

Middletown Springs Historical Society NEWSLETTER

Vol. 36, No. 2

September 2005

Middletown 1833 - 1852: From Wheat to Sheep

by Jon Mathewson

Editor's Note: For Vermont History Expo 2005, Jon Mathewson assembled an exhibit showing an overview of Middletown during twenty years from 1833 - 1852. It is the fourth in a continuing series of exhibits exploring newly available and long forgotten sources and displaying items and images from the Historical Society collection. It is currently on view in the museum exhibit room.

During the decades from 1830-1850 in Middletown, farming changed from growing wheat to raising sheep while A.W. Gray received his first patents, and established the Vermont Wrought Iron Nail Company.

The sources describing this period of Middletown's history are rich and varied. Town records tell of meetings contentious and mundane. Photography was becoming popular during the 1840s, and the Historical Society collection includes daguerreotypes of some of Middletown's early citizens. Also in the collection are informative diaries of young Middletown women, and tidbits like a hand-written description of the village in 1842 by 12-year-old Eugene Gray. The recollections by Judge Orin L. Ray, who was raised in Middletown, and taught in several schools in that period, recently transcribed from the 1880's Poultney Journal by Dawn Hance and Joann Nichols, are an intriguing mix of fact and legend. Taken together, these accounts and artifacts show a town which had long been settled, but was facing changes in agriculture and industry. In addition, many of its young people were leaving to find opportunities elsewhere.

Young Eugene saw the village center this way:



Photo by Dana Carpenter

The Methodist Church built on the northeast corner of the Old Cemetery in 1837. The Town Room door is visible on the ground level. The building was demolished in the 1940s.

This village consists of three stores, one brick, two wood ones, two taverns, one apothecary store, one grocery and four blacksmith shops and one wagon shop, one factory that is brick, three Meeting houses, one congregational, that is the old one that stands on the green and one Baptist house that stands up on a rise of ground between the apothecary store and Mr. J. Clark's house and it has a steeple and a bell in it. The Methodist house stands on the corner of the South and West Road and this meeting house has a steeple but no bell. The under part of it is a town room which was made for Town business and there is a singing school held in it once a week.

There are two grist mills, two sawmills and there are three stone shops, one stone mill and one hat shop, eight school houses and one harness maker, two physicians, four lawyers, two Ministers and two tailors. Oi [sic] like to have forgotten the cider mill, it stands on the South road and there is several shoemakers I have just thought of them, I believe there is no more."

Here are some highlights of events over the years:

1833 - April: Voters "resolved that the [tax] collector take warning, look wild, and conduct himself accordingly."

June 15: Voters recommend that the selectboard discontinue the North Road from Gray Farm to village of Ira.

December: Local acting troupe performs "The Tragedy of Pizzarro."

1834 - Town hearse purchased, and town hearse shed installed, for \$96.67.

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The advent of Annual Meeting on September 18 encourages us to assess the accomplishments of the closing fiscal year.

Foremost on our list is the successful series of five collections care workshops which took place in April, May and June. Attendance averaged 17 per session, which was near the capacity of our dining room with two or three persons working at each table. Ten of the volunteers are affiliated with our Society; some attended all five workshops! Several participants were from the neighborhood - Poultney, Fair Haven, Ira and the Slate Valley Museum. And others, who registered through Vermont Museum and Gallery Alliance, came from as far away as Strafford. The skills and techniques we learned will help us reorganize and carefully store the many diverse objects in our collection.

Another accomplishment was the re-roofing of the Spring House in the Mineral Springs Park with authentic red cedar shingles, replacing the asphalt shingles installed in 1971. After some further repairs to deteriorating wood the Spring

House will be repainted next year in a Victorian color scheme.

Annual events included innovations designed to increase participation and raise more funds. In advance of the Maple Festival we mailed raffle tickets to all members near and far and solicited extra prize donations from area businesses. Response from the membership doubled the number of raffle tickets sold compared to previous years and increased the bottom line by several hundred dollars! At the Strawberry Festival, Peter Huntoon, well-known water color artist and Middletown Springs resident, led a "community painting" project that attracted dozens of participants who added touches of color to Peter's 3 ft. by 5 ft. pencil sketch of the Middletown Springs green.

The Society's participation in Vermont History Expo continued with an exhibit by Jon Mathewson exploring the Middletown events in the decades 1840 -1860.

