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Memories of the Ketchins of Tariffville

Part 4: The Stone Construction Business Prospers

In Part 3 in this series, William Ketchin's memoirs told about the first stone buildings that A. J. Ketchin & Son built for Ensign, Bickford & Company in Simsbury and Avon and the quarries from which stone was taken. The memoirs also shed light on the construction of several buildings at Westminster School; the Joseph R. Ensign house, now a branch of Webster Bank; and an addition to the Wilcox mansion, now the Vincent Funeral Home. Ensign, Bickford & Company was the Ketchins' major source of work, but they took on many other building projects in Simsbury, large and small.

William Ketchin wrote that from about 1888 until he moved to Florida in 1925, the Ketchins built "all the stone buildings in the Simsbury area...schools, churches, Ensign-Bickford & Co. buildings at Simsbury and Avon, Conn., river bridge abutments and cellar walls." In summary he wrote, "In fact, for many years we built everything that required stone or concrete that came within a radius of ten miles of Tariffville. This included house cellars and underpinnings, cement sidewalks, road sluices, etc."

The *Hartford Courant* reported on April 27, 1895, "Work has begun for the foundation of the new hotel and boarding house to be built by H. J. Humphrey on his lot near the Methodist Church. The new building will be 38x67 feet in size and three stories in height, with a hall in the upper story for public entertainments. C. A. Ensign is the architect and A. J. Ketchin has the contract for the stone work."¹ Ten months later the paper announced, "Maple Tree Inn (the new hotel) will be formally opened this evening. The public is invited to attend. Butler's Orchestra will furnish the dancing."² Today the building, which houses the Maple Tree Cafe, still stands at 781 Hopmeadow Street.

"Andrew Ketchin of Tariffville has the contract for the stone work on the new chapel and will begin work right away," wrote the reporter for the weekly *Farmington Valley Herald* in the December 7, 1895, issue. The following week he wrote, "Excavating for the foundation walls of the new chapel is nearly complete. Contractor Ketchin has sold the dirt to the Fuse company." This chapel for Simsbury's First Church of Christ stood just to the north of the church (but was lost in the 1965 fire). The Ketchins helped with the renovation of the church building at the same time. An explosion at Ensign, Bickford & Company on December 19, 1892, had caused damage, especially to the stained glass windows. The architect for these projects was Melvin H. Hapgood, who had designed the Simsbury Free Library.³

Apparently the weather became too cold to continue building the chapel and making improvements to the church because the reporter did not mention the work again until April 4, 1896. He wrote, "The cellar artists have had a hard time of it with two feet of frost in the ground about the meeting house, but they have pecked away with praiseworthy industry and got a hole certainly big enough for Captain Kidd to bury his money in, if not big enough for a cellar." In the middle of July the reporter continued his saga, writing, "Work is progressing on the Congregational church. Contractor Ketchin has had a force of men this week redressing and relaying the stone steps in front of the church. The painters under George Yates, Jr., have their work on the interior nearly done till the arrival of the new pews and the carpenter work is in the same condition. Builder Fagan has his men at work on the new chapel building, the framework of which is up."

Busy as they were with work on the church and chapel, A. J. Ketchin & Son was also engaged in work for the building going up two blocks north, on the east side of Hopmeadow Street. The *Farmington Valley Herald* reporter wrote in the April 25, 1896, issue, "Contractor Ketchin has commenced laying the foundation for the new casino." This social club, called in the manner of the day, the Casino, was one of the many projects Joseph R. Ensign organized and backed. This Shingle style wooden building, which was replaced in 1931 by the brick Eno Memorial Hall, was designed by Melvin H. Hapgood and was erected by builder Thomas Hamilton. The building had an assembly hall that seated as many as 400 people, a banquet hall and kitchen and pool tables. It was used for town celebrations, public meetings, plays and, later, movies. During the 1918 flu pandemic, it served as an emergency hospital.⁴

Also in 1896, A. J. Ketchin & Son built the "cellar, underpinnings and retaining walls" for "Holly Hill," George Payne McLean's home.⁵ When George McLean, a Republican, ran for governor of Connecticut in the fall of 1900 the Ketchins joined in the excitement that permeated the town. On October 12, a torchlight parade of 150 men led by a brass band marched through every street in Tariffville and culminated with a rally and meeting in the home of Andrew J. Ketchin. "At the mention of the names of William McKinley and George P. McLean, rousing cheers were frequently given," the *Hartford Courant* reported.⁶ Mr. McLean won the election for governor and later served three terms as a U. S. Senator. In March 1913 the *Farmington Valley Herald* reported, "A. J. Ketchin & Son have been very busy working on the home of Senator George P. McLean. They are building a double decked piazza [that is, a porch] across one end of the house, a piazza across the other end, and enlarging the octagonal bay window...."

The Ketchin family suffered the loss of Andrew's father, John Ketchin, on April 11, 1902. This old Scottish stone mason had lived to see his son and grandson's construction business flourish to the point that they owned a business wagon and a quarry and were in great demand as builders. He had three great grandchildren, William and Hattye's daughters Ethel, Pauline and Elizabeth, ranging in age from six to two years old. Two more children would be born later, Dorothy and William.

