

Middlefield Store Ledger Book



The ledger is 7" wide and 17" tall – with water damage and minor mold infestation. The spine has failed.

The Myron Robbins entries are from page 2 to 111 and run from 1 Jan 1890 to 6 Mar 1891. There are about 20 entries per page detailing every item sold with the customer's name. One wonders if this 1891 ending date is when Robbin's gave up the store due to his tuberculosis in favor of his brother-in-law William Rowen.

William Rowen in turn dies in November of 1896 from "Brain Fever". On page 113 there is an inventory of William L. Rowen's estate dated 23 Nov 1896. On pages 115-122 is the complete store Inventory with wholesale prices. This is also part of Rowen's estate tabulation. There are no ledger entries by Rowen.

In the 1900 census Daniel E. Bryan is the store-keeper with wife Nona L. (William Rowen's widow). They were married [22 Apr 1897](#). No children are listed. Please see appendix A for a follow up story.

Pages 126-205 are accounting entries by another party for July – September 1908. Each page is for a single customer. An index list of all customers is on the rear inside cover.

Vital Records: Myron Lawrence Robbins b. 1866 d. 2 Apr 1894 (Consumption) [Birth](#) [Marriage](#) [Death](#) [FAG](#)

Wife - Martha (Mattie) Belle Rowen b. 3 June 1869, m. 27 Jan 1887, d. 13 Aug 1912 [Birth](#) [Death](#) [FAG](#)

Children - Walter Clark Robbins b.17 Jun 1889 [Birth](#), Ethel May Robbins b. 27 Jun 1892 [Birth](#)

William Lincoln (B.?) Rowen b. 5 Jun 1866, d. 23 Nov 1896 (Brain Fever) [Birth](#) [Marriage](#) [Death](#) [FAG](#)

Wife - Nona L. Green, m. 28 Jun 1888

In 1910 Arthur Cook & George Darling are the store keepers and Gertrude Pease is the post mistress.

In 1920 Adrian Hatch is operating the store.

This ledger was found and donated by John Rice. It was found in the Platzer Barn on Arthur Pease Road.

The store at Factory Village closed at the time of the April 1901 flood and was moved to Bancroft. This eventually led to an increase in business for the remaining store at the center.

I have photographed all the pages containing any written entries. The digital images will be given to the museum and Town.

Howard Knickerbocker
November 2019

Appendix A Follows (28 July 1897 Boston Herald):

LOVE AND HATE.

Pretty Postmistress Held for the Grand Jury.

Charged with Opening the Letters of Sweethearts.

Evidence Offered of a Bump of Illegal Curiosity.

Sensation in Middlefield, a Hampshire Hilltop.

An Alleged Conspiracy and a Rekindled Feud.

(Special Dispatch to the Boston Herald.)

CHESTER, July 27, 1897. The hill-top hamlet of Middlefield, seven miles up the mountain north of the Boston & Albany tracks, had its greatest-ever sensation today, when two postoffice inspectors and a United States deputy marshal came from Boston to put the law on to the pretty postmistress, Nona L. Bryan, on the complaint of opening letters of young persons for the purpose of finding out who was keeping company, what they wrote to each other and when they intended to be married.

The print cloths, the dried herring box, the case of spool silk, the flour and sugar barrels constituting the general store whose front window corner is occupied by the little rack of postoffice boxes missed the rustle of the postmistress' dress for six hours while she was pleading "not guilty" before Commissioner John L. Rice in Springfield. She waived examination, and her friend, Newhall Smith, furnished \$500 bonds. The United States grand jury will meet Sept. 14 in Boston and consider the evidence against her.

"It is a conspiracy," she said, "and I will engage a good lawyer to prove my innocence. They have bothered me ever since I have been here, and I've been tempted to resign many times because they talked so about me. I don't get any salary, and most days I don't sell more than 12 cents' worth of stamps. Whatever I said to the inspectors when they first came here a few days ago I did not mean it. I cried, and I did not know what end my head was on. I did not tell them I opened the letters."

The complainant is Henry S. Pease, the 2-year-old son of Asher Pease, who owns a maple sugar orchard and saw mill one mile to the east of the general store. Henry was president of the Christian Endeavor Society last year, and now is on the "lookout committee." The postmistress thinks he has looked out her way in anything but a Christian spirit. There is an old feud between the Peases and the Bryans, dating from the time the latter refused to support Mr. Pease, Sr., for selectman. The Peases have not traded at the village store for a long time, preferring to come down the long hill to Chester and toil back again with the family supplies rather than to enrich the Bryan pocketbook.

