

## CHAPTER VII

### THE PERIOD OF ISOLATED FARMING

IT IS difficult for the present generation, which has known or participated in the peaceful rural life of Middlefield during the last half of the nineteenth century, to realize that an entirely different mode of living and working existed in the town during the early years of the century. In retracing our steps from the present day to the time of the installation of Rev. Jonathan Nash we must think of life without the modern inventions which seem necessities to-day. We must picture the residents of Middlefield living in farmhouses provided with great fireplaces to supply precarious heat until iron stoves were gradually introduced; working their farms without the machinery which lightens the labors of men to-day; lighting their houses with tallow candles, and traveling tediously over rough roads first with ox-carts and saddle horses with their limited capacity for passengers, but later with spring wagons drawn by horses.

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of this early period was that most of the inland towns of New England were self-supporting and practically independent of each other in procuring necessities of life. We are prone to think of this feature as the natural result of the energy and ingenuity of the Yankee, but in reality the development of this type came as the result of the economic conditions under which he was forced to live. Without a market for his agricultural products and consequently without the money to purchase imported manufactured goods or the means of transporting them inland, every farmer looked to his farm, his family, and to his neighbor to produce or manufacture the necessities of life.

The reason why the inland farmer had no market for his produce was not primarily because of his distance from the coast. Had a sufficient demand existed in the seaport towns, there would have been built a system of good roads over which the back-country products could have been transported thither. But



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no such roads were created. The plain facts of the case were that even in the coast towns half of the population was engaged in agriculture so that the demand for foodstuffs to support the relatively small number engaged in manufacture, commerce and shipping activities, and also for export to the West Indies and other parts of the country, could readily be supplied by the towns situated on or near the coast or along the navigable rivers. The almost complete absence of inland manufacturing plants of any significance is shown by the fact that in 1810 the only towns of Massachusetts at a distance from the coast which had a population over 3,000 were the large farming communities of West Springfield and Brookfield.

How the agricultural towns maintained themselves with only slight dependence upon the seaboard is a matter of common knowledge. The men raised, slaughtered and salted their own beef and pork. The beef hides, after being tanned by the local tanner, were made into shoes, boots, harnesses, or saddles either at home or by the saddlers and shoemakers. Candles were made from the tallow and soap from the grease. From the flax and wool grown on the farm the women of the household spun, wove, knit and dyed almost all of the summer and winter clothing and household linen. Woolen cloth was finished at the fulling mill and fashioned into suits by the village tailor if there was one. Corn, rye, and in the early days, wheat, ground into flour at the gristmill formed the staple articles of diet. Carpenters made furniture and wagons as well as houses and barns. Blacksmiths made nails and iron parts for wagons and farm implements in addition to shoeing horses. Only firearms, gunpowder, iron, salt, rum, spices and a few dry goods were procured from the coast towns.

In Middlefield, as elsewhere, some of the farmers developed special industries in addition to the general activities just mentioned. David Mack established a potash works on his farm, purchasing ashes from his neighbors at fourteen cents a bushel, and hauling his marketable product to Westfield and Hartford. James Dickson, finding a deposit of clay on his farm, made bricks for the chimneys of the community: At least one house, that of Benjamin Eggleston on the West Hill, was made from the product of Dickson's brickyard. South of where the Factory



Village schoolhouse now stands was a quarry of limestone, where as early as 1797 lime was produced in a primitive kiln. Dr. William Coleman and his successors at the Arthur Pease place operated a distillery located near what is yet known as the "Still Bridge," near the Pease District schoolhouse. In view of the popularity of cider brandy which was an important product of the farmers' apple orchards, it is probable that Dr. Coleman did not restrict the output of his still to medicinal use only.

*Wm Coleman*

In this rapidly growing pioneer town with forested hills and abundant water power lumbering was naturally a thriving industry. Before 1800 there were probably a dozen sawmills on the principal streams. Most of the town carpenters seem to have been interested in these ventures. Elijah Churchill and his sons established on the Den Stream above Rhoads' Mills a sawmill which later became a wood-turning works. Ithamar Pelton operated one sawmill at the McElwain farm and another in Blush Hollow. In 1793, at the height of the boom period William Church and his sons, who were the leading artisans in this line, built a sawmill situated a short distance north of the site of the Church Brothers' lower mill on Factory Brook near a tract of woodland on the eastern side of the valley, which he purchased at the same time. On this stream were also the sawmills of Malachi Loveland at the foot of Johnnyeake Hill, of Amasa Blush in Blush Hollow, and of the Meachams farther north. Still others were operated by Theodore Coats on Coles Brook, by Matthew Smith on the upper part of Den Stream and by some early settler on Tuttle Brook.