A. J. Ketchin & Son continued to build for the Ensign-Bickford Company and also for the company's president Ralph H. Ensign. The date 1904 is carved in stone on the brownstone building at the west wing of the U-shaped complex now known as The Courtyard on Mall Way. The north building bears the date 1914. It is likely that William was remembering this project when he set down this story:

When the wooden barns of R. H. Ensign's residence at Simsbury were torn down, I rebuilt them of stone. In one of the old barns was stored a real "Irish Jaunting Car," a two wheel cart, beautifully and substantially built to carry 4 persons, two facing front and two facing back. The back of the seat served both front and back.

I asked Pat Ryan, the caretaker, if Mr. Ensign would sell the cart, and Pat said, "What would you give for it?" I said, "25⁰⁰." Pat replied, "It's yours, take it away."

My children spent many happy hours in it with Little Dolly as horse power. Dolly was a fair size horse, but looked small beside Dick. So she was always "Little Dolly," black and a fast or slow traveler, as gentle as a kitten and the household pet.

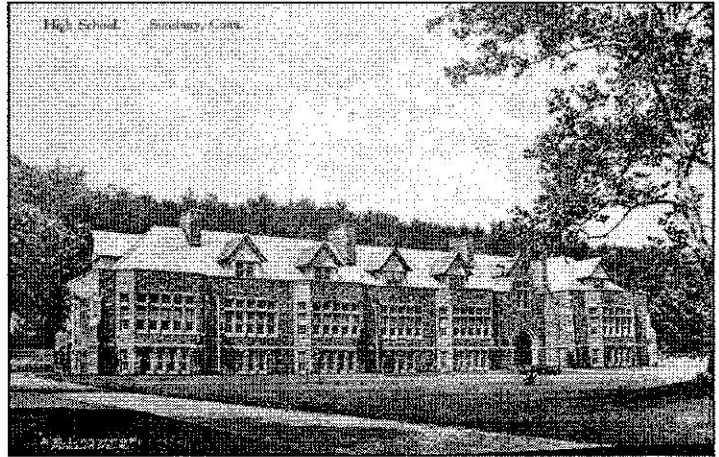
I had occasion to go to the farm, so I thought to take Dolly and the "Go Cart" and asked Hattye to go. We returned by way of Terry's Plain and the quarry. As we neared the quarry, a large shepherd dog ran out and kept snapping at Dolly's head. I took the whip from the socket (never used it on Dolly) and stood up (foolishly) and brought the whip down on the dog with all my strength. Dolly made a sudden leap, and I flew out of the cart backwards, still holding the reins. A couple of turns of the wheel against my suit made me drop the reins.

The road was narrow and rough, with a mean, stony ditch on one side. When I got to my feet, that cart with my Sweetheart was flying down that road at breakneck speed, weaving from side to side,

with the reins dragging on the road. My heart came up in my throat for an instant when I saw that Little Woman stand up as if to jump, but she had no such foolish notion.

The horse was now galloping at a fearful speed. Hattye carefully got over the dashboard and worked her way along the shaft. I saw then what she was after, and I was dumb with fear that she might not accomplish her purpose before they reached the intersection with the main road. She picked up the reins where they came through the rings of the harness on the back of the horse, then carefully worked her way back to the seat. Within a few seconds Dolly was under control and stopped. When I reached the cart I was "all in." So that courageous little woman drove the balance of the way home.

The townspeople of Simsbury voted in 1903 to establish a public high school. It opened that September on the third floor of the McLean Seminary, the same building in which William had attended two years of private high school.⁷ The success of the high school program made apparent the need for a new building, so in February 1906 the town authorized its construction.⁸ The preliminary plans called for a brick building, but the plans were soon amended to make it stone and the contract was awarded to A. J. Ketchin & Son.⁹ With this contract in hand, the Ketchin company bought two parcels of land totaling three and a half acres abutting their Simsbury brownstone quarry, bringing it to a total of about seven and a half acres.¹⁰



Courtesy of the Simsbury Historical Society

The First Simsbury High School Building

William remembered an accident during the construction of the high school building (which now houses Simsbury Town Hall at 933 Hopmeadow Street) and he wrote this story, which he called *Tony Borosky's Fall*.¹¹

We were building the Simsbury High School, a beautiful brownstone building designed by Hapgood of Hartford, Conn. The stones were from our Tariffville quarry. Window and door jambs, caps, sills, water table and corners were all cut stone. Basement walls were 21 inches thick, and above the water table 18 inches thick. The curtain walls were "Hammer dressed random rubble," stones of all sizes up to 150 lbs. As the stones were hammer dressed on the staging, after the walls were 4 feet above the ground the staging had to be sturdy. Double 2x4s were used for standards, 10 feet apart, and a working floor 4 feet wide was made of 2-inch-thick plank, 12 inches wide and 12 feet long.

After we got on the second staging, 8 feet from the ground, we erected a Steffen derrick at one corner of the building and lifted all stones to the staging, where they were picked up by two laborers and carried by "hand barrow" to the masons. This hand barrow was made by laying down two 2x4s 2 feet apart and 5 feet long and nailing boards across the center portion, thus making a small platform about 24 inches square. The 2x4s projecting each side of the small platform were whittled down for handles. When the small platform of the hand barrow was loaded with stone, each man would step between the handles, pick up the load, and take it to the mason. There they were *instructed* to set the barrow down on the staging *before* unloading. The reason for this was to avoid any large stone being "dumped" on the staging where there were usually several hundreds of pounds of stone, and dumping a large stone might carry the staging to the ground.

