



# AVON LAND TRUST

## SUMMER 2022 E-NEWSLETTER



Welcome to our Summertime E-newsletter! We have some news and upcoming events listed below as well as articles about our lovely town. We hope you enjoy all the little things that make summer so special. The Land Trust offers outdoor fun for families at our hiking trails. There is a walking path around Lake Erie with wildlife to observe at Oakes Preserve, 65 Chidsey Road. Other trail maps can be found here: [http://avonlandtrust.org/?page\\_id=6](http://avonlandtrust.org/?page_id=6) Follow our Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/avonlandtrust/](http://www.facebook.com/avonlandtrust/)

### ALT NEWS AND EVENTS

- The Board of Directors is pleased to announce that Avon Land Trust has received a grant from the Lower Farmington River Wild and Scenic in the amount of \$4,500! This money will be used to responsibly remediate an old fallen cabin on one of our riverfront properties!
- The Avon Land Trust recently acquired a 8.5 acre parcel of land located at 160 Huckleberry Hill Road. The parcel was a bequest from the estate of Marge Dubiel. Marge was born and raised on Huckleberry Hill in Avon, and had a deep and abiding love of the land and nature. The parcel contains a wonderful mix of wildlife habitat, ranging from fields to mature forest, and adjoins Huckleberry Hill Recreation Area. This is the third land acquisition made by the Avon Land Trust in the past 8 months. A half-acre parcel with Broad Brook running through it was recently donated by retired educator Janet Conlin. Persons interested in donating land, conservation easements or financial bequests to the Avon Land Trust can contact [trustavonland@gmail.com](mailto:trustavonland@gmail.com)
- The Avon Land Trust was saddened to learn that David Leff passed away on Memorial Day weekend. During David's tenure as Deputy Commissioner with the DEEP, he helped preserve the 15,000 acres of land that make up the Centennial Watershed State Forest, making him an environmental hero in our eyes. As if that wasn't enough, David was also an author, a poet, a historian, a volunteer fireman, a husband and father. David was a guest speaker for the Land Trust several years ago, and we planned to have him present in person again in Fall 2022.
- The Avon Land Trust has been busy at Oakes Preserve, located at 65 Chidsey Rd. In addition to maintaining trails in preparation for Father's Day hiking, we also launched our first turtle basking raft at Lake Erie, a former ice pond.
- The Avon Land Trust has applied for grants from two new sources, to launch several new projects. Fingers crossed!
- We are already planning events for the Fall. We have some 'History Talks & Walks' that will start with a short talk by our Historian Laureate, Janet M. Conner, and be followed by a walk to see where things were or still are today. One will be in East Avon and one in West Avon. We are also planning a few upcoming fundraising activities. Details to follow.

# HISTORY BENEATH OUR FEET

## Tracking Down Avon's Early Train Depots



Matthews, Northrup and Co., SC, Buffalo, New York

For many people, trains hold a special romanticism and allure. They evoke dreams of faraway places and adventure. Train depots have historically been places of people and freight coming and going. Avon actually had three train depots, each with different functions and appearances. The first depot wasn't a passenger station, it was a flag station run out of a home that also functioned as a post office. It was located just off Scoville Road in the early milling community of Sleepy Hollow. The house appears on the 1855 E.M. Woodford map of Hartford County with Ahira Alling as the owner.

The railroad crossing was known as Allen's Crossing and on the railroad map at left, as 'Allen Sta [station]'. The 1869 Avon Business Directory map shows Calvin Judd as owner. A colleague, who is a Judd relative, has a diary in which Edward Judd mentions in 1871, "putting on the mail". Trains would slow down to snag a mail bag off a hook with a pole. An old-time resident of West Avon, Oliver Thompson of Sunrise Farm, said his relatives the Judds, "...would accept mail from local residents and bag it for the train. And when mailbags were thrown off the train, the Judds would take them back to the office for sorting." [Hartford Courant, February 2, 1992] There were three RR crossings; one on Country Club Road, one on Scoville Road, and one on Thompson Road. The New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad right of way track map (UCONN Library/CTDA) shows the Judds, Allings, and Oliver Thompson deeding property to the railroad in 1849 and 1894. The Avon Land Trust owns a parcel of land at 200 Scoville Road, west of the old crossing.



In the early 1920s, Theodate Pope Riddle began buying up thousands of acres of land to build her crowning achievement, Avon Old Farms boys boarding school. She bought out the last remaining farmers and tradesmen along Old Farms Road and Scoville Road, including the Judd house above. Her plan was to build a depot for the purpose of receiving building materials for the school; later used by students. Her design was a brownstone foundation building completed in 1925. Following tradition, "The school also allowed residents to hang mailbags at the depot for passing trains." [ibid]

The building stands today on the northeast side of Scoville Road next to the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail on private property. (Photo Connecticut Digital Archive).



