

~ Introduction ~

Rationale ~ Conception ~ Background ~ Curiosities & Caveats

Middletown, Connecticut – so named because it is located half-way between Saybrook and Windsor, Conn. – was first settled in 1650 by 23 families. Those who first carved out a presence in what was known as “Mattabesset” had previously been among the early settlers of Hartford and Wethersfield, Conn., and Rowley, Mass. Some 350-plus years later, descendants of the most prolific early families are spread across the continent and beyond. In recent years, with the Internet facilitating easier genealogical research and networking for the layman, there has been a growing interest in Middletown from those who regard it as their ancestral hometown.

Early Families of Middletown, Connecticut - Vol. I: 1650-1654 is a project that grew from (1) the specific research for “in-depth profiles” of early Middletown settlers prepared for the web site of the Society of Middletown First Settlers Descendants, (2) the research for local history context articles developed for the organization’s publication, *The Middler*, and (3) my “in the trenches” experience interpreting 17th-century architecture and domestic life for the contemporary public in the museum setting.

The aim of the profiles, first compiled in 2006-2007, was to bring together in a standard, repeatable format the known facts about each individual, including relevant snippets from the standard genealogical sources now in the public domain. The aim of the SMFSD *Middler* articles always has been to enhance understanding through context. (The descendant organization, SMFSD, was formed in 2000, in time for participation in Middletown’s 350th anniversary celebration.)

While much of the genealogical material is available at the SMFSD web site, and many of the local history topics have been covered to some degree within the pages of *The Middler*, until now there has never been a compilation or integration of such material between the covers of a book. The motivation to do so was the approach of SMFSD’s 2012 Triennial Meeting, when a nationwide “community of cousins” gathers in Middletown. With meetings only every three years, this was the time to bring together the years of research into book form as a service to those new to their Middletown family history, and to those who would appreciate the material gathered in a bound volume.

FIRST SETTLERS - 1660-1654	
THOMAS ALLEN	GEORGE HUBBARD
NATHANIEL BACON	JOHN KIRBY
WILLIAM BLOMFIELD	JOHN MARTIN
WILLIAM CORNWELL	THOMAS MILLER
JOHN HALL	JOHN SAVAGE
JOHN HALL, JR.	WILLIAM SMITH
RICHARD HALL	SAMUEL STOCKING
SAMUEL HALL	SAMUEL STOW
GILES HAMLIN	MATTHIAS TREAT
DANIEL HARRIS	ROBERT WEBSTER
WILLIAM HARRIS	THOMAS WHETMORE
NATHANIEL WHITE	
INDIAN GRANTORS - 1672-1673	
SEPUNNA-MOE	JOAN,
WEEKPESICK	ALIAS MAMECHIZE
WESTUMPSTIA	WAMPHANCH
SPUNNOE	SACHAMAS
TACCUMHAIT	PASKUNNAS
MASSEKUMP	ROBINS
PEWAMPSSKIN	RACHIASK



Above is Founders Rock at the entrance to Riverside Cemetery. The 60-ton boulder, with plaques naming the 23 first male settlers (1650-1654) and the 13 Indian grantors (1672-1673), was dedicated at the 250th anniversary of Middletown in 1900. At the 350th anniversary in 2001, a plaque was dedicated that included the first 22 women settlers. At left is a facsimile of the names as they appear on the plaque.

When deciding on a premise and format for the book, I knew that a simple anthology of previously written articles bundled together with the in-depth first settler profiles would be perfectly ... *adequate*. But the prospect of executing a merely adequate project is not much of a motivator. The challenge was to take the materials and do something at least a tiny bit more ambitious. Even though there have been hundreds of town-based genealogy compilations, especially for early New England towns, this present book became an opportunity to establish for the genre a new kind of template, complementing the dry collection of names and dates with illuminating historical and cultural context.

From my vantage point, as one who engages the public in the history and museum field, my observation is that many ardent genealogists, in a voracious quest to gobble up more names and dates for their database, often miss out on the historical, social, and cultural context that can lead to a better understanding of our world, past *and* present. Therefore, in addition to the early settler profiles in this volume, also included are maps, timelines, and chapters on topics relevant to 17th-century life, such as Puritanism, public services, domestic architecture, and Native Americans & African-Americans in Middletown, among other topics. Whether this historical/cultural approach and template for 17th-century town-wide genealogy studies generates a perceptible blip in the local history and genealogy world remains to be seen. But my view is that history and genealogy complement each other: For the historian, genealogical study helps draw human portraits of the *individuals* who made the history. For the genealogist, the study of historical and cultural context facilitates understanding of the mind, motives, and machinations of the research subjects – who may have led, followed, responded, or ignored the forces of change in their lives.

