

Whatever Happened To The Hoboes?

By W.W. EDGAR

The morning session of the Learn To Control Your Temper Class was in full swing at the C&O railroad crossing on Starkweather Road as the freight cars, coal gondolas and auto carriers moved slowly along their way.

"Sixty, sixty-one, sixty-two." The Stroller kept mumbling to himself as he counted the conveyors in an effort to keep calm and refrain from exploding with a lot of colorful phrases he heard from other members of the class in the stacked-up traffic.

It seemed there never would be an end to the line and that the little blue "caboose" was still far in the distance.

Suddenly a thought struck The Stroller—even this early in the morning—and he realized that he hadn't seen a single member of the ancient fraternity of

bums, tramps and hoboes "riding the rails," or sitting, bravely and daringly, atop the boxcars.

THIS SEEMED strange, too, because there was a time when Plymouth was the gathering place of these colorful characters who had their periodical get-togethers in what was known as "Tramp Hollow" in the area just above Shearer Drive and St. John's Seminary.

What had happened to them?

Where are the tramps and hoboes of yesteryear who'd fill the air at their gatherings with the theme song, "Hallelujah, I'm a Bum."

Are there any more travelling these days or have they gone to keep company with the dodo bird and left behind only "Freddie the Freeloader" of TV fame as their only champion?

These questions plagued The Stroller as he sat there patiently waiting the end of the freight car parade and the lifting of the crossing gates.

There was one way to get the answer—call our good friend, Freddie Costello, the C&O public relations gent who is supposed to have answers to all questions about the railroad.

"Freddie, what ever happened to the old-time hoboes and tramps who used to ride the rails?" The Stroller asked.

There was a loud chuckle at the other end of the telephone line and finally Freddie answered—

"There are only a few of them left, and those we still have with us have gone a bit high class. They don't ride the rails any more. They've moved up to the auto carriers and now ride in more comfort."

"And would you believe it?" he asked, "some of them now carry social security cards. They work just enough to collect and then go back to illicit travel."

Between chuckles at the thought, he added—"Over in the fruit belt in western Michigan, we've found some of them with bank books in their coat pockets and fairly decent sums of cash."

"No, they're not gone entirely—but the few who still ride prefer to ride in comfort."

ALL OF WHICH called to mind one of the most colorful hoboes The Stroller ever had met.

He was a tall, broad-shouldered red-haired chap named "Red" Roberts, back in the old home town. He had come up through the ranks and was proud of his status as a hobo. Somewhere along the line, he had lost his left arm and wore a highly polished hook. He preferred that to an artificial hand because he could hook on to the coal cars much easier.

He'd be gone from the comforts of home for months at a stretch. Then, when he was almost forgotten, you'd see him coming down the main street, waving the hook and renewing old acquaintances. For several days he'd hang around—changing from his "working" clothes to some natty attire, and he'd visit his old haunts and talk by the hour.

Then, just as suddenly, you'd see him in his shabby dress, heading for the railroad yards and the 9 o'clock freight.

A colorful character, he never was without a smile and he could regale you with all sorts of tales, but he never spoke of work.

Scouts Seek 2 Boys For Honor

A program is underway to select top boys to represent the Boy Scouts of America as 1971 national youth representatives. The program, sponsored by the Boy Scouts of America, is reviewing applicants to select two outstanding young men.

Applicants must be Eagle Scouts or Explorers, must have given faithful service to their church or synagogue and outstanding service to their school and community.

Candidates must be between the ages of 15 and 20 and prepare an original statement on the biggest concern about our environment today. Emphasis and selection will be based on a thorough knowledge of and deep interest in the field of conservation.

Final selections of the two winners will be made in Chicago, Oct. 27 and 28.

Local nominations should be submitted to the Activities Dept. of the Detroit Area Council, Boy Scouts of America, 1776 W. Warren, Detroit.

He was proud of his rank as a hobo.

Now, like the old soldiers, they seem to have faded away.

But they left behind a great heritage.

They were the first to master outdoor cooking. Such things as chicken barbecues, wiener roasts and hamburger burnings can be traced to these rollicking fellows who delighted in filling the air with the strains of "Hallelujah, I'm a Bum."

Plans 2 Reunions

The Bentley High School Alumni Association is seeking graduates from the classes of 1951 and 1961 to help plan their reunions.

The association asks that anyone willing to volunteer to help organize the reunions, contact the association at, 15100 Hubbard, or call 422-4361.

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