

150 Years Ago In Middletown: History In the News



In a community survey conducted by the Historical Society a few years ago, we asked what people most enjoyed about local history. The answer given by many was that they loved hearing about people and how they lived through

momentous events in the past. The Civil War was one of the landmark events in the history of our country. What was Middletown like in the early 1860s? How—and how much—did Middletonians know about the war? What else did they care about? What were their daily lives like? Pat Tully will answer many of these questions in her talk to be given at the annual meeting of the Historical Society on Monday, April 25 at 7:00 pm in the Hubbard Room at Russell Library, 123 Broad Street, Middletown.

Starting in March 2011, Tully undertook a project she hoped would answer some of these questions. She created a blog, *150 Years Ago In Middletown, Connecticut*, with weekly posts consisting of excerpts from one of the

local newspapers of the time: the *Middletown Constitution*. This close reading of the newspaper shed new light on what it was like to live in Middletown during the Civil War, with an immediacy not often achievable in history books or documentaries.

The Constitution.

This talk will summarize and illustrate a few of the Middletown stories brought to light in this project, which was completed in June 2015. It will also describe how the project was begun, how articles and story lines were selected, and how it changed over time.

Pat Tully is a librarian with a passion for the history of Middletown and Middlesex County. She has lived in the area for 12 years, and been an active member of the Society since 2006, having served as President for four years. She holds a B.A. from Williams College and a Masters in Information and Library Studies from the University of Michigan. She is also a member of the Middletown Rotary Club and the One Book on the Riverbend literacy project. The annual meeting lecture is delivered each year in memory of Arthur M. Schultz. 

Connecticut Historical Appraisal Day Saturday, May 7

Have you ever wondered if your grandmother's favorite necklace or her original Shirley Temple doll has any value? Or did you buy a painting from a struggling artist and wonder if it has increased in value? Now is your chance to find out. Nest Egg Auctions is teaming up with several area historical societies to have an appraisal day at its galleries at 758 Four Rod Road in Berlin on Saturday, May 7 from 9 am to 3 pm. The price is \$30 per ticket with the Society netting 100% of its ticket sales. Each ticket includes verbal appraisals for two items. Items can be anything that you are curious to learn more about from toys, porcelain, jewelry, and furniture to contemporary art. Tickets are available at the Society by calling 860-346-0746 or emailing at mchs@wesleyan.edu. 



President's Message

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your partnership in my two-year tenure as President. In this time, it has been a great pleasure to work with all of you in helping to give a focus to the Society, primarily bringing to the fore the dramatic history of Middletown's riverfront. Our efforts are now being realized in the forthcoming exhibit, "A Vanished Port," scheduled for this fall.

I have especially enjoyed working with our Executive Director, as well as an energetic and talented board, who have become friends. More good things are to come, and I will be following the Society's activities with great interest.

Best wishes to all of you!



Erik Hesselberg

Director's Message

Dear Members,

Spring has arrived! I just returned from a walk in the Mansfield House yard and smiled when I saw the many daffodils planted by Juanie Flagg blooming. The rose bushes in the garden started by Sally and Sal D'Aquila are sprouting tender leaves with the hopes of scent-filled blooms ahead. The herbs in the front garden are also emerging from their winter sleep. Please do stop by for your own walk in the gardens.

Over the winter, our members of the Buildings and Grounds Committee, Joe Samolis and Adam Fleming, installed new fixtures and flooring in the bathroom. They also added paneling and painted from floor to ceiling. The bathroom had not been updated since 1959, so this was a welcome improvement for all who work and visit here. In answer to my plea in the last newsletter, Edith Dubey donated a vacuum cleaner, which is helping to keep the Mansfield House clean.

Many thanks to all those who contributed items to our holiday drive for the homeless. The folks at St. Vincent DePaul Place were thrilled with your generosity as were

the recipients of the wool socks and shirts, toiletries, and many other thoughtful donations.

Middletown third graders have been busy exploring their families' past for their entries in this year's William E. Sheedy Memorial History Contest. The committee will spend April reading the entries and winners will be honored at a reception at the Mansfield House on Wednesday, May 25 at 6:00 pm. All Society members are invited to attend and hear about the heartwarming stories uncovered by our youthful sleuths. We also thank William E. Sheedy, Jr. and his wife Sharon for their continued financial support of the contest.

We thank Erik Hesselberg for guiding the Society for the last two years, especially for his vision of our next exhibit about Middletown's role in the West Indian trade. I look forward to working with Joe Samolis and the rest of his team to make the Society all it can be as a leader in Middletown's cultural life.

