

THE OPTICAL CITY

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Southbridge was incorporated as a town Feb. 15, 1816. Its colonial and revolutionary history is that of the towns of Charlton, Sturbridge and Dudley from which its territory was taken. The origin of the town was in a poll-parish incorporated Feb. 28, 1801, under the name of the Second Religious Society in the town of Charlton. To this poll-parish was attached the name of Honest Town, a sobriquet of doubtful source and meaning. The name Southbridge, it is understood, was proposed by the venerable Capt. Abel Mason, Sr., and was accepted at a meeting held Dec. 6, 1814, but the discussion in regard to its acceptance was the hottest that the parish had ever known. Quinebaug was the rival name at this meeting but it was voted down. At a meeting held Jan. 3, 1815, the vote for the name Southbridge was reconsidered, and the name Vienna was substituted; however, this Austrian cognomen was not satisfactory and at the adjourned meeting held Jan. 20, the advocates of Southbridge were again triumphant; but even then this name escaped oblivion only from the fact that there was found to be no other Southbridge in the state, it having been voted, "That if there be any other town by the name of Southbridge in this commonwealth, that Newburgh or Newburn be substituted." So far as is known there is no other town or place of its name in the United States. This story of the naming of the town is interesting in that it shows how early in the town's history were begun those heated debates and protracted meetings for which our town has been noted and it is a prediction that Southbridge citizens were not to enter into any project or enterprise without due consideration and forethought.

The first town meeting was held March 6, 1816, and the officers elected were representative citizens whose descendants in most cases hold today a high place in the esteem of their fellows. James Dennison, for whom Dennison district was named, was probably the first settler in this region. He came from Medfield about 1730, and for two years made his home in a kind of cave of rocks which can still be seen on the easterly side of the road between the residences of Willard P. Morse and Mrs. Vernon Chamberlain. The first resident in the present center of the town was Samuel Freeman, before 1744. He was father of Colonel Benjamin Freeman, who, in 1801, deeded to the parish, an acre of land for a burying-ground, the beginning of our beautiful Oak Ridge Cemetery. His home was on Elm Street. Several of his descendants are present residents.

The first business of manufacturing nature was conducted, as now, along the banks of the picturesque Quinebaug which, passing through the center of the town, keeps the wheels of our mills a whirling. Farming was the primitive occupation and saw and grist mills were erected as necessity required. It appears that John Gray, a clothier, did business in what is now Southbridge as early as 1790, and Oliver Plimpton opened the first store in 1791, but merchants and manufacturers were few before 1800. The first cotton factory in this vicinity was erected in 1811 at the place now called Westville by an incorporated company with a capital of \$6,000. The first woolen mill was built in 1813 near the present location of the Central Mills Co. The introduction of the cotton and woolen business may be considered as the most important factor in the rapid increase of business and population within the present limits of Southbridge. Globe Village received its name from the Globe Manufacturing Co., and was first settled

in 1814. The repair shop of the Hamilton Print Works at the east of the Main Street Bridge is one of the oldest buildings in town. Two of the oldest occupied homesteads in Southbridge are the Clark place at the corner of High and Glover Streets, and the Marcy house, opposite the Methodist Church. Sandersdale is located upon the homestead farm of the late Colonel Thomas Cheney, the pioneer settler there, and was at first called Ashland, but was changed to its present name in honor of James Sanders. From these small beginnings has arisen an enterprising, up-to-date town, whose manufacturers are sought for by the whole mercantile world and whose citizens have reared for themselves and posterity an enviable reputation for business sagacity and integrity.

Southbridge is proud of being the birthplace and early home of William Learned Marcy, once Governor of New York, United State Senator, and Secretary of State and War, and who was the promulgator of the phrase, "That to the victor belongs the spoils of the enemy;" of Holmes Ammidown, a millionaire merchant of New York, the donor of the perpetual lease for our unsurpassed town library; of Moses Plimpton, Ebenezer D. Ammidown, Linus Child, Dr. Samuel Hartwell, Frederick W. Bottom, Timothy Paige, and of others, living and dead, all of whom have reached eminent places in their chosen occupations or professions. More recently the names of the late George L. Stedman of Albany, N.Y., a noted lawyer, of William DeWitt Hyde, President of Bowdoin College, of George T. Angell, President of the society "with the long name," serve to show the intellectual attainment of former citizens, and the present residents have no cause to be ashamed of the moral and educational status of their fellow-men.

Southbridge has always been proud of its school system and the recent expenditure of \$30,000 for the Marcy Street Grammar School building is a token of its care for rising generations. The High School, F. E. Corbin, Principal, occupies a portion of the imposing Town Hall building, which structure has cost \$100,000 and is recognized as without a superior in this portion of New England. There are twenty-three common schools in town, upon which and the High School, are expended annually from \$15,000 to \$25,000. Besides these there are two parochial schools, having a daily attendance of several hundred pupils. The Southbridge Public Library, Miss Harriet H. Stanley, Librarian, contains upwards of 17,000 volumes and is supported at the public expense.