Avon Depot ca. 1900 Connecticut Digital Archive

The freight and passenger Avon depot was built about 1880 according to the 1997 Town of Avon Architectural Survey. It was located where the current post office now sits at 15 Enford Street. This depot played a major role in Avon's history. Immigrants were offered jobs at Ellis Island to come to Avon to work at the Climax Fuse Company; others came to work on the farms. It is noted in the survey, the depot was also a place for families to say goodbye to men going off to war. "For generations the building [depot] was a symbol for Avon residents of the outside world and the all-important link to it represented by the railroad." The building was moved to Riverdale Farms.

Perhaps the next time you are taking a walk or bike ride along the trail, crossing on Scoville Road, you might muse about the former flag station when the Judds were an important component in Sleepy Hollow's history. Or you may ponder the Avon Old Farms School depot that replaced it. **NOTE:** There is a 'No Trespassing' sign posted at the driveway leading to the extant building. Maybe when you go to mail a letter at the Avon Post Office, you might remember the train depot that formerly stood on this site. Just think about all of the history...beneath your feet!

# AVON FLORA AND FAUNA

## Taking A Stroll in an Avon Subdivision



I have recently been walking with a friend in a subdivision of Avon. Each time I go there, I marvel at all the flora and fauna. Roaring Brook runs through this subdivision and also forms ponds in several spots there. These ponds have an amazing abundance of wildlife. One can hear croaking bullfrogs, and I saw a redwing blackbird clinging to one of the cattails. The narrow stream splits and flows into two larger ponds, one on the east and one on the west side of the roadway.

The pond on the east side has waterfowl, amphibians and reptiles. There is a resident Great blue heron that I have seen multiple times, and my friend pointed out a green heron (*Butorides virescens*) too. According to the National Audubon Society's website,

these birds are generally solitary and its habitat is lakes, ponds, and marshes, preferring smaller bodies of water with dense vegetation. The site says its green plumage on its back is an iridescent color and it has a crest on its head that it can raise. One interesting tidbit is that this bird is clever enough to drop a feather or a small twig on the surface of the water, to lure a fish near enough to catch. That's amazing! The green heron also feasts on small frogs, minnows, and other insects.

I noted a large 'log', covered in plant material, moving slowly beneath the surface of the water like a silent submarine. It seemed to move, not just floating by on the current, but with purpose. My friend informed me that this log was actually a large snapping turtle! How neat is that for toward its unsuspecting painted turtles (*Chrysemys* rocks, who slipped into the of Connecticut website notes ponds with mucky bottoms interesting fact is that the determine if they will be all west side of the road was flowers; my friend said are



was actually a large snapping turtle! camouflage as it glides imperceptibly prey. There are also many Eastern *picta* ssp) sunning themselves on water as we approached. The Wildlife these turtles like small streams and as they hibernate in the mud. An temperature of these turtle's eggs male or all female. The pond on the propagated with pretty little blue an invasive species of forget-me-nots.



Further along on our walk, we find interesting leaves that have fallen. It had a faded light yellow and orange-petaled flower, and yellow green leaves with 'ears' (see photo). This is the Eastern tulip poplar bloom. On the Arbor Day Foundation website, I learned that this tree's seeds provide food for many animals including squirrels, deer, mice, rabbits, and birds. In Spring, its flowers provide nectar for the ruby-throated hummingbird. There are woodland acres with many tree species including white pine, oak, white birch, tulip, and a new one to me - a shagbark hickory. These woodlands also support many kinds of birds and mammals.

This subdivision also maintains a community garden for its residents. On the outside of the fenced area, there is a very large planting of milkweed with a sign denoting the plant supports monarch butterflies and others. It is to their credit that this P.U.D., planned unit development, encompasses not only buildings for habitat of humans, but also a vast acreage consisting of mowed grasslands, woodlands, and wetlands that has the side benefit of preserving land and natural habitat for its varied wildlife. The Avon Land Trust functions similarly preserving about 300 acres of land to date and counting!

## IF THE WOODS COULD TALK

### Trees As A Sense of Place

The Avon Land Trust has two hiking trailheads just off Nod Road; the Garvin/Maher Trail, and the Hazen Park to Heublein Tower trail. The west side of Nod Road has been farmland for over 350 years, on level land that fronts onto the Farmington River. The east side is woodland rising up to Talcott Mountain. Recently I drove to Nod Road and noticed that a residence, that had been there since I moved here in 1998, was gone. Nothing is left except the trees and the land on which an old house stood. This site was where one of early Avon's seven original school houses was located. It was school house number 2 and where children from the early Nod Division and Nod Hill, along Waterville Road, were educated.



This photograph, from the Connecticut Digital Archive, shows school house number 2 with horses and mules from the Wood Ford (intentional gap) farm across the street. The photograph, dated 1912, is from the Clinton B. Hadsell collection (Avon Free Public Library). Town historian Nora Howard wrote: "Joseph Alsop and his wife Corinne Robinson Alsop (the niece of president Theodore Roosevelt) lived at 27 Nod Road, on Wood Ford Farm, their 700-acre dairy and tobacco farm. Their four children were Joseph V, John, Corinne, and Stewart. Young Joe is in the center of the photograph in the white hat. The Nod Schoolhouse and a privy are in the background. The first schoolhouse there opened in 1767. In the early 1900s, about 13 children attended the school. It closed in 1917, was sold, and became the home of Wood ford farm manager Jesse Anderson".



