

50 YEARS AT THE MUSEUM

1973 - 2023

A Record of
The Middlefield, Massachusetts Historical Commission



The 1820 store was recently demolished and the church faces an uncertain future.

History rhymes as a town vote was taken to tear down the badly dilapidated old combined Town Hall and school building. The vote narrowly approved keeping the structure.

A group of public-spirited citizens joined to form the Historic Commission in 1973. Their goal was to first stabilize the old building and bring it to state where it could be used as the Clerk's office on the first floor and later as a museum on the second. In the first year the town contributed \$1,000 and the Commission raised \$4,000 in a series of tag sales, auctions, dinners and solicitation of donations.

The Council of Aging moves into the ground floor in 1985. An initial State grant stabilizes the building. Another grant in 2013 provides a new slate roof and other needed repairs.

I have excerpted the Commission's yearly reports from the town's annual report where available. You can read of the struggles from many voices of the fledgling Commission - and follow the growing pains of the museum. A very light editing was undertaken for continuity.

Being at the mid-point of a centennial window allows a look both back 50 years and forward for another 50.

Looking back, I marvel at the massive collections and state of the museum and realize it is all due to the devotion and hard work of 34 Historic Commission members - along with unending support from the town's citizens.

Many times, the Commission was down to one person or had gone inactive. It would have been easy to throw in the proverbial towel and go the way of so many other now missing Middlefield organizations.

Guessing at the next 50 years, I see adding audio visual displays to explain our collection in relation to the town's history. This would be an attractive addition to our static displays. If the church was made available as a museum, there would be room to display our now hidden collections.

Most of our patrons are at a distance. Covid has greatly diminished in person visits. Digitizing our image and document collections makes them universally available and protects them from fire or theft. Please see Appendix A for an explanation of these on-going electronic efforts.

I have included a table listing every member with their years served as Appendix B. It is one small way We can acknowledge their contributions and thank them for their commitment.

Howard Knickerbocker, Secretary
February 2023



Museum Cleaning Party – February 2023
Members (l-r) Jane Craker, Doreen Black and John Savery

1957-68 The Schools

The key to understanding the birth of the museum and COA was the availability of space at the old Center School due to the new school construction, first at Middlefield and then Gateway, during the 1957-68 period.

- 1957 – New Middlefield Grammar School (all grades). The Center and Bancroft schools are closed.
- 1963 – Middlefield grades 7 and 8 move to the new Gateway.
- 1968/69 – Middlefield grades 1 to 6 to Gateway. The Middlefield school is now available to be used for town offices and meeting hall.

1973

The year 1973 saw the establishment of the Middlefield Historical Commission. The commission first formed in the interest of saving the Town Hall from further deterioration or destruction. Through the efforts of the commission and the support and hard work of interested townspeople enough money was raised through donation, weekly flea markets, a smorgasbord, auction, raffle, etc. to pay for the painting of the Town Hall, repairs of the roof, wiring, and miscellaneous repairs.

Thus far the building has been painted, all windows repaired, fire escape painted and repaired, and the roof repaired with the chimney rebuilt. Wiring of the downstairs, replacement of the front door and fire escape door and repairs to the foundation will be completed in the Spring.

Plans for raising money to supplement the balance in the commissions account to enable repairs to or replacement of the present heating plant are now underway.

We, of the commission feel we had a very successful year but that without the help and the support of the many interested townspeople and friends who donated their time and money we would have floundered by the roadside. A special thank you to all who worked at our flea markets, smorgasbord, .and auction. Special mention and thanks to Janet Waite who so very successfully organized the Watershed Supper and the Smorgasbord, and to Joe Sena who donated his time as auctioneer. We offer a very special thank you for the time and efforts of the late and beloved Jessie Pease who was instrumental in organizing our successful food sales.

1974

1975 found the Historical Commission not as active as in the previous year but we feel we have made several important accomplishments.

The main work done to the Town Hall this year was the repair, inspection and reconnection of the wiring. The furnace was also checked and thought to be repairable. A sign, designating the building as the Town Hall is now in place over the front door of the building. The upstairs and attic have been cleaned in preparation for painting and the establishment of a Town Museum. Anyone having material of Historical nature to add to our present collection, may leave it with a member of the committee.

