



The Middler

NEWSLETTER of the SOCIETY of MIDDLETOWN FIRST SETTLERS DESCENDANTS
CONNECTICUT, U.S.A.

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Fall 2008

MIDDLETOWN in the REVOLUTIONARY WAR

The Redcoats never marched down Main Street, but war did accelerate change in Middletown life

By R.W. Bacon
Editor, *The Middler*

The past two issues of *The Middler* included articles on the movement of early settler descendants away from Middletown in the period following the American Revolution. Both articles – one on the movement to

Whitestown, N.Y., the other on the movement to Stow, Ohio – detailed Middletown’s changing economy and precarious social conditions that motivated so many people to seek a better life for their families elsewhere. In this issue, our lead article, based on the work of historian Albert

E. Van Dusen (1916-1999), profiles Middletown’s role in the Revolution. (After all, in 1776 there were 588 Middletown men on the militia rolls and 202 men in the Continental Army – that is, 790 out of the 947 town men between the ages of 20 and
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Mark your calendar: Triennial Meeting is August 27-30, 2009

Middletown first-settler descendants, cousins, and central Connecticut genealogists should reserve August 27-30, 2009 for the SMFSD Triennial Meeting. Once again the headquarters hotel will be the Marriott Residence Inn, Rocky Hill, Conn.

Activities will include research visits, member networking, cemetery explorations, and social gatherings. (For some, this is like a kid being locked in a candy store for days!)

Full details will follow in a separate mailing – with a registration form. ■

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All 1001 pages now online at www.godfrey.org

All 579 pages now online at www.godfrey.org

Above are two valuable resources for Middletown genealogy now accessible for free on the Godfrey Library web site: the *Commemorative Biographical Record of Middlesex County* (1903), and the *History of Middlesex County 1635-1885*.

~ **DUES are DUE!** ~

Annual Membership dues (\$15) are due November 1, 2008. Please send payment to:
Thomas Smith
SMFSD Treasurer
P. O. Box 194
Clinton, CT 06413

Thank You!
Did you know dues have not increased since our founding in 2000?

Thanks to grant, Godfrey Library does it again!

Editor’s Note: In late September *The Middler* received a press release from Godfrey Memorial Library in Middletown, our nominal headquarters, about the free availability on its web site of three essential books for Middletown genealogy. For current researchers this is cause for dancing in the streets, and for longtime researchers, they can now replace their fading photocopies. Here is the full text of the press release:

Three basic sources for anyone researching the history, biography, or genealogy of Middlesex County, Conn., are now available in their entirety free to the public at the Godfrey Memorial Library website, www.godfrey.org. A \$5,000 grant from the Middlesex County Community Foundation / Connecticut Humanities Council made the digitization possible.

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SMFSD NEWS

SMFSD welcomes six new members

SMFSD extends an enthusiastic welcome to six new members since the last issue of *The Middler*:

Elizabeth Routt Power, LM-263, Garland, Texas (1st settler John Ward); **James Thomas Keefer**, AM-264, Bozeman, Montana (1st settler George Hubbard); **Terry Ann Hubbard Severson**, AM-265, Mountain, Wisconsin (1st settler George Hubbard); **Samantha Severson**, AM-266, Mountain, Wisconsin (1st settler George Hubbard); **Bret Armstrong Sage**, AM-267, Barstow, Calif. (1st settler David Sage); and **Matthew Armstrong Sage**, AM-268, Burbank, Calif. (1st settler David Sage)

• **2009 New England Regional Genealogical Conference.** The SMFSD will once again participate in the Society Fair on Thursday, April 23, 2009 at the New England Regional Genealogical Conference to be held in Manchester, N.H. The one-day event serves as a showcase for

RESEARCH LINKS

Jane Devlin's web site moves to a new home

Jane Devlin's web site, "Dunham/Wilcox/Trott/Kirk," a valued Internet destination for Middletown genealogy researchers, has moved.

Hosted by *Rootsweb.com* since 2001, the site now has its own domain: *www.dunhamwilcox.net*.

Devlin's award-winning, information-packed site was profiled in fall 2005 issue of *The Middler*. ■

genealogical societies at the 5-day conference, held April 22-26, 2009 at the Radisson Hotel and Expo Center of New Hampshire. SMFSD exhibited at the Hartford Conference in 2007, and it proved to be an excellent opportunity to make contact with prospective members and network with other genealogical organizations and family associations. The SMFSD will exhibit display panels and showcase the organization's web site.

• **Correction.** Following the publication of the obituary tribute to SMFSD founder Gale Cornwell (1926-2007) in the spring 2008 issue of *The Middler*, it was called to our attention that Gale was not only a member of the SAR (Sons of the American Revolution), but also a life member of the Sons of the Revolution of the State of New York (SRNY) at Fraunces Tavern, New York City. ■



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Monitor the pulse of Middletown at 'The Middletown Eye' blog site

By R.W. Bacon
Editor, *The Middler*

Since taking on the editorship of *The Middler* in 2005, one of many areas of interest on behalf of SMFSD members has been monitoring historic preservation, open space, and environmental issues in present-day Middletown. That became much easier this spring with the debut of "The Middletown Eye," a wide-ranging local news blog.

The blog was launched in June 2008, and thanks to a growing roster of contributors, subjects include local politics, the environment, transportation, energy, cultural activities, and much more. The address on the web: <http://middletowneyenews.blogspot.com/>.

