



Notes from the Academy

FALL 2023 | VOL. 5 NO. 3

From the Desk of the President

It has been a full summer! From welcoming new volunteers and members, to opening three new exhibitions and an online exhibition, the staff and volunteers at the Society have been busy bees. On July 22nd we opened not one but TWO new exhibitions featuring the Underground Railroad. At the opening, the Society hosted more than forty guests! *Courage and Compassion* features the stories of local abolitionists in their fight to assist freedom seekers. *Fear To Freedom*, our second collaborative art show with the students of Appoquinimink High School, explores the story of the Hawkins family as they sought their freedom with the help of local farmer John Hunn. The art show will be up through the spring of 2024, so be sure to come visit the Society on one of our open days (the first Friday and the third Saturday from 1-4 pm).

We were also excited to be able to host a summer intern from the University of Delaware. Pamela Ahern's work has focused on creating a new exhibition focused on the contributions of Middletown's Jewish Population. *L'Chaim, Jewish Life in Middletown* explores the roles that the Levensons, Burstans, Fogels, Schagrins, and Berkman had on Middletown over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. Many thanks for her hard work!

The end of September is the board of directors' elections for the Society. We want to welcome our newest board member, Alison Matsen. Alison has served the Society in a number of roles, from creating exhibitions to knowing our collections intimately and being museum coordinator and we look forward to working with her. We want to thank outgoing board member, David Matsen for all his work over the years. David has served as Society President, Board Chair, Treasurer, Chair of the Olde Tyme Peach Festival, and in innumerable other ways and the Society would not be what it is without his service. Thank you, David!

As always, we look forward to seeing you on-site for one of our open houses this fall, either Trick or Treat on Main on Thursday, October 26th, or our Christmas open house on Saturday, December 2nd, which will coincide with Middletown's Christmas Parade!

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Membership!

A reminder that membership renewals are due by the end of the year. It's \$10 per person or \$20 for a family. Checks should be made out to the Middletown Historical Society and sent to the attention of Mary Alice Aguilar, P.O. Box 567, Middletown, DE 19709



Phyllis Waecker shows guests around during Peach Festival

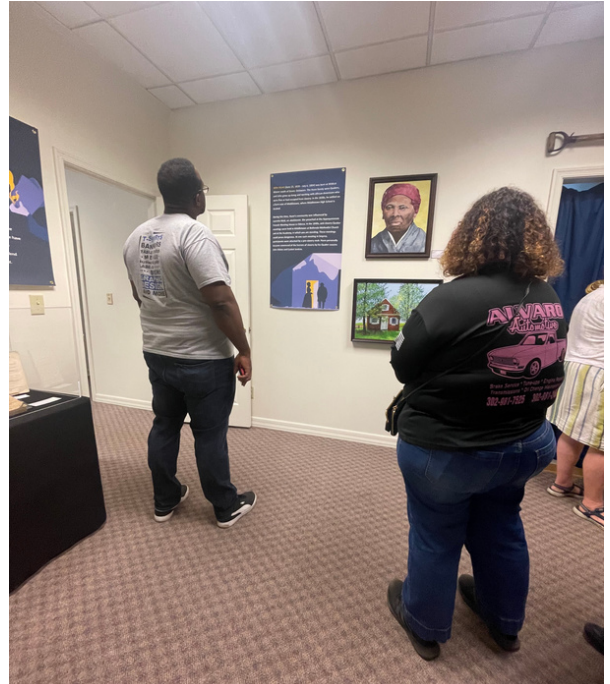
Exhibition Opening Pictures

July 22nd, 2023

As part of our mission to foster historic awareness and pride in our community, the Society has a robust schedule of new exhibitions. Two new exhibitions related to the Underground Railroad were opened and more than 40 guests were welcomed at this event!



Guests speak with one of our student artists, Christine Castillo



Halloween in *The Middletown Transcript*

Make your own Halloween decoration from October 23rd, 1915

HALLOWE'EN FUN.

