

CHAPTER VIII

EARLY FARMHOUSES AND THEIR BUILDERS

IN TRYING to reproduce in imagination the Middlefield whose history has been followed to the year 1815, it is of great help to turn to the houses which the pioneers built, and which are in no inconsiderable numbers, still standing on the ridges. Doubtless the first houses were log cabins in the primitive clearings, but this stage did not last long in the settlement of such a town as Middlefield, for all except those who passed on to some other land speculation after a brief stay on the rugged hilltops, proceeded to build genuine houses just as soon as their farms were in anything resembling running order. They came from settled Connecticut and Massachusetts towns, and they had no idea of remaining under pioneer conditions a moment longer than was necessary. Sawmills were early set up, as mentioned in Chapter VII, and from the trees around them, pine, hemlock or hardwood the settlers began to reproduce the farm buildings with which they were familiar in their original homes. Within a very few years after the first rush to the new territory and the opening of the first roads worthy of name, house building was under way all over the new township.

The methods of building in those days are well known, for they lingered on far down into the nineteenth century in remoter regions of New England, and were reproduced in the wooded regions of the West. Planks and clapboards were sawed as a rule, but the heavy hardwood beams and joists were more often hand-hewed and laboriously worked into shape by adz and broadaxe. House frames were elaborately fitted and morticed, the easy nail-driving habits of the later time being unknown, for nails were hard to make and wooden pins were regarded as preferable for frames. When the time came for erecting a house the event took on perforce a community character, for few families possessed the man-power to raise and pin

together the oak, maple or beech frames. The "house-raising" or "barn-raising" assumed the aspect of a sort of festival. Under the direction of the master builder the men were assigned to the different tasks according to their size and strength. With shouts and cheers the "men with pike poles" were commanded to raise the sides while the lighter and more daring experts waited the stentorian summons for "men on top pounding" to scale the wavering framework and drive together the mortices or hammer home the wooden pegs. All over the rugged hills of Middlefield one must imagine neighbors gathering frequently during these years to assemble the framework of houses and barns, on which occasions an ample feast, and a generous ration of hard liquor, were customarily provided.

Houses thus built were capable of lasting almost indefinitely if their two vulnerable points were attended to: viz., the roofs and the sills, and there are numerous houses in Middlefield standing firm and apparently indestructable after a century and a half, their age marked by shrinking and settling here and there, giving their outlines a quaintness and homeliness, but their roofs well protected by the frequent shingling and their sills either carefully kept from wet or, in some cases renewed after years of pressure and nearness to the damp earth had developed decay. On the other hand, a house of this type, no matter how heavily built, is very certain to fall rapidly to pieces if roof and sills are allowed to weaken, and the abandoned farmhouse of New England is destined to rapid and complete obliteration under snow and rain. So dozens of the early farmhouses which in the years about 1800 dotted the entire township have not only fallen in but have completely disappeared, their sites discoverable only by the cellar-holes, and the straggling rose bushes, lilacs and apple trees near them; while neighboring houses, often earlier in construction but properly protected, still stand as firmly as when first erected.

Among these survivors of the early days excellent examples are found in house building of the Connecticut and Massachusetts farmers of the epoch. To the student of the modest "Georgian" or "Colonial" houses the Middlefield hills furnish a museum of perfectly preserved specimens, some of which, alas, seem destined to perish in the not distant future since their

location renders them unlikely of preservation. The mortality among the houses of this type has been grave in the last twenty years, and several of the remaining ones have been unoccupied for so long that their stability is seriously imperilled.

Partly then as a memorial of the noble old New England farm-houses, fated to disappear under the pressure of decay and storm, as well as of those that still stand in good preservation it is well to pause and note some of the characteristic buildings of that epoch. But first it is well to record what has been gathered, probably a mere fragment of the whole truth, about their builders.

Green H Church

From scattered notices and traditions we know something of the men who were the leading builders of the early days. Such were three members of the Church family, William Church the first settler of that name and two of his sons, Green Hungerford Church and Ambrose Church. About all that is known about the first two is that they were "carpenters and cabinet-makers," and perhaps also "clock-makers." It is also known that William Church besides building his own house, which stood until 1888, was master builder for the meetinghouse, as described in Chapter VI. Green Church is also known to

Ambrose Church

have built two houses, as noted below. Of Ambrose Church we have a fuller picture, showing that he was one of the traditional "Connecticut Yankee" type, a versatile genius—a carpenter, cabinetmaker, machinist and millwright. He tinkered at everything, even having tried to make a perpetual motion machine at one time. After building at least three houses and one mill in Middlefield, he moved to Lebanon Springs, New York, and later to Canandaigua where he and his sons built and owned the first planing mill and also built some of the finest houses.

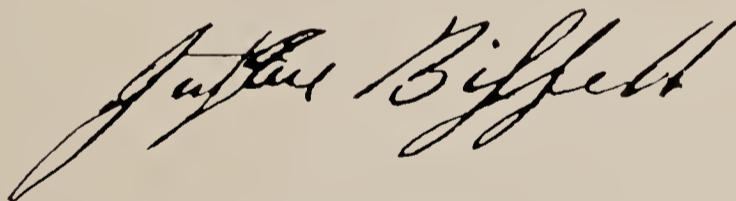
Another master builder was Ithamar Pelton, who was distinctly of the architectural aristocracy of those days. Before

coming to Middlefield from East Windsor, Connecticut, he already had high standing as a church builder, having built, tradition says, no less than thirteen. He was one of the committee of three in charge of the meetinghouse in 1791, but in spite of his reputation he was called to account in 1792 and

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ebenezer Pelton". The signature is written in dark ink on a light background.

