

Lower Farmington River/Salmon Brook

Wild and Scenic Study



Third in a series of newsletters to keep the community informed about the Wild & Scenic Study.

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Issue #3 Winter 2009

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Today there remain traces of the Farmington Canal throughout the Farmington Valley.
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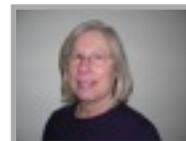
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Progress Report from the Chair by Sally Rieger

"How is the Wild and Scenic Study coming along?" That question is one that the Wild and Scenic Study Committee often hears. I'm glad to say that the short answer is "It's coming along nicely", but there is still a lot of work left.

Here's a report on what we've accomplished and what remains ahead:

Outreach to Study Towns: All of the study towns have hosted us at the meetings of one or more boards and commissions. The towns' responses have been very favorable, and we are most appreciative of their support and hospitality.

We've given some presentations to local groups, including land trusts, a garden club, and a program series exploring ways that Simsbury can become a greener community. If you are a member of an organization that would like to have a Wild and Scenic presentation for one of its meetings, please contact me (dfrandsr@aol.com).

Our library display is currently in Simsbury and will move to Avon in March. All ten study towns are scheduled to have the display for about a month, so be sure to check it out when it goes to your town's library.

Upcoming Outreach: Part of the Wild and Scenic Study process requires that we demonstrate to Congress that there is adequate protection of the Outstanding Resource Values which we defined earlier in the study process

(Geology, Water Quality, Biodiversity, Cultural Landscape, Recreation). A draft review of the relevant regulations of the ten towns has gone out to the towns for comments. The final report will show both existing protections for river resources and opportunities for improvements.

So that the towns can work together in looking at river protections and consider what might be done to improve them, we are planning a **Town Summit** for town staff and commissioners in the spring. The Town Summit will be an important opportunity for town input into the Wild and Scenic Study Committee's advisory Management Plan.

New Things We Have Learned: Both our monthly meetings and our National Park Service funded studies have provided new information on river-related issues and resources. Here are some highlights:

- The Farmington River has 12 out of 12 freshwater mussels found in southern New England, not 11 out of 12 as we originally thought. Ethan Nadeau of Biodiversity reported to us last summer that he found a Yellow Lampmussel in the Farmington. The Farmington River has better mussel diversity than the Connecticut River.
- The Farmington River is an important bird migration corridor. Jay Kaplan pointed out that on a fall evening, in Simsbury or Avon, one might see 6,000 or

7,000 nighthawks traveling along the river corridor.

- The 280 foot long aqueduct in Farmington was one of the greatest engineering projects of the time.
- The Farmington River Archaeological Project has revealed the presence of hundreds of archaeological sites dating back to as much as 10,000 years (see Ken Feder's article).

The Big Challenge that lies ahead is writing the advisory **Management Plan**. This document must explain what our Outstanding Resource Values are and provide authoritative evidence that they are regionally or nationally significant. The plan must also look at the adequacy of the existing protections for those resources, set priorities for improved protection and provide the needed tools. Should the lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook be designated Wild and Scenic, the Management Plan will be the document which the study towns have committed themselves to support. It will provide guidance for river protection for years to come.

We have made much progress since April, 2007. The tasks before us have become clearer, and we can see how much work still lies ahead. We think our communities as well as the lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook will benefit from a Wild and Scenic designation. We remain committed to seeing the study process through to a successful end.

Cultural Resource: The Farmington Canal

The building of the Farmington Canal began on July 4, 1825 in Granby, near the Massachusetts line. When the ground was broken by Governor Oliver Wolcott, the gilt shovel he used broke in half, and some of the onlookers interpreted this as an unhappy omen for the canal project.¹ Ruth Hummel, Plainville Town Historian and Naturalist, describes the event: "Two to three thousand people attended, making the long walk from Granby Center to the Massachusetts border. This was the largest celebration in the state up to that time. It was a hot, hot day and there were no conveniences along the way. It must have been miserable. Dignitaries however, arrived on a canal boat that had been set on wheels down in New Haven."²

Ms Hummel points out that the purpose of the Farmington Canal was "to answer a dire need for better transportation of valley made goods as well as farm products. The mountains between the Farmington Valley and the Connecticut River precluded economical shipment, and roads of the late 1820's were a sad lot, either snow or mud bound".³

Although there were numerous small mills in the Farmington Valley producing a variety of items, and local farmers had surpluses of cheese and other products, and there was no easy way to get this merchandise to market. A canal was seen as a way to bring products to New Haven, where they could be transported to New York City by boat. Conversely, things made elsewhere could be brought by canal to people in central Connecticut and Massachusetts.

