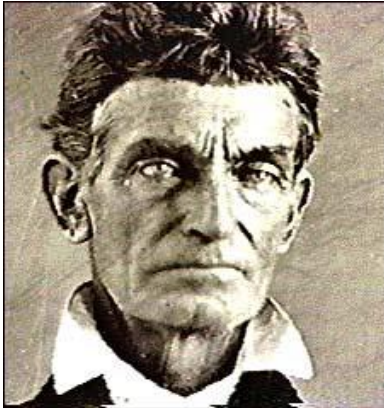


John Brown and George Kellogg

By Jean Luddy

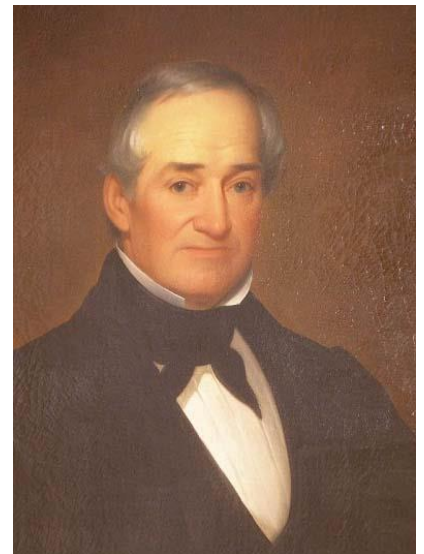
When most people think of John Brown, they remember the fiery abolitionist who attacked pro-slavery settlers in Kansas in 1855 and who led the raid on the Federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia in 1859 in order to spark a slave rebellion. Most people do not realize that Brown was no stranger to Vernon and Rockville, and that he worked for one of Rockville's prominent 19th century citizens, George Kellogg.



John Brown

John Brown was born in Torrington, CT in 1800. His father was a staunch opponent of slavery and Brown spent his youth in a section of northern Ohio known as an abolitionist district. Before Brown became actively involved in the movement to eliminate slavery, he held a number of jobs, mainly associated with farming, land speculation and wool growing. (www.pbs.org) Brown's path crossed with George Kellogg's when Brown started to work for Kellogg and the New England Company as a wool sorter and buyer.

George Kellogg, born on March 3, 1793 in Vernon, got his start in the woolen industry early in life when he joined Colonel Francis McLean in business in 1821. They established the Rock Manufacturing Company and built the Rock Mill, the first factory along the Hockanum River, in the area that would grow into the City of Rockville. Kellogg worked as the company's agent from 1828 to 1837. At that time, he left the Rock Company to go into business with Allen Hammond. They founded the New England Company and built a factory along the Hockanum River. Kellogg worked as the agent for the New England Company. Much like a CEO, the agent's job entailed managing the company's finances, supervising daily operations and maintaining contacts with suppliers. (Abbott, p50)



George Kellogg

Before the Civil War, the mills in Rockville made satinet, a sturdy woolen cloth with wool weft and a cotton warp. Originally, mill owners would buy fleeces from local farmers. As the demand for wool increased, owners sent wool buyers to mid-western states where there were more sheep farms. Wool buyers were provided with funds to purchase and ship the desired wool to the factory. (Abbott, 33)

On one of Brown's trips east, he stopped in Rockville and took an order from George Kellogg to ship fleeces to the New England Company. A receipt to Kellogg from Brown, now in the Society's collection, shows that Kellogg pre-paid cash for a shipment of wool.

“\$2800

West Hartford 15th June 1839

Received of George Kellogg by the hand of Samuel Whitman two thousand and eight hundred dollars to be expended for said Kellogg in the purchase of wool in Ohio, or refunded when called for.

