

Arrivederci, Center Street: Mayor Stephen Bailey and the Early Years of Middletown Redevelopment

Not long ago, the Historical Society received a memento from old Main Street—a huge hunk of brownstone weighing 750 pounds. This cornerstone, bearing the incised inscription, “1893” is all that remains of a much-loved city edifice, the massive Romanesque municipal building, which was torn down 50 years ago in August of 1961, during the stormy years of Middletown’s redevelopment program.

This much-argued about period—which resulted in the clearing of more than five city blocks—will be the subject of an illustrated talk on October 25 at Russell Library by journalist and historian, Erik Hesselberg.

The talk, entitled, “Arrivederci, Center Street; Mayor Stephen Bailey and the Early Years of Middletown Redevelopment,” will make use of a collection of rarely seen documentary photographs from the era, which bring to life these tumultuous years and the personalities involved.

Foremost among these are Stephen Kemp Bailey, a man who thought of big solutions. Bailey was a prominent Wesleyan University government professor who turned to politics in the post-war years, becoming Mayor of Middletown in 1952. A navy man and a war hero, Bailey had a reputation for getting things done. Topping his agenda as mayor was a new municipal building to house expanding city departments and the county court house.



Cornerstone from original Middletown Town Hall on Main Street

However, plans for a new town hall on Main Street would be shifted to a site near the Connecticut River, embodied in a grand vision for a “city of the future.” An Italian neighborhood would be sacrificed to realize this vision—one that never fully materialized.

Erik Hesselberg was an environmental reporter and city editor for the Middletown Press, and the former Executive Editor of Shoreline Newspapers. He now writes for the Hartford Courant and is a member of the Society’s Board of Directors.

The talk will take place at 7 p.m. in the Hubbard Room of the Library. 🌿

GET LOST!

...In lower river valley heritage, that is. The Society, along with the societies from Chester, Deep River, East Haddam, Haddam, and Old Saybrook, was recently awarded a \$9,700 grant from the Connecticut Humanities Council to fund a collaborative brochure highlighting our area’s historical assets. The brochure

will feature the offerings of each of the participating societies and is seen as a marketing tool to attract tourists and local residents alike. Each of these towns developed its own unique history but together are unified by the Connecticut River’s impact, a concept addressed and illustrated by the brochure. 🌿

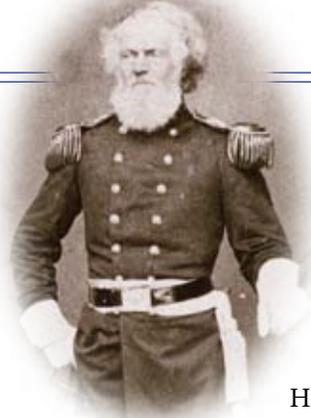
What’s Inside:

SOCIETY NEWS

President's Message

The Middlesex County Historical Society takes to the airwaves! This summer our Executive Director, Deborah Shapiro, has appeared on television and radio to spread the good word about the Society and our role in keeping alive the history of Middletown. Her appearances on *The Bauer Hour*, *Community Conversations*, Channel 8 News' *On the Green* with Gil Simmons, and *WNPR's Where We Live* with John Dankosky, have publicized the work and events of the Society to a wider audience than ever before.

The more people know about the fascinating history of Middletown and what the Society is doing to preserve it, the more people will support our efforts. And the Society needs that support. As is demonstrated in this newsletter's article on the budget, our income from memberships, fees, event proceeds and gift shop profits



does not cover the expenses of maintaining the Mansfield House and providing research assistance and educational programs. If you have visited the Mansfield House or attended an Historical Society program, you know that the Society has a unique and essential function in the life of Middletown and the surrounding area. Your support for the Middlesex County Historical Society helps us to fulfill that function—to celebrate the rich history and cultural heritage of our community.

