

*Middletown News*

Founded: 1885

Location: High Street, Middletown ( – 1968); 469 Locust Street (1968– )

J. A. Wertz founded the first Middletown newspaper in April 1885. Wertz quickly sold the Republican party organ to George W. Rodecap in September. While Wertz and Rodecap edited the *News* it carried material that was national and international in scope. The first several pages were devoted to presidents, wars, and business transactions far away from Henry County, and the remaining eight pages consisted of advertisements and local news. Rodecap soon tired of the business, selling it to Joseph O. Lambert. Except for a brief interruption in 1893, Lambert controlled the paper, either alone or with Charles B. Unger, until 1906. While he was writing editorials for the paper, Lambert also delivered the town's mail. In 1902 the position of postmaster was taken over by Willis L. McCampbell, who bought the newspaper in early 1893 only to sell it back later the same year. During the 1890s the journal became a four-page semiweekly.

Lambert sold the newspaper to B. R. Inman in 1906. Inman brought many changes to the paper, changing the name to the *Tri County News* in 1910 and recasting the paper as a weekly. Inman gave up control of the paper to L. S. Roberts in 1912. Less than a year later Roberts had moved on, leaving the publication in the hands of Otis Strickler. Strickler brought stability to the paper and resurrected the old name, *Middletown News*. He had worked for the paper for twenty-one years before he bought the venture and remained the publisher for another twenty-one. During Strickler's administration the paper was issued every Friday, cost \$1.50 for a year's subscription, and ran between four and six pages in length. While restoring some tradition to the

weekly, he was not afraid to bring innovation to the company. When the phone came into widespread use Strickler encouraged people to call and report on local events.

When Strickler died in 1934 his son, Wyatt, operated the newspaper for three years before selling it to Ida M. Anderson. Anderson held on to the weekly for four years but added some novelty to the weekly's price. During the depths of the depression she made subscriptions payable in eggs or cash.

A succession of owners published the *News* during World War II. Stability did not return to the weekly until 1953 when David and Eugene Reed sold the paper to George and Laura Rice. The Rices moved the operations from High Street to the Davis Building on Locust Street in 1968. In the mid-1950s the price of the paper remained only five cents a copy or \$1.50 a year. The advent of television made national news an irrelevant topic for a weekly newspaper, so the *News* focused on local concerns. Columns included "Pleasant Valley," which reported on family visits and vacations, personal triumphs, and special gatherings. In each eight-to-ten-page issue advertisements no longer sold "patent" medicines, as in the 1890s, but rather told of the local grocery specials or the latest automobile craze. By the late 1960s the price had risen to ten cents a week, but local news and notes remained the newspaper's primary focus.

The Rice family kept control until 1971 when Jack N. White became publisher. The number of pages doubled during White's first years as proprietor. Sixteen pages a week revealed details of local marriages, deaths, and school sports. New features were added in the 1980s and 1990s. By 1982 "Dear Debbie" gave advice to local readers, and Hollywood columnist Jill Jackson reported on tinsletown. Costs and inflation had driven the price up to a quarter a week. By the late 1990s a more organized and professional *News* greeted subscribers. Syndicated columnists advised readers on health, love, the horoscope, and movies. Some favorites of the

past, such as “Town Talk,” the column concerning the private lives of area residents, disappeared.

White continued as publisher in 1998. The paper employed four and expected sales of less than \$500,000. The newspaper remained concerned with the tricounty area and Middletown.