

## The Old "Buck Cannon"

Seemingly the end of old "Buck Cannon" was known to few writers and historians, yet there is a simple answer in the columns of the Weekly Intelligencer. It served the loyal Democracy during the Buchanan campaigns and in years following.

For years it had been the custom of the jubilant Democracy of the Eighth Ward to give expression to their feelings on occasions of party success by bringing out the big gun and from an elevated position on Cabbage Hill overlooking the city, firing salutes in honor of victory.

The reelection of Mayor John T. McGonigle, on February 28, 1882, inspired the customary impulse, and a party of young Democrats procured twenty pounds of powder and took the cannon to the usual ground at the corner of Fremont Street and Laurel Alley, that point being on an eminence that has a sweep over the entire city, and is well-adapted to the purpose designated. The gun was rammed with sod, corn stalks, etc., and filled nearly to the muzzle, and when the powder was ignited there was a deafening report as the gun exploded into a hundred fragments which flew in every direction. One piece of the flying metal, weighing eighty pounds, struck Frank Herzog, a barber aged twenty-four years, on the left temple, killing him instantly. Another piece struck Peter Roerich, carpenter, twenty-nine years old, on his right leg, shattering it frightfully, making amputation necessary. The operating doctors were M. L. Herr, David, Muhlenberg and Foreman.

The gun was completely shattered, the wooden carriage was torn to pieces, spokes torn from the wheel hub, axles broken, and there remained nothing but splinters. The impaneled jury for Coroner Daniel A. Shiffer rendered a verdict "that Frank Herzog came to his death by the explosion of a cannon caused by carelessness in loading."

"Old Buck," as the gun was familiarly called, was an historical piece of artillery. It was made at the Phoenix Iron Works, Phoenixville, Pa. (not at Safe Harbor), and is said to have been originally intended as a gift to the Emperor Napoleon III, but was instead presented to the Democracy of this city by John Griffin during James Buchanan's presidential campaign, as the minutes of the famous Wheatland Club show, and from which it derived its sobriquet.

Peter Roerich, whose right leg was amputated as the result of injuries sustained by the explosion of the cannon, died March 9, 1882.

(Picture of Old Buck appears in vol. 64, page 211, pamphlets of the Lancaster County Historical Society.)

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