



The Middler

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

Vol. 14, No. 2

www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ctsmfsd/Index.html

Fall 2014

LIFE IN EARLY MIDDLETOWN

Farming in early Middletown: Hard-won prosperity, then a depletion of resources and exodus of families



Varied agricultural assets led some families to stay, but led many others to seek 'greener pastures'

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

In my time working on *The Middler*, I have received occasional emails from distant researchers inquiring about Middletown and the departure of a particular ancestor for points west.

One such inquiry was from an individual whose family kept on the move beyond Ohio and Michigan, making the arduous wagon train trip over the mountains and all the way

to the Oregon coast, where a new farm was established in the 1870s which remains in the family today.

I seized upon the family surname (Scovill, another one of my own numerous Middletown ancestor families), looked back at some early maps, and realized that just a few months earlier I had driven all around the southeasternmost part of Middletown where this family lived in the 17th and 18th centuries. This area, known as Maromas, near the border with Haddam, is wooded, hilly, and rocky, and, in the 17th century, was likely the most inhospitable farmland in all of Middletown. It is no wonder, after generations of family expansion and dividing this acreage into more and smaller parcels, that those at the bottom of the family pecking-order decided to leave the "rockpile" for "greener pastures."

(Note to Maromas residents: Hold off with the sticks-and-stones. The wooded ambiance of 21st-century

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Make the most of two opportunities in 2015 to gather with fellow SMFSD members

By Marge Pierson
President, SMFSD

Next year, 2015, will offer two opportunities to meet with fellow SMFSD members in New England. Our Triennial Meeting will be

October 8-10, 2015 and headquartered at the Marriott Residence Inn in Rocky Hill, Conn. The location is perfectly situated between Middletown and Hartford, and is an easy drive to many good restaurants. While we do hold a business meeting for all members to vote on any issues that come up, the focus of the weekend is on learning and sharing about our ancestors' common history in Middletown. We have also tried to reach out to those currently residing

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~ DUES are DUE! ~

Annual Membership dues (\$20) are due January 1, 2015 for the 2015 calendar year. Please send payment to:

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

New members; NERGC, Providence, R.I., April 14-19, 2015; planning for SMFSD Triennial Meeting Oct. 8-10, 2015

• **Welcome new members.** SMFSD welcomes three new members since the last issue of *The Middler*: **Nathan W. Thompson**, AM-346, Spencerport, N.Y. (1st settler Nathaniel Bacon); **Marilyn Ann Whatley**, LM-347, Acton, Ontario, Canada, (1st settler Thomas Wetmore); and **Janel Q. Kaster**, AM-348, Spring Valley, Minn. (1st settlers Nathaniel White, William Harris, Daniel Harris, Thomas Miller, Francis Whitmore, and William Sumner).

• **Planning ramps up for SMFSD Triennial Meeting.** For the past several months, flurries of email exchanges indicate that behind-the-scenes planning is taking place

for SMFSD's Triennial Meeting scheduled for Thursday-through Saturday, October 8-10, 2015. Every three years, SMFSD members gather from across the U.S. for genealogy research, social gatherings, and to walk in the footsteps of Middletown ancestors. This year the headquarters hotel will once again be the Marriott Residence Inn, Rocky Hill, Conn. Planning for speakers, research destinations, and other activities will continue, and complete information will be in the spring 2015 *Middler*. Committee members planning the 2015 meeting are **David Bowe**, **James Cornwell**, **Betsy Johnson**, **Cindy Nicewarner**, and **Barb Stenberg**.

• **SMFSD to have a presence at 2015 New England Regional Genealogy Conference in Providence, R.I.** SMFSD will once again participate at the NERGC "Society Fair," this time at the Rhode Island Convention Center, Providence, R.I., on Thursday, April 16, 2015. The conference, held every-other-year, features speakers, educational sessions, and a vendor-packed exhibit hall. Dates for 2015 are Wednesday through Sunday, April 15-19. For information, visit www.nergc.org.

• **SMFSD Facebook presence.** Don't forget that you can keep up with SMFSD on our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/SocietyofMiddletownFirstSettlersDescendants>. ■



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FIRST SETTLERS DESCENDANTS
1650-1700 – Middletown, Connecticut, U.S.A.
www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ctsmfspd/index.html

Vol. 14, No. 2
Fall 2014

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and corrections to:

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MCHS NEWS

Erik Hesselberg is new president of historical society

Erik Hesselberg, a guest speaker at the SMFSD Triennial Meeting in 2012, is the new president of the Middlesex County Historical Society.

Hesselberg, a newspaper journalist, succeeds outgoing president Pat Tully, who served four years and now steps down to vice-president. Until recently Tully was the director of the libraries at Wesleyan University.

In his letter to members in the society's newsletter, *The Historical Observer*, the new president looks towards collaboration with nearby historical societies, especially in connection with a proposed museum exhibition on Middletown's maritime heyday. "The principal (project) is the work toward the exhibit, *A Vanished Port: Middletown and the Caribbean 1650-1824*, where objects from our remarkable collection will be displayed to illustrate the grand days

when Middletown was an international hub of commerce," he wrote. "In Middletown, 26 miles up from Long Island Sound, was the Customs House for all the lower river towns, each with its own story."

The Middlesex County Historical Society headquarters is the General Mansfield House, 151 Main Street in Middletown, which serves as the society's museum and houses its collection and archives. The museum is open for *tours* on Monday through Thursday, plus Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. For the latest information on current exhibitions, visit the MCHS website at www.middlesexhistory.org.

Of note to SMFSD members, the Middlesex County Historical Society archives holds the research papers of Middletown's premier genealogist, Frank Farnsworth Starr (1852-1939). *Research* in the archives is by appointment only, and is free to MCHS members (\$10 per day for non-members). (Individual membership is \$30 per year.) Contact museum director Debby Shapiro for more information by phone at 860-346-0746, or by email at mchs@wesleyan.edu. ■

DNA and GENEALOGY

Middletown DNA project has potential to identify early settler descendants to prospective members

(Editor's Note: The following article was submitted for publication in July 2014. Since then, participation in the Middletown Settlers DNA Project has doubled, and now has 31 members. To learn more, visit www.familytreedna.com/public/MiddletownSettlers.)

