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THIS WEEK: The Cardiff Giant

BACKGROUND: The Cardiff Giant, one of the most famous hoaxes in American history, was a 10-foot-tall "petrified man" uncovered on October 16, 1869, by workers digging a well behind the barn of William C. "Stub" Newell in Cardiff, New York. Both it and an unauthorized copy made by P.T. Barnum are still on display.

"The Great Cardiff Giant Deception" By Ex-Lieutenant Governor B.F. Gue (Published in 1899) From: *Biographies and Portraits of the Progressive Men of Iowa: Legislature Leaders in Business, Politics and the Professions Together with An Original and Authentic History of the State*

THE GREAT CARDIFF GIANT DECEPTION.

One of the most successful frauds of modern times was conceived in the year 1868, and perpetrated in connection with the great gypsum fields near Fort Dodge, which made that town famous over the civilized world.

In the month of October, 1869, strange stories were whispered about the streets of the city of Syracuse, N. Y. It was reported that a petrified human body had been found on the farm of a Mr. Newell, near the village of Cardiff, some thirteen miles from that city. Upon investigation made by a reporter of the *Syracuse Journal*, who hurried to the spot where the discovery was said to have been made, the following facts were learned:

William Newell, the owner of a small farm lying a mile west of Cardiff, a small country village, had begun to dig a well for stock water near his barn. The spot selected was the low swampy margin of Onondaga creek. Two well diggers began excavation on the morning of October 16th, and when about three feet below the surface their spades struck what seemed to be a rock. Upon trying to unearth the bowlder, a huge foot was discovered, and upon digging further an enormous leg was found, and then an immense human body. Mr. Newell, who had been directing the work from the start, had cautioned the men to be very careful when their spades first struck a hard substance. He now took one of the spades and uncovered the body until it was found to be an immense stone giant buried in the earth. He directed the further digging until an excavation had been made about fifteen feet

long, disclosing the full stature of a petrified man. The news of the wonderful discovery on the Newell farm spread rapidly among the neighbors, and soon an excited crowd of villagers gathered around the grave of the great unknown, and gazed with awe-stricken faces upon the colossal form of the "petrified giant," as Newell called it. The excitement increased hourly, and before Sunday night, more than 1,000 curious people had gathered at the Newell farm from the surrounding country to see the wonderful discovery. The news had reached Syracuse and glowing accounts of the mysterious giant had been published in the daily papers under displayed head lines. Every livery team and hundreds of private rigs were conveying hundreds of people from the city to the scene of the wonderful discovery. Large offers were made to Mr. Newell by some of the visitors for the giant, but he refused to sell.

Early on Monday morning it appeared to dawn upon Mr. Newell's mind that he had struck a huge bonanza in his shallow stock well. He procured a large tent and erected it over the resting place of the giant, enlarged the excavation around the body, the water was pumped out, guards were stationed around it, and Newell began to collect half a dollar from each of the hundreds of visitors coming to see the wonder. No one was permitted to touch the reclining giant as he held his silent reception lying prostrate in his ancient grave with closed eyes, majestic form, in calm, awful repose acquired by centuries of unbroken slumbers, while earth's tragedies and pleasures had rolled unceasingly by. Ten thousand dollars offered by a little