“ordered to do all in his power to nail caps over the windows where it is painted, and where the work in the inside is not sufficiently nailed, to nail the same sufficiently and nail cleats on the roof, where the snow drives through the same.” It is quite probable that Mr. Pelton’s economy in nails was due to their high cost, which made them in early days much more valuable than timber. As late as 1814 they were worth a shilling a pound.

We hear also of Alpheus Russell, the third of the three carpenters placed in charge of building the church; of Justus Bissell, Elijah and Giles Churchill, and others as having been carpenters, but as a rule no record was kept as to which of them if any, built any particular house. Yet a keen curiosity is aroused by the evidence of difference in taste and inventiveness shown within the confines of this single hill-town. Scarcely any

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Justus Bissell". The signature is written in dark ink on a light background.

two houses were exactly alike. They differed in pitch of roof, in relation of front to depth, in spacing of windows, in character of doormoldings, occasionally in arrangement of rooms. Two or three houses have elements of oddity in their plans. Some have a mechanical character, others show feeling for proportion. In short, this little hill-town illustrates once more the generalization of a recent writer who states:

“Perhaps we instinctively admire the successes and ignore the failures of these early builders, which is both a natural and a generous thing to do. Certainly every country builder was by no means gifted with even a faint spark of architectural genius. Many were downright stupid, but

most of them, if we are to judge from their work, were strangely endowed with an inherent sense of architectural fitness."¹

None of these Middlefield houses, of course, rivaled in size and pretentiousness the contemporary seaport houses of New England merchants, nor the finest of the mansions of the Connecticut and other river valleys. It was not to be expected that this late-settled community of pioneers should include men of sufficient wealth to erect the square mansions, with central passage ways, doors on each side as well as in front, and ornamental railings masking the low pitch roof; or the exceedingly refined hip-roof houses, almost Italian in their feeling, which one sees in the rich meadow lands of southern New England. But within the limits set by nature and by the capital of the settlers, the old time carpenters did work that their descendants may well hold in affectionate reverence.

Much of the charm of the early New England farmhouse lies in its location and surroundings, especially in the valley towns where meadows generally stretched around or before the buildings and wooded knolls rose behind. When the elm trees set out by the early settlers had grown to giant proportions, overshadowing the farm in all the unsurpassed grace of the full grown tree, the whole group of buildings was often glorified. In Middlefield the settlers had a different problem to meet, with the heavy snow and wet hillsides, and they were driven to locate their houses with primary regard for drainage. Thus they are frequently placed on small knolls by the roadside, giving them an isolated and rather commanding position but making them less cosily picturesque than the farms of the lower valleys. For this reason it is often difficult to secure an adequate photograph of many an excellent old house in Middlefield. Another habit of the settlers was that of setting out a row of maples in front of the house and often along the road on each side of it, making a charming approach and a shaded dooryard but almost concealing the house from observation except in winter. Several of the pictures given in this chapter and elsewhere in the book illustrate this feature of the Middlefield farms, which was, of course, characteristic of all New England.

The most primitive type of house found throughout New

¹ "White Pine"; October, 1919.

England is that of the single-story house with a high-pitched, gabled roof. The high pitch prevented snow from pressing with too great weight, and also gave several rooms on the second floor under the roof. It is possible to identify several houses of this sort as having been built at early periods in the settling of Middlefield. Such, for instance, is that of Enoch Crowell² built some time between 1790 and 1800, still standing half way between the Center and Blush Hollow much as it was 120 years ago except that it has been painted red, and has had a door cut into the kitchen where a window probably stood originally. Another dwelling³ equally old somewhat modified by later additions, is the house of Thomas Blossom, 1787-1804 originally built on that windswept spot on the eastern slope of the main ridge known as Blossom Corner, but moved in the '30's to the Center. As the picture shows it has the low eaves and simple lines of the earliest buildings. Another, exceptionally well preserved, is the house⁴ built after 1801 by Dan Pease on the edge of the Worthington slope, far to the northward on the Ridgepole Road. Oldest of all now standing is the house⁵ William Taylor built not long after 1781 on the West Hill, modified by additions but still retaining its primitive character.

Other houses of this type still exist as wings or ells to later constructions, as in the Ingham house⁶ where the first single-story, gable house erected by Erastus Ingham in 1788 was added as a wing to the later house, not dissimilar in type, built in the '30's or '40's. The same thing happened with the house⁷ north of the Center probably built by Daniel Chapman, between 1780 and 1800, which now stands as an ell to a larger and later structure said to have been built by Alpheus Russell or Solomon Root. Not infrequently houses of this sort have been subjected to remodeling which now almost entirely conceals their primitive traits. A house⁸ on Windsor Street about a half mile from its junction with the Chester Road, must have been built early

² Now occupied by Ralph Pease. (1924)

³ Now occupied by Thomas Mulcay. (1924) See illustration page 93.

⁴ See illustration page 120.

⁵ Now owned by Mr. Eden. (1924) See illustration page 42.

⁶ Where Samuel C. Willard now lives. (1924) See illustration page 196.