**By Rev. Peter B. Irvine,
Project Administrator,
Middletown DNA Project**

The Middletown Settlers DNA Project now has 14 members, nine of whom appear on the public website by virtue of having tested their Y-DNA. The others have used autosomal testing ("Family Finder" in the Family Tree DNA parlance). An additional people 10 people have taken the autosomal DNA test offered by Ancestry and are proven to be descendants of Anthony Sizer, a seaman born in Portugal who emigrated to Middletown in 1726 and married a great-granddaughter of Daniel Harris, one of the very first settlers and a qualifying ancestor for SMFSD. In total, DNA has identified 20 of Sizer's descendants.

DNA has also confirmed that Sizer was, in fact, born on the Island of Terceira in the Azores, Kingdom of Portugal, as Lillian Hubbard Holch asserts in her comprehensive study of his American descendants, *Sizer Genealogy*. It confirms that two Sizer descendants, who are fifth cousins once-removed, have a relatively recent ancestor, undoubtedly Anthony Sizer.

DNA has also disproved the theory held by Mrs. Holch and early Sizer descendants that everyone in America with the name Sizer is descended from Anthony. The ancestors of one person with the surname came from England, where they originally migrated from Germany. Thus, we can no longer suppose that just because someone has the Sizer surname, that person is a descendant of Anthony Sizer, because it just isn't so.



There is some very good news here for the Middletown Settlers DNA Project and for SMFSD: Autosomal DNA can in some cases identify a descendant of a first settler of Middletown. Furthermore, both men and women can take an autosomal DNA test, unlike Y-DNA, which can be taken only by men. Those who have taken autosomal tests with other companies can transfer their data to FTDNA for \$69, a bargain in the world of DNA testing.

The other good news is that Y-DNA may provide clues as to an ancestor's place of origin. In the case of Anthony Sizer, the matches of his two descendants in the project both had Portugese names, and at least one match had an ancestor who came specifically from the Island of Terceira. Furthermore, the surname affords a logical way of organizing test results under the name of a Middletown settler, which makes it easy to find whomever you are looking for.

Of other surnames in the project, only one has a confirmed match: Thomas Wetmore. The two participants in this group match on 110 out

**Autosomal DNA testing,
reaches far enough back,
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to identify or confirm
a Middletown first settler.**

of 111 markers, resulting in a genetic distance of one. The other groups – Bow, Cornwell, and Harris – only have one member each. Ultimately, we would like to establish a group for each of Middletown's 89 first settlers.

If the Middletown Settlers DNA Project is to become the clearinghouse for SMFSD members' results, we will need to increase participation dramatically. The way to accomplish this is for each participant to recruit other known descendants to join the project under their ancestor's surname. The designated administrator for each surname can then create a spreadsheet with the names, contact information, and kit numbers of each of their participants, thereby establishing a mini-project within the overall Middletown Settlers DNA Project.

The benefits to this approach are several. First, there will be one place to go to find information about about the DNA of Middletown settlers. Second, the growth of the project will result in identifying new candidates for SMFSD membership. Third, participants will be able to prove or disprove theories about Middletown ancestors using DNA evidence.

Perhaps the most promising aspect of this experiment is that autosomal DNA testing, which can be taken by both men and women, reaches far enough back, in at least some cases, to identify or confirm a Middletown first settler. Women who wish to have the benefit of Y-DNA testing may ask a male relative to take the test for them. Remember, however, that the relative must have the same surname, in one form or another, as the Middletown ancestor.

In conclusion, I personally invite all members of SMFSD to join the DNA project, and participants in the project to consider becoming members of SMFSD. That is the way to grow the project and our society. ■

Farming in early Middletown: Struggle, prosperity, ... and depletion

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Maromas is a delight, with private homes on narrow winding roads creatively tucked in among rocky outcroppings. But it must have been a challenge to farm this land in 1675.)

In another effort to add *context* to our understanding of life in 17th-century Middletown, this article looks at farm life and agriculture in the early Massachusetts Bay Colony, in the Connecticut Valley, and within Middletown from the early settlement through the out-migration of the late-18th and early-19th centuries.

Farming in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Insight into farming in the earliest New England settlements calls for an understanding not only of the suitability of the land, but also of the knowledge and aptitude of the new arrivals. Fortunately for those who landed at Plymouth, Mass. in 1620 and the next wave of newcomers in the first decade of settlement, they encountered Native Americans who had practiced agriculture for at least a thousand years before. Crops included corn, beans, squash, pumpkins, and watermelons. Tobacco was grown for smoking. Gourds were grown to be fashioned into utensils. Tools for working the earth were made from wood, stone, bone, and shells. Crop-producing fields, cleared and kept open by controlled burnings, were fertilized in spring by fish from rivers and streams. In fall the harvest was secured in dry storage cellars. The Native Americans were familiar with the land and the weather, and knew what they were doing.¹

It was a good thing the Native Americans knew what they were doing, because a good number of the settlers at Plymouth did not. Among the new arrivals in Plymouth were businessmen, craftsmen, civil servants, and ministers who had little or no agricultural experience. A number of the *Mayflower* passengers were from rural areas in the south of

England, but their experience was more in livestock-raising than in growing crops in a vastly different climate.² Survival and necessity, however, proved to be good teachers. With guidance from Squanto, their primary agricultural adviser, by 1629 the Plymouth Colony was trading its surplus corn with settlements from Maine to New York in exchange for furs and other commodities.³

Later arrivals in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the next two decades had the benefit of more information about the soil, the climate, and the tools needed, and thus were better prepared. Two determining variables were the experience and competence of the settlers in agriculture and animal husbandry.

Fortunately for English settlement, for many years before, the coastal areas of what would become known as the Massachusetts Bay Colony were routinely cleared for farming by the native inhabitants. By the mid-1620s, however, the native inhabitants were decimated by disease, and in many cases, any survivors of a family group retreated to join remnants of their tribe further inland. So with the open land as a waiting resource, wealthy investors could plan for success.

