



Middletown Springs Historical Society **NEWSLETTER**

Vol. 49, No. 2

September 2018

Election Excitement in 1840

In a letter to the Poultney Journal from January 1886, Judge O. L. Ray reminisces about events and personalities when he was an 18 year old in Middletown. The letters exchanged between Ray, Journal Editor Barnes Frisbie, and others were excerpted and re-published in 2004 by historians Dawn Hance and Joann Nichols.

“In 1840 the election excitement in Middletown was very great. The political parties, Whig and Democrat, were about equally balanced. Two years before, the Whigs had elected their candidate, Jonathan Morgan, to the Legislature. The next year he was again the candidate, but was defeated, or ‘killed a yearling,’ as common parlance had it, by Merritt Clark, the choice of the Democrats. So, early in the spring of 1840 both parties began to strengthen and martial their forces for a trial at the September election. Every vacant house had a tenant by the first of June. The leaders of both parties left no stone unturned to strengthen their own and weaken the cause of their opponents. Some even went so far as to burn vacant buildings belonging to or under the control of the opposition, to prevent them from harboring imported voters. The importance of the presidential election was not lost sight of, but the determination to elect their favorite man for town representative was paramount to every other purpose. That year the Whigs nominated [Dr.] Eliakim Paul, and the Democrats their former standard bearer, Merritt Clark. Clark was a young man then, and very popular, while Paul had scarcely an enemy in town. I thought in the spring I knew every voter in town, but I noticed that many men with strange faces were swore [sic] in their votes at that election. There was a hot contest all day at the polls, to wit: the basement of the Methodist church at the corner of the graveyard. The crowd were [sic] expelled from the room at the time of counting by the election board. Joe Spalding was 80



East St., looking west, showing the Clarks' Brick Store and the Methodist Church with Town Room below. Photo by Dana Carpenter.

years of age [Joseph Spaulding, Jr., was actually aged 73], a Whig and a cripple. They allowed him to remain in the room, while a perfect jam of men and boys hung around the windows outside. I need not say I was a Whig in sentiment, and though not a voter I was one of that outside crowd and anxious for the success of Paul. After waiting for a time which seemed an age, Spalding hobbled upon his staff to the window, raised it, his face

beaming with joy, and said ‘Boys, we’ve got twice the majority we wanted. Paul is elected by two votes.’ A cheering went up that went to heaven, and for the next hour or two Albert [W.] Gray and his clerk, behind the counter at the [Valley] hotel, were the busiest men probably ever known in the town to that date.” - O.L. Ray

Eliakim Paul (1798-1876), a doctor for many years, had previously represented Middletown in the Legislature 1829-1832 and continued 1840-1842 after defeating Clark. He served again 1850-1853. He also served as town clerk 1847-1849. In his *History of Middletown*, p.128, Frisbie says Paul “will be remembered as one of the most useful citizens of his time.”

Merritt Clark (1803-1896) was born in Middletown, graduated from Middlebury College, and in 1825 built the brick store opposite the green which he operated with his brother Horace. He was town Representative to the Legislature 1832, ‘33, and ‘39. In 1841 he moved to Poultney where he served as cashier of the Bank of Poultney for more than forty years and where in 1848 he founded, with Horace, the Rutland & Washington Railroad, later sold to Jay Gould.

He represented Poultney in the Legislature for two years. He was a Rutland County Senator for four years, Democratic candidate for Congress in 1850, and for Governor in 1854 and ‘55.

It's election season, and that helps explain why the reminiscence from O.L. Ray about the voting in 1840 is appealing. Also intriguing to current readers are specific references to people and places in Ray's letter.

For example, although church and state had shared "meeting houses" in early New England, by 1837 when the Methodist church with the Middletown Town room at ground level was built, it was an unusual collaboration. The building survived until the 1950s when it was deemed an obstruction to visibility for motorists at the four way intersection. What's more, the proposed Town building currently planned for the other opposite corner of the same intersection, with a town library above a town office, clearly has an historic precedent.

The reference to A.W. Gray selling a great number of celebratory drinks after the election results were an-

nounced reminds us that Gray was a hotel keeper before establishing his successful horsepower machine business. In fact Beers' Atlas maps show that A.W. Gray and Sons still owned the Valley Hotel property as late as 1869.

Finally, Representatives to the Legislature are no longer elected from each town but now often represent a proportional district of multiple towns. Our incumbent Representative, elected to his first two-year term four years ago, was the first Middletown Springs resident to be sent to the Legislature since the proportional representation began in 1968. Winning candidates from Pawlet, the town with the largest population, had represented the district for forty-six years. Another close contest is expected this year.