The building of the Farmington Canal was part of a broader effort in the large and geographically diverse United States to provide better internal transportation for goods. The governments of New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio were involved financially in canal construction, but in Connecticut the construction of the Farmington Canal relied solely on private financing. Thus, the first step in building the Canal involved raising the necessary capital. The history of the Canal is marked by problems which arose from insufficient funding. In the initial work, all done by hand, shortcuts were taken which necessitated later repairs for which money was short.⁴

The initial plan for the Farmington Canal called for it to extend from the tidewaters of New Haven through Hamden, Cheshire, Southington, Bristol, Farmington, Simsbury and Granby, and north to Northampton,

Massachusetts. An extension canal built to Unionville became a feeder canal, carrying water from the Farmington River into the main canal. Although the Canal bordered the river in many places, there was no way at the time to pump water from the river into the canal, which was at a higher elevation than the river. Thus, a feeder canal was a necessity.⁵ The Canal opened in 1828. By 1830, Guignino notes, "four million pounds of merchandise were shipped every month from New Haven". It took 24 hours for goods to be moved from New Haven to Northampton, and this speed was unheard at the time.⁶ Eric Sloane notes that, "Pleasure excursions were the canal's specialty, but wood products, cider, maple sugar and meal actually floated down its surface from the north, while salt, oysters, rum, coal and hardware sailed back into the New England hills."⁷

Hummel mentions that coal was a very important cargo which was delivered to the Collins Axe factory among other places.⁸

The canal helped open markets for various goods, and it spurred development along the canal. For example, the Union Hotel, which is now part of Miss Porter's school, was built and opened for the use of canal patrons. Some manufacturing businesses for small items like buttons opened along the canal, using the water power from the canal even while the canal was being used for transport. The Bristol clock industry found that the Canal offered a safer way to move its delicate merchandise than the roads of the time. On the negative side, many farmers lost land to the Farmington Canal Company which had been chartered by the State of Connecticut and given the power of eminent domain. Landowners had no say in the route of the Canal.⁹ Lawsuits occupied a great deal of the Canal company's time, and there were acts of sabotage.¹⁰

Anyone who wanted to transport materials on the Canal had merely to pay tolls to the Farmington Canal Company. The tolls were based on weight of the material being hauled and covered only normal operating expenses for the Canal, not needed improvements, repairs or other work necessitated by flood or drought.¹¹ In addition to off and on financial problems, the Canal began to face competition from a growing rail system. In 1838 the New Haven Railroad opened a line to Meriden and by 1850 the railroad had reached Tariffville and Collinsville. Canal boats offered faster transport than the roads, but the speed of the horses that walked along the towpaths pulling the boats could not match the speed of the

trains. People preferred railroad travel and transport because, although the fares were higher, the trains were much faster. Canal lines were gradually abandoned in Connecticut and elsewhere in the United States.¹²

Today there remain traces of the Farmington Canal in the Farmington Valley. Ruth Hummel points out a number of these in her work:

Farmington & Avon

At the site of the magnificent 280 foot long aqueduct over the Farmington River, signage on Route 10 clearly marks the area. The towpath is atop a 49 foot embankment to the river. Remember all this was built by Irish laborers, along with company workers, and no machines of any kind. Look at the huge stones, brought to the site on barges, that were grappled into place by simple pulleys and muscle power of man and beast. This was considered one of the greatest engineering projects of its day. The Avon Living Museum has a nice collection of canal items, as well as a diorama.

Simsbury

One of the most beautiful pieces of canal stonework is the great Hopmeadow arch culvert near the Ensign Bickford plant. Sadly, the damage from the 1955 flood is very apparent.