Investors shipped livestock, seeds, saplings for orchards, and farm implements across the Atlantic, but most important for the settlement enterprises were the people that the investors depended upon to do the real work. The time was right, because in this period there were thousands of English citizens who desired to leave England to escape religious persecution – and thou-

sands more who decided to come to New England for other reasons.

Documentation of the investor-financed settlements indicates an expectation that farming in the new colonies would be carried out as it was in England, with a de-emphasis of Native American practices that proved so helpful at Plymouth.

The ambitious study of the background of the earliest settlers by Charles E. Banks (1854-1931) provides some indication of the settlers' relative agricultural experience. In his *Topographical Dictionary of 2885 English Emigrants to New England 1620-1650*, Banks, notes that among 300 heads-of-families that arrived with the Winthrop Fleet in 1630, just 75 were listed as yeomen or husbandmen. Over 15% of the 300 were from London, and likely had little or no farming experience. Also among the 300 were tradesmen like carpenters, shoemakers, weavers, and tanners. Some of those, of course, may have been from rural areas, and kept a cow, sheep, poultry, and a garden on a small scale. Specifics were not noted for the large number of laborers and servants.⁴

In the 1630s in Massachusetts Bay Colony towns, families lived on designated home lots of varied acreage (2-5 acres). In the morning a herdsman would drive the livestock to an enclosed common pasture, then deliver them back to their respective home lots at the end of the day for milking. Individual gardens and orchards were kept at the fenced-in home lots. The ongoing effort to establish fields of English wheat, barley, and rye was not a great success, especially in the coastal areas. But the potential market for wheat kept everyone trying.⁵

Farming in early Connecticut Valley settlements. When Rev. Thomas Hooker and his followers removed to Hartford in 1635, they found more than religious freedom. There were difficulties, of course, in establishing shelter and foothold on the land for their families and



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Farming in early Middletown

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livestock. Severe weather and sickness took a toll. But the trekkers had arrived at a fertile land of opportunity for a soon-to-be-ready market. Also ready for the market were previously-established Connecticut Valley settlements at Windsor and Wethersfield.

Wesleyan University emeritus professor Jelle Zeilinga de Boer wrote of the agricultural difficulties and adaptations of early Connecticut Valley settlers in *Stories in Stone: How Geology Influenced Connecticut History & Culture* (Wesleyan University Press, 2009).

“The soils in ‘old’ England’s agricultural south, where most of these people originated, contain a lot of lime, derived from soft bedrock that had formed in warm, shallow sea. Such soils are chemically basic, and provide much-needed nutrients for raising grain,” he explained. “Soils throughout glacially-ravaged New England, on the other hand, derive from hard, quartz-rich formations; they are acidic and frequently very rocky.”⁶ With no experience with the native crops, early settlers continued their market-driven experiments with grains imported from England.

Thanks to the soils of the 1300 square-mile valley drained by the Connecticut River – in contrast to the soils of coastal Massachusetts, for example – central Connecticut became an agricultural force within a century. “This was primarily due to the peculiar geology of the central valley,” writes de Boer. “Here, clays and silts had settled on the bottoms of large glacial lakes and covered the rocky debris left by sheets of ice. The well-



drained, relatively fertile soils were suitable if treated the right way.”⁷

The probate inventories of some early settlers in Hartford indicate the progress that was made in just a few years. James Olmsted, who died in 1640, had three horses, 13 cows, 13 pigs, four goats, 160 bushels of Indian corn, 30 bushels of summer wheat, and 12 bushels of peas.⁸

By the early 1640s it was clear to New England’s leaders that one particular belt of soil was the best suited for growing European grains: the alluvial terraces along the Connecticut River extending from Middletown north to above Springfield, Mass. As the settlements along the river grew more populated, and could supply the labor needed for the hand-reaping-and-threshing, the first “wheat belt” in the colonies, centered around Hadley, Mass., exported wheat to Boston, and down-river to points beyond.⁹

In the early 1640s the growth of Connecticut Valley settlements and the recognition of the region’s agricultural potential just happened to coincide with (1) the ouster of King Charles I, (2) the ascent of Oliver Cromwell, (3) England’s civil war, and (4) the resulting economic upheaval. The immigration of new planters, the investment of outside capital, and the market of selling necessities to newcomers came to a halt. Prices for all goods fell, even the market price for formerly-profitable grain.¹⁰ This is when the abilities of New England’s early merchants, who may not have known the handle from the business-end of a hoe, came to the fore.

With low prices came opportunity. Almost immediately, markets were identified and investigated along the eastern seaboard and in the Caribbean, and New England began to trade on its true wealth in timber, fish, livestock, and grain. This fueled

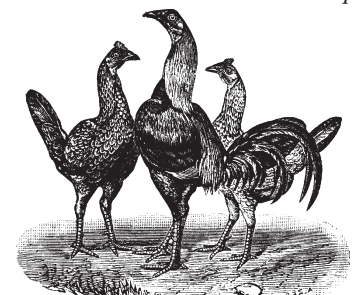
a new shipbuilding industry. By 1650, Connecticut Valley wheat was flooding markets. New England ships were carrying livestock to Europe. Horses, milled lumber, pipestaves, barrels of fish and meat, and all manner of agricultural produce were exported to supply sugar cane plantations on the Caribbean islands.¹¹ Such were the economic conditions when the settlement of Middletown was approved by a committee of the General Court of Connecticut in March 20, 1649/1650.

Farming in early Middletown.

Archaeological studies and historical accounts indicate that Native American tribes in central Connecticut practiced formalized agriculture before English arrival in the 17th century. In 1640, in what was to become Middletown, Chief Sowheag of the Wangunk tribe built a fortified village, comprised of elongated wigwams of various sizes for individual families, near the location of present-day Indian Hill Cemetery.

Those that passed up and down the Connecticut river in the years before settlement made note of the land, but did not think much of its potential. There were no spreading alluvial grounds as seen further north. Much of the land along the river north of the present city appeared to be undrainable lowlands, entangled by thickets. Further south, the cleared land to the west was obscured by giant, ancient trees that grew along the riverbank. On the east bank of the river were brownstone cliffs. The more desirable lands to the west of the river had not been explored, as even the most curious would be discouraged by Chief Sowheag’s fortifications.¹²

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Farming in early Middletown

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Although the details of the transaction are sketchy, sometime between 1640 and 1646, Chief Sowheag conveyed his “township” that became Middletown to Connecticut’s governor, John Haynes. Subsequent agreements in 1650 and 1672 formalized the transfer of lands in exchange for three reservations, one on the west side of the river, and two on the east (about 350 acres in total).¹³

The first few pages of the town records of Middletown are lost, but in September 1651 the General Court ordered that “Mattabesett” be considered a town, and that it choose a constable. In 1653 the General Court approved the name “Middletown” (halfway between Saybrook and Windsor), and by 1654 the town had 31 taxable persons (heads of families).¹⁴

Analysis of the *known* origins of the adult men and women of Middletown’s first 23 families indicates that 16 had first been in the Massachusetts Bay Colony at or near Boston; 14 were in Hartford before Middletown; five had first been in Wethersfield; and four had spent nearly a decade in Rowley, Mass. (*The Middler*, spring 2011).

Generally the early “proprietors” of Middletown began with five-acre house-lots, as was the custom throughout early New England. Crops were cultivated and livestock pastured on larger tracts, or common land, that was not necessarily contiguous to their house-lot. Subsequent land divisions granted acreage in outlying sections of the town according to the individual’s contribution to the town in labor, material, or services for public projects like fences or roads.

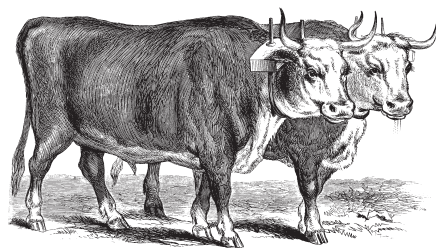
The most comprehensive study of farming in early New England, *A Long Deep Furrow: Three Centuries of Farming in New England*, by Howard S. Russell (1976), notes that an average harvest from a small family farm in the 17th century would be regarded as small by later standards: no more than 50-60 bushels of corn grown on five or six acres; and no more than 10 bushels of wheat, rye, or barley. Livestock

owned by small family farms was usually no more than 10 each of cows, sheep, and pigs.¹⁵

Russell interprets those modest statistics in the context of the times, and not an indication of incompetence or idleness. The small scale reflects the all-consuming time and labor required before the advent of mechanization. To support a family of a dozen with just a hoe, scythe, sickle, and axe required knowledge, ingenuity, and almost continuous labor from everyone.

More specific to Middletown is *Two-and-a-Half Centuries of Farm Life in Middletown, Connecticut*, by Josiah Meigs Hubbard (1907), a 22-page published paper read before the Middlesex County Historical Society. Hubbard’s writing is charming and expressive, but he acknowledges that his work is merely a “word picture” and includes no statistics or source citations. Of the early settlers, he wrote “They chose a goodly spot whereon to locate. The wide sweeping curve of the river sending the channel close into the shore on the west side, indicated a favorable spot for a landing. The gentle slope back from the riverbank was naturally well-drained and advantageously situated for clearing and cultivation. To the north were grassy meadows, holding the promise of winter forage for domestic animals. ...”

“The patient ox, slow moving but powerful, peculiarly adapted to the service of the pioneer in clearing his fields of trees and stones, and in furnishing motive power for plow and harrow; serviceable also for road transportation for short distances, has the other weighty consideration in his favor, that he is easily kept,” wrote Hubbard. “It is no wonder that



the ox should be the favorite animal for farm work. ...” Hubbard also noted the equal importance of the domestic cow, and surmised that its need for the forage close by along the Sebethe River likely dictated the town’s first clearings and tilled fields.

Geographically, Hubbard saw significance in that the areas of Middletown to the west that were first to be cultivated outside of the town’s center had “field” as part of their name: Newfield, Westfield, and Middlefield, “a fair and fertile scope of country.” To the south and southeast were less attractive regions. “For a couple of miles from the center it compared fairly well with that found in other directions” he wrote, “but beyond this the surface of a large portion of it was broken and rugged, demanding a greater outlay of labor to bring it into a condition for tillage.” The South Farms, Millers Farms, and Farm Hill, areas had a slightly more gravelly soil quality, while Maromas, at the far southeast along the Connecticut River, was the area most inhospitable to farming.

Hubbard noted that the goals of the family farm were simple, but the work was not. The aim was to produce, as far as possible, everything needed for the support and comfort of the family; and also produce a marketable surplus of everything grown, so that proceeds could purchase necessities that the farm could not produce. The work force to accomplish these aims consisted of every member of the family except the very young, the very aged, or the infirm.

Young boys started in by assisting with the care of domestic animals. As they grew older, they took on lighter farm work, and when older still, joined men in the fields. “A similar course of training awaited the girls of the family,” wrote Hubbard, “for the business of the farm was carried on in and around the house, as well as out upon the fields.” The manufacture of butter, cheese, candles, soap, wool spun and woven into clothing,

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Feature Graphic #18 – Middlesex Gazette, Thursday, Oct. 25, 1821: Report on the Middlesex County Cattle Show & Agricultural Meeting

All the farmers didn't leave Middletown. Below is the report on the Middlesex County Cattle Show published in the Middlesex Gazette, Oct. 25, 1821. The meeting of the Society for the Promotion of Agriculture & Domestic Manufactures was held Oct. 16-17, 1821 in Middletown.

MIDDLESEX GAZETTE.

MIDDLETOWN,

THURSDAY, October 25, 1821.

Middlesex County Cattle Show and Agricultural Meeting.

On the 16th and 17th days of October current, was holden in the city of Middletown, the Annual Meeting of the Society for the promotion of Agriculture and Domestic Manufactures in the county of Middlesex. The weather was favourable; and about two hundred yoke of oxen were brought in—a number considerably greater than the year preceding. Many of them particularly the working oxen, were deserving of high commendation. Indeed, from the information afforded us, we believe that Middlesex may justly be proud of her fine stock of Cattle, and that with due attention on the part of our farmers, we shall, in a short time, be exceeded by no part of the State, in this respect.

