

***A Local Resident's Story – The Story of Stella LaVigne Kendall
Part of a Memoir Written with love by her daughter, Ruth
by Elaine McCabe***

Stella LaVigne was born to Pauline and Victor LaVigne on January 8, 1900. She had an older brother, Victor. Stella lived most of her life in Bridgeboro and Riverside, NJ, and was a very interesting, active woman in our community.

Stella went to school in Riverside, attending high school until she was sixteen. She quit school and went to work at the Watchcase in Riverside. After working all day she would go home, have some dinner and get a bus to Philadelphia where she went to the Conservatory of Music to take piano lessons. When she completed her training at the conservatory she got a job at the movie theater in Riverside, playing background music for the silent films.

When Stella married Raymond Kendall in 1920, she left the movies and went to work on their farm in Delran. Stella said she didn't even know how to make a cup of tea and had no knowledge of housecleaning, washing clothes or dishes. Learning to cook on the coal stove was a challenging job for her. She had to learn in a hurry because they fed lunch to some of the farm hands. When her mother fell down the cellar steps and broke both wrists, Stella learned fast and very well. Her piano went to the farm as well and family and friends all enjoyed her playing.

Their first child, Raymond Victor, was born prematurely on December 28, 1920. The baby had no fingernails and no eyebrows, but it didn't take long for them to appear, along with reddish hair. Stella loved the hair but it soon turned brown. Four years later, on August 3, 1924, Paul Lester was born. Paul had asthma and passed away in 1975. After Paul Lester, they had a girl, Ruth Daisie. On the farm the children had to make their own amusements. Paul and Ruth would have bicycle and foot races down the lane. Paul always won; Ruth just got cinders in her knees.

In the fall of the year before Thanksgiving, Stella's husband and Uncle Addison would hold turkey shoots on the field next to what is now Route 130. People came to shoot at targets for a fee. Whoever got the most shots in the bullseye would win a live turkey. There was a small building on the shoot site where Stella sold coffee, hotdogs and cakes to the shooters. This was done for several years. The turkeys were kept in a pen out back of the ice house, wood shed and chicken coop.

When the depression started in the 1930s it was tough. Raymond went to the bank to get a loan to buy seeds and fertilizer, but was turned down. Before the depression

ended, they had to move from the farm. In or about 1938, they moved to Bridgeboro where Paul and Ruth went to grade school, Raymond was in high school. Raymond was able to get a job with the Works Project Administration clearing trees from Route 70 through the Pinelands. When that job was finished he went to work at the metal company in Riverside, He was not happy there – too many employees taking up space and not doing their jobs.

When they moved to Bridgeboro, they lived across from the Methodist church, so that's where Ruth went to church. The new minister, Mr. and Mrs. Scarborough were younger and more interested in getting the young people into the church. They started a junior choir with six others around the same age. Stella got interested in helping with the practices and played the piano whenever they sang at the services.

In the meantime, they moved one block up the street to a nice house with a bathroom. Stella gave piano lessons, took in sewing, and had the County Library branch in the front room. She made all Ruth's dresses and coats, plus her own, and still helped the children learn the Sunday songs.

Raymond missed farming and felt he had left his family down. It was a bad time for all families, but he thought it was his fault. His health suffered and he had a stroke. He recovered but had to take it easy. Stella gave up sewing, piano lessons and the library to take a job at the stocking factory in Riverside. Her job was winding the thread to make stockings, on spools to be used on the knitting machines. She was making more money than Ruth so Ruth quit her job and went to work as a mender. Stella would get her pay check and put it in a safe place. Her bureau had a slot above the top drawer inside where she would put her check. She also had the bureau up for sale. One day while she was working, the man who bought the dresser came to pick it up. When Stella heard the bureau was picked up, she thought "CHECK". Her husband didn't know about the hiding place. She called the man, but it was already sold to a family in Cape May. Stella called Raymond to come and take her to Cape May that afternoon to retrieve her check. All ended well.

When Raymond started feeling better, Stella made arrangements to buy fruits and potted plants and set up a stand to sell them in the front yard. Raymond could sit in the living room and see or hear someone at the stand. When the weather got cooler, the family put up shelves in the front room and opened a small store, selling canned goods, penny candy, cigarettes and such. It took off right away. Stella quit her job at the stocking factory and took over the store. In a short time, the store grew. The living room was moved to the dining room. The piano went there too. A partition was put up so the store was separate from the living areas. More canned goods, an ice cream cabinet, fresh meat case, fresh baked goods, and a cash register were added. The basement was used to store canned goods for restocking and also contained an ice cream freezer. Her first stock boy got in trouble because he couldn't resist having ice cream so handy. The bigger the store grew the demand for more milk and sodas grew also. They put a big refrigerator on the porch plus a freezer with a lock for frozen

foods. The store was open six days a week from 7 am to 11 pm. Stella hired a part-time clerk to help wait on customers so she could take a short break in the afternoon. She had the part-time clerk work full time while she and her husband went to Florida again.

When Stella could not keep up the pace, they decided to sell the business and move. Raymond wanted a house with a porch and Stella found one in Riverside, a three story with the required porch which was used for parade viewing only. Sadly, Raymond passed away in 1973. Shortly after Raymond passed away, Stella got her driver's license again and drove to California alone. When she arrived in California, she picked up a former neighbor who was visiting her son. They returned to Riverside by way of Florida.

Stella knew she had to keep busy and earn some money too. She would go to homes where the residents were going to move and make an offer for items they didn't want to take. She'd bring the items home and clean them up. Small items went in a basket in the cellar, bigger items to the garage. People would look around downstairs, maybe buy something, maybe not, but they would have a cup of tea with her. She was a happy lady. She finally sold the house in Riverside and had an auctioneer sell the contents she didn't want to keep. She then got an apartment in Burlington along the Delaware River.

After a very busy life, Stella Kendall passed in 1992 and left the following memory with her daughter, Ruth. Nothing got the best of her. She was determined to do it "her way". Stella had a little card that Ruth found in her mother's records, after she passed, about leaving an "afterglow":

I'd like the memory of me to be a happy one.
I'd like to leave an afterglow of smiles when life is done.
I'd like to leave an echo whispering softly down the ways.
Of happy times and laughing times and bright and sunny days.
I'd like the tears of those who grieve to dry before the sun.
Of happy memories that I leave when life is done.

~Carol Mirkel



Stella Lavigne-Kendall in 1919