

The Old Anvil (1886)

Its History and Incidents Connected Therewith The Forge Hollow Celebration of 1849

The following article was written for The Waterville Times by "E. J. R. " and appeared in that publication in two segments on July 9 and July 17, 1886.

In the year 1808 Daniel Hanchett and Captain Nathan Daniel were the owners and proprietors of a charcoal iron forge, situated in Forge Hollow, Oneida County, N. Y.

The building in which Messrs. Hanchett & Daniel conducted their enterprise is standing on the south bank of the east branch of the Oriskany creek, two and one-half miles north of Waterville. It is now the property of G. D., Phinney, but the storms assisted by nature and neglect, have reduced the building and its surroundings to a forlorn ruin, a ghostly monument of its former usefulness.

Those acquainted with the manufacture of iron as conducted in those days, will inform you that one of the requisites was a ponderous trip hammer to pound or draw the metal into marketable shape. One of the difficulties in operating this hammer was the anvil; none could be found sufficiently large for the purpose. The firm of Hanchett & Daniel had no little trouble in this direction, and finally concluded that if this country had an anvil that would fill the bill this firm would have it. A general inquiry being made, one was found at Hudson, N. Y., and purchased; the Hudson firm delivering it at Albany, from which place Capt. Daniel brought it in a wagon, some seventy-five years ago. How long the Hudson firm had owned the anvil is not known, hence its earliest history may be said to be "enshrouded in the twilight of uncertainty." The anvil was placed in position in the old forge, and for years afterwards rendered its owners excellent service. In course of time the firm of Hanchett & Daniel was dissolved and the firm of Hanchett & Skinner formed, prosecuting the same line of business until the year 1848, when this firm sold out to Sherman S. Daniel. About this time how, and for what, deponent sayeth not, the anvil was removed from its bed in the block under the old trip hammer and consigned to oblivion in a dusky corner of the old forge.

On the morning of the Fourth of July, 1849, Sherman S. Daniel, who by the way was in those times a genius, and withal of a patriotic nature, arose early in the morning and sought to devise a way to celebrate the day in a manner befitting the occasion. While in a fit of mental abstraction the old anvil recurred to his mind. The dimensions of this anvil are 12x12x22 inches, its weight 850 pounds. Through the center is a hole two inches square, made to admit a bar to assist in handling it.

To the forge Daniel went quickly, and from the dark corner the old anvil was hauled, one end of the anvil was quickly and strongly plugged with hot iron. With great exertion the anvil was got from the cover of the forge to a plot of ground outside. In a short time a wooden plug with a slot for priming was made; half a pound of powder fed into the anvil, the plug driven home with a sledge, primed and lighted; Daniel stepped back for the results. suddenly there was an explosion that shook the neighboring hills and demolished two-thirds of the window lights in forge Hollow. The surprised and affrighted villagers rushed to the place. Upon learning the circumstances they gave Daniel and

ovation, whereupon all hands proceeded to celebrate the glorious Fourth, this celebration being limited only by the supply of powder. To this day it is a tradition among the solons of Forge Hollow that the Fourth of July, 1849, has a glory particularly its own.

The people of Forge Hollow continued to enjoy the anvil's society, notwithstanding Waterville and Deansville were continually plotting to effects its capture. In the fall of 1852, one dark night a party from here headed by a gentleman, who later distinguished himself as a captain in the volunteer service, with the present Adjutant of Post Bacon, Utica, and some twenty others including old Rans. Turner, who worked for James I. Peck, and was induced to join the party and to surreptitiously borrow a yoke of cattle belong to his employer, proceeded to Forge hollow where the boys were found firing the anvil. The Forge Hollow party was immediately surrounded, the anvil captured and brought to Deansville, where there was general rejoicing. the Deansville party was in possession of the anvil for a long while, but had to exercise great caution, and when whenever they fired it a line of pickets was thrown out on the Waterville and Oriskany Falls roads to keep a look-out for Daniel and his force, who were expected to attempt to recapture it. A panic at one time was imminent among the Deansville captors caused by a report that Forge Hollow had been reinforced by a delegation from Sangerfield and that a strong party with George Tefft for a leader, was approaching. The report proved false and for greater security the anvil was buried in the Chenango canal. The anvil remained in the canal for some time, when some local event demanded a celebrations and it was hauled out and fired. Daniel came and took it away and the Deansville party were sad. For some unexplainable reason the Deansville nights had an unconquerable longing for this piece of iron and were bound to get possession again. It was not thought advisable to attempt to take it by force again, but to steal it. Accordingly one night a party from here went to Forge Hollow, and following directions given by a spy, went to the old forge, where they had been informed the anvil could be found. The forge was locked. Here was an unlooked for dilemma. While any of the party would not hesitate to take the anvil, none were bold enough to break a lock. while scouting around for upwards of an hour an entrance was made by crawling up the wheel-pit, a distance of forty feet, through mud and water underground. On getting into the forge a small door hooked on the inside was found. this was opened, and when Daniel came in the morning the anvil was non est. On reaching Deansville the anvil was immediately hid, its whereabouts being known to but two or three. No piece of ordinance ever constructed was more destructive to window lights than this same old anvil. To people of retiring dispositions and quiet habits it was an unmitigated nuisance. To none was it more objectionable than to Dr. Hovey, who lived on the corner of Main and West street. The following story the Doctor used to relate adding the joke was too good for him to keep. "One Fourth of July morning the boys commenced firing the anvil near the hay scales owned by Page & Mowry. The firing commenced about 10 A. M., and at 2 o'clock the rain drove them off. Being up early in the morning I discovered the anvil where the boys had left it. Thinking I had been troubled enough by it I took a wheelbarrow and went out, intending to wheel and throw it into the canal. I could not turn the anvil over, let alone lifting it." The Doctor had never heard that it weighed 850 pounds.

