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Township of Monro

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OF those who read these lines, probably not one in a thousand has ever heard of the township of Monro. It is not strange—indeed, it was some years from the time I first saw the map of Monro until I learned anything of either its name or its history. And yet, had the Fates so willed, it might have made its own small place in state history; and the Union Station and the Post Office in Washington D. C., and the state capital in Madison, Wisconsin might have been constructed of Monro White instead of Bethel White granite.

But the township of Monro was still-born. It was an unwanted child, and no doubt the parents—the towns of Bethel, Randolph, Royalton, and Tunbridge were distinctly relieved.

The origins of Monro go back into the history of Tunbridge Gore. This narrow strip of land was left over when the towns of Royalton and Tunbridge were chartered—the former on the basis of a New York grant of 1769, and the latter by New Hampshire in 1761. Thus it came about that in 1785 Paul Spooner and fourteen associates were given title to the Gore, which, for political purposes, was annexed to Tunbridge. Perhaps it is typical of such gores to breed lawsuits and disaffection; at all events, to believe Mrs. Lovejoy, author of the history of Royalton, such was the case of Spooner's Gore.

The residents, or some of them at least, having served an apprenticeship in this controversy, turned their attention to a new proposition—the creation of a town which should embrace the corners of Bethel, Randolph, Royalton, and Tunbridge. The tract proposed would have totalled some 9285 acres, of which 2355 would have been taken from Bethel; 2560, from Royalton; 2270, from Tunbridge; and 2100, from Randolph. Substantially, it

included the valley of the Middle Branch of the White River from a point below East Bethel to a point north of South Randolph, together with a considerable area of hill country sloping down to that valley on either side. In Randolph it included what was called Davis Gore, together with part or all of the Parks, Persons, Evans, and Rogers Lots. In Bethel, it began at Mr. Ellis's holding, Lot 1 Second Range East of the Branch, and took in 21 lots in all, the southernmost being that of Mr. Green, on the Royalton border. Eighteen lots in Royalton would have fallen within its bounds, all to them in Town Plot. Tunbridge's share embraced 20 lots, six of them in the disputed Tunbridge Gore region. The whole would have made an odd shaped but compact tract, some five miles long, and at most two miles wide. It would have included the present villages of South Randolph and East Bethel; and among its unknown assets would have been the granite deposit on Quarry Hill.

That such a township had much to be said for it is evident to anyone familiar with local geography, despite the casual verdict rendered by the Royalton historian, who wrote: "It is difficult to understand just what motives prompted them to meditate the formation of a new town by taking portions from..." existing towns. If one lays off the approximate boundaries of the proposed tract on the U. S. Geological Survey map (Randolph Quadrangle) it becomes apparent that it had more natural, functional boundaries than did any of the parent towns.

In the first place, the towns in question are traversed by the three parallel branches of the White River, all of which join the main stream in a distance of some six miles as it crosses Bethel and Royalton townships. Today the main villages of Bethel and Randolph lie in the valley of the Third Branch; the main villages of Tunbridge and Royalton lie in the valley of the First Branch; but the Middle Branch flows through East Brookfield, North Randolph, East Randolph, South Randolph, and East Bethel, down to North Royalton or Foxville—a series of communities whose natural interests are in common, but whose public affairs are administered from the larger villages of the other two valleys.

In the second place, the heights of land lying between at least three of the sectors and their respective government headquarters were true barriers to travel in late winter and early spring, if not

at other seasons. From South Randolph to Randolph Center, then the seat of town meeting, is a rise of more than 800 feet. The road from East Bethel to Bethel traverses Quarry and Christian Hills at an elevation of 1200 feet—only slightly less than that of the Center. And from the Rae School, in old District No. 7 of Tunbridge, to Tunbridge Village, the road rises nearly 500 feet in half a mile, as it climbs over Tunbridge Hill. Only in Royalton was there a reasonably direct and level road to the center of population.

My first knowledge of the town was from a map, drawn on four sheets of foolscap pasted together. It was probably made in the summer or fall of 1809, by Jonathan Whitney, a self-taught surveyor, teacher, and farmer living in the Gore. Further investigation uncovered, in the State Department files at Montpelier, three musty documents which contain practically all that can be ascertained regarding the project. The first was a petition, dated at Tunbridge, October 10, 1809, and bearing 56 signatures; the second, a similar petition with 89 signers, dated August, 1820, and thoroughly written over with various endorsements tracing its progress through the legislature; and the third, a "counter-petition and remonstrance", dated at Randolph, October 1, 1823. The Journal of the Assembly and the records of Governor and Council furnish official confirmation of the legislative action.

