

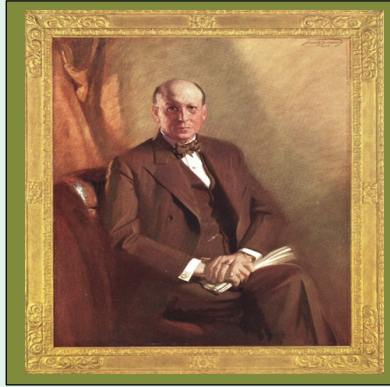
FRED MORGAN KIRBY

WHEN?

1861-1940

EVENT

Mr. Kirby was an entrepreneur who became a generous benefactor of the people in Wyoming Valley and beyond



WHERE?

Wyoming Valley,
Pennsylvania

VOCABULARY

dry goods
five and dime store
philanthropy

Most people who have lived in or near Wilkes-Barre for any length of time have heard of the F.M. Kirby Center located on Public Square. The old Paramount Theater building was renovated, in part, by a \$300,000 grant from the Kirby Foundation. (This organization was begun in 1921 to provide funding to many projects in our area and beyond.) Perhaps you know about the Kirby Library in Mountaintop or the Kirby Health Center in Wilkes-Barre. The latter building cost two million dollars and was designed to last 300 years.



Or maybe you have spent the Fourth of July watching fireworks, listening to a concert, enjoying a nature walk, or playing sports at the 50 acre park named for the family.



The Kirby name is also involved in several other places in our valley as well as at Lafayette College in Easton, and places in New Jersey. They are part of the legacy of Fred Morgan Kirby and his family.

Born in Brownsville, N.Y. on October 30, 1861, Kirby grew up to become head of a company that had stores not only in the United States but in Canada, Germany, Cuba, and England too. He began his career at age fourteen working in a dry goods store in Watertown, N.Y. It was here that he met his future partner, C. Sumner Woolworth who was from Scranton. Eventually, at age 23, Kirby formed a partnership with his boyhood friend and opened a five and dime store at 172 E. Market St. in Wilkes-Barre.

By 1887, Kirby purchased full ownership of the store. This was just one year after he married Jessie Amelia Owens. Ninety-six stores were in operation throughout the United States by 1911. He then merged with thirty-one Woolworth stores and other five and dime stores to become the director of 596 stores. This company was now worth \$65,000,000. That is a phenomenal increase from the \$1000 that started the company in 1878.

Kirby proved himself to be a great contributor to humanitarian and philanthropic causes. He provided the funding for the building of Kirby Park as well as a \$500,000 endowment for taking care of the park in the future. Many other projects in the Wyoming Valley were also benefactors of Kirby's generosity before he died October 16, 1940. His family continued his legacy of entrepreneurship and generosity.

PRINT RESOURCES

Times Leader Profile 91

ONLINE RESOURCES

[FMKIRBY Foundation](#)

[PA HISTORICAL MARKER](#)



Kirby House in Wilkes-Barre now Kirby Hall for Wilkes University

