



The Avon Land Trust

QUARTERLY E-NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2021



Photo credit: Janet M. Conner, ALT

Welcome to Avon Land Trust's quarterly electronic newsletter, designed to bring Avon residents interesting information about our Town's natural resources, wildlife, and habitats. We endeavor to preserve land while offering great hiking and places to enjoy Avon's natural beauty. In this issue is an article about our Oakes Preserve to visit and a link to our hiking trails. We invite you to check out our upcoming guest speakers for the Fall, and visit our website at: www.avonlandtrust.org and Facebook page: www.facebook.com/avonlandtrust/ We welcome new members and volunteers!

The trees in Avon put on a spectacular show of color in Autumn in celebration of their last hurrah before winter sets in. It is fascinating how the pigments in the leaves change with the onset of cooler temperatures and longer darkness. Chlorophyll is the green pigment, and produces sugars needed for tree growth. Carotenoids are the yellow and orange pigments, and anthocyanins are the red and purple pigments. One can identify tree species by their autumnal colors: sugar maples, beeches, tulip poplars and birches display yellows and oranges; sumac, red maples, and mountain ash, and others display reds.¹ Avon is most fortunate to have many varieties of deciduous trees in our woodlands and residential settings. Trees not only add beauty to the landscape, they provide valuable functions such as the production of oxygen from carbon dioxide, prevention of soil erosion with their roots, renewable resources for building materials, fuel for heating, and habitat for wildlife.

ALT NEWS

- During storm 'Fred', the bridge leading to ALT's Nod Way trail was washed downstream. This bridge is owned and maintained by the Town of Avon, and was promptly and miraculously put back in place in short order! We apologize for any temporary inconvenience.
- Speaking of our Nod Way Trail, Avon Recreation and Parks Dept is sponsoring a hike there on Saturday 12/4/21, from 9-12 noon – together with the Avon Land Trust.
- Speaking of our Nod Way and Hazen Trails, you can use them to attend the Hike to the Mic Event at Heublein Tower on September 25 and 26! See link for more info: <https://hiketothemic.com>

¹ Perry, Leonard Dr., Extension Professor, University of Vermont, 'FALL FOLIAGE-THE HOW AND WHY', <https://pss.uvm.edu/ppp/articles/fallleaves.html>

AVON LAND TRUST GUEST SPEAKERS - FALL 2021

October 5th. Zoom presentation by Dr. Nicholas Bellantoni, State Archaeologist Emeritus 'Greatest Hits in Archaeology', also featuring sites in Avon. Register via Avon Free Public Library.

October 13th. Zoom presentation on the Unidentified Bird Disease, presented by the Sharon Audubon Society. Register via Avon Free Public Library. Supported by the generosity of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving.

Avon Flora and Fauna



Photo credits: Janet M. Conner, ALT

AVON'S WHITE-TAILED DEER

By Janet M. Conner, Historian Laureate

Many of us have often seen white-tailed deer in our yards, while hiking, or the nerve-wracking driving encounter. Personally, I think deer are one of the most graceful, gentle, and elegant of creatures. I decided to do some research into this ubiquitous woodland mammal. I consulted the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection website: <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Wildlife/Fact-Sheets/White-tailed-Deer> for some facts and stats. I learned that the 'rutting' [mating] season runs late October to January, with peak in our state being the last two weeks in November. This is important for drivers to be extra watchful during this timeframe. In Connecticut, according to the site, there have been twins, triplets, and even quadruplets born, usually in June. This explains our ample deer population. But it was not always the case back in history. "Due to over-harvesting for venison and deerskins, market hunting, and a general loss of deer habitat caused by extensive clearing of the land for farming, white-tailed deer were uncommon in Connecticut from 1700 to approximately 1900."² Their numbers have increased in recent times due to their adaptation to suburban landscapes, reclaimed abandoned farmland, and preservation of woodlands.

² Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Wildlife/Fact-Sheets/White-tailed-Deer>



This is why the mission of the Avon Land Trust is so very important. With the encroachment of development, wildlife has had much of their natural habitat destroyed. This means woodland animals have to seek other food sources and water supplies, places to bear their young, and cover from predators, including humans! Sometimes deer become 'nuisance animals' eating flowers and vegetables from household gardens. We must realize we are living in *their* territory and they are just trying to survive. However, a 1975 law was passed to allow deer hunting to prevent over-population.³ The Avon Land Trust currently owns and manages over 312 acres of land. Some of this land was purchased, some was obtained by bequeaths, and some

set aside by the Town as open space. This land is important for several reasons: it maintains the natural beauty of the Town, it preserves the Town's historical agrarian heritage, it mitigates urban sprawl and over-development, and preserves land and habitats for future generations. The land, et.al., and Nature's creatures have a symbiotic relationship; one cannot exist without the other! The photo above, is a doe who had a fawn in our yard's 'back 40' last June, and has returned this summer with a new fawn! Avon is a lovely, bucolic town, and we residents all benefit from the Avon Land Trust's preservation efforts. We welcome your support by donation of time or membership contribution. Thank you!

