

# Ira C. Kimball

A Bethel Village leader

BETHEL MAINE HISTORY

## The Bethel Journals

February 8, 2013



Ira C. Kimball 1816-1866

### Ira Kimball became well known for:

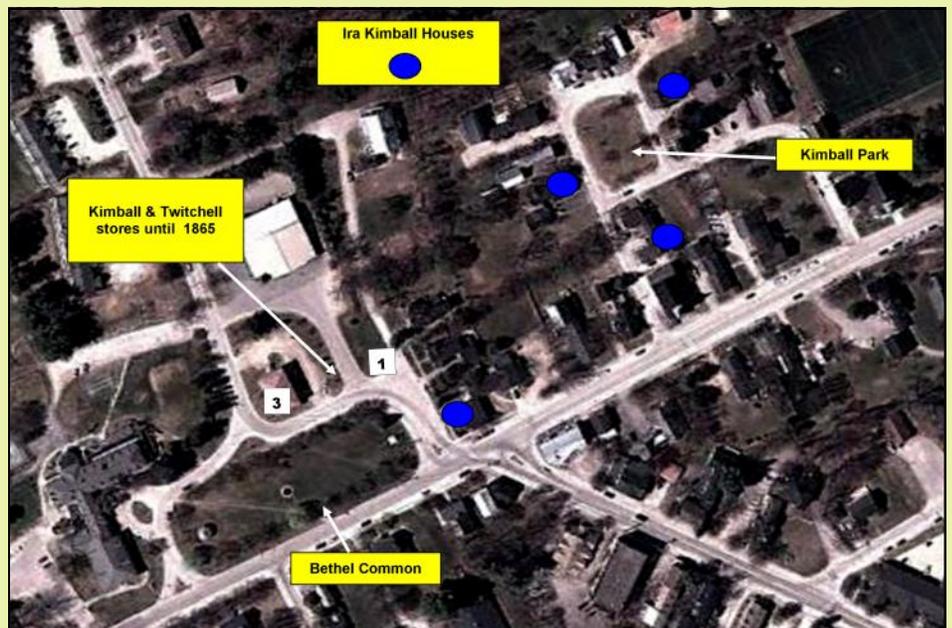
- Enterprising Bethel trader
- Promoter and organizer of the country's new Republican Party in Bethel and Oxford County
- Supporter and member of new Universalist Church society
- Establishing the Kimball Park residential neighborhood
- Builder of the Kimball Block of stores in 1865
- His surviving hallmarks —Kimball Park and Chapman Inn

### It's All in the Family

The Ira Kimball era can best be understood if the reader sees it as a second stage of the buying, real estate swapping and building that took place along the north, west and south sides of the Bethel Common beginning in 1797 when Eleazer Twitchell put up the first house on the western edge of the Common at the crest of the slope leading to Mill Brook.

After Twitchell's new house called the "Castle" went up, Edmund Merrill became the next most prominently identified builder by virtue of his purchasing land on the west side of the Common, erecting his own house then designing and putting up Bethel Hill's first hotel.

Between Twitchell and Merrill came James Walker; he was the first inde-



**Ira Kimball's Neighborhood Part 1—** On the map site #1 was built by Edmund Merrill for his home; then Ira Kimball's home and later occupied by Winslow Heywood; site #3 The Bethel House later Lovejoy House and in the 1860's the F.S. Chandler House. Hotel, stores and home were lost in April 1865 fire

pendent store keeper; he came to Bethel in 1799. Walker operated a store out of one room of the "Castle" then from his own small store on the west side of the Common followed by "stands" on the Common's south side and on the north side, the latter site was purchased by Robert A. Chapman in 1832 who later sold his property to Ira Kimball.

In 1806, James Walker's property (on the west side of the Common) was taken over by his brother Gardiner Walker – the property then included a store which was on the site of one which would later be occupied by Ira Kimball for twenty five years.

In 1823 when Eleazer Twitchell's heirs prepared a deed conveying the Common land parcel to the public, James Walker still owned land which bordered the Common at both the north and south ends.

Although Ira Kimball goes down in history as one of Bethel's most successful traders, Kimball Park is today's most visible reminder of his accomplishments in the growth of Bethel village.

Ira Kimball was born in Bridgton on January 29, 1816. His father was Israel Kimball and his mother was Phebe Hazen Kimball. Ira was the youngest of eight children all of whom were born in Bridgton. In 1824, Israel Kimball bought land in the Middle Intervale and the family moved to Bethel. Israel Kimball died five years later in 1829. As the Kimball families in the Middle Intervale grew in number their "neighborhood" lay on both sides of the road south of the Carter homesteads.

