

## **Horatio G. Brooks** **1828-1887**

Horatio Brooks was born in Portsmouth, N.H. on October 30, 1828. Very early in his life he exhibited a taste for the railways and locomotives he saw. He was educated as a machinist and became an engineer for the New York & Erie Railroad. In 1850 he left Boston with NY & E Engine No. 90, and came to Dunkirk via the Erie Canal and Lake Erie. On November 28, 1850 he arrived in Dunkirk Harbor with the county's first locomotive and blew the first steam whistle heard in the county. He remained a locomotive engineer until 1854 when he was appointed master mechanic of the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad. In 1859 he took the same post for the western division of the Erie Railroad, and in 1865 became superintendent of motive power for the entire Erie Railroad.

Because of mismanagement, the Erie was close the bankruptcy in 1868. At the same time the Jersey City to Buffalo mainline was completed, leaving Dunkirk an out-of-the-way destination. The Erie decided to close their Dunkirk car shops and move them to a new location. Dunkirk was faced with losing several hundred jobs and likely citizens. The village had just begun to enter the industrial era, and now it looked several hundred jobs and likely citizens. The village had just begun to enter the industrial era, and not it looked a though it would revert to a more fishing village.

Horatio Brooks decided he couldn't let that happen. On November 11, 1869 the Brook Locomotive Works was established with Horatio Brooks as President. Brooks leased the shops and machinery from the Erie and saved the jobs for Dunkirk.

Business was slow and capacity minimal at first. Soon capacity was greatly increased as the orders came in. The first locomotive built in Dunkirk was completed in December 1869. The first order came from the Erie Railroad for 25, eight-wheeled locomotives. In 1870 the company produced 27 locomotives, in 1871 it was up to 45, and 1872 saw 73 produced. By 1872, 550 men were employed at the Brook Locomotive Works and Dunkirk was prospering.

The year 1873 was a disaster for the nation and launched a depression that lasted for five years. By 1874 Brooks was forced to reduce his staff to 124 since only six locomotives were ordered. Employees that were laid off from the plant had their grocery bills personally guaranteed by Brooks himself. The handouts exhausted Brooks' savings until he could no longer pay the storekeepers. They had faith though, and allowed Brooks to continue his practice with the promise of paying.

After the depression ended, business rebounded and the Brooks Locomotive Works soon became the largest manufacturing concern in the county. By 1890 is employed two-thirds of the City's labor force. Brooks Locomotive Works remained the stronghold of Dunkirk for the next fifty years.

Mr. Brooks also served as Mayor of the City of Dunkirk for three terms and as a town councilman prior to that. In a scandalous and "arrogant action" according to Mr. Brooks, he was denies his post as Mayor by an opponent in his first election. In February, John S. Beggs who was President of the Common Council is designated Mayor and in the same meeting Dunkirk goes from a village to a city. One week later, the true winner of the election, Horatio Brooks, is sworn into office along with the newly elected Councilmen. The scandal is never again mentioned and little is known about it to this day.

On April 20, 1886 at the age of 59, Horatio Brooks died of a massive cerebral hemorrhage. Horatio Brooks was remembered as the City's greatest benefactor and a sincerely generous man. After his death, his wealth and generosity continued to develop the City of Dunkirk. In 1898 the Brooks Mansion on Center Avenue in the

City was bequeathed to the young Men's Association of become a hospital and library. Within two months the Brooks Memorial Hospital and the Brooks Memorial Free Library were incorporated. Though the original building in gone, both the hospital and library remain today, serving the citizens of Dunkirk, most of whom have long forgotten Horatio Brooks; the great developer and benefactor for when they bear their name.