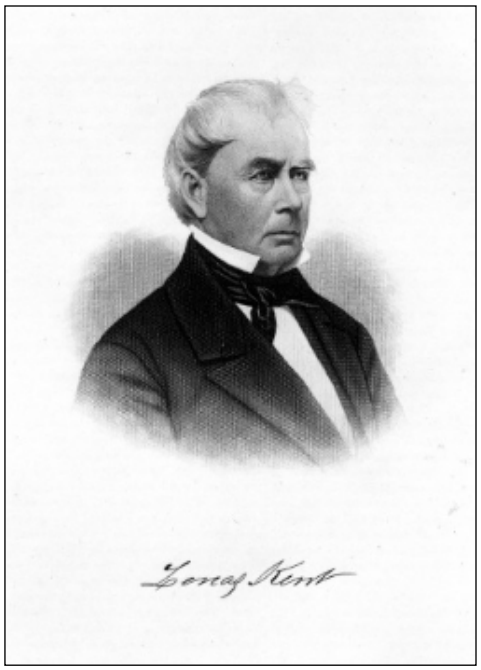
Zenas Kent



Zenas Kent was born in Middletown, Connecticut, July 12, 1786. His father was a carpenter and joiner by trade and fought in the Revolutionary War. Young Kent was educated in the common schools of Middletown, acquiring what was considered a good education at that time. In 1811, he was married to Pamelia Lewis of Farmington, Connecticut.

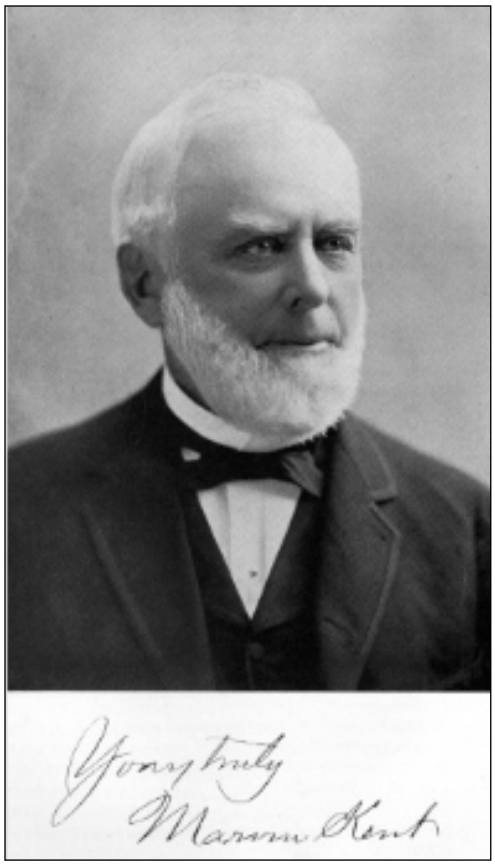
A year later Zenas accompanied his father's family to Ohio where they settled in Mantua. As soon as Zenas secured a place for his home, he returned for his wife. They came immediately West and settled in Hudson. There Zenas met Captain Heman Oviatt with whom he entered a partnership in the summer of 1815. The firm opened a general store in Ravenna. After several years Kent was able to refund the money advanced by Oviatt and the firm was dissolved, leaving Kent in sole control of the business.

In 1825, Kent entered into a contract to erect a courthouse in Ravenna. From 1831 to 1850 he was senior partner in the firm of Kent and Brewster which had a store in Hudson. In 1832 he joined with David Ladd in the purchase of a tract of land consisting of about 600 acres, in Franklin Mills. The tract included the waterpower of the Cuyahoga River. In 1833, Kent bought out Ladd's interest. He then erected Kent's Flouring Mill which continued in operation for many decades.

In 1836, Zenas Kent sold his property in Franklin Mills to the Franklin Land Company which afterward became the Franklin Silk Company. When the boom started by the Silk Company crashed, Kent regained his property. In 1849, the Franklin Bank of Portage County was established and Kent became its first president. He held the office until 1864 when the Franklin Bank became the Kent National Bank, of which he also was made president. He held the positionuntil his death.

