

A Bit of Local History Concerning Kendall Tavern of Old. "Where Good Toddy Could Be Bought for Three Cents a Glass." H.W. Gibbs, February 13, 1914.

[Transcribed by: CJ Bagley 10-2005]

Some time ago we visited the old Kendall Tavern now commonly called the Carter Tavern on West Street. It is owned and occupied by Daniel Sullivan and family. We found Mr. and Mrs. Sullivan very cordial after we had announced who we were and what we come for. They said that in the four years that they had lived there quite a large number of people had come to see the place; some from out of town and some from a long distance.

The tavern was built by Jonas Kendall in 1785. The house, situated just north of the tavern, was built previous and was owned by Mr. Kendall, and his brother. Connected with it was a farm of about 300 acres. The old tavern is interesting because of the times and way in which it was built and the associations connected with it. It was built soon after the close of the Revolutionary war, when money was very scarce and labor cheap.

It is a solid framed building with timbers of large dimensions, hand hued, evidence of which can be seen in the attic, as the roof is supported by purlin plates on top of large posts that come up through the building. The plates, rafters and braces are all nicely fitted, jointed and tightly held together by oak pins. The building is three storied in height, with two large chimneys. One starts from the cellar bottom, the other, evidently to save room in the cellar is supported by an archway of brick, covered with enormous flat stones, on which the chimney is built.

There were originally 10 or 12 fireplaces. The one in the kitchen is there now, and is very large. Connected with that is a large brick oven, in which bread, pies, cake, meat and many other things were baked that went to appease the appetite of the weary teamster and hungry traveler and

others who flocked to once famous hostelry in by gone days, for the sign that hung out there for over 50 years announced that "refreshment for man and beast could be found within". Around the kitchen fireplace are several cubby holes or cupboards in which things were placed to keep warm or used for other purposes.

The building does not stand square with the points of the compass, but the doors that would naturally be called the north and south doors open into the main hall that lead from one side of the house to the other. This was the office and loafing room for men. In this hall was a large fireplace. Along the sides were large settles. These and the large chairs which could be drawn up to the fireplace were often filled in the palmary days of the tavern with travelers, teamsters and loungers. There they used to congregate nights, stormy days, and days that were not stormy to smoke their pipes, for cigars were unknown, and drink toddy at three cents per glass; talk politics, and about the "war", etc., and listen to and tell long yarns, some of which were true and some were not of course, but it was a comfortable place and there is no question but what the men enjoyed it. The bar room was a small affair that opened out of the hall.

There are 17 rooms, not including the halls connected with the stairs. The teamsters used to occupy the rooms on the top floor. The other rooms were reserved for more pretentious guests. All of the rooms are wainscoted and they all have a large moulding around the top of the room next to the ceiling. The rooms having fireplaces have mantelpieces with panels above them, and some of the panels have pictures painted on them. One of the paintings is in good order. It is a picture of Portland, Maine, harbor and was painted by a niece of Mr. Kendall.

On the top floor is the assembly hall. It is about 15 feet wide by 40 long; it has tow entrances and two small rooms and cupboards and closets connected with it. It is wainscoted and has an arched ceiling from which used to hang two large chandeliers. On one side of these are two fireplaces.

Around the hall there are lockers, which were formerly used for keeping or storing articles and with the cover down for seats. Around the hall on three sides are small windows with panel shutters that slide into the casing. The same is true of some of the windows in other rooms. At one end of the hall is a raised platform on which many an orchestra of the days of long ago played for the elite of the town to dance, for many a famous or rather high social ball was held there, as well as balls that were not so high.

In this hall the Aurora lodge of Freemasons was organized June 9, 1801, with 20 members, but they did not meet there long. They removed to the Leland tavern, that stood where the Unitarian church now stands. One of the by-laws adopted about this time is interesting. It provided "*that the regular meetings were to be held on Thursday preceding the full moon, at 4 pm. And close at 8 unless some special emergency required the lodge to sit to a later hour*". The reason given for the by-law was that "*These early hours are to prevent late sessions which are calculated to encourage dissipation and fault finding in families*". This was a wise by-law for them to adopt, considering the fact that they met in halls that were in taverns with toddy at three cents a glass. The lodge moved to Fitchburg in 1845. It had not been very prosperous for it had less than 30 members at the time.

The old tavern building is in remarkably good preservation inside. The floors do not sag, as is often the case with floors in old houses. They are made of two inch pine plank matched together. The windows are all in good condition and are not loose. There are two stairways leading to the top floor, built in old Colonial style and are in just as good shape today as when built. The rooms are not like the rooms in some old houses, too large to be comfortable, with large windows, but they are of comfortable size with windows not too large. There are two stairways leading into the cellar. The main stairway leads down from the main hall and is built of solid blocks of wood stringers. Evidently it was

built strong for the purpose of rolling down barrels of wet goods, after the bulkhead had been closed up for the winter, for the winters of those times were like most everything else – different from what we have now.

The way the house is built makes it warm. The boards were beveled on both edges, and then the one above lapped over the one below and then clapboarded. Mr. and Mrs. Sullivan said it was the warmest house they ever lived in. In the old days with all the fireplaces going Old King Frost must have found it a discouraging place for him to get in his work. There is a story and a half hall built on the north side. The room on the first floor was the wash room for teamsters. The upper room was called the meal room where fodder and meal were stored. There were formerly two very large barns and a large shed, into which the teamsters used to drive or back their loads, and there used to be a platform up in one of the large elm trees that stood near the tavern and they used to climb up there to watch for the coming of the stage and as soon as it came into sight they would give a signal so the folks in the kitchen could put the tea to brewing, and supper would be ready when the stage arrived.

The old tavern ceased to be a public house a great many years ago and has since been a farm house and has 100 acres of land connected.

H.W. Gibbs
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