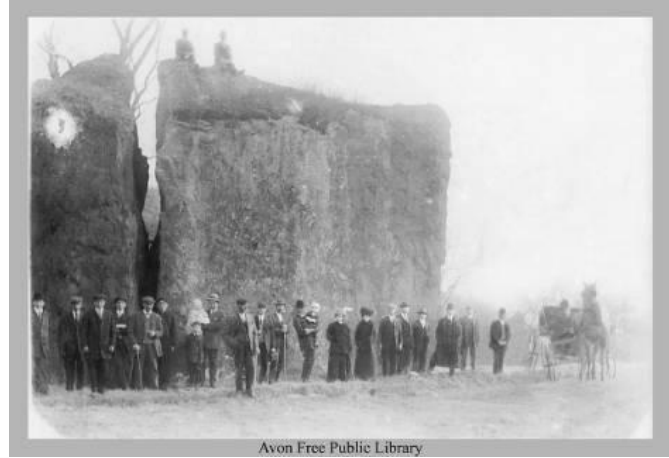
On May 5, 1830, the Connecticut General Assembly incorporated Northington (formerly a section of Farmington) as Avon, named possibly after the River Avon in England. The new Town of almost two hundred families (1,025 residents) had four school districts, two congregational meetinghouses, a Baptist church, the Farmington Canal, the Farmington Canal Warehouse, and several inns. Families operated dairy, poultry and tobacco farms. Beginning in 1850, the railroad roared through Avon on the former canal route. The railroad ceased operations in 1991 and three years later the Town opened its five-mile portion of the recreational multi-use trail known as the Farmington Valley Greenway.

Fuse manufacturing began in 1852 with the factory of Romeo Andrews and Sons. The Company, later known as Climax Fuse, merged with Ensign Bickford of Simsbury in 1907. There was a growing need for fuse factory labor, which led to immigrants from countries including Italy, Ireland, Eastern Europe, Hungary, Poland, Russia, and Germany to settle in Avon.

Photographs courtesy of Avon Public Library



Playing cards at the Climax Fuse Co.



A gathering at “Split Rock” Avon Mountain

Around 1911, the Ensign-Bickford Company began building housing for its workers in Avon Center. This building boom continued during World War I and II, as the factory expanded and housing demands grew. Seventy residences were initially available at low rent, and were later sold to the employees. Today, this housing still offers more moderately priced home ownership opportunities in vibrant neighborhoods consisting of Ensign Drive, Mountain View Avenue, Eddy Street, Old Farms Road, and Columbus Circle.

Significant population growth took place following the Second World War. In 1950 Avon’s population was 3,171. The most significant growth occurred in the decades from 1950 to 1990. The 2014 population is estimated to be 18,597. See Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion on population growth.

Local Government

Avon’s local government organization is established by Home Rule Charter, adopted in 1959 and amended in 1962, 1969, and 1975. A revised Charter (effective 1981) provides for a Town Manager, Town Council, Board of Finance, and Town Meeting.

Historic Resources

Historic resources are an important link with Avon’s heritage that helps define a special community character and a “sense of place.” These resources include buildings and sites of both historic importance and cultural significance.

In 1997 a Town-wide Historic and Architectural Survey, funded by the Connecticut Historical Commission, was conducted. Over 175 sample properties were inventoried – residences, churches, social halls, small bridges, schools, agricultural complexes, and landscape features. All sites were inventoried on standard forms in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Identification and Evaluation. Each site was also photographed.

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The National Park Service has approved more than 80,000 properties nationwide as meeting the criteria to be included on the National Register of Historic Places. These properties include over 1.4M buildings, sites, structures, and objects. An official designation makes properties eligible for Federal preservation tax credits. Such designation does not generally burden private property owners with special regulatory constraints and can make some properties eligible for tax credits, an incentive toward preservation. Any nomination of properties for the National Register of Historic Places should involve the support of the owners of the eligible properties.