The coming of the new people necessitated the building of roads into the outlying portions of the town until only the steep hillsides along the Westfield River branches and the rugged northwest corner remained sparsely inhabited. In the northeast corner where the valley of the "Worthington River" widens sufficiently to permit profitable farming, a number of families settled, the most permanent of whom were the sons of Calvin Smith, so that the locality came to be known as "Smith Hollow." On the Ridgepole Road there were twice as many farms as at present. On the road along the West Hill ridge,





HOUSE OF THOMAS BLOSSOM

HOUSE OF CALVIN SMITH



from the Savery place north to the Washington line there were fifteen farmhouses where to-day there are but three. In the southwest part of the town the two square miles of pasture land known as Johnnycake Hill and the Walnut Hill section was inhabited in 1800 by at least a dozen families who were well connected by roads to the Centers at Middlefield, Chester and Becket.

It is important to note that none of this early building activity took place at the Center, except the erection of the parsonage<sup>1</sup> a quarter of a mile north of the Center. The reason for this was that the Center was simply the geographic middle of the township where citizens met for Sunday worship or for town meetings. Under the conditions already outlined the natural meeting places for trade and industry were the mills and taverns scattered about the town, while the small amount of products exported at this time were hauled by the farmers themselves to distant markets. David Mack's two-story store building, half a mile south of the Center built about 1804, represents perhaps the first serious attempt to draw the currents of trade inward toward the center of the township.

But it was at the taverns situated along the county road from Chester Center to Hinsdale that the social and political life of the community was really fostered. Although these hostelries are thought of generally as ministering mainly to the wants of travelers, emigrants and farmers passing along this thoroughfare, the larger part of the patronage came from the town itself. The three principal taverns within the town, of which mention has already been made, were those of Enos Blossom, David Mack and Oliver Blush. At the first two, most of the town meetings and church services were held during the long period before the building of the meetinghouse, and all of them were natural meeting places of town committees and informal gatherings. As Shays' Rebellion was greatly stimulated by the harangues of agitators at the taverns throughout the state, it is quite likely that the Blossom Tavern, near which the prominent insurgents of Middlefield lived, was the scene of some of this revolutionary spirit.

As a more purely social force the influence of the tavern was

<sup>1</sup> Site of present house of James Cody. (1924)

equally marked. Here were posted notices and here the news from the outside world and gossip from other parts of the town were dispensed to those who gathered there. Here were held also balls, receptions and other festivities. Some of the older inhabitants have spoken of one occasion at the Blush Tavern when the guests marched through the rooms around the center chimney to the tune of "Old Hundred." What has been well said of the tavern in general was no doubt true of those in Middlefield,—that it was the only rural institution "where prosy people broke into merriment and song, and spun yarns of human delight as they had from time immemorial in Merry England."

This jovial atmosphere was, of course, induced to a certain extent by the general drinking habits of the time. Whatever reason may be ascribed for this craving for strong drink,—the ill-balanced diet or the monotony of farm life, or the severity of the climate,—the fact remains that the innholder's bar was a place of relaxation and good cheer. Oliver Blush's ledgers contain long accounts for "grog," "sling," "toddy," and "flip" and other ancient mixtures. "Grog" was a strong mixture of gin and rum with water, and when sweetened with sugar was known as "sling." "Toddy" was a weaker mixture, sweetened and served hot in a large toddy glass. "Flip" was a more elaborate concoction. This popular drink was made in a great earthen pitcher or pewter mug into which was poured a mixture of beer, rum or gin. After sweetening with sugar, molasses or dried pumpkin, and adding ginger or nutmeg, if desired, the finishing touch was given by thrusting in a red hot iron which made the liquor foam and gave it a delightful burnt taste. Beside holidays, the gala occasions for the Blush Tavern were the "training days" when the town youth met according to the law of the state for drill and instruction in military tactics on the parade ground adjoining the meetinghouse. After the exhibition nearly everyone gathered at Blush's Bar to celebrate the event with a glass of stimulating drink.

Although Enos Blossom was at the Arthur Pease place as early as 1780 and is supposed to have built the tavern which still stands in its original style, with its two parts joined at a right angle without a gable, it is possible that it was built at an earlier date. (As early as 1772 the decade before the incorporation of



the town of Middlefield, John Taylor was living near the Pease place. As he is spoken of as "Landlord John Taylor," in 1779, when the town of Murrayfield voted to build a road out to his house to connect with Partridgefield, it is possible that he and not Blossom was the builder and the first tavern keeper here.

