THE HISTORY
OF THE TOWN OF
MARLBOROUGH
WINDHAM COUNTY
VERMONT

BY
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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
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MONTPELIER
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kettles over it filled with water, the temperature of which he raised to a boiling heat, took up the floor by the door, and calmly sat down, ladle in hand waiting for the time when the Indians, rushing in, would fall down into the cellar and give him a chance to dash on them the hot water and scald them to death.

In the meantime the armed militia proceeded northward to meet the advancing enemy, and either destroy them, or drive them back before they reached the settlement. They continued their march, bearing in a northerly direction nearly three miles towards Newfane. They found the snow very deep and the trees so heavily laden as to bend in every direction, forming a natural barrier against their advance. At length they became convinced that the combined ferocity of Tories and Savages could not surmount the obstructions by the hand of nature. Accordingly they gave up their march, returned to the settlement, found Mrs. Mather's bread in the oven, and left not a whit behind. Here they met their companions in arms.

During the pleasant day referred to, the industrious citizens of Newfane were engaged in piling brush, rolling logs, and clearing their new farms. As they saw the storm approaching near the close of the day, they set fire to their brush and log heaps which they had so laboriously piled. Soon brilliant flames sprang up, which shone upon the horizon and reflected their crimson light afar through the falling snow, and being seen at a distance, confirmed the whole region in the opinion that on that dismal night the Indians and Tories had fired every log house in the pleasant vales and upon the lofty heights of Newfane. They were happy however to find it a mere delusion.

When the facts of the case reached Marlborough, the brave soldiery, with dauntless courage, pursued their wives and children and brought them back in triumph as the daring achievements and noble trophies of their valor; took possession of their deserted dwellings, and exchanged their martial glory for the sweet enjoyment of domestic tranquility. Thus ended their campaign of 1780.

CHAPTER IV
Natural Advantages—Minerals
Streams—Manufactories

The town of Marlborough in its native state was clothed with a heavy growth of timber. We know not of a single right of land on which the rock maple did not abound in sufficient numbers to furnish sap for making a full supply of maple sugar for domestic use. The trees were "boxed" with an axe; beneath the box an incision was made with a tapping iron into the body of the tree, into which was driven a spout to carry the sap to a trough. The troughs were principally made of ash and basswood logs from twelve to eighteen inches in diameter, and about three feet long, halved in the center and hollowed out with an axe. The sap was poured from these troughs into sap buckets, and carried by the aid of a sap yoke upon the shoulders, to the place of boiling. This was prepared by making a fire against a large log, or rather between two large logs, over which were suspended from a long pole supported by a couple of crochets the iron kettles in which the sap was boiled down to a thick syrup. The syrup was taken home, clarified, and "sugared off." Often times the snow was so deep and soft, that men would gather sap upon snow shoes. How rude were the implements and how fatiguing the toil, when compared with modern improvements!

The forests have furnished and are furnishing an untold quantity of mill logs and building timber which has been sawn and manufactured into varieties of lumber for home consumption, with a surplus for exportation. Large quantities of wood are also cut, corded and hauled to neighboring villages, where it finds a ready sale at paying prices. Formerly ashes were gathered, where logheaps had been consumed in clearing new lands, and from domestic hearths, and manufactured into salts by boiling down the lye to a consistency much resembling a coarse variety of maple sugar. This was carried to merchants and exchanged for goods, and by them manufactured into pot and pearl ashes for foreign markets. In some instances the ashes were sold to owners of asheries, who, on a large scale, made a
business of manufacturing potash for the Boston market. These were sources of income much valued, and have had their influence in the growth of the town.

Soil. The soil is a deep rich mould, made up of animal and vegetable decay with an intermixture of loam resting upon a subsoil of hard pan, or drift, capable of a high state of cultivation. It produces good pasturage, hay, rye, wheat, oats, Indian corn, barley and the usual varieties of garden and field vegetables congenial to the climate. The principal product is grass, which furnishes the material for raising the best of stock, and producing the best of dairies. It has proved in no small degree to enrich the farmers and increase the wealth of the town. “Blooded” animals have been introduced as breeders, to the improved appearance of the herds, exhibiting a commendable effort of the farmers to raise the best variety of stock for work, the dairy, and the shambles. In the summer the cattle have a wide range of pasture; in the winter they are furnished with stalls in stables convenient for their feeding and rest. Their sale amply rewards the owner for the nursing care which they have experienced.