The initiative for the blog came from local activist Jennifer Alexander and longtime television writer, producer, director, and radio host Ed McKeon. In his first post on June 13, McKeon explained his

rationale: "Increasingly local media is failing the municipalities and communities they cover ... Think of Middletown. Forty-two square miles. An active Police Department. Municipal meetings nearly every night. Cultural performances galore. Sports at many amateur levels. There's no way that even a handful of reporters can do the town justice. But what if we become the reporters? With a digital camera, an audio recorder and a laptop, we might be able to do a far better job than the newspapers ever could. So that's the idea. A blog devoted to our town, and written by its residents."

Judging from activity since June, the blog has been a resounding success, so much so that it rated a lengthy and complimentary article in the *Middletown Press* - on October 13.

For first-settler descendants interested in keeping tabs on the ancestral homeland, "The Middletown Eye" blog definitely rates a bookmark. ■

A profile of the profiler: Meet Paula Higgins, new compiler of SMFSD 'First Settler Profiles'

By R.W. Bacon
Editor, *The Middler*

Editor's Note: Paula Higgins, a corporate librarian who lives in Mansfield, Texas, joined SMFSD in November 2007 (AM-261) as a descendant of George Hubbard. In July 2008 I received from her via e-mail the first of several Middletown first-settler profiles, carefully prepared according to the template devised for our SMFSD web site. My long-range goal is to have a profile for each one of the pre-1700 settlers, so I was pleased to have another willing contributor to this project. In the coming weeks, new profiles by Paula Higgins will be online for Nathaniel Brown, William Cheney, Isaac Johnson, Thomas Ranney, and John Wilcox. Since I am so well-acquainted with the work involved in such profiles, I initiated a *Middler* "e-mail interview" to learn about Paula's interests and to share her enthusiasm with SMFSD members.

The Middler: I recall that you became a member in November 2007. How and when did you learn about SMFSD? Are you a member of other genealogical organizations?

Paula Higgins: Whenever I googled any of my Middletown ancestors, I kept ending up at your website. I'd joined a few other groups (Ohio Genealogical Society, NEHGS, DAR, CGS) and decided that your society was tailor-made for me and my interests.

The Middler: How long have you been interested in genealogy? What first sparked your interest? What is your educational and/or professional background, and does it relate to your interest in genealogy research?

P.H.: I've been working on my genealogy for about 20 years now (not continuously, though; there were long stretches when I didn't touch

it). My interest was sparked by visits to my great-aunt when she'd pull out old photos and talk about people I'd never heard of. I realized there was so much about my family history that I didn't know. I'd always assumed that all of my ancestors came over in the 1850s (Irish and Welsh), but I discovered that some of my mother's ancestors came over in 1634 (they never lived in Connecticut, though). It was a big surprise to find that some of my father's ancestors came here in the 1630s (and ended up in Middletown).

I'm a corporate librarian and patent agent, so I use my work skills every time I 'do' genealogy. I know how to search databases and the Internet and how to uncover facts from dusty old documents. I know how to piece together unrelated facts and weave them together to provide answers to questions. I understand what constitutes proof and what doesn't. I enjoy my work and I enjoy my hobby; a win-win situation.

The Middler: Were you always aware of your multiple connections

to Middletown, or was this a recent discovery?

P.H.: I'd been running into a brick wall with Edwin Hubbard. He suddenly appeared in Ashtabula County, Ohio about 1830, but I had no idea where he came from. I finally tracked him down to Middletown early in 2007 (the Internet is a great tool). I first found Jane Devlin's website and discovered that his family had lived in Middletown for almost two hundred years (which meant I was related to a boatload of families). All those connections came down to one young man leaving home and moving to another state.

The Middler: Have you ever visited Middletown and walked in the footsteps of your many ancestors there? If not, tell us how you go about researching via long-distance and what your favorite sources and methods.

P.H.: I've never been to Middletown (although it is definitely on my to-do list; I want to look through the old town records). My main method of researching long-distance is through the local Family History Center. I borrow the microfilm from Salt Lake City at \$5.50 per film, and the local centers have microfilm readers.

I love land records in particular. The Internet may provide direction on where to go, but I always use it with caution and try to find documentary proof. Microfilm of land records proved that my Edwin Hubbard originated in Middletown – through a quitclaim he and his siblings signed after their father's death. I'd already established that he was living in Loudonville, Ohio at the time, and that's what the land deed in Middletown listed as his location. I've also used microfilmed copies of old probate records. Manwaring abstracted the documents, but the

"I enjoy solving puzzles and connecting dots. The best part, though, is finding a 'hook' that turns a project into a living, breathing person. I want to know more about my ancestors than just dates and places. What is unique about this person? What makes him stand out from the crowd?"

Paula Higgins

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New first-settler profile on Thomas Ranney clarifies details – and introduces questions

By R.W. Bacon
Editor, *The Middler*

Of the first five In-Depth Profiles prepared by Paula Higgins for the SMFSD web site, one of particular interest to present-day descendants is the profile for Thomas Ranney (1616-1713), who was living in Middletown's "North Society" by 1658. Not only does Thomas Ranney have numerous descendants among the membership (including your editor), but also it was the Ranney family connection that prompted Charles Collard Adams (1836-1925) to compile *Middletown Upper Houses*, his encyclopedic tome of Middletown genealogy.

The new profile for Thomas Ranney as posted on the SMFSD web site is a comprehensive, self-contained, 4-page PDF file, and includes all the categories of information in the profiles for the first 23 1650-54 Middletown families.

For those unfamiliar with the in-depth profiles on the SMFSD web site, the format was developed by your editor, inspired by Robert C. Anderson's *Great Migration Begins* series, to aid researchers seeking a solid foundation of what is known about a given first settler.

The profiles include information in the following categories: name, birth, emigration, death, occupation & public service, marriage, parents, children, residence/property, will, and burial location. The categorical information is followed by excerpts from as many as 16 standard genealogical references.