Best,



Debby Shapiro

Middletown 366 Blog Reveals Unknown History of Middletown

Sometimes the interplay with numbers produces remarkable coincidences. One was recognized by our member and former Councilman David Bauer. This year is the 366th anniversary of the founding of Middletown and it is also a leap year with 366 days. Last November, he introduced a resolution to recognize this milestone

and to urge its commemoration with the posting of an interesting piece of history each day on the City's website. Thus was born "Middletown 366." The postings are on a blog set up by Society vice president and computer wiz, Pat Tully and facilitated by our chairman of buildings and grounds Joe Samolis through the city's IT Department.

(continued on next page)

SOCIETY NEWS

Agenda for 2016 Annual Meeting

The annual business meeting of the Society will be held on Monday, April 25 at 6:30 pm in the Hubbard Room at Russell Library, 123 Broad Street. On the agenda will be annual reports by President Erik Hesselberg and Treasurer Richard Adelstein. Adelstein will also present the proposed April 1, 2016 – March 31, 2017 budget for approval by the membership. It is printed along with a comparison of this year's actual expenditures in this newsletter.

The Nominating Committee, chaired by Ronald Schatz and including Buck Zaidel and Richard Kamins, proposes the following slate of officers and board members for the April 1, 2016 to March 31, 2018 term:

President:	Joseph Samolis
Vice President:	Brandie Doyle
Secretary:	Nancy Bauer
Treasurer:	Richard Adelstein
At large:	John F. Bolles III George Camp Adam Fleming Richard Kamins Lisa Santangelo Pat Tully Maria Weinberger Carlton Winslow Buck Zaidel

Middletown 3666 Blog continued.

It can be reached by going to the city's homepage and clicking on "366" or going directly to the blog <https://mchs366.wordpress.com/>.

Pat has been able to find unusual happenings reported about Middletown in newspapers throughout the country and spanning the centuries. Wesleyan students Thomas Reid and Kimberly Singh have contributed posts as have members Gary Keating, John Hall, Chris Hinze, and Marnie Goodman. Debby Shapiro has found interesting photos to enhance the posts as well as writing about some of her favorite Middletown characters.

If any of you have any particular events in our city's past that you would like to see posted, please let Debby know. We are combing the Society's archives and newspapers and welcome your ideas.



Society Welcomes New Members

The Society is pleased to welcome the following new members: Dr. Alison Bailey, Lynn Boyan, Mario Damiata, Joann DeRaffaele, William C. Donahue, Jr., Peter Harvey & Lucy Wollaeger, Bill & Ellie Howard, Anne & Walter Mayo, Aaron Roome, A.D. Spangenberg, Kenneth & Lois Thomsen, Krishna Winston, Pamela Woodard, and our newest life members, Thomas & Hanna Chace, and Carlton and Katherine Winslow. Several of these new members are from out-of-state but with close ties to Middletown. We are pleased that they have chosen to support our mission of preserving our local history and making it available to young and old alike.

Membership renewals have gone out in the mail. Your generous contributions and membership in the Society help provide funding for the maintenance of the General Mansfield House, for Society programs, the preservation of our manuscript and artifact collections, and for your subscription to the *Historical Observer*. Please respond as soon and as generously as possible to keep our Society moving forward.



Middlesex County Historical Society Membership Application

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____

E-mail _____

Membership Levels

<input type="checkbox"/> Student \$20	<input type="checkbox"/> Business \$60
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$30	<input type="checkbox"/> Patron \$125
<input type="checkbox"/> Family \$40	<input type="checkbox"/> 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



