

APPENDIX B

DOCUMENTS CONNECTED WITH THE HISTORY OF MIDDLEFIELD

AS HAS been stated in a previous chapter, the dwellers on the Middlefield plateau, under the leadership of David Mack, applied to their respective towns asking that land might be set off to join Prescott's Grant to form a new township. Concerning this we find the following in the book *Town of Murrayfield, Mass.* A. M. Copeland, quoting Murrayfield town records:

“Action touching the Northwest Corner of the town of Murrayfield. “A special town meeting was called to be held March 29, 1779 and one article in the Warrant was, “To see if the town will consent to have the northwest corner of this town set off to join with Worthington and Becket corner in order to make a society or town.” This was in response to the following petition: “Murrayfield, February 18, 1779.

“Whereas we, inhabitants of the north west part of the town of Murrayfield being together with the inhabitants of the northeast part of Becket, and the southwest part of Worthington, unanimously think it best to be set off as a town; Wherefore we request and desire to be set off from this town and adjoin those forementioned inhabitants; our living so remote from the middle of the town makes it very tedious attending any town business especially the preaching of the gospel. Therefore we whose names are underwritten do humbly petition to this town to be set off as far as Thomas Elders.”

(Signed)

SAMUEL JONES,
JOHN TAYLOR,
JOHN THOMPSON,
JOHN JONES,
BENJAMIN EGGLESTON,
BIGOTT EGGLESTON,
LEBANON ISHAM.

“The town of Murrayfield voted not to grant the request.”¹

In Becket the matter was given a more generous treatment as the following extract from the Becket Town Records indicates:

“Becket, March 8th, 1779. 8th Article Put to Vote whether they will hear the request of the People at the North East Corner of the town as they

¹ Copeland's *Town of Murrayfield, Mass.*, page 142.

requesting that some part of said town be voted of(f) in order to be erected in to a separate town with other lands adjacent and it Passed in the affirmative also Voted that their be a Committee to affix a Line what part of said town shall be so set of(f) and make report to the town at some future meeting of said town for their approbation or disapprobation as they shall Think best and that James Birchard, Lieut. Jonas Childs and William Watson Jr. be a committee for the purpose afore said.”²

It apparently took all summer for the committee to find time to attend to the business and report, for it was not until November that the report was made.

“Nov. 5, 1779. Put to vote whether they will accept the Report of the Committee appointed to view and report what part of the North East Corner shall be set to the proposed new township they Reporting that all the Land Lying East of North East Corner of 3rd Division Lot No. 33 Running a straight course to where taggarts Brook enters Westfield River, all land East of said Line and north of said River be voted of(f) as Requested and it passed in the negative.”³

As no entry of any action by the town of Worthington is found in its records we conclude that the adverse results in Murrayfield made the representatives of the Worthington section withdraw their petition. Two years later, under the leadership of Colonel David Mack, the following petition was drawn up and presented to the General Court:

“Petition of Prescott’s Grant and others, Sept. 22, 1781. To the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Humbly sheweth the subscribers Inhabitants of the southwest corner of Worthington in the county of Hampshire, and the northwest corner of Murrayfield in the said county and the northeast corner of Becket in the county of Berkshire and the south side of Partridgefield in said county and the tract of land heretofore granted by the General Court to James Prescott, Esq. and others called Prescott’s Grant that there are more than fifty families allready settled on the abovementioned tracts of land which contain about fourteen thousand one hundred and forty acres of land of which quantity three thousand four hundred and forty-six acres are in Becket, two thousand five hundred and ninety-six are in Murrayfield. three thousand six hundred and ninety-one in Worthington, three thousand four hundred and twelve in said tract called Prescott’s Grant and one thousand in Partridgefield and four hundred and thirty acres at the northeast part of the town of Washington that all the persons who are settled on said lands live at a distance of five miles and some at much greater distance from the meeting-house in their respective towns on which account many of your petitioners have for several years been obliged either to carry these families the distance above mentioned in rough roads or to educate them without any of the advantages

² *Becket Records*, Book 2, page 76.

³ *Beckets Records*. Book 2. page 81.

