Yellow Fever in Middle Haddam, 1796

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History 331
January 1980
INTRODUCTION

Middle Haddam is a village on the eastern bank of the Connecticut River, remarkable for its well preserved early nineteenth century architecture. Colonial and Federal houses predominate in this somewhat remote area, and residents are proud of its historic charm. Originally a ship-building community, Middle Haddam is now home to many afficianados of ship craftsmanship and sea captain stories. Shipbuilder's whimsey is pointed to and in fact seems a credible explanation for some anomalous features in these houses. It lends speculative insight at any rate, into the people who created this community. For frustratingly little remains to inform us about how they actually lived.

From the pastures above Main Street, one can see the state-ly Federal houses along Main Street, the church, the school house, and Knowles Road leading to the older houses on the riverfront. Beyond the river lies Middletown to the north. With the exception of the very uncolonial power plant directly across the river, this is an idyllic scene. It conjures swarthy sailors, whittling in the village store, relating sea tales to the children rapt at their knees.

This comfortable image is somewhat belied however by the continued existence of the very structures that evoke it. After the mid-nineteenth century Middle Haddam fell out of the main stream of American growth and became a summer retreat for New Yorkers. Something must account for its arrested development.

One incident that sheds light on the state of this community at the turn of the nineteenth century is an account of a
Yellow Fever plague that struck Middle Haddam in 1796. Writing twenty five years after the fact, a Middletown doctor asserted that once three people had died, the panic stricken community fled, leaving only five men to care for the remaining sick and dying. This evidence suggests that the community itself was malfunctioning and begs investigation into the nature of Middle Haddam's formation and evolution.*

First the question of community itself: how can a modern person fathom its significance for a late eighteenth century riverport? As a point of departure, we have an intuitive nostalgia for communities that is evoked by scenes like present day Middle Haddam. Whatever its basis in fact, this nostalgia is persistent; a vague notion, instilled by Grampa in the formative years, of neighborliness, discipline and oversight. It is a sort of safety net for the exigencies of daily life, identifiable through our recollections of family and security in childhood. For many the consensus is that, sad and inevitable as growing up, community no longer exists.

Set against this is Thomas Bender's view. He feels the word 'community' requires redefinition to accommodate modern day mobility. He considers that a shared place is no longer an essential term of the definition. Earlier sociologists had classified human relationships as falling into one of two kinds. Those impelled by social, economic or political circumstances, they labeled Gesselschaft. Gemeinschaft was their term for rela-

* An ironic modern analogy—there is no plan for evacuation of this area in the event the Yankee Nuclear Power Plant explodes. The plant is a few miles south of Middle Haddam.
tionships that persist despite these circumstances. Their error, according to Bender, had been viewing these two categories as mutually exclusive. For Bender, community persists today in a new form. Loose networks of people, whose economic needs may separate them by hundreds of miles, remain loyal to one another and to some shared idea that informs their daily activity in the intervals when they are not in contact. By this interpretation it is possible to conclude that perhaps the Connecticut emigres, rather than those remaining behind, perpetuated the community ideal.

There is a misconception that responsibility and individual freedom are antithetical. In fact individual responsibility is essential both for the maintenance of a community and to facilitate action based on free choice. On the most basic level, this is illustrated by housework. The more dislike and resistance one brings to the task, the more control it exerts, by incurring grumpiness and anxiety about procrastination. The task itself cannot ultimately be avoided. A general acceptance of such responsibility is the first requirement for a community. In turn a community fosters responsibility among its members by virtue of the simple fact that the responsible individual is not alone and will not be required to take on the responsibilities of others. Menial necessities can become occasions for social events. Again, a basic example, somebody in the laundromat lends some detergent or watches another person's kids while he or she goes out to buy some. As a result both people feel less lonely and bothered, and a friendship might even evolve.
in Bender's terms, this model unites the Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft duality. Associations necessitated by work become more fulfilling because of this shared sense of responsibility, and are the basis for cementing the community, fostering a broader network of chosen friends.

When an event such as the Yellow Fever epidemic in Middle Haddam disrupts the entire community, the above described structure is clearly lacking. An investigation of the village's formation and subsequent development will reveal the original premise of the community and how and why it failed.
Middle Haddam was originally a part of Middletown, along with present day Cromwell, Portland and East Hampton. Near the end of the seventeenth century, large tracts of land on the east side of the Connecticut River were sold by the town to Middletown men. These initial proprietors do not appear to have taken up residence across the river; they used the land primarily as a repository for capital and perhaps later for lumbering. Middle Haddam, about six miles south of Middletown center, was not then as remote from the main stream as it appears to be today. Before bridges spanned the river, ferries were the common means of crossing. Situated directly across from Maromas, an outlying farm district of Middletown, Middle haddam was a natural location for a ferry crossing. A 1737 map reveals two operating ferries: One owned by Bigelow went south to Higganum; another, owned by Jonathan Yeoman, crossed the river to Maromas and by a footpath, gave access to the road to Middletown green.

