

David Kennison

Born: circa 1736,
1758, 1776?

Died: Feb 24, 1852

Time of Service: War of 1812
Sources: B10 F2a – J Miner,
Kennison's monument and
Wikipedia article from J.L.
Bell in *Boston 1775*

According to Jesse Miner in his *Early Days on Washington Island*, David Kennison was the last survivor of the Boston Tea Party, and fought in the American Revolution. He was married four times, had 22 children, and came to Rock Island when he was 80 years old. He lived there 30 years and at the age of 110 moved to Chicago where he died on February 24, 1852. It turns out that almost none of this story is true. There is a monument to him in Chicago dedicated to him fifty years after his death by the Sons of the American Revolution and the Daughters of the American Revolution. The monument is a very big rock placed a few yards off Clark Street in Chicago's Lincoln Park. More recently, a second plaque was erected behind the rock with the original message. That plaque says:

"The 1852 funeral for David Kennison was the most elaborate Chicago had ever seen. The City paid all expenses and donated two cemetery lots intending to erect a monument on his grave. That never happened.

The legend of his exploits grew to unfeasible proportions. His Boston Tea Party fame, military achievements, and his claim to have lived to the age of 115 are disputed today. This boulder installed 50 years after his death is likely two blocks north of his actual burial site in what was then the Chicago City cemetery."

J.L. Bell's article in a local Boston publication named *Boston 1775*, says "David Kennison arrived in Chicago in the 1840's as an old man. He was a veteran of the War of 1812, but became a local celebrity by falsely claiming to be the last survivor of the Boston Tea Party and a veteran of the Revolution though historians have established that he was approximately 85 years old when he died in 1852. Chicagoans believed he was 115, and buried him with the pomp they thought was owed to the last survivor of the Boston Tea Party. In 1903, aging Chicagoans who still remembered the 1850's erected a monument to Kennison at his gravesite in Lincoln Park. Even in the age of the Internet, the official city Website has presented Kennison's story as fact."

Bell continues, Kennison "was nearly a complete fraud. Pension rolls in the mid-1800's has him 59 in 1835 or 82 in 1840. Only when he arrived in Chicago did Kennison start to state he'd been born in 1736. Likewise his war stories don't add up. In 1848 he told a Chicago newspaper he saw Cornwallis surrender in October 1781. A couple years later he told a Chicago magazine writer of being captured by 300 Mohawk Indians at Saratoga Springs, and held captive for one year and seven months, which leaves him no time to be at Yorktown.....He said he fought under General Richard Montgomery who died leading the invasion of Canada, yet Kennison never mentioned that campaign. His name does appear on a list of soldiers at Ft Dearborn (which became Chicago) in the early 1800's but there is no evidence he was there when the fort fell in 1812. Maybe he went back to Chicago to get support in his old age."

Bell speculates Chicagoans wanted the credibility for their young city of a Revolutionary veteran and a Tea Party participant. Kennison did live for a number of years on Rock Island where his soldier buddy from the War of 1812, David Carlin, was lighthouse keeper, before he went to Chicago.