Notice of Annual Meeting

The 49th Annual Meeting of the Middletown Springs Historical Society will convene at 2:00 pm on Sunday, Sept. 16, at the Historical Society Building. Featuring a delicious dessert buffet, it will begin with a brief business meeting including a review of the year's accomplishments and discussion and vote on proposed changes to the Society's Bylaws, which the trustees hope will further encourage participation by the membership in Society activities and governance. (Bylaw changes are shown on the page inserted in this issue of the *Newsletter*). Also on the agenda is the election of new trustees for the 2018-2020 term.

After the business meeting, textile conservator Michele Pagan will give a presentation, "How to Date Your Antique Textiles," using examples from the Historical Society's collection.

This demonstration will help you determine the general age of textiles — items such as quilts, bed coverings, flags, etc. that you may have inherited, may be considering buying, or already own. Since condition of an object often confuses the eye in estimating its age, Michele will discuss



Michele Pagan discussing Vermont Civil War flags at Bennington Museum.

and demonstrate the keys to identifying the fundamental nature of most textiles. She will also discuss general practices to help preserve your collection of antique textiles.

Michele Pagan is a textile conservator in private practice with a studio in East Dorset. She is a native Vermonter from the Bennington-Rutland area and has recently returned here after 45 years in exile.

Historic District Book Now Available

Last December the Historical Society announced publication of *Middletown Springs Historic District*, a collection of the photographs and descriptions of the historic properties and places in the village of Middletown Springs.

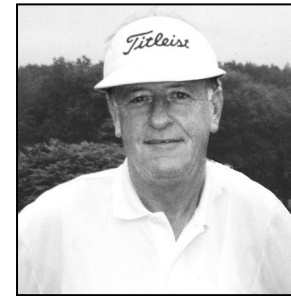
The book is based on the *National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, prepared by historic preservation architect, Matthew Cohen, and approved by the National Park Service in Washington, D.C., in 1985.

For many years the Historical Society's copy of the Nomination Form and related photographs was displayed in an album in the Museum, accessible to the public during museum hours. However, as the fabric of the album deteriorated, the Trustees looked for a way to preserve, edit, and update the informational material and assure its long-term availability. It was decided to create a high quality book, using the latest digital technology that could be printed on demand, edited and updated periodically and reproduced in both print and digital formats.

The result is a 202-page book with 97 high resolution black and white photographs that will be equally appreciated in Historical Society members' homes and in the libraries of Vermont's secondary schools, universities, and historical institutions. See purchase details on page 4 of the *Newsletter*.

In Memoriam

R. THOMAS BURKE, 74, formerly of Rutland, died unexpectedly on September 22, 2017, at his home in Norwich, Conn., following a heart attack. He was born January 22, 1943, in Rutland, the son of Raymond and Freda (Wheeler) Burke. He graduated from Poultney High School in 1961 and was an outstanding athlete during his years there. He graduated from Castleton State College with a BS degree and furthered his education at the University of Tennessee.

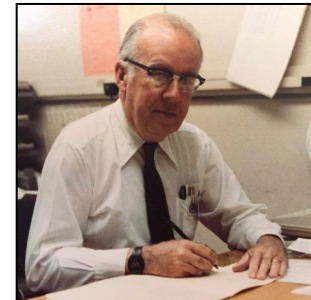


He was a physical education teacher in the Norwich, CT, school system, where he taught for 34 years before retiring.

He enjoyed golfing, fishing, and hunting in Connecticut and Vermont. One of his favorite places was the deer camp in Middletown Springs. He was a loyal fan of the Mohegan Sun's women's professional basketball team and never missed a home game. He also enjoyed many women's basketball games at UConn over the years. He was a kind and loyal friend to many. Tom is survived by his sister, Susan Myers, and her husband Tom, nephew Darren, niece Kristen and her family, and many cousins.

Tom was a member of the Historical Society for many years. His family designated the Society for memorial contributions and we are grateful for the many contributions received.

DONALD G. ROGERS, 96, passed away June 28, 2018 at his home. He was born in Middletown Springs, the son of Frank F. and Jessie (Gardner) Rogers. Educated in Middletown Springs schools, he enrolled in Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1940. In 1943 Donald entered the U.S. Army where he served in the Corps of Engineers in New Guinea and the Philippines. Following military service he returned to R. P. I. where he obtained a bachelor degree and master's degree in Metallurgical Engineering. He was elected to membership in honorary societies, Sigma Xi and Tau Beta Pi.



