

WE ARE BUILDING HISTORY!

The Historical Society of the Town of Middletown Archives and Hall Renovation Project

OUR MISSION

The mission of the Historical Society of the Town of Middletown, Delaware County, NY is to build awareness and appreciation of the heritage of Middletown by discovering, preserving and making accessible historical information and materials related to the Town and its environs. We do this through educational programs and preservation projects, and through cooperation and collaboration with other local organizations.

OUR VISION

HSM will serve as the primary center to learn about and share the history of the unique communities of Middletown.

WHO WE ARE

HSM has 158 dues paying members in 106 households. The organization is led by a nine-member Executive Committee. We produce lectures, exhibits, concerts and other history-themed events (at least eight each year) at our hall and at other venues around town. The organization does not have paid staff, but benefits from a dedicated Board and corps of volunteers. We maintain a growing collection of historic materials, currently stored at the Middletown Town Hall.

OUR HISTORY

In 2004, a group of about 25 area residents met at Fairview Library to explore the possibility of establishing an association of history enthusiasts to collect, preserve and share Middletown's heritage. There was serious concern that materials crucial to understanding the community's past were not being formally or actively collected for public benefit and were in danger of being discarded or leaving the area forever. Thus, the Historical Society of the Town of Middletown, Delaware County, NY (HSM) was born. It received a Provisional Charter from the NYS Board of Regents in March 2005; an Absolute Charter was granted in 2015.

We began to collect historical materials at risk of being lost. Because we did not have a home of our own, the Middletown Town Board allowed us to store these items in the secure records room of the Middletown Town Hall.

In 2012, HSM was given a building and 7 acres of land just outside the Village of Margaretville. This structure is a wonderful venue for programs and special events from May through November. However, it is unheated and unsuitable as an archives storage and work space.

In 2017, with our space allotment filled at the town hall, the HSM Board applied to the Documentary Heritage and Preservation Services for New York for help in developing a strategic plan to deal with this issue and other physical and organizational needs. The resulting Strategic Plan, adopted by the HSM Executive Committee in May, 2017, placed "Facilities and Collections Care and Management" at the top of our priority list, with the top goal to **"Ensure HSM has the facilities, policies and practices needed to preserve and display archival material."**

THE NEED

Our holdings are largely paper – approximately 55 itemized boxes of photographs, diaries, store ledgers, school records and yearbooks, maps, personal letters, records of civic organizations, memorabilia, advertising items and the like. The collection -- the only repository dedicated to Middletown history -- includes a large and significant collection of 20th century photographic negatives from a local photographer. We also have many unboxed items, for example a rolled 1856 Gould map of Delaware County, a chair made in a local factory, a large framed collection of horse and ox shoes made by a local

blacksmith. In addition, there are some items that because of their size are stored offsite (eg: a tractor-drawn cauliflower planter and architectural fragments of the building believed to have been the oldest house in Middletown).

Since its founding in 2005, HSM has contributed to the body of historical knowledge about Middletown and contiguous towns (Hardenburgh, Roxbury, Andes, Halcott). Projects have included digitizing the *Catskill Mountain News*; documenting the lives of more than 300 men who served in the Civil War from our area; compiling photos and histories of standing barns; and researching dozens of topics and personalities to produce lectures, exhibits and website posts. These and future projects would benefit from the remarkable collection of original materials we have thus far assembled. However, the Records Room in the Town Hall is only available during weekday business hours, and is accessible only by climbing a long, steep set of stairs. Further, there is no work space in that room, therefore, our collection has not yet been properly documented and catalogued, and so these items remain largely out of reach.

We need a proper home for this material -- a climate-controlled location with secure storage, work room and exhibit space, along with appropriate equipment and preservation supplies -- to allow us to examine, interpret and make these materials available to researchers and the public. Without it, we will be unable to accept future contributions of personal and family collections, nor will we have space to house items rescued from E-bay, local auctions or the Town Transfer Station (it happens!) The time to correct this serious problem is NOW!

While we have made several improvements to the hall, including a new roof, lighting, foundation repairs and utility improvements, the building has definite problems: substandard rest rooms which are a disservice to our patrons; a small basement that is plagued by dampness; recurring pest issues in the kitchen floor, and lack of storage for tables, chairs, display materials and merchandise inventory.

