

History of Leominster, MA: Jonas Kendall.

[NOTE: This history came from the Leominster Historical Society, originally hand typed, date and author unknown. Transcribed by CJ Bagley 4-2005]

The name Kendall has long been associated with Leominster for soon after the incorporation of the town a family of Kendall's located here.

The original Kendall family had three children, Jonas, who settled on West Street, Timothy on Lindell Avenue and a daughter Sarah, who reportedly married her cousin John Kendall of Woburn, who settled on Central Street.

Jonas Kendall in company with William Nichols erected the first paper mill in Leominster in 1796. That first paper mill was built on the Nashua or North River as it was called at the time. The mill was located somewhere near the old Wheelwright or Head Paper Co. site.

The river area was the location of Leominster's industrial beginnings as David Wilder notes that the first grist mill in the town was erected Jonathan Wilson, a son-in-law of Ebenezer Wilder of Lancaster who owned the mill, probably before the town was incorporated.

Wilder writes in his "History of Leominster" published in 1853 that *"after Wilder's death...in the 65<sup>th</sup> year of his age, Wilson came into possession of a large portion of real estate in this town, in the right of his wife. But, as is apt to be the case with men who marry women supposed to be rich, he lived above his income, became involved in debt, and the mill with the farm and other land adjacent, passed into the hands of Major James Richardson, who rebuilt the mill, and constructed a new dam lower down the stream."* After a succession of owners the mill was finally sold to Jonas Kendall and Sons.

The first paper mill erected by William Nichols and Jonas Kendall was a few rods below the Wilson Mills and water for the

paper plant was taken from Wilson pond. The Wilson dam was for sixty years the only one to be constructed across the Nashua in Leominster.

Wilder records that the first paper mill: *"was a one vat mill, and one engine. The value of the paper manufactured the first year did not much exceed \$4000.00. The mill was destroyed by fire in 1810, and rebuilt the next winter. Jonas Kendall and Sons manufactured paper on a cylinder, first in 1825, and in 1833 they put in a fourdrinier machine."*

The fourdrinier machine was invented by Roberts' and Didot in France in 1790, but was perfected by the Fourdrinier's, a firm of stationers of England. The principle of the machine being an endless wire cloth receiving pulp on which the paper was formed, and transferring it to an endless felt going to the dryers, as opposed to the older moulds and felts of the desired size being used in the hand method of papermaking.

In 1801, Nichols and Kendall had erected a second paper mill a short distance below the first. That second mill was sold in 1850.

In 1828, J. Kendall & Sons bought Taylor's carding and woolen factory which became an addition to their own mill.

In 1851, another dam was constructed upstream where another paper mill was erected. That dam was near what is now Amarin Plastics, located at Hamilton and Forrest Streets.

In 1799, Nichols and Kendall and Ephriam Lincoln purchased a water privilege and built a building for a woolen factory which was operated by John Taylor, an Englishman who sold it back to J. Kendall & Sons in 1822.

The first oil mill was built and owned by Jonas Kendall about 1785 and it had a saw mill attached to it. The mill was described by Wilder as being located "on the Monoosnock Brook, near the Fitchburg line."

Paper made in the mills founded by Kendall was used as newsprint paper for the "New Orleans Picayune", "Boston Herald" and "Boston Journal" soon after 1858 when the mill had been leased by George W. Wheelwright of Boston.

Wilder tells of the importance of grinding and sawing mills on the river to the economy of the town but when a choice had to be made to use the power for one purpose or another the person owning the water right won out. After Kendall had purchased the grist mill and had converted it to paper making it became apparent that a new grist mill had to be built. It was the custom that whenever a factory or home was destroyed by fire or flood that the citizens would raise money for rebuilding with no expectation that such funds would ever be returned. With the need for a grist mill, the funds were raised for Major Haws to erect the grist mill and that marked the first time that funds were raised in the customary manner to commence new work. After a few years of operating the new mill Major Haws called on all of the contributors' then living and refunded to each the full amount of his subscription.

The foregoing recitation of the Kendall family involvement with the early mills of Leominster may be of only casual interest to some but it clearly shows the early industrial and business training of Jonas Henry Kendall who became a prominent benefactor of our town and city.

J. Henry Kendall was born at the Kendall Tavern on December 1, 1795. He was the sixth child born to Jonas Jr. and Sarah Gowing Kendall who were married in 1785. J. Henry had a brother Joseph Gowing who was seven years older than Henry and he had a brother Charles, six years younger, who died at the age of 37.

Joseph Gowing Kendall graduated from Harvard College in 1810 at the age of 22. He was a councilor -at-law, a representative in Congress, a master of the Chancery, a clerk of courts for the County of

Worcester and served as a member of the school committee for at least three years. His death in Worcester on October 2, 1847 at the age of 59 was "universally lamented" according to David Wilder.

