

Walter William Law 1837–1924 'A Kidderminster Expatriate to New York'

Bob Millward

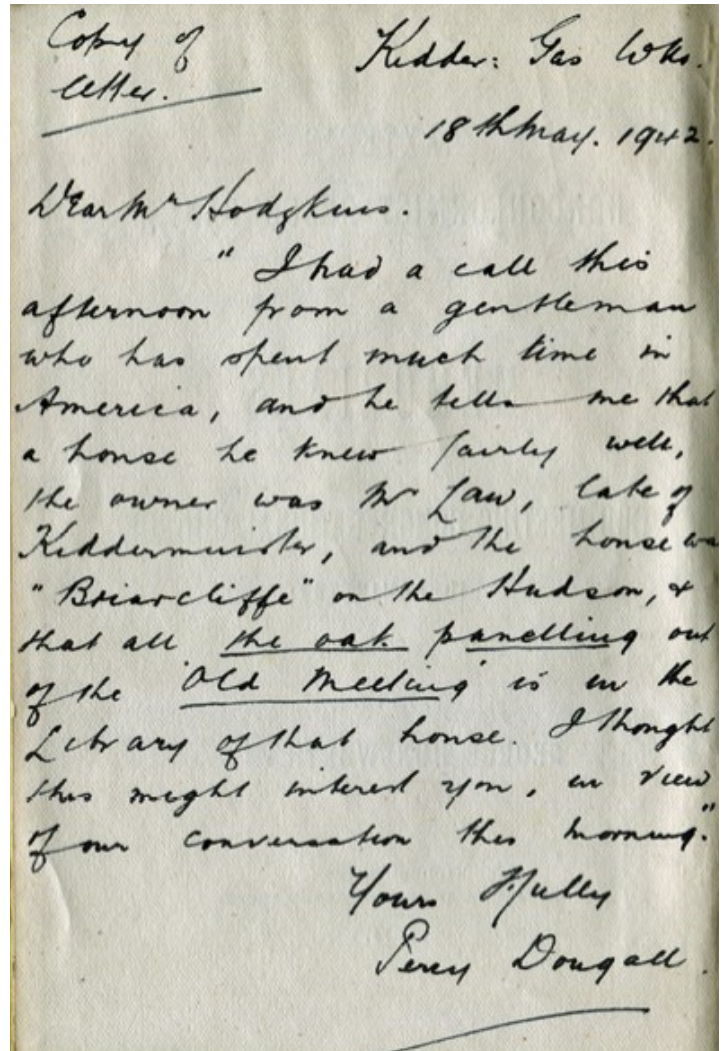
December 2016 revised January 2018

Kidderminster & District Archaeological & Historical Society

INTRODUCTION

This story begins with the book, "Memorials of the Old Meeting House – Kidderminster" by Rev. George Hunsworth, published in 1874. A particularly interesting copy was given to Mr Ernest Hodgkins (Headmaster of St Mary's Boys' School) by Mr Percy Dougall (Manager of the Kidderminster Gas Works). On the reverse of the title page a letter from Dougall to Hodgkins, dated 18 May 1942, had been reproduced, probably by Hodgkins. The letter refers to a man, known to Dougall, who often travelled to America and had been to "a house he knew fairly well, the owner was Mr Law, late of Kidderminster, the house was Briarcliffe on the Hudson & that all the oak panelling out of the 'Old Meeting' is in the Library of that house."

Who was this 'Mr Law'? What was his connection to Kidderminster? What is the story of his life in The U.S.A.? The implication of the letter is that he had been successful but in what way and how had he earned his living? How did he acquire the panelling from the Old Meeting House and does it still exist in the library of Law's house? A quick internet search reveals that the Briarcliff man involved was **Walter William Law**. But perhaps we should first address the issue of the source of the panelling that Law acquired.



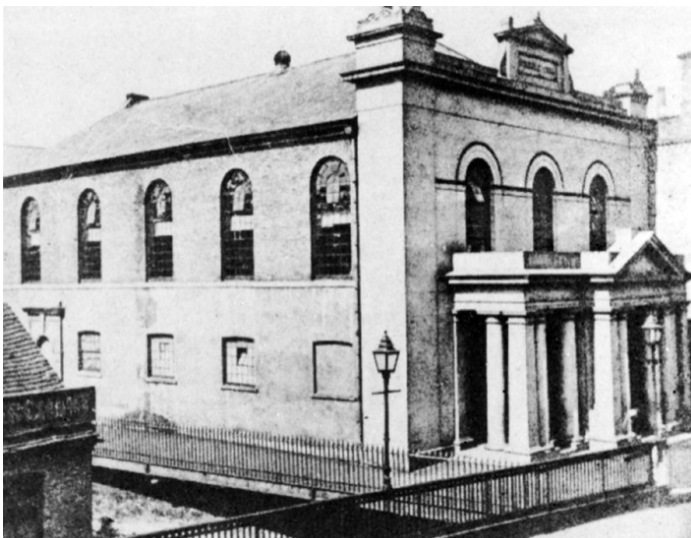
Copy of
letter.

Kidder. Gas Works.
18th May. 1942.

Dear Mr Hodgkins.

"I had a call this afternoon from a gentleman who has spent much time in America, and he tells me that a house he knew fairly well, the owner was Mr Law, late of Kidderminster, and the house was "Briarcliffe" on the Hudson, & that all the oak panelling out of the 'Old Meeting' is in the Library of that house. I thought this might interest you, in view of our conversation this morning."

Yours Truly
Percy Dougall



The Old Meeting 1825-1884

The building shown here was the third successive Old Meeting Chapel built on this site [1] and it existed from 1825 until 1884 when it was demolished to be replaced by the present church. The latter opened in 1885 and the new name of 'Baxter Church' adopted. There are no known photographs of the interior of Old Meeting but undoubtedly it was oak panels from this building that were removed on demolition and transported by Law to the U.S.A.

WALTER WILLIAM LAW - HIS ORIGINS

He was born in Kidderminster late in 1837 and probably baptised at the Old Meeting Congregational Church either later that year, or in 1838. Earlier Baptismal records [2] for siblings show that his mother Elizabeth's maiden name was Bird and that in 1835 and 1836 his father John was a clerk. A brother John Francis had been born on 22 March 1834 and baptised at the Old Meeting on 1 February 1836 having already been baptised at the Wesleyan Chapel on 1 February 1835! A sister Sarah Elizabeth, born on 12 October 1835 was baptised at the Old Meeting on 1 April 1836. By the time of the 1841 census (6 June 1841) the family was living in Mill street and his father was described as a yarn agent; presumably he had branched out into business on his own account. In 1850 John was a dealer in Carpet yarn and wools etc. in Mill Street [3] and had clearly improved his status. But at the 1851 census he had moved to his home town of Bridgnorth where he was Worsted Spinner Master employing 100 work people. This was probably when he was in the partnership with a Mr Grierson in Bridgnorth and Kidderminster [4, 5]. At home in 1851 were: wife Elizabeth (38), siblings John F (17), Walter W (13), George (11), Henry (10), Frederic (8), Emma (6), Harriette (4) and Caroline ((2); and a housemaid and cook. In 1855 John Law was listed as a worsted Spinner in Church Street and living in the prestigious Blakebrook area of Kidderminster [6]. Later, census records reveal that by 1861 John Law was at 89 Mill Street and described as a General Agent. His son Walter showed early promise as an organiser. In 1859 having already been involved with the Old Meeting as a Sunday school teacher, and played his part in founding and conducting the Mechanics' Institute, he actively supported Mr. A. B. Bristowe the Liberal candidate who was returned as Kidderminster's M.P. (see Appendix, Article 3).

