

# The Mystery of the Chrome Iron Spherical Mini-Cannonball Safe



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**The Legend:** The safe was transferred from the First Bank of Essex County to its present location (TD Bank Branch, Main Street, Keeseville N.Y. (Originally Keeseville National Bank))

The 1<sup>st</sup> Bank of Essex county was established in 1832 on the corner of Front and Main Streets, Keeseville, NY. In 1832 the Essex County Bank of the Village of Keeseville was incorporated by the legislature, capital stock \$100,000, divided in 4,000 shares. Oliver Keese II, Martin Pope and Elias Hurlburt of Keeseville, Rueben Whallon and William D, Ross of Essex. William Burt of Clintonville and James Duane of Duane, Franklin County were its commissioners under the act. Judge Fisk of Keeseville was its first president. **The affairs were ended in 1862 with Silas Arnold, last president and Samuel Ames, cashier.**

A portion of the building with its entrance on Main Street was used for banking purposes. The building was made from native sandstone. The banking rooms, two in number were on the north side of the entrance. **The vault was built in the smaller of the two rooms. It was made of slabs of limestone and bound with wide iron bands. The floor and ceiling were also of limestone, which was reinforced (with) sheet iron and was locked with a very large iron key.** If this description of the vault is accurate, would the bank have had a need for the Spherical Iron Safe?

**The building was sold in 1937 when it was demolished. Is this when the safe was supposedly transferred to the Keeseville National Bank?**

**The Patent date painted on the front of the safe is March 19, 1867.**

If the 1<sup>st</sup> Essex County Bank ended operations in 1862 and the safe was not patented until 1867, could the bank have owned the safe?

**The Keeseville National was established on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1871, eight years after the 1<sup>st</sup> Bank of Essex County ended operations.**

The following articles which appeared in local newspapers, suggest that the Keeseville National Bank had its own spherical safe(s):

**Plattsburgh Sentinel, Friday February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1872, Page 3:**

**KEESEVILLE RASCALITIES.** – Keeseville had a fine Sensation Tuesday morning. The Teller, on opening the Bank, found that burglars had broken into the vault. They reached it by ladders outside, and with the proper tools tore out enough brick work to admit a person. No papers were disturbed as is yet known. Some thirty or forty dollars in Nickels, outside of the safe, were taken. They took a turn at **Marvin and Co's. Spherical Burglar Proof Safe** and retired in disgust. It is not believed that burglars from abroad did the work, but only tolerably expert rascals in our own community, of which we have a goodly number outside of State Prison. Keeseville has its schools of vice, the primary departments being on the streets and sidewalks, the pupils going rapidly through the intermediate departments to the graduating class in the school of crime.

From the street, one step only takes you into dens of infamy that are already ripe for the officers of the law, and from which the strong arm of justice, we believe, will not long be withheld.

LATER – Tuesday afternoon an examination of parties was had in reference to sledge, chisel, etc., taken from Drazey's shop to operate with in breaking through the brick wall of the vault. Several five cent nickels were found on the floor of the shop. Nothing was established, and no clue obtained.

Did the **Marvin and Co's. Spherical Burglar Proof Safe** referred to in the above article come from the First Bank of Essex County or did the Keeseville National Bank purchase from the manufacturer?

**Essex County Republican, Thursday March 20, 1873, Page 3:**

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**Marvin's Spherical Safe.** – We had quite an excitement on Friday, and lively times in front of the Keeseville National Bank. Our account of the burglarous entrance into the Bank about a year ago has not been forgotten. It will be remembered that an attempt was made to break into the safe and with that end in view the lock was somewhat injured. It had been taken out and repaired, but imperfectly, and finally it would not operate, and the funds and papers of the Bank could not be reached.

An expert was sent for from New York, and that will account for the excitement of last Friday. The whole day was devoted to experiments for breaking into the safe. Finally powder was passed into the lock with a view to an explosion, but it was found it ran into the safe among the papers. Here was a dilemma, and expert, and mechanics, and bank officers, held a tremendous council of war, and duly considered the exigency and danger of the case, for it was extremely dangerous, as was apparent to all, to fire a train that was sure to ignite postage stamps, green-backs, evidences of debt, and other valuables, confined in that iron receptacle of bank availables. Cold chisels had no more effect on that iron globe than a puff ball would have on adamant itself. At last it was concluded to fill it up with dry sand. This done, a charge of half a pound of powder was tried with no effect. And then a pound with no better result. And then two pounds of powder was put in the door, the train was fired, the explosion that followed was not wholly unlike one of McClellan's big guns on the night of the evacuation of the rebel side of Warwick, up went the door some 500 feet in the air, being thrown from Clinton into Essex County and coming down struck near the twine factory. The digging in the sand by Senator Ames and other bank officers followed, and all the money and other valuables were taken out uninjured, and only wanted "some" shaking to separate the sand that had proved their protection.

