



Town of Middlefield Historical Commission Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, November 22, 2022

The meeting opened at 10:00 A.M. at the Town Hall Gym.

Present were members Jane Craker, John Savery, Doreen Black and Howard Knickerbocker

Doreen Black volunteered to be Chairwomen. Nomination (Knickerbocker), second (Craker) and unanimous positive vote.

Howard Knickerbocker volunteered to be Secretary. Nomination (Black), second (Savery) and unanimous positive vote.

These votes were followed by a discussion of the outline prepared by Secretary Knickerbocker (attached) to bring the Commission to speed and present topics of potential interest. The Commission will try and find the document hoard that was possibly placed in the Clerk's closet. This is our immediate priority.

The Commission discussed the possibility of moving the museum to the now partially abandoned church. This move would solve the handicapped accessibility quandary of the second-floor museum and negate the possible need for an elevator installation. There would be no need to heat the church in the winter time if the museum occupied the building. Chairwomen Black will inform the Selectmen of our potential interest under the town bylaws. Please see Appendix B.

The early church records might be in the church safe whose combination was lost. These earliest original town records are extremely important and the hiring of a lock smith to open the safe should be considered - with the Church's permission. State law requires that these records be held by the Town Clerk after dissolution of the church.

The Commission will investigate the procurement of a modern computer for the museum now that high speed networks are available. A high-resolution flatbed scanner is needed for digitizing high value museum documents and photos.

Howard digitized a large collection of photographs and a diary belonging to Lillian Savery. These were provided by Rod Savery. John Savery will try to access the many more diaries that give great detail to early 20th century Middlefield farm life.

The Commission will meet after the holidays to review the present museum operations and evaluate instigating new displays and historical arrangements.

This meeting adjourned at 11:10 A.M.

Respectfully,
Howard Knickerbocker, Secretary

Appendix A: Outline prepared by Secretary Knickerbocker

November 2022

To: The Middlefield Historical Commission

Subject: A partial outline of the present status of the Commission

Completed:

- The microfilm of the Town Records has been digitized. There are over 3000 images.
- The Historical Commission Museum inventory has been digitized. (EXCEL)
- The paper cemetery records have been digitized and presented to the Cemetery Commission. I have been adding Pine Grove photos and information to the "Find a Grave" on-line cemetery database.
- The Lillian Savery collection of photographs and written memories has been digitized.
- The 1924 Smith History has been digitized and available at www.middlefieldma.org. I use this web site to display random Middlefield history. I am finishing extensive reports of the Bancroft paper mills and stores.
- A 1900 era Mack general store ledger has been digitized. It includes an inventory of every item.

In Process:

- The original Congregational Church Records might be located in an old safe at the church. The combination is lost. These contain the earliest town records and deserve modern digitization. A transcribed copy is at the Pittsfield Atheneum.
- Several thousand early secondary town records were found. They sit and deteriorate in the Clerk's closet. An inventory of the other historical material stored in the Clerk's closet at the town hall has not been undertaken nor has a conservation plan been put in place. I believe early tax records might also be stored here.
- I have digitized about 60 Annual Town Reports. There are many more needed to complete the collection.

Observations:

- We continue to receive queries from all over the country from folks researching their families' Middlefield roots. This trend adds emphasis to digitizing records and photos to support these distant investigations.
- The Museum is a static display and hasn't changed in many years. Some items are not related to Middlefield. Covid has stopped most visits. I would suggest focusing on one topic and developing a display to support that focus. The display can change over time which will add interest.
- I suspect the church will eventually be abandoned. There are not enough members to support its upkeep. It would make a relevant ground floor museum location. Otherwise, it will go like the store.

Governance:

- The Commission should meet at least once a year and elect officers.
- A meeting should be called to authorize any substantial disbursement of funds.
- Members must complete the on-line ethics test within a month of appointment and retake the test every two years.

Respectfully, Howard Knickerbocker

Appendix B: Historical Commission Enabling Town Bylaw – published in 1987.**XVII. Historical Commission**

SECTION 1. There shall be a Historical Commission consisting of five members, each appointed by the Selectmen for a term of three years on a rotating basis. The Commission is responsible for special projects determined by the Commission and/or the Selectmen such as the **restoration of Town property** and special town events.