Mary Louise Kearns and Richard Waite attended a Massachusetts Historical Commission meeting this past summer. At this meeting it was stressed that an architectural survey of the town should be made.

The Middlefield Bicentennial Commission was organized with Mary Louise Kearns as chairman. A representative of the Massachusetts Bicentennial Commission spoke at an open meeting. Mr. Frank Higgins, the commission representative discussed the possibility of obtaining funds from the Bicentennial Commission for further restoration of the Town Hall or for the reissuing of the Middlefield History.

The Bicentennial Commission would appreciate any suggestions for activities, projects, or events for the Bicentennial year.

It is planned to complete the restoration of the inside of the Town Hall with the old library as a possible site for Town Offices, with places for storage available, and the establishment of a Town Museum in the upstairs, as previously mentioned.

It is with regret that we receive the resignation of Mr. Corn Vreeland, his dedication and hard work will be greatly missed.



1975

The Historical Commission revived the old tradition of the 4th of July Town Picnic. It was a very successful affair. The Fair Grounds dining room was filled with Towns' people and friends of Middlefield. The picnic grew into a banquet, and the speakers entertained us all with stories of Middlefield's past.

The July Flea Market was widely attended. The Historical Commission sold space to individuals, and had tables of their own goods to sell. We wish to thank all who donated time or articles, and helped make the Market Day possible.

The financial success of the Flea Market, as well as donations, allowed the Historical Commission to apply for a Bicentennial Grant. Our proposal was granted by the State for \$1000 and is to be matched by funds from the Historical Commission's treasury. With these monies we intend to continue restoration of the Town Hall, and to create a Town Museum on the second floor.

Work on the Town Clerk's Office was carried out largely by volunteers. We wish to thank all who helped get the Town Clerk into her new quarters. The storm windows were provided by a donation from Mr. and Mrs.

Henry Cummings. Hanging in the Town Clerk's Office, awaiting future hanging in the Museum, is a painting by the late Edna Stauffer of Mr. Arthur D. Pease. This was framed and donated by Miss Helen Evans. Both Miss Evans and Miss Stauffer were summer residents of Middlefield.

The Middlefield Bicentennial Commission, under the direction of Mary Louise Kearns, has begun to work on plans for a float for the County Parade to be held June 13th. Middlefield has been chosen to lead the parade.

1976

During the past year, the Middlefield Historical Commission has completed another important phase of the restoration of the Town Hall. Volunteers painted most of the upstairs and hallway and Ray Shook of Pittsfield sanded and refinished the floors.

Other repairs included the installation of a fire door, replacement of timbers in the foundation and the front door, and the addition of insulation under the Town Clerk's office. Part of the expense of the repairs in the first floor was paid for by the town. Materials for the display cases and standards have been secured and will be used in the preparation of exhibits in the near future.

In connection with the Bicentennial celebration, the Commission joined the members of the Ladies' Aid and the Grange in a gala event with a most original parade, a dinner at the Agricultural Hall and a program. Edward Batorski was in charge of the parade, while Richard Waite was master of ceremonies. Ross Wolff photographed many of the parade units and participants and gave these pictures to the Commission for use in the museum.

The July Flea Market was widely attended and provided a welcome addition to the treasury. A memorial fund contributed by relatives and friends of Corn Vreeland, a long-time supporter of the Commission, will be used for a special plaque or exhibit.

It is hoped that the museum will be open to the public sometime this summer. Donations of furniture and clothing have already been received or promised. One of the most prized possessions is the community quilt composed of blocks portraying many of the Middlefield homes and public buildings.

Meetings have been held with the Board of Selectmen and the insurance agent to discuss the plan for securing insurance on the building and its contents. In compliance with the suggestions of the insurance inspector, new fire extinguishers have been installed.

Plans for the future include the securing of more copies of the Middlefield history, provided that a feasible plan for financing the project can be evolved.



1980

The Council on Aging (COA) forms.

