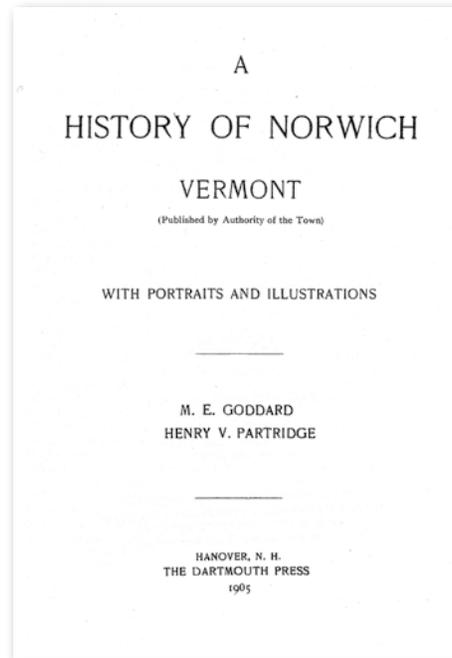


INTRODUCTION

What Goddard and Partridge wrought (1905)

The authors of this book see ourselves as resuming the project begun more than one hundred years ago by M.E. Goddard and Henry V. Partridge. Goddard and Partridge published *A History of Norwich Vermont* in late 1905. It was “Published by Authority of the Town” and printed by The Dartmouth Press, across the river in Hanover. It is a good specimen of the wave of town histories being written in New England around the turn of the twentieth century, as various aspects of modernization began to wash over the region, even seeping into remote rural communities, and nostalgia for traditional ways and founding stories reached a crest. Like most similar histories of the time, Goddard and Partridge’s book is characterized by reverence for the early settlers, a focus on the founding of the town and the establishment of institutions and infrastructure, reporting on the townspeople’s contributions to the country’s wars, and a series of biographical sketches of many of Norwich’s early families. It contains some unique elements as well, most notably a chapter on the American Literary, Scientific, and Military Academy, founded in his hometown by Captain Alden Partridge in

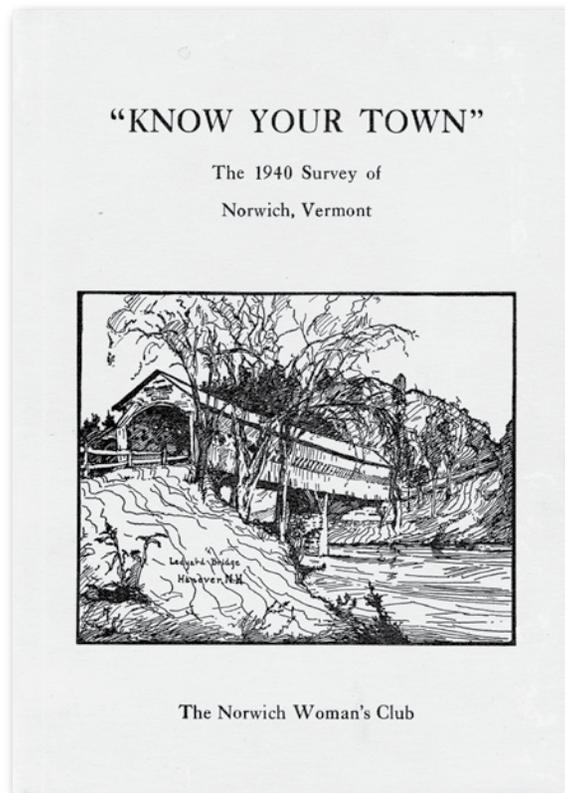


1819. But unlike many other contemporary town histories, *A History of Norwich* does not suffer from excessive romanticism or self-congratulation: The tone is generally sober and the narrative is straightforward.