Ira probably attended the nearest district school (#11) but there is no mention of him attending either the Bethel Academy or Gould.

Ira most likely worked on the family farm while growing up and left there for Bethel Hill about 1836. He probably "apprenticed" in an established store.



**KIMBALL PARK**  
Original owners/builders

Legend:

- A— Ira Kimball circa 1857;
- B - Daniel Twitchell circa 1857;
- C—Ira Kimball 1861;
- D— John Phillips circa 1867;
- E-Asa Knight circa 1865;
- F— William Hastings 1890;
- G— also William Hastings 1890;
- H— Ira Kimball circa 1861;
- I—Pat McCloskey;
- K—John Rowe (?) in the 1860's.



**Kimball Park circa 1900**

Rosalind Rowe Chapman used this photo for her article about Park Street homes, their builders and later residents in the Spring 1982 edition of the Bethel Historical Society publication The Bethel Courier



Kimball was probably one of the seven other members. Joseph A. Twitchell (1817-1890) was a grandson of the Bethel village founder, Eleazer Twitchell, and "no man was better known in the village or in the west parish of Bethel".

On March 15, 1848 Ira Kimball married Salome Burnham Chapman -his second wife . The new Mrs. Kimball was the daughter of Eliphaz Chapman, Jr. and granddaughter of the Rev. Eliphaz Chapman who had suggested that Sudbury Canada be named Bethel upon its incorporation as a town in 1796.

About 1850 (sources I found listed no exact date) Ira Kimball bought the property owned by Robert A. Chapman north of the Common that Chapman had acquired from James Walker in 1832. Purchase included buildings which Kimball expanded and re-modeled into what is in 2013 known as the Chapman Inn. Dimensions of this property extended 20 rods north from the Common's boundary which would have placed the north boundary at the current South Park Street.

Children born of the marriage between Ira Kimball and Salome Chapman were: (1) Anna Flora born 1850 and died 1887; (2) Carrie E., born 1854 and who in 1877 married Charles Hersey; (3) Jessie Frances, born 1858 and married John M Ostrander in 1880; (4) Minnie, born July 27, 1860 but only lived a little over five months.

After Kimball remodeled the Robert Chapman house and store (1851-1852) into a larger residence he moved his family from their home on the Northwest corner of the Common into this new house.

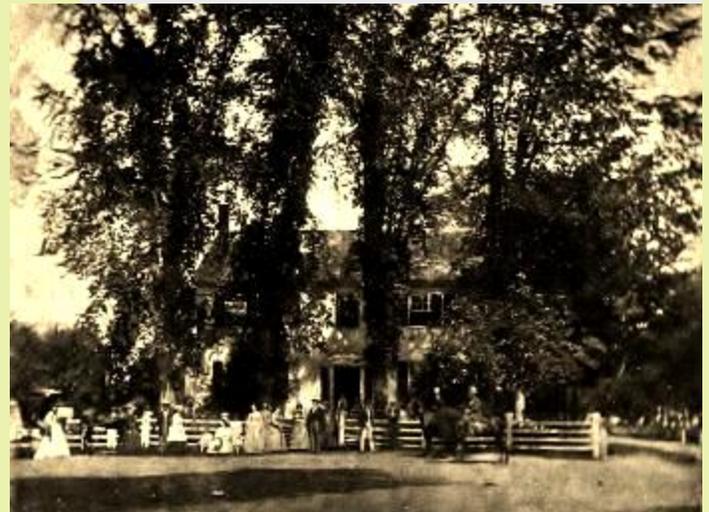
Winslow Heywood moved into the now vacant Ira Kimball house on the west side of the Common.

Heywood's first wife had died in 1851, and he had moved to Bethel where he married Ira Kimball's sister, Phebe, widow of the late Ezra T. Russell.

1853 – The Universalist Society built the church which is now the Nazarene Church. In 1892 an addition was built on the rear of the church building which became the vestry. Ira Kimball was



Kimball Park neighborhood in 1911—by that date all of the Kimball Park homes had been built. To fit everyone into the space there are a few inaccuracies.



The Ira Kimball family's home after Ira had rebuilt the store/house building used by Robert A. Chapman into a much larger house on the same site. Robert Chapman was the one who set out the elms trees in this photo. Bethel Historical Society photo — estimated date circa 1860.

one of the contributors to the church building fund. He became “one of the most faithful and active members.”

During 1854 – 1857, Ira Kimball “aided in the organization of the Republican party in Bethel and Oxford County”; in 1856 and 1857 he was elected to the state legislature as the first Republican from Bethel to be so elected”. Kimball received 320 votes versus 90 for his opponent who was from Grafton. The same year, 1856, Hannibal Hamlin was elected Governor of Maine after joining the new Republican Party; until then he had been a staunch Maine Democrat.