All in all, it was a typically productive year for the Society.

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Troy Conference Academy, later Green Mountain College, opens in Poultney.

1836 - Grand list: \$8,060.

Wool sells for 60¢ a pound, and Middletown is one of the leading sheep towns in Rutland County.

March 1: Voters unanimously resolve to annex West Tinmouth. Effort dies in Legislature.

A.W. Gray patents a corn sheller.

Methodists ask Town for permission to build a church on the northeast corner of the burying ground. After three town meetings, and three votes, permission is granted, provided that the Town can use a basement room for meetings.

1837 - Methodist church is built. First meeting held in "The Town Room" on October 14.

1839 - Grand List: \$8,262.

Rev. E. Bullard becomes minister of the Baptist Church. He moves to Burma in 1841.

A tax of 25¢ on each dollar of is imposed on the Grand List to pay off debts related to James Adams lawsuit against the Town. Adams was awarded \$1,655.37.

1840 - Grand List: \$9,064.

Middletown population: 1,057.

1843 - Grand list plummets to \$2,575.13.

1844 - Potato rot cuts crop in half.

A.W. Gray patents a wrought iron nail machine, and a horse powered treadmill.

Strawberry Festival

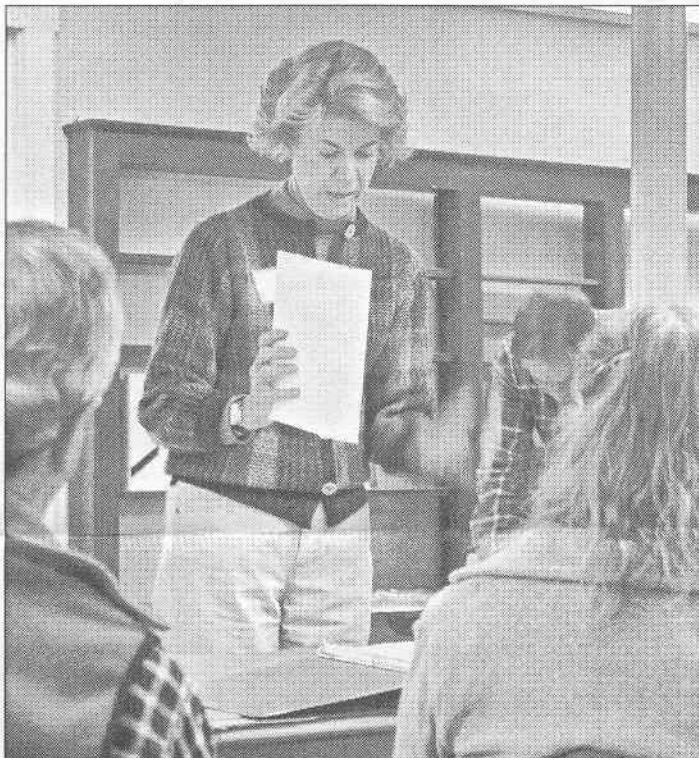


Middletown Springs water color artist and teacher Peter Huntoon (above) directs a Community Painting at the annual Strawberry Festival. Discovering their perhaps neglected "inner artist", festival goers young and old applied paint to panel, completing a sketch which Peter had earlier drawn of the Middletown Springs green.

Wayne Surrell and Earl Provin entertained with guitars and vocals and Jon Mathewson introduced a new chapter in his Vermont History Expo series on the Decades of Middletown History.

Delicious shortcake was enjoyed by all, bringing \$750 of revenue to the Society treasury.

Workshops Teach Collections Care Techniques



Professional conservators Michele Pagan (above) and Eileen Corcoran trained enthusiastic museum volunteers in conserving and re-housing objects from the Society collection in a series of five workshops this spring at the Historical Society Building. The workshops were funded by a 2003 National Endowment for the Humanities Preservation Assistance Grant of \$5,000, as part of the process of returning the collection to the newly

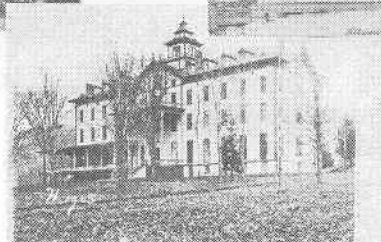
renovated Museum Storage Room. The award was a follow-up to the 2002 NEH Preservation Assistance Grant of \$4,870 to construct storage shelves and other furnishings in the \$12,000 renovation of the storage area.

