SIMSBURY FREE LIBRARY Quarterly

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Memories of the of Ketchins of Tariffville

Part 1: Builders in Stone and Quarrymen

Three generations of men in the Ketchin family worked on most, if not all, of the brownstone buildings constructed in Simsbury and surrounding towns from the 1850s to the 1920s. They built the Ensign-Bickford Company buildings in Simsbury and Avon, the Simsbury United Methodist Church, the former high school that is now the Simsbury Town Hall, the former tobacco warehouse that is now the volunteer fire department building in the Tariffville section of Simsbury, and the former residences that are now Webster Bank and Vincent Funeral Home on Hopmeadow Street and other buildings.

The last of these builders to live in Tariffville, William Mansfield Ketchin, sat down in his home in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in 1948, at the age of seventy-seven, and began to write down in ink in a 5½ x 8¾ inch notebook his memories of his family, of his own life within it, and of the several businesses the family had developed, primarily concerned with stone construction, but including owning and operating quarries, a monument carving shop and a tobacco business. Over the years he added episodes to his text and retold stories to add detail until he had covered more than 300 pages, plus a twenty-seven page genealogy, which he completed in 1955.

This manuscript, containing so much Simsbury history, is owned by William Ketchin's great grandson, Frederick Henry Herpel of West Palm Beach, Florida. In honor of his Simsbury ancestors, Mr. Herpel has given a copy of the manuscript to the Simsbury Free Library. The following series of articles are based on William Mansfield Ketchin's writing. He began thus,

This is a chronicle of one
William Mansfield Ketchin
Recording the sunshine and shadows
Of an ordinary life from childhood to old age

William Mansfield Ketchin's great grandparents, Andrew Gilmore and Elizabeth (Arthur) Kitchen,[1] emigrated in 1821 from Paisley, Scotland, to the United States. They brought their two small sons with them, added two more sons in this country, and eventually settled in Tariffville where Andrew Kitchen found work as a weaver in the carpet mill on the Farmington River.

Their eldest son, John Kitchen, was William Ketchin's grandfather. He was born in Scotland in 1817 and William Ketchin wrote, "He learned the trade of stone cutting from his cousin James Arthur and the trade of stone masonry from his uncle Robert Arthur of Hartford, Conn." In another section of his memoirs, William wrote of his grandfather:

> John was a Stone Mason and the facts about working conditions at that time were related to me by him about 1890. He worked at his trade at Simsbury and Tariffville when there was work to do, but at other times he would work in Hartford 12 miles away. As there was no rail, bus or other transportation, he would walk to his work Monday, stay in Hartford through the week, and walk home Saturday. The working day at that time was ten hours plus. When he worked in Simsbury center he walked the four miles to and from work each day. Top mason wage was two to two-fifty per day with no overtime pay.

He worked on the Old Grist Mill of the Beldens and the Belden Stone House at Simsbury[2] and on the [Toy-Bickford Company's] Old Coiling Shop, Old Machine Shop and several Fuse Rooms.

He was at work on the Wilcox Stone House in Hop Meadow Street [now the Vincent Funeral Home] when the Civil War broke out and he enlisted. It is said that when the news came calling for volunteers that he stood up and threw his trowel into the mortar box and announced that he was going to enlist; several of the workers left with him. So the Wilcox home remained unfinished until after the war. He enlisted in the 10th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry, Company E.

Military records show that John Kitchen enlisted on September 14, 1861, was mustered into the Company E on September 30, 1861 and was discharged with a disability on September 25. 1862.[3]. William explained that while in the Union Army his grandfather suffered severe sunstroke that left him incapacitated for twelve years and from which he never fully recovered. His younger brother, James Arthur Kitchen, also fought for the Union. He was wounded at Antietam, captured at Plymouth and died a prisoner of war in Florence, South Carolina, where the Confederates had their infamous Stockade prison. Many years later, A. J. Ketchin & Son was hired to build additions to the Wilcox house. But that is getting ahead of the story.

