

CHAPTER X

MID-CENTURY MIDDLEFIELD. 1815-1870

IN THE previous chapter consideration was given the economic phases of the life of Middlefield between 1815 and 1870, which resulted in the appearance of three distinct villages with well defined manufacturing and mercantile activities. Coincident with the growth of the general prosperity thus established were developments in other directions not so obviously connected with the existence of communities within the township. In particular, the social, educational and religious influences of this same period demand attention, which, though less tangible, were no less vital in the life of the town, and in some respects were as notable as the more material achievements already described.

One of the early factors in bringing Middlefield more closely in touch with the outside world was improved transportation. Soon after the War of 1812 the increasing travel and cartage business between the Connecticut Valley towns and Pittsfield and the west led to a demand for a better thoroughfare from Springfield. Besides the Third Massachusetts Turnpike reaching Pittsfield by way of Northampton, Worthington and Peru, the most used road was the Hampden and Berkshire and Housatonic Turnpikes, chartered in 1826, reaching the same point by way of Blandford and Lee. Both of these routes traversed steep hills, and both were notorious for accidents to stagecoaches.

As early as 1818 it had become known that an easy grade through the Berkshires lay through the "Pass of the Westfield" at the northern end of Mt. Gobble in Chester,—where the three counties of Berkshire, Hampden, and Hampshire meet,—and along the river to the mouth of Factory Brook in Middlefield. A preliminary survey of this route for a railroad was made at an early date, but such a proposition seemed visionary, and the building of the Pontoosuc Turnpike through this valley appeared much more feasible.



FARM OF DANIEL ROOT, AND MT. GOBBLE

One question which caused some discussion was the location of the proposed highway between the mouth of Factory Brook and Hinsdale. The most level route lay north along Factory Brook through Blush Hollow and the corner of Peru while an alternative route continued along the West Branch through North Becket and the eastern part of Washington. Middlefield naturally favored the former location, which would have brought the turnpike within one mile of the Center. In fact the town voted in 1828 to build a mile of turnpike along Factory Brook "provided the Pontoosuc Turnpike is actually located and made from the mouth of said Brook and passing near the house of Amasa Graves¹ in Middlefield and from thence to Pittsfield."

Unfortunately, however, Middlefield was the only town in Hampshire County through which the proposed turnpike would pass, and the county officials were frankly hostile to supporting a project which seemed to benefit only the adjoining counties. With prominent Berkshire men among the members of the corporation it was but natural that the route through Becket and Washington should be chosen. This decision had considerable significance to Middlefield when it is recalled that the Western Railroad later bought out the Turnpike Corporation in order to lay its roadbed along its course. Had the turnpike been located along Factory Brook, the railroad would undoubtedly have followed this route also, to the great advantage of the woolen manufacturers in the hollow and to the greater convenience of the Middlefield citizens generally.

But even though the turnpike only skirted the township of Middlefield, its superiority over former roads bestowed great benefit upon all the towns along its route. The enthusiasm with which the opening of the Turnpike was greeted is well indicated by the impressions of the Honorable Julius Rockwell, of Pittsfield, of his ride in 1830, immediately after the completion of the road: "From this place (Washington) to Colonel Henry's in Chester, a distance of about twelve miles, the road is as perfectly level as the most fastidious traveller could wish. The labor and expense of constructing the road and the wildness and peculiar beauty of the scenery are as wild and romantic as any which the great novelist of Scotland has described in that land

¹At the head of the reservoir where Samuel Smith, Jr., once lived.

of mountain and song. 'The views richly repay the time and expense of the whole journey.' The pleasure of this trip was enhanced by the comfortable coaches and excellent horses and the Pontoosuc Turnpike deservedly became a popular throughfare during the decade preceding the building of the Western Railroad. From the car windows several stretches of this road between Middlefield and Chester can still be seen, particularly the portion still lined with old maples near the Daniel Root place at the foot of Mt. Gobble.

In order to make greater use of this turnpike, Middlefield, about 1835, built two new roads. One of these was the present highway down the mountain to the Chester Valley, located somewhat east of the steeper and more roundabout road passing the Alderman and Root farms which had been a county highway since 1784. The other new road was built by the county from Blush Hollow along Factory Brook in the same general location as the present route to Middlefield station. This road gave the woolen manufacturers and others a practically level route over which to transport their goods and raw materials in either direction. In fact, during the few years from 1835 to 1840, Factory Village was as accessible, so far as grades were concerned, as any place in western Massachusetts.

The opening of the Pontoosuc Turnpike turned public attention to the feasibility of using the West Branch as a water way through the Berkshire Hills. The great benefit derived from the Erie Canal in the cheap transportation of freight to New York City by way of the Hudson River gave rise to much discussion of a similar canal across Massachusetts. Several routes were considered, one of which, following the Westfield River Valley through Chester, Middlefield and Becket, was to have its summit level at Pittsfield, and its water supply from brooks as far east as Middlefield. These plans were dropped, however, in the face of the more feasible project of a railroad with its advantages of quicker transportation, cheaper construction in a mountainous country, and less interruption to traffic through ice and flood.

As early as 1829 the success of the various short railroad lines which had been built in different localities in the eastern states led to the discussion of the project of building a railroad across