Workshops topics included the inventorying of collections and the conservation of paper, photographs, and three dimensional objects. As many as 21 volunteers from the Society and other local historical societies attended each session. Several participants in the training will continue to apply what they learned in working with objects in the Historical Society collection under the leadership of Jon Mathewson, chair of the Collections Management Committee. The committee hopes to hold monthly work sessions on Saturdays, starting in September.

Formerly the Director of the Vermont Collections Care Program (VCCP) of the Vermont Museum and Gallery Alliance (VMGA) and a specialist in textiles and costumes, Michele Pagan is currently involved in the Vermont Painted Theater Curtains Project. Eileen Corcoran, current Director of VCCP, and a specialist in paper and photographic conservation, came to VMGA from the New York Upstate History Alliance, where she was Program Coordinator and Documentary Heritage Program Regional Archivist. Jon Mathewson, former curator at the American Museum of Fly Fishing, is now Collections Manager at the Sheldon Museum in Middlebury.

If you would like to join the Collections Management Committee and help with ongoing work with the collection, contact Jon at 235-2561 or David Wright at 235-2376.

Historic Photo Note Cards Available Soon



Note cards featuring eight historic Middletown Springs photographs from the Historical Society collection (a sampling shown above) will soon be available for sale to benefit the Society. Packaged in an attractive box, eight cards, each with a different

photograph, and eight envelopes will be offered for \$12, postage paid.

Keep these cards in mind for holiday gifts and watch for an order form with the Annual Fund appeal in October.

Membership Information

Membership dues for 2005 were due in January.
Check your mailing label for current status.

Dues (Check one):

Individual	\$8.00	Contributing	\$25.00
Family	\$12.00	Individual Life	\$125.00
Business	\$50.00	Family Life	\$150.00

Send to: Pat Hemenway, *Treasurer*
Middletown Springs Historical Society
P.O. Box 1126
Middletown Springs, VT 05757

- Frisbie's *History of Middletown* CD-ROM \$20, post paid.
- Lampshades featuring 12 historic postcard views of Middletown Springs, \$48, plus shipping.
- *Historic Architecture of Middletown Springs* pamphlet, \$3, post paid.
- *A Gem in the Hills*, by Frances Krouse, \$25.00, post paid.

Donations to MSHS, a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization, are tax deductible.

Visit our website:

www.members.tripod.com/MiddletownSpringsHS

Business Members

Thanks to local businesses that have joined MSHS under our "Business" membership category:

Archideck—Sarah Grimm

Estelle Ellis—Business Image, Inc.

William Emberley—Antique Bottles & Collectibles

Friends in Adoption—Dawn Smith Pliner

Green Mountain Timber Frames—Dan McKeen

LaValley Building Supply

Jim Marquis—Antiques Appraiser

Southview Arts—Digital Recording Studio

Stewarts Dairy

Twin Mountain Farms B&B—Annie & Walt Pepperman

Williams Hardware, Poultney—Bob Williams

The MSHS Newsletter is published as many as four times a year for members and friends of the Society. Comments and manuscripts on subjects of interest are encouraged and should be sent c/o David Wright, editor.

Middletown Springs Historical Society
P.O. Box 1126
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Return Service Requested

Notice of MSHS 2005 Annual Meeting — Sunday, September 18

The 36TH ANNUAL MEETING of the Middletown Springs Historical Society will be held on **Sunday, September 18**, at the Historical Society Building.

AGENDA

- 6:00 p.m. Pot Luck Supper
7:00 p.m. Business Meeting and Election of Trustees
7:30 p.m. Historian and Genealogist **Joann Nichols** will give a talk on "Odd, Quaint and Curious Events in Middletown," based on transcriptions she and Dawn Hance recently completed of the letters of Judge Orin L. Ray to the Poultney Journal, 1884-1889.

Welcome! New Members

ANNUAL MEMBER

Tom & Linda Petrich, *Walnut Creek, CA*
Peter McClure, *Hartland*

NEW LIFE MEMBERS

Brigitte & Michael Rutenberg, *Philadelphia, PA*

2005 COMING EVENTS

Sunday, September 18, *Annual Meeting*, 6 pm

Museum Open House and Donor Celebration has been postponed. New date will be announced.

