

The Wilmington-Black Brook Affair

Wilmington, NY, March 24th, 1901

Editor of the Elizabethtown Post

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Editor of the Elizabethtown Post:

Complying with the request of your Massachusetts friend I hand you herewith the chronicles and poem referred to by him.

For the celebration of the 4th of July 1850, the people of Wilmington had made great preparation; the cannon was brought out and placed on the village green the evening of July 3rd and was to be fired at daylight.; when all was ready the gunner with necessary cartridges proceeds to the spot, when lo and behold! No gun was to be found; a search was immediately commenced and was kept up until eight o'clock before the tracks of mules were discovered leading north; about this time Salma Chase now of Keene, came on from Black Brook and reported that the gun was there, the people of Black Brook enjoying themselves immensely. In less than three hours, 40 teams loaded with Wilmington boys were on the road to Black Brook intent upon the gun's recovery. The Chronicles will tell the rest, except that the gun was lent to the people of Keene to be used at the celebration of July 4th, 1884, and was there busted.

Yours, M.M. Cooper

Chronicles of Wilmington and Black Brook

By Wendell Lansing, founder and for many years editor of the Essex County Republican, David Hinds, Esq., and Sanford Avery

Chapter I

1. *And It came to pass, after the world had existed many thousand years, and many nations had waxed strong and had fallen to pieces through riotous living.*
2. *That one Christopher, a seafaring man, a native of old Spain, discovered a far-off country.*
3. *And the children of Albion settled much of said country and it was subject to Albion.*
4. *And it came to pass that the king of Albion oppressed his subjects in this new country.*
5. *And the people of this new country threw off the Yoke of their new master, the King.*
6. *And they established a jubilee, and it was in the seventh month on the fourth day of the month.*
7. *And always did the people of this new country assemble themselves together on that day.*
8. *And they made themselves merry on that day and the chief men spoke to the people.*
9. *And they had much doings with fire and turpentine and displays of fiery serpents, and there was much smell of brimstone and saltpeter on that day.*
10. *And the old men were exceedingly glad, and the young men and maidens danced together.*
11. *And there was great joy throughout the whole land on that day.*

Chapter II

1. *And one of the provinces of this new country was Wilmington.*
2. *Now Wilmington was a stony mountain country, but inhabited by an exceeding brave and war-like people.*
3. *And it came to pass that the seventy and fourth jubilee was nigh at hand, and there was much preparation for the jubilee.*
4. *And the people of Wilmington had an engine which spouted fire and made much loud noise on the day of jubilee.*

5. *And the people of the neighboring provinces of Black Brook had no engine, and they were moved by evil spirits, to invade the province of Wilmington and take away their engine.*
6. *Now the people of Black Brook are a thievish people, and given to much lust and in olden time hard sayings were spread all over the country.*
7. *And they came with asses in the night time, even on the third day of the seventh month, and stole away the engine from the people of Wilmington.*
8. *And when the morrow came, and it was found what had been done, the people were exceeding wroth.*
9. *And David, the scribe of Sylvester, smote his breast, and would take no food, or be comforted.*
10. *And he moved Sylvester and Willard to call the tribes together, and make war on the province of Black Brook.*

Chapter III

1. *And the tribe of Charles, was Robert and Leonard, and Newel and Charles.*
2. *And the tribe of Moses, was Sylvester, and Norris, and Darius, and Landon.*
3. *And the tribe of Aaron was David, and Nathaniel, and Aaron and Samuel.*
4. *And of the tribe of David was William, and David, and Hiram, and James.*
5. *And of the tribe of Nathan, was the two Iras, and Hiram, and Lewis and Henry.*
6. *And a numerous host of which the record will be given in another book.*
7. *And they pitched their tents in the plain country on the borders of the two provinces.*
8. *And Robert, a mighty man of the tribe of Charles, by the voices of all the tribes, was chosen to lead them into battle.*
9. *And the trumpet sounded, and they moved like a rushing wind.*
10. *And Robert took with him six chosen men to move cautiously through the traveled country, to come in on the east.*
11. *And he appointed Sylvester to lead the whole host of all the tribes of Wilmington through the wilderness country, to come in on the west.*
12. *And the tribes of the province of Black Brook were rejoicing with exceeding great joy.*
13. *And the sound of the engine which they had stolen directed the steps of Robert and his chosen men, and Sylvester and his host.*
14. *And they came down from the mountain like a mighty rushing torrent, and they drove before them the tribes of the province of Black Brook, and put many to the sword.*
15. *And Robert and Sylvester joined hands at the engine, and all the tribes of Wilmington shouted aloud.*
16. *And one Mark, a hot headed warrior, overturned the furnace and entered the camp of the tribes of Black Brook.*
17. *And from the temple of John, kinsman of the prophet who was burned in Albion aforetime, a loud noise was made with brass to call together the wandering tribes of Black Brook; and the battle waxed hot.*
18. *And Robert commanded that the chains should be taken from the engine, and that the bolts should be drawn by which it was confined, and it was all done as he had commanded.*
19. *And the chosen men took the engine on their shoulders and placed it in in a chariot, and moved through the city of the province of Black Brook, and they rent the air with their shouts, while the tribes of Black Brook tore their hair and cried aloud at what was done.*

