

BACKROADS BICYCLE/AUTOMOBILE TOUR OF MIDDLESEX, VERMONT

(created and published by the Middlesex Historical Society)

Welcome to a 25-mile self-guided historical tour of the backroads of Middlesex. You may take the tour by bicycle or by car. You may want to allow about one hour for the car tour. The bicycle tour is rated strenuous and is mostly on dirt roads; you may need to allow 3-4 hours or more, depending on your fitness level.

The tour highlights cemeteries, mill sites, certain old homes, cellar holes, and sites of the earlier communities of Middlesex Center, Wrightsville, and Putnamville. Most old homes are not mentioned specifically, but they are fairly easy to spot. They are generally built in the Cape style. Many of the homes and other sites date from the early 1800s, during a time when the town was settled mostly by people from the southern New England states.

Please respect private property and view these sites and homes from the road only. A special note will be made if the site is on public property. Enjoy your trip!

The tour begins at the Middlesex Town Hall in Middlesex Village at the corner of Route 2 and Church Street.

The Town Hall was built in the early 1900s on the site of an earlier brick church building that burned. Behind the Town Hall is the Middlesex Fire Department building, which was previously the Middlesex Village District 2 schoolhouse. Across the street from Town Hall is the Middlesex United Methodist Church. This building was erected in 1909. Beyond the church, Church Street comes to a dead-end at the Winooski River. Peering down at the river from this vantage point offers the onlooker an impressive view of the Green Mountain Power hydroelectric plant and dam. Before the river was dammed back in the 1890s, the level of the river was significantly lower, and this spot was known as the breathtaking Middlesex Gorge.

From the late 1700s until the year 2001, a bridge spanned the gorge here, connecting Middlesex with Moretown and the Mad River Valley. The earliest bridges on the site were covered bridges. The last of these was replaced in the early 1900s with a steel truss bridge, which was then washed out in the Great Flood of 1927. This was replaced with a double-span steel truss bridge, which was removed in the late 1980s. A temporary bridge spanned the river until 2001, when a much wider bridge was built in a new location just a bit upstream.

Go back to the Town Hall. If you are in a car, set your trip odometer to **zero** at the intersection of Church Street and Route 2. If you look to your right, you can see the Middlesex Country Store and some of the homes of Middlesex Village. Just beyond the store is the turnoff onto Route 100B and the new bridge over the Winooski River. The Village used to be considerably larger, complete with stores, hotels, a post office, and mills along the river. Unfortunately, much of the Village was washed out in the 1927 flood. Further changes were made to the Village and many homes were removed when the interstate was built in the 1950s. Most recently, the Village was altered once again when Route 100B was re-routed and the new bridge built over the Winooski River in 2001.

Take a left turn onto Route 2. At **0.1 mile** on the right is the Middlesex railroad depot, which is now owned by Gallagher Lumber Company. The depot used to be a bustling hub of activity and was a

main stop for the Central Vermont Railway. Beyond the depot and to the right of the train tracks is the Middlesex Village Cemetery (owned by the town of Middlesex and open to the public). Early town officials and prominent residents are buried here. A large part of Middlesex Village used to exist in the area around the cemetery; few homes are there now.

At **0.2 mile** on the left is the Camp Meade restaurant, overnight cabins, and museum complex. This was built on the site of the Camp Meade CCC camp, which provided the labor for the rebuilding of the area after the 1927 flood. Camp Meade was named after Thomas Meade, the first white settler in Middlesex and in Washington County.

At **0.4 mile**, turn right onto Center Road and proceed under the interstate overpass and straight up the hill. The Center Road was in a different location before the 1950s. The current road has only been here since the interstate was built; hence no evidence of farms or fields here.

At **1.8 miles** is the home that was the last working dairy farm in Middlesex. Note the old wooden silo made from small fitted strips of wood.

Continue up the hill on the Center Road. At **2.7 miles** on the right is the Middlesex Center Cemetery (owned by the Middlesex Center Cemetery Association and open to the public from May to November). This cemetery was founded in 1812, and is still in use. Many of the town's earliest settlers are buried here. On the left is the hearse building, which is still owned and used as a storage building by the Cemetery Association.

At **2.8 miles** on the left is the Middlesex District 4 schoolhouse, which is now a private home, as are most of the schoolhouses that are still standing. The town was at one time divided into 14 school districts, each with its own schoolhouse.

At **3.7 miles** on the left is a cement foundation. It was intended to be a building for Middlesex College, a project started in 1960 that was never completed. The next home on the left was built for the College, as well as two newer homes that you will pass on the left at about the

4.0 mile mark. One may wonder how this area would have changed had the College actually been completed.

At **4.6 miles** on the left is Leland Farm Road. If you look down the road, you will notice an old white farmhouse on the right. Some people think this home may once have been a stagecoach stop with rooms for overnight travelers, although this has not been confirmed.

At **4.8 miles**, turn left at the stop sign and proceed up the hill to another T intersection. On the left at this intersection is a large home built in the early twentieth century by Hinckley Chapin, a descendant of William Chapin, one of the earliest settlers in Middlesex. Hinckley Chapin was a well-known and influential resident of Middlesex. Among other things, he was the Town Clerk from 1936-1946, and Town Representative in 1943.

Turn right at this T intersection (**5.0 miles**). You are still on the Center Road. This area of town is known as Middlesex Center. Immediately on the left is the Middlesex District 7 schoolhouse. Behind the house is the home that was built by the aforementioned William Chapin.

At **5.1 miles**, beyond the next white house and its barn, is a pile of large rocks in the field on the left. This is the site of the Middlesex Center Church, which was built in the early 1800s and has been gone for at least one hundred years. The entire community of Middlesex Center was once the hub of activity for the town's hill farm residents, with its church and even a dance hall that was attached to the Chapin's home. As many of the early prosperous farms in the area fell by the wayside, Middlesex Center as a true community center ceased to exist, and is now indistinguishable from other areas of town.

At **5.6 miles** a road will come in from the left. Continue straight. The road name now changes from Center Road to East Hill Road.

At **6.4 miles**, look carefully in the woods on the right and you will see a small cellar hole. Long ago this was the home of a family named Somers.

Continue up and over East Hill. At **8.1 miles** is the Carr Cemetery on the left, which is owned by the Town of Middlesex and accessed by the small road leading directly to the cemetery from East Hill Road. Just next to the cemetery was the site of the Carr family home.

At **8.2 miles** on the left is the Middlesex District 6 schoolhouse.

At the next 4-way intersection, bear left and downhill. You are still on East Hill Road. At **9.0 miles** on the left is a large farmhouse that was the home of the Hill family. Just across the road from the house is a cement foundation. At one time, there was another house here also belonging to the Hill family.

At **9.3 miles**, turn left onto Portal Road. At **9.5 miles** on the right is the old Portal family farm.

At **10.7 miles**, it is thought that there was once a town road that went to the right. It is now just fields and woods. There was also a building on this site, which was some type of shop.

At **11.0 miles** on the right you will see the North Branch Cemetery (owned by the North Branch Cemetery Association and open to the public from spring through late fall). This cemetery has been in its present location since only the 1930s. It was previously in the settlement of Wrightsville, along the North Branch of the Winooski River. The cemetery and much of Wrightsville was washed away in the Great Flood of 1927. After the flood, the families in Wrightsville were left with the grisly task of finding as many of the remains as they could of the people who had been buried in the cemetery. They then moved the cemetery to higher ground in its current location, at the same time that the Wrightsville dam was built in the mid 1930s.

At **11.2 miles**, you will come to a T intersection with Route 12. If you look to your right, you will see across Route 12 a road called Mill Street, which is actually over the town line in Montpelier. The homes along Mill Street are the last remains of what was once the village of Wrightsville. At the end of Mill Street, just at the base of Wrightsville dam, still stands the home of Medad Wright, who built sawmills and a machine shop here, and founded the once-prosperous settlement of Wrightsville, complete with many more homes, farms, stores, and a

school. Most of what comprised Wrightsville now lays at the bottom of Wrightsville Reservoir.

Back to the intersection at **11.2 miles**. Turn left onto Route 12 and proceed north. The hill you are climbing is known as Camp Green Hill. Camp Green was another CCC camp that was located here in the 1930s to build Wrightsville Reservoir. Another CCC camp, known as Camp Weeks, was also located in the area. Wrightsville Reservoir and dam were built to protect the city of Montpelier from future flooding after the devastation caused there by the 1927 flood. Unfortunately for the people who lived in Wrightsville, the village of Wrightsville had to be sacrificed for the future safety of Montpelier. The houses were bought by the State of Vermont, sold at auction, and then moved by some owners to different locations, including a few along the current Route 12.

At **11.6 miles** on the right you will see the southern end of Wrightsville Reservoir and the dam. The old Route 12 also lies at the bottom of the Reservoir; the road you are now traveling on was built in the 1930s. Wrightsville Reservoir is now an important recreational area for the community, as well as providing flood control for Montpelier.

At **13.9 miles** on the right is the Putnamville schoolhouse, technically Middlesex District 11. You have just entered the village of Putnamville, which until the flood, and even now to some extent, maintained a separate identity from the rest of the town of Middlesex. Note the two front doors on the schoolhouse. One entrance was for the boys, the other for the girls!

At **14.0 miles** on the left are two large homes next to each other. These homes once belonged to the Putnam family, as did most of the village of Putnamville, which they founded. The second home was the home of C.C. Putnam. Across from the Putnam home is a blue building on the right. This was the Putnamville store.

At **14.1 miles**, turn right onto Norton Road. Look over the bridge to your right. You can still see metal rods sticking out of the rock across the river. This is almost all that remains of the once impressive Putnamville saw and planing mills. The entire village was really built

around the mills by the Putnam family to support the mills and their workers. These mills, too, were completely washed away in the 1927 flood, and from then on, Putnamville ceased to be a commercial center of any kind.

Turn around on Norton Road and go back to the intersection with Route 12. Turn left onto Route 12 south and retrace your route back through Putnamville and on towards the Reservoir.

At **15.3 miles**, turn right onto Shady Rill Road.

At **15.9 miles** on the left is the farmhouse and barn of the Cummings family. They were some of the earliest settlers of the Shady Rill area. The barn was built around 1860 through a community barnraising, and is the largest historical barn now left in Middlesex. Rumor has it that the Cummings farm was a stop for escaped slaves making their way to Canada during the Civil War on the Underground Railroad.

At **16.4 miles** on the right is the Shady Rill Baptist Church, whose earliest ministers were members of the aforementioned Cummings family. Directly across the road on the left is the Middlesex District 12 schoolhouse. This was the heart of the Shady Rill community.

At **16.7 miles** on the right is a very small family cemetery in the woods marked by a white picket fence. (This is on private land and is not accessible to the public.)

At **17.2 miles** on the left is Rumney Memorial School, currently the elementary school (grades K-6) for the town of Middlesex. There are about 150 students at Rumney School. In the last 150 years, Middlesex has evolved from having 14 separate schoolhouses to one central school for the entire town!

At **17.4 miles**, bear to the left on the paved road. But first, look to your right, down Story Road. You will see on the right-hand side of that road the Middlesex District 9 schoolhouse.

At **18.4 miles** on the right is the home that once belonged to George and Madge Rumney, who were very involved members of the community. The Rumney's donated the land on which the

elementary school was built; Rumney Memorial School is named in honor of them.

The road name now changes to Molly Supple Hill Road. Continue up and over the hill. At **19.0 miles** on the right is the home that belonged to the Supple family. The road was named after Molly, one of the unmarried Supple daughters.

At **19.3 miles**, turn right onto Center Road. This should look familiar, because you traveled the other way on this road about 14 miles ago. Retrace your way through Middlesex Center, and at **19.9 miles**, turn left and downhill (still on Center Road).

At the next intersection at **20.0 miles**, go straight, leaving the Center Road and entering the Brook Road. This road meanders through a mostly wooded area along the Great Brook. This road was never heavily populated.

At **22.7 miles** on the right, you will see some old maple trees on the property of the brown house on the hill. There was once a farm here belonging to the Long family, and there may still be a cellar hole around somewhere.

At **23.2 miles**, you will be back at the old dairy farm and the intersection with Center Road. Take a left onto Center Road, and retrace your route 1.8 miles back to the Middlesex Town Hall.

Hope you enjoyed your trip!

This tour was created and written by Patty Wiley, President of the Middlesex Historical Society. June 1999. Revised 2004.

*Do you have any questions about what you saw or read?
Contact the Middlesex Historical Society at 229-0499*