In October, 1809, when the legislature met, the following document was laid before it:

"To The Honorable the General Assembly of the State of Vermont next to be convened at Montpelier on the second Thursday in Oct. instant. A petition a number of the inhabitants of the towns of Bethel, Randolph, Tunbridge & Royalton. Humbly showing that whereas your Honor's petitioners, inhabitants of the living on the contiguous corners of the aforementioned towns by reason of the local situation labor under many and great inconveniencies, firstly from the distance at which they are placed from the center of their respective towns, secondly by reason of the roughness of the road and the allmost inaccessible mountains that some of us have to pass over to get to the place of public worship or other public business and thirdly what renders it still more inconvenient in the winter season it is frequently impossible to keep a road through the snow so that some of us have to

travel from 9 to 12 miles to get to our annual March meeting and many others not necessary to mention at this time. All of which we your Honors Humble petitioners as good citizens as bound in duty shall ever pray.

Dated at Tunbridge this 10th Day Oct 1809."

<i>Jonathan Whitney</i>	<i>Jonathan Peake</i>	<i>Ezra Young</i>
<i>Pryah Green</i>	<i>Jared Rich</i>	<i>George N. Kinney</i>
<i>Nathaniel Morrill</i>	<i>John Page</i>	<i>Lyman Wight</i>
<i>Eleazer Clossen</i>	<i>Oliver Preston</i>	<i>Paul Smith</i>
<i>Reuben Bloss</i>	<i>William Goodrich</i>	<i>Asa Parn Jr.</i>
<i>William Wight</i>	<i>Isach Hincer</i>	<i>Wm. Anderson</i>
<i>James Morrill Jr.</i>	<i>John Parish</i>	<i>Jaman Woodworth</i>
<i>Ziba Gifford</i>	<i>James Woodworth</i>	<i>Enoch Grean</i>
<i>John D. Brooks</i>	<i>Wm. Jones</i>	<i>Abraham Sargent</i>
<i>Riel Cross</i>	<i>Ephraim Terry</i>	<i>Samuel Pain</i>
<i>John W. Evens</i>	<i>Leonard Fish</i>	<i>Elisha A. Fowler</i>
<i>James Kelsey</i>	<i>Robert Anderson</i>	<i>Joseph Carpenter</i>
<i>Beriah Badcock</i>	<i>John Moxley Jr.</i>	<i>Wm. Southworth</i>
<i>John Gifford</i>	<i>Squire Cleveland</i>	<i>Daniel Woodbury</i>
<i>James Annis</i>	<i>Arunah Hibard</i>	<i>John Kimbal</i>
<i>Benj. Cozzens</i>	<i>Solomon Burnham</i>	<i>Joseph Kirber</i>
<i>Hezekiah Young</i>	<i>Nathan Davis</i>	<i>Luther Anderson</i>
<i>James Morrill</i>	<i>John Bradford</i>	<i>Ether Mathews</i>
<i>Peter Whitney</i>	<i>David Davis</i>	

One is tempted to inquire what type of men these were—dissatisfied trouble-makers schooled in the land quarrels of the Gore, or substantial citizens, sincerely seeking to re-draw the map in conformity with the facts of geography. Unfortunately, your author is in no position to give any such verdict, since he recognizes but a small portion of the names. Perchance there may be readers, descendants of these men, or living in the valley of the Middle Branch, who can supply the data from which such a judgement could be made.

The petition was immediately referred to a committee composed of the representatives from Barnard, Pomfret, Northfield, Braintree, and Sharon, with a request that the Council appoint a member to confer with them. Accordingly, Elias Keyes of Stockbridge was added to the group. The obvious intent of the Assembly in appointing this committee was to place the matter in the hands of a group from neighboring towns, who were acquainted with the local situation. This committee, however, either from the press of other business, or from disinclination to commit them-

selves on a matter of concern to their sister townships, merely reported in favor of the appointment of another committee to view the site and report to the session of 1810.

Of the subsequent history of this petition, not a great deal can be said. Whether or not the committee was appointed in the 1809 session is not apparent; however, the question of the new township was carried on the list of unfinished business for the next session. Moreover, the records of the Governor and Council, under the date of October 16, 1810, carries the following entry: "Recd from the House a bill entitled an act appg a Committee to examine the towns of Randolph, Royalton, Bethel & Tunbridge with an order of the house referring the same to a committee of 4 to join, which was read & it was Resolved to concur with the house in said reference & Mr. Hunter was appd to join." And there the matter rested, for all that we can learn.

