

OLD BETSEY AND HER VARIED EXPERIENCES

One interesting pioneer relic, which was well known to the citizens, when it and they were not so old, may be seen on the lawn in front of the residence of Mr. George Walters, in North Findlay, in a condition truly melancholy. It is the old smooth-bore, six-pounder cannon, which, since 1847, has belched forth its thunderous applause, when great events called for boisterous enthusiasm. According to Captain James Wilson's statements, the old gun must have had a history in active warfare. It was probably used in the war of 1812, as well as in the Indian wars of Gen. Harrison before it was invalided like many an old comrade, and relegated to peaceful Fourth of July occasions or to jollifications over successful political campaigns. The old veteran gun, with the lower half of its wheels gone rests with its axles prone upon the ground, with head elevated to the west, like an old soldier-hermit, at his orisons in the cloister after a life amidst the alarms of war in the devout crusading age. Whatever the history of the old gun may have been prior to its having been sent here, by the governor of Ohio in 1847, since that time its various vicissitudes of fortune can be easily traced. Before 1847 its history may be as obscure as is the pedigree of some of the eminent American statesmen; but since then its history is part of the history of the county.

It was sent to this county to be an object lesson, in the hands of amateur artillerists, in the science of war; but it very soon became so antiquated a weapon as to be used only for making an occasional uproar at some pioneer jollification. On Fourth of July occasions, it became quite common to load the old

gun with a reasonable good charge of powder and a tremendous wad of tanner's shavings, from the local tanneries, rammed home with such forces as to make it doubtful in the discharge whether it would be the load or the cannon which would "go off."

In those days Col. Mungen, Wm. Diduit, Oliver Mungen, Isaiah Keltner, Fred Worsley, and other old time gunners, used to take the old gun down to the river bank and make her talk until the woods would ring again and again. On one particular occasion, the old spit fire went off in a puff, somewhat prematurely, in Diduit's face, and tatooed him in an irregular pattern, to such an extent that skillful surgeons failed to get out all the powder marks and some of them are visible in his genial countenance to this day. At the same time, it also took off a finger, which has not been heard of since.

For a long time it was a standing conspiracy among the young men to make old Betsey do her best in one grand final effort; that is they would try to burst the old fossil with an overcharge. Despite the best efforts of the boys and their slow matches, the old joker always got the laugh on them by refusing to burst and that is how it happens that old Betsey still exists and is now in the possession of George Walters.

At an early day the reputation of the old gun was such that our neighbors of Putnam county, at Ottawa, cajoled the Hancock contingent into lending it to them for an occasion. It was not returned, not in fact until some of the old smooth-bore's friends went after her with some improvised artillery horses taken from the plow, and the return was made in rejoicing and triumph.

What the history of the old piece was while absent, what mischief she did or what good is unknown. On her return the old routine was resumed. When used at a Fourth of July demonstration, or to celebrate some Whig or Democratic victory in the elections, the old gun was left standing where last used until some new occasion for its use would arise.

Finally along in the fifties when politics were raging with unusual heat, by some unexplained claim of ownership made by the Democratic party, the Democratic central committee evolved a new use for the gun. It was put up by the committee as a prize to be given to that township which should give the greatest percentage of increase in the Democratic vote at the coming election. Great exertions were made by the different townships to win this coveted prize. There seems to have been no question raised as to the right of the committee to convert the old gun into Democratic votes. She had never been known to fire a solid shot anyhow, although she probably had done so before our acquaintance with her began. The Whigs, thereupon, named the Democratic committee the "pot metal committee," by which name they were known throughout the campaign. Van Buren was the fortunate township that year, and showed the largest increase in the Democratic vote and took the gun. The artillery was turned over by Hon. William Mungen in a neat speech to the rejoicing reception committee of the township, who took it to its country home with great elation. On its arrival there, it is said by some Whigs, perhaps maliciously and perhaps truthfully, that the jubilant winners celebrated the occasion by loading it with a heavy charge of powder and a wooden plug, well

rammed home, and fired it at an angle of about 25 degrees elevation. The plug plowed up the dust somewhere over in Madison township, near a man plowing in a field. It is said the man promptly ran up a flag of truce, and made a graceful surrender at discretion.