In 1786 Blossom sold out to Ebenezer Selden, but tavern-keeping was resumed by Elijah Bartholomew and Russell Gillet from 1791 to 1804 when the property became a private farmstead. After passing through the hands of several occupants it was bought by Dan Pease in 1821, the grandfather of the present owner, Arthur D. Pease. The southwest corner room, which is now used for a sitting-room, originally contained the bar, and the usual outside door has been replaced by a window looking out upon the county road. The room overhead was the ballroom, built with a spring floor, and formerly extending over the present dining-room. The ancient traditions of hospitality which center around this house are still maintained by the Pease family whose guests and friends are entertained there at all seasons of the year.

The prospect of a flourishing village growing up around the Blossom Tavern began to diminish with the establishment in 1784 of a new county road from Westfield to Hinsdale and Pittsfield which followed the west branch of the Westfield River to the foot of Mt. Gobble in Chester where it climbed up the hillside to Middlefield, passing through what is now the Alderman farm. The travel north and south which had previously passed the tavern over the highway through Chester Center was now partly diverted over the new county road which required less hill-climbing. As a result, Ebenezer Selden and the Roots, who had first settled near Blossom's, took up farms bordering on the new thoroughfare. The fact that David Mack opened his house for a tavern in 1785 indicates that he benefitted substantially by the patronage which had previously been enjoyed by Blossom.

David Mack kept tavern in his commodious house for at least fifteen years. Its central location made it a convenient place for holding town meetings and church services before the erection of the meetinghouse. These meetings were held sometimes in the kitchen and sometimes in the barn. One of the chambers was used as a store until a separate structure was built to take care

of this enterprise. So far as is definitely known, this house is the oldest frame dwelling in the town, and its ancient character still remains in spite of the removal of the fireplaces and the addition of a front porch. From 1801 to 1815 an innholder's license was held by David Mack, Jr., so that it seems probable that he continued the tavern business of his father in his own capacious house which he built about 1804 on the east side of the road.

The third and most widely known tavern in Middlefield was opened by Oliver Blush in his father's house at the Center a year or so after his father's death in 1788. This house, long known as the home of Aunt Lucy Newton, is nearly as old as the Mack Tavern. The location of the meetinghouse nearby in 1790 was a considerable stimulus to its business as it was customary for the worshippers on cold Sundays, after being chilled by long sitting in the unwarmed house of prayer, to repair to the tavern to warm themselves at the cheerful fireplace and to consume stimulating beverages at the bar.

The parlor of the tavern where the genteel guests were received was the northwest corner room to the left of the front entrance. Neighbors and patrons of the bar, however, entered the southwest corner room through the side door, this room being the equivalent of the lobby of a modern hotel. Back of this room was the large dining-room facing east and just at the right was the much frequented little room containing the bar. Over this was a stairway leading from the dining-room to the ballroom overhead. The house remains much the same as in tavern days.

*Oliver Blush*

Oliver Blush was a popular landlord throughout his ownership of the tavern from 1790 to 1827. He was genial in disposition and possessed a goodly fund of stories with which he entertained his guests and neighbors. In person he was tall and portly, and he was an inveterate smoker. His connection with the tavern by no means hindered him from being an influential member of the church. Upon retiring in 1827, he turned the tavern over to his nephew, Oliver Smith, 2nd, who ran it for a few years. Smith was a landlord of a different type, abstemious in his habits and



quiet in manner, though decided in his views. As he did not sell spirituous liquors, the tavern, no doubt, lost some of its earlier hilarity under his management, and with the opening of the railroad it was discontinued for lack of patronage.

About 1822 Captain Alexander Dickson opened a tavern in his house two miles north of the Center on the Hinsdale road where the late Mr. Wanzer recently lived. The bar was in the southwest corner room which could be entered directly by a side door. The ballroom was on the second floor. The change of management in the Blush hostelry in the '30's evidently worked to the advantage of the Dickson Tavern, as it was said to be patronized by those from Blush Hollow and elsewhere who craved liquor and a fight. As there are people still living who remember the stage coach stopping twice a week at Dickson's, it must have continued in business until the railroad was opened.

Oliver Blush's ledger shows that his tavern was a center for varied activities. A livery stable and teaming business was a natural adjunct. Horses of visitors and of new settlers not yet owning barns were boarded. Horses, wagons and "slay" were continually rented for trips to Westfield, Hartford and New York State. His oxen were in demand for plowing and for hauling hay and lumber. His stallion sired his neighbors colts. Beside these interests he carried on the regular duties of his farm.