1981

In June of 1980, the Historical Commission met and organized for the year. At the first meeting, officers were elected - President, Marjorie Batorski; Vice President, Priscilla Suriner; Secretary, Edward Cook; Treasurer, Priscilla Suriner. The committee cleaned the winter dust at the Museum and decided to have the museum open on Sunday afternoons and by appointment. The Middlefield Elementary School children visited the museum in June and were greatly impressed with the exhibits and the story of the burning of the church in 1900 and seeing the remains of the clapper of the bell. For anyone who has not visited the museum, it's worth the time as there is a lot of Middlefield history and what better time than just before the 200th birthday of our town.

1981 INVENTORY - MIDDLEFIELD HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Five display cases:

- Middlefield Center Case
- Middlefield Celebrations Case
- Early days at the Fair Case
- Memento Case
- Organizations & Publications Case

Eight free standing boards for display

Six framed pictures of Town scenes

One Cattle Show & Fair framed picture

One Portrait of Arthur Pease, 1862 - 1931

One WWI parachute

Two wooden signs:

- Middlefield Post Office
- Smith

One set of Weights and Measures

One Deacon's Bench

One Large Library Desk

One Spinning Wheel

Two manikins

One small desk (Middlefield Telephone Desk)

One ballot box.

One old cradle

One large dresser - 4 large drawers, 2 small drawers

Forty-five pieces of old clothing and old accessories

Ladies Aid quilt of houses in town

Bell clapper from Church that burned in 1900

A collection of old papers, books, and mementos donated by various people along with a collection of tools



1982

The Historical Commission wishes to report that there is a balance of \$686.95 in the account with the Town Treasurer. In July of 1982 we received a gift of an antique signature quilt made in 1888. It was made by Mrs. Amasa Graves for Miss Minnie Smith as a wedding gift when she married Mr. Lawrence Meacham of Cato, New York. Several of our present residents are direct descendants of the eighty-one (81) names on the quilt.

We are very fortunate to have the quilt given to the Museum at this time as it will add greatly to the interest of the Museum during our Bicentennial Year.

Using the quilt as an inspiration, the Ladies Aid Society is making a signature quilt of the present residents which will be turned over the Museum. All are welcome to sign this quilt if you have not already done so.

1985

The COA moves into the museum building

1987

The Historical Committee has received two gifts this past year to add to the displays at the Old Town Hall. Mrs. Alice Steele of Cummington donated one of her shadow-boxes of miniature items that have made her miniature room displays come alive. She is very well known for the many miniatures room displays she has made.

Ollie and Polly Olsen have given a quilt to the Museum. This will add to the colorful Signature and Town quilts that are already on display.

1989 Cemetery Commission Report

During 1989, your commissioners undertook the task of updating the Pine Grove Cemetery map (necessitated because of vandalism at the school which destroyed much of the cemetery records a few years past).

1992

The Middlefield Historical Commission initiated its reorganization this year with the addition and help of three newly appointed members, George Bell, Jr., Nancy Burnham, and Jack Cobb.

Our first major undertaking will be to refurbish and restore existing records, documents, and articles belonging to the Town Museum.

At this time, we wish to express our gratitude for the generous gift of \$500.00 to the Museum Account from the estate of the late Ethel Pease. Miss Pease was always a great source of information of town history; a friend to all, she and her wry sense of humor will be missed by all.

We are hoping to mount our first exhibit in the early summer. Date will be announced.

1993

The year of 1993 was a year of growth for the Middlefield Historical Commission. Regrouping after several years of absence with Lydia Sanders as the Chairperson and Museum Curator, the commission took on the job of identifying, cataloging, and preserving the items of the Middlefield Historical Museum.

After many weeks of preparation, the museum held a grand opening during "Old Home" weekend featuring many new and interesting exhibits. The museum was also open for other special days such as the fair weekend, the Apple Festival and upon request. A total of approximately 300 visitors were received throughout the season. Many expressed a sense of pride in the museum and felt that it could become a

focal point of the community. As a result of the high opinion of the visitors, the commission received many donations to the museum as well as offers to lend items of historical interest used to round out exhibits on display.

The task of preservation of museum artifacts has become a high priority. Shades have been added to the windows of the museum and special acid free storage boxes were purchased to better preserve and store items. At the close of the season all of the items of the museum were either covered or stored in a protective environment. The commission estimates that a total of 1,000-man hours were contributed by its members during the past year. The number of hours was largely due to the amount of time taken to catalog and rearrange the museum collection.

