

Bysiewicz and Giuliano Honorary Co-Chairs for Society's Capital Campaign

In 1997, the Society conducted a capital campaign to raise funds for substantial renovations to the Mansfield House. The effort raised \$170,000, the work was completed and our home was preserved and improved. Now, twelve years later, we are about to kick off a new campaign, with a goal of \$150,000, and are delighted to have two prominent Middletown natives, Connecticut Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz and Middletown Mayor Sebastian Giuliano, as honorary co-chairs.

The purpose of the campaign is to accomplish two main objectives. First, the heating system at the House is at the end of its useful life, and the entire HVAC system, which consists of an inoperative furnace and a cranky window air conditioning unit, is of an era we revere in our historical collections but not in our operating plant. It is extremely inefficient and not conducive to the preservation of our artifacts, our collections or our Executive Director. We are installing a completely new system, which will be much more cost effective and will protect and preserve our collections for many years to come. Half of the cost of the project is provided by a grant from the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism. The remaining cost must be borne by the Society.

For the past several years, the expenses of the Society have been greater than its income, requiring us to dip into our savings. Recent market declines have

further depleted our reserves. We are solvent, and in no immediate financial danger, but it is imperative that we replenish our savings and generate additional investment income to cover our operations. The remainder of the campaign proceeds will be used for that purpose.

The board of directors has stepped forward with generous pledges to get the campaign off to a good start. Our members, prior donors and others in the community will soon receive letters asking for support. We hope that, even in these difficult times, you will be generous and assist us in continuing with our mission of preserving the history of Middlesex County. Please join us for the campaign kickoff and an official welcome to our Executive Director, Debby Shapiro, at the Mansfield House on Thursday, June 11 from 5:30-7:30. 

A Future for Our Past



THE MIDDLESEX COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Who's In Your Past?

Middletown's third graders are busy interviewing their relatives to find out interesting stories about their families. Last year almost 200 students wrote essays telling how their ancestors came to America, how they weathered

the depression, and how they defended our country in World War II. The Sheedy History Contest committee is looking forward to again reading the essays that make them laugh and cry and marvel at the insight these eight year olds display. The winners will be honored at a reception at the Mansfield House on Thursday, June 4 at 6:00 pm. 

What's Inside:

SOCIETY NEWS

President's Message

At a time when most economic news is depressing, and many people come to work each day worried it may be their last, I am happy to report that the Society has one of the happiest employees in the City of Middletown. It is delightful for me to see Debby Shapiro adapting so well to the position of Executive Director, and to see the enthusiasm she has for her new job. All who know Debbie agree that she brings a great deal of warmth to the Mansfield House, which is fortunate, since we do not have an operable furnace at this time (see HVAC Project below).

Since the extremely popular Civil War exhibit opened in December, there have been a number of ancillary programs at the Mansfield House, at Wesleyan University and at the Russell Library. We have partnered with Wesleyan and the public library to bring you author lectures, photographic exhibits and dramatic presentations that have been very well received by our



membership and the general public.

One of the exciting events of 2009 is the release of a pictorial history book of Middletown, co-authored by Robert and Kathleen Hubbard and the Society. Former executive director Donna Baron contributed her efforts on behalf of the Society. Whether your family has deep roots in Middletown or you are new to the area and would like to learn more about its history, I think you will find the book interesting and enlightening. The Hubbards will deliver the keynote address at our annual meeting on April 22.

I wish all of you a pleasant summer, and hope to see you at some of our upcoming events.

Bill Ryczek, President

From the Executive Director

Dear Members,

Since I last wrote to you, a number of people have shown their support of the Society by becoming members. Welcome to Donna Baron, Maria Buatti, Joseph and Elisabeth Carta, Sally McGee D'Aquila, Dr. Kenneth Eckhart, Kip Harris, William and Elizabeth Holder, Patricia Hubbard, Shawn and Siobhan McLaughlin, Bryna and Mary O'Sullivan, Paul Schilling, Sarah Shapiro and Rohan Manning, Dick and Mae Spooner, and Jan Sweet. We hope to see you at our upcoming programs and look forward to having you volunteer your talents at the General Mansfield House.

Our membership chairman, Kathie Green, has sent out membership renewals to current members. We encourage you to not only renew so that you will continue to receive your Observer and other membership benefits, but also to invite your friends and family to join so they, too, may enjoy the interesting programs and events that we are planning.