John Brown”

Unbeknownst to Kellogg, John Brown was experiencing some significant financial pressures at home. Brown had been trying to buy land for a family farm. Short of the necessary funds, he used money from his employer to cover the purchase of the land. His employer found out about the deficit before Brown could pay back the amount and threatened to take Brown to court. To avoid prosecution for the embezzlement, Brown used the money sent to him by Kellogg to pay back his employer, hoping that money from another investment would later become available to replace the money from Kellogg. (Boyer, 326-327)

By August of 1839, Kellogg had learned about the misappropriation of funds and wrote to Brown. In Brown’s reply, also part of the Society’s collection, he explained the reasons behind his decision and offered to replay the missing money. (VHS)

Franklin Mills 22th Aug. 1839

George Kellogg, Esqr

Dear Sir,

Yours of the 2nd was received in season, & I have no excuse for not answering it promptly except that I have found it hard to take up my pen to record & to publish, my own shame, & abuse of the confidence of those whom I esteem, & who have treated me as a friend, & as a brother. I flattered myself till now, with the hope that I might be able to render a more favorable account of myself, but the truth, & the whole truth, shall be told. When I saw you at Vernon, I was in daily (sic) expectation of receiving a number of thousands of dollars from Boston, something over five of which I owned for money I had used belonging to our cattle company (viz. Wadsworth, Wells & myself). On the day I was to set out for home, as I was disappointed of the money I expected, I found no alternative but to go to jail, or to pledge the money you had confided to my trust, & in my extremity I did so with the most of it, pledging it for thirty days, believing that in less than that I could certainly redeem it, as I expected a large amount from a source I did believe I could depend upon. Though I have been waiting in painful anxiety I have been disappointed still, & as the best course I could take, I have made an assignment of all my real & personal property for the benefit of my creditors generally, as our laws forbid any preference. I think my property much more than sufficient to satisfy all demands, & that I shall not have to subject you to anything worse in the end than disappointment & delay. I am determined that shall be all, if I & my family work out by the month, & by the day to make up a full return. I have yet hopes of relief from Boston, & should that be, it will set matters in measure to right again. I have disposed of about forty yards of your cloth. I find that it would go well if my affairs had stood as I had expected. Wool has sold at much higher prices here than was expected, & higher than I should have dared to pay had your money been in my possession when got home.

Unworthily yours,
John Brown

In *The Legend of John Brown: A Biography and a History*, Richard Boyer described George Kellogg's response to Brown's letter.

"Mr. Kellogg, upon receipt of this letter, felt he could not prosecute so honest a thief, so penitent, so unflinching in facing his own wrongdoing, so strong in his indictment, so determined on restitution whatever the sacrifice. Under all the circumstances, he was inclined to believe the dereliction might have happened to anyone as it had happened to many following the panic of 1837 when they tried desperately to raise sufficient money to avoid ruin. He did, however, venture a word of rebuke when he wrote again to Brown on September 12. One so ardent for the abolition of slavery, he said, and so free in expressing his opinions in opposition to it, could not indulge in wrongdoing without damaging the cause he professed to champion. He hoped too, that a merciful God would enable John Brown to reform and pay to all their due." (Boyer, 329)

In further correspondence between the two men, Brown expressed his appreciation for Kellogg's understanding and outlined his plan for stabilizing his finances. He urged Kellogg to "present a claim of sufficient amount abundantly to cover interest and every species of damage and disappointment" Kellogg had suffered, and signed himself, "Respectfully your unworthy friend, John Brown". (Boyer, 330)

In October 1842, Brown was forced to declare bankruptcy. As part of the settlement he signed a document agreeing to reimburse the New England Company for the missing funds. He also wrote directly to George Kellogg. (Sanborn, 1885, www.familytale.org)

Richfield, Summit County, Ohio, Oct. 17, 1842
George Kellogg, Esq.

Dear Sir, I have just received information of my final discharge as a bankrupt in the District Court, and I ought to be grateful that no one of my creditors has made an opposition to such discharge being given. I shall now, if my life is continued, have an opportunity of proving the sincerity of my past professions, when legally free to act as I choose. I am sorry to say that in consequence of the unforeseen expense of getting the discharge, the loss of an ox, and the destitute condition in which a new surrender of my effects has placed me, with my numerous family, I fear this year must pass without my effecting in the way of payment what I have encouraged you to expect (notwithstanding I have been generally prosperous in my business for the season)

Respectfully your unworthy friend;
John Brown

In spite of Brown's financial difficulties, his reputation as an expert breeder of sheep and an astute judge of the quality of wool fleeces remained untouched. In 1844, Brown entered into a partnership with Simon Perkins of Akron, Ohio. Brown managed the flock with Perkins' financial backing. Sheep from the Perkins & Brown flocks were widely acknowledged for their superior breeding. In addition many wool farmers allowed Brown to evaluate and sell their wool for them. (Boyer, 361)



The New England Mill buildings. The brick factory still stands near the intersection of Vernon Avenue and Brooklyn Street.