city syndicate on Tuesday morning to the small farmer for his petrified giant, awakened him to a realization of the sudden fortune that had come to him like the discovery of a gold mine. But he steadily refused all offers and continued to take in half dollars at a rate that almost bewildered him. A cousin of Newell now appeared upon the ground, named George Hull, who took charge of the exhibition. Accounts of the wonderful discovery had been telegraphed to all parts of the country and the great newspapers sent special reporters to Cardiff to investigate and write up every phase of the great discovery. Scientists became interested and began to make examinations and put forth their learned opinions upon antiquity of the colossal figure so strangely deposited. Up to this time no one seems to have doubted that it was a petrified giant. But some of the geologists who had examined it pronounced it a statue carved from rock. But the owner, from the day of its discovery, refused to permit anyone to go very near it, or make any tests as to the material in the body or statue. Prof. James Hall, the noted New York geologist, who made the geological survey of Iowa in 1855, wrote a lengthy account of his examination and his theory as to what it was. He says: "It is certainly a great curiosity, and, as it now presents itself, the *most remarkable archaeological discovery ever made in this country.* It is clearly a statue cut by human hands, and in no way connected with petrification or with calcareous deposits from springs, nor is it a cast or model of any kind, but an original. The importance of the object lies in its relations to the race or people of the past, formerly inhabiting that part of the country. The statue is of a far higher order and of an entirely different character from the smaller works of rude sculpture found in Mexico and Central America, or the Mississippi valley. In regard to the question of the antiquity of its origin we are compelled to rely upon the geological and chemical evidence. *That the statue has lain for a long time where it now lies there can be no doubt.* The entire length of the left side and back of the statue is eroded to the depth of an inch or more from the solution and removal of the surface by water coming in along the stratum upon which it lies imbedded. Such process and removal of the gypsum, a mineral of slow solubility in the waters of that region, must have required a long period of years. Any theory of the recent burial of the statue in this place is disproved by the fact of the extensive solution and removal of the surface by the water coming in along the gravel bed from the southwest. The most extensive erosion has taken place upon the left side and beneath the back upon that side, corresponding to the direction whence the water came. You will see, therefore, upon any theory of inhumation, you must have time for this process of the gradual dissolving of the stone. So long as the alluvial deposit was going on,

this portion was covered by water, and there would be no current along the gravel bed, and this movement of the water would only take place after the drainage of the stream or lake to a lower level. Therefore, so long as the alluvial deposit was going on, and the water remained above that level, there would be no current and consequently no erosion. This statement answers the inquiry as to what are some of the evidences of its antiquity."

Thus one of the most eminent living geologists proved the great antiquity of the giant, and also proved that it could not have been buried where found in recent ages.

Dr. Amos Westcott wrote to the *Scientific American* an elaborate article, in which he says: "It would be far easier to suppose this a veritable petrification of one of the giants who lived in those days than to suppose it a statue. There is not a chisel mark upon the entire image, nor of any other implement employed by the human hand. The style of model, its perfection, its peculiar smooth surface—all defy the artist. Not a single individual has ever examined it who was not impressed with the feeling and belief that it is the most extraordinary and gigantic wonder ever presented to the eye of man. Be it what it may, it presents a most perfect human form of colossal size, defying the present state of science, whether geology or archaeology. Its origin, we have to confess, is as deep a mystery as when first brought to light."

An Onondaga squaw who came to see the giant said that her tribe believed that it was the petrified body of a gigantic Indian prophet who lived many generations ago, and foretold the coming of the "pale faces." He warned his people of the coming encroachments of the white men, and of their extermination of his people. He told them he should die and be buried out of sight, but that their remote descendants should see him again.

The mystery surrounding the whole affair seemed only to deepen with investigation. The scores of learned men who came to look upon the wonder differed widely as to what it was, its antiquity and probable origin, but all agreed that it was the most remarkable discovery ever unearthed in America. People came by hundreds and thousands from all over the country, paid the admission fee, looked upon the giant and went away in awe and wonder. Col. J. W. Wood, of Chicago, who had large experience in the show business, was employed to take charge of the exhibit and he greatly enlarged the tent, issued a pamphlet giving a history of the finding of the giant and the opinions of learned men. P. T. Barnum sent an agent to purchase the wonderful giant who was drawing such crowds. But a syndicate was formed which offered a larger sum—said to be \$40,000—and the great showman did not get him.

