

TAMMANY HALL AND FENWICK HALL© (Part II)

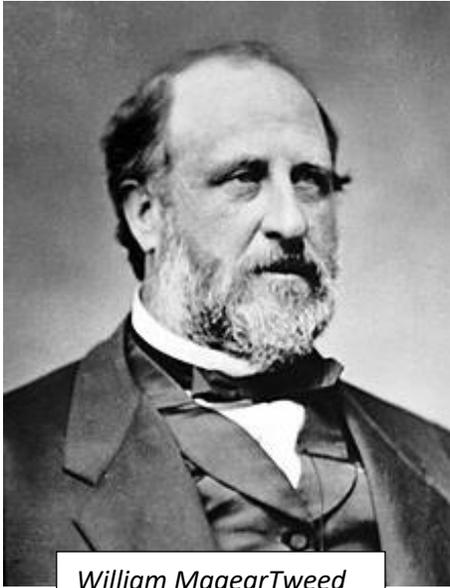
(By Lamar LeMonte OSHS July 2021)

Tammany Hall

New York City's **Tammany Hall** had a long, colorful and corrupt history. It was also known as the **Society of St. Tammany**, the **Sons of St. Tammany**, or the **Columbian Order**. It was a New York City political organization, incorporated in 1789 as the **Tammany Society**.



Its original mission did not embrace Loyalists, any foreigners, and especially not Catholics. It is ironic that Tammany Hall ultimately became famous for helping immigrants, most notably Irish Catholics, rise in American politics. From the 1850's onward, it controlled most of the New York Democratic Party's political nominations and political patronage, both in the city and the state. Its loyal members, predominately Irish Catholic ward bosses, appreciated its ability to help cut through regulatory and legislative bureaucracy to facilitate rapid economic growth. Many non-Irish immigrants were also loyal members of Tammany Hall. In the age of corrupt, post-Civil-War profiteers and Gilded Age robber barons, Tammany's influence and political power, perhaps not surprisingly, also became an engine for large-scale graft and corruption.



William Magear Tweed

(Right) Boss Tweed. "As long as I count the Votes, what are you going to do about it?"



That corruption reached its height during the leadership of William "Boss" Tweed. He was eventually tried and convicted of embezzlement and died in the Ludlow Street Jail in 1878. But the Tammany Hall power and corruption did not end with Tweed.

Richard Croker

He was a rough, tough Irish immigrant in New York City. In his youth he became a valued member of the *Fourth Avenue Tunnel Gang*, a street gang that attacked teamsters and other workers that gathered around the Harlem line's freight depot. Croker eventually became the gang's leader. A Tammany member took notice of him when Croker won a public boxing match by knocking out all of the opponent's teeth. Croker became a member of Tammany Hall and was well known for being a *repeater* at elections, voting multiple times at the polls. Croker ultimately became head of Tammany Hall. Like his predecessor, Boss Tweed a decade earlier, he completely controlled that organization which still controlled New York City politics and state government.

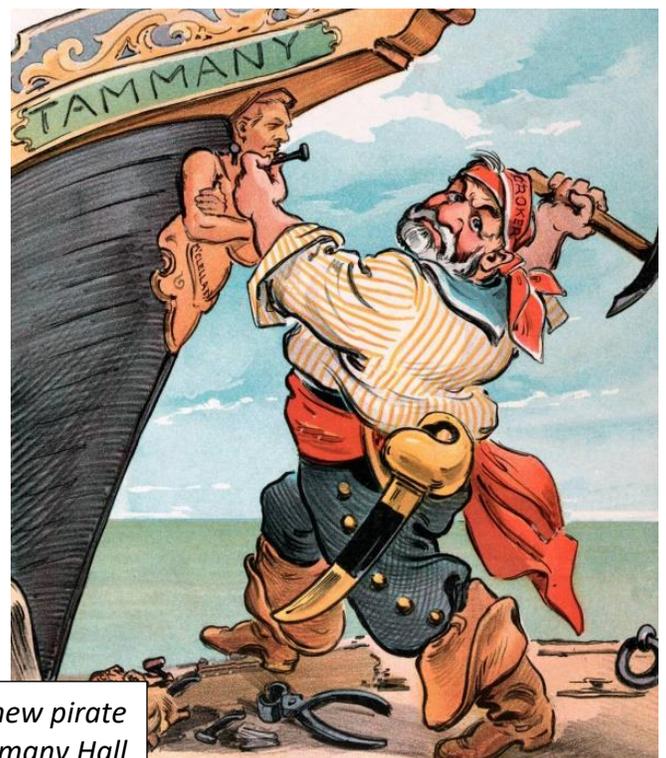


Croker's Tammany Hall also controlled the NYC Police Department and this allowed Croker free reign in collecting bribe money from the owners of brothels, saloons and illegal gambling dens. While heading Tammany, he was also a partner in a real estate firm from which he made substantial money. This money was often derived from sales under the control of the city judges.



