

## A Landmark Gone

It has been our desire ever since the old "Russell Grocery" was demolished, to print an article in memoriam of this quaint old structure whose exact age we have been unable to ascertain. But which have been a landmark of the town even prior to revolutionary days. It was, with its site, on the corner of Water street and Massachusetts avenue, purchased in 1902 by the Twenty-one Associates of Arlington, the location to be used for a handsome modern building block, the foundation for which will soon be underway. The work of the demolishing the old building was begun Saturday, Oct. 17. The brief, yet interesting, article which we are able to offer for the personal of our readers and which we doubt not they will keep and value, was prepared by one of the oldest members of Arlington Historical Society, a lady connected with our oldest and for many years most influential families, who is deeply interested in the local history of the town and whose bright mind enables her to recall many incidents which have been told her by the old people of her youth. The cut of the picturesque old structure was made especially for us and is the most perfect picture of the building yet shown. This we can positively assert, for all other pictures are marred by electric lighting poles, wires, etc. Our cut was prepared from a splendid picture taken by an experienced local photographer, and then the artist painted out all objects that detracted from the building, including a horse and team, an ugly pole and great arc lantern that cut the front of the building in half, and the innumerable wires that detract from the old-time appearance of the building and completely marred its effect. Of course printed on common newspaper the effect of the picture is not what it would be printed on coated paper and with all the nicety of the printing art. We conclude the historic sketch with a poem which was written by an Arlington school boy, now grown to manhood, and thus are able to give our readers a memorium which is the loving contribution of the town's own citizens:-

The passing of the "Russell Store," corner of Massachusetts ave. and Water street, calls for some notice at the present time. It is not definitely known who built the store and dwelling house of which it was part. History says that Thomas Russell, son of Jason, had a well-established grocery there in 1773, but it calculated that the house was built some twenty-three years prior to this and the section devoted to the store built on some years after. At any event it would be safe to place the date of the original structure as 1750. He pursued the business through all the vicissitudes of the war of the Revolution until 1809, and died at the age of 58. He was succeeded by his oldest son and namesake, Col. Thomas Russell, who was succeeded by his son, Thomas J. Russell, when failing health obliged the older Mr. Russell to retire. Thomas J.'s son, Thomas H. Russell, then became the proprietor of this ancient store. He was the fourth grocer of the same name and family.

This store seems to have been the center of the village and was then surrounded by the town green and all the town's activities centered around it. The post office was once offered to Col. Russell, but was declined on account of the small compensation. The local letters were brought to the store, pinned to a post and the "expectant ones" called for them, thus saving the high postage of those early days. In the time of the first store-keeper, the business was done chiefly by barter, the currency of the colony being so fluctuating as to have no reliable value. A bushel of corn or grain was used as a standard value. The leading commodities were rum, molasses, codfish, calico, some imported fabrics for women's wear. Three hogsheads of rum were disposed of weekly. The price after the war was two shillings, three pence per gallon, or 37.5 cents. The liquor was not all consumed by the people of Menotomy. This store was a favorite stopping place for the teamsters and drovers of cattle who passed through the Vermont and New Hampshire with their loads of farm produce and exchanged them for

foreign goods in Boston. It was thus that they patronage of the store, which was in certain respect a highway tavern, was very large by the dusty and thirsty overland travelers.

Above the grocery store was a good sized hall some twenty-five or more feet in length. IT has an arched ceiling, which gave it more height than one would expect from the exterior of the building, the arch being carried into the gable, thus economizing space and giving the hall a light, airy effect, in spite of it being low posted on its two sides from the junction of the spring of the arch. This hall was the centre of the social and civic life of the town in the early days and was the popular gathering place for meetings and festivities. We are told of a meeting of the "Precinct" holden in the hall as long ago as Jan. 9<sup>th</sup>, 1805. It was here that Mr. Eli Robbins of Lexington, had a dancing school, where he taught to the young West Cambridge Light Infantry. Here was held also, at one time, a school for boys, taught by William W. Wellington, and some few of our oldest citizens will recall many an enjoyable family party held in the old hall, as well as stirring political and citizens' meetings.

Like all structures of these days it was strongly built with heavy timbers. Facing the street it had two and one-half stories, but in the rear the roof sloped to one story and was flanked by a massive chimney, as large as many a room, containing the open fireplace, brick oven, and all the features that made the chimney the veritable heart of the house for our forefathers. The building was located squarely to the south and on an angle to present lines of Mass. avenue. The massive timbers and wide boards, put together with wooden pins and wrought iron nails, had stood bravely exposed to the elements for more than a century and a half. "It was here that the distressed colonists gathered to talk over their grievances after the memorable 19<sup>th</sup> April, 1775; and the father of the proprietor was sleeping with his eleven comrades in the graveyard but a few rods away." It was also the scene of a British raid on the memorable 19<sup>th</sup>, when hogshead of molasses were left with the taps down to run all over the floor, but which some thrifty person espied before a great deal of the valued sweets had escaped.

The Passing of the Russell Store.

Alas 'tis gone, we'll see no more

That quaint old landmark, Russell Store,

That relic of the days of old,

Whose walls could many tales unfold,

Could they but speak

It seems by this untimely end.

As though we'd lost a life-long friend;

Once fair Menotomy's boast and pride,

Through all these years you have defied

The hand of time.

But Progress, through grim fate, decrees  
That you must die; yet from your seed,  
On yonder site, will soon arise  
A structure grand to greet the eyes  
Of those to come.

Your's surely was a noble life,  
Through all these early years of strife.  
Those trying days when you were born,  
When loved ones from their homes were torn  
For Freedom's cause.

But, now, alas, your time has come;  
You've earned your rest, your work is done;  
Unwilling hands have laid you low.  
'Tis sad indeed to see you go,-  
But fate has willed.

We seem to hear you loudly call,  
As one by one your timbers fall,  
O spare me this unkind fate.  
Alas, your plea has come too late,  
Your doom is sealed.

But thus 'twill be while time shall last,  
As one by one the years roll past,  
Old friends must part; for one and all  
Before the scythe of time must fall,  
The end must come.

So, now, old friend, we bid adieu,  
A last farewell we say to you,  
For you who played your part so well,  
We weep, as sounds the parting Knell.  
Old friend, good-bye.