

Middlebury Community House News

Main Street . Middlebury, Vermont 05753

Premiere Issue Spring 2005



Early sketch of the house Horatio Seymour built in 1816

Mission Statement:

Partners for Middlebury Community House was formed to promote financial support to assist with responsible caretaking and maintenance of the historic home belonging to the citizens of Middlebury.

The House - Yesterday & Today

The original, brick structure of the Middlebury Community House was built between 1816 and 1817 on the corner of Main and Seymour Street by the Honorable Horatio Seymour, a native of Litchfield, Connecticut. His house was, and continues today, to be quite elegant and enchanting in its exterior architecture and interior design. The house is one of the best in post-Colonial Federal Style architecture.

Set on top of a stone terrace and surrounded by a white wooden fence, the rectangular structure with four tall chimneys is simple yet elegant. The brick walls are capped with marble. Crowning the house is a white wooden balustrade over the eaves. A gracefully curved white hood also shelters the doorway, the only Middlebury home with such a hood left in tact. Both the exterior and interior of the house are embellished with many fine examples of free-hand woodworking for the eye to enjoy. The house also boasts ten fireplaces with some of the most decorative mantles in all of Middlebury. The Seymour house continued to be the residence of the family from generation to generation, each making changes to the structure to meet their needs and tastes of the period.

In 1938, Jessica Stewart Swift and her brother, Philip Battell Stewart, gave their family home and its furnishings to the citizens of Middlebury to be used openly for the hosting of community events and functions. According to Jessica's instructions, there is to be a ten member Board of Trustees. She specified that the National Bank of Middlebury President, a representative for the President of Middlebury College, President of the Woman's Club, Regent for the DAR, a Swift/Stewart family representative and five people at large from the community, would share the operation responsibilities. The board members volunteer their services to the house. There are four employees: a house director, treasurer, housekeeper, and a maintenance assistant.

In the 1960's, Jessica had a Community Cottage built on Seymour Street in order to offer additional meeting space to town citizens. The cottage is also under the care of the Board of Trustees. The years have been good to the house, but maintenance needs are showing up more regularly. The Community House has benefited recently from a few "community based" gifts and grant awards to assist in beautifying this significant historic resource.

Call to Action

In the summer of 2004, the Trustees applied for a grant to obtain a diagnostic assessment of the Community House maintenance needs. The report was funded in part through the Robert Sincerbeaux Fund of the Preservation Trust of Vermont. The completed report, done by Thomas F. Keefe, architect from Keefe and Wesher Architects, PC, has given the Trustees a method of prioritizing repairs. The first item on our repair schedule is the wooden fence that surrounds the house. The cost estimate is \$16,500 and work will begin this summer. It is our hope that interested members of the community will join the Partners for the Community House in supporting this worthy project.



A close look at the fence around the Middlebury Community House showing the repair needs.

Join the Partners

I/We wish to become a Partner for the Middlebury Community House and help repair the fence.

- Annual Membership \$15
 Additional Contribution is enclosed

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Email _____

Make Checks Payable to: Middlebury Community House Partners
Mail to: 6 Main Street Middlebury, VT 05753

Contributions will go directly towards fence repair. Partners will receive two newsletters each year with information about the House and updates regarding maintenance projects. A 501 C-3 Organization, your donation is deductible in accordance with the law.

Current Use of The Community House and Cottage



Two functions held at the House. The Red Hat Society get-together and Children's Tea.



The Community House is officially opened from 10 to 4 weekdays, but Pat Hornbeck, our house director, sees expanded need for meetings, tours and events. Her scheduling of the house has been very flexible to meet the community needs. Pat loves seeing the house used and willingly cooperates whenever she can to meet requests. The calendar for the Community House has in the past matched the school schedule, but this year Pat is scheduling some events for the summer months. The groups that have enjoyed the hospitality of the Community House recently are Middlebury Friends, Woman's Club, Garden Club, Vermont Public Radio, Danforth Pewters, Frog Hollow Crafts (jury selection), Addison County Hospice support group and the Red Hat Society. Get togethers have been held for birthday parties, receptions and teas. Each year the Community House hosts Santa for the Middlebury Business Association, pot luck dinners for the Milk and Honey Quilters and many other holiday gatherings. The Middlebury Garden Club decorates the House for the Holiday season and people love to see their creative efforts. Pat is an organized gracious hostess and keeps the activities at the house running smoothly.

The Community Cottage is used for meeting and functions daily. Over 1000 people a month utilize the space. The cottage, built in the 1960's, is on Seymour Street, behind the main house and next to the fire station. This building fills a substantial need within the community. Both meeting spaces are scheduled by Pat, the house director, by calling 388-2071.



Santa with his Elves during a Middlebury Business Association event.



Sue Flanagan and Phyllis Cunningham representing the DAR, with Fletcher Brush, President of the Middlebury Community House, dedicating a plaque to thank the DAR for their generous gift.

The Board of Trustees

Fletcher Brush, President

Member at Large

G. Kenneth Perine, Finance

President National Bank of Middlebury

Anne Ginevan, Clerk

Rep. Swift/Stewart Family

Raymond Churchill, Bldg./Gds.

Member at Large

Linda Busier

President Woman's Club

Jessica Liebowitz

Rep. President Middlebury College

Phyllis Cunningham

Regent, DAR

Richard Emilo

Member at Large

Kevin Newton

Member at Large

Lynda Rheaume

Member at Large

Staff:

Patricia Hornbeck

House Director

Mari Quesnel

Treasurer

Elizabeth Quesnel

Housekeeper

Edward Hornbeck

Maintenance

Generous Community

The Trustees of the Community House are grateful to organizations who are giving back to Middlebury by supporting this historic house. A new garden, a gift from Middlebury Garden Club, with additional support from the Woman's Club and the Community House was added last summer. Not only is the garden a wonderful addition to the house, it is eye candy to the town.

The Daughters of the American Revolution presented the Community House with a check for \$5000 for use as the trustees see needed. The gift from the DAR was the first gift received since achieving the status of a 501-c 3 tax exempt organization.

This newsletter was published as an introduction to the newly established Partners for the Middlebury Community House. Please consider becoming a supporting partner. Your interest in the Community House can ensure a solid foundation for generations to come. If you want more information please call 802-388-2071. We appreciate your time and any donation you feel able to give.

A 501-C 3 Corporation, contributions are tax deductible according to the law.