(To be continued next week.)

THE OLD ANVIL.

The Waterville Boys Capture It - A few Doughty Forge Hollow Citizens Hold it Against a Load of Deansville Boys - Capers and Anecdotes of the Anvil. - "Lost to Sight to Memory Dear."

One night in 1858 a firing crowd at Deansville left the anvil out in the wet, and the morning sun developed the fact that some one had taken it in and cared for it.

For some time its whereabouts were a mystery. Finally its sonorous voice was heard in Waterville. Many are the conjectures and proposition offered to show how a piece of iron weighing 850 pounds might silently and unaided by human hands abstract itself from its Deansville captors and make a debut amidst the refined circles of Waterville society. The writer having been unable to secure competent information as to this removal and the particulars relating thereto, is compelled to accept the theory advanced that Geo. Hubbard found it in an empty whiskey barrel. The fact remains, however, that his anvil was in Waterville giving utterance to its sentiments in no "uncertain sound," and was to have been used in a Fourth of July celebration. On the night of the 3d, four men with a span of horses might have been seen lurking in the suburbs, while one of their band was locating the position of the anvil. This accomplished, at 10 o'clock it was noiselessly loaded, and in less than 30 minutes was being fired in Deansville. It is said that on that occasion, the jollification being so intense, the one whose duty was loading the anvil substituted powdered brick for the usual plug, hoping to make a report that would rouse the dead. The experiment was a failure; the iron with which the anvil had been plugged blew out, and then it was discovered that the hole originally extended through the anvil. The next day, the anvil being replugged, firing was kept up continually. The favorite firing place was in the centre of the highway, a little to the north of the store now owned by G. B. Northrup. On this occasion some one suggested that if a weight was placed upon the plug it would cause a greater report. Accordingly a blacksmith's anvil was procured and placed in position, the result being contrary to expectations. The force of the plug tilted the upper anvil and passed out sideways, cutting into a picket of Dr. Hovey's fence, passed through a door into the dining room where it was found imbedded in the wall of an adjoining room. This cooled the patriotism of the Deansville celebrators perceptibly. The following day Daniel came and took his property, to the great relief of many citizens. The anvil was in the custody of the Forge Hollow people for some time, and was used in giving farewell salutes to the soldiers as they passed through on their way to the front. On the night of July 3d, 1862, a large force went from Deansville to Forge Hollow to get the anvil. The anvil was defended by Sherman Daniel, assisted by his sons Charles and Reuben, and George Tefft. The defense was so ably conducted that notwithstanding it required six horses to draw the Deansville crew, the anvil remained in Forge Hollow. The next day, as the would-be anvil abductors appeared on the streets, it was noticed that discolored eyes was the rule rather than the exception. It being thought impossible to get through a fourth of July without the anvil in Deansville, a prominent citizen obtained Daniel's consent to let the boys have it, and for once it made the trip by daylight. But there was not the old-time zest, and the reports fell less melodiously than on other occasions caused no doubt by the reflection of the failure to capture it the previous night. According to agreement the anvil was returned to Daniel. For years it was carried back and forth until the oil well fever broke out at Deansville, when it was used for driving pipe. When the oil well was abandoned the anvil found a resting place in Mowry's storehouse.

In '69 two of Deansville's leading citizens were involved in a lawsuit. The suit resulted favorably for the plaintiff, who, being greatly rejoiced over his victory, furnished the boys with a keg of powder that they might fire the anvil. Boys are supposed to be thoughtless and inconsiderate of the feelings of others. These boys were no exception. Regardless how the defendant might feel to have his defeat celebrated by the burning of powder while his opponents were gleefully exulting, the anvil was loaded on a truck and hauled to the Academy hill and fired. There were all sizes of boys in this crowd, from the kid up to the one who rejoiced in the dignity of being a man. The largest and strongest appropriated the fence for a bonfire, and crowded the smaller and weaker from the anvil. On the same

day the grounds surrounding the Academy building had been mowed, and the grass put up in little bundles. Some of the smaller boys sought to see the effect of burning powder under the hay. Unknown to the larger ones a quantity was placed under that hay and an attempt made to light it with a faggot from the bonfire. One of the larger boys, who was just budding into manhood, saw the fire carried to the grass, and supposing the intention was to burn it, authoritatively demanded a stop. The other boy, seeing he was caught, threw the brand on the grass. The older party jumped on the fire to stamp it out and succeeded in bring the powder and fire into contact. The result was an illumination of such magnitude as to astonish every one. The victim lost a carefully cultivated mustache, also his eyebrows. It was a close call for the young man, and had it resulted fatally would cut short a life that was afterwards distinguished as commissioner of schools in this district, and now has a law office in Waterville. That night the anvil was left out and in the morning was gone. some two years elapsed when one of its captors from Deansville saw it in Peckham's foundry at Utica. It is supposed that some heavy hitters, who had partaken of Deansville hospitality in the guise of hop-pickers, had come here and stolen it, when, finding they had a white elephant on their hands, they sold it to Peckham, who in turn considered it something of the nature of an elephant to him. Daniel went to Utica and secured possession of it, when it was brought here and duly honored.

In 1875, the Forge Hollow boys were firing it when a party set out from here on foot and succeeded in getting possession of it. It was then brought here and fired, and, as usual, left out in the morning. As usual it was gone and has never been seen since in this locality. It is supposed that "General" Phinney was the latest capturer, and that he has hidden it beyond the per-adventure of reclaiming. This is the history of the anvil, and all will unite in the wish that it rest in peace wherever it may lie. It still belongs to Sherman S. Daniel of Waterville, and anyone knowing of its whereabouts will confer a favor by informing Mr. Daniel.

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