

A Guide to Middleton's History



1 South Main Street
Middleton, MA 01949

Telephone 978-774-8132
Fax 978-777-3270
e-mail flint3@comcast.net

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www.flintlibrary.org

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Points of interest on map:

1. Flint Public Library: built in 1891, renovated and expanded in 2008.
2. Merriam Cemetery: contains grave of Dr. Silas Merriam and his descendants.
3. Old Centre School House, now Town Hall.
4. The "Mansion House" of Lt. Thomas Fuller, originally a saltbox: built 1684.
- 4a. Two-room shoe shop.
5. Old Timothy Fuller Cemetery: contains grave of Rev. Andrew Peters, Middleton's first minister.
6. Tomb of Rev. Elias Smith.
7. Captain Andrew Fuller House, circa 1750.
8. Middleton Congregational Church: built in 1859 on site of the first church which stood from 1728-1846.
9. Site of first town meeting: July 9, 1728.

10. "Old Town Hall": built in 1848. Now the Senior Center and Middleton Food Pantry.
 11. The Bradstreet House: originally had a peculiar center chimney built in a diagonal relation to the roof line.
 12. Railroad Station: trains ran 1848-1926.
 13. Howe-Manning School: originally built as a WPA project in 1935. Building was replaced with new school in 2011.
 14. Estey Tavern: called "The Black Horse" in 1789. Had a ballroom with domed ceiling on second floor.
 15. Site of homes built by the Wilkins families.
- A. Middleton Pond: supplies water to Danvers and Middleton. Formerly Wilkin's Pond.
B. Will's Hill: highest point in Middleton at 253 ft. above sea level. Man-made reservoir located at the top of this hill.

- C. Factory building used as shoe shop. Sylvania was said to have started in this building.
D. Site of Town Pound used in the 1700s.
E. Original site of Merriam house. House is now located further down South Main Street.
F. This house formerly stood where the library is now. In the 1830s part of it was used by Elias T. Ingalls as a store. His son, John James Ingalls, who later became US senator from Kansas, was said to have been born in this house.
G. Methodist Church: built late 1800s.
H. Universalist Church until early 1900s.
I. Indication of an early mill can still be found along this brook which runs from Middleton Pond to the Ipswich River.
J. Site of Stiles' blacksmith shop. A blacksmith shop was of vital importance to every community.
K. "Tramp House" lockup: built 1878.

Middleton was incorporated on June 20, 1728, and is so named because it was organized from parts of four other towns: Salem Village (now Danvers), Topsfield, Boxford, and Andover.

William Nichols was the first settler, locating near the brook that still bears his name. In 1659, Bray Wilkins, his six sons, and John Gingle received a large grant of land from Gov. Bellingham. The Wilkins families built houses near Middleton Pond and Will's Hill, in what had formerly been an Indian village (see 15 on map). The lone survivor of that village, named Will, was then living on the summit of the rocky mount. Until the settlement became a town, it was called Will's Hill.

In 1663, Thomas Fuller, a blacksmith from Woburn, bought 300 acres from Maj. Gen. Denison of Ipswich. On this land he built Munday Bridge over Beech, or Boston, Brook in 1667. He also continued his trade as an iron worker. Others who settled on large tracts of land before 1700 included the Putnams, Hobbs, Townes, Elliots, and Peabodys.

The distance in those days was too great to travel to Topsfield, Boxford, or Salem Village to attend church. Permission to form a new parish was granted under the conditions that Will's Hill men construct a suitable place of worship and engage a schoolmaster to teach the young.

On July 9, 1728 Jonathan Fuller presented the charter at Middleton's first town meeting held at or near the home of Dr. Daniel Felch (see 9 on map), a short distance from the Congregational Church. The church was already under construction, and in November

1729, Rev. Andrew Peters, a Harvard graduate, was ordained as the first minister.

The greater number of old houses still standing in Middleton were built about the time of the organization of the town. However, most have been changed in roof lines and additions. The earliest of these houses is the Lt. Thomas Fuller house (see 4 on map) from 1684, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Until recent years, Middleton was a farming community, although attempts had been made to establish industries. The most notable was the ironworks, or bloomery, begun in the early 1700s or before, which ran for more than 30 years. The Putnams and Flints and John Howe and Thomas Cave were instrumental in starting this business. The works stood on Mill Street, south of Pout Pond Brook, where remains of the sluice may still be seen.

The shoe industry was established in the mid-nineteenth century when several small factories furnished materials for scores of townspeople, who worked in little shops in their homes. Nearly every family had some part in this trade, which for the first time offered women an opportunity to earn some money of their own. A paper mill, founded by Col. Francis Peabody, later operated by the Crane family, was located on the Ipswich River in South Middleton.

The Flint Public Library was preceded by a series of other libraries. One of the earliest social libraries in the state was founded here in 1772. Early records show who the readers were and what they read. Many of the books from this first library are in a special collection in the Flint Public Library (see 1 on map).

Middleton was still part of Salem Village during the period of witchcraft hysteria. John Willard, who lived on Peabody Street, was executed as a witch in 1692. The husband, wife, and daughter of the Hobbs family of Locust Street were tried but not executed.

Slave labor was very common through the years. The records show that most landowners kept slaves, even the ministers. There is some evidence that one man may have been a dealer in slaves. The balcony at the church was reserved for "slaves and ladies."

The earliest schools in town were held in private homes. Later, one-room school houses were built in four sections of town. The only lasting site was the Centre School, where a series of buildings were erected. The last, greatly added to, is Memorial Hall, which is now Town Hall (see 3 on map).

The townspeople have been involved in all the wars through the years. At least one Middleton man fought in King Philip's War at Narragansett in 1675-1676. It is recorded that in 1776 many walked or rode horseback to the Concord Bridge. Over 100 men served in the Civil War.

Middleton was a stage stop for coaches travelling from Salem to Andover, a good day's journey. The Estey Tavern (see 14 on map), built in 1753, was run off and on by various persons until 1892. It was used by gentry and drovers alike. The latter pastured their animals in the Town Pound (see D on map) close by.

In 1878 a lockup (see K on map) was built to temporarily house tramps as they followed the railroads looking for work. This Tramp House still stands and contains two rooms, some furniture, and a stove.

The Curtis Oak Tree is supposedly over 450 years old. This national landmark still stands on Peabody Street.

At the turn of the 20th century, Middleton was a favorite summer resort, with small cottages located along the banks of the winding Ipswich River. In those days, the town had both steam railroad and electric car lines available for commuters and visitors.

As late as 1840, Middleton had only 640 residents. By 1975, the town's population had jumped to 4,200. Today, approximately 10,000 people reside in this historic town.

This brochure has been prepared as a brief guide to Middleton's past by the Flint Public Library Bicentennial Committee, 1975.

*Shirley Raynard
Francine Buckley
Page Campbell
Dorothy Clark
Joan DeBoer
Alice Maloney
Alice Milbury
Maria Pride
Faye Raynard*

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