

[Storrs, Levi Bidwell]

Levi Bidwell Storrs Dead.

Levi Bidwell Storrs died in Canton Monday afternoon, August 29, 1898, of paralysis, aged 82 years. Over two years ago he suffered from his first attack of paralysis, and since that time he has been practically confined to the house. Sunday afternoon he was taken with the second stroke, from which he never recovered.

Mr. Storrs was probably the oldest native of Canton at the time of his death. He had been heard to state this fact recently. He was born in Canton, September 19, 1816, his father being Samuel Storrs, who moved here from Vergennes, Vt. Mr. Storrs learned the trade of tailor and in 1836 opened a store on Court street near the present site of the Eagle House. Later he built a block in company with the late H. P. Matthews on the site of the present Matthews block, and opened a store where French & Griswold are now located. At that time he did an immense business, having started the manufacture of clothing, employing at one time 150 hands. He lost all his savings in the fire of '57. In '58 he invented his pressing machine, which still finds a ready market. To accommodate this branch of his business he built large machine shops on Water street, one of which is still run by his son Frank. The machine filled a decided want and became very popular. Later he moved his clothing business into the present Plaindealer block, and after he built the block on the south side of Main street he moved into it, where he continued in active business until '82.

He was also probably the oldest native Odd Fellow in the county, having been initiated in Watertown. He started the lodge in Ogdensburg, the first one in the county, over fifty-one years ago, and the River DeGrasse lodge in Canton village in 1852.

When the promoters of St. Lawrence University were looking about for a location, Hudson offered \$15,000 if they would locate there. Mr. Storrs, Martin Thatcher, former county clerk Theodore Caldwell and Barzallai Hodskin outbid Hudson, giving individual notes in a larger amount and the University was secured for Canton. Almost from its inception Mr. Storrs became secretary and treasurer, which office [sic] he held for 19 years. He was president of the village [for] seven years, a life long democrat, and a frequent delegate to conventions.

He married Caroline Kenzie sixty years ago the 14th of the present month. She still survives him at the age of 80 years. They have eight children born to them, of whom Ellen J., Rosalvo, Florence and Isadore are dead. Those surviving are Mrs. R. [Robert] M. [Imogene] Stocking, of Quebec, and Levi C., Frank E. and Carrie, all of whom reside in Canton. One sister, Mrs. Olive Currier, also survives him and makes her home at Canton.

[Storrs, Levi Bidwell]

Mr. Storrs' figure has been a familiar sight in Canton. Deprived of a leg, which was taken off at the hip when he was a child of four as the result of a fever sore, he has nevertheless always been active and popular. His relatives have the deepest sympathy of all in their affliction.

The funeral will be held Thursday morning at 10 o'clock.

St Lawrence Plaindealer, Canton NY, Wed. 31 Aug 1898

Transcribed on 29 Mar 2016 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY

[Storrs, Levi Bidwell]

NORTHERN LIGHTS

Finally Has Found The Answer To A Long Standing Question, "What Happened to Levi Bidwell Storrs' Leg?" Finds That One Of The Founders of St. Lawrence University Lost That Member As The Result Of Illness In Early Youth. Finds That Levi Storrs Was Personally Responsible For The Inclusion Of What Later Became The College Of Letters And Sciences At The University. Tells Something Of The Times In Which This Stalwart, One-Legged Man Lived.

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There has been an item of local historical interest which has heretofore remained unanswered for The Rounder, and for some reason he has felt a trifle embarrassed about crossing the street to ask Publisher John Finnegan to dip into the storehouse of memory and dish up the answer. The question which has troubled The Rounder has been the absence of the left leg of Levi B. Storrs. In all photographs which have ever appeared with that gentleman the leg is in absentia...

When Frank Stocking of Montreal was recently in town, coming here for the burial of his brother, Robert Stocking [husband of Levi Storrs' daughter Imogene], The Rounder inquired as to what happened to "Uncle Levi's" leg. Frank Stocking did not know. "Uncle Levi" had always been one-legged to his knowledge. One-legged elders of The Rounder's past boyhood period were always supposed to have lost them in the War Of The Rebellion.

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But it was not that way with Levi Bidwell Storrs. He did not go to war. He couldn't. He was minus his left leg, almost from the start, it transpires. The Plaindealer files of August, 31, 1898 furnish the explanation. That was the August in which 82-year-old Levi Bidwell Storrs died. As a small lad of four years Levi Storrs lost his leg, which the doctors of those days cut off at the hip due to a "fever sore." What a "fever sore" was The Rounder does not know. Possibly it was nothing more than a bed sore which became infected. Infections can be nasty at times. In 1820 medical science wasn't what it is today, and that was the year the small Storrs boy parted company with his left leg at the hip.

The Storrs family is becoming only a faded memory for Canton. Yet this family did as much for Canton as Silas Wright ever did and here in the community Levi Bidwell Storrs was as much a man as his contemporary, The Governor. Levi began humbly. His parents, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Storrs were Vermonters coming from Vergennes. Levi Storrs was not the first white child born in Canton but he dated pretty well up toward the front line of Canton babies. His year was 1816.