We look forward to the upcoming season and are planning to change and upgrade exhibits to keep the community interested in the preservation of Middlefield's past.

1994 Council on Aging

Perhaps the biggest impact on our COA this year was the approval of grant money (\$133,300) for the renovation of the senior center. This grant comes from a federally funded community development program and will be administered through the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC). All aspects of this project will be handled by Natalie Bozarth of the PVPC. A committee of COA members, Historical Commission, and Selectboard has been formed to work with Natalie to see that our needs will be met. The renovation is scheduled to begin in the spring (1995) and should be completed by the end of the calendar year.

1994

During 1994, the Middlefield Historical Commission completed its inventory of the town's historical collection, and catalogued many newly loaned and donated items. With the goal of sustaining community interest, exhibits were rotated for the season reopening.

Following the season reopening on July 4th, the museum was open during several weekends throughout the summer and fall, and during other town events such as the Middlefield Fair and the annual Apple Fest. The museum was again very positively received by visitors with attendance during the season numbering approximately 300. A special historical tag sale held in July enjoyed a very good turnout, and raised \$161 through the sale of items donated by residents and commission members. An October lecture on period candle making likewise drew a good crowd.

Preservation activities continued throughout the year, with a focus on framing additional photographs and documents for preservation and display. Restoration of furniture, cleaning and repairing of period clothing and creation of new work/storage space was ongoing throughout the season. Expenditures during the year included the purchase of glass and other framing supplies, and additional acid free storage boxes to preserve and store fabric items such as clothing and quilts. An estimated 1000 hours were contributed by commission members to historical efforts during the year.

While pending senior center renovations make the 1995 season somewhat uncertain, the commission will continue its preservation efforts during the upcoming season, and is planning a historical exhibit for display at the 140th anniversary celebration of the Middlefield Fair.



1995

In spite of the limitations put upon us by the necessary reconstruction of the Old Town Hall begun in 1995, we were able to open to the public for three weekends and the Fourth of July, mount a splendid exhibit of past Highland Agricultural Society award ribbons for the 140th Fair, continue framing historical photographs and other paper ephemera, repair and restore donated furniture and other items, and conclude the season on Oct. 7, 1995 with a successful second annual Tag Sale which brought in over \$250. Without the overwhelming generosity of volunteer time and important Middlefield family memorabilia donations and monetary gifts from so many people, residents and former residents, none of the above would have been possible.

Several weekend work-bees were held by Commission members during late September and October to “wrap-up” our growing museum’s collections (no easy task!), securing everything possible to protect against potential damage as a result of the downstairs reconstruction. Since that work is incomplete at this writing, we cannot estimate a date for this year’s opening. An announcement will be made.

Finally, preserving Middlefield’s historic and cultural heritage in a proper, respectful, interesting and attractive museum setting is our mutual goal, a goal that could not be achieved without your thoughtful and generous support. We welcome your ideas, suggestions and criticisms - our Town Museum is your museum.

1996

At the close of last season, all items of the museum were either covered or stored in a protective environment, due to the extensive renovations to take place during the winter at the Senior Center.

On July 3, the committee members began to reorganize and reassemble the displays at the museum to coincide with the dedication of the newly refurbished Senior Center on July 10. The museum was open that day from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Forty-seven visitors signed the guest book. During the summer the museum was open by appointment and all day in October during the Apple Fest celebration held at the church.

We look forward to a busy year cleaning and recording a major acquisition from one of Middlefield’s earliest families. A new format of labelling will be devised to inform viewers more readily of information relating to the objects and pictures displayed.

2000

With the help of the old folding tables from the Town Hall, we were able to expand our display space and develop a new layout in the Museum.

In April, the Middlefield/Chester Brownie Troop #323 presented a millennium time capsule to the Museum. The capsule will be on display until April 2025 at which time it will be opened by the Troop. The Museum was open most Thursdays during the summer and on Saturdays coinciding with other town events.

We had visitors from all over the country, many with Middlefield roots. All were appreciative of our museum.

