

CHAPTER XIV

HISTORY OF THE MIDDLEFIELD CHURCHES

THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

THE first settlers of Middlefield, like other New England people in that day, wisely judged that virtue and morality are essential to the peace, welfare and prosperity of the community. Having experienced these blessings in the towns from which they had come, they early sought to obtain the benefits of the Christian church even among the wilds of the Berkshire Hills. Some, like David Mack, for several years traveled on foot six miles to Chester Center meetinghouse. But this was a hardship in the days before roads were laid out through Middlefield, and even the dwellers in the Murrayfield section were moved to petition to be set off to join a separate town because their "living so remote from the middle of the town makes it very tedious attending any town business especially the preaching of the gospel." That the Middlefield settlers were not entirely dependent upon the churches in the surrounding towns is clear from the words of the petition for incorporation, where the petitioners complained that they had "for several years been obliged either to carry these families the distance above mentioned, or to educate them without any of the advantages of public institutions, except in some few cases in which they have been able to procure preaching among themselves."

The Middlefield pioneers at one of the earliest town meetings after the incorporation in 1783 voted to pay thirty pounds to support the gospel and appointed a committee of three to procure preaching. Though all citizens in those days were taxed to support the minister, the select souls were few who on Sunday, November 16, 1783, were organized as the Congregational Church. These persons, who represent the sixteen original members were the following:

Sarah Taylor	David Bolton
Mary Mack	Asa Brown
Elizabeth Brown	Anson Cheeseman
Daniel Chapman	Oliver Bates
Lucy Chapman	David Mack
Mary Mann	Berzela Wright
Job Robbins	Joseph Blush
Elizabeth Blush	<u>John Taylor</u>

The document of their organization opened with these words:

“We whose names are underwritten, being desirous of uniting in the profession of the true Religion, and joining together in church Communion according to Gospel Rules, do at this time, solemnly by, and in presence of the heartsearching God, give our hearty consent to the following Confession of Faith and Covenant.”

Their statement of faith is full of quotations from the Bible, emphasizing the atonement and the merits of Christ, and the doctrine of particular election in accordance with which “God, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life.” They make much of the duty of watching over their brethren and being watched over by them. To reform unworthy members, and if necessary to excommunicate them, was a duty resting heavily on the consciences of our Christian forefathers.

On the day the church was organized, Daniel Chapman and Malachi Loveland were chosen deacons. David Mack and Job

Daniel Chapman

Robbins were also chosen deacons two days later. The matter of securing a minister proved a very serious problem. It took no less than eight years to obtain a settled pastor. The story of this troubled period has been given in Chapter VI. Among the ministers who served the church were Messrs. Smith, Woodbridge, Williams, Thompson and Strong. Religious meetings were held at various places, principally at the taverns kept by Enos Blossom and David Mack, or at Joseph Blush's house.

During 1791, after great controversy over the site and delays in construction, the meetinghouse was at last sufficiently completed so that it was first used in April. Harmony was probably

hastened and the church had more vigor when it had its own building to use. June 7, 1792, it was voted to invite Jonathan Nash to preach on probation for settlement. August 2, 1792, he was called to settle in the town, being offered a settlement of two hundred pounds worth of neat cattle—a much more manageable

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jonathan Nash" followed by a horizontal flourish.

settlement than that which had been offered in 1787 to Mr. Robinson, in which not only cattle, but ten other commodities had been included. Mr. Nash was to receive a salary of sixty pounds the first year, sixty-five pounds the second, seventy pounds the third, and seventy-five pounds the fourth year or any year thereafter, to be paid in lawful silver money. A pound seems to have been worth about \$3.33 at that time.

Mr. Nash was a descendant in the sixth generation of Thomas Nash who came to Boston, probably in 1637. He was the son of Deacon David Nash of Amherst and South Hadley, Massachusetts, and was born in Amherst in 1760. He was graduated from Dartmouth College in 1789 with the highest honors. He studied theology under Rev. Joseph Blodget of Greenwich, Massachusetts, and the church in Middlefield was his first and only charge. Those were the days when life unions were frequently formed between churches and pastors. Mr. Nash's acceptance, given on Sunday, September 15, 1792, was as follows:

“Fathers and Brethren of the church, together with the congregation, it is no more than reasonable that you by this time expect an answer to the invitation which you have given me to settle with you in the work of the ministry. Have taken into consideration the present situation of this church and people with the proposals for settlement offered me; have studied to know what my duty was, not without asking direction of heaven, the importance of the work, the great trials which ministers are called upon to encounter, a sense of my insufficiency to discharge my obligations which are incumbent upon a minister of the gospel, appear almost sufficient to dissuade me from ever undertaking that work. Yet induced as I hope by motives of duty, have proceeded thus far with a view to reside where the righteous providence of God should direct. The present situation in which you as a people stand—the danger of your being more unhappy without a settled minister—your desire that I should undertake in that character manifested by your unanimity and the proposals made for my support point

out to me as a duty thus publicly to manifest my compliance with your invitation.'"

Having entered into his agreement not lightly nor inadvisedly with no rose-colored visions of the future, he stood by it, from youth to age, for forty years. The ordination and installation, to which nine churches were invited, occupied two days, beginning with October 30, 1792. Mr. Nash used the 200 pounds given him as a settlement, to buy a ninety-one acre farm which cost him 445 pounds and left him in debt for many years. He evidently kept sheep, for among the many earmarks recorded in 1795 we read that his earmark was "a Square Crop on the right Ear and a slit in the end of the left Ear." His house stood east of the highway running north from the Center, about a quarter of a mile from the church.¹

Of Mr. Nash it has been said; "As a preacher he was direct, plain and practical." Though not remarkably brilliant, he was yet a man of considerable natural ability with an education good for that day. But living on a small salary, with a large family to support, he had, unfortunately, no means for the continued intellectual improvement which clergymen have at the present day. Books were expensive, and hence his furniture for the mind was very limited. After his death, his whole library was appraised at thirty dollars.

He was a man of remarkably pure character. In theology he was sound and truly evangelical. He felt that he was set for the defense of the gospel. In disposition he was remarkably mild and gentle, careful not to wound the feelings of others without cause. Though grave in manner, he had a vein of humor in the presence of associates. At his funeral, Rev. Mr. Jennings of Dalton offered prayer. In his quaint language he said, "Thou knowest, O Lord, that thy departed servant had naturally more of the milk of human kindness than the rest of us."

At the time of his settlement railroads were, of course, unknown and stagecoaches and other carriages were rare in these mountain towns. Hence when he took a wife, he brought the young bride home on horseback. A company of his parishoners, male and female, also on horseback formed a procession, and meeting the happy couple between Middlefield and Chester,

¹The site is now (1924) occupied by the house of James Cody.

opened to right and left in true military style to let them pass through.

Only two new members were added to the roll of sixteen charter members before the ordination of Mr. Nash. During 1792 the pastor received six upon profession and one by letter, while the following year six more joined by profession and fourteen by letter. For several years the growth was not at a more rapid rate. In 1802, however, there seems to have been a revival of interest for no fewer than twenty-six joined on profession. Again in 1820 there was a large ingathering of twenty-nine more, and seven years later thirteen. In 1831, when his work was nearly over, Pastor Nash received no fewer than forty-six members, all upon profession. This was at the time which Deacon Ingham called "the great revival of 1831," which he believed sprang from the temperance reform which went before it.

Some of the members in those days seem to have been received to all the privileges of the church, and some to only a part. One who was admitted to "full communion," to "full communion and fellowship with this church," or "to full standing in the church," seems to have had complete membership. Others seem to have taken the Half-Way Covenant." Such may have been those admitted "to occasional communion," or to "the watch care and discipline of the church and to enjoy the privilege of baptism." In 1832 a request for such a privilege "while he might continue here" was made by a certain Joshua Walker, and granted by the church.

In watch care and discipline the church was vigilant. The records show harassing cases of members tried for their offenses, such as personal quarrels, dishonesty, lack of integrity and sometimes intoxication or immoral conduct. At other times the defendants were arraigned for neglecting to hear the church and breaking covenant. Excommunication was enforced upon recalcitrant members. One typical case of discipline may be cited. A member of the church wrote a letter to the society asking that her connection with the church be dissolved. Instead of obtaining her request she was made the object of an investigation. She failed to appear before a church meeting to which she was called. It was found that she would not confess, reform or "walk with

the Church." Accordingly, "the church, having found" that she "had co-operated with her husband for years in selling intoxicating liquors on Sundays and weekdays, and that, though the first and second steps had been taken, she was inpenitent," excommunicated her. Since the middle of the century, excommunication has been generally abandoned, and churches have left their members largely to their own consciences, limiting their watch care to acts of brotherliness, and quietly dropping from the church list those who no longer recognize its jurisdiction.

In those days it seems to have been the custom to appoint ministers year after year upon school committees, "during life or good behavior." April 6, 1807, the town appointed David Mack, Jr., William Ingham and William Church, Jr., a committee "to assist the Reverend Jonathan Nash in examining school instructors respecting their qualifications for teaching school." Clearly Mr. Nash was the chief of this committee. Later notices give him the same prominence. In 1826 and 1827 Mr. Nash and Mr. Isaac Child, the Baptist minister, were both included in the school committee.

A sermon preached by Mr. Nash in July, 1812, is of interest. It is approximately 15,000 words in length, and must have required nearly two hours for its delivery. The date of this sermon is shortly after the beginning of the War of 1812, which it will be remembered, was bitterly opposed in New England. The preacher asserted the common belief that offensive war is wrong but defensive war is right. Whether the war with Great Britain was righteous, he admitted he did not know. Evils for which he thought the country was being punished were Sabbath breaking, extravagance, luxuries, uncleanness, profane and obscene language, and the misuse of ardent spirits.

