

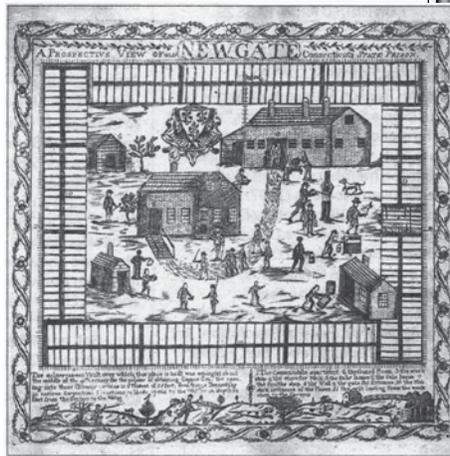
Amazing Story of Middletown Slave Prince Mortimer Subject of May 3rd Lecture

In 1834, a former slave named Prince Mortimer died in the new prison in Wethersfield. Mortimer was 111 years old at the time of his death, and, since arriving in America on a slave ship at the age of six, had been either enslaved or imprisoned for 105 years.

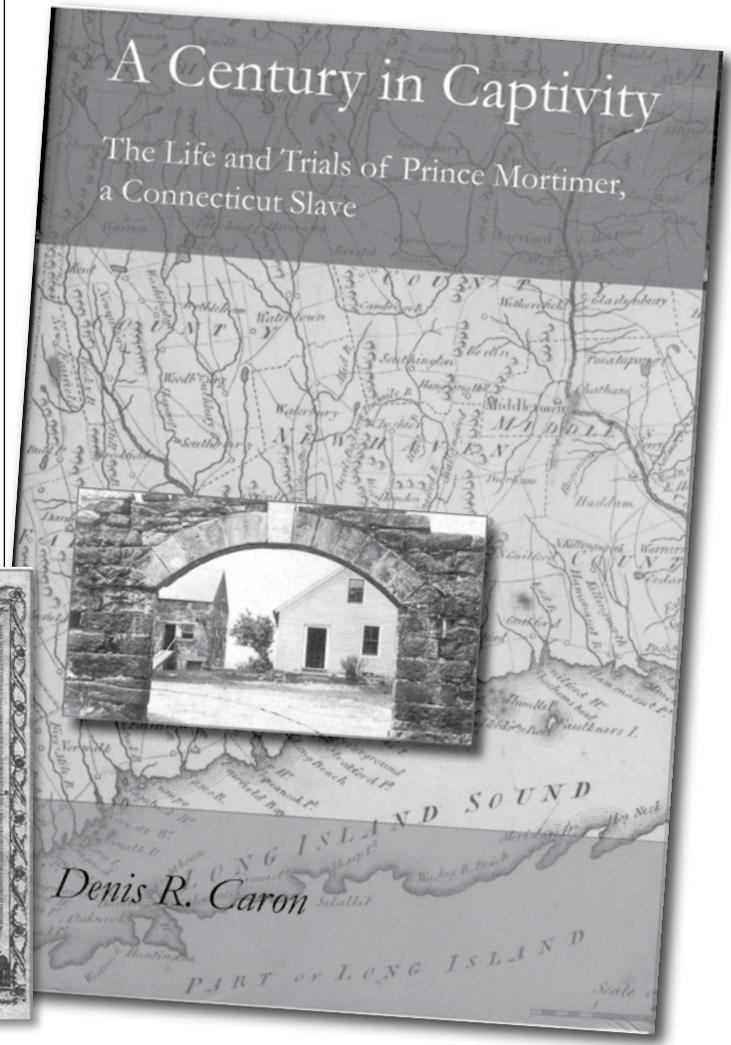
After serving as a slave in Middletown, Prince was sent to Simsbury's infamous Newgate Prison at the age of 87 for attempting to poison his master. On one occasion, he was released, but chose to return to prison voluntarily. Prior to his incarceration, much of the remarkable life of Prince Mortimer took place in Middletown, where he served prominent local families such as the Stars and Mortimers.

Local attorney Denis Caron has described the unique life of Prince Mortimer in his newly published book *A Century in Captivity, The Life and Trials of Prince Mortimer, A Connecticut Slave*.