Petitioning incorporation of Middlefield

of public institutions except in some few cases in which they have been able to procure preaching among themselves the many disadvantages arising from the Roughness of the Roads Steep Hills and Rapid Rivers that are in the way to their respective Towns are more than many of your Honours would think of that those of your petitioners that live in the tract of land called Prescotts Grant not being annexed to no towns have no Priviledges as other towns have nor ever can have till that August body the general Assembly of the Commonwealth Incorporates them and allows them the Priviledges of other towns your Petitioners therefore most humbly pray your honours that a Committee may be appointed and sent to view our circumstances and see if it is not reasonable that we should be incorporated into a separate town and be vested with all the powers and Priviledges and Emunities which towns in this state are by law Intitled to and as in duty bound shall ever Pray

John Carter	Elisha Mack
Miles Washbern	James Dixon
Abraham Washbern *	David Mack
Isaac Washbern	Robert Coffin (Cochran)
Richard Abee	Elnathan Taylor
Thomas Abee	Samuel Taylor
Elisha Macke Jun.	William Taylor
Asa Brown	William Roads
Enos Blossom	Isaac C. Roads
Josiah Leonard	Silas Roads
Calvin Donham	Thomas Arms *
Aron Godard	John Pinny
Anson Cheesman	John Roads *
Benjamin Cheesman	Benjamin Eggleston
Abel Cheesman	John Jones
John Ford	Zebulon Isham
Joseph Carey	Moses Eggleston
Thomas Blossom	Burget Eggleston
John Taylor	Zebidee Goodwin *
Solomon Ingham	Ebenezer Babcock
Seth Hilyard	Daniel Babcock *
Benjamin Blish	Joseph Preston
Benajah Jones	Samuel Jones
Daniel Chapman	John Dixon
John Owls	Joseph Dixon
James Owls	Joseph Russ
John Tuttle	Hennery Lamberton
	James Newton
	David Taylor
	Jonathan Clerk
	James Taggart
	John Taggart
	James Taggart Jun.
	Joseph Mann
	William Mann
	David Bolton
	Joseph Freeland. ' ' 4

⁴ Acts 1782, Chapt. 52, Papers.

There seems to have been two circulations of the petition for one copy dated in 1782 has in addition to the original signers those names marked “*” in the above list.

The petition together with David Mack's efforts resulted in the following action by the General Court:

“Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In the house of representatives. Sept. 24th 1781. On the petition of Part of the Inhabitants of Worthington, Murrayfield, Becket, Partridgefield and the tract of land called Prescott's Grant, praying for a committee to repair to said Prescott's Grant & the towns adjoining in order to examine and report the expediency of their being incorporated into a separate Town. Resolved that the Prayer of the Petition be so far granted that the Hon. Jahlul Woodbridge Esq. Benja Mills Esq. and Col. Asa Barnes be and they are hereby appointed a committee to repair to the aforesaid Prescott's Grant and the towns adjoining for the purpose above mentioned and to report their opinion respecting the same to this court some Time in their next Session and the said committee shall give due notice of the time and place of their meeting to the Petitioners who are hereby directed to serve each of the clerks of the above mentioned Towns and one of the principal Inhabitants of Prescott's Grant with a copy of this resolve together with the Time of the Committees meeting at least fourteen Days before the Time of the said meeting that they shew cause if any they have why the Prayer of the Petitioners should not be granted—also Resolved that the Petitioners be and they are hereby directed to pay the said Committee Due Compensation for their trouble and expenses which may arise in obedience to this resolve.

Sent up for Concurrence

Nathl Gorham, Spk.

“In Senate Sept. 27, 1781.

Read and Concurred,

Saml Adams, Pres.

True copy,

Attest

John Avery, Secry.”

In the Becket Records we find the following action:

“Dec. 6, 1781. Voted to choose a committee to repair to the North East Corner of the town on the 18th day of this instant to Mr. David Mack's to represent the state of the town before the Courts Committee and that Lieut. James Birchard, Nath'l Kingsley Esq. & Capt. Jonas Childs be a committee for the above purpose.”⁵

By the following February the committee had attended to its business and was ready to report as is seen below:

“This may certify that the Towns of Becket, Murrayfield, Worthington, Partridgefield, Washington and the Inhabitants of Prescott's Grant were

⁵ *Becket Records*, Book 2, page 95.

Notified and were all present by their committees excepting Washington, when the Court Committee considered of the Propriety of Incorporating the aforesaid Prescott's Grant with part of the aforementioned Towns Into a separate Town and where the Committee agreed upon this Report.

Stockbridge

February 21, 1782

Att

Jahlul Woodbridge

Chairman of sd Committee."