The following properties identified in the 1997 Survey should be considered as priorities for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places (see below). **Table 6-1** lists these properties.

Property/Structure/Building	Address	Description
Avon Old Farms School	500 Old Farms Rd	Built in 1927 by Theodate Pope Riddle, architect
West Avon Congregational Church	280 Country Club Rd	Built in 1819
District No 3 School	8 East Main Street	Operated by Avon Historical Society (Moved from original site)
Climax Fuse Company/EB	60 West Main Street	Former Ensign Bickford buildings house Town Hall complex
Prince Thomas of Savoy Society	32 Old Farms Rd	Also known as the Italian Club, founded in 1917
Two stone bridges on former Railroad right-of-way	136 Simsbury Rd	Adjacent to Nod Brook Wildlife Management area
MacDonald Memorial Park sculpture	Avon Mountain Rd	Evelyn Beatrice Longman, sculptor
Avon's oldest house	72 Cider Brook Rd	Built in 1660
Home of Rev. Rufus Hawley	281 Old Farms Rd	Avon's second Pastor, served 1769-1817.
Sunrise Farm	712 West Avon Rd	One of the last remaining historic farms in Avon

Table 6-1 Properties recommended for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places

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In addition, the following additional properties (as listed in **Table 6-2**) should be considered for nomination:

Property/Structure/Building	Address	Description
Single-family home	184 Waterville Road	
Single-family home	290 Waterville Road	
Single-family home	200 Waterville Road	
Single-family home	99 West Avon Road	Small vernacular house
Single-family home	289 West Avon Road	Greek revival
Single-family home	361 Lovely Street	Greek revival
Single-family home	563 West Avon Road	Federal Style, c. 1810
Single-family home	607 West Avon Road	Original features, c. 1775
Single-family home	226 Avon Mountain Road	Shingle style, c. 1910
Woodford Tobacco Farm	Nod Road	
The Pickin' Patch	Nod Road	350 years old in 2016 – one of CT's oldest farms owned by same family
12 Former Climax Fuse Buildings	North of Climax Heights Road	10 buildings owned by Ensign Bickford Corp; 2 buildings owned by the Farmington Valley Arts Center
1832 Joseph North Blacksmith Shop	1 Nod Road	The North House reopened in 2016 as a tavern and event venue
Cider Brook Cemetery	Off Route 10	Entry on west side of Route 10 in vicinity of Cider Brook Road intersection. There is no sign.
Greenwood Cemetery	644 Lovely Street	Includes several Civil War gravesites
West Avon Cemetery	280 Country Club Road	On Burnham Road, adjacent to West Avon Congregational Church
East Avon Cemetery	6 West Main Street	On Route 10, adjacent to Avon Congregational Church
Former Railroad Station	124 Simsbury Road	Relocated to Riverdale Farms shopping
O'Neills Blacksmith Barn	25 Simsbury Road	Avon Center area
Former Canal Administration Building	12 West Main Street	Owned by Twelve West Main Street Trustees, C/O Avon Congregational Church
Constitutional Pin Oak, a Connecticut Notable Tree	Intersection of Route 44 and Old Farms Road	Avon Center area

Table 6-2 Additional properties to be considered for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places

Properties Currently Listed

Two buildings and the entire portion of the Historic New Haven and Northampton Canal, as it travels through Avon, are currently on the National Register of Historic Places. **Table 6-3** lists these properties.

Property/Structure/Building	Address	Description
Pine Grove Historic District with Schoolhouse	Located in the vicinity of the intersection of West Avon road and Harris Road	Listed in 1980. Pine Grove Schoolhouse (built 1865) and five homes built before 1865.
Avon Congregational Church	6 West Main Street	Listed in 1972. Built in 1819.
The Farmington Canal-New Haven and Northampton Canal	Approximately 5 miles of the canal from the Simsbury Town line to the Farmington Town line	Listed 1985. Avon's section is part of the entire canal right of way in Connecticut, between Suffield and New Haven.