The following excerpts present just a small part of the detailed Thomas Ranney profile, and were chosen for publication on these pages because of the additional compiler's notes. Some of the notes by Paula Higgins introduce questions, while others offer clarifications:

- **“Marriage:** m. Mary Hubbard, May 1659, Middletown, Conn. (b. January 16, 1641, Hartford, Conn.; d. December 18, 1721, Middletown, Conn.) She was the daughter of George Hubbard and Elizabeth (Watts) Hubbard of Hartford, and later Middletown, Conn. (*In-Depth First Settler Profile: George Hubbard*) [**Compiler’s note:** This was probably a second marriage for Thomas Ranney; according to his gravestone, he was 43 years-old at the time. Mary Hubbard was 18.]

- **Children:** (MLR, vol. 1, page 35; BCVR; MAN; *Records of First Church of Christ, Congregational, Middletown, Conn., 1668-1870*; (MUH).

(1) Thomas Ranney, b. March 1, 1660/1, Middletown, Conn.; d. February 6, 1726/7, Middletown, Conn.; m. Rebeckah Willet, March 29, 1691, Hartford, Conn. (8 children) [**Compiler’s note:** Widow Rebeckah Ranney married Jacob White on December 16, 1729]

(2) John Ranney, b. November 14, 1662, Middletown, Conn.; removed to East Middletown; date of death unknown; m. Hannah Turner, December 28, 1693, Middletown,

Conn. (9 children) [**Compiler’s note:** Some writers state that he died on April 4, 1717, however, this is a misreading of information in MUH which shows that his father-in-law Edward Turner died on that date. John Ranney was alive in 1718. (MLR vol. 1, p. 93)]

(6) Ebenezer Ranney, b. abt 1670, Middletown, Conn.; d. May 8, 1754, Middletown, Conn.; m. Sarah Warner, August 4, 1698, Middletown, Conn. (5 children) [**Compiler’s note:** Year of birth is only an approximation; however, the other sons of Thomas Ranney did not marry until they were 30 years-old. It fits the timeline better than the 1681 date in MUH.]

(7) Esther/Easter/Hester Ranney, bapt. June 22, 1673, Middletown, Conn.; d. April 1, 1750, East Middletown, Conn.; m. Nathaniel Savage, December 3, 1696, Middletown, Conn. (9 children) [**Compiler’s note:** Esther was baptized on 22.4.73, which is June in the old calendar and not April as stated in MUH.]

(8) Hannah Ranney, bapt. May 23, 1675, Middletown, Conn.; d. before November 2, 1713, Middletown, Conn. (unmarried). [**Compiler’s note:** Hannah was baptized on 23.3.1675, which is May in the old calendar and not March as stated in MUH; on November 2, 1713, “Adms. granted unto Joseph Ranny, a brother of sd. decd” for “Hannah Ranny, single woman.” (MAN, vol. 2, p. 275)]

(9) Margaret Ranney, bapt. March 10, 1678, Middletown, Conn.; d. after 1727 (possibly unmarried). [**Compiler’s note:** Margaret was baptized on 10.1.1678, which is March in the old calendar and not January as stated in MUH; she signed her name Margaret Ranny in land deed dated October 12, 1727 (MLR vol. 6, p.



Above is the reproduction marker over Thmas Ranney’s grave at the Old Burying Ground in Cromwell, Conn. The present town of Cromwell was formerly the part of Middletown known as “Middletown Upper Houses,” or the “North Society.”

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FOR THE RECORD – FROM THE RECORD

Early Middletown records reveal inhabitants grappling with ‘growth issues’ not unlike today

Editor’s Note: In reading over some early Middletown records that were reprinted in the 1884 *History of Middlesex County*, your editor, fresh from speaking at a local zoning board hearing, was reminded once again that wrestling with growth issues is nothing new.

From the records:

- **“ffebru 6, 1653.** It was ordered at a town meeting that no man shall fell any timber within in the bounds of the plantation to make sale of it to any one out of the towne, exept that any man shall have liberty to ffaull any timber for his own use or for the use of the towne or else who shall

fffully worke up such timber they get casks or pailles or such like. It is fffurther ordered that no ordered that no man shall have liberty to ffell either tree or trees within the bounds of the town, but shall be bound to worke up such timber within 3 months after the ffeling of it, and if any man shall neglect to work up

Your editor, fresh from speaking at a local zoning board hearing, was reminded once again that wrestling with growth issues is nothing new.

such timber within the time limited all such timber shall be ffforfffeit to the town.”

- **“March the 10, 1654.** It was agreed at a towne meeting that the medow ffenc should stand in the old place where it stood the last yeare ...”

- **“November the 20, 1662.** It is agreed that the townsmen for the tim being shall have the power of the whole to order common occatyons of the towne according of any order of the town requires excepting n the casis following ... : (3.) That they do not allow any highways already and laid out or lay out highways without the consent of the body.” ■

Ranney profile adds answers – and questions

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152). Some believe she married Stephen Clark about 1734. (MUH) (11) Mercy Ranney, bapt. February 11, 1682/3, Middletown, Conn.; d. before March 6, 1711, Middletown, Conn. (unmarried). [**Compiler’s note:** Mercy was baptized on 11.12.1682, which is February 11 in the old calendar and not November 12 as stated in MUH; she was not mentioned in her father’s 1711 will.]

