

Frank Hutchinson Peavey

Grain Merchant

“Do well what you are given to do, and, if possible, do it better than anyone else ever did it before.”

This is the advice Frank Hutchinson Peavey gave young men intending to enter business careers in 1900. His audience would have done well to heed his words; at age 50, Peavey was one of the most powerful grain men in the United States.

The son of a lumber and shipping merchant, he had learned business skills early; and growing up in Eastport, Maine, a major New England trade port, he knew the importance of opportunities commerce held. His father died in 1859 leaving nine year-old Frank in financial charge of his mother, brother, and sister. He decided to prepare himself for the business world by continuing in school and selling newspapers on the side.

On the day the Civil War ended, with his dreams, common sense and newspaper money savings, Frank Peavey set out by train for Chicago to see for himself what frontier life had to offer. He took on steady employment, first with a grain firm and then a bank. He had no intentions of going back to Eastport. By the time he was 13, he had seen enough to know that American prosperity, and his own, lay in the agricultural development of the West.

He won a reputation for level-headedness and industry. When a grocer from Sioux City, Iowa came through town looking for a bookkeeper. Peavey was recommended for the job. With 450.00 borrowed, he moved west on the path of ambitious railroad men and hopeful immigrants.



Figure 1. Frank H. Peavey with his mother Mary Drew Peavey, his daughter Lucia Peavey Heffelfinger and grandsons, Frank P. and Totten P. from the Minnesota Historical Society collections

After a year and saving \$2,000, he started a farm implement business. Hoards of settlers were moving in and he believed that there would be a need for farm machinery. Peavey's business skill brought success to the fledgling company until a fire destroyed the building and put the 19 year old entrepreneur in debt for \$1,800.00

Always a visionary, he realized that he could help farmers by building a business with farm implement manufacturers not yet represented in the expanding territory. By 1871, with the partnership of his brother James, Frank Peavey made an important decision. This led to developing the origin of the Peavey Company.



Figure 2. Frank H. Peavey's home called Highcroft - later the home of his son-in-law Frank T. Heffelfinger and daughter, Lucia Peavey of Lake Minnetonka/Wayzata.

From the Minnesota Historical Society collections

In 1874, he decided to accept grain in payment for farm implements. Word spread among the farmers in the area that grain was as good as gold to the Peavey brothers. Soon they found themselves in the grain merchandising business with a small elevator full of wheat.

F. H. Peavey and Company was born. He was among the very first to accept crops for payments of debts of the farmers.

Efficient movement of the grain to the mills or storage facilities was a problem. If he could move the grain more effectively, it would encourage farmers to increase production, resulting in ready markets for increased profits. This one factor made the difference in our agricultural development for all time. Moving grain by rail and Great Lakes cargo ships, four of which Peavey built, were new concepts in the early days of grain merchandising. The farmer now had speedy and ready access to markets.

By 1884, most of Peavey's principal customers were members of the Minneapolis Millers Association consequently Minneapolis was selected as the location for the new headquarters

office. He immediately began expanding his grain buying along the railroads serving Minnesota. By 1885, Peavey helped make it the number one wheat-receiving market in the United States.

He worked closely with the rail companies to extend their lines to the areas of grain production. The Peavey Company serviced the entire Midwest and western part of this nation. This resulted in huge terminal elevators for export. They were among the first to use innovative means for grain transport, moving from horse drawn wagons to providing elevators that were collection points along the entire rail system servicing the grain growing areas of this state and those throughout the west.

Soon grain haulers all over the Midwest caught on to the terminal storage system. They built their own smaller elevator storage facilities along rail lines, many of which Peavey later bought.

Storage of large amounts of grain had become a problem due to the fact that through the 1890s all elevators in the United States were built of wood, making for tremendous fire hazards. Rebuilding was time consuming and costly.

Grain prices went up to cover the cost of financial risk involved in grain storage. After three years of investigation into a better storage solution, Frank Peavey determined that the Romanian style of elevator, made of concrete, would do the job nicely.