⁷ Dwelling of G. E. Cook. (1924)

⁸ The Elbert Pease house where W. Pierce now lives. (1924)

HOUSE OF DAN PEASE
HOUSE OF THOMAS DURANT



HOUSE OF ENOCH CROWELL
HOUSE OF ISAAC GLEASON



in the nineteenth century either by Elijah White or Samuel Little, but during its long occupancy by members of the Pease family it was undoubtedly modified by having a door of the 1840 type cut on the gable end and sundry other minor alterations made.

A still more emphatic change has been made in the appearance of an unusually well-built house⁹ of this type which was erected by Thomas Durant, on the North Road, near the Peru line about 1800, known for the greater part of its existence as "the Meacham place." Here a gable has been added over the front door, which bears the evidences of the moldings of the '30's, and was without much doubt a modification made by Philip Meacham when he bought the place in that decade. In all other respects the house is typical. Finally there may be mentioned the very old house¹⁰ on Windsor Street near the cemetery, which was built by Timothy Allen doubtless early in his stay between 1781 and 1820, but which has been altered out of all resemblance to the primitive type, by the addition of dormers, a piazza, and a large wing and the destruction of the original interior arrangement.

Fully as early in its appearance was the gambrel-roofed house, which was substantially the same as the preceding type, except that the break in the line of the roof gave greater headroom on the second floor. The fitting of the frame called for more elaborate cutting and planning, but it seems to have been considered worth while for a great many of the earliest built houses, still preserved, were constructed in this way. Here for instance is the house¹¹ probably built by Dr. William Coleman, 1781-1800, which in spite of the addition of a modern piazza retains its original symmetry of proportion and attractiveness of appearance. Another, smaller and less regular, is the house¹² built in 1803 by Ambrose Church. Still another, larger and preserved in almost complete perfection is that built by Amasa Graves not long after 1782.¹³ Another equally old, but not now in

⁹ Where Victor Hoskeer now lives. (1924) page 120.

¹⁰ Summer residence of Dwight McElwain.

¹¹ Where Ralph Bell now lives. (1924) See illustration page 99.

¹² The dwelling now occupied by W. J. Adams. (1924)

¹³ The old Graves homestead where Harry Pease now lives. (1924)

existence, is the house built by Samuel Jones on the Chester Road, probably before 1780, shown in the picture in Chapter VI (page 73). And not far from that stood another of the type, built by John Metcalf, about 1807, and known chiefly as "the Metcalf place."¹⁴ It still remains after a fashion, although completely altered by rebuilding and a considerable amount of elaborate decoration, besides a large wing.

Most picturesquely placed were two others of this sort. One,¹⁵ on the southern part of the West Hill, was built by Eli Crowell in 1800, but has been occupied by successive generations of the Graves family for nearly a century. It stands at the edge of the plateau forming the top of the hill, just where the road plunges down, commanding a wide sweep over the valley of Factory Brook to the hills forming the main Middlefield Ridge. Save for the addition of a piazza it has been little changed since it was built. Still more strikingly placed was the house built by Benjamin Blish,¹⁶ between 1780 and 1790 and occupied for many years by Elisha Mack, Jr., which although standing on the windswept summit of Johnnycake Hill and deserted for a dozen years, has so far resisted the destructive force of winter snows and summer rains, a tribute to the strength of its construction.

Looked at directly from in front the gambrel-roofed house suggested heaviness but from any angle which showed the side it was and is charmingly picturesque. In most of the Middlefield examples the gambrel feature appeared on both front and rear but in one early house the long sloping rear roof, carried down to the first story, made its appearance.¹⁷ The dormer windows in the above house are recent additions, they seem not to have been known among the hill-builders of the eighteenth century. The two types just discussed were confined to the smaller houses, and the earlier ones. Only one aberrant example is found of a gambrel house built as late as 1810.

The farmer who felt more ambitious or had greater means early replaced his log hut with a farmhouse of a more spacious

¹⁴ The summer residence of Mrs. W. A. Pearson. (1924) page 99.

¹⁵ Dwelling of Willis B. Graves. (1924)

¹⁶ See page 534.

¹⁷ House of Jesse Pelkey. (1924) See page 46.



HOUSE BUILT BY AMBROSE CHURCH
HOUSE OF ELI CROWELL

type, the two-story, gabled house which stands in tradition as the typical New England farmhouse. Architecturally these houses are perhaps less attractive to modern eyes than the single-story, gabled houses or the gambrel-roofed, but to their builders they represented a higher stage of comfort and, presumably of elegance. As a rule the pitch of their roof was not so acute as that of the single-story house, and, as all the architectural world is aware, they generally limited any external ornament to the decorated front door. There is something rather bare and barn-like in their lines, at times, but they are capable, under the shadow of fine trees and attractive surroundings of presenting a simple dignity, and to the real New Englander their whole aspect breaths solidity and rural comfort. There is one of the earliest houses of this type still surviving almost unchanged in its external features. This was the first important house at the Center,¹⁸ built by Joseph Blush about 1783, and used as a tavern by Oliver Blush, 1792-1827 and by Oliver Smith, 2nd, 1831-1833. The wing must be nearly as old as the main body of the house. The door cut in the corner is commonly associated in tradition with the fact that the House was an Inn and the door in question was to give direct access to the taproom from the street, leaving the other doors for visitors of a different sort.

