

CHAPTER IX

FACTORY VILLAGE, THE CENTER AND “THE SWITCH”

THE period following the War of 1812 saw great changes in the economic life of Massachusetts, and nowhere were they more in evidence than in the inland hill-towns of the western part of the state. The rapid development of manufacturing in the eastern cities which was given its stimulus before the war by the Embargo Act, and which continued thereafter in spite of unsettled conditions, brought about the gradual rise of a new class of people, an industrial population. This condition had a beneficial effect upon agriculture in that it created a demand for farm products, for which there had been hitherto no market. As a result, the use of new inventions now became profitable and much interest was taken in the improvement of farming methods generally.

Even in the hill-towns the “jack-of-all-trades” type of farmer began to disappear. As the time arrived when he could secure manufactured household goods and wearing apparel more cheaply by the exchange of his farm products than by making them himself, his house ceased to be a “factory on the farm,” and he could devote his energies more particularly to agricultural production. Other farmers with a talent for trading could now specialize in the mercantile business. Still others with a bent for mechanics became manufacturers. In Middlefield these specialized branches of business activity were wool growing, beef raising, woolen manufacturing, paper manufacturing, and merchandising, and a noteworthy development in each line can be traced. As it was the interrelation of these pursuits that brought into existence the three communities,—Factory Village, the Center, and “The Switch,”—the story of their growth in a region where for forty years there had been only scattered farms will be of considerable interest.



SMITH HOLLOW

MIDDLEFIELD
1850



E.C. SMITH

DAVID HAMILTON
ABEL CHEESEMAN
HARRY MEACHAM

HIRAM PARISH

JOB & JACOB ROBBINS

DIOGATE DICKSON

DAN PEASE JR

OBADIAH SMITH

ORRIN SMITH

ASA SMITH
L. HOLMES

ADDISON EVERETT

OLIVER SMITH

ALVAN HOLMES

AMBROSE NEWTON

NORATIO N. DICKSON

AMBROSE ROBBINS

JOHN DAMON

S.H.

EBENEZER SMITH

CHARLES BILLS
ISRAEL HALE

SAMUEL SMITH, JR.

JAMES CHURCH

RUSSELL PEASE

JONATHAN MCELWAIN

DANIEL ALDERMAN

ERASTUS JOHN INGHAM

MRS. POLLY OLDS
AMOS W. CROSS

FREEDOM COATS

MRS. WM. CHURCH

S.H.

JOEL TAYLOR

HIRAM TAYLOR

MILTON NASH
DR. J. WARREN
O. SMITH 2ND
OLIVER CHURCH
S.F. ROOT
L.D. BOISE
BAPTIST CHURCH

NELSON SPENCER

HARVEY ROOT

BARTHOLOMEW WARD

MRS. WEALTHY OLDS

LYMAN & JAS. T. SUMNER CHURCH, U. CHURCH

URIAH STACY, CHURCH ROOT

W.M.D. SELDEN
O. BLUSH ROOT
O. BLUSH
W.M. BLUSH W.M. & CO. MILLENDARD (BOISE, SMITH & ROOT, LESSEES)

U. CHURCH & SONS LOWER MILL

WM. WHEELER

HIRAM LEACH

STACY S.M. COMBS

JOHN P. LOVELAND

AMOS CONE

AMBROSE LOVELAND

JAMES GRANGER

DANIEL MCCARTHY

JOHN MANN

WALTER METCALF
UNO. MCELWAIN JR.

ALEX. INGHAM
C.F. LEONARD
REY. E. CLARK

MATTHEW SMITH, JR.

MILTON SMITH

ANDREW MEACHAM

HENRY HAWES

MILTON COMBS

HARLOW LOVELAND

JAMES GRANGER

DANIEL ROOT

GASTON DICKSON

HENRY STANTON

ELIJAH COLE

MATTHEW SMITH

ARNOLD PEASE

GILES CHURCHILL

DAN PEASE JOHN METCALF MORGAN PEASE

T. ROOT

SAMUEL INGHAM

JOHN L. BELL

ELDRIDGE PEASE

JESSE F. WRIGHT

MILTON D. LEONARD

BETHEL M.E. CHURCH

MRS. DOROTHY WRIGHT

NATHAN WRIGHT

SM

SMITH HOLLOW

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The period of readjustment immediately following the War of 1812 was quite uncertain for those interested in the woolen business. As soon as peace was declared a flood of English dress goods was dumped upon the American markets with the express purpose of destroying the competition offered by the American manufacturers. As Congress failed to enact a tariff bill which would afford adequate protection for the newly developed home industry, many concerns which had begun to make broadcloth were forced to shut down. Among these, perhaps, was Amasa Blush, who like many others had built a new factory following prosperous war-time conditions, but it is possible that the larger part of his business, as well as that of the Church plant, consisted of carding and finishing for the local weavers of homespun goods which continued without interruption.