Before going to enlist, John Kitchen hired out his thirteen-year-old son Andrew to Ariel Mitchelson, a farmer in Tariffville. "I understand," William wrote, "that the meals were quite deficient and Andrew soon learned the art of sucking hens eggs. This kept him in quite robust condition." By the time his father returned from the war, Andrew apparently had had his fill of Farmer Mitchelson, his three sons and the bull that one day stuck his horns under the boy's armpits, lifted him up and dumped him into a pond. Now fifteen, Andrew was determined to go off to the war.

William tells of his father Andrew Quincy Kitchen's Civil War enlistment and service this way:

About this time his father, John, was sent home on account of extreme sun-stroke. And at this time there was very much activity through this district to raise recruits and a train was started [in] Poughkeepsie on the Connecticut Western R. R. and [was] making stops at the principal stopping stations in the hope of picking up a whole trainload of recruits. Andrew and a friend of his about the same age made up their minds they were going to enlist, but Andrew's Father and his friend's Mother, who was a widow, forbade this move.

This train was scheduled to make its last stop at Simsbury, Connecticut. So the day on which it was to stop at Simsbury, a large crowd collected on the platform. The parents were on the platform to see that their sons did not get away. The boys knew that their parents were on the platform and made their plans accordingly, pretending that they were not interested. They waited until the train got started and until the tail-end was about to pass where they were. But Andrew's father was also watching and he secured a very insecure hold of Andrew's coat-tail. However he was a little late because both boys got onto the train and away they went to Hartford.

Andrew's Father and the other boy's Mother followed as quick as they possibly could, but transportation in those days was such that the boys had a pretty good start. The parents did, however, follow them clear into the South, but whenever the parents caught up with the boys the soldiers hid them and the parents were obliged to go back to Connecticut empty handed.

Military records show that Andrew Ketchin enlisted and was mustered into the Union Army on December 7, 1863, was wounded on March 25, 1865 (just four days after his seventeenth birthday) and was mustered out on June 28, 1865.[4] William wrote, "The boys were taken in at first as drummer boys, in the 25th Regiment, Company E, Infantry, Connecticut Volunteers. He [Andrew] was a husky fellow and was transferred to the 1st Connecticut Heavy Artillery, Company L."

The battle on the day that Andrew was wounded is known to Civil War historians as the Battle of Fort Stedman. It was the last battle of the Petersburg–Richmond Campaign. Just outside Petersburg,

artillerymen from Company L manned the mortars in Fort Haskell and Siege Battery 12 at the beginning of the conflict. Confederate troops took Fort Stedman and other positions in the early hours, but amid fierce fighting these were soon retaken by the Union troops.[5]

Some ninety years after this battle William wrote down what he remembered his father had told him about the circumstances under which he was wounded:

