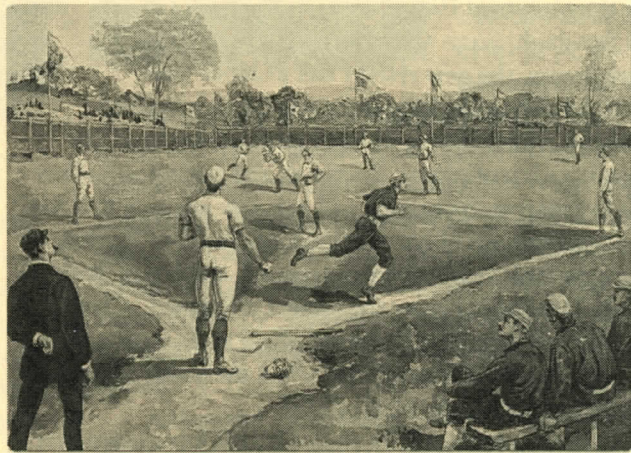


## Doubleday Didn't Do It : A History of Baseball Before 1860

Popular legend has it that Abner Doubleday invented and codified the rules of the games of baseball in his native Cooperstown, New York in 1839. That bit of historical trivia, however, has little basis in truth. The game has deep roots and was well known long before Doubleday was even born. Tom Kelleher will talk about the origins of "the national past time" and trace those roots and the evolution of the game from child's play to the very beginning of professional baseball, as well as how the Doubleday myth came to be and why it remains fixed in the popular mind.

Kelleher discovered in his research that games involving balls were played in ancient Egypt, China, and Greece and a poem entitled "Base-Ball" was printed in a children's book in England in 1744. There were references to Revolutionary War soldiers playing "base" and to "base-ball clubs" as early as 1825, but the game as we know it today was born in New York City with the "Knickerbockers" Base Ball Club in 1845.



Kelleher will give his illustrated talk on Tuesday, October 27, at 7 pm in the Hubbard Room at Russell Library, 123 Broad Street, Middletown. This presentation, which is co-sponsored by the Russell Library, is a must for baseball fans on the eve of the first game of the World Series. Admission is free. 🐾

## Flowers Are Blooming Again at the Mansfield House

In June, Eagle Scout candidate, R.J. Wall and his troop, supervised by Middletown Garden Club member Patsy Hoffer (his mother!), tackled the job of restoring the gardens at the Mansfield House. Preliminary clearing of the yard was done by Society members Ed Rubacha and Dave Wolfram, and the invasive bamboo along the fence line was cleared by our neighbor, the Middletown Housing Authority. R.J. and his troop then entered the yard armed with shovels, clippers, and even a backhoe. The result of these efforts was a properly trimmed backyard and beds planted with native perennials. Other members of the Garden Club helped design the beds to maximize beauty and minimize maintenance, so we can expect the fruits of their labor to endure for years to come.

The Society was also most fortunate this spring to receive the collection of noted landscape architect, Helene Bliss Warner. Miss Warner was a Fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects and a member and officer of our Society. She designed the gardens at the Mansfield House after the Society purchased the property in 1959. Included in the newly-acquired collection are photographs of the property before Miss Warner implemented her design as well as sketches of her design plans. After Miss Warner passed away, long-time member, the late Arthur Schultz, planted an azalea bed in her memory. R.J. was able to salvage some of the azaleas when he refurbished that bed. The spirit of Miss Warner lives on in our newly-beautified backyard. Thank you, R.J.! 🐾

### What's Inside:

Society News and Events

Calendar of Events

Starr Family Paintings

Hard Work and a Keen Eye



# SOCIETY NEWS

## President's Message

This morning, September 30th, Director Debby Shapiro and I met with the contractors, architect, and engineer who will effect the installation of a new HVAC system in the Mansfield House. Work will begin in five days. From an immediate practical standpoint, the new system will produce heat, which has been lacking since our furnace expired late last winter. From a longer term perspective, the combination of piping, ductwork and boilers will allow us to preserve the unique and valuable artifacts that are such a vital part of our community's history. The bid process took longer than anticipated, and it will likely be early December before the project is finished. Given the lengthy planning cycle, design phase and construction period, it will be a happy day when the boiler is fired up and puts out its first blast of heat.

