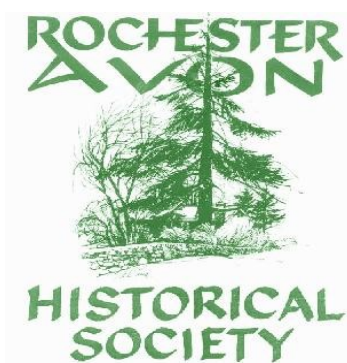


Rochester Avon Historical Society Research Reports

Research Report #8
William Clark Chapman
October 2011



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William Clark Chapman

researched and written by
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William Clark Chapman was born in Proctorsville, a village in the township of Cavendish, Windsor County, Vermont on March 1, 1866, the third of four children and the youngest son of Clark H. Chapman (1822-1888) and Ellen M. Sherwin (1833-1898). Clark Chapman was a prominent man in Windsor County, Vermont; he was an attorney, delegate to a state constitutional convention, and Register of the Probate Court. The family variously lived in Ludlow, Cavendish, and Proctorsville, Vermont, all neighboring towns within Windsor County, until 1882, when Clark H. Chapman decided to move his family to Detroit.¹

William C. Chapman was sixteen years old when his family moved from Vermont to Michigan. His older brother and only living sibling, Charles Sherwin Chapman (1864-1912), was eighteen. William attended a business college and then took a position as bookkeeper for Detroit lumber and real estate magnate William C. Yawkey (1834-1903). One of Michigan's great lumber barons, Yawkey's holdings included vast timberlands in Minnesota and Wisconsin. William Chapman spent eight years learning the lumber business from Yawkey and then spent four years on his own working in the lumber trade in Rhineland, Wisconsin before returning to Detroit.² In 1891, Yawkey and William's brother, Charles S. Chapman, organized the Western Knitting Mills in Detroit and brought William on board as secretary-treasurer of the company. WKM moved to Rochester in 1896, building a state-of-the-art factory on Water Street at the foot of Fourth, and establishing itself as the community's primary employer for a generation. Both Charles and William Chapman made their homes in the village of Rochester.

William Chapman married Ada Josephine Barney (1869-1955) in his old home of Ludlow, Vermont in March 1890. Ada Barney was the daughter of a Vermont businessman in the granite and marble industry, and was a member of the 1889 graduating class of the Black River Academy in Ludlow, where Calvin Coolidge was one of her classmates.³ The couple had one son, Carroll Barney Chapman (1890-1990). Though William and Ada Chapman made their home in Rochester for almost all of their married life together, they remained in close touch with their family and friends in Vermont and made frequent visits to their childhood home.

After making the decision to locate permanently in Rochester, William Chapman purchased for his home the former Lorenzo D. Morse residence at 311 Walnut Street, (which had been occupied most recently by Joseph D. Partello, former superintendent of the old woolen mill in Rochester that had been bought out by WKM). Chapman made several improvements to the frame house, including adding a wrap-around porch. He also became heavily involved in real estate development in the village of Rochester, and platted three subdivisions: the Ludlow Addition and W. C. Chapman Addition on the west edge of town in 1899, and the Chapman and Yawkey addition at the south edge of the village in 1900. Chapman owned various business and residential lots throughout the village and is responsible for the construction of a significant portion of the housing stock that was built in the village in the first decade of the twentieth century, partially in response to a need for additional housing for laborers employed by Western Knitting Mills as the company grew in national prominence.

According to a state factory inspection report, this was the condition of the Western Knitting Mills in 1904:

The Western Knitting Mills at Rochester, Michigan, occupy a space of 100,000 square feet. The building is of stone and brick, equipped with machinery of the most modern type, the mills possess every facility for the manufacture of woolen goods. Over 500 different styles of woolen gloves and mitts, half hose and lumbermen's socks are made, this company being acknowledged to be one of the largest manufacturers of these goods in the world.

The machinery is driven by water, steam and electricity, the company controlling a first-class water power. The mills have over 400 sewing, knitting and tufting machines, and when in full operation employ upwards of 500 people.

Although incorporated, the business is really left up to C. S. Chapman, manager and president, and W. C. Chapman, secretary and treasurer. While the company pays the largest wages for the same work paid in the State, they have so far been unable to secure enough help; being deficient in female operators, who earn one dollar a day and over. The leading specialty made here is the Esquimaux knit boot made on a patent machine which they own and control. They have an immense demand for their goods.⁴

In 1916, Chapman moved his house at 311 Walnut to another lot that he owned immediately to the west of it on Pine Street (now numbered 311 Pine), and contracted

for the construction of a grand, new residence at the 311 Walnut address. The *Rochester Era* reported on April 14, 1916:

William C. Chapman will move his present residence on Walnut street back to his lot on Pine street purchased of Lew Bitters, and will erect a modern bungalow on the site.⁵

Far from a bungalow, the house was actually a 5,000-square foot Italian Renaissance style mansion designed by MacFarlane, Maul & Lentz of Detroit that cost \$45,000, according to this report, published in the late summer of 1916:

The plans for W. C. Chapman's new \$45,000 residence on Walnut street are out and work is being rapidly pushed. The basement is well under way and it is expected the building will be completed this season.⁶

The grand new home of William and Ada Chapman was not the first mansion in Rochester associated with the family. Seventeen years earlier, Charles S. Chapman had built a substantial residence on a bluff north of the village, one of the few private homes designed by industrial architect Albert Kahn.

Charles S. Chapman died in 1912, and William C. Chapman succeeded his brother as vice-president and general manager of Western Knitting Mills. He remained with the company until 1920, at which time he sold his stock; the company closed about 1927.

