

CHAPTER XI

BUILDING DURING THE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD

THE Middlefield of the period just covered was a very different place from that of 1783-1820. The Center rose around the two village churches, the factories appeared in the hollow and around them clustered new houses, and all over the hills the outlying farms began to be abandoned, the houses to fall down and disappear, and the currents of life to run in far narrower although more intense channels. The life in Blush Hollow was the new element and at the heart of it were the factories of the Blushes and the Church Brothers. These structures which for the greater part of the nineteenth century rose above the trees and lesser houses were characteristic of the New England of the '30's. Their pictures on page 190 show their simple character, relieved, however, by a break in the roof slope which gave a row of windows half way up, thereby lighting the upper floor. The small belfry which appears on each building was the sole element of ornament.

The problem of housing the persons who were to work in these mills now presented itself, and the mill owners found themselves called upon to erect what were virtually tenement houses along the valley roads. This introduced a wholly new sort of house into Middlefield, where hitherto every house had been supposedly a farmer's individual home. As the pictures show, the mill owners solved the problem by erecting small story-and-a-half houses, almost devoid of architectural pretense but resembling, in a general way, two of the smaller farm buildings of the period joined together. Rather barren looking in themselves, they were set in such surroundings of stream, valley, wooded hillsides and country roads, as to render them by no means wholly undesirable for the new race of mill hands which flocked in to occupy them.

At the other new focus of economic life now called "Bancroft," far down on the southernmost border of the town where the river ran along its deep valley, was the railway station. It



THE NEW BOARDING HOUSE

HOUSE IN UPPER VILLAGE

WHERE LYMAN CHURCH LIVED

HOUSES IN LOWER VILLAGE

began, as the narrative in a previous chapter shows, as "The Switch," where a turnout permitted the passing of the trains which traveled the single-track road and for half a century the name stuck, even after a station and freight house had been erected, and the whole line double-tracked. The primitive little buildings of this first railroad epoch still stand, the first one reduced to the status of a tool shed, but the second still serving, in part, its original purpose, although the single room which for years was the only passenger waiting room has been supplanted by a handsome modern stone station.

The third focus of the new life was the "Center" on the hill-top where the three churches became grouped, the principal store joined them and in 1859 the Agricultural Society set up its fair ground and erected its buildings, to rise even higher than the churches and their towers. Near these three centers of activity took place much of the building of these years which has left abundant traces on the Middlefield hills and valleys beside the remaining structures of the first settlers.

The first marked change appeared in the classic influence, which even in its most attenuated forms bore a faint reference to the Roman and Greek temples and in its full form was clearly inspired by them. In Middlefield there appeared no building with columns, no classic portico, but rather a treatment of the gable building with mouldings of a classic inspiration: wooden pilasters at corners, emphatic cornices, pediments and doorways with squared and severely plain surroundings.

The typical product of the period was a new form of house, in which the gable end, directed toward the street, became the principal feature and was treated in such wise as to suggest a pediment. The front door was located on one side of the front and the earlier balanced system of interior arrangements was replaced by an unsymmetrical one. This became a characteristic house of the New England factory villages in the '30's and '40's, since it was well suited for a relatively narrow house lot. In Middlefield the earliest of this type were sundry houses built in the newly growing Center, the first house being that built north of the tavern by Dr. Joseph Warren about 1830.¹ The second was probably the house built by E. P. Morgan, north of the

¹ Now owned by Mr. J. Duggan.



HOUSE OF DR. JOSEPH WARREN

HOUSE OF E. P. MORGAN

HOUSE OF BARTHOLOMEW WARD

store.² The illustration on page 228 shows the village store which was a much older building moved to the Center in 1829 and rebuilt in part on the new lines, with the gable treated like a pediment.

The controlling element in this new form of construction,—apart from the rapidly spreading classic revival,—was the fact that the iron stove was now replacing the old-fashioned fireplace and brick oven, and the immense central chimney was no longer needed. It was no longer necessary, moreover, to build the houses with low ceilings, nor to construct the rooms so as to concentrate the heating power in one place where the fire could be kept always burning. A little later in larger towns the hot air furnace made its appearance to reinforce the heat dispersion throughout the newer houses which distinguished them from the old ones. There was no longer any reason for the symmetry and the concentrated room plan of the old “colonial” farms.