After graduation in 1950, Don took a position with Sprague Electric Company in North Adams, Mass., as a research engineer. He worked for Sprague, where he held seven U.S. Patents, as a process and product engineer until retirement in 1986. In 1950 he married Helen Louise Wetherby of Middletown Springs. They raised five children and lived in Pownal from 1950 until 1998 when they moved to Bennington.

Donald is survived his wife, Helen; and by five children: daughter, Jean Rogers of Woodford; son, Richard Rogers, and his wife, Mary, of Pownal; son, Miles Rogers of Pownal; daughter, Gayle Rogers of Pownal; and son, Geoffrey Rogers of Hinsdale, Mass.; ten grandchildren; and nine great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his son-in-law Harold Wisell. Donald served two terms as a Director of the Mount Anthony Union High School representing Pownal from 1966-1971. After retiring from Sprague he volunteered at RSVP as an income tax aide and at the Bennington Museum Library. Donald enjoyed hunting, gardening and travel.

Donald and Helen are long time members of the Historical Society, which is designated by the family as the recipient of gifts in Donald's memory.

Strawberry Festival was Picture Perfect



This young strawberry lover can't wait to enjoy her shortcake at this year's festival.

It was a cloudy June Sunday for the 43rd Annual Strawberry Festival, but the rain held off. Dutton's strawberries were perfect. DellVeneri's biscuits were freshly baked. The music by Paul Morgan and friends was lively. The flower arrangements by Lois Dansereau and Maureen McCormack were appropriately beautiful. Children enjoyed creative activities with Claudia Gonda. Thanks go out to all of the above.

We also send thanks to Stewarts for the ice cream, Thomas Dairy for the whipping cream, and Dietra Davis for the loan of both the lawn furniture and the servers' aprons.

Congratulations to all the local vendors: Mahar Family for maple products; Maureen LaBate for honey and beeswax products; Bud and Ann Krouse for the *Gem in the Hills* history; Caite Raishart for jewelry, knitted dolls and flower arrangements; Solange Martineau for knitted socks, iris rhizomes and photography items; Rita Hansen for hand-crafted earrings.

Thanks, ultimately, to the approximately 375 attendees, and the many volunteers who helped us net over \$1600 for the Historical Society. We are grateful for each and every one who helped make it a perfect day!

Items for Sale

- Copies of Historical Society Newsletters, \$1 postpaid.
- *History of Middletown*, by Barnes Frisbie, CD. ROM or photocopy, \$20; original 1975 reprint, \$35, postpaid.
- Historic photo notecards of Middletown Springs, box of 8, \$12 postpaid.
- *Searching for Ichabod*, by Julie Van Camp, \$18, postpaid
- *A Gem in the Hills*, by Frances Krouse, \$25, postpaid.
- Middletown Springs Historic District book, \$75, postpaid

Membership Information

Membership dues for 2019 are 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: Pat Hemenway, *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.

www.MiddletownSpringsHistoricalSociety.org

Business Members

Dellveneri Bakery
Gabe Friedman, Web Designer
Green Mountain Timber Frames, Luke Larson
Hermit Hill Books, Patricia McWilliams
Johnson Energy, Tom & Eileen Johnson
Mahar Family Maple, Ryan & Ann Marie Mahar
Morgan Mountain Organic Gardeners
New England Slate Co., Chris Smid
Stewarts Shops
Thomas Dairy, Rutland
Williams Hardware, 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 emailed to montvert@vermontel.net.

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

Address Service Requested

Welcome! New Members

NEW SUSTAINING MEMBER

Barbara Buxton Bradney, *Kearny, Neb.*

Janet Buxton Drelicharz, *Bellevue, Neb.*

Mary Jo Buxton Nielson, *Buchanan Dam, Tex.*

Our Back Pages

More back issues of the *Newsletter* are now posted on the website. In late 2017 Trustee Pam Johnson scanned issues from 1990 to 1999. The archive now includes 1990 to the present at www.MiddletownSpringsHistoricalSociety.org. Earlier issues from the 1970s and '80s wait to be scanned.

2018 COMING EVENTS

Sunday, Sept. 16
2 pm

Annual Meeting and presentation "How to Date Your Antique Textiles" by Michele Pagan

Sunday, Oct. 7,
2-4 pm

Museum Open House, featuring photos from the Rogers family and the Homestead, with special guests Helen, Richard, and Jean Rogers. Folks who worked at the Homestead or have any connection to the Homestead are invited to bring photos and memories!

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