Other income came by way of gifts of stock from street railway and transit companies. Payoffs from vice protection operations also contributed to his income. As Tammany's boss he was a multi-millionaire, with homes in Ireland and Palm Beach, Florida, as well as a summer cottage in Fenwick.

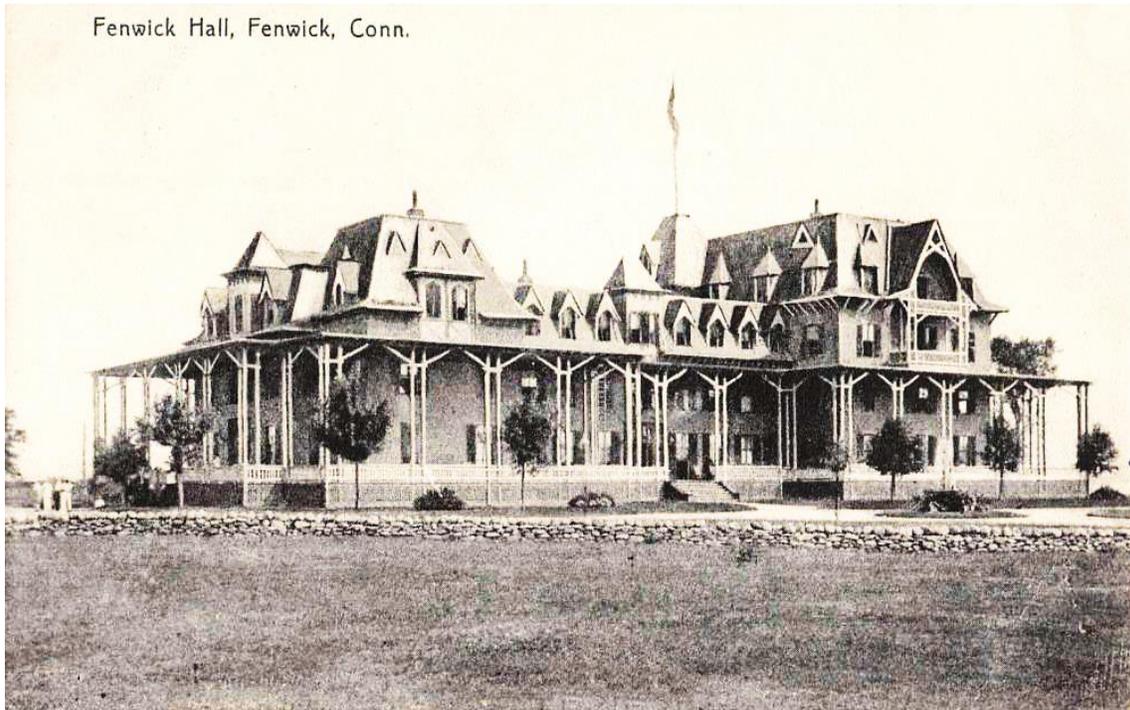
Earlier in his Tammany career, Croker had been charged with the murder of John McKenna during a fight on election-day in New York City. Croker was tried and after the jury was "undecided" about his guilt, Croker went free.



Croker (right) portrayed as the new pirate in charge of Tammany Hall

The Fenwick Connection

While Boss Croker was the head of Tammany Hall, he bought one of the summer vacation cottages in Fenwick, probably in the late 1870's. It was often reported in the local papers that he and his good friend David B. Hill, governor of New York, were regular dinner guests at Fenwick Hall.



Another frequent dinner guest was a New York City hotel owner named Edward "Ned" Stokes. Possibly that was when and where the notion of Stokes buying Fenwick Hall originated.



But it was more likely that Croker had conversations with Stokes at the famous Hoffman House, the New York City hotel Stokes owned and where Stokes lived. The Hoffman House had long been the unofficial headquarters of Tammany Hall associates and other city power brokers. Stokes was two years younger than Croker, both were young multi-millionaires, living large in New York City's power-circles, and both were somewhat infamous.