Here the scene changes. A thousand miles westward, on the upper Des Moines river, was the

picturesque village of Fort Dodge. In its vicinity are extensive deposits of gypsum. In the year 1867, one H. B. Martin stopped several days at the St. Charles hotel, and spent some time among the gypsum beds. He seemed to be deeply interested in the beautiful variegated stone which had been used in the construction of some of the finest residences in the village. He disappeared and was forgotten. On the 6th day of June, 1868, he returned, accompanied by a large, well dressed, intelligent looking man. They registered at the St. Charles as George Hull, Binghamton, N. Y., and H. B. Martin, Boston, Mass. They took frequent strolls among the gypsum quarries and finally leased an acre on Gypsum creek, south of Fort Dodge, and employed Mike Foley, an experienced quarryman, to get out an immense block of gypsum for them. It was four feet wide, two feet thick and



twelve feet long. After many tribulations, breaking down wagons and miring down in wet places, they reached Boone, the nearest railroad station, on the 27th of July. The next day the block of gypsum was shipped east over the North-Western railroad. This was the last seen of Hull and Martin by the Fort Dodge people.

When, in November, 1869, the papers were filled with accounts of the wonderful "petrified Onondaga giant," that had been resurrected near Syracuse, N. Y., and the whole civilized world was wondering what race of remote antiquity he had belonged to, and scientists were puzzled over the mystery, a New York paper stated that Professor Boynton had pronounced it a statue carved from crystalline gypsum, but of a different color and appearance from the New York gypsum. Galusha Parsons, an eminent Fort Dodge lawyer, saw this report, and on his return from New York stopped off at Syracuse to take a look at the giant. He

wrote back to the editor of the *North West*: "I believe it is made of that great block of gypsum those fellows got at Fort Dodge a year ago, and shipped east." The editor and a few others at once began to investigate. Syracuse papers were sent for, letters were written to friends in that city, and it was learned that George Hull was one of the exhibitors of the "petrified giant." A description of the New York Hull corresponded in every particular with the George Hull who, with Martin, got out the Fort Dodge gypsum block fifteen months before. The clue was followed up with energy, and in the course of several weeks a chain of evidence was secured so complete that it reached without a missing link from Gypsum creek, Iowa, to the grave of the wonderful giant on the Newell farm near Cardiff, N. Y. Quietly, but with great celerity, the evidence was put in type at the *North West* office at Fort Dodge, and a pamphlet was issued that was destined to expose in all its details the most ingenious and successful fraud ever perpetrated in America, and wreck the great fortune then in sight for Hull, Newell and Martin. * * * * * Going back where thousands were flocking to see the "petrified giant," it had been moved to Syracuse by the syndicate which now owned it, where fine accommodations had been prepared for its exhibition. It was now valued at \$100,000, and the daily revenue coming from its exhibition justified that valuation. Preparations were being made to remove it to Albany and place it on exhibition at the state geological rooms. Early one morning a newsdealer offered a counter attraction on his stand in a large package of forty-page pamphlets, illustrated with portraits of the "stone giant," his inventors, his sculptor, his burial and resurrection. Its title page bore this inscription:

THE CARDIFF GIANT HUMBLED—THE GREATEST DECEPTION OF THE AGE.

The pamphlets sold like hot cakes. Intense excitement followed. The proprietors were soon seen reading the exposition of a fraud that must ruin them. One of them rushed to the news stand, bought the pamphlets and burned them. In a few days another lot was on the ground, and as soon as discovered these were bought and burned. But many had escaped them and got out among the people, and suppression was impossible. The owners of the giant must now fight for their vanishing fortune. They issued a statement denying every word of the exposition, and ridiculed the entire "yarn," as they termed it. But the newspapers, keen on the scent of a great sensation, got hold of some of the pamphlets and saw at once that the evidence was complete and conclusive as to the great fraud, and gave summaries of the exposition and evidence.

In the meantime P. T. Barnum went to the Chicago sculptor who made the giant, and whose name was given in the Fort Dodge pamphlet, and got a plaster cast made, which was a good duplicate of the original. He put it on exhibition in his museum in New York as the original "Cardiff giant." The proprietors of the genuine original hastily shipped it to New York, and the war of the giants was on. They applied to Judge Barnard for an injunction to restrain Barnum from exhibiting his cast, but the court declined to protect one fraud from the encroachments of another. Hull, Martin, and Newell now came forward and made solemn denials of all the charges and evidence in the Fort Dodge exposition, and certificates of character were procured and published. But it was all in vain. The public saw that the chain of evidence was continuous and conclusive.

