

# AVON LAND TRUST

## Summer 2023 E-Newsletter



Summer has arrived! Remember the best things about summer when you were a kid - going barefoot, looking for bullfrogs, fishing for sun fish, climbing trees, picking berries, riding bikes, walking in the woods, swimming, and playing outdoors until dark? Well, some of these delights can still be had at our beautiful properties here in Avon. We invite you to take a cool walk on one of our hiking trails [see [www.avonlandtrust.org](http://www.avonlandtrust.org)], to visit the pristine Oakes Preserve to observe wildlife, enjoy a lunch at one of our picnic tables, and just enjoy Nature. We welcome new members.

*Happy Summer!*

### **ALT News**

Happy Trails to You! The Avon Land Trust has been very busy this past month, blazing new trails. Trail manager Scott Lewis started by creating several new trails at our Wellner Family Conservation Area, and finished strongly with a new White Trail loop that extends just below Heublein Tower. Girl Scout Makena Logan has forged a "Logan's Run" path through a very large and challenging patch of invasive barberry, to connect our newest parcel at 160 Huckleberry Hill to the town trail. This work is partly in response to the popularity of the new series of hikes hosted jointly by the Avon Land Trust and the Town Recreation and Parks Dept. In other news, the Avon Town Council issued a Proclamation naming 5/23/23 as Avon Land Trust Appreciation Day, to commemorate our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary!

### **ALT Events**

Saturday, August 26 @ 10:00 am. Hike to the Mic, starting at Hazen trail. FREE. Sign up with Avon Recreation and Parks.

Tuesday, September 26 – all evening. Fundraiser at Flatbread Pizza, located at 110 Albany Turnpike in Canton (aka The Shoppes at Farmington Valley)

Saturday, October 21 @ 10:00 am. Tower Toot hike, starting at Hazen trail. FREE. Sign up with Avon Recreation and Parks.

Wednesday October 25 @ 7:00 pm The Land Trust and Library co-host a "Halloween Special" on Local Gravestone Restoration, presented by Randall Nelson, a sculptor educated at Pratt Institute.

# IF THE WOODS COULD TALK...

## ALT Board Member Makes Contribution to Avon's Historical Record

By Janet M. Conner, Historian Laureate



You may recognize the name of Avon Land Trust Board member, Scott Lewis, often noted on our Facebook page for his hard work in keeping our hiking trails clear of fallen trees, maintaining the foot path in Oakes Preserve, and helping with other arduous tasks. I'd like to showcase a different kind of project that Scott took upon himself. Scott chose to research the history of the properties on which ALT's hiking trails are located. Scott consulted me to fact-check his work, and I must say he did an outstanding job...especially tackling land records at the Town vault for his first time!

The highlight of this project was a meeting with Janet Carville, a Woodford descendent and lifelong resident who grew up on Nod Road, who was personally acquainted with some of this land. Besides Janet, our co-president Bob Breckinridge, Scott Lewis, Doug Ross, and myself also attended. We were regaled with tales of Janet's family, their land, and their farm. In addition, she was a font of recollections of neighboring farm owners.

The Woodford farm dates back to 1666. If the woods could talk, they would tell the tale, of Native people on the ridge of Avon Mountain/Talcott Mountain. Janet recalls seeing earthen dug outs behind their property where she believes the Natives used them as cover, perhaps in confrontation with early Woodfords! Some of the woodlands were cut down both for firewood, and for building the Woodford tobacco barns, some of which still stand! She recalled geologic formations that can still be seen on our trails, as well as a natural spring. As a kid, she and her friends played on this land and she was crystal clear in her recollection of the details as compared with Scott's own intimate knowledge of the terrain. Some of the other historical family names that once owned property here included Miller, North, Sperry, Webster, Hazen, and Alsop.

