

DISPATCHES FROM THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE

TOWN OF MIDDLETOWN, DELAWARE COUNTY

THE Bridge

NO. 52 APRIL 2025

Marking a Milestone



On July 12, 1848, the Delaware Gazette reported “A post office has been established in the town of Middletown in this county by the name of Margaretville and Dr. O. M. Allaben appointed postmaster.”

With that, Middletown Center became Margaretville, thanks to Orson Allaben, physician, land speculator, railroad promoter, State legislator, publisher, sawmill operator, shop owner and all-around civic booster. The community’s namesake was Margaret Lewis Livingston, an heir to a 20,000-acre section of the Hardenburgh Patent that included the growing hamlet on the East Branch.

It wasn’t until 1875, however, that the bustling community voted to become an incorporated municipality. On April 5, 1875 residents of the hamlet, population 400, met to discuss whether to create a formal structure for the man-

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This was the thriving hamlet of Margaretville in 1869, six years before it was formally incorporated as a Village. From Beers Atlas of Delaware County, downloadable at dcnyhistory.org.



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agement of the community, to be run by an elected president (now known as mayor) and trustees. They would devise a system to provide services and collect taxes to pay for them.

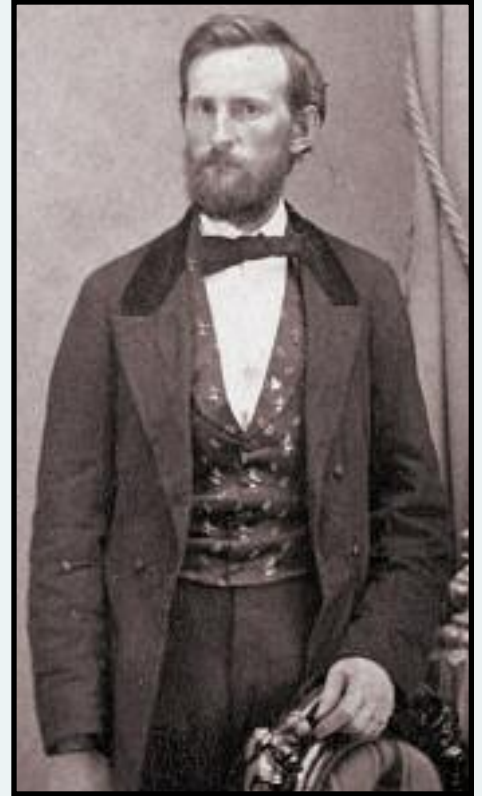
"The people of Margaretville are to decide by ballot on the 8th of May whether to incorporate or not," reported the *Stamford Mirror* on May 4, 1875. Voters (men only at that time) said Yes and then on June 21 elected Dr. Smith Reed, a popular local physician, as President. The first Trustees were E. A. Olmsted, George G. Decker and attorney Albert Carpenter.

That important date in the village's history will be observed by the current Village Board who will begin their monthly business meeting on Thursday, May 8 at 5 p.m. with a reading of a NYS Assembly Resolution in honor of Margaretville's birthday. The public is most welcome. And . . . there will be cake!

An illustrated program, to be held Sunday, July 13 at 2 p.m. at the Middletown History Center, will detail the story of Margaretville's development, focusing on the past century and a half. The talk will cover the impact of railroads, wars, floods and technological progress on businesses, schools, hospitals, civic groups and families. Dr. Alaben will make an appearance!

The celebration continues with a block dance on Main Street Saturday, July 26 from 4 to 7 p.m. The street will be partially closed, music will be provided by Sue's Garage, vintage cars will be on display, food will be available for purchase, and a community portrait will be taken at 4 p.m.

These activities are spearheaded by the Village Board (Mayor John Hubbell and Trustees Iris Mead, Sarah Hubbell, Dave Budin and Jeff Warren), the Central Catskills Chamber of Commerce, and the Historical Society of the Town of Middletown.



Dr. Smith Reed was Margaretville's first President. Photo from the Grant Collection, DCHA

In the beginning . . .

