



**Town of Middlefield Historical Association  
P.O. Box 348 Cooperstown, NY 13326  
Headquarters at the District No 1 Schoolhouse,  
On County Highway 35, in the Hamlet of Middlefield  
September, 2011**

### **President's message:**

When you receive your newsletter, we will have concluded another year of successful summer Sunday programs. We had a wide range of topics this year and they helped to educate us on our local history. The board thanks everyone who helped with arranging the programs, setting up for them and most of all the presenters themselves. Now we move onto our last two events of the year; Fall Festival Oct. 9<sup>th</sup> and our Christmas gathering on Dec. 4<sup>th</sup>. If anyone has any idea's or suggestions for a program for our summer Sunday series for next year, please contact any board member. We always need volunteers' as well for our events, so please let us know if are interested in helping.

I would like to welcome our two new board members, they are September Amspacher and Francesca Vanesco-Wheeler. We are looking forward to working with them in the coming year. I would also like to thank Merrilyn O' Connell for her many years of service on the T.M.H.A. Board.

**Jan Bartow President, T.M.H.A.**

### **Historical Sketch of the Middlefield Methodist Episcopal Church**

**Written by Mrs. Mildred Wilson (née Marsh) for the 1928 Centennial Celebration of the Middlefield Episcopal Church. Mrs. Wilson was a former teacher at the Middlefield Dist. #1 School.**

Middlefield, once known as Clarksville, was in Cherry Valley Township until March 3, 1797, when it became a separate town. Methodist societies existed and flourished here and in the surrounding territory from very early times. The Peck Homestead, where Bishop Jesse T. Peck was born, was located at Middlefield Center in the northern part of the town of Middlefield. Many of the old warriors of early Methodism lived and preached here and in the surrounding villages: Freeborn Garretson, Jonathan Newman and Benjamin Bidlack being among them.

The first circuit consisted of Middlefield, Middlefield Center and Westville. Later Middlefield and Gailor Hill formed the charge. In 1851 Middlefield, Pleasant Brook, Gailor Hill and South Valley constituted the circuit. In 1852 Gailor Hill and South Valley were discontinued and Westville added. Later Westville was taken off and Roseboom added. The Pleasant Brook Church burned in 1901.

The first parsonage (of the Middlefield Methodist Church) was a log cabin and was located a half mile from the church. In 1892 a new parsonage was built.

On February 5, 1828, the society met in the home of Benjamin D. North and incorporated as the "Trustees of the First Methodist Episcopal Society of the Town of Middlefield". In November of the same year George Clark deeded the society two acres of land for the consideration of \$1, the original deed being in the possession of the present trustees of the church. On this site the church in which we worship today was built. Perhaps not exactly the same building for it has been remodeled and changed through the years. But in a very true sense we are worshipping during this centennial in the same hallowed place where generations since the fathers have listened to the ministry of the word and gone forth to work in the Master's vineyard.

## **Hayden Watters and Emancipation** **by Dominick Reisen**

On 9 July 1827, *the Freeman's Journal* reported that a celebration had been held at the Presbyterian Meeting House in Cooperstown on the fifth. This event, coming a day after Cooperstown residents celebrated American independence, was to mark emancipation in New York State and became known as Jubilee Day. One month prior to these events, Thomas Mann, a free black man living in Cooperstown, had called a meeting at his house to organize the festivities to surround Jubilee Day. Hayden Watters of Middlefield was at this meeting and was chosen to take a significant role in the celebration to be held on the fifth.

Little is known of Hayden Watters before these events of 1827. He lived in Middlefield throughout the 1820s with his wife and five children. Whether he was born a free man or had been manumitted is unclear. However, he was free prior to Jubilee Day. It is surmised that he was a subsistence farmer leasing his farm since there are no deeds indicating his ownership of land in Otsego County. Further, there is no mention in the scant school records available to show that his children attended school in Middlefield or that his family became members in any of the churches in Middlefield (for which records are available) even though at least one Middlefield church (the Baptist Church) was racially integrated. This notwithstanding, it is known is that Watters was considered by his peers to be a man of notable speaking and intellectual abilities. This fact makes it seem rather incongruous that his children were not at least being taught basic literacy and math skills at home.