The euphoria will be cooled by the knowledge that the campaign to pay for the system is still in its early stages. Thus far, we have raised about \$25,000. At the



six-month point of a three-year campaign, we appear to be on track, but since we have already solicited many of our prime prospects, we will need to work hard over the next two and one half years to meet our goal. Institutional funds for the arts are severely constricted, and tenacity and creativity will be necessary to complete our task. Again, I ask you to be generous and help us preserve and protect the history of Middlesex County.

Any organization that appeals for funds must be prepared to "sing for its supper" by providing value to its supporters, and we have many interesting programs planned for the coming months. During the past year, most of our programming was related to our Civil War exhibit; this year we will offer a much broader and more eclectic brand of entertainment and enlightenment. I hope you enjoy it.

Bill Ryczek, President

## Donors A Future For Our Past

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**Editor's note:** The following article was submitted by former director, Donna Baron, about her experiences in putting together the new Middletown book. Copies are available for sale here at the Historical Society for \$21.99. They make great holiday gifts.

## Hard Work and a Keen Eye: Putting Together an Arcadia Book

Sometimes, things just seem meant to happen. Almost from the first day I worked at the Middlesex County Historical Society, people called and asked if we sold a book with pictures of Middletown. The answer that day was "I don't think so, but I'll check."

Very quickly I learned about Elizabeth Warner's wonderful *Pictorial History of Middletown* which had been through two printings and was almost impossible to find. The Mayor's office had a few and on EBay or on-line used book sites it could be purchased for \$70 or more. The phone calls kept coming but we had nothing to offer.

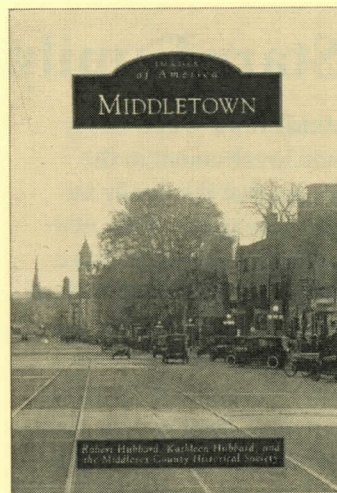
Through this period Historical Society President Bill Ryczek and I received promotions from Arcadia Press, a well-known publisher of local history picture books that always has a sepia-tinted photograph as the cover. Arcadia was looking to expand its list of Connecticut titles and hoped someone at the Historical Society would be able to write a book about Middletown. Both Bill and I thought that the idea was good, but the timing was not. These projects take hundreds of hours and the Society had too many other priorities.

Then, just about a year ago, I received yet another phone call. This time the caller introduced himself as Bob Hubbard. He said that he was interested in developing a picture history of Middletown and wondered if the Historical Society had any old photos. As I told him about the thousands of photographs, postcards, and other images in the collection, we both began to realize that we were discussing a possible collaboration. When he mentioned that he was already in contact with Arcadia Press, I understood that he was really serious about this project.

A meeting with Bill Ryczek, discussion of the contract, and we were underway. Bob and I developed a list of sample themes and identified sample images which Bob submitted to Arcadia. By early May, we had a signed contract and Bob planned his summer break around this project. Instead of working for a year or more as other historical societies had done, we had an October deadline for scanning all images and submitting all text. Fortunately, both Bob and his wife (and co-author) Kathleen have jobs that accommodated such a schedule.

