

The Village Smithy

R. Fry

The above caption appeared above the door of the blacksmith shop at Carnarvon for many years. In the first instance "Dick" as he was known by all and sundry, worked in the shop for H.P. Hart, merchant at Carnarvon, then owner of the shop. About the year 1906 he purchased stock and building from Mr. Hart and operated on his own until his death.

While the shoeing of farmer's and lumbermen's horses was the chief item of work, a good amount of repair work in both wood and steel was done. Dick was a great trader, many and varied were the bargains made at this shop. I quite well remember an advertisement he ran in the local paper setting forth the many implements and vehicles he had for sale. The advertisement closed with the clause, "Terms cash or will trade for anything useful from a cradle to a tombstone."

During the slack season a good many wagons, buggies and sleighs were turned out at the shop. The parts were purchased in the rough, ironed off and painted at the shop. Dick was a man who took some short-cuts in his work and many of the rigs were not just as "the one horse shay"-wear out evenly, but the weak spots showed up much sooner. His argument was, that a man's eye was his merchant and he should know what he was purchasing.

One case of this kind was particularly grievous to the purchaser. A peddler of small wares had a very good outfit; a particularly good set of wheels on it and as he stopped by the shop many times Dick knew the

good points of the vehicle and was determined to make a trade. As the man was passing one day, Dick hailed him and took him to the paint shop to show him a buggy he had just remodelled and eventually made a sale, taking the traveller's vehicle in exchange plus some boot. As soon as the peddler left, he came over to the store asking me to help him move the vehicle he had received in trade. The wheels were removed and the gear with the wheels were stored in the back of the shop. Dick remarked, "that very shortly the man would be back demanding his own buggy." He was quite right, for apparently when getting out of the new buggy to go in a farmer's gate, the floor boards of the buggy gave away and he was standing on the ground his legs astride the reach of the buggy. Of course he had no case.

One of the best tales of his exploits has to do with his encounter with the local game wardens. Under suspicion of purchasing venison out of season and also dealing in contraband furs. On a lovely spring day two of these men came in his shop. Dick was busy at the forge, without hesitation after a brief "good-day" Dick accosted them as follows - "no use of any pretense here boys, you are ready to search the premises, just go ahead." With this invitation Dick walked over to the horseshoe keg, sat down, lit up a short stump of pipe which could well be his trade mark. A thorough search was made even to dumping the forge and at Dick's invitation the upstairs where vehicles, paints etc were stored was given a complete overhaul. The job finished, the men gave him a clear bill and proceeded on their way. Had they asked Dick to move and investigate the keg he was using as a seat, they would have found a

neat roll of beaver pelts. However in some cases the officers won and he came out second best but there was no feeling of revenge, all in a days adventure for Fry.

Being of English descent he was very fond of meats, especially game. He was an excellent provider and his larder from October to January was something to behold. He always kept two or three pigs, these were killed early in November and put away for winter use. Later a dozen or more of fowl would be added and near christmas a few geese. Then for good measure a carcass of beef and a saddle or two of venison. For some years his home was a stopping place for lumbermen on the move, hence his extensive preparations. Many an individual was quietly helped by a ready dollar or a hamper of food without any thought of repayment.

While Dick Fry after a short term with H.P.Hart was always his own boss he worked regular hours. His shop would be open at 7:30 or 8 in the morning and kept open until 5 or 6 in the evening. Being a very rugged man he often wore his boots without any socks and his boots when working were never laced. His argument was, "if a horse steps on my foot, I will leave him the boot." Often in winter I have seen him pull off his boots, dump a shovelful of hot coals, empty them out then pull them on again.

In later years he carried altogether too much weight and he knew his life span was not long. On Christmas day, he arose early to prepare the goose for dinner, this done, he shaved, dressed in his best suit and

lay down for a rest. When his daughter and her family came for dinner and called to him, there was no response. He had slept quietly away and his end was just as he had wished. With his passing and the closing of the shop, there ended an interesting chapter in the community records.