Tony and his helper were not very tall men, but they were two very muscular "Poles." Several times I had checked them carelessly dumping their load without setting the barrow down. But carelessness caught them one day as they were carrying an extra large stone. They tipped up their barrow and let the stone crash to the staging, taking staging, tenders, mason, stone and mortar boxes

crashing to the ground. It was a miracle that no one was seriously injured.

Tony Brosky was the first to make a sound, and he could be heard for a block yelling that he could not move because his back was broken. All crawled out of the wreckage except Tony. I got a nearby doctor and, after an examination, [he] said no bones were broken. He found several bruises. He thought a day or two rest would find him OK. Tony kept up the groaning and said that he could not stand, so I got the business wagon and took him home, lying full length on the floor of the wagon. He lived alone, so I got someone to help me carry him in and lay him on his bed.

After the Doctor examined him I did not worry too much about him, although he kept on moaning and groaning. I carried no accident insurance, so picked my way carefully. So when I left him, I told him I would be down later and bring his supper. When I brought his supper, he was still groaning. I was getting more suspicious, so after a couple of days, I examined him very thoroughly myself. Finding nothing as far as I could tell, I waited a day or two more. Then Saturday night I gave him his weeks wages and told him to be on hand for work Monday morning or look for another job.

He was on hand and went to work after I had given him a thorough blessing for his cowardly deception and carelessness. Mike Burns, who was the mason who went down with him, called him unprintable names, and for several days the boys made Tony miserable by imitating his yelling and saying that their back was "broke." Finally, I had to stop the ribbing.

The school, designed in the English Gothic style by Edward T. Hapgood, was dedicated in December 1907.¹² It was paid for almost entirely by private donation, the largest donor being Horace Belden, followed by Antoinette Eno Wood, Ralph Hart Ensign, George P. McLean and Rev. D. Stuart Dodge.

Building Simsbury High School took almost two years, so the need to keep their masons and tenders employed during the winter months was more pressing than usual. At times, William had found the men work harvesting ice. He explained the ice-cutting process like this, "A horse-drawn ice saw was used to mark out the cakes, and on ten-inch ice we would cut four inches deep one way and about one inch deep the other way. We would hand saw the one-inch way and then split the cake free with an ice chisel." He remembered one man who absentmindedly sawed off the block of ice that he was standing on and splashed into freezing water up to his neck. "We pulled him out while Father ran to a nearby saloon and brought back a pint," he wrote. "John took a long pull at the bottle and started for home. Father said that the only thing that he worried about was that John might do the same thing the next day when there might not be someone near to pull him out and get the liquor."

There was another man who relied on the Ketchins to keep him out of trouble through the off season. William Ketchin wrote of this hod carrier:

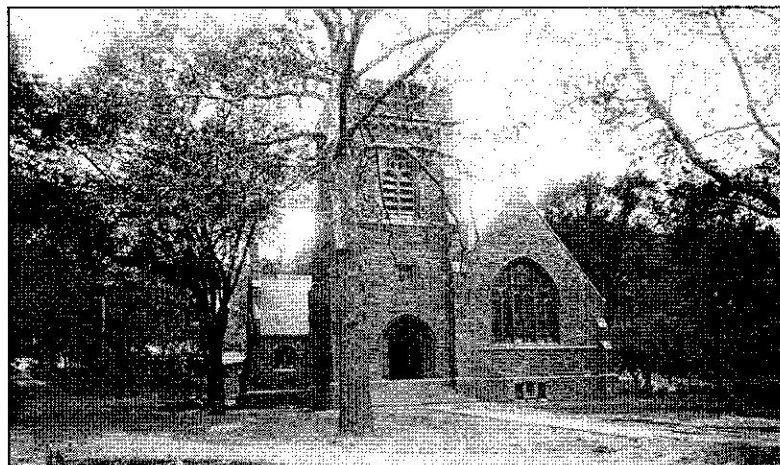
Pat was a tough little old fellow, past middle age. A splendid tender who never lost many working days, but managed some way to drink up his money as fast as he got it. As a consequence, every winter found him broke and hard pressed. One winter with snow piled three feet about the houses, word came to me that Pat was without coal or wood or means to procure them. So as usual, we had to get to his house and fix him up. The following spring, when we started work, I said to him, "Now Pat, your drinking must stop. I'm tired of having to travel through snow and ice every winter to keep you alive when you could cut your drinking and save yourself. He listened respectfully and then, looking up at me with the most friendly smile which said *You wouldn't do that to me*, he said, "Will, I never died a winter yet."