Caron's task was rendered somewhat daunting by the dearth of information available on Mortimer's life. But through unrelenting research—much in the Historical Society's archives—some resourceful sleuthing and a few suppositions, Caron has succeeded in re-constructing his subject's unusual life story. Caron's book also provides an extensive, sometimes bone-chilling, description of the prison system of the early 19th century, especially Newgate, an underground cavern of unimaginable suffering. Of prime interest to local residents is the author's portrait of life in Middletown, and of the Mortimer and Starr families.



On May 3rd, Caron will deliver the Arthur M. Schultz Memorial Lecture at the Historical Society's annual meeting of the Middlesex County Historical Society. The meeting will take place at First Baptist Church, 93 Main Street, Middletown, beginning at 7:30 p.m. Refreshments will be served immediately following at General Mansfield House, just a few steps away. Admission is free.



What's Inside:

SOCIETY NEWS

Dear Gentle Reader,

We are delighted that to announce that Susan Allison, co-founder of North End Arts Rising, Inc./The Buttonwood Tree, is the Historical Society's interim administrator. A maven of the non-profit world, Susan is keeping the Historical Society humming until a new director is hired. Our intern Jesse Nasta, a Wesleyan junior, returns this summer after a semester in Spain.

As we went to press, Middletown's third graders were polishing their essays for the 2006 William E. Sheedy Memorial History Contest before the April 26 deadline. Each year, city students delve into their family histories to create a portrait of one of their ancestors. The result is an outpouring of wonderful profiles of beloved grandparents, quirky aunts and uncles and distinguished forebears. The 2006 contest winners will be announced on Wednesday, June 7 at a reception at General Mansfield House, beginning at 6:00 p.m. All are invited to attend.

In 2005, we received the largest number of entries ever in the history of the 15-year-old contest. Some 209 students participated, nearly double the number from 2004. The 2005 winners were: Philip Santoro, Edir Abid, Christopher Tipton, Lauren Gionfriddo, Timothy Harvey, and Hannah Breton, from Farm Hill School; Adam Gauthier, Kelly Richards, Alexandra Zmyndak, Jacob Glenn and Noelle O'Toole, from Moody School; Philip Dylewski, Alyssa Santostefano, and Richa Gupta,



from Lawrence School; and Lucas Mitchell Saunders from Spencer School. Each winner was presented with a \$50 U.S. Savings Bond.

Would you like to receive notices of events and other Historical Society news via email? We would love to put you on our email list. Simply shoot us your online address at middlesexhistory@wesleyan.edu.

Special thanks to the many people who made the farewell tribute to Di such a memorable evening: Maria Holzberg and Marilyn Mills, who arranged the catering and décor; Dave Wolfram for designing the invitations; and Cathy Stebbins for contributing the wine. A very special thank you to Cindy Wolfram, owner of Wild Orchid, for donating the gorgeous floral arrangements.

Each October, more than 1500 car enthusiasts ooh and ahh for the creampuffs and dream machines of yesteryear at the Historical Society's annual Antique & Classic Car Show. The 2005 extravaganza displayed some of the best, 200 vintage wheels vied for best in show. The auto love-fest netted more than \$3000 to fuel our activities. The Car Show Committee gave a special trophy in memory of longtime car show committee Ed Yuska. Thanks to the Car Show Committee for staging another successful show: Jerry Augustine, chair, Marc Augustine, Ray Beauregard, Rich Bergen, Pete Bozzo, Bill George, Wally Haas, John Kuzminski, Bill Miller, Oran Mills, Mark Olerud, Jack Pieper, Bernie Prue, Seb Sbalcio and Debby Shapiro.

In Memorium

It is with deep sadness that we mark the passing of longtime friend and retired board member Mort Briggs, who died last September. A Wesleyan faculty member for more than 40 years, Mort was a professor of romance languages with specialty in French language and literature and served as director of Honors College for two decades, chairman of the Master of Arts in Teaching Program and acting director of the Graduate Liberal Studies Program.