Another house¹⁹ of this kind, superior in some respects to the Blush Tavern is standing on the North Road, about two miles from the Center, also known to have served as a tavern. It was built by Green Church for Captain Alexander Dickson about 1802 and furnished rooms and food for travelers on the Albany Road for a generation. The picture shows the usual corner door, cut into the taproom, and gives some idea of the handsome fan-light front door. Unfortunately this well built and still solid house has been virtually abandoned and seems destined to early ruin when once the elements get the opportunity to penetrate its roof or windows.

Green Church, the builder of this house, continued his activity into the next period and at a time when new forms of house decoration and planning were entering Middlefield he repeated the primitive farmhouse lines with fidelity to his earlier ideals.

¹⁸ See page 40.

¹⁹ Where Mr. Wanzer lived. See page 49.

In 1834, for instance, he built for his brother, William Church, Jr., a house²⁰ on the West Hill which still stands, an excellent example of the original type of farmhouse. There is another house²¹ also, on the North Road, built in 1827 for another Dickson, James Dickson, Jr., which, like the Church house on the West Hill is a perfect example of the early spirit and one is tempted to find here also, the hand of Green Church, who had built the Alexander Dickson house on the same road.

The David Mack house,²² one of the earliest in the community, built in 1781 and believed to be the oldest frame house in town, and still standing firmly on the southwestern brow of the highest part of the ridge, is of this type, but it has been considerably modified by later rebuilding as the picture on page 73 shows. The nature of the cornice is such as to reveal a later addition, and the pitch of the roof is rather higher than was customary in the first farmhouses. The front door, too, has the moldings and proportions of the '30's and '40's. The two chimneys are, of course, a later modification. Since the photograph in the text was taken the Mack house has been still farther altered so as to meet the taste of its present owner, by having additional windows cut, receiving a piazza and undergoing a considerable shifting of the interior partitions. Nevertheless, the original frame and dimensions stand the same as when the deacon erected it, a monument to the sound construction of those days.

Another example of this most characteristic form of house is the house²³ built by Calvin Smith, about 1788 on the Ridgepole Road, noteworthy, like the Dickson Tavern, for its front door. It also has a side door, and this may indicate that it was a tavern. At the foot of Ridgepole Road, on the meadows of the Den stream stands still another fine example of this type, the house²⁴ built by Jesse Wright in 1810, still preserving the good proportions of roof and door, although a trifle too regular in the spacing of windows to satisfy the highest demands. Still another, little changed on the exterior, although deprived of its original

²⁰ Dwelling of Mr. Drozd. (1924)

²¹ Summer house of Judge Birnie. (1924)

²² Summer home of Rev. John Brittan Clark of Washington, D. C. (1924)

²³ Dwelling of Frank A. Cottrell. (1924) See page 93.

²⁴ Dwelling of W. E. Prew. (1924) See page 126.



HOUSE OF MATTHEW SMITH, JR.
HOUSE OF ALPHEUS RUSSELL

HOUSE OF JESSE WRIGHT
HOUSE OF ISRAEL PEASE

chimney, is the house²⁵ built by Matthew Smith, about 1820 on Windsor Street. And another is the house²⁶ built by Alpheus Russell in 1802 or Solomon Root later and now joined to a dwelling built some years before by Daniel Chapman. This junction may have been made at a later time and, in connection with it, the present position of the main body of the house, with its gable to the road, is an exceedingly uncommon location for the first decade of the century. The house bears evidence also of rehandling in other respects but seems to be genuinely one of the early period.

A house²⁷ of this type bearing marks of primitive construction somewhat obscured by commonplace and mechanical later "improvements" is one on the "Ridgepole Road" built by Israel Pease at some time during his long residence on this farm about 1789. The two side doors on the south side are interesting features suggesting use of the house as a tavern, although there is no record of any such status. Behind the house may be caught a glimpse of the remarkable collection of unrelated and disconnected barns and farm buildings which, placed at all sorts of angles, made this farm a byword for a "cluttered" appearance in the later years of the nineteenth century.

There is another type of farmhouse which, more than any of the preceding forms suggests to the present day observer elegance and refinement of line, namely the hip-roofed houses. Probably no form of "colonial" house has been more admired or studied and none is more generally imitated by modern architects, owing to the opportunities for subtle balance of proportion. Especially does this type flourish in Connecticut and in the Connecticut Valley, to which it undoubtedly came from England where the prototypes exist in many English country and city houses. Middlefield has not many of these.

A good example is that of Uriah Church, Jr., in the Factory Village. Built by Ambrose Church in 1814, it is sparingly decorated by a narrow frieze of triglyph-like moldings, and the front doorway has side pilasters and overhead moldings of a similar character. As the picture shows it is now disfigured by

²⁵ Where Richard Sweeney lives. (1924) See page 126.

²⁶ Dwelling of G. E. Cook. (1924) See page 126.

²⁷ Owned by Frank Chipman. (1924) See page 126.



HOUSE OF CAPT. TIMOTHY McELWAIN

HOUSE OF ITHAMAR PELTON

HOUSE OF URIAH CHURCH, JR.

a piazza whose posts bear "ginger-bread work" of the most offensive kind, and by a front door of the '60's or later, but the proportions of the house are excellent and the spacing of the windows harmonious, bearing testimony to the good taste of the "Yankee genius" who built it. Another example, standing in excellent condition is that of Walter Smith but this was built late in the period (about 1823) and shows signs of rough construction about the front door and too mechanical regularity in the spacing of the windows. It is, however, exceedingly well preserved and has suffered less than the Church house from modifications at the hands of builders of the black-walnut era.