During the next decade, the troubled time of the War of 1812 and of the Hunger Year of 1816 must have distracted the attention of the proponents of the change; but not permanently, for in 1820 the project was brought forth anew. Another petition was circulated, in four sections (presumably one in each of the four towns) and 89 names were secured. This document reiterated, in somewhat more polished form, the main points of the earlier one:

"To the honb the General Assembly next to be holden at Montpelier on the second Thursday of October next, the petition of the undersigned, inhabitants of Randolph, Royalton, Bethel, and Tunbridge, humbly represents that the sections of the several towns in which they respectively reside are contiguous; that it would promote public justice and private interest to form the same into a separate town, endowed with corporate privileges; that the local situation of the undersigned removes all doubt as to the expediency of the measure; that the sections belonging to Bethel & Tunbridge are in a measure deprived of corporate rights enjoyed by other citizens, by reason of ranges of mountains separating them from said towns. That they are & ever must be under the necessity of travelling a very circuitous route to the usual place of holding public town meetings; that that portion of the inhabitants belonging to Royalton and Randolph would be much better accomodated if the Honb As-

sembly would grant the prayer of the petition. They therefore humbly pray the Honb Assembly to take their unfortunate situation into their wise consideration, and grant the prayer thereof, or such other relief as they in their wisdom shall deem proper, as in duty bound will ever pray.

August A.D. 1820	Daniel Woodbury	Peter Woodbury Jr.
Elisha A. Fowler	Bradford Cleaveland	Samuel Woodbury
Oliver Palmer	Squier Cleveland	
Samuel Hibard	Simeon Bloss	Dated at Bethel this
William Deman	Oliver Luce (?)	22nd Day of Sept.
John D. Brooks	Jason Bairter	1820
Joshiah P. Brooks	John G. Dutton	Mathias Priest
J. A. Curtis	John Cleveland	Calvin Priest
Luther Davis	Henry Luce (?)	Zabad Whitney
Adonijah B. Rogers	Nathan Kimball	Nathiel Morrell Jr.
. . . Fowler (illegible)	Walter Perrin	James Randall
George W. Kinne	Ira Richardson	Saml Morrell
Harper Richardson	Don Crain	Patten Davis
Daniel Kinney	Nathl Morrell	Solomon Burnham
Jared Rich	of which your humble	Harry Wight
Isaac Hincer	petitioners as shall ever	Paul Smith
Thomas Clark	pray	Hiram Anderson
Jesse Cogswell	Elisha L. Tracy	Gilbert Smith
John Gifford	Cyrus Tracy	Austin Bradford
Benjamin Putnam	Olin Kingsworth	James Kelscue
O. N. Brooks	(exempt from expense)	Henry Macy
William Jones	Charles Kelsey	William Wight
Abel Wright	Benjamin Dering	Joseph Moxley
Elisha Terry	Calvin Davis	Thomas Cozzens
Asa Billings	John Page	Jona Whitney
This column signers	Adonijah Rogers	Benjamin Cozzens
belongs to Royalton	Lemuel Woodworth	Lyman Wight
Reuben Blak	Famin Woodworth	George W. Wilson
Leonard Fiske	James Wallace	Joseph Anderson
Bethabra Terelane (?)	John Wallace	Ziba Gifford

Of these 89 signers, 21 had also signed the earlier petition of 1809. Of the rest, neither more nor less can be said than of the previous group.

This petition went before the legislature on October 19, 1820, and then began a great game. Or, in modern parlance, it was given the "run-around." The following chronology, compiled from the endorsements which cover almost every available square inch of space on the outside of the document itself, and from the records of Governor and Council, tell the story in itself:

- October 19, 1820 Read and referred to a joint committee, consisting (for the House) of representatives from Weathersfield, Pantton, Middlesex, Wheelock, Enosburg and Glover.
- October 20, 1820 Council concurred, and appointed Leland of Chester and Cotten of Bradford.

Two facts seem noteworthy here—first, that this was a rather large committee to be appointed unless the matter were deemed worthy of serious consideration; second, that it was entirely different from the committee of 1809, being drawn from distant and not neighboring towns.

- October 20, 1820 Committee reported in favor of referring it to the next session.
- October 21, 1820 Referred to the next session.
- October 13, 1821 Listed among unfinished business of previous session.
- October 25, 1821 Referred to committee consisting (for the House) of representatives from Dorset, Halifax, Wilmington, and Fair Haven.
- October 26, 1821 Council resolved to concur, and appointed Cittenden of Williston.
- October 21, 1821 Committee reported in favor of referring to next session.
- November 30, 1821 Report concurred in, and referred to next session.