The first white settler in Middle Haddam built his house in 1710 on Hog Hill, about a quarter of a mile from the river's edge. Presumably he was lured by farming rather than commerce. The 1737 map indicates that a few houses had been built along Main Street and a larger cluster further south in the vicinity of Hog Hill. The growth in this interval was the result of a 1730 migration from Massachusetts. Many of these men were from Eastham, a seafaring community near Cape Cod. According to Map of Chatham/Middletown Ferry, 1737, Connecticut Archives Volume 1, Document 225.
legend, Ralph Smith who brought his family from Eastham, did so to establish them in a farming community away from the lure of the sea. Eventually, however, his sons all became involved in shipping.

Even the early settlers were aware of the potential for shipbuilding. A 1727 deed in which Comfort Davis granted right of passage across his land to the rest of the community, made provision for a place to build and launch boats:

Comfort Davis promises to allow a convenient landing place for the landing of timber or whatever else may be brought for landing. And if any of the proprietors want to build a vessel they shall have the liberty of the yard. 2

This was part of an agreement between five men who owned adjoining subdivisions of a lot that had originally been granted by the town of Middletown. Clearly those involved in this transaction perceived the beginnings of an industry requiring a common interest and cooperation that transcended the institution of private land ownership. Communities in the previous century had been started by proprietors who held the land in common and oversaw its distribution. But the original proprietors of Middle Haddam sold off their land more or less indiscriminately and were not involved with founding the community. There was no village green in Middle Haddam yet the landing emerged as a modern counterpart. Although not communally owned, nearly every member of the community would have interests there and relatively public access would be maintained for a time.

2 Comfort Davis, Samuel Shepard, Ebenezer Wetmore, John Willcock and Ebenezer White, agreement. Middletown Land Records 2:421, April 6, 1727.
Common land had been a premise for the founding of seventeenth century communities. For this eighteenth century community the utility of common land became manifest through commercial pursuit.

The people in Middle Haddam initially made a living by farming and selling timber for shipbuilding. Knowles Landing, the riverfront portion of Middle Haddam, became a point of transfer, drawing lumber from the neighboring communities of Marlborough, Hebron and Haddam Neck, for market up river. Middle Haddamites had to commute down to Haddam Neck for worship during the early years. In 1740 a group from Middle Haddam petitioned the Assembly for their own parish. They built a meeting house in 1744 on Hog Hill in the southern end of town. This parish served people living in Haddam Neck and Maromas also.

In 1767 the town of Unatham, comprising present day Portland and East Hampton including Middle Haddam, was incorporated as a separate entity from Middletown. The three were united by a poor road and had divergent interests. Portland, like Middle Haddam, was becoming a shipbuilding center, but also was beginning to exploit her quarrying potential. East Hampton's industry, then in a fledgling state, centered around small factories along streams that issued into the Connecticut River. In view of these differences, town governance ran remarkably smoothly, with the annual appointment of three selectmen, each representing one of the parishes, and the usual assortment of fence viewers, keykeepers and the like to minimize disputes ar-
rising from agricultural pursuit. Other town officers oversaw the standardization of weights and measures, watchdogs over the scruples of the artisan class. According to the town minutes the governing hand encompassed all the factions in the community until late in the century when contention began to emerge.

Meanwhile religious dissension grew within Middle Haddam. An Episcopal church was formed in 1771 under the ministry of Matthew Graves, a representative of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. With the coming of the Revolution, however, some residents protested his pro-Tory sentiments and an angry mob literally dragged him from his pulpit. He allegedly fled the town disguised as a woman.

Despite the initial rejection of the Anglican church, problems were developing within the Congregational parish. The Reverend Benjamin Boardman was ordained minister in 1762 following the death of the previous pastor. During the Revolution he served as a chaplain. But when he returned to Middle Haddam, disagreement arose regarding his salary and he was dismissed in 1783. He went to a church in Hartford that had been vainly seeking a minister since 1778. Four previous choices had rejected the church's invitation; this suggests that Boardman was not in an advantageous position for selecting his pastorage following the Middle Haddam incident.