I would like to give Scott high praise for his exceptional research work. You can read his informative work 'History of Nod Way Parcels and Trails' at: <https://avonlandtrust.org/trails/> along with trail maps. We invite you to visit the Hazen Park to Tower trail, the Garvin-Maher Loop, and Metacomet Ridge trails to step back in time, recalling the former early owners of these properties. There is now a brand-new picnic table and bench located just below the Heublein Tower, on our Hazen trail. Come sit a spell, and if you listen carefully, you might hear the woods talk in the rustling of their verdant leaves, on a summer breeze.



**We need volunteers to help with various projects!**

Contact Rick Dubiel at 860-670-8036

# HISTORY BENEATH OUR FEET

## Caring For the Environment With 'Green' Products

By Janet M. Conner, Historian Laureate



Bumble bee on Dunning plant

Recently my husband and I were driving along Brickyard Road in Farmington, and on a whim, stopped to look at the plants at the nursery of Dunning Sand and Gravel Company. I picked up a yarrow plant, and headed to the office to pay. I got to chatting, and in no time I felt like I had known the couple a long time, as they are lovely people. It turns out that Ben is a fourth generation Dunning, and owns the business with his wife Donna. [You simply must read his inspiring life story here: <http://www.dunningsand.com/about-us.aspx>]. While this business is not officially in Avon, the story is just too good, and I think it will resonate with our readers and our environmentally-conscious members.

Prior to becoming Dunning Sand and Gravel, the original company was Atlas Sand and Gravel, founded by Stewart N. Dunning [1]. Atlas, in addition to sand and gravel, mined traprock from Avon Mountain and I would wager that the house in the article below was built using Atlas-supplied traprock. Anyway, there's a lot of interesting history about the Atlas company, about them blasting stone and startling locals. One story tells of a 40 year old employee preparing to set off the dynamite, and dropping dead just before setting off the charge! [2] John Stewart Dunning, son of Stewart, was a lawyer, and started the business under the Dunning name with only seven products in 1917. They now have many products, and what amazes me is the original idea of harvesting something literally free for the taking from the earth, and reusing, recycling, and upcycling it, not only made a profitable business, but helps the environment! From their website: "We are proud to be a "green company" with a major portion of our company revenues coming from recycling products."

Ben Dunning bought the business from his father, R. Mort Dunning in 2002, and started with only two office employees, and two outdoor employees. Today the business has branched out into multiple environment-friendly Divisions, change to Dunning Industries. leaves and natural debris in 'winnows' (long tunnel-like rows,) Green! Another product line is recycling it into brick chips. Green! crushing it for a base for roadways, rate. Some of their clients include Dunning custom soils for their Yale '28] Dunning products are get just the right amount of Dunning products have made their as natural stone for hardscapes, gravel for pathways, mulch for gardens and landscapes, sand for playscapes, plus trees, bushes, and perennial plants. On one other historical note, J.S. Dunning had a bird sanctuary in Granby, started the Matanzas Pass Preserve in Florida, now managed by the Nature Conservancy [3], and also donated land for the Burlington and Granby land trusts.



Butterfly bushes at Dunning nursery

with a larger crew and a name One product line is picking up Farmington, laying it out in to decompose into compost. reclaiming used brick, and They also recycle concrete, as it has a high compaction Yale University that used rooftops. [J.S. Dunning was also used for golf courses to bounce for golf! Many of way into Avon properties, such

The Avon Land Trust applauds the environmentally-conscious Dunning company, as a model for others, in thinking green! As I stroll around my garden, walking on my Dunning mulch, I will think of the history beneath my feet.



Thanks to the Dunning family for providing fodder for this story!

# AVON NATURAL RESOURCES

## One With Nature

By Janet M. Conner, Historian Laureate



Jim and Mary Harrop's house is built out of Avon Mountain traprock! I had the honor of visiting their remarkable house and grounds, that are literally one with Nature. Mary Harrop, an earth angel in her own right, gave me a tour to see things a casual observer would miss. The house is set back from the road, nestled in a clearing within very tall trees, that hug the residence. Approaching the front of the house by ascending stone steps and following a stone path, Mary and I walked between some very tall, dense conifers. Mary points out a bald spot in this enormous evergreen, and tells me about a bear that had gone under this expansive growth, breaking limbs. She pulls back the front branches to show me where there are bolts and screws holding together the large woody limbs, that now support the branches effectively.

