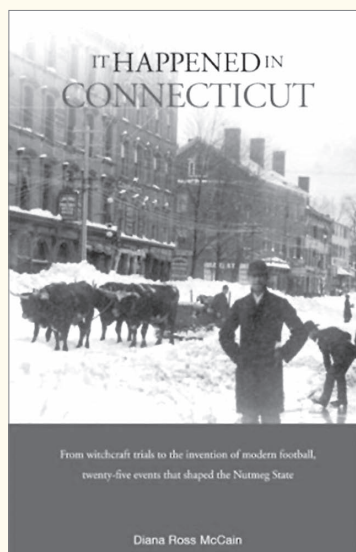


## It Happened In Connecticut

Have you ever wondered why Connecticut is known as the “Nutmeg State” even though nutmeg trees do not grow here? Or whether Connecticut experienced witchcraft trials and executions similar to those in Salem, Massachusetts?

Historian Diana Ross McCain will discuss these topics and more when she recounts highlights from her book, *It Happened in Connecticut: From Witchcraft Trials to the Invention of Modern Football, Twenty-Five Events That Shaped the Nutmeg State*, published in 2008 by Globe Pequot Press. Her talk will be held on Wednesday, February 10, at 7:00 pm in the Hubbard Room at Russell Library, 123 Broad Street, Middletown.

Among her tales, she will relate the story of the real-life serial poisonings in early twentieth century Windsor that reportedly served as the inspiration for the black comedy *Arsenic and Old Lace*. She will also explain how the slick salesmanship of peddlers who fanned out from Connecticut across the new nation in the 1800s earned their homeland the not-necessarily complimentary nickname of the Nutmeg State.



McCain holds a master's degree in history from Wesleyan University and is currently head of the Research Center at the Connecticut Historical Society in Hartford. She has been published regularly in *Connecticut* magazine, *Early American Life* magazine and the *Hartford Courant*. She is also a former member of the board of directors of the Middlesex County Historical Society.

At the conclusion of her remarks, McCain will have copies of the book to sell and autograph, as well as her two other books published in 2009: *Connecticut Coast: A Town-by-Town Illustrated History and Mysteries and Legends of New England*. This program is free and open to the public. The Hubbard Room is handicapped accessible. 🐾

### What's Inside:

Society News and Events

Calendar of Events

## SOCIETY NEWS



### *President's Message*

In April, I will complete my second two year term as president of the Society. During the past four years, we have experienced a number of changes and many happy moments. There have been two new directors and some fabulous exhibitions, including the Civil War display that had been in the planning stages for several years. By the time you read this, we will have a new HVAC system. We have had more programs than we'd had in many years, and the number of researchers and visitors at the Mansfield House is greater than ever before. We have been featured in an article in a Japanese newspaper. We've welcomed new members. We've honored four groups of Sheedy Contest winners.

Many of the goals I'd envisioned and enunciated for the Society have come to fruition. There is one major piece of unfinished business—perhaps the greatest challenge of all—putting the Society on a sound financial basis. We have sufficient funding for the foreseeable future, but in order to provide security, current income must be increased and the endowment must be bolstered. We plan to deal with the distant future by commencing

and promoting a legacy program. We are working to increase the membership base and current income. To boost the endowment, and pay for the HVAC project, we launched a capital campaign last summer. To date, we have raised about \$33,000, a good showing in a weak economy, but only a fraction of our goal of \$150,000. In nearly every message I've written over the past year, I have stressed the importance of the campaign, for without capital we are unable to produce exhibitions, run programs, assist researchers and promote the activities which the membership has come to enjoy. Asking for money is always a difficult task, and I am proud to say that the Board has stepped up to the plate with very generous donations and with meaningful efforts to solicit contributions from others. I ask you, the members and friends of the Society, to help in whatever way you can to provide a future for our past.

Bill Ryczek, President

### *From the Executive Director*

A year has passed since I became the Society's Executive Director. And what an eventful year it has been! We have hosted a number of civic groups who have toured our exhibits, and I have spread the word about our wonderful resources by speaking to community groups and appearing on community access TV with President Bill Ryczek.

I would like to thank our volunteer Juliane Silver, an archival specialist, for the hundreds of hours she has spent at the Mansfield House this last year. She has not only cataloged recent manuscript acquisitions, but has completed the cataloging of the Misenti collection of letters donated in 2007, and has nearly completed work on the Smith family collection of hundreds of sermons and letters acquired in 2005.

Having had to move parts of the collection to safeguard them during the HVAC construction has given me an increased appreciation and knowledge of the richness of objects and manuscripts that are in the Society's safekeeping. Every day brings a new object to peruse and a new story to tell.

Since starting as Director, there have been many "small world" moments for me—like the man who called from California just this past week asking about a tea set he had acquired which was stamped "Middletown Plate Company." When he called, it reminded me of the silver basket from the very same company that my great-grandmother purchased in Ohio when she first arrived in America in 1913. Sadly, she died soon thereafter, and this Middletown silver basket is the only memento she left behind. Who would have guessed that I, a girl from Ohio, would end up as the caretaker of Middletown's history, and in turn be able to share it with a man from California?