How the old gun again got back to Fendlay is not very clearly defined, but it did get back, and was here at the time that the news of the firing on Ft. Sumter arrived, and the President called out the three months' contingent to put down the insignificant rebellion. At this time the old gun was run down to the point of land running into the river, where the Flint block now stands and in a spirit of levity that then prevailed at the presumption of the South in proposing to withstand the North, got off some "cracks" suitable to the occasion. It is said that shortly afterwards, when the volunteers of the Twenty-first regiment were assembling at Findlay and were camping in the old fair grounds, which was then in East Findlay, opposite Martin Hersher's old pottery, on the East side of the angle of Blanchard avenue and Blanchard road, the old gun became an object of admiration for the young soldiers. One morning about 6 o'clock, a number of them in a spirit of frolic, hitched themselves on to the gun by a drag rope and drew it down Sandusky street on to Main and turned north. The spirit of mischief prompted the young fellows to stop in front of Langworthy's drug store, which was then where Entrikin's jewelry store now is, and fire one blank cartridge, just for fun. There was not a whole pane of glass left in two blocks around. At that time Main street from the bridge to Lima street, which was then the whole of Main street, was lined with flag poles about

fifty feet apart on both sides of the street, either of ash or hickory, as the politics of the owners of the lot might be, and every pole had a flag on it. Dr. Langworthy immediately hauled down his flag and ran up a white one instead, in token of surrender. Albert Langworthy was afterward colonel of Forth-ninth O. V. I., and served with great credit.

But the last serious work which the old gun did, that is what was supposed to be serious work at the time, was when it took part in the defense of Cincinnati at the time of the squirrel hunters' campaign, when John Morgan invaded Ohio. On this occasion, all the men who remained at home, flocked to Cincinnati, on the call of the governor, armed with all kinds of grotesque weapons, from a 22-calibre, muzzle loading squirrel rifle up to the old sixpounder smooth-bore; all in dead earnest in their intention to resist invasion, but many of them with weapons that would only be available as clubs. The old cannon was at that time loaded on a flat car and taken to the front, over in Kentucky, manned by Abel F. Parker, Edson Goit, and a company of such old pioneers. When the danger was over the squirrel hunters all flocked home and so did the artillerists, but as usual, and as had always been the case before, the old gun was left standing in the field where last used. The retreat was not at all hurried, and yet the old fraction of a battery was abandoned in the field.

After the war was over and affairs began to resume the normal state, the old gun was missed by our citizens and nowhere to be found. Col. Mungen who was an ex-Congressman as well, at the earnest solicitation of our citizens, finally had influence

enough to procure a substitute for the loved and lost, but the substitute never took the place in the affections of the people which the old gun had held. Furthermore it never gave satisfaction in any of its loud attempts to attract attention. Finally in a fit of desperation as it were, or in a fit of disgust, it may be at the subterfuge, exploded and scattered its worthless fragments over all the surrounding territory, fortunately without injury to anyone. Then the search for the old gun began again, and one of the old artillerists who had taken it to the front was appointed by a citizen's meeting as a committee of one to explore the arsenal and besiege the officials at Columbus, in the hope that it might be recovered. This committee performed his delegated duty, with such persistency and dispatch that Governor Hayes in a fit of desperation wrote and delivered to this efficient committeeman a note addressed to the adjutant general, saying, "For God's sake, hunt this gun up for this man or he will pester me to death." With this order in hand the aforesaid committeeman waited upon the adjutant general and demanded that the gun be found. When asked by the adjutant general whether he would know his old gun, the committee responded, Of course he would for he "sighted her! In explanation it was developed that the "sight" had been filed up by the same committeeman and that he would know the file marks as certainly as if they had been on one of the gentleman's legal papers. So it was the old gun was found and identified by the file marks and was delivered up by the adjutant general. The next step was to pass the hat and raise \$7.50 to pay freight from Columbus home, which was done, and the old gun

was at home again.