Much more serious was the effect on the farmers who had taken up the raising of the Merino sheep. The closing of the broadcloth factories brought an immediate fall in the high prices for fine wool prevailing during the war, and many flocks of Merinos which had been developed with painstaking care were ruthlessly slaughtered. As Middlefield was located within the principal wool producing area of the state, it is probable that some of its citizens shared in these losses.

There has appeared in print the statement that Uriah Church and General David Mack manufactured cotton goods during the War of 1812, and that, anticipating a severe decline in price at the conclusion of peace, they inaugurated an extensive sales campaign for the disposal of their surplus goods which reached even to southern New York State and Pennsylvania. Undoubtedly General Mack was a financial backer of Uriah Church in the beginnings of his woolen (not cotton) industry, but this enterprise is supposed to have been in its infancy at this period. That the community's investment in wool growing and woolen manufacture was sufficient to require extraordinary efforts to dispose of their surplus products is an interesting possibility, but one which cannot be verified.

With the coming of higher tariffs in the decade beginning in 1820, the woolen business revived somewhat, but did not become really prosperous until 1830. This improvement, however, was exemplified in Middlefield by the commencement of manufacture

of woollen goods for the market by both Amasa Blush and Uriah Church. The former installed spinning jennies and power looms in his factory, which had been built in 1815, and he began making satinet, an inexpensive grade of cloth made of coarse wool woven upon a cotton warp. In 1823 Uriah Church built a three-story woollen mill just north of his carding shop, and aided by his cousin, Ambrose Church, who set up his spinning and weaving machinery, began the successful manufacture of broadcloth.

The prosperous period of woollen manufacture during the '30's brought about a tremendous demand for fine wool only a third of which could be supplied by the flocks of the state. A craze developed for the raising of Saxony sheep, a variety of the Merino which produced the finest grade of wool and the fleece of which brought a much higher price than that of the coarse-wool sheep. So much attention was paid to this industry that the dairy and cattle raising industry suffered. That Middlefield farmers participated fully in this venture is shown by the statistics of sheep raising in Massachusetts for the year 1836 in which the Middlefield production is classed as "Saxony," although there is no doubt that a certain proportion of the native variety is included therewith. But the important fact is that there were in Middlefield in this year 9,678 sheep, a number which was exceeded throughout the state only by the towns of Hinsdale and Lanesboro. So great was the development of this industry in the western highlands that the number raised on the comparatively small acreage of Middlefield exceeded in this year even the production of any county east of Worcester County, except Plymouth.

As Hinsdale and Lanesboro were situated near the important mill towns of the Housatonic and Hoosac Valleys, the principal reason why Middlefield outstripped its neighbors in sheep production is found in the proximity of the woollen mills of Church and Blush, the owners of which were eager purchasers of all the wool which the farmers could raise. Even as a mill town Middlefield was quite prominent at this date for outside the valley towns of Berkshire mentioned above, no other hill town in western Massachusetts had four sets of broadcloth machinery in operation. Although Amasa Blush retired about 1830, the business was continued by his sons Oliver and William D. under the

name of O. Blush and Company. About 1834 their plant was extended by the erection of a new finishing shop south of the dwelling houses of the owners. By 1840 the partnership was dissolved, and William Blush, taking possession of the finishing shop equipped it with a full set of woolen manufacturing machinery for the production of broadcloth and satinet.

As the woolen business grew, the conservation of the water power of Factory Brook was a matter which demanded the attention of the factory owners in Blush Hollow. They soon learned that the stream, on account of the height of the hills



Factory Village
Middlefield, Mass.

From a sketch by
W^m F. Church.

surrounding its sources, responded very quickly to heavy rains and necessitated a careful regulation of its overflow. A great freshet in October, 1833, carried off the dam of Uriah Church's woolen mill and damaged the lower one which furnished power for his fulling mill. In addition to the individual mill ponds belonging to the several mills, a storage reservoir was needed. In 1839 or 1840 the Blushes and Churches together constructed a short distance above the Church upper mill a large dam of uncemented stone, backed by earth and wide enough to allow

the highway from the Center to Becket to run along the top. The reservoir thus created covered a tract of fifty acres, and besides providing adequate water power for the mills, added much to the attractiveness of the Hollow.