Speaking of events, those recently held were very well attended. About 70 people sang "Happy Birthday" to Abraham Lincoln, and partygoers enjoyed having their pictures taken with a life sized cardboard cutout of

our 16th President. Thanks to Buck Zaidel and Di Longley for organizing the special exhibit. Also in February, Tammy Richardson gave an outstanding performance as Elizabeth Keckly as did Kevin Johnson as William Webb in March.

Our Wesleyan interns have been busy cataloguing our archives and several are conducting independent research. Jessica Jenkins, our intern from Central Connecticut State University, has been meeting with Middletown educators to put together the education component of our Civil War initiative, funded in part by a grant from the Connecticut Humanities Council. Two teachers will be hired to write the curriculum for use by Middletown students.

We are very excited about the publication of *Images of America-Middletown*. Please join us at the annual meeting where you may purchase a copy of the book and have it signed by the authors. The cost of each book is \$21.99, and it makes a great gift. Since the Society is a co-author, the Society receives a portion of the royalties, so a purchase you make will be helping us as we bring history alive in Middletown. See you there.

Debby Shapiro, Executive Director



100th Anniversary of President William Howard Taft's Visit to Middletown

Excitement abounds when people of national prominence visit a local hometown. Main Street was crowded when Julius "Dr. J" Erving, the basketball star, visited Bob's Store, people vied for prime spots on Foss Hill to see Madame Sadat, Bill Cosby, and most recently, then candidate, Barack Obama speak at Wesleyan University graduations, and St John's Square was lined with schoolchildren to see President Bill Clinton pass by.

But all of these visits pale in comparison to the visit of President William Howard Taft to Middletown on November 12, 1909. His purpose in making the visit was to speak at the inauguration of President William A. Shanklin of Wesleyan University.

When the city fathers learned of the visit, they quickly formed a general committee which was chaired by Isaac Spear and which included representatives from both the Business Men's Association and the Common Council. They met with President Shanklin to determine how big a part the city would play in the visit and began meeting October 5 to make this one of the biggest celebrations in City history.

It was reported in the Penny Press on October 6 that there had not been a Presidential visit since Andrew Jackson in 1832 and only one resident still living, Randolph Pease, remembered that day. The Penny Press had frequent articles detailing the plans for decorations, bands, parades, and other public displays for President Taft. Fraternal societies from Middletown and surrounding towns were invited to participate, bands were hired, the Middletown school children, reportedly numbered at 2500 were to play a part, and the Company H. Mansfield Guards arranged for the military representation. The General Committee expected to spend \$2500 for the celebration. The Middletown Electric Light Co. offered to supply electricity to lights strung across Main Street free of charge and plans were made to feed the throngs. As is the case today, representatives of the Secret Service came in advance to plan for the President's security.

The day arrived with the Penny Press declaring that there were "unusually favorable" weather conditions. President Taft arrived at Union Depot by private railcar, the "Mayflower," accompanied by Vice President James Sherman and Senator Elihu Root. They were greeted by President Shanklin, and other dignitaries. Wheeler and Wilson's band of Bridgeport played "Hail to the Chief."



Main Street was lined with hundreds of members of fraternal societies all dressed in their colorful regalia. Church bells and factory whistles blew for 2 minutes to mark the start of the parade. The President rode in the first car driven by F.L. Caulkins, and accompanied by President Shanklin and Stephen H. Olin, representing the alumni of the university. They were escorted by 75 members of the Mansfield Post, Grand Army of the Republic (Civil War veterans) and letter carriers and postal clerks.

Subsequent cars carried Vice President Sherman, Governor Frank B. Weeks of Middletown, and Mayor T. Macdonough Russell. The line of march went by St. John's Parochial School where 400 schoolchildren sang to the President. As the parade proceeded down Main Street, members of the fraternal societies joined the line of march. They passed buildings gaily decorated with flags and bunting. The decorations, declared the Penny Press, in the opinion of many "exceed in beauty those used at the 250th anniversary" in 1900. The parade continued to Union Park where hundreds of school children waved flags and back around to the Middlesex Theater where President Taft gave his address.