An experimental 'tank' was constructed in Minneapolis. The entire structure was poured in one continuous motion. This was the first use of the 'slip form' technique for forming concrete container structures for grain.

The elevator, jeered at by local skeptics and called Peavey's Folly, was ready for the test early in 1899. Grain men in Minneapolis predicted the new concrete structure would burst like a balloon. On the day of the test spectators gathered to watch a perfectly uneventful and new grain storage and handling process. The original concrete elevator, Peavey's Folly still stands today in St. Louis Park, Minnesota and is on the National Historic Register.

After this success, Peavey constructed a 3.3 million bushel concrete storage terminal elevator in Duluth in 1900, the first of its kind in North America. At the time of his sudden death in 1901, Frank Peavey's company owned five line elevator companies with a total capacity



Figure 4. Peavey grain elevator built in 1900 still in operation today [http://www.allposters.com/-sp/Peavey-](http://www.allposters.com/-sp/Peavey-Grain-Elevator-Duluth-Minnesota-Posters_i6078259_.htm)

[Grain-Elevator-Duluth-Minnesota-Posters_i6078259_.htm](http://www.allposters.com/-sp/Peavey-Grain-Elevator-Duluth-Minnesota-Posters_i6078259_.htm)

of 10.5 million bushels among the 440-odd elevators. Seventeen 'terminal elevators' gathered and stored grain owned by the company. Peavey was known from coast to coast as the Elevator King.

When Frank H. Peavey died suddenly in December 1901, the headlines proclaimed that the "Elevator King" had taken out a million dollar insurance policy the previous year, having paid only one \$48,000.00 premium. The only larger policy was held by George Vanderbilt.

He did not think that he was worth that amount, but that the company was. Peavey saw it as a means of guaranteeing the uninterrupted success of the company should it be deprived suddenly of his leadership. The Peavey Company was his beneficiary. It continued under the leadership of his sons-in-law, Frank Totton Heffelfinger and Frederick Brown Wells.

Peavey lived a life devoted to the service of others. His highest devotion was reserved for his newsboys

Peavey did not forget that when his father died, leaving the nine-year-old to help support the family, his first business venture was the selling of newspapers.

He held a banquet for the 'newsies' each year where he lectured the boys about saving their money. To encourage their thrift, he offered to add one dollar to every dollar each of them placed in the bank.

Frank H. Peavey led a company moved by 'integrity, honesty and fairness in all dealings.'

Frank H. Peavey married Mary Wright in 1892, resulting in the birth of three



Figure 3. The Peavey-Haglin Experimental Concrete Grain Elevator built 1899-1900

children, Lucia Louise Peavey Heffelfinger (1873-1941), George Wright Peavey (1877-1913) and Mary Drew Peavey Wells (1875 - 1924).

References;

Peavey Centennial Spring Review, 1975
Grain the Entrepreneurs, Charles W. Anderson, 1931, p. 51-52-56
The Grain Merchants; An Historical History of the Minneapolis Grain Exchange, David Kenney, 2006; p. 44, 45, 189, 48, 82, 112, 137, 139, 145, 148, 183.
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Minnesota Colonial Dame

Mary (Mimi) Morrison Bendickson, great granddaughter of Frank H. Peavey



Figure 5. The Morrison family: Adrienne Morrison, Mimi Morrison Bendickson, Truxtun Morrison Jr, and Truxtun Morrison(Truck Sr.)

As a child, Mimi grew up listening to stories about her father's family. Lucia, Mimi's great grandmother, hosted a Christmas party for the entire community at their home each year, complete with a Christmas play, caroling, and refreshments. Many of the principal actors were Wayzata adults and children, along with family!

What a wonderful legacy of memories.

Major John Mason

Colonial Ancestor
of Mary (Mimi) Morrison Bendickson and Adrienne Stork Morrison

Major John Mason was born in England in the year of 1600 and raised into a military life, serving in the English army, under Sir Thomas Fairfax.

Mason immigrated to America in 1632 and settled first in Dorchester, Massachusetts. He soon represented the town in the General court. Within five years of emigrating, he had joined those moving west from the Massachusetts Bay Colony to the settlements along the Connecticut River, which would in time, become the Connecticut Colony.