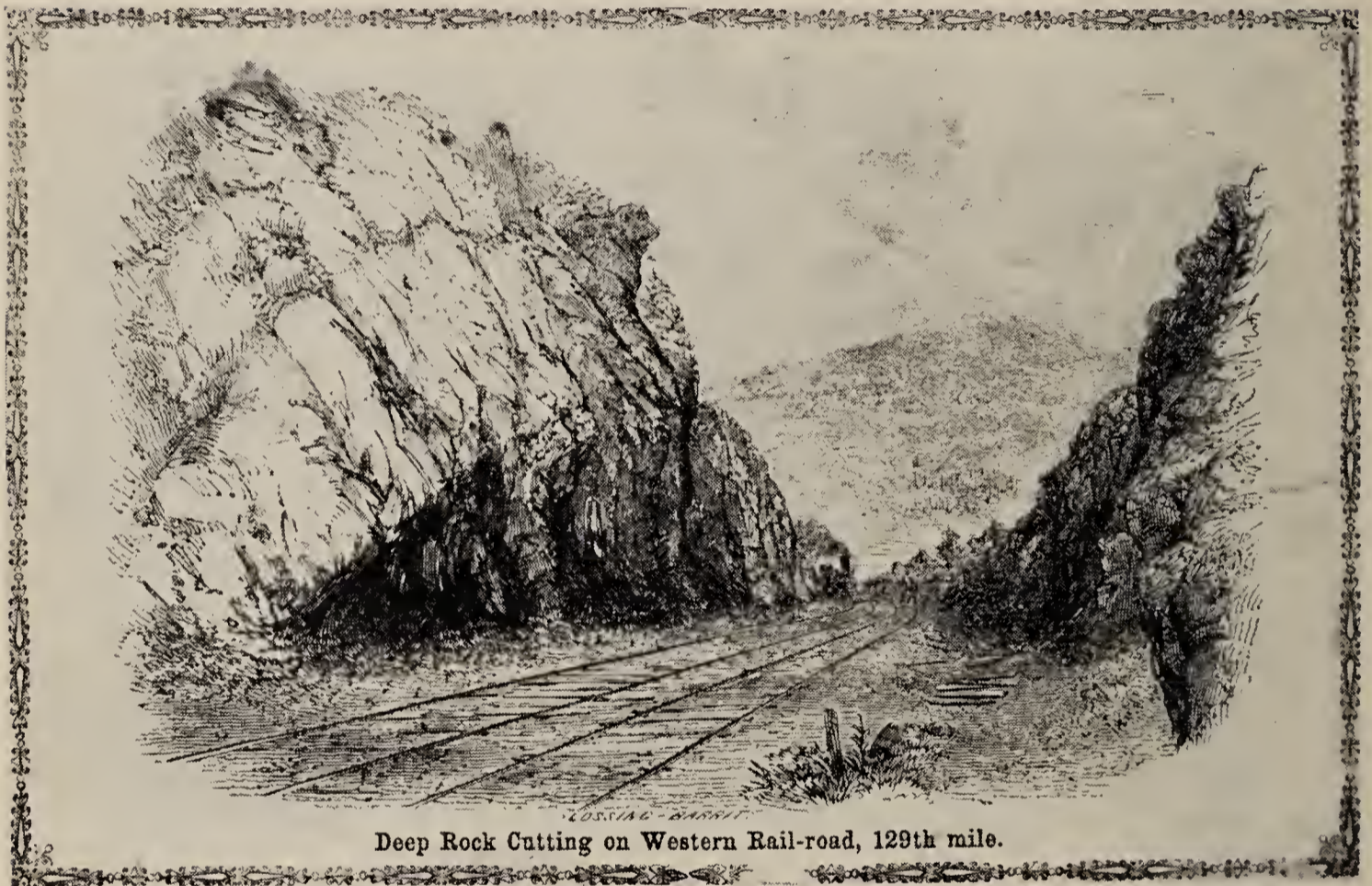
Massachusetts from Boston to Albany. The principal reason for this discussion was the fact that if such a railroad could be built, a large part of the traffic which came to Albany from the west by means of the Erie Canal might be diverted from New York City to Boston for shipping abroad. That such a road would facilitate the distribution of western products throughout the state is evident when we remember that the people of many of the western Massachusetts towns, on account of the unsuitability of the soil and climate for wheat production, had to bring their flour from Albany to their highland homes.

The estimates of the rate of speed and cost of transportation of the proposed railroad in comparison with stagecoach travel are of interest. The trip from Boston to Albany by stagecoach could be made in two days, thirty-six hours of which were spent in hard travel. It was claimed that the railroad could cover the distance in twenty-two hours, a conservative estimate, certainly, considering the six hour trip of to-day. On the other hand it was confidently asserted that the eight dollar stagecoach fare could be reduced, even making allowance for unforeseen expenses, to the magnificent sum of one dollar and five cents a person, a judgment which shows little idea of the organization and equipment necessary for maintaining the twentieth century railroad.

Although incorporated in 1833, it was some time before the Western Railroad Company after considering a southerly route through Great Barrington finally took over the route of the Pontoosuc Turnpike. In surveying the location along the Westfield River Valley, as in the survey of the original turnpike, the engineers again brought up the fact that in crossing the hill ranges to the Housatonic Valley a much easier grade existed by following Factory Brook to Hinsdale, than by the turnpike to that town, which lay through Becket and Washington. The railroad consequently applied to the town for permission to lay its tracks along the valley of Factory Brook.

As the ultimate advantages of railroads were at this time by no means widely appreciated, this question brought forth a variety of opinion from the different classes within the town. The woolen manufacturers in Blush Hollow who naturally saw at once the great saving of cartage in having their wool

and dyestuffs brought directly to their doors and their manufactured goods, shipped in the same manner, were strongly in favor of the Factory Brook route. The merchants, also who were equally benefitted, must have entertained similar opinions. The average farmer, however, who did his trading mostly at the Center, and whose contact with the outside world seems to have been mainly through his relatives and friends who had left town to seek their fortunes elsewhere, saw in the railroad a menace to the youth of the town, luring them away to distant



places where the conditions of living seemed easier, or furnishing them with an undesirable loafing place at the station, if they remained in town. He deemed it a sufficient improvement in his condition if he had to haul his produce only to Chester, Becket or Hinsdale instead of to Westfield, Hartford or Albany.

As the conservative farmers were greatly in the majority, the Western Railroad Company was denied permission to lay its tracks along Factory Brook, and had no choice but to follow the path of the Pontoosuc Turnpike through North Becket and Washington. On account of the deep cut necessary to lower the grade to Washington summit, the construction of the road

over this route was much more expensive than it would have been over the Middlefield route. Even east of Middlefield so winding and narrow was the valley that between Westfield and Washington no less than twenty-eight culverts and bridges had to be built, in addition to the numerous cuts made through solid rock. The immensity of this undertaking may be appreciated in the fact that only hand drilling and black powder were in use at this time for blasting, so that progress was slow even though many employees were hired.

Descriptive of the portion of the Western Railroad through Middlefield, the following paragraphs are of interest:¹

“One mile of road between the 128th and the 129th mile-posts cost the company \$219,929.87, and the whole mountain division 13¾ miles in length, over one million of dollars.”

“Leaving this station (Chester Factories) we pass along through a narrow meadow for a mile and a half, and at 127½ miles, through a deep rock cutting, and immediately over a stone arched bridge, sixty feet above the river, we enter the mountain section. No language that we are master of could give the traveler any proper description of the wildness, the grandeur, of the obstacles surmounted in the construction of the portion of the route. The river is exceedingly crooked, and the lofty mountains, which are very steep and rugged, and of solid rock, shut down quite to the river on both sides, their sharp points shooting by each other, rendering crossing at every bend of the stream indispensable. In addition to this, the points of the hills must be cut away and for many miles these rock cuttings and bridges follow each other in regular and rapid succession. The grade here is eighty feet per mile, and although the track is sixty feet above the river at the bottom yet so rapidly does the water fall that at McElwain's Mills, about five miles distant the grade is but 2½ feet above the mill dam. Nor does the passing traveler, hurling along rapidly as he is, see much of the beauty of the mountain gorge. It is not until he has seen, from the base of these mighty structures of art, the passage of the cars, that their magnificence is really felt.”