By 1840, therefore, at the height of the broadcloth era in the woolen industry there had grown up in Blush Hollow a thriving manufacturing village. Forty-six people, including the mill owners, were engaged in the woolen business, and several tenements had been erected, among which was the two-story, upper, boarding-house north of the Church Mill. Uriah Church purchased the John Smith farm as an auxiliary to his business, and built just above the old house a dwelling for his eldest son, Sumner; at the edge of the reservoir he also built a double house for the families of his younger sons, James Talmadge and Lyman. The Blushes, in addition to maintaining a farm, remodeled their father's old fulling mill, which stood north of the Oliver Blush Mill, and opened a small store for the community. Another of their houses,¹ which now stands opposite the present schoolhouse, is said to have housed the first school in the village.

The introduction of the factory system into Middlefield did not at first directly affect the household industry of the community, as the broadcloth and satinet goods manufactured were worn mostly in the cities. The prevalence of the home manufacture of cloth for household use in 1821 was shown in an exhibit at the Pittsfield Fair of eight hundred yards of cloth,—consisting of fulled cloth, raw flannel, carpeting, table cloth and other linen goods, woven by a mother and her four daughters in one year. But during the succeeding years the manufactured goods of the eastern cities gradually eliminated the demand for the homemade articles, and some of the farmers' daughters in the vicinity of Middlefield, whose occupation had thus been taken away, obtained employment as weavers and spinners in the factories at Blush Hollow. No class distinction between employer and employed, however, existed for many years. The marriage of one of Uriah Church's sons with a factory girl who was a farmer's daughter was not considered as differing in any respect from the marriages of his brothers with farmers' daughters who did not work in the mills.

¹ Now the dwelling of Fred Boyer.

In certain cases the Church and Blush mills did custom work for the local wool growers, taking their wool and making it into broadcloth or satinet according to specifications. One of their principal customers was Ambrose Newton who no doubt was able to resell the manufactured goods to his brothers who were merchants in Albany. According to an old receipt dated June 13, 1840, Uriah Church and Sons acknowledged the receipt of six hundred seventy pounds of unwashed wool from Mr. Newton which they agreed "to manufacture into broadcloths of such colors as he shall direct except blue, and to do it in a workman-like manner for ninety cents a yard."

The wool growing industry continued to prosper during the early '40's. In 1845 the number of sheep raised in Middlefield was 9,840—the highest official record for any one year, but the statement is probably true that there were some years when over ten thousand sheep were sheared. After 1846, however, this business began to decline. The tariff of that year reduced the duty on imported manufactured woolens and the new fancy worsteds introduced from England began to displace broadcloth in popularity. This affected the fine wool culture immediately and the Saxony breed which had been raised entirely for this purpose quickly lost favor. By 1855, therefore, many western Massachusetts towns had decreased their number of sheep to less than half of what they had raised ten years before. The fact that the local mills continued in more or less steady operation was probably a factor in the smaller proportional decrease in Middlefield, for in that year the town with its 4,849 head of sheep again ranked third in the state.

In 1846 Factory Village appears in the town records as desirous of better conditions of transportation and schooling. At this date no station had been granted to Middlefield by the Western Railroad, and the woolen manufacturers hauled their goods and raw materials over the two ridges separating them from Becket. The West Hill Road caused much dissatisfaction both on account of its steep inclines and on account of its circuitous route to the West Hill schoolhouse where the Hollow children received their education.

At the town meeting of April 13 of this year the town voted to accept a new road "to commence near Church's Factory and



S. U. CHURCH AND BROS.' UPPER MILL

S. U. CHURCH AND BROS.' LOWER MILL

SCENE IN FACTORY VILLAGE, ABOUT 1872,
U. CHURCH AND SONS' ORIGINAL UPPER MILL
IN THE BACKGROUND

to lead onto the West Hill,"—apparently through the Blush pasture to connect with the southern road to Becket. Town politics were much involved in this matter for on May 2 the action was rescinded, reconsidered, and again defeated. In September a road was accepted which would commence at the Reservoir, but this road was never built. Probably the establishment of a railroad station at "the Switch" rendered this road less necessary. With the population of Factory Village doubled by the erection of the lower Church mill in 1848, it soon was made a separate school district with its schoolhouse built south of the highway bridge where it stands to-day.