An uncommonly fat Ox of six years old was exhibited—supposed by good judges to weigh alive twenty four hundred. It was owned by Mr. Sylvester Cone of East-Haddam, who obtained a premium for it. The legs of this animal, it was noticed, were unusually short.

There were also some excellent Milch Cows and some very good Sheep. It is the opinion of many well informed persons that our farmers might advantageously bestow more attention upon the Merino full & mixed breeds; & that it would be for the interest of regular manufacturers to offer further encouragement by extra prices, or premiums, on large quantities of the best Wool at the annual fair.

Two large hogs were exhibited—one between five and six months old, estimated to weigh, when dressed, three hundred pounds; and the other less than eight months old, estimated to weigh when dressed, three hundred and twenty pounds. The last is of the Chinese breed. It is of great importance to persons in narrow circumstances to raise their own pork, when their situation will permit. If more salt pork was generally used, it would prove economical; and, in hot weather especially, eaten with plenty of vegetables, it would be very conducive to health.

Two stud horses were exhibited; but neither of them gained a premium. We wish that more attention was paid to improvement of the breed of horses. Those which are good and elegant command a high price, and their keeping costs but little more than that of poor ones. It is thought by some that in this quarter of the State we have too many horses. This is, probably, correct. One thing, however, is unquestionably true, that we have far too many poor horses.

There is good reason to believe that in the short period since the Society has been regularly organized, considerable emulation has been excited amongst many of our respectable

and intelligent farmers. This favourable symptom is viewed with peculiar pleasure—we ought highly to appreciate every thing which tends to give energy to the Agricultural class who, in truth, constitute the bones and sinews of the community.

In the forenoon of the 16th inst. there arrived in this city from Durham (five or six miles distant) a very large cart drawn by nearly eighty pair of Red oxen; with a fine ox in front, bearing between his horns a board with the motto "Spread the Plough." In the lower part of the cart were several musicians—on a stage over their heads were men working at mechanic trades, or threshing and winnowing grain.—This procession was headed by Mr. W. Wadsworth of Durham, one of the Vice Presidents of the Society.

The exhibition of Domestic Manufactures was highly gratifying. Among them were several articles of superior quality and beauty—almost all of which were made in families. In times like the present, when there is scarcely any demand abroad for our produce, the fabrics of this country acquire additional consequence. The extension of our household manufactures we consider of paramount importance; because household manufactures profitably employ the leisure hours of the men, women and children of a family, which would otherwise be lost, and, still more, because they directly promote habits of industry and frugality; of morality and virtue.

One circumstance which attended the exhibition of domestic manufactures, we noticed with sincere regret. We allude to the disorder which prevailed in the room set apart for their exhibition. It should be recollected that the LADIES feel particularly interested in the examination of these articles, and being more immediately within their proper province—while they leave to the men the inspection of the animals and other objects. It is, therefore, hoped and expected that in future the men will not persist in crowding into the room, to the annoyance of the ladies. A little reflection upon this subject will, unquestionably, correct the evil. Hereafter, the committee of arrangements would do well, on the morning of the first day, if not before, to post up in some public place a few necessary regulations.

In the afternoon of the 17th inst. the Ploughing Match took place in the north part of the city, in a field of upland sward, belonging to Capt. Isaac Bacon. This contest gave much satisfaction to a great concourse of spectators. The field was marked out into seven different parts; each (after deducting two furrows ploughed prior to starting, for the purpose of trying and regulating the ploughs) containing about six sevenths of one quarter of an acre.

Among the rest was a plough with wheels attached to the fore part. This kind has been recently employed in the easy soils of some of the West-India islands; and its principal ad-

vantage (independently of less exertion to him who holds it,) seems to consist in the even depth of the furrows which it makes; the iron wheels in front serving as a regular gauge to the ploughshare. Each plough was provided with a ploughman and a driver—excepting one, for which Mr. Samuel Crowell, jr. acted in both capacities. The wheel plough was drawn by one pair of oxen, assisted, part of the time, by a horse. The other ploughs were drawn by one pair of oxen without any other aid.

The respective sections were finished as follows;
By Mr. Elisha Treat, in 21½ minutes,
Ezra Coe, 22½
Samuel Crowell, jr. 24½
Elihu Coe, 26½
Joseph Coe, jr. 26½
T. Mather's Wheel Plough, } 27½

Robert Johnson, 30 m. nearly.
Mr. J. began later than the rest, and did not enter into regular competition

The above periods of time were noted by an accurate watch which has a separate hand to indicate the seconds. The successful candidates were, 1st, Mr. Joseph Coe, Jr 2d, Mr. Elihu Coe. 3d, Mr. Samuel Crowell, jr.

Premiums awarded for Cattle and Live Stock.
Best fat ox, Sylvester Cone,
Best pair working oxen, Joseph Coe, jr.
2d best pair do Aaron Plum,
Best pair 3 year old steers do,
Do 2 do do, Curtis Coe,
Do 1 do do, Ezra Coe,
Best bull 3 years old, Hezekiah H. Seiden,
Do 2 do do, Ezra Coe,
Do 1 do do, Lemuel White,
Best milch cow, Nehem Hubbard,
2d do, E. B. Tompkins,
Best heifer 2 years old, Jed. Wilcox,
Do do 1 do do, Wm. J. Trench,
Best Merino Buck, Linus Coe,
2d best do, Wed. Wadsworth,
6 best merino ewes, Curtis Coe,
Best boar not 2 years old John Miner,
Do sow not less than 1 yr. Asher M. Coe,
Best litter pigs not less than }
4, & not more than 3 months } Syl. Wilcox.
old,

For Domestic Manufactures as follows.
Best piece woollen cloth (family) not less than 8 yards, Jonathan Usher,
Homemade carpet not less than 20 yards—Reverilo C. Usher,
Hearth rug, Elisha Treat,
Counterpane, Mary Hubbard,
Pair woollen stockings, Linus Coe,
Best specimen of linen thread, Elisha Miller,
Do, of silk do, Elisha Miller,
Best piece diaper, Phinehas Parmelee,
Do. linen Cloth, Heth F. Camp,
Do. grass bonnet in imitation of Leghorn, Mary Hubbard,
Do. boots or booties 1 pair, Joseph P. Camp,
Do. shoes 1 pair, Joseph P. Camp,
Do. 2d do, John White,
Best white flannel, Linus Coe.

