

L to R, Lions Ron Blanchard and Edwin Altimarano help Christine Pyregeine of Christine's Critters hold Lemon Drop the Burmese Python. Lemon Drop was joined by raptors, bats and alpacas at the Second Annual Family Wildlife Day. (Submitted photo)

Lions hold Wildlife Day

The Watertown Lions Club Second Annual Family Wildlife Day was held at Veterans Memorial Park Pavilion and Soccer Field #1 in October. Christine's Critters, a wildlife rehabber, brought three different live Owls, a Red Tail Hawk, a Peregrine Falcon, an American Kestrel Falcon and Lemon Drop, the nine-foot long yellow Burmese Python. Maureen Heidtman was there with her live bats, Vince Jennetta of DEEP brought bat houses, and JD Farms had alpacas. Art Potwin, a DEEP master naturalist, had a fur bearing animal display and artifacts and Felicia Oterman of DEEP shared Black Bear artifacts, fur and claws. Vendors included Wolf Central, Litchfield Hills Audubon, Watertown Land Trust, Watertown Rotary and Lions Clubs, face painting, and Intuit Arts with giant wildlife puppets and crafts. Hot dogs, popcorn and cider were available for purchase.

The event was created to thank the Water-Oak Community for 75 years of support of the Lions Club's efforts to raise money for those less fortunate, eye and hearing exams, the food and fuel banks and donations to holiday giving programs.

It Happened in Middlebury

Occupations varied over time

By DR. ROBERT L. RAFFORD

Some of the earliest records of occupations of residents in Middlebury come from the decennial United States Census records, primarily from 1850 onward. While there are fairly complete records of households beginning in 1790, the first six censuses (1790-1840), for the most part, did not list residents' occupations. Middlebury's record of the 763 (374 male and 389 female) residents in the June 1850 census, showed that 236 male residents were listed with an occupation.

It goes without saying that the women in town labored just as hard as the men. While women were not listed with occupations in the 1850 U.S. census, the 1860 U.S. census listed Lydiann Nichols, wife of Isaac Nichols, a farmer, with an occupation of "housekeeper," as were most other wives of the "heads" of the households. Keeping house – raising children (Lydiann had four) and managing one of the 145 homes in town in 1850 was every bit as demanding as any other occupation. It was not until 1860 that women were recognized in census records as housekeepers, although census records still did not recognize housekeeping as a true occupation on par with those of men. In 1900, more females were likely to have been listed with an occupation, however. An example is Mary R. Igoe, a 24 year-old school teacher (she would later married William Johnson and be remembered because the Region 15 School District Headquarters is named for her: Mary I. Johnson).

In 1850, as might be expected, 155 males were listed as farmers, 66 percent of the identified occupations. Middlebury was originally referred to as the West Farms of Waterbury. Twenty-two men, or 9 percent, were listed as laborers, the next highest occupation. Eight cutters and seven brick makers comprised the next most populous occupations, while joiners, blacksmiths, carriage makers and axe makers had four workers in each category.

A cutter could be an ice cutter, and Middlebury's Lake Quassapaug supplied much ice to businesses and households here and in Waterbury. Another type of cutter worked with fustian textiles, slicing off surface loops to create a short pile face; but a cutter could also have worked forging or sharpening metal knives and sharp-edged tools. Joiners worked in shops "joining" wooden pieces together, similar to carpenters who worked building structures out of wood. The four axe makers doubtlessly worked at the Fenn Axe Company on Fenn Road, manufacturing axes similar to the hewing axe on display at the Middlebury Historical Society Museum.

Fifty years later, the 1900 census records show how Middlebury's occupations had modified as the town approached a new century. With a population of 736, our town surprisingly had fewer residents than in 1850. Of the 350 residents listed with an occupation, only 91 of them were now farmers, comprising just 26 percent of all occupations. Farm laborers (89) now comprised over 25 percent of the workforce. Farming still occupied over 50 percent of the town's population.



An 1818 woodcut by John Aiken depicts farm life. In 1850, the census listed 66% of Middlebury's male occupants as farmers. (Library of Congress photo)

Service workers included two hostlers and a coachman, and a vacation venue at Lake Quassapaug now featured one waitperson and two cooks, in addition to another hotel worker and a laundress. There were three grocers and a postmaster in town. Professionals included four schoolteachers, two music teachers, a physician, a nurse and two clergymen.

