

**THE HISTORY OF MIDDLETOWN,
VERMONT, IN THREE DISCOURSES:
DELIVERED BEFORE THE CITIZENS
OF THAT TOWN, FEBRUARY 7 AND
21, AND MARCH 30, 1867**

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The History of Middletown, Vermont, in Three Discourses: Delivered Before the Citizens of That Town, February 7 and 21, and March 30, 1867 by Barnes Frisbie

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BARNES FRISBIE

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HISTORY
OF
MIDDLETOWN, VERMONT,
IN
THREE DISCOURSES,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE
CITIZENS OF THAT TOWN.

FEBRUARY 7 AND 21, AND MARCH 30, 1867,

BY THE

Hon. BARNES FRISBIE,
POULTNEY, VT.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE CITIZENS OF MIDDLETOWN.

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HISTORY OF MIDDLETOWN.

FRIENDS AND FELLOW CITIZENS :—You have assembled this evening to hear from me the history of Middletown. I should rejoice if I could assure you that I had a full and complete history ; but I cannot so assure you. I have recently written it out, although I have for twelve years or more intended to do so, and in the meantime have been collecting the materials, as I had opportunity. I now present it to you, not as a full and complete history, but as the best production I am able to give you.

Much of the early history of the town is in oblivion. Fifty years ago, when many of those pioneer fathers and mothers were living, the most of it might have been gathered up and saved ; but such as I have been able to collect in my time is hereby most respectfully and affectionately dedicated to and for the use of my native town.

I wish here to say, that for the literary merits of my production I claim nothing. My desire, and, I may say, only purposes have been to collect all the material facts I possibly could which go to make up your history, and to express them intelligibly and truthfully, conscious that if those facts can be preserved, they may be put in better form by some one more capable than myself, who shall come after me.

In regard to the history of this town, however, I do claim, that with the labor and attention I have given the matter during the last twelve years, that I have collected a good deal more of it than is now in the possession of any other person ; hence the importance of my writing it. I fear that unless I should write it,

and leave it where it will be preserved, that a large portion of what I now have, incomplete and imperfect as it is, would be beyond the reach of mortals at my decease. With this view I have written it, and am now happy to meet this full house and read it.

MIDDLETOWN is situated in the south-western part of Rutland County, and is bounded on the north by Poultney and Ira, on the east by Ira and Tinmouth, on the south by Tinmouth and Wells, and on the west by Wells and Poultney. As will be seen from the map, its shape or form is peculiar, which will be hereafter accounted for. The territory of which it is composed was taken from the towns of Poultney, Ira, Tinmouth and Wells. Poultney, Tinmouth and Wells received their charters as early as 1761. The date of the charter of Ira is believed to have been about the same time, though I have been unable to obtain the exact date.

About three-fourths of a mile north of the village of Middletown, a little east of the present dwelling house of Harvey Lef-fingwell, and in a pasture belonging to Royal Coleman, Esq., is the locality where was the north-east corner of Wells, the south-east corner of Poultney, the south-west corner of Ira, and the north-west corner of Tinmouth. The line from thence, between the towns of Wells and Tinmouth, run south, passing in its course through the eastern part of the village between the school house and the stream, a little west of the school house; also, in its course further south, it makes the west line of the "old Zenas Frisbie farm," so called, the east line of the "Thomas Morgan farm," and passes very near the west line of the "Burnam farm," now owned by S. W. Southworth, and the "Perry farm," now owned by Mr. Atwater. The line from thence (the corners above named), between the towns of Poultney and Ira, ran directly north from those corners, and lines running east and west from thence divided the towns above named.

The township of Middletown was created by an act of the Legislature of October 28th, 1784. Prior to that time the town, or the territory of which it is composed, was included in the above named four towns, with the lines as above indicated. The settlement of the town, or the territory, was commenced some years

before 1784; and in speaking of this settlement, we shall, for convenience, speak of it as in Middletown.

The exact date when the first settlers of the town came here, perhaps cannot now be given. It was before the revolutionary war. Mr. Thompson in his history says, that "the settlement was commenced a short time before the revolutionary war by Thomas Morgan and others," "and mills were erected." Thomas Morgan came here before the war, and so did Richard and Benjamin Haskins, Phineas Clough and Luther Filmore. Mr. Morgan, who lived until 1841, said to me before his death, that when he came here he found his way by marked trees, and that when he arrived not a tree had been cut, but throughout the entire town it was one unbroken forest. He also said to me, that he came about three years before the war commenced, and that when that commenced he left. But he probably treated the stirring events of 1777 in this region, in which we may include the evacuation of Ticonderoga, Burgoyne's invasion, and the battle of Bennington, as the commencement of the war, for he was here until a short time before the battle of Bennington, which occurred August 16th, 1777, over two years after the war had commenced. So that the probability is that the settlement was commenced in 1774.

Mr. Morgan, after he came, like all the early settlers, put up a log house, and commenced clearing up the forest. Mr. Morgan purchased a hundred acres of land about three-fourths of a mile south of where the village now is, and put up his log house a few feet north of where the framed house now stands on the "old Morgan farm." By the summer of 1777, I should judge, he had made considerable progress in clearing up his land, as he had that summer four acres of wheat, some sixty or seventy rods from his house, opposite of where Truman Kibburn now lives, and on the east side and adjoining what is now known as the "Coy Hill road." He was called away to Bennington, and his wheat was never harvested. Richard Haskins had commenced a settlement a little east of the village, near where Lucius Copeland, Esq., now lives. He, too, in the summer of 1777, had two acres of wheat which he never harvested, but went to Bennington.