Even after the new style had come in, as shown above, the builders of farmhouses were slow to depart from the well-established habits. One conjectures that some of the older carpenters who still lived, preferred to keep as closely as they could to the traditional types. Thus it is that such a building as that of Samuel Smith,³ although rebuilt above the first story in 1839, changing the gambrel roof of the original farmhouse of 1806 to a full second story, reproduce with complete fidelity the spirit and detail of the primitive days. Similarly the quaint little building⁴ shown in the picture on page 194 almost completely “colonial” in its feeling and details, was actually built by Timothy Root about 1840. In every respect it would have been in place sixty years before. Still more striking is the house⁵ erected by William Wheeler in 1845, probably in part out of the material in an older house torn down by him. For a building of this date, the virtual identity of its appearance with that of the first forms is remarkable.

There are also several houses which, built originally in the period of settlement, were afterwards refashioned with the clas-

² Recently owned by Mr. A. G. Hatch. (1924)

³ Owned by his grandson, Louis C. Smith of Newton Center. (1924)

⁴ Moved north of the Center and now the summer home of Prof. Gerald B. Smith of Chicago. (1924)

⁵ Now occupied by John W. Ferris. (1924)



HOUSE OF HIRAM TAYLOR

HOUSE OF TIMOTHY ROOT

HOUSE OF SAMUEL SMITH

HOUSE OF LESTER ROOT

sical cornices and mouldings, although usually with a scantier treatment than that shown above. Such was the house of David Mack, the oldest house in the town,⁶ built in 1781 but now showing a roof cornice, two small chimneys and other features foreign to that date. Another similarly handled is the attractive house built by William Skinner, but clearly altered in the epoch of classical details which was until recently the dwelling of the late Lester Root. It is certain also that the Uriah Church house, shown in the earlier chapter (page 133) received its cornice and pilasters in this period at some unknown time.

Even when in the '40's the classical molding began to spread to the farmhouses in more unequivocal form, their builders tended to adhere to the traditional farmhouse type, continuing to some extent their squareness, symmetry and homeliness. Their roofs were steeper in pitch, their ceilings higher, yet in spite of their heavy wooden classic ornamentation, their similarity to the earlier houses is manifest. Such was the house which is the original portion of Wayside Lodge. This was constructed (in 1848) by Hiram Taylor out of the primitive old "red" house which was built upon the same site by John Ford about 1780. A still more ambitious one⁷ was that built by Bartholomew Ward in 1850 on the Ridgepole Road. As can easily be seen these farmhouses, hardly less than the Georgian farms, keep up the tradition of plain dignity and generosity of aspect.

One of the most attractive forms presented by the new period was that of the single-story or story-and-a-half gable house, having cornice and pediment like the larger ones but showing a better harmony of proportion. The house built by Erastus John Ingham in the '30's is a good example, the more so, perhaps since it stands in conjunction with one of the primitive single-story houses of fifty years before. The contrast in feeling between the two kinds of houses is manifest. Apparently some of the earlier single-story houses were rebuilt in this later style. Such seems to have been the fate of a building⁸ dating from 1811

⁶ Now the summer home of Rev. John Brittan Clark of Washington, D. C. (1924) See page 73.

⁷ Now the dwelling of Wesley J. Chipman. (1924)

⁸ Dwelling of John Cody. (1924)



SOLOMON ROOT'S STORE

HOUSE OF E. J. INGHAM

HOUSE BUILT BY ADDISON EVERETT

which began its existence as a store and that of Gideon Russell,⁹ supposed to be from 1800. Whenever these were originally built, their present exteriors clearly date from the '30's or '40's.