In November 1856, Ira Kimball and Daniel Twitchell\* bought the land behind the new church and put up single family houses. Later these houses were connected. (The 1880 Bethel map shows the houses joined together as they are in 2013) This was the first house Ira had built in the yet to be developed Kimball Park; the Kimball family did not live there, however. The two houses are separately owned in 2013.

By the end of the 1850’s Bethel Hill marketplace had grown considerably since the first house on the Common had been erected by Eleazer Twitchell in 1797. Bethel’s 1858 map shows the village of Bethel Hill to have grown into a community more than large enough to support a number of shop keepers. Within a half-mile radius of the Common (Kimball’s store) there were more than a hundred homes, shops specializing in everything from general merchandise to hats and shoes to home furnishings to shoeing horses, schools, and churches – but no banks.

In all, for 1858 mapping purposes Ira Kimball owned or operated five properties in the village – a good reflection of his ability as a businessman. Ira Kimball’s name appeared on one property on lower Main Street (known more recently as the Muriel Whitney or the former Herb Lyon place), plus he is shown as owning the house now (2013) the Chapman Inn, a store just west of the Common, and the land which he soon developed into Kimball Park. He also owned the house immediately behind the Universalist Church which he had built as an investment home.

1859 – A second Universalist group was organized consisting of 43 members who included Ira Kimball, O’Neil Robinson, Charles and Oliver Mason, Eber Clough, Clark S. Edwards, Albert Stiles, Albert Gerrish, Moses Pattee, Joseph Twitchell and Dr. Almon Twitchell.

\* Daniel A. Twitchell (1831-1863) a trader, town treasurer in 1858, Bethel postmaster in 1861 until he died in 1863 of diphtheria , in 1851 member of the Eagle Division of the Order of the Sons of Temperance.



Ira Kimball’s house as it appeared about 1890— owned then by William E. and Kate Skillings. This photo appeared on the cover of Randy Bennett’s Illustrated History of Bethel published in 1991. Note that the view shows off the Universalist and Congregational Church steeples.

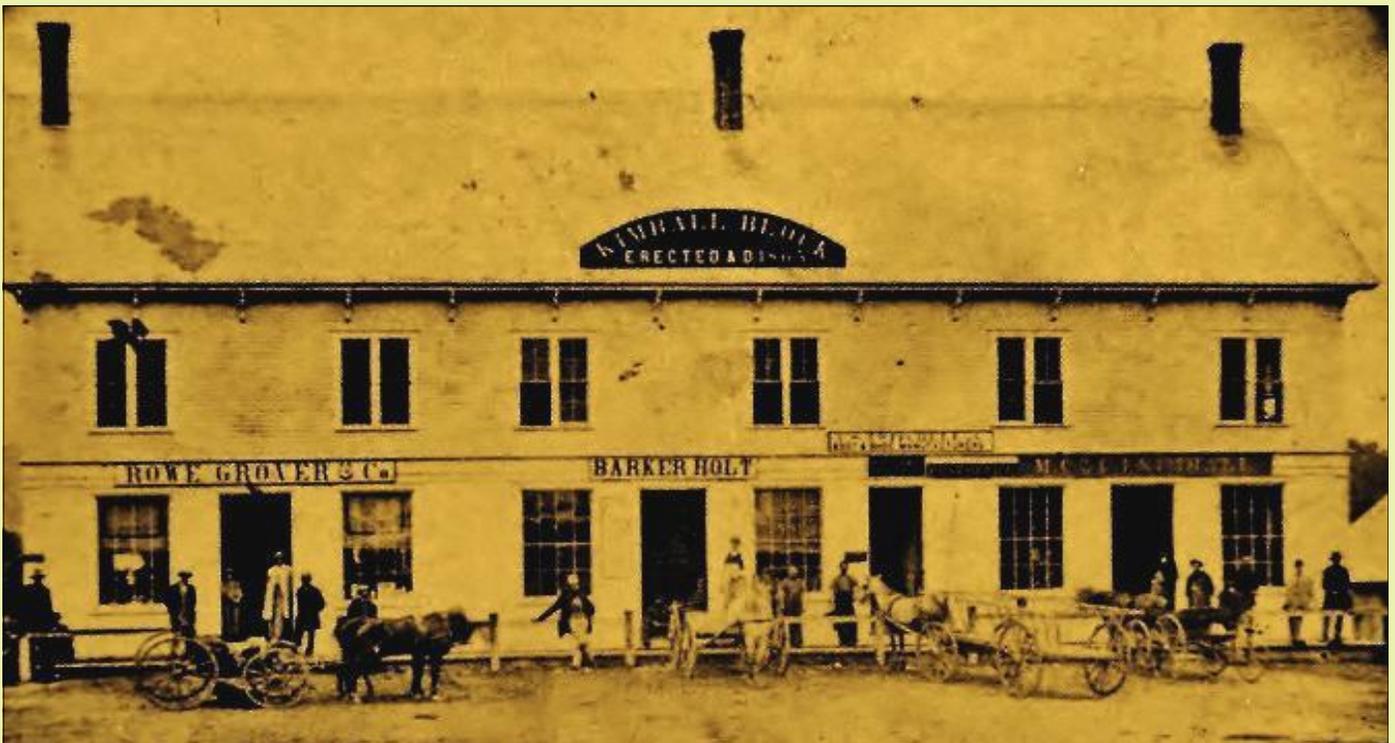
1861, December 21, Melville C. Kimball, Ira Kimball's son, was mustered as a Sergeant into the Fourth Maine Battery; he was promoted to Second and then First Lieutenant; he was discharged for disability December 21, 1864. Melville Kimball was one of 17 Bethel men who held a commission during the Civil War.

