

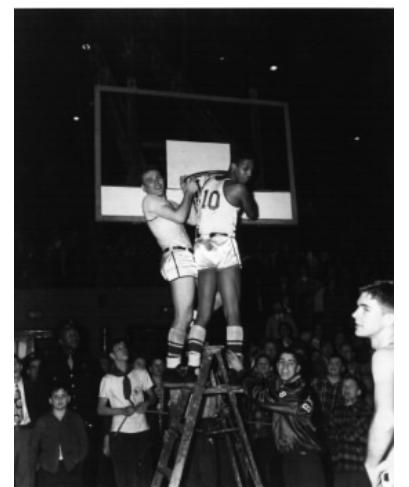


75 Years of Middletown



An exhibit of materials from the
 Archives and Special Collections Research Center
 Ball State University Libraries

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Introduction

Dwight Hoover wrote that when Robert and Helen Lynd “stepped off the train in Muncie, Indiana, in January, 1923, little did they know that they were to initiate a chain of events which continues to this day.” The book that resulted from the Lynds’ research in Muncie, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture*, celebrates its 75th anniversary this year, and continues to be an inspiration and valuable resource for scholars.



Main St., west from Elm, 1925



N. Walnut from Charles, ca. 1923

The review that appeared on the first page of the *New York Times* following the publication of *Middletown* in 1929 stated that the book “should be inscribed on tablets of stone and preserved for future generations.” The book may not be in stone, but the vast research that it sparked through the years, and that shows no signs of diminishing in the future, has evolved through print, audio, film, video, and now digital media and the World Wide Web, to serve many generations. The journey from *Middletown* the book to the Middletown Digital Archives has been exciting and rewarding for scholars and students from a broad spectrum of disciplines. And the journey is not nearly complete.

This exhibit on 75 Years of Middletown provides evidence of the historical significance of Middletown and looks to the future of Middletown research. The photographs, publications, and other documentation used in the exhibit is only a sampling of the rich resources available in the Archives and Special Collections Research Center for students, faculty, and national and international scholars to use in studying Muncie as Middletown. With the development of the Middletown Digital Archives, a growing number of these resources can now be shared with researchers anywhere in the world instantly, 24/7.

Happy anniversary, Middletown!



Muncie Press Orchestra, 1922

Credits:

- The “75 Years of Middletown” exhibit was prepared by Joan Dutour and graduate assistants Hannah Cox and Anne Tonne.
- “Introduction” and “Future of Middletown” by John Straw
- Web site and handout designed by Daniel Hartwig and Nicole Werner.

The Lynds' 6 Categories

In order to make their project more manageable, the Lynds decided to make use of a technique used by many anthropologists. W. H. R. Rivers, a British social anthropologist, first developed the idea of dividing human activities into the categories of getting a living, making a home, training the young, using leisure, engaging in religious practices, and engaging in community activities. This technique originated because all societies have such categories in one form or another. The Lynds separated their data on Middletown into these categories, then analyzed them using methods developed by Wissler, regarding cultural patterns, and Radcliffe-Brown's ideas of the meanings of social customs.



Robert Lynd, n.d.

1. Getting a Living



Warner Gearette, 1936

When the Lynds first arrived in the 1920s, they deemed Middletown's economy as highly dependant on national exchange. Although impressed by the many different types of jobs found in Middletown, they tended to discount service occupations and non-industrial work. Instead, the Lynds focused on the community's large factories, particularly the relationship between the workers and managers. They spent considerable time on the glass and automotive industries.

The Archives contains a number of items and collections that help flesh out Middletown as a working community, including photo collections, collections from businesses and individuals chronicling their working lives. The Archives also houses the research for the *Working in Middletown Project*.



Ball Blue Book of Canning and Preserving Recipes, 1932

2. Making a Home



"Typical family." 1939

The Lynds studied marriage, divorce, child-rearing, houses, food, clothing and housework in Middletown for the chapter "Making a Home". According to both *Middletown* and *Middletown in Transition*, the majority of Muncie citizens lived in single family homes. In 1998, The First Measured Century found that this trend continues with detached single family homes accounting for 79% of new housing. In the case of divorce, *Middletown* concluded that the rate was fairly high and that divorces were "commonplace," frequent, and speedy in

Middletown. *Middletown in Transition* determined that the rate of divorce had begun to drop before the Depression and remained fairly stable with a slight rise as the local economy recovered.

To help document these and other aspects of "Making a Home" the Archives has material regarding families, homes and neighborhoods including photographs, family papers, government publications, maps, abstracts, books and pamphlets.



Johnson wedding, n.d.

3. Training the Young



YMCA Bible class, 1924

When looking at education in Middletown, the Lynds were struck by how much emphasis was placed on schooling. A good education was seen by all social classes as the key to a successful and satisfying life. Whereas childhood had once been a time of carelessness and play, it began to be seen primarily as a time of preparation and learning.

The Archives holds a number of school collections, as well as collections from individuals that include educational material.



Home Economics class, 1925

4. Using Leisure

Leisure time is highly valued by most people, and the citizens of Muncie are no exception. Technology has certainly impacted the way that leisure time is spent, although some aspects have remained the same. In Middletown, the Lynds found the number of movie theaters and the number of people they attracted to be of particular interest. The automobile had a significant effect on how people enjoyed their leisure time. With the advent of the automobile, people found their worlds expanded, and plans could be made



C&O Rats, 1926

for a few hours of enjoyment, instead of the use of an entire day. Today, the citizens of Muncie still enjoy such pursuits. Basketball and baseball games occupy the time of fans as well as parents and children. Music, albeit far different from that heard in the 1920s, is still popular.

The Archives and Special Collections holds varying items of interest in this category. Amidst additional information, files are available about the Muncie Bearcats, the Wysor Grand Theater, as well as the Renaissance Fair of the 1970s and 1980s.



Muncie Central Bearcats, 1937-38



Muncie Fair ticket, 1929

5. Engaging in Religious Practices



First Universalist church, n.d.

Religion was and is an important component of life for many of the citizens of Muncie. Like countless other average-sized communities, Muncie's population has been largely Protestant. Although the "standard" denominations, such as the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians, still have the highest numbers of congregational members, many other denominations are represented in the town as well, including Roman Catholic parishes, those of Jewish faith, and Quakers. The Lynds pointed out in their original study, *Middletown*, that there was a "division into 42 religious groups, almost all of them representing some branch of Christian faith, but each centering its worship in a separate building" (pg. 332). In *Middletown in Transition*, the



Jubilee leaflet, 1899

Lynds were concerned with what they saw as a lessening of faith. Theodore Caplow's *All Faithful People*, however, suggests that religion is continuing to strengthen.

Archives and Special Collections is the home for scores of material relating to religious activities in the area. Records can be found concerning the Unitarian-Universalist Church, Madison Street United Methodist Church, and Grace Episcopal Church, as well as Silver information about the various other denominations.

6. Engaging in Community Activities

The citizens of Muncie have been involved in a wide range of community activities since the community's early days. Politically and socially, Muncie has earned its name "Middletown." Its clubs include those for women and men, veterans, those affiliated with business, and those that are religiously based, among many others. Politically, Muncie has the distinction of having voted for the winning presidential candidate in



By-Laws of the Knights of Pythias, 1911

nearly every election since the 1930s. The Lynds, when gathering material to use in their book *Middletown*, soon learned that Muncie citizens had a very active club life. They did, however, overlook to an extent Muncie's political system. This was rectified when, in *Middletown in Transition*, they dedicated an entire chapter to "The Machinery of Government." In this, however, the Lynds tended to emphasize the problem parts of the political system. As to clubs and organizations, they found still more clubs had been formed, with people joining for a variety of reasons, instead of primarily social.

In the Archives and Special Collections Research Center, numerous resources can be found concerning Muncie's club and political life. Many clubs, such as the Rotary Club, or the YMCA/YWCA, have files within the collection. Information is also available for political affiliations, as well as copies of past newspapers and articles.



Mayors Dale & Bunch, 1937



Women of the Moose, ca. 1950

The Underrepresented

Although *Middletown* and *Middletown in Transition* did not consider racial, religious or ethnic minorities in the studies, Muncie's small, but rich and varied, populations deserve additional attention.

The African American Community



When studying *Middletown*, the Lynds chose to virtually ignore the city's significant Black population. Since then, some progress has been made on studying the African American population in Muncie. Numerous books and articles relate how African Americans fought back against racism and hatred to build a vibrant community.

In addition to articles in the Middletown Studies Project, the Archives houses a number of works by Hurley Goodall, as well as recorded interviews with Muncie African Americans and panel discussions on the Black experience in Muncie.



(Pictured, L. to R: Jesse Nixon, first Black graduate from Ball State, 1925; former slaves, 1935; Muncie firefighter, 1968.)



The Jewish Community

Little can be found about Muncie's Jewish community in either study conducted by the Lynds. Numbering roughly 200, Jews were visible enough to provoke anti-Semitism but too small to support a permanent rabbi. The smallness of the community posed a problem because there was always a danger of extinction, as well as a struggle to find common ground within the community. Some of Muncie's Jews were Orthodox, while others were Reform or free-thinkers, which led to struggles over how the Jewish Temple should be run.



Herbert Pazol confirmation, 1932

In the late 1970s, fearing that his generation's experiences would be forgotten, Martin Schwartz commissioned two Ball State University professors to interview a number of Muncie Jews on their experiences in the 1920s and 1930s. The interviews were edited and published as *Middletown Jews*. A second round of interviews was done between 2003 and 2004. Tapes and transcripts of both interview series are available in the Archives.

What is the future of Middletown?



Dr. James Connolly and Anne Tonne, 2004

Perhaps we find evidence of it in Middletown's past. The rich and varied subjects that have been previously explored by Middletown researchers have provided a strong foundation for future exploration and may be an indication of the vast future that Middletown research offers for future generations of students and scholars.

Perhaps we find clues in today's headlines. Middletown finds its place in the digital world, media studies, and in the examination of once neglected or under-represented populations such as the African American community.

Or perhaps we find Middletown's future among the researchers who continue to visit the Archives and Special Collections Research Center each year. The phone rings and a newspaper is calling about doing an article on the 21st century religious experience in Middletown. An email arrives from a national television network requesting historical photographs of factory workers in Middletown. A fax comes through from a graduate student in Canada who needs documentation for her dissertation on the shift from manufacturing jobs to a service economy in Middletown. A faculty member asked for articles on sports in Middletown for a journal article. A Ball State student is preparing a paper on architecture in Middletown. The Middletown beat goes on.

The question often arises about Muncie still being "Middletown." It is the domain of scholars to do the research on that question. Whether Muncie is, or ever has really been, Middletown may be beyond the point anyway. It is close enough to keep researchers coming back to the "hallowed" soil that the Lynds cultivated over 75 years ago. The fact that so much historical data exists to cite, examine, interpret, and compare with new data ensures that there will be a future for Middletown.

As this exhibit illustrates, the Archives and Special Collections Research Center, working closely with the Center for Middletown Studies and the vast community of Middletown researchers, and transforming research methods through digital technology, has the ever-expanding resources to be a vital part of the future of Middletown.

