

Since its incorporation in 1875, Russell Library has become a jewel in Middletown's crown, offering everything from concerts to children's stories, from writing programs to computer classes, from reference help to digitizing older media, and, of course, thousands and thousands of books.

Originally a church, Russell Library was established by Frances Russell in memory of her husband, Samuel. Purchasing the Episcopal Church of the Holy Trinity on the corner of Broad and Court Streets, Mrs. Russell remodeled it in the Roman Gothic Style. Mrs. Russell made extensive renovations to the church building, and then presented it to the City of Middletown as a public library in honor of her late husband. Although Middletown had boasted several private lending libraries dating from the 1700s, Russell Library was the city's first true public library, open to all citizens without cost on April 5, 1876.

In 1930, the Hubbard Room was added, and in 1972 the Children's Library (originally the First Federal Saving and Loan Association of Meriden) was remodeled.

In 1983, the original church and the Children's Library (located in the old bank) were connected. Two of the original stained glass windows were reinstalled in the new main peak and in the Children's area. Access was improved by the addition of an elevator and ramps. The combined buildings surround a beautiful inner courtyard, the site of concerts and other events. Lovely outside gardens have been subsequently installed.



Russell Library today is known for its enthusiastic and creative staff who develop innovative and useful programs for the Middletown Community, such as the Job/Career Program which provides resume writing and interviewing assistance and has helped many a citizen find meaningful work. Other outreach overtures to the community include story times and library card registration at the summer Farmers' Market, partnering with Middletown Pride, and presence at the Juneteenth Celebration and the Middletown Go Green Fest on Earth Day. In addition to traditional materials for reference and for checkout- Russell offers numerous programs for the community such as Book a Librarian, Lawyers in Libraries, on-line live Zoom author talks which are recorded for later viewing, a veteran's writing group, and live concerts.

Children's programs abound at the library and range from story hours, craft activities, Play Pals, preschool dance jams, chess for kids, tabletop gaming, Dungeons and Dragons sessions, and a Pod available for creating podcasts in a studio-like setting.

In October of 2022, the staff at Russell Library took advantage of the older parts of the building to offer (electric) candle-lit after-hours tours called "Secrets of Russell Library" on Friday evenings. Costumed librarians drifted ghostlike though the stacks and the basement while a tour guide narrated the history of the library. Attendees were greeted in the lobby by a Frances Russell look-alike garbed in Victorian attire. The staff has an even more thrilling version of the "Secrets" tour planned for October of 2023.