Bob is on faculty at Albertus Magnus College where he teaches about technology. Kathleen is a public school teacher in Middletown. Both grew up in this part of Connecticut and love learning about history. Both are very hard working, creative, and patient – they needed to be. Over three months, they reviewed thousands of images, read every book or pamphlet ever written about Middletown, and talked with all kinds of folks. Once or twice a week, they arrived at the Mansfield House lap top and scanner in hand.

Box by box, folder by folder Bob and Kathleen went through the various files. Many of the pictures raised questions so Kathleen and I tried to research people, places, and events. Some of the photos were amusing and many were beautiful. We had such a



good time puzzling over those pictures and sharing stories. When the Hubbards were not at the Historical Society, they visited the Russell and Olin Libraries, talked with friends, and found stories all over the city. I kept investigating files and each week had something new to share. We had lots of fun comparing new finds. Through all of this, we could never lose track of our looming October deadline.

By the time Bob and Kathleen headed back to teaching in the fall, all the scanning was done, a cover photo had been selected, and caption writing was underway. By late September, Bob began sending me electronic copies of the texts, one chapter at a time. As I checked facts and made minor revisions, Bob and Kathleen wrote page after page and Bob refined the photo files. The manuscript and files went off to Arcadia on time and within a few weeks we had a proof to review.

Although I know many individuals and historical societies who have worked on an Arcadia book, I have never heard of one that went together as rapidly as the Middletown book did. The enormous photo collection at the Middlesex County Historical Society is part of the explanation. However, the dedication and hard work of authors Bob and Kathleen Hubbard must also be acknowledged. Thanks to them we now have a wonderful resource with which to explore Middletown's past. Hopefully all its readers will enjoy looking through it as much as I enjoyed working with Bob and Kathleen putting it together.

### Membership Application

Name	_____
Address	_____
City	_____
State	Zip
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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  
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# The Starr Family and Their Portraits

While the Starr family of Middletown is known for its national arms manufacturing and involvement in the Connecticut state government, the fact that the family sat for one of the most prominent American artists of the mid-19th century is often overlooked. A large portrait of Grace Townsend Starr, the wife of the prominent merchant Nathan Starr Jr., hangs in careful storage on the second floor of the General Mansfield House, surrounded by other portraits of unidentified children, prominent judges, and quiet faces carrying well-known Middletown names. Next to Mrs. Starr rests a portrait of her husband, and the two of them emit a stately and noble air, even through portraits over one hundred years old. The portrait of Mr. Starr dates from 1831 and is by an artist whose history has since been forgotten. However, an extremely well known American portrait painter, Ambrose Andrews, was the artist behind Mrs. Starr's likeness.

Andrews' 1835 portrait of Mrs. Grace Townsend Starr is one of many portraits he painted at the time. Andrews attended the American Academy of the Fine Arts in New York City, studying there for a year. He then co-founded the New York Drawing Association, along with many other accomplished American artists such as Thomas Cole and Samuel F. B. Morse. Andrews then travelled to Connecticut to paint commissioned portraits for wealthy and prominent citizens in order to gain experience and make a living. Responding to an advertisement placed in a Middletown newspaper, "Sentinel and Witness" in January of 1835, the Starrs commissioned Andrews to paint portraits of the family right away.

The two portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Starr (hers by Andrews, his by an artist named John Coles) hung prominently in the dining room of the Society's General Mansfield House for many years, and only when exhibitions were hung were the portraits moved. However, the Starrs had eleven children, none of which were represented in any paintings to be found in the Middlesex County Historical Society's collection. Indeed, no portrait of the entire Starr family remained in Middletown. The family portrait, painted by Andrews at the same time that he painted the MCHS's portrait of Mrs. Starr, was bought by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, where it is still part of the museum's permanent collection. The portrait shows Mrs. Starr and four of her

