

Stephan's Store

During a recent visit with Bill Ker, who is ninety-four, he reflected on his first job in Walkerton at Stephan's Store, where Adel's store is now. The store was owned by two brothers, Harry and Charlie Shaphan. Bill came to work for them in 1909 as a young man of twenty-one.

At that time, many of the customers could only talk German. This proved to be a problem for Bill, but he soon picked up enough of the German language to be able to serve people. To start with, he was working in the clothing department, but later helped on the main floor which was groceries and general goods.

At this time, much of the trading in the store was done by the exchange of farm produce for store goods. The basement of the store had (and still has) a back entrance; and it was here that bartered goods were stored. Farm women would bring in crates of eggs, which were "candled" to check for blood spots, then they would be paid by cash, or by a merchandise voucher which was worth ten percent more than cash.

Many farmers brought in potatoes, and large bins in the basement were used to store them. When enough potatoes had been accumulated to make a carload, they would be put into ninety-pound bags, carried up the back steps and loaded into wagons for transport to the train, then on to Toronto. This was hard work.

The farm women churned their own butter and would bring it into the store to sell. The store supplied square wooden boxes, called firkins, that held fifty pounds of butter, which the women could fill and return. A long dagger-type dipper was pushed into the firkin of butter to make sure it was uniform to the bottom.

On one occasion a large rock was found buried in the butter, and Harry Stephan told the woman he couldn't buy her butter because it was too hard to cut.

The butter from the many sources would be dumped out on a large table and mixed, then re-packed into the boxes for shipment, or local sale.

The most troublesome goods

received from the farmers were the live chickens and poultry, which were only accepted on certain days of the month. The birds had to have their legs tied to be weighed, then they were put into crates of about ten each and kept in the basement until enough were gathered for shipment to Toronto.

This, of course, was before Walkerton had any poultry processing plant.

There was a small creamery where Canada Packers is now, and an Egg Emporium at the corner of Jackson and Cayley Streets.



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The Big Fire

From the time the first settlers built their log cabins in the valley that was to become Walkerton, the fear of fire was always present. In summer the bush became tinder dry, and in the cold weather all heating was done by wood stoves, and often makeshift ones with poor chimneys.

As the town grew, it became apparent that fire protection was needed. So in 1872, Walkerton formed its first fire brigade and purchased a hand-powered, horse-drawn fire engine. The people felt much safer.

Unfortunately, their security was short-lived. On May 28, 1877, a fire started behind McVicar's Hotel on Durham Street. McVicar's was a large frame hotel, situated where later the Post Office stood for many years.

A picture taken about 1870 shows Walkerton's Main Street with all frame buildings, except at the Hartley House corner. So when fire struck, and was helped by a brisk wind, it didn't take long to find the new fire engine was inadequate. A large part of the business section was razed; forty-two buildings in all, mostly along Durham Street.

How many, if any, carried fire insurance in those days is not known. Nevertheless, in short order, clean-up and rebuilding began. Many of the buildings now lining our main street were built at this time, and still stand sturdy and strong. Another long-range result, at least partially instigated by the fire, was the installation of the waterworks system which was built in 1891.



AN EARLY WALKERTON FIRE COMPANY

The Cordwainer

1983

Harvey Damm's True Story

While ago, Norbert Schnurr brought me a small booklet, written by Harvey Damm during the Depression years, titled "Shipping Under Difficulties."

It seems that Harvey had sold one of his prize Jersey cows to a purchaser on Manitoulin Island; and had agreed to look after shipping the animal north. The best access to the purchaser from here was by boat from Owen Sound, such boat leaving the dock of 9 p.m. Saturday night. Harvey's concern was to get his cow onto the boat on time, and in good health.

To assist him in this endeavour he enlisted the services of "Mr. Mac" as transport manager, and the assistance of "Mr. Dempsey."

His story starts when a good deal of confusion was caused when "Mr. Mac" cannot be located at the agreed shipping time on Saturday afternoon. After a search of garages, shoe shops and hotels, he was finally located at 5 p.m. The conveyance supplied for the trip was a 1917 Ford car, "with dim lights, poor brakes and a horn that wouldn't honk." To this was attached a high trailer.

Finally at 5:45, the caravan headed up "Shaw's Hill" and was on its way. Harvey himself was driving because "Mr. Mac" was "dead to the world." North of Hanover the first misfortune occurred, when they drove past a detour sign and sank into a quagmire of quicksand. After the help of neighbours, the car and trailer were pulled back onto the road and the trip continued.

A short time later, with "Mr. Mac" sleeping through all the excitement, the car ran out of

oil, causing further delay. By now Harvey was pushed for time. Just outside Owen Sound a tire went flat. Fortunately this happened only twenty feet from a garage, and a quick fill up of air sent them along again. At the garage, Harvey had enquired the shortest way to the boat dock, and followed directions carefully. Imagine his chagrin when he found he had been directed to the wrong dock!

It was late fall when this story took place, and the dockyard was deep with mud. "Mr. Dempsey," clad in new rubber boots, took charge of turning the rig about. This could only be done by unhitching the trailer, so the car could turn around. After re-coupling the trailer, a hurried dash was made to the boat dock, which, surprisingly, was reached in time.

After safely unloading the cow, the return trip was started. On passing the "Patterson House" in Owen Sound, "Mr. Mac" insisted on stopping for a

minute to see someone. This minute turned into hours, and only ended when a policeman arrived to charge Harvey with obstructing traffic with his car and trailer parked on the road.

"Mr. Mac" was routed out and the three-some herded to the police station. The hero of the story turns out to be "Mr. Mac",

who while sucking on breath candy, convinced the police magistrate that he could pay no fine, as he was penniless. He vowed they would head on home, and cause no more traffic troubles.

This is a true story. "Mr. Dempsey" - Edward Fennell and "Mr. Mac" - Gladstone McIntyre.