

# NEWS FROM THE SCHOOLHOUSE

## Middlebury Historical Society Winter 2010 Volume 1, Issue 4

The Newsletter of the Middlebury Connecticut Historical Society

### Letter from the President



Our historical society houses research, artifacts and exhibits, but our most important "possession" is you. You make it possible for all our achievements during the year; so at this holiday season, your board of directors and officers want to thank each and every one of you for your continuing generosity and support.

By the time you receive this newsletter, many of you will have been to Dr. Ray Sullivan's signing of his new book, *Breakneck: The Early Settlement of Middlebury, Connecticut, From 1657 to its Incorporation as a Town*. Ray, a historical society board member, has performed an invaluable service to Middleburians by pulling together much of our early history and making it available so attractively. Our historical society, and that includes you, helped Ray to make the book possible, as he noted in his acknowledgments. If you haven't already ordered a copy, it is available through our historical society, our town clerk or library.

Perhaps you also attended the opening gathering at the Mattatuck Museum for Rachel Carley's presentation, *Suburban Dreams: Middlebury in the 20th Century*. Rachel's work was sponsored and supported by the Mattatuck Museum and our historical society. Again, without you, this project could never have been completed. If you missed the opening, you can still visit this exciting exhibit. On January 16, Rachel will deliver an illustrated lecture at the museum and on April 3rd she will lead an architectural tour of Middlebury – see the Web site of the Mattatuck Museum for full details.

We continue to acquire photographs and artifacts

relevant to Middlebury's history. We just finished going through our collection of about 500 35mm slides of Middlebury businesses and other buildings taken by members of the historical society and the town's Beautification Committee from the 1950s through the 1980s; these include pictures of our 150th Anniversary celebration in 1957, the country's Bicentennial in 1976, and some businesses and buildings no longer around. For many of us, this period is almost "olden times." We will have the collection digitized and many of the images will be available on our Web site during the coming year.

We are also proud that we were able to republish Delia Bronson's *History of Middlebury, Connecticut*, complete with a revised index. Your copy is waiting for you at our building, the Town Hall or library for \$30 (\$25 for MHS members).

During the past year we have hosted at our building many more people interested in Middlebury's history, people who came from as far away as Massachusetts and Los Angeles; we have taken people on tours of the old knife factory in Hop Brook Park, our old cemetery, historical buildings, and through our own growing collection of artifacts and research on our town. We are glad that people value our town's history and the place it has played in our lives, and look forward to seeing many more of you next year.

May we thank you once again for your wonderful support as we strive to document, exhibit and bring to you Middlebury's inspiring history. May you all have inspiring holidays and good times as we welcome in another year.

Sincerely,

Bob Rafford,

President, Middlebury Historical Society, Inc.

Middlebury Official Town Historian

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**From our Collection:**

**Clock or Click Reel**

“Pop goes the Weasel” goes the old nursery rhyme. The origin of this rhyme is said to have its roots in the sound made by this wool measuring device that is sometimes referred to as a spinner’s weasel. After wool was spun into yarn, it was necessary to measure it into specific lengths. The yarn was tied to one of the spokes of the wheel and the wheel was turned. The clock reel had gears that clicked with every revolution (two yards) After a certain number of turns it activated a wood spring and resulted in an audible POP! when the correct length was reached.



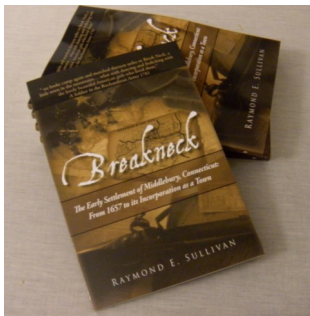
**Middlebury Then and Now**

**Breakneck School**

**Above—Early 1900s**

**Now a private residence on Breakneck Hill Road**

**below**



**Breakneck** the new book by Middlebury Historical Society board member Dr. Raymond Sullivan is now available at our building. This book details the early settlement of Middlebury from 1657 to its incorporation in 1807.



## The Middlebury Historical Society, Inc. and Museum

### Mission Statement

In order to promote a better understanding of our town for future generations, it is the Mission of the Middlebury Historical Society to collect, preserve, present, and celebrate the history of Middlebury.

As custodian of Middlebury's history and our town's storyteller, we believe a community is enriched and strengthened by an awareness of its unique cultural, political and social history.

Our museum houses period exhibitions and temporary exhibits. We have a growing collection of historic artifacts, paintings, furniture, documents and photographs related to Middlebury history from the Native peoples to the significant events of the present day.

We disseminate information about Middlebury to assist people in the research of our history through publications, educational programs, and displays relating to historical personages, places and events so that all interested persons can develop their understanding and appreciation of this town and its people.

We partner with and support the efforts of community and cultural organizations which further the growth of historical interest in our rich history.

We encourage scholarship related to Middlebury's history cultivating a greater appreciation and respect for our shared heritage so that a significant legacy will be left to future generations.

Adopted by the Board of Directors of the Middlebury Historical Society, Inc.

March 4, 2007



#### The Larkin Bridle Path

The Larkin State Park Trail follows an old railroad bed through the four towns of Middlebury, Naugatuck, Oxford and Southbury. The railroad line was opened in 1881 and carried passengers and freight between Waterbury and Brewster, New York. By 1931, passenger service was discontinued and then freight in 1939 after which the line was abandoned. In 1943 a 10 mile section was purchased and given to the state of Connecticut by Dr. Charles L. Larkin for the purpose of establishing a bridle trail. This long and narrow state park encompasses a total of 110 acres and 10.4 miles and provides woodland views of wetlands ponds, and streams. It crosses Allerton Farm Road, Shaduck Road, Bioski Road, Wooster Road, South Street and Long Meadow Road as it meanders through Middlebury. The Larkin Bridle Trail can be accessed at Whittemore Glen State Park on Route 63 near the Middlebury Naugatuck border and across from Hop Brook State Park.



Middlebury Historical Society  
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P.O. Box 104  
Middlebury, CT 06762

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## 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,

## Board meetings

Our Board of Directors meets once a month on the third Wednesday at 7 at our building. 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.