Boardman's diary gives an account of his difficulties. His salary was set at ninety five pounds per year in the year 1776 and not increased to account for the wartime depreciation
of currency. Reportedly, ministers' salaries were frequently increased as much as six-fold during this time to compensate for the currency's declining buying power. Boardman wrote that he accepted the diminished salary:

First: For the sake of Peace, that the people might not have their minds disconcerted in Matters of less Moment, to divert them from the more important concerns of a publick nature, as we were involved in a most interesting but doubtful War.
Secondly: That I might by no means be any way instrumental of discredit ing or depreciating the money.
Thirdly: Because my heart was bound up in the Cause of my Country and was very anxious for its Salvation, and felt disposed to Submit to Suffering with my fellow creatures to as great a degree as I could well bear.

When the parish, 'presuming on his self sacifice,' offered him the same salary for the following year, Boardman declined, seeking instead the real value of the money in 1776. The society rejected this proposal and his subsequent request for comparable value in silver or wheat. He was finally paid in 1779 for the three preceding years, an amount the real value of which was fourteen pounds per year. But even still, merchants would not accept the Yorktown currency and he had to resort to loans. When he left he calculated that the Middle Haddam parish owed him 530 pounds which they never paid. His condition for accepting the Hartford ministry was that he be paid 400 pounds in Spanish milled dollars, and that the payment be made punctually.

Edwin Pond Parker, History of the Second Church of Christ in Hartford, p. 151
Boardman was dubbed by Beers, 'A man of superior talents and learning but deficient in prudence and self control!' Evidently this controversy incurred animosity on both sides. Aside from Beer's recollection, however, no other remnants of the parishioners' viewpoint was found. When another minister was procured two years later, the church was reorganized under a new confession of faith. In short, Middle Haddam in the years following the revolution was politically a sub-entity of the three parishes comprising Chatham. As a parish, its only true basis for sovereignty, financial squabbles had sufficiently eroded the basis of the church that it lacked a minister for two years. Fiscal pursuit over rode spiritual piety as a basis for uniting the residents and the subsequent re-establishment of the Episcopal church gives further evidence of this.

In 1786 Samuel Taylor sold Stephen Hurlbut and Nathan Cornwell, wardens of the Episcopal society, land for the construction of a church. The resulting 36x47 foot structure featuring a bell tower and fine early Federal detailing, belied the financial duress of the community that had been unable to pay their Congregational pastor a few years earlier. Friction arose between the new and the old church. In the minutes of the Congregational church is recorded a request from a woman relocating to Glastonbury, for a letter of recommendation to her new church. The request was turned down because she sought to

4 J.H. Beers, History of Middlesex County, p. 189.

5 Deed between Samuel Taylor and Episcopal Church Society, 1786, East Hampton Land Records, 4:366.
change her denomination to Anglican.

Though the records of the founding of Christ Episcopal Church are no longer extant, records dating from 1794-1828 indicate an increasing membership comprised of many of the town elite. Included are: Enoch and Ralph Smith, Chauncey Bulkley, Stephen Griffith, Nathaniel and Job Doane, Jeremiah Taylor and William C. Hall, all prominent merchants or sea captains. Another defector to the Episcopal society, John W. Johnson, began his career as a privateer during the Revolution. Jonathan Bowers, a son of the first Congregational minister in the village, also joined Christ Church. A few prominent men did remain loyal to the Congregational society, the Hurs and Brainards among them. But the Episcopal church counted most of the towns' influential members among its numbers. Some families were even divided between the competing parishes in church membership. Interestingly, allegiance to the two societies seems to have broken down geographically, and the Knowles Landing emerges as a distinct entity during this shift in the power structure. Christ Church was built near the landing, while the Congregational meeting house lay about a half mile southeast of it. The Hurs, who remained Congregationalists, built their mansion in the southern portion of the village. Most of the early members of Christ Church lived near the landing and had interest in stores and wharves along the riverfront.

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Records of the Middle Haddam Congregational Church, July 7, 1875.
The new church was supported by a tax on its members of 3 1/2 pence on the pound. Pew rights were also sold averaging about $35 each. Intra-congregational business debts appear to have been settled in the payment of these dues. In the church accounts there are frequent references in which an individual's debt was discharged by a different individual who owed him money from a prior transaction. Initially the church was presided over by Reverend Jarvis from Middletown who had several other parishes under his care as well. Reverend Tillerston Bronson was pastor from 1791 to 1793. Another minister, Reverend M. Smith Miles took charge in 1796 and remained half time for fifteen years. He was paid half of 110 pounds, 55 pounds for half a year's service, so long as the parish and minister shall agree." Evidently they planned on avoiding the trouble Congregationalists had had earlier. Christ Church also hosted students from the divinity school in Middletown, serving as a sort of practice church for the school during the half of the year when there was no presiding pastor.

This religious realignment suggests that Middle Haddam was undergoing a profound change during the latter half of the eighteenth century. When the Reverend Benjamin Boardman had taken charge in 1762, Middle Haddam was a predominantly agricultural community. There were a few mills along the tributaries leading into the Connecticut River and some local trading along this waterway. Shipbuilding was just beginning to emerge.