Edward “Ned” Styles Stokes

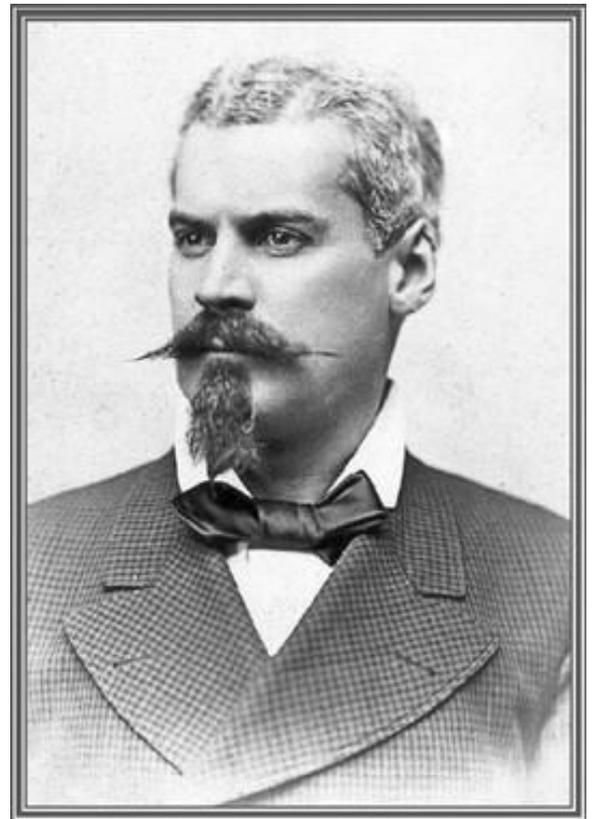
When Stokes purchased Fenwick Hall in 1887, his reputation, without doubt, preceded him.

Twelve years earlier he had been released from Sing Sing prison and the story behind his crime had been in all the press and was still legendary.

He was also the owner, with two other partners, of the Hoffman House, perhaps one of the most famous New York City hotels. He lived there for over two decades, both before and after his incarceration. Whether he also lived in Fenwick Hall is not known, but he very likely stayed in the hotel on numerous occasions and perhaps spent his summers there, avoiding the New York City heat and humidity.

Ned Stokes’ crime and his hotel are both worthy of more details because they were emblematic of the life of the robber barons, the Gilded Age, Victorian sensibilities, and New York City’s Tammany Hall power-politics and corruption. But the first story usually told about Stokes is how he purchased Fenwick Hall.

Stokes' bidding rival for the bankrupt hotel was Lawrence S. McMahon, bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hartford, who wanted Fenwick Hall for an orphanage. On the day of the auction, the story is that Stokes arrived with his Tammany Hall pal, Richard Croker, and persuasively invited the bishop's agents to



Fenwick Hall

take a ride on Stokes’ yacht, which conveniently breaks down offshore. Stokes may have been on the yacht while his agent was sent to the auction to make the purchase. Regardless, the bishop’s agents missed the auction and Stokes became the owner of Fenwick Hall.



One newspaper account described Ned Stokes as follows: *He was a notably handsome man, with regular features, keen gray eyes and a fine head of curly black hair, that then had in it just one splotch of that white which by the time he was 35 had spread over his entire poll, giving him that curious look of a young old man*

that made him always observed in the streets of New York even by those who didn't know who he was.



Decades later perhaps the screen writers had read that description when they cast Cary Grant to play Ned Stokes in the movie, *The Toast of New York*.



Cary Grant, Edward Arnold and Frances Farmer in "The Toast of New York."

A 1937 movie, "The Toast of New York," was a fictionalized version of Ned Stokes' famous love-triangle and crime.

Edward Arnold starred as Jim Fisk and Frances Farmer as Josie Mansfield. Ned Stokes was the basis for a character named Nick Boyd, played by Cary Grant.

