

Incidents in Lowell History

**Told by an Old Resident
(William Kittredge)
1871**

**Stories by an Old Resident
Lowell Historical Society**

An acre of land bounded by Central, Market and Middle Streets, and a line connecting the latter parallel to Central St.

Jock Tyler's father lived in Chelmsford, and had a farm there. He raised up four or five boys, one of whom, who was a cooper, was dissipated. They tried all manner of ways to reform him, but he wouldn't be reformed. The family grew quite ashamed of him, and wanted to get rid of him. The old man paid a portion of money to each boy that left the farm, and to this one he gave this acre of land so that he should not spend it. The proportion was a hundred dollars a piece, and he gave this acre of land for a hundred dollars, and the son had a cooper shop on it. In process of time, after becoming terribly dissipated, he took a notion to go off west, and they raised a hundred dollars (or the old man did) and took the land and started him off where they knew he would never get back again and thus it came into the old man's hands again.

The old man used to come down to the Mansion House, kept by Jock, his son, two or three times a week, and would get his bitters pretty regularly. Living on a farm, he would occasionally buy a pair of chickens, some eggs and a few notions, and always took his dinners at the house, and two or three drinks of liquor, which was a very popular practice then – everybody took a sip. Things run on in that way for a year or two perhaps, or more than a year. Capt. Jock's wife, who was the landlady had just chalked down six cents, or a four pence, for every drink the old man had taken, and the price of a dinner when he staid. He used to wait until the boarders were done, and then go and sit down

and didn't suppose it would cost anything to eat of what was left, farmer-like.

When this time had expired, Jock one day went to Boston on the stage, to buy liquors. He used to go down every two or three months, and be gone two or three days. The old lady shrewdly asked her father-in-law who happened to be down the day

Jock was gone off, to stop and tend bar. Well, he did so, and she got him up a mighty good dinner. He got pretty chipper, and she felt that was the time to collect her bill. She had cleared off the table, and they ate there together. I was late to dinner and saw the operation. They had something a mighty sight better than the common boarders who came to the second table. Just as they were getting through dinner, she pulled out of her pocket a piece of paper. The old man brought down that day a pair of nice chickens when he came – the very day Jock had gone to Boston. She said, “Mr. Tyler, those are very excellent chickens; hadn't we better settle up for them?” “Nothing to pay – nothing to pay”, said he, “I haven't charged at all for anything I have brought down.” “Well”, said she, “you're very kind. Here is a little bill of what you have had of us, and we want yours, to have things settled up.”

The old gentleman got up from the table as mad as a hatter – he was raving mad. Said he, “I never can pay it, never can pay it.” She had charged \$96.00 for his rum and his dinners. He said, “I never can pay it in the world.” He hadn't finished his dinner.

Said she, “Mr. Tyler, sit down and eat your dinner.” She was in a terrible flutter. He declared he would raise the money if he had to sell his farm, and he went out and harnessed his old mare to the wagon. He had a good-stick about five feet long, and he whacked that mare over the ribs all the way up to Chelmsford at a 2-40 gait, and came back with a deed of that acre of land for the consideration of a hundred dollars. I think it was the same day, but it may not have been until the next day. He told her she

might have the land; he never could get the money in the world – for money was very scarce then. She said, “That is all very well; this is more than enough to pay; your bill must be considerable.” But he said No, and wouldn’t hear to anything.

She threw the deed of the land on the table, and she took it and put it into a drawer. He then cleared out, leaving her to tend bar and be general skipper for the other one or two days until Jock, came home.

Soon after Jock got home, his father came down, and Jock heard about it. Jock was very much annoyed. He got the deed and handed it back to his father, and scolded very much about it, and was grieved at the transaction; but the old man slapped it on to the floor as hard as he could throw it, and was mad as he could be, and he went off.

What year was that? 1830 or 1828. It was before these locks were dug here. I came here first in 1822, and then went away six months, and went away summers, and came back winters.

