

over Brown's trial helped fracture the Democratic Party, which helped Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln win the election of 1860. Unhappiness with the results of that election led, in part, to South Carolina deciding to secede from the United States, an action that led to the outbreak of the Civil War. As Union soldiers marched into battle, they sang "John Brown's body lies a moulderin' in the grave..."

As Loris Troyer points out in his column for the *Record-Courier* on May 24, 1999. "On the day of Brown's death, all the public and church bells throughout Portage County were tolled in sorrow for the onetime Portage County resident. Indignation meetings were held in both Kent and Ravenna after the hanging."

Brown's legacy does not lie in the small events of his life, nor do his rather noticeable character flaws detract from his position as a catalyst in American history. While he is a rather difficult figure to celebrate, he is nonetheless an individual whose impact was felt nationwide as well as right here in the town once called Franklin Mills.

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John Brown: The Kent Connection

By James F. Caccamo

Many famous people have lived in Kent, but perhaps one of the most well known was anti-slavery crusader John Brown. Over 200 years after his birth, it is important to remember Brown's place in the fabric of local and national history.



John Brown was born in Torrington, Connecticut on May 9, 1800. His father was Owen Brown, a tanner. John's grandfather was Captain John Brown, who lost his life during the American Revolution. Owen Brown eventually settled in Hudson, and there his son learned how to be a tanner or leather maker. John was sent to Litchfield, Connecticut as a teenager to go to school at the Morris Academy and prepare for a career as a minister. Poor health forced

John to return to Hudson and take up the tanning trade.

In 1826, John uprooted his family and moved to Crawford County, Pennsylvania, but when his tannery there did not succeed, he returned to Ohio, settling in Franklin Mills and entered into a partnership with Zenas B. Kent in 1835, building a tannery along the banks of the Cuyahoga River.



John Brown Tannery
Crawford County, Pennsylvania, 1826

Unfortunately, John Brown and Zenas Kent did not have a good partnership, and eventually they stopped doing business together. Around this same time, though, something exciting seemed to be about to happen in Franklin Mills.

A number of investors planned to start a new company, the Franklin Land Company, with the goal of turning Franklin Mills into a major industrial city. The idea included a plan to raise silk worms here and create an American silk industry. After all, the silk worms' major food source, the mulberry tree, grew extremely well here. (Later, of course, they would discover that silk worms

do not thrive in our cold Ohio winters.) The plan was that other industries would soon follow and the economy would boom. In any case, John Brown believed that real estate in Franklin Mills was going to be extremely valuable, and that by investing early, he would end up a wealthy man. Brown borrowed large sums of money, bought over 95 acres of land, and waited for his investment to pay off. The son of a wealthy man, John was careless with his money, a trait that would follow him his whole life. Instead of Brown becoming wealthy through his new scheme, he lost everything. In 1837, the entire nation was caught up in an economic crisis. The poor economic climate prevented Franklin Mills from developing into a major industrial metropolis, and John Brown was driven to bankruptcy. Eventually, Brown would leave Franklin Mills, returning to Hudson, then Richfield and Akron. He switched his career from tanning leather to raising sheep.

Brown's story is not just one of economic failure, though. He had been brought up to believe that slavery was wrong, and following the example of his father, Owen Brown, John worked to try to help free slaves. Certainly that activity preoccupied him during his days in Franklin Mills. According to Richard Boyer in *The Legend of John Brown*, the summer of 1836 led Brown to loggerheads with some of the community. Angered by segregated seating at the old Franklin Congregational Church, Brown began protesting during the church service. He then moved his family into the back of the church and escorted a black

family into his own pew in front. Boyer tells us that for four consecutive services, Brown continued his protest.

Brown's hatred of slavery would eventually lead him to involvement in a bloody conflict in Kansas Territory between those who were working to keep slavery out of the territory and those who hoped to bring Kansas into the Union as a slave state. As tensions in Kansas escalated, Brown began using violence to reach his goal, which led him to the infamous slaughter of pro-slavery advocates at Osawatimie. Brown ended up fleeing the country, taking refuge in many places, including Chatham, Ontario, Canada. Despite being wanted by the law, Brown continued to appear in many areas of the country, including Northeast Ohio.

By the summer of 1859, John Brown decided to do something about slavery once and for all. Returning to the United States, he and a group of others decided to raid a federal arsenal in a place called Harpers Ferry, Virginia, which is now in West Virginia. The raid, which took place on October 16, 1859, was a failure. Brown was captured, put on trial, and condemned to death for his actions. The trial itself captured the nation's attention and put new emphasis on the struggle between slavery and anti-slavery forces.

On December 2, 1859, John Brown was hanged at Charles Town, Virginia. While John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry failed, it did force the nation to pay attention to the slavery issue. The national controversy