

Who Was William Richmond?

This article was written by former Library Director and Marlborough Historical Society member Florence S. Lord some time in the early 1980s.

The Richmond Memorial Library Association is planning a new facility and many hours have been spent assessing present and future conditions. During this period the question arose, "Who is or was, William Richmond, and why do we bear his name?" Hopefully, this will provide the answer.

William Henry Richmond was born in Marlborough on October 23, 1821. His father, William Wadsworth Richmond, had come here to live at the urging of Esq. Joel Foote, a prominent resident. He had a blacksmith's shop located near the waterfall on what is now South Main Street, a foundry at the foot of the hill below the Congregational Church and, with two others, he had three farms. The Richmond family was well to do. When William Henry was six years old, the family moved to a larger home nearer the Church known as Dean Farm. When he was twelve years of age, he had his first job, working in a store in Middle Haddam, which was run by a business associate of his father. His education was limited to winter months, but he had his first taste of the mercantile business.

In 1839 his father and many other residents lost all they owned, due to speculation in Texas land and mulberry tree growing. Young Richmond had to go to work to help support the family. For a while he worked for a farmer named Isaac Buell, living with the Buell family. Like many other young men, he felt that there would be plenty of work in the city if only he could get there. His father did not agree and made no move to take him to Hartford, which did not deter William. He borrowed fifteen dollars from Mr. Buell, received a letter of recommendation signed by Mr. Buell and Moseley Talcott, and took the stage for Hartford. Much to his chagrin he found that the conditions in a city were no better. Rather than admit defeat and return home, he decided to visit an uncle living in Salisbury, Connecticut. Conditions were no better there so he decided to visit another uncle living in South Amenia, New York. Disappointed once more, he decided to return home to Marlborough.

His uncle suggested that he go to Albany with him on business. There young Richmond met a man named Robert More who had been in the mercantile business in Honesdale, Pennsylvania, where he lost everything in the Panic of 1837. He had borrowed enough to start over again, and when he learned that Richmond had worked for three years in a store in Middle Haddam, he offered him a job. Richmond, of course, was glad for the offer and accepted. Little more than two weeks after he left home, he was a clerk in a store, which sold groceries, boots, hats, etc. He persuaded Mr. More to add dry goods to their stock but said if liquors were sold, he would leave. Mr. More agreed not to put liquors in his store.

After two years of increasing business, they moved to a larger building. There, most of their supplies were ruined by a fire in an adjoining building. Not discouraged, Richmond left Mr. More and became a partner with a Mr. Robinson who had come from Connecticut. Together they continued their progress in the mercantile business heading toward the city of Scranton.

These facts have been taken from a copy of Richmond's "Recollections." We are greatly indebted to Mrs. Marie Johnson, a member of our Society, whose love of "poking around" in antique shops produced an old *Journal of American History* containing the first installment. The remaining installments are in further issues of the magazine in the archives of the State Library in Hartford.

William Richmond became wealthy in the anthracite area around his adopted city-Scranton. It has been said that he left Connecticut and never returned. That is not true. He tells of coming back to Marlborough many times in his memoirs, and Rebecca Buell often spoke of visits made to her grandfather. Mary Hall respected him enough to want to honor him by giving the library, that she and W. D. Keirstead started in 1924, his name. The town honored him by inviting him to be one of the main speakers at the 100th Anniversary. The editor of the *Journal of American History* says, "Richmond was one of the twelve (12) great builders of the famous Lackawanna coal district, organizer of the Crystal Lake Water Company and organizer of the Carbondale Gas Company." The editor refers to Richmond as a "scion of the old Connecticut breed." He has been honored in our town for more than sixty years. We believe that honor should be continued. At the annual meeting of our Historical Society, members voted unanimously to retain the name as The Richmond Memorial Library.

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