In 1877, the year of the great strike, when many unemployed men and tramps were on the road and the authorities became uneasy as to the outcome of the disturbances, the adjutant general of the state ordered the O. N. G. at Findlay to secure the gun and keep it safely. Thereupon Capt. Werts, J. K. Barnd, Merle D. Sours, S. D. Houpt, Henry Kob and a squad from Company A proceeded quietly one night to run the cannon into the old courthouse, through the wide doors, and after a great effort, took it off the carriage and slid it over the floor by means of a pole run down its capacious throat, into a large closet room under the stairway, and closed and locked the door. The carriage was run into the wood house and that door locked. No one was the wiser for the transaction and even the old and astute Courier in the next weekly edition gave veracious and succinct account of how the gun had been stolen by tramps and had been seen near Ada a day or two later. There it remained in retirement until the fall encampment of the O. N. G. at the old fair grounds, when the boys resurrected and reunited the severed parts and made the old gun do duty in announcing the rising and the setting of the sun, according to military usage. The Courier heard an early contradictory report of their former account and were duly indignant thereat.

But possession again palled, and a feeling of indifference arose as to claims of ownership in the gun, and Hon. William Gribben, by some shadowy right, assumed to sell and dispose of it to Frank Klaber, on account of some indebtedness to him, Frank removed the gun to his place of popular resort at the mouth of

creek, on the East Side, and it there became an ornament of his park. It was while here that our citizens had the last report from the old gun itself. This was about the year 1886. Findlay was a thriving village of the first-class, just awakening to the possibilities of becoming a city of the second-class - as yet unaccustomed to the gas and nitro-glycerine explosions of a later date. One summer day was like another in monotony, and even Sam McMicheals sold his peanuts in front of the court house to the constant monotonous cry of "Five a quart!" "Five a quart!" Suddenly on a bright, sunny, lazy afternoon came a tremendous, startling, unusual explosion from some unknown quarters, which awoke and alarmed the entire village. People rushed into the streets and asked of each other "What is it?" "Where is it?" without receiving any answer. Sam McMichael was for the moment silent. Judge Burket turned to him and said: "Sam, what do you say?" "Five a quart!" "Five a quart!" was Sam's startled response. It was soon discovered, however, that the cause of the commotion was the joke of some revellers at the Klaber place who had fired what proved to be a last shot from the old gun.

Another informant, Merle D. Sours, insists that this was not the old gun's final report, but that on the occasion of the presidential election in 1892 Joseph C. Laney and other Republicans in anticipation of the election of Harrison, secured the gun from the John M. Scott Post, to whom Mr. Davis had given it, and took it down to the flats in front of the old Strother homestead, and put in it a good round charge and awaited the election returns. The Republicans never fired that shot. When the returns came in,

they showed the election of Cleveland, and Laney & Co. were not celebrating on that side, but left the old gun standing in the field and went off in search of consolation. The Democrats, unexpectedly finding themselves in a position of jollify, went out and fired the charge in honor of Cleveland that had been loaded for Harrison, and made the old gun fittingly retire as a member of the Democratic party, having begun its political career under the auspices of the "pot metal" committee.

The administrators of the Klaber estate was notified that the gun was public property, and he left it stand where he found it. When sold, it went with the land to Dr. Davis, who after a time under some arrangement made with Mr. Walters that the old gun should be honorably cared for, allowed it to be removed by Mr. Walters to its present location. Age and weather have caused its wheels to fall away spoke by spoke, until now it rests in helpless decrepitude, an honored relic of a past age, useless but in the memories it recalls of days when it was as good and serviceable a gun as any of its class.