. . . the village's new leaders grappled with wandering livestock, sidewalk complaints, where to put new streets and the lamps to light them, how to curtail nuisance revelers and (surprise!) how to pick up the pieces after a flood.

The following items were taken from Volume 1 of the Minutes of the Village of Margaretville, archived at the Municipal Building, Main Street.

Undated (summer of 1875): On motion of George G. Decker, a resolution for "restraining of horses, cattle, and swine from moving at large in the streets unaccompanied by their owner." John Osterhoudt was appointed Pound Master to impound (corral) the animals until they were claimed by their owners.

Feb. 17, 1876: Present, S. W. Reed,

President; Trustees G.G. Decker, A. P. Carpenter, and E. A. Olmstead. After receiving bills totaling \$58.98 from Edward Burhans, surveyor; H. T. Becker, printer; and Swart, Winter & Kittle for "lamps, etc.," the board "resolved that the sum of \$50 be assessed against the taxable inhabitants of the corporation and that the above bills be paid pro rata from the amount to be raised."

Feb. 7, 1877: The Board agreed to receive sealed proposals "for some careful person to fill, light and attend to the street lamps for a year." James Chamberlain was later hired to do this work for 19 cents per night, every night. Property owners were required to pay a 'street assessment' per foot of frontage to help pay for street maintenance, and those who installed sidewalks per specifications saw their assessment reduced by one foot. J. B.

Ackerly was allowed \$3 for maintaining a watering trough.

Mar. 10, 1877. The Board "authorized the street commissioner to spend money from the village treasury to repair damage done by the recent flood." Two weeks later they let the bid for removing stone and gravel from the bed of the Bull Run to a depth of three feet to George Hendrix and John Burns, for \$117.

May 7, 1877: "Ball playing in any form is prohibited in all streets of the village." A penalty of \$2 would be paid by offenders, with half going to the complainant and half to the village. Also, "Any person riding or driving any streets of Margaretville below the cooerage faster than 10 miles per hour" will also be fined \$2.

July 1, 1878: The Board resolved that "the burning of fire crackers in public

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streets on the approximate 4th day of July is prohibited.” Fine: \$1. Alvin B. Edson was appointed constable, and Edwin A. More village justice.

During the 1880s and 90s the biggest issues were how to secure a reliable source of water, and how to equip the Pakatakan Hose Company and the Excelsior Hook and Ladder Company. On February 3, 1890 the Board ap-

proved four resolutions to put before the voters: Contract with the Margaretville Water Co. to use 19 hydrants for \$10 each per year for five years; to buy 700 feet of hose for \$300 and a hose cart for \$100; and to erect a building to store the hose and cart for \$25. Fifty-two people voted, defeating two of the measures, narrowly approving one and splitting on the fourth. On April 1, the Board approved a tax of 1% to pay for water, and

to buy nozzles, hose cart and hose anyway. More than five years later the public voted to buy a lot on Church Street for \$375 and build the engine house for up to \$1500. (It still stands, as an apartment house.)

May 12, 1890: The Board set license fees for circuses (\$5), small tent shows (\$5), hall shows (\$3), two-horse cart peddlers (\$3), and peddlers selling out of packs, hand trunks or baskets (\$1).

Coming Up in 2025

The community will be celebrating a couple of milestones this year – the 35th anniversary of the creation of Kids Kingdom, the monumental playground at MCS; and the 150th anniversary of the incorporation of the Village of Margaretville.

A reunion of anyone who helped plan Kids Kingdom, raise funds for it or build it, and the now-grown kids who helped design it and for sure played on it for a decade, will be held Sunday, May 4, 2-4 p.m., at the Middletown History Center.

The Village anniversary will be observed three times – at a special meeting of the Village Board at the municipal building May 8 at 5 p.m., at an illustrated presentation on the history of Margaretville July 13 at 2 p.m. at the History Center, and at a Birthday Block Party July 26 from 4 to 7 on Main Street. Come join the crowd for a community portrait at 4 p.m. that day!