Chapter IV

1. *And the traitors of Wilmington were Erastus of the tribe of Nathan, and James and William of the tribe of Aaron, and David and Ralph, inn-dwellers for a time of that providence, but all had now become servants of John, the worker in iron and kinsman of the profit.*
2. *Now this John was a good man, and ministered in high place.*
3. *And he had much money withal, and houses, and asses, and men-servants, and maid-servants.*
4. *And he sold oils and rhubarb for three and a half pieces of silver, so that his gains exceeded that of all the merchants of the east.*
5. *And so he taxed the tribes of Black Brook craftily, and took their money and builded himself roads for his own asses and servants to draw heavy burden.*
6. *Now it came to pass that fear cam over the traitors of Wilmington, and they all fled at the first onset of the battle, even Erastus, and James and David, except Ralph the giant.*
7. *And the knees of Ralph smote together, and paleness as of death came over Ralph, and many other things happened to Ralph, the giant, which will be recorded in another book.*
8. *And Henry, the chief scribe of John, used pleasant words to appease the anger of the battle.*
9. *And essayed to move Norris of the tribe of Moses, to accept thirty pieces of silver for the engine.*
10. *And the wrath of Norris was kindled, and he would have smote Henry, but Henry wisely took himself into the temple of John.*
11. *Now this Henry is a very wise young man in his own conceit, and moreover winketh knowingly; for, albeit, he had furnished asses from the stable of John his master to the underservants to draw away the engine from the province of Wilmington.*
12. *Now after the army of Robert had laid waste the province of Black Brook, they betook themselves to their own country.*
13. *And they came with banners streaming in the wind, and shouting and singing the song of the Jubilee.*
14. *And they were received by the old men, and the women, and the children with great joy.*
15. *And the engine was remounted on a chariot and it spouted fire till long after the setting of the sun.*
16. *And there was music, and dancing, and games, till nigh unto the morrow.*
17. *And great sadness reigned throughout the province of Black Brook for their discomfiture in battle with the tribes of Wilmington, and the household of John was clad in deep mourning.*
18. *And the cunning of Henry, the scribe, departed from him, and the flesh fell from the bones of George, one of the servants of John, so that he became small in stature.*
19. *And there will be no more valor in Black Brook forever.*

After all these “proclamations,” peace ensued, and two years later, in 1852, the boys from Black Brook came to Wilmington with their artillery to help celebrate the Fourth. The reports of the transaction gave no one more amusement than John Rogers himself. The people involved in these proceedings are nearly all of them dead. [year1901] **In 2nd Chapter, vs. 9**, it speaks of David the scribe of Sylvester--- he was the book keeper for Sylvester Mihill and Willard Bell, then merchants in Wilmington, he was the prime mover of the whole business. Silvester Mihill died in the west; Willard Bell died in Keene some years since. **Chapter 3, vs.1**. The tribe of Charles were sons and grandsons of Charles Owens and Robert Thomas, all dead; Newall Marshall, a grandson is a resident of Morrison, Ill. **Vs2**. The tribe of Moses was the family of Moses Mihill; Norris Mihill became a Methodist clergyman and Darius a farmer in Wisconsin; they are now both dead. Landin Wilkins, a son-in-law, lived and died in Wilmington. **Vs.3**. The