Our story is done. Our conclusion is that the **Marvin' Spherical Burglar Proof Safe** is the champion article of the world. It had been put to the severest test, no one knows how many hours. By experienced burglars with no apparent impression upon it except a trifling injury to the lock, and that did nothing toward helping them into it. And the on Friday. The whole day was spent by an expert. A dozen smiths more or less, with the entire stockholdership of the bank, and certainly not less than one hundred men and boys, and finally by resorting to the "villiany" of powder the door was blown out and entrance was obtained. When we have money enough to want a safe, which can't be a great while according to "malicious" rumors in circulation, we shall know where to apply.

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**Essex County Republican, Thursday April 10, 1873, Page 3:**

After the issue of the Republican containing the article on **Marvin's Safe** was exhausted \we received a large order. This we can answer only by republishing the article. (**The March 20<sup>th</sup> article was reprinted in full in the adjacent column of page 3.**)

Was this **Marvin' Spherical Burglar Proof Safe** rendered unusable by the explosion of the two pounds of powder, and did the bank then purchase another safe or could the safe have been repaired and put back into service?

**MASKED BURGLARS**

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**The Keeseville National Bank Completely Cleaned Out.**

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**THREE NIGHT WATCHES BOUND To THE FLOOR.**

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**The Spherical “Burglar Proof” Safe Blown open and about \$80,000 Gone.**

Last Saturday morning at an early hour, the citizens of Keeseville were startled by the news that village had, during the night, been invaded by a band of armed and masked burglars who after capturing the watchmen, and binding them fast, had broken into the bank, blown open the safe and fled with its valuable contents. The news spread like wildfire over the county: men were sent in all directions to pick up no traces of the criminals; Telegrams flew over the lines as soon as the offices were open and the greatest excitement prevailed.

**THE BANK**

Presented a sorry appearance enough when entered by the citizens. The night lamp was still left burning on the counter and the front windows curtains were yet drawn up as left by the watchmen the night before. The double door to the vault was forced open and the floor of the vault was covered with fragments of the door of the **Marvin Spherical “Burglar proof safe”** which had been considered by the bank officials as invulnerable, and the entire contents of the safe, - bonds, notes and currency - were missing.

**TRACES**

On the floor were found a steel punch some eight inches long, a short steel wedge very finely finished, a valuable square bellows, probably part of an improved blow pipe arrangement ( which had evidently not been used during the night) and a piece of fuse, such as is used for firing nitro glycerine.

**THE HEAVIEST LOSSES**

By the robbery are parties who had funds - mostly United States Bonds – in the bank, not on deposit, but left for safe keeping without any security. This amount is not far from \$60,000. Among the losers in this class are Daniel and E. H. Stickney of Jay, \$23,000; Mrs. Ladd formerly Miss Howland of Plattsburgh, \$4,500 (nearly all her means); Austin Bigelow, \$4,500; Mrs. Colvin Port Kent, \$8,750; Mr. Dodge, \$3,000 and several others who lost smaller amounts.

**THE ENTIRE LOSS OF THE BANK**

Is stated at \$8,000 in bonds, - mostly town bonds – and \$7,000 in currency, besides all the promisory notes held by the bank.

We have taken considerable pains to collect all the facts bearing on this remarkable case. The first thought which naturally struck the minds of many persons was that this robbery could not have been executed without the assistance of some “home talent” that three fact that these the watchmen, (not withstanding they were in different places when the attack was made upon them,) suffered themselves to be bound and intimidated with earshot of a considerable of inhabitants, without giving an alarm, was, to say the least of it, a very suspicious circumstance and strongly indicated a possibility that the job may have been a “put up” one on their part. These and other considerations made us anxious to get at the exact facts in the case, and to that end we have personally obtained very full statements from all three of these watchmen and it is

proper to say right here that whatever suspicions we had harbored of the kind indicated, previously to investigating this case were entirely dissipated by the honest, frank manner of these men, taken in connection with their previous good characters and the uniformity of their statements. The three men who were bound by the burglars were John Collins, Henry Duval and Wm. H. Ames.