There were times of discouragement during this long pastorate and it was probably at one of these that in 1831, a little more than a year before his dismissal, Mr. Nash subscribed, though he could ill afford it, one half of his annual salary for the support of preaching. It is pleasant to read in the society records that they voted to cancel this subscription. In 1832 when the church was looking forward to securing Rev. Samuel Parker to succeed Mr. Nash, who was then over seventy, the pastor wrote as follows:

"You inquire on what terms I shall consent to take a dismissal at the time the Rev. Samuel Parker shall be installed, provided that the con-

templated event should take place. There are several things worthy of consideration in an event so interesting to me; my advanced age in life; my temporal circumstances and the temporal and religious state of the society at present should be considered. But few ministers who have become connected with a people, have continued with them as long as I have been continued here. On the last day of October, 1792, I was ordained, almost forty years ago, and have been spared to enter upon the seventy-second year of my age. The terms of support offered me were two hundred pounds settlement in neat cattle, £100 the first year and £100 the second year; and sixty pounds salary the first year and to rise five pounds a year till it rose to seventy-five pounds and *that* to remain permanent.

“The sum given as a settlement was generous considering the state of the people at that early age of the town. The settlement I disposed of toward purchasing this house and farm which I now hold, for which I was to give five pounds per Acre, there being about ninety-one acres. The settlement not paying half of the price of the farm, some years elapsed before I could clear myself of debt for the farm, and there was but little done to the inside of the house. Soon after settlement the price of labor and all articles of support took a rise and the small Salary, with what the farm produced, was found insufficient to support an increasing and more expensive family and the other necesary expenses, so that I found myself unable to make such convenient buildings and procure such other accomodating articles as would have been desirable and useful.

“For several successive years with what income I received and what prudence and strict economy, could hardly bring the year about; and have not the belief that I could, had not a number of Parishioners, feeling for my straitened circumstances, liberally contributed to my relief; for which I still feel grateful for their liberality, and for all the presents I received through their respect and kindness. Without more assistance that nominal sum of two hundred and fifty dollars afforded it has appeared to me that I should have been compelled to have sought other ways of support. I think it will not be said or thought by any acquainted with my situation and management that I have needlessly wasted what I have received from this people or that my family have lived in idleness or have not been industrious, for I know not but that they have labored as faithfully according to their ability as other families, which was right that they should.

“Respecting my present circumstances, I am not deeply in debt, and paying interest for not more than 40 or 50 Dolls. and am owing something more, how much I cannot say. My sons who have labored for me, before and after they were of age have a claim on me for compensation, so that what property I hold I cannot realize wholly for my own support. I have been thus particular that the Society may know my real circumstances, and would add that my property of late has become liable to taxation.

“Would now turn to the situation of the society and I see it much diminished in numbers. It has become small, the *causes why and how*

it is thus diminished are not at this time to be investigated. It may have arisen from my delinquency and unfaithfulness, or from a combination of causes, not at first discovered, but so it is, and has come about under the righteous government of God, and what is unseen *now* will be seen hereafter. Had a dissolution of my connection with this people taken place twenty years ago it *might perhaps have been* better for the society. Circumstances would have been materially different had that taken place. I am not insensible that the support of a successor in the office and work of a minister here will require much additional expense, and am pleased to see the unity manifested and the purpose expressed of not doing without the stated ministry, and hope that greater blessings than they have received are yet in store for them. The unity and friendly feelings and cordiality which have subsisted between this people and myself have produced an attachment in my feelings which cannot be easily erased, and had not my own advanced age and consequent inability, together with the advantage it would probably be to the society and the cause of religion, seemed to call for another Minister here, I should not so cheerfully have consented to the measures which have been adopted. But under the existing circumstances my Judgment approves of the measure.

“From a long acquaintance with this people and the experience I have had of their marked kindness affection respect and friendly feeling, I indulge the belief, that they do not wish or desire to see me or my family by the proposed dismissal, *to which I consent*, be thrown into such straitened circumstances, as to render the remaining journey of my life (which cannot be long) a state of absolute dependence and want. It is expected that the contract of the people for my salary will be at an end when I am dismissed, and if anything more should be thought expedient and right to do for me or not it is not proper for me to say *what or how much* if anything; but refer this matter to the Society, trusting that they are disposed to do as they would be done by in change of circumstances.

“Respectfully yours,

“February 8, 1832.

JONA. NASH.”

These words from a man who was old, poor and in debt, must have reached many a tender heart, and it is encouraging to know that in December, 1832, a few months after his dismissal, the sum of \$124 was subscribed for Mr. Nash, “as a tribute of respect.” The dismissal took place July 11, 1832, and on the same day Rev. Samuel Parker was installed as his successor. Sylvester Nash’s book on *The Thomas Nash Family* says of Mr. Nash:

“The connection with the church and society proved a happy one and for a number of years the people continued together under one Shepherd, seeking the law at his mouth, and when in the course of events a portion of the people withdrew to other denominations and organized separate

congregations, still he possessed his soul in patience, and steadily and faithfully pursued the work of his high and holy vocation.’’

Mr. Nash lived through the short pastorate of Samuel Parker and at the ordination of the third pastor, Rev. John H. Bisbee, gave the Charge to the Candidate. A year before his death he was appointed Standing Moderator of the church. An entry in the record of August 31, 1834, reads thus:

“Rev. Jonathan Nash, aged 74 years. He was the first settled Pastor of this church—he was ordained October 31, 1792 dismissed from his pastoral relation July 11th, 1832 on account of advanced age. The evening before his death he retired to his bed in usual health expecting to preach the next day (in the absence of the pastor). But God otherwise determined and he awoke in eternity.’’

Rev. Samuel Parker, Mr. Nash’s successor, installed July 11, 1832, was born in Ashfield, Massachusetts, in 1779, and was therefore fifty years old when he came to Middlefield. He was graduated from Williams College in 1806 and from Andover Seminary in 1810. He went to Middlefield with misgivings, partly on account of fears lest the climate might prove too harsh for Mrs. Parker, who was subject to inflammation of the lungs, and partly through modesty about himself. He once wrote, “I have some fears that you will be disappointed in me, should I settle with you. May the Lord direct us in the path of duty.’’

He was engaged at a salary of \$450, a sum which must have looked very large to Mr. Nash who had lived on \$250 a year. His moving expenses were paid, and the records lead us to suppose that wagons went to Albany to meet his goods as they came from Ithaca.

Mr. Parker was perhaps the equal of Mr. Nash in intellectual ability and soundness of faith but widely different in disposition, manners and habits. He was more bold in spirit, rough in exterior and austere in appearance. He remained less than a year, and asked to receive dismissal in May, 1833. He had much of the independence of the pioneer and it was while living at the Oliver Blush Tavern that he resolved to go on a mission to the Indians of Oregon. In 1834 he persuaded Marcus Whitman to share his plan. His sterner traits of character fitted him admirably for the perilous journey across the Rocky Mountains, with Indian guides, to explore that vast western region in behalf

of the missionary work with the aborigines. They opened a station at which Mr. Parker remained from 1835 to 1837, while Whitman returned to the East to get reinforcements. About ten years later, Whitman's heroic work at the hazard of his life, had made it sure that the Stars and Stripes were to wave over Oregon, Washington and Idaho. Few people know that a minister in Middlefield had so important a part in the Oregon expedition. Mr. Parker lived to the age of eighty-seven, and died in Ithaca, 1866. His son, Henry W. Parker, was the founder of Central Congregational Church in Brooklyn, New York.

The third pastor, Rev. John H. Bisbee, was called January 23, 1834, and was ordained and installed February 20, by a council which lasted two days. He came from Chesterfield, where he was born, in 1805. He was graduated from Union College in 1831 and studied theology at the seminary at Auburn, New York. His salary was set at \$375 a year. When Mr. Bisbee preached his first sermon in Middlefield, which happened to be the Preparatory Lecture, he began on the hour appointed with only three people in the room, though others continued to come in until the close of the hour. After one evidence of his promptness, business men said they could now attend a service on a week day, for they knew just how long they would be kept from business. At one time during his five years pastorate, a severe epidemic of scarlet fever prevailed and public funerals were frequent. Mr. Bisbee, daily visiting afflicted families and conducting funerals, contracted the disease himself.

In 1838 Mr. Bisbee resigned and a council was held December 3, which voted unanimously, "after mature deliberations," that the pastorate should be dissolved, stating that "The Council deeply sympathizes with the Church and Society in their present destitution, and hope that they will speedily be blessed with another Pastor who shall break to them the bread of life." Mr. Bisbee was called to the church in Worthington, his home church, where he was pastor for twenty-eight years. After having several other charges he died in Westfield in 1892. At the ordination of his successor at Middlefield, Mr. Bisbee was chosen to express the fellowship of the churches. He preached the sermon at the installation of Rev. Moody Harrington in 1854, and at the age of seventy-eight made an address upon the Clergy of Middlefield at the Centennial exercises in 1883.

On March 5, 1839, the church called Rev. Royal Reed to be its pastor, but he declined, saying that though Middlefield was more attractive, Cummington, to which he had decided to go, was a more needy parish.

The next pastor, Rev. Edward Clark, remained thirteen years. He was called in May, 1839, at a salary of \$400 a year, to which the generous Deacon Mack added \$60 a year. He was installed and ordained June 19, 1839. Mr. Clark was a graduate of Williams College of the class of 1837. These were stirring times when the population of the town was more than doubled by the addition of 1000 souls in the families of Irish laborers employed in building the Western Railroad.

The parsonage which Mr. Clark occupied was located on what is still known as the "Parsonage Lot," where the Mack Monument now stands. This six-acre tract, with the house of David Mack, Jr., valued at \$2,500, was given by the two Macks, father and son, to the society, in 1833, shortly after the dismissal of Mr. Parker. In 1843 it is described as being a two-story house, thirty-one by forty-two feet, with six fireplaces, but fortunately also, three stoves. Tradition says it was the finest "square house" in town. Attached was an ell almost as large, connected by a passageway with the barn. Opposite, across the road stood another barn.

