

Mark Leavenworth

1774 - 1849

"He was a man of untiring industry and indomitable energy and perseverance."

- Dr. Henry Bronson

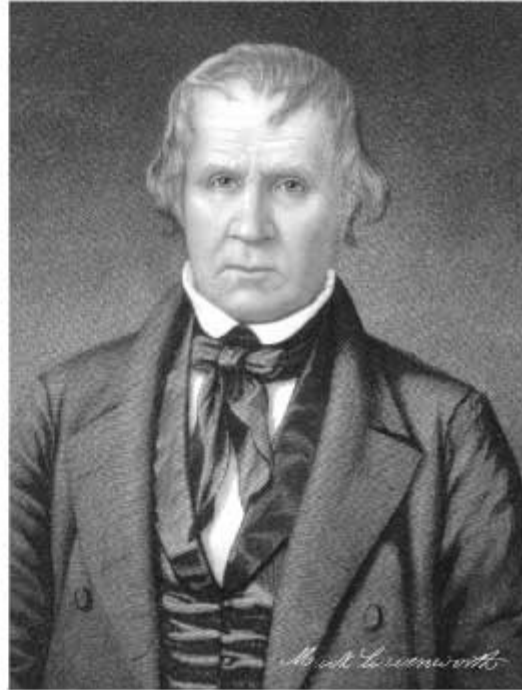
Mark Leavenworth, the clock worker, was born on August 30, 1774 in New Haven. He was one of the pioneers of Waterbury's glorious industrial history.

When Leavenworth was ten years old his parents separated and he moved to Vermont with his father, Jesse, a Yale graduate and a colonel during the Revolutionary War. In 1788, disliking Vermont, Mark walked three hundred miles to New Haven to live with his uncle. He later moved to Waterbury and served an apprenticeship with Jesse Hopkins in making buckles. In 1795, he began his own business of fashioning axes, bayonets and other steel articles. In 1801, Leavenworth and his brother Frederick who later would be a partner in the concern of Leavenworth, Hayden & Scovill, traveled to Georgia to sell their wares. On returning in 1810, Mark Leavenworth's interest turned to clocks.

A contemporary of area clock makers Eli Terry, Seth Thomas and Chauncey Jerome, Leavenworth would become Waterbury's most famous clock maker, the largest clock fabricator in town for twenty years. In 1811, he purchased a third interest in the firm of Lawson & Sperry, a creator of wooden movement tall clocks. After three years Leavenworth bought out his partners and began selling both clocks and movements to customers and competitors. He built shelf clocks, mostly of the pillar and scroll type, incorporating many of the improvements introduced by Terry. They were sold widely, with clocks peddled deep into the South as early as 1820.

For a time his establishment, located on Great Brook near Cherry Street, was thriving. His clocks were more crudely made and finished than Terry's, but they were serviceable and a marketing success. His son, Benjamin, joined the operation in 1825 and four years later his son-in-law, Green Kendrick became an associate. Their business was the largest wood movement manufacturer in New Haven County and, according to *The Clocks of Mark Leavenworth*, sold 13,504 clocks from 1824-1829.

Leavenworth continued his enterprise until 1836 when wooden clocks were superseded by brass. Ever the entrepreneur, he went into partnership with his son-in-law Gordon Sperry and William Spencer to manufacture gilt buttons. Leavenworth's last venture was the crafting of cloth buttons.



He was a member of a legendary Waterbury family. His grandfather, Mark, was the minister of the Congregation Society for fifty-eight years and his uncle, William, was also a Waterbury clock maker and businessman. His son, Melinas, was an Assistant Surgeon of the U.S. Army and a respected botanist who had a genus of plants named in his honor and a nephew, Elisha, was the chief financial backer of the Waterbury Industrial School and the Young Women's Friendly League, now Girls Inc. which is located in his former house on Park Place.

Though not always fortunate in business, Leavenworth would never let his spirit be crushed. He did not attain the stature of Terry or Thomas but was instrumental in the development of Waterbury's second largest industry. Dr. Henry Bronson characterized Leavenworth, who died September 5, 1849, as kind of heart, public spirited, "...well-informed, social, sensible and shrewd".