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Furniture Stores Served Multiple Roles a Century Ago

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This image shows the interior of Stevens' Furniture Store located in Kendall, taken sometime in the early 1900s. The man standing in this photograph is likely Marhlon Stevens, the owner of the business. Marhlon was the son of Nelson Stevens, a Herkimer County native who worked as a farmer, bookkeeper, and schoolmaster before testing out the furniture and undertaking business in Kendall.

Nelson Stevens brought his family to Orleans County in 1901 and operated this business for several years before he unexpectedly died of pneumonia in 1908. At that point in time, his son took over the operations of the outfit, which advertised itself as the "House of Quality." In the days prior to embalming and before funeral parlors were established, furniture dealers often doubled as undertakers who assisted families in preparing the home for wakes.

In this image we see a number of mattresses and rocking chairs in the center of the room. Along the right wall we see a roll-top desk, folding chair, and a "low-boy" dresser. Throughout the entire showroom are dishes and crockery, popular merchandise for these types of stores. The walls are adorned with various portraits, landscape paintings, and mirrors; one noticeable image

is that of Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* hanging on the back wall. It also appears that Stevens was selling boots and shoes as a number of them are on display in the rear of the showroom.

With many furniture businesses, the first floor provided space to showcase current and featured merchandise, while the upper floor offered space for crafting and repairing furniture. In a smaller outfit such as this, the upper floor likely provided additional storage space for extra furniture. Marhlon Stevens operated this store for a couple of decades and was associated for a period of time with McNall & McNall Funeral Home. Marhlon passed away in 1951 and was interred at a cemetery in Palmyra, the location where his family lived prior to arriving in Kendall.