On March 10, 1846, the society voted to build a new meeting-house, "provided the funds necessary can be raised." In the end the old structure, which had served since 1791 was turned around so that the end instead of the side of the building faced the street, and with considerable alteration and redecoration and the addition of a small belfry became a fairly modern church building.

Mr. Clark was twelve years a member of the School Board in Middlefield. He was dismissed August 10, 1852, at his own request. Soon afterward we find that he was living in the town of Washington, for when he was a member of the council called to install Mr. Harrington, his home was there. At that council he gave the Charge to the Pastor. In 1883 he delivered an address at the Middlefield Centennial on "Education in Middlefield." He was highly esteemed, and was always warmly welcomed, whenever he visited Middlefield.



THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH—1846-1900

INTERIOR OF CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

On June 27, 1854, Rev. Moody Harrington was installed. He had studied theology at Auburn, New York, side by side with the Reverend Titus Coan, that veteran missionary to the Sandwich Islands. No man in the institution ranked higher in Christian spirit and attainments in the estimation of his associates than Mr. Harrington. Though somewhat eccentric in manner, he was a power for good and was loved by all who knew his worth. His piety was deep-toned, earnest and uniform, his character unblemished.

A note made in 1855 states that the gifts of the church in that year, with only fifty-one members, were \$23.15 to the American Bible Society and \$23.18 to the American Tract Society. April 9, 1857, Mr. Harrington resigned, as he said, "for the simple reason, my unavoidable expenses for living comfortably exceed by a considerable sum the annual salary." Though he had no fault to find, he said, "I do it as an unavoidable consequence of the extraordinary prices which the market levies upon the staple articles of living and has so done for the whole three years I have been with you." The annual meeting of the society was held on the same day that the resignation was presented, and there were some hopes that the salary might be increased; but this proved to be impossible and a council was called to dismiss the pastor April 28. So bad was the weather on that day that the dismissal did not take place until May 12. Strange to say, after that, Mr. Harrington remained for over a year, with highly encouraging additions to the church, closing his work certainly not earlier than August 8, 1858. On March 5 thirty-four persons were proposed for membership. During 1858 no fewer than forty-nine persons were added to the membership on profession and six by letter. For a church which three years before had numbered only fifty-one, this was an immense increase in strength.

August 30, 1858, Rev. Lewis Bridgeman,² a graduate of Oberlin College, was called to the pastorate, at a salary of \$525. He was not installed until May 11, 1859. He has been described as a warm-hearted, earnest and energetic preacher and yet one whose zeal sometimes gained the mastery over his better judgment. Sharing the Oberlin sentiment, he was an ardent abolition-

² See *My Children's Ancestors* by R. T. Cross. (1913)

ist and preached anti-slavery continually. Though his convictions were not at the time shared by many of his congregation, yet on December 8, 1859, six days after the death of John Brown, resolutions were unanimously passed by the church, the sentiments of which are indicated by the following extracts:

“Whereas we believe that the declaration of our Revolutionary Fathers is true, viz;—“That all men are created equal” and that “they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights” as “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness:” which is equally applicable to the colored race as to the white;

“And whereas the law of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ require that ‘whatever’ we ‘would that men should do to us’ we should do ‘even so to them’ and that the injunction of the Apostle is, ‘Remember them that are in bonds as bound with them’—

“And whereas we believe no enactment can be law or of any binding force, which contravenes the law of God, or violates the principles of justice:—therefore

“Resolved 1st, That American Slavery . . . can have no legal existance whatever.

“2. That all enactments assuming . . . to authorize . . . slavery . . . are . . . null and void.

“3. That it is the natural right of those who are held in slavery to assert and maintain their liberty regardless of consequences, and that it is their duty to do so as soon as there is a reasonable prospect of success.

“4. That whenever bloodshed or loss of life . . . result from holding . . . persons in slavery, the guilt is properly and only chargeable to the slave holders and those who aid, justify or countenance the unrighteous system.

“5. That the Fugitive Slave Act is unconstitutional. . . .

“6. That we believe that peaceful means for the overthrow of slavery are not yet wholly exhausted. . . .

“7. That while we deeply regret the events at Harper’s Ferry and attempt of John Brown and his companions to liberate slaves in Virginia by forcible means . . . we believe, nevertheless, that they (especially the leader) were actuated by no other than humane and Christian principles. . . .

“8. That John Brown and his companions, in our estimation, were guilty of only an indiscretion. . . .

“9. That we believe John Brown and his companions were innocent of the crimes with which they were charged, viz., treason, murder and an attempt to incite the slaves to insurrection. . . .

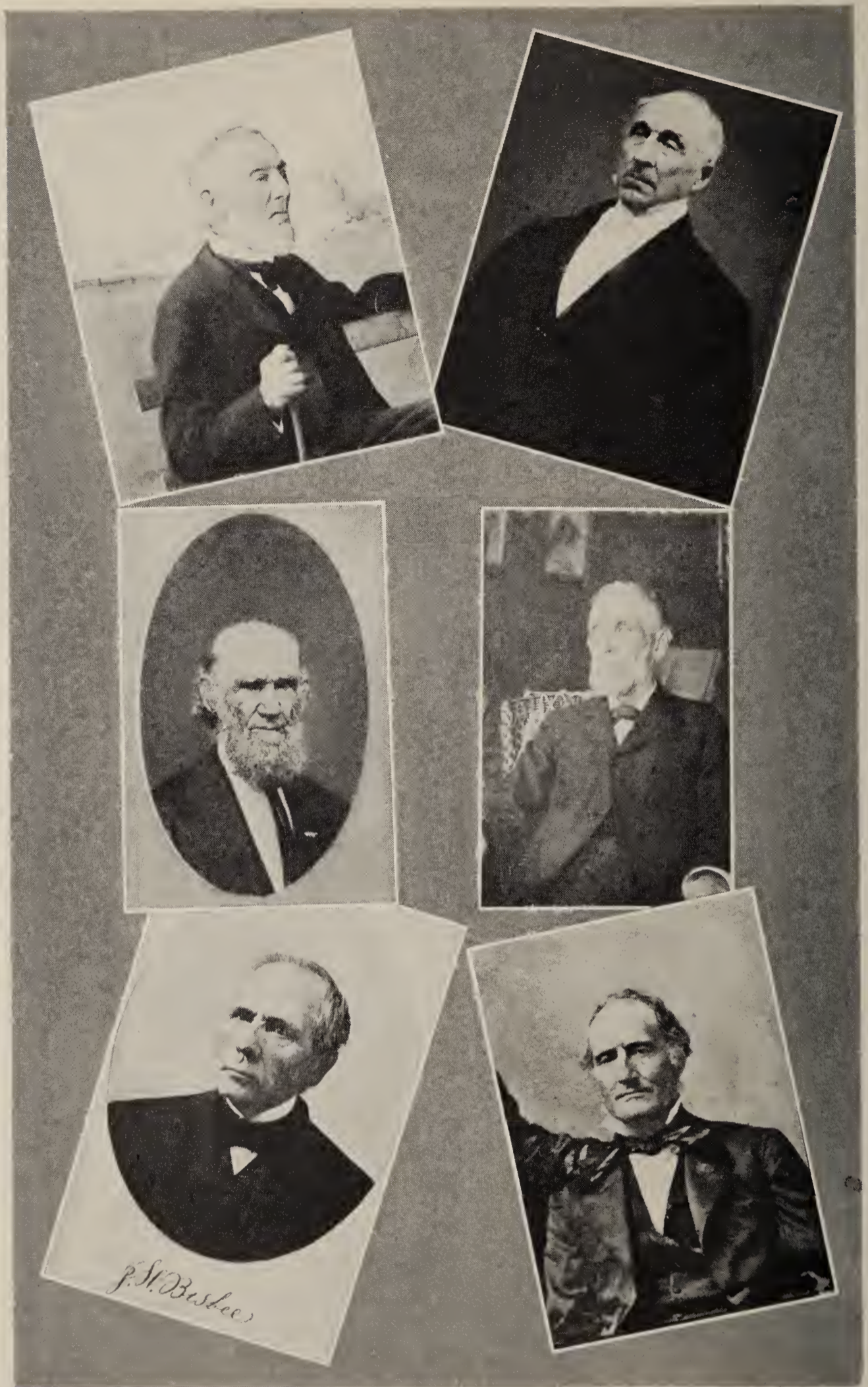
“10. That we deeply deplore the fate of those noble and self-sacrificing men . . . that we sympathize with them in their martyrdom. . . .”

These fiery resolutions well expressed the feelings of the pastor and also of Deacon Alexander Ingham who was a stalwart tem-

perance reformer and anti-slavery worker, "laboring," he tells us, "in the midst of much opposition." When it is remembered that Dr. Jefferson Church, another son of Middlefield, who bore attacks from the pulpit and press in Springfield because of his early opposition to slavery, was an intimate friend of John Brown, the fierce intensity of this document is largely explained.

Judged by the standards of the time, the people of that day gave generously for missionary and benevolent objects. On the first day of 1860 they gave \$26.00 for the American Board; on April 1, \$19.50 for the American Tract Society, and on October 14, \$17.00 for the American Missionary Society. This society with its warm interest in the negroes was so close to Mr. Bridgeman's heart that when he entered the amount on the church records he wrote, "Alas, how little sympathy is felt for a missionary whose object is to send out and support a gospel purified from the sin of slavery."