Records of Christ Episcopal Church, Middle Haddam, 1796.
Artisans ancillary to shipbuilding, several blacksmiths, sawyers and ropemakers, established themselves during the 1770s and 80s. By 1790 there were several stores along the riverfront and three shipyards. Thomas Child, a local shipbuilder, claimed to have overseen the construction of 1237 ships, most of them in Middle Haddam. This industry was at its peak between 1790 and 1820.

Several rum distilleries were built to process the molasses that ships brought back from the West Indies, at the turn of the century. Other West Indian commodities appear in a 1790 advertisement placed by Job Doane in the Middlesex Gazette. He lists over 150 specialized items, "Besides a number of other articles too tedious to mention."

Middle Haddam merchants, some of whom had begun by privateering in the Revolution, were by the end of the century involved in markets worldwide. The rewards they sought were well beyond the ken of the provincial Reverend Boardman, trained thirty years earlier in New Haven. It is clear that the dispute over his salary did not develop from a lack of capital in the town. Rather the more worldly orientation of the upcoming entrepreneurs must have been a large factor in this dispute. This is further supported by the fact that when this group established their own church, they chose a series of ministers who served part time; and substituted with students who were probable more likely to countenance their new ideas. Such

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9 Middlesex Gazette, November 25, 1790.
an arrangement seems designed minimally to impede, and even by settling business debts through church accounts, to enhance shipping and commerce in the community. The Federal houses built along Main Street at the turn of the century witness the prosperity of merchants during this period.

Attendance at the Congregational Church continued to decline. A statistical summary of church membership for the years 1786 to 1816 indicated a total of 504 baptisms and 83 current church members in 1816. Clearly some of this attrition can be attributed to westward migration. But records for the individual years show that few were becoming Congregationalists. Seventeen people were admitted to the church in 1790. But as the decade progressed, many defected to Christ Church and there were few new members. Two were admitted in 1796, two more in 1797, none in 1798 and only one in 1799. By 1805, a committee had to be appointed to discipline church slackers. In 1811, the Congregational meeting house literally collapsed due to neglect.

While religious and business factions divided Middle Haddam internally, political problems were fracturing the town of Chatham as a whole. A dispute arose in 1798 regarding the location of the proposed town hall. The three parishes, each sought a location convenient for them, a geographical impossibility. They petitioned the state for exemption from the regulation that towns hold their meetings in the same place

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10 Records of the Middle Haddam Congregational Church, 1816 and January 22, 1805.
annually, hoping to meet in each parish on a rotating basis. This was denied. An agreement was finally reached on a location but no action was taken for several months. A commission was then appointed, another location agreed upon, and the structure was built in present day Portland in 1799. A few years later the town minuted report that the building had fallen into disrepair and had a leaky roof.

The three parishes diverged further as the Portland quarries became prosperous. There were grumblings in the Portland society for secession which the other two parishes tried to squelch, hoping to profit by this development themselves. A split finally came in the mid nineteenth century. Chatham, hampered from the start by her geographical unwieldiness and later fraught with religious dissension, lacked an effective mechanism for dealing with Yellow Fever when it struck the parish of Middle Haddam in 1796.

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Records of Chatham Town Meetings, 1798-99.
The details of the Middle Haddam epidemic were reported by Doctor Thomas Miner in 1823, in the aftermath of an outbreak in Middletown. His interests in analyzing the event were to determine the exact cause of the disease and to exonerate the medical profession in Middlesex county. Gathering the facts from Ralph Smith and Nathaniel Doan, two participants in the care of the afflicted, he sketched the following account.

A ship arriving from the West Indies had lost a crew member to the disease on her passage homeward. The victim's clothes were kept, though the body evidently was thrown overboard. The villagers employed in scrubbing the boat, John Ranney and Newel Hurd were the first to contract the disease. Sarah Exton and Elizabeth Cook who washed the sailor's clothes, and Lucinda Norton, a seamstress, also contracted the disease and died. They were all members of the same household. Elizabeth Cook's children, Elizabeth and Rebecah Cary, were also mortally stricken. It is not clear whether they lived with their mother. A local clerk and two boys from Portland who explored the infected craft one night, also died of Yellow Fever. After the deaths of Sarah Exton, Ranney and Hurd, writes Miner:

Doctor Bradford, an old physician resident in the place and doctord Hollister and Thacher, two young men who were candidates for business, departed precipitately, and did not return until all traces of the disease had disappeared; and somany others followed their ex-
ample, that only five had firmness of mind and humanity sufficient to take care of the sick and bury the dead. 12

Those who did remain behind were Ralph Smith of Middle Haddam, John Richmond of East Hampton and William Brenton Hall of Middletown. Miner originally mentioned five but the other two are unidentified, nor is it clear whether these five were in fact the only ones to remain behind or whether of the remaining people, only these five ministered the sick. At any rate the situation was that a plague affecting eleven people resulted in the evacuation of a majority of the two hundred residents of Knowles Landing.

