



Middletown Springs Historical Society NEWSLETTER

Vol. 45, No. 1

May 2014

A Training Day Gone Wrong

Barnes Frisbie, author of *The History of Middletown, 1867*, and publisher of the *Poultney Journal* from 1873, carried on an exchange of letters in the *Journal* with his boyhood friends Orin L. Ray and Cyril Carpenter, between 1884 and 1889. Historians Dawn Hance and Joanne Nichols transcribed and compiled the sixty-five letters from Ray, a dozen from Carpenter and numerous responses from Frisbie in a 166-page book, *Historical Sketches Published in the Poultney Journal*, 2004. The following excerpts from Ray's July 9, 1886 letter and Frisbie's history illuminate a tragic incident at a Training Day in 1816.

Rubber, dubber goes the drum
Round the corner see them come

The military trainings of fifty years ago! The first Tuesday of June, and the general gathering and parade by brigades and regiments each alternate autumn. What good times we had then and how the boys enjoyed them! But the spirit that animated them is gone probably to be known among us no more. The people are patriotic as ever, but the law that required the public drilling of able-bodied men is changed or repealed, and with it the enthusiasm that inspired them has "departed from Israel". Do any old people remember now the habit or custom practiced by the boys, of waking up the officers in the early morning of those training days? They loaded their guns heavily and discharged them by the window of their sleeping room. It generally brought them to the door in "undress uniform". Then followed an invitation "To step in, boys". The officer would set out on the table the wherewithal to make one jolly. It was all friendliness and good cheer then. If an officer at such times showed reluctance or stinginess in treating, the boys would get even with him at the next election of officers. He would fail of the usual promotion, as subordinates would be jumped over him, to fill the higher offices. Sometimes a musket would burst at the discharge, crippled hands or bruised head was the result. I have seen a shooter turned several times round, or knocked over by such explosions. The story was, I don't vouch for its truth, that one of the old king's arms kicked the shootist across a ten acre lot, pitched him over a fence and then thumped him twelve or fifteen times in succession before it let him up. . . .

There was a great deal of firing at these June

trainings, a great deal of carelessness, and many accidents that might have been avoided. At one of these parades, in 1826 (sic), a younger brother of David Griswold was killed by a tow wad from the musket of one of his comrades. The wad was driven an inch and a half into his head. He died instantly. . . ."

– Ray, *Old Memories: Number Forty-two, Historical Sketches*, pp. 87-88

Barnes Frisbie, recounting the incident in his history, says the year was 1816. Griswold's headstone (right) in the Old Cemetery confirms the date, June 4, 1816.



Jonathan Griswold ...had a son, Jonathan, who met his death under circumstances sad and painful. He was accidentally killed on a 'training day' in June 1816. He was then an officer in the company of militia. The accident occurred in the latter part of the day, after the company had been discharged. A company had collected in the ballroom of the present hotel [ed.'s note: The Valley Hotel, where Grant's Store now stands]. The members of the militia company without form or order, were saluting them by discharging their muskets heavily loaded with powder, in front of the hotel, and during these exercises Griswold received the contents of a musket discharged within a few feet of his head, which killed him instantly. The affair cast a gloom over the people of Middletown, and for a long time the foolish practice of firing on training days was almost wholly abandoned; and so long as the military trainings were continued, the fathers and mothers, as their sons started on the first Tuesday of June 'to go to training', as a matter of caution, would rehearse to them the fate of 'poor Jonathan Griswold'.

– Frisbie, *History of Middletown*, pp.32-33
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Our Mission Statement pledges "sound fiscal management" and a good example in the past year are the improvements to the energy efficiency of the Historical Society building carried out in June, 2013. We are happy to report they have successfully reduced the total energy expense for the winter of 2013-14, despite the unusually cold weather.

Following specifications of a grant application to Efficiency Vermont, contractors added insulation to the ceiling above the Town Office area of the first floor and closed extensive air leakage between heated and unheated parts of the first floor. They also insulated and air sealed foundation walls and hot air ducts in the basement and installed a \$4000 air-source "mini-split" heat pump system.

The heat pump efficiently captures heat from outside air, even in below-zero weather, and transfers the heat to the Town Office rental space. This

low-cost heat allows the oil furnace thermostat to be turned back, saving hundreds of gallons of fuel oil.

Fuel oil and electricity bills for the months from November 2013 through March 2014, compared to the same period for 2012-2013, show an estimated saving of \$1,650 for fuel oil and an increase of only \$200 for electricity.