Dissatisfaction at last arose in the church in the spring of 1862. Mr. Bridgeman preached anti-slavery almost continually, and being somewhat pugnacious, stirred up those of his flock who did not share his extreme position. A year later the society agreed with the statement of the church that "the experience of the past and the present state of public feeling among us forbid us to hope that our pastor can be useful here." Therefore the church and society "kindly and respectfully" asked the pastor to unite with them in calling a council for his dismissal. This was on March 16, 1863. The council met on May 19, and while commending Mr. Bridgeman, regretted that the church was sending him away, and urged it in the future to be very careful about settling or removing ministers. As since that time the custom of installation has almost ceased, the church has avoided the possibility of incurring the disapproval of a council. The council also provided that Mr. Bridgeman should receive \$300 more than was due him, with the use of the parsonage for six months, if he should wish it. This money was promptly paid. By 1863 the Civil War was nearing its climax and expenses must have been soaring. In two calls issued in 1865 ministers were offered salaries of \$900. Mr. Bridgeman had received but \$525. He often paid for goods by orders on his salary, perhaps because of lack of money.



MIDDLEFIELD MINISTERS

REV. JOSEPH M. ROCKWOOD
REV. LEWIS BRIDGEMAN
REV. JOHN H. BISBEE

REV. ALEXANDER DICKSON
REV. CHARLES M. PIERCE
REV. EDWARD CLARK

Nearly two years and a half passed before the church again had a resident minister. Many supplies were heard and candidates examined. By the time of the arrival of the next pastor the new parsonage had been built. March 2, 1865, the society voted to accept the offer of Sumner U., James T., and Oliver Church to build the house and furnish the land if the society would, without their aid, dig and wall the cellar, and give them the parsonage buildings which then stood on the Parsonage Lot. These were taken down and with the materials the new house was constructed, which still serves as a parsonage for the pastor of the Middlefield Church.

On September 4, 1865, Rev. John Dodge was called at a salary of \$900. It was provided that his ministry might close on two months' formal notice from either party, and though installation was suggested in his letter of acceptance, he was not installed. One has described him as "lovely in life." But his stay was not a long one. As was not unnatural shortly after the Civil War, there were financial troubles, and at one time a large deficit was reported. Mr. Dodge did not receive the last installment of his salary until more than five months after he left town. He resigned June 24, 1867, because of the impaired health of his daughter which made it necessary to move to some place where she could be taken to ride over smooth roads. Mr. Dodge might well have complained of the winter snowdrifts, for it is said that once the snow so blocked his barn door that his horse could be taken out only by leading it through the house.

In spite of the shortness of his pastorate Mr. Dodge accomplished much. During the year 1866 no fewer than twenty-five members joined the church on profession and fourteen more by letter. The last Sunday of Mr. Dodge's service in Middlefield was July 14, 1867, a little less than two years from the time of call. On January 5, 1868, he was given a letter of dismissal and recommendation to a church in North Brookfield, Massachusetts.

After a period during which many supplies and candidates were heard, the church called Rev. Charles M. Pierce, a native of Hinsdale, Massachusetts, and a graduate of Williams College in 1857 and of Andover Seminary in 1861. Before coming to Middlefield he had been pastor for four years at West Boxford,

Massachusetts, where he was ordained in 1863. He came to Middlefield at a salary of \$900 and was installed July 1, 1868.

Two days after his installation an important meeting was held. Among the measures taken up the following resolution, proposed by Deacon Alexander Ingham, was passed:

“Resolved That the use or sale of intoxicating liquors as a beverage, or the refusal to bear proportionally the expense of supporting the Gospel ministry and the maintenance of public worship are in our judgment inconsistent with Christian character.”

It was during Mr. Pierce's pastorate that the changes began to be manifested which marked the decline of industry and population in Middlefield. The removal of the younger generation to more profitable farming lands in the West, and the death and removal of a number of the older members reduced the available income for maintaining the church, and in the spring of 1879 Mr. Pierce was asked to accept a reduction of two hundred dollars in his salary. He assented, “provided with this reduction the society were cordial in wishing him to remain their pastor.” His pastorate had been fruitful. In 1877 no fewer than thirty-nine members were added on profession. At length after thirteen years of service, Mr. Pierce resigned July 7, 1881; his resignation was reluctantly accepted and he was dismissed July 26. He continued in the pastorate in three other churches for more than twenty years longer, and retired in 1903. He died in Worcester, Massachusetts, March 4, 1915.

After Mr. Pierce's resignation came a series of very short pastorates. On November 26, 1881, Rev. Samuel E. Evans was called at a salary of \$700. A native of Fitchburg, he was graduated from Harvard in 1863, from Andover Seminary in 1866 and from Chicago Seminary in 1867. Mr. Evans was a genial and energetic man, a vigorous pastor and a good preacher, and the church genuinely regretted the termination of his pastorate which closed on July 1, 1883. After several fruitless attempts to find a pastor the church called Rev. Albert G. Beebee in May, 1884, at a salary of \$700. He remained until May, 1886, when he was called to Southwick, Massachusetts. Rev. John A. Woodhull, a graduate of Yale in 1850, began to serve the church September 1, 1886, and continued with it until June 1, 1889. Both of these pastors were courteous gentlemen of the old school, who

maintained dignified services but were unable to do more than continue the routine. After nearly a year during which many candidates were heard, Rev. William E. Morse began serving May 1, 1890, at a salary of \$800. He was an ambitious man of considerable native ability. His personal aggressiveness, however, aroused some opposition and he resigned after a year's pastorate. He later served a church in Somerset, Massachusetts.

The Baptist Church had given up its preaching services in 1890, at the time of the resignation of their beloved pastor, Rev. Joseph M. Rockwood. In April, 1891, and again in April, 1892, they were cordially invited to worship with the Congregationalists. On May 8, 1892, the Baptist Society was asked to appoint a committee to co-operate with a committee from the Congregational Society in obtaining a minister. During the period when candidates were being heard the church became incorporated and was thus enabled to do business without a society. In the Act of Incorporation, dated August 9, 1892, Hiram Taylor, Jonathan McElwain and Royal D. Geer and their associates and successors were made a corporation with the name "The Congregational Church of Middlefield, Massachusetts."

On September 19, 1892, Rev. Lucien C. Kimball was called at a salary of \$700, with the privilege of being absent half the time if he furnished satisfactory supply. He was a graduate of Andover in 1887 and was ordained in that year. He undertook to edit a religious paper, *The Church and the Times*, and doubtless expected to give half his time to this. Since the paper did not succeed, he devoted all his time to the church.

Shortly after the beginning of Mr. Kimball's pastorate, the Chapel, which had been owned by the Church family but placed at the disposal of the church, was given to the church as its property by Oliver Church and the heirs of Sumner U., and James T. Church. This fine gift the church accepted with thanks and invited the Ladies' Aid Society and the Christian Endeavor Society to meet there as formerly.

The church met with financial difficulties during 1895 and a grant of \$300 was obtained that year from the Massachusetts Home Missionary Society. This was paid to the pastor in quarterly installments, beginning November 1. The financial situation did not improve, the church lacked leadership and about the

middle of 1896 Mr. Kimball resigned. He was later pastor at Dummerston, Vermont. The discouraged condition of the church is reflected in the vote to turn over the funds of the church to the Massachusetts Home Missionary Society, to be held in trust by it, the income to be paid over so long as preaching was maintained. In case of failure of services for one year, the funds were to revert to the Missionary Society. Fortunately, the energy and optimism of the next pastor made it unnecessary to carry out this vote. Mr. Kimball closed his services in August, 1896. He afterward preached for a number of years at Hopkinton, New Hampshire.

Rev. Herbert Alden Youtz, a native of Iowa and a graduate of Boston University, began serving the church early in November, 1896, and continued until the close of 1898. With courage and enthusiasm he revived the spirit of the church, and helped it to become self-supporting, refusing longer to accept aid from the Home Missionary Society. This achievement was due partly to the more cordial attitude of the Baptists. The pleasing personality of the pastor endeared him to his parishioners. Both Mr. and Mrs. Youtz, being good singers, greatly revived and extended the musical activities of Middlefield, not only during his pastorate but during many subsequent years, since Middlefield became his summer home. His pastorate was fruitful in strengthening the growing ties between the Congregationalists and Baptists which have caused the former spirit of rivalry to give place to one of warm fellowship. It was in these days that the Baptists, who had for some years been joining in the attendance on preaching, accepted the invitation to unite forces in the Sunday School, instead of holding theirs in their own house of worship. Thus the religious forces of Middlefield were united in one church and new enthusiasm was created under the leadership of Mr. Youtz. On December 17, 1898, having been called to another charge, Mr. Youtz resigned and the church regretfully released him a few days later. After a pastorate in Providence, Rhode Island, and a period of study abroad, Dr. Youtz became professor of Christian Theology in Chicago, Montreal and at Auburn, New York. He is now connected with the Graduate School of Theology at Oberlin, Ohio.

Rev. Henry M. Bowden, a native of Walden, New York, a stu-



MIDDLEFIELD MINISTERS

REV. HENRY M. BOWDEN

REV. SEELYE BRYANT

REV. HERBERT A. YOUTZ

REV. WM. T. BARTLEY

REV. WM. A. ESTABROOK

dent at the University of Pennsylvania and a graduate of Yale Divinity School in 1886, began as pastor May 7, 1899, and continued a high-minded and scholarly pastorate for three years. It was during his pastorate that the meetinghouse was destroyed by fire. On Monday afternoon, June 11, 1900, lightning struck the steeple and set it on fire. As the spot could not be reached by water and the solid timbers could not be cut off, the people had to watch helplessly while the flames crept downward and burned the church to the ground, consuming also the Town Hall, which stood just south of it. One of the most pitiful moments was when the bell, as if mourning its own fate, fell clanging and crashing to the ground.

The Baptists immediately offered the use of their church, and a service was held there the following Sunday. Steps were taken to solicit funds for a new building. The insurance was \$2,000, and by July 2, \$1,400 had been subscribed. At that date it was decided to issue a circular letter, bearing a picture of the old church, and an appeal for funds. Through the kindness of Mr. Harding, an architect in Pittsfield, two plans, one for a wooden, the other for a stone church were prepared without charge. August 15 a third plan was asked for, and it was voted to build of wood. August 22 it was voted to consider the obtaining and repairing of the Baptist Church. September 10 it was decided to buy the Baptist Church for \$500, with the understanding that the money would be given back to the Congregational Church to be invested so as to be used sometime for a new house of worship. May 21, 1901, the building committee was authorized to proceed to build. It was difficult to proceed at all, as many wished to repair the old Baptist Church, and many others would have liked to build a wholly new structure, perhaps of stone, so the matter was long delayed. Services were held for some time in the new Town Hall, which had recently been completed.

