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Article published Oct 19, 2010

## His highway history has been a long road

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ORANGE — Some projects take a little longer to complete than others, but David Newhall, 74, doesn't seem to mind that it has taken him more than five decades to complete his work on Interstate 89 and how it impacted the town of Middlesex.

Newhall, a local historian, began the work in 1957, taking photos of many sites that were affected by the building of the highway from Montpelier to the Middlesex exit. The last two decades he has been cataloging the more than 100 photos for his book, "I-89 Interstate: Eisenhower Interstate System 55 Years Earlier Through Middlesex, Vermont." "It's an interesting topic at an interesting time," said Paul Carnahan, Librarian at the Vermont Historical Society's Howard and Alba Leahy Library in Barre. Carnahan was responsible for digitizing the photos and matching them up with captions that Newhall had written. Carnahan also matched the photos to positions along a map of the highway. Each site that corresponds with the photo can be seen in the beginning of the book.

"I've always been fascinated in the history of the highway," Carnahan said. "I was happy to work on a project that I could rope in. It's important to see those photos preserved," he said.

Carnahan said that although he has digitized the photos, he hoped to see the photos permanently preserved and available for public viewing with either the Vermont Historical Society or the Middlesex Historical Society.

The photos include 24 of the properties that the highway ran through, including the farm Newhall grew up on. The highway's path following the Winooski bottomlands separated some 200 acres of the farm that his mother Ullie and aunt operated at that time, to be separated from the area where the house and barn stood. Part of the property is where the Scribner family's Settlement Farm currently sits.

Newhall said he began taking the photos with an old Brownie camera when his aunt realized they were going to lose access to the area when the road was built.

Newhall, who recently gave a presentation to the Middlesex Historical Society, explained that when the highway came through Montpelier toward Middlesex, the town lost 16 taxable buildings. Newhall has these buildings and eight other sites cataloged in his book.

"When people ask me how I feel about the highway, I tell them that it had to go in that valley. It couldn't go to the east because of the hills of Middlesex and Waterbury and couldn't go west because of the Moretown range," Newhall said. "It split our property and cut us off from that 200 acres, but it had to go where it did."

Newhall said he wants to do further research about the section of the highway just south of exit nine in Middlesex; in the early 1960s, the road collapsed when wet clay that was used for fill gave way. "It seemed like it was hush, hush when it happened, but I've talked to one

engineer who said he remembered when it happened," he said.

"I still got to get out there and take some photos of the same sites," Newhall said. "Some of the buildings just aren't there anymore, but I could get pictures anyway." Newhall said that he would enjoy getting some photos that would show how the landscape of the highway corridor has changed in the last 50 years.

"I'm not going to sell the book," Newhall said. He hopes to publish and distribute the books himself, but said, "I don't want to make anything off it. I want people to make donations to local libraries and historical societies instead."

"I remember running a go-cart up and down the road after they paved. My mother and aunt would count the cars as they went by and on an afternoon there was maybe one car a minute. Now on any given afternoon, 100 cars a minute could pass by," said Newhall, who retired from the state after 30 years of service at the Capitol Complex in Montpelier. He is currently president of both the Vermont Antique Farm Machinery Association and the Connecticut River Antique Collectors Klub.

"When people ask if I've always been interested in history, I tell them that when I was in school I didn't like history. Now I can't get enough of it. "

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