Plainville

The Plainville Historical Society, 29 Pierce Street, has one of the largest collections of information on the canal existing. There is a canal room with artifacts and a 10-foot diorama of the canal in Plainville.¹³

Notes

1. Sloane, Eric "The Farmington Canal". Feb., 1958, v.9, issue 2, p.1 at http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/1958_2_98_print.shtml
2. Hummel, Ruth. Written communication, Dec. 2008.
3. Hummel. Op. cit.
4. Guignino, George M. "The Farmington Canal 1822-1847: An Attempt At Internal Improvement. pp.5-8. <http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1981/cthistory/81/ch.04.x.html>
5. Walter, Carl. Oral presentation, July 2008
6. Guignino. Op. cit. p.1
7. Sloane. Op. cit. p. 2
8. Hummel. Op. cit.
9. Guignino. Op. cit. p.9-10
10. Sloane. Op. cit. p.2
11. Guignino. Op. cit. p. 9
12. Guignino. Op. cit. p.10
13. Hummel. Op. cit.

Featured Town: Avon

Late winter, say, toward the end of February, might be a good time for a tour of the **Town of Avon**. The outing could be by car, and if the weather turns unseasonably warm, portions on foot or by bike. As a relative newcomer to Avon, I was impressed with the wealth of history and beauty found on this simple afternoon jaunt.

I started my tour at the foot of Avon Mountain, where Route 44 and Route 10 intersect, turning north on **Nod Road**. Avon was originally part of Farmington but spun off in 1751 as a satellite community known as Northington Parish. English farmers had migrated from Farmington, built a new meetinghouse in 1754, and purchased valley land from the River Indians in exchange for trade rights. Northington formally separated from Farmington and was incorporated as Avon in 1830. Nod Road still connects Albany Turnpike with Simsbury Road. In Revolutionary times Avon was a thriving agricultural community, with tobacco farms, orchards, pastures and livestock production and all of the components of a growing economy. Here, where the Farmington River keeps the land fertile from its often memorable flooding, Pickin' Patch farm still grows acres of delicious fruits and vegetables. Continuing north on Nod Road a little farther, you'll probably get the best possible view of **Heublein Tower** from below, near Tower Ridge golf club. This most visible landmark, perched atop the ridge, was built in 1914 as a summer place for Gilbert Heublein, gourmet food and liquor importer. Now, the 350-acre property is part of Talcott Mountain State Park. You can access the impressive 360° views from the observation tower on foot via Avon Land Trust trails, or from Route 185 in Simsbury. Now going back toward Avon on Nod Road, cross Route 44 and continue along Waterville Road. Turn right onto Old Farms Road, marked by two stone pillars. This winding way crosses a narrow old bridge over the Farmington River, and opens onto **Fisher Meadow**. Another taste of Avon's history as a farming community remains at **Fisher Farm**, on Tillotson Road, now owned by Avon and Farmington and leased as a working dairy farm.

Old Farms Road continues to wind through the forest, crossing Thompson Brook, and passing by **Avon Old Farms School**. The charming red stone school buildings of the school's campus were designed in the English Cotswold style by Connecticut's first licensed female architect, Theodate Pope Riddle and built by Italian immigrants among others.

From there, continue on Old Farms Road to **Fisher Meadow Trail Head**. Here would be a great place to stretch your legs and enjoy the outdoors.

Continue north on Old Farms Road, then turn left on Arch Road. Across from Security Drive you might stop and sample the **Farmington Valley Greenway**: north through the historic **Ensign-Bickford** compound, red stone buildings now housing town offices and the **Farmington Valley Arts Center**, or south toward Farmington. A smooth wide paved path, much of the Greenway is built along the canal/railroad routes of the early 1800s, hence the concept of rails-to-trails. "Along the way are historic buildings, canal locks, towpaths, iron bridges, stone arches, and other artifacts that provide a rich cultural background for the trail experience" (Farmington Valley Greenway website). Continuing west up Arch Street, before the intersection with West Avon Road you'll find the



-Sean Sweeney

stables of the **First Company Governor's Horse Guards**, where historic mounted drills are performed. The First Company "upholds traditional customs and displays the pageantry of the US Cavalry."