2002

The Historical Commission has continued work on developing the inventory of the museum's acquisitions, with concentration on the new additions. Both the existing inventory and the new additions have been placed in electronic format to facilitate future use. A paper copy and an electronic copy of the inventory are kept in the museum for reference by interested parties. The museum began the summer season on July 6, and was open on July 27, Aug. 10, Aug. 31, and Oct. 12. We were also open by appointment.

The museum has received generous and extensive donations of family artifacts, photos and personal

papers from the Youtz estate, and the Olsen/McElwain families. Ellen Russo donated the material from the Youtz estate, and the material from the Olsen/McElwain families was donated by Ollie Olsen.

The commission has continued work on the genealogy files and has assisted visitors in their family research from across the country. We welcome, and encourage any genealogical information from families having Middlefield connections either now or in the past. It will be held in our files at the museum for future reference.



2003

The Commission continued work on the Museum's inventory and genealogy files. We assisted several visitors with their family research and the postal services with information on Elijah Churchill. The Museum accepted on behalf of the Town a flag used in the ceremony by the Postal Service celebrating the issue of a stamp commemorating the award of the first Purple Heart to Elijah Churchill.

2005

This past year we helped with a very successful quilt show held in the summer. The quilts were displayed in the museum and in the Church, and were a barrage of color and history.

2010

During the weekend of the fair, the antique farm equipment building was manned by the museum. It was tastefully done by Chairman, Jack Cobb. There were old tools, kitchen utensils, old pictures from the late 1800's to the early 1900's and many more things, too many to mention. Some items were donated and others came from the museum. Judging by the response of the fairgoers, this was a very popular attraction.

This year Lois Leonard-Bell resigned after many years of service. Thanks Lois! We welcome aboard Howard Knickerbocker and John Savery as new members, and Rita Doktor as an Associate Member.

2013

We man the farm building during the annual Middlefield Fair and present varying exhibits every year. This year an electronic slide show of 120-year-old Middlefield "Magic Lantern" glass photos caught the attention of many of our visitors.

The Commission has slowly started to digitize our unique photograph and document collections. Hopefully we will get them on-line and available to the distant audience unable to visit Middlefield. We have helped several folks this year that made contact by email. We have access and knowledge of local research resources that are not widely known outside the local area.

Finally, we note with sadness the passing of Roy Haapala in March of 2013. Roy served for many years as our secretary. We miss him greatly.

2013 Council on Aging

The slate roof is replaced and many other repairs made thanks to a state grant.



Marge Batorski

2016

These Annual Town Reports have chronicled over the last 150 years the comings and goings of the citizens who have graciously contributed their time and energy to the betterment of Middlefield. This year has been particularly painful for the Historical Commission as we have lost two of our guiding members.

Jack Donald Cobb joined the Commission in 1992 and was serving as chair by 1996. For the last 20 years he guided every facet of the museum and was instrumental in adding material to our collections. Jack's partner Roy Haapala, who passed in March 2013, was our long-time secretary and was probably shanghaied into the position by Mr. Cobb. Jack was an antique dealer and retired interior designer. Both vocations adding greatly to the professional appearance and depth of the museum. Most visitors are amazed that the tiny town of Middlefield has such an outstanding museum of local history. Jack died in late September of 2016. Hopefully the town will see fit to rename the museum in Jack's memory.

Marjorie Batorski became Middlefield Town Clerk in 1990 and held the position until retiring in 2016. Marge joined the Historical Commission in 2002 and served continuously until her passing on March 23, 2017. Marge applied her record management skills gained from her town clerk position into organizing the records and inventories of the Commission. I will miss manning the history shed at the fair with Marge as it gave us a chance to catch up with the town's ever unfolding history once a year.

I believe that both of my friends with their encyclopedic historical knowledge were truly a walking, talking museum unto themselves. Their passing opens a huge hole in our collective town memory.

In other matters, we continue to receive queries from all over the country from folks researching their families' Middlefield roots. This trend adds emphasis to digitizing town and personal records and photos.

The paper cemetery records have been digitized and presented to the Cemetery Commission. We look forward to supporting their requirements. We have been adding Pine Grove photos and information to the "Find a Grave" on-line cemetery database.