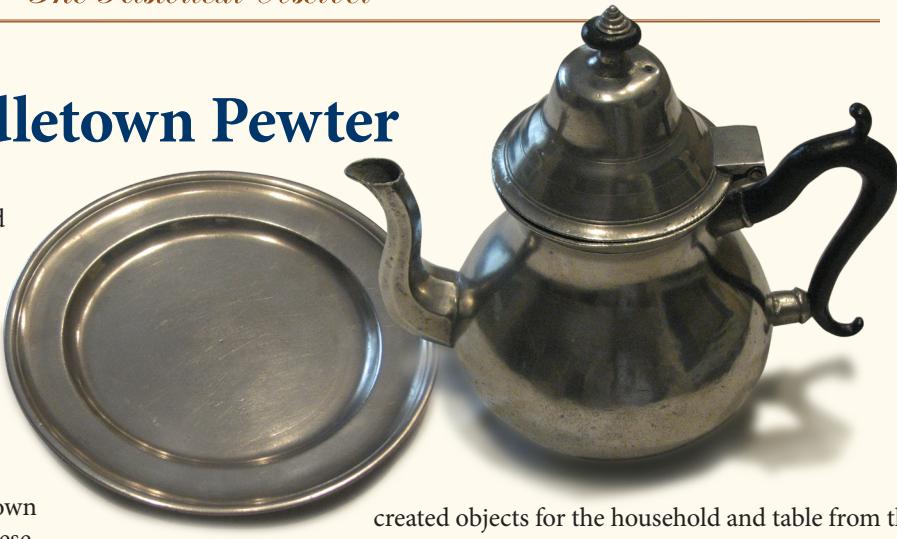
The Glow of Middletown Pewter

An exceptional collection of pewter crafted by a master pewter-making family during the 18th century has come home to the city where it was made and now will live at the Middlesex County Historical Society. This gift of 13 pieces, the majority made by the great Thomas Danforth II in his Middletown workshop, has come to the society through the generosity of Diane Turano, whose late husband beloved Middletown pediatrician, Dr. Andrew Turano, collected these pieces while living for many years in Colchester. Society member, Dr. Kenneth Eckhart, a close friend of the Turanos, facilitated this gift.

Society Executive Director Deborah Shapiro, who worked with Mrs. Turano and Dr. Eckhart in effecting the transition of the pewter from the private collection to the Society's holdings, says the pewter is "an extraordinary gift."

"Nine of the thirteen pieces are by the renowned master pewterer, Thomas Danforth II, while the other four are by Danforth family members, so to have these high-quality Middletown-made pieces come into our permanent collection, is a truly remarkable event," Shapiro said. The gift is particularly timely, she added, because they are an example of the type of crafts that were supported by the wealth evident in Middletown during the era of the West Indies trade. Many of these pieces will be displayed in the Society's forthcoming exhibition, *A Vanished Port: Middletown & the Caribbean, 1750-1824*, scheduled to open in September.

Sometimes called "poor man's silver," pewter is an alloy of tin and other materials, sometimes with a little silver added, and its soft luster and relative durability made it a favorite in colonial homes. Among the many skilled artisans who settled in Middletown during the 18th century, none were more famous than the renowned pewterers of the Danforth family. In a workshop on Henshaw Lane, which today is called College Street, three generations of Danforths



created objects for the household and table from the middle of the 18th century until the mid-1830s.

The first Thomas Danforth founded a workshop in Norwich in the 1730s, and his son, also named Thomas, opened a pewter workshop in Middletown in 1755. Using the skill of Thomas II's sons and their descendants, many of whom became pewterers, the local workshop produced over the next seven decades, high-quality plates, tankards (called "canns"), ladles, tea and coffee pots, oil-burning lamps, flatware, and candlesticks. There were also artisan silversmiths working in Middletown, but their craft was more labor intensive, required more expensive materials, cost more to acquire, and was less available than pewter, which was cast in molds of brass, bronze, iron and soapstone, and in multiples.

The influence of the Danforth workshops was broad not only because of the dynastic nature of the family business, but because the Danforths trained others to the pewter-making, including Jacob Whitmore and Samuel Hamlin. The Danforths also used peddlers to sell their products throughout the Connecticut River Valley and beyond, cementing Middletown's status as a pewter center rivaling Boston and Philadelphia.

The 18th century Danforth Pewter Shop was dismantled, moved, then rebuilt on its current location overlooking Middletown's South Green nearly 40 years ago, and is the last known surviving artisan's shop from that era in town. Examples of Danforth pewter are in many major American museum collections.

"We are so delighted to have received these objects and we look forward to sharing them through the context of our upcoming exhibition and with our many visitors," Shapiro said. 

—Anne Farrow

Art Guild and Garden Club Team up for Show

Spring has come and with it an exciting collaboration between the Art Guild of Middletown and the Middletown Garden Club. The main gallery of the Mansfield House will be alive with paintings done by Art Guild members with interpretative floral arrangements crafted by Garden Club members. The paintings range from landscapes and garden scenes to modern art, giving the Garden Club members a chance to display their diverse talents in flowers and other natural materials.