"Report of a Committee of both Houses appointed to repair to a tract of land called Prescot's Grant &

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

"The Committee of Both Houses appointed to Repair to a Tract of Land called Prescot Grant and the Towns adjoining to examine and Report the Expediency of their being Incorporated into a separate Town have attended that Service and beg leave to Report as their Opinion—That the said Prescots Grant with part of Becket part of Murrayfield, part of Worthington, part of Partridgefield and part of Washington be Incorporated into a Separate Town agreeable to a plan hereto annexed Bounded as follows, viz. Beginning at a Hemlock tree Standing in the river in Becket Directly south from the southwest corner of the aforesaid Prescots Grant, from thence running north 12 degrees east to the north side of the first square of lots in said Partridgefield. Then south seventy degrees east nine hundred rods to the east line of Partridgefield, Thence northwardly in said Partridgefield east line one hundred and forty rods, Thence east six hundred rods to the River in Worthington to a Hemlock Tree directly west of Worthington meetinghouse, Thence Down said River to where it crosses Worthington south line, Thence West Thirty five degrees south nine hundred and forty rods to where the River crosses Becket East Line, Thence up said River to the bounds begun at—

Jahlul Woodbridge

pr order

Becket

Deer 18, 1781''

"In Senate Febry 25, 1782

Read and accepted and the Petitioners have leave to bring in a Bill accordingly.

Sent down for Concurrence.

S. Adams, Prest."

In the House of representatives Feb. 26, 1782.

Read and concurred

Nath Gorham,

Speaker.'''⁶

⁶ Acts 1782, Chap. 52.

On February 27, 1782 a vote was passed that this matter was "to lie till next session." On March 12, 1783, the Act of Incorporation was passed. This act reads as follows:

"An act for erecting certain lands hereinafter described into a town by the name of Middlefield, and annexing the whole to the county of Hampshire.

"Whereas the inhabitants of the south-west corner of Worthington in the county of Hampshire, and the north-west corner of Murrayfield (now Chester) in said county, and the north-east corner of Becket, the south side of Partridgefield, a part of Washington, and the inhabitants of Prescott's Grant (so called), all in the county of Berkshire, have represented to this court the great difficulties and inconveniences they labour under in their Present situation, and have requested that they bee incorporated into a town: Bee it therefore enacted by the Senate and house Representatives in general court assembled, and by the authority of the same, that said south-west corner of Worthington in the county of Hampshire, and the north-west corner of Chester in the same county, and the north-east corner of Becket, the south side of Partridgefield, a part of Washington and the land called Prescott's Grant, all in the county of Berkshire, and bounded as follows, viz: Beginning at a hemlock tree standing on the river in Becket, directly south of the south-west corner of Prescott's Grant, thence running north one thousand rods to a Beech tree, then north twelve degrees east to the north side of the first square in Partridgefield to a stake and stones; thence south seventy degrees east nine hundred rods to a stake and stones; thence north one hundred and forty rods; thence east six hundred rods to the river at a hemlock tree, a west point from Worthington meeting-house; thence down the said river to the place where the same crosses Worthington south line at an heart-Beam tree thence west thirty-five degrees south nine hundred and forty rods to the place where the said river crosses Becket east line; thence up the said river to the first mentioned bounds,—with the inhabitants thereon, bee and hereby are incorporated into a Town by the name of Middlefield, and that the said town bee and hereby is Vested with all the Powers, Privileges, and immunities which the towns in this Commonwealth do or may enjoy by the Constitution or laws of the same; and the whole of the said town of Middlefield shall forever hereafter bee considered as a part of the county of Hampshire. And bee it further enacted that John Kirkland, Esquire, bee and he hereby is empowered to issue his warrant to some principle inhabitant within said town of Middlefield, directing him to warn the inhabitants of said town qualified to vote in town affairs to assemble at some suitable time and place within the said town for the purpose of chusing such officers as are Necessary to manage the affairs of the said town. Provided, nevertheless, that the inhabitants of the said town of Middlefield shall pay their proportionable part of such town, county, State and other taxes as are already assessed on them by the respective towns to which they have belonged, and of all public debts,

duties, which may be due and owing from said town, until a tax shall be laid by the General Court upon the said town hereby incorporated.”⁷

PETITION OF MIDDLEFIELD FOR ABATEMENT OF TAXES

During the first decade after the incorporation of Middlefield the citizens endeavored to build a meetinghouse. Not only were they hampered by such differences of opinion that seven years were required for the settling the question of site, but their economic conditions made very difficult the raising of sufficient funds to build the structure. In their difficulty they petitioned the General Court to assist them by abating the state taxes. The petition follows:

