Summer reading....

HUMPHREYS’ CHERRY BROOK FARM, CANTON
WITH FAMILY CONNECTIONS IN AVON

It was around Christmastime when I found an online website, (no longer active) for a cut-your-own tree place. It was called ‘Humphrey’s Christmas Tree Farm’ and a man with a pleasant voice answered the phone. He told me it was an old number and kindly referred me to another nearby tree place. I took the opportunity, out of curiosity, to ask if he was a descendant of the Humphrey family. He nicely replied that “yes” he was, at which point I let him know I was a researcher for the AHS and interested in his family heritage and the original Cherry Brook Farm. We agreed to meet, after the holidays, for coffee in town to which he brought two of his siblings.

Prior to our meeting, I did some background research on the family in this area. The Humphrey family descendants today living in Canton Center and environs, trace their family tree limb back to Michael Humphrey. Michael is believed to be the immigrant ancestor, coming to Windsor from England in the early 1600s. As with many settler families, they were prolific and spread to nearby West Simsbury, Weatogue, and Canton. The land and house that were to become Humphreys Cherry Brook Farm, was originally owned by Deacon John Mills in 1742. In 1815, Gardner Mills built the homestead that is still extant. His son, Anson Gardner Mills, married Lydia Griswold, who inherited the house after Anson passed away. Lydia remarried to Alfred Humphrey. So now you see where this story is going!

Cherry Brook Farm got its name because of its proximity to Cherry Brook waterway in Canton, and is physically located at 225 Cherry Brook Road, now under new ownership. The farm, as can be seen in the aerial photo, consisted of the homestead, a dairy barn, a horse barn, ice house, a tobacco shed, and an “engine house”. This was located away from other buildings as it housed a gasoline engine that powered the hay lift and other things, I learned. The historic barns were surveyed in 2007 by The Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. (1997) The farm was originally a working farm with dairy cows and
later tobacco as a ‘cash crop’. It comprises about 73 acres of land and became a Christmas tree farm after the 1977 passing of Harold William Humphrey. During the 1950s, and twenty years thereafter, the property was reforested by the State with pine trees. This is how the later generations of the Humphrey family ran it as a cut-your-own Christmas tree farm. See historic photo at left of the first tree they sold for $12.00 dwarfing a Ford Pinto!

The Humphrey family had continuous ownership of the farm until 2008 when it was sold. However, since the trees already planted on the land were theirs, they continued to sell Christmas trees another ten years. The Farmington Valley Herald ran a story in 1989 titled ‘10th Generation Comes Home to Canton Farm. It mentioned that the Connecticut Department of Agriculture did a survey of farms that have stayed in the same family for generations. Cherry Brook Farm was missed, but it would have made thirty-seven farms since the signing of the United States Constitution!

Now for the connection to Avon’s history. One example, and I expect there are many more due to Canton being our neighbors to the north and west, was in the Huckleberry Hill section of Avon. There was a letter found in the wall of a house that was being remodeled. This house was built in 1832 by Romanta Woodruff, an affluent man through his distillery that, according to his diary, produced hard cider, and selling this cider and butternuts in the West Indies. The letter is written by one of Romanta’s daughters, Abigail, to her sister Ann. The letter, written in 1852, is a time capsule of neighborhood and family news on Huckleberry Hill and nearby Collinsville. Why it is relevant to this story, is that Mary Ann Woodruff, daughter of Romanta, married Henry Humphrey according to a genealogy website. See Woodruff Family History, Descendants of Mathew and Hannah Woodruff of Farmington, CT

The Humphrey descendants I met with are ninth generation. They are Warren Mills Humphrey, a military veteran, Mariane Ruth Humphrey Burbank, and Ken Stockwell Humphrey, also a military veteran. Their father was Samuel Stockwell Humphrey, a veteran as well, with an amazing story, that will be saved for another time. Each of these siblings value their family heritage and were proud to share their story with me. Each one holds a position in town as it was instilled in them, by their father, about the importance of civic duty. Warren quipped, “It has taken three of us, to equal the [civic duty] work of their father.”

What came through most when meeting with this family, was not only their sibling kinship, but their love of family and their fond memories of visiting Cherry Brook Farm as they were growing up. Warren and Ken would visit their grandparents during the summers when they returned from active service. Mariane spoke about “her” horses and I can only imagine the joy of riding a horse on this beautiful landscape. That old farmhouse is classic in its Colonial styling, with a charming covered porch on the rear addition. I can envision the ladies of yesteryear, sitting on that porch shucking peas for dinner, or in the kitchen canning vegetables.

