



# The Middler

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

Vol. 12, No. 2

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Fall 2012

## SMFSD TRIENNIAL MEETING 2012

# Outward focus of recent Triennial Meeting forges 'new' connections with 'old' Middletown

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

Attendees from all corners of the U.S. gathered in their ancestral hometown of Middletown, Conn. for SMFSD's Triennial Meeting Oct. 17-20, 2012.

Some 40 genealogists and historians, mostly descendants of early Middletown settlers and distant cousins to some degree, enjoyed a packed schedule of cemetery tours, library visits, research sessions, speaker presentations, and social gatherings. Many also attended the annual seminar of the Connecticut Society of Genealogists on Sunday, Oct. 21 in North Haven, Conn., where SMFSD engaged potential members at its corner booth in the exhibit hall.

**Thursday, Oct. 18** was "Cemetery Day," and the first stop that morning was Old North Burying Ground (est. 1735) in Middlefield, Conn., originally part of Middletown. There, Ruth Shapleigh-Brown of the Connecticut Gravestone Network shared the fascinating details of the cemetery's history, restoration, and conservation. The group then headed downtown, and after a quick lunch, gathered at Riverside Cemetery, Middletown's oldest. Augie DeFrance of the Middletown Old Burying Grounds Association spoke about recent preservation work, and about the new variety of hardy, slow-and-low-growth grass – which means less potential damage to gravestones from mowers and trimmers. The group squeezed in a quick trip to Washington Street Cemetery (est. 1739),



The 2012 Triennial Meeting was a winning combination of library research, outdoor excursions, and social gatherings. Below (l. to r.): Jo Lynn Campbell, Mike Campbell, & Janet Wallace.



then departed for the Cromwell Historical Society, where Richard Donahue delivered his custom-crafted presentation on the early settlers of the "North Society." The hospitality of the staff was outstanding – we were amply fortified with cookies before they led us on a late-afternoon tour of Cromwell's Old Burying Ground (est. 1713). This

was the last stop on what was a beautiful autumn day in New England.

**Friday, Oct. 19** was "Research Day," which began at Godfrey Memorial Library. Director Beth Mariotti and staff assisted researchers and made everyone feel most welcome. (For details of the SMFSD business meeting held at Godfrey, see pg. 2.) At midday, the group moved to Russell Library, Middletown's public library, for a reception in advance of Erik Hesselberg's "Middletown as a Seaport" presentation. The program room was packed – community members were also eager to learn about Middletown's maritime past. The program was followed by a research period at the library's local history room, where we were treated to an orientation by Denise Mackey-Russo. Feverish page-turning ensued – no one wanted to miss Don & Lyn Brock's Wine & Cheese Social at 5 p.m. back at the Marriott Residence Inn in Rocky Hill. It was a standing-room-only success as usual before the departure to Carmen Anthony's restaurant in

### ~ DUES are DUE! ~

Annual Membership dues (\$20) are due November 1, 2012. Please send payment to:

Mike Campbell  
**'Due' it Today !!!** SMFSD Treasurer 3570 Willow Street Bonita, CA 91902-1226 **Thank You !!!**

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## SMFSD NEWS

### Triennial spurs SMFSD membership: Eleven new members since May 2012

• **Welcome new members.** SMFSD extends an enthusiastic welcome to 11 new members since the last issue of *The Middler*: **Caleb Sage Hendrickson**, AM-300, New Haven, Conn. (1st settler John Kirby); **David Harding Wetmore**, AM-301, Washington, D.C. (1st settler Thomas Wetmore); **Woody Exley**, ASM-302, West Hartford, Conn.; **Michael S. McCampbell**, AM-303, North Kingstown, R.I. (1st settler Nathaniel White); **Dorothy G. Whitmore**, LM-304, Wilmington, Del. (1st settler Thomas Wetmore); **Christopher A. Whitmore**, LM-305, Wilmington, Del. (1st settler Thomas Wetmore); **Michael H.G. Whitmore**, AM-306, Vienna, Va. (1st settler Thomas Wetmore); **Laura Cowles Hobbs**, AM-

307, Middletown, Conn. (1st settler William Cornwell); **Dorothy S. Dreher**, LM-308, Black Creek, Wis. (1st settler Robert Webster); **Michael G. Whitmore**, AM-309, The Villages, Fla. (1st settler Francis Whitmore); and **Elizabeth F. Johnson**, AM-310, Forth Worth, Tex. (1st settler Isaac Johnson).

• **SMFSD supports grant application for Indian Hill Cemetery preservation work.** On “Cemetery Day” of the SMFSD Triennial Meeting (Oct. 18), the attentive stewardship of **Augie DeFrance** and the Middletown Old Burying Grounds Association was clear to all. Riverside Cemetery and Washington Street Cemetery looked better than ever. All it took was casual mention of a grant application for preservation work on the chapel and mausoleum at Middletown’s Indian Hill Cemetery, and **Don Brock**, SMFSD’s official historian – and outgoing registrar – was on the task of preparing a letter in support. At the 11th hour before the Nov. 1 deadline, a letter was sent to the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation (CTHP) that included the background and mission of

SMFSD, the significance of Indian Hill Cemetery to our members and the Middletown community, and the imperative that the structures be preserved for future generations.

“Indian Hill Cemetery has been an intergral part of Middletown’s history for over 160 years.” Brock wrote in the final paragraph of his four-paragraph letter of support for the \$8500 grant. “The Society just concluded a Triennial Meeting in Middletown, and our members visited Indian Hill Cemetery because of their own personal family connections there. Many have family buried there, and can recall family stories or past glorious outing days visiting the cemetery. These memories vividly include the historic architectural beauty of the chapel and mausoleum, accompanied with the overall special sense of Middletown’s deep historical roots reflected in the cemetery’s unique historical setting. ... The Indian Hill Cemetery must be restored and preserved now for future generations.”