Probably after his discharge in December 1864 Melville Kimball married Cyrene Straw Robinson, youngest daughter of O'Neil Robinson.

Also in 1861 Ira Kimball put up two houses in his park (today we would call them "spec houses") – one on the south and one on the north side of the by now laid out park circumferential road which connected in the park area with Church Street. (See the maps, page 3.) The two Kimball built homes were taken by Albert and William Gerrish. In 1854, the Gerrishes had built a steam operated saw mill on the Sanborn Farm. They did not stay in Bethel long and moved to Berlin, NH.

Years later in 1889, in possibly an "all in the family" interest, Samuel Philbrook who had become a son-in-law of Ira Kimball bought the house in Kimball Park built by Ira in 1861, made extensive repairs before selling it - more recently identified as the home of Dana and Carolyn Brooks.

**THE KIMBALL BLOCK**, built in 1865, an old picture by Barker, a Bethel photographer. This illustrates the activities of 90 years ago, as some of the enterprises shown here are known to have moved before 1870. The signs indicate that the occupants at that time were: Rowe, Grover & Co., Barker Holt; A. S. Twitchell, boot and shoe manufacturers; E. Foster's law office; Post Office; and M.C. and C. J. Kimball. Eva Bean article—1957 Citizen



During these years, Ira Kimball contracted a disease which was not identified in any accounts of his activities in the middle 1860's – possibly it was tuberculosis. Diphtheria was also prevalent at this time resulting in a number of deaths in Bethel.

1865 The Big Fire – Buildings on the west side of the Common were lost in an April fire. These included the first Bethel House, at the time of the fire called the Chandler Hotel, the Kimball and Twitchell store block and the home of Winslow Heywood. Soon after the fire, Ira Kimball had a new store building going up on generally the same site as the one just destroyed. Although modified over the years, it lasted until torn down by the town in 1965 to allow building a new fire station.

Also in 1865 Melville Kimball was appointed Bethel's post-master for three years with the Bethel post office housed in the new Kimball Block. Following Winslow and Phebe Heywood's loss of their home overlooking the Common in the 1865 fire, they were able to move into the Ira Kimball house on lower Main Street.

A very general comment in William Lapham's history of Bethel notes that due to advancement of Kimball's disease he went south hoping to cure himself but he died in 1866. Possibly just before he died, Ira and Joanna Kimball's daughter, Emily J., married Samuel D. Philbrook; she was Philbrook's second wife. Ira Kimball was only 50.

In 1872 Melville Kimball was elected Bethel's town treasurer. He was 32 years old. If he was still operating a Kimball store in the new Kimball Block, he would have left by 1878 when Ceylon Rowe took over the northern store in the block. Melville Kimball probably assisted the widow Kimball after his father died and may have arranged the sale of the Kimball house to William and Kate Skillings about 1878. The 1880 Bethel map lists the house belonging to Skillings.

The 1880 map of Bethel also shows that Mrs. Winslow Heywood was in the house on lower Main Street.

Ira Kimball's accomplishments speak for themselves.



Kimball Block in a photo taken after 1902 when a fountain had been added to the Common. A Bethel Hose Company occupied the center section of the building.



Top—Kimball Block in 1931, and above in 1962; it was torn down in 1965 making way for a fire station

Sources: The History of Bethel, Maine by William B. Lapham and Park Street by Rosalind Rowe Russell, Spring 1982, The Bethel Courier published by the Bethel Historical Society. Photos: Bethel Historical Society, Bethel Journals and Google Earth images.

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