

Greene County Gleanings

by Raymond Beecher

In the year 1884, the Catskill printing firm of H. & S.A. Baker, 194 Main Street, conceived the idea of publishing a 20-page 5x3½" booklet on a monthly basis. It was to carry the name "Baker's Catskill Library," and was to be distributed gratuitously to readers. The cost of the venture was to be borne by the sale of advertising, both local and out-of-county. The Bakers would eventually claim a distribution of a thousand copies. Readers not securing the publication otherwise were urged to call at the Baker printing office and request the same.

Volume 1, No. 1 did appear as planned on the Catskill scene in September 1884. It contained a main piece of fiction entitled "Our Ice Adventure." The back cover was preempted by L.R. & W.A. Doty "between the banks on Main Street." This firm dealt in staple and fancy dry goods, cloaks and millinery goods. A.G. Fox, 288 Main, urged readers to insure their property with the old reliable firms he represented. Gaylord's, in the Opera House block, was stressing its large stock of boots, shoes, rubbers, hats, caps and Gents' ware at low prices. For wallpaper, window shades, books and stationery, readers were reminded of Henry Van Gorden's News Depot. In competition was the Estate of Geo. W. Halcott, 257 Main Street, "Booksellers

and Stationers." H. & W.S. Concklin, on Bridge Street between Hill and Water, was dealing in choice groceries. Their slogan was "Cheap as the cheapest and good as the Best." All goods ordered would be delivered free of charge to any village location.

H. & S.A. Baker naturally promoted their printing: business cards, statements, note-heads, letter-heads, envelopes, visiting or calling cards, bills-of-fare, badges, circulars, receipts, shipping tags, programmes and catalogues. "If you want these, go to 194 Main Street" they advertised.

The October issue was similar in content with additional fillers of humor and verse; the main fictional reading was "An Undergraduate's Aunt." It was the November issue which has made Baker's Catskill Library a collector's item of importance. Its feature story was "The Hop-o-Nose" which sought to explain the true origin of the name. The unidentified author produced a Catskill folklore tale of considerable interest, one not generally known about today.

The introduction by the publishers would read: "Among the subjects of peculiar interest in the history of Catskill none seems to be involved in greater obscurity than the origin of a rocky promontory on the right bank of the Catskill Creek,

known at the present time as 'The Hop o'Nose.' Local antiquarians and philologists differ widely in their opinions with regard to it; and as their views do not appear to be based on any positive data, the information in relation thereto vouchsafed by Mr. Campeachy Whistler, an 'old settler,' if not quite sufficient to produce conviction of its entire correctness, may be regarded by many, perhaps, as a common sense suggestion of the possible truth. And this possibility is the excuse we offer for placing it before our readers."

The several men had gathered at their usual hangout in a restaurant [saloon] on Catskill's Water Street. Sitting around the stove they were exchanging the news of the day when a local character by the name of Campeachy Whistler entered. Now this Catskill resident was a local character and could be encouraged to spin yarns with free drinks of cider laced with rum. It took little to excite Campeachy who waxed indignantly over the Hop-O-Nose Knitting Mill preempting that name, when it rightfully belonged to Hoppy Hopson, known to the local Indians as "Big Skin" for his fraudulent trading practices.

Returning early one morning from a night out to attend a cockfight in Jefferson, Hoppy Hopson by chance came upon a group of nighttime thieves on the bank of the creek. In the fight he lost his nose. The remainder of Campeachy's folktale tells of its retrieval in a frozen state, its subsequent theft by the family cat and of the incident of Hoppy's nose being a major item of Catskill news that winter.

And thus, concluded Campeachy Whistler, "You see, gentlemen, the place was christened and dedicated to the fame of Hoppy Hopson to commemorate his courageous defense of local interests. For years after it was known as Hoppy's Nose. Next the apostrophe was dropped; later residents used 'The Hoppy Nose,' and finally 'The Hop o'Nose.'" Much to the derision of his listeners, the assemblage broke up, with the landlord stuck with part of the drink bill.

Baker's Catskill Library does not appear to have been a long-lived publication. The first three copies survive in the collections at the Greene County Historical Society's Vedder Memorial Research Library. Readers may know of subsequent issues, a matter of interest to this columnist.

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