On April 12, 1902, Mr. Bowden resigned and closed his services May 1. He has been for many years a professor in the American International College in Springfield, Massachusetts.

On November 3, 1902, Rev. Seelye Bryant was unanimously called and accepted. He was born in Sivas, Turkey, was graduated at Amherst College in 1887, and at Princeton Seminary in 1890. He began his pastorate January 1, 1903. On February

17, 1903, the discussion of the new church was again resumed, and it was decided to build it of wood with a spire of reasonable height. It was finally decided to buy the old Baptist meeting-house for \$250 and remodel it. The Baptists donated the money they received to furnish new windows for the new church. The structure as rebuilt consisted of the Baptist meetinghouse moved to the site which the burned Congregational meetinghouse had occupied, with the Chapel, formerly the Methodist Church, joined to it on the north side, and a new tower and belfry, in the angle between them. This is all that represents the "spire of reasonable height." It was not very high and Mr. James Ingham expressed the opinions of some people when he declared that it was "too clumpid." Mr. Asher Pease provided the ornamental steel ceiling for the main audience room. The building was finally dedicated on January 14, 1904. With such a composite building it was fitting that there should be greetings at the dedication from Methodist and Baptist friends and from Berkshire Congregational Churches, and that the beloved Rev. J. M. Rockwood, the last Baptist minister, should have made the invocation.

On March 24, 1907, Mr. Bryant resigned, having been called to the Olivet Church in Springfield, Massachusetts. Rev. Francis A. Fate served as pastor during the rest of the year. On November 5, Rev. Wm. A. Estabrook of Amherst was called. His service began January 1, 1908. His pastorate of nearly six years was an era of good feeling and the church prospered. Meanwhile Middlefield was becoming increasingly a place of popularity as a summer residence. Mr. Estabrook left in July, 1913, to take a pastorate in Brimfield, Massachusetts.

In the autumn of 1913, Rev. William T. Bartley, Ph.D., a native of Concord, New Hampshire, was called, and began services December 1. He was graduated from Yale in 1891, from Andover Seminary in 1897, and received the degree of doctor of philosophy from Yale in 1895, for graduate work in the classics. His beautiful Christian spirit and fine literary tastes endeared him to all. During his pastorate Mr. Bartley made an extensive study of the church and town records, which has served as the basis for this history of the Congregational Church. July 22, 1917, the pastor resigned in order to begin work in the Congregational Church of Canaan, New York.

On August 14, 1917, the church voted to ask their former pastor, Rev. Herbert A. Youtz, to superintend arrangements for supplying the pulpit until a settled pastor could be secured. As a result, during the winter which followed, the pulpit was filled by Mr. Albert D. Stearns, who had been a student under Mr. Youtz at Auburn, New York. During his stay of several months, Mr. Stearns greatly endeared himself to the people of his parish.

For the next year the church was served by Rev. Aaron Avery Gates, who had been a student under Mr. Youtz at Chicago, and who during his stay of one year continued his studies at Hartford Seminary. The following year the pulpit was supplied in part by Rev. Alvah J. Rhines of Huntington, a graduate of the Y.M.C.A. College of Springfield, Massachusetts.

On October 11, 1920, the church extended a call to Rev. R. Barclay Simmons of Shoreham, Vermont, who began his pastorate the following month. Mr. and Mrs. Simmons were very successful with the young people of the town, especially the boys. These happy relations continued until the end of his pastorate in November, 1922, when Mr. Simmons resigned to accept the call of the First Congregational Church in Chicopee.

The present pastor, Rev. J. G. Robertson, began his work August 1, 1923. He has had a wide experience in rural fields and begins his pastorate with the most cordial feeling of the people.

The isolation of Middlefield, the limited resources of the church and the severity of the winter season upon the hill-top has always made it hard for the church to obtain and hold pastors for long periods in recent years. But it has the loyal support of the majority of the community and the good will of all residents. Among former citizens of the town and members of the summer colony the church has found staunch supporters, who aid to support the church work, and so the gospel is still preached where the church stands "on the rocks," and where the Word has been spoken during the past one hundred thirty years.

David Mack's deeply religious life and his generous support of the church are well known to Middlefield people, and have received wider notice through the tract called "The Faithful Steward." He was a deacon in the Congregational Church for many years, living not only through the long pastorate of Mr.

Nash, but through those of Mr. Parker and Mr. Bisbee into that of Mr. Clark. He was connected with the church society, of which he was a constituent member, for sixty-two years, and occupied the same pew in the meetinghouse for fifty years.

Among the early deacons were Daniel Chapman, Malachi Loveland, Job Robbins, George W. McElwain, Erastus John Ingham and Zachariah Field. Deacon Alexander Ingham is remembered not only for his religious zeal but also for his work in education and the cause of temperance. In this period also served Deacon Harry Meacham and Deacon Amasa Graves. Deacon Jonathan McElwain was not only town clerk for many years, but was clerk of the church for forty-five years. He was active in Sabbath School work, and his blameless life was an example to the younger generation. Deacon Hiram Taylor was a very lovable and generous man. His gifts to the church were large. During the last illness of Mr. Royal D. Geer, who had been the caretaker of the church for many years, Deacon Taylor assumed his duties for some weeks and gave the proceeds to Mr. Geer. In later years the faithful services of Deacon Barton B. Graves and Deacon George S. Bell are well remembered.

Among the prominent early supporters of the church was Uriah Church, Jr., who married Phebe, daughter of Colonel David Mack. Concerning him Rev. Edward Clark once said, "When I entered the sanctuary on a Sabbath morning, let the weather be ever so inauspicious, there was one man that I was sure to see, if his health would possibly allow. He sought no excuse for staying away from the sanctuary, he did not plead a slight illness or advancing years, or the wearisome acclivity that he was to ascend. There was one man of intelligence and faith whom I felt sure of meeting there, and who in unpleasant weather took certain pains to come." Following in the footsteps of their parents Sumner, James Talmadge, and Oliver in the Congregational Church, and Lyman in the Baptist Church, in proportion to their material prosperity were devoted and generous upholders of the Gospel in Middlefield.

In Middlefield, as elsewhere, music has been the handmaid of religion from earliest times. At a meeting held on Christmas Day, 1800, reminding us how little thought there was then of making Christmas a holiday, the town appropriated \$40 to hire

a singing master that winter. Such an action may well have been in the interest of church music, for there were many singers in those days, so many in fact that at times the front seats all around the gallery of the first meetinghouse were filled with those who had voices to sing. These were the days when Russell Little was chorister, who like others of his family, had an excellent voice. The question of hiring a singing master was often brought up in town meeting, though sometimes the town chose to take no action. In 1851 or 1852 a subscription paper was circulated specifying, "provided a satisfactory arrangement can be made with the Baptist Society, we the subscribers promise to pay the sums set to our names and unite with them in a singing school." The sum of \$50.50 was subscribed. These singing schools were in their prime when the singing masters were Edwin Reed, George Lucas, Joseph Gibson, Thaddeus Lyman, Sylvester Bartlett, Homer Carter and others. The Meachams, Littles, Smiths, Wrights, Churches, Robbinses, Aldermans, Bells, Spencers, Hawes and Graves were familiar names in connection with church choirs in Middlefield.

Musical instruments as aids to the voices of the choir were introduced early in the nineteenth century. Mr. Isaac Gleason played a bass viol back of the singers for years; afterward the double bass, violin, flute, clarinet and all manner of stringed instruments were employed up to the advent of the harmonium. The record states that Isaac Gleason received \$42 in 1833 "for his services in singing the past year." His oldest son, Gillet Gleason, was musical and somewhat expert in church music, being a good tenor singer. He taught vocal music and singing school in the surrounding towns.

Enoch Dwight Graves was probably the most prominent man in musical affairs in his day. He had a large family of boys all of whom were good singers. One son, Edward, was especially gifted, and was a leader of several choirs and a successful teacher of music when singing schools were common. The father, who was familiarly known as Dwight Graves, was a man of unusual musical talent, and was connected with the choir for forty years, for the greater part of that time as leader and director. At the age of twelve years he was engaged to take charge of the singing, and sang soprano for several years until his voice

changed to bass. He played violin, single bass and double bass viols for many years. At one time during his leadership the church in Easthampton had an organ given by Mr. Williston, and Graves learned that their bass viol was for sale. He went to Oliver Church and stated the circumstances. Mr. Church gave him the money for the purchase of the instrument. Mr. Graves used the viol in the choir for many years. Later the Congregational Church at Worthington gave up their bass viol for an organ, and Mr. Graves, realizing that this was a superior instrument, went again to Mr. Church for assistance. Mr. Church willingly gave him the money. Mr. Graves was delighted with the instrument and played it during the remainder of his stay in the choir. He was a man of large frame, and his rugged features bore a look which would not soon be forgotten when the choir failed to sing with "due expression" or a member was so unfortunate as to get off the key. We are told that when the choir had sung through a piece by syllable when practicing, Mr. Graves would utter the command, "Apply the language" when he wished the words to be sung.

As early as 1857 there was some kind of a melodeon or harmonium in the church for Mrs. Julia M. Smith played on it for services at the age of twelve, under the direction of her father, James Talmadge Church, who then directed the choir and was a fine tenor singer. The melodeon and the Mason and Hamlin organ which followed it were gifts of the Church brothers. Other members of the choir then and a few years later were Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Church, Mrs. Huntington, Laura and Mary E. Church, Mrs. Edwin McElwain, Mrs. John W. Crane and the daughters of William D. Blush. In later years Geo. S. Bell, Cooley W. Graves, Mrs. Willis Graves and Deacon Wesley A. Olds have been prominent in the choir. Miss Alice B. Church played the organ for many years. Mrs. W. O. Eames has recently been organist. One of the early hymn books was the famous old *Watts and Select Hymns*, which was abandoned in favor of *The Sabbath Hymn Book*. A later book was the *Plymouth Hymnal*.