Benj. Haskins had built a log house and commenced a settle-

ment near where Dea. A. Haynes now lives. Luther Filmore had put up a log house on the south-west corner of what is now known as "the green," in the village. Where Phineas Clough first located himself is not now positively known; but he very early settled on what has since been known as the "Orcutt farm," now occupied by Mr. Lobdill. Those five men are all who are now known to have been here before the Revolutionary war. They all left in the summer of 1777, joined the militia at Manchester, and were all in Bennington battle.

But were "mills erected" before the war? The mills known as "Miner's mills," in an early day, were built by Gideon Miner in 1782. They were located about a mile and a half east of where the village now is. Mr. Morgan then assisted Mr. Miner, as a workman, in building the mills. Morgan brought the mill irons from Bennington on a horse. Some of the Miner family have informed us that there was "some sort of a mill there" when Mr. Miner came; but Mr. Morgan's descendants are confident that he had nothing to do with mills in Middletown until he worked for Miner in 1782. So that we cannot reliably state by whom this some sort of a mill was built. The opinion of the old people seems to have been that it was the work of Mr. Morgan. It might have been; but whosoever it was, the mill never went into operation, and Mr. Miner had to build anew in 1782.

Mr. Thompson says, that the settlers "returned after the war." It is true there was not much done by way of settlement for some three or four years subsequent to the summer of 1777, when the settlers left to meet the invaders at Bennington. But we find Benj. Haskins and Phineas Clough back here in 1778, and Morgan and Filmore were back soon after; and a good many others were here before the close of the war. Azor Perry came as early as 1778. James and Thomas McClure, it is supposed, came in 1779. William and Jonathan Frisbie came in 1781; and Gideon Miner, Nathaniel Wood and his sons, Jacob and Ephraim, Caleb Smith, Jonathan Brewster, Gamaliel Waldo, Nathan Walton, and some others were here as early as 1782. And Joseph Spaulding and some others, it is supposed, came the same year, but we cannot be positive. We find that a Congregational Church was organ-

ized as early as the spring of 1782, and Mr. Spaulding was made the clerk of the church.

We shall now omit further mention of the first settlers, and the incidents, trials and hardships attending the settlement, until after we give an account of the organization of the town.

It is evident that the settlement was rapid, for in the fall of 1784, the people petitioned the Legislature, then in session at Rutland, for a new town—and we can now very readily see that the settlers upon those parts of the then towns of Poultney, Ira, Tinmouth and Wells, now included in the limits of Middletown, would naturally become a community by themselves, and unite their interests and feelings in spite of town lines. They had already done so—two churches had been organized—Congregational and Baptist, and a log meeting house erected near the south-east corner of the present burial ground, and the members of the churches were from the four towns, but had a common center, where it has been since, and now is. If those town lines had never been changed, there must have been the same churches here, the same business—the same village. Nature formed the territory for a town, and as the settlers increased in numbers, they became aware of it.

The original petition for a town, I have not been able to find, but the prayer of the petitioners was granted. On the 28th day of October, 1784, the Legislature passed an act of which the following is a copy :

An Act constituting a new Town by the name of Middletown.

“ WHEREAS, the inhabitants of a part of the towns of Wells, Tinmouth, Poultney and Ira, which are included in the bounds hereinafter described, have, by their petition represented, that they labor under great inconveniences with meeting with their several towns for public worship and town business, by reason of being surrounded by high mountains,

“ Be it therefore enacted, and it is hereby enacted by the representatives of the freemen of the State of Vermont in General Assembly met, and by the authority of the same, that the tract of land or district hereinafter described, be and is hereby created and incorporated into a township, by the name of Middletown,

“and the inhabitants thereof and their successors with the like
 “privileges and prerogatives, which the other towns in the state
 “are invested with, viz :

“Beginning at a beech tree marked, standing west 26 degrees,
 “south 310 chains from the north-east corner of Wells; thence
 “east 40 degrees south 290 chains, to a white ash tree standing
 “in Timmou:h west line; thence east 10 degrees south 45 chains,
 “to a beech marked; thence north 33 degrees east 264 chains,
 “to a beech marked; thence north 10 degrees west 333 chains,
 “to stake and stones standing in Poultney east line; thence
 “south 10 degrees west 28 chains, to stake and stones; thence
 “west 11 degrees north 60 chains, to a small beech marked;
 “thence south 45 chains, to a hard beech tree; thence west 40
 “degrees south 207 chains 5 links, to a stake and stones standing
 “in Wells north line; thence west — south 4 chains, to a stake;
 “thence south 10 degrees west 185 chains, to the first mentioned
 “bounds.”

From Thompson's Vermont we find that three thousand five hundred and ten acres were taken from Timmouth, six thousand one hundred and eighteen acres from Wells, two thousand three hundred and eighty-eight acres from Poultney, and one thousand eight hundred and twenty-acres from Ira; making in all fourteen thousand eight hundred and forty-one acres.

Those “high mountains,” with which the petitioners for a new town were “surrounded,” seem to have directed the survey; as, in point of fact, all acquainted with the locality well know that the town is surrounded by hills and mountains running around it in such directions, that the survey, as above given, in running around on the tops of those hills and mountains, gives the peculiar and unusual form which Middletown has, as will be seen from the map; and this accounts for the form or shape of the town.

I have very much desired to give you more than I am able to of the action of the people in procuring their charter; or, more properly speaking perhaps, their act of incorporation, and for that purpose have sent to the office of the Secretary of State for the original petition, but the Secretary writes me that it cannot be found. Joseph Spaulding, doubtless, took the lead in that move-