Notes:

- (MUH) (*Middletown Upper Houses* by Charles C. Adams, 1907): “... In 1698 Alexander Rollo, a Scotchman, and an attorney ... wrote and witnessed a will wherein ‘Thomas Rheny’ gave to his son Ebenezer a parcel of land. This spelling does not occur in a deed dated a day later wherein the father gave adjoining land to a brother of Ebenezer. The conclusion is that Alexander Rollo is responsible for the form in which he wrote the name. In

Scottish records Rheny is a familiar name. The conclusion is that Thomas Rany came from Scotland.” [**Compiler’s note:** This circular reasoning is not conclusive proof of Ranney’s origin; it merely shows that Alexander Rollo, who was from Scotland, used a familiar spelling for a stranger’s surname.]

- (*Records of First Church of Christ, Congregational, Middletown, Connecticut, 1668-1870* (available at Godfrey Memorial Library, Middletown, Conn.): On December 30, 1668, “the wife of Goodman Ranny” was admitted as a member of the church in full communion (p. 4); on January 10, 1668/9, “the child of our sister Ranny by name Elizabeth, received ye iniatory seale” (p. 5); on June 22, 1673, “Esther Ranny daughter of our sister Ranny” was baptized (p. 18); on May 23, 1675, “Hannah daughter of Sister Mary Ranny baptized” (p. 22); on March 10, 1677/8, “Margaret daughter of Sister Ranny baptized” (p. 26); on February 11, 1682/3, “Mercy (ye daughter of Thomas senior & our sister) Ranny” baptized

(p. 33); on November 23, 1690, “Mary wife of John Savage admitted to full communion” (p. 40); on March 29, 1691, Thomas Ranny Junr & his wife Rebecah admitted to full communion (p. 40); on June 9, 1695, John Ranny & Hannah Ranny his wife were admitted to full communion (p. 46); on July 28, 1695, Elizabeth Ranny admitted to full communion (p. 46); on September 15, 1695, Joseph Ranny and Mary his wife were admitted to full communion (p. 47); on September 12, 1697, “Jeremiah son of Thos Ranny Junr & Rebeckah” baptized (p. 51); on April 29, 1711, “Hannah ye daughter of John & Hannah Ranny” baptized (p. 73). [**Compiler’s note:** Thomas Ranney Senior was not a member of the Congregational Church since his children were baptized in their mother’s right only.]”

Make sure to check out all of the new in-depth profiles (Nathaniel Brown, William Cheney, Isaac Johnson, Thomas Ranney, & John Wilcox) on the SMFSD web site: <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ctsmfsd/InDepthBios.html>. ■



The 'Redcoats' did not march down Main Street, but the Revolution left its mark on Middletown

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70.) For those whose ancestors served the revolutionary cause and/or departed Middletown in the ensuing decades, Van Dusen's work aids the understanding of that period of local and family history.

In preparation for the 1950 Tricentennial Celebration in Middletown, the Middlesex County Historical Society, in conjunction with the Rockfall Corporation (DeKoven House Community Center), engaged Dr. Van Dusen, an up-and-coming Connecticut historian, to prepare a paper entitled "Middletown and The American Revolution." The first-class result was published in booklet form, and today the 35-page work can be found in most Middletown-area libraries.

Dr. Van Dusen divided his paper into 14 categories: Background, Early Military Activities, Loyalists & Prisoners, Significant Leaders, Town Officials, Aid to Dependents, The Middletown Lead Mine, Privateering, Trade, Military Service, Population, Medical Conditions, Religious Institutions, and The Dawn of Peace. Many individuals are mentioned in the booklet, therefore interested readers are urged to check the full text. What follows is just a summary.

"On the 300th anniversary of Middletown's founding, it seems appropriate to recall some of the

For those whose ancestors served the revolutionary cause and/or departed Middletown in the ensuing decades, Van Dusen's work aids the understanding of that period of local and family history.

more stirring years in the long history of the town," wrote Van Dusen in his introductory remarks. "In common with most of the large American towns, Middletown found itself severely jolted and shaken by the bitter fight for independence. Fortunately for the townspeople no 'Redcoats' ever marched through the streets, but many citizens faced them on grim battlefields elsewhere."

Background. The American Revolution was brewing for decades before the Battle of Lexington & Concord, and Van Dusen begins with an original-source account of protest and chanting in the streets against the Stamp Act of 1765. The account describes that on November 2, 1765, a group of "principal gentlemen" of Middletown met to plan the protest of "the day prefixed to enslave America." The group agreed that bells should toll all day with clapper muffled, that guns should be discharged, and that pendants should be flown at half-staff at the town house and on all vessels. Then about noon, the gentlemen met for several rounds of toasts, proclaiming "liberty, property, and no stamps." That evening, young people dressed three stuffed figures and placed them on a stage, one with a sign that read "Let's enslave America with stamps." Behind the three well-dressed figures was another figure representing the devil. About 10 p.m., the figures were taken off the stage and burned, and the ashes stamped into the ground. The observer wrote that 800 people participated in this protest, and "notwithstanding the number of all ranks, the whole was conducted and concluded with the utmost decency and good order." The observer also noted that even the youngest children, barely able to speak, were joining in the singing in the streets: "Liberty, property, and no stamps!"

Local affairs dominated town records in the early 1770s, but in June 1774 over 500 Middletown residents gathered to protest England's "Intolerable Acts," and vowed to support any actions taken

by a general Congress or by the state. At this meeting a local "committee of correspondence" was chosen, made up of Richard Alsop, Titus Hosmer, and Matthew Talcott. In the fall of 1774 the Continental Congress passed a non-import, non-export agreement, called "the Association." Middletown, even with its considerable trading interests, agreed to a complete cessation of trade with the British, and formed a committee to "inspect the conduct of the inhabitants of this town," and "to publish the name of any willfull transgressor of said Association." A new committee was chosen annually.