Possibly you have already made your plans for a Hallowe'en party, but ideas for fun are always in great demand, so I shall give you a number.

Figs. 1 and 2 show two forms of pumpkin lanterns. No two of your lanterns should be alike. Fig. 1 shows the ordinary type of jack-o'-lantern. The large teeth are an important feature to make a fearsome appearing face. The old pirate jack-o'-lantern in Fig. 2 has his eyes, nose and mouth backed with colored tissue paper. Use white tissue paper for the eye openings, pasting a round cen-



ter of black to one and a center of red to the other, for pupils; then back the nose opening with green tissue paper and the mouth with red tissue paper. A turban of red cloth supplies the finishing detail.

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From Our Collections

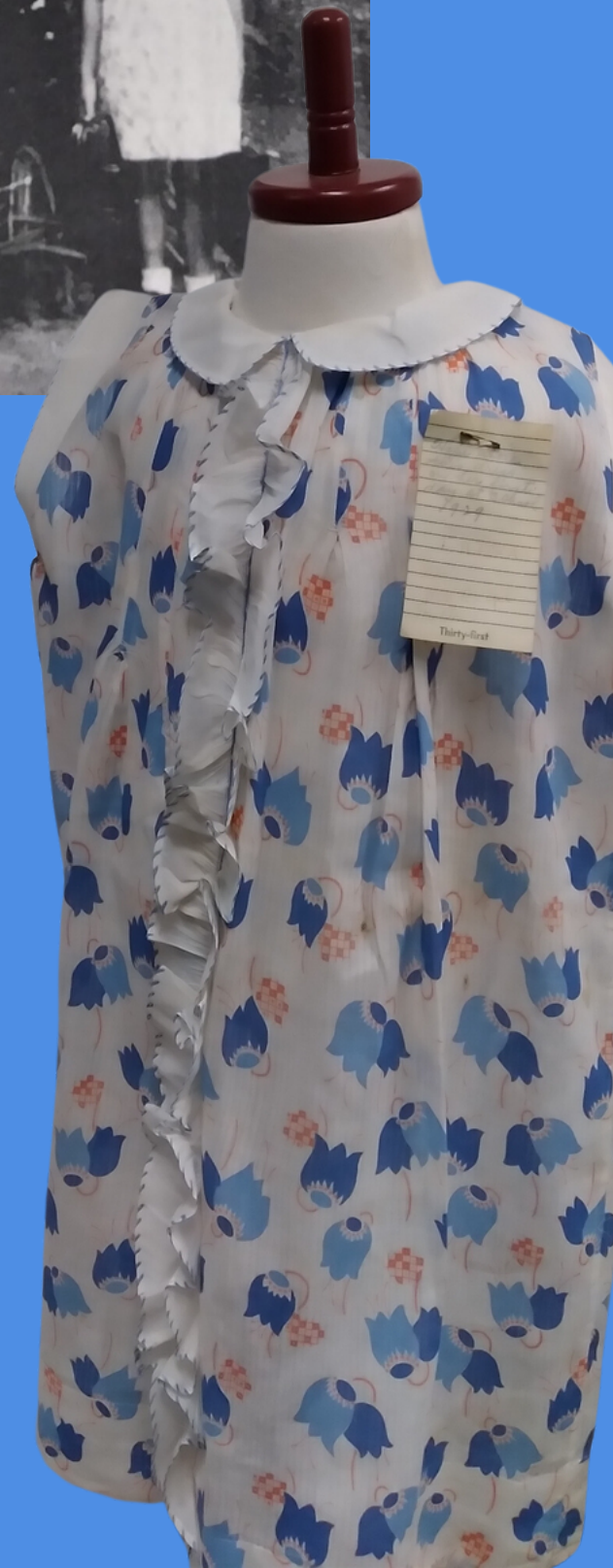
A QUESTION OF PROVENANCE

Alison K. Matsen, museum coordinator

Many who watch "Antiques Roadshow" on PBS know that the provenance of an object is important. Provenance refers to the history of an object, like who made it and when, where it was created and used, and who has owned it through the years.