Now turn south on West Avon Road to view Avon's historic farms. The intersection of West Avon Road and Harris Road, an area known as **The Pine Grove Historic District**, includes **Sunrise Farm** and **Pine Grove Schoolhouse**, open to the public on Sunday afternoons (see the town website for times). The pastoral sunrises in this locale can be spectacular. Historic homes still abound in modern Avon. To view some of them, continue your tour by turning north on West Avon Road, left on hilly Country Club Road, then left on Lovely Street, right on Chevas Road, and left on Huckleberry Hill Road. On Lovely Street and Huckleberry Hill Road alone, you'll pass an impressive 32 historic properties

including Greek Revivals, Victorians, and Bungalows.

Here on the western side of Avon, you can glimpse the rolling Farmington River (which actually might be frozen at this time of year). Try New Road, accessed from the southern end of Huckleberry Hill Road. Avon traces its roots to the withdrawal of the last Ice Age. As Native Americans moved northward with the retreating ice about 10,000 years ago, their settlements left abundant archaeological evidence in the valley. On New Road, you'll find a few roads with names like Pequot, Sequassem, and Chepachet recalling those early settlements near a source of good fishing and clean water. Also along this road, the stone chimneys of more modern dwellings remain, memorializing the existence of riverfront homes which were tragically swept away in the flood of 1955.

If you're adventurous, put your vehicle in low gear and turn right on **School Street** to climb steeply back up to Huckleberry Hill. Turn right, where at the top the 280 acre Huckleberry Hill Recreation Area includes wooded trails for jogging, hiking and cross-country skiing.

To return to the starting point of our Avon tour, turn left on Chevas Road, left on Lovely Street, right on Country Club Road, left on West Avon Road and finally right on Route 44. At the corner of Old Farms Road and Route 44, you'll find the beautiful **Avon**

Congregational Church, listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

And now that you've completed the driving tour, you can learn more about Avon's culture and history at **Avon's Living Museum** at 8 East Main Street, open by appointment and on Sundays in the warmer months. And if you're about ready for refreshment, check Old Avon Village on the right or **Avon Old Farms Inn**, also on the Register of Historic Places, found back at the intersection of 44 and 10.

Currently about 85% of Avon is now considered either developed or permanently protected open space. **The Avon Land Trust** owns over 340 acres that will never be developed.

by: Diane Field
Many thanks to Nora Howard, Historian, Town of Avon for her input.

Archaeology of the Lower Farmington Valley *by Ken Feder*

Those of us who today live along their margins are acutely aware of the outstanding and diverse resources offered by the Farmington River and Salmon Brook. These watercourses provide sources of fresh water and fish, they present scenic vistas, wonderful hiking trails, and, in the case of the Farmington, a readily accessible avenue for canoes and kayaks. Further, they produce rich agricultural soil and a diversity of wildlife habitats. We can today easily appreciate the beauty and value of these watercourses and, from a modern perspective, most of us recognize the importance of their preservation.

Today's inhabitants of the Farmington Valley are not the first to recognize the great value of the region. In fact, over the course of the last thirty years, the Farmington River Archaeological Project (FRAP) has revealed the presence of hundreds of archaeological sites dating back to as much as 10,000 years ago, ancient remnants left behind by those who were drawn to and who populated the Farmington Valley in antiquity. Today, those sites are both a reflection of continuity of settlement in and reliance upon the rich resources offered by the river and are, themselves, a resource for learning about how people in the past adapted to and relied upon the region in which we live today. When I began working in the Farmington Valley in the late 1970s as a young archaeologist, I was told that there likely weren't many significant sites here. It was felt by some archaeologists that smaller rivers like the Farmington had not been as significant to ancient people as had been the Connecticut River. Perhaps, it was suggested, in ancient times small, nomadic bands of people only traveled through the Farmington Valley on their way to richer areas. In this view, few of these ancient people would have settled here and, thus, the archaeological record of their ephemeral presence would be sparse.