Farming in early Middletown

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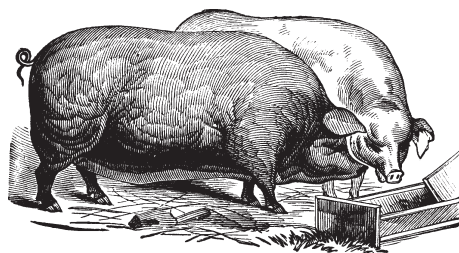
and flax woven into linen fabrics were among the responsibilities, according to aptitude, in addition to caring for chickens or lambs, and light work in the fields.

Hubbard saw a permanency in the relation of the farm to the family occupying it. "Farms more often passed from ancestor to descendant than from seller to purchaser," he wrote. "There are farms in Connecticut which have never been transferred from owner to owner by deed since the first white settler obtained his title from the Indians."

Hubbard wrote knowledgeably about the crops grown on early Middletown farms. "Of grains there were Indian corn, rye, wheat, buckwheat, and oats. Very early the settlers came to realize the value of the new grain made known to them by the Indians. The variety grown in this region was the yellow flint. It was a slender ear carrying eight rows of shallow kernels rounded in form and deep yellow in color, containing a large proportion of gluten, and being of a high nutritive value." Some grains were for animals only, while others were for the family table.

Vegetables grown as field crops were potatoes and turnips. The gardens nearer the house furnished peas, beans, sweet corn, radishes, cabbage, beets, parsnips, carrots, and lettuce. Family orchards first produced apples, and later on, peaches and plums. Wild berries, fruits, and nuts added variety to the diet.

Beef, pork, mutton, poultry, and eggs amply supplied the farmer's table, and in season was supplemented by Connecticut River shad.



Of the early settlers, Hubbard surmised that "Their bodies were well-nourished, even if their palates were not so tickled with dainties as are those of their descendants. Their children grew up ruddy-cheeked and healthy, with strength to labor and vigor to endure."

Hubbard wrote of the interdependency of extended family and neighbors, the reliance on nearby laborers who did not own their own farms, and the "joyous element" of life as manifested in sleigh rides, games, hard cider, and spontaneous merriment. He acknowledged the outmigration to Vermont, New York, and Ohio, but remarked that "through it all, for a century and-a-half at least, the economic and social life of the farm and the farming community remained practically unchanged."

Hubbard concluded with a resigned but objective look at the impact of mechanization on the lifestyle and economics of farm life. But he was encouraged by the application of modern science to agriculture: "one of the marvels of our time."¹⁶

The rosy "word picture" of Josiah Meigs Hubbard is a valuable look at farm life in Middletown, but it touches only lightly on the economic, social, and environmental forces that changed farming in New England and Middletown in the late-18th and early-19th centuries.

Central Connecticut had become New England's breadbasket by the 1750s, but the Revolutionary War and its aftermath affected farm life and production. The war effort drew men's labor away from their farms, and as a result, manuring, cultivation, and fence repair were neglected.

After a few years, many structures were in need of maintenance and much pasture land was overgrown. Disease epidemics in the 1770s and consecutive years of severe winters in the 1780s were no help. Many farm families persevered through the hardships, while others used the hardships as motivation for change.

Throughout New England, settlements that were first agrarian in nature, but that turned out to be well-situated for commerce, saw population growth and the development of a central town, city, or port. What followed was often a clash of mercantile vs. farming interests, "town" vs. "country" in both economics and lifestyle. In many cases this resulted in political separation.

A dispassionate overview of Middletown in the turn of the 19th century period is within *Middletown: Streets, Commerce, and People, 1650-1981*, by Peter Hall. "Middletown in the early 19th century was not the peaceful New England village of popular lore," he writes. "It was a place in fundamental transition." The area encompassing Middletown and the current towns of Cromwell, Portland, Middlefield, and East Hampton changed little until the 1750s. The population was almost entirely descended from the earliest settlers, and "lived contentedly as self-sufficient farmers."¹⁷

The early settler families, from the modest beginnings of home lots and adjacent meadows in the 1650s, in subsequent decades acquired vast acreage in the outlying areas through land grants. For a century and more

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Farming in early Middletown

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this land was divided again and again to provide for successive generations. "By the 1730s, land was no longer abundant and farming less profitable," writes Hall, and the ambitious younger sons of farming families turned toward the mercantile interests of the soon-to-be major port. Timber from Middletown was harvested for shipbuilding and export. Entrepreneurs from elsewhere were drawn to Middletown by the opportunities in the West Indies trade.¹⁸

It is interesting to note that even in this period of Middletown's growth as a port, among the wharves, warehouses, and shops near the river, were kitchen gardens and enclosures for horses, pigs, and cows. Diaries held by the Connecticut Historical Society tell of vegetable gardens and even grain harvesting in Main Street backyards in the 1780s-90s.¹⁹

"The economic revolution that had transformed Middletown from a sleepy farming village to a busy international port had overturned the whole order of society and values," writes Hall. By the end of the 18th century, the river town was becoming a city, and poverty and crime were obvious social problems. New arrivals and new leadership turned emphasis more towards mercantile rather than agrarian interests. "The ownership of a farm, which had once been the goal towards which nearly all young men aspired, was becoming less and less possible as land became scarcer and farming itself less profitable," writes Hall. "By the first decade of 19th-century, Middlesex County was in the grips of a full-blown ecological disaster caused by overpopulation and intensive commercialized agriculture."²⁰

David Dudley Field, writing in his *Statistical Account of Middlesex County* in 1819, described the state of the county in a generally upbeat tone, but he did make note of woodlands decimated by avaricious timber exporters, and pasture land ruined by sheep raised to keep up with the demands of New England's



textile mills. Illustrative of the change in Middletown, Dr. Field in 1817 counted, in the district closest to the river, 11 dry good stores, 22 grocery stores, four lumber yards, four blacksmith shops, four tailor shops, and 42 other shops ranging from bakeries and butcher shops to millinery shops and shoe stores.²¹