There are seven churches, two Congregational, two Roman Catholic, one each Methodist, Universalist and Baptist, and these occupy substantial edifices. The pastors are respectively: Revs. Silvanua Hayward, Willis A. Hadley, J. B. Drennan, G. E. Brochn, C. H. Waters, G. W. Penniman and H. J. White. The young man finds his physical, mental and moral life strengthened and made pleasurable at our unrivalled Y.M.C.A. building, which stands on one of the principal corners of the centre, and makes an imposing and attractive appearance. It cost some \$75,000.

Another public enterprise, in which the town takes just pride, is its highway and sidewalk maintenance and development. Visitors to town invariably speak at once of its wide, well-shaded, and at night, well-lighted streets, and they go away with flattering comments on its beautiful drives and excellent walks in all directions. The town has five miles of concrete walk and the portion of Main Street between Hamilton Street and the bank building is macadamized. Last year an expenditure of \$10,000 was made for highways and sidewalks, and before long Hamilton and other streets in town will be macadamized. The sewer system has been started and will be pushed forward until the main part of the town is covered. The Southbridge Water Supply Co., in which local capitalists are interested, has three good sized reservoirs which furnish abundant hydrant and house supply. The Southbridge Fire Department, consisting of two engine and two hook and ladder companies is well-equipped and manned, with

Charles P. Phipps as Chief. At Globe Village a new engine-house was erected about four years ago at an expense of \$9,000, and before many years the centre company will be furnished with new quarters. Fortunately the town has escaped disastrous fires in recent years.

During the past year an Armory costing \$10,000, has been erected by the town for the use of Co. K., 6th Regt., M.V.M., Capt. U. A. Goodell, in which company the town has taken a just pride since its organization ten or more years ago. Co. K. has responded almost to a man for the volunteer service in the present war and is stationed with the other companies of the regiment at Camp Dewey. The Southbridge & Sturbridge Electric R. R., chartered in the autumn of 1895, was opened for traffic in August, 1890, and its stock is controlled by leading citizens of Southbridge and Sturbridge. Calvin D. Paige is its President. The road-bed and rolling stock are excellent and the patronage is generous. It runs through Hamilton and Main Streets and connects Fiskdale in Sturbridge with Sandersdale. The Southbridge National and the Southbridge Savings Banks occupy an elegant structure in the centre of the town.

Oak Ridge Cemetery, under public control, is considered the most beautiful "city of the dead" in any town of the same population in the Commonwealth. Evergreen Cemetery, belonging to the Catholic Churches, is also pleasantly situated. From the first days of settlement, the tilling of the soil and the raising of fine breeds of domestic animals have brought much renown to Southbridge. The town is full of various clubs and organizations for advancement along educational, social and philanthropic lines. Secret societies are numerous, among which may be mentioned the Masons, Royal Arcanum, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Foresters, A.O.U.W., Knights of Columbus, A.O.H., and several among the French people. It has also an active board of trade of which J. D. Blanchard is President. Malcolm Ammidon post, G.A.R., and the W.R.C. hold meetings in Memorial Hall, a room devoted to their use in the Town Hall building. Southbridge has always been loyal to her country's calls, and sent some four hundred men to the Civil War, whose services and memory are gratefully remembered on every Memorial Day. The first newspaper printed in Southbridge, the Reformer and Moralist, was started in 1825 in the old brick building opposite Mrs. Hartwell's residence, Southbridge, by Deacon Haynes, father of Deacon Haynes of Sturbridge. There are now three weekly newspapers, the Journal, the Herald and the Press, supply local and suburban news.

Southbridge is reached by rail over the East Thompson (Ct.) branch of the New England R. R., which gives us daily communication with Worcester, Boston, Providence and Norwich.

The present board of selectmen consists of Thomas Sanders, Joseph M. Olney, and William C. Callahan, and town clerk is Edgar M. Phillips, and the town treasurer, John A. Hall. The assessed valuation of the town, May 1, 1897, was \$3,589,172, of which \$1,552,208 was in the center watch district. The rate of taxation was \$15.40 per \$1000. The population according to the last census was 8,250, which is probably smaller than at present.

Recently in Boston, there was a reunion and banquet of former residents of Southbridge who are interested in the business and educational life of the "Hub." The large number present on that occasion testified to the loyalty which they have for their old home, and also shows the influence in professional and social circles which they are exerting in the busy life of a large city. This is also true of many cities where our old friends and acquaintances have gone to take up their abode and reflect credit upon us. What greater proof is needed that Southbridge, while famous in the mercantile world as the producer of

optical goods, shuttles and knives than which no better are made, has no less great distinction than being the home of law-abiding, peace-loving, industrious and ambitious people, who, whether they remain in town or go out into the world, bear the stamp of genuine manhood and lofty purpose.

Wilford J. Litchfield.