



Notes from the Academy

SEPTEMBER 2019 | VOL. 1 NO. 3

Up Coming Events and Programs!

September 17th: Monthly Public Program

Did you know that you can trace your family's history through local organizations like MHS? Listen to Mary Alice Aguilar recount what she has discovered of her family through her research at the historical society and other organizations!

October 15th: Monthly Public Program

Jim Ethridge, who has a PhD in botany, will uncover the historic landscape to us, and we'll learn about the changes in that landscape through native and non-native plants

November 19th: Monthly Public Program

Celebrate the winners of our Annual Research Paper Contest! Hear excerpts from the work of budding Middletown historians!



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From the Desk of the President



Research Paper Contest

Don't forget about our annual Research Paper Contest!

The Middletown Historical Society is conducting its third annual historical research paper competition for Middle and High School Students.

Papers must be submitted on or before November 9th, 2019. This year's topic will be based on Middletown street names.

See rules and information on our website. Questions may be directed to David Matsen, dmatsen@verizon.net, or 302-378-8265.



Stories from Living History

Stephen England is a living history interpreter who engages our guests at the Peach Festival as a composite character named Thaddeus Ward. In his own words:

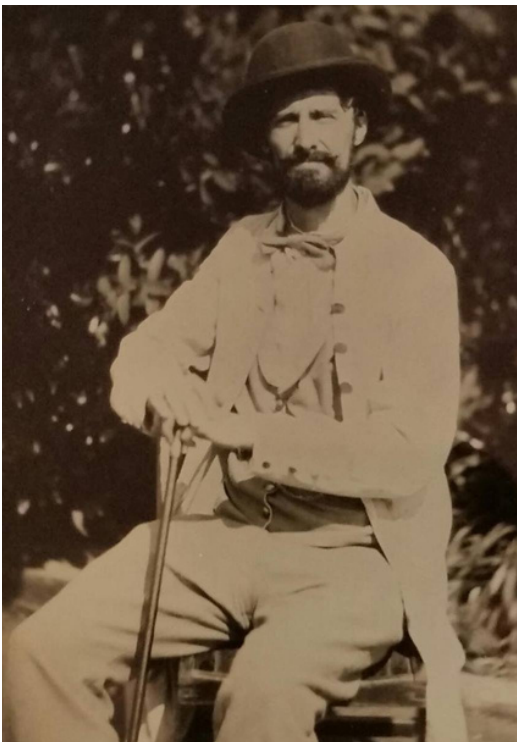
Every year, I try to do some fresh research for Thaddeus Ward's appearance at Peach Fest, to find something new I can draw out, some aspect of history to bring to light through his character.

This year, part of that renewed focus was the Battle of Wilson's Creek, which took place in Missouri on August 10th, 1861--just seven days before Thaddeus Ward's appearance at Peach Fest--a Union defeat the news of which would, like as not, have made its way East in the intervening days. And that led me to a very interesting place where, once again, my research and other interests collided in a way I could never have anticipated. Because as I was reading about the death of Union general Nathaniel Lyon at Wilson's Creek, I came across an eyewitness account who said, in his dying moments, Lyon "picked up rocks and fought with thousands of men around him."

True? I have no idea. Certainly possible. But, as I know from my reading the western ancients. . .that image of heroes picking up rocks from the battlefield is a very common literary motif from the epic poetry of ancient times. You encounter it in Homer, again, if memory serves, in Virgil--and most recently, I've come across it in the "Punica" of Silius Italicus. It's one of those things that you end up asking yourself, "did this happen, or is this just how we describe heroes in this tradition?" And that's the question I asked myself of Lyon's death. I don't know the answer,

but that's how Thaddeus Ward chose to describe it in retelling the story of Wilson's Creek Saturday, particularly recounting how: "our gallant General Lyon died fighting, surrounded by the Confederates, hurling rocks upon his enemies like one of the heroes of Homer's Iliad." The fun of living history is in those moments when you find a unique, but accurate to the period, way to communicate history. Thaddeus Ward, I have no doubt, would have read Homer--as many other Americans of his time--so the idea of him summoning up such a cultural touchstone in service of his own cause's noble fallen is perfectly in step with the history and his character.

I didn't set out reading the classics to more thoroughly inform the character of Thaddeus Ward. I did it for myself, and this was the result.