Aside from real estate development and his role in the Western Knitting Mills, W. C. Chapman was involved in the community of Rochester as president of the Rochester Savings Bank, and as president of the village of Rochester from 1893 to 1895.

William Clark Chapman died at his Walnut Street residence at the age of 80, on May 20, 1946. His remains were sent back to Ludlow, Vermont for burial with other members of the Chapman and Barney families. His wife, Ada, died in 1955 and was buried beside her husband in Vermont.

Bibliography

Avery, Lillian Drake. 1924. *An account of Oakland County [Michigan]*. [Dayton, Ohio]: National Historical Assoc.

Hemenway, Abby Maria, Carrie E. H. Page, and George W. Wing. 1868. *The Vermont historical gazetteer: a magazine, embracing a history of each town, civil, ecclesiastical, biographical and military*. Burlington, Vt: Miss A.M. Hemenway; [etc.].

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Appendix



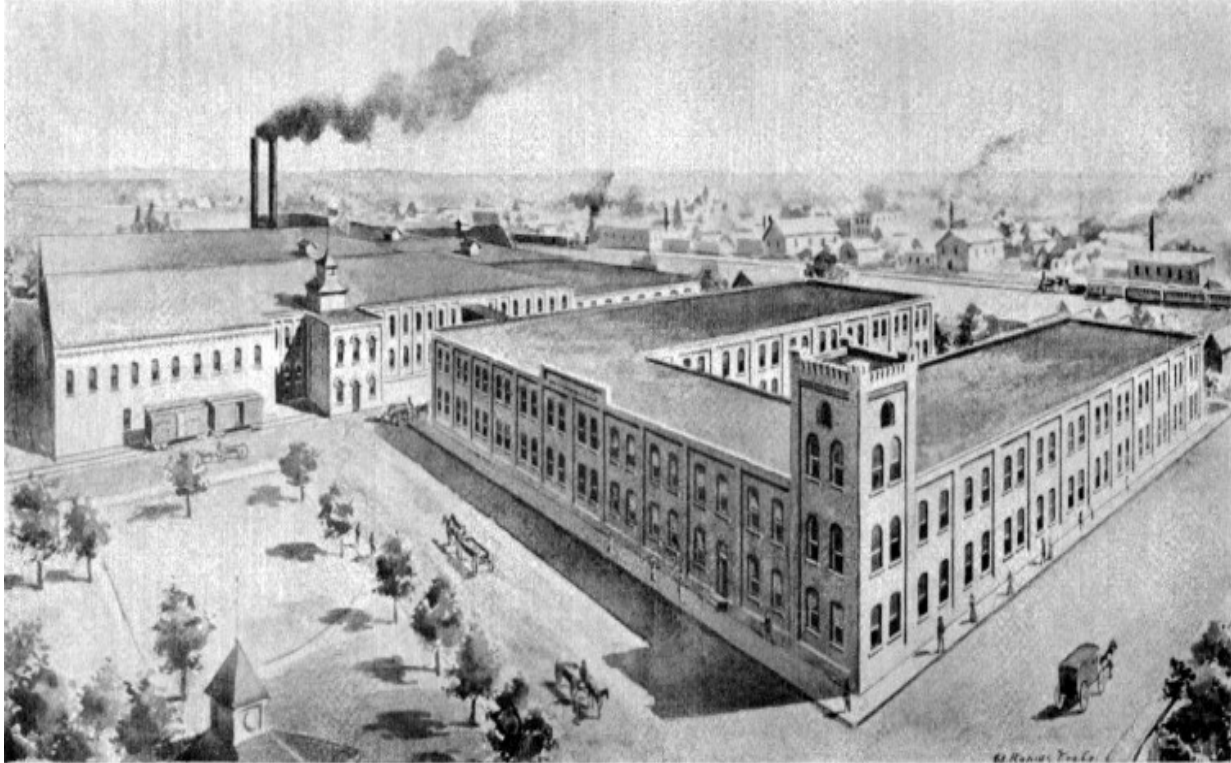
William Clark Chapman, ca. 1885
(Courtesy of Rod and Susan Wilson)



First William C. Chapman house located at 311 Walnut, as it appeared in 1907. This house was moved back to Pine Street in 1916, and now stands at 311 Pine.



Second William C. Chapman house at 311 Walnut, ca. 1918.
(Courtesy of Rod and Susan Wilson)



Western Knitting Mills complex as it appeared in 1897.



Barney/Chapman family monument in Pleasant View Cemetery, Ludlow, Vermont
(photographed by Deborah J. Larsen, 2010)



Inscription on Barney/Chapman family monument, Pleasant View Cemetery,
Ludlow, Vermont
(photographed by Deborah J. Larsen, 2010)

Endnotes

- 1 Hemenway, Abby Maria, Carrie E. H. Page, and George W. Wing. 1868. *The Vermont historical gazetteer: a magazine, embracing a history of each town, civil, ecclesiastical, biographical and military*. Burlington, Vt: Miss A.M. Hemenway; [etc.], 119-120.
- 2 Avery, Lillian Drake. 1924. *An account of Oakland County [Michigan]*. [Dayton, Ohio]: National Historical Assoc., 165-166.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 166.
- 4 Michigan. 1904. *Annual report of the Bureau of Labor and Industrial Statistics*. Lansing, Mich: [The Bureau], 222.
- 5 *Rochester Era*, April 14, 1916.
- 6 *Rochester Era*, August 11, 1916.