

NEWS FROM THE SCHOOLHOUSE

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Newsletter of the Middlebury Connecticut Historical Society

Spring 2011 Volume 1 Issue 5

Letter from the President



Middlebury has gotten a great deal of good exposure lately. Rachel Carley has been very busy showing our beautiful architecture to packed audiences at the Mattatuck Museum and the Middlebury Library. I hope many of you attended her presentations and the museum exhibits. If you love the history of our corner of the world, I can't commend enough a membership in the Mattatuck Museum (followed by your renewal in the Middlebury Historical Society, of course!). In addition, Ray Sullivan has produced the latest hot-selling book on Middlebury, *Breakneck*, and a must-have for anyone who loves this town. His presentations have been packed too, and sales of the book have been brisk. Get your copy soon.

Thanks to all of you who renewed your membership and to our new members. You make our work possible. While I am thanking people for their support, I can't say enough about our industrious volunteers. Our building is open on Mondays from 2 to 5 (usually closer to 6!). During that time, Jean Plowman (a descendant of the famous Ferrante and Delaney families of Middlebury) and Mary Anne McCormack come by to assist with our growing collections of photographs, newspaper accounts, and just about anything else that needs doing. Agnes Lutes, our vice president and editor of this newsletter, is always present, working hard to secure our collections, working with the board, doing presentations to visitors and much, much more. Without her dedication for over fifteen years, your historical society would probably have been, well, history.

Many more people work in many ways "behind the scenes" to assist in so many ways. People such as Chris Parker, Michelle Berthiaume of Shutter Speed Photo, Dana Osborn, Rob Fenn, Mike McCormack, Ray Sullivan, Sue Healy, Ed St. John, Terry McAuliffe, Marge Needham (The Bee-Intelligencer), Marie Galbraith (Mattatuck Museum), Scott Lutes, Patrick Jordan, Edie Salisbury (Town Clerk), Brigitte Bessette (Assistant Town Clerk), Joannie Rafford, our Middlebury Library staff, college student Zachary Marotte, and I probably left off some others. But for your rich contribution in time, effort and ideas, I thank you all.

We were fortunate to recently receive a copy of Rachel Carley's inventory of over 450 Middlebury buildings in her architectural survey. Your Middlebury Historical Society and the Mattatuck Museum partnered a number of years ago to give birth to this project, and now the final product is in. Please stop by if you would like to view this two-volume opus. It is a very thorough and welcome addition to the ongoing collection and preservation of Middlebury's rich history.

See you at our Annual Meeting and Memorial Day Parade Open House!

Sincerely,

Bob Rafford

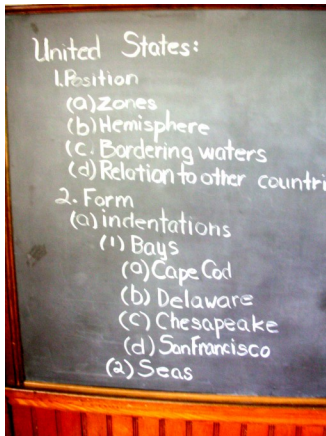
President Middlebury Historical Society, Inc. Middlebury Official Town Historian

Middlebury Yesterday and Today



From our Collection:

The Middlebury Historical Society is very fortunate to have the original chalk boards that were in use when the building was a schoolhouse. The photo above shows our display set up as it might have been when the building was Center School. We have in our collection a photo of a class from Hop Swamp School around 1920 with a geography lesson on the blackboard. In the photo below we have reproduced that lesson at our building.



Historical Society President Bob Rafford speaks to the Middlebury Cub Scouts during their visit to the Historical Society February 21, 2011



The Bissell Store

This building was moved from its original site at Westover School about 1908. In 1940 it was rebuilt after it was destroyed by fire. Over the years it operated under several names including The Middlebury Store and Ferrante and Delaney.

This building also housed the Post Office and in the above photo the mail is being delivered by coach. The Post Office remained in this location until it was moved to the site at Tyler Crossing and Rt 64 and finally to its present home at Four Corners.

The structure, though modified, exists today as Perrotti's Pizza at the intersection of West Street and Store Avenue.

Ear Marks

The word earmark has been used frequently in the news to describe direction of funds to specific projects but the original meaning of the word dates back to the 16th century and quite possibly before that. Historically it is the notching or cropping the ears of livestock in distinctive patterns for identification to denote ownership, gender and age. Today the practice of ear notching has been replaced by the use of ink tattoos.

We have in our collection, a printing block that shows the earmarks of many prominent Middlebury farm families such as Bronson, Bristol, Tuttle, and Tyler. It was published previously in the Middlebury 150th Anniversary book.