These assumptions have turned out to be false. In fact we have found many ancient archaeological sites in the valley, including the remains of large and substantial villages. Beyond this, these sites do not appear to be the temporary settlements of outsiders just passing through. Stone tool styles uniquely found in the Farmington Valley and, especially, the reliance on local raw materials including rock like Talcott Mountain basalt and hornfels (present in seams of ancient sandstone heated to a high temperature when it was overridden by the molten rock that became the basalts of Talcott Mountain nearly two hundred million years ago) for making stone tools, show that the Farmington Valley was a distinct homeland for ancient people who relied, for the most part, on native resources and likely spent most of their yearly schedule living within its boundaries.

For example, consider the site we have called Old Farms Brook, located in the Lower Farmington River valley. At this place, more than 4,200 years ago, a group of people settled on the floodplain at the confluence of the Farmington River and a small, spring-fed brook. At this spot, the inhabitants built a small earth oven—a pit into which they placed heated stones, the remnant heat of which was used to cook food (Figure 1).



Figure 1: An earth oven being excavated along the Lower Farmington River. The stones had been heated in a separate place and then positioned in a pit, perhaps for baking an acorn flour based bread—fragments of burned acorn were found at the site.

Nearby, atop a layer of firewood and kindling, the ancient people constructed a large square platform, approximately six-feet on each side, composed of rounded quartz and quartzite river cobbles, (Figure 2).



Figure 2: The roasting platform at the Old Farms Brook Site located along the Farmington River. Note the white arrow pointing to the location of the broken spear point shown in Figure 3.

On this platform they roasted meat including at least one deer. Adjacent to the roasting platform feature we recovered the possible “smoking gun”—the broken-tipped spear point that may have dispatched that deer (Figure 3). Sites like the Old Farms Brook site present researchers with a truly outstanding resource for examining the most ancient component of Farmington Valley history.



Figure 3: Spear point associated with the 4,000-year-old roasting platform shown in Figure 2. Only the tip is broken, likely the result of impact with one of the bones of the animal that the weapon was used to kill.

Along with the compilation of archaeological sites we have previously identified during the course of the Farmington River Archaeological Project, the archaeological component of the Wild and Scenic study involves the assistance of property owners along Salmon Brook and the Lower Farmington River. In the summer of 2008, we mailed questionnaires to more than 400 land owners, several of whom shared with us information concerning their own discoveries of artifacts on their property (Figure 4).



Figure 4: This cluster of artifacts collected over many years by a property owner along Salmon Brook indicate prehistoric settlement over the course of as much as 8,000 years.

The history of human reliance on the Farmington River and Salmon Brook is written, not so much as words on a page, but in stone tools and potsherds, burned acorn shells and deer bone, earth ovens and roasting platforms. The places where ancient people lived and left behind these kinds of material evidence of their cultures enable archaeologists to reveal the deep history of our region and are, as such, resources of outstanding historical value. By contributing to the preservation of the Farmington River and Salmon Brook through the Wild and Scenic program, we contribute to the preservation of those rare and precious places where those who came before us continue to tell their stories in the present.

About the Study Committee...

The study committee's membership includes locally appointed representatives from each town in the study area, and representatives from The Stanley Works, CT Department of Environmental Protection (CT DEP), National Park Service, the Farmington River Watershed Association (FRWA), the Tariffville Village Association (TVA), Connecticut Forest and Park Association (CFPA) and the Salmon Brook Watershed Association (SBWA).

Avon:

Diane Field * - Riparian Landowner
Harry Spring * - Former Inland Wetlands Commissioner
Rob House - Conservationist

Bloomfield:

Paula Jones* - Conservationist
Kevin Gough* - Conservationist

Burlington:

Paul Rochford * - Burlington Land Trust
Thomas Small * - Burlington Land Trust

Canton:

Cynthia Griggs - Conservationist
David Leff * - Author, Former Deputy Commissioner of DEP

East Granby:

Ian Clark * - East Granby Land Trust
Mike Krammen * - Engineer

Farmington:

Walter Sargent * - Executive Director, Farmington Land Trust
Larry Schlegel * - Angler
Josef Treggor - Ecologist/Educator, MERA

Granby:

Carolyn Flint * - Conservation Commission, SBWA Board
Eric Lukingbeal * - Land-use attorney, Wetlands Commission member

Hartland:

Sue Murray * - Hartland Plan of C&D Committee, Hartland Land Trust
Kathy Dunn * - Hartland Land Trust