The most interesting house²⁸ of this sort has but recently fallen into ruin, the house built by Ithamar Pelton, which was noteworthy for the richness of its exterior woodwork, on the cornice, and in its pilaster-like moldings at the angles and in its elaborate doorway, a photograph of which is here given. It dates from somewhere between 1788 and 1800 in all probability.

Another hip-roof house very early in its construction was that of Timothy McElwain which was square or nearly so in plan and approximates the familiar "colonial mansion" type of the Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts seaport towns. Here we find one of the best preserved "Georgian" buildings anywhere in Middlefield. This house, built in 1797, has the characteristic proportions of the period, decorations on the shallow cornice and about the front door, and also has one of the side doors commonly associated with the taverns of the early nineteenth century. Occupied constantly by members of the McElwain family for a century and a quarter it has been preserved with a loving care and reverence that has kept it in a perfection scarcely matched in any other Middlefield house.

The fact that Pelton and McElwain both came from East Had-dam, the location of the two houses on the same road about a mile apart, and certain resemblances in the treatment of the two exteriors leads to the conjecture that Pelton may have been in charge of the construction. If so, that would account for the superiority of this house as an example of early construction.

And finally there should be mentioned a house²⁹ of the tra-

²⁸ Last occupied by the Chamberlain family.

²⁹ Dwelling of Arthur D. Pease. See page 40.



DOOR OF ITHAMAR PELTON'S HOUSE

DOOR OF JAMES DICKSON, JR.'S, HOUSE

ditional tavern type which, throughout New England, appears at cross roads facing two ways and so constructed as to have an "L" plan. Enos Blossom, innkeeper, appears as living on this site in 1780 and he sold or exchanged this farm with Ebenezer Selden in 1792. The house must have been built between these dates and from its appearance and details it is evidently one of the oldest houses in town. In its roof we find a mingled hip and gable construction and in each face we see the treatment usually given to the single front of an ordinary farmhouse.

Throughout the buildings of these primitive types one form of interior arrangement prevailed with such uniformity as to suggest its proved adaptation to New England hill-town conditions. The front door opened on a narrow rectangular hall, from which a tiny winding stairway mounted to the second floor. On the right and the left were two square rooms each with a fireplace opening into the central chimney. The rear half of the house contained an oblong room behind the chimney entered through either of the front square rooms, and possessing an enormous fireplace furnished in the original state with brick or soapstone ovens. This was the kitchen, dining-room and living-room. At each end of it were one or two smaller rooms, pantries and downstairs bedrooms. A stairway led to the rear of the second story. Thus the large kitchen-living-room was protected on every side but one from the outside cold and was the one, thoroughly defensible place in the house in the severest winter weather.

In many of these houses the enormous chimney which was the sole method of heating the whole, still stands and gives openings to one great fireplace in the combined kitchen and living-room and four or even more smaller fireplaces in the larger bedrooms. When stoves, the so-called air-tight, sheet-iron stoves, were introduced these fireplaces were usually boarded up but they still remain hidden away in the older houses. Around the chimneys were opportunities for queer narrow or shallow closets. In such a house as the McElwain house, (page 128) we find this arrangement existing untouched and the enormous chimney and fireplaces scarcely disturbed, but in many, otherwise perfectly preserved, this chimney has been taken down and replaced by a smaller one into which the stoves of the mid-nineteenth century

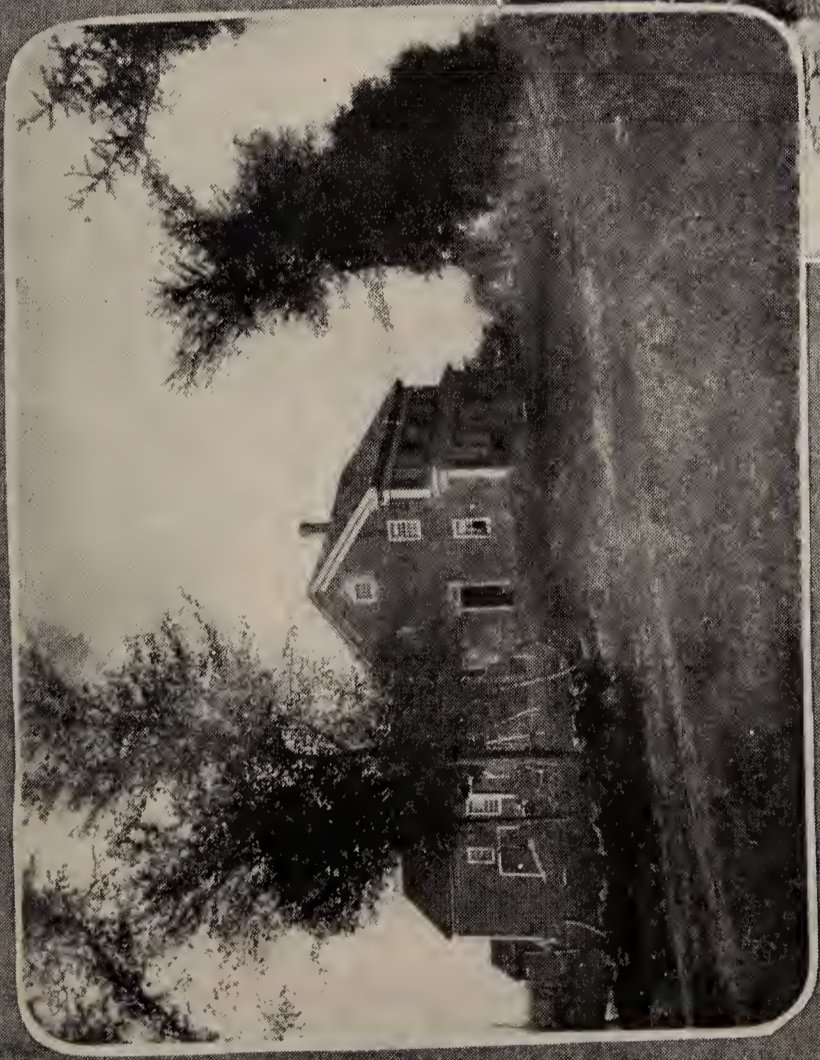
ran their pipes, more efficient doubtless than were the old fireplaces, but painfully lacking in the elements of beauty.

