

2010 Sheedy History Contest Winners

The General Mansfield House recently came alive with the voices of the third grade winners of the 21st Annual William E. Sheedy History Contest. A reception was held in their honor on June 3, attended by their parents, grandparents, teachers, and local school officials. The students wrote a report about an ancestor and they were encouraged to interview family members, search through original documents, and discover their family's part in the history of our country. Many students wrote about an immigrant ancestor, or a grandparent who weathered the depression or World War II, and even the Vietnam War. Others wrote about their ancestors' jobs, the games they played, and the one room schools they attended. The goal is to teach the students that everyone is a part of history, not just the people who make the headlines and the history books. Sue Ryczek, Pat Tully,



Debby Shapiro and Nancy Bauer, the chairperson of the contest, judged the essays.

Pictured are the 2010 winners, Edward Leary, Katerina Rodriguez, Bianca LaBella, Jordan Leonardi, Matthew Simmons, Sophie Woodiwiss, Lily Doan, Atticus Deleon, and Ryan Hurlbert. Absent from picture, Aaliyah Jones. 

The English Lady Visits MCHS

Fall is coming and with it the task of putting our flower gardens to bed. Some plants like to be cut to the ground, while others add interest to the winter landscape and can wait until spring for trimming. But which plants fall into which category? Maureen Haseley-Jones, aka The English Lady, will tell us this and more when she speaks at the Society on Thursday, September 23rd.

This program, a fund-raiser sponsored jointly by the Society and St. Luke's Eldercare Solutions will begin at 5:30 pm and will also feature a Silent Auction along with hors d'oeuvres and refreshments. Both organizations are busy securing auction items, which range from a week's stay at a time-share resort on Cape



Cod to an afghan crocheted by our very own president, Pat Tully. Admission is \$20. To reserve a spot, call the Society at 860-346-0746.

The English Lady is the founder of her company, "The English Lady Landscape and Home" and works throughout the Northeast. Haseley-Jones received her formal horticultural training at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew

in Surrey, England and has earned a wide fan base through her show on WRCH Lite 100.5 FM radio. She regularly publishes articles in a number of area newspapers and lectures extensively throughout Connecticut. Join us as we learn gardening tips and have fun raising funds for the Society and St. Luke's. 

What's Inside:

SOCIETY NEWS

President's Message

My first summer as Board President has been a wonderful experience, thanks to Debby Shapiro, our Executive Director, members of the Board, and all of you who contributed to the success of the Sheedy Contest reception and the Garden Luncheon.

This summer I've been meeting with each Board member individually, to explore their thoughts about how the Society can continue to thrive despite the struggling economy. Each Board member brings a unique perspective to the Society and their ideas reflect this. These have so far ranged from new exhibits, to ways to attract more people into the Mansfield House, to the creation of a gift shop to sell Middletown and Historical Society items, to the promotion of a strong, distinctive identity for Middletown rooted in its colorful past. I have not spoken to everyone yet, and cannot wait to hear what they have to say!

In addition to strengthening relationships within the Society, we are also developing ties with other local



organizations. Earlier this summer Debby Shapiro, Bill Ryczek and I met with Diane Cummings and Cecilia Hemsley of St. Luke's Eldercare Solutions of Central Connecticut to talk about how we could work together. Diane and Cecilia are experienced fundraisers, and we had a lively and productive meeting. As a result, St. Luke's and the Historical Society are co-sponsoring a fundraiser and silent auction on September 23. We are very excited at this partnership and look forward to developing relationships with other local organizations.

It is an honor to be part of such a dynamic, dedicated organization! If you would like to become more active in the Historical Society, we would love to talk to you about volunteering. Please contact Debby Shapiro at mchs@wesleyan.edu or 860-346-0746, or me at ptully262@gmail.com or 860-632-8618 for more information.

Pat Tully, President

From the Executive Director

Dear Members,

The HVAC project is complete and the State of Connecticut Commission on Arts, Tourism and Culture check for \$61,481 has arrived. With this very hot summer, the artifacts, manuscripts, researchers, and volunteers have been very grateful for the cooler air and humidity control that the system provides. Our fundraising efforts continue to fully pay for this modern marvel.

Thanks go to the many members who contributed baked goods, fruit, and beverages for the recent garden luncheon. Over 80 ladies and a few lucky gentlemen enjoyed the summer fare and stimulating conversation, capped by the delicious homemade ice cream churned by members Kip and MaryAnn Harris. The luncheon committee was chaired by Nancy Bauer, and she was ably assisted by Sandy Adelstein, Denise Cahill, Ruth Purdy, Susan Ryczek, and me. Connecticut Underwriters, Inc. was the sponsor of the event.