Please consider making a donation or remembering the Society with a legacy gift. Contact Debby Shapiro at mchs@wesleyan.edu or 860-346-0746, or me, Pat Tully, at pres@middlesexhistory.org or 860-632-8618 for more information. In any case, thank you for your membership in the Society and the support you give to us throughout the year!

Pat Tully
Pat Tully, President

From the Executive Director

Dear Members,

Congratulations to the garden luncheon committee headed by Nancy Bauer. This year's luncheon was the best attended yet and we raised the funds to pay for the upgraded fire alarm system. The day couldn't have been more beautiful weather-wise and we had many new people discover our gardens and exhibits. Thanks to Susan Ryczek, Pat Tully, Denise Cahill and Nancy for planning the event; to Lindsay Fralick and Lisa Santangelo for making many calls to solicit donations of cupcakes, fruit, and beverages from our generous members; to Joe Samolis for heading up the set-up and clean-up crew; and to the many who worked the day of the luncheon to make it a success.

The luncheon participants were treated to the sight of a renovated herb garden, compliments of Bonnie Penders. Bonnie completed the Master Gardener program at the UConn Extension Center and, fortunately for us, chose our gardens as her project. Sally D'Aquila continues to pay for the boxwood specialist working on our knot garden and our landscaper, Jason Kearns, planted and mulched the hillside under the holly trees free of charge. The Board of Directors is working on a policy to govern the use of this beautiful yard and house for small weddings, parties, and corporate events.

The summer has been a busy one with many visitors and researchers coming to the Mansfield House. It all

started with our reception for the Sheedy Contest winners in June. This year's recipients of a \$20 cash prize were third graders Erica Augeri, Michael Bjorklund, Lia Rosenbloom, Andrew Brown, Jenna Ifkovic and Jason Connelly from Farm Hill School; Sarah Rydell, Shreya Seshadri, Michael Flynn, and Jayden Koski from Lawrence School; Ryan Tobin from Moody School; and Caroline Rocco from St. Mary's School. The Sheedy family made a generous donation to underwrite the cost of this year's contest. A number of schools also brought students here as part of their annual field trips.

The Society recently received a bequest from the estate of the late Warren Ehlers. Warren was very active in the Society in the 1960s and 70s, especially on the Building and Gardens Committee, and he very generously remembered us in his will. His gift will keep his memory alive, as its income will go toward keeping up the Mansfield House. The Fund Raising Committee, chaired by Bill Ryczek, is working on building a legacy program to keep the Society on a sound financial footing. If you have any questions regarding how you, too, may remember the Society in your estate planning, please call your attorney or me at the Society.

Read on for news of all our fall events.

Debby Shapiro

Debby Shapiro, Executive Director

1937 Was a Very Good Year...

Lifting a line from Frank Sinatra, 1937 was a very good year in the automotive world, judging by the looks of this year's featured car, a 1937 Pontiac Deluxe 6. This beauty will motor into town for the Society's 26th Annual Antique and Classic Car & Truck Show, being held on Sunday, October 2. Last year's entrants were very enthusiastic about our show's new location at Middletown High School on LaRosa Lane, off Newfield Street, so a large turnout is expected. Car registration begins at 8:30 am and judging starts at 11:30 am with trophies awarded at 2:30 pm. General admission is \$3.00 and children under 12 are free. Car registration is \$10.00.



Although cars registered for judging must be dated 1986 or older, there is no cut-off date for cars being placed in the car corral. In case of rain, the show will be held Sunday, October 9.

This year's featured car was lovingly restored by owner Michael Rispoli, using parts found as far away as California and South Carolina. The car's Fisher B-body rides on an extended 117" wheelbase, intercepting the split-V windshields at a mod, rakish angle. The grill was the most difficult piece to reconstruct, re-crafted from all original parts sourced from seven different Midwestern states. The instrument cluster features a horizontal speedometer and gauges for temperature, oil pressure and fuel. The car has won numerous awards and Mr. Rispoli will happily tell you about his adventures in restoring this bright red vehicle.