The credit side of the ledger shows in a convincing way how the tavern's patrons with their lack of ready money settled their accounts in work or in produce and is an index of the different trades of the townsmen. Ebenezer Emmons and Aaron Hale did blacksmithing work. Benjamin Pinney, Thomas Swain and Isaac Bartlett were shoemakers, and Eliakim Wardwell and Parker Fellows, harnessmakers. Thomas Wood and Samuel Gray brought in cloth woven by themselves or their families, while Nathan Mann was credited by "making Zeal a coat and pare of Breaches," "Zeal" being Blush's nephew, Barzillai Little, Jr., who worked at the tavern.

Under this system of barter it was inevitable that the tavern should become a place where all sorts of goods were collected and

*Nathan Mann*





HOUSE OF JOHN METCALF

HOUSE OF DR. WILLIAM COLEMAN



exchanged. This is indicated by the variety of articles appearing on the account of Dr. William Coleman, one of the early physicians. Besides maple sugar and other products of the farm the account was credited with "a pare of old overhalls," "two old chears," "one black Hankercher," etc., which would seem to indicate that the doctor turned over to Oliver Blush whatever unusable articles he received from his patients in payment for professional services. It is interesting to note therefore that the first stores in Middlefield started as adjuncts of the Mack and Blush Taverns.

This exchange of produce and work was by no means confined to the trade of the farmer with the tavernkeeper and miller, but took place naturally between the farmers themselves in the necessity of fitting out their farms and households. Although under the conditions previously outlined every citizen including even the doctor and minister was compelled to do more or less general farming for the support of his family and was more or less independent of his neighbors as regards food stuffs, yet, unless he was a "jack of all trades," he was obliged at times to employ a carpenter, weaver or shoemaker, and in return would recompense him with the handiwork of his trade, with ordinary farm labor, or with the produce of his farm. This could take place more readily in a community devoted largely to grazing and dairying where the farmer had a number of spare hours every day to carry on his trade. That these trades were largely incidental to regular agricultural work is amply borne out in the case of Middlefield where the number of artisans in the early days was such that, had they given their time to their special occupations, a population of several thousand would have been required for their support.

Out of this necessity for co-operation developed some of the characteristic social customs of New England. When a citizen built a new house or barn his neighbors turned out in a holiday mood to help him raise the frame. The men were assigned according to their strength and skill to various duties of pike men with long or short poles, and those who went aloft to pin the frame together, whose work was more spectacular and involved some danger and considerable skill. The place of honor was held by the master builder who shouted the orders to the dif-

ferent parties of men at the critical moments. Bees for husking corn and for other large scale operations lightened the incessant labors of the farmer and became social occasions enlivened by music and dancing.

Closely allied to the tavern business was the turnpike movement. The increased travel of homeseekers and traders to the west and north created a demand for improved thoroughfares which many towns, notably in the hill sections of the state, were financially unable to construct. The State therefore granted charters to groups of private citizens who were willing to take over the maintenance and improvement of certain main highways with the privilege of reimbursing themselves through the collection of a toll from the people who used the road.

In western Massachusetts the principal object in the construction of turnpikes seems to have been to find the most feasible road from the Connecticut over or through the Hampshire and Berkshire Hills to Pittsfield and Albany. The first corporation to operate in this region was chartered in 1797 and was known as the Third Massachusetts Turnpike Corporation. The highway under its management ran from Northampton through Chesterfield, Worthington, Peru and Hinsdale to the Pittsfield line, but this route was unsatisfactory on account of its many and steep grades, and also on account of its round-about route for travelers from Springfield and the south.

In 1800, therefore, the Eighth Massachusetts Turnpike Corporation was formed, which made use of the more level highway along the west branch of the Westfield River, from the Westfield line, through what is now Russell, Huntington and the southern part of Chester to the Becket line. This company was also authorized to improve certain roads in Becket and Washington to the Pittsfield line, but the cost of construction in this rugged region proved so great that no continuous turnpike road could be maintained.

This was the situation when, in 1803, the State, acting upon a petition of a hundred names, granted to David Mack, William Sizer, Charles Plumb and their associates a charter for the Chester Turnpike Corporation which authorized them to take over the control of the county highway running through Chester Center and Middlefield Center. The great merit of this road



was that at its southern end it connected with the Eighth Massachusetts Turnpike near the Huntington line while its northerly terminus was near the Hinsdale meetinghouse where it met the Third Massachusetts Turnpike. There was thus made possible a much shorter route between Springfield and Pittsfield, and one which was covered continuously by the turnpike companies.

Just what improvements to the highway were made, or what the profits of the Chester Company were cannot be learned at this day, but that the venture was apparently a promising one at the start seems to be indicated by the incorporation in 1807 of the Dalton and Middlefield Turnpike Company, which was composed mostly of Dalton and Washington men. Their highway ran from the Pittsfield line in Dalton across a corner of Hinsdale and through the eastern part of Washington. It entered Middlefield along the West Hill Ridge and crossed the valley of Factory Brook to Middlefield Center in the location of the present highway.