A second parade took place in the afternoon to escort President Taft from Fayerweather Gymnasium back to the Union Depot. The article in the November 12 Penny Press bore six headlines summarizing the day's activities. One declared, "One of the Greatest Parades Witnessed Here," another said, "Decorations Most Elaborate in History of the City," and a third read in part, "Day Long to be Remembered in history of Middletown." President Taft arrived back in Washington the next morning, with the only unsettling incident having occurred in Bridgeport. A "hobo" boarded the President's car and locked himself in the kitchen. He was arrested by the Secret Service and turned over to Bridgeport police. It was said he was looking for a "square meal." The chair in which President Taft sat that day is in the collection of the Society, a reminder of that grand day 100 years ago.

Six Tips to Preserve Your Election Collections

If you are like many of us at the Historical Society, you have a habit of saving newspapers and other items depicting historic events such as the recent election and inauguration of Barack Obama, the landing of men on the moon, or even runs to the Final Four by the UConn Huskies. The Society recently received a press release from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services outlining ways to protect your collection from common threats such as high temperature, humidity, and light exposure, so that the items will be preserved long into the future.

Follow these simple preventive steps to keep your treasures safe and sound for the next generation:

1. If you feel comfortable, your treasures will be comfortable. When you feel hot or cold, damp or dry, so do your treasures. You wouldn't feel comfortable living in the basement or attic and neither are they. You feel better when there is good circulation; so do they.
2. Avoid extremes of temperature and humidity. Strive to maintain as moderate and stable a level (72 degrees Fahrenheit and 50% relative humidity) as practically possible. When choosing where to display or store objects remember that the conditions of the interior walls, room, and closets are more stable than those on the exterior.
3. Create micro-climates and use protective covers. Matting and framing with proper materials creates protective micro-climates, as do chemically stable boxes (even boxes within boxes). Use dust covers on stored objects and polyester liners on wooden shelves to protect your treasures from dust and pollutants.
4. Limit light exposure. The damaging effects of light are cumulative. Take precautions with the amount and type of light to which your treasures are exposed.
5. Inspect your treasures regularly and tend to problems as they arise. Regularly checking your treasures will help you monitor and tend to problems as they arise. A water condensation problem might not be present in the summer, but left unattended during the winter, could cause serious damage.
6. Be sure that any alterations are reversible. Respect the original historic materials and structure. Don't cut an artwork to fit a frame. And if you must clip a photograph for your scrapbook, do it to a copy and keep the original intact elsewhere.

For more information on preserving your collections, please go to the *Guide to Online Resources section on Care For Collections* at <http://www.imls.gov/collections/resources/care.htm>.

Happy Collecting!

HOME REMEDIES

As part of our exhibit "From Neighborhood to Nation: Women and Health Care in Middlesex County", we asked visitors to share their favorite home remedies. Here is a sampling.

"Great gargle for sore throat: 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar plus a pinch of cayenne pepper in a cup of warm water"

"Soak a teabag in very warm water and put it on a tooth that hurts"

"For water in the ear – swimmer's ear – use equal parts of alcohol and vinegar. The alcohol dries up the water and the vinegar kills the yeast"

"Matzo ball or chicken noodle soup cures a cold every time"

To share your favorite home remedy, stop by to see the exhibit and inscribe your cure in our book.

Membership Application

Have you renewed your membership?

Please check your records. Your continued support is vital to our operation and our ability to bring exciting and educational programs to the greater Middlesex community.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____

E-mail _____

Membership Levels

Student \$15 Business \$50

Individual \$25 Patron \$100

Family \$35 Life \$500

Please make checks payable to:
The Middlesex County Historical Society

Detach and send to:
General Mansfield House,
151 Main Street, Middletown, CT 06457

Middletown Has Come Alive in Pictures

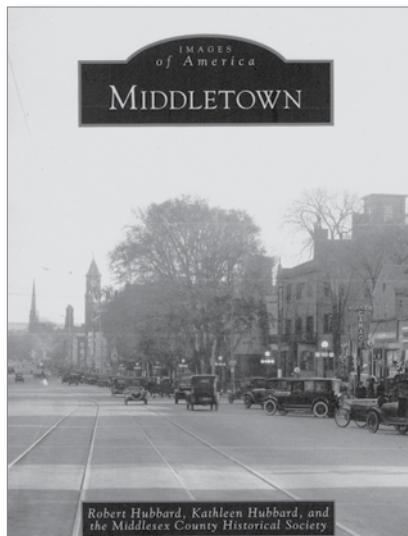
With Liz Warner's wonderful *Pictorial History of Middletown* out of print and commanding extraordinary prices as a used book, people have been asking for a new Middletown history book for several years. "Don't you have one of those books with the sepia photos on the cover?" was a question often asked at the Middlesex County Historical Society. Arcadia Press had indeed approached the Historical Society and proposed such a book. These projects, however, are time and labor intensive and starting just seemed too challenging.