“To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives, in General Court Assembly on the 27th Day of Febr'y 1788. The most Humble Petition of the Inhabitants of the town of Middlefield in the county of Hampshire, Beg Leave to Show, that your Petitioners have settled in this an uncultivated Country and are mostly of the Poorer sort of People and the Publick Expense by the Reason of the Late War Occasioning Heavy Taxes, and Having no Publick lands to assist in the Support of the Gospel or of Schools we are Nesessiated to lay Before your Honors our Circumstances and pray for Some assistance Towards Building a Meeting House for Publick Worship which we are unable to do without your Honours See Cause to Grant Some Support. Your Petitioners Beg Leave further to Inform that we have been Obliged to pay our proportion towards Building Houses for Publick Worship in the Towns to which we formerly Belonged.

“We Therefore pray Your Honours to take our Circumstances into Consideration and Grant us some Relief by Being Exemped from the payment of Publick Tax or Any other Way your Honours think proper and Your Petitioners will ever pray,

Middlefield 20th Febr'y 1788.	James Dickson	} Commtt. in Bilgd. of Middlefield.” ⁸
	Sam'l Jones	
	David Mack	

The General Court was probably too busy with problems arising from the late Shays' Rebellion to have any time or sympathy to expend upon the dwellers in the hill-towns who had been active in that insurrection. So we are not surprised that this petition produced no relief. But the situation in Middlefield did not improve and the citizens were led to petition again for relief by abatement of taxes in 1790, as follows:

“To the Honourable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the Petition of the Inhabitants of the Town of Middlefield in Said Commonwealth most Humbly Sheweth

⁷ Appendix *One Hundredth Anniversary of the Town of Middlefield*, 1883.

⁸ House Document 2810, 1788.

That the Said Town of Middlefield is but in a state of Infancy, it being but a Few years since the Train of Human Beings could be Discovered therein, that the Said Town was settled By People whose circumstances were Low in the World & Having the Burden of the Late War to support and the uncultivated wild to encounter, Occasion them remaining poor, Yet knowing it to Be their Duty to provide for and Support the public worship of God, Having proceeded on far as to Raise and pay the Sum of Three Hundred & Sixty Pounds in the Compass of Twelve months By which means they Have gone considerable forward Toward Building a House for Public worship of the almighty God—the beforementioned Sum together with their other Taxes is such a Burden on a considerable Part of the Community as to Prevent their completing the Building they have Begun, By which they can have no Advantage of What they have done & in a few years must Occasion the Loss of What they have Expended. We therefore Pray your Honours to take our Circumstances into Consideration & Grant us some Assistance in so good a work. Your Honours are Sensible that we have not the Advantage of any Public Land for the Support of the Gospel or Schools as is customary in other new towns. We therefore Believe and Doubt not But Your Honours in your Wisdom will Compassionate our Care & Grant us some Relief By ways which your Petitioners will not Pretend to Proscribe & as in duty Bound Your Petitioners will ever Pray.

Dated at Middlefield this 20th Day of Dec' 1790.

Daniel Chapman	}	Selectmen
Malachi Loveland		of
Amasa Graves		Middlefield.''

The General Court records state:

“Read in the House Jan. 28, 1791; not acted upon by reason that no person appeared to give the necessary information relative thereto.””

PETITION FOR ALTERATION OF TOWN LINES

In the year 1811 four citizens of Middlefield, evidently thinking their condition or school advantages or proportion of the burden of taxes would be more satisfactory under changed arrangements proposed, or at least wishing to have their real estate taxed in one town only, submitted the following petition to the General Court:

“To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court Assembled A. Domini 1811. The petition of Theodore Coats, John Norcott, Levi Olds & Justus Olds of the town of Middlefield in the County of Hampshire and Commonwealth aforesaid, humbly sheweth, that in their opinion it is necessary that there should be an alteration in the town line between Middlefield in the County of Hampshire and Washington in the County of Berkshire, beginning

⁹ Senate Files, 1791, 1415.

where the town line crosses the north line of Levi Olds, thence westwardly on the line of said lot to end line of said lot and other lots to the south west corner of Mr. John Norcott's land, thence eastwardly about five or six rods to the original town line and we pray that your Honours would make the said alteration in the said town line and your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray,