Avon Natural Resources



Nod Brook waterfall at Avon Town Hall
Photo credit: Janet M. Conner

NOD BROOK PROVIDED EARLY HYDROPOWER FOR MILLS

By Janet M. Conner, Historian Laureate

Governor John Treadwell (1745-1823) reported about Farmington, of which Avon was a part, at that time: "It is presumed no town in the state is better accommodated with mills of every description than this, being remarkably situated on different Streams of water, agreeably interspersed thro' the town and extremely [sic] commodious for its inhabitants."⁴ Avon's waterways that today provide scenic beauty, were once the hydrological power for many types of mills located on or near them. These streams were Roaring Brook, Nod Brook, Ware Swamp Brook, Old Farm Brook, Chidsey Brook, and Long Swamp Brook (old names). Early mills included gristmills for grinding grain, sawmills for lumber, turning mills for wood products, textile machines for natural fibers, and cider mills/distilleries!

For this article, let's focus on Nod Brook that runs into the center of town. Nod Brook supported a clothier's works (textile) as far back as 1790! In the early 1800s, the brook supplied power to a gristmill and sawmill and distillery where Nod Brook runs almost parallel to Simsbury Road. These mills changed ownership over many years. Other early businesses operated from Nod Brook's water power. They were the Avon Manufacturing Company, a cotton concern, and Andrews fuse company [prior to Climax Fuse Co.], in the mid-1800s. The last business to harness the water-power, was the Phillips Box company, that made wooden boxes.

³ Ibid.

⁴ John Treadwell, 'Farmington 1800-1832', *Voices of the New Republic*, Volume One, The Connecticut Academy of Arts & Sciences.



The photo at left, from *Connecticut Digital Archives*, the collection of the Avon Free Public Library, shows some folks standing next to the waterwheel at Wheeler's Mill, a gristmill and sawmill. This is what is known as an 'overshot' wheel, where the water flows over the wheel, to transfer power to gears inside the building that turn shafts to rotate



Photo credit: Connecticut Digital Archive collection of the Avon Free Public Library

the mill stones. The hydropower source was Nod Brook. Nod Brook runs from the ridgeline just west of West Avon Road (Rte. 172) and eventually empties into the Farmington River. In the center of town, near the Town Hall complex, is Stub Pond. Early residents remember

ice skating on this pond in the winter. The pond is a mill pond with a dam that held back water for operation of the mills with the opening and closing of sluice gates. The photo at right, *Connecticut Digital Archives*, collection of AFPL, shows some folks in what looks like their Sunday finest standing on top of the dam in the early 1900s. Dams were located on different parts of the brook to operate various mills. Disputes arose over 'riparian' rights to use the water, one of which involving water power from Nod Brook, was heard by the Connecticut Supreme Court!



Photo credits: Janet M. Conner, ALT

Today the waterway, no longer a power source, continues to provide habitat for wildlife, like this family of baby raccoons (right), and other woodland, aquatic, and amphibious animals. The banks provide vegetation which is a food source, materials for nesting, and cover for wildlife. Much of Nod Brook today runs through residential areas before entering the commercial center of town and terminating in the State-owned Nod Brook Management Area. "Straddling the border of Avon and Simsbury, it is used for walking, dog walking, and as an access route to the river when not in use for field trials."⁵



We residents of Avon, as stewards of our Town, can help protect the water quality of Nod Brook and our other waterways by being mindful of the use of pesticides, herbicides, phosphorous fertilizers, and chemicals that enter the groundwater and as run-off directly into waterways. Let's work together to keep Avon's natural resources pristine!

⁵ <https://lowerfarmingtonriver.org/docs/appendix-5-public-access-report.pdf>

History Beneath Our Feet



Photo credit: Rick Dubiel, ALT

THE OAKES PRESERVE - A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

By Janet M. Conner, Historian Laureate

One of the most benevolent and timeless gifts a person can bequeath, is the donation of land for preservation by the Town as open space, or to the Avon Land Trust as caretakers. One such donation in 2011, was made by the Oakes family, who lived in the Cider Brook section of town for many years. The 17-acre parcel of land off Waterville Road, is at the end of Chidsey Road. According to Susan Rietano Davy, of the Avon Land Trust, [it] "...was acquired via a land swap of a smaller parcel originally donated to the Trust by the family..."⁶ The site includes a 0.4 mile walking path that runs

around Lake Erie; a small pond more than a lake actually. The Farmington Biodiversity Project identified Lake Erie as a primary core habitat, one of six in Avon.⁷ This land is biodiverse as it has a water feature, meadow, a buttonwood swamp, woodlands, and provides natural habit for a variety of wildlife, including many bird species.