Visiting with our Visitors!

Did you know that on the day of the Olde Tyme Peach Festival the Historical Society sees hundreds of guests? It's our busiest day of the year! At the museum we have a number of volunteers who help tell Middletown's history! The following are some of the wonderful interactions they had over the day!

Linda Lally had the pleasure of speaking with a young couple with a baby. It was their first visit to the museum. They have recently moved to the Middletown area from Bulgaria. As part of learning about their new home they visited the Historical Society to learn about the history of Middletown. They very much appreciated the friendliness of everyone at the Historical Society.

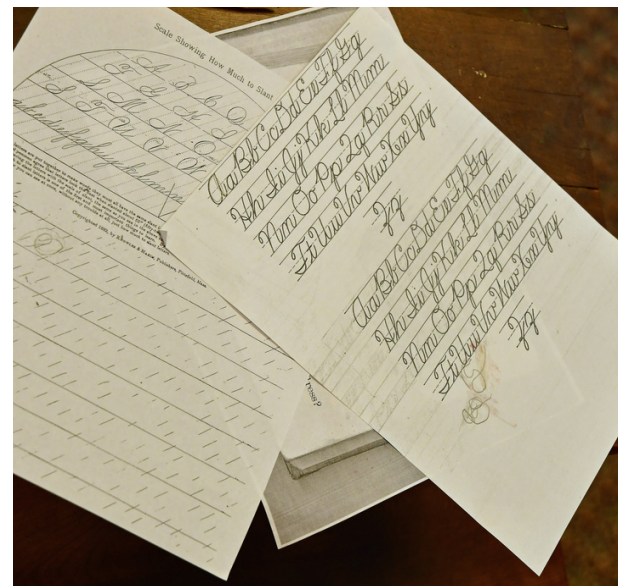
Being a local, community organization all the stories we tell are the history of our local families. Jay Plischke helped in the World War I exhibition on the day of the Peach Festival. While many guests meandered through the exhibits one woman entered the space on a mission. She walked directly to the portrait of John P. Cochran, governor of Delaware from 1875-1879, and took several photos of the portrait. Jay asked her what her interest was with this particular painting. It turned out that the visitor was a descendent of Governor Cochran!



What's New at the Museum!

When the Middletown Academy (now Historical Society) was closed as a school in 1929 after a 100-year tenure of the building, and the "Middletown School" opened on South Broad Street, the old school flag was left at the Academy. It was discovered in the attic decades later when the Middletown Historical Society took over the old building as the Town Hall moved into its present quarters. The flag had been rolled up and left on the floor of the attic. It was fragile, and damaged by dirt, age, insects, etc. This summer, as

volunteers Alison Matsen, Linda Biggs, and Nabila Sabir were renovating the "schoolroom" display upstairs, Alison decided to stabilize the damaged old flag. She carefully darned the areas of fabric loss and then sewed by hand a thin netting to one side of the flag so that the flag would be supported. It now hangs proudly once again in the Academy building upstairs. Another addition to the "schoolroom" area is an old kerosene heater, donated by Roseann Harkins, and repainted by Jacob Moyer.



From the Desk of the President

Peach Festival 2019 is behind us and a new season has fallen upon us. I hope you got to come by and see all the happenings during the Olde Tyme Peach Festival. There were many wonderful articles and photos in the booklet as well as delightful photos from the day on our Facebook page. We are very grateful for all the volunteers who helped make it another successful day for the Middletown Historical Society!

As we dig into the strategic plan, we continue working with our contractor, Abby, to get a volunteer manual in place as well as update the website. Those involved with exhibitions look forward to developing a plan with goals for the next few years. As we plan for the future, give us your opinion on upcoming exhibitions and programs at

<https://forms.gle/4gufkjW8spq5Z1KEA>

Our September 17th public meeting will be the membership's opportunity to elect new directors to our board.

Please come and show your support for Mary Alice Aguilar, Phyllis Waecker, and Patsy Warner as we grow the Society.

Contact Us!

(302) 378-7466

mhistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Physical Address:

216 N. Broad St.

Middletown, DE 19709

Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 567

Middletown, DE 19709

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The Middletown Historical Society collects, preserves, educates, and encourages the development of Middletown's history in order to foster historic awareness and pride in our community.