The DAR History contest forms for grades 5-12 are again available at the Society. The deadline for submitting entries is January 10, 2011.



The Society is lucky to have many dedicated volunteers. This summer we were particularly fortunate to have the services of Catherine Zaczek. She is a Junior at the University of Pittsburgh majoring in Anthropology. She came in 5 days a week and assembled an exhibit showcasing some of the unusual pottery and porcelain in our collection, mounted the exhibit, *Greetings From Middletown: Changing Views of a Colorful City*, and catalogued most of the vast collection of material relating to the Russell Manufacturing Company that was donated to the Society last year. Please do come in to see what she accomplished.

The fall calendar is filled with events, some familiar favorites with new twists and others completely new. I do hope to see many of you there.



Debby Shapiro, Executive Director



1960 Corvette Hums into Town

Which do you remember more clearly: the captain of your high school football team or his prized Corvette? Relive those teen-dream memories on Sunday, October 3rd, when you see a 1960 Corvette in pristine condition as the featured car of the Society's Antique and Classic Car & Truck Show. The show, in its 25th year, is moving to a *new location, Middletown High School*, on LaRosa Lane, off Newfield Street. Car registration begins at 8:30 am and judging starts at 11:30 am with trophies awarded at 2:30 pm. The rain date is Sunday, October 10. General admission is \$3.00, children under 12 are free; car registration is \$10.00. There is no cut-off date for cars being placed in the car corral, whereas cars registered for judging must be dated 1985 or older.

This year's featured car is owned by Al and Marie Johnson of Broad Brook, CT. It was made in St. Louis, Missouri and the 7979th one made out of 10,261 that year.

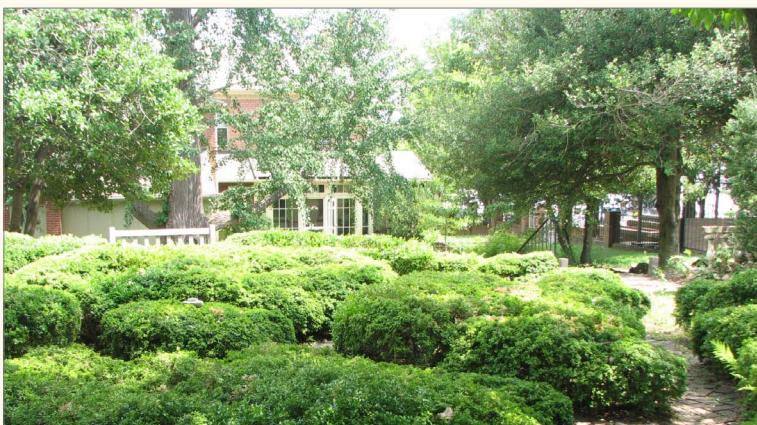
It weighs 2985 lbs and is powered by a 283 ci engine. The car new cost \$5134 when the average yearly salary was \$5400 and gasoline cost \$.25 a gallon. Some of the options included heater, courtesy light and hard-top as well as soft-top. This was the last year for tail lights, formed into the rounded rear fenders, and for the distinctive heavy "teeth" in the grill. Although the car is 50 years young, the Johnsons drive it on a regular basis!

The car show committee headed by Rich Bergan is busy making new class signs and preparing for the changes needed to hold the show on blacktop rather than a grass field. Other members of the committee are Jerry Augustine, Ray Beauregard, Pete Bozzo, Mark Olerud, Jack Pieper, Debby Shapiro. Additional workers will be needed the day of the show, so anyone who would like to volunteer, please call Debby at 860-346-0746. 

Mansfield House Gardens Shine!

A project begun last year with the restoration of the back azalea garden by Boy Scout R.J. Wall, the planting of daffodil bulbs by Juana Flagg and the AIC group from The Connection, and the general clean-up by Ed Rubacha and Dave Wolfram, continued at a feverish pace this summer. Armed with the blueprints of our yard drawn by its designer, Helene Bliss Warner, and aided by the slides she took when the work was done in 1961, many volunteers worked in the heat to refurbish the gardens to their past glory.

Ed was back this summer pulling vines that had grown over the trees and the Middletown Housing Authority not only cleared away overgrowth from their side of the fence, but also cleared along our side and took away all the debris from the other aspects of beautifying the yard. Joe Samolis hauled



away all the outdated signs and other wood remnants that had accumulated over time. Denise Cahill, working tirelessly with her friend, Master Gardener, Mary Collins, weeded, edged, and transplanted throughout the front and side yards, and she even painted the porch and the wrought iron railings and gate. Sally McGee D'Aquila restored the

knot garden in honor of her husband, Sal's, 70th birthday. That was a huge job, which included tree trimming, and the removal of many layers of brush. You can now walk along the brick paths so carefully laid out by Helene. The Middletown Garden Club members continue their stewardship of the side yard herb garden. The results have all been captured by photographer John Cahill, see above.