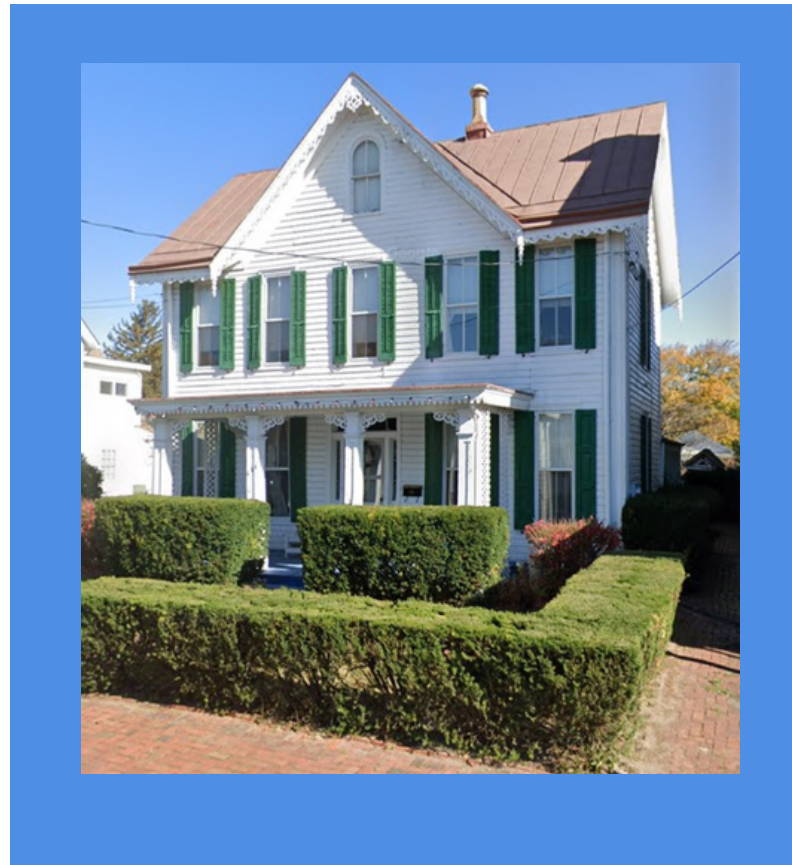
Some of the objects in the Middletown Historical Society's collections have full provenance, such as the cute blue and white sleeveless dress on display in the schoolroom area of the museum. Hope Ellison Motter, remembered being fitted for it in 1929 in a dressmaker's room deep in the building at the northeast corner of Main and Broad (now the bridal shop). A note, donated with the dress, handwritten by her mother, Rose Evans Ellison says "Dress worn by Hope on the first day of school." We even have a photo of Hope on that day, wearing the dress! That was in September of 1929, when Hope entered first grade at the school on South Broad Street. (It was also the grand opening day of that new school, known simply as Middletown School. It later became Middletown High School, until 1997, and then was later the Everett Meredith Middle School, replaced last year by a new building.) Other objects taken into the collection have much less provenance, but they are nonetheless interesting and we can deduce information about them.

Continued below



From Our Collections, continued

This part of a gravestone, seen on the next page, was donated by Bob McDowell, who lived at 111 N. Broad Street, at right, for decades. He said he found it in the garden behind his house, along with a more modern small stone with the notation "M.A. R.", but there were no other pieces of it anyplace that he could see. It may well have been taken years ago as salvage from a defunct graveyard, as we have no record of a graveyard ever having been at that location. The McDowells were long-time members of the old Forest Presbyterian Church, across from the Everett Theater, and that land in the 18th and early 19th century was the Peterson family cemetery, so it's possible there



could be a link. Or perhaps from the old Forest cemetery north of town. A watchmaker named Bourquin lived in the house on North Broad Street as of 1868, but little is known about him.