It is obvious that this arrangement was inapplicable to a house that faced southward, for in that case the protected living-room would face the north and would be wholly cut off from any sunlight. It was somewhat trying to a house facing eastward for no sunlight could penetrate the living-room until afternoon and the chilling west winds would beat directly upon the exterior. In one house,³⁰ that of John Smith, the arrangement was preserved by making the house rather deep from front to rear and having the living-room flanked by its smaller rooms on the north and west sides of the structure, while two large rooms occupied the southern half.

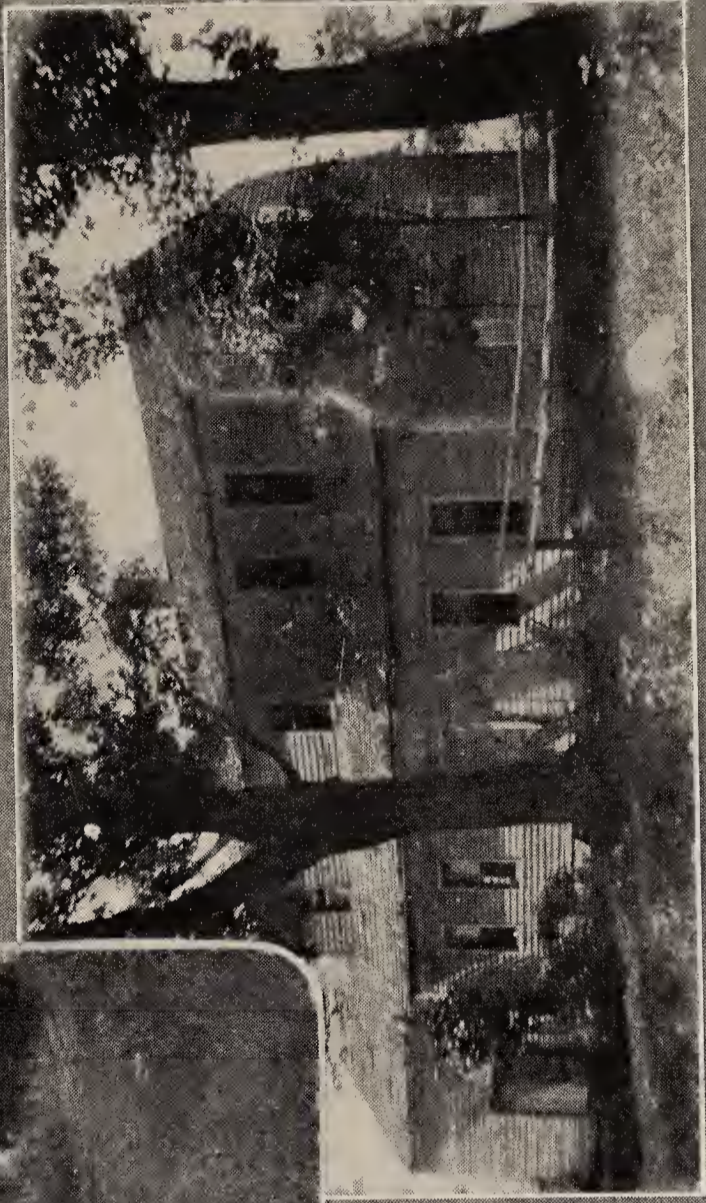
At the present time practically every one of the old houses shows an ell projecting toward the rear, in which the modern kitchen is placed. In most cases it can be seen that this is an addition, constructed when the advent of kitchen stoves rendered the primitive built-in ovens obsolete, but in several cases the wing shows signs of being as old as the rest of the house. These are the three hip-roofed houses, on opposite sides of the township, those of Uriah Church, 1814, in Factory Village; of Asa Smith, 1823, in the Smith Hollow; of Pelton on the Summit of the Ridge and the gambrel house built by Amasa Graves after 1782. Here we find a different internal plan, for instead of the great central chimney there are two chimneys whose sole functions are to warm the front rooms on the two floors. The hallway, instead of being a mere entry confronted by a small stairway, runs through the house from front to back while the rooms on either side at the rear seem far too small to serve for kitchen and dining-room. The wing seems to have been necessary from the beginning to provide adequate space for kitchen, dining-room and living-room.