Day laborers numbering 56, just 16 percent of the town's occupation, were unskilled or semi-skilled workers who may have worked on farms or anywhere they could find work.

Skilled tradespeople were more abundant than in 1850, as the 19 teamsters, eight carpenters, two blacksmiths, seven machinists and a carriage maker now populated the town. There was also a mason, a steam fitter, three painters, a plasterer and a collier. A collier worked in the charcoal industry.

The only factory workers in 1900 numbered 21; 18 of them worked at the Naugatuck Rubber Shoe factory in Naugatuck, while two worked in a cotton mill and one in a knife factory.

Bob Rafford is the Middlebury Historical Society president and Middlebury's municipal historian. To contact the society, visit MiddleburyHistoricalSociety.org or contact him at president@ middleburyhistoricalsociety.org. Your membership and support are welcome.

Holiday Events



Luminarias cast light along a Middlebury driveway in 2024. The Middlebury Lions Club is selling luminarias again this holiday season. See below. (Submitted photo)

Gingerbread Village

The 58th annual Gingerbread Village and Christmas Bazaar at St. George's Episcopal Church in Middlebury returns December 5. It features elaborately decorated gingerbread houses representing homes, businesses and churches, all carefully set in place to depict a snowy New England town. Trees, reindeer and snowmen complete the scene.

Village hours are Saturday, December 5 - 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Sunday, December 6 - 12 to 7 p.m.; Monday through Friday, December 7 to 11 - 2 to 4 p.m. and 6 to 8 p.m.; and Saturday, December 12 – 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Parking and admission are free (donations welcome). The church is handicap accessible.

Find more information at www.gingerbreadvillagect.com. For general questions, contact the church at 203-758-9864 or email saintgeorgesct@gmail.com.

Luminarias and ornaments

The Middlebury Lions Club is selling luminarias and ornaments again this year. Luminarias are a long-standing Christmas Eve tradition in Middlebury, with their soft white lights lining driveways and walkways at dusk. Many families also use them for New Year's Eve celebrations and holiday parties.

Each set includes 12 white luminaria bags and 12 long-lasting 10-hour candles and costs $10 per dozen. Buy them at Vaszauskas Farm or the Middlebury Parks and Recreation office. Lions also will sell luminarias at the Middlebury Transfer Station on Saturday, Dec. 12, from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Pay by cash or check

The "Middlebury 250 – Honoring Our Heritage" ornament first offered in 2025 is available again for the 2026 holiday season. The ornament features the Josiah Bronson House, the oldest surviving house in Middlebury, with the Comte de Rochambeau on horseback and a French soldier in the foreground. The scene recalls Middlebury's place in the French army's 1781 march to Yorktown.

Buy ornaments at Sullivan's Jewelers, the Middlebury Tax Collector's office at Town Hall and the Middlebury Parks and Recreation Department at Shepardson Community Center. Pay by cash or check. Selected prior year ornaments also are available.

Cookie Walk

Santa's helpers have been hard at work because cookie lovers across Connecticut will be heading to the famous "Cookie Walk" at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Woodbury, Saturday, Dec. 5, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The annual cookie sale features hundreds of homemade cookies in dozens of styles, all from local volunteer bakers. Tasty treats this year will range from simple delicious sugar cookies to far more elaborate creations in an array of flavors, colors, shapes, and varieties.

St. Paul's is at 294 Main St. S. in Woodbury. All cookies and other treats are made by St. Paul's parishioners and sold by the ounce. Proceeds from the annual sale support the missions and ministry of St. Paul's Episcopal Church.

Police toy drive

The Middlebury Police Benevolent Association annual toy drive will be Saturday, December 5, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at DG Market at 600 Middlebury Road in Middlebury. Donate a new unwrapped gift to bring a smile to a child this holiday season. Cash donations also will be accepted. Those who can't make it December 5 can drop off gifts at the police department Friday, December 18. Donations will support local children and families.

Tree lighting

Middlebury's Annual Tree Lighting ceremony begins Saturday, December 5, at 4 p.m. in front of the Middlebury Congregational Church steps with performances by various children's groups, followed by caroling around the Green led this year by the Connecticut Yuletide Carolers. Then Santa arrives to light the tree along with hot chocolate served by church members! Young children will have an opportunity to visit Santa in Town Hall after the tree lighting.

Don't forget to drop your wish list in Santa's big red mailbox next to the gazebo at Shepardson Community Center! All letters received by 3 p.m. Monday, December 14, are guaranteed to receive a reply from Santa and his elves. Please include child's full name, age, complete mailing address and telephone number (in case Santa has any questions). Siblings and/or pets' names are also encouraged.