It is perhaps idle to speculate how different Middlefield would be to-day if the station were located in Blush Hollow instead of at “The Switch.” There would in fact have been no “Switch” community, as all the mills would have been located along Factory Brook. Judging from the effects of the railroad on other towns of the same character, it is probable that the woolen factories would have carried on a somewhat larger business for

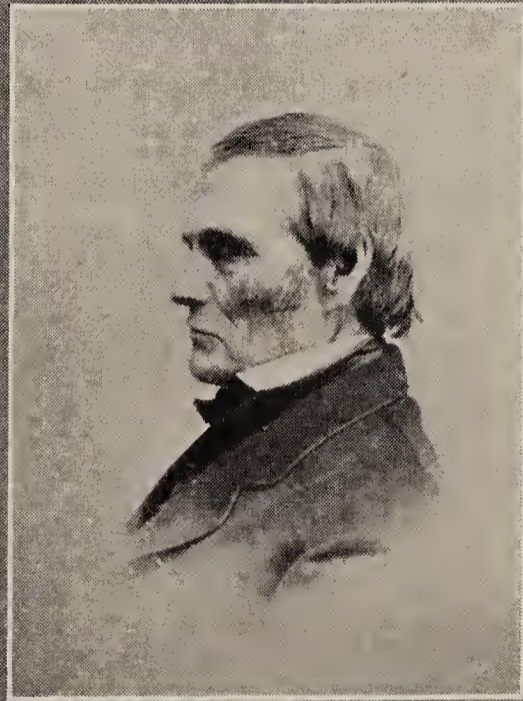
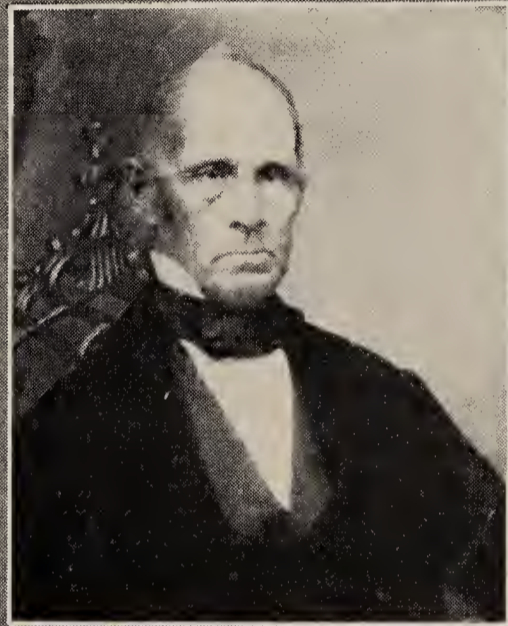
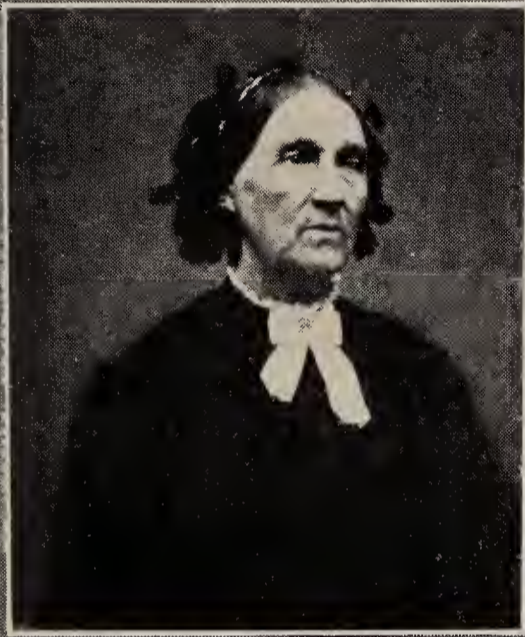
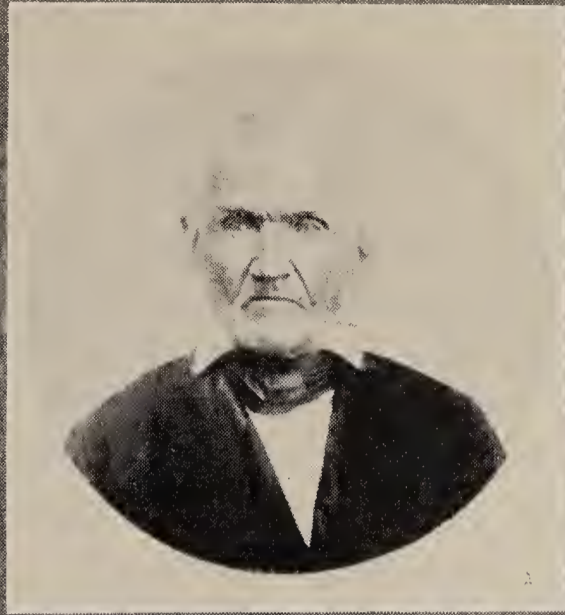
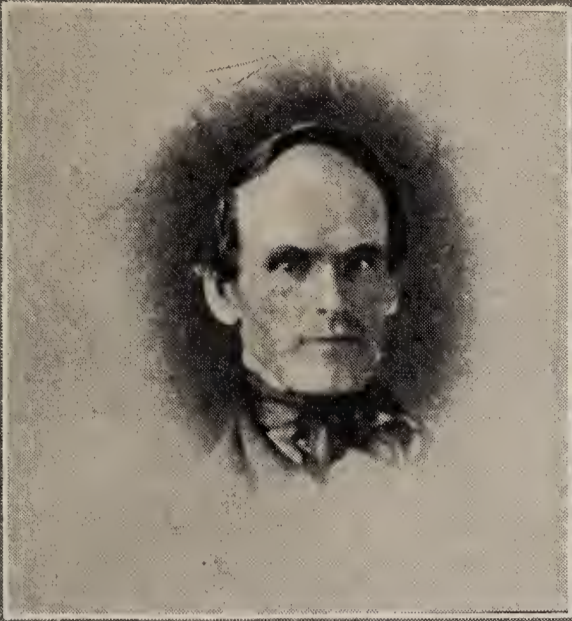
¹From “A Chart and Description of the Boston and Worcester, and Western Railroads” by William Guild—1847. Pages 54, 57, 59.

a time, but with the general transfer of manufacturing activities to the cities and the larger scale methods of modern business, they would, in any event, like the mills in Hinsdale, have been closed or remodeled for manufacturing of some other kind. The greater accessibility of the town to strangers from the outside would have had a stimulating effect on the social life of the community. On the other hand, the charm of the simple and quiet rural life which attracts the summer visitor who seeks to escape the noise and general intensity of city life would to a great extent be lost with the railroad trains puffing and rumbling incessantly up and down the valley of Factory Brook.

The temporary residence within the town of about a thousand immigrant laborers, who worked on the railroad and lived in shacks, created a social problem which the town of Middlefield was not backward in attempting to solve. The illiteracy of these people excited the interest of Deacon Alexander Ingham and he succeeded in securing the support of the town for two schools. One of these was located a short distance east of the arch bridge and the other near the foot of Mt. Gobble where a large colony of the laborers lived. The children were gathered in in large numbers and much was done for their mental and spiritual uplift.