As might be expected these men built according to the customary forms and habits. But one or two builders among them appear to have had sufficient individuality to construct a pair of unusual and rather peculiar houses. There stand on the North Road, about a mile from the Center, two houses not far apart whose front elevation presents the anomaly of a lower story pro-

³⁰ Where Jesse Pelkey now lives. (1924) See page 46.



HOUSE OF URIAH CHURCH



HOUSE OF DEA. JOHN NEWTON

jecting about two feet farther than the upper story. In the rear one house has a plain vertical wall of the usual kind, but the other has a gambrel roof.

There is no certainty as to which is the older. It is known that the house³¹ with a gable roof was built by Uriah Church, somewhere about 1794, and the interior of the house remains to the present day very much as it originally was, with great chimney, enormous kitchen fireplace and all the interior arrangements according to the prevailing plan. On the exterior, moldings of the classic type of 1840 have been applied, but whatever rebuilding the house may have undergone, there is nothing to show that the projecting lower story was not original. The other house³² may be later in date but no definite time has been found. It was built by John Newton before 1800, in all probability, and if the external appearance of the house is a trustworthy indication, its peculiar roof was built from the start in its existing mongrel form. Although there is nothing to show that the builders of the two houses were connected, nor that the owners had anything in common, the fact that these two stand near together and that, unlike in all other respects, they have this one similarity of a projecting lower story strongly suggests copying. One is inclined to surmise that Newton concocted his mixed half-gambrel arrangement after having seen how well the Church construction looked. One can only hope that the extra lighting he gained in his second story compensated him for the ugliness of the roof he built.

Among the houses at the Center is one³³ which is clearly primitive in its construction but has oddities in the location of its windows, and of its chimney, not in the center, and in the appearance of vertical beams in the middle of each end. This house is, in fact, a small primitive house, only one room deep, which was enlarged by building on a rear half and constructing a roof of the usual type over old and new parts. The two parts of the house are very imperfectly fused inside and the junction line is marked by the appearance of a vertical joint on the outside, but the total appearance is that of one of the early farmhouses. The

³¹ Where Arthur Gardner now lives. (1924)

³² Where Mrs. Sternagle lives. (1924)

³³ Where Miss Sarah Chamberlain lives. (1924) See page 508.

original part was built by Ambrose Church between 1810-20, the enlargement made by Deacon Alexander Ingham in 1828. The house then had a wing on the west side, occupied by the deacon's tailor shop, which for many years was also the town post office.

In the interiors of these houses there was of course much variety. Most were of the plainest; simple plastered walls and bare fireplaces; but many of them had panelling and interior woodwork that showed the skill of the old New England carpenter to the full. Quite frequently one or both of the lower front rooms were decorated with wainscoting and a broad stretch of panelling about the fireplace. Such is found, for instance in the Blush Tavern of 1783 and in the Dickson Tavern on the North Road, which also had plaster ornamentation on the ceilings of the two downstairs rooms. Sliding inside shutters are also found in many houses, now wholly unused.

What is impressed upon the observer is the fact that these farmhouses were built wholly for indoor living and were planned mainly with a view for defense against winter cold. The compact ground plans, the great chimneys, the fireplaces, the arrangement of the living-room with only one side exposed to the wind all show that the concentration of warmth and exclusion of cold air was the principal concern of the builders. The piazza, the portico, features familiar in the South, were wholly unknown in these first houses, although in the nineteenth century the piazza not infrequently was added along the rear ell, and in the most recent times was placed along the front as several of the pictures already shown make clear. The "summer kitchen," a room less hermetically sealed than the original kitchen, also made an addition to its appearance, indicating a greater consideration of the housewife's comfort in June to August than was apparently possible in the earliest days.

But with all their concern for physical comfort and warmth in their houses, the early builders of Middlefield bringing Connecticut habits with them, failed to take precautions against winter hardship when building their barns. The settlers in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont in many, perhaps most cases, constructed their barns in such wise that they were connected with the house by a wood shed or other outhouse but the Massachusetts and Connecticut farmers preferred to build their chief

barn at some distance from the house, very commonly across the road. Only the woodhouse was joined on, usually at the end of the ell. Hence it was necessary in the freezing winds or blinding snow of the dead of the winter, to flounder through drifts, or totter across icy roads and slopes to the barn, bearing milk pails home exposed to the full force of the storm. In the rare cases where a barn is found connected with a farmhouse it is usually only a "horse-barn" or stable, not the main "cow-barn" and the junction is the result of late construction. The Blush Tavern, for instance, (page 40) 1783 has a barn connected with the house through the woodshed, but this was not done until 1867 when Ambrose Newton, then the owner, bought a discarded school-house and moved it into position to provide a carriage house and stable.

Later observers, visiting the hills to enjoy the beauty of field and roadside, forest and sky, have generally criticized the way in which the early builders placed the farm and barnyard "right in the view." It may be doubted, however, whether the settlers of Middlefield spent much time considering the landscape, for the love of New England scenery was a cult rather far in the future in 1780-1812. Only a few pioneers³⁴ were beginning to expound to their readers, the real charm and grandeur in what most farmers thought of chiefly as rough ground. Of the houses mentioned in this chapter probably two thirds originally had their barn across the road and not far away, although sufficiently distant to make the memory of winter excursions to milk the cows in the early morning when a blizzard was raging, no pleasant dream.

