

~ Introduction to Volume I ~

Rationale ~Conception ~ Background ~ Curiosities & Caveats

Middletown, Connecticut – so named because of its location half-way between Saybrook and Windsor, Conn. – was identified as a viable colonial settlement in 1650. The first 23 families that settled between 1650 and 1654 in what the indigenous Wangunk peoples called “Mattabesett” had previously been among the early colonists of Hartford and Wethersfield, Conn., and Rowley, Mass. Now more than 350 years later, descendants of the early families are spread across the continent and beyond. More recently, with genealogical resources more accessible than ever, there is 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) research for profiles of early Middletown families prepared for the website of the Society of Middletown First Settlers Descendants (SMFSD); (2) research for local history context articles for *The Middler*, the SMFSD newsletter and journal; and (3) my current work in the museum, history, and preservation field, interpreting early New England architecture and domestic life in public presentations for a regional preservation organization.

The aim of the early family profiles, first compiled for the SMFSD website in 2006-2007, was to bring together in a standard, repeatable format, the known facts about each individual, including relevant excerpts from the more reliable standard genealogical sources now in the public domain. The aim of the SMFSD *Middler* articles has always been to enhance understanding of 17th-century life through historical and cultural context.

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, with a nationwide “community of cousins” set to gather in Middletown. Because the organization meets in Middletown at three-year intervals, 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 “genealogy-with-history” as expanded and presented in a bound volume.

FIRST SETTLERS - 1650-1654

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	WAMPANCH
SPUNNOE	SACHAMAS
TACCUMHAIT	PASKUNNAS
MASSEKUMP	ROBINS
PEWAMPSSKIN	RACHIASK



Above is Founders Rock at the entrance to Riverside Cemetery, Middletown’s earliest burying ground, in an early 20th-century postcard view. The 60-ton boulder, with plaques that list 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 early 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, one that could complement the 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, the *micro* genealogical study helps draw human portraits of the *individuals* who made the history. For the genealogist, the *macro* 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 - Volume I: 1650-1654* is based on the names on the plaque at Founders 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

February 1652 are lost. Volume II of *Early Families of Middletown, Connecticut - 1655-1700*, which will also feature profiles compiled by long-distance research colleague Paula K. Higgins, will include profiles of individuals and families that arrived to Middletown between 1655 and 1700. 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 early arrivals to Middletown 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 claim to be the "final word" on the family history. In some cases the profiles clarify evidence, identify questionable assumptions, and flag outright mythology, but in most cases the profiles break no new ground. Instead the profiles aim to provide an informed starting point, a foundation for more focused research. For more about the sources consulted for the profiles, see the introduction to the profile format on page 21.

A few words about my introduction to Middletown: Although I was born in Hartford, Conn. and carried the Bacon surname, as a youngster I knew nothing about any family roots in Middletown. According to my cerebral global-citizen father, our family origins probably extended back to the shrouded mists of post-medieval England before the "great migration." But even he knew next-to-nothing about the family history through most of the intervening 300 years.

As a young man, my first career was as a journalist and editor. I was well-practiced in investigative research, but it was not until the mid-1970s that I encountered a veteran genealogist. When I revealed a hint of curiosity about my family line, she suggested that I go directly to Godfrey Library in Middletown that very day. I sensed her urgency. I drove straight to that gem of genealogy libraries, arriving about an hour before closing. Within the hour, as the expert librarian walled me in with weighty volumes, my previously unknown Bacon-surnamed ancestors tumbled out from their pages. This was all too easy – my Bacon-surnamed 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 with research on more difficult family lines, but on this day, the ease of discovery bordered on the bizarre.

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 297 acres extending west from Newfield Street (near Godfrey Library) was received by Nathaniel Bacon, Sr. (1630-1705) as part of the 1671 land grants. (He retained his original home and acreage at the north end of Main Street, where my family line of mariners and craftsmen lived through most of the 19th century.)

Later in the 1970s, in the early years of a long travel-intensive career as a performing artist, 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 very welcoming 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, Mary, attended a performance, then visited backstage to pick my brain about the finer points of my acrobatic juggling specialties.

Since then, my experiences in Middletown – research, exploration, SMFSD gatherings – 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 the ancestral hometown. 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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This 2024 printing includes two updates ... and minor corrections: (1) In the chapter on early land grant maps of Middletown, 12 author-redrawn maps have been added. (2) The bibliography has been updated to include relevant books published since the first printing in 2012. This reprint also corrects three typographical errors in the first printing.

~ Acknowledgments ~

A project that integrates genealogy and history does not come to fruition without the expert assistance of devoted professionals in the library, archives, and museum field. Therefore thanks go to the many who have welcomed me cheerfully into their world through the years.

An extra-special thanks go to the following folks 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 Longley, Doris Sherrow, and Prof. Richard

Buel for their past work and present insights. Speaking of the past, thanks go to acclaimed genealogists Donald Lines Jacobus (1887-1970) for his inspiration, and Middletown’s own Frank Farnsworth Starr (1852-1939) for his thoroughness.

For the land grant maps, all redrawn for clarity by the author, researchers are the beneficiaries of the work of Jessie Alsop (1875-1951) in the 1930s-40s, and the work of J. Paul Loether for the Greater Middletown Preservation Trust in the 1980s.

Several chapters draw from the fine work of 19th-century historians, genealogists, and illustrators whose work is now in the public domain. I am pleased to bring this work to the fore once again.

For encouragement and exhortations, thanks go to SMFSD colleagues – inclusive, friendly, and supportive folks that I am glad to call my cousins. ■