Table 6-3 Properties currently listed on the Register of Historic Places



Photograph courtesy of Deb Key Imagery

The State of Connecticut also maintains a Register of Historic Places. There are currently 247 structures in Avon listed. These include structures located in Avon Center and two properties owned by the State of Connecticut, known as The Derrin House and Horse Guard Barn, located at 232 and 249 West Avon Road, which are listed in **Table 6-4**. The Derrin House sustained significant damage from a fire in 2016 following major renovations completed by the Avon Historical Society. Damage has been mitigated and the property has been restored to pre-fire condition. A reopening is planned for 2018. The properties in Avon Center include buildings which were owned/used by the Climax Fuse Company.

Many are owned by the Town and house Town Offices which were, until recently, owned by Ensign Bickford Corporation (the successors to the Climax Fuse Company). The majority of these buildings are constructed from locally quarried brownstone. These buildings were recently sold to a private developer and a master plan for a mixed-use development has been approved by the Commission. These buildings play a key role in helping to establish a special character for Avon Center. These structures should be preserved, if at all possible. Any structural changes to these buildings should be done in a manner which is architecturally appropriate to these special structures.

Property/Structure/Building	Address	Description
Avon Center District	Includes 247 houses, schools, factory buildings, sites and structures. Structures were constructed from the early 1800s through the 1940s	Listed 2004
The Derrin House and Barn	232 and 249 West Avon Road	Listed 2014

Table 6-4 Properties currently listed on the State Register of Historic Places



Photograph courtesy of Deb Key Imagery

Possible Avon Center Historic District

In 2002 the Town hired a consultant to inventory properties in Avon Center for possible designation as an historic district, as administered by the National Park Service. A nomination was submitted in 2003 and a public hearing conducted. Although there was support for the designation, there was substantial opposition by property owners within the proposed district.



Concerns were expressed by many owners that the designation, although largely honorary, would, nevertheless, impose added layers of government imposed restrictions. As more than 50% of these owners delivered a written objection to the National Park Service, the district was not established. However, the Park Service has determined that the district meets eligibility criteria should the Town wish to revisit this in the future.

The Commission may wish to consider an amendment to Zoning Regulations which would relax setback requirements for structures located within a district (should one be established). This would offer an advantage to property owners in the district who now must often seek a variance for proposed building additions.

Possible Demolition/Delay Ordinance and Density Bonuses

It may be prudent to consider the adoption of a demolition/delay ordinance. Such an ordinance would place a hold on the issuance of a demolition permit by the Building Official for a period of at least 30 days and may be drafted to provide for a maximum 90-day delay for older structures due to their age and historical significance. The Town would then endeavor within this time frame work with interested organizations to find a willing buyer interested in preserving the structure or try to convince the owner to do so. Applying such an ordinance to structures built prior to 1850 may be most appropriate.

Another strategy to encourage the preservation of historic structures located within commercial or mixed-use zones is to offer zoning bonuses in exchange for preservation of the structure. Bonuses could relate to permitted lot coverage, building height, building setbacks (building additions and/or parking requirements).



Organizations Preserving Avon History

There are a substantial number of resources available regarding the history of Avon. **Table 6-5** lists these resources.

The Marian M. Hunter Local History Room at the Avon Free Public Library includes maps, deeds, photographs, scrapbooks, cemetery records, letters, genealogy, and files on houses and families, events, school, and organizations. There are journals from 1763-1812 of colonial minister Rufus Hawley, Frank Hadsell journals of 1845-1942, and photographs by Clinton Hadsell (including digital collections).
The Avon Historical Society operates the Derrin House (18 th Century) and CT Horse Guard's Barn (c. 1880), the Pine Grove Schoolhouse (1865), its administrative building is in the No. 3 Schoolhouse (c. 1845) on Route 44, and helps operate the Library's Marian Hunter Local History Room.
Avon Congregational Church and West Avon Congregational Church archives from the 1700s to the present.
The Avon Land Trust owns and manages 312 acres of open space.
Farmington Valley Trails Council promotes use of the Farmington Valley Greenway.
The Farmington Town Clerk's office (records before 1830)
The Avon Town Clerk's office (records after 1830).
The Connecticut State Library (including digital collections).
The Connecticut Historical Society (including digital collections).

