

Winner of the 2013 CSG Brainerd T. Peck Award for Family History *Early Families of Middletown, Conn. - Vol. I: 1650-1654* by Reginald W. Bacon



Reginald W. Bacon, an editor and designer still engaged professionally in the history, museum, and preservation field, has been editor of *The Middler*, a publication of the Society of Middletown First Settlers Descendants since 2005, and researcher/compiler/designer of the organization's web site content since 2006.

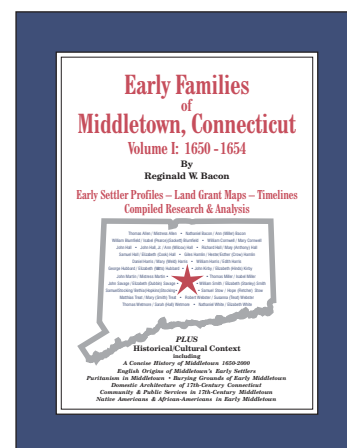
His first career was as a newspaper and magazine journalist and editor, but, after a decade, that was set aside in favor of a well-traveled career in show business as an acrobatic juggler, comedy tap dancer, and jazz/ragtime tenor banjoist/vocalist. He and his wife, the sensational club-juggler L.J. Newton, toured nationally throwing things at each other for nearly 30 years, working in every kind of venue from theatre and film productions to the circus arena, resorts, prisons, and on the corn-dog circuit. Today, as a scholar of early 20th-century popular music and entertainment, he presents an illustrated lecture/performance and exhibition, "A Vaudeville Retrospective," exclusively for museums, libraries, and college theatre departments.

Since running away *from* the circus to join a museum, he works for Historic New England (SPNEA) and also on independent interpretation and collections projects. He serves on the board of directors of the 1710 Weeks Brick House & Gardens (Greenland, N.H.) and the Newburyport (Mass.) Preservation Trust. Publications aside from genealogy-related writings include two books on his circus/variety specialties, and a local history and memoir of Tannersville, N.Y. He is a graduate of Syracuse (N.Y.) University and Harvard's graduate program in Museum Studies, and is a member of professional associations such as the American Alliance of Museums and the American Association for State & Local History.

The author began his own family history quest in the mid-1970s, and inevitably the road led to Godfrey Memorial Library in Middletown. The paternal surname line of his family lived in Middletown from 1650 until the late 19th century, resulting in descendant relationships to half of the first 23 Middletown families and a third of the first 90 families. The years of accumulating family information and photos led to the compilation of *The Bacon/Weeks Story: People, Places, & Events Through the Generations* (2002). In an effort to help others with contextual family history discoveries outside the confines of names, dates, and research libraries, he conceived and implemented the Family Genealogy Day program (2006), an event-planning template for the collaboration of museum and genealogy organizations. At Family Genealogy Day programs, participants can walk in the footsteps of ancestors, directly experiencing original family farmsteads and historic houses.

Early Families of Middletown, Conn., Vol. I: 1650-1654, grew from (1) his specific research on early settler families for the SMFSD web site; (2) the local history context articles developed for the SMFSD *Middler*; and (3) his museum work interpreting 17th-century history, architecture, and domestic life for the contemporary public.

The author and his wife live in Newburyport, Mass., a historic seaport city north of Boston where the Merrimack River meets the Atlantic Ocean. ■



Book Review by Russell A. DeGrafft

Early Families of Middletown, Connecticut, Volume I: 1650-1654 by Reginald W. Bacon. Published by Variety Arts Press, P. O. Box 489, Newburyport, MA 01950. LCCN 2012949502, ISBN 978-0-9817945-5-6. 8.5 x 11, softcover, 194 pages, 2012. Order directly from the publisher at the above address or from the publisher's web site at www.VarietyArtsPress.com. Cost is \$50.00 postpaid in the U.S.

This book is the winner of the Brainerd T. Peck Family History Award in the Connecticut Society of Genealogists, Inc. 2013 Literary Awards Competition. Middletown played a significant role in the history and development of Connecticut. Its inhabitants, beginning with the early Native American influences to our present times, have provided economic contributions to a rapidly

developing territory. This all-encompassing book is a wealth of information for any researcher interested in treading the grounds of this very early settlement and now cosmopolitan city. The author has outdone himself in providing a wide variety of information starting with its early settlers to the present day Society of Middletown First Settlers Descendants. The book is replete with scores of photographs, charts, graphs and drawings. Not only is the reader treated to early settler profiles, but also to reproductions of land grant maps, a history of Middletown, and multiple time lines. A very helpful composite index of individuals and place names used within the material concludes this book. This is a must-read for anyone interested in a city and its inception, and should be displayed in a place of significance in one's library. The reader should be prepared to get far more than he expects. ■