A word might be added about the barns, which so far as the main ones were concerned, were of a practically uniform type. Similar in proportions to the larger farmhouses they were entered by a large door in the side, practically never through the end, and had cow stalls on one side of the main floor, while the rest of the barn was devoted to storing hay for the long months of indoor feeding of the cattle. Only in rare cases were the barns painted. As a rule they were left to weather to a granite-like gray. Some of the houses, it would appear, were also left to weather the same tint, but most of them were painted white,

³⁴ Such as Timothy Dwight.



LOOKING NORTHEAST FROM THE McELWAIN FARM
BARN ACROSS THE ROAD. MATTHEW SMITH FARM

occasionally red, and not infrequently both, the white covering the front and the two ends, the red being confined to the rear, away from the main road. This custom persisted in some cases far down into the nineteenth century.

But the most important house of all has not yet been mentioned—the meetinghouse—which for the New England town represented the culmination of architectural ambition. How the early settlers of Middlefield solved the problems of location and erection of their house of worship has already been shown, but the history of the structure itself, which underwent a number of changes while remaining for over a century on the ledge at the Center, is of considerable interest.

As completed in 1791, the meetinghouse was a plain, barn-like building, standing north and south, with its long side toward the county highway. There was a large door in the middle of the east side and small ones on the north and south ends. The building was lighted by two rows of windows, the upper ones opening into the gallery which ran around the south, east and north sides of the auditorium. For nearly thirty years it remained thus,—little being expended upon decoration and ornament.

In 1819, when a bell was needed, a tower was erected at the north end of the meetinghouse, surmounted by a belfry and a spire. Upon the latter a gilded, wooden weather vane was placed. The tower was entered by an outside door on the east and also by a door from the auditorium. Although there are no pictures of the meetinghouse at this period, it has been possible to obtain from the memories of those who recalled it enough details to warrant the accompanying pictorial reconstruction. Some contradictory evidence has been gathered as to whether the belfry was open or closed, and whether the spire was tall or short, or existed at all, but since the consensus of opinion favors an open belfry surmounted by a spire, these features have been incorporated in the restoration.⁵⁵

Since this description shows that the church was one of a type not at all uncommon in the eighteenth century in the Connecticut Valley, the restoration has been drawn with the fact in mind. In the work on *Some Old Time Meetinghouses of the Connecticut Valley* by C. A. Wright, 1911, numerous drawings and photo-

⁵⁵ See illustration page 81.

graphs reveal churches with the square tower at one end of a plain structure, identical in proportions with the farmhouses, two rows of windows and the main door in the middle of one of the long sides. Some of these were not far from Middlefield, such as the Northampton meetinghouse erected in 1737; the Springfield meetinghouse of 1752; the Hadley Church of 1751; that of West Springfield of 1800; of Farmington, 1771; of Wethersfield, 1761. In fact, the well-known Old South Meetinghouse of Boston, built in 1730 is closely similar in plan, and may be regarded as the parent of all that type.³⁶ Seeing that the three men who built the church were all Connecticut men, Church, of East Haddam, Pelton, of East Windsor, and Russell, of Somers, it is quite likely that they had such churches as those of Farmington and Wethersfield in mind and may even have consciously imitated one of them.

Within, the church was divided by a central aisle running from the east door to the pulpit. On either side was a double row of square box pews with doors opening into the aisle and seats built on the three sides. The outer rows of pews opened into the north and south aisles. Square pews lined the walls. In front of the pulpit was a seat reserved for the deacons.

The pulpit was small and perched high upon the west wall. It was reached by a steep flight of stairs which started west from the floor and when half way up turned north along the wall. Under these stairs was a seat which was reserved for negroes. The pulpit was surmounted by a huge dome-shaped, octagonal sounding board without visible means of support, so that the effect of the whole arrangement was to make the pastor seem at an infinite distance from his flock. The small pulpit had an ornamental, fluted front which must have excited some admiration, for in later years, after the dismantling of the old pulpit, it was used to adorn the gable of a local farm building.³⁷

The gallery was reached by stairways from the northeast and southeast corners of the auditorium. A row of seats in the front part of the gallery and running around to each end was reserved for the singers, and the late Oliver Church could recall when the choir was large enough to fill the entire row. Back of these seats

³⁶ See Embury *Early American Churches*.

³⁷ The corn house of Frank Chipman.

and lining the walls were more square box pews where the youths and maidens sat on their respective sides of the gallery, and here also, to preserve proper decorum and to keep within bounds the gambols of the lambs, sat the tithingman.

Church-going in the winter time during this period was something of an ordeal when it is recalled that no provision for heating the meetinghouse was made for many years. The only means of comfort were the foot stoves which the worshippers brought with them, though it might be added that probably many an incipient case of pneumonia was warded off between and after services by stimulating drinks at the Blush and Mack Taverns.

From the houses shown in this chapter and in earlier ones it is possible to reconstruct a picture of the Middlefield of the days between 1783 and 1820, so far as the farm buildings were concerned; but as a whole the township must have presented a very different appearance from what it does to-day. Where forests now extend, farm clearings diversified every hill and the network of roads reached the remotest corners. In placing their farm-houses on these steep hill-slopes great ingenuity was often shown and the resulting situations were often strikingly picturesque, commanding sweeping horizons and overlooking deep valleys. So near together were the farms in those days that in haying time the shouts of the oxen-drivers could be heard from one field to another up and down the long roads where stretches of overgrown pasture or jungles of second growth woods now spread in unbroken silence.