For Bob Hubbard, a faculty member at Albertus Magnus College, and his wife Kathleen, a Middletown teacher, this seemed like the perfect summer project.

After approaching the Historical society in the spring of 2008 and signing a contract with Arcadia, they got to work reviewing and scanning hundreds of photographs in the Historical society collection and reading every pamphlet ever written about the city. Conversations

with long-time residents and trips to the Russell and Olin Libraries rounded out their efforts. The project went to press in November 2008 and Middletown's Arcadia Press book, *Middletown*, is available.

On Wednesday, April 22, 2009, the Hubbards will deliver the Arthur M. Schultz Memorial Lecture at the Historical Society's annual meeting. They will share their experiences researching and writing their book. Their presentation will feature images from the Historical Society collection and will be followed by a book signing and refreshments. The program will be held in the Hubbard Room at Russell Library, 123 Broad Street, Middletown. The Historical Society will hold a brief annual meeting at 6:00 pm followed immediately by the program. Admission is free. 



HVAC Project

Have you been at the Mansfield House in the winter when the furnace has stopped working and you had to keep your coat on, or stopped by in the summer to view exhibits in galleries so hot you had to leave? Imagine yourself an artifact that can't voice its discomfort. All that is about to change.

Thanks to a Historic Restoration Fund Grant of roughly \$63,000.00 awarded by the Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism, the Society will be able to install an HVAC system that will more properly regulate the climate control in the Mansfield House. The system will heat and humidify in the winter and cool and dehumidify in the summer.

With a Heritage Preservation Technical Assistance Grant from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, the Society engaged the services of Legnos and Cramer Engineers to evaluate the current system and propose a cost effective alternative to address temperature and humidity levels to benefit both the collection and human occupants of the Mansfield House. The total cost of the project is projected to be \$125,920.18.

The mission of the Society includes collecting, preserving, and interpreting artifacts, documents, and photographs that are illustrative of the history of Middlesex County. The Society has a duty to its members, donors and the community at large to properly preserve these artifacts and archival material so that they may be used to educate. The grant application highlighted the history of the Mansfield House, which will turn 200 in 2010. This new HVAC system will give new life to this venerable building and allow the Society to further its mission and draw more visitors to research in the archives and view the exhibits. 

Annual Meeting Agenda

Our annual membership gathering wouldn't be a business meeting without a little business, and therefore several items of business are proposed. First on the list are the presentation and approval of the 2009–2010 operating budget, which will be followed by short reports from the Treasurer and President. Also on tap for a vote is the election of the nominating committee, whose mission is to compose a slate of board officers and directors to serve a new two-year term starting in April, 2010. The Board proposes that the committee be chaired by Ron Schatz, with members being Richard Kamins and Buck Zaidel. 



THE MIDDLESEX COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

151 Main Street, Middletown, CT 06457
(860) 346-0746
www.middlesexhistory.org

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Everyone Loves A Parade!

Join us as we honor our fellow Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our country by marching in Middletown's Memorial Day Parade on Monday, May 25. You don't have to dress in a period costume, but it is a lot of fun if you do. Meet us at the corner of North Main Street and Stack Street at 10 am.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

The Museum at the Mansfield House	OPEN Tuesdays & Wednesdays Thursdays	1:00 to 4:00 10:00 to 1:00
Annual Meeting Arthur M. Schultz Memorial Lecture <i>Images of America, Middletown</i> Hubbard Room, Russell Library 123 Broad Street, Middletown	Wednesday, April 22	6:00 pm
Marching in the Memorial Day Parade Corner of Stack and North Main Streets	Monday, May 25	10:00 am
Reception to Honor Winners of the Sheedy Contest	Thursday, June 4	6:00 pm
Reception to Kickoff Capital Campaign and to Welcome Debby Shapiro as our new Executive Director	Thursday, June 11	5:30 to 7:30

*Note: All events will be held at General Mansfield House unless otherwise noted.

visit us on the web at www.middlesexhistory.org