### **THERE ARE THREE POINTS,**

which the reader, who desires to get a correct idea of the robbery, should fix in this mind. First, the Keeseville National Bank which is located on the west bank of the Ausable River close to the bridge in the village of Keeseville and on the north side of the street leading across the bridge; secondly, the Horse Nail Company's Office – across the street and nearly opposite the bank, less than 100 feet from it; and third, the Sorting Room in the rear of the office, and about 125 feet from it and nearly in a line with the Bank and office. This office was the regular headquarters of Henry Duval, night watchman, employed by the Horse Nail Company and not by the Bank, although it was part of his business to watch the Bank, as it appears. – Duval is a powerful man, 36 years old and weighs 218 pounds.

### **HENRY DUVAL'S STORY.**

He says: I have worked for the Company four years last April; was born in the Town of Mooers but father came to this part of the county when I was six years old. I enlisted in the 77<sup>th</sup> New York Regiment in which I served from the commencement of the war in 1861 to its close in 1865, ten months of which time I spent in Andersonville Prison; when I returned from the war I came to Keeseville and have lived here ever since. I have served as night watch for the Company four years the fourth of this July; have had charge of the key to the door of the bank all this time. My business at the bank is to unlock the door early every evening, light the lamp and place it on the counter, and draw up the curtains so that any one passing in the street during any part of the night can look in and see the vault door and everything inside except behind the counter and in the morning at daylight I go in again and put the light out. Last Friday night I lit the lamp and left it burning on the counter as usual at the Bank. The curtains were up and the burglars didn't put the curtains down while they were at work. And didn't put the light out but left it burning and I found it burning in the morning. I consider this the boldest burglary I ever saw done. Once when I was in New York city there was an alarm of fire and while the people were all excited some burglars went through a jewelry store in broad daylight, but that burglary wasn't as bold as this one. – Just after the town clock on the opposite side of the street from the office struck 12 last Friday night I went out of the office where my headquarters are, locking the door after me and walked up the street to Mr. Kingsland's house and saw that everything was all right there and on the street; I always do this immediately after midnight. – I walked slowly and came back in from fifteen to thirty minutes, put my key in the door of the hall, not of the office, unlocked it, went in and locked the door behind me. – (There is a partition between the office and the hall door inside, but it extends back only a few feet so that the hall and office are in one sense the same room.) My light was burning in the office just as I had left it and upon turning around, I was confronted by three masked men. My left hand – I am left handed – happened to be in my pocket hold of the handle of my pistol, which I always carry in my pocket ready cocked. The moment I saw the men they said to me simultaneously, "Don't you open your head, if you do, we'll blow your brains out." One of the men had a bulls eye lantern, but he didn't turn it on me as there was light enough without. All had dark clothes, think they wore sack coats and

wool hats, but only had a glimpse of them. All three wore masks – regular white masks, good fitting, with dark lips and eye – regular manufactured, full masks. The moment they spoke I pulled my pistol out and fired at them, at random I suppose, and gave a yell; the next I knew one of their hands was on my mouth, another seized my by the throat, and in an instant they crushed me down to the floor and had me handcuffed. with my hands behind me; they then blindfolded me with three towels and rammed a handkerchief into my mouth and bound a linen coat around to hold it in. Then they took my boots off and took me up into Johnny’s room, (Collins’s) set me down into an armchair, tied my hands to the chair behind with cords and strapped me down to the floor. The straps they used were hame straps as I found afterward with the inside loop cut off and they passed the straps thro an iron ring which was screwed down into the floor and Collins and Ames were also fastened about the same time. Then they turned a tin pail up against my chair so that if I stirred it would fall down and make a noise and soon afterwards I think they all left but one. Just before they left I heard one of them say, “Hurry up, it’s half past one” Before going they asked me where the key to the bank was and I told them I didn’t know and and one of them called me a s \_\_\_\_ b \_\_\_\_ and struck me pretty hard with a pistol or knife hilt. Afterward I told them it was downstairs. Soon after they left, I heard an explosion over at the bank and after that time I heard five more. About three o’clock there was somebody came up the stairs and Ames complained that the straps hurt his wrists and the man said he would be back in a few minutes and fix them, but he hasn’t got back and when he comes, I’d like to try the handcuffs on him. In a few minutes I said, “Boys they’ve gone,” but John and Ames told me to shut up my head. Soon afterwards we worked ourselves loose; John worked the bandage off his eyes some way and by all of us leaning our heads forward he pulled the bandages of Ames’ and my heads. Then John got clear from his chair and unbuckled the strap on Ames’ foot (only one of Ames’ feet were bound) with his teeth and Ames’ help and then we soon got loose. This was just about daylight. I think these were regular city burglars; I think there were at least nine or ten of them. The stage went by while we were trying to get loose and I hollered at the driver as loud as I could but he didn’t hear me. I’m not a very learned man, there’s many smarter men than me in Keeseville, but I think if the fire bells had been rung and enough citizens called out to scour the woods thoroughly Saturday morning early, we might have caught those robbers.