Walter was not included in the 1861 Kidderminster census list for a very good reason; he had emigrated to New York in January of 1860. After 1861 the rest of this Law family also disappeared from documentary records for Kidderminster because they had emigrated to Australia [see Appendix articles numbers 1 & 3].

Before he left Kidderminster Walter would have seen many changes in the town. The Stour Vale Mill Company (partnership of Lord Ward, William Grosvenor and Joseph Kately) was one of the

first factories to be purposely built (1855) to house steam powered looms. Sections of the loom sheds were available for other carpet manufacturers to lease. Other steam powered factories soon followed and the smaller loom shops for handloom carpet weaving gradually became redundant.

One example that would have been very noticeable to Walter Law would have been the new factory in Vicar Street built by Crane and Barton in 1856 to accommodate brussels power looms. The exterior of the upper storey frontage of this building remains little changed to this day and is a grade II listed building.

It is the left hand portion of this building which was built in 1856 as a showroom, warehouse and offices. The right hand portion, delineated by the step in the brickwork, was added later.



WALTER WILLIAM LAW - HIS CAREER IN NEW YORK

Much of Law's career in USA, as described here, has been derived from material provided by the Briarcliff Manor-Scarborough Historical Society [7], in addition to other publications and sources. It was to Briarcliff Farm that Law 'retired' in 1890. There he was to become closely entwined with the development of the area and its community.



Walter Law as a young man
[BMS-SHS]

Law, the son of a carpet dealer in Kidderminster, was educated privately in local schools and in his father's office. He went to work for a draper at the age of fourteen but at twenty-two travelled to New York City without friends or money to seek fortune, arriving in the City on 22 January 1860 aged 22. The first job he found was as a travelling salesman with a carpet company but when he discovered that the firm was passing locally made carpet as an expensive imported product he resigned. It was said that one of his mottoes: was "Nothing is good enough if it can be bettered". His next job began early in 1861 until they failed in October - largely due to the Civil War. He then walked the streets looking for work and finally found employment at W & J Sloane's carpet sale business at 591 Broadway at the handsome wage of about \$1 a day! He was not to look back, and on 1st January 1866 was admitted as a partner into the firm, on the same day as William D. Sloane. This advancement was clearly something that enabled him to marry Georgianna Ransom (right) later that month.

Law developed the wholesale department of W. & J. Sloane and secured the account of Alexander Smith & Sons Carpet Company of Yonkers for marketing their production of tufted high-pile moquette carpets. He managed this connection, and the remarkable growth of the Smith company (of which he was an early stock holder) was, at least in part, due to his energy and good judgment: the "dogged perseverance" he called his British birthright.



To service the account with Smith's more efficiently and conveniently, Law moved to Yonkers where he and Georgianna raised their family of three sons and four daughters. Whilst there Law was to join the Board of Directors and became a vice president of W. & J. Sloane. The industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie was numbered amongst Law's circle of friends. Over the years W & J Sloane expanded into furnishings, furniture and antiques and moved to high-status premises on the SE corner of 19th Street and Broadway (left). [BMS-SHS]



In 1890, at the age of 53, Walter Law retired from the Sloane firm and became a trustee for life of the Company. He also developed a keen interest in the Westchester County countryside, in the Lower Hudson valley north of New York. There he bought the 236-acre Briarcliff Farm.

WALTER WILLIAM LAW - HIS LIFE IN BRIARCLIFF MANOR

Walter Law may have retired from his executive business position at Sloane's but he was not about to become idle. Having bought Briarcliff Farm in 1890 he quickly set about purchasing other land and farms in the neighbouring district. The Briarcliff Manor-Scarborough Historical Society

hold a complete documentary record of these purchases in Law's spidery, but neat, handwriting. By 1900 he owned more than 5,000 acres of farmland. This formed the basis of his 'Briarcliff Farms' venture which expanded to employ about 300 workers. Some farms he worked with the original owners on a shared basis. The business specialised in pure-bred Jersey cattle and was one of the first producers of certified milk in America. Ice houses were utilised for cooling milk. There were also: pigs, chickens, thoroughbred horses, pheasants, peacocks and sheep. Cream and butter were processed in the Briarcliff Dairy and sold in New York. He established a local School of Practical Agriculture and Horticulture and said "I shall not be satisfied to stop until 'Briarcliff Farms' has placed itself in the forefront of any institution of its kind to be found in the whole country".

Diversification came naturally to Walter Law and he was quick to spot enterprises with potential for success. He collaborated with the Pierson family who were rose specialists. Their foreman George Romaine propagated the pink Briarcliff Rose at 'The Briarcliff Greenhouses', a business which



came to generate more than \$100,000 per annum.

He established the Briarcliff Table Water Company to take advantage of the pure water 250 feet underground. The water was bottled and then sold in the Briarcliff Farms' Store that Law had opened in New York City, as well as in many other shops. Nearby, the 'Briarcliff Print Shop' produced advertising material etc. and the 'Briarcliff Once a Week' booklet which first made its appearance in 1903.

He ran a 'tight ship'. He was often generous with his money and workers were treated fairly but projects needed to be viable and businesses expected to be profitable. He gave prizes for the gentlest handler of his cows. He believed that cows do better if properly treated and allowed no abuse or shouting of any kind. If he saw a worker kick a cow the man was told to seek work elsewhere.

BRIARCLIFF MILK
AND
FARM PRODUCTS

Farms: Briarcliff Manor, N. Y.

Supplying Only the Highest Quality, produced and handled at every point under rigid requirement, and approved by the highest scientific authority

New York Store: Fifth Ave. and 46th St.
The Windsor Arcade Telephone 3278-38th

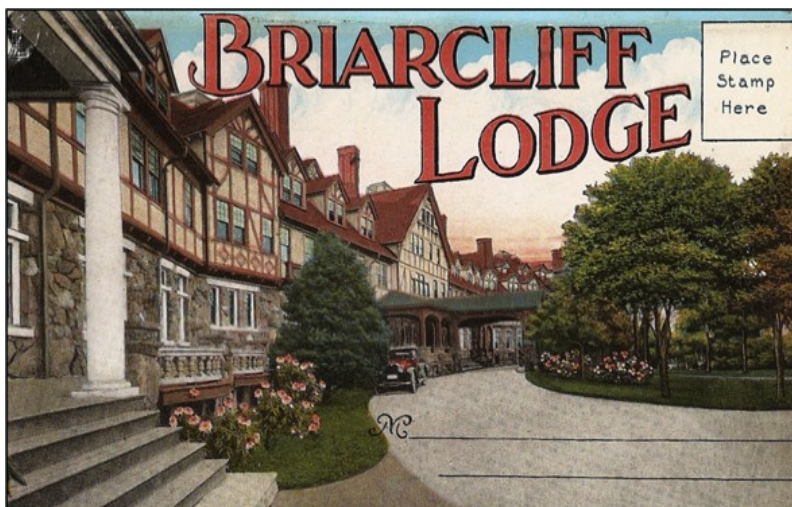
Briarcliff Milk is Served by Glass in New York City
by Leading Hotels and Restaurants

But perhaps the grandest of his schemes, which demonstrated his flair for choosing a winning idea, was outside the realm of farming; the opening of a prestigious hotel - Briarcliff Lodge.

Briarcliff Lodge Hotel
[BMS-SHS]



Built in 1902 on the highest point of his estate, Briarcliff Hotel overlooked the Hudson river and surrounding countryside and became a popular summer residence for the affluent of New York. It offered meals provided by 'the finest chefs' from food sourced from Briarcliff Farms. There were many recreational facilities encompassing: indoors - a music room for daily concerts, a swimming pool, a small theatre, a casino, billiards, pool, a library, a ballroom and various other social rooms; outdoors - a golf course, tennis courts, woodland paths, riding stables, and croquet lawns. For those



without motor transport there was a livery of Fiat cars and limousines for use at any time and, if you came in your own automobile, garaging and special accommodation for chauffeurs was provided. The guest list over the years included: F. W. Woolworth, Franklin Roosevelt, film stars Warner Baxter, Mary Pickford and Tallulah Bankhead, actress Sarah Bernhardt and, interestingly from British point of view, grocery chain magnate Sir Thomas Lipton.

Law was a good employer. He built houses which he sold to farm workers on generous terms and held the mortgages himself. He was generous to the local community in many ways especially with his support of the Congregational Church. It was he that provided the land for building the church in 1897 and funded later additions: east and west transepts, a Manse, a school room, two pipe organs and stained glass in the West transept and South windows.

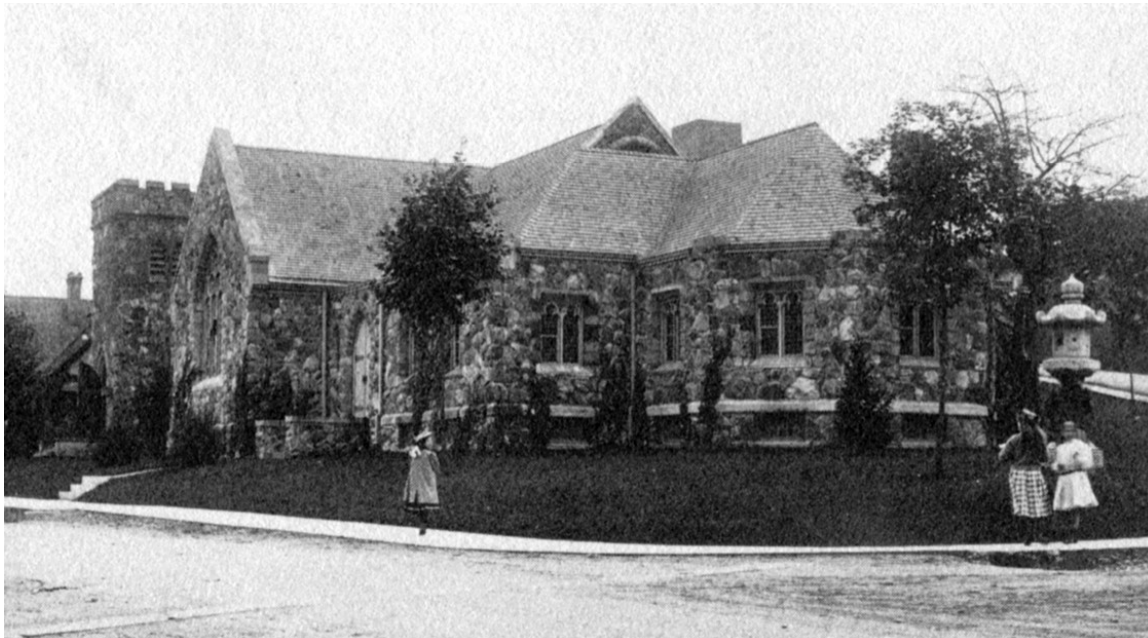


Briarcliff Congregational Church 1897 [BMS-SHS]

Karen Smith, President of the Briarcliff-Scarborough Historical Society says that Walter Law is still remembered with great respect and quotes from the church's 50th anniversary booklet: *"For the last 28 years of his life much of his time and interest centered in this Church, and of this Church he declared, 'My heart is there!' His money as well as his heart was there!"* A further passage goes on: *"His membership dates from July 1, 1898, when the Church voted into membership among others, Walter W. Law, Mrs. Georgianna H. Law, & Walter W. Law, Jr. by letters from the First Presbyterian Church, Yonkers, N.Y. The Church, the Manse, the two pipe organs, and **four Tiffany windows** bear witness to Mr. Law's zeal for the Christian faith. Easily he might have required that this be called the Law Memorial Church; but he had no self-glory in his gift; rather his real intent was proven that time when the **Governor-General of Canada** wrote him of his wish to see Briarcliff Farms on a specified Sunday at 11 o'clock. Mr. Law's reply has passed into local history: **'I have an unflinching appointment with the King of Kings every Sunday at 11 o'clock!'** And faithfully, regularly, he worshipped God within the Sanctuary here."*

Further, from the same source: *"It is noticeable that in all his gifts Mr. Law never dictated any policy. This is a rare attribute of anyone who gives so generously to any object. To paraphrase his own sentiment, 'The best is none too good for Briarcliff,' we know he believed the best was none too good for the Briarcliff Congregational Church!"*

Below we show a photograph of the expanded church as it was in 1905 and examples of the excellent stained glass to be found in the church.



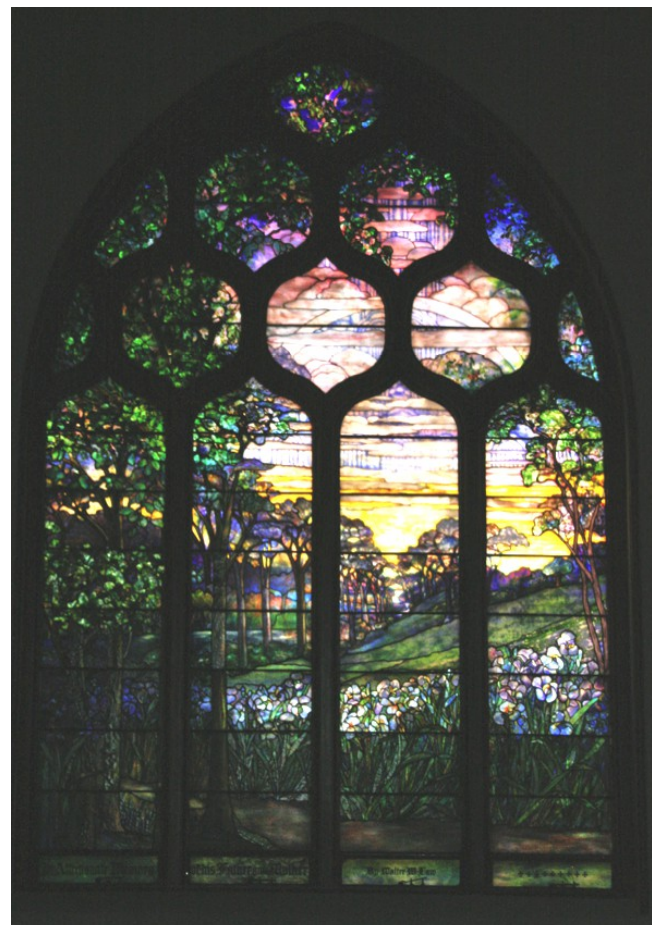
The expanded Congregational church dedicated 1905. Photograph 1913 [BMS-SHS]

Some of the Stained Glass in Briarcliff Congregational Church is shown below.