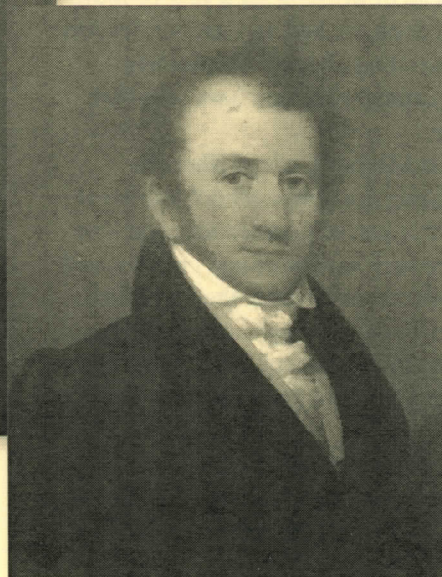
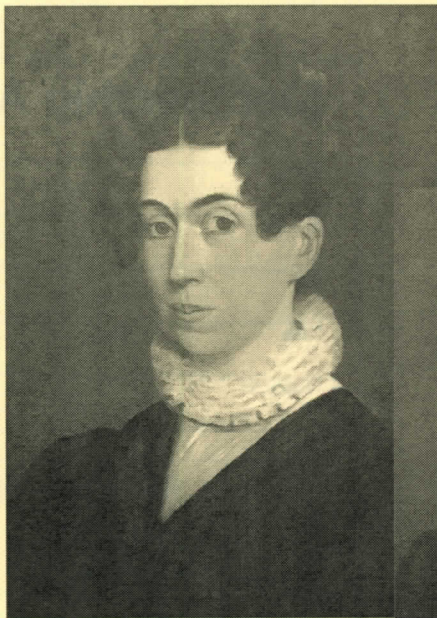
children inside their house, which sat on High Street atop the hill where Wesleyan University's ΔKE fraternity house now sits. Demonstrating his talent, Ambrose paints portraits, landscape, and architecture in the same work. The five figures stand in front an open door that overlooks a rural valley, sprinkled with architecturally specific buildings. The portrait of the Starr children holds an important place in the history of American painting.

It is not surprising that such a renowned artist painted the portraits of the Starrs, as they were a very important family in Middletown. Nathan Starr Jr. was the inheritor of his father's armament manufacturing company, Nathan Starr Arms. Nathan Starr Sr. studied as an apprentice for many years, and, after being discharged from the Revolutionary War, opened a small blacksmith's shop in Hartford in 1779. After relocating to Middle Haddam, the Starrs' armament manufacturing business received its first large government contract in 1798 for two thousand cavalry sabers. The business continued to expand through 1813 when its large factory was completed on Staddle Hill. When Nathan Starr Sr. passed away in 1821, his son, Nathan Starr Jr., took over the company. At this point, Nathan Jr. had already served term as a representative to the Connecticut State Legislature from 1817 to 1818. As a director of the Bank of the United States' Middletown branch in 1817 and a member of Middletown's common council from 1817 to 1822, Starr was also part of the Middletown elite governing body. He was married to the daughter of a wealthy New Haven family, and in charge of the Arms Company that sold arms across the nation. The Starr family was the paradigm of a successful, entrepreneurial family, rising from mere blacksmiths upon their arrival in Middletown to be one of the most influential Middletown merchant families of the 1800s. It is no wonder that Ambrose Andrews was delighted to paint their portraits.

—Erica E. Lohe

Wesleyan University class of 2009

B.A. American Studies; French Studies



## Research thanks to:

John E. Barry's *The Starrs, Huntingtons, and Alsops of Middletown, CT*, Wesleyan Honors Thesis, April 1981.

Doreen Bolger's "The Children of Nathan Starr," *American Art Journal*, Vol. XXII, No. 1. (Spring 1990)

Bernard P. Prue's *Nathan Starr Arms*, 1999, Higginson Book Company, Salem MA.

The archives of the Middlesex County Historical Society.