I would like to thank the Board of Directors and the Society's membership for their support and for allowing me to experience the joy that each new discovery brings.

Debby Shapiro, Executive Director

## Springfield rifled musket manufactured by Savage Fire Arms Co. Middletown .58 caliber

carried by Henry Hill,  
10<sup>th</sup> Connecticut Volunteers.

The Model 1861—a rifled musket nicknamed the “Springfield” after the U.S. Armory in Springfield, Massachusetts—was the most widely used U.S. Army weapon during the Civil War and was favored for its range, accuracy, and reliability. Indeed, the Springfield saw more action from 1862 through 1865 than any other Federal firearm. More than 700,000 of the .58 caliber Springfield’s were manufactured during the War. When demand exceeded supply, Springfield Armory’s production capacity of the Model 1861 fell short of the huge demand for the weapon and the government opened up production and contracted with private arms manufacturing companies. One of these was Savage Revolving Firearms, of Middletown, Connecticut.

Armaments production became a crucial factor in the Civil War even before the hostilities officially erupted. Soon after South Carolina seceded from the Union in December, 1860, local militia seized the Union weapons. Shortly thereafter, forces sympathetic to the Confederacy, seized arsenals across the South, including Apalachicola, Baton Rouge, San Antonio, and Little Rock. Despite these seizures, the Union still had 437,433 muskets and rifles; 4,076 carbines; and 27,192 pistols at the outbreak of hostilities. The War Department saw this as a comfortable number of weapons for what they thought would be a short war. Unfortunately, most of the weapons that they possessed were ageing or obsolete. Only around 40,000 of the infantry arms remaining in the U.S. arsenals were of modern design with rifled barrels.

Until the turn of the 19th century, long barrel weapons were muzzle loaded and not rifled. Small arms technology had improved steadily throughout the 1800’s, and in the 1850’s, it accelerated sharply. During this time, the United States had taken the lead in many aspects of arms innovation, including the techniques of mass production and the standardization of parts. By 1861, nearly all military arms were still loaded through the muzzle, but a few of the more advanced breech loading arms were available. The percussion ignition system had taken the place of the flintlock, but many of the vintage arms were still stored in the federal arsenals, waiting to be altered and modernized to the new percussion system.

The other technological advance, which made most of the existing weapons in the U.S. arsenal obsolete, was the minie ball. Before 1855, rifled shoulder arms were considered



impractical for infantry use because they were slow to load: thrusting a round solid lead ball down the lands and grooves of the rifling was more difficult than loading a smoothbore musket. However, smoothbore weapons were much less accurate because the barrel of the gun was not rifled, but smooth. The minie ball, invented by French army officer Claude-Etienne Minié, was cast slightly smaller than the diameter of the rifled bore so that it slid easily past the rifling. When the gun was fired, the exploding powder caused the soft lead of the hollow base to expand into the grooves of the rifling. This gave the bullet a spin that stabilized its flight and dramatically increased its range and accuracy, making the rifled arm a practical weapon for all infantrymen.

Before the Civil War, the two main armories of the United States were located in Springfield, Massachusetts and Harpers Ferry, Virginia. After Virginia seceded, all Union Army arms manufacturing shifted to Springfield, Massachusetts. Governors and senators from all states wanted the best firepower for regiments from their state. Political influence quickly siphoned off the Springfield muskets that were available and in direct competition with the Federal Ordnance Department. Massachusetts and New York had their own agents in England buying Enfield rifled muskets for their soldiers. The Enfield rifle was similar to the Springfield rifled musket in that it used a relatively similar projectile and firing mechanism. The Springfield Amory could not keep pace with the demand for the rifle, and the government authorized a number of private companies to manufacture the Springfield Model 1861 Rifled Musket, including Savage Revolving Firearms located in Middletown, Connecticut. This was the Middletown company that produced the weapon in the Middlesex County Historical Society’s collection and that was carried by Middletown soldier Henry Hill of the 10th Connecticut Volunteers.

The Savage Revolving Fire Arms Company was organized August 17th 1859, with a capital of \$30,000 for the manufacture of revolving pistols. This company did large business during the war and increased their capital to \$45,000. The company disbanded in 1866. The Model 1861 rifles that Savage manufactured were the exact same as the one’s manufactured at Springfield, with parts and ammunition being interchangeable between the two. The only difference between the two rifles was the inscription on the lock plate.