Several thousand early secondary town records were recently found. The Commission has offered to digitize, catalog and conserve these documents. Permission has not been received and they sit and deteriorate in the Clerk's closet.

2017

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR *13 Apr 2017*

Remembering two great citizens

To the Editor:

Each spring we grudgingly put together our written contributions to the Annual Town Report in preparation for the Town Meeting in May. The truth be known the present year's tome usually closely— and sometimes exactly— resembles that of the preceding year. This year is different.

These Annual Town Reports have chronicled over the last 150 years the comings and goings of those hundreds and hundreds of citizens who have graciously contributed their time and energy to the betterment of Middlefield.

This year has been particularly painful for the Historical Commission as we have lost two of our guiding members.

Jack Donald Cobb joined the Commission in 1992 and was serving as chair by 1996. For the last 20 years he guided every facet of the museum and was instrumental in adding material to our collections. Jack's partner Roy Haapala, who passed in March 2013, was our long time secretary and was probably shanghaied into the position by Mr. Cobb. Jack was an antique dealer and retired interior designer. Both vocations adding greatly to the professional appearance and depth of exhibits at the museum. Most visitors are amazed that the tiny town of Middlefield has such an outstanding museum of local history. Jack died in late September of 2016. Hopefully the town will see fit to rename the museum in Jack's memory.

Marjorie Batorski became Middlefield Town Clerk in 1990 and held the position until retiring in 2016. Marge joined the Historical Commission in 2002 and served continuously until her passing on March 23, 2017. Marge applied her record management skills gained from her town clerk position into organizing the records and inventories of the Commission. I will miss manning the history shed at the fair with Marge as it gave us an entire day to catch up with the town's ever unfolding history set against the background of that special once a year ancient gathering of the town.

I believe that both of my friends with their encyclopedic historical knowledge were truly a walking, talking museum unto themselves. Their passing opens a huge hole in our collective town memory and we are all poorer for it.

Howard Knickerbocker
Middlefield Historical Commission

Appendix A: Digitization of Images and Documents

The following examination gives some sense of the massive holdings and potential of even a small country museum like Middlefield. My estimated median count of various museum records and images is 23,000. Of those, about 10,000 have already been digitized.

1. The 1982 microfilmed town records were digitized due to microfilm and microfilm readers becoming obsolete. 3,000 pages were converted to PDF and image formats by the Northeast Document Conservation Center.
2. The Cemetery Commission's paper records were digitized including three large plot maps. About 1,100 pages and images are digitally archived. It is about time to update these records as protection and backup for the paper-based records.
3. The Lillian Savery (1897-1987) collection was converted to digital. Thank you to the Rod Savery family for access. About 1,100 images and documents are archived. I will add the many items of town interest to the museum electronic files and inventory.
4. A collection of account books and ledgers at the museum were digitized. A complete 1897 store inventory with wholesale prices was found. About 700 pages were processed. [Link](#) to collection.
5. The Town Annual Reports are being scanned to a PDF format. About 4,000 pages have been completed and there are about 4,000 more to be digitized. The mid 1980 and later reports are on the town web site. The earlier ones are at <http://middlefieldma.org/atrl/>.
6. There are two hordes of 19th century secondary town documents. One might be in the Clerk's closet and a second box is at the museum. Many of the documents are folded and must be conserved before individual scanning can be undertaken. I estimate there are 2,000 to 3,000 documents to be scanned. This [Link](#) is to a few examples of this 1800's collection.
7. The museum image and document collections are being organized for scanning I estimate there are 5,000 – 8,000 items and pages to be scanned.

A new record management and inventory system is being developed. The new system must be manageable by anyone with a basic spread sheet understanding. Modern databases and AMS (Archive Management Systems) are expensive and probably too complicated for volunteers without initial and then continued technical training.

This approach using a simple spread sheet inventory structure potentially makes possible a Commission web site, something that might be manageable without paid IT personnel.

The following is the hardware used for scanning. Most flat paper documents can be digitized with a sheetfed document scanner. 50 pages can be scanned in a few seconds. The media must be single sheets so any bindings must be removed.

Photographs and folded documents must be singly scanned with a flatbed scanner – which takes much more time and requires a detailed setup. Many early documents cannot be processed with a sheetfed scanner.



The Museum