The selection of 23 family profiles included in *Early Families of Middletown, Connecticut - Vol. I: 1650-1654* is based on the names on the plaque at Founder's Rock, located at the entrance to Riverside Cemetery, the settlement's first burying ground. The giant 60-ton boulder and plaque were placed there in October 1900 during Middletown's 250th anniversary celebration. It is not possible to say with certainty that this list includes all of the earliest arrivals, since town records before Febru-

ary 1652 are lost. Volume II of *Early Families of Middletown, Connecticut*, which will also feature profiles compiled by colleague Paula K. Higgins, and still in progress at this writing, will include profiles of the remaining pre-1700 early Middletown families. Those families are identified in large part from the Proprietor's List of 1670. That list of pre-1700 Middletown residents is most certainly not comprehensive, and will continue to grow as more "under the radar" early Middletown settlers are discovered. In fact, in 2009 the Society of Middletown First Settlers Descendants changed its bylaws to include any documented pre-1700 Native Americans and African-Americans as "qualifying ancestors" for membership, an inclusive step forward that is rare, if not unprecedented, for such descendant organizations.

Note that the profiles of the early families do not constitute the "final word" on the family history – they break no new ground – but instead aim to provide an informed starting point, a foundation for more focused research. For more information about the format and sources of the profiles, see the comprehensive introduction to the early settler profiles on page 21.

A few words about my introduction to Middletown: I was first directed to Godfrey Library for family research in the mid-1970s. (A far more experienced genealogist heard me utter the word "Middletown," and she sent me packing off to Godfrey with no further discussion needed.) It was worth the trip from my home in Massachusetts, as within a few hours, with the help of a librarian who was playing the stacks like a virtuoso plays the harp, I identified generations of Bacon family ancestors. This was all too easy – my ancestors were lined up for discovery as neatly as a row of dominoes waiting to fall in sequence. (Of course I "paid my dues" in later years wrestling with other more difficult family lines ...) By the end of the afternoon, one of the librarians at Godfrey pointed out that some Bacon families lived diagonally across the road from the library. A few years later I learned that the land across from Godfrey Library and to the north (297 acres) was received by Nathaniel Bacon (1630-1705) as part of the 1670 land grants. (Nathaniel retained his original home and acreage at the north end of Main Street, where my Bacon line of mariners and craftsmen lived until the late 19th century.) A few years later in the 1970s, in the middle of a long career in showbusiness, I was

driving down Main Street in Middletown to an engagement elsewhere in central Connecticut when I saw a sign that said “Bacon Bros. Hardware.” I parked on the wide downtown street, walked into the store, and had the good fortune to meet the proprietor, a 7th cousin, Charles Bacon (1906-1985). We chatted about family history – he and his family lived on part of the original Newfield land grant, in a house built by Nathaniel Bacon, Jr. (1675-1759), parts of which date to about 1700. Charles Bacon kindly invited me to take photos of the house and barns before I left town – but I was surprised the next afternoon when he and his wife attended a performance, then

hung out backstage picking my brain about the finer points of precision juggling, combination stunts on the unicycle, and stagecraft.

Since then, my experiences in Middletown – research, exploration, SMFSD meetings – have been filled with further discovery, coincidence, and friendships. In a way this project gathers together all the diverse nose-in-a-book research and all the curious poking about town. In recent years the process of the Middletown-related research, analysis, and writing has been its own reward. My wish for readers – and my further reward – is that you find *Early Families of Middletown, Connecticut, Vol. I: 1650-1654* both informative *and* illuminating. ■

– **Reginald W. Bacon**
Newburyport, Mass.
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~ Acknowledgements ~

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An extra-special thanks goes to the following individuals who have always pointed me in the right direction when faced with a research inquiry: Denise Mackey-Russo at Russell Library in Middletown; Donna Baron and Debbie Shapiro at the Middlesex County Historical Society; Sharon Dahlmeyer-Giovannitti at Godfrey Memorial Library; Jeannie Sherman at the Connecticut State Library; and Judith Johnson at the Connecticut Historical Society.

Appreciation is also extended to Middletown historians Elizabeth Warner, Diana Ross McCain, Dione

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Certain chapters in the book, as well as the early settler profiles, draw generously from the work of 19th-century historians, genealogists, and illustrators whose work is now in the public domain. I am grateful to be able to bring this first-class work to the fore once again. The pre-1923 illustrations, such as those in the chapter on 17th-century domestic architecture, especially enhance this volume.

For encouragement and exhortations, thanks go to colleagues in the Society of Middletown First Settlers Descendants – from the very beginning they have been inclusive, friendly, and supportive folks that I am glad to call my cousins. ■