

# The Crook That Got Away

By Patricia Brown Davis

**T**oday the only evidence of a large crook in the creek that helped give it the original name—Crooked Creek—is a decaying tree and a few smaller shrubs snaking strangely in a horseshoe-curved line across a hay field that lies next to Route 287 a few hundred yards west (and south) of the village of Holiday.

Indeed, a long time has transpired from the time Daniel Holiday decided to call this place his home—Holidaytown—and to open a tavern. In 1829 a post office was opened and given the name of Crooked Creek. For years the little village flourished, attracting farmers, two local general merchandise stores, a post office, two churches, a flour mill, a barbershop, and a blacksmith shop—turned garage after cars replaced most horses. The saloon, owned by one of my Keeney ancestors, had faded into history when the township voted “dry,” but not some of the stories.

It was not surprising that Crooked Creek became its official name for the large creek that snaked its way through the valley and mountains. Holiday always flooded in the spring and other times of heavy rain. This all deposited fertile topsoil on the bottomlands, making the land just a bit higher than the creek. The more level the land, the more the creek meandered.

The large crook in the creek was still there when I was a kid. Summer found us kids playing along its banks or in it. We were cowboys, Indians, pioneers, soldiers, sailors, hunters—but always imaginative adventurers. Sometimes we enjoyed setting sail small handmade boats at the upper end of the crook, running across the field to the lower end, and waiting for the boats to come sailing around the bend and back into sight.

Then one day, one of the bigger boys declared *we* should do the traveling. They hunted for anything to make a raft. Since we couldn't all sail at the same time, we settled on sending a neighborhood dog down the creek. At first it looked successful, but when the dog began to go out of sight at the bend, he “jumped ship,” swam back, and shook water all over us.

Then one of the boys decided to send

his little brother downstream. He was told to sit still and not move. We watched his smile slowly fade as he went around the bend. We raced across the field to the other side, where we saw his smile return as he saw us and we rescued him.

This only happened once. The story spread like wildfire. Stern lectures were doled out to us all. Days of sailing came to an abrupt end...for most of us. The older boys just became more clever and secretive. The rest of us were too wimpy to expose ourselves to parental wrath. I hadn't yet learned to tell a good lie and didn't want to push my luck.

Winter was just as much fun. In January, we'd grab our skates and head for ice.

Then one year, to punctuate his warnings, Dad shared a tragic childhood story about what had happened to him and his four sisters. They were all on the crook with the family dog and having a great time skating and sliding on the ice, when they heard a huge splash up creek. They turned just in time to see their dog disappear in the water of an unfrozen area.

They all went racing. However, the water was swift and the dog was dragged under. The kids watched helplessly as they saw their dog float downstream under the ice. They followed along until he disappeared from view, standing at the lower end of the bend waiting for the dog to reappear, but he never did. They were left looking morosely at each other. For awhile they walked along the bank, but the dog was never found. Silently they turned, defeated, and went home to tell their sad tale.

From that day on, I lost all appetite to skate “on the crook.” When the other kids heard the tale, they did, too. We moved across the road to the Lewis Farm pond, where we skated and played Fox and Geese, Snap the Whip, and Red Rover, Come Over. By then the girls and I became interested in figure skating and the boys drifted to hockey games, the genders splitting.

A few years later, the government engineers came to town. First they bulldozed and cleaned out the small streams connecting to Crooked Creek. Then they cleaned the main creek through the town, building the

banks higher. Finally they went to the crook and dug a deep, straight channel to connect the upper and lower bends. After they built up the sides and had the creek flowing in a straight line, they went back and filled in the old creek bed with dirt, leveling it with the surrounding field. Only the dying tree and shrubs left a telltale scar on the land.

Today, every time I drive by the field, I look at it and remember those days—and the story of Dad's dog.

The engineers did a great job. Holiday never flooded again. The water roared on by to other places downstream, like Tioga, where it commingled with the water from the Mansfield area. For twenty years the engineers planned for and finally completed the Tioga-Hammond Dam project. When it was done two large water-protection lakes, both culminating and connecting in the Tioga area, were the result. Prior to that, most of Holiday was moved; it exists today, but our ancestors wouldn't recognize it.

Times change—as do towns and waterways. The old original town cemetery, next to the crook, was moved also. All remains of Daniel Holiday and the early settlers were exhumed, moved to the Fairview Cemetery, a small hill that overlooks Holiday, and reburied. Their higher and drier bones now commingle with others who have chosen this hill as their final residence. These include several generations of my family. (If my ashes were to be placed anywhere, I'm thinking that this spot might just be as good as any.)

FYI: A group on facebook was formed last year, called “If You Were From Holiday/Middlebury, Hammond Do You Remember?” Here can be found old photos, stories, memories, and questions from some of us who lived there and talk about those times. 📷



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