The genuineness of this missionary work elicited wide and favorable comment. When the laborers moved on to other towns, Deacon Ingham visited Horace Mann at Boston with the result that the educational work begun in Middlefield was continued in other towns. Deacon Ingham also went to Albany and interested Governor Seward and others in looking out for the welfare of the laborers in New York State.

By May, 1841, the railroad was opened for use from the east as far as Chester, and by August, as far as Washington. In December the opening of the completed line was celebrated by excursions over the route from both Boston and Albany. The locomotives first used were of the wood-burning variety, equipped with huge flaring smokestacks. The passenger cars resembled the old stagecoaches, with doors on each side and three seats in each. The conductor did not enter the car but walked on a rod on the outside, letting down the windows in order to take up the tickets. The rails were spiked onto wooden



OLIVER SMITH, 2ND
MRS. SARAH (METCALF) DICKSON
AMBROSE NEWTON

PAIN LOVELAND
MATTHEW SMITH, ESQ.
SAMUEL SMITH

timbers laid lengthwise and subject to displacement so that frequent stops were necessary while the trainmen ran ahead to nail down "snakeheads." Under these conditions the speed of the trains was about fifteen miles an hour.

The location of the Western Railroad over the path of the Pontoosuc Turnpike affected the prosperity of land owners in the southwest part of the town, now generally known as "Taylor's pasture." Through this region ran the original highway from Becket Center which crossed Factory Brook at Leach's Mills and climbed Jonnyeake Hill. Along this road lived families by the name of Herrick, Chapin, Millard, Beach, and others. While the Pontoosuc Turnpike improved the accessibility of this section, all communication with Becket Center as well by the turnpike was cut off by the railroad bed, leaving the Factory Brook road as the only means of egress. As a result no families are living in "Taylor's Pasture" to-day. The town of Becket built a new road from Becket Center to "The Switch," and all that remains of the ancient Becket highway of 1780, besides several short stretches now used, are the foundations of "Becket Bridge" and the parallel lines of stone walls winding up and down over the hills.

While the roadbed of the railroad was being built, the stagecoach line between Springfield and Albany, which had previously passed over the Pontoosuc Turnpike, was detoured from Huntington to Hinsdale over the county road running through Smith Hollow to West Worthington and Peru. For a few years Asa Smith's house became a sort of tavern and regular stopping place for changing horses. In 1839 the coach from Springfield reached this place every evening, and the Albany coach every noon. With the opening of the railroad, however, the picturesque era of the tavern and the stagecoach came to a sudden end.

The railroad also brought a change in the transportation of the mail. In 1789 post riders distributed the mail slowly from Springfield which at that time was the only post office in western Massachusetts. Later, Titus Pomeroy, of Northampton, brought the mail on horseback from that town. Solomon P. Fitch, who lived at the Center for a time, is said to have been one of these carriers. Some years later when a regular wagon route was

established between Northampton and Hinsdale, via Middlefield, the driver lived at Chester Center and made alternate trips to each end of the route twice a week.

In 1820 the government contracted with Enos Boise, of Blandford, to carry the mail once a week on a four day route from Hartford to Hinsdale through Middlefield, at an annual salary of \$68.00, the stops being made at Blandford and at the ends of the line. This contract was renewed by Watson Boise, of Blandford, in 1832, at a salary of \$140.00. Between Hartford and Blandford Boise drove a stage, but from Blandford to Hinsdale the trip was made with a sulky. With the coming of the railroad and the establishment of the Bancroft post office at "The Switch" came the daily mail service by the star route to Middlefield Center, and, in late years, the rural delivery from Chester and Hinsdale post offices.

The coming of the railroad brought about a revival of the activity in quarrying soapstone. In 1853 the quarries at the top of Smith Hollow Hill were taken over by the Metropolitan Soapstone Company of New York City, which was incorporated with a capital of \$200,000, a sum which was soon increased to \$300,000. Two mills were established for sawing the stone into slabs which were used either for fire stones for furnaces or for facing buildings. Some of the stone was also ground to powder to be used with oil as a lubricant or as a basis of soap to remove grease from cloth. In 1853 1,000 tons were quarried and shipped to the New York yard of the company where it brought about \$12 a ton. The following year the output was increased to 1,200 tons, requiring a maximum of forty men to carry on the work. The distance of the quarry from the railroad station and the steep hills between eventually caused the expense to exceed the returns and the operations were brought to an end by the time of the Civil War. Rich deposits of soapstone still remain to be quarried whenever favorable conditions return.

A few years previous to the renewed operations at the soapstone quarries Smith Hollow was the scene of another industry. At the foot of Smith Hollow Hill lived Addison Everett, a mechanic and eccentric inventor. One of his inventions was his dwelling constructed of a square central portion with box-like rooms attached at the corners, which was an object of

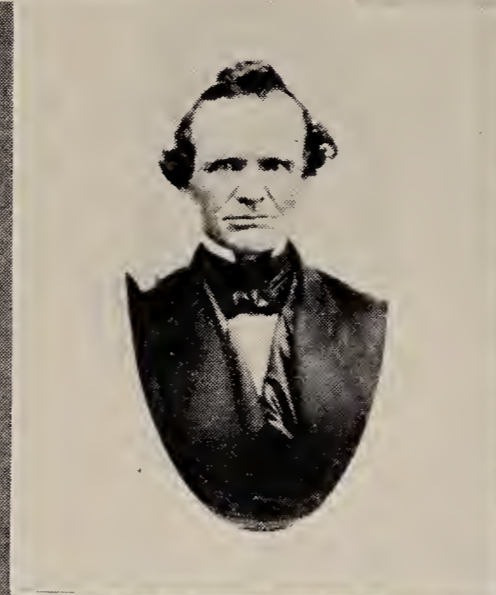
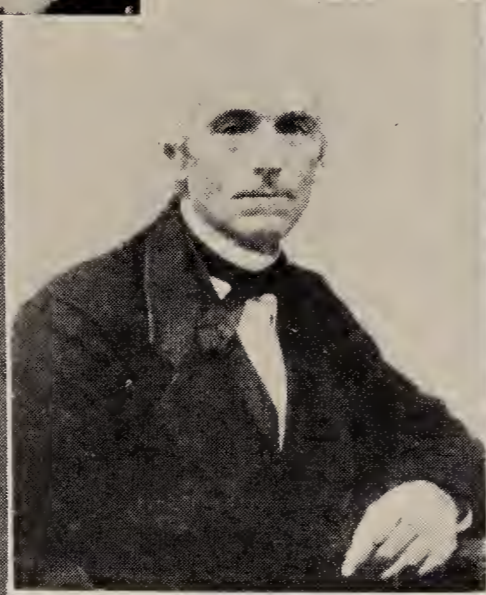
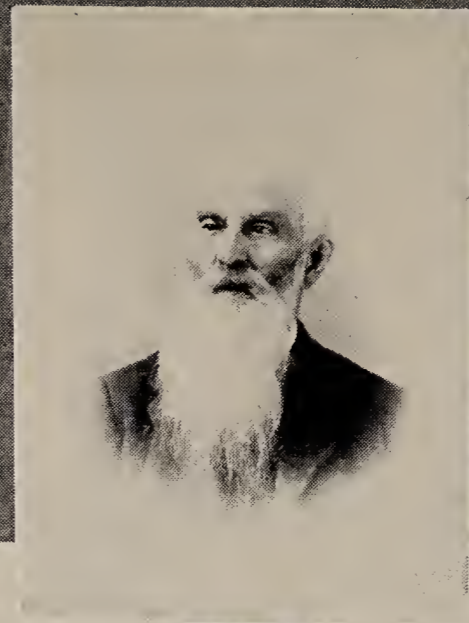
curiosity rather than of practical utility. On Tuttle Brook, however, he set up a turning shop and developed a process for making wooden bowls which was far in advance for any process then known. There appeared to be a bright future for the business until the secret of the manufacture was stolen and used to his disadvantage elsewhere, so that the business in Smith Hollow came to an end. Specimens from his workshop are still to be found in Middlefield households.