Early Military Activities. News of the skirmishes at Lexington and Concord was received within a few hours, and just hours later, the 56-member light infantry, under the command of Capt. Return Jonathan Meigs (1740-1823), began a march towards Boston. A 50-member "troop of horse" under the command of Capt. Comfort Sage (1731-1799) left for Boston at the same time. Marching under Lt. Amos Hosford (1737-1822) was a group of 17 men. After a few days with no further skirmishes, the men returned to Middletown. In May 1775, however, more prolonged service was needed, and a regiment of five officers and 95 privates under the now Major Meigs served with other soldiers from the surrounding towns until discharge in late December. During this period, too, there was no fighting, just a state of siege alongside Continental forces outside of Boston. Some Middletown men, including Major Meigs, did participate in the December 31, 1775 attack on Quebec, in which Lt. Abijah

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... even the youngest children, barely able to speak, were joining in the singing in the streets:

"Liberty, property, and no stamps!"

Middletown in the American Revolution ...

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Savage (1744-1825) was captured. He was held until a prisoner exchange in January 1777.

Loyalists & Prisoners. Unlike other places with significant Loyalist population, Middletown only confiscated two properties, both belonging to out-of-town Loyalists. There was one instance, however, when 45 people signed a petition to the town selectmen to close down a tavern run by Stephen Ranney (which one of several is unknown) and Widow Mary (Clark) Bigelow (1725-1819). The petitioners believed that the Ranney-Bigelow tavern, established years before by Timothy Bigelow (1724-1776), was offering assistance to the enemy, but there is no record of any action by the selectmen. The town did agree to safely quarter a number of Loyalists from more unstable locations. The most noted of these was ex-Governor William Franklin (1731-1813) of New Jersey, an illegitimate son of Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790). But Franklin would not curb his Loyalist ranting, and Gov. Trumbull ordered Franklin to solitary confinement in Litchfield without access to pen-and paper. (Franklin was released in 1778 and made his way to London, where he lived for the remainder of his life.)

Significant Leaders. Historian Van Dusen identified Middletown's two most important political figures as Titus Hosmer (1736-1780) and Jabez Hamlin (1709-1791). Hosmer graduated from Yale in 1757, and moved to Middletown in 1760 to practice law. He was one of the town's two representatives to the General Assembly from 1773 to 1778, and during this period served on local and state Safety Committees handling wartime details. In 1780 he was appointed as a judge to handle special appeals cases, but he died in August of that year at the age of 44. Jabez Hamlin, like Hosmer, also served in the state legislature and on local and state Safety Committees. He



was judge of the Hartford County Court and the Probate Court for Middletown. When Middletown was incorporated as a city in 1784, Hamlin became the first mayor. In this section Van Dusen devoted several paragraphs to other notables of the era: Richard Alsop (1726-1776, West Indies trade, insurance, legislator), Benjamin Henshaw (1729-1793, iron foundry manager), Elijah Hubbard (1745-1808) & Nehemiah Hubbard (1752-1837) (military supply business), Samuel Russell (1727-1794, land trader, lead mine administrator), Comfort Sage (1731-1799, merchant, legislator, military leader), Matthew Talcott (1713-1802, lead mine overseer, legislator, military leader), and Chauncey Whittlesey (1746-1812, military clothier). "It is an interesting fact that Middletown happened to produce a far larger number of eminent civil leaders than military ones," wrote Van Dusen.

Town Officials. In this section Van Dusen enumerated the 20 town selectmen that served between 1775 and 1783, and noted that the town continued to elect the full slate of town officials, from horse branders to fence viewers to pound keepers.

Aid to Soldiers' Dependents. During the Revolution there was no central system of aid to dependents of those serving in a military unit. In 1777 the town pledged to make sure the dependent families were provided

Middletown provided 16 of 86 privateering ships that sailed forth from the Connecticut River.

with necessities, and committees were formed for that purpose.

The Middletown Lead Mine. Upon the outbreak of war, the Middletown lead mine, abandoned for many years, was revived to meet the demand for bullets and cannonballs. The mine was located in a ravine close to "the narrows" of the Connecticut River. Mining and smelting proceeded at full-speed, but production never met expectations of military leaders. In 1778 it was determined that the vein of lead was all but exhausted. Records show the mine produced 15,563 pounds of lead for the war effort.

Privateering. Legalized piracy upon British merchant ships played a significant role in the Revolutionary War. According to Van Dusen, Middletown provided 16 of the 86 privateering ships that sailed forth from the Connecticut River.

Trade. Before the start of the war, Middletown was a flourishing port, with a high volume of direct trade with the West Indies. Beef, pork, flour, horses, cattle, sheep, and lumber were shipped to the islands. On the return, rum, sugar, molasses, and salt came to Middletown. With the British blockade of Long Island Sound at the outbreak of war, however, this trade slowed to a trickle. Inland local trade suffered little disruption, according to Van Dusen, plus the agricultural economy carried on as usual. Middletown was also a center of wartime supply business and trade. This section includes a list of local merchants that advertised in the *Connecticut Courant* during the Revolution.

Military Service (Continental Army, State Troops, Militia 1776-1783). "It is impossible in brief compass to give the names and records of all Middletown men who had a Revolutionary military record," wrote Van Dusen in the introduction of this section. Those Middletown men who served in the Continental Line were primarily farmers, and generally signed up for either three

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Middletown in the American Revolution ...

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years of service, or the duration. The Militia in Middletown was in a state of readiness throughout the war. There was never an British attack in Middletown, but the Militia did respond to an attack in New Haven. The "State Troops" were a special category of regiments that filled gaps or undertook special missions. The most notable Middletown-related military action was the successful assault on Sag Harbor, Long Island, led by Col. Return John Meigs in May 1777. Meigs crossed Long Island Sound with 400 men in whaleboats. The surprise attack destroyed 12 boats, killed six men, captured 90, and seized provisions. Not one American casualty was suffered. For those interested in Revolutionary War records of Middletown men, Van Dusen suggested consulting *Rolls and Lists of Connecticut Men in the Revolution*, published in 1901 by the Connecticut Historical Society. A reprint is available from Heritage Books (www.heritagebooks.com) (ISBN: 0788403001).