### **JOHN COLLINS’ STORY**

Mr. Collins is a powerful young man about 26 years old. His father, John G. Collins was an old employee of the Kingslands, having worked for them making iron on the Boquet and, afterwards was foreman of the works at Keeseville.

John Collins has worked for the Horse Nail Co. twelve years, having lately worked by the piece making boxes. For four years he has slept in the room directly over the Horse Nail Company’s office, and was a night watchman only in this sense-that it was considered safer by the Company to have him within call in case assistance should be needed during the night by the regular night watchman. Mr. Collins Says:

I have slept in this room (over the office) off and on about four years. While the railroad company used this room, I slept in an adjoining one, I went to bed last Friday night about a quarter after ten and I think I was asleep at eleven, and slept sound until I was awakened by a shot in the hall below, and a yell which I knew to be Duval’s; he yelled as if in terrible pain and then all was still for a moment and the next thing I knew there came a heavy blow on my door, the door was burst open and before I was fairly awake three masked men rushed into the room,

there was a flash in my face from a bull's eye and the next instant they were all on top of me; they turned me over on my face and strapped my hands behind me; while they were at work on me some more men came upstairs and they asked, "how's the big fellow?" (meaning Duval) and they said "all right". I think there were about six of the men in all; the men I saw had their faces completely covered by white cloth – which I think was drawn down and tucked into and buttoned up in their coats. They blindfolded me with my pillow-case, then they got me out of bed and put my pants on and strapped me down to the floor. Before they got me bound they asked me where the "key of the vault was," I told them I didn't know, and I didn't. I saw two revolvers pointed at me. I had a revolver in my room which they took but left my watch? They tied my hands down to the chair behind and strapped my feet to the floor. Duval and Ames were brought in and bound. They tipped a tin pan up against my chair so it would fall and make a noise if I moved and a coal scuttle against Ames" and a tin pail against Duval's. I didn't know when Ames and Duval came into the room, the first I knew they were there I heard Ames complain that he couldn't breathe and Duval said he was fainting; one of them said "faint you s--- - b---- if you want to." They asked Duval where the key to the bank was and he said downstairs. They worked very deliberately and didn't seem to hurry at all. They couldn't find the key at first and came back the second time and Duval told them again. They left us in charge of one man who came upstairs occasionally and took hold of our hands to see if we were fast. Once Ames asked if he could have the strap around his foot loosened and he said he wouldn't make any noise and the man replied in a threatening manner, "you'd better not." About ten minutes after the men went away, I heard an explosion over at the bank, heard no noise over there until this, the explosion was quite sharp but seemed as if muffled by doors and windows. I heard six blasts in all at intervals of about ten minutes each, all seemed to be of about the same force. About five minutes after the last blast, one of the men came to the lower door and said "Say, say." Our guard said "What" and the other said "Come here." Then the man said to us "I'll be back in a few minutes." And went out and that's the last we heard of him. Soon afterwards I asked Ames what time it began to be daylight and he said about three, and that it must be about daylight then. The clock struck three shortly after they went out. Duval said he thought they were gone. After I had made up my mind that they had gone I worked the bandage off so I could see, by moving my scalp, and the sight which Duval and Ames presented, with the long ends of their bandages sticking up like tassels, was so ridiculous I burst out laughing. Afterwards I contrived to pull off their bandages by the ends with my teeth and then unbuckled Ames' foot also with my teeth. The stage went by a little before four, I yelled as loud as I could but couldn't make the driver hear. I have a confused idea that I heard a wagon in the street soon after the men left, but am not certain. I think it was a band of experts that did the job. They only worked at the bank about one hour.