A four-person Archives Search Committee spent several months in 2016 and 2017 visiting five regional historical repositories to see how comparable organizations house and manage their collections. The committee also investigated 20 existing buildings throughout Middletown to see if they were suitable for archives use. We did not find an appropriate location, and so the HSM Board opted to focus on the property we already own, and to solicit bids to both expand and renovate its hall.

Trade Design Build, an Ithaca-based team made up of Michael Barnoski and Gideon Stone, was selected to design the project. <https://tradedesignbuild.com/>

THE PLAN

We aim to construct a 1,600-square-foot, year-round addition to our hall. This will include:

- Archives storage and work space: 583 SF

Providing triple the storage space we currently occupy for steel shelving units, file cabinets and map drawers, as well as flexible countertop work areas.

- Reading/multipurpose room: 296 SF

An area for visitors to read from our library of local history volumes and to examine documents and materials from the archives. This space, with floor to ceiling window with a view of our lovely grounds, will be ideal for board and small group meetings for HSM and for outside organizations.

- History Hall – A Gallery: 240 SF

Rotating wall exhibits can be accommodated in this hallway

- Office/Lobby: 452 SF

Room for desk, cabinets, computer and printer, and for display cases for artifacts and photos.

- Two rest rooms: 100 SF

Accessible men's and women's rooms will replace two tiny, substandard bathrooms in the current hall. These facilities will be heated and will be centrally located to allow them to be used by archives volunteers and researchers as well as program attendees.

A generous amount of storage and mechanical space is worked into the plans, which also call for the existing commercial-sized but inefficient kitchen to be replaced by a 143 SF caterer's kitchen in the main hall. The kitchen, and hall, which accommodates up to 75 people for seated programs, will remain for seasonal use only. Aesthetic improvements will also be made to the exterior of the existing structure. We will explore the potential for the use of solar panels to supply the building's energy needs.

As proposed by Trade Design Build, the addition mirrors a traditional covered bridge through the use of design elements like cross braces, triangular windows and cedar shakes. The former Margaretville Covered Bridge is featured on HSM's newsletter, *The Bridge*, to symbolize the connection we have created between the past and the present, so this design is a fitting tribute to both our organization and the heritage we seek to preserve.

The Historical Society has been blessed with a beautiful site that includes a pond which shelters migrating waterfowl, fish, frogs, turtles and pollinators of all kinds. Great care will be taken to avoid adversely impacting the special nature of our land, which is one of the attractions for our audience, a mix of long-time residents, recent transplants, and visitors from throughout the Catskills and the New York metropolitan area.

ANTICIPATED BENEFITS

Aside from the obvious improvements in the storage and preservation of irreplaceable materials that have been entrusted to our care, we envision several benefits from this building project.

- Heightened assurance that HSM is capable of protecting these items will lead to more people donating items from their personal collections, secure in the knowledge that they will be safe in perpetuity.
- A history center that is open regularly will encourage visitors. They may join HSM, donate materials or contribute to their restoration.
- Among the goals of our Strategic Plan is to entice young people to become interested and involved in saving local history. Making letters, photographs, tools, artwork or other items available for original research or classroom visits will prove inspirational.
- Making items in the archives more accessible will add to the quality and relevance of future programming and exhibits.
- Enhancing the hall and its facilities will make it more comfortable for programs and events, and more appealing to groups that may wish to rent it for special occasions, a source of revenue for HSM.
- Fully accessible entrance and restrooms will bring the building into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

THE COST: \$300,000

HSM has paid Trade Design Build \$3,750 for the conceptual plans from its modest operating funds. (Our annual budget is \$16,000.) However, our savings total another \$30,000. We are committed to raising the capital needed for this project through targeted and public appeals, events and other means.

Naming opportunities:

\$50,000: Archives – The Past Preserved

\$40,000: Forest View Alcove – Reading and Meeting Room

\$30,000: The Gathering Room – For Programs and Events

\$20,000: History Hallway – An Exhibition Space

\$10,000: The Courtyard – Landscaped Entry and Outdoor Space

Matching Gifts

Many employers will match charitable contributions made by their employees. Please contact your human resources office for eligibility information and to obtain a matching gift form.

Bequests

A bequest enables you to give any amount you choose free of estate tax without restrictions.

In-kind gifts

Opportunities for in-kind gifts may arise. These gifts may contribute directly to the reduction of cost. Some examples are donations of labor, materials, furnishings, fixtures and equipment.

Tax-exempt Status

HSM is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization; contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Campaign website: mtownhistory.org. Read project updates, become a member and donate online.

HSM Executive Committee

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