

Joel Strong

(Born 29 December 1829, a son of Daniel Strong and grandson of Adam Strong)

The story of the Hermit of Strong's Park, York County, Pennsylvania, is fast becoming a legend. The truth of the matter is that he belonged to us and that he was a strange and harmless soul.

Joel Strong was his name and he was born in the time to be of service in the Union army during the Civil War, but not Joel. He became a draft dodger, hiding in his father's home and with nearby relatives and keeping away from public roads Joel was able to keep from sight of the authorities until danger of going "to the front" was over and apparently his misbehavior forgiven by the government.

His most narrow escape from the authorities came about in this manner: While fishing one day Joel saw two men approaching too late for him to move on. The visitors came up to the fisherman and asked, "Do you know Joel Strong?" "Yeah," answered Joel, "Saw him a little while ago!" "Where is he? Which way did he go?" queried the government agents.

"Why he went down that way," replied Joel, calmly pointing down stream. Whereupon the visitors hurried away in the direction he had pointed to while Joel made tracks in the opposite direction.

When the grain was harvested in the field between his own home and that of his relatives several round places were found where people had sat or laid while watching the houses in an effort to catch Joel.

With the war over reports on Joel turned to another nature. He was considered somewhat of an acrobat. Upon the completion of a new home with which he had helped, Joel placed a rocking chair over the comb of the roof and then stood on his head on the seat of the rocker.

The hermit of Strong's Park became the name by which he was later known when he took up his residence in a beautiful area owned by the Strong family. A ledge projected out over the ground forming a little cove below and a natural roof for the rustic residence. Joel prepared for himself by cooking over an iron kettle on an open fire. This spot was also a perfect picnic ground and a number of groups were known to take basket lunches there and Joel joined them. Following a bounteous meal Joel entertained them with antics on the leaning trunks and nearby trees.

Before Joel was laid to rest which his ancestors in the little burial ground in sight of Strong-Holde, his existence was well known for miles and people were said to have frightened their children into obedience by threatening "the Hermit of Strong's Park will get you if you are not good." (Frances Strong Helman.)