Mort, along with his wife Kay, also worked tirelessly to make Middletown a stronger, more vibrant community. In addition to serving on the Historical Society board for more than 20 years, he was active in the Middletown Rotary Club, the Middlesex County United Way, The Middlesex Chapter of the American Red Cross and The Church of Holy Trinity.

Noted for his gentle nature, Mort brought his sweet, yet clear-eyed intelligence to every endeavor he undertook. We will miss him very much.

Farewell, Di



The soiree to end all soirees was gala night indeed as more than 100 friends and supporters came to General Mansfield House on March 16 to bid “adieu” to retiring director Dione Longley. Many paid tribute to Di’s 20 years at the helm of the Historical Society, transforming it from a sleepy period house to a cultural powerhouse in our community.

Di’s accomplishments over the past two decades include the Middletown Heritage Trail, museum exhibits, walking tours, an African-American history workbook adopted by the city’s elementary schools and the preservation of hundreds of artifacts and documents for future generations to enjoy.

Mayor Sebastian Guiliano declared March 17 “Di Longley Day” in honor of her years of service to the community. Turn to page 4 to read the Mayor’s proclamation. Laurie Rayner, director of heritage programs at the Connecticut Humanities Council, presented Di with a special plaque that read:

“The Connecticut Humanities Council honors Di Longley, archivist, genealogist, educator, public programmer, tour guide and hockey player par excellence for her extraordinary successes over two decades in bringing Middletown’s rich history to the general public.”

Said Historical Society President Marnie Goodman, “Di will be sorely missed. Her passionate love of history and her peerless ability to make history fun has made the study of our community’s past an important part of our cultural landscape.”

Board members Debby Shapiro, Cathy Stebbins and Dave Wolfram also honored Di with toasts.

Di Longley said, “I don’t have much in common with Lou Gehrig, but I can’t help but think of his farewell speech. Like Gehrig, I feel extraordinarily grateful that I’ve had a job I loved with all my heart, and worked with wonderful people that I admire and respect. And at the Historical Society, I can truly say (like Gehrig) ‘I have never received anything but kindness and encouragement from you.’ Thank you for an unforgettable 20 years.”

As tokens of their appreciation, the Board of Directors presented Di with a framed print of her photograph that appeared in *The Hartford Courant* with the article about her retirement and a pair of earrings from her favorite artisan jeweler.



Proclamation

WHEREAS, Dione (Di) Longley served as executive director of the Middlesex County Historical Society for twenty years until her retirement on March 1, 2006; She spearheaded the transformation of the Society from a period house to a significant cultural voice in Greater Middletown; and

WHEREAS, She created the Middletown Heritage Trail, a historic walking tour that provides the city's first permanent exploration of Middletown's illustrious and diverse past; The twenty highly illustrated plaques dotted around downtown reveal the city of yesteryear and curated more than a half-dozen major museum exhibits exploring different aspects of Middletown's history; and

WHEREAS, Di led an annual Halloween walking tour through Greater Middletown's cemeteries that revealed the powerful stories of the people buried there and our community's shared past; she also led an annual spring walking tour, SCANDAL, that revealed the nefarious doings and foolish foibles of our city's forebears, proving that those who lived before us weren't so different from people today; and

WHEREAS, she wrote *A Brightly Colored Past*, a workbook on local African-American history, which has been used by the city's elementary school students for more than ten years; she oversaw the William Sheedy Memorial History Contest, the Society's annual contest for the city's third graders in which youngsters write an essay about one of their ancestors; and

WHEREAS, Di guided hundreds of scholars, researchers and genealogists through the Society's extensive collection of artifacts, diaries, public documents and private records to directories to obtain the information they sought; she mentored dozens of interns, college students and high school students in the intricacies of historical research and museum administration; Di safeguarded Middletown's past through the acquisition and archiving of significant historic buildings and landmark structures; and

WHEREAS, Dione Longley most importantly of all, shared her infectious love of history with all those she met and made history fun!

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, THAT I, SEBASTIAN N. GIULIANO, Mayor of the City of Middletown do hereby proclaim March, 17, 2006, as

DIONE LONGLEY DAY

in the City of Middletown and wish her good health and happiness in all her endeavors.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and cause the seal of the City of Middletown to be affixed this 15th day of March, 2006.