The following is a brief summary of the facts as set forth in the Fort Dodge exposition: George Hull and H. B. Martin came to the St. Charles hotel and registered their names on the 6th of July, 1868. They remained there until the 14th, getting out the block of gypsum described by Mike Foley, who did the work for them. On the 27th of July they shipped the block from Boone, in car No. 447, to E. Burkhardt at Chicago. Hull followed it to Chicago, stopped at the Garden City hotel, where he was often seen by Fort Dodge men who knew him, until September 22d. The block was traced from the car to a building on the west side, where a sculptor named Otto worked on it until the giant was completed. Hull served as the model. It was securely boxed and shipped as *finished marble*, its weight now reduced to 3,720 pounds. It was directed to George Olds, Union, N. Y. This is a station on the New York & Erie railroad, ten miles west of Binghamton. It arrived there October 13th, and was delivered to a man who gave his name as George Olds, on the 4th of November. It was taken away in a wagon drawn by four horses, and they stayed the first night at the house of Mr. Luce, a few miles north of Union. From there the route of the four-horse team was followed up by way of Homer to Newell's farm. At Homer one of the men was recognized as George Hull by men who knew him well. When questioned as to what was in the large iron-bound box, Hull always replied, "castings" or "machinery." The team was seen by five persons on the evening of November 9th, within a mile of Newell's house, going in that direction. Some of the men were found who helped to lower the giant into his grave, which was ready for him on Newell's farm. The night was dark and rainy, but the four-horse team was seen and recognized by a Mr. Cummins, starting on its return before daylight on the morning of November 10th. Hull had left the four-horse team at Tully, got a livery team and drove to Cardiff on the night of November 9th, and walked from there to Newell's late in

the evening, where the four-horse team had already arrived. Hull again appeared at the Tully hotel before daylight in the morning of the 10th, wet through and covered with mud. He disappeared soon after breakfast, and was seen no more in that vicinity for nearly a year, or until a few days after Newell had discovered the wonderful petrified giant in his new stock well. Martin, who joined Hull at Newell's, proved to be a blacksmith from Marshalltown, Iowa. These three men turned out to be the owners of the "Cardiff giant."

All efforts made by the owners and exhibitors to refute the chain of evidence which appeared in the Fort Dodge pamphlet, proved futile, for the names and residence of all witnesses, dates of shipment, shipping bills, copy of hotel registers, affidavits of the quarrymen were published in full, and every step of progress in the most ingenious and successful deception of modern times, was given with an accuracy that left no doubt. A piece of the very ledge of gypsum from which the giant was manufactured, was taken out of Gypsum creek at Fort Dodge, showing the erosion of the water (which so completely deceived Professor Hall), and sent to Syracuse to be compared with the "petrified man," and the mass of evidence could no longer be disputed. It has never been made known how much Hull, Martin and Newell realized out of their enterprise, but it must have been a large sum, for they sold out to a syndicate before the exposition came.

The genius that could conceive such an original scheme; the executive ability that could successfully carry out all of its difficult details, would have achieved success in legitimate business. The shrewdness that led them to select a block lying in the bed of a creek, where for ages erosion of water had left its marks; the instructions to the sculptor to leave these marks untouched; completely deceiving the eminent geologists into pronouncing the statue of great antiquity, has never been surpassed.

Years afterwards Hull and Martin made full confessions of their part in the enterprise, confirming the truth of the evidence as published in the Fort Dodge pamphlet, and the last lingering doubt was removed.

The gypsum quarries at Fort Dodge, have since been developed by local enterprise and capital and the manufacture of stucco has become an important and profitable enterprise. One of the mills has in its name perpetuated the memory of the "Cardiff giant," which gave world-wide notoriety to Fort Dodge gypsum in early days.