There is no record of this event in the town minutes. The town finances for that year are revealing, however. The total town expenditures recorded in 1797 for the previous year amounted to 272 pounds. Of this 160 pounds went for 'sickness and the poor.' The average annual expense for the preceding five years was 160 pounds total. This suggests that the sickness was a major event incurring a 70% increase in town expenditure. Aside from the eleven people directly affected by the disease, the event seemed to have wider repercussions resulting from the disruption of town affairs, for there are a significantly greater number of reimbursements for 'billeting the poor' in 1797 than in other years. Expenses for the Yellow Fever were expressly stated as such. 13

A comparison with two other outbreaks of Yellow Fever will help establish to what extent the behavior of this community

13 Accounts Town of Chatham 1790-1800.
was aberrant. The disease struck New London in 1798. When the first victim died, his funeral was well attended, suggesting that there was no initial panic. When twenty-five more were dead within the week, however, New Londoners fled. (An initial panic might have been a healthier reaction in this case.) Here too the exodus included three of the town's doctors. This attack was on a much larger scale, involving 350 cases and eighty-one deaths.

An attack in the autumn of 1820 affecting about twenty people, met Middletown prepared. The town held a special meeting on July third of that year to discuss public health. Health officers, S.T. Hosmer, Matthew Russel, and Thomas Miner (author of the Middle Haddam account) were appointed. They established the following guidelines. A place of quarantine for all vessels from foreign ports was established on the far side of the river. Any vessel that had an infected crew or cargo, would be required to stay there until issued a certificate of health by the appointed commission. The commission had the power of proscribing the method of cleaning such ships and of securing the dead in their coffins; removing the healthy people from unhealthy environments; and preventing others from visiting infected places. It was also decided that every physician had to make daily reports to the commission on the disease's progress and that the commission could release this information at its discretion. These measures, coming after the Middle Haddam episode, may have been derived to avoid the mistakes of that experience. This
situation clearly contrasts with the 1796 episode at any rate. The governing body had established measures not only for containing the disease itself, but for the prevention of panic in the town by controlling the release of information about it. The residents of Middletown did not all flee in this episode as had their neighbors across the river, a quarter of a century earlier.

Miner's commentary on the Middletown epidemic suggests that there were problems there too, however. He regretted, "that periods of greatest calamity, more especially mortal sickness," should often evoke "all the malevolent passions that ever lurked in the heart of man... The physicians are charged as being the authors of the mortality." He felt this persecution was often directed against the most 'eminent' because they naturally had to care for the most difficult cases which were most often fatal. He concluded, moreover, that irreparable damage had been suffered by the medical community in the Middletown, Middle Haddam and Hartford outbreaks. "Philanthropists were slandered... their business destroyed, their reputation murdered." Such testimony helps account for the reluctance of local doctors to assist in the Middle Haddam and New London incidents, as perhaps it was intended to. The medical profession was just establishing itself at this time. Miner's account was part of such an effort. In an earlier time, communities dealt with such crises on an individual level. More modern societies developed

14 Thomas Miner, p. 91.
institutions on which these duties devolved. In the interval, situations like that in Middle town arose, where people were developing institutions but did not yet have faith in them.

The Middle Haddam event implies a breakdown of the earlier type of community without modern measures to compensate. Though no direct account of the event appeared, a letter in the Middlesex Gazette dated September 2, 1796, criticized the selectmen for their lack of action. The letter signed 'Civis' reads in part:

'It must be the wish of every man, who has any benevolence toward the human race, that the Selectmen of Chatham would exert themselves to arrest (if it is possible) the further progress of this disease. Next to this object should be the prosecution of the daring offenders against the laws of the State, provided to prevent the introduction of contagious disorders. That law it is to be hoped, will not be permitted to be a dead letter, but that a speedy enforcement of its penalties will set an example that may in future be highly useful. The accursed avarice of some persons can alone be checked by the severest scourge.'

Writing three days after the first three deaths occurred, this observer, possibly Dr. William B. Hall of Middletown, asserts that the selectmen were overlooking public health laws in the interest of facilitating commerce.

The selectmen, Chauncey Bulkely, Joseph Sage and Moses Cook, apparently took little note of this attack. They were not directly involved in what action was taken, for their names appear neither in Miner's account nor among the recipients

'Middlesex Gazette, September 2, 1796.'
of reimbursement listed in the town accounts for that year.