Jock never sold an inch of that land. Nobody could buy it. He made a bargain with more than one person, a fair bargain, but he never produced that deed. No one ever saw that deed from that day to this; and for that very reason he has never sold it. They were washing the floor, and it went down into the soap suds. I made a fair bargain for the land where my wood-shed is, and he really wanted the money a good many years ago, but he wouldn’t make the deed. It was quite a curious circumstance. He has sold a great deal of land, but this acre no living man could buy. The deed was lost, and the land has never been sold.

The Middlesex Locks, rear of American House

While I was here, Mr. Boott and the directors of the Locks and Canals Co. advertised for propositions to build these lower locks down here by the American House – the Middlesex Locks. In sounding, they found the soil to be sandy, and that they would have to go a great distance to find hard gravel. They went down as many as forty feet, or nearly that. I remember looking down the hole there, which was as deep as any well I ever saw. They wanted to make it permanent and safe. The proposition from the Locks and Canals Co. was on the basis of stones containing one perch. For stones containing two, three, or four perches, the price paid increased per perch. Some stones would have perhaps four or five perches in them, but there was no machinery for handling them. Still they wanted the largest stones they could possibly get, and they trebled the price to be paid on the large stones, because it was important to have them. They made the price very much larger in order to induce people to get them, but they had no hope of ever getting them.

A man made proposals by the name of Rand, captain Rand. I remember seeing the man when he came here. He was a man who would weigh three hundred pounds – a beautifully proportioned man, and about the color of a brick. He didn't seem to make much talk, but was the lowest bidder. It was at the Mansion House I have spoken of, that the proposals were decided. He has on home-spun clothes (he was a Vermonter) a slouched hat and cow-hide boots, well greased, but a nice looking man.

The story was that they wanted to know how he could find bonds sufficient to accomplish the job. It was a large job. Boott had told another man to be there who would be most likely to have the job; but Rand's bid was the lowest. Boott asked him, "Whom can you get for bondsmen?" Well, Rand mentioned over three or four men who lived in Boston, who were worth perhaps a million a piece, very rich men, and owners, some of them, in this corporation, or had taken stock in it, as Mr. Boott knew very well.

"Why, Mr. Rand," said he, "can you get them, rather doubtfully, supposing him to be a little unsound, not supposing for a moment those men would back him. And Boott actually adjourned the meeting a while, and took his horse—he had another horse half way down, two horses to go to Boston—and got into a gig and went down there to see these men, and asked if they knew a man by the name of Rand of Vermont.

Yes, very well. He is a very substantial man, and we have proposed

to go as surety for him in any bargain he may make. Boott came back satisfied. The other party felt terribly indignant. He had almost got the promise of the job, but was out-generaled; and the contract was completed with another party.

The first movement Rand made was to arrange for his boardinghouse. He wanted that hotel, that is, the Old Mansion House, and Tyler made arrangements to accommodate them, for the directors were moneyed men. Anyhow, he vacated the Mansion House, and Rand went to work and got some men and fitted it up in such shape as he wanted it.

In process of time there was a great hue and cry made here in Lowell, coming from the neighborhood of the machine-shop, and everybody went to see, as if to a fair. We were then in the black-smith shop, and I off with my apron and started to see where everybody else was going-to see what was up. It turned out to be this same Capt. Rand with his menagerie of horses and oxen, and his procession extended more than half a mile. Some of the wheels were fourteen feet high, which nobody ever saw before, and there were great ox-carts, and immense oxen that no State in the world could raise except Vermont at that time, and there were cows bellowing, forty or fifty fat oxen, sheep, great fat hogs in the carts and wagons, so fat they could hardly get up to feed, a regiment of men apparently, barrels of beef, and pork and onions and supplies-seven hundred bushels of potatoes for one item. It made a very long string in all, and that was what everybody was running to see, and they stood with their mouths open until they came up, and followed them down as you have seen boys and people following a procession. They finally brought up by the Common at the Mansion House. They had stables for the animals. It was all open around them. You could hardly see a building anywhere; it was justlike a great farm. The people would drive in in wagons, hearing of the thing, and great numbers would come in to see.