The advantage claimed for this route was that it shortened the distance between Springfield and Pittsfield still more than the Chester Turnpike had done with its route through Hinsdale. But the cost of improving the grades of the highway on Middlefield town hill, West Hill and in Washington had been underestimated. Moreover, the Middlefield people who would have benefited by these improvements gave no financial support to the corporation, although as a town they were no doubt very glad to give the corporation permission to take over the highway. But no construction was attempted and the project was finally abandoned.

The Chester Turnpike, however, was in operation probably about fifteen years. The first meeting of the incorporators was held at Blush's Tavern. David Mack, Jr., was at one time the secretary, and a number of Middlefield people were no doubt among the stockholders. Only one toll gate was allowed by the charter. As it was provided that the Chester Company should receive one third of the profits of the tollgate of the Third Massachusetts Company at Hinsdale, it seems likely that the gate of the Chester Turnpike was located near the southern end at Chester Center.

The rates of toll which were posted up at the turnpike gate are of interest as they give an idea of the styles of vehicles in common use. For every Coach, Phaeton, Chariot, or other four wheeled carriage drawn by two horses, the charge was twenty-five cents, and three cents for each additional horse; for every cart, wagon, sled or sleigh drawn by two horses, ten cents; for every curricule, a two-wheeled vehicle for two horses, fifteen cents; for every chaise, chair, or other carriage or cart drawn by one horse, twelve and one-half cents. A man and horse got by for five cents; while oxen, cows and horses, led or driven were charged one cent each; and swine and sheep passed for three cents a dozen.

The provision of the charter which throws the most light on the economic policy underlying the operation of the turnpikes in general is the one which states "that nothing in this act shall entitle said corporation to demand and receive toll of any person who shall be passing with a horse, team or carriage to or from his common labor on his farm or to the gristmill, to public worship, military duty or any funeral." In other words, the people to whom the turnpike was of the most use were not required to share in its upkeep except as they traveled to another township.

It is not strange, then, that the turnpike companies did not receive sufficient revenue from through travel to make a reasonable net profit above the expenses of maintaining the highways and the tollgates. The returns of the Third Massachusetts Company showed that for a number of years the net profit did not exceed two per cent. As the towns grew in prosperity, therefore, they took over the turnpike roads whenever the owners were ready to abandon their ventures, and by 1840 most of the main highways were again free.

As already stated the mercantile business in Middlefield seems to have grown out of the trading in miscellaneous articles carried on at the taverns. It was probably as early as 1790 that David Mack opened a store in one of the chambers of his tavern. During these early days his yearly supply of goods could be brought on horseback from Westfield in two trips, these goods consisting, no doubt, of salt, dry goods, spices, powder and shot, and molasses, which were necessities which



the inland farmers could not provide for themselves. As his business grew he built a small one-story building for this purpose adjoining his house on the north, but this structure was also outgrown, and shortly after 1804 a new and commodious, two-story building was erected on the Parsonage Lot near the new dwelling of his son, David Mack, Jr.

By 1810 the trade at the Blush Tavern was such that the starting of a store at the Center seemed a profitable venture. Accordingly a co-operative enterprise was inaugurated with a capital of \$5,000. Edmund Kelso of Chester, whose share was \$1,000 was one of the principal members; as he was appointed the first postmaster of Middlefield in 1813, he was doubtless the storekeeper. The townsmen who were members of the company were Oliver Blush, Captain Nathan Wright and his son, Israel and Dan Pease, Calvin and Captain Matthew Smith, James Dickson, Jr., William Ingham, and John Metcalf.

The company account book kept by Oliver Blush shows that he was actively interested in the success of the store. He not only worked with the carpenters and masons and boarded them at the tavern, but hauled boards from the sawmills as far away as Dalton and sand and stone from near by. The inclusion among the expenses of \$28.60 for thirty gallons of rum and an additional charge of \$1.50 for bringing it from Hartford shows that according to the general custom of the time Blush served rations of grog to the workmen as part of their wages. The building, now the dwelling of Mr. John Cody, was located for convenience at the junction of the turnpike roads, and seems to have been ready for occupancy by the summer of 1811.