The lead article in the gazette the following week is about Yellow Fever. Citing recent outbreaks along the eastern seaboard, it tried to mitigate the role of ships in spreading the disease. The writer asserts that once there is a predisposing influence, an outbreak can occur anywhere. He implies that the belief that Yellow Fever originates in foreign ports arises out of peoples' reluctance to admit their own region might be so contaminated. The issue has political overtones, with the merchants and shippers aligned on the side of local origin and those not involved in seafaring alarmed at the evidence that it might originate in foreign ports. By the middle of the nineteenth century it was generally agreed that stagnant water breeding pestilential mosquitoes, was a major factor in spreading the disease. Ships may have contributed to this because their fresh water supplies were often uncovered, enabling insects from foreign ports to breed and be transported back to this country.

Yellow Fever and similar diseases were a fact of life in colonial America. But responses to it varied. The foregoing accounts suggest that Middle Haddam evaded its responsibility both as Dr. Hall alleges, in preventing the disease and in caring for the sick. Ruptures within the existing institutions of church and town governance also suggest a breakdown in this community. A closer investigation of the individuals involved should lend further insight into the nature of this stress.
None of the victims were prominent members of the community although many were descended from original founders. Newel Hurd was the son of Jacob Hurd. His brother Jesse would one day be an enterprising shipbuilder and merchant. But Newel's life had not taken a clear direction when he died at sixteen. He would probably have followed in his family's steps however, and it is interesting that entering the shipping business meant starting at the bottom despite the family connections he would have had. For he and John Ranney were employed in the lowly task of scrubbing the boat. Ranney, 21 was from an established family of lesser note as was Mayhew Tupper, 18, the original victim.

The women are curious in that at least three of them who were unrelated, were living in the same house. Sarah Exton was married to a sailor William, who may have been at sea, although the accounts show a Chatham resident being reimbursed for nursing him at some time during the year. Lucinda Norton, the seamstress, was a daughter of John Norton who was the founding Congregational minister in East Hampton. She was twenty seven. Elizabeth Cook, twice a widow, had been married to Prosper Cary a and Joshua Cook. Her first marriage was in 1767 so she was probably about fifty years old in 1796. Elizabeth Cook's first daughter, Elizabeth Cary was born in 1770, making her twenty six at the time of her death and her sister Rebecah, somewhat younger.

Of these victims, Elizabeth Cook is the only one whose name appears in land transactions. There were at least three other Elizabeth Cooks in the village though; two nieces and a
sister in law to this one. So it is difficult to be certain which one was involved in these deeds. None of the victims were recorded in probate records. Elizabeth's first two husbands are somewhat more accessible through the records.

Prosper Cary married Elizabeth Parker in 1767. It is not clear where she came from but she was probably not local since the name 'Parker' does not appear in other records of this time. Cary was a son of Joseph Cary who came from Massachusetts in 1740 with the early settlers. Joseph Cary owned a sizeable tract of riverfront land and appears to have been a prominent citizen. His son Prosper, belying his name, died a poor man. Between these two generations there was a restructuring of power within the Community. As mentioned above, in 1727, settlers near the landing agreed to a system of shared access to the waterfront. By 1752, things had changed. A deed between Cary and Cornelius Knowles for a piece of riverfront property reserves "the right to pass and repass my gates or bars through parts of said land." As this land became more valuable the proprietors evidently took measures to defend their rights. Cary's children sold these rights for little financial gain. Prosper never achieved his father's prominence. The emerging class of influential people would be merchants and shippers. This new structure would be reflected in the changing pattern of land holdings along the landing.

Prosper was probably a carpenter since the inventory of his

16 Deed between Joseph Cary and Cornelius Knowles, Middletown Land Records, 15: 546, April 9, 1752.
estate lists joiners tools. He was involved in a speculative real estate transaction in 1771, realizing a few pounds profit, an increasingly common practice during this time. Elizabeth and Prosper had two daughters, Elizabeth and Rebekah. Prosper died in 1783 with few possessions and no land or house. His estate, worth a total of nine pounds, went to Elizabeth for 'housekeeping and necessaries.' Elizabeth remarried within the year. Her second husband, Joshua Cook, had been the administrator of Prosper's estate. Furthermore, Cook owned a blacksmith shop abutting the property Prosper had owned, so the two were undoubtedly well acquainted.

Joshua Cook was a widower himself and the marriage to Elizabeth Cary seems to have been a matter of course; people frequently remarried after their spouse's death. In this instance the marriage was evidently essential to Elizabeth's support and might even have been arranged between Cary and Cook before Cary's death.

