

When our area was settled, there was a tremendous amount of hard physical labor involved. This was forest country, pretty much unbroken except for the swamps and bogs that remained more open. Horses and oxen, along with some tools for groundbreaking and stump pulling, were the aids that the homesteaders had at their disposal. The pioneers' own strength and skill in using the equipment they had made the difference between success and failure. In retrospect, much of this land should have remained wooded, but that was not the prevailing land ethic. At that time, in the late 1800s, the goal was to cut trees, work ground, and make the wilderness into farms.

It's no wonder, then, that the early farmers embraced the use of explosives so wholeheartedly. Blowing stumps, stones, and ditches soon became a common practice. Cheap and easy to obtain, dynamite became the tool of choice in clearing land and removing obstacles to a farmer's progress. There were some serious injuries and even deaths resulting from accidents with blasting, but most people were careful and knew what they were doing. Few considered the use of dynamite a particularly risky business.

This use of dynamite declined with time. Farms were settled, stumps and stones had been removed, and there was not as much need for the explosive. But, on occasion, dynamite was still useful.

In the late 1950s there was an incident in the neighborhood that eclipsed all the previous dynamite stories, both real and imagined. It began when a neighbor's old farm house burned to the ground. The owners were no longer farming, so they decided to take down their big barn and use the large quantity of good lumber to build a new house. They soon discovered, however, that the hemlock siding was hard to remove. The nails sat fast, and it was easy to splinter the boards while trying to pull them from the framing.

They were temporarily stymied, but someone, another neighbor I have heard, had a bright idea. He had read that a little dynamite would loosen the nails. So, they set off a couple of sticks inside the barn. It did nothing but make a satisfying "bang." They decided that they needed a larger charge if it were to be at all effective. But, instead of putting out a

half dozen sticks, they hung the rest of the case of dynamite in the middle of the barn.

My father was watching this from the road. When he saw what they were going to do next, he jumped into the car and drove up to a hill on the corner that was a safer distance from the activity. He was no stranger to the use of dynamite, and he liked using it as well as the next farmer. But, he could see no good ending to this affair. He had just stepped out of the automobile and turned his head toward the barn when the charge blew. He recalled later that, for a split second, nothing seemed to happen. Then, the barn swelled, becoming nearly round. Finally, in a tremendous explosion that was heard and felt many miles away, the building disintegrated into splinters. When the debris and dust had settled, they discovered that there weren't enough boards left intact to build a dog house, let alone a dwelling for a family. That big barn was nothing but kindling.

The general opinion of the spectators was that, while it was a shame that a good building was so wantonly destroyed, if it had to happen, they were glad they were on hand to witness this spectacular event. As the years passed, it became more difficult to purchase explosives, and, anyway, the neighborhood has settled down considerably since those days.