By the middle of the century the new prosperity of the town and the growing significance of the Center led to an outburst of building activity on the part of the three church organizations. In 1846 the Congregational Society voted to build a new meeting-house and appointed James Church, Erastus John Ingham, George W. McElwain, Uriah Church, and George W. Lyman a building committee with power to dispose of the old building as they thought best. But after studying the situation, with the aid of Volney Peirce of Peru, architect and builder, they decided to rebuild rather than destroy, and so the main body of the old church was utilized, although the original square tower and belfry were done away with. In keeping with the more recent fashion of church exteriors the building was turned one quarter way round with its gable to the road, the two rows of windows were replaced by one row of long windows, and two chimneys added at the west end, now become the rear. Inside the old square pews were taken out and the "slip pew" substituted and the gallery removed except at the east end. The pulpit was now placed at the west end and lowered to a platform. On the east front a new and ambitious entrance was built regarding which the testimony of Volney Peirce's younger brother, the late Benjamin F. Peirce of Springfield, has come down to us.

"The remodeled church in its architecture had to go back to 6,000 B. C. Its facade was taken from an Egyptian temple on the Nile. If you will notice the New York prison called the Tombs, you will see a facade similar to the facade of the remodeled church. The bell tower or place of the bell was a nondescript. As the Egyptians had no bells the architect had to draw from his own imagination and between Egypt and 1846, what could you get? The cupola was without form or likeness to any previous architecture and was an eye-sore. It was an open cupola, with tall slender columns, badly proportioned. G. W. Lyman who did not like it, said in a lyceum article, 'Get the Congregational people to take down their Peirce proud steeple.' "

The derided belfry was also known by the nickname of "Jim Church's pepper-box," in allusion to the leading member of the building committee.

⁹The Fred Osgood place in Smith Hollow, now occupied by Jas. N. Cone. (1924)

Nine years later, in 1855, the society decided to replace the unsatisfactory belfry with a real steeple and accordingly Franklin Stowell designed and built one.¹⁰ Architecturally the design had little to commend it, being a mere square platform superposed on the roof of the church, bearing a square belfry, which in turn was surmounted by a smaller octagonal cupola bearing a tapering spire. It had no visible organic connection with the main body of the church and the lines were not carried down to the ground in any way. But the general effect was none the less attractive and the commanding position of the white church, with its white lofty spire, standing "on the ledge" made it a landmark for dozens of miles around. For over fifty years longer the transformed meetinghouse of 1790 continued to stand at the Center, bearing its Egyptian facade and its colonial steeple not ungracefully.

The success of the rebuilding of the meetinghouse seemed to be the signal for a considerable outburst of building activity at the Center. In 1846 there was constructed a schoolhouse, a two-story building, which went so far in imitation of the new church as to have an Egyptian doorway and moldings. Twenty-one years later this building, having served its purpose, was sold and bought by Ambrose Newton for a stable. It still exists bearing the marks of the old school days in many unmistakable signs. Among others is a list of the names of the scholars of 1866 written over the nails in the entry where garments and hats were hung.

The next year the Baptist Society also built a church at the Center, but they, doubtless to emphasize their independence of the Congregationalists, declined to follow the Egyptian revival and erected a more conventionally classic edifice. Isaac Peirce of Peru, an uncle of Volney Peirce, was the builder. As the picture shows the church had a *quasi* classic pediment, long windows, wooden pilasters at the corners and a square belfry surmounted with something approximating battlements. Like the Congregational Church, its belfry was merely superposed on the roof.

Each of these churches on the inside was heated by sheet-iron stoves whose long pipes ascended through the auditorium to

¹⁰ See illustration page 266.

elevated chimney holes. Each was decorated with a wall paper which strove to represent classic columns and panelling on the plaster walls, in chilly grays and drabs. Each had a gallery facing the minister in which the choir sat and toward which the audience faced during the singing of the hymns. Without, across the front of each church ran a rather high platform of earth, with stone wall at the front and stone steps at each end, so arranged that carriages could drive up and discharge their family freight on a level, and these platforms offered an admirable place for waiting and visiting before, between services, and afterward. Across the rear of each platform a solid row of men, chiefly young ones, stood rubbing their backs against the front wall of the church and watching each carriage load and disembark, in Sunday best. Not until the cessation of bell-ringing and the rustle of the rising congregation inside gave warning that the service was on the point of beginning would these watchers abandon their positions and file inside.