During 1846, George Kellogg purchased wool from Perkins & Brown for the New England Company. In a letter to Kellogg dated July 25th, Brown described the amounts and conditions of various types of wool that he was having shipped. He suggested opening any wet bags of wool first and offered a discount for No. 3 wool. He closed the letter with the following postscript. "I am so sleepy as scarcely to be able to keep my eyes open for want of rest." (VHS) In November 1846, Brown sent Kellogg a short letter notifying him about the availability of "Superior No. 3 wool". (VHS) No further correspondence between the two men has been found.

By 1850s, John Brown's inherent abhorrence of slavery evolved into more activist behavior. "In Aug. 1855 he followed 5 of his sons to Kansas to help make the state a haven for anti-slavery settlers. The following year, his hostility toward slave-staters exploded after they burned and pillaged the free-state community of Lawrence. Having organized a militia unit within his Osawatimie River colony, Brown led it on a mission of revenge. On the evening of 23 May 1856, he and 6 followers, including 4 of his sons, visited the homes of pro-slavery men along Pottawatomie Creek, dragged their unarmed inhabitants into the night, and hacked them to death with long-edged swords. At once, "Old Brown of Osawatimie" became a feared and hated target of slave-staters."

(www.civilwarhome.com)

Brown wanted to overturn slavery by inciting the slave population to revolt. By 1859, he had developed a plan to get weapons to slaves and to lead an uprising of slaves against their masters. "In the summer of 1859 he transferred his operations to western Virginia, collected an army of 21 men, including 5 blacks, and on the night of October 16th raided the government armory and arsenal at Harpers Ferry. From there he planned to arm the thousands of chattels who, learning of his crusade, would flock to his side. Instead, numerous bands of militia and a company of U.S. Marines under Bvt. Col. Robert E. Lee hastened to the river village, where they trapped the raiders inside the fire-engine house and on the 18th stormed the building. The fighting ended with 10 of Brown's people killed and 7 captured, Brown among them." (www.civilwarhome.com)

After the failed attempt to start an insurrection at Harper's Ferry, John Brown was tried and convicted of treason. His execution was scheduled for December 2, 1859. From his cell, Brown began to put his affairs in order, writing letters to family and friends. On December 1st, he prepared his will, listing items for dispersal to family members. In addition, he used his last will and testament to make amends for past financial transgressions. Among these bequests, he directed that \$50 be willed "To Allan

Hammond, Esq., of Rockville, Tolland County, Conn. or to George Kellogg, Esq., former agent of the New England Company at, that place, for the use and benefit of that company.” (Sanborn, 1885, www.familytales.org)

By 1859, George Kellogg was no longer working for the New England Company. In 1857, he was elected as the representative from Vernon to the Connecticut State Legislature. In 1860, he joined other investors in establishing the Florence Mill along West Main Street. He was again elected to the State Legislature as a representative in 1865 and elected as a state senator in 1866. During his many years in Rockville, Kellogg was active in the Congregational Church. He was a leader in the temperance movement which sought to restrict the sale and consumption of “spirituous liquors” in town. He helped established the first schools in Rockville. An esteemed citizen and leading manufacturer, Kellogg died in 1870.

The John Brown letters were carefully saved and have become part of the Society’s collection. They remind us that historic figures have complex lives with the same distractions and responsibilities of work and family as we do. Historians remain divided on Brown’s place in American history: liberator or traitor, abolitionist or terrorist. Brown felt compelled to correct what he saw as a terrible injustice by using any means necessary which makes him a controversial figure.

Brown was considered by many to be a martyr to the antislavery cause. As word of his execution spread throughout the northern states, many church bells tolled in his memory, including the one on the old First Congregational Church in Rockville.

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