Rand stowed away quietly his cattle and horses, filled up his bins with potatoes and other things; and among the rest I remember distinctly he went to Newburyport with a pair of horses and wagon, and got three barrels of Newbury rum, and had a plank cut rounding to set them in, in the entry, and then had his sugar, ice-water, toddy-sticks and everything handy in the broad entry. Then they got their table and had their dinner. I was still working there because we were blacksmiths, and the Captain retained my brother to work for him. I think there were seventy-five or a hundred men or more whom he brought down with him.

After they had got through their dinner, Rand told them that he desired them to have everything they wanted to eat and drink, and that there was some spirit there, and to take what they wanted without stint or

hindrance. Such a dinner I never conceived of before that day. There were roast-beef, lamb, and as large a variety as you would want.

The men were sectioned off, and preparations made to put in these locks. These cart-wheels were what surprised everybody. They would swing seven feet under the axle, and more than that, because they were rounded up, and the wheels were fourteen feet high. Mr. Boott had shown Rand some small stones; but he went to work and straddled his wheels on to the great big stones, such as no human power, apparently, could move.

He didn't want any small stones. He put up derricks and put in stones there thirty feet deep. There was a great deal of expense in working at such a depth, and Mr. Boott asked Rand if he was going to charge extra for going down to such a depth; but Rand said No; yet he chucked in these tremendous stones, and worked in but very few of the small. The stones he selected which anyone around here would naturally use for the principal part, he used to fill in with. For these large ones he had a very high price – proportionately three or four times the amount for the smaller ones.

Rand was a very quiet man. He went on with the job, and at its completion there had been only one instance, that I remember, of a man's getting drunk, although rum was just as free as water. Rand said he was as good a man as he had on the work. Rand had a little office right in the ard of the American House, a little square box of an office, and I happened to be in there one day with a bill. Rand sent for one of the men to come in, and he came. He was the foreman of that section of men. He sat down, looking very sober indeed. Rand called him by name pleasantly, and said he How much is there due you? –figuring it up. He asked if he was satisfied with the wages, and the man answered, yes, perfectly. Well, said he, there is so much your due, sign your name to the book. A scarder man I never saw. Said he” Mr. Rand, what does all this mean?” Mr. Rand said, you want the money , I suppose you work for money. He hoped he was satisfied and they parted good friends. He wanted to know a second and third time what it meant. It means, said he, that we had a contract, and I have paid you all satisfactorily. The man the day before had drank too much, and it was the example that he wanted to enforce. I don't think Rand had any troubles after that. There was nothing said-only the man was turned off and discharged.

The arrangement for pay by Boott was that seventy-five per cent of the work done should be paid for every month, and he should retain twenty-five per cent. Boott was smart, and wanted to be sure to be on the safe side. Rand goes along and gets this job pretty well completed, and calls one day for some money, going to the counting-room for it. Mr. Boott told him he had paid all that was due him. Said Rand, how do you

make it? Boott's engineer had measured the work as so many perch, and Rand had drawn pay up to within a few hundred or thousand dollars of it.

Rand replied – very well, Mr. Boott. Rand concealed the slip Boott had made. He saw for the first time Boott was reckoning 24 $\frac{3}{4}$ feet to the perch, while Rand reckoned sixteen. The perch counted up an immense number, of course. Rand said very well. Rand went right to Boston, as he was to pay off his men, as quick as he could go their with horses -was gone all night – called on those sureties for money, and got back and paid off his men. He went on and completed the job, and then the referees looked it over and pronounced it well done. He walked up to Mr. Boott's office and made out his bill at 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ feet to a perch, so many perch credited him with so much money leaving a balance due him of a very large amount. Boott said "What do you mean by this?" Said Rand, "Mr. Boott, you can have so many hours to settle it. If you don't settle then, I shall put an attachment on every thing you have got here, and you will settle it with somebody else, and pay every dollar of it to the last cent." He probably hadn't spoken to Mr. Boott from the time I have mentioned before, to that time. Well, Boott didn't know what to do about it, but went to Boston to consult a lawyer, taking the bill, and he probably never went quicker to Boston and back. The lawyer's advice was to pay it; that he didn't know any arithmetic but the old Adam's arithmetic in Vermont, and he didn't think it would pay to fight. It was an enormous difference, thirty-three and a third per cent, you see. Mr. Boott sent a note to Mr. Rand that if he would call up to his office he would settle it. Rand sent back a note that he would settle at his own office, as he had been up there once; and Mr. Boott went, which was rather an unusual thing for him. There was a great deal of talk about it at the time. Mr. Boott came down with the money, and paid him to the last cent. Rand receipted the bill, and he went off.