> As I understand it, about 150 men had been stationed in an old fort or "dugout" while the main body was in another fort about a mile away and between these two forts was a deep ravine. The men in the small fort discovered one night that a large body of Southern soldiers had encamped in the ravine during the night with the evident intention of attacking in the morning. The boys in the small fort estimated this enemy at about 6,000 men. Knowing this the boys in the small fort, among them my Father, had little chance of escaping capture unless they could reach the large fort. The Lieutenant [George H. Couch] called them together and explained the situation. He had a plan which was as follows: To sneak down as close as possible to the sleeping enemy and then he would give the order "First Brigade Double Quick Charge," and followed by another order "Second Brigade Double Quick Charge" and every man to yell "like hell" while running for the other side, figuring that their only hope was to reach the steep hill going up to the other fort. The assumption was that the enemy would soon see that it was a surprise bunch of a few men and they would jump up and commence firing. The hope was that bullets would strike into the hill below the running men.
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> It was Andrew's misfortune to be behind with Lieut. Couch and a big fellow was following close behind them yelling, "Stop Yank." Andrew wheeled about and raised his gun to fire, but as he pulled the trigger he noticed his gun cap had fallen off. He had just put on another cap when the fellow who was following fired. [Andrew] instinctively shrugged his shoulders and the shot tore through the lower part of his jaw, and he fell across cornrows, his feet resting on one row and his body on another. The "Reb" who shot him quickly jumped on him and began to tear open his blouse for money. Lieut. Couch wheeled and shot the "Reb," who fell across my father. The Lieut. then pulled father to his feet and yelled, "Run for your life."
>
> Father said that he did not remember anything more until he found himself inside the fort. The wound allowed his tongue to hang through and it was very near the jugular vein, which he felt would burst. He crawled to a brook and stroked it with cool water, then he lost consciousness. When he awoke his first thought was that the vein had burst, but when he felt of it he found that the swelling had gone down. Andrew had a well-to-do cousin (a rag merchant) in New York and how he got in touch with him I do not remember. Anyway he reached there and surgeons sawed off the jaw bones (without anesthesia), fashioned a metallic "RUBBER JAW," pulled the flesh about it and in time he was able to hide the scars with a beard. The new jaw caused him to learn and produce sounds of words all over again. I can remember when I was a small boy one could stick a pin into father's jaw without hurting him. However, the wound injured his windpipe so that he made a disagreeable sound when sleeping. This trouble stayed with him through life, but was less pronounced as the years passed. In sewing up the wound, it made his mouth quite small. He never had robust health again. Of course after the war these boys had seen so much that they were pretty rough customers. I guess from what I learned Andrew was as tough as they make them.
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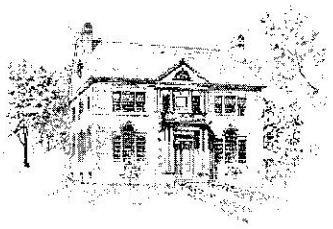
> He was discharged June 23, 1865, with a pension. When the papers finally arrived his name was spelled "KETCHIN" and the middle initial changed to "J." He was so badly in need of the $24.00 a month that he dared not return the papers for correction, fearing that he would lose all.

From that time forward, he and his descendants spelled their last name Ketchin. .Also, while he was in the army Andrew's mother, Margaret (Moore) Kitchen, born in Paisley, Scotland, died in Tariffville at the age of 42 on April 23, 1864.

Although his father was a stonemason, Andrew J. Ketchin decided that he wanted to be a stonecutter, for which he would have to learn stone carving and lettering. Going to Hartford, he became an apprentice in the J. G. Batterson Marble and Granite Works on North Main Street. During his time with this company he worked on the construction of the ornate white marble state capitol building. James Goodwin Batterson, in addition to heading his stone monument and construction company, later the New England Granite Works, was a founder and president of the Travelers Insurance Company.



William writes that when his father's apprenticeship was over,

> ...he went to Springfield, Mass., where considerable building was in operation. Being then about 22 years of age with a good trade and a good job he began to think about getting married. And he met a girl that he took to right away who was working in the mills of Agawam. After going with this young woman for about a year or a year and a half he persuaded her to marry him. Her name was Harriet Spencer of Middletown, Conn. Their first son was born at Springfield, Mass [William was born June 3, 1871]. They continued to live in Springfield for a year after this event and then journeyed back to Hartford and he went to work in [a] marble and granite shop just below South Green at the head of Maple Avenue.

William related many stories of his childhood years in the two-story farmhouse on Maple Avenue that his parents rented, subletting the upper story to friends. It had a pear and apple orchard of about two acres and there were very few houses south of it. He had a Shepherd dog and a goat that he could hitch to a little wagon. His brother Archibald Brown Ketchin was born there on November 6, 1874. When he was old enough, his parents sent him to the Washington Street School. To get there he had to walk about a quarter mile which, he wrote, took him "through the vacant lot along beside the buildings of the insane asylum ... and many times I would hear cries of some of the inmates. I went from my house to the Washington Street School about as fast as my legs would carry me."[6]

William's mother and father were baptized into the Central Baptist Church and his father became foreman of the marble shop. Eventually Andrew Ketchin saw that some business practices there "were not to his liking." William elaborated,

> With his other work he had to see to the erection of monuments and on occasion found that Barry granite was substituted for Westerly granite. While these two granites resembled each other, they were far apart in durability. The black spots in Barry were mica, while the black spots in the Westerly were very hard hornblende. These irritations were continually coming up so finally father put in his resignation and obtained a position as foreman with the Redway marble and granite works on North Main Street [about 1879]. We moved north to 55 Fairmount Street to be near as possible to Father's work and from there I went to the Arsenal School on North Main Street.

