

FRED HERMAN'S STORY

(1957)

Note: Fred Herman and his wife opened a women's dress-wear shop in Liverpool where the T. Eaton Company has its office today (1957). They came here about the time of the opening of the Wersey mill (1929), hoping to cash in on the ~~the~~ new prosperity of Liverpool, but the Great Depression was at its worst, also Liverpool ladies continued to travel to Bridgewater or Halifax when they wanted anything "good" -- anything else they could get in the mail order catalogues. Finally (about 1935) the Hermans closed their shop. They had a little money, and they bought a big old house at the top of Robertson's Hill, near Port Joli on the main shore highway. It had been a coach inn in the old days, and they had a notion that they could work up a transient room-and-meals trade in this motor age. They were disappointed. Travel was limited in those Depression years; the Province did not undertake to plough and keep clear its main roads through the winter until 1938; and aside from a few luncheon or dinner parties coming out from Liverpool the Hermans did little business in what they called ~~XXXXXX~~ Hill Top Inn. My wife and I drove out there a few times. The Hermans put up an excellent chicken dinner that was well worth the trip. About 1940 the inn burned to the ground, the Hermans collected their insurance, and retired to Dartmouth N.S., where Fred Herman still lives. This is the story Fred told me in a little aside during the opening ceremonies of the Simeon Perkins house, June 29, 1957. We were speaking of Liverpool characters, and I mentioned our former Sheriff, the late Duncan C. Mulhall -- always known as "D.C."

"Ha! Old D.C.! There was a character, alright. Funny thing happened back in the 1930's, when we were keeping the Hill Top Inn near Port Joli. It was January, there'd been quite a fall of snow, and it was still snowing when a well dressed man appeared at our door, early in the morning, and asked for breakfast and some help. He'd been driving from Yarmouth to Halifax, he said, took a chance on the weather, got caught in the snowstorm, and finally got stuck in a drift at the foot of Robertson's ~~back~~ Hill.

Well, we hustled around, got him a hot breakfast and walked down to have a look at the car. It was a fairly new one and it sure was well stuck in the snow. The first thing was to get it up the hill and into cover in my barn. As you know Robertson's Hill is very long and very steep, the road runs through woods and on past Robertson's Lake, and there's no habitation between Hill Top Inn and the few houses at the head of Port Joli. I had a Dodge car, six years old, rather battered but in good running order. ~~XXXXXX~~ Lloyd and I got the Dodge going, fastened on a set of tire-chains, drove down the hill, and hitched on to the stranger's car. But it was too much of a struggle, trying to tow it up that hill through the snow. Finally we broke the rear axle of my Dodge. There was nothing for it then but to go to the village, hire a team of oxen, and drag both cars (one at a time of course) up the hill to my barn. At last we got them there.

The stranger stayed overnight with us, and left on foot in the morning, saying he had urgent business in Liverpool. He would come back later when the road was open, pay our bill and take his car. He seemed a pleasant well-spoken fellow and I thought no more about it. However spring came, the road was clear, and had been clear for weeks, and still no word from the stranger. His car sat there in my barn. Summer came, and I began to wonder. I had the license traced. One day a man turned up from Moncton N.B. My enquiries had come to the attention of his firm, an automobile finance company there. It didn't take him long to tell the rest, and it was interesting.

The car had been bought by a Moncton man, and financed through his company. The car-owner had made quite a number of payments, but in these hard times he had fallen into difficulties. The finance company didn't like to re-possess the

car, because after all the fellow had paid quite a bit of the debt, and they still hoped he could pay off the rest. Then things got complicated. The car was stolen. The thief had apparently driven to Yarmouth hoping to catch the Boston boat, ~~and~~ knowing that the New Brunswick roads would be well watched. Of course he found that the Boston-Yarmouth steamers had a very reduced sailing schedule in winter, he would have to wait there for a sailing, and he didn't like the idea of sticking around there with a "hot" car. So he headed along the South Shore, got caught in a storm, and ended up at my place. The name he had given me I don't remember now, but it turned out to be false, and nobody ever knew who he really was.

The finance company man wanted to drive the car back to Moncton, but I said, "Wait a minute. I've got a bill of expenses here. What with my broken axle and hiring the ox team and so on it cost me quite a bit to get this car into shelter, and I've given it careful storage since. Who's going to pay me?" The finance man didn't seem to think his company should. I said "No pay, no car," and he went off back to Moncton. Several months went by. The original purchaser of the car was at odds with the finance company, and until they came to some kind of agreement there was no chance of anyone paying my bill. By this time I was adding monthly storage charges to the original bill. I was sore about the whole thing.

Well, time went on. The original purchaser of the car apparently had decided to let it go. The finance company itself seemed to be in financial difficulties, and they refused to pay my bills. The car sat in my barn. One day in town I ~~XXXXXXXX~~ went into the Sheriff's office in Town Hall and told the whole story to old "D.C." He thought it over and said, "Well, something ought to be done about it." He knew my own difficulties at Hill Top Inn. He said, "There's only one thing to do. You must get legal possession of the car yourself. Present your bills, get a judgement, and leave the rest to me."

One day he phoned me, said the car was to be sold at public auction as the law prescribed, and said I'd better be present to make a bid. So I came into town. When I entered his office, there sat "D.C." and no one else. Not a living soul. ~~XXXXX~~ "D.C." closed the door, paused a moment, and then said in that high thin voice of his: "~~THE~~ Gentlemen, the item for auction is a car now in the possession of Mr. Fred Herman, of Hill Top Inn, Port Joli. He has a judgement against it for bills incurred." He then looked about the empty room with an odd little smile on his face. "Do I hear a bid of four dollars? Four dollars? "

So I said, "Five!" The Sheriff smacked his fist down on the table. "Sold to Mr. Fred Herman for five dollars! " And that was it. I got the car for five bucks and the amount of my bills. It was a good car, too. I drove it for years."

J.H.R.