Westover School is joining the fun and will open its historic Red Hall from 3 to 6 pm. They hope you will stop in to take pictures in front of the tree and enjoy the holiday decorations and treats. Please use the main entrance on Whittemore Road.

Glebe House

Glebe House Museum at 49 Hollow Road in Woodbury will host an open house and holiday shop Saturday, December 5, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and an old-fashioned holiday celebration Sunday, December 6, from 1 to 4 p.m.

On Saturday, admission is free, donations accepted. Experience the life of a Woodbury family during the early 19th century as the Botsford family prepares for the holidays. Enjoy a tour of the main floor, watch demonstrations of traditional activities, and shop in the Holiday Shop.

On Sunday, advance tickets are $25. Dress in your warm, festive best to gather around a warm fire while enjoying a hot beverage, hors d'oeuvres and listening to the sounds of the season. Enjoy Yuletide caroling and check out the holiday decor and gift items available for purchase. For more information, visit www.glebehousemuseum.org, call 203-263-2855, or email office@glebehousemuseum.org.

Cookie Sale

The MVFD ladies auxiliary annual cookie sale will be Saturday, December 12, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the Middlebury Fire House at 65 Tucker Hill Road. Cookies will be for sale for $9 per pound.

Cookies usually include white chocolate chip with craisin, snickerdoodle, spritz, Swedish dreams, peanut butter balls, cake batter, sugar cookies, pignoli, snowballs, Christmas crackle and more! For questions, please contact ladiesauxiliary@middleburyfire-ct.org,

Photo with Santa

The Middlebury Lions Club 4th annual photo with Santa will be Saturday, December 12, from 3 to 7 p.m. in the gazebo at Shepardson Community Center. Parents use their cameras or cell phones to take the photos. Pets are welcome, too. Enjoy holiday music and s'mores. A $10 donation to the Lions Club is suggested, as is a nonperishable food donation to the Middlebury Food Bank.

Christmas Eve Service

The Christmas Eve service at Calvary Southbury will be Thursday, December 24, at 4 p.m. The church is at 354 Kettletown Road in Southbury.

Salome's Stars

Horoscope for the week of November 30, 2026.

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) Restless Rams and Ewes might want to let others finish a current project while they start something new. But if you do, you could risk losing out on a future opportunity.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) The Bovine's creative forces start revving up as you plan for the upcoming holidays. Some practical aspects also emerge, especially where money is involved.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) Moments of doubt disrupt your otherwise clear sense of purpose. Don't ignore them. They could be telling you not to rush into anything until you know more about it.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) A planned trip might have to be delayed. Plan to use this new free time to update your skills and your resume so that you'll be ready when a new job opportunity opens.

LEO (July 23 to August 22) A flood of holiday party bids from business contacts allows you to mix work and pleasure. Your knowledge plus your LEOnine charm win you a new slew of admirers!

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22) An unexpected act by a colleague complicates an agreement, causing delays in implementing it. Check out the motive for this move; it's not what you might suspect.

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22) You might want to cut ties with an ingrate who seems to have forgotten your past generosity. But there might be a reason for this behavior that you should know about. Ask.

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21) Be careful not to set things in stone. Much could happen during the next several days that'll make you rethink some decisions – and maybe change them.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21) Your plans to help provide holiday cheer for the less fortunate inspire others to follow your generous example. Expect welcome news by week's end!

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19) You're in your glory as you start planning for the holiday season ahead. But leave time to deal with a problem that needs a quick and fair resolution.

AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18) The upcoming holiday season provides a perfect setting for strengthening relationships with kin and others. A new contact has important information.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20) Instead of fretting over a cutting remark by a co-worker, chalk it up to an outburst of envy of your well-respected status among your colleagues and superiors.

BORN THIS WEEK: You instinctively know when to be serious and when to be humorous – attributes that everyone can find endearing.

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VASZAUSKAS FARM
Middlebury Road (Opposite the Shell Station)
Open 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily
Anthony Calabrese 203-758-2765
Christmas Trees - Cut
Wreaths • Roping
Poinsettias
Cemetery Boxes
Kissing Balls
Pots of holiday decorated greenery
Gift Certificates Available
Bird Seed Headquarters Black Oil, Premium Mix, Sunflower Hearts, Niger Seed (thistle for finches)
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