Cherry Brook Farm was a typical dairy farm in former days that became a tree farm. Just imagine all of the families who have gathered around one of their trees on Christmas morning sharing love and stories of their own families. The Humphreys created memories for generations of their family and for many of ours. They have left a legacy.

By Janet M. Conner, Researcher
Abigail’s Springtime Birthday

One of the best things about the newly arrived Springtime was not only all of the beautiful flowers and warm weather, but it is the season of Abigail’s birth. She was born on a farm with five other girl mice and six boy mice! Being from such a large family, it was often hard for Abigail to be noticed or recognized for good deeds. Sometimes Abigail had to do something really spectacular to get her parent’s attention. She thought and thought, and then came up with an idea.

She started by sketching out a drawing of her plan in the dirt. Then she thought about what materials she would need to make her creation. Then she was OFF!!! She scurried into the nearby woodlands and started gathering small twigs and carried bunches, tied with string, on her back to her chosen spot. Then she gnawed them into the sizes she wanted using her sharp teeth. Next, she began to construct the frame by tying together long and short twigs to form two wall sections and two end sections. She was a clever mouse right from that start. She figured out that to stand these sections upright, she would have to use a pulley-type system. She tied a long piece of string to one end, the other end to her tail. Then she scurried up a tall bush, the string became taught, and then she leaped off the bush and her body acted like a counterbalance raising up the section. Then, all she had to do was tie them together!

Now, was the fun part…off she raced into the woods to gather clumps of moss that she carried back in her apron. Abigail was a well-dressed mouse from the time she could dress herself. She didn’t own a lot of clothes, but she had a certain flair for wearing them. Next, she stuck the moss onto all sides of her structure, carefully poking some of the tiny roots in between the twigs. Her project was really beginning to come to life!

Now it was off to the fields of wildflowers for the finishing touch. She gathered buttercups, bluebells, black-eyed Susans, thistle, and daisies. In the wink of an eye, or in this case whisker, Abigail stuck all of these pretty, colorful flowers into the moist moss. Her flower house was complete and resplendent!

Abigail, all covered in dirt, splinters of wood, and pieces of leaves, ran back to her family home. She told her family that she had a big surprise for them. Unbeknownst to her family, Abigail had rolled a small wheel of cheese, from the farm’s milk room, down the low hill to the spot of her creation. She covered the cheese in edible violas to make a birthday ‘cheese-cake’ for her siblings and built the flower house around it! When the family arrived, they could not believe their eyes seeing the adorable, little flower house that Abigail had constructed all by herself! Everyone enjoyed cake and delicious flowers. They put her up on their shoulders carrying her back home singing Happy Birthday to Us! Abigail wasn’t unnoticed today-she did something nice for herself and for her family.

Historic Gravestone Project in West Avon Cemetery – Surprised CT Resident

From Nora Howard, Town Historian:

In the West Avon Cemetery, beside the West Avon Congregational Church and across from the Avon Free Public Library, a crumbling gravestone is held together by an ancient metal brace. The stone marks the grave of the Rev. Rufus Hawley, Avon’s only pastor from 1768-1817.

With the gravestone deteriorating and its loss inevitable, Dick Rulon, superintendent of the West Avon Cemetery since 2010, raised over $5,000 to replace it with a copy. The original stone will be removed by stone carver Randall Nelson and Mr. Rulon, and then donated to the Avon Historical Society. Mr. Nelson will make an exact copy of the stone. His company, Nelson Architectural Restoration of Willington, CT specializes in the preservation of monuments, building facades and statuary. His stonework projects include the Soldiers and Sailors Arch in Bushnell Park, the
McClellan Gate at Arlington National Cemetery, and statues of historical figures for the tops of flagpoles at the Old State House.

In 2011, Avon town historian Nora Howard wrote a biography of the Rev. Hawley, *Catch’d on Fire*. She noted, “The gravestone of Rufus Hawley has deteriorated beyond repair, and to save it means it must be preserved indoors. It represents the life of a man vitally important to Avon. He lived in Avon from 1768-1826, when the area was first part of Great Britain and then part of the town of Farmington. I am very grateful that Dick has taken on this worthwhile project to replace this stone in the West Avon Cemetery, and to move the original stone to the Avon Historical Society.”