Our acclaimed Living History Cemetery Tour will be re-

constituted for the stage this year. The ‘Armchair Cemetery Tour’ will take place August 23 and 24 at the Open Eye Theater – 10-minute portrayals of seven figures from Middletown’s past, with an engaging ‘spirit guide’ as narrator.

Speaking of ghosts, “The D&N: Ghost Railroad of the East Branch” will be presented at the History Center at 2 p.m. June 8 by railroad historian John Duda.

Looking ahead to autumn, the 21st Annual Cauliflower Festival is planned for Sept. 27, and a new “All Things Pumpkin!” party will be hosted by HSM Oct. 19.

Finally, on November 2, photographer/author and HSM member William Abranowicz will discuss and show examples of his widely acclaimed work at the annual meeting of members and friends at the Middletown History Center.

For details, visit the website, mtownhistory.org.

A Kingdom for the Kids



Hundreds of volunteers built the amazing community playground at Margaretville Central School in 1990. Two years of designing, planning and fundraising led to five intense 15-hour days of construction when even those who didn’t know a hammer from a wrench pitched in to make it happen. The event

brought people of every stripe together “for the kids,” and is remembered wistfully as a time of cooperative community spirit. That was 35 years ago. If you remember Kids Kingdom, or wish you did, come to the reunion planned for Sunday, May 4, 2-4 at the Middletown History Center. There will be

videos of construction, light refreshments, and shared memories of working on – and playing on – Kids Kingdom. Please bring photos, mementoes and anecdotes, as well as pieces of the playground you may have salvaged when the Kingdom was taken down in 2001 to make way for the school addition.

Margaret Lewis Livingston (1780-1860), namesake of the Village, was the only child of Morgan and Gertrude Livingston Lewis.

Her father was Washington's Quartermaster General during the Revolution, a judge on the State Supreme Court, and New York's third governor, from 1804 to 1807.

Mother Gertrude had grown up at Clermont, Columbia County, one of the grand Hudson Valley homes occupied by the Livingstons who owned nearly a million acres of land, much of it rented to Catskill Mountain tenant farmers, adding to the family's wealth.

Gertrude inherited 20,000 acres — half of Great Lot 39 of the Hardenburgh patent — from her brother, Chancellor Robert Livingston, who had helped draft the Declaration of Independence.

When Gertrude died in 1833, husband Morgan, became the owner of this tract. At his death in 1844, daughter Margaret inherited the land. A few years later, the post office that was established to serve the growing community in the middle of this tract was named for her. It's not clear why Postmaster Orson Allaben chose as its namesake a member of a family that had profited from the hated land lease system that had ensnared generations of Catskill farmers.

As is common in wealthy, landed families, Margaret Lewis had married a distant cousin, Maturin Livingston, in 1798. They had 12 children, all raised in the house her father had built in Staatsburgh. In addition to inheriting the Livingston lands in this section, Margaret also inherited the extended Lewis family's Dutchess County home with its fine views of the Catskills.



Dr. Orson Allaben, Margaretville's first postmaster. He selected the name for the hamlet that became a village in 1875.

Margaret more than likely never visited here but her son, also named Morgan, and his wife spent a good part of the 1830s in residence 'in Delaware' — the Lake Delaware estate (now in the Town of Bovina) that her father had developed in the 1790s.

Today, both Clermont and the Lewis' home — now known as Mills Mansion at Staatsburgh State Historic Site — are preserved by the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and are open to the public.

A window into the life of Margaret Lewis Livingston can be found in *Mother to Daughter*, a collection of letters she wrote to daughter Gertrude Livingston Lowndes between 1826 and 1842. The book, annotated by Mary Mistler, is a transcription of letters preserved at the Vassar College library.

Margaret Lewis Livingston, undated, unknown artist. Courtesy of Staatsburgh State Historic Site, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.



The basketry of Karl Amor and the fanciful metal sculpture of Joseph Schoell will be the featured exhibit at the Middletown History Center this year. These two immigrant folk artists lived just a couple miles from each other in Dunraven.