Historically, Lake Erie was useful to farmers in Avon's early days for ice harvesting. "Horse drawn saws scored ice on Lake Erie off Chidsey Road, Anderson Pond at the town line on Harris Rd., Lily Pond near the present Golf Club of Avon, and Stub Pond. Blocks of ice were cut, packed in straw or hay, and stored in ice houses. The ice kept throughout the summer, and was important for refrigeration, especially to keep milk and cream from spoiling."⁸ Ah, the good 'ol days!

Jeptha Curtis Chidsey (1809-1874) was a farmer, wheelright, and a carriage maker. He owned a 'stand', as small businesses were called then, on Main Street (Albany Tpke.) in the partnership of Chidsey & Morse in 1832.⁹ He owned the farmland that became Oakes Preserve until his death in 1874. In the Avon non-population agricultural census, his farm was sixty-one acres producing corn, oats, potatoes, orchard crops, hay and tobacco. Part of the property, twenty acres, is listed in his estate papers as "with pond lot adjoining",¹⁰ so this was Lake Erie! While no Will was found online, his son Frank Edward Chidsey, is shown on the 1880 Avon census among the same neighbors. On the 1884 'Driving Chart of Hartford and Vicinity: 15 Miles Around' [Albert A. Hyde & Co., New York] the name Chidsey still appears in the same location. Hence, the namesake family for Chidsey Road! Frank Chidsey died in Canton in 1907.

⁶ <https://patch.com/connecticut/avon/an--avon-land-trust-to-dedicate-its-newest-property-o1ca4313980>

⁷ https://www.avonct.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif151/f/file/file/pocd_chap_4_natural_resources.pdf

⁸ Nora Howard, Avon Town Historian, photo CTDA caption, <https://ctdigitalarchive.org/islandora/object/150002%3A4345>

⁹ *Hartford Courant*, November 13, 1832

¹⁰ Avon Probate District, 1874, Packet #69, Connecticut State Library



Photo credit: Rick Dubiel, ALT

The photo at left, shows an old roadbed that heads in a southwesterly direction on the property. "At the hearing before the County Commissioners, it was shown that this road has been a public highway since before the incorporation of the Town of Avon."¹¹ The Lord's Barn was the colloquial name for the Second Church of Farmington, early Avon's first church. It was built ca. 1751 when early Avon became the separate parish of Northington (1750) on the Farmington river, at the base of today's Reverknolls. This church was located near the ancient Cider Brook cemetery, only a short distance further south. The old road led to the Church according to Nora Howard, Avon's Town Historian.

Members of Avon Land Trust have recently worked hard to clear some of the brush and weeds blocking the walking path. There is a nice gazebo overlooking the pond that is a great spot for photos or lunch. It is a lovely place to enjoy the peaceful beauty of the lake and its surrounding woodlands. Some waterfowl that come to the lake are mergansers, Canada geese,

wood ducks and mallards. There are also wild turkeys, turtles and water snakes. In Spring, there are wild birds to be observed and ALT has placed nesting boxes to augment reproduction. There is also an abundance of wildflowers, vegetation and trees so don't forget your camera and binoculars! The landscape of the Oakes Preserve wears different attire depending on the season. We hope you and your family will visit and enjoy the scenery of this unspoiled Nature preserve.

Avon Land Trust welcomes volunteers to help maintain accessibility to the trail, pick up litter, and to keep the Preserve in its natural state of beauty. If you would like to help, please contact Rick Dubiel or Bob Breckenridge at www.avonlandtrust.org or phone Rick: 860-670-8036.

The link for our hiking trails: http://avonlandtrust.org/?page_id=6

If The Woods Could Talk

¹¹ *The Hartford Courant*, May 4, 1959.