For Elizabeth, the new union did not bring a great deal more economic security. Although Cook owned a blacksmith shop, a potentially sufficient means of support, several judgements were levied against him in 1772 by local merchants. He lost his house twice, apparently, and in a later judgment, lost part of his houseslot and part of his fishing boat, 'for want of a place of residence.' He eventually lost his blacksmith shop.
as well and died intestate in 1790. These judgements do not seem to have resulted in Cook's eviction, for a reference in the 1780s finds the property still 'in the Possession' of Joshua Cook.

Instead it seems, merchants were using their debt settlements to consolidate land holdings near the river front. This was a gradual process; the Cooks for example seem to have retained their house until the turn of the century. But by the early nineteenth century, virtually all the riverfront property belonged to merchants, as the original families died out and emigrated. In the interim, the land records reveal frequent judgements and deeds often quit claiming partial ownership. The pie was split into many pieces before it was reconsolidated in the hands of the emerging class.

It is difficult to determine where Elizabeth Cook and the two women were living. Neither of the two female headed households in the 1790 census of Middle Haddam had an additional three women. She may have lived with her brother in law Josiah Cook. He has five women in his household in 1790 and only two in 1800, perhaps having lost three to yellow fever in 1796. It is possible that Josiah Cook lived in Joshua's house after he died. This house was the same involved in the above described tangle of judgements, and still stands, adjacent to a former tavern on the landing. Two additional finished rooms on the third floor of this house might have served as dormitories for seamen at one time. This house at the focal point of the landing amid stores, wharves and a tavern, would clearly have been
a center of life there. It is unclear whether the women were supporting themselves by sewing and washing alone, but the obvious speculation about prostitution can not be confirmed either way. Sarah Exton's child was specifically referred to as the child of William Exton in the vital records. No further evidence was upturned on the matter.

Time now to turn from the victims to the villains and heroes of the event. A doctor who left, Jeremiah Bradford, was sixty-two years old at the time, having practiced since mid-century. He was remembered as a 'man of good sense and an able practitioner, but much of a coward.' Perhaps he had run away in another instance as well or this infamy might be based on the Middle Haddam event alone. Doctors Hollister and Thacher who were training under him, also left. Doctor Hollister seemed to have been pursuing a mercantile career at this time. He was from out of town and was never a member of the Middle Haddam Congregational Church, nor was he at that time a part of the Anglican society. By 1801 he was a town officer; and he built a house near the Episcopal church soon after that. His cowardice evidently did not impugn his esteem in the community very significantly.

The town accounts list seven individuals who were reimbursed in connection with the 'Middle Haddam Sickness.' Jonathan Ufford received the greatest amount, 12 pounds for his services. He was apparently a resident of Portland. William B. Hall, paid four pounds, was a Yale graduate who had been practicing medicine

19 Carl Price, Postscripts to Yankee Township, p. 320.
for six years in Middletown. Nathaniel Doan, a brother of
the infected ship's owner, received three pounds for his as-
sistance. He was an aspiring merchant, an Anglican, and descen-
dant of one of the villages founders from Eastham. William C.
Hall, another nurse, was also a merchant who began unsuccess-
fully in Middle Haddam and later moved to Middletown. Halsey
Cary who was probably related to Elizabeth Cook by her first
marriage, also assisted along with Lawles Goff, about whom no
record remains.

The hero, Ralph Smith, who was highlighted in, and supplied
much of the information for Thomas Miner's account of the event,
is not listed as a recipient of reimbursement. He might have
offered his assistance free of charge. It is also possible,
however that the details of the event became blurred with the
passage of time.

Smith had a blend of interests and was a wealthy member of
the community. A grandson of the Eastham emigre by the same
name, Smith inherited over one hundred acres from his father's
estate, as well as partial mill rights. He expanded his milling
interests and seems to have farmed as well. Nor was he exempt
from shipping affairs; he was a sea captain and owned several
vessels. Smith was to become the most well respected citizen of
the town in the beginning of the nineteenth century, holding an
array of public offices as well as being an officer in the Epis-
copal church. He built the first Federal style house in the
village in 1780, spawning an architectural trend that culmi-
nated at the turn of the century. His brothers Enoch and Hezekiah, older and younger than Ralph, received roughly equal distributions from their father's estate, but their lives took different courses. Enoch, after a stint at sea, pursued a farming career, then moved to Vermont at the turn of the century. Like Ralph, Enoch was an Anglican. Hezekiah devoted all his energy to shipping and married into a prominent Congregationalist family in town, the Hurds. He was quite successful in the early part of the nineteenth century, trading through a New York merchant with ports as distant as the Orient. But Ralph died the wealthiest of the three and his was the most prominent name in town affairs.