Table 6-5 List of Historic Resources

The following publications are available at the Avon Free Public Library and some may be purchased through the Avon Historical Society at avonhistoricalsociety.org.

Also, Joseph, with Adam Platt. I've Seen the Best of It. (Doubleday, 1992). A memoir of his life in politics and journalism.

Also, Stewart. Stay of Execution: A Sort of Memoir. (Lippincott, 1973)

Goralski, William. Series of books on Avon's history in the 1930s and 1940s.

Howard, Nora. Avon (Arcadia Publishing, Images of America Series, 2000)

Howard, Nora. Catch'd on Fire. The Journals of Rufus Hawley, 1763-1812. (History Press, 2011)

Katz, Sandra. Dearest of Geniuses: A Life of Theodate Pope Riddle. (Tide-mark Press, 2003)



MacKie, Mary-Frances. Avon, Connecticut. (Phoenix Publishing, New Hampshire, 1988)

Thompson, Ruth and Marian. Guides to Avon cemeteries (East Avon, West Avon, and Cider Brook) are in the Marian Hunter History Room at the Avon Free Public Library, on the reference shelf.

Winthrop, Elizabeth. In My Mother's House. (Doubleday, 1989) (Novel loosely based on the Alsop farm on Nod Road)

Wright, Peter. Avon, Then and Now. (Arcadia Publishing, 2010)

Online Sources include

Avon Free Public Library, Marian Hunter History Room.

Connecticut Historical Society - Avon photographs and more.

Connecticut State Library - Avon photographs and much more.

Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation - Survey on Avon barns.

Find-a-Grave for Avon's cemeteries and highlights of gravestones.

Goal and Policies

Goal:

Goal: Encourage protection of Avon's historic resources.

Policies:

1. Utilize the most recent Town-wide inventory of historic structures to identify whether development proposals contain such resources. Consider nominating properties listed in **Tables 6-1 and 6-2** for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.
2. Encourage the preservation of historic structures in Avon. Consider possible adoption of a demolition/delay ordinance and/or incentives within the Zoning Regulations aimed at preservation.
3. Encourage the adaptive re-use of historic properties where economically and physically feasible.
4. Consider developing zoning regulations which provide incentives to property owners who provide significant and exceptional preservation efforts of historic properties.
5. Consider establishing an historic national register district under a program administered by the National Park Service (similar to the proposal considered in 2003), should it be likely that a majority of those owners within the proposed boundaries of the district would support such a designation.



6. Seek Grants where applicable for assistance with inventory, study, and preservation of historic structures and historic district areas. There are 247 structures located in Avon Park North which are listed on the State Register of Historic Places. These were initially constructed to support the operations of the Climax Fuse Co. These structures play a key role in establishing a special character for Avon Center. The Commission has recently approved a master plan for the redevelopment of this area into a mixed-use project (retail, offices, residential). The preservation of these structures, as well as architecturally-appropriate modifications to them, is the essential to preserving this historic component of Avon's heritage.
7. Consider adopting a demolition delay ordinance for pre 1850 buildings, as allowed by CGS. Adopt zoning regulations which would support preservation of these structures when used for commercial purposes. Consider awarding bonuses relating to lot coverage, building height, and/or building setbacks to incentivize owners to preserve historic structures.
8. Continue to work in partnership with the Avon Historical Society and the Avon Town Historian (appointed by the Town Council) to present and promote Avon history.