At this June 1827 organizational meeting, Watters was chosen to give an inspirational oration at the Presbyterian Church to mark Jubilee Day. In his speech, Watters noted the need for his fellow brethren of colour to prove themselves worthy of the freedom bestowed upon them. He advised those gathered to practice "sobriety, honesty, and industry." He went on to beseech them to tend to the education of their children. *The Freeman's Journal* reported that the "large assemblage of white citizens" who had gathered to watch the proceedings were "gratified with the very appropriate matter furnished by the speaker," and that the entire celebration had been "conducted decently and in order."

In September of 1827, Watters and Thomas Mann called another meeting at the Mann residence in Cooperstown for the purpose of organizing a self-help society for their coloured brethren. It would seem that the goal of these two men was to show to the world that, contrary to some theorists of the time, the African race was not inferior to the white race. It was felt that a self-help society would show a certain degree of self-sufficiency and concern for personal betterment.

At the end of September Watters led a discussion at the county court house on the "merits and demerits of the African Colonization Society." It is unknown what his stance on this issue was, but one can assume, since he exerted himself to show that the African race could be responsible members of a largely white society, that he would have opposed colonization. Colonists generally held the view that the two races could not both be free and both inhabit the same region, Watters' Jubilee Day oration as well as his efforts at forming a self-help society seem to argue against his agreeing with such a position.

After this brief, but crucial, foray into the larger world as a guiding star for his African brethren, Hayden Watters seems to have blended back into the world from which he came. Nothing has come to light of his activities after these important events of 1827 surrounding the ending of slavery in New York State.

## WHO WAS ‘MURPHY? AND WHY DID THEY NAME A HILL AFTER HIM? (Part 2)

By David Edwards

This is the conclusion to the story which was begun in the May 2011 newsletter.

### So who was Murphy??

“He was one of the first settlers in the Town (of Middlefield). He came from Columbia County, New York in 1808 and lived on the farm that he first settled until his death. He was a kind husband, an affectionate father, a good neighbor and the poor man’s friend.” *Freemans Journal*, February 20, 1857, in the death notice for Smith Murphy, 1779-1857.

To summarize and localize the Murphy genealogy,

Morris Murphy (born 1740, Ireland) and Dorothy Smith of Chatam, Columbia County, New York, had 12 children, seven came to Otsego County, four of them to the Murphy Hill area of Middlefield.

One of the four, Smith Murphy and his wife Sarah (or Sally) Thompson settled at the base of what we now know as Murphy Hill. They had eight children. The oldest, Harriett (b. 1810) never married and lived her entire life on “The Old Homestead”. Her brother Samuel (b. 1812) inherited, purchased from his siblings and consolidated the family farm while younger brother Adelman (b. 1828) established his farm right next door. Their brother Norman (b. 1816) established his farm in the vicinity of Black’s and Oriole Roads.

Samuel and his first wife Anna Guy had one son, Adriel Guy Murphy who helped expand the operation into hops and beekeeping, and became the Town Supervisor. He and his wife Anna Cooper had one son, Herbert, who farmed, married Blanche Wilbur and had one son Stuart.

The children of Adelman and Lydia Marsh, --Viola, James, Florence Viola and J. Fredrick Murphy, --seem to pass from the scene, the farm disappearing into history.

Norman and his wife Hannah Maria Long had 12 children. The two youngest boys, Ashael and LeRoy, purchased the farm in 1896 and operated it as Murphy Brothers Farm until it was sold in 1944.

Five Murphy men, spanning 3 generations died in the 20 year period 1892-1912. The women continued to run the farm for another 10 years until 1923 when Anna Cooper Murphy, Blanche Wilbur Murphy and young Stuart sold the farm and moved into Cooperstown. The women died within a few years and Stuart left the area in 1927, age 21. In 1980 he was living in Tucson, Arizona.

By 1950 the Murphys had all but disappeared from the area, but Murphy Hill remains—1771 feet (537 meters) at its peak, Latitude 42.675 N, Longitude 74.888 W.—a tribute to three generations of hard working Irish Americans.