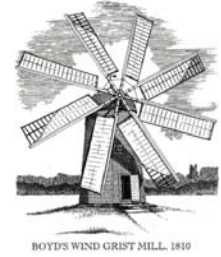


MIDDLETOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS



May, 2008

SOCIETY'S ANNUAL MEETING AND POT LUCK SUPPER

Save the date! The Middletown Historical Society will hold its Annual Meeting and Pot Luck Supper on Thursday, May 22nd, at the Senior Citizen Center on Green End Avenue beginning at 6:00 p.m.

Members may socialize before dinner, followed by a brief business meeting including election of Officers for the coming year. Local businesses have donated raffle prizes to be drawn after the business meeting.

Please bring a dinner dish, or dessert of your choice, with serving utensils. We will also be asking for volunteers to help with clean up. Thank you, in advance, for your assistance. Many hands make the load light.

WE HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!

IN MEMORIAM: CHARLES C. ROBERTS

The members of the Middletown Historical Society are saddened at the loss of Charles C. Roberts, who died Friday, January 25, 2008 in Rapid City, SD. After a distinguished Army career, Mr. Roberts retired to Middletown, RI, in 1967. He was appointed Middletown's first full-time Finance Director in 1969 and Town Administrator in 1985.

Mr. Roberts retired in 1989 and was a member of several organizations including the Middletown Historical Society. Charles was involved daily as the Construction Manager during the restoration of Boyd's Wind Grist Mill. Built in 1810 by John Peterson, a schooner ship's captain from Bath, Maine; the mill was originally located in Portsmouth, RI. William Boyd bought the mill and commercially operated it, with his family, until 1943.

The Boyd family donated the mill to the Middletown Historical Society in 1990 for restoration; a project which took two years to complete. The mill stands proudly in Middletown's Paradise Park, thanks to the dedication of Mr. Roberts and many other volunteers. We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family. Charles will be remembered for his service to the Town of Middletown and dedication to the restoration of our historic Boyd's Wind Grist Mill.

☀ Help Wanted ☀

Someone interested in being a part-time "Caretaker-of-sorts". There are many small on-going tasks that need attention such as light housekeeping, winding the clock, sweeping leaves or shoveling snow off the steps, changing light bulbs, minor repair jobs, etc. Maintenance of small flower gardens may be included. Salary is negotiable. Call 849-1870.

PHOTOS TO ORDER

Photos of historic Middletown are available to order now. Copies of the six can be viewed and an order placed at the Paradise School, located at the corner of Paradise and Prospect Avenues.

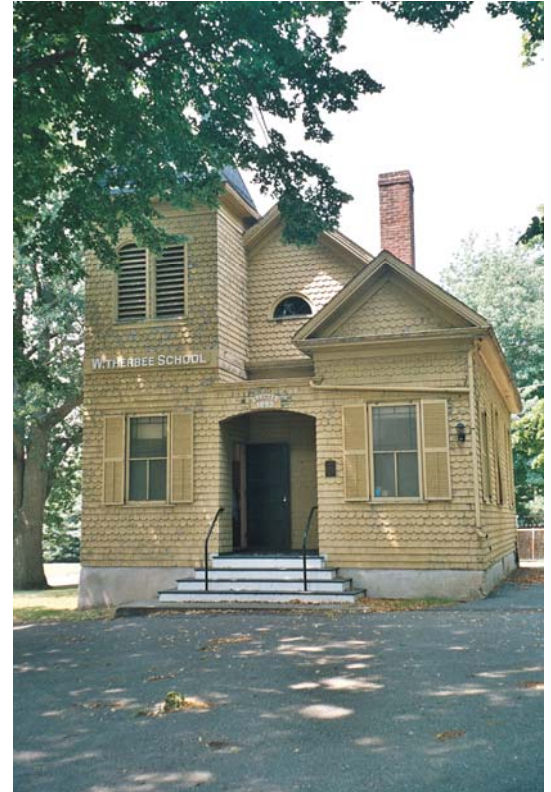
Golden Rule Days Program Underway

For the 14th year, the Golden Rule Days Program is underway for the fourth grade students in the Middletown Public schools. The program began the week of April 21st and will conclude the week of May 19, 2008. During this time, educators will visit Aquidneck, Kennedy and Forest Avenue Schools. Students will also board a bus for a visit to Witherbee School where they will experience, first hand, what it was like to attend a class in a one-room schoolhouse.

We are grateful to Rita Wood for her continued interest in facilitating this very worthy program and the following retired Middletown educators for giving of their time, freely: Eileen Brown, Donna Walters, Ann Gizzi and Mary Bellagamba. Our thanks also to Cindy Killavey, storyteller, for her continued participation. Great Job!

Thanks to Norman Hall for designing the student handbook, Witherbee and Golden Rule Days brochures. He has them printed each year and delivers them to Witherbee School in time for the program. "Thank you" to the Middletown Historical Society for having Witherbee School cleaned each year and providing funds for the publications.

Witherbee school, built in 1892, is located at the corner of Valley and Green End Avenues.



Historic Exhibit on Display at Island Cinemas

During the months of March and April, the Society placed an exhibit in the display case at Island Cinemas in Middletown. An historic picture display and Revolutionary War recreation of the Siege of Newport, which took place in Middletown were featured.

The display showed the different areas in which the Middletown Historical Society works to preserve and protect our heritage. Many thanks to Mary Bellagamba, Mary Redgate and Ken Walsh, Society members and a student intern who worked with Mr. Walsh.

MIDDLETOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY MISSION

In order to ensure a record of the town's past, its heritage - where we came from, what we have done, what has been important to us - the Middletown Historical Society was formed to protect and preserve that priceless legacy which we have inherited.

FOUNDED JUNE 1, 1976

The Middletown Historical Society, Inc.
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TRACING THE HISTORY OF THE JOHN PECKHAM GRIST MILL

It's a warm, fall day on Paradise Avenue, Middletown, Rhode Island. The leaves are turning to beautiful shades of gold and red. The sound of the grist mill grinding the harvest grain can be heard along the Maidford River. How can this be? It can because the year is 1850 and Abner Peckham is hard at work in his mill.

I made this exciting discovery when I was researching my Paradise Avenue home. During the summer of 2006, an article in the Newport newspaper cited the donation of an 1860 Aquidneck Island map to the Seaman's Institute by Hugh Auchincloss. The article stated that this map recorded the property owners of all island land. Because I had been researching the origins of my home, I decided to view the map. Yes, there was my house, owned by John Peckham and diagonally behind my house was the grist mill of Abner Peckham! I was surprised and intrigued by this newly discovered fact. Thus, information about this mill has been my quest for the last year and a half: I would like to share this quest with you.

Of course, the first person I contacted was Natalie Nicholson. Natalie was as surprised as I. She said her mother used to play in that part of the Maidford but had never mentioned the mill. She volunteered to search the maps that she owned.

Next, Mary Redgate, of our own Middletown Historical Society, spent several Wednesday mornings sifting through the materials at Paradise School. Another map was added to the material; one of 1870 that marked the grist mill. And, this map sketched in a holding pond which enabled the mill to have a constant supply of water.

I spend on chilly afternoon walking the area with Captain Richard Alexander trying to determine how the land might have been configured in the mid-1850's. Unfortunately, it was hard to visualize.

Using the Newport t Library computers, which have a genealogical program, I was able to find John Peckham, who gave his occupation as "miller" in three consecutive years of the United States Federal Census.

The greatest find was uncovered at the Middletown Town Hall. The staff was extremely helpful in explaining the Town records and how property was recorded. To my great delight, I found two corroborating documents in the *Middletown Land Evidence Books*. The first, in Volume 8, page 501, record the sale of about an acre of land to John Peckham by his father Abner Peckham, for the sum of \$300. (This land description coincides to the area in question.) It states that the land includes:

"the privilege of using the water in the pond near said premises for funning the Mill on said premises which was erected by this grantee, (Abner Peckham) also the privilege of going into said pond and taking stones and stuff there for the benefit and use of the Mill so long as the Mill is kept on said premises doing as little damage as may be."

In Volume 9, page 9, John Peckham, miller sells what appears to be the same parcel of land to his father, Abner, for the sum of \$300. This transaction specifically states that the mill is not included—"excepting the mill and dam standing on said property and the appurtenances to said Mill...also the right of paving and repaving from the road through said premises to said Mill at any and all times."

I must make note of additional persons whose interest and research has been appreciated. James Yarnall, Ph.D., of Salve Regina University, a noted authority of the artist John LaFarge, offered helpful assistance. LaFarge summered in the Hessian House on Paradise Avenue during these years. My thought was, "How could an artist not make a sketch of a grist mill which was almost in his back yard?" Dr. Yarnall and I engaged several emails without discovering the sought-after sketch. William Varian, of William Vareika Fine Arts, Ltd., in Newport, was also consulted in this quest.

Bert Lippincott, III, reference librarian and genealogist of the Newport Historical Society, gathered many records for me to check, in hopes of finding additional information. Lastly, Leonard Panaggio, whose column, *The Grist Mill*, is in the Newport Daily News, included a mention of the mill in the paper in hopes that someone might have information.

I would appreciate any suggestions as to where additional information could be located or any mention of the Mill that you might have been told or have in personal papers.

Thank you, Janice Hart (j.m.hart@cox.net)

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