The Crime

Ned Stokes had become a very young, post-Civil-War profiteer -- a legitimate Carpet Bagger. He then got even richer as an oil man by establishing an oil refinery at Hunter's Point called, The Brooklyn Refining Company. Like all oil refineries at that time, it distilled crude oil into kerosene for lamps. An early financial backer was "Jubilee" James Fisk, aka "Big" Jim, and "Diamond" Jim. This was the same robber baron who, with Jay Gould, had caused the nation-wide Black Friday panic in 1869. Jim Fisk also owned the Erie Railroad which supplied the Pennsylvania crude oil to Ned Stokes' Brooklyn refinery. Fisk also owned the Fall River and Bristol line of steamers, which regularly stopped in Old Saybrook along their coastal route to New York City.



Diamond Jim Fisk

Josie Mansfield

Ned Stokes

Fisk was said to be pompous and a braggart and was intensely vain. His waxed mustache, his love of public display, and his passion for diamond jewelry became his hallmarks. It was the height of the Tweed ring days and James Fisk, still senior partner of the great Wall Street firm of Fisk, Gould & Martin, was in all his glory. He lived well and he lived large. His large living included a mistress, named Josie Mansfield. It was Fisk's habit to regularly invite his friends and companions to parties and feasts in the fabulous splendor of the Mansfield 23rd Street town house, which he had purchased and furnished for her. Fisk's wife did not attend those regular social affairs. It was at one of those events where Ned Stokes met Fisk's mistress, Josie Mansfield. Like Fisk's wife, Stokes' wife never attended those social affairs. The rest of the story made New York City tabloid history.

The love triangle of Jim, Ned, and Josie ended with very public blackmail attempts and lawsuits started by Jim's jealous acts of revenge on his former refinery partner. Fisk also stopped Josie's allowance and tried to ruin Stokes in his Wall Street speculations. He discriminated against Stokes in the shipments of his oil. He attacked young Stokes in court, and even got Stokes falsely arrested on a charge of embezzlement in connection with his oil business. Miss Mansfield retaliated by turning over to Stokes letters said to compromise Fisk badly with the Tweed gang. These letters got published and embarrassed Fisk. Fisk then got an indictment against Stokes for blackmail. Finally Stokes had enough and decided to kill Fisk. He went to the hotel where Fisk worked and shot him three times. Fisk died the next day after he gave a deathbed deposition stating Stokes had shot him in cold blood. James Fisk was 37 years old, Stokes was 31 years old.

Ned Stokes went to trial with several defense tactics: He shot in self-defense; he was insane because of Jim's persecution of him; the shot didn't kill Jim, the doctors poking around in his guts did; or maybe they gave him too much morphine. Result: a hung jury, with a couple jurors suspected of being bribed. Unlike the trial of Fenwick's Richard Croker, whose murder trial ended with a hung jury and set him free, Ned's hung jury did not set him free.

In his second trial he was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to be hanged. But the verdict was appealed and overturned on a technicality because the judge didn't give the jury sufficient explanation on the explicit intent to kill that was required for first-degree murder. In his third trial, in 1873, the jury found Stokes guilty of only manslaughter. He was sentenced to six years in prison, up the Hudson River, at Sing Sing.



A magazine cover featuring the Fisk murder

Ned Stokes was released from prison due to his good behavior, after serving half that time. Apparently he still had some friends in high places to lend him support. He returned to the Hoffman House, divorced. He was 34 years old. He went back to work, traveled to Europe and the west coast, bought a diamond mine, a yacht, and also controlling interest in the Hoffman House. Twelve years later, at 46, he bought Fenwick Hall, but no one knows exactly why.

The Hoffman House Hotel

His New York City hotel, located at Broadway and 24th Street, was famous for two things -- the guests it attracted and the painting in the bar. The hotel's first visiting clientele were comprised of New York's political power brokers from Tammany Hall, who considered the hotel their unofficial headquarters. The most notable of them was legendary Democratic Party strategist William Magear Tweed and later Richard Croker. Out of town guests included Grover Cleveland, who was living at the Hoffman on the day he was elected to his second term as President. The hotel also welcomed extended stays from diverse notables such as newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst, actress Sarah Bernhardt and showman William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody. On their trips to Europe, Gilded Age, first class travelers invariably stayed at the Hoffman House the night before their first class departures.