While Enoch relied predominantly on farming, as had his predecessors, and Hezekiah, significantly younger, joined the later wave of trade, Ralph combined both. He retained his land at a time when serious farmers were seeking larger tracts further west. But simultaneously he involved himself in shipping and manufacturing. Through this link with both the heritage and the progress of Middle "addam, he commanded a disproportionate amount of the residents' respect. Furthermore, his wealth, founded in land and manufactures, was not subject to the vagaries of trade. Thus he died with his fortune largely intact unlike many of the other wealthy merchants in town.

The pattern that emerges from these brief sketches is of a society in flux. The victims, many the children of prominent Congregationalists, were relatively low class, employed in the more menial aspects of shipping. Elizabeth Cook's
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fathers in law had both been among the town's original founders. Lucinda Norton's father was the first minister in East Hampton. Clearly the descendants of these men were not perpetuating their legacy. The ascending hegemony was a mix of some descendants of the founders and some who had come from out of town to take advantage of the shipping opportunities. Only two from this group stayed. The doctors who assisted were from outside the community and of the other two who helped nurse, one was related to the victims. The town elite as a whole, including the selectmen and three doctors, abnegated responsibility.
An additional insight into the mood of the period is offered by the diary of Elisha Niles. Niles, native to Colchester, later lived in East Hampton. He was the son of a Congregational minister but became a Methodist, a dissenting sect that gained Middle Haddam followers in the early nineteenth century. Born in 1764, he served in the Revolution and was an itinerant school teacher in the towns around East Hampton. His diary combines personal reflection, travelogue and a catalogue of births, marriages and deaths.

Death and wonder at his own survival are the issues that dominate these pages. One of fourteen children, he is at age eighteen, one of only three living. He devotes his opening paragraphs to the circumstances of his siblings' deaths. Seven had died in infancy, another four died of disease in distant parts, Canada, New York and New Hampshire. He was the youngest and stayed behind.

Another recurring theme is Niles' service in the war. His father had initially opposed his going but relented and let his son go in his own place when he was drafted himself. Niles nearly died of an infection in a camp in New London. He recovered and resumed his teaching after the war. His entries during the last years of his life invariably note the anniversary of an event in the war fifty years earlier.

He seems to feel obliged to keep this journal of town events by virtue of being a survivor himself, having resisted both sick-
ness and the lure to move westward. He lists the victims of 'West Indian putrid fever' in the 1796 attack. And there are more and more frequent reports of emigres. In 1815 he reported forty men setting out for New Connecticut in Ohio. His diary records two trips to New York and Ohio, in which he visits over fifty residents of Chatham and Colchester. He mentions people in detail but gives little account of natural features. On one trip he traveled a total of 1255 miles. In a time when travel was very difficult, this represented a great length to go to renew and preserve old associations.

Shortly before he died he compiled a list of all the students he had taught, noting which among them had since died. On the same page that he notes the completion of this task, he composed the following prayer. "Lord grant that I may live in Preparation to Die in peace, when Ever the Summons comes, Amen. Our age to 70 years is set, How short the time, how frail the date. And if to 80 we arise, we rather sigh and groan than Live."

He is ambivalent about his survival and nostalgic for a community he can dimly recall from his early years. Many of his students have since moved and he feels left behind at age eighty. Not only has he outlived everyone, but in East Hampton, he is no longer at the heart of his community. As his travel accounts demonstrate, that community impulse has been transformed and perpetuated by those who left. They fled the limitations of diminishing land inheritances, yet seemed to preserve

Diary of Elisha Miles, February 29, 1844.
personal ties.

Niles' recollections of service during the Revolution stand against the void of personal commitment, represented by the Yellow Fever panic, for example. He is constantly retrospective to those experiences, evidencing the subsequent failure of the community to inspire such loyalty in its members. This was ultimately the failure of the members themselves of course. The community, threatened, was strengthened during the war, but disbanded during the plague.

This is not to say that Middle Haddam residents lacked common interests. Rather, the geographical parameters of the village did not define the communities that existed there. The waning elite, represented by Elisha Niles and some of the plague victims, lived in the wake of a heroic tradition that was beginning to take seed elsewhere. The rising mercantile class was part of a large shipping network based in New York and Boston. The two groups juxtaposed did not meld naturally. Furthermore, since Middle Haddam was a mere subentity of Chatham with no religious unity, there were no effective political mechanisms to compensate for this.

The Yellow Fever epidemic, because it was a notable and recorded event, gives unique access into the mechanism of Middle Haddam society at the turn of the century. This does not aid in recapturing its former sense of place. But it may help define the prerequisites of community and warn of the potential problems when 'community' and 'place' do not coincide.
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