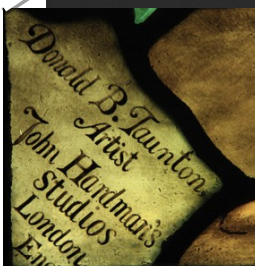


Left. In the East transept of the Congregational Church is a fine window dedicated to the memory of Walter William Law and his wife Georgianna Ransom Law by their children in 1929. The artist was Donald B. Taunton of John Hardman's Studios of Birmingham & London.

It depicts a stylized view from Walter Law's lawn down to the Hudson. [Karen Sharman]



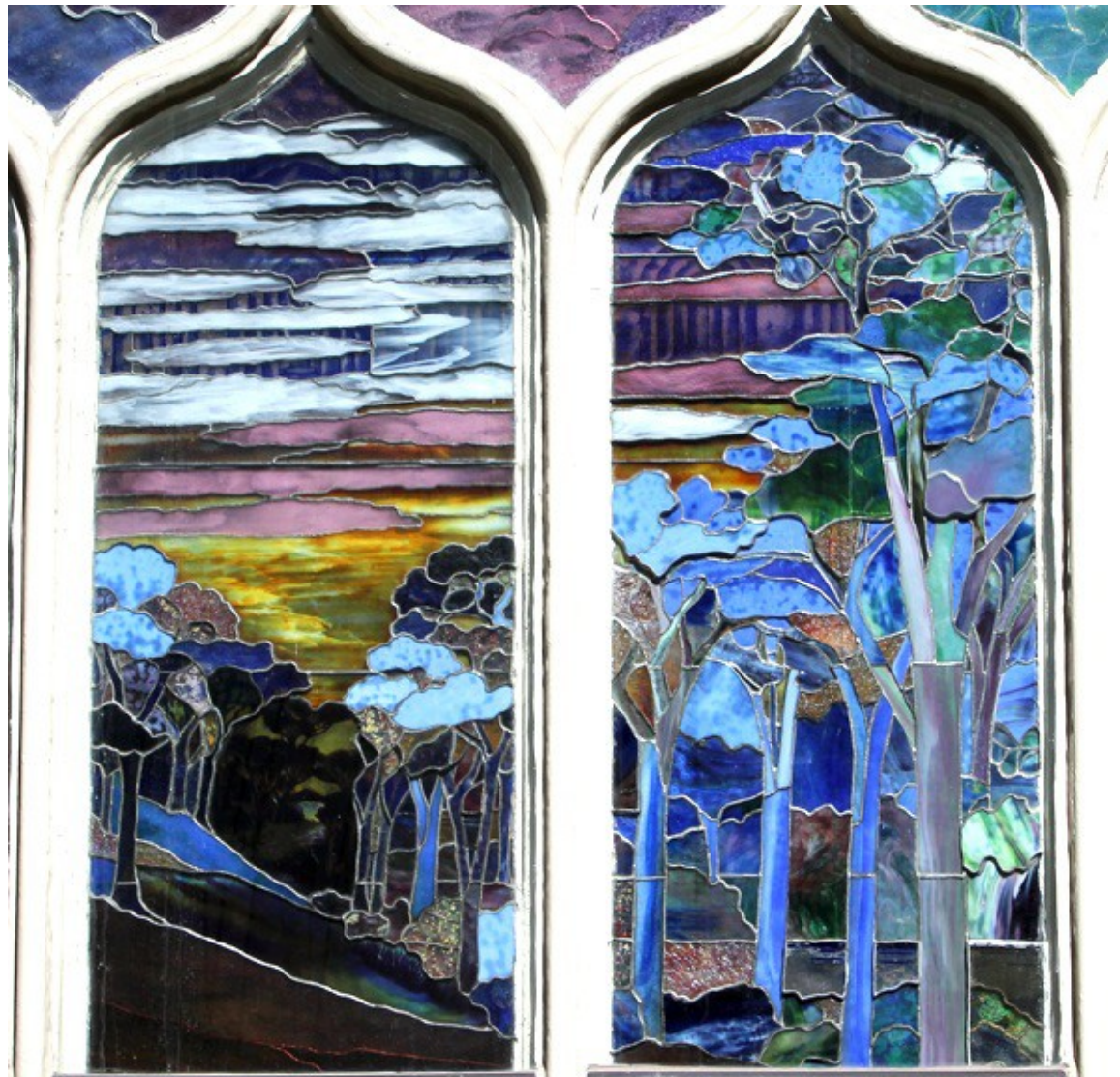
Right. This Tiffany window, dedicated by Law to his parents in 1906, is in the West transept. The design has been attributed to Miss Northrop who was 86 years old at the time. [Karen Sharman]



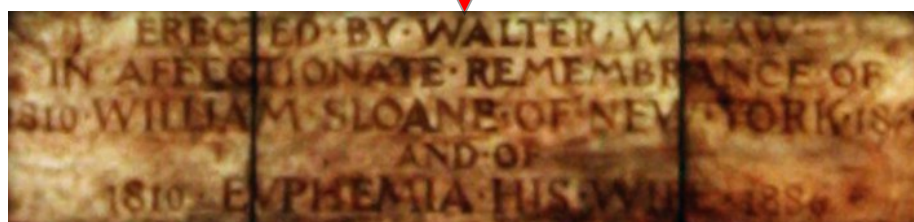


Left: The West transept window is seen viewed from **outside** the church. [Karen Sharman]

Below: Exterior view of the central part of the West transept window exhibiting some of the details of its construction. [Karen Sharman]



The first stained glass installed in the church was in the South window. It was made by Tiffany and dedicated by Walter Law on Thanksgiving Day, 1898, to memory of William (1810-1879) and Euphemia Sloane (1810-1886). It was Sloane who had been Law's mentor and partner in the rug and carpet business in New York City. The window portrays the story of Joseph greeting his eleven brothers in Egypt.



The South 'Tiffany' window in Briarcliff Manor Congregational Church. 1898

[Karen Sharman]

Walter Law was always aware of his responsibilities to the local community and, as the population of the area grew, he realised the need for municipal services.

In 1899 he tried to incorporate the area as a village under the banner of the centre of largest population – Scarborough. That failed for the lack of the required 300 persons per square mile.

Undeterred he adopted a 'cunning plan'. Close to his farms he built and sold houses to his workers on generous terms. By May of 1901 he was able submit another petition with 328 persons per sq. mile as well as the necessary 25 adult freeholders also needed.

This plan was successful and the incorporation of '**Briarcliff Manor**' became fact on November 21st, 1902. Walter Law's friend Andrew Carnegie had long jokingly called him "The Laird of Briarcliff Manor" and it is this attribution that is thought to be the origin of the village's name.

Later, the residents of Scarborough requested annexation to the village of Briarcliff Manor, and this was granted in 1906.



Walter William Law 1923

Walter William Law, pictured left in 1923, died during a rest cure treatment at Summerville, South Carolina, on January 17th 1924. He is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx where F. W. Woolworth is also buried. Other family members are commemorated in the plot seen below.



Walter Law's grave stone 1837-1924 in the Law plot. To the right of this stone are the marker stones for his wife Georgiana 1839-1910 and one of his daughters - Carolyn Law-Fotterall 1869-1923.

By the time of his death two of his sons had long been exerting their influence in the village. Both were village Trustees and Walter William Jr. served as Mayor (1905-1918) followed by Henry Herbert (1918-1936).

The last Law to hold public office in the area was his Grandson, Theodore Gilman Law, who was deputy county director of civilian protection in 1943.