Rich Bergan again heads the Car Show Committee. He is joined by longtime members Jerry Augustine, Ray Beauregard, Pete Bozzo, Bill Miller, Mark Olerud, Jack Pieper, Seb Sbalcio, Debby Shapiro, and newcomer John Peterson. They have been meeting and working since March to put on another memorable show. Additional workers are needed the day of the show, so please call Debby at 860-346-0746 if you would like to volunteer. Best of all, working at the entrance gate affords you the opportunity to see and hear these fine-tuned cars vroom in! 🌱

Membership News

We welcome to the Society the following new members: Lisa Angeli, Carmen Bell, Kathleen Boyd, Jane Ferree Bradbury, Charles & Sharon Chafee, Carole Clew, Kathleen Didato, Cliff & Ruth Drechsler-Martell, Eric Horan, Richard Kagan & Anna Wasescha, Marie Kalita-Leary & Al Leary, Leo Kania, William Kehoe, Timothy Maloney, Irena & Howard May, G. John Pelchuck, John Peterson, Alice Stelzer, Frederick Vollono, and Nancy Winship. We had lost track of life member, Charles Hammond, and happily, he contacted us recently to let us know of his whereabouts. Please encourage your friends and relatives to join the Society.

Membership renewals were sent out in late March for the April 1 to March 31 membership year. Most of you have returned your envelopes, but a few have not. Please check your records and return your membership dues so you will continue to receive the newsletter and enjoy other benefits of membership. 🌱



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How Much Does It Cost to Run the Society?

Several members, who were unable to attend the annual meeting in April, inquired about the annual budget. The budget that was adopted by the members in attendance follows. Several categories have been consolidated for space considerations.

INCOME	
Car Show	4,000
Donations	2,500
Fund Raisers/exhibits	2,500
Gift Shop Sales	1,500
Membership Dues	6,000
Research fees	1,000
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Operating Income	17,500
EXPENSES	
Personnel Expenses, including taxes and health insurance	42,628
Property Maintenance And Utilities	12,500
Accounting	2,400
Car Show	1,800
Insurance	8,000
Office and Misc. Expenses	6,800
Programs & Events	1,500
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Total Operating Expenses	75,628
Shortfall	58,128



The Society maintains an account at Merrill Lynch from which it draws funds to cover the shortfall in revenue. The account does not come close to generating the income needed to cover the shortfall, so the Society is invading principal to an alarming degree.

We recently had to repaint the chimneys at a cost of \$8250. This expense was not anticipated at the time of the adoption of the budget. The more money we can raise from dues, fundraisers, and the capital campaign, the less money we need to get from our savings. You can see how important our fundraising efforts are, not only to maintain the Mansfield House, but also to keep the Society the vital organization it is. The population of Middletown is over 47,000 and our membership hovers around 300. We really appreciate all the support that you, our members, give the Society, but you can see that it is important that we increase our base. Please encourage your friends and neighbors to join so that we can keep Middletown's history alive.

Irene Spares Mansfield House

We are pleased to report that other than a few tree branches strewn about the yard, there was no damage done to the Mansfield House by Hurricane Irene. Preparedness was the word around the Society in the week leading up to the storm. Over the last 6 months, Executive Director Debby Shapiro attended a series of workshops on disaster planning

and recovery and drafted an emergency plan for the Mansfield House. Chairman of Buildings and Grounds Joe Samolis and President Pat Tully assisted Debby in preparing the building for the storm. In addition, the 120-year-old ginkgo tree in the backyard was spared, a treasure as the 17th largest ginkgo reported in Connecticut, by recent measurements.

Looking Back 150 Years!

One hundred fifty years ago, Fort Sumter was lost to the Confederates on April 14, Joseph Mansfield was promoted to brigadier general, in charge of the defenses of Washington by President Lincoln on May 14, Union troops were badly defeated at the First Battle of Bull Run on July 21, and ordinary citizens volunteered to fight to save the Union.