Fruit. Wild fruits, such as cherries, strawberries, raspberries, and blackberries, have a rich spontaneous growth, and produce a luscious harvest. Cultivated fruit, such as apples, pears, plums, and cherries, have been grown as a luxury for domestic use. The orchards planted by the fathers of the settlement show the marks of age and decay, and, we are sorry to say, in some instances of unjustifiable neglect. Young orchards have a thrifty growth, and promise a good return for judicious cultivation.

Minerals. In the early settlement of the township, near Mather’s Mills, was found a hornblende rock in mica slate, in which was discovered upon the surface, somewhat embedded, precious and massive garnets with chlorite and sulphuret of iron. The garnets in perfect crystals were fascinating to the eye. A Mr. Samuel Mather, a man of rare genius and of a peculiar visionary temperament, having an occasional residence in the place, became charmed with the appearance of this rock. He pretended to possess a glass into which he could look and see the mineral treasures in the bowels of the earth. He induced individuals to believe that in the heart of this rock he saw caverns lined with ingots of gold. This excited a gold fever. With a burning zeal the rock was opened by the gold seekers and a deep pit excavated, by drilling and blasting, at an expenditure of much hard work and about all the riches they possessed, without reaching the golden caverns.

Some forty years ago in conversation with a gentlemen advanced to middle life, we were told by him that when he was a boy, he spent one summer with the men working in the mine, of whom the inquiry was particularly made if they found any gold. He replied that they found something that looked like gold and sent it away to be refined, but the refiner sent word back “that there was so much plaguey brimstone about it that he could not get out any gold.”

This is recorded not only as an item of historical interest, but as one of the wild delusions of mineral hunters deceived by pyrites, a mineral of little worth, of yellowish cast, which has received the name of “fool’s gold.”

Steeple. In this town there are three beds of marble, one near the farm of the late Elisha Worden. This mineral receives the common name of chalk stone from the circumstance of its making a white mark resembling chalk. It is also called soapstone in consequence of its soapy or greasy feeling. It is valuable for furnaces, for the lining of furnaces, and to resist and retain the action of heat. The softer or more talcose variety is used with oil, for oiling or lubricating heavy machinery, such as the axles of large wheels. These quarries have been opened and wrought to some extent, and have furnished large quantities of stone for the Boston and New York markets. For some years past these quarries have been almost abandoned, but we trust the time is not far distant when their valuable qualities will again be brought into notice.

In the Worden quarry are found perfect rhombic crystals of brown spar embedded in the steatite, also veins of greenish tale and crystalline magnesian carbonate of lime, of snow whiteness. In the same rock is found the micaite or fibrous spar; also near the rock is found green chlorite in which are embedded octagonal crystals of the magnetic oxide of iron. Cubic crystals of iron pyrites are not infrequent in the syenite and mica slate rocks. There is also a fine locality of actinolite on the farm of
Ward Bellows. Hornblende slate, containing acicular crystals of hornblende, is found on the farm of Zenas Whitney, and on the stage road upon the highest elevation near Wilmington. The rock on which the township rests is mica slate, with talc-micaeous slate, occasionally interstratified with syenite, consisting of hornblende, spotted with feldspar, and an occasional bed of hornblende slate. Scratches upon the surfaces of rocks exhibit evidences of heavy drift agencies from a northwesterly to a southeasterly direction, corroborated by boulders of granular quartz not found in situ in the vicinity, and by boulders of serpentinite scattered over the easterly section of the town, which are evidently from a massive bed of that rock in the western border of the town on the farm of Levi G. Ballou.

Beds of clay and sand of a good quality for brick are found, and it is our opinion that on or near the surface are found suitable stones in sufficient quantity for substantial stone fences. In some localities fine slabs of mica slate are obtained for valuable purposes, and fence posts are quarried of an enduring quality.

Springs abound, of pure cold water clear as crystal, gushing from the ground and furnishing one of the greatest boons of nature. Occasionally one is found impregnated with sulphur and iron, which is readily recognized by the yellowish mineral sediment deposited.

STREAMS. The town is well watered. Every farm has its springs and brooks and wells from living fountains, yielding a never failing supply for all desirable domestic uses. Several valuable streams have their rise in town and find their way to the Connecticut River. It is said to be a remarkable fact that not a stream of water of sufficient size to fill a goose quill runs into town, visible on the top of the soil, but several streams take their rise, among which is a portion of the west branch of West River, and also Whetstone brook, which flows into the Connecticut River at Brattleboro, and furnishes the water power to the many valuable mills and machines set in motion upon its banks. Branches of the Green River also have their rise in town, furnishing valuable mill seats, and wend their way through Guilford to the Connecticut River.