Simsbury:

Sally Rieger * - Simsbury Land Trust, FRWA volunteer
Margery Winters * - Simsbury Inland Wetlands & Conservation Commission
Suzanne Battos - Conservationist

Windsor:

Frank Davis * - Chair, Conservation Commission, Riparian Landowner
Betsy Conger - Loomis Chafee School Science Dept.
Terry Langevin - Friends of Northwest Park Board Member
Melissa Vanek - Environmental/Science Educator

The Stanley Works:

Kurt Link * - Lean, Productivity & Facilities Mgr., TSW

FRWA:

Sarah Hincks * - FRWA Board, Volunteer
Eileen Fielding* - FRWA Executive Director
Aimee Petras - FRWA Staff

CFPA:

Eric Hammerling* - Executive Director

TVA:

Wanda Coleman - Member, Photographer

SBWA:

David Tolli* - SBWA Board

PRWA:

Mary Moulton - PRWA President

CT DEP:

Susan Peterson*
Maryann Nusom Haverstock*

National Park Service:

Jamie Fosburgh - Rivers Program Manager
Joyce Kennedy Raymes - Study Coordinator

** Officially Appointed*

Meet the Committee Members



Diane Erickson Field: Resident of an Avon home on the Farmington River since autumn of 2001, Diane is a recreational kayaker, osprey watcher, and long time cross country skier. As a former Boston inhabitant, she finds the river valley offers a rare natural beauty. In inclement months, hand weaving in silk, wool, cotton or linen is an enjoyable pastime. But occasionally, she'll step out for an adventure in faraway places like Peru, Egypt, or Sweden. Professionally, she specializes in customer research for the health insurance industry.

Harry Spring has been an Avon Resident since 1974. He is a retired teacher of Biology, Earth Science and Chemistry at Hartford Public High School. He has been a member and chair of the Avon Natural Resources Commission, served on the Avon Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commission, was an Avon delegate to and subsequently chair of the Hartford County Association of Conservation and

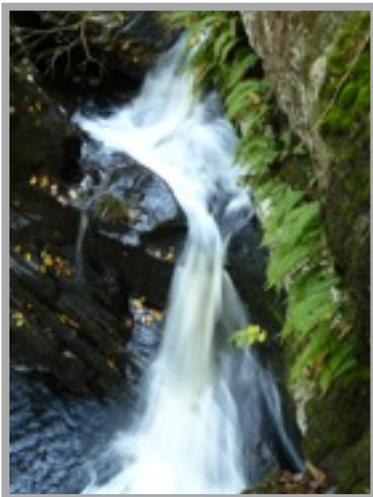


Inland Wetlands Commissions, a member of the Avon Land Trust which he served as a member of its Board of Directors and as Vice-president for several years. He was also a member of the Fisher Meadows Building Committee and a delegate from the Avon Land Trust to the Farmington River Watershed Association's Open Space Consortium.

More recently he has served at the Waterfowl Sanctuary in Farmington as a docent and in its Incubator in the Classroom Program.

Feasibility Study Updates

Stay informed about the process!



-Sal DeCarli

For more information about the study, please contact Sally Rieger, Study Chair at 860 658-7317 or at dfrandssr@aol.com or Joyce Kennedy Raymes, Study Coordinator at 860 658 4222 x. 203 or at joycekennedy1845@yahoo.com



-Sal DeCarli

Sal DeCarli, an undergraduate at Central Connecticut State University, spent this past semester compiling an archive of photos for the Lower Farmington River/Salmon Brook Wild and Scenic Study. His photos will appear in newsletters, PowerPoint presentations, and informational kiosks along the river. This spring Sal will be collecting fish diversity data from the CT DEP. If you spot Sal with his camera and green truck along the river this spring he asks that you strike-up a conversation- he is always happy to answer questions. Sal's photography has been recognized by the Connecticut Review.



The New England Whitewater Triple-Crown Championships
 First Annual, April 18th & 19th 2009
 Tariffville Gorge of the Farmington River
 Towns of Simsbury, East Granby, and Bloomfield, Connecticut
 For more information go to:
<http://www.tvilleteiplecrown.com/>

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