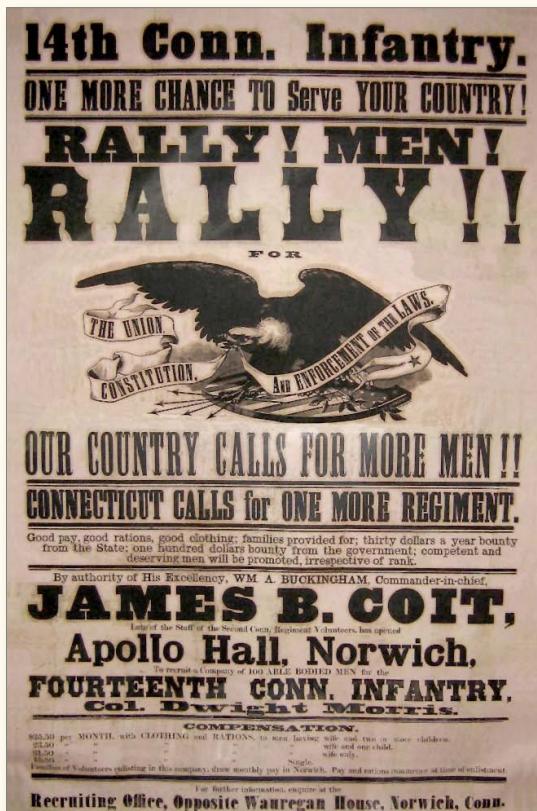
Come enjoy a stroll in our beautiful backyard!

The Soldiers Are Marching Again!

In anticipation of the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, the Society is pleased to sponsor a living history event, an encampment of Company G, Fourteenth Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry on Saturday, September 18, from 10 am to 3 pm. The Mansfield House backyard will be alive with demonstrations of camp skills and cooking and drilling and firearms demonstrations. Participants will be able to interact with the reenactors who are recognized for their high standards of authenticity. Company G's present membership has five members whose ancestors fought with the original 14th Connecticut.

The day's events will also include a performance of Civil War era music at 11 am by the ensemble Back Swamp. The group consists of local musicians Mary Cooke, Joe Mayer and Nancy Meyers on fiddle/violin; Wayne LePard and Tom Worthley on guitar, and Ron Krom on accordion. Songs by Middletown's own Henry Clay Work will stir the audience along with traditional love ballads like Lorena and Shenandoah.

At 12:30 pm, William Hosley will present his new program, "Monumental Accomplishment: The Civil War and the Making of History." Prior to the Civil War there was no tradition



of public memorialization, almost no statues or monuments commemorating great events or deeds in the life of our country, and only a small emerging corpus of historical narrative and scholarship. After the Civil War, the supply and demand for these things surged. It was not an accident. The Civil War, an event of cataclysmic emotional and cultural significance, coincided with a wave of nostalgia and loss induced by the transformation of an agrarian society into an urban industrial society. The period's new engineering capabilities enabled the ultimate expression of this newfound turn to remembrance; the remnants include much of our most inspiring public sculpture, a wide layer of art and material culture, and some of our most auspicious public buildings and landmarks

including the Connecticut State Capitol. Bill will provide an armchair tour of Civil War monuments, art and material culture in Connecticut and related places.

Bill Hosley, the principal of Terra Firma Northeast, is an independent scholar, cultural resource consultant, planner, writer, and photographer. He was a curator and exhibition developer at the Wadsworth Atheneum, most recently working on and writing the exhibition catalog for *Sam & Elizabeth: Legend and Legacy of Colt's Empire*.

Admission for this event is \$5, with children under 12 free. In the event of heavy rain, the encampment will be cancelled, but the music portion and talk will be held.

The Society's exhibits, *Hard & Stirring Times: Middletown and the Civil War* and *Greetings from*

Middletown: Changing Views of a Colorful City will be available for viewing. 

Society Honored by State and National History Organizations

Jin June, the Society was honored to receive an Award of Merit at the state meeting of the Connecticut League of History Organizations. The Society's Civil War initiative which included the current exhibit "Hard & Stirring Times: Middletown and the Civil War," the placement of the exhibit on our website, www.middlesexhistory.org, and the development of curriculum using our Civil War archives for the local middle and high schools was cited for recognition.