• **SMFSD will exhibit at the New England Regional Genealogical Conference** in Manchester, N.H. at the “Society Fair” along with other genealogical and historical organizations on Thursday, April 18, 2013. The conference will be April 17-21 at the Radisson Hotel & Expo Center. Feel free to join us that day to promote SMFSD. ■



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SOCIETY of MIDDLETOWN  
FIRST SETTLERS DESCENDANTS  
1650-1700 – Middletown, Connecticut, U.S.A.  
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and corrections to:

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#### SMFSD OFFICERS

**President** ..... Margery Pierson  
**Vice President** ..... Sue Welles  
**Secretary** ..... Cynthia Nicewarner  
**Treasurer** ..... Mike Campbell  
**Historian** ..... Don Brock  
**Registrar** ..... Hal Whitmore  
**Middler Editor** ..... R.W. Bacon

### SMFSD business meeting highlights: Positive reports ... & bright future plans

**Submitted by Marge Pierson,  
SMFSD Outgoing Secretary**

**Treasurer’s report:** Balance as of Oct. 19: \$11,466.50 (checking: \$5,332.86; savings: \$6,133.64). Income and expenses break close to even each year, approximately \$1200 each.

**Registrar’s report:** SMFSD receives at least 1-2 inquiries per week from our website, resulting in 10 to 15 new members annually.

**Proposed bylaw change:** Our membership will be asked to approve a bylaw change so that our dues year, fiscal year, and the calendar year all coincide.

**Donations:** Donations will be sent in appreciation of help with the SMFSD 2012 Triennial Meeting.

Godfrey Memorial Library - \$100  
Cromwell Historical Society - \$100  
Russell Library - \$50

**Future possibilities:** Electronic dues collection; SMFSD logo sweatshirts and T-shirts available at the 2015 triennial meeting; board meetings via Google Plus or Skype.

**2015 Meeting:** Opinion favored an October meeting in 2015. Planning committee for 2015: Barb Stenberg, Cindy Nicewarner, David Bowe, James Cornwell, and Betsy Johnson. ■



## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

# Marge Piersen, SMFSD president, gives an overview of our meeting, a new board, & ideas for the future

### To our SMFSD members:

I am writing as the newly elected SMFSD president, still feeling the afterglow of our great meeting with 40 attendees. How special it is to meet “cousins” in a place where our ancestors all lived and worked together before 1700! Only traces of the bygone days remain, but we are seeking to find them.

I am most proud of the number of current Middletown area residents who were involved in our events this year. Approximately 30 community members joined our members and friends, doubling the audience to over 60 for the seaport era lecture by Erik Hesselberg. I think the use of the public library for this talk helped generate attendance, besides the obvious fact that Erik is an engaging speaker with a high interest topic and Reg and I made a big publicity effort.

The day before, the Cromwell Historical Society had out done themselves on our behalf. Richard Donahue created a presentation on the earliest settlers especially for our group, and at least six other society members were on hand to serve homemade refreshments, to answer our questions about the Stevens-Frisbie house, and to give us a special tour of the Cromwell cemetery. Hopefully, in 2015 we will again be able to make our organization visible.

We didn't just sit around in libraries and listen to presentations but got outside for cemetery tours, led so expertly by “the cemetery lady” Ruthie Brown and by Augie DeFrance. Some of us found a tombstone or two from an early settler, or more likely from a child or grandchild. (Connecticut brownstone decomposes easily from the inside out, so not much is left from the earliest days.)

The idea of giving special recognition to our members who have written

on Middletown history and genealogy expanded in scope as Don Brock identified a total of 13 such authors. A special thanks to Don for writing such wonderful mini-bios which I then combined into a special booklet.

So many presenters and organizations helped Sue Welles and me with this meeting, and each board member took on some tasks. I have written to thank them all. One could not ask for a better co-chair with whom to run such an event. Sue's background as an English teacher really shows in her organizing ability and sense of what will build group spirit and hold attention. Living down the road from

Middletown in Oakville, Conn., she knows the local restaurants and other attractions.

We closed the triennial meeting with a more than capable and enthusiastic new board to lead us until our 2015 meeting. All board members remain, with some positions reshuffled. Sue Welles rejoins the board as vice-president. And we welcome two new faces to the board, Cindy Nicewarner and Hal Whitmore.

Cindy Nicewarner, our new secretary and a professional genealogist at the DAR Library, has already built us a public Facebook page and a members-only Facebook group. Hopefully, this Facebook presence will help SMFSD catch the attention of some younger prospective members. Reg Bacon, our website architect and editor of *The Middler*, remains on the board. The website is our largest source of new members.

Mike Campbell remains as our treasurer. He handled registration and name tags for the meeting and creatively combined the meeting schedule and roster into a small booklet that fit into each name tag.

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At left, SMFSD's new president, Marge Piersen.



At right, SMFSD's past president, Barb Stenberg.

## ... And a message from Barb Stenberg, SMFSD's immediate past president

### SMFSD members:

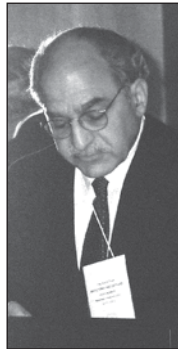
Our recent Triennial Meeting brought some changes to the board of our society. Don Brock, who has served as our Registrar since 2000, has accepted the position of Historian to fill the term of Tom Smith. That term will be up at the next meeting. We thank Don for his very hard work and effective management of applicants papers these several years. Harold Whitmore was elected to the office of Registrar at the meeting. He comes highly recommended and we thank him for consenting to the job.

Marge Piersen has been our very capable secretary and seemed a good choice for president. I have served in that capacity since our founding meeting and Marge was gracious enough to consent to that job. Cindy Nicewarner was elected secretary at the meeting. Thank you Marge for your work as secretary.

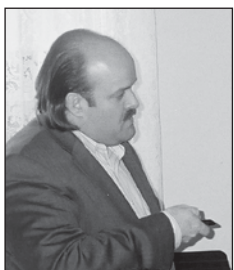
I will be staying on the board as the Immediate Past President and will also be coordinating the Liaison Program which I feel can be very helpful to the

*continued on page 12*

## Scenes from SMFSD's Triennial Meeting Oct. 17-20, 2012



### The Presenters



Clockwise, from top left: **Ruth Shapleigh-Brown** at Old North Burying Ground, Middlefield (Photo by Michael Whitmore); **Dr. Ronald Schatz**, Wesleyan University, at Carmen Anthony's (Photo by Marge Piersen); **Erik Hesselberg** at Russell Library (Photo by R.W. Bacon); and **Richard Donahue** at the Cromwell Historical Society (Photo by Marge Piersen).