tribe of Aaron was of the family of Aaron Hayes, the miller of Wilmington for over 60 years. David Hayes resided in Wilmington until his death, which occurred less than a year ago. Nathaniel Hayes removed to North Lewis and practiced law there until his death. Aaron Hayes, Jr. still lives in town. Samuel George, an adopted son, died in 1879. **Vs.4.** The tribe of David was of the family of David Hinds; William Hinds died in AuSable Forks. David Hinds lived and died in the town of Keene. Hiram Hinds is now living at Crown Point. **Vs. 5.** The tribe of Nathan was the family of Nathan Winch of Wilmington, consisting of two Iras, a brother and son; Hiram Winch removed to Vermont. Louis Pelkey and Henry Wilkins, both son-in-law of Nathan are now dead. **Vs.7.** And they pitched their tents, etc. it is where Thos. Crowley's house now stands. **Vs. 16.** Mark, the hot-headed warrior, was Mark Watson; he was suddenly killed in St. Lawrence County some years ago. **Chapter 4, Vs.1.** And the traitors, etc. were Erastus Johnson, don't know where he is; James McDonal, son-in-law of Aaron Hayes, now dead; Wm Hayes now living at Lake Placid; David and Ralph were David Bell and Ralph Day, don't know of their whereabouts. **Vs.7.** Henry Marten at the time underboss for the Rogers Company. **Vs.14.** "And they were received by old men, etc." At the time it was proposed to go *en masse* and take the cannon by force. It was opposed by Elisha Adams and strongly favored by Maj. Reuben Sanford, hero of the War of 1812. Adams proposing to take lawful means to possess it; on the arrival of the hosts from Black Brook with the recaptured gun, Major Sanford was standing near the M.E. Church, when he turned to Adams and remarked; "This is better than your dish-water stuff." **Vs.18.** Geo. Gould, a bloomer, now dead. The venerable Elisha Adams, who married a daughter of the late Reuben Sanford, is now living in Plattsburgh, enjoying the distinction of being Essex County's oldest ex-County Clerk and ex-Sheriff. L.E. Avery, son of the late Sanford Avery and great-grandson of the late Major Reuben Sanford, has a good piece of the old gun, which was presented to him by the late David Hinds, Esq., of Keene. Mr. Avery is now of the mercantile firm of Avery & Preston, dealers in general merchandise, Ferrisburg and No. Ferrisburg, Vt. In conclusion, we might also state that the late Wendell Lansing, founder and for many years editor of the Essex County Republican, the late David Hinds, Esq., and the late lamented Sanford Avery composed [the song "The Stolen Gun" and the **Chronicles.**]

[Note from the Wilmington Historical Society---See the "Stolen Gun" lyrics, originally in the same newspaper article in 1901, See below.]

The Stolen Gun

Sung to the Air---“Dandy Jim” *

Lyrics by Wendell Lansing, founder and for many years editor of the *Essex County Republican*, David Hinds, Esq., and Sanford Avery

Editor of the Elizabethtown Post

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The Black Brook folks to celebrate
July 4th in proper state;
Thought it quite right to steal a gun,
So posted off to Wilmington.

Chorus:

At Black Brook Forge the gun was holed.
The boys all laughed to hear it told.
Ha!ha!ha! what lots of fun
For the brave boys of Wilmington.

Hank Martin's asses one dark night,
Were sent to put the matter right.
Did he not know, the foolish elf,
He soon would be an ass himself?
At Black Brook Forge, etc.

When Ralph, the giant, led the throng,
To move this heavy gun along,
He made a small mistake or two,
But then with him 'twas nothing new.
At Black Brook Forge, etc.

Bill Noyes, who sometimes makes a noise,
Was one among the other boys,
Who thought no sin to steal a gun,
Or rob the folks of Wilmington.
At Black Brook Forge, etc.

And Kibby, with much in his head,
Encouraged larceny 'tis said.
And though possessed of manners fine,
Fell in with Henry's base design.
At Black Brook Forge, etc.

But in this world in spite of Martin,
Many things are quite *unsartain*.
As Hank soon found when war did brew
Around his ears a mighty stew.
At Black Brook Forge, etc.

It was on glorious *Freedom's Day*
When men rejoice, and children play,
The people of Black Brook did grieve,
The STOLEN GUN so soon should leave.
At Black Brook Forge, etc.

Ah! Ha! The bells did ring in vain,
As they shall never ring again!
And that the gun might speak the louder,
'Twas taken with a charge of powder.
At Black Brook Forge, etc.

Says Pat to John, what mighty call
Have ye down here, these people all?
Says John to Pat of Wilmington,
What call had ye to steal our gun?
At Black Brook Forge, etc.

But Henry did not get much ease,
When bribery failed to purchase peace,
Five dollars and a keg of powder,
But made the bull-gine speak the louder.
At Black Brook Forge, etc.

When Robert and his mighty host,
Ere they the sandy plains had crossed,
Gave one loud shout to pay arrears
They saw Black Brook dissolved in tears.
At Black Brook Forge, etc.

But Hank must somehow have a gun,
Well as the boys of Wilmington:
So chased the country up and down,
And stopped at last at Betsey town.
At Black Brook Forge, etc.

And with his pockets lined with cash,
To have a gun he made a dash!
One hundred eighty he did thrive,
And got a gun worth forty-five!
At Black Brook Forge, etc.

To thieving there must be a stop,
By those who show their broughten-up.
Would it not be a pretty story,
To send Black Brook to Dannamora?
At Black Brook Forge, etc.

The host that there would congregate
Within those heavy walls of state,
Would if let loose, with nimble feet,
Steal all the guns at Watervliet.
At Black Brook Forge, etc.

So now we'll close this little song,
Regretting that 'tis quite so long.
And having well paid up the score,
We hope that Black Brook will steal no more.
At Black Brook Forge, etc.

*[Note from the Wilmington Historical Society--- while originally sung to the 1850s popular tune "Dandy Jim", we recognize that the original music was a minstrel song, and that the original lyrics to the song are condescending and inappropriate by current standards. With historical accuracy in mind, we decided to use the tune as originally written with the lyrics as published in 1901.]