

[Stevens, Bingham Sykes]

BING S. STEVENS A LOYAL FRIEND

Death of Prominent Merchant Saddens Community
University Abandons Charter Day Program Out of Respect to His Memory

There is scarcely a person in Canton who could not contribute some word of appreciation or regard, or relate some interesting experience or incident to help form an estimate of the position Bing S. Stevens held in this community. It is for this reason that his death shortly before seven this morning came as a personal loss to so many. Death came as sleep to him. For that his family and friends are grateful. Two years of illness, two years when at any moment he and his family realized a heart attack might prove instantly fatal, had seen him withstanding several illnesses from this cause and each time recovering and returning to his usual routine. He refused to give up, and likewise he preferred not to relinquish his customary mode of living, choosing to go his usual way and take what might be in store for him rather than submit to complete invalidism. That was his philosophy of living. His physician, Dr. John Stauffeur, marveled that one afflicted with angina pectoris should possess such rugged recuperative power, for on several occasions Mr. Stevens had "come back" after what seemed like certain fatal attacks. Had he not suffered a cerebral hemorrhage this last time it is possible that he might again have "come down to the store."

The attendance at the funeral Sunday afternoon at two from the Universalist Church of which he was a member, and of which he had been treasurer the past ten years, was a tribute to one so universally liked. The St. Lawrence University Trustees meeting here Saturday nearly all remained, for Mr. Stevens was one of the most loyal and best known of all the University's alumni. His pastor, Rev. Hugh S. Tigner, conducted the service, which was simple and dignified. A mass of flowers was the unspoken words of esteem in the hearts of so many. Burial was in the family lot at Fairview Cemetery.

Dr. Sidney Robins, personal friend of Mr. Stevens, assisted at the service, paying his late friend a beautiful tribute.

Active bearers were Carl Witherbee, Lee Hunt, Roy B. Cogston, Dr. Ward C. Priest, Dr. John Buys and Lewis T. Cook, all of Canton.

Honorary bearers included Dean Edward C. Hulett, Prof. Charles Rebert, Dr. Raymond Harmon, G. Atwood Manley, Dr. Harwood M. Schwartz, John McGaughey and Roy H. Bassett, all of Canton, and Floyd Callward, Storrs, Conn.

Complete arrangements had been made for the celebration of Charter Day at St. Lawrence University Sunday afternoon, the day of the funeral, but everything was cancelled in respect to Mr. Stevens.

It is difficult for one who has been a close and intimate friend, and a fellow worker in different matters, to present this tribute. The heart overflows. Bing Stevens was surely a royal comrade, so genuine, such a straight shooter in business affairs and in conduct. Loyalty and friendship were no myth so far as he was concerned. The last thing he would desire would be to have an over-profuse tribute paid him, or his memory. He never thought of himself, always the other person.

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Though he had always been known as Bing, his correct name was Bingham Sykes Stevens, the Bingham Sykes being after his grandfather, who was an uncle to Richard Eddy Sykes, of St. Lawrence University. This family was among early Canton settlers, down in the Sykes neighborhood, as it was called then, and still is. Heber Sykes, the senior a Vermonter, came here not long after the town was settled. His home was on the crest of the hill first north of the County House Corners on the present Morley highway. Heber's son, Bingham, built the place just across the road, where the late Justice Leslie W. Russell later ran his celebrated stock farm, now the Harold Perkins place. It was there Bingham Sykes lived and died. It was there Mary Sykes grew up, later to marry Elbert E. Stevens of this village. Her mother, Lydia Aldrich, was of another old and familiar Canton family. Another of Heber's sons, Edwin, located on the cross road. Edwin's grandson, the present Edward Sykes, still runs the farm. It was there Dr. Sykes was born and grew up.