'MANOR HOUSE': WALTER WILLIAM LAW'S HOME IN BRIARCLIFF.

In 1891 Law purchased a stone mansion off the Scarborough Road. This property was to become the family home in Briarcliff and known as the 'Manor House'. The library was a special interest for Law and contained some 5,000 volumes collected over many years. It is not known for how long he retained his house 'Hillcrest' in Yonkers although he was still there when his daughter Carolyn married William Fotherall in December of 1891 [see Appendix article number 5]



Walter William Law's 'Manor House' sometime between 1891 and 1924 [BMS-SHS]

After his death the Manor House was sold to the Metropolitan Masons Country Club and it remained in reasonably good order in their hands until the late 1940s when it became the home of the Briarcliff Nursery School. Then, from 1970, it was used by The King's College which drastically altered many of the rooms for use as dormitories. Rooms were cut up to make many out of one, the elegant woodwork was over painted, fireplaces bricked up—and so on and so on

The Bogoni family bought the property in 1993 and restored the then sadly neglected house to its former use as an elegant family home.



'Manor House' now the Bogoni home [BMS-SHS]

The local paper 'The Gazette' published an account of the Annual Meeting of the Briarcliff-Scarborough Historical Society in 2012. This meeting was hosted by Paul and Irene Bogoni in the house that had been Law's residence in Briarcliff. Here are some extracts related to the history of the house 'Briarcliff Manor':

Guest speaker at Sunday's annual meeting was Scarborough resident Robert Little who provided a history of the up and downs of Mr. Law's former estate following his death in the mid-1920s.

Mr. Little said it was in 1890, at age 53, when Mr. Law was suffering from tuberculosis and forced to retire from W. & J. Sloane Co. in New York City, that the English native came to what was known as Whitson's Corners to recuperate—and began "buying up as much of the area's farmland as possible." That included the Stillman property, which included "this wonderful structure."

"Mr. Law lived here, very happily, with his wife, Georgianna, and their six children, until his death in 1924," said Mr. Little. "Once his family moved out, his former home was used for a variety of purposes, not all to the advantage of the house."

"Probably the most caring tenants were the 'Metropolitan Masons Country Club' that moved into the house from the Briarcliff Lodge in 1927," Mr. Little said.

Reading from Ossining resident Mary Cheever's book, "The Changing Landscape," published in 1990 by the Society, "Second to none for beauty and appointments, it contains 25 rooms, 18 fireplaces, a library of 5,000 volumes, bowling alleys, billiard room, dining rooms, etc. and is furnished completely with rare taste and elaborateness."

By the late 1940s, the main house was home to the Briarcliff Nursery School, and it later became the property of The King's College, which "drastically renovated many of the rooms for use as dormitories," Mr. Little explained. "Cutting up rooms to make many out of one, putting layer after layer of paint over the elegant woodwork, bricking up fireplaces—it goes on and on."

"Then came the years of emptiness, a sad building with buckling floors and other symptoms of neglect."

Mrs. Bogoni rolled her eyes when recalling what the house looked like just over 20 years ago when she first saw it—and decided that this was a challenge for she and her husband to take on.

"As we look around us here today, we can only think of how proud the Laws would be that once again someone loves this house, and they have created another vision of beauty, elegance, warmth and graciousness," Mr. Little continued. "Our thanks again to the Bogonis for saving it."

Note: Briarcliff historians now think it uncertain that Walter Law was suffering from tuberculosis as stated above. If he was, he did remarkably well to survive 34 years until 1924.

SO WHAT ABOUT THE PANELLING (where this story began)?

Replacement of the Old Meeting Chapel in Kidderminster (built in 1825) was discussed as early as the 1870s but it was not until 1884 that the old building was demolished. Since Law did not purchase his stone built Manor House until 1891, there was a lapse of at least seven years before the panelling was removed from the chapel and installed in Walter Law's library in Briarcliff. Did Walter Law hear about the availability of this panelling during a visit to the town, or from friends or business contacts?

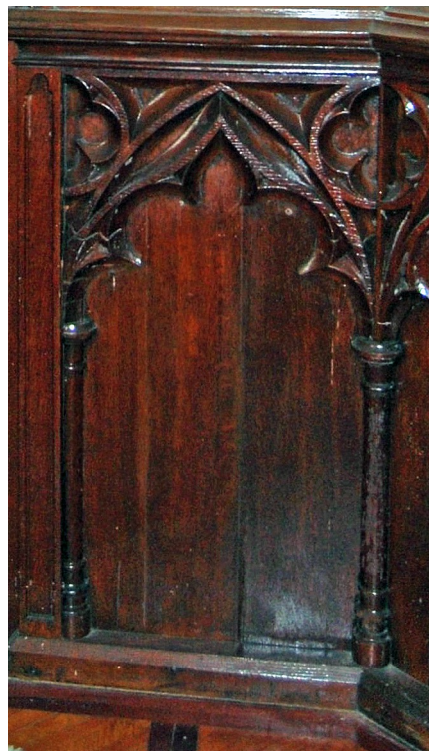
That he did have many contacts within the Kidderminster carpet trade is probable given his family's background. Indeed, we know that one such contact was Michael Tomkinson whom Law visited in 1888 (see Appendix article 2). Tomkinson & Adam's carpet Company was set up in Kidderminster in 1869 with Tomkinson provided the marketing expertise and Adam the engineering skills. Tomkinson often visited New York to visit W & J Sloane & Co. presumably to market his carpets [8]. In particular, Tomkinson went to Yonkers in 1878 and purchased the British Patent rights from Alexander Smith & Sons for the spool axminster process developed by Halcyon Skinner [5]. The Yonkers firm called their carpet 'Moquette', but Tomkinson & Adam were to style the product as 'Royal Axminster'. It made sense that Kidderminster born Walter Law, a partner in Sloane's and directly responsible for their business with Alexander Smith & Sons, would be involved with Tomkinson's business dealings and visits to New York and Yonkers. But he probably also had other local links with Kidderminster business people.

Did Law find out about the panelling before or after the Old Meeting was demolished? Was it removed from the chapel and stored locally in Kidderminster awaiting a buyer or was it transported by Law to America shortly after demolition? If the latter, Walter Law was at that time in an excellent line of business to be able arrange suitable storage whilst he decided what to do with it. Did he acquire the panelling purely for decorative purposes or was there a sentimental aspect to owning artefacts dating back to his time and experiences in Kidderminster as a child? It is doubtful that many, if any, these questions will be fully resolved but we do know that Law kept in touch with the carpet trade in Kidderminster, was in the town in June 1888 and that his son was in Kidderminster in August 1890 (see Appendix Articles 2 & 4).

That he did acquire the panelling, and install at least some of it in his library at Manor House in Briarcliff, is certain. The letter from Percy Dougal to Ernest Hodgkins makes that clear. But what has been the subsequent fate of the panelling? The Bogonis found the house neglected and in need of a lot of attention when they purchased it in 1993. It has already been mentioned that the house had been used as a school for many years and, subsequently, King's College installed student dormitories as well as administrative offices. The house suffered grievous internal adaptation to suit these purposes and it is probable that some of the panelling did not survive these alterations or that they were damaged beyond reclamation.

Photographs (courtesy Briarcliff Manor-Scarborough Historical Society), after sensitive and stylish renovations to the house, show that by 2012 the panelling is no longer in the library room. Nevertheless, the house still retains a wealth of oak features (see photograph to the right) some of which surely must have been part of Law's Old Meeting collection.