With the decline of the wool-growing industry the raising of fat cattle came more into prominence. That this branch of activity had been carried on extensively since the beginning of the century is indicated by the tanneries which were in operation at an early date. The first and most prominent of these was located a short distance south of the Pease District schoolhouse on Meeker's Brook, which soon after became known as Tan House Brook. An early, if not the first proprietor, was John Metcalf, whose product was widely known for its excellence. His son-in-law, Alexander Dickson, later carried on the business

John Metcalf

for a few years, and then sold out to Robbins and Handy who continued the industry into the late '40's. Another tannery, located at the foot of Glendale Falls, was operated by one Rutherford, and later by Prentice and Robbins, but was abandoned about 1840. Here again the coming of the railroad, with its facilities for shipping live stock direct to the cities, no doubt brought about the abandonment of the tanning business.

Quite otherwise was it with the beef raising industry to which the railroad seems to have given impetus. The Middlefield farmers were early interested in the improvement of their herds made possible by the importations of blooded stock from England, particularly of the Durham breed, but also of the Devon and Jersey. By 1840 a shorthorn Durham bull had been brought into the community from the pure bred Rensselaer stock. He was followed by "Roan Duke," purchased by Eldridge Pease from the herd of Mr. Thorne, of New York. This creature was one of the three bull calves sired by "Grand Duke"—a bull which had been imported from England at a cost of one



HENRY DICKSON

EDWARD KING

MATTHEW SMITH

JOHN L. BELL

HENRY HAWES

GEORGE W. COTTRELL, SR.

thousand guineas. As a result the Middlefield cattle became noted for their excellence throughout the state.

It was primarily the development of cattle raising that led to the formation of the Highland Agricultural Society in 1856, and the fact that its annual exhibitions have always been locally known as "cattleshows" indicates the particular branch of agriculture which has been of the most importance in the community. Under the direction of a temporary organization of which Ambrose Loveland was president and Solomon F. Root, secretary, an exhibit of stock was held in September, which was attended, so it is reported, by "a large concourse of people." The following year a permanent organization was effected with Matthew Smith, president, Edwin McElwain, secretary and Solomon F. Root, Treasurer. Money was raised by annual fees of one dollar per member. Liberal premiums were offered from its funds and great interest was shown in the enterprise. Peter Geer of Peru presented the society with a fine flagpole. Though the day of the fair in 1857 was cold and windy, 400 head of cattle besides a fine display of horses, sheep and swine were on exhibition. Chester furnished sixty-five yokes of oxen and steers in one string headed by a sturdy bull, decorated with bells and ribbons and ridden by a sturdy boy. Behind, drawn by all, came a large wagon filled with the musicians of the day, the Stars and Stripes floating over their heads.

In 1858 the society was fortunate in being presented with a generous parcel of land for its exhibition by Matthew Smith, the leading spirit in this enterprise. This land was not only situated conveniently near the Center but its location on an isolated hillock on the crest of the ridge afforded an unusually wide prospect of the multitudinous hills and valleys of western Massachusetts which, for visitors, at least, has been one of the features of the exhibition. To revive momentarily the memories of this and of other pictures of Middlefield scenery the impressions of President Edward Hitchcock, of Amherst College, in exploring this locality come naturally to mind:

"It is extremely exhilarating to the spirits of the tasteful traveler as he traverses these regions, specially in summer, to find such a constant variety of landscape attending every change of place. For every new hill he climbs, he is rewarded by the discovery of some new grouping of the distant

mountains, some new peak or ridge rising fantastically on the horizon; some new village crowning the distant hill with its neat white houses and church spire; or some hitherto unseen valley opens before him, through which tumbles the mountain torrent; while the vast slopes of the valley present so much diversity, softness and richness of foliage, as to form a lovely resting place for the eye."

Having secured this land the society decided to build a fence around it and charge admission. To further augment its funds the policy of selling life memberships was also initiated. A description of the exhibition this year is given thus by an eighteen-year old youth:

"Our Cattleshow took place on Tuesday and Wednesday, Sept. 28 and 29, and is acknowledged by all to have been a complete success. A fine looking fence was built around the ground. It was six feet high and therefore inaccessible to all save a few of the most determined spirits, viz., Orrin Pease who was led out by the collar, and others who were chased over the fence. Matthew stood at the entrance and took admission fees of ten cents, or rather the tickets which were sold to the people by the Secretary and Treasurer, viz. Lawrence Smith and S. F. Root. . . .

"Upon the first day 407 head of cattle were exhibited to a somewhat small collection of people, though 39 dollars were taken, and but 37 on the second day. The Peases did not bring their cattle and if they had there would probably have been over 500 head on exhibition. 68 horses were entered; of these the finest were those owned by Worcester Taylor, of Becket, named "Berkshire" and by Wm. J. Mallory, named "Lone Star, Jr." Two fat pair of oxen were exhibited by George Huntington, of Becket and Charles Bills, of Middlefield, both of which were sold on the ground to Hezekiah Taylor, of Westfield, husband of Harriet Pease, for the sums of \$225 and 210 dollars respectively."

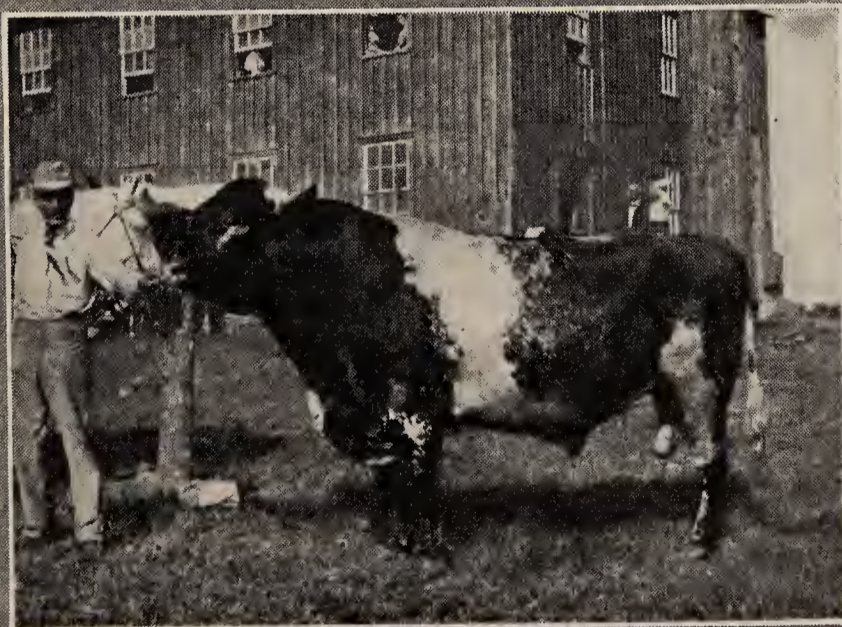
During the legislative session of 1859 the agricultural society sought incorporation, but opposition to the movement came from Huntington and other towns who had held a cattleshow the previous year. Delegations appeared with the purpose of securing the charter for Huntington instead of Middlefield. Matthew Smith was the sole representative for Middlefield, but he addressed the committee of the General Court in such a forceful manner that the charter was granted to Middlefield. When this news reached the town much excitement was manifested. Some of the jubilant spirits mounted the town ordnance on the fair grounds and fired it long into the night, taking particular care to point the piece down the valley in the direction of Huntington.

The society now voted to add a ladies' fair and to build an exhibition hall to house the display of the products of their needles, looms and cook stoves. In the midst of the work of erection the community was plunged into grief by the tragic death of the society's president, Dr. James U. Church, the much esteemed physician of Middlefield. In spite of this misfortune the other leaders were able to secure sufficient funds to pay for the hall and to complete the building for the fair that same year. It had two stories with a flat roof and a cupola in order that visitors might better enjoy the view of the surrounding country. For this privilege a charge of five cents was made. Very few people considered that they had seen the sights until they had climbed the stairs to view the Becket and Chester Hills and on a clear day to see the Pelham Range across the Connecticut Valley.

The custom of gathering in the town hall on the first evening of the fair for a social time was considered one of the most enjoyable features and was early inaugurated. An address was given on the afternoon of the second day in the Congregational Church which was the largest auditorium in the town and in the early days it was filled to overflowing. At the time appointed therefore a procession formed, headed by the band and all marched down to the church, those in the rear sometimes failing to get seats. The speakers were often men of note and were listened to with intense interest. At the close, reports were read and premiums distributed.

On the last evening a ball was given by the society but was seldom attended by the best class of people. Dancing was thought by many, if not sinful, at least a harmful practice. To counteract this influence one of the good women of the town established the practice of giving the young people a party on that evening. This was a great success and the practice was adhered to for many years. In 1871 the society voted to abolish the ball and to prohibit the sale of intoxicating liquors on the grounds during the fair.

Among those active in later days are remembered, Jonathan McElwain, who was secretary of the society for many years, and Metcalf J. Smith, who served a long term as treasurer of the society. Cattleshow time was the great event of the year.



ANNUAL CATTLE SHOW OF THE HIGHLAND AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY
VIEWING THE STOCK
THE WINNER OF A FIRST PREMIUM

Farmers were busy beyond measure looking after their stock and judging that of other exhibitors; farmers' wives and families all had articles to show in the hall; feeding the crowd was a task for others; the Center was a place of bustle and business. Solomon F. Root used to state that he was so busy in those days that he had no time to see the fair at all, for Middlefield, not boasting an inn at that time, had to depend upon the Center store which was turned into an eating-house for the time being, and the proprietor became a vendor of pastry. Aunt Irene Root's pies became famous for miles around.

The Highland Agricultural Society, like other such societies came under the supervision of the State Board of Agriculture, with the privilege of choosing a representative who served as a member of the board for a number of years. Among the early members of the board were Matthew Smith, already mentioned, and Monroe F. Watkins, of Hinsdale. Funds were provided by legislature for paying the premiums awarded the exhibitors. In 1860 this amount was \$460.00, and was increased to \$600.00 by 1862. The delegates sent to the exhibitions to observe and report on the progress of the society have generally emphasized the fact that the region around Middlefield was good grass and grazing country and commended the exhibitions as giving the practical farmer an opportunity to show what he could accomplish without the handicap of competition with wealthy owners of fancy stock. Some of these comments by disinterested experts are worth quoting:

“It is a mistake to suppose that improved and large herds of cattle cannot thrive in the mountain pastures. The Middlefield farmers raise their broad-hipped Durhams mainly by the agency of grass, with little aid from grain.”

“The show of oxen and steers was the best I have ever seen at a county show, not for the number and perfection of training, but for size and early maturity; almost every yoke, especially of steers, was remarkable.”

“Among the three hundred head on the grounds, by far the largest number was composed of Shorthorns. Better specimens of the blood are seldom seen.”

“It was evident that Middlefield farmers and those of adjacent towns had gained a reputation for raising good stock, as was fully shown by the number of good judges and lovers of good stock present, and willing to pay large prices for it.”

Both these official reports and the newspaper accounts make mention of some of the early animals which excited favorable

comment. Besides "Roan Duke" already mentioned another thoroughbred Shorthorn bull, "Americus" was purchased by Matthew Smith. From this strain came Clark Wright's "Duke of Clarence," "Glendale Duke" and other fine animals, which have been prize winners at the annual cattleshows for half a century. In 1860 Harlow Loveland's Devon bull "Winchester" was declared "hard to beat" for beauty and finish, while a Hereford bull "Prometheus" attracted equal attention. Charles Bills's Shorthorn steers, weighing forty-five hundred pounds, received commendation in 1861. Few herds could boast animals equal to the Alderney bull owned by William D. Blush.

Many fine horses have also been exhibited at the annual cattleshows, but their names do not appear prominently in the records with the exception of "Berkshire," a famous stallion owned in Becket. At one time in the early days the horse lovers endeavored to have the fair removed to a place where a more suitable track could be secured, and went so far as to appeal to the legislature. Their project was defeated but the society went to much expense to hire an engineer and improve the track, and many exciting races have taken place in which Parson Smith, of Otis, and his brothers, Harry Meacham and others were the contestants.

When the state was looking for a site for an agricultural college, some of the enthusiastic members of the Agricultural Society thought that Middlefield was superior to Amherst as a location for this institution. In 1864 they went so far as to raise fifty dollars to oppose Amherst if it was deemed advisable to act in the matter. The society evidently became reconciled to the choice of Amherst, for in 1867 they appropriated fifty dollars to be used in paying tuition to the college for a student living within the limits of the society.