ATTEST:

SEBASTIAN N. GIULIANO
Mayor

Board Election Tops Annual Meeting Agenda

Come out and vote! The Middlesex County Historical Society will hold its biannual election of the board of directors at its annual meeting on May 4th at 7:30 p.m. at the First Baptist Church at 93 Main Street in Middletown.

The nominating committee—Debbie Shapiro, chair; Bill Ryczek; and Cathy Branch Stebbins—have put together a top-notch slate of candidates to be elected for the 2006 -2007 board of directors. The proposed board and officers are:

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| President: William Ryczek | Directors at Large: |
| First Vice President: David Wolfram | Richard Adelstein |
| Second Vice President: Marilyn Mills | Nancy Bauer |
| Secretary: Deborah Shapiro | Michael Cubeta |
| Treasurer: Lillian Guilmartin | Richard Kamins |
| Chairman of the Museum Committee: | Audrey Livingston |
| Peter Zaidel | Ronald Schatz |
| Chairman of the Buildings and Grounds | Rosemary Shea |
| Committee: Michael Giuliano | Catherine Stebbins |

Many thanks for their years of service to the following board members who are rotating off the board: Marnie Goodman, President; Maria Holzberg; Laura Martino and Bill Vasiliou.

The 2006 Annual Meeting has an additional vote on its agenda: a revision in the Historical Society's bylaws that would allow the Board's secretary, like the treasurer, to serve more than two consecutive terms. The bylaw revision proposal is as follows:

Article V, Paragraph 5.3 to be amended as written: Election, Qualification, Term. The Officers of the Society shall be elected by the members at the Annual Meeting in even numbered years, and they shall serve for a term of two years or until their successors shall have been duly elected. All Officers shall be members of the Society. No Officer, except Treasurer AND SECRETARY, shall be elected for more than two successive terms to the same office.

Other items on the agenda include the presentation and approval of the 2006 operating budget and short reports from the treasurer and president.

Please consider becoming a supporter of the Capital Campaign today.

The General's Commanders	\$1,000 and up
Benefactor	\$500-\$999
Patron	\$250-499
Contributor	\$100-249
Donor	\$50-99
Friend	up to \$49

YES. I want to ensure A Future for Our Past and preserve Mansfield House for future generations. Please list my name as:

Please make checks payable to the Middlesex County Historical Society and send to Mansfield House, 151 Main Street, Middletown, CT 06457
Donations are tax deductible.

Membership Application

Name

Address

City

State

Zip

Telephone

E-mail

Membership Levels

_____ Student \$15	_____ Business \$50
_____ Individual \$25	_____ Patron \$100
_____ Family \$35	_____ Life \$500

Please detach and sent to: The Middlesex County Historical Society and send to Mansfield House, 151 Main Street, Middletown, CT 06457



Time for Renewal

The cold has dissipated. The equinox has been celebrated. Dare we say it, spring has sprung. While we all enjoy these days of renewal, let us not forget the most important renewal of all. That's right: your annual membership to the Middlesex County Historical Society.

We have mailed the renewal notices. Now it is your turn to send them back. Your membership dollars enable the Historical Society to preserve our community's past, mount thought-provoking exhibits and present entertaining programs that show that history can be fun. The more you give to the Historical Society, the more the Historical Society can give to you, your family and your descendants.

Please give generously and give today.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

The Museum at General Mansfield House	Temporarily Closed	
Annual Meeting	Wednesday, May 3	7:30 pm
Lecture: Prince Mortimer		
Denis Caron, author of <i>A Century in Captivity</i>		
First Baptist Church, 93 Main Street	Reception to follow at General Mansfield House	
SCANDAL! Walking Tour	Thursday, May 20	6:00 pm
Reception: Sheedy History Contest participants	Wednesday, June 7	6:00 pm
21 st Annual Antique & Classic Car Show at Pat Kidney Field, Middletown	Sunday, October 1	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
Rain Date	Sunday, October 8	

*Note: All events will be held at General Mansfield House unless otherwise noted.



THE MIDDLESEX COUNTY
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