The exhibit can be viewed before and after HSM programs and on the first Friday and Saturday of the month, May through October, from 10 to 2.

Karl Amor (long A) was a native of Estonia who immigrated to the US in 1949 and found work at the Gray and Ruff farms in New Kingston. When he retired in 1970 he returned to the basketmaker's art that he learned from his mother in the old country. His finely woven, original basket designs caught the eye of folklorists and collectors who brought the Dunraven man a measure of fame in his later years.

Many local folks recall Karl riding his single-speed bicycle along the back roads looking for willow branches and wild grapevines for his creations, several of which were recently donated to the HSM archives by folklorist Mary Zwolinski. Some of Karl's baskets will be offered for sale at HSM's "All Things Pumpkin!" event October 19 to raise funds to support HSM's Nicholas J. Juried archives.



Joseph Schoell, who spent four years as a Russian prisoner during and after WWII, came to America from Hungary after the failed uprising against the Soviets in 1956. Settling in Long Island with wife Agnes and sons, he worked as a plumber, roofer and in a machine shop. A sheet metal worker in the old country, he parlayed that skill into a hobby after his retirement, fashioning amazing metal sculptures which he placed on the lawn of the summer home he bought and expanded on a bluff above County Route 3.

Several of his pieces – the Statue of Liberty, a castle and a 'house' mailbox – are in the collection at Fenimore Museum, Cooperstown. Mr. Schoell was the father of HSM trustee Josef Schoell.



Above, Josef Schoell applying paint to a sheet metal creation
Karl Amor working on a basket at his home in Dunraven in the 1980s

History Center Hours

Construction is finished, the hall has been cleaned up, new exhibits have been mounted and the Middletown History Center, at 778 Cemetery Road, Margaretville, now has regular monthly hours.

The Nicholas J. Juried Archives, a treasure trove of Middletown and genealogical history, will be open on the first Friday and Saturday of each month, May through October, from 10 to 2, and at other times by appointment (845-586-2400). Exhibits in the lobby and in the program hall can also be viewed on those days as well as afternoons of scheduled programs.

There was a time when Catskill waters were stocked with trout that were locally-raised, right here in Margaretville.

The Delaware Fish Hatchery operated from 1902 to 1933 along Huckleberry (aka Whortleberry) Brook. The State purchased 35 acres of what was known as the Adee farm from William Franks in November 1901 for \$700. William Ball constructed the facility which was completed in spring 1902. The first trout fingerlings were released in August of that year.

For many years, hatchery Superintendent Herbert Annin and family lived in a house that may or may not have been there previously.

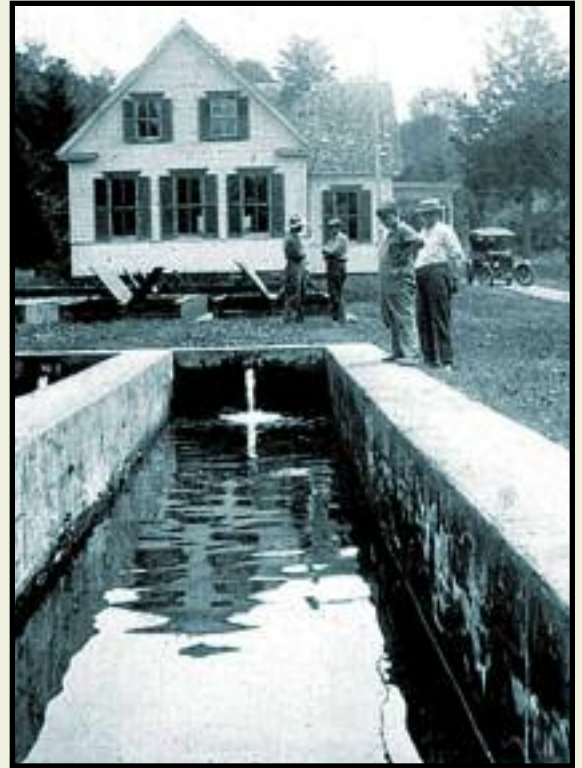
The Delaware Fish Hatchery closed in 1933 because the State Conservation Department determined the water was too cold to raise brook trout to an adequate size for stocking. At some point the State decided it would make a good place to house a regional forest ranger. The property included a barn, the caretaker's house and smaller buildings once devoted to hatchery operations.