Population. The Connecticut census of 1774 counted 4878 people in Middletown. By the 1782 census, the population was down to 4612, a decrease of 6%. Van Dusen noted that moderate emigration continued during the war, that European immigration ceased, and that some young Middletown men were killed, died of disease, or became disabled. The author also noted that in 1774 Middletown had 198 black residents, 4% of the population.

Medical Conditions. During the war there were three physicians in Middletown: John Osborne, Eliot Rawson, and John Dickinson. At one political extreme was Dr. Osborne, a Loyalist. Dr. Osborne practiced in Middletown for 62 years, and was instrumental in the battle against smallpox. At the other extreme was Dr. Dickinson, who was also a state

legislator, and according to Van Dusen, "mixed politics with prescriptions."

Religious Institutions. The three churches in Middletown during the Revolutionary War – the First Church, the Strict Congregational, and the Episcopal – were united in support of the cause. The First Church was the oldest and most established, and its minister, Rev. Enoch Huntington, helped shape public opinion against the British. Aside from the churches, Van Dusen deferred to the opinions of Rev. David D. Field in his 1819 *Statistical Account of Middlesex County*: "The Revolutionary War ... gave a shock to the moral habits of the people, from which they have not wholly recovered. From that time to the present an unusual number have indulged in Sabbath-breaking, profaneness, and intemperance."

The Dawn of Peace. The Middletown populace welcomed the end of the war in 1783, but difficult adjustments followed. "The war had brought many dislocations to individuals and to the town as a whole," wrote Van Dusen. While there had been a mercantile boom fueled by the military supply business, prosperity certainly did not spread equally throughout the population. The dependent families struggled, and discharged soldiers were often left holding devalued currency. The impact of war wounds or disease would be lasting. In Van Dusen's view, Middletown's "greatest claim to fame" in the period was the high caliber of its civilian leadership, led by Jabez Hamlin and Titus Hosmer, that enabled the town to "weather the storm." At the end of the war, all was far from perfect, but Middletown, with its port open once again, was in a position to take advantage of the commercial and industrial growth of the next decades – at least until the War of 1812. ■

For further reading, search your library database for *Middletown and The American Revolution* by Albert E. Van Dusen, published in 1950 by The Rockfall Corporation and the Middlesex County Historical Society.

Middletown scored when it engaged Albert E. Van Dusen for research report

When Albert E. Van Dusen (1916-1999) was engaged to write the booklet for the Middletown Tercentennial in 1950, he was in his first year as assistant professor of history at the University of Connecticut, following his WWII service and a period at Duke University. Before WWII he had earned his Masters degree and Ph.D. in history from University of Pennsylvania. His connection to Middletown? He was a member of the Wesleyan University Class of 1938. At the University of Connecticut, he went on to full professorship and taught there for 34 years. His particular area of interest was Connecticut's colonial and revolutionary history.

In 1952 Van Dusen was appointed official Connecticut State Historian, a position he held until his retirement in 1985. In that role he edited the two-volume *Public Records of the State of Connecticut*, and wrote *Puritans Against the Wilderness - Connecticut History to 1763*. His magnum opus was *Connecticut*, a hefty, compendious, and lavishly-illustrated coffee-table history book published in 1960. Van Dusen was also the editor of the *Papers of Jonathan Trumbull*, an unfinished project that is now part of the special collections at the University of Connecticut's Thomas Dodd Research Center.

Over his career Van Dusen was a founder of historical societies, a consultant to countless museums, a promoter of the study of history, and a much sought-after speaker. In perfect hindsight, for a report on Middletown's role in the Revolution, the up-and-coming Albert E. Van Dusen was just the man for the job. ■

Feature Graphic #9 – Edwin Whitefield’s ‘Homes of Our Forefathers’

Compared to many Connecticut towns, Middletown has few existing examples of Colonial-era domestic architecture. Yet domestic architecture in Connecticut has been addressed thoroughly by architectural historians – a subject to be addressed in future issues of *The Middler*. For evocative representations, however, below are some drawings from *Homes of Our Forefathers* (1882), just a small sample of the great body of work by prolific illustrator and landscapist Edwin Whitefield (1816-1892). In Whitefield’s non-stop career, he also produced panoramic views of cities and towns across New England.



John Clark House, Farmington, Conn., c. 1650. This house was built before 1650 by Robert Wilson or John Steel. After a period of use as a barn it was torn down about 1880.



Joseph Beckley House, Berlin, Conn., c. 1685. The family operated a tavern for travelers for 78 years. The house was torn down by the eighth generation owner about 1917.



The Scovill Homestead, Waterbury, Conn., c. 1720. This house was occupied by the Scovill family until 1905, when it was torn down to make way for construction of the Elton Hotel.



Thomas Griswold House, Guilford, Conn. c. 1655/1774. Edwin Whitefield dated the house at 1655. The Guilford Keeping Society identifies the date of the museum house today as 1774.



(Above left) Philip Mortimer House, Middletown, Conn., c. 1750. This house was built by 18th-century Irish immigrant Philip Mortimer (1710-1794), owner of a prosperous ropemaking enterprise in the years when Middletown was an important shipping port. The house was located at the northern end of Main Street near Riverside Cemetery. Mortimer was a generous and public-spirited individual who added landscaping and benches to his property overlooking the Connecticut River so the public could enjoy the view. After Mortimer’s death the property was purchased by the Hackstaff family. The house was torn down to make way for the Union Railroad Station. **(Above right) Eells-Stow House, Milford, Conn., c. 1700.** This house, which was the setting of some local Revolutionary War drama, still stands, and is operated as a museum house by the Milford Historical Society.