There was, of course, in this period of the Classical Revival in Middlefield, an example of architectural eccentricity, this time in Smith Hollow. Addison Everett, an inventive Yankee whose part in developing machinery for turning wooden bowls has been mentioned in the preceding chapters, constructed some time between 1830 and 1850 an extraordinary house, in which a central structure, with gable and pediment, was supported by four smaller ones, each the size of a single room and each attached to the central one by a corner. The picture taken after the house was abandoned and overgrown shows that each little unit had its own pediment and two of them at least had separate chimneys. As to his objects in designing such a structure, tradition is doubtful.

Wholly unarchitectural in character, but impossible to omit from a survey of the buildings of Middlefield, were the district schoolhouses, which were, for the most part, built in this period. In this town the "little red schoolhouse" of sentiment does not seem to have been present, at least in the nineteenth century. White paint was the customary preservative. Since the plain little buildings were usually placed where children from various directions could meet, they were frequently, perhaps usually, away from houses, often in wooded and picturesque localities.

FACTORY VILLAGE
COTTRELL DISTRICT



SCHOOLHOUSES IN MIDDLEFIELD



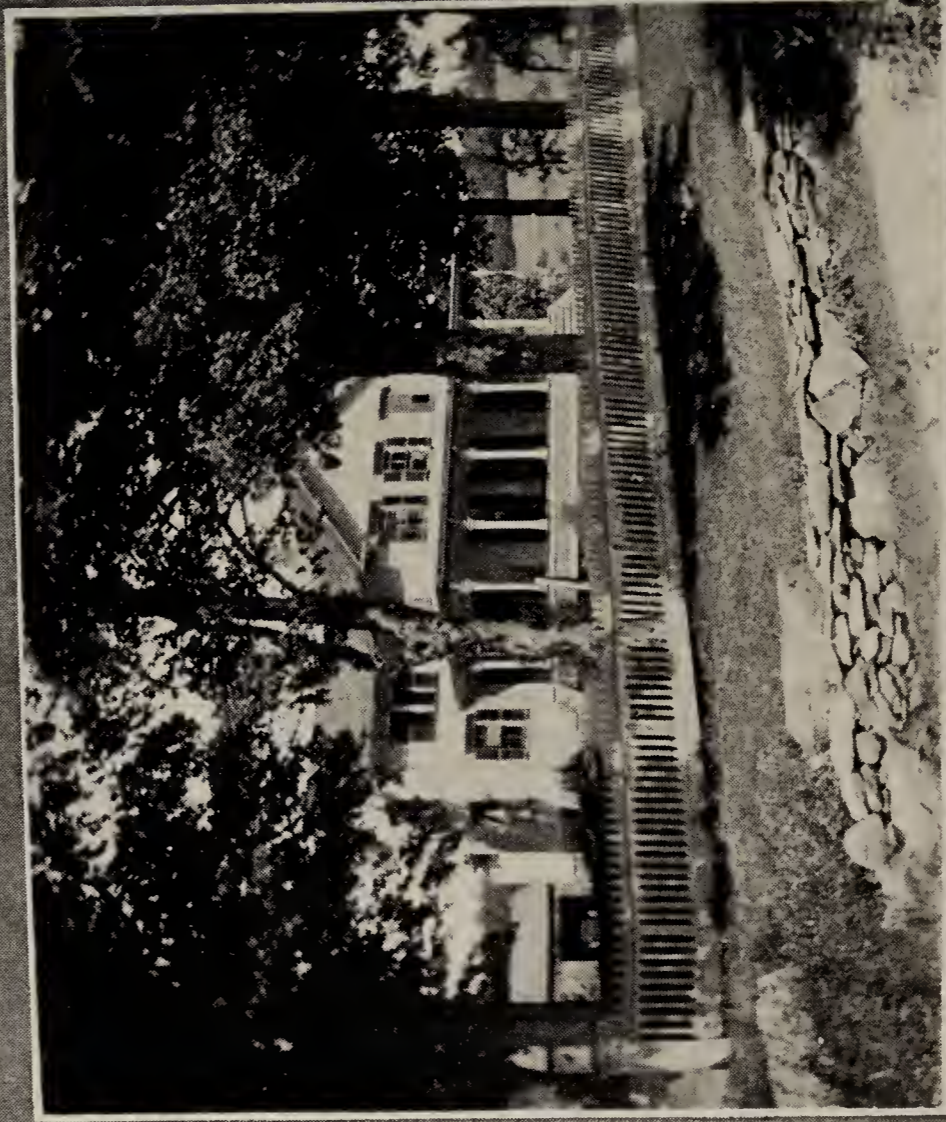
PEASE DISTRICT
THE DEN

The accompanying pictures show some of these "bulwarks of civilization."

By the end of the mill period a new form of house began to enter Middlefield, in which the inspiration was no longer classic but indirectly French, and marked as in all parts of America, by the use of abundant ornament in the form of cornices, brackets, "jig-saw decorations" and, in general what was known as "ginger bread work." The Congregational parsonage, constructed in 1865, from the timbers of the fine hip-roofed house of General Mack, shows the general features of the plainer examples of this type. The bull's-eye window in the gable and the absence of the heavy moldings suggesting a pediment differentiate this type from the classic. Then came several farmhouses, following after this model, frankly intended to be heated by stoves and furnaces, unconcerned with symmetry or balance, and concentrating their effort toward creating pleasant interiors. In this they were successful. There is a sunniness and cheerfulness and a warmth in such houses which was frequently lacking in the lower, heavier colonial farmhouses. Yet their architectural charm is wholly gone. The sense of proportion which marked the builders of 1780-1800 vanished; buildings became higher in ceilings and narrower, the exterior became irregular and commonplace until the farmhouses of this sort offer nothing to the eye except what can be derived from picturesque situations and the charm of trees and shrubs and hillsides.

Some of the most successful farms of the period and of later years down into the twentieth century are marked by houses of this sort. The farm home of Wesley A. Olds, built in 1881, shows the same features as the Congregational parsonage, the gable toward the street, the bull's-eye window, the plain exterior. But the hillside and surroundings make it cheerful. Another, of about the same type is that of Clark B. Wright, with the round window in the gable and also a bay window on the lower floor. Most picturesque of any of this sort was the house of Daniel Alderman, rebuilt in 1874 after this type, and perched on the southerly verge of the main ridge, where it falls off sharply to the valley of the Westfield River.

The culminating houses of this period are properly those of the Church brothers, whose mills enriched the town and brought



CONGREGATIONAL PARSONAGE
HOUSE OF JAMES T. CHURCH



HOUSE OF SUMNER U. CHURCH



HOUSE OF OLIVER CHURCH

a brief gleam of worldly prosperity to the high pastures and deep valleys. The earliest was the house built by Uriah Church, Jr., for his son, Summer Church, in 1837, probably of the classical type, with pediment and pilasters, but extensively remodeled in 1871 by J. Talmadge Church, in the new French spirit, with wings, elaborate cornice and brackets and a piazza with unmistakable "ginger bread work" on the capitals of the columns. This was surpassed by the two houses, closely similar in type which were built by Sumner Church and Oliver Church in 1868 and 1869, the former in Blush Hollow, close to the upper mill, the latter on a commanding site at the Center where the road from the Hollow first reaches the main street. There it still stands with its cupola, one of the village landmarks.

In these two houses, one finds the "villa" of the '60's and '70's, planted among the Middlefield hills, a form of house that appeared in countless repetitions throughout the Northern states in brick or wood, in the years following the Civil War, wherever any man who had made his profit in the stormy days of war manufacturing or constructing, felt moved to put his earnings into a mansion for himself and his family. The French windows, the bay windows, the cupola, the piazzas, the heavy corniced roof, the elaborate ornamentation—all these speak of an epoch when external decoration had utterly abolished the restraint and simple dignity of the first builders. Within, these houses were light, sunny, cheerful, well-warmed, convenient. In every practical respect they were suited to the life of the day and of the later days, of the end of that part of the nineteenth century when the hill towns of New England flourished into prosaic and commonplace prosperity. Fittingly their pictures may close an epoch.