THEODORE COATS,
JOHN NORCOTT,
LEVI OLDS,
JUSTUS OLDS.'¹⁰

In opposition to the above petition the town of Washington submitted the following petition in their own behalf:

“To the Honourable Senate and House of Representatives in General Court Assembled. At a legal meeting of the inhabitants of the town of Washington who are qualified by Law to vote in Town Affairs held on Monday the 29th of April last The petition of John Norcott, Levi Olds, Justus Olds and Theodore Coats preferred at the last session of the General Court praying that their lands lying in the town of Washington may be annexed to the Town of Middlefield being under consideration said meeting voted not to agree to said petition or any alteration of the line between the said towns and the said meeting did vote that the selectmen of Washington respectfully remonstrate to the Honourable Legislature against such alteration and pursuant to the vote of the said town of Washington do most respectfully remonstrate and object to such alteration to the following reasons which to us appear satisfactory & just.

“1st Because all the reason assigned by the petitioners is the Inconvenience they suffer by paying their taxes in two towns; whereas there are twelve of the inhabitants of Washington who own lands in the adjoining towns on the Town line & have the same claim for an alteration as the petitioners and would gladly be accommodated if practicable upon the same principle, and likewise there are several of the Inhabitants of the Towns of Becket, Lee, Lenox, Pittsfield, Dalton and Hinsdale who own lands in Washington on the Town line who experience the same difficulty and your Honours will readily see the almost impossibility of accommodating all who have equal claims with the petitioners and that it is totally impracticable as the line between towns must be frequently altered.

“2nd Because the petitioners are Legally and justly holden to pay their proportion towards the support of paupers who have gained a legal settlement in sd. town previous to such alteration & of course it will be unjust in principle by giving to the town of Middlefield what is our right.

“3rd Because such dismemberment of the Town will operate unjustly in the school district to which such Lands and Tenements now belong by the loss of about one seventh part of the Lands belonging to sd. district with one dwelling House and Barn, some personal estate and three Ratable polls, there being but seventeen polls now in the district exclusive of two or three

¹⁰ Senate Files, 1811, 4335.

families in Becket who have the privilege of schooling their money in sd. District and Mr. Norcott who is one of the petitioners cannot be so well accommodated for schooling at Middlefield as at Present in Washington.

“4th Because the Town line is now a straight line and the proposed alteration will make it a zig zag and of course more expensive preambulating.

“For the foregoing reasons which we respectfully submit to your Honours We do and shall ever object to such alteration as we believe it to be the bounden duty of sd. Town of Washington so to do.

Dated at Washington the 21st day of May A. D. 1811.”¹¹

There appears to have been no result from this attempt to alter the town lines. The next fall the selectmen of Middlefield petitioned to have Middlefield taken from Hampshire County and joined to Berkshire County. The petition reads as follows:

“To the Honourable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court Assembled, Jan’y A. D. 1812 The petition of Erastus Ingham, John Dickson and Daniel Root, selectmen of the Town of Middlefield in the county of Hampshire, in behalf of said town in praying this petition and in conformity with the vote of said Town passed at their town meeting legally warned and holden on the fifteenth day of November 1811 Humbly sheweth that the town of Middlefield is twenty six miles from Northampton in the nearest direction and thirty miles in any comfortable Road for a carriage Northampton being the place for holding the courts for the county Your petitioners further State that the Said Northampton is not in any Direction for any other Business which might be of advantage for the said town to do while attending the courts as the case might be, your petitioners farther state that it is not more than sixteen miles from the meeting house in this town to the court House in Lenox in the county of Berkshire and by far the better road and Direction to Albany and other parts of the State of New York where the inhabitants of this town Have considerable business to do your petitioners farther mention that about two thirds of this town originally Belonged to the said county of Berkshire, your petitioners therefore pray that they meaning the Town of Middlefield may be taken from the county of Hampshire and annexed to the county of Berkshire and your petitioners as in duty Bound shall ever pray,

Jan. 7, 1812.

ERASTUS INGHAM	} Selectmen of the town of	
JOHN DICKSON		} Middlefield in the county
DANIEL ROOT		} of Hampshire.” ¹²

This movement was without result and the Senate Files show the following entry for June 9, 1812, that the petitioners have “leave to withdraw their petition.”

¹¹ Senate Files, 1811, 4335-2.

¹² Senate Files, 1812, 4594.