Meet Paula Higgins ...

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originals are even better. The old inventories show how my ancestors made a living as well as the names (and sometimes the ages) of their children. The only problem is trying to decipher old handwriting.

The Middler: What motivated you to add to the collection of SMFSD profiles? I know these profiles are a lot of work. What captivates you as you plow through the details? What about the process is the most “fun”?

P.H.: I love writing – taking bits and pieces and turning them into something that flows along smoothly and seamlessly. It bothered me that Isaac Johnson didn’t have a profile. He deserved one; I certainly had a lot

of material to work with. I didn’t have as much on all his children, so that required more digging. I enjoy solving puzzles and connecting dots. The best part, though, is finding a ‘hook’ that turns a project into a living, breathing person. I want to know more about my ancestors than just dates and places. What is unique about this person? What makes him stand out from the crowd?

Discovering that Isaac was excommunicated (temporarily) certainly brought him into focus for me.

The Middler: Who is your favorite Middletown ancestor, and why? Have you discovered other family lines that compare with your collection of Middletown ancestors?

P.H.: I had to think about this one a long, long time. I spent a lot of time

on Isaac Johnson’s profile. That should make him a favorite. However, he comes across in the church records as arrogant and hot-tempered. Memorable, yes, but not a favorite. George Hubbard’s descendant brought me here to Middletown (and another one of them got me into the DAR). That makes him useful to me, but I find him confusing since there are four different George Hubbards in that line. (Please don’t use family names for your children; it makes the lives of future family historians miserable.) Richard Hall? Yes. John Savage? Yes. Samuel Stocking? Positively. Daniel Harris? Absolutely. I even have a soft spot for Thomas Miller. If I had to choose, though, I think my favorite ancestor

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Godfrey Library does it again!

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The three books are *The History of Middlesex County, Connecticut, with Biographical Sketches of its Prominent Men*, published in 1884; *The Commemorative Biographical Record of Middlesex County*, published in 1903; and *A Statistical Account of the County of Middlesex, in Connecticut*, by David Dudley Field, originally published in 1819.

These volumes, each more than a century old, are difficult to access in their hard copy format. Hard copies in Connecticut libraries are typically part of the reference collections and thus do not circulate. They are often too fragile to be photocopied.

Researchers living outside of Connecticut may have no access at all to hard copies. The digitization project funded by the Middlesex County Community Foundation has put on line more than 1,700 pages of material about the county, its towns, and its people.

David Dudley Field’s 1819 *Statistical Account of the County of Middlesex, in Connecticut*, includes

all manner of intriguing information about events major and mundane, from murders to mining to the mysterious Moodus noises. The 1884 *History of Middlesex County* includes detailed histories of each of the 16 towns in the county, highlighting religious, military, and industrial heritage along with interesting tidbits about fixtures of local life such as taverns, newspapers, and schools. It includes biographies of more than 150 notable individuals, and portraits of more than 50 of them.

The 1903 *Commemorative Biographical Record of Middlesex County* features biographies of more than a thousand men – and a few women – who were prominent at the turn of the 20th century, along with their family lineages, and hundreds of portraits. The majority of the biographies are of individuals with roots that extended back to the colonial era, some of whose names are still part of the landscape today, such as Russell, Wilcox, Pelton, Lyman, and Gildersleeve. However, among them are included biographies of a number of recently arrived immigrants from Ireland, Scotland, and Germany, with names like Dunn,

Inglis, and Kretzmer, who had prospered in their adopted homeland.

The three volumes can be accessed at the Godfrey Memorial Library’s web site, www.godfrey.org, by clicking on the “Search” tab, then on “Mdlx Co Hist,” which opens a page with links to the histories and background on the project.

The Godfrey Memorial Library is a privately supported, non-profit library of genealogy and local history located at 134 Newfield Street, Middletown, Conn.

The Middlesex County Community Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life in Middlesex County. Its mission is to work with charitably-minded individuals and organizations to build permanent endowments and other charitable funds and to support local non-profit organizations through effective grantmaking to address community needs. Since its founding in 1997, the Community Foundation has provided over \$850,000 in grants to more than 142 organizations for the arts; cultural & heritage programs; educational activities; environmental improvements; and for health & human services. ■



SMFSD Membership Information

If you descend from anyone on this list, we welcome you to join us

The following is a list of those individuals (and presumably spouses & families) said to have settled in Middletown, Conn. before 1700. The list is based on information from *The History of Middlesex County* (Henry Whittemore, Beers Co., 1884), which was in turn derived from the *List of Householders & Proprietors*, Middletown, March 22, 1670. (Names in boldface are the original 1650-54 settlers of Middletown listed on the SMFSD plaque at Godfrey Memorial Library.)