To get through one winter himself, William tried selling washing machines, which he stored in a former blacksmith shop they owned in Tariffville. He described this Bluffton appliance as "a wonder machine with corrugation all around the inside of the tub." "On the top of the cover, an iron cog wheel meshed into a segment cog to which a handle was attached and, by moving this back and forth, it turned a block with fingers under the cover and thus agitated the clothes back and forth. This machine cleaned a tub

full of clothes in ten minutes," he wrote. After success with selling small orders, he raised enough capital - \$1,139 - to buy a whole boxcar load of 456 of these arm-powered washers. He would load a dozen onto a sleigh and send them out with his drummer, his wife's brother Horace Moore, who would leave a washer for a week in any home that would agree to a free trial. "The machine had such value that nine out of ten were sold on first trial," he wrote. However, he did not become the New England agent for the Bluffton firm because his construction business was on the rise, taking much of his time, and the company soon realized that a man in East Hartford would be a better prospect.

Incidentally, William also backed his brother-in-law in a jackknife-selling venture. Apparently, Mr. Moore stayed on the road for lengthy periods and he saw an opportunity to sell jackknives in the evening "while sitting about boarding houses." William went to a cutlery manufacturer in Plainville, Connecticut, and "bought all the knives on hand of an abandoned pattern." "These were a fine three-bladed knife that had sold at 75 cents each," he wrote, "and I bought them for 16 cents each. There were 100 or more of these knives." He concluded, "Well, the outcome of this adventure was that before long I had a letter from the cutlery factory protesting our selling the knives for 35 cents."

William finally decided that the best way to keep the stone masons, tenders and himself employed throughout the winter was to go into the business of buying tobacco from local farmers, processing and packing it, and storing it in the old blacksmith shop for sale to cigar manufacturers. His partner at the beginning of this venture was his friend William J. Hayes of Tariffville. The story of the Ketchin & Hayes Corporation, incorporated in 1908, and the subsequent Ketchin Tobacco Corporation and how it grew to encompass most of the facets of the shade tobacco industry is too involved for telling here. That subject will be covered in the Summer issue.



Courtesy of the Simsbury United Methodist Church

Simsbury Methodist Church in 1909

Soon after completion of the high school, the trustees of the Simsbury Methodist Church awarded A. J. Ketchin and Son the contract to build a new stone church to replace the wooden one that had stood on the northwest corner of Hopmeadow Street and Plank Hill Road since 1840. The trustees had chosen Hartford architect George Keller's design for a church in late English Gothic style. The *Farmington Valley Herald* reported on February 7, 1908, that the building would be built "of the brownstone found on the ridge east of Simsbury, material from which the new high school was built. The trimmings will be of cut stone and terra cotta, but the main construction will be of brownstone." It added, "Work will be commenced at once hauling from the quarry the blocks that will enter into its construction."¹³

Work must have paused for a time when Harriet G. Ketchin, Andrew's wife and William's mother, died on March 30. The *Farmington Valley Herald* said in her obituary, "Her sudden death cast a pall over the community in which she had labored for the good of all for so long a time." On April 10, the same paper announced, "Work Commenced. The outline of the foundations for the new church were staked out and the work of excavation was begun." Sandwiched among weekly reports of building progress, was this personal announcement on May 22. "A son was born to Mr. and Mrs. W. M. Ketchin Saturday morning." They named their fifth child and only boy William Andrew.

Memories of his Mother and his Edison Phonograph

William Mansfield Ketchin's mother, Harriet Spencer Ketchin (1846-1908), was the daughter of William K. and Sarah J. (Mann) Spencer of Middletown. In his memoirs he wrote of her:

Up to this point I have not mentioned my mother. Looking back on events I must say she was a most remarkable woman. Her mother and father were English. Her father was a skilled machinist and die-sinker. [He] is given the credit for being the original inventor of the spring mattress and a great lock inventor – the Yale locks, it is claimed, being the outgrowth of his ideas. Also, he was an accomplished musician. He was the organizer and leader of the Middletown string band for many years. Her mother was a maid in the rich Russell family of Middletown, Conn.

[Mother was] brought up to work because, as I mentioned in this story before, when my father met her she was employed in a cotton mill at Agawam, Mass. So when she married my father she was not much of a housekeeper or cook. A little incident which occurred in their early married life was like this. They were members of the Baptist church. Usually the man of the house has to wait for his wife to get ready for church, but this particular Sunday it was the other way around. Hattie, getting rather impatient, went to the bedroom to find what was the matter. And she found her husband with his white shirt in his hands diligently rubbing all parts of the shirt between his hands. Instead of starching just the bosom of the shirt, she had starched the shirt all over.

Eventually, however, she became not only a model housekeeper, cook, and mother, but interested herself in the church and community. The church at Tariffville was very bare, no carpet, no organ, no baptistery, etc. And she finally raised enough money to cover all these items, including a nice organ, from the Mason Organ Co., so that the church was really a nice, well-fitted little place.

Mother never seemed quite the same after the death of the two boys [William's younger brothers, Georgie and Frankic]. She had never taken any lesson in music, but she had a beautiful, smooth contralto voice, and could be found at her organ often, picking out hymn tunes and singing them to herself.

The tragedy of the whole story is that she only lived to be 61. She caught cold and died within 2 days of pneumonia. She had never ridden in an automobile or heard a talk over a radio.