Fun Middlebury Quiz

1. Middlebury was formed from what towns?

- A. Waterbury
- B. Woodbury
- C. Oxford
- D. Naugatuck.

2. The highest point in Middlebury is

- A. The Green
- B. Three Mile Hill
- C. Breakneck Hill
- D. Bedlam Hill

3. The Middlebury Greenway follows the path of the trolley that ran through town to

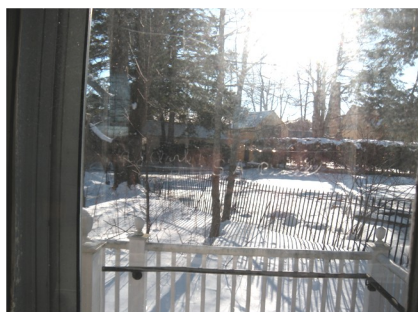
- A. Watertown
- B. Naugatuck
- C. Woodbury
- D. Southbury

4. Middlebury celebrated its Bicentennial in the year

- A. 1807
- B. 1982
- C. 2007
- D. 1976

Check your answers on our website at

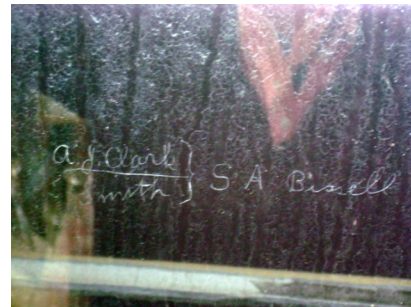
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A Message In Our Window

There are many surprises hidden in old buildings and the Middlebury Historical Society is no different. Looking out one afternoon when the light conditions were just right we were delighted to find a hello from the past. Three names had been scratched into the glass, A. J. Clark, S.A. Bissell and another L or possibly S. Smith. The presumed culprits are Allan Judd Clark who was born in 1889, and Sarah A. Bissell who was born in January 1891. The suspect named Smith remains a mystery as was the modus operandi of the three. They could have accomplished this when they attended Center School. Certainly we would never condone the defacing of public property but we have to laugh at this long ago demonstration of kids being kids. We would like to ask you to please come forward with further evidence., though fortunately the time period has expired for the statute of limitations.

Autographs from the Past



Rochambeau Trail

We are very sad to report that the trail to the Rochambeau Monument on Artillery Road has fallen into disrepair. Bad weather and the harsh conditions of this past winter have brought down numerous trees and the path is hardly passable. Additionally the bronze marker plate by the road has been stolen.

We are trying to determine a way to remedy this situation. If you know any way to clear the path or have experience with wood clearing please contact us.

For those of you who do not know, the French General Rochambeau along with 6000 soldiers marched in 1781 across Connecticut camping on Breakneck Hill in Middlebury. He was en route to aid the Revolutionary Army of General George Washington at Yorktown, Virginia in a pivotal battle in the Revolutionary War. A monument was erected on this site by the American Irish Historical Society on a small plot of land deeded to the town of Middlebury by D.H. Tierney in 1904.

Rochambeau's route covered a total of 680

miles and passed through New York, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland and eventually on to Yorktown, Virginia where they engaged and defeated General Charles Cornwallis. In her History of Middlebury Delia Bronson quotes Rochambeau's aide Monsieur de Closen as saying "We had the most exhausting march over Breakneck Hill, a name well deserved for the stony roads and endless mountains with which this part of the country is covered."

This is an area of great historical value and significance.

Would you like to help?

We are presently working on many projects both large and small. which include everything from sorting, filing, and assembling scrapbooks to working with Photoshop and even designing our displays.. Scouts may like to work on their merit badges or toward Eagle Scout projects. We also offer an internship for those interested..

Everything the Historical Society does is passed on to future generations and your work will become a part of town history. Someday you might hear someone say something wonderful about the exhibits at the MHS and you can say "I did that!".

Middlebury Historical Society
4 Library Road
P.O. Box 104
Middlebury, CT 06762

Hours of Operation

We are open each Monday from 2 to 5. Bob Rafford and Agnes Lutes are usually there to welcome visitors and work on the exhibits. It's best to call ahead if you are planning a visit. Bob's cell phone is 203-206-4717 and of course, you may always make an appointment for other times by calling Bob.



**The Middlebury Historical Society building,
just east of the Green in Middlebury,
Connecticut.**

Board meetings

Our Board of Directors meets once a month. Our meetings are open to the public and you are welcome to join us. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact us. We have many interesting and fun projects, both large and small. You will love the history of our town and its people.

President	Bob Rafford
Vice President	Agnes Lutes

Board members are Sue Healy, Zachary Marotte, Terry McAuliffe, Edward St John, Dr. Raymond Sullivan, and Harold West.