Though Middlefield was remote from the populous centers and great arteries of trade and commerce, the town was deeply affected by the mighty currents of thought and the events and economic forces which molded the characters of men and institutions during the middle of the nineteenth century. During the decade preceding the Civil War, the discussion of slavery brought out in Middlefield, as elsewhere, a great variety of opinion, and the long winters were enlivened by stirring debates

at the Center School. That the independent mountain life of the North was naturally good soil for the anti-slavery crusade is shown by the fact that Dr. Jefferson Church, who was a son of Green H. Church of Middlefield, became a prominent abolitionist at Springfield. Like all other early agitators, he was bitterly attacked for his extreme views. An intimate friend of John Brown, he assisted many of the oppressed race in their flight to Canada by the "underground railroad."

In Middlefield the anti-slavery sentiment was at first more in evidence among the Baptists than among the Congregationalists, particularly in the Root and Smith families. The sons of Samuel Smith were attending colleges in New York State and Ohio during this period, and, being strongly influenced by the anti-slavery movement, gave effective expression of their views when they returned home. On the other hand, Rev. Edward Clark and a majority of his Whig congregation, were at first opposed to the agitation to free the negroes, so that when Rev. Lewis Bridgeman, an ardent abolitionist from Oberlin, Ohio, became the Congregational minister in 1858, his outspoken manner aroused bitter controversy over this burning issue of the day. After the formation of the Republican party, however, the town became generally anti-slavery. The only pronounced "copperhead" in town, Bartholomew Ward, was arrested and imprisoned at Fort Warren, in Boston Harbor.

With the outbreak of the war all classes of young men responded to the call for volunteers—farmers' sons, hired men, mill workers and railroad hands. Nearly fifty men went from Middlefield, thirteen of whom lost their lives in the service of their country. More than thirty others were hired abroad under the town board, of which John L. Bell was chairman, thus exceeding all demands for recruits made upon the town.

As in other towns "war meetings" were held for the purpose of stimulating enlistment. Metcalf J. Smith gathered together about thirty recruits from Middlefield and other towns, quartering them in the Agricultural Hall and drilling them on the race track. Their subsistence was furnished by the Root store and the state paid the expense.

One of the first to enlist and one of the few who served through most of the war was Uriah Frank Cheeseman, a son

and grandson of soldiers of the War of 1812 and of the Revolution respectively. Twelve Middlefield boys enlisted in September, 1862, in the 46th Massachusetts Volunteer Militia, Companies F and K, and were engaged mainly in North Carolina, cutting communications between Richmond and the South. Among these were Clarkson Smith, William C. Blush, George W. Cottrell, John Damon, George Ingraham, James Rowen, Henry Dickson and Levi J. Olds, the last two of whom lost their lives. Dr. Edwin C. Bidwell, who was a practicing physician in Middlefield when the war broke out, enlisted as an assistant surgeon and was promoted to surgeon. Among the better known of the other soldiers who represented the town were Edward Pease, Charles Robbins, and Jerome Smith, of the farmers' sons; John J. Vetter, Seth Wait, William Lathrop and James Kershaw of Factory Village; and Dennis Gallivan of "The Switch."

During the war the women as well as the men labored valiantly to aid the Union cause in every possible way. They organized a branch of the Sanitary Commission for furnishing supplies for the soldiers. As elsewhere they knitted socks and mittens and made shirts and bandages, carrying their knitting to church and working through the services. Aid was furnished to the families who had sent their bread-winners to the front, for which the state afterward paid \$1,975. In addition to the amount of aid paid solely by the town, which was \$14,490, generous contributions were privately made and many boxes of general supplies sent to the front.

Turning now to the growth of the various church organizations during this period, it can be seen that the Congregational Church, with its start of twenty-five years, had an advantage over the Baptist Church in that it had drawn to itself many of the wealthier citizens of the town. At the same time, the vitality of the newer form of doctrine was such that after the Baptist Society had built their meetinghouse they were able to compete successfully with the standing order in acquiring new members. Although the Congregational Society numbered probably a hundred members at the time the Baptist Society was organized with its eighteen constituent members, yet by the year 1851 the Baptists had added to their roll two hundred

fifty members while the older organization had added but two hundred thirty-six. This achievement is the more significant when it is considered that the Baptists had to compete also with the Methodists who had a flourishing membership of their own.

In both the Congregational and Baptist Churches the membership was increased by groups every few years rather than by a small yearly addition, as the spiritual life of the community was stirred by revivals and the installation of new ministers. The banner year seems to have been 1831 when the Congregational Church received forty-six and the Baptists twenty-eight new members, a total of seventy-four. The great revival of 1857-58 brought the Baptists their largest yearly addition, thirty-seven members. In 1858 the Congregational Church received fifty-five members, forty-nine of whom were admitted upon profession of faith.

On account of the long-standing differences in religious opinion between the Congregationalists and the Baptists and the ill feeling caused by the early coercion of the Baptists in the support of the church of the standing order, it was inevitable that there should have been a keen rivalry between the flourishing church organizations of this later period, which entered for a time into the activities of secular life. Baptists naturally traded at the Root store while the Macks and their successors and the Churches who maintained the other stores were Congregationalists. The frequent intermarriage within the Baptist families of Smith, Root and Metcalf and among the Congregationalist families of Mack, Dickson, Church and Emmons shows the denominational influence. There were heart-burnings when Laura Mack, the youngest daughter of the Puritan deacon, "turned Baptist" and married Solomon Root, the merchant and prominent Baptist. In the course of human events, however, a better feeling developed and the churchmen of whatever belief began to understand

"that they as brothers warred
In one grand army of the Lord."

Whether there was political cleavage among the townspeople corresponding to the religious division between the standing order and the dissenters such as there was in Connecticut is difficult to determine. In that state the triumph of the Demo-

cratic-Republican party in 1818 meant also the overthrow of the Congregationalist party and the complete separation of the church from the state. In Massachusetts where the issues were not so clearly drawn this condition did not come about until 1833 after a ten-year rule by the Democratic-Republican party. Whether there is any significance in the fact or not, it is yet true that before 1821 there had always been a majority of Congregationalists on the board of selectmen, while from that date until 1845, during the rule of the Democratic-Republican party in the state and for ten years beyond, there was a majority of Baptists, or of Baptists and Methodists on the board.

This period saw the various churches of Middlefield reach the noontide of their strength and activity. The Baptist Church, which, as has already been mentioned, had built its meeting-house and parsonage at the Center, enjoyed prosperity during the decade between 1860 and 1870. It had one hundred members, many of them influential men of the town. Rev. J. M. Rockwood, the highly respected and beloved pastor, began his labors in 1865. There was a steady rate of addition of new members.