1870 publicity photo of French stage actress, Sara Bernhardt, at the Hoffman House. She was known as "the queen of the pose and the princess of the gesture"

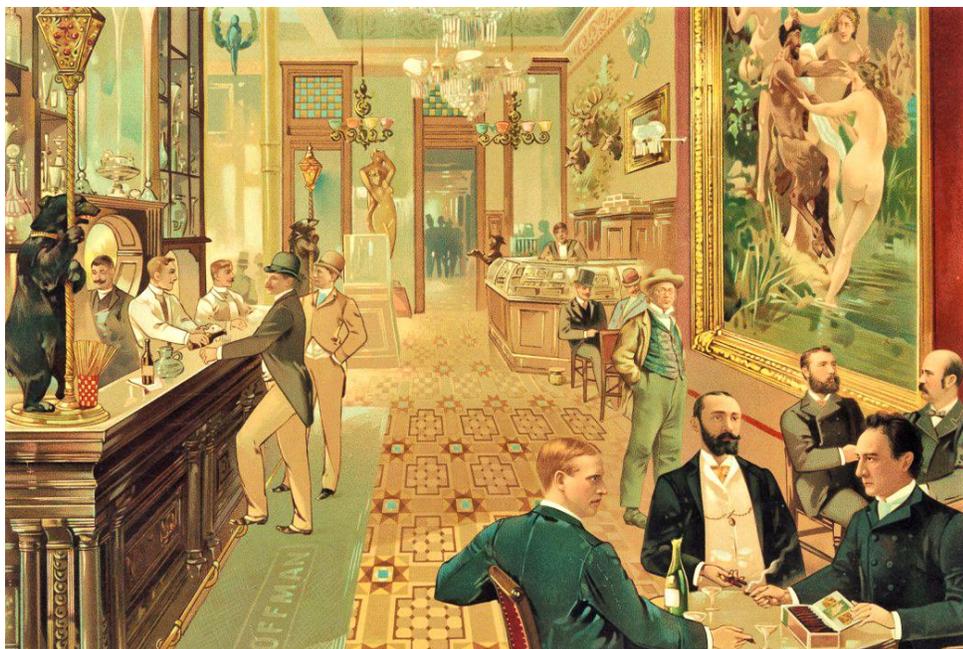
The Hoffman House bar served patrons Wilson Pure Rye Whiskey, the leading house drink of choice. As was the Victorian custom, only men could frequent the bar. Perhaps that is why the painting remained for as long as it did. Artist Adolph William Bouguereau's infamous oil painting, *Nymphs and Satyr*, was 12 feet high and hung on the wall opposite the bar.



The Painting

The New York Times described it, *as a quartet of ripe, naked maidens prancing around a preoccupied faun and it was for 24 years the despair of Victorian moralists and the delight of the clubmen who crowded Manhattan's Hoffman House bar.*

The painting became a tourist attraction. People lined up and crowds gathered to catch a glimpse of the titillating image. Magazines covered the story. The bar room painting set a trend, as hotels and bars in Chicago and San Francisco followed suit, exhibiting their own classical nudes. It was such a sensation, even women were allowed to peek at it—but only one day a week, as ladies were normally barred from the bar.



One historian writing about the Victorian Age described it as “the painting that changed New York.” Perhaps an overstatement, but reflective of the changing Victorian values.

The Fenwick Years

Stokes traveled to Fenwick regularly on his steam yacht named *Fra Diavolo* (Brother Devil). He docked at Fenwick at the *Government Dock*, beside the carriage bridge near the Hartford Yacht Club clubhouse and the Inner light. He reportedly turned Fenwick Hall into one of the liveliest and most popular resorts on the coast. He also put money into upgrades. He installed an elevator, cultivated a five-acre vegetable farm for fresh produce, added hot and cold salt water baths, invited a well-known head of a New York City riding academy (along with his horses) to Fenwick for the pleasure of the Hotel Guests, built a bathing pier into Long Island Sound, electrified the hotel with its own power plant and installed a telegraph office. He regularly promoted Fenwick Hall to his Hoffman House guests with brochures, recommending Fenwick Hall for the summer.

FENWICK · HALL.

FENWICK HALL, well known as being one of the most delightful of summer resorts on Long Island Sound, has been purchased and is now owned by the proprietors of the Hoffman House, New York. It is the intention of the present management to make it the most superb of American summer resorts.

IMPROVEMENTS AND ADDITIONS.

The Hall has been newly refitted and furnished throughout by firms celebrated in the manufacture of artistic furniture, upholstery, linens, etc.

A very important feature, and one costing many thousands of dollars, is the introduction in the Hotel of HOT AND COLD SALT WATER BATHS, for the benefit of guests and those having any rheumatic tendencies.