### The Libraries

Clockwise, from top left: **Michael Whitmore** assisted by **Sharon Dahlmeyer-Giovannitti** at Godfrey Library, with **James & Regina Cornwall** to the right (Photo by D. Brock); **Stan Bowe, Mark Phelps, & David Bowe** (Photo by M. Piersen); the **Russell Library** program room; and researchers at **Godfrey**.



### The Banquet

At left (l. to r.): **Michael H.G. Whitmore, Sandra Salm, Connie Bernholz, Barbara McCarthy, & Mark Phelps**. Below (l. to r.): **Woody Exley, Augie DeFrance, Sue Welles, & Don Brock** (Photos by Don & Lyn Brock).

### The Wine & Cheese Social



Clockwise, from left: **Lyn Brock** & young **Ms. Brock, Woody Exley, Linda Whitmore, Hal Whitmore, Sue Welles, Mary J. Jones, & Cindy Nicewarner**.



### More People!

In both bottom row photos, (l. to r.): **Augie DeFrance, Barb Stenberg, Barbara McCarthy, Reg Bacon, Sue Welles, Don Brock, Hal Whitmore, & Stan Wetmore**. (Photos by Marge Piersen)





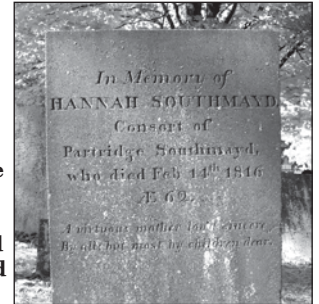
## Oct. 18, 2012: A fall 'Cemetery Day' in Middletown, Cromwell, & Middlefield



Top row: **Old North Burying Ground** in Middlefield, Conn., (est. 1735) was the site of our first tour by **Ruth Shapleigh-Brown**. Second row: **Augie DeFrance** was on hand as our host at **Riverside Cemetery**, the resting place for many of our earliest Middletown ancestors.



Third row: **Washington St. Cemetery** in Middletown (est. 1739) is also administered by **Augie DeFrance** and his fellow members of the **Middletown Old Burying Ground Association**.



Fourth row: **Richard Donahue** and staff at the **Cromwell Historical Society** treated us to a tour of Cromwell's **Old Burying Ground** (est. 1713).

(Photos by R.W. Bacon; top right photo by Michael Whitmore)



## Triennial Meeting 2012 ...

*continued from from page 1*

Wethersfield. At the dinner SMFSD recognized numerous authors for their contribution to Middletown genealogy and history: Caleb Sage Hendrickson, Sue Welles, Hal Whitmore, and your editor; and in absentia, Leigh Hanscom, Paula Higgins, Donald Sage, Dr. Fred Scott, Robert Swenson and Jack L. White. Recognized posthumously were Gale Cornwell, Al Dudley, and Hazel

Crooks Hesselgrave. Don Brock read brief author bio-sketches and Barb Stenberg presented certificates. The guest speaker was Dr. Ronald Schatz, professor of history at Wesleyan University, whose presentation, "The Barons of Middletown," expanded our knowledge of 20th-century history.

**Saturday, Oct. 20** was departure day for many, as some folks set out for home, some plowed ahead with more Connecticut research, some continued

their vacation, and others packed off to the Connecticut Society of Genealogists event less than an hour away.

For historians, genealogists, and cousins, the Triennial was energizing. The meeting offered a mix of outdoor and indoor activities, and a balance of nose-in-the-book research and face-to-the-public programs and encounters – a combination that will likely bring many back for more in the future. See *you* in Middletown in 2015. ■



# Domestic architecture of 17th-century Connecticut impacted the daily life of our Middletown ancestors

**Editor's Note:** The following article is adapted and abridged from a chapter in the recently-published book, *Early Families of Middletown, Conn. - Vol. I: 1650-1654* (Variety Arts Press, 2012) and is used by permission of the author.

By R.W. Bacon

Some readers drawn to a book entitled *Early Families of Middletown, Connecticut* may not expect to encounter a discussion of 17th-century domestic architecture bundled in with the hundreds of names and dates held within the early settler profiles. This writer aims to make it a pleasant bundling that enhances understanding of the 17th-century life of the families.

**Rationale.** Why do historians of under-the-radar local history study domestic architecture? It is because domestic architecture is more than “style” – it has an undeniable impact on habits of living, and on the rhythm of daily life in a functioning home. If any further rationale is needed, here is the charismatic icon of early American cultural studies, Dr. James Deetz, on the subject: “The house is our most

important buffer against the elements. The house forms the focus of that basic social unit of our human species, the family. People are conceived, are born, and die in houses. The form of a house can be a strong reflection of the needs and minds of those who built it; in addition, it shapes and directs their behavior.”<sup>1</sup> (Dr. James Deetz (1930-2000), an anthropologist, archaeologist, and professor – and author of the essential *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life* – is regarded as the “Father of Historical Archaeology.”)

**Analysis of domestic architecture in New England.** Popular understanding of 17th-century domestic architecture in New England – if indeed there is any such thing – tends to regard the “colonial” homes of those imprecise early times as a uniform style. When one probes further into the subject, however, one discovers that within the range of “First Period” homes (c. 1625-1725), that (1) slightly different building practices and traditions were brought from different parts of England; (2) regional differences developed in New England associated with specific craftsmen; and (3) variations in style were introduced due to climate, building site, or economic status.