The opening reception, to which all Historical Society members are invited, is on Friday, May 13 from 6 to 9

pm. The arrangements and paintings may also be seen from 10 to 2 on Saturday, May 14 and Sunday, May 15, with the paintings continuing through the week to Thursday, May 19 from 10 to 2. The paintings may also be purchased from the Art Guild members. "We are excited to be teaming up with such a talented group of people and providing the venue for them to show off their creations," Society Director Debby Shapiro said. She added that the show will be a chance to welcome new visitors to the Mansfield House. 

Max Corvo of the OSS — An American Story

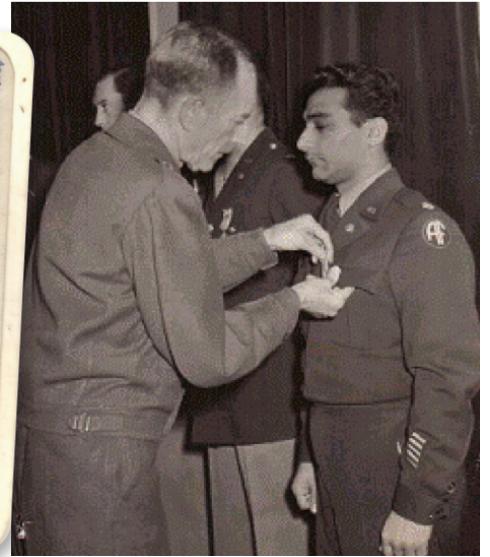
People today search for heroes all over the globe, only to find one in their own backyard. Biagio "Max" Corvo of Middletown was a true hero of World War II and will be the subject of an illustrated talk to be given by his son, Bill Corvo, on Thursday, May 19 at 7:00 pm in the Hubbard Room at Russell Library, 123 Broad Street, Middletown.

Coming to Middletown at the age of 9 to join his father, Cesare Corvo who had immigrated from Mellili, Sicily, Max Corvo was highly influenced by Ida Keigwin in his early schooling and assimilation into American life. When World War II broke out, he enlisted as a private at the age of 22 to fight for his adopted country. But the old country, Italy, was not far from his mind. He devised a plan to invade Sicily and develop an espionage and partisan warfare project. Although only a private, his superior officers saw the merit in his proposal and arranged a meeting with the head of the OSS, General William "Wild Bill" Donovan. This meeting was facilitated by his old boss at Russell Manufacturing Company, Thomas Russell.

Corvo was transferred to the OSS and put his plan in place, recruiting other Middletown soldiers of Italian descent, such as Vincent Scamporino and Emilio Daddario, to infiltrate Italy and establish the partisan network. He also established contacts with Italian anti-Fascists, many of whom had been associates of his father. By May of 1943, the newly commissioned 2nd Lieutenant left for North Africa to implement his plan. The little-known story of the success of this group is a gripping one that Bill Corvo will tell in detail.



Max Corvo's official OSS ID card



Max Corvo receiving the Legion of Merit

An amateur historian, Bill Corvo has written several articles for magazines about OSS Italy operations and has presented at historical symposia including the 58th anniversary of the Armistice at Cassibile, Italy and the National Archives Symposium on the OSS in Washington, D.C. He is also the author of *The Italian Military and Foreign Affairs Situation, 1933-1943* about Mussolini's military operations prior to and during World War II. Long active in political and community affairs, Corvo served on the Common Council of the City of Middletown and succeeded his father as editor of the *Middletown Bulletin*, an Italian American newspaper. He holds a B.A. from Wesleyan University and a J.D. from the Cleveland Marshall College of Law. The father of two sons, Brian and Andrew, he and his wife, Betty, live in Middletown. 

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

The Museum at the Mansfield House

Annual Business Meeting

Hubbard Room, Russell Library

150 Years Ago in Middletown: History in the News

Hubbard Room, Russell Library

Art Guild & Garden Club Show

Show continues at Mansfield House

Max Corvo & the OSS

Hubbard Room, Russell Library

Sheedy Contest Awards Reception

Mansfield House

OPEN Monday – Thursday and Saturday
10:00 to 2:00

Monday, April 25, 6:30 pm

Monday, April 25, 7:00 pm

Opening Reception Friday, May 13, 6 to 9 pm
Saturday – Sunday, May 14 and 15, 10 to 2
Through Thursday, May 19

Thursday, May 19, 7:00 pm

Wednesday, May 25, 6:00 pm

The Middlesex County Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the following individuals and companies who generously contributed to the Society during 2015 beyond their dues.