Regarding the loss of woodlands, Dr. Field observed: "It is an alarming fact that wood and timber are decreasing. They are cut down not only to supply our own inhabitants with fuel and fencing, and with materials for building houses and vessels, but immense quantities of wood and lumber are exported to New York and other parts of our country; the call for which has been increasing since the Revolutionary War. Some trees, from their brittleness or the slowness of growth, have been destroyed by sheep and cattle."²²

Regarding prevalent crops in the early 19th century: "Wheat was the principal crop in this county until the ravages of the Hessian fly about 1777, since which there has been but little raised. Rye is now sown abundantly and is of an excellent quality. Corn has ever been an important crop in Middlesex. A general opinion prevails among the farmers that the continuance of the same crop upon the same ground for a succession of years, is inexpedient. Hence, grain, oats, and flax are customarily sown after a crop of corn. These are frequently followed with grass, and then corn is again planted."²³ "The more important articles of exportation are livestock, corn meal, and lumber."²⁴

Dr. Field's selected observations of farming in the early 19th century: "Weeds are destroyed among us by the plow and hoe, and generally with a view to a crop which they would injure. The principal manures used are taken from the sty and yard.

Ashes, so far as they can be obtained, are used. Ox-teams are almost wholly used. It appears that there must be between eleven and twelve hundred teams in the county. Fences in the stony parts of the county are built sometimes wholly of stone, and sometimes with stone and posts with two or three rails; in other parts of the county they are built of posts and rails, or of rails only." Dr. Field noted that farm land was rarely leased to tenant farmers, and that in most cases the owners were also the cultivators of the soil.²⁵

Dr. Field on population and out-migration: "The inhabitants of the southern, western, and northern parts of this town are very generally farmers, and as the lands in those parts have long since been taken up for farms, the population has increased very little in many years. There were 80 dwelling houses in Middlefield in 1745. and but one more in 1815. The population of Westfield for the same length of time has been nearly stationary. The increase in the Upper Houses has been confined principally to the village in the southeastern section of it, as the increase in the first society has been to the city. Young, enterprising men, trained to husbandry, unable to get farms in their native town, have removed from time to time to other parts of the country. Individuals and families for 80 years have been almost perpetually removing from this county, They at first removed to the county of Litchfield in this state, and Berkshire in Massachusetts; then to New Hampshire and Vermont; in later years they have removed to New York, and to the Western States and Territories. The descendants of those

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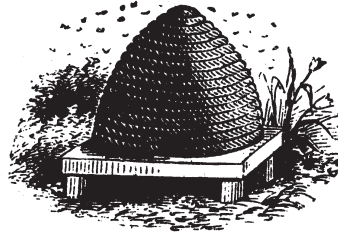
Farming in early Middletown continued from page 8

who have emigrated from the county doubtless exceed its population at the present time.”²⁶ Dr. Field specifically mentioned the removal of many Middletowners to upstate New York beginning in 1784 when Hugh White established a settlement, near present-day Utica, called Whitestown.

As David Hall phrased it so bluntly in *Streets, Commerce, and People*, “Once a pleasant place to live, Middletown became a place to leave.”²⁷ In the late-18th and early-19th centuries, many families did leave Middletown for the “greener pastures” of western Massachusetts, Vermont, New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. But although Middletown declined as a port after the War of 1812, it would soon flourish in years to come as an industrial and commercial center. And of course not *all* the farmers left.

Through the 19th century, forests in Connecticut continued to disappear. The average New England household that heated with wood used more than 30 cords of wood per year, which represented the annual logging of one acre of mature forest. In *Stories in Stone*, author Jelle Zeilinga de Boer noted that by the end of the 19th century, more than 75% of the state had been cleared for pasture land. “The soils rapidly lost their nutrients, which were washed downhill, where they silted streams and rivers. Water tables fell, and the ecology changed irreversibly,” he wrote. Then in the 20th century, it was the farms and pasture land that disappeared, replaced by asphalt and suburban development. On a positive note, today Connecticut forests have regained half of their original footing, according to de Boer.²⁸

The 20th-century farms that remain in Middletown, Cromwell, Middlefield, Portland, or East Hampton are examples of protracted good management, good fortune, adaptability, and perseverance. One such example was the subject of a feature article in *The Middler* in fall 2009: The Brock family dairy farm in the rolling hills



of Middletown’s southern Farm Hill district. The farm was the boyhood home of SMFSD’s former registrar Don Brock, and is still operated by his cousins and members of the extended family. The acreage has been worked continuously by 11 generations since farming on the land began by one of the Brock family’s early Middletown ancestors, Daniel Harris, in 1650.²⁹

About Connecticut agriculture tomorrow, we can only say for sure that change is inevitable. As for the past, the earliest Middletown families made the best of the land for as long as they could, with the knowledge they possessed at the time. Both the families that stayed in Middletown, and the families that departed for “greener pastures” chose to persevere in their own way, making the best of opportunities before them. The thousands of descendants spread far-and-wide across the land – including those on farms in Middletown and on the Oregon coast – are today’s evidence of that perseverance. ■