Mr. P. T. Wall, of the HOFFMAN HOUSE, who has had long experience in hotel matters, and having a thorough appreciation of the many wants necessary for the comfort of guests, will have the management.

Professor Durland, of Durland's well-known Riding Academy of New York, will be in attendance, with a large contingent of his fine trained and saddle horses, as the surrounding country is of a most picturesque nature; and, abounding as it does in many beautiful drives and roads, this is an innovation that will be highly appreciated.

A new pier of a most substantial nature has been built for the especial accommodation of the guests, and extends some 300 feet into the waters of the sound, fronting the hotel, and having a pavilion on the end.

The Hotel has accommodations for 300 guests, and is fitted up throughout with electric lights and other modern conveniences.

It is unnecessary to state that the CUISINE will be of the very best. An adjacent dairy and farm owned by the proprietors, will serve the Hotel with the purest of milk and cream and all vegetables in season.

Other main attractions are the fine Bathing facilities, Sailing, Driving, Fishing, Bowling Alleys, Billiard Rooms, etc.

THE · HOTEL · WILL · BE · OPEN · ON · JUNE · 15TH.

For further information address

P. T. WALL,

**Or at FENWICK HALL,
Saybrook Point, Conn.**

Hoffman House, New York.

Newton Brainard, the son of Leverett Brainard, an early cottage owner, had youthful memories of Fenwick Hall after Stokes bought it: *Theatrical luminaries and political leaders make it their headquarters. Prominent still were Richard Croker and Governor David Hill of New York. The hotel was once again crowded throughout the season. Cots were put up on weekends in the billiard rooms and even in the halls, to accommodate the crowds. Life moved at a fast pace and tandem carts and liveried grooms were not uncommon. There was an orchestra available as a rule and evening dancing was popular of course. Once a week there was entertainment by traveling talent, which toured the resorts of the coast. Mr. Stokes came up every week on his steam yacht the Fra Diavolo on which the now famous chef, Oscar of the Waldorf, was a steward.*

No one knew exactly why Ned Stokes bought Fenwick Hall in the first place, but there was no mystery as to why he sold it. Ned Stokes and the town of Old Saybrook did not get along. More specifically, Stokes disagreed with the town about the responsibility, upkeep and taxes for the carriage bridge from Saybrook Point to Fenwick.

Stokes claimed it had been accepted as a town road, and that the town should be appreciative of the fact that the hotel had been maintaining it for years. The town claimed it was a private road built just



for the Hotel, despite the fact that the general public used is regularly. Lawsuits ensued and Stokes, fearing liability suits, tore up various sections of the bridge so that no carriages, only pedestrians, and could cross. The courts ultimately ruled that the Town had to pay to maintain the carriage bridge.

Although Stokes owned Fenwick Hall for six years, he only kept it operational for about four years. Many claimed that he closed it to get even with the town for challenging him about the carriage bridge. It sat empty for several years and became the favorite playground for young kids on rainy days. By 1894, empty and abandoned, Fenwick Hall was once again put up for auction. Morgan Garden Bulkeley, soon to be the Governor, bought it for \$500 and some back taxes.

Postscript

After selling Fenwick Hall, **Ned Stokes** returned to his New York City Hoffman House hotel. He died six years later in 1901 at the age of 60, and he still made headlines.



Edward S. Stokes is Dead

Slayer of Jim Fisk Succumbs to Bright's Disease

His Was a Stormy Career, Harking Back to When the Tweed Ring Was in the Height of Its Power – Woman Who Caused the Breach Between Stokes and Fisk That Ended in the Latter's Assassination – Fisk's Prominence in Wall Street and His Attempt to Ruin His Former Friend – Stokes's Numerous Litigations After His Release From Prison – Woman Who Says She Is His Widow

Richard Croker left Tammany Hall that same year. In 1905, with numerous city commissions investigating the source of his substantial wealth, he fled to his home in Ireland. He took his thoroughbred race horses with him. One of his horses won the Derby in 1907, Britain's most prestigious race. He died in Ireland in 1922, still a very rich man, at the age of 78.

Morgan Bulkeley was not interested in Fenwick Hall. He was a politician. His Fenwick accomplishments were incorporating Fenwick as a borough, getting the town road built across South Cove using the old railroad right-of-way, getting the Fenwick golf course established, and building his Fenwick cottage. He died in Hartford the same year Croker died, outliving them all. He was 85 years old.

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