HISTORY OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH IN MIDDLEFIELD

For over thirty years after its founding, the Congregational Church was the only church in town, but there were, however,

persons of other religious views, from a very early period. There were persons of Baptist sentiment such as John Newton and Matthew Smith who never joined the 'standing order' but held aloof until they could find a church to their taste. As early as 1783 the question of the Baptists paying the minister tax arose and Ebenezer Babcock's rates were abated because he had joined the Baptist Church in Chesterfield. The question came up again with new force when fourteen citizens from the southeast part of the town petitioned to be permitted to pay their minister tax to the support of "Rev. Eleazer Rhodes, a Public Teacher of Piety Religion and Morality and of the Baptist Persuasion." A town meeting was called to act upon this petition "to see if the town will abate the rates of those who call themselves Baptists or any part of them. To see if the town will give the Baptists a little span of time to turn themselves to pay their rates in case the town do not abate their rates." The law had been on the side of the standing order and the town voted "not to abate those rates . . . nor give any further time for payment thereof." The Baptists paid the rates but felt that such enforced payment was persecution. The difficulties in settling a minister in the early days of the town and the trouble arising from the "unhappy differences subsisting in said town occasioned by different sentiment in religion" were in part due to the influence and opinions of the Baptists.

In 1797 a Baptist Church was formed in Partridgefield West Parish (later Hinsdale) and several of the Middlefield Baptists identified themselves with it. The pastor included Middlefie'd in his field of labor. John Newton was baptized in 1800 and the following year was made deacon. Matthew Smith was baptized in 1801 and Calvin Smith and Solomon Root the following year. At this time the church voted to hold meetings in Middlefield one fifth of the time. Less than two years later it was voted to hold them one third of the time. In 1805 the same vote was repeated, Deacon Newton's house being mentioned as the place.

John C Newton

It is said that the house of Matthew Smith was similarly used at times. The original law by which all of whatever sentiment were

taxed to support the Congregational Church was modified quite early so far as those who could produce certificates of actual membership in another church were concerned.

The following is a certificate, certifying to the membership of Matthew Smith in the Partridgefield Church:

“Partridgefield, Sept. 6, 1801.

“We the subscribers, Ebenezer Smith, public teacher of a society of the religious sect or denomination called Baptists, in the West parish of Partridgefield and places adjacent, and Joshua Jackson and Hugh Smith, Committee of said society, do hereby certify that Matthew Smith doth belong to said society and that he frequently and usually when able attends with us in our stated meetings for religious worship.

EBENEZER SMITH, *Public Teacher,*

HUGH SMITH, *Committee.*”

JOSHUA JACKSON, *Committee,*

John Newton was a member of the committee of the Hinsdale Church, appointed to sign the certificates of exemption in 1803.

In 1816 a house of worship was erected by the Baptists of Hinsdale. This strengthened the work there and naturally led to the formation of a Baptist Church in Middlefield which movement received hearty co-operation from the Hinsdale brethren and the new church was constituted the following year. The record of this important step reads as follows:

“In the Spring of 1817 the Brethren in Middlefield belonging to the Hinsdale Baptist Church, viewing their local Distance and other inconveniences voted that in their opinion it was best to take measures to be formed into a Distinct Church. Accordingly Deacon John Newton and Matthew Smith applied to the Hinsdale Church in behalf of said Brethren and obtained their approbation by vote that we had their fellowship in being set of as A distinct Church. On the 13th day of July 1817 the Said Brethren voted to send to Chesterfield Baptist Church and Chester and Hinsdale wishing them to send their Elders and faithful Bretheren to Set with us in Council on the 23rd Day of Said July to advise whether it be thought expedient to Constitute them into a Distinct Church or not. Chose Matthew Smith to send letters to said churches.”

Delegates were sent as follows: Six from Chesterfield, two from Chester, and three from Hinsdale.

There were twenty-nine constituent members of the church—twelve men and seventeen women. The list which is here given

includes many of the foremost families in the history of Middlefield.

John Newton and Martha Newton
 Matthew Smith and Asenath Smith
 Calvin Smith and Anna Smith
 Solomon Root and Mary Root
 Levi Olds and Lucy Olds
 Paine Loveland and Phebe Loveland
 William Taylor and Priscilla Taylor
 Amariah Ballou and Polley Ballou
 David Ballou and Mary Ballou
 Clark Martin
 Asa Acksdel
 Asa Ide
 Elizabeth Skinner
 Mary Ballou
 Elizabeth Durant
 Lucy Metcalf
 Sarah Johnson
 Sarah Smith
 Sarah Allison
 Louis Freeland

Several of these persons, like the members of the Ballou family, lived in Peru and other neighboring towns.

The church thus constituted called as its first pastor Rev. Isaac Child. May 24, 1818, he was received into membership (though he had apparently been preaching for the church since June 5, 1817), and on June 10 of the same year he was ordained, on the advice of a council called from the churches at Chesterfield, West Springfield, Chester, Hinsdale and Becket. As an indication of the brotherly feeling, the council "voted that Elder Rand (pastor of the West Springfield Church and scribe of the council) wait on the Reverend Mr. Nash (pastor of the Congregational Church in Middlefield) and invite him to walk in the procession and sit with us." Whether Mr. Nash accepted the invitation or not is not recorded. When we recall that the Congregational churches in New England at that time still felt themselves to be the rightfully established form of Christianity, since they represented the faith of the original settlers who held

the charter of government, it would have been a mark of considerable breadth of view, if the pastor of the established church of New England should thus publicly show his approval of a dissenting sect like the Baptists.

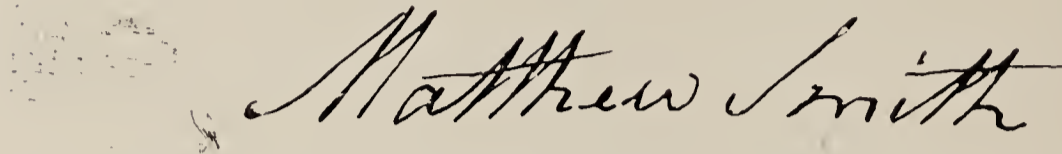
The church voted to Mr. Child the sum of \$200 per annum for his services. The money was raised by assessing each member what was believed to be his just proportion of the total amount. Three assessors were appointed to make out the tax list, and the contribution of any member was currently known as his "minister tax." Thus even the dissenting church preserved the methods and the vocabulary which belonged to the days when the state church received its revenues from taxation. It was customary first to solicit voluntary subscriptions from those who attended the church but who were not members. Then the remaining amount necessary was raised by taxation, levied upon the members according to their ability. The method of assessment was occasionally a source of friction and we find in the records that members sometimes appealed to the church to lighten the burden imposed by the board of assessors.

The contributions seem to have been quite often in arrears and for several years the church voted that any one who had not paid his minister tax by a certain date should give a personal note with interest. In 1836 the church "voted the money (for pastor's salary) be assessed according to what each one is actually worth, and that the assessors endeavor to come at the fact as near as possible and make the tax accordingly." Finally in 1860 the following specific procedure was proposed by Samuel Smith and adopted by the church: "Voted that each member pay his share of necessary expenses of said Society by an equality according to each one's ability—this equality to be ascertained by making the Town Valuation the standard, taking from said valuation each one's indebtedness and adding to the same Real Estate owned by Members in other Towns."

An interesting indication of the way in which the pastor's salary would fall into arrears is found in a receipt given Mr. Child. It reads as follows: "Have received of the Baptist Church Society the sum of four hundred and eight dollars in full of all demands against them for services rendered them from June 5, 1817, to January, 1821." Since Mr. Child's salary was

\$200 a year he would have earned \$700 in the three and one-half years. Apparently less than \$300 had been paid him until this special effort was made to collect the remainder.

Where the church held its services at first is not known. The houses of John Newton and Matthew Smith would have been



the natural gathering places. There is no mention in the records of the building of a meetinghouse; but such a building must have been provided at an early date, for Mr. Child was ordained in the meetinghouse June 1, 1818. This church building stood on the knoll south of the road leading east from Blossom Corner, just before the turn is made to the cemetery. A granite monument marks the site. It was a plain building without spire or tower, with a semicircular window in the front gable. On entering one passed through a vestibule into the main audience room. From the vestibule stairs led up to the gallery, and at either end was a small room which could be heated. There was no means of heating the main auditorium. Committees and small gatherings would occupy these small rooms occasionally, but their main purpose was to furnish a comfortable place in which to spend the intermission between the morning and afternoon services on the Sabbath, for in those days men and women made a business of cultivating religion on Sunday. At ten-thirty came the first preaching service. At the close of this the Sunday School met. Then came an hour for rest and conversation with a luncheon consisting of an apple or a slice of bread for hungry children. At two o'clock came the second preaching service after which tired and hungry Christians drove their hungry horses homeward to satisfy the physical demands of man and beast. In the evening a prayer meeting was held either in the church or in a district schoolhouse.

Mr. Child, the first pastor, remained with the church ten years, adding thirty-five members by baptism, and six by letter, nearly doubling the original membership. His spiritual character was accompanied by a lack of worldly wisdom which expressed itself in ways very amusing to his practical parishioners. He was a man of little mechanical skill, as likely to put a button

to fasten a door on the door itself as on the frame, but he was very genial and companionable in his social life, a faithful and earnest preacher of great spiritual power. While pastor he lived in a house on Ridgepole Road, some distance north of where it crosses the road to Worthington. An indication of the affection he inspired was evidenced in the fact that at his death, when his wife was left penniless, the Middlefield Society invited her to make her home with them, which she did, being supported by them as long as she lived. When she died she was buried from the home of Samuel Smith.

