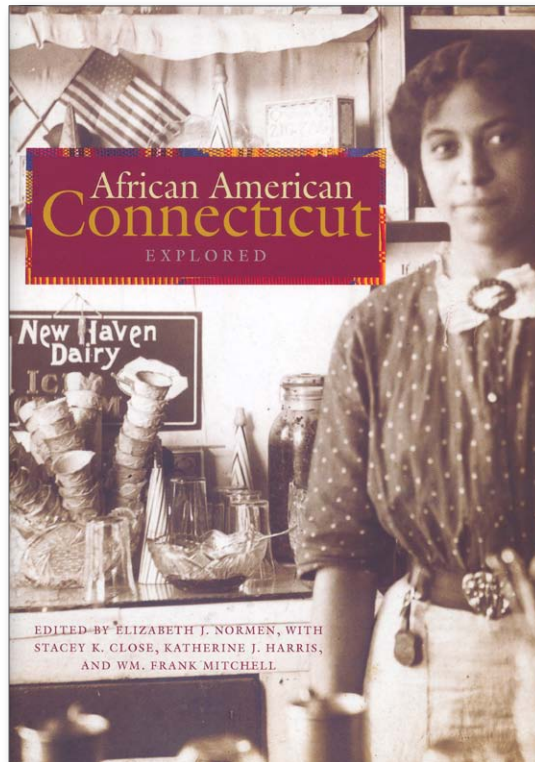


Society to Host Local Author Elisabeth Petry at February Lecture

“Overcoming the Odds: Anna Louise James and Ann Petry Gamble and Win” will be the subject of a presentation by local author Elisabeth Petry on Tuesday, February 24 at 7:00 pm. The program, co-sponsored by Russell Library, will be held in the Hubbard Room of the library located at 123 Broad Street, Middletown. The illustrated talk will expand on essays included in the recently published book, *African American Connecticut Explored*, and will illuminate the lives and work of these two remarkable women.

Petry, the great-niece of Anna Louise James and daughter of Ann Petry, will reveal the reasons Miss James became the first African American woman to obtain a pharmacy license and operate a pharmacy for more than forty years in Old Saybrook. She will also discuss the writings of her mother, a best selling novelist, and will include readings from her essay, “Just Like Georgia, Except for the Climate: Black Life at Mid-Century in Ann Petry’s *The Narrows*,” which appeared in *African American Connecticut Explored* published by Wesleyan University Press in 2014.



A native of Old Saybrook, Elisabeth Petry is a writer and former journalist and lawyer. Her first book, a collection of letters that she edited, is titled *Can Anything Beat White?: A Black Family’s Letters*. Her second is *At Home Inside: A Daughter’s Tribute to Ann Petry*, published

in 2008. Liz has also taught English and is conducting a weekly writer’s workshop for military veterans. She lives with her husband, Lawrence Riley, in Middletown.

Copies of *African American Connecticut Explored* as well as copies of Petry’s books will be available for purchase and inscription. Russell Library is handicap accessible. 🌱

SAVE THE DATE! Mayor’s Ball, Saturday, April 18

At a press conference held on December 11, Mayor Daniel Drew announced that the theme of the 10th Annual Mayor’s Ball to be held on Saturday, April 18 at the Wadsworth Mansion is “Middletown: Past, Present, and Future.” Each year the ball committee chooses local organizations to be the beneficiaries of the funds raised by the ball, and the Society was most fortunate to be named a recipient this year in honor of our dedication to preserving Middletown’s history as a commitment to our past. The present is represented by St. Luke’s Elder Care Services,

and the future, by the Rockfall Foundation, which preserves our natural environment for future generations. In addition, Amazing Grace Food Pantry continues as an annual recipient.

Our local members will receive invitations in the mail and we do hope that many of you will attend to show your support for all of the worthy organizations. The event will be catered by the Aqua Turf Club and music will be performed by Prelude Band. As the social event of the year, it’s a festive evening not to miss! 🌱

President's Message

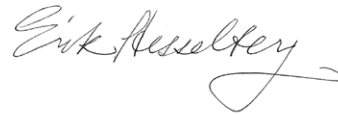
Dear Friends,

Good news has come through the snow! We were thrilled to learn recently that the Society has been awarded a substantial planning grant from Connecticut Humanities towards our next exhibit: "A Vanished Port: Middletown and the Caribbean, 1650-1824," scheduled to open in the spring of 2017.

