

LOCAL-OPTION IN 1858

An Early Demonstration Against Liqor – They Dumped the “tea” into the Highway –
Very Well Known Men Showed Feeling Against Liquor Traffic Which Lives in Hopkins
Today.

To the Editor of the Gazette:

The present fight in behalf of local-option recalls to the minds of old settlers of Hopkins an incident which took place in the summer of 1858.

R. A. Baird and Dr. L.H. Wait came to Hopkins in 1856 and erected a steam sawmill at what is now known as Hopkinsburg. They employe a number of hands and soon they was quite a settlement. About three quarters of a mile north was a little grocery story owned by Luther Martin. Zenas Pratt also had a shoe store in the same place. As people became more numerous Mr. Martin thought he could add to the comfort of the settlement and also put some money into his own pocket by getting a barrel of whisky and retailing it to the settlers. This for a time did not meet very decided opposition. But soon, after the fashion of all saloons, boys were roped in and made drunk.

The people objected and said it was time to call a halt, and after considerable talk and consideration of the matter it was determined to empty the whisky on the ground and warn Mr. Martin not to bring in any more. So one evening L.A. Atwater, Frank Congdon, Rollin Congdon, Luther Mason, Chas. Gurney, Geo. Buck, Geo. Congdon, Wm. O’Brian and some others whose names I have not obtained, banded together and undertook the task. There were three barrels in a row and to determine which one held the whisky Chas. Gurney and Wm. O’Brien were sent in to buy some. Then the whole company went in and rolled the barrel end over end into the road and Geo. Congdon with a blow that was heard at the Burg and which echoes still, smashed in the head of the barrel and emptied the whisky on the ground. After which the young men quietly dispersed to their homes, feeling that although their act was not lawful, they had stopped an unlawful and intolerable nuisance which was a menace to the community.

Mr. Martin of course resented the destruction of his property and make complaint to Justice of the Peace Norton Briggs of Wayland who issued warrants for the arrest of the guilty ones. Johnathan Brewer of Hopkins was the constable employed to make the arrests. He secured the services of Jason Baker with his old team of horses and dilapidated lumber wagon to assist in arresting the parties and conveying them to Wayland Village, about seven miles away. The young men were informed of what was going on, so Luther Mason, L.A. Atwater, and Chas. Gurney went upstairs in their boarding place, changed their clothes, lay down and patiently waited for the constable.

They were perfectly willing to submit when he came, but suddenly fund themselves unable to walk a step. Help was secured and they were carried down stairs and put into the wagon. The others who were wanted also suddenly became unable to walk and had to be carried from the places where they were found and put into the wagon. The wagon was so full they kept falling out and had to be picked up and put back into the wagon. After the constable and his assistant had become completely exhausted, exasperated, and hopeless of any success in delivering their prisoners to the court, the boys thought they had fun enough and told Mr. Brewer to let them alone and they would

go of their own accord. The constable was very willing to give up his job. They made up a four horse team, a span of mules and a span of horses, rigged up a big wagon and with John Baird as marshal on horseback with a big wooden sword and two immense wooden pistols, they started with Luther Mason as driver and banners flying to report to the court in Wayland, where after an immense amount of fun, they delivered themselves and were duly arraigned and the day set for trial.

The trial came off on the day set. The boys were there in the same style as before. Stoughton appeared for the defense. Only three of the band could be found guilty, Wm. O'Brien, Chas. Gurney, and Geo. Congdon, and they were fined five dollars each. That and the expenses of the lawyer was divided among the interested parties and it was very light for each, and all considered the fun and moral effect worth all it cost. Local-option triumphed and no one attempted to sell liquor in Hopkins for many years. Those who aided the boys and the boys themselves have mostly passed away but the memory of the deed still remains in the minds of the old settlers and the strong sentiment against the saloon that was then exhibited still remains. The axe that was used is now in possession of Robert Baird, son of John, who was marshal, and is treasured as a relic of the first local-option fight in Hopkins.

Yours respectfully,
F. E. Pickett

Note on the back of this copy of newspaper article:
March 3, 1959 Copied by Esther W. Hettinger for Willis D. Parmelee from
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