The Congregational Church, numbering among its members the Church brothers and some members of the Blush families, showed financial prosperity during the days when the manufactories in Factory Village flourished. The old meetinghouse was remodeled and beautified by the addition of a graceful spire. Through the generosity of the Church brothers, the new parsonage was erected at the Center, the Methodist Church, no longer used, was purchased for a chapel for the Congregational Society, and a melodian and later an organ were obtained for the church. Oliver Blush presented the large chandelier that hung in the old meetinghouse until the structure was burned. The general prosperity was reflected in the salaries paid. Whereas Mr. Bridgeman was called in 1858 at a salary of \$525, Mr. Dodge received \$900 in 1865, and his successor, Mr. Pierce received the same until 1879. Large additions to the membership were obtained, particularly in 1866, when thirty-nine joined the church, twenty-five of them upon profession of faith.

The Methodist Society flourished during this period, drawing to its Bethel meetinghouse congregations which, at times, were

as large as that of any other society in town. This church served not only its Middlefield constituents but drew also from neighboring sections of Chester and Worthington as well. Under the influence of a faction which as early as 1833 had thought that the society would be benefitted by moving its house of worship to the Center, the removal was finally accomplished about 1853, against the judgment of the members who had lived in the valley. The "Bethel" was taken down and rebuilt on a slightly larger plan on a site just south of where the town hall now stands. For a while services were continued but the society lost by the change and the correctness of the judgment of the opposition was justified. In 1861-62 the society was much weakened by a large number of deaths and removals, and finally services were discontinued, while the church building became the property of the Congregational Society.

The interest in education, so much in evidence during the early years of the town's existence, was steadily continued throughout this period. The number of school districts was increased to eleven with the erection of schoolhouses at Smith Hollow, Blush Hollow, and "The Switch." In 1838, however, the independent district system was superseded by the policy of having a general examining committee of three members, which brought about a greater uniformity and economy of supervision. The first members of this committee were the two ministers, Rev. John H. Bisbee and Rev. Orson Spencer, and Samuel Smith.

Middlefield's interest in education was not confined to the welfare of its own citizens. Besides the schools for Irish immigrants already mentioned, the value of higher education was also appreciated. About 1835, Miss Mary Lyon made her personal canvass of western Massachusetts for funds to establish a seminary for the further mental training of women. Although at this time such a project was generally deemed of doubtful value to the fair sex, Miss Lyon received liberal support for the future Mt. Holyoke College from Deacon David Mack, Jonathan McElwain, Samuel Smith, and Deacon Alexander Ingham and others. This contribution of funds to establish the seminary was naturally followed by the attendance of the daughters of those townsmen who had the vision of what such further training would accomplish for their children. Considering that her population was

smaller than that of most western Massachusetts towns, Middlefield's record in this respect is notable. The list of alumnae of the seminary shows that from its beginning in 1838 to 1880 the number of students attending from this region, excluding the Connecticut Valley towns, was seventy. Of this number, thirteen, or nearly a fifth, came from Middlefield, this representation being exceeded by no other town, and equalled only by Blandford, a much older and larger community. Next to these came Cummington with eight; Hinsdale, Peru and Becket with six each; Chester and New Marlboro with five each; Worthington with three; the rest scattered among several other towns.

Unquestionably this good showing made by the young students of Middlefield, not only at Mt. Holyoke Seminary but at other colleges in Massachusetts, New York and Ohio, was the result of the efforts to provide preparatory work within the town itself. Before the memory of any now living Deacon Alexander Ingham is said to have kept a select school for a time. Some recall "The Academy" kept by a Mr. Sears, and advanced work taught by Mr. Alonzo P. Alden. The full fruitage of this interest in higher education, came a few years later when Middlefield's sons and daughters, who had graduated from colleges in Massachusetts, New York and Ohio, returned to teach in the schools of their native town, with the result that the young men and women of Middlefield were offered greater educational facilities than had previously been possible.

About 1860 Azariah Smith, a graduate of New York Central College, and a teacher of Greek, returned home to prepare a younger brother for college. As there were a number of other people who desired similar instruction, Mr. Smith organized a "select school" for the purpose. During subsequent terms his brothers, Judson and Edward, who had studied at Amherst College, conducted these classes successfully.

In 1864 Metcalf J. Smith an older brother of Azariah, at great sacrifice gave up his career as a college professor and returned to Middlefield to relieve his father of the burdens of the farm. Like his brother he was also a graduate of New York Central College and was a teacher of mathematics and natural sciences. His interest in education did not lapse, however, for he at once took charge of the "select school" and conducted it for many



OLD CENTER SCHOOLHOUSE
TOWN HALL AND CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH—BURNED 1900
MACK STORE AT CENTER

years to the lasting benefit and gratitude of the young people who came under his tutelage. The excellence of his instruction brought occasional students from neighboring towns and the town of Middlefield was considered fortunate in having such an educator among its citizens. At times the school numbered forty scholars and the yearly course generally lasted fifteen weeks. When on account of diminishing number of students the select school was discontinued, Mr. Smith's services were still available as a private teacher.

Another member of this family, who rendered valued service to the youth of Middlefield, was Lucy Smith, sister of Azariah, afterward Mrs. Ambrose Newton. Graduating from Mt. Holyoke Seminary in 1843, she taught for many years in Middlefield and elsewhere. At one time she taught a small private school for young women in the old button shop building which used to stand north of the Congregational Church. When her teaching days were over she served most efficiently for some years as librarian of the public library.

The influence of education appeared in the social life of the town during this period. In the '60's there flourished the Lyceum with its debates and other varieties of literary entertainment. Elaborate tableaux, called "scenics," were produced by Myron Church. In later days scenes from Shakespeare were presented by members of the select school. The cast of characters for *The Merchant of Venice*, given about 1878, is recalled as follows:

Bassanio	Ira Geer (of Peru)	Portia (Casket Scene)
Prince of Aragon	John Combs Carolyn Church
Prince of Morocco	Lyman Smith	Portia (Court Scene)
Shylock	Joseph Ingham Emily Rockwood
Antonio	Edwin Smith	Nerissa
Gratiano	Azariah Root	Sophie Smith

Music also held a prominent place in the town life. The singing schools were among the few diversions in the community and under the direction of able teachers, among them Thaddeus Lyman, Sylvester Bartlett and Eustace Hamilton are particularly remembered, they trained singers for the choirs of all the churches. At times both the Baptist and the Congregational choristers numbered twenty-five or thirty. Watts Hymns were

sung by both congregations in the early days. Musical instruments were introduced into the Baptist Church about the time that Henry Hawes became choir director. Solomon F. Root played a flute for some years. The violin was considered too worldly, but a bass viol was played by Milton Smith and a piccolo by Mr. Coleman.

In the Congregational Church a cabinet organ was introduced about 1858 and was played by Julia M. Church at the age of twelve years. But there was, besides, an orchestra composed of one or two violins, a flute and a bass viol which flourished for many years under the leadership of Dwight Graves and Edward Graves. Edward Graves organized the Middlefield Band, which played at Cattleshow about 1875, and which was composed of Joseph Ingham, cornet; Milton Dickson, alto horn; Cooley Graves, bass horn; and Dwight Geer, drum. By all these means Middlefield attained a high standard of rural culture the influence of which is still potent in the life of this highland community.