PONDS. In town are two natural ponds of considerable dimensions. Allen's Pond is situated in the northeast corner of the town, and is about one and a half miles long and three-fourths of a mile wide. South Pond is situated in the southeasterly section of the town and nearly of the same dimensions. These ponds were originally well stocked with fish, which some of the early settlers took in great abundance. In a short time with hook and line they would load themselves with the beautifully spotted salmon-colored mountain trout, in excellence nowhere surpassed, weighing from one to two pounds each. But latterly it is not so, for the numerous anglers have to a great extent exhausted their waters of their once delicious treasures.

MILL PRIVILEGES. These are more numerous than permanent. On the streams above noticed, mills have been erected, doing good business a portion of the year in the manufacture of lumber, to the great convenience and advantage of the citizens. Probably the most permanent and valuable water power in town is on the stream issuing from the South Pond, on which there is a fall of any desirable amount, for the construction of improved machinery to do valuable service, and unquestionably it will be put to the test, in addition to its present desirable use. The first mill built in town was a saw mill erected by Col. William Williams, in 1772, upon the site since known as the Underwood Mill, which has passed through the hands of several owners and is now in the possession of Absalom Snow. Since the erection of the first mill by Col. Williams, several others have been built and gone into decay. For the number of owners of those in present use, see the list in another place.

MOUNTAINS. Although the town presents several prominent elevations, Centre Mountain is the highest and is situated in the center of the township, from which circumstance it receives its name. Much of it is still covered with a heavy growth of timber.

CURIOSITIES. There are no caverns in town to our knowledge, but there is over a branch of Green River a natural stone bridge of some interest, on the farm of the late Jonas Smith, now owned by Clark A. Winchester. It is said that the Indians, before the settlement of the town, were in the habit of following up the stream to this bridge and then returning.

DISTILLERIES. In the last, and early part of the present century, this town was famous for its crops of potatoes, both for their large quantity per acre and their excellent quality, some persons raising 400 bushels or more to the acre, and they
were considered a profitable crop at twelve and a half cents per bushel, probably as much as at forty or fifty cents at the present time.

About the year 1810, John S. Strong erected buildings near the gate on the old turnpike, a mile east of the meeting house, and commenced distilling alcohol from potatoes, which received the common name of potato whiskey. Another was erected about the same time by Francis Very, on the farm now owned by Reuben Winchester; and a third one was built by Levi Barret and others on his premises, now owned by Simeon Adams. These were run only for a few years and went to ruin sooner than their influences.

Asheries. Several asheries have existed in town for the manufacture of both pot and pear ashes. The first was erected by Messrs. Phineas and Timothy Mather, near their dwellings, and afterwards the business was continued by Messrs. David, Cotton, Phineas, Jr., and Rufus Mather, in Company. Francis Very erected a potash near his distillery; so also did John S. Strong, near his, Levi Barret and Roswell Paddleford, near theirs, and Lucius Field put up one near his store in the middle of the town, all of which did a successful business. They created a demand for ashes which were carefully saved by the citizens and sold to their own advantage and to that of the purchaser. All have gone to decay.

Chair Factory. For many years, Capt. Nathaniel Whitney and his son Solomon carried on the business of chair making, and manufactured substantial plain and fancy work which is still preserved in domestic use. For the last thirty years this business has been abandoned in town.

Starch Factory. In the year 1835, Cotton and Dan Mather erected a starch factory at the Mather's Mills, so called, which did a successful business for a few years, but owing to the blight of the potato crop went into disuse.

Tanneries. The principal manufactory of leather have been owned by the Messrs. Mather, and carried on by Capt. Timothy Mather and his son Dan, who succeeded him. As was formerly the custom, they tanned the hides furnished by their customers into leather which was manufactured for domestic uses. They also purchased stock of their own and manufactured leather for the accommodation of their patrons with a surplus for other markets. The business was considered good, yielding a fair profit, but from various causes for some time past it has been abandoned.

Domestic Manufactures. Formerly the mothers and their daughters spun and wove nearly or quite all the cloth with which their families were clad. Flax was raised and spun upon a foot-wheel and manufactured into nice linen cloth. The tow was carded by hand and spun upon a high wheel and woven into tow cloth—a substantial article for common use. For many years wool was carded by hand, spun upon a high wheel called a spinning wheel, and woven into cloth in a common hand loom. It was made into garments by the industry and ingenuity of the females. Even down to the present day we are happy to say that in many families the mothers and daughters still know the use of the wheel and loom, and garments of domestic make constitute quite an item of common wear.