William was proud of how he had entertained his mother with his Edison phonograph. He also delighted in telling how he used the phonograph to bedevil the stone mason, Mike Burns.¹⁴ He wrote:

Not many people had phonographs in the early days. I had an Edison with hard cylinder records. I also had wax cylinders for making records. The machine was wound by a spring and

William Ketchin wrote at length about the short- and long-term health problems that Hattye developed because she caught pneumonia toward the end of this pregnancy. He said, in part:

With the help of Mrs. C. A. Ensign, I secured a Scotch nurse by the name of Stirling, who proved to be worth ten Dr. Woosters. She nursed Hattye through the pneumonia, and right here came the most severe trial of my life.

Hattye was still in bed and it was nearing time for the baby when my Dear Mother caught cold and passed out in four days with pneumonia. This affected Father's heart, so that for a time it looked as if all three of my loved ones would leave me. Miss Stirling was wonderful and kept us all sane. Then the baby came and the sun began to shine again. Miss Stirling was with us for six months.

Later, X-rays showed that Hattye had developed an enlarged heart, so Dr. Isaac Kingsbury of Hartford Hospital prescribed a form of digitalis. "He told me she would have to be very careful. She should

would run off two or three of these records. [The] records were made in a barrel shape of wax. And when ready to play, [they] were slid over the barrel and the contact which was with a needle, something like that used in radio years later. The phonograph became very popular, and I bought a set of records intending to learn to speak French. But it resulted in using soft records and getting my mother's voice and other voices that I wished to record and keep. I made and played many of the records, which amused my mother very much.

Perhaps I could tell you just how this was done by reporting just one instance. Mike Burns was one of our old Irish masons. He still retained the whiskers that were worn in Ireland [that] designated the place from which the Irishman came. Mike had a little bit of sideburns and a long, thin beard hanging from his chin, called a goat-sucker.

He lived about a mile up the East Granby Road on which there were not more than 2 or 3 houses. In one a maiden lady by the name of Merlin lived. Old Mike had to walk by this house every morning while walking to work. My brother Arch, who was then an invalid, used to call out to Mike every morning and ask if he had stopped to call on the lady when passing on the way to work. And Mike always had a good reply for to him.

Knowing that Mike had never heard a voice over the phonograph, I told him that sometime I would come to his house and show him how a message can be taken and put on a wax cylinder and carried across the country and be repeated. So I arranged to give this exhibition one night, putting on a big reception horn and getting Arch to talk on a recording record to repeat to Mike. I used ½ the record with Arch's recording, leaving the other half for Mike to answer him. And away to Mike's house I went.

I had Mike and his wife sit on one side of the room and I set up my phonograph on the other side. And I explained to Mike that Arch would speak to him, and I said, "Now, Mike, when he tells you something, you get right up and go over and talk into that horn and give him the blazes."

So I started the machine and all of a sudden it came out, "Mike, you old goat-sucker, did you stop and talk to Miss Merlin this morning on your way down?" Well, Mike jumped right out of his chair and said, "What the hell did he say?" and I said, "Now Mike go over there and get yourself close up to the horn and tell him just what you think of him."

He put his head in the horn and you could hear what he said for half a mile. He said, "Arch, what do you mean?" (And this is a great word Mike always used.) He said, "Wait till I get there in the morning and I'll put the lip off you." That will show how I worked the thing on different people to kind of bring back the fun and merriment that my mother used to enjoy.

not exert herself in any way. She must not go up or down stairs. From that day on, I carried her up and down stairs," he wrote. He also hired a housekeeper, Beula Parmelee, who became like part of the family.¹⁵

Back at the building site, they prepared to lay the cornerstone of the church. Although he didn't seek recognition, it had become an open secret in the town that Ralph Hart Ensign, president of Ensign-Bickford, had donated most of the \$45,000 cost of the church.¹⁶ At his request, the ceremony on June 23 was a simple one. As president of the Methodist Church board of trustees, he laid the cornerstone "assisted by Ketchin."¹⁷

Architect George Keller arranged to live for a while in Simsbury in "the Thomas cottage at Valley Farm."¹⁸ The Irish-born architect was about six years older than Andrew Ketchin and early in their careers each had worked in Hartford for James Goodwin Batterson in his monument business. George Keller had a career of national scope and designed all manner of commercial, civic and private buildings, but he is probably best known locally for the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch in Hartford's Bushnell Park.

The church, now the Simsbury United Methodist Church, was completed in 1909 and dedicated on June 10. It was set back farther from the street than the former building and had a larger footprint, reported to be 89x94 feet. Among its distinguishing features were its square bell tower, deeply recessed entryway and a Tiffany stained glass window in the chancel given in memory of Joseph Toy by his four daughters.¹⁹

The medical crisis back in March 1908 caused a change in the habits of the hard working Ketchin family. William wrote, "After Mother died, Father next began to give me trouble, [his] heart began to bother him, and after consulting Dr. Abrams of Hartford, I decided to get Father out of the severe Connecticut winter. It was a hard job to get him to leave home, but finally he was persuaded to go, if I would send Hattye and the children, too. We were stumped as to where to go. Mr. Joe Mitchelson recommended Miami, Florida, but it was such a new unsettled place that I finally took the recommendation of Mr. Horace Belden and decided on Bermuda."