They say their letters have been tampered with for two years past. Two of the four letters on which the complaint is based were written April 19 and April 27 of the present year by Albert Pease, the eldest son, 34 years old, to Miss May Meacham, a Middlefield belle, who has since removed to Dalton. It was a scheme to decoy the postmistress, and May sent the letter unopened back to Albert, who was satisfied that it had been opened in the postoffice and the flap rustled. The friendship of May and Albert cooled quickly for some reason which is a matter of guesswork among the townspeople, and he married Miss Gertrude Jones, whose father was postmaster of West Worthington. The knot was tied June 6. Albert is confident that the postmistress was curious to know why he broke off with May Meacham and took up with Gertrude Jones.

There is a handsome young daughter in the Pease family named Maude. She is the teacher of the village school. She wrote four letters to her brother Ernest when he was away from home a short time ago, and all the Peases were satisfied by the looks of one of the envelopes that it had been pried into. An older daughter, Cora, who is a housekeeper in Chester, also thinks that some of the letters passing to and from her home were objects of unlawful curiosity.

Nona Bryan came from Florence to Middlefield nine years ago, when just out of her teens. She was wooed and won by William E. Rowen, who went to work for John C. Bryan, then the postmaster. Bryan sold out the store to Rowen, and the latter was appointed postmaster by President Cleveland during his last term. Rowen pined, and one day last October he passed away, after only one day's illness. Dr. J. O. Shephardson hurried up from Chester in the morning, and at night his patient was dead. The cause was considerable of a mystery. An hour or two before he died the sufferer was stricken blind. The gossip's tongues began to wag straightway. They were given a new topic for conversation six months later, when the interesting widow fell head over heels in love with D. C. Bryan, brother of John, the former postmaster, and was married to him April 22. Bryan is five years his wife's junior, and is the mail carrier on the star route between Middlefield and Bancroft, the railroad station, where the hill-top town's little porch is put off once a day. The widow had been acting postmaster, and after two months as Mrs. Bryan she was appointed permanent.

"I am a Republican," she said to the Herald correspondent. "There are only a few Democrats in the town. When my first husband died I thought I would give up the store, with all the vexations of the postoffice and other matters, and move away. My friends all asked me to stay. Then sent in a petition, so I remained. I wanted to settle down and get married and be happy again, so I did last spring. I'd like to resign now. I surely will, no matter what the outcome of this is."

COINCIDENCE.

A church quarrel follows hard upon the heels of the present excitement. In fact, to last August the Rev. L. C. Kimball was pastor of the Congregational Church, which stands opposite the postoffice. He did not satisfy a faction of his congregation headed by the Peases, and was forced to resign, his place being taken by the Rev. Herbert A. Young. A young lady in the Kimball household was courted by one of the Pease boys, but they did not marry. Whether or not this was the cause, the Kimballs became estranged from the Peases. The postmistress favored the retention of Pastor Kimball. She is not a member of the church, but is a leader in its excursions and the village parties. The town improvement society is due to hold a meeting next Friday evening at her home, which is next door to the store.

The evidence against Mrs. Bryan was collected by inspectors White and Snow from Boston. They have the letters in the case, including one which was written within the past week, to bait a trap. They made their first visit to Middlefield last Thursday, and Mrs. Bryan is alleged to have confessed after they had questioned her. One of the government witnesses will be T. H. Fleming, the postmaster at Bancroft. The arrest was made by United States Deputy Marshal James H. Waters at 8:30 A. M. He drove down the hill with the fair suspect, and arrived at Chester in time to board the 10 o'clock train for Springfield. Her husband and Boardman Smith followed in a buggy. She waved her hand to the group of sympathizers in front of the store, and shouted a cheery adieu. Two hundred yards down the hill her coat ran up to the pasture fence and whinnied. She wasn't a bit depressed. Her pet was entered with Commissioner Rice, and she was on her way back to the hill-top before noon.

Inspectors White and Snow remained in Middlefield to see Thomas Bryan, her father-in-law, and John Cady, whose names were signed to her bond for \$500 furnished previous to her appointment in June. They designated Mrs. Daisy Green to act as postmistress until further notice. She is a sister-in-law of Mrs. Bryan, and lives in the second-story rooms over the store. The cancelling and date stamps from this time on will go down on the Pease letters with spiteful whacks.

Every soul on the hilltop knew of the arrest 10 minutes after the arrival of the deputy and inspectors, and the air of Middlefield tonight sizzled with excitement.