Company G of the 14th Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry will bring that calamitous year to life as they encamp in the backyard of General Mansfield's home on Saturday, September 24 from 10 am to 3 pm. The day will feature demonstrations of camp life including drilling and firearms demonstrations, cooking, and other skills that kept the soldiers ready for combat. Participants will be able to interact with the reenactors some of whom appeared in the films, "Glory," "Gettysburg," and "Gods and Generals." Members of Company G also travel to Gettysburg twice a year to help maintain monuments to the 14th CT erected there.

The day's events will also feature the music of the Civil War era at 11 am performed by Connecticut's first Official State Troubadour, Tom Callinan. Tom has developed a program of diverse songs entitled "Brother Against Brother," drawing from songs from the Union, the Confederacy, abolitionists, and slaves, as well as original and other contemporary songs about the nation's turmoil on and off the battlefield. His repertoire ranges from "The Battle Cry of Freedom," "Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!," and "Follow the Drinking Gourd," to "The Bonnie

Blue Flag," and "Two Brothers." Tom performed at the dedication of the monument to Connecticut's 29th Colored Volunteer Infantry in the Fair Haven section of New Haven and at the dedication of the monument to Connecticut's 9th Volunteer Infantry Regiment, "The Irish Regiment," at Vicksburg.

At 1 pm, Dean Nelson will present his program, "Connecticut Yankees: Likenesses from the Rebellion." Dean is the Administrator for the Museum of Connecticut History in the State Library in Hartford and is now curating an exhibit titled, "Connecticut for the Union" with a vast array of Connecticut materials drawn from major public and private collections. His presentation will feature many images drawn from this exhibit and in his words, "tons of the best CT CW pictures and accompanying CT sound bytes." Dean has been a Civil War enthusiast starting from his childhood addiction to the TV show, "The Blue and the Grey" and avid collection of Marx Civil War play sets. He is an expert on Connecticut's Civil War arms demonstrated in his article, "Connecticut Arms the Union," appearing in the Spring, 2011 issue of *Connecticut Explored*.

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 *Within These Walls: One House, One Family, Two Centuries* will be available for viewing. 🌿



Prohibition!

Ken Burns' new documentary, Prohibition, will air on PBS in three parts, October 2-4 at 8 p.m. In the beginning stages of production, the Society was contacted for permission to use a page of the record book of the

Middletown Temperance Union. This page includes the names of local African Americans who signed the pledge of abstinence from alcohol. Tune in to look for the manuscript and to see our name in the credits! 🌿

Who's In the Photo?

*H*ave you ever opened the family photo album and were puzzled as to the identity of the people or places pictured? Was your first thought, "Why didn't grandmother write the names on the back?" The Society can use your help so this doesn't happen to future generations.

Several years ago, Erik Hesselberg, a one-time reporter for the Press and current Society board member, rescued many photos taken by Middletown Press photographers. The Society, along with Russell Library and Wesleyan's Olin Library, received a grant from the Middlesex County Community Foundation to properly catalog and archive

this vast collection. Students did a great job with most of the photos, due to their inscribed information. Left over are three archival boxes full of unidentified photos. For example, one on the top of the pile pictured three former Middletown mayors who would be recognized only by longtime residents.

This is where our members come in. Please call Debby Shapiro at the Society (860-346-0746) to help take the mystery out of these important photographs. We will have some evening sessions for those of you who work as well as daytime hours. Have fun exercising your memory while reviewing our local history! 🐸

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	Saturday, September 24	10:00 to 3:00
26th Annual Antique and Classic Car And Truck Show Middletown High School, LaRosa Lane off Newfield Street	Sunday, October 2 Rain Date, Sunday, October 9	8:30 to 3:00
Arrivederci Center Street: Mayor Stephen Bailey and the Early Years of Middletown Redevelopment	Tuesday, October 25 Hubbard Room, Russell Library	7:00 pm

visit us on the web at www.middlesexhistory.org