Those who recall Bing Stevens' youth in Canton remember his passion for athletics. He was a member of that now legendary organization, The Mohecan Athletic Club which had among its members "Chel" Austin, Harry Conkey, Jay Benton and other boys of that time who were athletically inclined. In the field of Canton sports of those days there was only one branch which amounted to much and that was baseball. It was baseball for Bing and he never lost interest in it. As an M.A.C. he played shortstop. He not only played shortstop but he was of short stature and that combination resulted in a nickname, "Shorty," which Frank Heaton and a few others never relinquished when addressing him.

From helping the M.A.C. win nine games against all comers, Bing Stevens graduated to the St. Lawrence Varsity, four years in the same berth. After graduating from college in 1899, he took up post-graduate baseball on the town teams, along with John Keeler, George Adams, Ceylon Chaney and others. When he retired from active playing he was kept on as umpire for local town games and college games. Eventually he became just another ball fan, but when there was a ball game in town he was always there.

Elbert E. Stevens, Bing's father, was for many years a Canton business man and insurance agent. It is interesting to note that the Stevenses have represented the Agricultural Insurance Company in this village for 61 years. It was in May 1890, just fifty years ago this month, that Elbert Stevens advertised in this paper that he had purchased what is now the Stevens Store on Main street and was putting on an opening sale of books, stationery, household goods, wall paper, picture frames to order, spectacles, tin and agate wear. He was to continue his business on Court Street where the fire station now stands, and was to sell there, as before, his line of carriages, harness, saddles, wagons and carts. He, of course, was continuing his insurance business. Many will recall that Mrs. Stevens, "Aunt Mary," looked after the Main street store business for many years.

It was into this family business establishment that Bing stepped upon completing his college course. At St. Lawrence he had joined the Alpha Taus, and on the campus he had been a live wire. He proved to be a live wire in business. Last week a friend recalled how Bing, Carl Witherbee and Roy Pike were among the

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first purchasers in Canton of Harley Davidson motor cycles and how they proceeded to tour the county.

Upon his taking over the family store that place soon became more than an ordinary store. College towns, by tradition, always have some place which is the accepted "student hang out." Here in Canton this was Bing's. Somebody started a student registry there, and every day students would drop in just to sign the register and add a few remarks, as well as to chat with Bing. Thus it came about that "Bing's" became a St. Lawrence tradition, and still is.

His business prospered. His father became interested in the lumber business and was extensively engaged in that line at the time of his death. Bing Stevens closed this out, in addition to conducting his own affairs. And this additional responsibility proved a heavy and trying burden for many years, more so than even some of his close friends realized. It was characteristic of him that he made light of his own troubles. It was so during his illness.

Never was there a man who more thoroughly enjoyed the life which a community such as Canton offered. At The Club of which he was so long a member he played billiards and bowled. He loved to sit down to a game of cards, and in recent years was a member of a group which met each week for their regular evening at contract or duplicate bridge. He not only was a master card player but he could do card tricks. When the Gold Club was organized he was a charter member and golf became almost as popular with him as baseball. His active interest in such recreations seemed to keep him young beyond his years. He was born January 13, 1878, making him 62 years old at his death. He supported everything which was for the good of the town.

His father and mother were the most loyal members and workers in the Universalist Church and for the past ten years he had served as treasurer of that society, as well as being a member of the church. For many years he was counselor to the Alpha Chapter and always stood ready to help in its affairs. He served one term, 1918-21, on the Alumni Council of St. Lawrence University. He had served on the Board of Governors of the Golf Club, the Lions Club, the Canton Fish & Game Club, the Chamber of Commerce.

On August 11, 1914 he married Miss Lena Bray, who had been head of the Department of Home Economics at the State School. Their home on Elm Street was hospitality itself. It was there that friends gathered, and where their two children Aldine, who graduated from St. Lawrence last June, and Brayton, who is a senior in high school, had their friends come.

It is to this fine family that the sympathy of the community now goes. No better husband or father ever lived, nor did Canton ever have a better friend and citizen.

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