### **Wm. H. Ames' Story**

Mr. Ames Says:

I am 54 years old, have lived in Keeseville 32 years, am a bloomer by trade and used to work for the Kingslands on the Bouquet river, have been a night watchman at the Horse Nail works about ten years, my business is to guard against fires, I go on at 6 P.M., my beat is from the factory up the river to the foundry and when not outside watching spend the night in the "Sorting room", sorting nails.



Last Friday night I was inside this sorting room at work about half past twelve. When someone knocked at my door; I asked what was wanted or who's there and somebody asked me to open the door. I opened the door – supposed it was some of the boys who had been fishing; they frequently come to my door that way in the night and I let them in. As soon as I opened the door three masked men stepped inside, two of them got behind me and seized my arms and bound them together; each had revolvers and some of them knives. I knew what had come – we had been expecting it; they said they hadn't come to injure me but I must keep quiet. The masks were regular white masks. One of the men was as tall as I am and the others small. I weigh over 200 and am 6 feet high. After they had bound me they asked for my handkerchief, I told them I hadn't any and they then took my working frock and blindfolded me with it; I had no revolver, do not carry one; Duval had one but they took it away from him. They stand they marched me into the office and upstairs where they bound me down to the floor (in the same manner described by the others). I heard them say something about ten being “enough for that job.” I think three or four men might have done the whole job but there might have been eight or nine. They went to the bank about half past one. I am sure I heard five explosions, there may have been six. The last shot was about half past 1. The first sound at the bank was like striking against sheet iron, the shots kept growing heavier and heavier and the last one made the room jar where we were. I think the robbery was committed by science burglars. The voices of the men were different from those of people about here; I think two were foreigners, one an Irishman. They didn't use me harsh, when one of them was fastening my hands he trembled so he had to stop, and went away. The thought struck me once or twice that some of the men lived about here, but I had no particular reason, that I can remember, for thinking so. I think they took the road to Birmingham and went into the woods.

Was the **Spherical “Burglar Proof” Safe** referred to in this article the same one which was blown open four years earlier in March of 1873 or had the bank purchased a new safe at that time which would make this the second **Spherical “Burglar Proof” Safe** to be destroyed? If Keeseville National Bank had two **Marvin Spherical “Burglar proof safes”** destroyed in the 1870s, perhaps the legend is true and the safe really did come over the bridge in 1937.

**Plattsburgh Press Republican, October 1, 1965, Page 3: (References July 1877 Bank Robbery.)**

Following the closure of the TD Bank branch in Keeseville in November of 2019, TD Bank donated a Spherical Ball Safe (**Chrome Iron Spherical Mini-Cannonball Safe**) to the Keeseville community in the care of the Anderson Falls Heritage Society in 2020. As of this writing, the safe resides in the Town of Ausable Town Hall.

Anderson Falls Heritage Society

September 2020



Release and Acceptance – Donated Property

Recipient Name: Anderson Falls Heritage Society

Address: 96 Clinton Street, Keeseville, NY 12944

C/O Town of AuSable, 111 AuSable St., Keeseville NY 12944

Donated Property: Spherical Ball Safe

By signing below and returning this Release and Acceptance to a TD Bank, N.A representative, the Recipient hereby agrees to accept the listed donated personal property from TD Bank, N.A. "AS IS" and without any warranties of any kind, and further agrees, to the extent permitted by law, to hold harmless and indemnify TD Bank, N.A its subsidiaries and affiliates, their directors, officers, agents and employees from and against all liabilities, claims, demands and causes of action resulting from bodily injury to or death of any person or destruction of or damage to any property arising out of the acts or omissions of the TD Bank's employees, volunteers and agents, including claims asserted by third persons, or arising from the use or removal and transportation of the donated items from TD Bank, N.A. premises to the Recipient's delivery point either arising out of the acts or omissions of TD Bank, N.A. or the Recipient, their subcontractors and agents, including claims asserted by third persons or otherwise.

Recipient will return a signed copy of this Release via facsimile to the Legal Department at TD Bank, N.A- 207.535.3816, before taking possession of the donated property. The Recipient agrees that facsimile copies will have the same force and effect as original documents.

Dated: 05/11/2020

By Authorized Recipient Representative:

Garth J. Houde, President, AFHS

(Print name) Garth J. Houde [Ph: 518-834-5162]

3/2009

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