

Southbridge As A Poll Parish

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"Although the corporate name of the Poll parish was of a religious character, the popular name may be called a moral one. Perhaps this is a case where religion and morality were intended to be united. This popular name was "Honest Town." I have endeavored to find out the exact reason for such a moral epithet, but nothing historic or traditional has come to my notice which would explain the exact reason of the name. I am obliged to rely upon Moses Plimpton's conjectures in this matter. He says, in his *History of Southbridge*, which was delivered in three lectures, in 1836 (now in printed form): "We had built a meeting-house, made calculations for public worship by ourselves, applied for incorporation as a parish, etc., but in all these matters had forgotten to give ourselves a name. We could not conveniently, or rather properly, be East Parish, West Parish or South Parish, because either of those appellations would apply to one of the three towns to which we belonged. In this state of things, and from the necessity of the case, some person or persons, (and it will probably be never known who) gave us a name, and that Honest Town. It may have been attached to us by some in the old towns from which we had separated in a moment of resentment at our obstinacy, in not being satisfied to go some miles to meeting, it may have come from some wag or bar-room joker over his mug of flip, or possibly from some one of our own, really honest inhabitants who firmly believed that there was more true, genuine honesty here than in any other place in this part of the country. Be all these things as they may, it is certain that this place, now Southbridge, for twenty years before we became a town, was known far and near by the name of Honest Town...."

Miss Katherine Edwards, in an article published in 1899, gives this story of William Learned Marcy, as occurring during the exciting days of the formation of the Poll parish: "One morning, an egg was brought into the Marcy household, and on it, carefully marked in black was the inscription, 'Woe be to Honest Town.' The days of the Salem witchcraft were not so old but that a flavor still lingered about these early settlers. People came from far and near to see this wonderful egg. One day, however, when fresh visitors had inspected the egg and a new theory was advanced as to how it was done, the mother saw a knowing look in William's eye, who, being strictly questioned, acknowledged how and when it was done." A similar story to this related by Rev. Zephaniah Baker, in his sketch of Dudley.

By the act of incorporation of "Honest Town," Oliver Plimpton was authorized to call a meeting of the Poll parish and accordingly he issued a warrant to Luther Ammidown of Charlton, "Merchant," directing him to notify and warn the inhabitants of the new Poll parish of a meeting to be held on Tuesday, March 31, 1801.....