*(continued on next page)*

*Springfield rifle, continued*

Each rifle produced by an outside contractor, such as Savage, was examined by government ordnance inspectors. The inspector would fire a proof charge to test the barrel as well as remove the lock and fittings to check the various components with standard gauges. If the weapon passed inspection, the barrel was struck with "VP" for viewed and proved along with an eagle head's acceptance mark. All Springfield rifles were manufactured with a walnut stock where the inspector then imprinted his initials after approving the weapon. We do not know much about Henry Hill except that he was born in 1845 and died in 1924. He served in Company B of the 10th Connecticut Volunteers enlisting on March 21, 1864 and mustering out on August 25, 1865. He was a machinist and later, foreman, at the W. and B. Douglas Company and lived on Home Avenue in his later years. His final resting place is in Section 3 of the Indian Hill Cemetery, Middletown, CT. 🌿

—Stephen Bachelder, Wesleyan University, class of 2010

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*History of Middlesex County* (New York: J.B. Beers & Co, 1883)

(Editor's Note: This weapon and many others can be viewed in the Society's current exhibit "Hard & Stirring Times: Middletown and the Civil War.")

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\*In honor of Deborah Shapiro's  
Special Birthday

# Collection Acquisitions in 2009

Within the past year, the Society received a number of donated items and manuscripts, which greatly enhance our collection and help to tell the story of Middletown. From two silver spoons commemorating the dedication of the Middletown – Portland Bridge in 1938 to the large collection of objects and manuscripts concerning the Russell Manufacturing Company, our Wesleyan work-study students and volunteer extraordinaire, Juliane Silver, have spent hundreds of hours accessioning and cataloging these wonderful donations.

## Highlights of the new acquisitions include:

- The Helene Bliss Warner collection of papers, slides, and commemorative objects. Miss Warner, of Middletown and a Society member, was a noted landscape architect, and the collection gives insight into her many design projects, including the gardens of the Mansfield House. Donated by Norma Williams.
- The Russell Manufacturing Company Collection including blueprints, specifications, product samples, and machine parts used at this major Middletown employer. (If any of you know someone who worked at Russell Manufacturing, we would like to contact them to learn more about some of the donated items.) Donated by G John Pelchuck, III and Gregory Pelchuck.
- Joan Stone Clothing Collection containing clothing dating from as early as the mid-1800s, handed down in the Stone family.
- Arrowheads and other Native American stone implements found in the fields in the South Farms area of Middletown. Donated by Charles Harris
- Uniform of the H.G. Hubbard Drum Corps organized October 18, 1883 along with two drums of the corps and drumsticks. Donated by Charles Harris.
- Documents found at the Old Saybrook town dump including the original boundary line agreement signed by the selectmen of Middletown and Haddam in May, 1877, Justice of the Peace documents from 1781, and a picture of Middletown city officials on an outing at Laurel Brook Reservoir on June 30, 1930, with every person identified.
- Letters written by local Civil War soldier, Robert Franklin, to his sweetheart, Fannie Miller. Donated by Diantha Morse.



- Memorial record of the Civil War service of Heman Crowell. Donated by Carolyn Bauer.
- Richard Dickerson plane collection consisting of over 50 wooden planes made in Middletown. Donated by Richard Dickerson
- Seven Middletown customs documents from 1775-1800. Arrived via the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Massachusetts.
- An account book of the Miller family with entries as early as the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and which documented among many other things, lumber purchases by Simeon North, small arms manufacturer, and Benjamin Douglas, owner of the W. & B. Douglas Pump Company and Mayor of Middletown. Donated by Susan Miller Coffman
- Coffee set purchased by Henry Livingston Mansfield in Boston and given to Herman Bielefeld by Miss Louisa Mansfield. Donated by Barbara Smallshaw.

The Society is most grateful to the many generous people who have donated their precious artifacts to our collection. We promise to treasure them and preserve them for the enrichment of future generations. 🌱

## Web Site Updated and Expanded

*B*oot your computer and launch the internet... the newly revamped web site of the Middlesex County Historical Society is now live! Thanks to grants from the Middlesex County Community Foundation and the Connecticut Humanities Council, the Society was able to hire the services of a professional web designer, Payson, LLC.

The web site now has virtual tours of two of our exhibits, "Hard & Stirring Times: Middletown and the Civil War" and "Their Own Stories: Voices from Middletown's Melting Pot." People can travel the Middletown Heritage Trail (the Society's gift to the City

in honor of its 350th Anniversary) through a series of pop-ups and they can join the Society or buy items from our gift shop by a click of a button. The site contains sections about the history and activities of the Society, the early history of Middletown, the gardens maintained by the Middletown Garden Club, and an overview of our archives and artifact collections.

Portions of the site were written by committee members, Dave Wolfram, Bill Ryczek, Nancy Bauer, and Debby Shapiro. The Civil War portion was written by exhibit curator, Deborah Rossi, with the excellent proofreading assistance of member, Janice Albert. You can visit the web site at [www.middlesexhistory.org](http://www.middlesexhistory.org).

### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

The Museum at the Mansfield House	OPEN	Tuesdays – Thursdays Fridays	10:00 to 3:00 10:00 to 12:00
"It Happened In Connecticut" Hubbard Room, Russell Library, 123 Broad Street, Middletown		Wednesday, February 10	7:00 pm

visit us on the web at [www.middlesexhistory.org](http://www.middlesexhistory.org)