I think that was the only time Boott was ever "stuck".

I never saw such a specimen of a man as Rand. He was very pleasant, but wouldn't speak more than once in an hour, and he was just so all the time.

Boott was deceived in the big rocks, and Rand got double pay. If he had been paid the ordinary rate, it would have been quite a different thing, but so large a price was offered. Rand was paid a large amount. The stone were great big rocks, boulders, carted from around here in the pastures, and sometimes split in two, and comprised all the big rocks within a mile or two of Lowell.

The time I have mentioned was probably the only time that Mr. Boott was ever out-generaled. He was the smartest man there was in this part of the country, and was selected as an expert to do this business.

Mr. Stone – I don't understand how he was out-generaled. You say he was out-generaled when Rand one day called for money, and Boott told him there wasn't anything due.

Payment had been made the month before, and Rand coming short of money, and finding there was considerable due him, reckoning his way, went up for it. Boott reckoning his own way said there wasn't anything due, and Rand said, very well. I will go off. He saw that Boott had figured it at twenty-four feet to the perch, which he knew nothing about until then, and he wouldn't say any thing until he had his job completed.

I remember one great stone about half-way between Wyman's corner and the town house. It was in a wall. An old wall run up against it on the south side of the road which is now Merrimack street. I climbed up on to that stone, and I should think it was higher than this room, considerably, and wider – an immense great boulder. Rand was to have any stone he could find.

They went to this stone and dug around it, and into the ground. I should think the hole in the ground to uncover it was as the dimensions above, like a floating iceberg. The stone was split in two. There might have been four pieces of it, but they took all that would swing under those big wheels, and it had the requisite number of perch of the biggest mark. Rand was careful to get all of about that size.

There hasn't been a man here since that could handle stone like that man. He would attack a great stone at night, and the next morning there would be nothing left but a hole in the ground and the stone would be down in that wall. They were let down with tremendous, great stout guys. I have seen no such tools since that time.

Rand came from Vermont, and had been working at building bridges as his general business. I think he had done a job in Boston. He was the biggest specimen of a man I ever met with.

The Merrimack Street Bridge Over Concord River

At that time there was a ferry over the river, and they were trying to get somebody to build a bridge there, but could not do it. The water was thirty feet deep, and mud at the bottom. Rand said nothing, but when he got the other job done he called on those men, and said he would put in a bridge for them. He had a little leisure time, his tools were there, and men, and he had done such work as that. They wanted to know if it would stand. He said yes. Well, he was going to build it from the bottom with split stone, and have it firmly bedded down below the mud, and have the stone all doveled together clear up to where we see the piers. They drew up what they wanted, and he told them what he would do it for. Then the mystery was how he was going to get away down there thirty feet deep in the water and four feet of mud.

He went to work and got great logs and made a raft of probably forty or fifty feet in length, and doveled them together strongly, and then laid the bottom right there with those flat rocks, having the stone just heavy enough to settle down, so that it would be perhaps two feet out of the water. He used to get hogsheds, and tie on one thing and another to buoy it up; and he had stone boats and got the stones from the boats, and kept laying them just right and even kept them settling down until they shoved it down into the mud, and when it wouldn't go any further he kept building it up; and there it stands to-day, the same thing. He made them quickly, had his stone all ready and a lot of men, and the work went on as fast as men could draw and lay them, and up went the piers.

