

## **A Man Who Likes Hard Jobs Like Road Building**

*This was an article in the Headlight-Herald date unknown*

*Typed by Dean Bones March 2023*

No country can develop without roads; the history of a land is the history of its roads. Often a great need carves out of human material its own salvation. Without a doubt it was the hardships encountered while a boy in Tillamook County's early days because of the lack of roads that made a natural road builder of Herman M. Farmer.

Born in Williamson County, Illinois, in 1868, Mr. Farmer came to Oregon in 1869. In 1874 when a boy of 6 he came with his parents and 2 brothers to Tillamook County. They moved on pack-horses from Yamhill County through the mountains and down the Harris trail on Trask River to Fawcett Creek where his father, Axom D. Farmer, took up a homestead and built a sawmill.

There were no schoolhouses at that time, but the children were sent to Mrs. Litchentalor, a neighbor, who taught them in her home.

Later about 1879 after living at Hemlock a year and Power's Bridge 2 years Herman's father took up a pre-emption claim on the on the Big Nestucca where the present Farmer Creek joins the river between Hebo and Beaver. Dense woods and underbrush surrounded their new home. An Indian trail that climbed the hills to avoid the fords wound by the longest way to Tillamook. Foot-logs served as bridges.

Money was very hard to get in those days. Butter, the chief source of revenue for the Farmer family, was carried on pack-horses out over Mr. Hebo to the Grand Ronde Agency where it was traded for provisions and clothing. The pioneers raised most of their own food. Deer and fish were so plentiful they could be had at any time. Cougars were occasional visitors, but bear and bobcat were numerous.

Herman recalled a funny experience he had with a bobcat when he was a boy. With his 2 shepherd dogs he had gone for the cows one evening when the dogs treed a bobcat. When he caught up with them the dogs were under the tree just shivering with eagerness to get hold of that cat. Looking up he could see the animal about the size of a dog apparently half-asleep and stretched out on the limb of a big alder about 20 feet above the ground. Herman had no gun, but he hated to disappoint his dogs.

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Armed with a stout stick about 3 feet long he thought he could climb the tree, hit the cat a blow on the side of the head and knock it off. His eyes like balls of fire the bobcat came fast down the limb that Herman was going up. When he got within 4 feet Herman felt himself falling but not nearly fast enough. He fell for such a long time that he thought the cat would catch him in the air. He bounced when he hit the earth and got up running. His dogs could get along without that bobcat. This was one of the few jobs Herman ever tried that he was willing to give up.

With the patience and perseverance characteristic of the pioneers, the Farmers built the first home of sawed lumber in the Big Nestucca valley. The lumber was hand sawed with a whip-saw. It took 2 men from 2 to 3 hours of hard work to make 1 board an inch thick, 1 foot wide and 12 feet long.

A big log was first hewed on both sides, lined, and then hoisted to a scaffold about 7 and a half feet high. One man above carefully following the lines drew the saw through at the top, and another drew it back below until the board was cut out. It took Herman and his brother a long time to make the lumber for that house; such a mansion when it was done! However, Herman used his knowledge of carpentering in building bridges later.

From his father who was an excellent cooper as well as carpenter Herman learned to make fish barrels, butter kegs, churns and other useful articles for the settlement. Coffins, too, the Farmers built when needed.

In 1882 the first road built by the Grand Ronde and Sand Lake Toll Road Company was opened through the Big Nestucca valley. A toll gate was established at the old site of Dolph. The Little Nestucca road was also opened this year, but there was no connecting road between the 2 sections of the valley.

Six years later when Herman Farmer was 20 he married Johanna Rhodes, a daughter of William Rhodes who had settled near Cloverdale in 1882. Since the Sandlake road promised to be completed in a short time the

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young couple took up a homestead near Sandlake, a wilder country, if possible, than the Nestucca Valley.

While they lived there Herman's mother, an active, energetic woman who served as doctor and nurse to the whole valley died suddenly of heart disease at the home of a neighbor, Bud Wallace, where she had gone to take care of Mrs. Wallace. Although it was only 5 miles to Beaver where she was buried near the Wallace home, the weather was stormy, and her husband who had been ill was unable to make the trip on horseback to her funeral. After his wife's death, Herman's father lived with his son at Sandlake until 1903 when the Farmer family including Hermon's 3 children, Reed, Rhoda and Henry moved back to the home ranch on the Nestucca.

The settlers of the Nestucca Valley had by this time begun to work out their own road problems. Herman Farmer who had always been deeply interested in roads served as road supervisor from 1903 until 1910 when he was elected county commissioner. The day after his election he began grading and cutting down Hemlock hill, one of the worst places on the road. For 4 years he built roads from Blaine to the Little Nestucca.

From 1918 to 1922 he served another term as county commissioner. Sometimes in his work of straightening roads and following better grades he met with bitter opposition. But backed by Judge Hare, the county judge whom he speaks of as "one of the safest sanest men in the county," he stuck to his job until he had practically rebuilt the road from Pleasant Valley south. "Put the best material with the best work into roads," was his slogan.

It is doubtful if any man in Tillamook County has done as much road building in the county during the past 25 years as Herman Farmer. His friends say that he joyed in hard work; he like to tackle road work that others thought could not be done.

Speaking of hard knotty jobs, his son, Reed Farmer, who has won fame in Coos county as a cheesemaker with 5 first prizes and 2 second prizes in the past year tells this story of his boyhood days. His mother coming out of the kitchen door one day while he was chopping wood noticed that he was splitting only the easy sticks and leaving the knots.

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“Well, Mother,” he answered, “I am leaving them knots for Dad; He likes knots. I’ve been watching him. He just picks out the knottiest chunk, gives it a whack with the ax, turns it over a couple of times, whacks it again, and it falls to pieces into the nicest wood. This story illustrates the character of Herman Farmer; he likes hard jobs.

Mr. Farmer still owns the old homestead at Farmer Creek where his daughter and her husband, Guy Choppard, now reside, but Herman has retired and lives at his home in Cloverdale.