But if we look at the object itself, much can be discovered. The stone is limestone, and the piece must be from the left side of the stone. The thickness and style of the stone itself, and the style of writing, as compared to other known gravestones in local old cemeteries such as St. Anne's and Old Drawyers, shows it's from the late 18th or early 19th century. It was typical back then to put not only the name and age of the deceased on the stone, but sometimes, at the bottom, a quote from a famous book or writer, reflecting the character of the deceased. In Old Drawyers cemetery, for instance, the gravestone for Agnes Bryan Crawford has a quote from Shakespeare, and her husband John's has an epitaph written by the minister. They both died in 1790.

So our best guess at this point is that the stone used to read
H(ere lies)

THO. (often short for Thomas in those days)

Died A(ugust? April.....?)

A(ged.....)

"The just are...." could well be from Proverbs 11:9, but the jury is still out.

From Our Collections, continued



Olde Tyme Peach Festival

August 18th, 2023

The Society was delighted to host its flagship event, The Olde Tyme Peach Festival! The weather was perfect and we welcomed many visitors to Middletown. The Society welcomed many guests over the course of the day. Our living history group recreated the 1925/1926 Peach Festival that was held by Bethesda Methodist's Epworth League. Please enjoy these photos from the day!



Olde Tyme Peach Festival Photos



Olde Tyme Peach Festival Photos



Olde Tyme Peach Festival Photos



Upcoming Programs

Oct. 17, 7:30 pm, at the Historical Society:

We Have Not Forgotten You: Lulu Calbazana, leader of Girl Scout Troop 873, will speak about the work to clean and restore part of the long-neglected Asbury Cemetery. Located just north of Odessa. Come and hear its story.

Oct. 26th, 5:30 pm, at the Historical Society

Join us for an open house during Trick or Treat on Main! Get a treat and visit us!

Nov. 21, 7:30 pm, at the Historical Society:

Monthly Public Program: Listen to Maj. Gen. Terry Wiley reminisces about his experiences in Middletown

Dec. 2, 10 am-1 pm, at the Historical Society

Join us for a Christmas open house with hot chocolate during and after the Middletown Christmas Parade! xmas in odessa

Dec. 19: Tours at 3pm & 7:30pm, at Historic Odessa

Tour of Historic Odessa Foundation's Special Literature Exhibition based on "Twas the night before Christmas. \$5 per person. RSVP to Alison Matsen at 302-740-5544

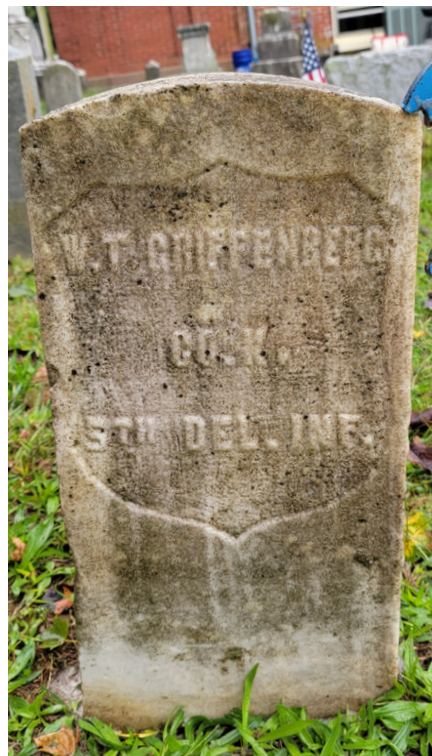


Learning how to clean a gravestone, Sept. 19th, 2023

Gravestone Cleaning Day

September 30th

Society members went to St. Paul's in Odessa to clean Gravestones! A big thank you to Sarah O'Donnell and Mary Alice Aguilar for organizing!



Contact Us

(302) 378-7466

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Open first Friday and third

Saturday from 1-4 pm

Or by appointment call

Alison Matsen at 302-740-5544

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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.