[Storrs, Levi Bidwell]

Handicapped from 1820 on by being a one-legged boy, he did not let that stop him. Levi and the State of Maine began from scratch the same year, he minus a leg, Maine by becoming the 23rd state in The Union, which in turn boasted less than ten million people. That was the year of the Missouri Compromise, when it was agreed there'd be no slavery west of the Mississippi. Three years later the fifth president, James Monroe, framed the Monroe Doctrine. Levi Storrs' youth was during stirring times for The Union, days of growing pains. He grew up during the administrations of John Quincy Adams, Jackson, VanBuren [Van Buren], "Tippy Canoe and Tyler too," and he was only thirty-three when James Polk became the 11th president.

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Those were the manual rail-splitting years, but young Levi Storrs had to find other avenues of employment. So he became a tailor. The cobbler, the tailor, the candlestick maker were quite some people one hundred years ago. They were on a par with the druggist, the doctor and the minister. Theirs was a preferred profession, the same as the village smithy. Each community has its own wool carding mill. The spinning wheel was in almost every home. Life in Canton was homey then, but severe Religion was taken seriously, of the extreme and straight-laced variety, much more seriously than now... The church fathers often met to try a member on some civil charge before the case reached the justice's court. Often the civil court did no more than ratify the findings of the church body... Such was Canton when Levi Storrs learned the trade of tailoring. When a young man of only thirty-eight he helped start the movement which resulted in having a university established here. The Storrs family were Universalists. Those were the days when Rev. Nathaniel Remington and Rev. Richard Eddy were Canton Universalist pastors. No doubt Levi Storrs learned through his church of the movement by the State Universalist Convention No doubt Levi Storrs learned through his church of the movement by the State Universalist Convention to establish a theological seminary. The Levi B. Storrs obituary printed in these columns fifty years ago reads "When the promoters of St. Lawrence University were looking about for a location, Hudson offered \$15,000 if they would locate there. Mr. Storrs, Martin Thatcher, former county clerk Theodore Caldwell and Barzallai Hodskin outbid Hudson, giving individual notes in a larger amount and the University was secured for Canton."

"Sixty Years of St. Lawrence," the only authentically published record of the University states that Canton offered a site of twenty acres of good arable land "located on a gentle eminence" and a promise to erect a building to cost not in excess of \$11,500 thereon. That is how Richardson Hall came

[Storrs, Levi Bidwell]

into being. The history further declares the late Levi B. Storrs, for many years Secretary and Treasurer of the University, was the originator of the idea of an academic department in association with the theological school. In this design he was heartily seconded by the late Honorable John L. Russell. Mr. Russell was by the way, an ardent and devout Episcopalian. The addition of the academic department was in fact establishing a college of letters and science, the core of the University.

Thus it was that the youthful, one-legged Canton tailor personally forged an important link in the chain of events which was to make this community the Canton of today. Probably as he sat on his tailor's bench, Levi Storrs did much thinking. Thatcher, Caldwell and Hodskin no doubt dropped in for many a "chat." A man's education in those days came as much from informal discussions as from voluminous tomes. Levi Bidwell Storrs was a thinker, and of this there can be no doubt. Educationally he was self-made. That missing leg prevented him going to war in '61 but it forced him to employ his mind throughout his life. He was Canton's Clemenceau in spirit, much in appearance and character like the old "Tiger" of France or World War I.

Seated at this bench, his mind's eye envisioned an easier way to press clothes, so he sat about contriving what his mind dreamed. The Storrs Presser resulted. It was a mechanical, steam-heated iron device, the forerunner of the modern steam presser such as one finds in operation today in Dick Aurelio's shop on the first floor of the Plaindealer block. That 1898 obituary relates how, in 1836, Levi Storrs opened a store on Court Street "near the site of the present Eagle House..."

Apparently this was an imposing edifice "on the site of the present Mathews Block. He opened a store where French & Griswold (Peggs Jewelry) are now located. At that time he did an immense business, having started the manufacture of clothing, employing at one time 150 hands. He lost all his savings in the fire of '57. In '58 he invented his pressing machine, which still (in 1898) finds a ready market. To accommodate this branch of his business he moved into the Plaindealer block, and after he built the block on the south side of the street (this means the present Commercial Advertiser building) he moved into it." He retired from that business in 1882, the article states.

Here was a man impaired by a great physical handicap in his early youth, who fought his way upward to success. Canton has had it Silas Wright who won fame in political affairs in both state and nation, its Russells, Judge Sawyers, J. C. Keeler and Ledyard Hale who became great lawyers and jurists; its Fred Remington, master of the brush and oils, its Ebenezer Fisher, John Stebbins Lee, Almon Gunnison, the three Gaines' and Richard

[Storrs, Levi Bidwell]

Eddy Sykes, the educators Heman Matthews and Barzaillai Hodskin, the community builders. But Canton would probably not be the Canton of today had not this rugged individualist, this youthful, one-legged Canton tailor, been born here on September 19, 1816. One cannot but speculate just how much the loss of that small boy's leg had to do with shaping this man's future and Canton's destiny.

The Rounder

St Lawrence Plaindealer, Canton NY, Tue. 14 Sep 1948
[somewhat abridged]

Transcribed on 30 Mar 2016 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY