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Floyd Atkins (1903-1997): A Major Player in Mansfield's History (Part One of Two)

The late Floyd Atkins holds his Eagleville musket, which was manufactured in the Eagleville mills in Mansfield during the Civil War.



Several months ago Mrs. Alice Atkins of Mansfield called in regard to an article I'd written on the old Eagleville mills. Her husband Floyd, a keen gun collector, owned a musket manufactured in those mills in 1862. Like many textile mills in the northeast, the Eagleville mills began manufacturing guns for the Union army. Mr. and Mrs. Atkins invited me round to see the gun, and we had an enjoyable afternoon chatting about local history, and Floyd's central role in the recent history of this section of the state. Unfortunately, Floyd passed away shortly afterwards. This article is dedicated to his memory. Thanks go to Mrs. Atkins and Floyd's son Adrian for the extra material furnished for these articles after Floyd's death.

Floyd L. Atkins was born in 1903, in Mansfield, Connecticut. Floyd's father, Arthur Ernest Atkins (1869-1943) lived on Valley Street,

Willimantic in the 1890s, and was employed as a painter at Latham and Crane's. He married Helen Pike (1870-1957) of Mansfield, and shortly afterwards the couple moved to Browns Road in Mansfield, where Helen's father, Ellery, owned and operated a chicken farm at the junction of Mansfield City Road and Browns Road. The property also had a number of mulberry trees, to raise silk worms, in the years that Mansfield was one of the nation's foremost silk thread and cloth manufacturing communities. Floyd's father worked for many years as a boss painter at the Storrs College of Agriculture and as the head painter for Ponemah mills, which owned most of the commercial and residential buildings in Taftville.

I asked Floyd how Mansfield City Road got its name. It was not, as many suppose, the Mansfield to (Willimantic) City Road. In the early 19th century it was thought that Mansfield would one day become a great city in its own right, thanks to its numerous silk mills. Floyd recalled that in his youth this section of Mansfield had a country store, a root beer manufacturer, a carpenter shop, blacksmith shop, a jail, distillery, butcher shop and a button factory.

Floyd's grandfather, Benjamin Atkins (1839-1925) was born in Wolverhampton, England. He was a skilled bricklayer and mason, and emigrated to the United States in

the late 1870s. One of his first jobs was on the construction of an aqueduct from Sebago Lake to Portland, Maine. Benjamin arrived in Willimantic in 1880, and worked on the building of worker housing for the Windham Manufacturing Company. These houses are currently being refurbished, and are situated on Vermont Drive. Benjamin also worked on the big brick chimney at the Willimantic Water Works which was recently demolished.

Floyd was educated at the Mansfield City school-which only had eight or nine students- from 1909 until 1916, and at the Windham High School, graduating in 1922. His first job was tail-sawing in George Little's steam saw mill in Andover. He then worked as a painter in the Taftville mills, and in New London for C. L. & P., changing the city to a higher voltage. He also worked as a carpenter for many small contractors. Floyd took correspondence courses, and attended night school to study architecture and building. later he worked on building and repairing houses along the coast from Westerly RI to Groton, CT. In 1926 he built a house for himself in West Mystic. In the course of his employment he designed many tools and machines, such as the machines to manufacture brushes for the Fuller Brush Company, and the machines to make ice cream cones.

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