The approximately \$10,500 cost of the entire project was initially reduced by \$3,500 in grants, rebates and incentives from Efficiency Vermont. On the basis of this year's savings the \$7000 balance will be repaid in four more years.

Thanks especially goes to trustee David Wright for suggesting and administering this project on behalf of the board.

– Robert Gould
aftabrg@gmail.com

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What was the "tow wad" that killed poor Jonathan Griswold? Jim Casco, local gunsmith and Revolutionary War re-enactor explains:

"Tow is the coarser fiber left from flax processing after the finer fibers are taken out to be spun into thread, I think. Either that or it was the fiber before the breaking process was finished. Can't remember. It was used for a bunch of other stuff but one of the applications was musket cleaning. A wad of tow was attached to an iron worm (picture small two tined fork twisted into a double helix) which was attached to the end of a ramrod. It was used with water to scour the inside of the barrel. I've got a bunch if you want a sample. It could be that the tow was used as a wad to retain powder. . . ."

Orin Ray continues:

The red-coated cavalry were sometimes present at these parades. They carried a heavy hand in these shooting games...

The barrels of the old horse pistols were about ten inches in length, with bores as large as the muskets. The troopers used them very recklessly at such times. It was no uncommon thing for one to steal up on the sly and shoot the handsome feather from the cap of a comrade. Rum was drank freely and nearly all would get jolly over their liquor. One redcoat fired a wad against the leg of another. The later was hurt badly and groaned over it. Asa Gardner was looking on. He laughed at it and said, in his peculiar tone, 'If you make such a fuss over a wad, what will you do when the bullets come?' The young boys would sometimes borrow these pistols and turn shootist. They tried to imitate the boys of a larger growth and so sometimes get hurt. Benjamin Williams borrowed

one of those of his brother, Elijah, and filled it to the muzzle with powder and green grass. We went to the north of the old church to see him fire it off. He fired it in the air. The weapon leapt from his hand, knocked his hat off, and turned his face white as the snow. For a moment he didn't know if he was standing or flying. We looked for the pistol, and after a long search found it in Chapin's lot four rods away.

But the general trainings drew out the biggest crowds. There would be gingerbread, raisins, flour candy and sweet cider for sale on every corner. But the flour candy and delicious gingerbread of those days have gone out of use. It is doubtful if the candy and cake makers of these times can equal them. Both melted in the mouth like butter, and cloyed the most delicate appetite. With what awe we looked upon the general and his staff! How the hot blood mantled the cheek at the fiffing and drumbeat of forty companies! The Indians in their native paint, hatchet, wampum, blanket and goose feather! Their jibberish language, and then the sham battles! No; we shall never see these gala, jubalistic days again.

The last general training I attended in Vermont was at South Clarendon in October, 1840. Col. Hickox was commander of our regiment, Gen. Hall commander of the brigade, and Major Gen. Roberts of the division. We were warned out for three days. We went and took the tent of the Middletown company with us. Capt. Woodward was the head of our company. We paraded in Hall's meadow at South Clarendon. At night I was tired out. But my greatest annoyance for the afternoon was from Henry Gray. He trod upon my heels at every turn, and purposely imposed upon and annoyed me beyond endurance. I was a boy just turned at eighteen, and he was a

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lummucking clown of twenty-three or four. I got mad, but he didn't. I never saw him get angry, laugh or cry. His face was always straight as a line. I thought he had the devil in his makeup, and I would have liked to thresh it out of him. But . . . I couldn't find anyone strong enough or willing to hold him while I administered the thrashing, so I gave it up, and bore with his insolence. The next day I changed my place in the ranks, got quit of him and left him to pester somebody else. I stood sentinel for half of that night. Some officers endeavored to go by me without giving the password. Then they tried to bribe me with a nip at a bottle of liquor. I knew they were only testing my firmness, or endeavoring to banter me. I was impudent enough to prick one of them with my bayonet. He proved to be Adjutant Fox of Wallingford. He drew back, saying: "I see you know your duty." They turned next to Harvey Dye, who was also on guard near me. He demanded the password. They extended to him the bottle. He snapped at it as greedily as a trout would spring at a fly. He took a drink and let them pass the lines. The next day he was called into the colonel's presence and reprimanded.