Coincident with the origin of trade in Middlefield came the development of the manufacture of woolen goods in Blush Hollow. In 1794 Moses Herrick purchased the property which lay along Factory Brook just south of the highway bridge



in Factory Village, where he erected a fulling mill. North of Herrick lived Samuel Gray, a weaver, whose house was probably situated near the site of the William Blush place. Such were the beginnings of the woolen business in Blush Hol-

low. At this date the manufacture of woolen cloth was not confined to the Hollow but was carried on in many of the farmers' households. The native wool was to be had in abundance as the rough hillsides from which the forests had been cleared made excellent pasturage for sheep. But the cloth thus woven had to go through the final process of fulling or finishing in order to make the weave firm and give body to the fabric, and the establishment of the fulling mill at this early date is evidence that there was much domestic manufacture of woolen clothing and household goods.

About 1800 Amasa Blush, a younger brother of the Center tavernkeeper, bought Herrick's property and operated the fulling mill for several years. Apparently this site had some drawbacks for about 1805 he erected a larger fulling mill farther north near the leaning elm tree on land he had previously purchased from Mr. Gray. On the opposite side of the highway

*Amasa Blush*

he built his house. The lumber for these buildings was no doubt furnished from the sawmill which he set up on the west bank of the stream. Below Herrick's mill, on the east side of the brook, another fulling mill was built and operated by Ambrose Church at some time between 1801 and 1813.

Up to this time all the woolen goods made from fine wool had been made in England and imported for the use of the people in the coast towns, but with the passage of the Embargo and Non-intercourse Acts of 1807 and 1809 this trade was suddenly cut off and the demand for fine wool for the domestic manufacture of broadcloth was created. At this juncture America was fortunate in being able to import the Merino breed of sheep in large quantities from Spain and many farmers began the culture of the fine wool in place of the coarse wool furnished by the native stock. Pittsfield became in a few years the center of the wool trade of the state both on account of its situation in the midst of the principal wool growing section and on account of its early establishment of the manufacture of broadcloth and of carding machines run by water power. In 1815 there were 8,000 sheep raised within a mile of that town.



These conditions were accentuated by the War of 1812 which created a further demand for woolen clothing and blankets for the army and navy. Prominent among the farmers of Middlefield who specialized in the home manufacture of these articles was Uriah Church, Jr., a grandson of the Scotch-Irish weaver, James Dickson. His entire output was taken by the government. In 1814 he moved to Blush Hollow where his cousin, Ambrose Church, built for him the large square house which is to-day the oldest building in this vicinity. Beside the brook, opposite his house he erected a two-story building where he set up a carding machine for making rolls of wool to be spun into yarn in the farmers' homes. He also purchased Ambrose Church's fulling mill and the surrounding property, and took up this branch of the industry also.

The following year Amasa Blush enlarged his business by erecting a three-story woolen mill which stood south of the fulling mill and just north of the leaning elm tree. Like his new competitor in the woolen business, Blush installed carding machinery and the plant was known as "Blush's Carding Mill." On the ground floor Blush operated a grist mill. From its mention in a recent history of woolen manufacture it was probably one of the largest mill buildings in western Massachusetts in its day.

In the northeastern part of the town industrial activity of a different sort was developed during this period. About the beginning of the century a large deposit of fine quality soapstone was discovered at the top of Smith Hollow Hill on land owned by William Ingham and William Skinner, Jr.<sup>2</sup> The property was purchased by Barnabas Billings who sold it to three Northampton men by the name of Shepherd. How it was possible to induce men of capital from outside to invest in an enterprise situated at such a distance from the coast towns is still a mystery. Probably the fact that soapstone when first quarried can be sawed as easily as wood into the desired shape and size and soon becomes sufficiently hard and durable for building purposes was deemed a compensating factor in estimating the expense of transportation. At any rate the Middlefield Free Stone Corporation was formed, the members of which

<sup>2</sup> Near the Howard Smith farm now owned by the Teffts family.

were Boston men who had purchased the property of the Shepherds for \$10,000. The stone was quarried and shipped in a rough state to the metropolis where it was manufactured into the different materials for building. The annual amount of this business in 1813 is reported as \$12,000. During this year, however, the company seems to have been in financial difficulties as the directors petitioned the General Court for permission to conduct a lottery to raise additional funds for carrying on the work.

The quarrying of this stone was made possible only by the construction of the county road from Chester to West Worthington through Smith Hollow in 1811. This road furnished a comparatively level route through Huntington and Westfield to Hartford where the soapstone was undoubtedly shipped to Boston by water.

Some local use was made of the soapstone for door steps and fireplaces in the old homesteads, but this was negligible. Nothing further is heard of the operations of the Free Stone Corporation, and the enterprise was apparently abandoned soon after the War of 1812, when the treasurer, Alden Bradford, was empowered to sell all rights and title to this land to Asa and Oliver Smith of Smith Hollow.