There is one more speculative comment that can be made about the fate of the panelling removed from the Old Meeting Chapel – but it is something of a 'long shot'. We do not know how much panelling was taken out of the Chapel but it seems likely that there would have been more than Law's Manor House library could accommodate. If this was case then could excess panelling, over and above any used in the rest of the house, have been used elsewhere?



The 'Oak Room' Briarcliff Lodge in 2000. [Rob Yasinac]

The high-status Briarcliff Lodge Hotel had a chequered history subsequent to Walter William Law's death. The Hotel's success declined significantly in the 1930s and from 1936 to 1954 the building was used as the Edgewood Park School before becoming part of the King's College in 1955 (a Christian liberal arts college). The college closed in the 1990s and the building became near derelict. It was severely damaged by a fire in 2003 and demolished. Rob Yasinac has studied a number of historical aspects related to Briarcliff Manor history and in the year 2000 took a number of photographs of the lodge building [9]. These images illustrate the dereliction and fall from grace to which the former elegant the Hotel building had been subjected.

The photograph above shows the 'Oak room' in Briarcliff Lodge in 2000. Despite its dilapidated condition, this room clearly contained significant amounts of oak panelling.

An earlier picture below [10] captures the stylish glory of the Oak Room panelling in the heyday of Briarcliff Lodge. Undoubtedly the décor matched the expectation of the wealthy clientele attracted to this hotel.



The 'Oak Room' in the 1920s [BMS-SHS & Ms. Sandi Schneider]

Could it just be that some of these oaken features were part of the assorted collection of panelling brought over by Law from the 'Old Meeting', not used in the library of Stone Manor but later retrieved from storage and installed in his new project?

This suggestion might be considered a little fanciful, but the more romantic reader might hope that it contains an element of truth. At any rate, the idea is there to be proved or disproved should further information be uncovered.

REFERENCES

- [1] (a) 'Memorials of the Old Meeting House – Kidderminster' Rev. George Hunsworth (1874)
(b) Historic Kidderminster Report No. 11, 'Baxter Church' by Robert Barber and Bob Millward available on line on the Kidderminster Civic Society's website or in print form at Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service at The Hive in Worcester, Kidderminster Library or the Museum of Carpet in Kidderminster.
- [2] 'The Non-Conformist Registers of Bewdley & Kidderminster, Worcestershire, Births/Baptisms 1727-1837, Burials 1757-1836'. Birmingham & Midland Society for Genealogy & Heraldry (2001)
- [3] Post Office Trade Directory: Kidderminster section, 1850
- [4] Slater's Trade directory: Kidderminster section, 1851
- [5] 'Woven in Kidderminster' Melvyn Thompson (2002)
- [6] Billing's Trade directory: Kidderminster section, 1855
- [7] 'The Changing landscape – A History of Briarcliff Manor-Scarborough' by Mary Cheever published by the Briarcliff Manor-Scarborough Historical Society (BM-SHS) (1990), ISBN 0-914659-49-9; information available on the BM-SHS website; personal communications from Karen Smith, President of BM-SHS; various sources available on the internet.
- [8] Talk by Michael Tomkinson (Carpet manufacturer Michael Tomkinson's Great Great Grandson) at the Museum of Carpet, Kidderminster, 16 April 2016.
- [9] Private Communication from Rob Yasinac who has published photographs on the internet and in his book: Images of America – Briarcliff Lodge, Arcadia Publishing (2004), ISBN: 9780738536200
- [10] Permission to use the photograph showing the Oak Room of Briarcliff Lodge was given by the Briarcliff Manor-Scarborough Historical Society which, in turn, was allowed to scan that photograph and other documents by Ms. Sandi Schneider granddaughter of Chauncey Depew Steele, Sr., who owned (or leased) and ran Briarcliff Lodge during the 1920s, perhaps its most glorious era.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank fellow Kidderminster District Probus Member Roger Baulk for his kind gift of the book 'Memorials of the Old Meeting House' by Rev. George Hunsworth which contained the 'letter' about panelling at Briarcliff. It was this book that initiated investigations that have revealed the story of Walter William Law, and his achievements in U.S.A.

Jean Talbot's advice leading me to articles in Kidderminster Shuttle referring to information about Walter Law and his connections with the carpet industry was particularly helpful.

Karen Smith and the Briarcliff Manor-Scarborough Historical Society (BM-SHS) have been specially helpful in the provision of information about Walter William Law and his life in the USA. They have been generous in giving permission to reproduce photographs from various sources including 'The Changing landscape – A History of Briarcliff Manor-Scarborough. The copy of this latter book, which they so generously donated to the Kidderminster & District Archaeological & Historical Society, has proved invaluable. Photographs reproduced from these source are labelled BM-SHS.

I am grateful to Karen Sharman for her excellent photographs and information about the stained glass windows in the Briarcliff Congregational Church. They are reproduced with her kind permission and (labelled with her name). I am also indebted to Karen for the gift of the interesting booklet '2008 Gala - In celebration of Walter W. Law's 171st Birthday'.

I am indebted to both the Briarcliff Manor-Scarborough Historical Society and Ms. Sandi Schneider for the photograph showing the Oak Room at Briarcliff Lodge in the 1920s (page 13).

Michael Feist, also of the Briarcliff Manor-Scarborough Historical Society, has been adding much information about Walter Law and Briarcliff manor to Wikipedia and I acknowledge, with thanks, the help that this source has provided whilst compiling the account given here.

Rob Yasinac has provided helpful comments and permission to use his photograph of the dilapidated Oak Room in Briarcliff Lodge taken in 2000 (page 12).

Without the above generous contributions this relatively unknown son of Kidderminster and his successful life and career in America, unremarked since 1923, would have remained unrecognised in his native town.

APPENDIX A – Articles found in the Kidderminster Shuttle related to Walter William Law

Here we learn many facets of Walter Law's historical background not only in New York and Briarcliff, but also in Kidderminster. Perhaps one of the most interesting items is related to his pre-emigration time in Kidderminster: his successful electioneering campaign in 1859 where he clearly must have exhibited early abilities to organise, sell ideas and persuade (2. & 3. below). The articles also show that he maintained contact with senior figures in the Kidderminster carpet industry. Michael Tomkinson and John Humphries, in particular, are mentioned but there were undoubtedly others. Of particular interest is the information stating that not long after Walter sailed for New York the rest, or most, of his family emigrated to Australia.

1. Kidderminster Shuttle 6th September 1882 page 5 in "Local News"

Old Kidderminster Men.—The American *Carpet Trade and Review* contains the following mention of former residents in Kidderminster :—"Mr. "W. W. Law, of Messrs. W. & J. Sloane, who has been for many years the partner in personal charge of their extensive wholesale department, leaves New York on the 7th inst., for San Francisco, Cal., whence he will sail for Australia, on the 23rd inst., to visit his father, a venerable gentleman, who has long resided in that distant province, and whom he has not seen in over twenty years. He will be accompanied by his daughter, an interesting young girl, who, with her father, will no doubt find much pleasure in the journey. The entire trade will join in wishing Mr. Law a prosperous voyage and a safe return."

2. Kidderminster Shuttle 30th June 1888 page 5 in "The Carpet trade" section

Among recent Transatlantic visitors to Kidderminster is Mr. Walter W. Law, formerly of this town, but now occupying one of the first positions in the American carpet trade. Mr. Law was the guest of the Mayor (M. Tomkinson, Esq.). We remember the active part this gentleman took, along with the late Mr. Alfred H. Greaves, in the election of Mr. Bristow in 1859. Mr. Daintry, who is a regular visitor, was also in Kidderminster a few days ago.