One wonders whether the fact that it took a month to take this move was an indication of lack of interest, or of actual difficulty on the part of the House in making up its mind.

- October 14, 1822 Listed among unfinished business from previous session.
- October 16, 1822 Referred to committee consisting (for the House) of representatives from Athens, Montpelier, Berlin, and Enosburg.
- October 18, 1822 Council concurred and appointed Stanley of Greensboro.
- October 22, 1822 The committee reported that the petition *ought to be granted*.

One wonders again why this committee differed from previous

ones, especially since one member, Follett of Enosburg, had served previously in connection with the matter. At all events, the action of the House was this time prompt and decisive:

- October 22, 1822 Petition recommitted to the same committee.
- October 23, 1822 Committee (properly chastised, we presume) reported in favor of referring to next session.
- October 23, 1822 Council concurred, and matter referred to next session.
- October 1, 1823 A remonstrance and counter petition signed as of this date.
- October 11, 1823 Petition listed among unfinished business.
- October 14, 1823 Both petition and counter petition filed, and referred to a committee consisting of King (probably of Tunbridge), Lillie (of Bethel) and Dewey (of Royalton).
- October 23, 1823 Committee recommended that petition be dismissed.
- October 23, 1823 Petitioners given leave to withdraw the petition.

The appeal which apparently finally moved the legislature to deliver the petition into the hands of its enemies—that is, representatives of three of the four towns which would be adversely affected—was as follows:

“To the Honorabl Gen^l Assembly of the State of Vermont next to be holden at Montpelier on 2nd Thursday of October 1823.

“This petition & remonstrance of the undersigned Inhabitants of Randolph & its vicinity humbly showeth that your petitioners reside within the limits of the contemplated town of Monro, being a tract of land composed of the four corners of the towns of Randolph, Bethel, Royalton & Tunbridge. That your petitioners are informed that sundry people residing in sd tract have heretofore petitioned the legislature of the State of Vermont to erect sd tract into a township and separate the same from the several towns to which it has heretofore appertained. Your petitioners beg leave humbly to remonstrate

against the measure contemplated as being in the opinion of the petitioners contrary to the true interests & real prosperity of the inhabitants of sd tract.

“Your petitioners therefore pray that the petition above alluded to may be dismissed and that the limits of the towns aforesaid may be suffered to remain as they now are, and as duty bound will we pray.

Randolph, October 1st, 1823.”

Pelatih Rogers

Adonijah Rogers

Benjamin Woodworth

Jamin Woodworth

Webster Wallbridge

Calvin Ellis

John Page Jr.

John Page

Sergent Page

Andrew Woodworth

John H. Cogswell

William Cogswell

James Peck

Harvey Peck

Lemuel Woodworth

Woolcott Allyn

Rastus Peck

John Granger

Ephrain Peck

Alexander Young.

Thus what two petitions, signed by 124 different persons, and a favorable report of a legislative committee sought to accomplish was easily blocked by a counter petition with twenty signers, five of them original proponents of the scheme, and more than half of them belonging to the Woodworth, Peck, and Page families! After the lapse of years one speculates as to what prompted the legislature, first, to entertain the proposal as it did for several sessions; and second, to dismiss it so suddenly upon the receipt of a document which would appear to represent such a decidedly minor segment of the population. Bethel itself, to take a single example, ranged between 1000 and 1300 inhabitants at this time; on the very modest assumption that each of the 119 signers who did not recant their views represented a family of five, this would accord the proposed town an interested population of nearly 600, as against a sixth that number claiming to be adversely affected.

One postscript remains to the history of the town of Monro. On October 16, 1823, there was filed in the legislature another petition from this section of the state, proposing to annex the part of Bethel known as Lympus to the town of Stockbridge. This was referred to a committee, which on October 27 reported in favor of referring to the next session. When the next session came, it was again called up, and sent to the committee “on the petition of Eli-

sha Fowler and others"—that is, the committee on the petition for the town of Monro. But since the legislature had dismissed the Fowler petition in the previous session, and since no further record appears to exist in the State Department of that or any similar petition for the town of Monro, this constitutes the final mystery of the affair—that such a committee should still be in existence, and in a position to report the Lympus matter unfavorably on November 11, 1824 and lead to the dismissal of the latter petition two days later!

The township of Monro was, as I said at the start, still-born. Since the infant was interred with appropriate rites by Messers King, Lillie, and Dewey, a century and a quarter have rolled by. Yet one cannot help but wonder, as one rides over the hills on either side of the Middle Branch or as one hears acrimonious give and take in town meeting, whether it might not have had a long and useful life, had the Fates so willed.