Jonas Kendall Jr. father of J. Henry and Joseph had served as a Special Justice, as a councilor at law, as a Senator, as a representative in Congress, and as a member of the school board for at least six years. The historian David Wilder wrote of Jonas Kendall Jr's *"uncommonly correct taste in the relation to forest trees and garden flowers, as may be seen by a view of the arrangements made by him at his last residence. Col. J. Henry Kendall, the only survivor of seven children and a non resident owns and improves the estate, and so far as it respects the cultivation of flowers, fruits, and forest trees, the discernment of the son is equal to that of the father."*

J. Henry was reportedly responsible for setting out many shade trees along the streets of North Leominster. He also served on the town committee, with his brother Joseph Gowing Kendall, which was charged with selecting and setting out the trees on the Common. And members of this society waged a losing battle to save the few trees on the lawn of Kendall Hall just a year ago. The immediate past mayor and the present mayor lent no assistance to the effort.

J. Henry was sometimes referred to as Col. J. Henry Kendall but I have not been able to determine the origin of the title. In fact, very little seems to have been written concerning J. Henry other than the descriptions of his thoughtfulness to this community and to its people.

J. Henry did not live in Leominster all of his life and perhaps he did live in the Holyoke area for William Whiting noted in "Paper Making In New England", written in 1897 that, *"The second mill in Holyoke was that of the Holyoke Paper Company, the organizer being Mr. D.M. Butterfield. Associated with him were Jonas Kendall and*

*Alford White and the Allyns, men under who Holyoke took form and shape as a place of industrial importance."*

Jonas Henry Kendall is best known for his generous gifts to the community and in particular for those given in support of education. He had served on the school committee for 11 years.

Lucy Shedd has written that Amos Haws, Esq. related the trials of starting the first school in the Village in 1818 and noted that the first building for a school was moved into the Village without its purpose being known to the public. He also related that "the donor (J. Henry) of the present Educational Temple (Kendall Hall) was one of the most bitter opponents to a village school. When the subject came up in town meeting for an appropriation for the school, which was carried, although a very cold day, it was a very warm meeting; but the school did finely, was commended by the committee, and was probably, the means of opening the fountain in his heart.

Kendall Hall which is the only community facility to bear the Kendall name was provided for in Clause 22 of the Kendall will which was a complex legal instrument. That clause read: *"To the Town of Leominster I give \$5000, upon the following condition: that it shall, within a reasonable time, erect in the North Village in Leominster, a brick building, two stories high, of suitable granite foundation and a slated roof, with two good school rooms on the first floor, and a commodious hall for village purposes on the second floor. I request, and it is my desire, that the town place upon the building a good bell and clock."*

The conditions were met and the building was dedicated on March 21, 1865.

[The following portions were read from the Lucy Shedd report]

There are no longer school class rooms in the Kendall Hall. They have been

replaced by a branch fire station which is looking for a new, more modern home in North Leominster.

The clock is no longer operating and the lawn and its plantings of years ago have been partially destroyed by public officials and their inconsiderate actions. This has occurred in spite of a heroic effort by our Miss Leta Wedge and others interested in preservation of Kendall Hall.

I would predict that Kendall Hall will go the way of Old Town Hall within a few years unless the current trend is reversed.

Clause 23 of the will gave \$3000 to the town of Leominster on the condition, *"That it securely invests and annually pays over the income thereof to the support of the school in the North Village of Leominster, in the District #10; and on the further condition that the Town annually appropriate its proportion, paid by the school money, received by taxation, to the support of said school, so that it might be kept (if possible) through the year."*

The conditions of this provision were met and the income of about \$90.00 per year is used for the benefit of Pierce School which is the "Village School" now.

The J Henry Kendall High School Fund is now in the amount of over \$270,000 with a yearly income of about \$5600 for the use of the high school.

The codicil to the will mentions a legacy to the children of George Merriam, a bequest to the Mt. Holyoke seminary and a gift of \$5000 for books for the Leominster Public Library.

Probably the best known bequest in the will was covered under Clause 21 which provides \$1000 for the purchase of a bell to be placed on the "Town House", with the town to bear the installation costs.

The bell given to the town by Col. Kendall was a perfect E composition bell weighing about 2200 pounds. It was cast by H. N. Hooper Co. of Boston.

The "Aegis and Transcript" published in Worcester, noted on the Saturday, June 23, 1860, the presentation day, that *"the presentation of the bell was the occasion of quite a little impromptu celebration, bringing out a large concourse of citizens, the Leominster Brass Band, the organization of its kind in Worcester North, who are prepared and hold themselves in readiness to do duty whenever called upon, was the escort, and at least a hundred BIG GUNS, but no speeches."*

The paper noted also that Col. Kendall sold out his interest in papermaking about 1845 and had not resided in Leominster until the spring of 1860 when he *"retired to the old homestead, with an ample fortune, probably to spend the remainder of life."*

The bell rested atop old Town Hall until it was removed in the dark of night at the order of former Mayor Crossman a few years ago. After years of storage in a highway's dept. barn it was resurrected only to be placed on a monument to veterans of several of our recent conflicts. At best this was an inappropriate resting place for the bell.

Jonas Henry Kendall died in 1862 at the age of 67. He had never married.

Jewitt's "History of Worcester County", published in 1879 wrote of J. Henry Kendall in the following manner: *"It is particularly for his benefactions in the cause of education that his name should be held in grateful remembrance by all lovers of sound learning and generous culture."*

Hopefully, that will be done.