

ne of Middletown's best-kept secrets where people climb and explore their family tree



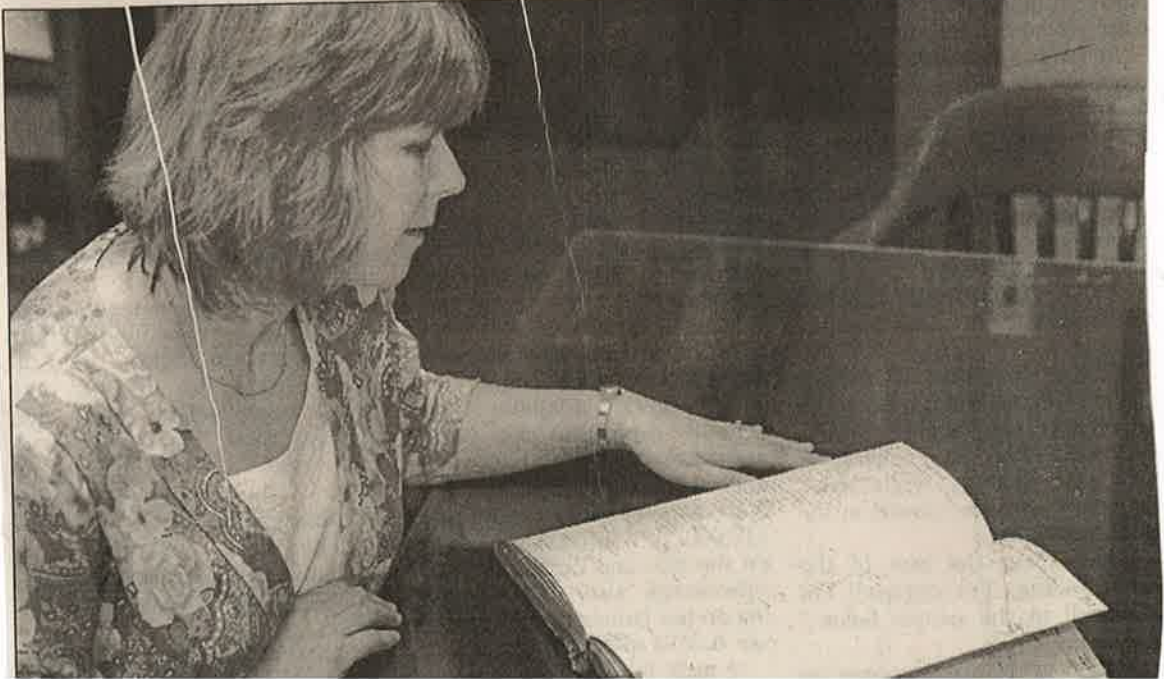
Godfrey Memorial Library
134 Newfield Street



HERALD PRESS PHOTOS - GINA AMOROSO

Top photo, Doris Sherrow, of Portland searches through the Godfrey Library's shelves of genealogy material. In bottom photo, Assistant

Director Susan Field-Burquiere looks through a ledger donated from an area funeral home to the Godfrey Library.



By Mary Milewski

HERALD PRESS STAFF

MIDDLETOWN — At the Godfrey Memorial Library, a tree grows with roots as deep as generations past and branches wider than New England.

Located at 134 Newfield Street, the library has over 16,000 volumes on family genealogy, local history, and biography — perfect for public use to climb and explore a family tree.

"Get all the information you can while you're young," advised Chester Tibbetts, 81, who has used the library's resources to trace back 12 generations in his family — all the way to 1635.

Coverage is mainly of New England and the 13 original colonies, though there is a growing collection of southern materials.

The American Genealogical-Biographical Index, referencing over 800 resources, is published at the library. It is made from a reference file with about 7 million entries containing the name, birth date, state of residence, and biographical information of a person.

"If someone wanted to know about a relative from 1790, we can look up a reference in there," said Susan Field-Burguiere, the library's assistant director.

Also found at the library are passenger and immigration lists, the American Genealogies Index, and the New England Historical and Genealogical Register Index.

Towering shelves of thick wood slabs hold an extensive collection of books. There are state, county, and local histories,

plus numerous family histories which have been donated to the library. The library has military records with information from colonial times through World War I, including service and pension records. Cemetery and church records, city and business directories, newspaper transcripts, compiled records of Mayflower families, 1900, 1910, and 1920 census records for all of Connecticut are also available.

Often the library holds genealogy classes. "It is an introductory course on genealogy and where to find records. It goes over interviewing your own family and how to compile the information," said Field-Burguiere.

Currently the library is putting together an ethnic room, focusing on specific countries.

"It's amazing what this library has. We try to help people — the best thing is when they find something," said Ellen Carlson who has been a volunteer at the Godfrey Library for about two years.

About 12 volunteers help at the library. "We all work very well together. We all have the love of genealogy and want to share it," said Field-Burguiere.

Anyone can visit the library at any level of experience, from those brand-new to genealogy to genealogists researching their histories for years, said Field-Burguiere. We assist people by showing them around, or by pointing them in the best direction to look for information, she added.

"Some people just stop by while others get totally absorbed and stop in several times a

week," said Field-Burguiere. "One woman came in yesterday at 10:30 a.m. Later in the day she asked the time — it was 4:30 p.m., she had forgotten lunch and everything else she had to do."

She added, "We have people coming from around the states, some on genealogy trips in their motor homes. Recently visitors came here from Washington, and also from Florida."

There is a computer available for patron use. Several genealogical programs are available, including a growing CD-ROM library. Sign-up time is required and training is available.

Arthur Fremont, who was a librarian at Wesleyan University, founded the library in 1949 with his own private collection of books. It opened on May 6, 1951. The library was named in memory of Grace (Godfrey) Rider and her brother Stuart Chopin Godfrey who were "a constant source of inspiration to its builder", according to a dedication placard at the Godfrey Library.

Though the library is on a heavily traveled road, it is set back from the street. Its grounds and interior seem quiet and reflective. Staff and volunteers agree it is among Middletown's best kept secrets.

The Godfrey Memorial Library is sponsoring a bus trip to Ellis Island, NY, on Saturday, September 13. Refreshments are provided on the bus. Reservations must be made by August 25. The cost is \$30 per person, proceeds benefit the library.

Library research is available through the mail, or through e mail. For a fee, the library can assist in finding genealogical data. For information, contact research@godfrey.org.

The Godfrey library is open to the public, free-of-charge, Mondays from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., Tuesday through Friday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. For further information call 346-4375 or 345-3627. The library's homepage address is <http://www.godfrey.org>.

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