Schooldays brought schoolboy troubles that his father helped him sort out. William said of Andrew Ketchin, "He was a sturdy, honest Scotchman with a quick temper which was always tempered with justice." One incident at the Arsenal School stuck in his memory. When he was about eleven, a teacher whom he liked, Miss Thomas, appointed him monitor to see that his classmates walked down the stairs properly. He remembered,

> In my room there was a tall colored boy who was always in some kind of trouble, so when he got out of line and jumped down the stairs, I reported him. He was called back and when he passed

me he indicated to me what he would do to me. I had no desire to tangle with him so I hurried to get out on the street and home. The marble shop where my Father was employed was only a block from the school, so I knew if I reached there I would be safe, but just as I reached the street, I saw my enemy coming out of the teachers' entrance and, by so doing, cutting off my run toward Father's shop.

I ran straight across the street with my enemy close behind me. I reached the sidewalk and turned. Just as he reached the curb, I drove my fist with all my strength into his face, but on he came and what a fight followed. A large crowd gathered. I couldn't seem to hurt him, but he was hurting me plenty. Suddenly a voice in the crowd (how I loved that voice) yelled, "Kick him in the shins."

I had on leather boots with a brass toe plate, a popular style worn at that time by school boys of my age, and while he kept pulverizing my face, I concentrated all my strength and attention on his shins and, while the black boy doubled to nurse his shins, someone grabbed me and hustled me down a side street for home. When I told my Father all the facts, he said that I must first guard against trouble in school, but always be ready to defend myself if it is unavoidable.

William wrote that years later he read in newspaper articles that his opponent was involved in a killing and eventually died in Wethersfield State Prison.

As a child William was called Willie, which changed as he got older to Will. Not long after this street fight, his father said to him, "Will, I want you to start learning your trade as soon as school is out this summer, and I will tell you why and what I plan. I don't want you running the streets though this vacation. I will take you into the Marble shop and you will start to learn the trade. I mean to give you plenty of time for play, but you are 11 years old now and I am sure you will understand your instructions and I will be nearby and I will answer any questions you want to know about the work.'

William remembered his work that summer in great detail.

At that time an apprentice had to serve three years. The first six months was spent in "rubbing and polishing." The rubbing and polishing was a tedious job. At that time (1882) so-called "Plumber slabs" were sawed at the marble quarries, one inch thick and twenty-four to forty-eight inches wide and up to six feet long. At the marble shops these slabs were "coped" to make wash stands and fireplace fronts – porcelain tubs and washstands had not come into use. And at that time marble headstones were popular. These were twenty-four to thirty inches wide and up to five feet long and two or three inches thick. When these slabs came from the quarries to the Marble shops, the edges had to be cut to size with steel chisels and a wooden mallet. Then the rubber's job was to erase the tool marks and polish the surface to be lettered.

On the edge of these slabs, a section of railroad rail about 12″ long was used and tool marks were rubbed out with coarse sand and water. On the broad surfaces of the slabs, a rubbing iron with handle weighting fifty pounds was used. This was a flat piece of iron, two inches thick, with slots cut through where the sand and water was fed. The rubber then pushed this contraption back and forth until all the tool marks were erased. This operation left sand pits which must be rubbed out by hand with a large piece of coarse grit; then the coarse grit scratches must be erased by a pumice stone, followed by hone. The surface is then ready to polish. This was done with oxalic acid crystals and tutty powder under a heavy woolen cloth and plenty of "elbow grease."

William's parent's third son, George Spencer Ketchin, had been born September 5, 1878, and he died of pneumonia when he was three years and eight months old. "Georgie was a fine, smart little fellow and his passing threw a deep shadow over the family," he wrote. "This had such an effect on my mother that we moved from that place to the corner of Fairmount and Center Street. This was a double brick house with 4 tenements with a backyard." William then recalled the period when his father's employer, Mr. Redway, was very ill and Andrew Ketchin had to shut down the shop for a prolonged period to care for him.[7] Andrew's heath was adversely affected, William wrote.