There are mowed grass areas bounded by graceful, undulating borders of groundcover, all contributing to a natural feel. There are no sharp angles, just a flowing landscape that is visually appealing to the eye. Also, no showy flowers, but rather borders with thick blankets of pachysandra, may apples, hosta, lily of the valley, ferns, and dictamnus albus, all blending into a sea of foliage. Here and there a small pop of color from a single bleeding heart, and a pinkish purple foxglove; the daffodils along the back grass border under a shady tree.



Off toward the side of the house is a dome-shaped leafy tree. Mary motions for me to follow her, and we go under this domed canopy and it is empty, except for a twisted tree trunk. This was a magical place where one could have a tea party with the woodland creatures, undetected by others. Mary called this a 'contorted beech' tree, which indeed it is! However, the



common and scientific names are Parasol Beech/*Fagus sylvatica* aka 'Tortuosa'. The Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University's website captures the tree's essence perfectly. "In the autumn, standing under this canopy is akin to entering a domed medieval cathedral with magnificent (and ephemeral, in this case) stained glass windows (the leaves) filtering the light. Looking up at the winding, aged branches, provides a sense of peace and isolation in a sea of trees in an urban oasis. In winter, the skeletal form becomes vivid with a dusting of snow." It would be grand to see Mary's tree again in both Fall and Winter!



We exited from beneath this horticultural marvel, to view another splendid tree. It was at the back edge of the grassed area, and towered at least 60 feet, one of three on the property. Some of its leaves were a dark shiny green persimmon 'copper beech' and others had an almost burnt hue, which Mary identified as a tree, Scientific Name: *Fagus sylvatica* 'Atropunicea', Common Name: European Beech. From a distance the contrasts with its verdant neighbors. More unusual leaf color for summer, was the "elephant foot" trunk, as Mary's family called it. The base of this tree had very large, spreading roots, with a gray bark and even wrinkles that truly did resemble the nickname!



shiny green persimmon 'copper beech' sylvatica Copper distance the contrasts with than the

At the back of the house is a lovely English-inspired boxwood formal garden. Mary explained that she handplanted 320 'starts' of Korean boxwood, taken from her front bushes, in a classical pattern. What is very unexpected is that rather than the typical roses, there are elegant white peonies in each center portion of the design.



This garden compliments the English design of the house perfectly. Coming around to the north side of the house, there is a mature Japanese maple near the residence and a white rhododendron, and more beds of white peonies, Dwarf iris cristata, in bloom, bordering another stone walkway that has moss growing between each stone, accented by lichen. The tonal qualities of all the flowering plants are subtle, allowing the beauty of the shapes and textures of all the other actors in this stage show, to be in their best light.



Now when one can focus on the house itself, you feel as though you are in the English countryside, with gnarled vines of Boston ivy clambering up the basalt stone. Mary related the house's history. She said it was built in 1941 by a couple from Montana, who wanted a "ranch" style house. There is even a whimsical nod to the ranch theme, with an iron yard art sculpture from the original owners, at the property's entrance. Yet, the visage of the house is clearly English tudor style. On close inspection, one can see all the stones were split to have a flat plane on the front facing side with generous amounts of cement in between, adding to the natural, rustic feel. Mary explained that this was traprock from Avon Mountain. She told me that concrete was poured into frames and then the stones were put into the concrete, before being hoisted up to form the walls. How ingenious!

Jim and Mary's house looks as though it has been there from time immemorial; as natural as a rock outcropping. The English-style lamps, copper window boxes with verdigris patina, charming small pane windows, and trim painted a dark earthy tone, all blend effortlessly into their surroundings. The Harrops have stewarded this residence and botanical landscape since 1971, and it is a truly an other-worldly place, right in the heart of town. The construction of this environmentally-friendly house using natural materials inside and outside, will be standing another hundred years. I think J.R.R. Tolkien would have appreciated this whimsical place!