It is probable that the Blush factories did not prosper during the unfavorable conditions of the late '40's. No satinet was manufactured in the Oliver Blush mill by 1855. William Blush rented his mill to a company composed of John Smith, Lewis D. Boise and Solomon F. Root, who lived at Middlefield Center, which carried on the woolen business until 1851 when the mill was destroyed by fire with considerable loss to the renters. Blush did not revive his woolen business but a few years later he erected on the same site a wood-turning shop in which he made wagon parts, such as shafts, spokes and felloes.

The demand for the output of the Church mill, however, was such as to warrant the erection in 1848 of the large "lower mill," some distance south of the Blush factories. A sawmill was set up just above the new mill and the timber from the hill-sides readily converted into lumber to erect tenements for the additional employees. The Uriel Cone farm west of the highway was acquired and the homestead remodeled into what was known as the "old boarding-house." South of this was later erected the large white structure known as "the new boarding-house." In 1851 Uriah Church died and four of his sons continued business under the name of S. U. Church & Brothers.

For a few years conditions necessitated the manufacture of twills and other goods in which coarse wool was used to some extent, but under the management of Sumner Church a broad-cloth of superior quality was obtained by carefully grading the wool and by greater care in fulling and washing than was generally exercised. This product, known in the markets of Boston, Philadelphia and Washington as "Mountain Mills Gold

Band Cloth," possessed a soft finish and a brilliant luster, and sold for twenty-five cents more a yard than any other brand of its kind. The colors were black and blue and the goods became especially popular with the wealthy planters of the south. By 1855, 40,000 yards of broadcloth were made in spite of the fact that general prosperity in the woolen business did not return until 1858 when raw wool began to be imported free from South America and the Cape of Good Hope.

With the outbreak of the Civil War the woolen manufacturers faced sudden changes. The market for the broadcloth made by the Church Brothers disappeared with the loss of the Southern markets. A special demand for army supplies, however, was soon forthcoming, and the workers in Blush Hollow were soon busy night and day making army blankets for the Union soldiers. In this work, as in earlier times, the presence of a local supply of coarse wool in the neighborhood was of mutual advantage to farmer and manufacturer. For a short time the price of coarse wool was as high as fifty cents a pound,—more than was paid for fine wool. Later, six months were spent in making cloth for uniforms. After two years, however, the scarcity of woollens for civilian wear brought about the resumption of the manufacture of broadcloth. Aided by the high protective tariff and also by high prices, the Churches entered upon the most profitable period of their career which continued for six or seven years after the war.

The tangible evidences of this prosperity were seen in the new buildings in Factory Village which gave it the appearance of a modern manufacturing town. William D. Blush remodeled his house into a comfortable residence with a mansard roof. Near by Sumner Church built, in 1868, his spacious and imposing mansion with barn and carriage-house. James T. Church enlarged his house a year or two later into an attractive and comfortable home. A number of other buildings connected with the mills had also been erected during the war and afterward. Chief of these was the Church Brothers store which furnished dry goods and groceries to the factory workers and which had previously been maintained at the Center until about 1860. This building was erected just south of the Uriah Church homestead. The store was first kept by Myron Church, who was succeeded

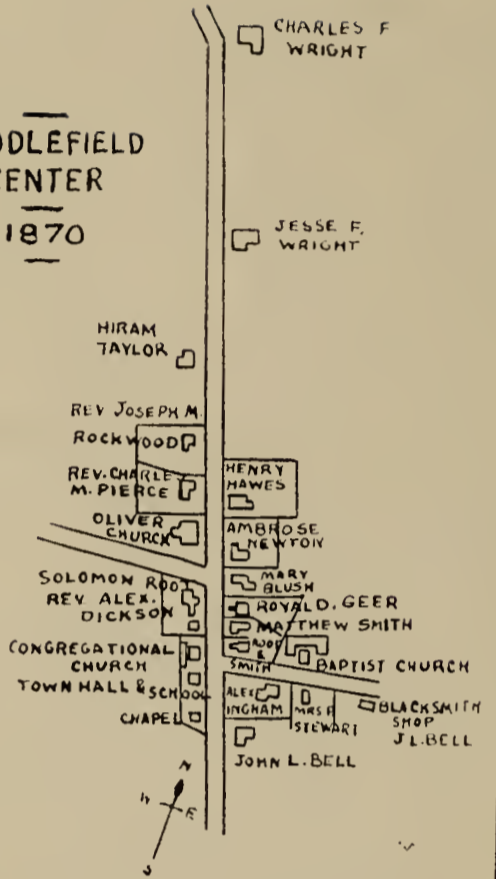
in 1871 by John W. Crane, now of Springfield. After Sumner Church moved into his new residence the storekeepers lived at the Uriah Church house.

By 1870 Factory Village had reached the height of its prosperity and contained one fourth of the families of the town. It was here that the outside world made its most obvious impression on the community. Besides the English and the Irish newcomers, there had been added a number of German families, but particularly a larger number of French Canadian families. These people lived together in comparative peace, in spite of their different customs and religious beliefs, and frequently intermarried. In these days of industrial unrest and boisterous diversions their simple and satisfying pleasures,—rowing on the Reservoir, fishing and occasional dancing,—seem quite idyllic.

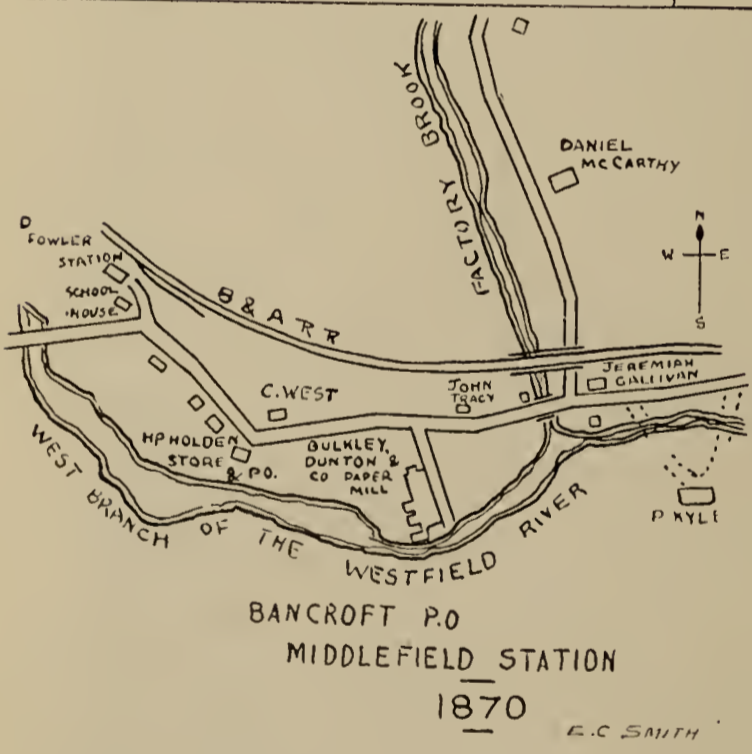
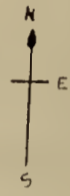
The number of factory workers was not so large that the Church Brothers who had grown up in the business could not take a personal interest in the welfare of their co-workers. The just and humane policy of the employers is shown by the general tribute of respect paid to them and by the lack of strikes and other industrial disturbances. Though welfare work had not become a profession in those days, yet the proprietors provided a room in the old office building where the men might meet and smoke and have their own social life. Prayer meetings were sometimes held in the dining-room at the “white boarding-house.” Those of the Catholic faith went to other towns to attend service. The Protestants who desired to worship at the Center were taken thither on Sunday morning in the company’s long five-seated wagon, familiarly known as “the big team.”

When the hours of labor are considered, the conditions may not seem so favorable for the workers. They sometimes started working at six A. M. with half an hour for breakfast at seven-thirty; half an hour for dinner at noon was allowed and an hour for supper; then they worked in the evenings from seven until nine except on Saturdays. Daylight saving was practiced in summer when the factories opened at five-thirty A. M. instead of six. It is indisputable to-day that these hours were too long, but at that time there was no such agitation for the shorter working days that are now almost universal. The workers were, in fact, eager for the opportunity to earn the extra money.

MIDDLEFIELD
CENTER
1870



E.C. SMITH



BANCROFT P.O.
MIDDLEFIELD STATION
1870

E.C. SMITH

FACTORY VILLAGE
AT
BLUSH HOLLOW
1870

E.C. SMITH

While Factory Village was thus developing, the Center was undergoing a similar change, but the growth was slow. The unsettled conditions following the War of 1812 brought about the failure of the company store as a co-operative enterprise, and in 1818 it passed into the hands of Orrin Smith, son of Calvin Smith, one of the members of the company. Orrin Smith had been trying to better his fortunes in Camillus, New York, but this frontier town had also been experiencing hard times. As it did not exhibit "that order and regularity that is observed in an older town," he returned to Middlefield. Smith lived in the house across the county road which had probably been erected by the company for its storekeeper, Edmund Kelso, who was also the first postmaster in Middlefield.² Smith ran the store for about ten years and then sold out to Solomon Root who initiated his successful business at the Center which was to continue for thirty years.

Except for the Blush Tavern, only one other dwelling, so far as is known, stood near the church and store. This was the house which stands opposite the church, but facing the road to Worthington. The original house was supposedly built by Ambrose Church who erected on the north side of the Worthington Road a joiner shop where the skillful cabinetmaker no doubt made furniture, farm tools and other wooden utensils when not engaged in building houses and barns. In 1828 he sold his property to Alexander Ingham who enlarged the house and built an ell toward the west which he used for a tailor shop. North of the Center was the Lewis Taylor farm and the small farm cultivated by Rev. Jonathan Nash.³

Half a mile south of the Center, however, was a rival community which must have competed for the trade of the township. Here at the fork in the road leading to Windsor Street stood the large houses of Colonel Mack and General Mack who kept tavern, and also a store which antedated the company store at

Ebenezer Emmons

the Center. Opposite Colonel Mack's was the house and blacksmith shop of Ebenezer Emmons. A little further south was

² The Geer house now owned by Mrs. May Youtz. (1924)

³ The site of the James Cody house. (1924)

located the first schoolhouse for all the pupils living in the central region. Here was also located the post office after Mr. Kelso had left the company store.

In spite of this, however, a marked growth began at the Center after 1830, coincident with the general prosperity of this period already mentioned. Solomon Root must have demonstrated that his location was the more favorable for trade, as the Macks soon moved their store building to its present location nearly opposite the meetinghouse. Just north of the store they built a dwelling



Aug 22/66

middlefield Village

From a sketch by
Wm F. Church

1866

house for Edmund P. Morgan, a partner of General Mack, and later owner of the Mack store. General Mack moved to Amherst in 1834 and the post office was transferred back to the Solomon Root store where it remained until 1857.

Most of the other houses in the Center were built about this time. North of the Blush Tavern Dr. Joseph Warren built the house later occupied by Henry Hawes.⁴ South of the tavern the house now owned by Mrs. Abbe (1924) was built for Ira B. Sampson, a shoemaker, constructed according to tradition from

⁴ Now owned by the Duggan family. (1924)

an eli of the neighboring hostelry. On the opposite side of the street adjoining his store Solomon Root built a house for his brother, Timothy Root, the next occupant of which was Rev. Alexander Dickson. Sardis Putnam, another shoemaker, purchased the old Thomas Blossom house at Blossom Corner and moved it to its present position south of the Alexander Ingham house. It is now owned by Mrs. Mulcay (1924), and is the second oldest house at the Center. Near the Town Pump stood the blacksmith shop of Benjamin Stewart, and his house later known



as the "Aunt Stewart" place, was built about 1834 between the shop and the house of Alexander Ingham.

Between the Timothy Root house and the meetinghouse Solomon Root built in 1838 a two-story building used for a button shop. The molds and the "prunella" cloth were obtained from the Williston Company at Easthampton. The coverings, cut out by Mr. Root with die and mallet, were given to the farmers' wives who finished the buttons and took their pay in goods from Mr. Root's store. After two years machinery for this purpose was installed at Easthampton, and the button industry in Mid-

dlefield came to an end. The building was later used as a tailor shop, schoolhouse and doctor's office.

In 1841 Mr. Morgan sold his store to G. W. Lyman and went to Cleveland where he continued his successful business career on a larger scale. In 1848 Lyman sold out to a company composed of the son and two sons-in-law of Solomon Root, known as Boise, Smith and Root, which took over also the Root store carrying on the combined business in the old Mack building. Solomon Root remodeled his vacated store into a dwelling for himself, selling his former house to Uriah Church and Sons Company who, curiously enough, turned it into a store. A successful business was conducted there by Oliver Church up to about 1858 when the store was moved to Factory Village.

Aside from the popularity of the Blush Tavern, the main reason for this growth of the Center seems to have been the enterprise of the rival storekeepers. In addition to the ordinary retailing of dry goods and groceries to the local farmers, these merchants undertook to handle the export business of the farms as well, thus gathering in the trade which had hitherto been carried on at Westfield and other places. The farmers brought their cheese and barrels of pork to the stores, taking their pay partly in wares from the store and the balance in cash at intervals. The storekeepers made their profits principally in salting and repacking the pork. As ten barrels of fresh meat, weighing two hundred pounds each, after the salting process made eleven barrels of the same weight, the packers were amply recompensed by the returns from the sale of the extra barrel.