Mr. Stone. I don't understand how he could keep them there without settling.

Mr. K. He did, and that is the way it was done. He tied on logs enough and other things to buoy it up. If you take a raft sixty feet long, and probably twenty-five wide, it will

hold a great weight.

Mr. Stone. How could he sink it gradually?

Mr. K. He had an engineer to fix that. If it didn't go fast enough he would fill in. He kept on adding logs and putting on stone, and tying on hogsheds, or whatever he used.

Mr. Howe. So that he would have his stone work all the time out of the water?

Mr. K. The logs were on the outside, and the stones inside kept sinking down. I remember looking in there, but couldn't see much difference between the top of the boat, and the top of the pier. They kept working, and didn't seem to gain any. It kept settling down. It was done by guys and ropes. He knew how to do it. It surprised everybody to see how admirably that thing was done. He wouldn't take any responsibility. They drew what they wanted, and he proposed to make it substantial, and to dowel it together in such a way, and of such a width, and he would lay it from the bottom. And he did it. Not a word was said about any money until the thing was completed and accepted, and done far better than they expected.

That was the first bridge ever there, and the stone-work is the same now. I think there were two abutments or piers.

Mr. Howe. There are just as many piers now as ever.

A Boy's Interview with Kirk Boott

Being a country boy, I supposed Boott was a sort of god. He would come to the shop occasionally, and talk about his men. Finally he built down here, on what is now the Boott Corporation, a house, stable and garden, taking the whole square, I think from Bridge Street, living on

Merrimack Street on that canal which runs down by the corporation clear through. There were no buildings on the square. He built a house about in the middle of it, and had a garden.

He had five or six horses, and my brother sent me down there one day in the morning to look after them. I had an old leather apron on, and I proposed to take it off, but my brother said No, go right along. I went over to the horses and took up their feet and was looking them over, when a tall, stern man came and stood by the door and looked at me. I supposed he thought I had no business there, and he was going to set the dog on me. I don't believe I was ever so scared in my life. I never shall forget it. He didn't say a word, but I kept right on, and when I got through he walked along and put his hand on my head and said, then you have come to look at my horses' shoes. And he told me a story about the carelessness of a servant in harnessing his horse and not examining them, and the shoes came off before he went two miles, and the horse was injured very much said he, I want you to sit down here, and he hauled up a milking stool. Now said he, you are going to make a smart man, and he wanted to know if I had a mother. My mother lived in the house of Capt. Brown. I told him where she lived. How much garden have you got? How does it lie? Let us pencil it out. Your house is so-and-so, and your fence comes so – and he drew it out a great deal better than I could, and a great deal better than I could tell him. What have you got in it? Well, not much. He pulled a bell, and an old man came upon the run.

Mr. Boott said "What is your Christian name?" William. William, said he, has come to look at these horses' feet, and I want you to take some roots that you want to thin out, and go and set them out in his garden. You had better take them up so that they will live, something that will look handsome. Well, that old fellow worked there more or less for a week fixing up that garden. One morning about 9 o'clock when I went up to look at the horses, he told the man to give me a drink of wine. We went into the cellar, and I never saw such a sight in my life. You might count the bottles by the thousand. He had one part of the cellar partitioned off for nicer qualities. He poured out a pretty good tumbler full. I was used to drinking cider, but knew nothing about wine. I drank a swallow or two, and he said, drink it up, it won't hurt you. I kept sipping away until I got it about all down, and then went into the garden and was looking over the roots and flowers, but soon thought it was about time for me to start for home, for I felt a little dizzy. I started on, and fell heels over head two or three times. I got home, but it was all I could do. My brother carried me home to my mother, and she nursed me up. I was very boozy, but finally got asleep and woke up all right. I could not bear the quantity, but he would take down a couple of tumblers full. I didn't go into that cellar again.