

FARMINGTON VALLEY CT HERITAGE NETWORK PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 5, 2023

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Farmington Valley CT Heritage Network Awarded Grant to Explore Immigration Stories of the Farmington Valley

"Why They Came" offers a personal perspective on the people who shaped our towns, sponsored by Connecticut Humanities

Two Consecutive Sundays: November 5 & 12, 2023 / 1:00-2:30 pm

FARMINGTON, Conn. – A \$1,908 Sponsorship Grant awarded by Connecticut Humanities to the Farmington Valley CT Heritage Network (FVHN) will breathe life into stories of immigration to the Farmington Valley spanning the 17th to 20th centuries. **“Why They Came: Immigration to the Farmington Valley”** is a series of talks to be presented on two consecutive **Sundays, November 5 and November 12, 1:00-2:30 p.m.** In each session, four FVHN member sites will present brief stories about an individual, family, or organization – including immigrants from Poland, Germany, England, Ireland, Italy, and more – that had an impact on their town. The **November 5** session will be held at **Stanley-Whitman House**, 37 High Street, Farmington, and will feature presentations by Avon Historical Society, Farmington Historical Society, Stanley-Whitman House, and Unionville Museum. The **November 12** session will be held at Simsbury Historical Society’s Ellsworth Visitors Center, 800 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury, and will feature presentations by Barkhamsted Historical Society, Canton Historical Museum, Salmon Brook Historical Society, and Simsbury Historical Society. Admission is \$5 per Sunday per person, payable in advance or at the door. To reserve your spot, please contact Nancy Anstey at nancy@farmingtonvalleyctheritage.org or 860-680-5298.

The Farmington River Valley is the geographic thread that connects the member sites of The Farmington Valley CT Heritage Network (ten member sites in all: for more information, visit <https://www.farmingtonvalleyctheritage.org/members>), covering the central watershed area of the Farmington River. While this area is widely known for its cultural history – from the extensive Indigenous presence of centuries past to colonial settlements and beyond – FVHN is pleased to have this opportunity to offer more in-depth stories of individuals who, escaping the changing economic and social conditions of their home countries, arrived in and helped shape our communities.

“We chose this topic for our annual fall presentation because immigration has been at the forefront of the news for some time, and we want to present the topic from a different, more personal perspective,” commented Nancy Anstey, the group’s Chairperson. “This is a topic that affects us all, whether we’re talking about the past or the present. By exploring personal stories from each town, we can bring a greater understanding to people about their communities.”

On **Sunday, November 5**, participants will hear from the **Avon Historical Society** about “Prince Thomas of Savoy – Past, Present, and Future,” discussing the founding members of the Society and their immigration from Italy in 1917. The **Farmington Historical Society** will feature a first-generation couple from Bangladesh discussing their journeys to the Farmington River Valley, perceptions of living here, and hopes for their children. Alyce Barlowski from **Stanley-Whitman House** in Farmington will appear in period costume as Civil War widow Julia Roper to talk about “Our History in Stories: The Legacy of Mrs. Julia Roper.” From the **Unionville Museum**, attendees will hear about “The Irish in Unionville, 1862,” including author James Joyce.

The following Sunday, **November 12**, will feature a story from the **Barkhamsted Historical Society** about an immigrant German family taking over one of Barkhamsted’s biggest farms after the Civil War. **Canton Historical Society** will focus on the immigrants from many countries who came to work at The Collins Company as worldwide demand grew for the company’s axes, machetes, and other tools. **Salmon Brook Historical Society** in Granby will present “Granby to the White House,” a story involving a 1698 immigrant from England, an abduction, and the family’s connection to one of the Presidents of the United States. Finally, the **Simsbury Historical Society** brings the story of “Frank Zablocki, Polish Immigrant, and the Industrialization of Simsbury,” about the first Polish man hired by the Ensign Bickford Company in 1898.

Proceeds from the program benefit **The Farmington Valley CT Heritage Network**, whose mission is to enhance appreciation of the rich history of Connecticut’s Farmington Valley by promoting collaboration and communication among heritage groups and raising cultural awareness through programming and tours.

To learn more about FVHN and this program, visit <https://www.farmingtonvalleyctheritage.org/>.

About Connecticut Humanities

Connecticut Humanities (CTH) is an independent, nonprofit affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. CTH connects people to the humanities through grants, partnerships, and collaborative programs. CTH projects, administration, and program development are supported by state and federal matching funds, community foundations, and gifts from private sources. Learn more by visiting cthumanities.org.

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(please see photos and captions on page 3)

Photo captions:

1. *John Ullmann raking hay.jpg*: John Ullman with a horse-drawn hay rake at his farm in Barkhamsted, c. 1920. John and Augusta Ullmann and their family immigrated from Germany to Barkhamsted in 1885. Photo courtesy of Barkhamsted Historical Society.
2. *Ensign Bickford Campus ca 1900.jpg*: A photo of the Ensign Bickford Fuse Factory ca. 1900. When the Ensign Bickford Company in Simsbury began to expand in the late 19th century, numbers of Polish and Lithuanian workers arrived to join the earlier Irish immigrants. Photo courtesy of Simsbury Historical Society.
3. *Julia Roper.jpg*: Julia Roper was a young Irish immigrant who worked at Miss Porter's School. After she lost her husband Hugh Roper in the Civil War, she raised her daughter as a single parent, living for some time in "the old Whitman house" (Stanley-Whitman House) on High Street. Photo courtesy of Stanley-Whitman House.