14th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry, Company F	John Ferrero & Macdonough Elementary School teachers	Dr. David Miner & Penny Robiner	Marcia & Richard Wrubel, in memory of Estelle Goodman
Alexandra and Richard Adelstein	Adam Fleming	Betsy & David Morgan	Ted & Mary Xenelis
Marj and Victor Adler	Lindsay Fralick, Jim Kowalski, & Robert Fralick	Diantha Morse	Martha Yaney
Anonymous	Peter & Laurie Frenzel	Irving & Julianne Moy	Dr. Buck & Cathy Zaidel
Anonymous, in memory of Ed Caplicka	Richard & Barbara Gibbons	Joan & Ernest Myer, in memory of Willard, Robert & Josiah Hubbard	
Jen Alexander & Mark Masselli	Deborah Gill, in memory of Estelle Goodman	Jack Pieper	The following businesses and individuals contributed to the Society through their advertisements in the 30th Annual Antique Car Show Booklet. Please patronize them to show your appreciation.
Susan, John, & Stephan Allison	Peter & Connie Gillies	Susan Plass-Vitro, in honor of Sally D'Aquila	Connecticut Street Rod Association
Penny Apter, in memory of Estelle Goodman	Michael & Marra Giuliano	Daniel & Linda Raskin in memory of Estelle Goodman	Daniels Energy
Barbara Bartoli	Dora Glinn & Vincent Loffredo, in memory of Dr. Louis & Eva Loffredo	Lynne Reilly	Rose & Seb Sbacio
Janet McCutcheon Batt	Barbara Glista	John Reisch	Sterling Realtors
Nancy & Michael Bell, in memory of Jerome & Phyllis McGee	Dr. Michael & Susan Good	Robin Reynolds	May, Bonee & Walsh Insurance & Financial Services
Scott Bishel & Lynn Baldoni	Marnie Goodman & Gordon Hard	Jules Roberts IV	Liberty Bank
Nancy Bauer	Katherine Green	Susan Robbins & Sidney Rothberg	Custom Carpets
Atty. & Mrs. Andrew Becker	Lillian & Welles Guilmartin	Michael & Nancy Rogalsky in memory of Francis & Mary O'Neil and Barbara & Benjamin Rogalsky	Middletown Plate Glass Co. Inc.
Robert & Catherine Boone	Amy Handler, in memory of Estelle Goodman	Edmund & Diane Rubacha	Connecticut Collision Center
Jane Bradbury, in memory of Robert L. Ferree	Kathryn & Erik Hanson	Thomas M. Russell III & Margaret Russell	Bergan Architectural Woodworking
Pamela Buchan	Gregory & Jane Harris	William & Susan Ryczek	Absolute Air Services, LLC
Phil & Marie Cacciola	Bill & Ellie Howard	Marge & Stan Sadinsky, in memory of Estelle Goodman	Moore Brothers, Inc.
Kirsten Carlson & Anthony Kriwokulski	Simone & Clay Howe	Joseph & Kate Samolis	Shapiro Law Offices LLC
Joe & Libbi Carta	Susanne Javorski & Bruce MacLeod	Ronald Schatz & Cynthia Wells	Guilmartin, DiPiro Sokolowski LLC
Charles & Sharon Chafee	Barry & Luisa Jones	Karl & Wendy Scheibe	Portland True Value
Peter & Jane Cohen, in memory of Estelle Goodman	Edith Kabatznick, in memory of Estelle Goodman	Deborah Shapiro, in memory of Estelle Goodman & Charles Chafee	Malloves Jewelers
Colebrook Financial Co.	Edward Kalita, in memory of Lena Kalita & Viola Bozzi	Roger Shapiro, in memory of Estelle Goodman	Personal Auto Care Service Center Inc.
Community Health Center	Marie Kalita-Leary, in memory of Lena Kalita	Sarah Shapiro & Rohan Manning in honor of Debby's birthday	Rice, Davis, Daley & Krenz Inc. Insurance
Jack & Joyce Conklin	Leo & Vivian Kania	Biff & Jean Shaw	Kennedy, Gustafson & Cole, Inc.
Connecticut Underwriters, Inc.	Beth & John Kilian	William & Sharon Sheedy	Labco Welding, Inc.
Karen Connor	Judy Kopman-Fried, in honor of Sally D'Aquila	Jeff & Inge Simmons	Comer and Company LLC
Bill & Betty Corvo	Jim Lamoureux	Mary Sizer	Connecticut Rental Center
Cromwell Junior Women's Club, Inc	David Larson	Mr. & Mrs. John W. Spaeth III	Deborah D. Shapiro
Al & Betsy Crosswell	Evelyn Larson	Linda Spazian	Quality Welding Service, LLC
Michael & Susan Cummins, in honor of Sally D'Aquila	Jude & Marc Levin	Leslie & Gary Stern, in memory of Estelle Goodman	Victor Auto Body Works
Mary Jane Dapkus	Dione Longley	Brian Stewart & Jane Brawerman	NAPA Auto Parts
Sally & Salvatore D'Aquila, in memory of Carl Fortuna & Maurica D'Aquila	Dr. Andrea Malon	Judith Stoughton & John Clark	Joe's Auto Electric II
Marjorie DeBold	Jennifer Malone in memory of Jonathan H. Malone	Elizabeth Swaim Fund	Micheli's Unisex Salon
Augie & Claudia DeFrance	May, Bonee, & Walsh	Jessie Trotta	Shlien's Furniture
Tito & Kathy DiBenedetto	Anne & Walter Mayo	Bill & Kris Vasiliou	Portland Boat Works
Richard & Suzanne Dickerson	Mayor's Ball	Donna Vickers	Portland Transmission
Kathleen Didato	Arlene Mazzotta	Barbara Warner	Smith & Bishel Co.
Heather Dodds	Carl & Joan Mazzotta	Susan & William Wasch	Amity Printing & Copy Center
Brandie Doyle	Peter & Ruth McGee, in memory of June Hughes	Webster Bank	Martin Moving & Storage Co.
Christopher & Beth Earle	Larry & Patty McHugh	Maria & Steve Weinberger, in memory of Robert Holcomb	Shoreline Antique Automobile Connection
Dr. Kenneth & Priscilla Eckhart	Jane McMillan	Barbara & Steven Weiss	
Helen D'Apice Errede	Willard & Katherine McRae	Barbara & Nelson Wetmore in memory of Thomas Wetmore & David Sage	
Dr. Vincent Fazzino	Arthur & Marcia Meyers	Kori & Eamonn Wisneski	
Lauralane & Richard Feitel in memory of Zigmund Borowicz & Margaret Gurland	Nancy & John Meyers		
	Elizabeth MacKiernan Miel, in memory of Jan Miel		