Josiah Adkins 1673	Samuel Cotton. 1697	Edward Higby 1667	Daniel Pryor 1696	Samuel Stow 1651
Obadiah Allyn 1670	Samuel Doolittle . . . 1693	Thomas Hill. 1678	Thomas Ranney . . . 1660	Thomas Stow 1669
Thomas Allen. 1650	George Durant. 1663	Thomas Hopewell . . 1662	William Roberts. . . 1680	William Sumner . . . 1687
Nathaniel Bacon. 1650	Samuel Eggleston . . 1663	George Hubbard . 1650	Joseph Rockwell . . 1693	James Tappin 1662
William Briggs. 1677	John Elton 1677	John Hulbert 1669	Alexander Rollo . . . 1697	Matthias Treat . . 1659
John Blake. 1677	Thomas Ferman . . . 1679	Isaac Johnson 1670	Noadiah Russell. . . 1696	Edward Turner . . . 1665
William Blumfield 1650	Edward Foster 1670	Francis Jones. 1672	David Sage. 1662	John Ward 1664
John Boarn 1677	Jonathan Gilbert. . . 1672	John Jordan. 1678	John Savage 1650	William Ward. 1659
Alexander Bow 1660	John Gill 1676	John Kirby. 1653	Arthur Scovill 1671	Andrew Warner . . . 1667
Nathaniel Brown. . . 1655	Richard Goodale . . . 1671	Isaac Lane 1664	Edward Shepard . . . 1687	Robert Warner. . . . 1655
Thomas Burk. 1670	George Graves 1650?	Thomas Lewis 1687	Joseph Smith. 1675	Robert Webster . . 1650
William Cheney 1655	John Hall 1650	William Lucas 1667	William Smith . . . 1650	Benjamin West. . . . 1698
Samuel Clark. 1676	Richard Hall 1650	Daniel Markham . . . 1677	William Southmayd. 1674	Thomas Wetmore 1650
Jasper Clements . . . 1670	Samuel Hall 1650	Anthony Martin. . . . 1661	Comfort Starr 1673	Nathaniel White . 1650
Henry Cole. 1650?	Giles Hamlin 1650	John Martin. 1650	James Stanclift . . . 1686	Francis Whitmore . . 1674
Nathaniel Collins . . 1664	Benjamin Hands . . . 1678	Thomas Miller. . . . 1650	Samuel Stocking. 1650	John Wilcox 1654
Samuel Collins. 1665	Daniel Harris. . . . 1653	John Payne 1676	John Stow 1667	James Wright. 1690
William Cornwell 1650	William Harris. . . . 1650	George Phillips 1680	Nathaniel Stow 1676	

Membership benefits . . .

When you join the Society of Middletown First Settlers Descendants, you will receive:

- Two issues per year of *The Middler*, the SMFSD newsletter full of information useful for research about Middletown's first settler families and local history.
- Full member access to the SMFSD web site which includes first settler profiles, genealogy resources, local history articles, a custom-prepared annotated bibliography for Middletown research, and an archive of past *Middler* issues.
- The annual membership roster enabling you to network with Middletown "cousins" and researchers across the country.
- The opportunity to attend SMFSD meetings (every three years) in Middletown that include genealogy research, cemetery tours, library/museum visits, member networking, and social events.
- The opportunity to participate in the organization, suggest/plan meeting activities, and vote on SMFSD business.

Membership is a simple 1-2-3 procedure . . .

If you are a descendant of anyone on the above list, and would like to join SMFSD, here is the simple 1-2-3 procedure:

(1) Send an outline/worksheet of your lineage to the Registrar. The applicant shall do their own genealogical research, and the resulting lineage should be accompanied by copies of reference material by generation. The Society seeks to verify submitted information, but does not research family lines.

(2) Send a check payable to the Society of Middletown First Settlers Descendants (1650-1700) for the non-refundable \$10.00 application handling fee.

(3) The application is then reviewed by the Society for approval. Documentation need be furnished only through the line of descent from the 1650-1700 founder. If needed, guidelines will be sent that help document descent by generation. (The Society will return an application if more documentation is needed. It is the applicant's responsibility to do any additional research, and to complete any gaps in the records.) When approved, the new member can choose to pay annual or lifetime dues:

(A) Annual dues from November 1 to October 31 are \$15.00 (in addition to the initial \$10.00 handling fee).

(B) A new member may elect to pay lifetime dues (instead of annual dues) based on age: Age 0-50, \$300; Age 51-70, \$200; Age 70+, \$100. Life Members receive a certificate suitable for framing.

Please send membership inquiries and/or lineage information to: Donald H. Brock, Registrar, Society of Middletown First Settlers Descendants, 10 Windy Hill Road, Glen Arm, MD 21057.



Meet Paula Higgins ...

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is John Blake. He was a blacksmith who died in 1690; I'm descended from him through two of his daughters. My affection for him may be due, however, to the fact that he's the one I'm currently profiling and I'm having a hard time digging up information on him.

My Middletown ancestors are unique because they stayed in one area for generations. The rest of my foot-loose clan stayed about 50 years in one place before pulling up stakes and moving elsewhere. It makes Middletown a refreshing change. I have a lot of ancestors who lived in Ohio (learning about the strong connection between Ohio and Connecticut really helped me).

The Middler: Do you have any long-range goals for your research?

PH.: I've been writing a family history – not for publication, though – just brief paragraphs about my different ancestors so my family would have all the information in one place. I wrote an article many years ago on my Lewis ancestors, but nothing since then. If I find an interesting project, I'd like to publish it. Meanwhile, though, I have these in-depth profiles to finish! If any

“I hate blank spaces, you see. I have this overwhelming urge to fill them up with information; it must be the librarian in me.”

Paula Higgins

members have information on their ancestors they'd like to share with me, I'd love to put together more of them. I hate blank spaces, you see. I have this overwhelming urge to fill them up with information; it must be the librarian in me.

The Middler: Will we see you at SMFSD's 2009 Triennial Meeting?

PH.: I certainly plan on being at the meeting. I love finding and meeting distant cousins.

The Middler: Do your family & friends support your genealogy pursuits, or do they regard you as “the genealogy hermit”?

PH.: I've never been able to get the family involved in my research. They enjoy listening to all my stories, but none of them has discovered an overwhelming desire to follow in my footsteps. Maybe the next generation will, though. ■