You have heard we are working on an exhibit, but now you need to know what it's about. "A Vanished Port" is a picture of a major New England port during the great days of the West Indies trade and the luxurious life of merchants as seen in the Historical Society's collections. We are fortunate to possess a collection of furniture and accessories which evidence the rich material culture of 18th century Middletown, when it was a major eastern seaport. The city's prosperity at that time was based largely on provisioning agricultural products to the slave-worked sugar islands of the Caribbean. This highly lucrative commerce is also documented in the Society's remarkable collection of shipping records.

Our first task is to inventory the collection, and select pieces which illustrate our theme. It will be a treasure hunt! We should thank our Executive Director Debby Shapiro and our friend Anne Farrow, published history writer and former Hartford Courant editor, for their diligent work in preparing the grant application, which, we were told, received high marks by Connecticut Humanities board of directors.

The planning grant also states as an objective developing a riverfront heritage program in association with the City's riverfront development project. As part of this, the Society will be working with Wesleyan University on their May riverfront festival at Harbor Park, where we look forward to making our contribution to the effort to reconnect with our beautiful waterfront. It's going to be an exciting year!



Erik Hesselberg, President

Director's Message

Dear Members,

I hope that all of you had a joyous holiday season. Due to the efforts of the members of the Middletown Garden Club, the Mansfield House was decorated from top to bottom with the inspired use of natural materials and artful arrangements. The outside not only featured beautiful wreaths on the fence and front door, but also hundreds of tiny white lights adorning large birch branches positioned between the fence and the house. The Co-Chairs of the Centennial Celebration Committee, Kathie Green and Debra Patrician, along with Maria Holzberg, the Chair of the Decorating Committee, and the many other committee members were a pleasure to work with. The centennial exhibit, reception, and decorations brought many new visitors to the Mansfield House, including people from as far away as the shoreline. We wish the Garden Club well as the exhibit moves to City Hall and the Russell Library and the members host a gala in May.

The Society is most fortunate to be receiving the talents of two Meigs Students from the Wesleyan University History Department this year. A fund endowed

by descendants of Middletown's Revolutionary War hero, Return Jonathan Meigs, provides a stipend for the students to work here cataloging manuscripts and helping to research aspects of our upcoming exhibit. This year's students are Jonathan Crook and Margaret Masselli. Our student for 2014, Gillian Mahoney, did a wonderful job, and she is now busily engaged in writing her senior thesis.

The City of Middletown dedicated its new Senior and Community Center on February 6. The former Eckersley — Hall School on Durant Terrace was renovated for this purpose and the results are beautiful. I was asked to research and write a brief history of the building and the people after whom it was named and it appears in story boards at the center. The mural by local artist Albert B. McCutcheon was also saved. I urge you to visit to see the building and the delightful mural.



Debby Shapiro

March 19 Talk

“Life and Death on Haddam Quarter Road”

Local physician Michael Good will deliver an illustrated lecture entitled, “Life and Death on Haddam Quarter Road” on Thursday, March 19 at 7 pm at the General Mansfield House. The talk examines the lives and deaths of three members of the Newton family, contemporaries between 1889 and 1913. Through their stories, he will show how fragile life was just 100 years ago and what strides modern medicine has made during this past century.

He will recount the story of Elizabeth Foote Newton who contracted tuberculosis and gradually succumbed over three years, despite the latest care she received at an Adirondack sanitarium. Her trials, along with those of her husband J.E. Newton, are seen through letters sent back home. The letters also tell the story of Elizabeth’s son Charlie, who at age 18 was injured in a wagon accident in 1904 and slowly died of internal bleeding while his family, friends and physicians attempted to intervene. The capabilities of the newly opened Middlesex Hospital and the advent of lifesaving surgery that came just a few short years after Charlie’s death will also be addressed. Finally, listeners will hear the story of Katherine Huntington Newton, a smart, spirited, and beautiful young woman who graduated from Middletown High School and Mount Holyoke College before her acceptance to the Johns Hopkins University Medical School. She became active in supporting the woman’s suffrage movement; correspondence between her and her



disapproving parents outlines her plans to participate in the March 3, 1913 Woman Suffrage Parade in Washington, D.C. Dr. Good will discuss this dramatic, violent, and historic event, the anxiety it caused back home in Durham, and her tragic sudden death due to pneumococcal pneumonia soon after she returned from Washington, D.C.