"Gone to Bermuda" the paper announced that fall. "Mrs. William Ketchin and her five children and maid left Tariffville Tuesday morning for New York, from there they sailed the next day to Bermuda. Mr. Andrew Ketchin went to Bermuda several weeks ago and has secured a house in which they will spend the winter."²⁰ At the end of January, William joined them for a time.²¹ He wrote,

On the first trip to Bermuda for the whole family, I took them to New York and engaged rooms at [a hotel] on 42nd St. Ethel was 12 years; Pauline, 9; Elizabeth, 8; Dot, 5; and Billy, [less than] one year. That night we all went to the "Hippodrome" (since torn down) to see "Neptune's Daughter." The most wonderful show I have ever seen. The stage would accommodate 500 actors, and a 15-foot tank represented the sea, into which many of the actors disappeared and did not return. Later when Old Neptune and attendants came up out of the sea, even New Yorkers were mystified, until the New York papers told how it was done.

The next day I took the gang on board the steamship *Bermudian* for Hamilton, where in 48 hours they were met by Father and taken to their cottage on the "Bay" in "Fairyland," while I went back to Tariffville a very lonesome guy.²²

I had promised to go to Bermuda and stay a month as soon as I could arrange my work, but it was winter and the busy season for packing tobacco and I had 85 people in the warehouse. I finally planned to get away for five weeks, spurred by a letter from Hattye saying that she was so homesick that, if she should meet Pinney's dog, she would kiss him. So I arranged with my bookkeeper, Gertrude McKinnie, to send weekly detailed reports of the business.

Leaving New York with the thermometer at 14° above zero, I found myself in 48 hours coatless, stretched on the lawn in front of our cottage at Fairyland. Poor Gertrude. She faithfully sent the five reports, while I read only one. It was my first real vacation.

We had many fine times together that winter. At that time – 1908 – no automobiles were allowed on the island and Bermuda was the most quiet spot vacationers could find.

William remembered, "When the First World War struck us, Bermuda became a preparation ground, so we had to choose another winter home. Some of Father's friends recommended St. Petersburg, while others favored Miami. Father finally chose St. Petersburg, but when my family were ready to go a year later, we went to Miami. When my family started their trips to Miami (1919), the city's population was 15,000 and Coral Gables was being laid out as a subdivision."

To return to A. J. Ketchin & Son's construction work in Simsbury, after completing the Methodist Church, the company began work in 1909 for Antoinette Eno Wood. Mrs. Wood had arranged with her brother Amos F. Eno for life use of their late parents' summer home on Hopmeadow Street. She remodeled and made additions to the house and property.²³ A front page column on in the *Farmington Valley Herald* on April 2, 1909, reported, "Mrs. Antoinette Eno Wood has let the contract to A. J. Ketchin to build an



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addition 22x38 to her house on Hopmeadow Street. The addition will contain a kitchen, butler's pantry and other needed rooms." William wrote in his memoirs, "\$35,000 of construction work was done for Mrs. A. E. Wood of Simsbury, which included an addition to the main building, converting the horse stable to an auto garage with a turn table, construction of a brick laundry building, which was made of cement brick, made [and] moulded at the site."

Also in 1909 the Ketchin company repaired the dam of the Ensign-Bickford Company's grist mill on West Street.

The last school building that A. J. Ketchin & Son constructed was the Central Grammar School, which they completed in June 1913. The town chose the hill west of the high school as the site and the architectural firm of La Farge and Morris of New York as the designer. Horace Belden was on the building committee along with Joseph R. Ensign and Alexander T. Pattison. The *Hartford Courant* commented "The building is the gift of the same public spirited citizens who gave the high school building and who are so modest that they do not blow their own horns much telling about it." The building was valued at \$50,000.²⁴ The *Farmington Valley Herald* reported, "Mr. Belden gives much of his time to the work in looking after every detail and when it is done it will be the best equipped grammar school in New England."²⁵

At the completion of this project Frederick G. Shaw left the Ketchins to form his own company. The paper reported, "Fred G. Shaw, architect and foreman on all carpenter work...for A. J. Ketchin & Son of Tariffville has severed his connection with the concern. For a great many years Mr. Shaw has had entire charge of all the woodwork on the various buildings that have been erected by Ketchin & Son and among the buildings are the high school, the Methodist church and the new grammar school building."²⁶

A carpenter named L. F. Reynolds worked on A. J. Ketchin & Son's next building. James W. Pinney of Tariffville commissioned them to build a one-story 30x40 foot red sandstone structure on Main Street that could have a second story added later.²⁷ Pinney's Café was a tavern.