The regiment camped out that night in their tents. Col. Hickox set the example by an early retirement. The boys raised ned upon the grounds, and threw firebrands onto the top of the colonel's tent. Of course the fire burned through and fell upon the sleeping inmates. I expect Henry Gray was the foremost in the ring that made the disturbance. Early the next morning I went up near headquarters. A ring had been formed and Henry Gray was the centre of attraction. He was issuing army orders, and going through with all the evolutions known to military tactics. It was a performance in burlesque that I never saw surpassed. His movements were exact; he was straight as a string, and grave as a priest, while issuing his commands. With his gun in his hands he gave orders, obeying and acting them out himself: "Shoulder, arms!" "Draw ramrod!" "Ram cartridge!" "Fix bayonet!" "Col. Hickox will take his place in the ranks. I command this regiment today myself." At

this moment the colonel appeared and clapped his hand on Henry's shoulder. Henry turned, with his musket at half shoulder shift, and, without changing a muscle of his face, drew back, looked his colonel in the eye, and suiting his actions to the word shouted: "Ground arms!" and he grounded. The boys laughed then, some of them until they couldn't stand up, then fell down, rolled on the grass and laughed again. They marched (us) on to Wallingford, and there inspected our arms. The inspector was a cranky fellow, in fine uniform, who put on lofty airs. He had a habit, as he went from rank to rank, of taking each flint between his thumb and finger, and giving it as sudden twist to see if couldn't loosen it from its place. A mischievous comrade with malice aforethought concluded to play him a trick that would take him down a peg or two. He had a flint in his gun that was as sharp as an Indian's hatchet at one corner. He turned the flint, fixed and fastened in such a way as to bring the sharp corner against the inspector's thumb. The latter came and, with a show of great importance, attempted the twisting game upon the flint. It didn't give or loosen worth a cent, but it laid the ball of the inspector's thumb open to the bone. So this game was up with him for the rest of that occasion. The officers had enough of the boys' pranks while camping out the night before, so they were glad enough to dismiss us to our homes at an early hour of the second day.

— Ray, *Old Memories: Number Forty-two, Historical Sketches*, pp. 88-89

Annual Meeting Celebrates the Irish

At the September 2013 Annual Meeting, UVM Adjunct Prof. Vincent Feeney, the featured speaker, presented "The Irish 'Wave' in the Green Mountains" in a program made possible by support from the Vermont Council of the Humanities through its Speakers Bureau program.

Thousands of Irish immigrants arrived just as Vermont was undergoing a mini Industrial Revolution, based on railroad construction, quarrying of slate and marble, and textile production. They came during the late 1840s and through the 1860s to escape the potato famine in their homeland.

Prof. Feeney, is the author of *Finnigans, Slaters and Stonepeppers*, the little-known story of Irish immigrants in Mid-Nineteenth Century Vermont.

Trustees Pat Hemenway, David Munyak and Marilyn Schubert left the board at the end of their terms with thanks from members present.

Alice Haynes Hoisington joined the board and Jon Mathewson returned to the board after a year's hiatus. Continuing for 2013-2014 are Robert Gould, Linda Hurcomb, Theron Krouse and David Wright.

In Memoriam



CAROLYN LOUISE (POWELL) ROACH, 93, died November 24, 2013 in Athens, Maine. She was born on February 5, 1920, in Jamaica, Queens, New York, the daughter of Harry L. and Cornelia A. (Eldert) Powell.

She graduated from The Katherine Gibbs School in New York City in 1937. On December 16, 1939 she married Edwin H. Roach and they resided in White Plains, NY. She worked for several years as the office manager of the nursery school at Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, New York.

In 1973 she and Ed moved Middletown Springs, which they had discovered as guests at the Homestead, a guest farm on North St., run by Frank and Jessie Rogers. (See the November, 1993 issue of the Newsletter for a brief history of the Homestead.) Ed had built a one room cabin near the Homestead and enlarged it over the next 20 years into a comfortable

retirement home.

Carolyn worked at Castleton State College in Castleton, Vermont as the office manager of the humanities department until her retirement in 1981. She served as board member of the Historical Society, president of the Garden Club, and was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution in the Vermont and Bangor chapters. Carolyn was a long-time member of Valhalla United Methodist Church in Valhalla, New York and Middletown Springs Community Church in Middletown Springs, Vermont. She attended the Essex Street Methodist Church while living in Bangor, Maine. She enjoyed gardening, reading, oil painting, traveling with her husband, and was very interested in her family's history as one of the earliest Dutch families who settled on Long Island, New York in the 1600s.

She is survived by a son, Richard Roach, and his wife, Beverly, of Youngstown, New York; a daughter, Sally Larrabee, and her husband Michael of Dexter; three grandsons; two granddaughters; two great-grandsons; and a great-granddaughter. Her husband, Ed, died in 2008 in Maine, where they had resided since the 1990s.

A memorial service and burial will take place in Middletown Springs on Saturday, June 21.

Thank you for your donation to the 2013 Annual Fund!

Contributions to the Fund totaled almost \$1,685.

Jan & Frank Asch
 Kelley Beckwith & Charles Stevens
 Josie & Jere Berger
 Phil & May Biondi
 Raymond Burke
 Dennis & Enid Clark
 Kathy & Patrick Feeley
 Gail Franz
 Jim Gilmour
 Robert Gould
 Margaret Graf
 Marie Hadwen
 Manson Hall
 Jerry & Rita Hansen
 Yolanda Hansen
 Richard & Cheryl Hanson
 Vannilu Harrison & Sharen Underwood
 Pat & Don Hemenway
 John & Lucille Horkan
 Linda & Tom Hurcomb
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 Tom & Eileen Johnson
 Anne C. Krouse
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Velma Reed & Wilma Avery
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 Adina & William Roberts
 Joan & John Roche
 Don & Helen Rogers
 Joyce Scribner
 Leslie Silver & Michael Beattie
 Anne Pratt Slatin
 Debra Squires
 Aileen & Peter Stevenson
 Kathleen Whittet
 Williams Hardware
 Katherine Williams
 Mary Lou Willits & David Wright

RECENT ACQUISITIONS

Sally Jones presented an antique doll which had belonged to her grandmother and articles of children's clothing sewn by her mother and grandmother.

Alice Hoisington gave early records from the Middletown Springs School.

Kara Gilmour gave items from her mother, Nan Gilmour's, estate: a Lamb family scrapbook, with early 20th century information about Skidmore College; a certificate presented to Moseley Hastings Gray's family after his death in World War I; a framed photograph of two women by a pond; four dresses likely owned by Hazel Grover.

Maple Festival Anticipates the Season

A mid-week snow storm and cold weather did not deter an ample crowd at our twenty-sixth Maple Festival. Volunteers served maple treats, including sugar on snow, "Spun Gold" maple cotton candy and home-made desserts. Vendors brought 2014 syrup for sale. Fred Bradley demonstrated old-fashioned sugar-making technique over an open fire while old-time sugarmakers Bill Clark and Truman Young recounted local sugaring history using artifacts from the Society's collection.

A Raffle and a Silent Auction with donated prizes from area businesses and friends of the Society kept up the suspense throughout the afternoon. The hard work of many volunteers paid off, with net proceeds of \$3066. Thanks to all who bought a raffle ticket or left an auction bid!

The following businesses and crafts people donated Raffle and Silent auction items for the Maple Festival. Please thank them by purchasing their crafts and patronizing their businesses in the coming year.

Thanks to local cooks and bakers for their delectable donations to the Maple Food Sale and all who contributed their time, talents, and knowledge!



Photo by Emmett Francois

Bentley House Bed & Breakfast – gift certificate
Birdseye Diner – dinner for two certificate
Blue Cat Bistro – dinner for two certificate
Bill & Sue Clark – gift basket, sap buckets for decoration
Lois Dansereau – handmade wool mittens
Dietra Davis – doll for kids' raffle
Carl Durfee's Store – gift certificate
Donna Johnson Physical Therapy – gift items & certificate
East Poultney Store – gift certificate
Gilmore Home Center – gift card
Bernard Grazulwich – History of Middletown CD
Green's Sugar House – Indian sugar and loan of Spun Gold machine

Hannaford's – grocery gift card
Hermit Hill books – gift certificate
Peter Huntoon – watercolor print
Johnson Energy – fuel oil certificate
King Arthur Flour – three cook books
Lake St. Catherine Country Club – greens fee gift certificate
LaValleys Building Supply – three gift cards
Mac's Citgo – gift card
Mahar Family Maple – syrup and maple items for raffle
Matt Solon Framing – gift certificate
David Munyak – treenware item
Ninety-Nine Restaurant – gift card
Quest Frames – gift certificate
Quickprint of Rutland – gift certificate
Rising Meadow Pottery – Nick Seidner jug
Roots Restaurant – gift certificate
Rutland Area Food Co-op – gift certificate
Sissy's Kitchen – homemade soup, gift basket, gift certificate
S.E. Smith Feeds – sunflower seeds
Solarfest – weekend pass
Staples – two gift cards
Stewarts Ice Cream – ice cream for Maple Festival
Stone Valley Co-op – gift basket
Taps Tavern – gift certificate
Tattersall's Clothing Emporium – gift certificate
Tractor Supply – merchandise gift
Twin Mountains Farm B&B – gift certificate
Vermont Country Store – gift basket
Vermont Sweetwater – case of maple soda
Vermont Teddy Bear Co. – gift bear ensemble
Wells Country Store – gift picnic basket
Williams Hardware – merchandise gift basket

