

## Miles Pratt 1825 - 1882

Though not born in Watertown, he certainly made a name for himself there as an industrialist and philanthropist. Born in 1825 during the administration of John Quincy Adams, he is known to be a descendent of Joshua Pratt who arrived in Plymouth on the “Ann” in 1623. The descendents of Joshua Pratt lived in the area for many years and Miles’ family is known to have settled in Carver.

By age 15 he was selling hollowware for his father and making a contribution to the bustling New England economy. At that time New England mills converted the raw materials produced by the South, such as cotton, into textiles. Abolitionism was in the air. It had been galvanized by William Lloyd Garrison’s The Liberator when Miles was only 6. By the time he was 34, he would be pledged to its cause.

Miles Pratt’s name appeared on a notice for a public meeting to be held December 2, 1859 to discuss providing material aid to the family of “martyr and abolitionist John Brown.”

Interestingly, 1859 proved to be an important year in Miles’ life not only for his involvement in abolitionism, but also for his marriage to Ellen Coolidge. Their daughter, Grace, married G. Fred Robinson, the author of “Great Little Watertown”. They lived in her father’s Italianate house at 106 Mount Auburn at the corner of Palfrey Street. The house was left to Pratt’s granddaughter, Helen Robinson Wright, who served as Treasurer for the First Parish for many years. It was Helen Wright who left the house to her church. The Unitarian Church in turn sold it to a consortium of dentists. In 1985 it was put on the National Register of Historical Places.

In 1855, Miles Pratt established a foundry on Main Street, which later consolidated with the George Walker Co and became the Walker and Pratt Manufacturing Company. The foundry had a big warehouse on Galen Street as well as wharves on the Charles River. Pratt decided to put his plant next to the town gristmill. He hired Luke Perkins of the gristmill to become his superintendent and Oliver Shaw, his manager. He knew both men from his hometown of Carver. Then Colonel Thomas Rodman, the Commanding Officer of the Watertown Arsenal, asked Pratt if he could mold cannonballs for the Union Army. He could and he did and before too long the 20 men he started with grew to 130. They made not only cannonballs but also canister shot and shells as well as gun carriages. During peacetime, his foundry produced the famous Crawford stoves that were sold all over the world.

Miles Pratt was 36 when the Civil War broke out in April of 1861. He and 20-year-old carpenter, Sam Stearns decided in January of that year that Watertown should raise a company. It became Company K, the Flag Company of the 16<sup>th</sup> Mass. Infantry Regiment. It was commanded by Colonel Powell Wyman of Boston. Sam Stearns was the first to enlist.

Today we think of Miles Pratt not only as a manufacturer of Crawford stoves and cannonballs, but also as a philanthropist. Solon Whitney, the town’s first librarian, noted in his Historical Sketches of Watertown that Pratt contributed \$100 to the library fund putting him on record as one of the founders of the Watertown Free Public Library. Unfortunately, he did not live to see the library’s completion in 1884 because he died in 1882.