The book you are holding now is inspired by the 250th anniversary of the town’s charter, granted by Governor Benning Wentworth to a group of proprietors from Connecticut on July 4, 1761. Much has happened in Norwich since 1905, of course, and while some reports, articles, and books about the town have been published in the past century, none has attempted to take stock of the town’s entire history. An update of Goddard and Partridge has been long overdue. We make no claim to comprehensiveness, but we have endeavored to chronicle the main threads of life in Norwich since the town was established, to supplement what Goddard and Partridge wrote about the first 144 years and to examine the people, places, and events that have shaped the town since the beginning of the 20th century. We have relied to a great extent on the rich archives of the Norwich Historical Society, collected over the past 60 years; the work of previous town committees,

particularly *“Know Your Town”: The 1940 Survey of Norwich, Vermont*, produced by the Norwich Women’s Club, and a series of reports produced by the town Planning Committee in 1973-1974; as well as on the memories and stories of many residents in the present day. We are enormously grateful to all the people who have collected, donated, transcribed, organized, cataloged, and cared for these priceless historical records.

For a deep and detailed understanding of the founding of the town of Norwich, and the earliest settlers who established homes, farms, and businesses here and organized its social and political institutions, Goddard and Partridge is your primary source. The right to establish this town was granted by Governor Wentworth to a group of proprietors from Mansfield, Connecticut, and neighboring towns, who first met at the house of William Waterman there in August 1761. The first part of *A History of Norwich* discusses the process of chartering and settlement, and contains the charter itself and excerpts from proprietors’ meetings and then town meetings in Norwich, during which the business of the settlement was conducted. Goddard and Partridge relate stories of the first families who traveled up the Connecticut River and established homesteads, where they settled, and where the first mills, roads, and meetinghouses were built. They talk about relations between the early people of Norwich and Dartmouth College, founded by Eleazar Wheelock in Hanover in 1769; many Norwich residents, not sur-



Cover of “Know Your Town.”

prisingly, assisted in the creation of the college by contributing materials, labor, and even money.

We also learn about Norwich’s role in what historians call the New Hampshire Grants controversy, the contest between Benning Wentworth, the colony of New York, and most importantly the settlers living in the area between the Connecticut and Hudson Rivers, for control over what became independent Vermont in 1777, and then the 14th state in the Union in 1791. In the early stages of the conflict Norwich men probably tended to side with New York, a common stance east of the Green Mountains and especially in the Connecticut River Valley. Goddard and Partridge report that in 1772, John Hatch accepted a commission to be a New York justice of the peace. Eventually Norwich rallied for independence and statehood, and early political leaders Jacob Burton, Peter Olcott, and Paul Brigham participated in various important

conventions and legislative assemblies, with Brigham serving as lieutenant governor of Vermont from 1796-1813 and 1815-1820, including a brief stint as acting governor in 1797 following the death of Thomas Chittenden. One early highlight was that the Vermont legislature convened in Norwich in 1785, bringing all the leading political figures of the day to town for most of a month. They met in the newly completed first meetinghouse in town.

A History of Norwich provides brief but informative summaries of the early churches and schools in town, and the names of

1761

Winter: Surveyors for the Governor of the Province of New Hampshire blaze hemlock and elm trees with the numeral 6 to mark the boundaries of Norwich. (Goddard, 12)

July 4: New Hampshire’s Royal Governor, Benning Wentworth, charters Norwich to 63 proprietors or grantees primarily from eastern Connecticut. It was originally chartered as the “Township of Norwhich.” (Slafter, 7)

men who served in the Revolution, the War of 1812, the war with Mexico, and, most notably, the Civil War. For the Civil War you can find capsule entries telling about regiments, dates of enlistment and mustering out, and for many soldiers, what happened to them. Other topics covered are the postal service and the town's postmasters; agriculture, merchants, and early industries; epidemics, cemeteries, and Freemasonry. There's even a chapter about the town's changing demographics through the 19th century, including a record of some of the individuals and families who migrated to other parts of Vermont or the beckoning west. Throughout the

book one encounters names galore, and the biographical section profiles 60 families and individuals, many of whose names will be familiar to readers today.

Most of these topics will appear in the present volume in some way or another. In many cases the writers have been able to expand upon what Goddard and Partridge wrote about the town up to 1905. In other instances, we have let history rest in their capable hands, and we encourage you to consult *A History of Norwich* for information about the town's first century and a half that you don't find here.

August 26: Grantees hold their first meeting at William Waterman's in Mansfield, CT. By the charter, each grantee is required to cultivate within five years five acres for every fifty he owns. Meetings continue to be held in Connecticut until 1768. (Goddard, 263)

1762

A committee of grantees divides the land into range and river lots. (Goddard, 17)