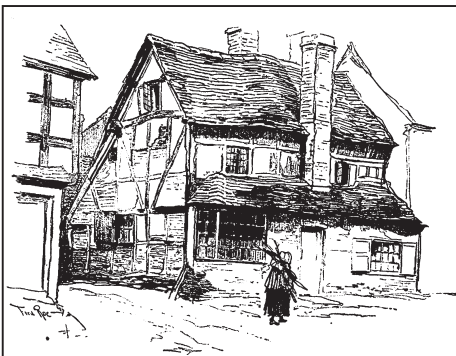
The earliest homes in New England were adaptations of “folk” or “vernacular” building traditions that the early settlers were familiar with in England. It is important to note at the outset the difference between the “vernacular tradition” and the “academic tradition” in architecture. The “vernacular” building is an immediate product, reflecting attitudes, values, world view, and suitability for a site or situation. The “academic” building is based on plans created by trained architects, reflecting contemporary fashion. It is also important to note that both traditions evolved – they did not remain fixed. The homes of early New England were not reflecting the

“popular culture” of England at the time, but rather the “folk culture.”<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Deetz, in his lifetime of research, identified three types of evidence for the study of early New England domestic architecture: (1) evidence of surviving structures in both England and America, though most examples have been altered in some fashion, (2) evidence of excavated remains, i.e. parts of a building that have survived below ground, and (3) evidence of documentary materials, such as deeds, probate records, and building contracts.<sup>3</sup>

**Early shelter: The earth-fast house.** The very first colonists that literally stepped off the first boats were in need of immediate shelter. At Plymouth Colony in December 1620, the settlers lived on the Mayflower, but every day went ashore to begin building storehouses, cottages and a meeting house for the settlement. Settlers in other areas of New England adapted the design of the oblong, round-roofed Native American wigwam as their first shelter, adding a fireplace and a chimney. Most common of the early shelters was the earth-fast or “dugout” house. The earth-fast house was a cellar-like square pit dug about six feet deep, with long poles set upright in the ground at intervals that served as the house frame. The dirt floor and lower walls were covered with planks. The outer shell was comprised of planks or clapboards, and the simplest roof for the temporary domicile (up to three or four years!) was thatch.<sup>4</sup>

**The post-medieval post-and-beam framed house.** The earliest framed houses in New England were constructed in post-and-beam fashion, using massive 10" x 10" white oak timbers, hewn square by hand. The frame was assembled on the ground, joined by pegged mortise-and-tenon joints. The frame was then hoisted into upright position by a combination of manpower and oxen power, and the

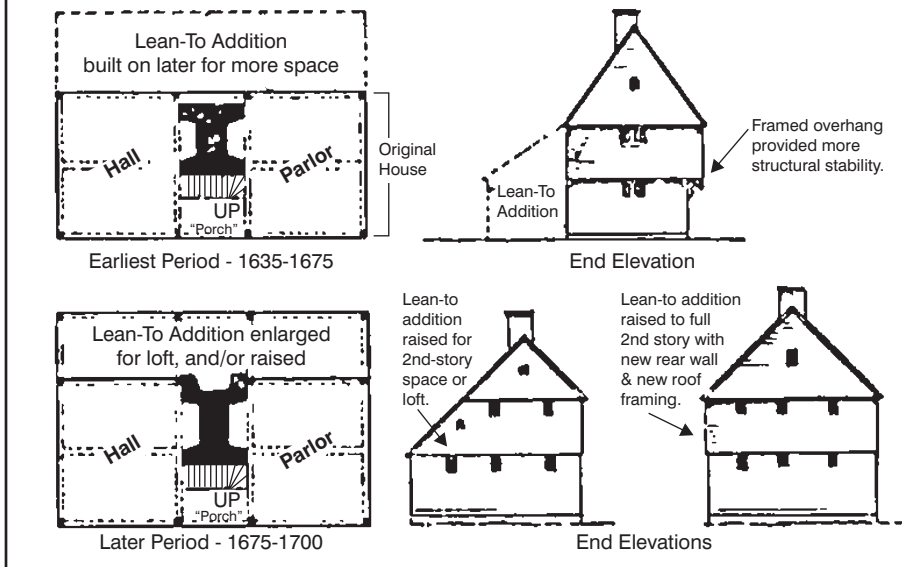


Above is “A Half-Timbered House in Warwick,” an illustration by Fred Roe (1864-1947), one of 47 he drew for the book, *Vanishing England*, by Peter H. Ditchfield (1854-1930), published in London, England in 1910. Notice the exposed framing with clay plaster finish between – the post-medieval approach first used in the New England colonies. The lean-to and overhang are also in evidence.



## “Development of the Connecticut Plan”

Isham & Brown, *Early Connecticut Houses* (1900)



Above is an enhanced version of “The Development of the Connecticut Plan” diagram from *Early Connecticut Houses*, by Norman M. Isham and Albert F. Brown (1900). Prof. Isham noted that in central Connecticut houses, the summer beam that carries the second floor (indicated by the dotted line) always runs parallel to the front of the house, while houses of the same period in Massachusetts Bay Colony often have the summer beam running parallel with the end wall of the house. The plan for the upstairs is not shown. The two sleeping chambers were referred to as the “hall chamber” and the “parlor chamber.”

critical mortise-and-tenon joints that held the frame upright were quickly pegged – with tight-fitting hardwood pegs. The roof was sheathed with vertical planking, which was then covered with wood shingles. (Cedar roof shingles were both safer than thatch and lighter than the slate commonly used for roofs in England.) The few windows were diamond-pane leaded casement windows, or in some cases just an opening with a shutter. The framing timbers were left exposed, in English post-medieval style, with exterior walls finished with a stucco-like clay. This exterior wall treatment, though traditional in England, did not hold up to the harsh New England climate, however. Subsequently houses were clad with wide horizontal ship-lap planks, and/or the narrower overlapping horizontal clapboards we are familiar with today.

Evidence has shown that in New England before 1650, houses were distinctively English in flavor, reflecting the regional diversity of early settler origins. Later in the century,

not only the lifestyle, but the building styles, began to reflect the isolation and separation from England. “By 1660 great numbers of Anglo-Americans had never seen England,” writes Dr. Deetz, whose studies revealed that the houses “remained English in spirit, but by the late 17th century they would not be mistaken for an English house.”<sup>5</sup> Contributing to the divergence from strict English style was the abundance of accessible timber for building in New England. In England, even by the late 16th century there was a scarcity of wood which influenced vernacular building design, and New England settlers appeared to be making up for the longtime timber shortage.

By the last decade of the 17th century, there were four types of houses in New England: (1) the “hall & parlor” house, i.e. post-medieval style post-and beam house described above, with a center chimney (to distribute heat equally), front staircase, and now with clapboard exterior; (2) the later Plymouth Colony house,

i.e. with vertical plank siding, to which lath-and-plaster was applied to the inside walls; (3) the Rhode Island “stone-ender,” i.e. with a stone wall at the gable end of the house that incorporated the chimney; and (4) the log cabin, i.e. a few examples in New Hampshire & Maine (perhaps for safety against Indian attack), sheathed with clapboards, and barely distinguishable from a framed house.<sup>6</sup>

**The First-Period “Hall & Parlor” form.** House-building was usually done, or directed, by a community’s designated carpenter or housewright, or by an itinerant master builder. As such, the form of the hall & parlor house – and the additions to them that are so commonly found – was influenced by the standard unit of measure at the time, the rod, equivalent to 16.5 feet. Rooms tended to be one rod square. Chimney sections and ceiling height were commonly a half-rod. House expansions usually reflected this standard unit of measure. In many areas, because the same master housewrights (and/or their former apprentices) were building most of the houses within a town, there evolved some local variation in the New England vernacular style.<sup>7</sup> The basic two-room floor plan was dictated by the center chimney placement. The chimney served two hearths, one facing into the “hall,” or kitchen, and the other facing into the “parlor.” (See the “Development of the Connecticut Plan” diagram.) The center door opened into a small entry area referred to in the diagram as a “porch.” The stairway to the upstairs sleeping chamber(s) was at the front. One could go left to the hall, or right to the parlor.

It is important to note that in the 17th century, all rooms in a vernacular house had multiple uses – there was no “privacy” as we know it. A visitor to the house would step directly into the activities of the house. For instance, the “hall” was truly a “living” room, used for food preparation, cooking, meals, small-scale

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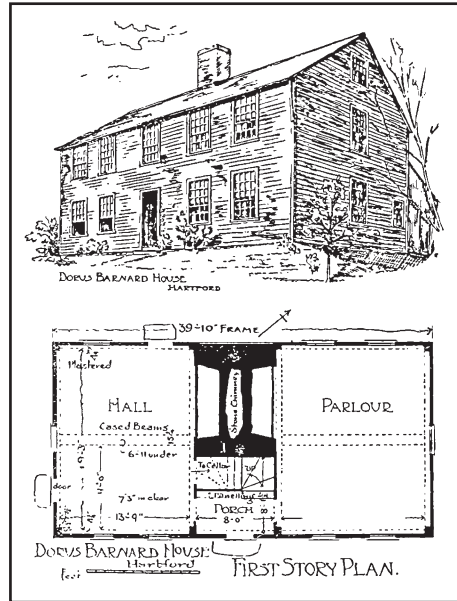
## Domestic architecture of 17th-century Connecticut

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manual work like sewing or wood-carving, hanging out, goofing off, arguing, etc. etc. The “Connecticut Plan” diagram shows the lean-to addition that was often added to the back of a hall & parlor house. The lean-to addition was one of several practical considerations that shifted the New England vernacular first-period house away from its English origins: (1) The lean-to addition was an easy and inexpensive way to create flexible, multi-purpose space to meet the needs of a growing household. It was a place for storage, for a pantry, for a kitchen work area, or for another sleeping chamber. (2) The root cellar, used for food storage, uncommon in England, was a fixture in New England. (3) The roof pitch was steepened in New England to allow snow to slide off more easily. These changes were not bold and daring, and did not happen immediately on arrival. In *Everyday Life in Early America*, author David Freeman Hawke noted “To judge by their houses, English settlers adjusted to the wilderness more slowly than the snail moved.”<sup>8</sup>

**The “Hall & Parlor” form in central Connecticut.** Researchers of 17th-century domestic life in the Connecticut River Valley are fortunate to be able to consult two in-depth studies of the early domestic architecture of the region: *Connecticut Houses*, by Norman M. Isham & Albert F. Brown; and *Domestic Architecture of Early Connecticut*, by J. Frederick Kelly. Further, there are a number of 17th-century structures in Connecticut that still survive for on-site study.

Norman M. Isham (1864-1943) was a practicing architect, architectural historian, preservationist, author, and professor at both Brown University and Rhode Island School of Design. In addition to his books, *Early Connecticut Houses* (1900) and *Early Rhode Island Houses* (1895), he restored numerous buildings for



The Dorus Barnard House in Hartford, Conn. was built by Robert Webster, son of Governor John Webster, about 1660. (Robert Webster, one of Middletown’s early settlers, lived in Middletown’s “North Society” in the 1650s before returning to Hartford.) In the early 19th century it was owned by Dorus Barnard. The house was demolished in 1899. Sketch & plan from Isham & Brown, *Early Connecticut Houses* (1900).

historical societies and museums, many of which are open to the public as museum houses today. In *Early Connecticut Houses*, Professor Isham describes the distinctions of the Connecticut hall & parlor house, and includes detailed drawings and measured floor plans.

“The typical Connecticut house consists of two rooms with a chimney between them. In front of the chimney is the entry with its staircase. The second floor is carried by a beam called the summer, which runs, in each room, from the chimney to the end of the house, and which is thus parallel with the front wall of the building,” he writes. But he notes that in the Connecticut house, the summer beam (i.e. as in “sumpter mule,” the brawniest of these work animals) was oriented differently. “In Massachusetts Bay we find exactly the same plan, the two rooms with the central chimney. We do not, however, always find the summer running in the same way. It is not uncommon to see it spanning the

room from front wall to back wall, and thus parallel to the end of the building.”<sup>9</sup>

Records of the earliest settlers in Hartford and Wethersfield indicate that there were quite a few skilled artisans among them, therefore Isham doubted that the earth-fast house was ever more than a very temporary dwelling option. He surmises that houses of the hall & parlor type as known in Massachusetts were being built in the new River Towns almost immediately.

J. Frederick Kelly (1888-1947), architect, architectural historian, and author, in reference to the artisans of early Hartford and Wethersfield, wrote “When trained workmen of a conservative stamp are confronted by a given problem, it is quite to be expected that they will solve it and execute their solution in accordance with their early training ... Coming as they did from various parts of England, different groups of craftsmen brought the usages and traditions peculiar to the regions from which they came; only, instead of making a literal application ... of their traditionary habits of workmanship, they split up or subdivided this body of usage into local mannerisms – a logical outcome of meeting new and untried conditions.”<sup>10</sup>

The most noticeable feature of the 17th-century Connecticut house is the overhanging second story, sometimes known as a “jetty.” This projected overhang was commonly seen across the front of the house, but also sometimes on the ends. The overhang seen in Connecticut was of two types: (1) The framed overhang was a sturdier construction – it was a better way to frame a two-story house without cutting too many weakening mortises into the vertical posts.<sup>11</sup> This is clarified in the accompanying diagram. The second story wall was carried by the overhang. On many houses the bottom of the second story wall posts were carved into pendants. (Besides structural stability, the origin of the overhang is also attributed to

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the English town architecture of the 1500s, in which the overhang protected the first floor market and shop stalls from the elements.)<sup>12</sup> (2) The hewn overhang, in which three or four inches of the lower part of the post was cut away, served no structural purpose, but was merely decorative.

From time-to-time the myth is revived that the projected overhang seen on early Connecticut houses was somehow for defense purposes. Blockhouses and fortifications, it is true, had wide defensive overhangs. Perhaps even the 1960s tract housing “garrison” style homes, with a projecting second story, helped fuel the myth. Architectural historian Hugh Morrison reveals his sense of humor in debunking the belief: “First, the overhang almost never occurred on all four sides of a house, and the Indians were hardly polite enough to attack only the “guarded” side. Secondly, the overhang was not equipped with ... trap doors, and thus would have offered more protection to the attackers than to the defenders. Thirdly, it was a feature that certainly originated in medieval England, where there were no Indians.”<sup>13</sup>

Those who have studied the types of “jetties” have noted that in the New Haven Colony, they were of a different type, and that in New London and Norwich the overhang was not as prevalent as in Hartford and Wethersfield.

Professor Isham’s studies revealed changes in building practices that began about 1675, coincidental with the Connecticut Colony reaching a level of stability and prosperity. “Wealth had been increasing ... The older settlers were by this time passing from the stage, and the younger ... craftsmen had come forward, in whom the traditions, brought from England by their fathers and grandfathers and already modified by the new surroundings, were to undergo still greater change,” he wrote.<sup>14</sup> In the last decades of the 17th

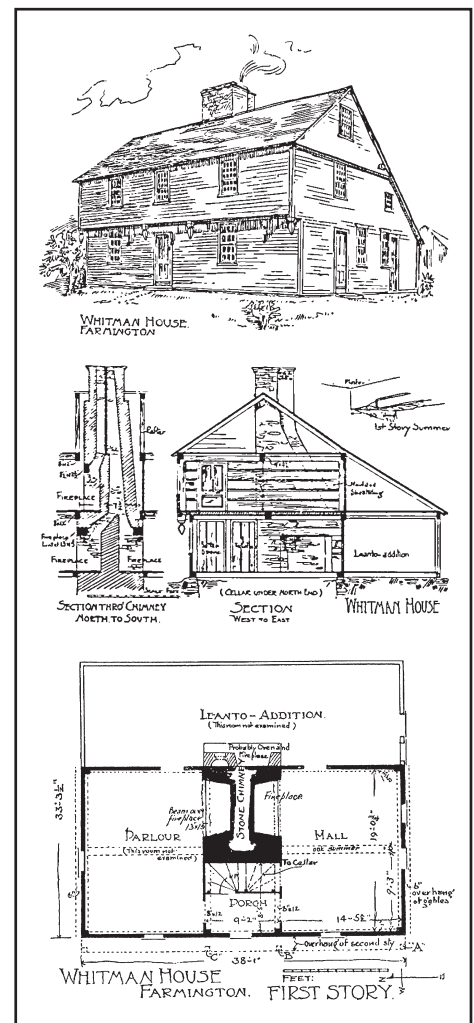
century, there was an increasing use of brick for chimneys instead of the stone used in the early years. The lean-to also evolved: At first it was for expanded utilitarian space; now it was part of an enlarged floor plan of living space. Even the overhang began to disappear on newly-built houses.

**Life in the 17th-century home.** Expansion on the theme of daily life in Middletown in the late 17th century is forthcoming in Vol. II of *Early Families of Middletown, Connecticut*. But in this article on domestic architecture it is important to at least briefly address family life in the houses. First of all, by today’s standards, the 17th-century house was overcrowded, cluttered, dimly lit, and closed in. Privacy as we know it was not anyone’s expectation – the average family had seven children. Some homes did not even have a chamber pot – the outdoor privy was everyone’s destination. New England winters were colder than the early settlers were familiar with in England, and as such the fireplaces were larger – large enough for three or four fires of independent intensity, or separate beds of coals. Sooty blowbacks that filled the house with smoke were a common nuisance in storms. Chimney-cleaning was a dirty job accomplished with a broom, although there are reports of creative souls dropping a chicken down the chimney – the bird’s panicked wing-beating did a fine cleaning job.<sup>15</sup> Despite all this, we should not lose sight of the fact that the 17th-century home was just as much of a welcome sanctuary to its occupants as our homes are to us today.

**The “Georgian” transition.** In the first half of the 17th century, even as the more formal “academic” Georgian style gained currency in New England, the older forms persisted, thanks to the “the tenacity with which the carpenters clung to the ancient modes of framing.”<sup>16</sup> Houses with a center entry and a gambrel or pitched roof were in fashion for a century, into and through the Federal period. Throughout New England, many first-period houses were

easily reworked into the more formal Georgian style, which introduced and imposed order and spatial specialization not present in the earlier hall & parlor form. The Georgian style of colonial era house in New England (c. 1725-1780) is so-named because of its period of vogue during the 18th-century reign of England’s succession of kings named ... George. Based on Italian architect Andrea Palladio’s (1508-1580) interpretation of classical design principles, the style became formalized when adapted by early English architects and published in pattern books for tradesmen. These

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Above are sketches and plans of the Whitman House (c. 1660) in Farmington, Conn. Prof. Isham referred to this house as one of the best preserved among the early houses he surveyed for his book. Sketches & plans from Isham & Brown, *Early Connecticut Houses* (1900).

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publications led to a kind of standardization of house-building among tradesmen. In New England the style was carried out as a simple, symmetrical, two-story, two-room deep house with a center entry and its windows aligned horizontally and vertically. The house was set on a raised foundation, and a gambrel or gable roof was common. In later examples, chimneys were set at each end of the house instead of one at the center. The paneled front door was usually capped with a decorative crown, supported on the sides by decorative pilasters. In the mid and late 18th century, many early New England houses were “made over” in Georgian style with fashionable ornament and re-purposed interior space – an interesting development, but a topic beyond the scope of this article.

Lest this account of the evolution of early domestic architecture in Connecticut is too squeaky-clean, to balance the accounting, here is an observation from a visitor to Connecticut in 1704, who found himself a guest in a house: “supported with shores (corner posts) enclosed with clapboards laid on lengthways and so much asunder that light comes through everywhere; the doors tied on with a cord in the place of hinges; the floor the bare earth; no windows but such as the thin covering afforded; nor any furniture but a bed with a glass bottle hanging at the head of it, an earthen cup, a small pewter basin, a board with sticks to stand on instead of a table, and a block or two in the corner instead of chairs.”<sup>17</sup>

**What about Middletown?** It is a truism in this area of study that one is more likely to find surviving examples of early vernacular domestic architecture in places that have endured protracted economic malaise. Preservation by “benign neglect,” followed by rediscovery, reinvestment, and renaissance has revitalized formerly depressed historic communities from Savannah, Georgia to Portland, Maine. Middletown’s heyday

as a flourishing trade port through the 18th century brought so much prosperity and investment to the downtown area that it is unlikely that there is a square inch of early settler house lots that has been untouched by change and development. The 1807 Embargo Act, the War of 1812, and the 1930s Great Depression notwithstanding, Middletown’s economy was never reduced to utter inertia. There are examples of 18th-century architecture in Middletown, but the earliest examples have been updated to suit changing needs so many times that the original features are mostly concealed. In 1979 the Greater Middletown Preservation Trust completed its four-volume *Inventories of Historical and Architectural Resources*, which identified and described hundreds of structures throughout the city. At that time the list included 84 properties built before 1800, and 16 were built before 1750. A number of the earliest houses in the downtown area that were slated for demolition during the urban renewal years were preserved for adaptive reuse, and are in fine condition today. Several pre-1750 houses survive in the Westfield section of Middletown. The inventory shows no structures before 1700, however.

To find likely examples of homes similar to those that would have existed before 1700 in Middletown, we look to examples in nearby towns settled by families from Hartford and

Wethersfield – those settlers with the same roots, values, and more importantly, regional building traditions brought from England – as Middletown’s early settlers. (Note: Nearby Guilford is known for its rich stock of 17th-century homes, and both New Haven and New London have fine examples. But the building traditions brought from England by settlers in those towns differ slightly from those building traditions associated with the Hartford and Wethersfield settlers.) Selected for illustration in this article are houses from Farmington and Hartford that were surveyed in depth by Prof. Isham for his book, *Early Connecticut Houses*: the Dorus Barnard House (1660) in Hartford, and the Whitman House (c. 1660) in Farmington.

After immersion in the floor plan and construction details, consider visiting one of the period-relevant house museums in Connecticut for even greater understanding. You will enjoy walking in the footsteps – and climbing the same sloping stairs – as those Connecticut folks who came before us. ■

*(Endnotes are on page 11.)*

**Editor’s Note:** The foregoing article is adapted by permission from a chapter in *Early Families of Middletown, Conn.* - Vol. I: 1650-1654 by R.W. Bacon, published in October 2012. For information about the book, visit [www.VarietyArtsPress.com](http://www.VarietyArtsPress.com).

At right are early 20th-century photos from *Connecticut Magazine* showing some of the oldest houses standing in Middletown. Clockwise from top right: the Jehosophat Starr House (1756), the Seth Wetmore House (1746), the Wright House (1750s), and the Gaylord House (1722). All are of the more formalized Georgian style.







## SMFSD Membership Information

*If you descend from a pre-1700 settler, we welcome you to join us*

The following are individuals (and presumably spouses & families) said to have settled in Middletown, Conn. before 1700. The list is from *The History of Middlesex County* (Henry Whittemore, Beers Co., 1884), derived in part from the *List of Householders & Proprietors*, Middletown, March 22, 1670. **Names in boldface** are the original 1650-54 settlers. **N.B.!** *This list is known to be incomplete!* If you descend from a pre-1700 settler *not* on this list, including a Native American or African-American ancestor, please contact our Registrar about submitting lineage and references. **Not a descendant? Join us in the Friends category!**

Josiah Adkins . . . . . 1673	Samuel Cotton . . . . . 1697	Edward Higby . . . . . 1667	Daniel Pryor . . . . . 1696	<b>Samuel Stow . . . . . 1651</b>
Obadiah Allyn . . . . . 1670	Samuel Doolittle . . . 1693	Thomas Hill . . . . . 1678	Thomas Ranney . . . 1660	Thomas Stow . . . . . 1669
<b>Thomas Allen . . . . . 1650</b>	George Durant . . . . . 1663	Thomas Hopewell . . 1662	William Roberts . . . 1680	William Sumner . . . 1687
<b>Nathaniel Bacon . 1650</b>	Samuel Eggleston . . 1663	<b>George Hubbard . 1650</b>	Joseph Rockwell . . 1693	James Tappin . . . . . 1662
William Briggs . . . . . 1677	John Elton . . . . . 1677	John Hulbert . . . . . 1669	Alexander Rollo . . . 1697	<b>Matthias Treat . . . 1659</b>
John Blake . . . . . 1677	Thomas Ferman . . . . 1679	Isaac Johnson . . . . . 1670	Noadiah Russell . . . 1696	Edward Turner . . . . 1665
<b>William Blumfield 1650</b>	Edward Foster . . . . . 1670	Francis Jones . . . . . 1672	David Sage . . . . . 1662	John Ward . . . . . 1664
John Boarn . . . . . 1677	Jonathan Gilbert . . . 1672	John Jordan . . . . . 1678	<b>John Savage . . . . . 1650</b>	William Ward . . . . . 1659
Alexander Bow . . . . . 1660	John Gill . . . . . 1676	<b>John Kirby . . . . . 1653</b>	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	<b>Robert Webster . . 1650</b>
William Cheney . . . . 1655	<b>John Hall . . . . . 1650</b>	William Lucas . . . . . 1667	<b>William Smith . . . 1650</b>	Benjamin West . . . . 1698
Samuel Clark . . . . . 1676	<b>Richard Hall . . . . 1650</b>	Daniel Markham . . . 1677	William Southmayd. 1674	<b>Thomas Wetmore 1650</b>
Jasper Clements . . . 1670	<b>Samuel Hall . . . . . 1650</b>	Anthony Martin . . . 1661	Comfort Starr . . . . . 1673	<b>Nathaniel White . 1650</b>
Henry Cole . . . . . 1650?	<b>Giles Hamlin . . . . . 1650</b>	<b>John Martin . . . . . 1650</b>	James Stanclift . . . 1686	Francis Whitmore . . 1674
Nathaniel Collins . . 1664	Benjamin Hands . . . 1678	<b>Thomas Miller . . . 1650</b>	<b>Samuel Stocking. 1650</b>	John Wilcox . . . . . 1654
Samuel Collins . . . . . 1665	<b>Daniel Harris . . . . 1653</b>	John Payne . . . . . 1676	John Stow . . . . . 1667	James Wright . . . . . 1690
<b>William Cornwell 1650</b>	<b>William Harris . . . 1650</b>	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.
- 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, 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 *any* pre-1700 Middletown settler, and would like to join SMFSD, here is the easy 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 Registrar 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 Registrar will review the application for approval. Documentation is required only through the line of descent from the 1650-1700 settler. 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 complete any gaps in the records.) When approved, the new member can choose to pay annual or lifetime dues:
  - (A) Annual dues (Nov. 1 to Oct. 31) are \$20.00 (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.

**Friends of SMFSD.** Are you a history enthusiast? Would you like to receive *The Middler*? Join us at \$20 per year!

**Please send membership inquiries & lineage information to:** Hal Whitmore, Registrar, Society of Middletown First Settlers Descendants, 1301 N. Harrison St., Apt. 201, Wilmington, DE 19806; or via e-mail to: [hbwhitmore@yahoo.com](mailto:hbwhitmore@yahoo.com).

### Endnotes for Domestic Architecture of 17th-Century Connecticut:

- (1) James Deetz. *In Small Things Forgotten.: The Archaeology of Early American Life.* (New York, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1977, 1996), pg. 92.
- (2) Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten.: The Archaeology of Early American Life*, pg. 92-93.
- (3) Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten.: The Archaeology of Early American Life*, pg. 93.
- (4) Hugh Morrison. *Early American Architecture: From the First Colonial Settlements to the National Period.* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1952), pg. 9.
- (5) Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten.: The Archaeology of Early American Life*, pg. 102.

- (6) Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten.: The Archaeology of Early American Life*, pg. 102.
- (7) David Freeman Hawke. *Everyday Life in Early America.* (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1988), pg. 55.
- (8) Hawke. *Everyday Life in Early America*, pg. 50.
- (9) Norman M. Isham & Albert F. Brown. *Early Connecticut Houses: An Historical and Architectural Study.* (Providence, R.I.: Preston & Rounds Co., 1900), pg. 6.
- (10) J. Frederick Kelly. *Early Domestic Architecture of Connecticut.* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1924), pg. 3.
- (11) Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten.: The Archaeology of Early American Life*, pg. 102.

- (12) Kelly, *Early Domestic Architecture of Connecticut*, pg. 62-64.
- (13) Morrison, *Early American Architecture: From the First Colonial Settlements to the National Period*, pg. 29.
- (14) Isham & Brown, *Early Connecticut Houses: An Historical and Architectural Study*, pg. 8.
- (15) Isham & Brown, *Early Connecticut Houses: An Historical and Architectural Study*, pg. 9.
- (16) Hawke. *Everyday Life in Early America*, pg. 49.
- (17) Hawke. *Everyday Life in Early America*, pg. 55.



## From the president ...

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Don Brock chose to leave the registrar position and recommended as his successor Hal Whitmore, an experienced genealogist with several published articles and who is the administrator of the Whitmore DNA Surname Project. Thanks Don, for giving so much of your time and talent to SMFSD since its founding and for agreeing to remain on the board as our historian.

Barb Stenberg, immediate past president, will remain on the board in the capacity of family liaison coordinator. The concept has always been for members to recruit their own close relatives to join our society and that one member would be especially informed about each surname and active in the recruitment. In this regard our new registrar has been

outdoing himself. So far in 2012, he has managed to sign up ten descendants of either Thomas Wetmore/Whitmore or Francis Whitmore.

For the first time since 2000 when our founder Gale Cornwell appointed her commander, Barb Stenberg can breathe a sigh of relief as she steps down from heading this society. In addition to leading the group, Barb

designed and mailed membership certificates and cards, published early directories, and wrote the society's first newsletters. Barb, we are all extremely grateful for your fine leadership in building such a great and unique organization.

**Your president,  
Marge Piersen**

## From the past president ...

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society. We just need you people to volunteer to serve as the representative for your settler group. E-mail me at [bstenberg@cox.net](mailto:bstenberg@cox.net) if you are willing to serve in that capacity or have questions about it.

Sue Welles was on the board for several years and resigned at the last meeting. This year she has come back

on as vice president, appointed to fill the term vacated by Rita Urquhart which expires at our next Triennial.

Marge and Sue have also planned the last two triennial meetings and done a wonderful job doing it. We again had a great time this year. Thank you both for a bang-up job again!

**Barbara Stenberg,  
Past President**