This second photograph, circa 1907 (Connecticut Digital Archive/Clinton B. Hadsell collection), is interesting as it shows how a school teacher and school kids dressed in those early one-room school house days. Nora Howard wrote: "Nod School, constructed about 1832, was located at 36 Nod Road in School District 2. Students are pictured with their teacher Miss Gerisch. Across the street was Joseph and Corinne Alsop's Wood Ford Farm and their white farmhouse at 45 Nod Road. The Alsop House and the former school building are still standing [at time photo was captioned in 2020]. In 1804, there were 58 children at the school. When Nod School closed in 1917, the students transferred to School District 5 in Avon center. The schoolhouse was sold for \$1,800...". A

local resident who has lived on Nod Road for over 80 years, told me the original school was added onto to over time, and was a private residence up until it was razed recently. She said her great, great aunt was also a teacher there and rode her bicycle to and from school.

The trees that bordered the early school house give us a sense of place today. There are still woodlands surrounding this parcel, kind of enveloping this site, like a warm embrace of its history.

## AVON'S NATURAL RESOURCES

### The Natural Resources of Yesteryear

Although Avon was never a prominent manufacturing center, it did have a few early manufacturing companies, and produced products for trade and export. As you may know, Avon was incorporated in 1830 at the height of the Farmington canal glory days. Early ventures included the Avon Manufacturing Company, the Hope Company, the Avon Creamery Corporation (first joint stock corporation), Phillips Box Company, and the Climax Fuse Company.



Map of Avon in 1830 Dorothy Anderson, based on research by Gladys Thompson August, Marian M. Hunter, Mary-Frances L. Mackie, and Betty Morton. From Mrs. MacKie's "Avon, Connecticut...and Historical story" (1988)

The Farmington canal [blue arrow] came through the center of Avon between 1828 and 1848/9, before being replaced by the railroad. During its heyday, canal boats transported people and/or goods for trade. Some men owned canal boats or a share in those boats. One of these Avon men was Thomas Fitch Bishop who lived in the Cider Brook section of town. His Will, drawn up in 1831, leaves his interest in a boat to his son Joseph Bishop. It is surprising today to learn how many products, made in Avon, were shipped on the canal. One of the ways to take a look at these products, is to look at the Federal Census Non-Population Schedules for Agriculture, to see the raw materials on the early farms.

The typical subsistence farm's acreage, as noted on the schedule, was divided into tilled land (crops), pasture/orchard/vineyard, woodland and grassland. Most farmers grew the same crops - vegetables including Irish potatoes, Indian corn, peas and beans and grains of rye, oats, and wheat. These crops were for both humans and livestock. There were orchard crops of apples and peaches and fields of hay. Everything grown on these earliest farms had a purpose, both for family consumption or barter. Later on in time, by interpreting the Agricultural census records, one can see the transition to 'for profit' or cash crops. The Farmington canal offered a trade route north and south from New Haven, Connecticut to Northampton, Massachusetts. Then goods were shipped by wagon to markets.

The first Agricultural census for Avon was in 1850, just at the end of the canal era. I did a tally of livestock as I was curious how these animals contributed to the farm products. Most early farmers had on one or two horses. Oxen did the hard work of plowing fields, and there were 198 working oxen. There were 376 'milch' cows that produced a whopping 38,400 pounds of butter and 5,500 pounds of cheese! Milk and milk products were sold in Hartford or transported via the canal. I was also interested in early fiber production; there were 342 sheep that produced 2,020 lbs. of wool. Orchards produced crops of apples that were turned into cider, high wines, and cider brandy. Wood products such as wagon spokes and shingles for buildings, were made at mills from farm's woodlands. There were some farmers just starting to venture into tobacco with the 1850 census showing 700 lbs. produced. Butternuts, grown on Huckleberry Hill, were exported via Wethersfield by wagon and onto ships to the West Indies.



Twenty years later, in the 1870 Agricultural census, one can see the transition to the start of the Industrial Revolution and a shift in crops. Shade tobacco is now a very productive cash crop with 61,854 pounds! There is a drastic reduction in the number of sheep, only 164, producing only 499 pounds of wool. Butter is still a valuable commodity at 31,851 pounds produced, but only 630 lbs. of cheese actually manufactured on the farm. Milk was now sold to creameries. Mills took laborious jobs off the farm and increased production of products that could be shipped faster via the railroad. A locomotive train

passes by the Avon Congregational Church in the CTDA photo at left. These raw materials were produced on Avon's 435 working farms. Today there are only 3 working farms left preserving the history of yesteryear!

## 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.