Soon after the work on the Central Grammar School was completed, the Ensign-Bickford Company marked President Ralph Hart Ensign's fifty years with the fuse manufacturing firm. One report of the Golden Jubilee celebration included this item: "The present buildings were all constructed by A. J. Ketchin and Son of Tariffville, and Mr. Ketchin, the senior member of this firm, was an interested visitor at the reception today."²⁸

The following year, when Ensign-Bickford needed a building in which to manufacture its new line from France, Cordeau-Bickford safety fuse, it again looked to the Ketchins. The 160x40-foot native red sandstone building was to be constructed near the railroad track east of the southern fuse rooms. "In general the construction will be similar to that of the other fuse rooms but the interior will be one long room," according to the paper, and Andrew J. Ketchin was going to oversee the construction.²⁹



Courtesy of the Simsbury Historical Society

Central Grammar School about 1913

Along with the high school and the Methodist church, the Simsbury Cemetery's memorial gateway and fence redefined the look of Simsbury Center. Dedicated on June 27, 1923, in honor of those from Simsbury who served in the Civil War and World War I, it was given by Lemuel Stoughton Ellsworth and Ann Jane Toy Ellsworth, but completed after their deaths. The gateway was designed by architect Lionel Moses, who during his career was associated with Gorham Company of New York and Providence and the firm of McKim, Mead & White. William supervised the construction and himself laid most of the brownstone for the posts, using stone from the Ketchin quarry. He also installed the other features made of pink granite quarried in Branford, Connecticut.³⁰

By the time the memorial gate was dedicated, A. J. Ketchin & Son had two more projects: a stone addition to the Ensign-Bickford office in Simsbury and a brick addition to the rear of the Simsbury Free Library. Seventy-five-year-old Andrew Ketchin, the paper reported, was one of two Civil War veterans remaining in the town, the other being Lucius W. Bigelow, the tin peddler. It retold the story of how his jaw was injured in the war and said, "[he] has kept the work moving in pretty good shape for these times when men employed on the job do not work as men did when Mr. Ketchin was a young contractor"³¹

In the fall of 1923 William began laying the foundations for a 30x40 foot one-story annex to the Simsbury Free Library building that Amos R. Eno had donated in 1890, leaving it in the care of ten trustees. His daughter, Antoinette Eno Wood, had given the trustees \$24,000 for the addition and for re-grading the front lawn, adding an ornamental cement balustrade and other improvements. The addition was opened in September of 1924.³²

William Ketchin listed many other building projects accomplished over the years, like the twelve small powder houses, nearly buried in sand and big enough to hold a carload of powder each, that they built in the woods for Ensign-Bickford. They also built the original fieldstone dam at West Simsbury for the Village Water Company and a reservoir for Joseph Mitchelson. In Tariffville, they poured cement sidewalks, repaired the flume and dam for the lace mills and designed and built Polish Hall. In 1907 they began sorting and packing tobacco and eventually became one of the largest independent tobacco growers in this area.



In the Summer 2012 issue, this series will conclude with William Ketchin's account of the Ketchin Tobacco Corporation. The series is being compiled by Mary Jane Springman from the several manuscripts of William Mansfield Ketchin's memoirs provided by Frederick Henry Herpel, his great grandson.

Notes

1. *Hartford Courant*, April 27, 1895:10. The men named with their initials are Horace J. Humphrey, Charles A. Ensign and Andrew J. Ketchin. The reporters for the *Hartford Courant* and the *Farmington Valley Herald* frequently misspelled the Ketchin's last name as Kitchen, Kitchener, Ketchen, Ketchum, etc.. The spelling is corrected in all quotations from the newspapers.
2. *Hartford Courant*, February 13, 1896:9.
3. Lyman G. Potter, *A History of First Church of Christ at Massaco, Simsbury, Connecticut* (Simsbury: First Church of Christ, 2002), 64-65.
4. John E. Ellsworth, *Simsbury: Being a Brief Historical Sketch of Ancient and Modern Simsbury, 1642-1935* (Simsbury: Simsbury Committee for the Tercentenary, 1935), 163.
5. *Ibid.*, 140. Historian Ellsworth dates "Holly Hill" at 1896. William Ketchin does not provide a date. The mansion at 36 Firetown Road is now part of the Governor's House Care and Rehabilitation Center.
6. *Hartford Courant*, October 15, 1900:13.
7. The founding of the McLean Seminary and Simsbury High School is reported in detail in the article on John Bunyan McLean in this publication's Spring 2008 issue.
8. Alexander T. Pattison, Chairman; Charles B. Holcomb; Frank H. Eno; Charles Croft; Lawrence Fagan; Arthur E. Humphrey and Joseph R. Ensign comprised the building committee. See the *Hartford Courant*, February 6, 1906, page 16.
9. The work on the high school began just about the time that A. J. Ketchin & Son completed their work on the walls of Joseph R. Ensign's house, now Webster Bank. See the Spring & Summer 2011 issue, page four.
10. According to the title search done by Richard Davis in 1996, one parcel belonged to Harry W. and Norwood Case and the other to Chancy F. Eno.

Researching the History of Your House

Tuesday, May 1, 2012

6:30 p.m. Reception to meet the speaker Marian Pierre-Louis

7:00 p.m. Program

You can research the history of your house whether it is 20 or 150 years old. Discover the history of the residents who lived there before you. Marian Pierre-Louis will introduce house history research including where to find the deeds to your house, how to chain a deed, and locating other sources of information, such as the US Federal Census records. Come learn some tricks of house history research.

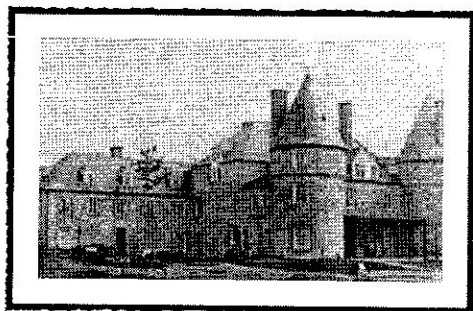
Cost to members is \$5.00, non-members \$10.00. Pre-registration is required.