Farming. The inhabitants of Marlborough have been and still are principally farmers and mechanics. Farming is the leading business and grass the principal product. Grain is grown in sufficient quantities for bread and feed for animals. Good crops of wheat, rye, Indian corn, and oats, are annually produced for domestic use, with a surplus of potatoes for market. Formerly many hogs were fattened with boiled potatoes, milk, and meal, and carried to the Boston market. Beef was also stall-fed with potatoes and meal, and sold to drovers. Thus was formed quite an item of revenue to industrious and thriving farmers. Latterly the blight has affected the potatoes and the crop has become so uncertain as to discourage its cultivation with any reliance upon it as productive or sure, yet food enough is raised to feed the farmers' own meat, but not enough to feed cattle for a foreign market. A small surplus, however, of oxen, cows, and young cattle, are annually furnished from the town and sold to speculators. Nearly every family furnishes a quantity of butter of an excellent quality for market. In addition to these sources of income there are several dairies in town from which several tons of cheese are annually produced, not to be surpassed in excellence, and commanding the best prices. Thus mowings and pastures furnish the great staple for the increasing wealth of the town.
SUGAR. The manufacture of sugar from the rock maple (acer saccharinum) from the earliest settlement of the town has been a rich and delicious source of profit. The introduction of modern improvements both diminishes the toil and increases the value of the product. The old troughs and tapping irons are laid aside and pine buckets and hollow tubes for spouts take their place. Few of the tall massive trees of the olden time which have endured the winter blasts of centuries still yield their annual supply of sap. Beautiful groves of maples have sprung up, self-planted on grounds once cleared, and where crops were grown and gathered, and now constitute the principal sugar orchards in town. In or near these orchards are erected convenient sugar houses in which are the boiling apparatus set in arches, tubs or reservoirs for holding sap, buckets and tubs when not in use, and seasoned wood for the furnaces. The sap is gathered from clean buckets and conveyed by teams to the sugar house, where it is boiled without exposure to injury from ashes, smoke, or dust, and made into sugar approaching a snowy whiteness. It is then put into tubs or run into tin moulds and thus prepared for domestic use or market. Some twenty tons or more are annually made in town and consumed or sold; with an abundance of trees for enlarged operations when the demand shall require it.

TURNPIKE. The Green Mountain Turnpike was chartered to a company of stockholders, and passed through the center of Marlborough across the Green Mountains from Brattleboro to Bennington. It opened one of the great thoroughfares of travel for emigrants and men of business or pleasure passing from the east to the west. It also opened facilities for market, increased the income of public houses, and tended in no small degree to bring the town into notice, and to improve the appearance and wealth of the place. Like similar enterprises in the state the burden of the expense fell upon a few and it was abandoned as a lucrative investment of capital.

CHAPTER V
First Congregational Society—Covenant
Dr. Gershom C. Lyman Settled—Diary—Ordination
Confession of Faith and Covenant
Life and Character of Dr. Lyman
List of his Publications—Epitaph

About the year 1770, a number of families from the Counties of Worcester and Hampton, Mass., and Hartford County, Conn., strengthened by their arrival the infant settlement.

Some of them were professed and hopeful followers of our Divine Redeemer, and united in establishing the order of the public religious worship of God; they conducted the services of their meetings by reading sermons, by prayers, and singing. They were few in number, but united and persevering in the support of religious order and the Lord blessed them in laying a good foundation for future action. The late Mrs. Deborah Morgan Underwood, widow of Jonathan Underwood, informed us that she “used to attend meeting at Col. Granger’s, where they used to read sermons and pray.” She said “the people were punctual in their attendance and great harmony prevailed in town in its first settlement.”

In 1774, the Rev. Abner Reeves of Brattleboro came and preached the first sermon delivered in town by a regular minister, from Mark 16. 15, “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” By the year 1776, about 40 families had joined this settlement in the wilderness, some of whom were anxious to enjoy the ordinances of the gospel, and the privileges of gospel ministry, and be bound together by covenant vows, to watch over each other in love and Christian fellowship.

On an application to the late Rev. Joseph Lyman, D.D., of Hatfield, Mass., he came, and after due preparation, on the 20th day of October, 1776, organized the Congregational Church in Marlborough, consisting of nine males and eight females, upon the following platform: