



A History of the Town of
Middlefield, Massachusetts

By

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and PHILIP MACK SMITH

with the assistance of

THEODORE CLARKE SMITH

PRIVATELY PRINTED

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To

EDWARD PAYSON SMITH,

Distinguished son of Middlefield, Historian of
the Middlefield Centennial, whose work gave
the incentive to its preparation, this history is
dedicated by his sons.

Southampton 12. 5 '0

PATRONS

The following persons and organizations, representatives, for the most part, of old Middlefield families, by their generous material support have made possible the publication of this work.

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The Middlefield Grange
The Middlefield Country Club

HISTORICAL PREFACE

THIS study of the origins of the little town of Middlefield, begun as a labor of love, has resulted in an historical investigation which possesses an interest beyond that of family inheritance. It was found that the steps leading to the settlement and the incorporation of the town were all dependent upon the general social movements of the years following the revolution, acting under the conditions imposed by the topography of the region. As for the subsequent development, during the nineteenth century, that also was directly controlled by the economic changes in New England, in the erection of mills, the building of railroads, the effects of the Civil War and the later alterations in industry. The value of such a study as the following lies in the minute, careful investigation of the movements of population, the shifts in farming interest and the rise and decline of a typical mill-village. At the same time the religious evolution of the hill-town was characteristic of the period in which it was founded, and the men and women who lived among the rounded summits of the Berkshire Hill plateau were absolutely typical of the New England country population of the mid-nineteenth century. Regarded in this light, the history of Middlefield can be considered as a monographic study of a typical hill-community and a contribution to the social history of Massachusetts in a period that has now definitely closed. Only by the minute, laborious investigation of hundreds upon hundreds of ancient deeds, poll lists, town records and letters can this by-gone society be recreated, and the life that once made busy the now deserted farms and fields be recorded for the benefit of the descendants of that rapidly vanishing race of New Englanders.

THEODORE CLARKE SMITH

Williams College, 1924

AUTHORS' PREFACE

“**T**O TRAVERSE the wide field with the aid of existing records, and with all the help tradition can afford; to read between the lines where acts alone appear, till in historical imagination the actors become visible and avow the motives of their deeds; to harmonize conflicting oral accounts; to give connection, form and proportion to the material gathered; to place the whole in just perspective, and animate it with warmth and color, so that the past may live again while you listen—this is what your centennial orator should do.”

This conception of an ideal history of Middlefield, voiced by the late Edward Payson Smith in his historical discourse at the Centennial celebration in 1883 could hardly be disregarded by his sons in their attempt to show in as interesting a manner as possible, how the life of this small hill-town of western Massachusetts, under the sway of far-reaching and uncontrollable economic, political and religious forces, has been a real, if not widely-known, portion of American history. As thorough a study of public and family records and historical authorities has been made as circumstances have permitted. The personal reminiscences of older residents have been gathered in order that the traditions and personalities of former years may enrich the lives of the sons and daughters of Middlefield to-day.

A special stimulus to the preparation of this work was the burning of the Congregational meetinghouse in 1900, when the difficulties encountered in obtaining authentic information regarding the early history of that ancient structure compelled recognition of the fact that if ever an adequate knowledge of the lives and times of the makers of Middlefield was to be acquired, the treasures in the memories of the older residents must be recorded before they should be lost forever. As a result, an Historical Committee was appointed, under the auspices of the Middlefield Country Club, which, for several years, was engaged in collecting and compiling this information. With singular good fortune the first chairman of this committee was

the beloved son of Middlefield, the late Metcalf John Smith, whose interest in the enterprise and whose knowledge of town affairs and town records, through his public service as town clerk and in other capacities, were of inestimable assistance.

Though the Country Club ceased in a few years to be an active organization, the writers continued to gather the necessary material. They are indebted for much of their information to the late Solomon F. Root, E. James Ingham, Oliver Church, Mrs. Charles Wright and Benjamin F. Peirce, and wish to express their thanks for the assistance of Clark B. Wright, John W. Crane, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur D. Pease, Henry S. Pease, Mrs. Daniel Alderman, Mrs. G. E. Cook and others. The Mack Genealogy, compiled by Mrs. Sophia Smith Martin, has been the source of a large amount of genealogical information. For other valued data of early families they acknowledge the help of Henry F. Church, Mrs. Idah Meacham Strobridge, Mrs. Sarah Ingham Bonney, Homer W. Hamilton, Mrs. W. S. Huntington, Miss H. Cerelia Snow, Miss Monemia Meacham, A. Rowley Babcock, Dana W. Robbins, Daniel R. Taylor and others.

The excellent compilation of material for the history of the Congregational Church, made by Rev. William T. Bartley, has lightened their labors considerably. They are indebted to Professor Herbert A. Youtz, of the Oberlin Graduate School of Religion, for much of the material included in Chapter XIII. They are especially under obligation to Dr. Theodore Clarke Smith, Professor of History in Williams College, for his assistance not only in organizing this work, but also for his contribution of Chapters VIII and XI, furnishing an illuminating study of Middlefield buildings as types of the various architectural styles of the past century. Their grateful thanks are also due to Professor Azariah S. Root, of Oberlin College, and to Professor Gerald Birney Smith, of the University of Chicago, for helpful review of text, and for their suggestions regarding the selection of illustrations and publication of this work.

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E. C. S.

P. M. S.