With their agricultural products thus prepared and collected the teams of the storekeepers made frequent trips over the hills to distant marts of trade, generally to Hartford if dry goods were wanted in exchange or to Albany when flour was needed. The latter trip consumed three days; the first day's drive extended to Chatham; the second to Albany and back to Chatham; the third, back home to Middlefield. Not only the farmers of the immediate community but many also in the neighboring towns availed themselves of this opportunity to market their produce profitably within a few miles without the necessity of making individual trips to these distant points. The amount of business done during this period before the railroad is indicated by the

fact that the second story of the Root store was at times packed to the roof with cheese casks. All things considered, it seems likely that the decade beginning in 1830 was probably the most prosperous period of the town's existence.

The coming of the railroad was, on the whole, of doubtful benefit to the Middlefield merchants, some of whose customers lived in other towns. While the stores could now ship their products to distant markets and obtain their wares by a short haul of only four miles from the railroad, the same conveniences were open to the individual farmers. As the railroad ran through the neighboring towns on the south and west, the stores near the stations gradually absorbed the trade of many of the farmers who had previously hauled their produce to Middlefield hill-top. But the fact that the Church Brothers opened their store at the Center in 1847, as soon as the Root store had been consolidated with the Mack store, shows that for many years there was business enough for two stores at the Center.

The prosperity of the town in general during this period was further reflected in the changes in church buildings which greatly altered the appearance of the Center. In 1846 the Congregational Society, desiring a more modern edifice, turned their building ninety degrees so that it stood with the gable toward the highway. The old tower and belfry were removed and a new one erected; but the bad proportions of the belfry with its long, slender columns excited so much criticism and ridicule, that in 1855 "Jim Church's pepper-box," as it was called, was replaced by the graceful spire which was well known to later generations.

In 1847 the Baptist Society, desiring a more central location, erected a new house of worship at the Center just east of the present store, where the horse sheds now stand. The site is marked by a granite stone. Through this change the society took on new life, adding to its membership many of the leading families of the community. Five years later a parsonage was built for the Baptist minister on the main street⁵ nearly opposite Dr. Joseph Warren's house.

In 1853 the Methodist Society, following the example of the Baptists, moved their chapel from the Den and rebuilt it at the

⁵ Now owned by Mr. Griffin. (1924)

Center just south of the town hall. Unfortunately, however, their society did not benefit by the change, and services were discontinued after a few years. It was later seen that in its former location the Bethel Chapel ministered to a large number of people in the adjoining sections of Worthington and Chester who were not able to go all the way to Middlefield Center to attend service. On the other hand there was no real need at the Center for more than two churches.

Coincident with all this growth at the Center came the necessity for enlarged school facilities. The original schoolhouse of the Center District which stood on the ledge at the fork in the road south of the David Mack farm was moved to the Center, probably during the '20's and placed across the road from the site of the present town hall. A few years later a second story was added. In 1846 the town built a one-story town hall, just south of the Congregational Church and for some reason the schoolhouse was moved across the road and placed beside it. Twenty years later when the town built a two-story town hall with a schoolroom on the ground floor, the old school building was purchased for a barn and removed by Ambrose Newton who at that time occupied the Oliver Blush house. Around this building, which is still standing, cling the memories of the older citizens who recall besides their hours of instruction many scenes of merrymaking and stern debate.

At the Center, as at Factory Village, there occurred changes following the Civil War. After the removal of David Mack, Jr., his large square house south of the Center had been used as the Congregational parsonage. In order to provide a more modern and more conveniently located home for the minister the Church brothers in 1865 took this house down and rebuilt it into a comfortable residence on a lot adjoining the Baptist parsonage on the south. As the classic frieze which decorated the original house was not in keeping with the Victorian style of the rebuilt dwelling, it was placed on the inside of the piazza where it can still be seen.

Opposite the Blush Tavern, at the fork in the road, there had been erected at an early date some barns which took care of a considerable livery business handled by the tavern. These buildings remained standing long after the tavern had become

the private residence of Oliver Smith, and later of Oliver Church, and became rather unsightly. In 1868 they were removed by Oliver Church, and a handsome residence, similar to that of Sumner Church in Factory Village, was erected on this site, thus adding much to the attractiveness of the Center. The building of this house marks the end of the growth of the Center for thirty years.