Enter the Civilian Conservation Corps. Dubbed Franklin Roosevelt's "Forest Army," the agency was tasked with putting young men to work in the depths of the Great Depression on environmental and recreation projects. A new CCC camp housing 200 enrollees had been established in October 1935 on what is today County Route 3 near Dunraven, not far from the hatchery site. Transforming the hatchery into a Conservation Department facility was a project tailor made for the CCC. The enrollees demolished the barn and an ice house, built a new

storehouse and garage, and renovated the residence. Rock walls were built along the brook, and the surrounding plantation of Norway spruce was trimmed and thinned. The project was completed in 1938.

However, the Huckleberry Brook headquarters was not occupied until 1946, when Ranger Lester Rosa moved in, and forest fire-fighting equipment was moved there from District headquarters in Fleischmanns. Seven years later, Rosa moved his family to a new home near Arkville, and a reorganization of the Conservation Department split operations for this area between Oneonta and the City of Middletown.

The Huckleberry Brook house then was sold by the State to a local family which had it physically relocated to a homesite on a mountainside nearby. The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation still uses the rest of the property for storage.



Concrete ponds for raising trout are shown in this photo provided by Leonard Utter.

Enrollees of the Civilian Conservation Corps camp in Margaretville were put to work rebuilding stone walls and doing other work as the state transformed the Delaware Fish Hatchery to a forest ranger headquarters.





This was the state fish hatchery sometime prior to 1933. The small building at right still stands, as does the barn.

The late Lester Rosa was the first and only forest ranger to live at the repurposed Delaware Fish Hatchery in Huckleberry Brook, from 1946 to 1953. He posed there in 2008.



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Jackie Purdy has done it again.

The Hog Mountain quilter has donated this full-size quilt, “Cabin in the Woods,” to HSM for its 2025 raffle item. It measures 87” x 91”, is cotton, machine pieced and hand quilted.

Members — watch for the annual spring mailing with the book of raffle tickets inside. All others can get tickets at our programs and events this summer and fall. The winning ticket will be drawn at the annual meeting November 2.

Thank you, Jackie!



The Value of Old Friends

Clarke Sanford, Catskill Mountain News publisher, penned a weekly column called Mountain Dew. This one appeared Feb. 16, 1940. Thanks to James Ayers for sending it to us.

I met an old friend Saturday.

I had not seen him in 20 years. We were cronies in that quite-a-while-ago time and fond of each other. But we went different ways, corresponded regularly, then intermittently until communication died a natural death.

What a heartwarming time we had. I had been told that he had married a woman a bit high-hat, also that he had made some money and “felt his oats.”

But, bless me, it was a lie. I don’t know about the wife. But Jim is the same old Jim. We talked ourselves almost hoarse.

“Do you remember that night when Millie gave you the mitten?” “Do you remember that big trout down at the Isthmus?” “How about that first open car?” “Is Bill as big a crook as ever?” “Is dear old man so and so still alive?”

So on we continued. There was no end to asking about this one and that one. We had any “20-years ago column” topped that a newspaper ever published.

It’s wonderful to find old friends the same and be the same myself. But, if we don’t see them, queer ideas are apt to creep into our minds.

It’s the same with everyday friends. There’s a man down the road—a good friend. Been too busy to see him for a year and the first thing I know I begin to have wrong ideas.

I do so need to see those toward whom I am drawn. Propinquity makes friends, business associates, lovers, fishing side-kicks and all the rest.

Give me an old chair, a cigar, and a fireplace one of these winter evenings, and we will go a distance along that most delightful path in the world—friendship.



Frank Dean and Foster Conine, old friends