# SOCIETY NEWS

## From the Executive Director

Dear Members,

I am pleased to report that there have been many exciting activities and numerous visitors here at the Mansfield House this summer. In June, we hosted over 100 students, parents, grandparents, and teachers as we honored the winners and participants of the William E. Sheedy Memorial History Contest. Nancy Bauer, head of the Society's education committee, read excerpts from the winning entries as the honored students beamed from ear to ear. Over 200 third graders wrote about various events in their ancestors' lives, many writing about a grandparent who was able to attend the reception. It was a heartwarming evening for all who attended. Thanks to Susan Ryczek and Donna Baron who joined Nancy and me in reading all the essays.

In another article, you will read about the acquisition of the papers of Helene Bliss Warner. The Society was also fortunate to receive a collection of artifacts and papers of the Russell Manufacturing Company donated by G. John Pelchuck III and Gregory Pelchuck in memory of their uncle, John Pelchuck, Jr., an engineer at the company. The collection includes maps, signs, product samples, spools of yarn, and other items associated with the company. The large concrete "Russell M' F' C. Co." sign, that the workers passed by every day, has been placed in our backyard. The collection is a treasure trove of information concerning this major employer in Middletown.

Researchers have been flocking to the Mansfield House to study in our archives. We had people looking for Middletown ancestors from New York and points west, and a gentleman journeyed all the way from Norway in search of his roots. Happily, we had information on all their families. The most interesting visitors were a reporter and photographer sent to Middletown

to research Middletown native Henry Clay Work by their employer, "The Asahi Shimbun," Japan's leading newspaper. Kaoru Watanabe and Toshi Matsumoto arrived at the Mansfield House less than 12 hours after stepping off the airplane from Tokyo, anxious to begin their research. They discovered much interesting information about Work (composer of "Marching Through Georgia" and "Grandfather's Clock") in our archives, and I took them to see Work's bust on the South Green and the house in which he was born on Mill Street. From Middletown, they went to Hartford accompanied by their New York agent, Helen Wood, to see Work's grave. They told me that all the schoolchildren in Japan learn "Grandfather's Clock"—so clearly the fame of our local composer has spread beyond our shores.



All of this activity demonstrates how important our collections are, not only to local researchers, but also to people around the country and throughout the world. The HVAC project which is currently underway is designed to provide proper climate control to preserve these precious documents for generations to come. If you have not already done so, please consider a gift to the Capital Campaign so that we can meet our HVAC funding goal.

*Debby Shapiro*

Debby Shapiro, Executive Director



## American History Essay Contests Due January 11, 2010

The Wadsworth Chapter of the DAR is proud to announce the 2010 American History Essay Contests. Two contests, one for fifth through eighth grade students and the second for high school age students, encourage students to gain an interest in history through exploring some of America's major events. This year's topic for fifth through eighth grade students is, "describe how you felt on May 10, 1869, when the golden spike was driven at Promontory Summit, Utah, to celebrate the

completion of the First Transcontinental Railroad." For high school students, the topic is "discuss and analyze Christopher Columbus' early influences and experiences and how these contributed to successes and failures in his voyages of exploration." Winning students are given the opportunity to compete on the state, district, and national levels. For more information, please see the handouts soon to be available at local libraries and the Middlesex County Historical Society. 🐾





## THE MIDDLESEX COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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The Middlesex County Historical Society is now accepting small advertisements in the newsletter to help defray the cost of printing and mailing it. The *Observer* reaches over 300 families with each issue. Call the Society at 860-346-0746 for details.

### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

The Museum at the Mansfield House

OPEN Tuesdays–Thursdays  
Fridays

10:00 to 3:00  
10:00 to 1:00

**"Doubleday Didn't Do It:  
A History of Baseball Before 1860"**

Tuesday, October 27

7:00 pm

Hubbard Room, Russell Library, 123 Broad Street, Middletown

visit us on the web at [www.middlesexhistory.org](http://www.middlesexhistory.org)