He began to cough considerably. His doctor advised him to go to the country and get an outside job and, if he could stand it, to get a pick and shovel job. The best thing to do, if he could afford it, would be to hire or buy a place where he could work the soil, like digging in the garden. He decided to move to Tariffville (where he was born) and there he found just what he wanted for his father, who was a stone mason, was engaged in digging cellars and building the walls and underpinning of houses. Those eight months were shadow months as Father's health and life was in the balance. Yet during that time a bit of sunshine came through, for another fine healthy boy (Frankie) came and the good Mother came through the ordeal beautifully and happy.[8]

In Tariffville in 1883 the family rented a two-story house on Winthrop Street. Andrew Ketchin worked with his father's laborers and regained his health. Twelve-year-old William helped with the digging of cellars at times and he and his eight-year-old brother Archie helped their mother with washing and drying the dishes. William wrote that after his father's health was restored,

He rented a 2-story small cottage on Center Street, hardly a stone's throw from where we were living. He located his father on the 2nd floor and opened a small marble and granite shop on the 1st floor. Of course, I helped father all I could, but he had to do all the drafting of the monuments and selling also. We seemed to do pretty well in the monument business because it was mostly in headstones at that time.

William recalled the making of the headstones, some of them marble and some marble set into a brownstone base. Typical of that time, they set the marble slab into the base by pouring melted brimstone into the slot. He wrote, "Cement had just begun to be manufactured in the states. There were 2 or 3 companies formed to try to make cement, which at that time had to be shipped from England. In the building trades, a cement called Rosendale was dug from the earth in N.Y. state and mixed with lime to lay cellars for houses."[9] Continuing with the family's progress, he wrote,

The little marble and granite shop prospered well for 2 or 3 years when father wanted to buy the little building, owned by a man named Latimer. And after talking to Mr. Latimer he found that he was very anxious to put up a monument on his cemetery lot in Avon. And Mr. Latimer wanted quite an expensive monument. Father agreed to make a design to Mr. Latimer's taste and let the whole thing go into purchasing the shop. So the little house went into sale to A.J. Ketchin.

After Frankie was born and we continued to get along in the monument business, father had a chance to buy the big McKew place further up Winthrop St. This was a fine 2-story cottage with a barn and a stable for a cow and horse. And, of course,...automobiles were not even dreamed of.

Young Willie attended the Tariffville Grammar School and an incident with his eighth grade teacher became a subject in his memoirs. Without explanation the teacher told him to stay after school.

It developed that a half wit who sat directly in back of me had reported to him that all the ink spots on the wainscot adjacent to my desk, which was on the aisle, were put there by me. So after school was dismissed at noon, he said, as he drew a long rattan from the back of his desk, "I want to ask you a few questions." And as he started from his desk, he said in a louder voice than he usually used, "Why did you spot that wainscot with ink?" I said that the ink was there before I came and I never did it. Then he said in a very angry voice, "I'll teach you to lie to me."

Then I was mad and I reached into my desk and pulled out a slate that was 12"x16." The slate across one corner had been broken out. I put my finger and hand through that corner and jumped on my desk. And I said, "If you come near enough to me I'll split your head open." And he stopped, and he turned around after a half a minute and went back to his desk. Then he said "I can sit here as long as you want to stand on that desk, but I will bring you under subjection."

Well, we both [stayed] there as the minutes went by, but my house was right next door to the school and some of the scholars had evidently passed the word, when the door suddenly opened and

Happy 200th Birthday to our founder Amos Richards Eno, born in Simsbury, November 1, 1810,
from the Board of Trustees, Staff and Members of the Simsbury Free Library.

my father stepped in. He walked in front of the teacher's desk and said, "What is going on here?" The teacher said, I was about to punish a boy who lied to me." Father said, "Will, what did you do?" I said, "This teacher accused me of putting this ink on the wainscot and I never did it." He said to go home and stay there.