Historical Society Building Hosts a Village WiFi Zone

The Historical Society building is hosting equipment that helps create a wifi zone serving the area around the Town green. Members of the Town Office Building Committee secured a grant from the Vermont Council on Rural Development's Digital Economy Project for the purchase and installation of the equipment, which works through the Town Office internet portal. Installation was completed in December after an amendment to the Town Office lease was signed by the Selectboard and Society Trustees. When the new Town Office is built, the equipment will be moved to that location.

Caitlin Lovegrove, Network and Outreach Coordinator for the Digital Economy Project, is a former Middletown Springs resident and the daughter of Society members, Jack and Juanita Burch -Clay.

Items for Sale

- Copies of Historical Society Newsletters, \$1 post paid.
- *History of Middletown*, by Barnes Frisbie, CD-ROM or photocopy, \$20, post paid.
- Historic photo notecards of Middletown Springs, box of 8, \$12 post paid.
- *Searching for Ichabod*, by Julie Van Camp, \$18, post paid.
- *A Gem in the Hills*, by Frances Krouse, \$25, post paid.
- Antique Mineral Springs Water bottles, prices start at \$60.

Membership Information

Membership dues for 2014 were due in January.
Check your mailing label for current status.

Dues (Check one):

Individual	\$10.00	Business	\$50.00
Family	\$15.00	Sustaining	\$100.00
Contributing	\$25.00		

Send to: Linda Hurcomb, *Treasurer*
Middletown Springs Historical Society
P.O. Box 1121
Middletown Springs, VT 05757

Donations to MSHS, a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization, are tax deductible.

Visit our website:

www.MiddletownSpringsHistoricalSociety.org

Business Members

Blue Cat Bistro, John Rehlen
Farmer Mould & Machinery, Jim Gilmour
Gabe Friedman, Web Designer,
Goldenbrook Construction, Dick Gray
Green Mountain Timber Frames, Dan McKeen
Johnson Energy, Tom & Eileen Johnson
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Jim Marquis, Antiques Appraiser
Morgan Mountain Organic Gardeners
Professional Tile Installation, Jerry Hansen
Stewarts Dairy
Twin Mountain Farm B&B, Annie & Walt Pepperman
Williams Hardware, Poultney, Bob Williams

The MSHS Newsletter is published twice a year for members and friends of the Society. Comments and manuscripts on subjects of interest are encouraged and should be sent c/o David Wright, editor, or e-mailed to montvert@vermontel.net.

Middletown Springs Historical Society
P.O. Box 1121
Middletown Springs, VT 05757

Address Service Requested

WELCOME! NEW MEMBERS

NEW MEMBERSHIPS

Greg Cooper, Waltham, Mass.
Grant Reynolds, Tinmouth
Mabel & Gerald Traver, Whitehall, NY

UPGRADE TO SUSTAINING MEMBER

Andrew & Susan Shayne, Middletown Springs

UPGRADE TO CONTRIBUTING MEMBER

Pat & Don Hemenway, Middletown Springs
Jon & Kimberly Mathewson, Middletown Springs
Diane Rae Schroeder, Long Beach, Ca.
Julie Van Camp, Lopez Island, Wa.
Harry & Mary Thomas, Gansevoort, N.Y.
Bill Upholt & Mary Lee Morrison, Hartford, Ct.
Jack & Cathy Winkopp, Greenville, S.C.

NEW BUSINESS MEMBER

Farmer Mould & Machinery, Jim Gilmour,
Clarendon

2014 COMING EVENTS

Sunday, May 25	Middletown Springs Memorial Day
Sunday, June 15	Strawberry Festival 1 to 4 p.m.
Sunday, Sept. 21	Annual Meeting 7 p.m.
Sunday, Oct. 5	Museum Open House 1 to 4 p.m.