In the period preceding the War of 1812 Middlefield, in accordance with the prevailing sentiment of New England politics was strongly Federalist and bitterly opposed to the second war with Great Britain. When the town voted that the war was "inexpedient" there were only seven citizens who felt the larger patriotic issue sufficiently to go on record as approving the government's course. These men were: Captain Matthew Smith, William Skinner, William Church, Green H. Church, Warren Church, Lieutenant Alexander Dickson, and Deacon John Newton. It is interesting to note that Uriah Church and Amasa Blush, who through their woolen manufacturing activities were to benefit probably as much as any citizens by the war, were not in favor of it politically.

During the first part of the war Massachusetts was inactive, refusing to send its militia outside the state for repelling British invasions in other parts of the country. David Mack, Jr., is said to have obtained his title as "General" while in command



of militia around Boston at this time. In 1814, however, when the Maine Coast was threatened, Governor Strong called for troops to defend her northern counties. All the Middlefield volunteers seem to have been members of Captain Marvin's company of Colonel Enos Foot's regiment and were probably recruited by David Mack, Jr., who held the rank of major. These volunteers were Matthew Smith, lieutenant; Solomon Root, sergeant; Abel Cheeseman, Clark Durant, Philip Meacham, John Skinner, Artemas Ward and Lloyd West. The alarm was soon over and after remaining in camp forty days during the fall they were reviewed by Governor Strong and discharged November 7.

As regards the religious activities of the town following the installation of Pastor Nash, it is not to be thought that the unanimity with which he was chosen meant that all antagonisms were thereby wiped out. For twenty-five years there was no other church, it is true, but so far as the records show there were, during that period, only thirty-five who joined the Congregational Society on profession of faith, and only thirty who transferred their membership from other churches, and this increase was probably offset by the removals of other members to distant places. It seems likely that a great many citizens did not feel the necessity of joining the society so long as they were in any case taxed for the support of the ministry and provided with a seat in the meetinghouse.

As already indicated, there was a strong element of dissent among Middlefield people, due to the growth of Baptist and Methodist teachings and to the repression of the "New Light" adherents in eastern Connecticut from whence many of the Middlefield pioneers came. When a Baptist Church was formed in Partridgefield West Parish (later Hinsdale) in 1797 a number of prominent Middlefield citizens became members, and they naturally felt that their taxes in support of the Congregational minister might now be abated. The Congregationalists, however, were in the majority. They maintained the position that their church was entitled to the support of all citizens of whatever religious belief, and in this they were upheld by the state law which provided that the church of the majority in any town should be supported by all the citizens therein.





SCHOOLHOUSE IN WEST DISTRICT  
SCHOOLHOUSE IN NORTH DISTRICT



This issue grew in importance as the Baptists gained converts among the leading families of the town, but the times were not ripe for toleration. To enforce the statute the standing order deemed it necessary to forcibly seize upon the property of an occasional recalcitrant Baptist who refused to pay the minister tax. Colonel David Mack is said once to have paid a visit to Matthew Smith's farm, taking from his indignant but unresisting cousin a gentle cow which he sold for this purpose. Such measures naturally engendered much bitterness between the sects and gave a stronger impulse to the Baptist movement.

Finally in 1805 the town adopted a more liberal policy toward the dissenters by voting to abate the ministerial taxes of those Baptists and Methodists who had for two years been bona fide members of Baptist and Methodists Societies and who have contributed regularly to the support of their preachers. This change however, came too late to affect the attitude of the dissenters toward the standing order. Had the abatement of these taxes been allowed from the beginning it seems likely that lacking the stimulus of persecution a separate church might not have been formed in Middlefield.

In 1817 a Baptist Society was formed and a meetinghouse soon erected about a mile east of the Center near the cross roads by the cemetery. At about the same time a class for the study of Methodism was formed in the Den, and the growth of this movement was such that a chapel, called "the Bethel," was erected by the Methodist Society in 1827 across from the Jesse Wright place.<sup>3</sup> The wide influence of these centers of religious activity are described at greater length in a later chapter.

How the township could support three different churches can be better understood when it is realized that during this period Middlefield had the largest population in its history. The roads existing to-day, and many others long since abandoned, as the map facing page 90 shows, were lined with small farms. When we consider the large area necessary for the pasturing of cattle and sheep and the limited amount of land which is suitable for tillage, the conclusion is reached that Middlefield was really over-populated at this time. This is also indicated by the continuous migratory movement of its

<sup>3</sup> Where W. E. Prew now lives. (1924).

citizens to other parts of the country. Under these conditions nothing is more natural than that those who did not inherit the farms of their fathers or who could not adapt themselves to the different conditions encountered in the hill country should take the first opportunity that offered to secure cheaper lands in New York State and Ohio. If we include with the emigrating families the unmarried young men over twenty-one who sought to better their fortunes elsewhere, we find forty who had left by 1790; fifty-eight more by 1800; ninety-five more by 1810, and ninety-one more by 1820, making a total of two hundred eighty.