He never told me what he said to the teacher, but lying in our family was a prime sin. Father told me after that he looked at the marks on the wainscot and was convinced that they had been put there years before. But he told me at the time, he says, "I'll tell you what you better do. (At this time I had been working at my trade for over a year.) You better go back to your work and let this simmer for a few days." About three days latter the teacher called at the house in the evening and said that he had come to apologize for falsely accusing me for something that I did not do. That he had investigated the matter thoroughly and wanted me to come back to school.

Andrew Ketchin left it up to his son to decide whether or not to return to school. William decided not to and kept working in the marble shop until the fall when his father enrolled him in the Simsbury Academy run by Rev. John Bunyan McLean.[10]

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The next installments of this series will tell how Andrew Ketchin and his son William became the major builders of stone buildings in the Simsbury-Avon area and how their success as builders led them to open two quarries and to build and operate a tobacco warehouse. The series is being compiled from the several manuscripts of William Mansfield Ketchin's memoirs by Mary Jane Springman.

Notes

1. The family name was spelled Kitchen until the time of the Civil War when it became Ketchin, as explained on page three.
2. The Belden house stood at the southwest corner of Hopmeadow and West Streets, where the Hopmeadow Place condominiums stand today. The article on Horace Belden in the 1919 *Encyclopedia of Connecticut Biography* (page 293) says that this mansion was built between 1853 and 1855 and that "the boss mason was paid $1.40 per day, while the carpenter received $1.25." In a different section of his memoirs, William Ketchin wrote that his grandfather worked on the Belden gin distillery that was on Hop Brook near the Belden mansion. See also the article on Horace Belden in the Fall 2006 issue of this quarterly.
3. Adjutants-General, *Record of Service of Connecticut Men in the Army and Navy of the United States During the War of the Rebellion* (Hartford: Case Lockwood & Brainard Co. for the Connecticut General Assembly, 1889), 414.
4. Ibid., 167.
5. John C. Taylor and Samuel P. Hatfield, *History of the First Connecticut Artillery and the Siege Trains of the Armies Operating against Richmond, 1862-1865* (Hartford: First Connecticut Artillery, 1893), 143, 146. See also William Henry Hodgkins, *The Battle of Fort Stedman (Petersburg, Virginia) March 23, 1865* (Boston: Privately printed, 1889). Both Google Books.
6. The institution he refers to was called at that time the Retreat for the Insane and is now the Institute of Living.
7. William Ketchin wrote that he died at that time, but George M. Redway's obituary appeared in the *Hartford Courant* on August 23, 1897, well after the Ketchins moved to Tariffville.
8. Frank Arthur Ketchin was born November 16, 1882.
9. The Brooklyn Bridge, opened in 1883, was made with Rosendale cement. For a history of this product go to the Web site of the Century House Historical Society in Rosendale, New York: www.centuryhouse.org
10. Rev. John B. McLean was one of the original ten trustees of the Simsbury Free Library. For a brief biography of Rev. McLean, see the article in the Spring 2008 issue of this quarterly.

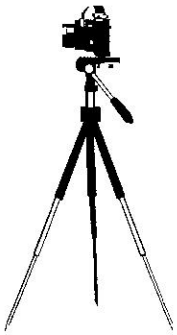
The library will be CLOSED on Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve and Christmas.
Please visit our art exhibit during Simsbury Celebrates! and throughout December.

The Simsbury Free Library Presents .....

Simsbury Artists ~ Simsbury Views

Featuring the work of five selected local artists:

Catherine Elliott	*Impressionist paintings in oil*
John Johnson	*Linoleum block & woodcut block prints*
Deborah Leonard	*Impressionist paintings in acrylic*
Bunny Curtis Millan	*Mixed media collages & pastels*
Rich Wagner	*Photography*



Saturday, November 27
4:30 to 7:30 P.M.
In the library during

Simsbury Celebrates!

This free exhibit will remain at the library through the month of December. All are welcome!

FIRST CLASS

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