THE SPIRITS OF THE TREES

By Janet M. Conner, Historian Laureate



Photo credit: Janet M. Conner, ALT

Native people believed that the natural world was imbued with spirits. If the woods could talk, what would they tell us about the bygone days of early Avon? There are only a few working farms left that attest to the early farming days, when people literally lived off the land. Farmers did the back-breaking work of clearing land for crops, planting, and harvesting. Land clearing unintentionally caused soil erosion, and removal of some native vegetation species. Many, many trees were cut down both for cropland, as well as building materials for homes, barns, and out-buildings. It was common practice for farmers to have a certain amount of acreage dedicated for fields, wood lot, and grassy areas. Typically, the trees closest to the homestead were cut down first for the home, and also as fuel for heating and cooking. This led to deforestation over large areas of land. One of the most over-consumed hardwoods was chestnut that was

abundant in the days of the first settlers. Chestnut was used extensively as fuel, and beams to support roofs and also floorboards. "In colonial America, chestnut was a preferred species for log cabins, especially the bottom rot-prone foundation logs. Later posts, poles, flooring, and railroad ties were all made from chestnut lumber."¹² In addition, much of the chestnut trees succumbed to *Asian chestnut blight* (*Cryphonectria parasitica*)¹³, and today their numbers have dwindled drastically.

If I were to walk deep into the woods, and listen carefully to the stories of the trees, they would tell me of all of the changes they have endured over each century. There are stories of the loss of their brothers and sisters, but also of regeneration of woodlands due to reforestation and use of imported building materials. Today Avon is fortunate to have abundant woodlands and organizations such as the Avon Land Trust, and prudent Town planners, who recognize the importance of preserving woodlands and valuable ecosystems. Perhaps they, too, have listened to the stories of the trees.

Nature will bear the closest inspection. She invites us to lay our eye level with her smallest leaf, and take an insect view of its plain.

– Henry David Thoreau

ACT ALUMNUS

A TRIBUTE TO OSTROM ENDERS

By Janet M. Conner, Historian Laureate

¹² <https://acf.org/the-american-chestnut/history-american-chestnut/#:~:text=In%20colonial%20America%2C%20chestnut%20was,contributor%20to%20the%20rural%20economy.>

¹³ Faison, Edward K., 'Witness Trees, Fossil Pollen, and Other Insights How Connecticut's Forests Have Changed From Colonial to Modern Times', Connecticut Woodlands, Summer 2014, 9.
https://harvardforest1.fas.harvard.edu/sites/harvardforest.fas.harvard.edu/files/publications/pdfs/Faison_CTWoodlands_2014.pdf



The late Ostrom Enders was elected, along with eight others, as one of the first Board of Directors of the Avon Land Trust in 1973.¹⁴ He had retired in 1967 from a stellar professional career in the banking and insurance industries. His business acumen and integrity served the Land Trust well.

The Enders had an architecturally interesting, contemporary home [demolished], located in the Cider Brook section of Avon. Mr. Enders was an

avid outdoorsman hunting for sport, and freshwater fishing for salmon and trout, according to his obituary. After his retirement, "Mr. Enders developed an extensive breeding program for rare species of North American waterfowl at his home in Avon."¹⁵ Mr. Enders was an honorary member of the Garden Club of Hartford, to which his wife belonged, and was given an award for Conservation in 1985.¹⁶ Ostrom Enders donated 2.65 acres of land at 125 Cider Brook Road to the Avon Land Trust in 1995.

In researching Mr. Enders, I found his gravestone pictured above.¹⁷ The verse that is inscribed caught my attention for its lovely Nature references. The words are: Let Me Love The Country; The Rivers Running Through Valleys; Streams, Broad Fields, and Woodlands; Where I May Lie Happy – *Virgil*. This inscription is actually paraphrased from a longer Virgil passage: "Yet if I cannot reach these distant realms of nature because of some cold spiritless blood around my heart, then let me love the country, the rivers running through valleys, the streams and woodlands-happy, though unknown. Give me broad fields and sweeping rivers, lofty mountain ranges in distant lands, cold precipitous valleys, where I may lie beneath the enormous darkness of the branches!"¹⁸

Mr. Enders clearly had a deep appreciation for Nature and our beautiful Town. His generous gift of the property on Cider Brook Road is a lasting legacy to his belief in conservation and protection of natural habitat. May he lie, happy.



'Like' us on our Facebook page. We would love to hear from you!

THE AVON LAND TRUST HISTORY AND MISSION STATEMENT

¹⁴ *The Hartford Courant* (1923-1995); Hartford, Conn., 26 May 1973.

¹⁵ *The Hartford Courant*, (1923-1995); Hartford, Conn., December 6, 1994.

¹⁶ Garden Club of Hartford, 'The First 100 Years 1916-2016', 100.

¹⁷ www.findagrave.com, photo credit: msimonds 2017

¹⁸ Highet, Gilbert, 'Poets in a Landscape', The Village and the Farm, Prion, London, England, 1999, 67.

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, and 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, to be preserved in its natural state.
- To maintain wildlife habitats on our properties.
- To provide public access to appropriate properties, to encourage public enjoyment of nature.
- To actively seek wetlands, woodlands, meadowlands and ridges which have unique scenic, historic, scientific and ecological significance for Avon.