Proposed 2016–2017 Budget

The Treasurer will present the annual report and proposed budget at the Society's annual meeting.

	2014-15 Actual	2015-16 Budget	2015-16 Actual	2016-17 proposed budget
INCOME				
Operating Income				
Donations (net)	\$17,117	\$20,000	\$21,479	\$20,000
Events, fundraisers (net)	\$5,498	\$10,000	\$8,240	\$10,000
Gift shop (net)	\$1,274	\$1,500	\$1,322	\$1,500
House, grounds rental	\$100	\$0	\$200	\$0
Membership dues	\$10,670	\$10,000	\$12,155	\$10,000
Miscellaneous (including royalties)	\$269	\$500	\$205	\$500
Newsletter ads	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Research fees	\$1,864	\$2,000	\$1,753	\$2,000
Total Operating Income	\$36,792	\$44,000	\$45,354	\$44,000
Investment Income				
Merrill Lynch transfer	\$38,500	\$25,800	\$14,500	\$26,350
Collections, capital savings transfers	\$0	\$500	\$0	\$0
Total Investment Income	\$38,500	\$26,300	\$14,500	
TOTAL INCOME	\$75,292	\$70,300	\$59,854	\$70,350
EXPENSES				
Office				
Accounting	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$2,650	\$2,750
Miscellaneous	\$602	\$700	\$998	\$700
Office supplies	\$1,268	\$2,000	\$692	\$1,500
Postage	\$821	\$1,000	\$672	\$1,000
Printing	\$1,061	\$1,100	\$1,592	\$1,200
Telephone & internet	\$1,144	\$1,200	\$1,360	\$1,400
Total Office	\$7,396	\$8,500	\$7,964	\$8,550
Facilities & Collections				
Collections maintenance	\$0	\$500	\$0	\$500
Electricity	\$3,249	\$4,100	\$3,919	\$4,100
Fuel oil	\$6,561	\$6,500	\$3,121	\$5,000
Insurance, non-employee	\$8,170	\$8,200	\$8,194	\$8,200
Maintenance & capital improvements	\$4,221	\$3,000	\$4,563	\$4,500
Total Facilities & Collections	\$22,201	\$22,300	\$19,797	\$22,300
Personnel				
Total Personnel	\$37,916	\$39,500	\$38,910	\$39,500
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$67,513	\$70,300	\$66,671	\$70,350
(Income) – (Expenses)	\$7,779	\$0	-\$6,817	\$0