

The Infamous Buggy Race

by Ira Briggs

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My great-great grandpa Charlie Briggs and great-great uncle Eddy Purcell both took it hard after their young wives' tragic buggy accident.

The wives were two sisters of the Harder family. They were en route to the annual Deacon's Picnic in a conventional horse drawn buggy, transporting their precious cargo of two apple pies. Grandpa Charlie's wife Lulu cradled the two pies in her lap on the passenger side of the buggy while Uncle Eddy's wife Hattie controlled the reins.

As they approached the intersection of Harder and Marrowback Roads, they were intercepted from Harder Road to the left by the Wheeler twins. The Wheeler girls made no effort to acknowledge the Harder sisters' presence as they drove past in their elegant horse-drawn Basket Phaeton with its blue cotton wicker seat, brass door handles and kerosene running lamps. There had been an ongoing rivalry between the Harder girls and the Wheeler twins as to whose pies were of the best

quality at the annual picnic.

Adversaries since childhood, they each strove for the lead on the dusty dirt road. Their horses picked up speed in a challenging trot with the twins in the lead. The crack of the whip and the rhythmic hammering of the horses' hooves on the hard-packed road would soon decide the supremacy between the women. The twins wore victorious smirks upon their faces as sweat cascaded off their horse's mane. They knew it wasn't feasible for the Harder girls to pass them on the last stretch of narrow road leading to the Hemlock Lake Park entrance, the location of the Deacon's Picnic.

The white and pastel colors of the Harder girls' Sunday best was soon covered with a thick dusting of uncomplimentary earth tones, as were their faces and hands. By now, both horses were at full gallop, with their cargo riding on the edge of peril. The twins proceeded left onto Blank Road, while the Harder sisters opted for Jakeway Hill, their only chance for a win.

Jakeway Hill, a perilous shortcut to the park, led to the bottom of Devil's Bedroom, one of the area's more spectacular gullies. The steep rutted hill is treacherous if not traveled with caution. A footpath to the left follows along the road's edge for the duration of the steep descent. Passengers would customarily disembark while drivers slowly eased their vehicles to the bottom. The scenic walk overlooks Devil's Bedroom, with its waterfall almost completely surrounded by shale rock formations.

On this occasion, the Harder girls broke over the crest of Jakeway Hill with no regard for the usual traveling procedures. As they caromed down the hill, Lulu's fingers dug deeply into the apple pies, grossly distorting the crusts that had been so painstakingly sculpted. The pies were a total loss, but the wives felt the race would be won. Halfway down the hill, the right front wheel collapsed like an egg. The sequential breaking of the spokes was followed by a crisp snap of steel as the pivoting center bolt joining the two wheels and axle to the mechanical steering rigging broke.

Minutes later, the Wheeler twins slowed to enter the park entrance, realizing they had somehow placed second. A puzzled crowd had gathered around the Harder girls' mare just inside the gates. The horse was still attached to the rigging; its left front wheel was intact, but all that remained of the right wheel was the broken stubble of six wooden spokes attached to the hub. Hattie's earth toned glove was entangled in the horse's reins.

Hattie's remains were found with the rest of the buggy on the floor of the Devil's Bedroom. Lulu was found wedged high in the crotch of a red oak. She died in a week's time as a result of her injuries.

That evening, as the two inconsolable men grieved, the animals of the woods-raccoons, squirrel, fox and deer- feasted on the sweet offering of the apple pies strewn throughout the woods and at the bottom of the Devil's Bedroom.

Editor's Note: Ira Briggs is a well digger, writer and Arc Living Skills Assistant and a University of Rochester employee who hails from Hemlock. He writes short stories from his memories of the people and events of Hemlock NY.