The next pastor, Erastus Andrews (father of President E. Benjamin Andrews) was called in 1828 at a salary of \$175, which was increased to \$200 the following year. In addition to his pastoral labors he taught school in Smith Hollow. He was a man of large and impressive stature, full of vigor, and in his short pastorate of two years received twenty-four new members into the church. He boarded with his parishioners during his stay in town. Though young, talented and ardent, full of fiery zeal, he was not distinguished for sound judgment, and as he did not give his hearers strong meat, those who were of full age welcomed his successor, Rev. Cullen Townsend, in 1831. The church in calling him "voted to raise Three Hundred Dollars for preaching the ensuing year if found necessary." Mr. Townsend's great interest was in home missions, and after a year he went to the "far west," which at that time was western New York. He boarded during his pastorate at Matthew Smith's, in the house now occupied by Mr. Sweeney.

In 1832, Rev. Henry Archibald, a vigorous Scotchman and a zealous preacher and temperance agitator, began his labors. His knowledge of the Bible was profound and his ministry was full of blessed results to his charge. He was clear-headed, sound in Christian doctrine and in common with his countrymen generally, tenacious of his own opinions. Yet he was not overbearing but was found by the pastor of the Congregational Church of that period to be a faithful and agreeable co-laborer in the Christian work. The church "voted to leave it to the committee to make the best contract with him that they can" and the result was a salary of \$275. In 1833 the church voted to have the Gleason place, so called for a "parish house." This was doubtless

the old fashioned house now standing just north of Mr. Cottrell's dwelling, where Isaac Gleason, Sr., formerly lived. At one time Mr. Archibald lived north of the Center were Mr. G. E. Cook now lives. Neither this house nor the Gleason place seems to have been regularly used as a parsonage, for the next pastor, Orson Spencer, lived in the old Walter Metcalf house, which once stood a short distance east of the meetinghouse, and in the old Emmons place half a mile south of the Center.

Elder Spencer was pastor from 1837 to 1841. He was greatly esteemed and seems to have been exceptionally devoted and conscientious. He voluntarily reduced his own salary \$100 during the hard times of that period, saying that he had no right to a larger income than his parishioners generally received. In 1841 he astonished the church by resigning, stating in his farewell sermon that he had become a convert to Mormonism. The church showed its sense of responsibility for true doctrine by promptly excommunicating him. On August 29, 1841, it "voted to withdraw Fellowship from Rev. Orson Spencer and his wife Catherine Spencer in consequence of their embracing Mormonism and joining that sect, which we consider is heresy." So conscientiously was this vote observed that when, a few years later, Mr. Spencer returned and lectured on Mormonism, not many of his former parishioners felt it right to go to hear him. The feelings of some who did listen to his remarks have been well expressed by the poet of the Middlefield Centennial celebration, himself formerly a member of the Baptist Church, as follows:

"Just why Elder Spencer a Mormon became
I never could tell, though his story I heard.
But his arguments seemed to me very lame,
And they neither my reason nor sympathy stirred."

In 1841 Rev. Foranda Bestor was called at a salary of \$375. This salary continued during his stay, although in 1843, the vote of the church authorized the committee to "give him Three Hundred and Seventy-Five Dollars if they think he ought to have that sum." During his stay in town he lived a mile east of the Center in an old house opposite the Harvey Root place now owned by Mr. Frank Chipman.

At this time it became imperative to repair the meetinghouse, but when the matter was discussed, it was decided that the old

building was not worth repairing. So in 1844 plans were made looking toward the building of a new church, William W. Leonard, Timothy Root, Ambrose Newton, Morgan Pease and Samuel Smith being appointed a committee to push the project. About a year later, October 20, 1845, we read in the records that "after much examination, deliberation, discussion, consideration and reconsideration a vote was passed that we proceed to build a



THE BAPTIST CHURCH
1846-1903

new house of worship in the year 1846, estimated to cost about sixteen hundred dollars, and that it be located on the town land in the Center or near it." Solomon Root, Matthew Smith, Ambrose Newton, Milton Combs and Oliver Smith were the building committee. Subscriptions were made by forty-two persons totaling \$1,606.59. The building erected with these funds stood where the horse sheds are now located east of the Center store. A granite monument now marks the site. The entrance was in the center of the front. A vestibule about eight feet wide ran across

the end and at either side stairs led up to the gallery which occupied the space above the vestibule. A square tower surmounted the roof. Into this new building the church moved in 1847. There is no record of any dedication.

The zeal manifested in the building of the new meetinghouse seems to have been simply one of the many movements for improvement about this time. In 1844 the church "voted to raise by Tax funds to pay for reviving the singing to be apportioned the same as the Minister Tax by the last year's assessors." How the money thus raised was expended is not stated. Henry Hawes was choir leader, and about this time musical instruments were first introduced. Mr. Solomon F. Root played the flute for several years. A little later a bass viol was played by Mr. Coleman. The choir sat in the gallery at the rear of the church, and often numbered twenty-five or thirty. The frequent singing schools in town constantly brought fresh recruits into the choir. Watt's hymns, sung to the "Boston Academy" tunes, were used in the early days of the church. Later a book entitled *Carmina Sacra* was introduced.

On May 22, 1850, a new constitution was drawn up and adopted; but it proved unsatisfactory, and in 1855 it was "voted that the Constitution adopted by the Baptist Church and Society, May 22, 1850, be set aside and that business be transacted as before its adoption." In 1850, also, preparations were made for the building of a parsonage. The money was raised by subscription but the church gave instructions that "the proportion of each member be made out on the present year's assessment and presented to each member for their guidance in making their subscriptions for the parsonage." The next year the parsonage was completed. It stood just north of the Congregational parsonage and remained in the possession of the church until purchased by Mrs. Gertrude Pease in 1908.

After the church moved into its new home, it had a series of short pastorates. Volney Church remained only one year, 1848-49, living as did his successor in the house at the Center which stands east of the main highway, a short distance south of the Town Hall. The eccentric Homer Clark proved unworthy and was disciplined and excluded by the church. Orlando Cunningham, John B. Burk and Lewis Holmes each served acceptably

for from three to five years, living during their pastorates at the new parsonage at the Center. During the fifteen years after the building of the new meetinghouse, the church attained its greatest strength. It numbered among its members the leaders in public enterprise and achievement. Most of the important town officers were usually Baptists. The wealth of the members increased so that \$450 and the free use of the parsonage could be granted to the minister. In 1850, thirty-three members were received by baptism; in 1858, thirty-four. The way seemed open for a splendid future for the church. It had over 100 members, many of them influential men of the town.

In 1865, Rev. Joseph M. Rockwood, the last pastor of the church was called at a salary of \$700. For twenty-five years his quiet dignity, high ideals, and spotless life exercised a profound influence on the community. For about ten years the church enjoyed reasonable prosperity. It was in 1880 that Miss Mary A. Rockwood, the beloved daughter of the pastor, went to Burmah as a missionary, only to succumb to the rigors of the climate two years later. The poet of the Centennial the following year, expressed the affection in which she was held by the community, in the following lines:

“And then I think of one I loved
As though she were my child by birth,
The maiden rare who crossed great seas
For God, and sleeps in Burman earth.”

But in the '70's began that change which has so altered the life of the hill-towns of New England. The great rich farming lands of the West, with cheap railway transportation for crops, made it more and more difficult for the farmers in Middlefield to prosper. The younger generation began to look elsewhere for their life work. Farms which for two or three generations had remained in one family began to pass into the possession of strangers. In 1878 the church was able to raise only \$500 for the pastor's salary; in the next decade it sank to \$400. But in the face of these discouragements Mr. Rockwood never lost his serene optimism, never failed to maintain his high ideals, never allowed outer circumstances to conquer his spirit. Finally, in 1890, he resigned, universally respected and loved, a true Christian gentleman who for a quarter of a century had maintained unfalteringly the standard of Christ-like life and service.

After Mr. Rockwood's resignation the church decided not to maintain preaching any longer. The members gave their support to the Congregational Church and attended its services. For four or five years the Baptist Sunday School was maintained; but it soon became evident that the Baptists could best serve the cause by uniting in all the activities of the Congregational Church.

In 1900, when the Congregational meetinghouse was destroyed by fire, the Baptists promptly offered the use of their edifice for the continuance of public worship. During this year it was voted to offer to sell the building to the Congregational Church for \$500, and to contribute the entire proceeds of the sale for repairing and remodeling the building. But eventually the meetinghouse was finally sold to the Congregationalists for \$250. In 1903 it was moved to its present site and joined to the chapel, which had originally been a Methodist meetinghouse. Thus church unity was fitly embodied in the building in which all Christians of Middlefield worship together.

During recent years the church contributed \$350.00 to the Belmont Avenue Church in Springfield, which was the church home of several Baptists formerly residing in Middlefield. In 1908 the surviving members of the society erected granite memorials marking the sites of the first and second Baptist meetinghouses, with suitable exercises of dedication, as a reminder of the devotion and sacrifice of those who formed and supported the Baptist Church in the town. The surviving members are loyal supporters of the cause of Christ in the united church. Of the few hundred dollars of invested funds, a part was given as a permanent endowment of the evangelical church in Middlefield, whatever its future denomination may be. The remainder was given to the Massachusetts Baptist State Convention.

The fact that the Baptist Church was originally organized as a protest against the assumption that all good citizens ought to support the Congregational Church brought out into clear relief a sort of personal independence in religious beliefs which sometimes stood in the way of cordial relations with those of different beliefs. There existed in the tradition of the church a profound disapproval, amounting at times to a species of con-

tempt, for "those Congregationists." At the same time this very positive attitude of independence created a stalwart character and an untiring activity on the part of many of the Baptists.