★ See our new hours and contact information on the back cover. ★

★★ If you are not getting e-mail reminders about events at the library, please let us know. ★★

★★★ To make warm weather activities more comfortable, the library now has air-conditioning! ★★★

11. William Ketchin spells this man's last name both Borosky and Brosky.
12. Cousins Edward Thomas Hapgood and Melvin Hathaway Hapgood were partners in the Hartford architectural firm Hapgood & Hapgood. See the article "Melvin Hathaway Hapgood (1859-1899)" in this publication's Winter 2008-09 issue.
13. Soon after, the wooden building was torn down by Myron Vincent and Nelson St. Thomas, who were hired by the private party who purchased the building. See the *Hartford Courant*, March 11, 1908:13.
14. William Ketchin frequently mentions Michael Burns in his memoirs. Federal Census records show that Michael Burns was born in Ireland in 1845 and emigrated with his wife Elizabeth and son John in 1872. He became a U.S. citizen in 1886. His son Peter was born in New York State. William Ketchin twice wrote that Michael Burns lived on "Shongum Road," so it is tempting to speculate that when the family first came to this country they lived near the Shawangunk Ridge in New York (commonly spelled Shongum). The cement mines in this region produced the Rosendale natural cement that William said his father used before Portland cement became available. (See pages 6-7 of the Winter 2010 Quarterly.) The Burns family lived at 186 Hartford Avenue (Route 189) in East Granby, according to that town's municipal historian, Betty Finnell Guinan. Tradition holds that John Griffin is buried at the back of that property near the power line cut. Griffin and Michael Humphrey were the first European settlers of Colonial Simsbury.
15. Miss Parmelee stayed with the Ketchins until after Hattie's death in 1921. She married Ralph L. Granger of East Granby and represented that town in the Connecticut House of Representatives from 1945 to 1953.
16. \$45,000 adjusted for inflation is \$1,078,084.53 in 2010 dollars. See www.westegg.com/inflation.
17. *Hartford Courant*, June 24, 1908:12. The article does not say whether it was Andrew or William Ketchin.
18. *Hartford Courant*, June 30 1908:15. Valley Farm was noted for prize winning Russian wolfhounds, fox hunts, and coach excursions, among other activities.
19. *Hartford Courant*, June 10, 1909:6.
20. *Farmington Valley Herald*, November 27, 1908:3.
21. *Farmington Valley Herald*, January 15, 1909:1; January 22, 1909:4.
22. The *SS Bermudian* was the first ocean liner dedicated to the roundtrip between New York and Hamilton, Bermuda. For a brief history and picture of the ship, go to www.bermuda-online.org/history1900-1951.htm
23. This building is now the Simsbury 1820 House country inn at 731 Hopmeadow Street.
24. *Hartford Courant*, September 13, 1913:11.
25. *Farmington Valley Herald*, March 28, 1913:7.
26. *Farmington Valley Herald*, May 16, 1913:1. Mr. Shaw had taken a correspondence course in architecture in 1898 from the same school in which William had enrolled in 1894. (See the Spring/Summer 2011 issue, page 5.) One of the first houses Mr. Shaw built was the Emmett Schultz house called "The Maples" at 72 East Weatogue Street. (See *Farmington Valley Herald*, July 11, 1913:6) William makes no mention of Frederick Shaw in his memoirs.
27. *Farmington Valley Herald*, August 8, 1913:3 William Ketchin does not mention this building in his memoirs.
28. *Hartford Courant*, August 2, 1913:11
29. *Hartford Courant*, July 26, 1914:15
30. *Farmington Valley Herald*, July 13, 1922:1; April 12, 1923; *Hartford Courant*, June 28, 1923:2; www.chs.org/finding_aides/ransom/111.htm
31. *Farmington Valley Herald*, June 7, 1923:1.
32. *Farmington Valley Herald*, January 3, 1924:1; *Hartford Courant*, September 24, 1924:11.



Bus Trip Grey Towers

National Historic Landmark

Wednesday, May 23

7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Grey Towers was built in 1886 by James and Mary (Eno) Pinchot in Milford, Pennsylvania, as a summer retreat. Later it was the home of their son Gifford Pinchot. Born in Simsbury in 1865, Pinchot was the first chief of the US Forest Service and twice governor of Pennsylvania. Today Grey Towers serves as a conservation and leadership center and has programs that interpret the lives of the Pinchot family.

Join the Simsbury Free Library and special guest Jack Eno for a tour of the mansion and gardens at Grey Towers and a guided walking tour of historic downtown Milford.

Member cost is \$100 with lunch, \$75 without lunch. Non-member cost is \$125 with lunch, \$100 without lunch. The fee includes luxury bus transportation (leaving from and returning to the Iron Horse Boulevard parking lot at Wilcox Street), all admissions, the two guided tours, some refreshments on the bus and a donation to the library.

For a brochure, please contact the library at info@simsburyfreelibrary.org, call (860) 408-1336 or drop in to pick one up.

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