When he started this project, Mr. Rulon contacted Ruth Shapley Brown for advice. Mrs. Brown, a leading Connecticut expert on gravestone preservation and history, told Mr. Rulon that a direct descendant must approve the removal of the gravestone. With no known descendant, Mr. Rulon and Mrs. Howard set out to find one. Mrs. Howard contacted the Hawley Society, which in turn sent out some emails and soon found John Miller of Oxford, CT. John and Christine Miller have conducted extensive genealogy research on their families, and knew that Rev. Hawley was Mr. Miller’s grandfather of many generations ago. The Millers were pleasantly surprised to learn of Rev. Hawley’s importance to Avon and agreed to help in any way.

The Millers visited the Avon Free Public Library in April to meet with the staff of the Marian Hunter History Room and with Mr. Rulon, West Avon Cemetery official Douglas Ross, and Mrs. Howard. The Millers offered documentation of their approval of the project, conducted research on their family in the History Room, and toured the West Avon Cemetery to see Hawley family gravestones. With funds for the Hawley gravestone project already in hand, Mr. Rulon is identifying other historic stones that need attention and funds. Donations to the effort may be made out to: “West Avon Cemetery” and mailed to Dick Rulon, 188 Thompson Road, Avon, CT. 06001. For information about the Hawley Gravestone Project, please contact Dick Rulon at rerulon@comcast.net or call him at: 860-978-8413.

The West Avon Cemetery overview. The gravestone of the Rev. Rufus Hawley is at right; the gravestone with the flag is of his son Zerah. Photograph by Nora Howard.

L-R: front are John and Christine Miller  
L-R: rear: Doug Ross, Nora Howard, Dick Rulon, at the Marian Hunter History Room in the Avon Free Public Library. Photograph by Tina Panik.
Recently the Avon Historical Society honored the early volunteers of the Marian Hunter History Room. These dedicated archivists cut newspaper articles, reorganized boxes upon boxes of newsletters, newspapers, maps, etc in order to create a workable archive of Avon’s history. The History Room had its beginnings in a much smaller room on the second floor of the old library. Thanks to these individuals, we now have a professional room that researchers can use and enjoy. The plaque below was hung this Spring for all to see:

![Plaque Image]

**TABLESCAPES SPONSORS, WINNERS and PHOTOS**

The Second Annual Tablescapes fundraising event in March was a terrific success and so beautifully done, it was hard for attendees to vote their favorite table! We have many people to thank for making this event happen. First and foremost are the Sponsors. We had three levels of sponsors this year:

**GOLD** – John Carmon, Carmon Funeral Home & Family Center; Marie Speich & Ann Ryan, Adventures in Decorating LLC; Georgia VanDemark; Penny Woodford, Coldwell Banker; David & Mardelle Peña.

**SILVER** – Al Curry; Garden Club of Avon; Jenna & Terry Ryan, New England Arborists LLC; Lee Wilson, Computers by Lee LLC; Anne Yurch.

**BRONZE** – Rose & Mickey Bennett; Sally Dengenis; Dennis Dix, Jr., Dixworks LLC; Otto & Barbara Ruppert; Bernhard & Katalin Schaefer.

Two decorators donated their tables for a raffle: Sally Dengenis donated a table setting with vintage Czech china in a bohemia cornflower pattern. Joan Blanchard donated a stunning 7’ tall Victorian dollhouse.

There were 3 winners (see photos next page) were chosen by those who attended the event:

**FIRST PLACE** – *LEMONS* by Marie Speich of Adventures in Decorating LLC

**SECOND PLACE** – *EASTER TEA WITH GRAMMY* by Patricia Moran of Works of Faith, Inc.

**THIRD PLACE** – *HONORING MILITARY VETERANS* by Renee Holder and Rose Bennett

The Society thanks all the decorators, designers and individuals who went above and beyond to make this a most beautiful and fun event for all. Same time next year!!!
First Place – LEMONS

SECOND PLACE – Easter Tea with Grammy

Third Place – HONORING MILITARY VETERANS

The mission of the Avon Historical Society, founded in 1974, is to identify, collect, preserve, utilize, publish, display and promote the history and heritage of Avon.

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