We recently received notification from the American Association for State and Local History that we will

be receiving an Award of Merit at that group's annual meeting in Oklahoma City on September 24. Terry L. Davis, President and CEO, wrote, "The AASLH Leadership in History Awards is the nation's most prestigious competition for recognition of achievement in state and local history. We congratulate you for the work that has brought this honor."

The initiative was funded by a grant from the Connecticut Humanities Council with matching support provided by the Society's Antique and Classic Car Show Committee and many private donations. 

The Society is Growing!

The Society extends a hearty welcome to the following who have joined in recent months: Sarah Croucher, Joan Adorno, Denise Mackey-Russo, Kori and Eamonn Wisneski, Eleanor Borkowski, Deborah Magnano-Hatch, Thomas M. Russell III and Margaret Russell, Nancy Meyers, Joan and Charles Stone, Anthony Pioppi, Rebecca Kowal, Dana Pellegrino, Dmitri D'Allesandro (Middletown Framing), James Sarbaugh, Tim and Kim Kitley, Michael Roth, Rich and Lauralane Feitel, Pamela Buchan, Denise Cahill, Valerie Stubaus, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Donohue, Melaine Smigel, Ronald and Kathy Hopkins, Karen Robbins, Alexia Belperron, Julie, John, Jay and Rob Mosley, Dan Alosso, and Lewis Montague. Please greet them at upcoming events. 

WANTED: a picture of Jessie Alsop (1875-1951).

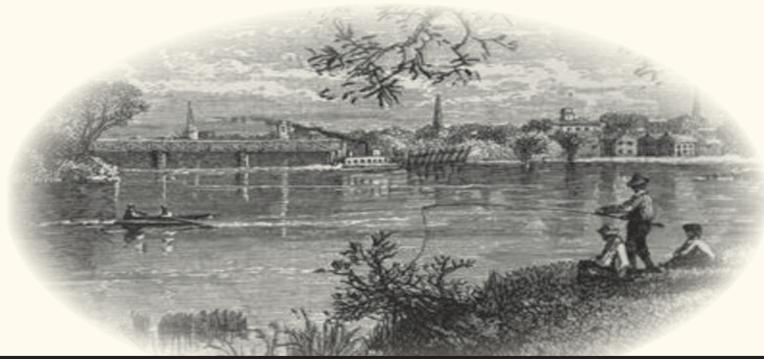
"Miss Alsop" (as I heard a 70-something Portland woman call her in perhaps 1980) was a local history dynamo during the later 1930s until her death in 1951. She wrote many columns for the *Middletown Press* on various aspects of local history, as well as many Colonial Dames reports on old houses up in the State Library. One can even go on the Internet and see her gravestone in Indian Hill Cemetery in Middletown. I have located most of her MP columns, but, so far, I have not seen a *picture* of this creative woman!

Does anyone have a snapshot of Miss Alsop?

~Doris Sherrow-Heidenis,
kerry.doris@sbcglobal.net or 860-342-2493

Grand Vacations (1810 style)

Mr. Nathan Starr, Junior, and fellow Middletown citizens, Eben Townsend Junior and Captain Henry Austin, are on the adventure of a life time traveling to the Western Country and down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. They were joined on the stage at the beginning of their trip by others including "a Facetious old gentleman from North Carolina (who took good care to get on to the back seat between a blooming young lass belonging to Philadelphia & a lady from Baltimore with a child, who charm'd us with the melody of its voice occasionally)" who enlivened the journey as he tried to make love to the ladies. One of the greatest sights Mr. Starr has seen so far are the Great Allegheny Mountains, which he graciously describes for the many of us that have not had the pleasure of visiting the area as "vast piles of mountains rising one above the other as far as the eye can reach—and deep valleys sinking almost down to the regions below." Our esteemed citizen was not as impressed with Chambersburg. "Both male and female were drunk as pipers by 1 o'clock... 'twas not uncommon to see the fair sex, if fair sex they may be called, for they are as ugly as the devil, toss off three glasses [of whiskey] in about ten minutes." Pittsburgh, on the other hand, is a fine town. "It is the most busy, industrious place of its size I have ever seen," and he predicts that "it must eventually be a great manufacturing town." Hopefully, Mr. Starr will continue to provide us with updates on his travels. 

**CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

The Museum at the Mansfield House	OPEN Tuesdays – Thursdays Fridays	10:00 to 3:00 10:00 to 12:00
Civil War Day Mansfield House	Saturday, September 18	10:00 to 3:00
English Lady Mansfield House	Thursday, September 23	5:30 pm
25th Annual Antique and Classic Car and Truck Show NEW LOCATION—Middletown High School, LaRosa Lane off Newfield Street	Sunday, October 3 Rain Date, Sunday, October 10	8:30 to 3:00

visit us on the web at www.middlesexhistory.org