Tensions arose in that area between the settlers and the dominant American Indian tribe, the Pequot. A member of the Manisseans, a part of the Pequot nation, killed a trade representative of Massachusetts Bay.

In May of 1637, an expedition that included John Mason and ninety men fulfilled their orders from the Massachusetts Bay colony to settle the conflict with the Pequot people.

The men confronted the Pequot tribe and demanded that the murderer of the trade representative be turned over. When they refused, the English expedition burned their wigwams and food stores, thereby inciting the Pequot Nation. The tragic conflict, known as the Mystic Massacre, escalated and ended in the bloodshed that resulted in the overthrowing and destroying of the prestigious and powerful Pequot and their fort near Mystic River. While Mason was undeniably successful in his leadership of resolving conflicts in the colonies, he dealt with his enemy using a very heavy hand, as was unfortunately exhibited in the Pequot War.

The colonists erected a life-sized monument of Major Mason to commemorate the war. In later years his relationships with the Pequot was one of fairness and justice, which helped to restore Mason's reputation of vengeful behavior. See the addendum.



Figure 6. John Mason

Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Mason_\(c._1600%E2%80%931672\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Mason_(c._1600%E2%80%931672))

After the Pequot War, Mason moved his family to Saybrook, Connecticut in company with the Rev. John Warham, Henry Wolcott and other prominent settlers of that town. He became known as a man of renowned abilities in community leadership that included settling citizen conflicts, securing the inhabitants from Indian attacks

and for his expertise in settling colony boundary decisions. He soon was elected Assistant Magistrate of the Connecticut Colony in 1642.

Resources:

History of the Town of Stonington, From its First Settlement in 1649 to 1900, p. 460, 461. Richard Anson Wheeler, New London, CT 1900.

The Life and Times of Major John Mason of Connecticut: 1600 – 1672, New York 1925, Louis B. Mason.

New England Marriages Prior to 1700, Clarence Almon Torrey, Baltimore Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc.

The Great Migration Begins: Immigrants to New England 1620-1633, Vol. I-III.

John Mason, *New England Historic Genealogical Registration (NEHGR)* 121:11.

Minnesota Colonial Dames Descendants

Mary (Mimi) Morrison Bendickson and Adrienne Stork Morrison.

Addendum

In 1889, the statue of Major John Mason was erected at Mystic, Connecticut. The statue was placed at the intersection of Pequot Avenue and Clift Street in Mystic, Connecticut (actually within the town of Groton), near what was thought to be one of the original Pequot forts. Over the years, there was considerable controversy involving the statue dedicated to John Mason and his role in the Pequot War. It remained there for 103 years.

After studying the sensitivity and appropriateness of the statue's location near the historic massacre of Pequot people, a commission chartered by Groton, Connecticut voted to have it relocated, with a new plaque that eliminated the interpretive language on the original plaque that was especially offensive to American Indians. The current plaque reads:

Major John Mason

Born 1600 in England immigrated to New England in 1630

A founder of Windsor and Saybrook and Norwich

Magistrate and Chief Military Officer
of the Connecticut Colony

Deputy Governor and Acting Governor

A Patentee of the Colonial Charter

Died 1672 in Norwich

Erected at Mystic in 1889

by the State of Connecticut

Relocated in 1996 to Respect a Sacred Site
of the 1627 Pequot War.

Today, Major John Mason's statue stands on Palisado Green looking toward First Church and its ancient cemetery in Windsor Connecticut.

First Church's early Puritan membership dates back to the late 1630s. The name Palisado is from the word palisades for a wooden enclosure that the first settlers built for protection.

To the south of the statue is the Windsor Historical Society in the Strong-Howard home built in 1758. Other historic homes over 200 years old surround the green.

As one of the early settlers of Windsor, it is appropriate that Major John Mason continues to guard the peace of this historic town.



Figure 7. The statue of Major John Mason on the Palisado Green in Windsor Connecticut

<https://minerdescent.com/2010/07/24/john-mason/>