In contrast with the beginnings of Factory Village and the Center, the origin of "The Switch," being due entirely to the construction of the Western Railroad along the West Branch of the Westfield River, is of a much later date. Previous to the railroad, it is true, the Pontoosuc Turnpike ran through this valley, but it is not known that anyone lived along it in the region of "The Switch." The first and nearest inhabitant seems to have been Avery Herrick, a farmer, who located, about 1820, in the comparatively level area to the north of where the railroad station now is, and whose means of getting to the outside world was a bridle path leading further north to the original highway from Middlefield to Becket Center which crossed the railroad valley at a considerable distance to the west of "The Switch" where the present road crosses.

In the late '30's however, the valley took on new life when swarms of laborers came to camp in temporary shacks on the hill sides while they constructed the railroad. These people, numbering a thousand, all moved on after a year or two. When the railroad began running in 1841 there was no station at Middlefield, but only a "turnout" which allowed trains to pass each other. The switch for this turnout was tended by Daniel Fowler, who established a home near by, and from this circumstance the community which gradually grew up in this locality received its local name of "The Switch."

About 1839 John Mann, who was perhaps the earliest settler, located on the highway a short distance southwest of where the arch bridge over Factory Brook now is. In 1843 he built a sawmill near by on the Westfield River. John Mann opened a store near the site of the present store, and a post office, called "Bancroft," was established here in 1846. At the same time "The Switch" was made a separate school district and a schoolhouse built. Some time after 1847 Middlefield was made a flag station,



OLD MIDDLEFIELD STATION
SCHOOLHOUSE AT BANCROFT

NEW MIDDLEFIELD STATION
STORE OF THOS. H. FLEMING

and a small one-story station was built. The community began to grow immediately.

At about this time also John Mann started a paper mill on the Westfield River, his product being straw paper. About 1850 the property came into the hands of William West who built the brick paper mill which for many years was a familiar sight until its destruction by fire in 1913. Throughout most of its existence it was owned by Bulkley, Dunton and Company, of New York City, who manufactured hanging paper out of old rags and newspapers, and shipped it to Philadelphia where it was printed for wall paper. In 1855 the amount of capital invested in this enterprise was between \$25,000 and \$30,000. The employees were mostly from Irish and French Canadian families, numbering fourteen in 1855, and twenty-nine in 1880. A half interest in the plant was for a time owned by Charles West, who sold it to his brother-in-law, John Tracy.

By 1850 Middlefield had been made a regular stopping place on the railroad, and the wooden building now used as a freight depot was erected for a station. Just across the River in Becket the Bulkley, Dunton and Company erected another paper mill for making hanging paper, adding more families to the community, though some of them lived on the Becket side of the river. So long as the locomotives burned wood the supplying of this fuel furnished considerable employment for Middlefield citizens. Charcoal burning was another industry which was carried on at "The Switch" until 1875. Two brick kilns for making charcoal were in operation near the station, and in 1855 as much as 52,000 bushels were marketed. In its early days the store changed hands many times, one of its owners being Boise, Smith and Root, who ran the store at the Center; but for about forty years it has been owned by Thomas H. Fleming.

Only by looking back again from 1870 to the beginning of the century can we realize how great were the changes in the economic life of the town during the intervening period. In 1810 the people were scattered rather evenly over the township, living independently upon the food products which they raised, and making their own clothing, household utensils and farm implements. Only three families lived in Blush Hollow, four at the Center, and none where "The Switch" now is. The churches,

stores and mills which sprang up in different sections to a great extent served the immediate neighborhoods in which they were located.

As has been already shown, the development of the factory system throughout New England, and even in Middlefield, created a demand not only for food products for the growing industrial classes but also for raw wool, both of which the Middlefield farmers could for a time supply at a maximum of profit to the local woolen manufacturers. In addition to this, the merchants at Middlefield Center were able to retain a large part of this money in the town by offering sufficient inducement to the farmers to exchange their food products for dry goods and other wares at the stores on the hill-top rather than elsewhere.

As a result of these influences there were in 1870 thirty-nine families living in Factory Village, fifteen at the Center, and seventeen at "The Switch." These constituted about one half the families of the town, almost all of whom were engaged mainly in the mills and stores, or in other trades and professions, leaving the remaining half carrying on a more or less specialized kind of farming. In a later chapter will be considered the decline of the manufacturing and mercantile phases of the town's life, so important in this period now under discussion, leaving Middlefield again pre-eminently an agricultural community.