Endnotes

- (1) Howard S. Russell, *A Long, Deep Furrow: Three Centuries of Farming in New England*. (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1976), pg. 3-4.
- (2) Russell, *A Long Deep Furrow*, pg. 6-7.
- (3) Russell, *A Long Deep Furrow*, pg. 9-10.
- (4) Russell, *A Long Deep Furrow*, pg. 15-16.
- (5) Russell, *A Long Deep Furrow*, pg. 22.
- (6) Jelle Zeilinga de Boer, *Stories in Stone: How Geology Influenced Connecticut History & Culture*. (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), pg. 2.
- (7) de Boer, *Stories in Stone*, pg. 3.
- (8) William deLoss Love, *The Colonial History of Hartford* (Norwood, Mass.: The Plimpton Press, 1914). pg. 156.
- (9) Russell, *A Long Deep Furrow*, pg. 23.
- (10) Russell, *A Long Deep Furrow*, pg. 33.
- (11) Russell, *A Long Deep Furrow*, pg. 37.
- (12) David Dudley Field, *A Statistical Account of Middlesex County, Conn.* (Middletown, Conn.: The Connecticut Academy of Arts & Sciences, 1819), pg. 33.
- (13) Field, *A Statistical Acct. of Middlesex Cty.*, pg. 34.
- (14) Field *A Statistical Acct. of Middlesex Cty.*, pg. 34.
- (15) Russell, *A Long Deep Furrow*, pg. 52-53.
- (16) Josiah Meigs Hubbard, *Two-and-a-Half Centuries of Farm Life in Middletown, Connecticut*, (Middletown, Conn.: James T. Young, Printer, 1907), pg. 1-22.
- (17) Peter D. Hall, *Middletown: Streets, Commerce, and People, 1650-1981*. (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University, 1981), pg. 7.
- (18) Hall, *Middletown: SC&P* pg. 9.
- (19) Hall, *Middletown: SC&P* pg. 10.
- (20) Hall, *Middletown: SC&P* pg. 11.
- (21) Field, *A Statistical Acct. of Middlesex Cty.*, pg. 45.
- (22) Field, *A Statistical Acct. of Middlesex Cty.*, pg. 13.
- (23) Field, *A Statistical Acct. of Middlesex Cty.*, pg. 13.
- (24) Field, *A Statistical Acct. of Middlesex Cty.*, pg. 44.
- (25) Field, *A Statistical Acct. of Middlesex Cty.*, pg. 16-18
- (26) Field, *A Statistical Acct. of Middlesex Cty.*, pg. 42.
- (27) Hall, *Middletown: SC&P* pg. 12.
- (28) de Boer, *Stories in Stone*, pg. 2-4.
- (29) R.W. Bacon, “SMFSD Registrar Don Brock shares recollections of his youth on a farm in 20th-century Middletown.” *The Middler*, fall 2009. (Society of Middletown First Settlers Descendants), pg. 6-7.

Joe Piersen (1940-2014), educator, historian, and friend of SMFSD

Joe Piersen, husband of SMFSD president Marge Piersen, died unexpectedly on July 14, 2014. He was 74.



Joe Piersen, at left, had no Middletown ancestors, but as supportive husband of Marge, SMFSD president, he was a familiar and welcome presence at past SMFSD gatherings.

Joe was not a member of SMFSD and had no Middletown ancestors, but his sunny presence added to the warmth of our Triennial Meetings in recent years.

Joe and Marge, longtime residents of Deerfield, Ill., met as students at Grinnell (Iowa) College and married in 1963. As history and American studies majors, respectively, they pursued interest in history throughout their lives. After Joe retired in 1994 from his long career as a language arts teacher at Wood Oaks Jr. High School in Northbrook, Ill.,

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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	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 Stancliff . . . 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.
- 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.

Joe Piersen (1940-2014) ... *continued from page 10*

he focused attention on his lifelong interest in railroad history. At the time of his death he was archives chairman of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad Historical Society. He was also on the board of the Deerfield Historical Society.

An indefatigable railroad historian, author, and photographer, Joe fielded all manner of inquiries from scholars, architects, and rail fans; wrote many

articles and books; gave presentations to the public; compiled historical photo collections; and republished arcane materials of interest to historians and model-builders. As an author, his three most notable books are *The Chicago and Northwestern Business Train*, *The Chicago and Northwestern Final Freight Car Roster* (with Ira Kulbersh), and *Chicago Great Western Depots Along the Corn Belt Route* (with Jerry Huddleston). His most recent and unfinished project was a book on the

firm of Frost & Grainger, architects of railroad depots in the Midwest.

Your editor had the pleasure of spending time with Joe at several SMFSD Triennial Meetings, and because I am a scholar of early 20th-century vaudeville, circus, and popular culture, I made sure to pick his brain on relevant railroad history. He was a quiet and modest man, but he was a walking bibliography on the subject.

As a former professional acrobat/juggler, I also admired Joe for his

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From the president ...

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in the Middletown area. If you would like to offer suggestions, or better still, help organize activities, please share your thoughts with planning committee chairperson Barb Stenberg at bstenberg@cox.net.

On April 15-19, 2015 several SMFSD members will attend the biennial New England Regional Genealogical Conference in Providence, Rhode Island. Once again, SMFSD will have a display to attract potential members during the "Society Fair" on Thursday evening. It is always fun to hang out with other SMFSD members at this event, and we can use your enthusiasm to help sell our organization. Please let me know if you will be there.

It is now time to send in your 2015 annual dues. Please send any phone, email, or address updates when you

pay your dues. Question; In the future, would you use PayPal to pay your SMFSD dues in 2016, if we made that option available by then? We would appreciate your feedback on this possibility, which is currently under discussion with mixed opinions as to cost and benefit.

Joe Piersen (1940-2014) ...

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workout tenacity: Did he ever miss a day? Even on "vacation" staying in hotels? He could root out a basement treadmill or exercise bike at dawn the way a bloodhound tracks a fugitive.

One day, my wife and I were standing in the rain at Riverside Cemetery, preparing to welcome SMFSD attendees for a tour. Nobody showed up. We saw one lone guy way down on the sidewalk, striding briskly through the drizzle. We said "Is that Joe?" But

Finally, to new members whose certificates have been delayed and to members who should have received a 2014 dues reminder letter this summer and did not, my apologies. This has been a difficult few months for me. ■

**Sincerely, Margery H. Piersen
President, SMFSD**

then we dismissed the happy hooper as just some teenager who didn't know enough to stay out of the rain. But it *was* Joe, coming to assure us that the group would be along in minutes.

In addition to Joe's wife of 50-plus years, Marge, survivors include their two daughters, Colleen and Gail, and six grandchildren. Widely known in the railroad history community, he will be missed in that circle. But he will also be missed by the unofficial "cousins" who had the pleasure of knowing him through SMFSD. – **R.W. Bacon**