# AVON FLORA AND FAUNA

## Invasive Plant Species in Avon

By Janet M. Conner, Historian Laureate



They blend in to the natural landscape almost imperceptibly, unless you know what you are looking for...invasive plant species! These are plants that are not native to Connecticut, and compete with our native plants. These invasive plants adversely affect native birds, butterflies, and bees. According to the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) website: "Non-native species are those that are alien to the ecosystem that they have been introduced into and whose introduction causes or is likely to cause harm to the environment or human health." See: <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Invasive-Species/Invasive-Species>

This is a great resource for identifying invasive plants; there is even a printable list. See: [https://cipwg.uconn.edu/invasive\\_plant\\_list-by\\_common\\_name/](https://cipwg.uconn.edu/invasive_plant_list-by_common_name/)

On my walks with a friend recently, in various places around Avon, we intentionally looked for invasive plants. Above is a pretty yellow flowered plant that is found at the edge of ponds. A Wikipedia article (See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iris\\_pseudacorus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iris_pseudacorus)) shows this as: "*Iris pseudacorus*, the yellow flag, yellow iris, or water flag, is a species of flowering plant in the family Iridaceae. It is native to Europe, western Asia and northwest Africa." It is an invasive aquatic plant in Connecticut, that it is difficult to remove "...outcompeting other plants in the ecosystem". It is surprising how many non-native plants are hiding in plain sight! The Connecticut Invasive Plant Group has identified 10 species of plant that are of most concern in the state: Japanese Knotweed, Oriental Bittersweet, Japanese Barberry, Multiflora Rose, Mugwort, Garlic Mustard, Autumn Olive, Common Reed, Mile-A-Minute, and Swallow Wort.

The American Beauties Native Plants informational flyer (See: [www.abnativeplants.com](http://www.abnativeplants.com)) says that "Native plants are essential if native bees are to survive and thrive. Native plants...have evolved with native bees and are better than non-native plants at providing the nutritional support in the form of nectar needed to sustain the native bee life cycle. Native bees are essential pollinators, along with other pollinators, are responsible for one third of the world's food supply". The same is true for butterflies. In addition, native plants have also evolved with native birds, and these plants provide attributes that non-native plants cannot: caterpillars for food for young, fruit and seeds, and cover for protection and nesting sites.

The Avon Land Trust encourages homeowners to keep invasive plant species out of their own yards, and to plant native species instead. Not only are you helping the ecosystem, you will enjoy the beauty of colorful flowers and plants, while benefiting wildlife. I purchased plants that are bee and butterfly friendly, as our pollinators need all the help they can get! ALT encourages folks to help our pollinators thrive by planting bee and butterfly friendly plants. Also, installing nest boxes near these plants, provides needed food for baby birds, by attracting both beneficial insects and natural seeds.



## EXTRA!



We would also like to recognize and thank one of our sister community organizations, the Garden Club of Avon. The club grows vegetables at the Sycamore Hills Recreation Area, in raised bed gardens. The produce is donated to Avon's Gifts of Love to help those in need. Also, the club maintains a pollinator garden under the pergola near the tennis courts there. In addition to pretty roses, iris, and daisies, are also purple clover, that bees love, and other butterfly friendly plants! We greatly appreciate the club's recent donation to the Avon Land Trust!



### *Note: All photographs by Avon Land Trust*

[1] 'Stewart N. Dunning Dies, Director Of Fuller Brush Firm: Dies in Bloomfield', The Hartford Courant (1923-); Nov 23, 1951

[2] 'Drops Dead Preparing Dynamite for Blasting', The Hartford Courant (1923-); Hartford, Conn. [Hartford, Conn]. 11 Apr 1934

[3] 'Service held for J. Dunning', The Hartford Courant (1923-); Jan 7, 1988;



## 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 these 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.