Michael Good is a family physician with a longtime

interest in all things historical. Originally from Southern California, he graduated with a degree in Political Science from Occidental College in Los Angeles and then earned his medical degree at the University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry in Rochester NY. He moved to Middletown to do his residency in Family Medicine at Middlesex Hospital, graduating in 1986. He has been in private practice in Middletown for 28 years. He moved to Durham in 1992 and has lived on Haddam Quarter Road with his wife Susan since then. In 2005 he published *The Search for Major Plagge: the Nazi who Saved Jews*, a work that describes his search for the German Wehrmacht officer who saved his mother and grandparents during the Holocaust. In recent years he has explored the local history of his neighborhood in Durham, relying heavily on the family collection of letters, photos and diaries of the Newton family who have lived continuously on Haddam Quarter Road for the past 300 years. 🌱

Mystery students

This photo was donated by Joe Barone. On the back, it is labeled “Marge Coughlin” and “Class of 41.” Can you identify any of the students or the school they attended? Call if you know. Answers will be revealed in forthcoming newsletters.



The Middlesex County Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the following individuals and companies who generously contributed to the Society during 2014 beyond their dues:

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Krishna Winston, in honor of Pat Tully

The following businesses and individuals contributed to the Society through their advertisements in the 29th Annual Antique Car Show Booklet. Please patronize them to show your appreciation.

Connecticut Street Rod Association
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Peter and Isabelle Bozzo
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SOCIETY NEWS

Macdonough School STEM Students Visit General Mansfield House

In November, two groups of Macdonough School STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) students visited the Mansfield House to learn more about the local topics they were studying. The students were accompanied by their STEM teacher, John Ferrero. The group learning about the Wangunk Native American tribe viewed a slide presentation by director Debby Shapiro as well as Native American deeds, arrowheads and other stone implements in the Society's collection.

The second group, studying Commodore Thomas Macdonough and the Battle of Lake Champlain, also viewed Debby's slideshow about Macdonough and examined objects and documents pertaining to Macdonough in the Society's collection. Ferrero wrote that "...the presentations were wonderful and seeing artifacts helped them form a stronger connection to what they are learning about. They returned to school excited and full of ideas for the websites they are creating."

Each of the students wrote an illustrated thank-you note to Debby depicting various aspects of the objects and pictures they had seen. One student wrote that "it was the best field trip I ever went on." Another wrote, "If I could do anything in life I would like to have your job. It must be fun to learn all these facts about famous people." Fortunately, for Debby, he is still too young to take her job, but the Society will remember him for future reference. 🌱



Society Welcomes New Members

The Society is pleased to welcome new members Robert & Catherine Boone, Heather Dodds, John Ferrero & the Macdonough School Teachers, Michael Good, James & Betty Horne, Ethel Peltz, Lois Peltz, Philip Pitruzzello, and Gina Ulysse. We would also like to acknowledge our newest life members, Charles & Sharon Chafee, and Peter (Buck) Zaidel. We hope to see all of you at upcoming programs and events. 🌱



Middlesex County Historical Society Membership Application

Your membership in the Middlesex County Historical Society helps provide funding for the preservation of Middlesex County's historical treasures as well as your subscription to the *Historical Observer* and discounts to many of the Society's events.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

Telephone _____

E-mail _____

Membership Levels

Student \$20 Business \$60
 Individual \$30 Patron \$125
 Family \$40 Life \$500

Please make checks payable to The Middlesex County Historical Society. Detach and send to General Mansfield House, 151 Main Street, Middletown, CT 06457

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

The Museum at the Mansfield House

OPEN Monday–Thursday and Saturday
10:00 to 2:00

Elisabeth Petry Talk, “Anna Louise James and
Ann Petry Gamble and Win”

Tuesday, February 24, 7:00 pm
Hubbard Room, Russell Library

Michael Good talk, “Life and Death on
Haddam Quarter Road”

Thursday, March 19, 7:00 pm
General Mansfield House

For more information, visit us on the web at www.middlesexhistory.org

Snapshots from the Middletown Garden Club
Centennial Celebration exhibit