In 1850, he began the erection of a cotton factory on the west bank of the Cuyahoga. The venture proved a failure and the building stood unoccupied many years. In 1851, he erected a home on South River Street which he occupied until about 1860 when he moved to Cleveland. Mrs. Kent died in Kent on October 21, 1864, while in the town on a visit. Zenas Kent soon afterwards returned to Kent to live and he died here October 4, 1865. He was buried in Woodland Cemetery in Cleveland.

At the time of Mr. Kent's death, nine of his children were still living. They were Mrs. Harriet Clapp, Henry A., Edward, George L., Marvin, Charles H., Mrs. Amelia L. Shively, Mrs. Frances E. Wells, and Mrs. Emily K. Dennis.



Marvin Kent

Marvin Kent was born in Ravenna September 21, 1816, the son of Zenas and Pamelia (Lewis) Kent. He was educated in the common schools at Ravenna and later at Tallmadge Academy and Claridon Academy. During his spare time, he worked in his father's store. When nineteen years old his father sent him to Philadelphia and New York to buy a stock of goods and upon his return, his father took him into the firm.

Marvin Kent attained his majority* while supervising construction work on the brick building which his father erected on the northwest corner of Main and Water Streets in Franklin Mills. Soon afterward, he assumed the management of a tannery which his father had built for John Brown of Harpers Ferry fame. While thus engaged he was married to Maria Stewart, daughter of the late Colonel William Stewart. He conducted the tannery for some time and in 1844 returned to mercantile pursuits becoming, at the same time, manager of the Kent Flouring Mill. In 1850, Marvin Kent joined with his father in an unsuccessful effort to start a cotton mill in Franklin Mills. He also established a glass works which later was purchased by Day, Williams and Company and developed into one of the largest glass works in the country. In 1851, Marvin Kent joined with others in engineering a railroad project which ultimately resulted in the Atlantic and Great Western Railroad The railroad was completed to Franklin Mills in 1863. Soon afterward, Kent used his influence to have the town selected as the site for the railroad's shops. When the shops were built, a boom started which caused the town's population to double within a few years. The people of the community were so gratified at this achievement, they changed the name of the town from Franklin Mills to Kent.

Upon the death of his father in 1865, Marvin Kent became his successor as president of the Kent National Bank, which position he held until his death. In October, 1875, he was elected State Senator from the 26th District of Ohio and served one term. In 1882, he erected a home on West Main Street which was considered one of the most beautiful mansions in northeastern Ohio.

Mrs. Kent died in May, 1900, and Mr. Kent died December 10, 1908. At the time of his death, one son, William S. Kent, survived. Henry L. Kent, the elder son, had died some years before, leaving a widow and two children, Mrs. Ella Southwick Reed and Mrs. Grace Emily Curtiss.

---

*The age when a person is legally considered a full adult.

William S. Kent

William S. Kent was born in Ravenna August 24, 1847, the son of Marvin and Maria (Stewart) Kent. He came to Kent with his family when a child and attended the public schools. Later he went to Western Reserve Academy at Hudson and the Polytechnic Institute in Philadelphia. In early manhood he became engaged in various business enterprises in Kent, selling groceries, hardware and dry goods.

In 1892 he sold out his business and took over the Kent Courier which had been founded in 1886 by Marvin Kent and others. He continued as the active head of the newspaper for many years. Upon the death of his father on December 10, 1908, he became president of the Kent National Bank. He held that position until he died January 21, 1923.

Politically, Mr. Kent was a staunch Republican and was elected repeatedly as delegate from this district to the national convention of the party. He also served as member of the Republican State Committee and at one time served with Senator W. G. Harding.

During 1910, Mr. Kent served as a member of the Chamber of Commerce committee which succeeded in having the city of Kent selected as the site for the Kent State Normal School. And it was his gift of a 52-acre tract of land on East Main which influenced the state normal commission in recommending that Kent should be favored. In appreciation of his gift, the board of trustees of the normal school named the school after him in 1911. On October 9, 1875, Mr. Kent married Miss Kittie North of Cleveland. His wife was killed by an explosion at her home in 1886. In 1905, he married Mary Logan Pearson of Chicago.