Among those whose names deserve especial mention are, of course, the leaders in the formation of the church. John Newton, Matthew Smith, Pain Loveland, and Solomon Root with others believed supremely in the importance of maintaining an honest religious devotion; and they were willing to pay the price.

The Smith family was always a tower of strength in the Baptist Church. Matthew Smith, with his brother Calvin, inculcated in their children a strong sense of loyalty. Of Matthew's descendants, especial mention may be made of his son "Squire" Matthew Smith, and of the latter's son, Matthew, who was one of the foremost citizens of Middlefield, and whose wife was a daughter of Laura Root. Samuel Smith, the youngest son of the first Matthew, joined the church after his marriage, and was one of its staunchest supporters. His unusual capacity for high thinking and intelligent citizenship had a great influence. His oldest daughter, Lucy, who married Ambrose Newton, was another devoted member of the church. As librarian of the town library she for years guided the reading tastes of old and young in Middlefield.

The intellectual traits of Samuel Smith were even more marked in his son, Metcalf John Smith, who like David Mack, was the most distinguished citizen of the town during his life. Largely to him and his father is due the emphasis on broad and idealistic thinking which kept the Baptist Church from sinking to the position of being a mere advocate of a distinctive form of baptism. Metcalf J. Smith was a man who embodied in his life what was best and noblest in the church life. Said one who had felt the power of his teaching and example: "His personality was reflected in the persistent labors of our pastor whose hands he consistently upheld under all circumstances. It was reflected in the molding influence of the church upon its young people. He impressed me as few characters have ever done. He always seemed to me like one from another world lent to our little town by a kind Providence. He represented a type of life and breadth of vision of which some of us might have remained forever ignorant had it not been for him."

Calvin Smith's son, Oliver, was another staunch member of the Baptist Church and one of its deacons. No weather was too inclement for him to make the four mile drive to attend Sunday service. Oliver's oldest son, Milton, was for years the chorister. His unbounded musical enthusiasm kept the choir well filled with good voices and faithful attendants at church. The youngest son, Clarkson, was converted in middle life, and was thereafter an exceptionally generous and loyal supporter of the church.

One of the strongest in her loyalty to Baptist principles was Laura Root, a daughter of Deacon Mack of the Congregational Church. The very fact that she was compelled to differ from her relatives in faith made her especially sensitive. To the end of her life "Grandma Root" was a vehement exponent of the scriptural way of baptism. Her testimonies in prayer meeting or in private conversation were marked by a zeal which bore witness to the profundity of her faith.

Among the many others who deserve mention were Henry Hawes, noted for his leadership of the choir; Solomon F. Root, who kept the Center store, and whose kindly spirit won him hosts of friends; "Aunt Amanda" Church, whose zeal for the Baptist cause was never-failing; Morgan Pease and Harlow Loveland, who served as deacons with rare devotion; Harvey Root, in whom Baptist loyalty and business shrewdness were strangely blended; Charles Wright, who could always be counted upon to serve the church in unobtrusive ways, and Mrs. Arnold Pease, whose class in Sunday School was an institution, and whose knowledge of Josephus introduced extrabiblical considerations rare in those days; Daniel Alderman, whose fine tenor voice made him a welcome member of the choir; Asher Pease and his family, and Clark B. Wright, who could always be counted on to be present at services and at business meetings; Howard Smith, whose interest in the church was constant and eager.

HISTORY OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

About the time the first Baptist meetings were held in Middlefield, there began, in the southeast section of the town, another religious movement. As early as 1801 or 1802 the Methodists formed a class under the leadership of Daniel Falley and David

Cross. Among the members of this class were Thomas Ward, Samuel Brown and wife, Jesse Brown and wife, also the Gilberts, Rhoadses, Talcotts, Mrs. Elijah Churchill and Giles Churchill, and at that time or later, the Peltons, Robbinses and Bells. Nathan and Jesse Wright. Mr. Falley subsequently moved to Fulton, New York, and there founded a flourishing Methodist seminary bearing his name. Thomas Ward, who had been a sea captain, overcome with grief at the death of his beloved wife, had with Bible and hymn book gone forth from Boston scarce knowing whither he went. Settling in Middlefield about 1793, he became an active Christian worker, conducting meetings in the absence of the minister, and was known far and wide as "Father Ward." At times in his barn, at others in a barn on the east side of the brook flowing through the meadows in the Den, and sometimes in the Den schoolhouse, meetings were held by various circuit riders until at last a church was formed, which was a part of the Dalton Circuit; afterwards it was a part of the Hinsdale Circuit, and still later this and other churches constituted the Middlefield and Washington Circuit.

In 1827 a movement to build a meetinghouse was started and a site selected. A curious incident occurred when the building began. The two brothers, Nathan and Jesse Wright, were engaged one morning in breaking the ground for the foundations, when a neighbor came and on looking over the ground with them observed that the corner opposite the house of Jesse Wright was a much better location for the church than the one upon which they were working. The brothers then decided that the neighbor's opinion was correct and they at once began the foundations on that site. This is one of the few times when a church site was selected without more or less friction and excitement.

The church was called the "Bethel" and remained and flourished for many years. Here the circuit rider preachers held forth to large congregations with such old-time fervor that at times the neighbors at the top of Churchill Hill, half a mile away, could hear more or less of the sermon. Here many a boy preacher made his first entrance into pastoral life under the fatherly care and guidance of his spiritual leader. On the occasion of quarterly meetings it was not an uncommon site to see sixty teams hitched around this little church, for the "Bethel"

drew its congregation not only from Middlefield but from the neighboring sections of Chester and Worthington as well. In those days its congregation is said to have been as large as that of any other society in town. It was quite the thing for the swains to take their lady friends to the meetings in the Den. Even old Aunt Betty Pinney admitted that when she wanted to hear a down-right good sermon she always went to the "Bethel."

The new ways and unction of the Methodist ministers produced the same results here as elsewhere. The great revival work of 1827-30 was conducted by Rev. Peter C. Oakly and Bradley Shelleck. Cyrus Prindle was one of the successful workers. In this church women had even larger liberty than was accorded them in the Baptist Church and a Miss Barnes is remembered as a preacher of uncommon fervor. There was also a local circuit rider of considerable ability, Rev. Alexander Dickson, grandson of the pioneer settler, James Dickson. Of Rev. Alexander Dickson, a member of another denomination has written, "Mr. Dickson was a tanner by trade, but reconstructed into a Methodist minister, one of the shouting kind." He married Sally Metcalf, a prominent member of the Bethel Church, and spent the latter part of his life in Middlefield.

As early as 1833 there was a faction in this church which thought that the society would be benefitted by moving its house of worship to the Center, and in response to a petition the town of Middlefield voted "that the Methodist Society in Middlefield have liberty to build a house of public worship and horse-sheds for the use of the same on the public ground near the Center meetinghouse." But no action was taken and wiser counsel probably prevailed to prevent the unwise move. But the faction continued agitation and when a committee of town officials reported in 1846 they recommended that the town purchase land of Oliver Blush so that the Methodist Society could build south of the Baptist Church, which, at that time was planning to move to the Center and build a new meetinghouse south of that of the Congregational Society.

It was seven years later, in 1853, that the town voted to permit the Methodist Society to erect a meetinghouse and horse-sheds south of where the town hall now stands. Against the

judgment of the members who lived in the valley, the "Bethel" was taken down and rebuilt on a larger plan at the Center, though, due to difficulties, financial or otherwise, it was many months in reaching completion. The society lost by the change and the correctness of the judgment of the opposition was justified, for, after the removal from the Den, the church never prospered. The strong roots of its power were in the southeast part of the town. It was needed there, for it was accessible



THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
1853-1873

to its constituents in the neighboring sections of other towns. Its necessity at the Center was not so obvious.

For a while the society continued services under Messrs. Shurtleff, Morgan, Boxley, Cobb, Johns and Alexander Dickson. Among the later officers were George Spencer, class leader; John L. Bell, and Mr. Spencer, stewards. Ambrose Smith and Horatio N. Dickson and others were active members. In 1861-62 the society was very much weakened by a large number of deaths and removals occurring not far from the same time. The mem-

bers left were too few to continue the work successfully, and services were finally discontinued some years previous to 1873. In that year the Church brothers bought the property and fitted it up for a vestry and church parlor for the use of the Congregational Society. Later the property was deeded to the church. After the burning of the Congregational Church in 1900 services were sometimes held in the Chapel as it was then called, and when two years later the society bought the Baptist Church for its meetinghouse, the Chapel was moved and joined to the other building on the north side, where it now serves as the Sunday School room of the Middlefield Church.

The principal pastor of the Methodist Society was Rev. Alexander Dickson, who, though not a native of Middlefield, seems to have spent most of his early life there. He learned the tanner's trade, working no doubt, with his father-in-law, John Metcalf, whose business he purchased. As some of the Metcalf's were Methodists, it was probably in the Bethel Chapel in "the Den" that Dickson received the religious inspiration which led him to abandon his trade for that of a minister. After studying at Troy, New York, he became a traveling preacher on various circuits, returning finally to Middlefield to become minister of the Bethel Chapel in its last days.

Dickson's preaching was of the shouting kind, and though he perhaps did not have the intellectual capacity or training of the ministers of the other denominations in Middlefield, he was a zealous, and probably effective, worker in less settled communities. His wife, later known as "Aunt Sally" was an enthusiastic co-worker on the frontier to the north. In 1837 she wrote from a small town in Vermont where the people were "making every effort to get rich," but were "not so well informed as the people in Middlefield." Her husband gives the following brief glimpse of his impressions during the prosperous days of the New England wool growing:

"The preacher in the Baptist Church is a great wool speculator; he has \$40,000 of stock on hand (it is said) now, which is the case, probably in sheep and cattle, horses, etc., and if his preaching is made up on anecdotes and stories, you need not wonder."

"I have a hard field of labor. I preach five times frequently in a week, aside from prayer-meetings. Last week and week before I attended meetings every evening but two. This evening I go four miles to meeting. But the Lord is with me."