3. Kidderminster Shuttle 28th June 1890 page 5 in "The Carpet Trade" section

WALTER W. LAW.

In the election of 1859, when Mr. A. B. Bristowe was returned M.P. for Kidderminster, against the future Baron Huddleston, two young men rendered good service to the Liberal cause. Their names were Alfred H. Greaves and Walter W. Law. Both were connected with the Old Meeting, both were Sunday school teachers, both had taken part in founding and conducting the Mechanics' Institute — long since defunct—and both were enthusiastic believers in Progress.

Very shortly after that election the Law family left the town, some of them to our Australian Colonies, but young Walter betook himself to the United States, where he is now described as one of the most widely-known members of the Carpet Trade. The admirably conducted *New York Carpet Trade and Upholstery Review*, in its issue for the 15th of this month, gives a carefully-executed Photogravure of Mr. Walter W. Law, with the following descriptive memoir:—

"We present herewith a portrait of Mr. Walter W. Law, of the firm of W. & J. Sloane, one of the most widely-known members of the carpet trade. Mr. Law has passed his entire life in a carpet atmosphere. Born in 1837, in the great carpet centre, Kidderminster, England, and the son of a dealer in worsted yarns and carpeting, his earliest business experience was acquired in his father's office, and when seeking for a wider field of action he came to New York City in 1860.

"Mr. Law's first engagement in this country was with the rug and mat jobbing firm of Lewis & Julian. He remained with this concern about a year, and then became a salesman in the establishment of W. & J Sloane, who were then doing business at 591, Broadway. The firm's trade was then confined almost exclusively to the retail line, but with the breaking out of the Civil War they begin to give more attention to the wholesale trade, and, as this department of their business continued to increase, Mr. Law's time became more and more occupied with it, and was soon devoted to it exclusively. On January 1, 1866, he was admitted to the firm, and on the same day Messrs. William D. Sloane and John Mitchell also became partners in the concern. In the immense wholesale trade of the firm Mr. Law's remarkable talents for business have found a congenial and conspicuous field, and have acquired for him a national and international reputation. Although he has heretofore preferred to give his attention to business exclusively, it is well-known that Mr Law possesses talents which would have rendered him a man of note in other lines of intellectual effort. He is an orator of more than ordinary ability, and this fact, together with his personal popularity and prominence as a business man, might have made him a notable figure in political life. More than once his fellow citizens at Yonkers, where he has lived for many years, have urged him to accept a nomination for Congress, but hitherto he has declined to do so—a decision much regretted by his business rivals, and likewise by all who know how much men of his ability, character, and business knowledge are needed in our national Legislature."

HYMENEAL.

On the 3rd inst., Miss Georgia Ransom Law, daughter of Mr. Walter W. Law, of the firm of W. & J. Sloane, was married to the Rev. John S. Penman, pastor of the Presbyterian Church at Irvington-on-the-Hudson. The wedding took place at the Presbyterian Church, Yonkers, and was followed by a reception at the home of the bride's father, who has resided at Yonkers a number of years. Among the guests at the reception were Mr. and Mrs. John Sloane, Mr. T. C. Sloane, Mr. and Mrs. A. R. Allen, Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Sloan and Miss Sloan (of Philadelphia), Mr. Warren B. Smith, Mr. and Mrs. W. F. Cochran, Mrs. Alexander Smith, Mr Jay Gould and Miss Gould, Mr. and Mrs. Cyrus Field.

4. Kidderminster Shuttle 23rd August 1890 page 5 in "The Carpet Trade" section

Mr. Walter Law, eldest son of an old townsman, Mr. Walter Law, of Yonkers, America, has been staying with Mr. John Humphries, at Blakebrook House, this week.

5. Kidderminster Shuttle 19th December 1891 page 3

MARRIAGE OF A DAUGHTER OF MR. WALTER WLAW—A brilliant wedding took place at Yonkers, N.Y ., on the evening of the 17th ult., the groombeing Mr. William F. Fottrol, of Philadelphia, and the bride Miss Carolyn Adela Law daughter of Mr. Walter W. Law, of the firm of W. & J. Sloane. The ceremony was performed at Hillcrest, the home of the bride's parents. Rev. John Penman, rector of the First Presbyterian Church of Irvington and brother-in-law of the bride, officiated, assisted by the Rev. Dr. John Reid, of the First Presbyterian Church, Yonkers. Among those present were Mr. and Mrs. John Sloane, Mr. and Mrs. W. D. Sloane, Mr. and Mrs. H. T. Sloane, Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Sloan, Mr. Warren B Smith, Mr. and Mrs. Wm. F. Cochran and Mr. J. C. Carroll.

A Veteran of the Carpet Trade.

The "Yonkers Herald" gives an account of Mr. Walter W. Law, senr., one of the early stockholders in the Alex Smith Co. About 65 years ago a young man went out from Kidderminster to America, with little money and no friends, not to mention the lack of a job. The money was soon gone, although friends were gained and a job obtained. An indomitable will and a high standard of business ethics, coupled with real abilities, combined^d, eventually to make this youth from the other side one of the captains of American industry.

To-day Walter W. Law, senr., is approaching his 87th birthday anniversary. He is resting from his lifetime of labours at his beautiful home at Briarcliff Manor. Surrounded by friends—for his are legion—and, near-by his "boys" Mr. Law is at peace.

For years Mr. Law was a member of the firm of W. and J. Sloane, rug and carpet merchants. It was Mr. Law who, after years of faithful service and after being admitted as a member of the firm, organised and developed the wholesale department, probably the largest anywhere.

Mr. Law first became interested in Yonkers and Yonkers first became interested in Mr. Law when arrangements were made by him with the Alexander Smith and Sons Carpet Company to market the products of the local manufacturing enterprise. This arrangement remained in operation for a number of years, or until a decade or so ago, when the Smith Company organised its own sales department.

He became a stockholder of the Smith Company, and for a number of years served as a member of the Board of Directors.

A son, Walter W. Law, junr., has attained considerable prominence as a lawyer and as State Tax Commissioner under former Governor Miller.

The greater part of Mr. Law's education was gained through reading—reading the works of the great masters of literature. His parents were hardy people and extremely religious. At fourteen the youth entered the employ of a draper, serving as cash-boy in a shop. He read during his spare time, centring his attention on books relating to America. What he gleaned through a perusal of these prompted him, when twenty-two, to come here to seek his fortune.

He left his first post in America, with a carpet jobber, because he learned the concern was selling domestic carpets as imported goods. His next one netted him an increase of \$100 over his former yearly salary of \$400, but the concern failed, and later, upon re-organisation, young Law was one of the few who were retained at lower wages. The Civil War came on, and business went to the bad. The lad determined not to return to Europe and elected to remain here, however great the hardships he endured. He walked the streets day after day looking for work, finally succeeding in procuring employment with the firm of which later he was to become a member. His wages were one dollar per day. Less than five years later he became a partner.

Mr. Law's property holdings in Briarcliff at one time comprised nearly 5,000 acres of land. More than 1,000 head of cattle grazed in the meadows and scores of workers busied themselves on the farmlands. Much of this has been given up during late years because of the advanced age of the owner, but the estate is still one of the marvels of Westchester and is considered in the light of a model for others. It includes the famous Briarcliff Lodge.

While retired from all active participation in business affairs, Mr. Law is a trustee, for life, of W. and J. Sloane and Company.

APPENDIX B. A discussion about alternative suggestions related to the provenance of the panelling installed in Law's Library in Briarcliff Manor.

Added January 2018

Michael Feist, of the Briarcliff Manor-Scarborough Historical Society, has provided evidence, taken from the words of Walter Law himself, which opens a question about the origins of the panelling found in Law's home in Briarcliff Manor. Because the matter is not yet resolved, our original story (given above on page 1) is left intact in the main body of this account. The new information, together with the old, will be examined in this appendix.

It would seem at first sight that there are two mutually exclusive versions offered for the source of wooden panels.

But, before we go further it is important that the relationship between Richard Baxter, the Parish Church of St Mary and All Saints and the Old Meeting Chapel should be understood. Richard Baxter preached, apart from a five year period during the Civil War, at St Mary's from 1641 until he was forced out of the town in 1660 by the authorities, never to return - not even to visit [*'A History of Kidderminster'* Nigel Gilbert, Phillimore, 2004]. Many of his adherents continued to meet in private houses until the congregation built their first Meeting House in the Bull Ring, just off Mill Street, in 1694. (Its latest successor - the Baxter Church is still on that site.) Baxter died the year before that first chapel was opened and clearly never preached there. Based on an incomplete understanding of the history of Baxter's connection with the Meeting House in Kidderminster, it is not uncommon for it to be believed, mistakenly, that Richard Baxter himself founded and/or ministered to that non-conformist religious body in the Old Meeting church in the Bull Ring.

2. The initial attribution. As explained on the first page of this document, our first inkling that wood panelling from Kidderminster had been installed in Walter Law's house in Briarcliff, N.Y. State, came from a letter copied into the front of a copy of the book *'Memorials of the Old Meeting House – Kidderminster'* by Rev. George Hunsworth (1874). The letter from Percy Dougall to Hodgkins (dated 18th May 1942) seemed clear: the panelling in Law's house was sourced from the Old Meeting chapel in Kidderminster after it was demolished in 1884.

2. The new evidence. Michael Feist has found, in the archives of the Briarcliff Manor-Scarborough Historical Society, a transcription of a speech made by Walter Law on the 14th May 1907. It was printed as a Souvenir of his 70th birthday (13th November 1907) for his children. In this address to the 'Men of Briarcliff', Law reminisces about his place of birth: *"But to get back to the story of my life: I must start at the beginning and tell you where I was born. Well, I was born something like seventy years ago in a town in England called Kidderminster (sic!). It was the town where Baxter preached, and I myself was born in the shade of the church where he preached; and I have a room in my house lined with the wood taken from that church, for there is a sacred memory even in the wood that he preached to."*

If we take Law's words literally *'I have a room in my house lined with the wood taken from that church for there is a sacred memory even in the wood that he preached to'* then these words can only mean that the wood in Law's house came from the parish church of St Mary & All Saints; for we know that was where Richard Baxter preached from 1641 until 1660 before he left Kidderminster for good. He had no direct personal connection to the Old Meeting chapel which was not built until after Baxter's death.

There is a problem with this conclusion. Most of the woodwork that was in the parish church in Baxter's time was removed in a major refurbishment in the 1780s some 100 years before Law took his panels to Briarcliff [*1780 is given in 'A History of the New Meeting House, Kidderminster'* by E. D. Priestley Evans (1900), and *1786 given in 'Kidderminster Parish Church'* by Betty Park (2000)].

However, possible explanations as to how the 17th century wood in St Mary's might have survived prior to its acquisition by Walter Law can be found. During the refurbishment in the 1780s the five galleries (erected to satisfy the increased congregation wishing to listen to Baxter) were removed and replaced by three galleries. The pulpit and pews were also discarded. There are various accounts [*'A History of the New Meeting House, Kidderminster'* by E. D. Priestley Evans

(1900)] suggesting that Nicholas Pearsall acquired the pulpit from St Mary's for the New Meeting church.

One belief is that Pearsall commissioned a builder (a Mr Preene) to buy all the old timber from the parish church that had been heaped up outside. Pearsall took what he wanted and the builder retained the rest. Certainly, the New Meeting has owned Baxter's pulpit for many years. An argument that is tenuous, but not beyond the bounds of possibility, is that some of the additional 1780s wood was used in the Old Meeting building of that time and reused in subsequent replacements. Indeed, the Communion table in the present Baxter Church (successor to the Old Meeting) is reputed to have been associated with Richard Baxter.

Furthermore, it is also possible that Law obtained his panelling from one of the later internal refurbishments at St Mary's which occurred in 1847, 1874 or 1877. He may not have known about the interior refurbishment in the 1780s and therefore assumed that the wood he had acquired had been present in the church during Baxter's time.

3. Interpretation and Conclusion

The discovery of Walter Law's address to the Men of Briarcliff has introduced a degree of uncertainty into our knowledge of the origin of the wooden panels installed into his house. The lovely story told by the travelling friend of Percy Dougall now has an apparently conflicting proposal that accounts for the source of the wooden panelling in Law's house. The second version is, perhaps even more interestingly, based on a direct connection to Richard Baxter at Mary's Church in the mid-1600s. Let us consider the two basic alternative suppositions.

One: the account given in Percy Dougall's letter to Ernest Hodgkins states, unequivocally, that the wood panels came from the Old Meeting. However, it is quite possible that the traveller in the USA was unaware of the true history concerning Baxter's time in Kidderminster and the quite separate development of the Old Meeting church. He may well have seen, or had related to him, Law's description of Baxter '*preaching to the wood*' and extrapolated that to a connection with the Old Meeting, rather than St Mary's.

Two: The wood panels date back to at least the 17th century and came from St Mary's Church. However, perhaps it was Walter Law who was unaware that Baxter had not had preached to the early meeting House. In that case, he may have attributed the wood taken out of the Old Meeting to have been 'preached to' by Baxter.

Unfortunately, the phrase '*was born in the shade of the church where he preached*' doesn't help to distinguish to which church he refers. Certainly the lower part of Mill Street possessed houses close to the Old Meeting, but equally there were many houses that were overlooked by St Mary's Church much further up Mill Street. Indeed, in 1861 his parents and family were living in such a position in Mill Street at number 89 although there had been several intervening house removals since Law was born.

Walter Law was widely read in theology, had been an active young member of the Old Meeting congregation and a Sunday School teacher. It would be surprising, but not out of the question, for him to be unaware of the full history of his church. He did leave Kidderminster as a young man of 22 and a definitive history of the Old Meeting was not published until Hunsworth's book in 1874. It would be interesting to know if that book was amongst Walter Law's library collection.

We have no knowledge of the credentials of the anonymous USA traveller friend of Dougall, where he lived or his knowledge of Kidderminster.

There is a potential compromise. If Walter Law's assertion about his wood being preached to by Baxter is to be believed implicitly then we have to accept that the only possible source of his wood is that removed from St Mary's church in the 1780s; and that Law knew, or thought he knew, of the provenance and locations where it had been housed prior to his acquisition of it. Should the Old Meeting have been where St Mary's the panelling was last situated in Kidderminster then both Law's account and that recounted by Dougall are compatible with each other.

In the absence of any known definitive evidence about how Law sourced his wooden panels we are unable to do anything but hypothesize about this question. What is certain is that the panelling came from Kidderminster.