As to the known destination of those emigrating from Middlefield, more than one-half went to other towns in Massachusetts and New England; about a quarter settled in New York State; one-sixth in Ohio and the remainder in scattering western states. Colonel David Mack's family of thirteen married children illustrates these movements. In spite of the fact that the comfortable financial condition of the family tended toward stability, his three sons eventually went to other parts of Massachusetts, where better business and professional opportunities existed. Of his ten daughters, four lived and died in Middlefield; two moved to Hinsdale; three settled with their husbands in New York State, and one in Ohio.

As the families making their homes in New York State were scattered through many towns in the central part of the state, the movement was not an organized one. Albany with its facilities for trade attracted the Durants and Newtons. At Manlius settled Azariah and Joseph Smith, the former being taken into partnership by John Meeker, an earlier emigrant from Middlefield, who had become a successful merchant in Onondaga County. At Warren there was a group of Middlefield farmers living near each other consisting of Warren Mack, Jacob Robbins, John Ward and Zebulon Isham. At Meridian settled Daniel and William Ingham and Parsons P. Meacham, each of whom married a daughter of Calvin Smith.

The emigration to Ohio, however, was confined almost wholly to Lake and Geauga Counties and the northern part of Portage County situated contiguously in the Western Reserve in the northeastern corner of the state. The first to go seems to have



been Benjamin Blish, who after making an arduous trip to Mentor in the winter of 1803-4 to purchase his land, returned to assist his family in journeying thither in the summer of 1805. Two years later a considerable party consisting of the several families of Eggleston and Bissell, besides those of Samúel Taylor and Captain Phineas Perkins, left for Mantua, spending forty-five days on the road. Some of these finally settled a few miles further west at Aurora where they were joined a few years later by the Middlefield families of the Spencers, Warren Little and Epaphroditus Loveland.

*Samuel Taylor Jr.*

September 11, 1810, sixteen citizens of Becket formed a corporation known as the Becket Land Company for the purpose of purchasing the unoccupied township of Windham in Portage County, Ohio, which was situated about fifteen miles southeast of Aurora. The following May a church was organized among prospective emigrants with the assistance of Rev. Jonathan Nash of Middlefield and two other ministers, and the company set out for their new home shortly afterward. One of the original sixteen members was Isaac Clark, who a few years before had married Anna, daughter of Colonel David Mack. Alpheus C. Russell, also of Middlefield, who had married Elizabeth Conant, a niece of the organizer of the land company, was apparently one of the early emigrants to Windham. At a later date they were joined by the families of John Smith, Jr., Champion Smith, Amasa Little and also by two sons of Jacob Robbins from the Middlefield Colony in Warren, New York.

In Geauga County the family of Gideon Russell, Jr., of Middlefield was the first among the settlers in the town of Russell, now Huntsburg. About eight miles south of this town is the town of Middlefield which is supposed to have been named for the Massachusetts town by some early settlers in the region like the Russells, but the fact has not been established. Jonathan and Joseph Ely settled at Bainbridge to which place came also Justus Bissell who had first settled at Aurora. Many of the other early inhabitants were from Becket and Washington. Several instances of the moving of families from one Middlefield

Colony to another and the occasional intermarriage of the children of these families testifies to the strong bond of friendship formed in the old Massachusetts town.

It would seem at first as though this steady loss of citizens would have a considerable effect on the number of people remaining in town. We should note, however, that the period of greatest emigration came directly after the town had received its greatest population; that with all the outflow the number of inhabitants did not drop below 700 until 1840, and that even the population at this date, 685, was considerably greater than the number in the first census, of 1790, which was 605. The reason for this was that the natural increase of the families remaining in town together with the newcomers was sufficient to counteract a large part of the loss by emigration.

Aside from the loss of valuable leaders in town affairs, however, the emigration during this period was not, on the whole, detrimental to the town. It was instrumental in correcting an over-populated condition. While it lessened the number of polls and increased the amount of taxation for each farmer, this extra cost was probably offset by the increased profits which the farmers derived from the extra pasture land purchased from those who left town.

The growing production of sheep makes it evident that the rugged Middlefield pastures were at this time steadily increasing in value. In a later chapter it will be shown that in spite of the gradual decline in population, the town of Middlefield, entering upon a period of prosperity, attained an enviable position in agriculture, manufacture and trade.