

**MUTUAL FIRE INSURANCE COMPANY
OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND**

F. D. LEIZEAR, - PRESIDENT
ALLAN FARQUHAR, SECRY. & TREAS.
A. D. FARGUHAR, ASIST. SECY.
ROWAN F. ERB. --- CLERK

SANDY SPRINGS, MD.

May 24, 1943.

Mr. Ross E, Humphreys, Proprietor,
Skamania Boat & Machine Works,
North Bonneville, Washington.

Dear Mr. Humphreys:

The members and friends of J. Hilliss Robison were much interested and appreciative of your letter and those of Mrs. E. Mintzer received here on the evening of the 21st of this month.

I married Mr. Robison's sister, who died in 1918, and with the others are curious to know a little more of the details of his life after leaving here without a trace the latter part of March, 1924, the communications referred to being the first authentic report of his whereabouts during all these years. Will you be good enough to write me as to the time he located in North Bonneville? He was in the plumbing business here and the reference in one of the letters to pipe fittings indicates that he was engaged in the same business in your town. It seems a little strange, but in August, 1925, I was up the Columbia River Drive on the Oregon side and recall very well having a splendid dinner at Tyrells, and it is possible he at that time was located just across the river from me.

If you can give me the details frankly of his life with you good people I will appreciate it, I would write Hillis direct, but judging from the letters I am not at all sure it would be advisable to do so in his present state of health, but if you see him and deem it prudent to do so, you might say to him that we are much interested in hearing about him and hope he will communicate directly with some of us and relieve the anxiety which naturally lingered with all of the family from the time he has been away.

Thanking you for your interest in Hillis, and again expressing my appreciation for a letter from you, I am

Very truly yours,
F. D. LEIZEAR

FDL:P

P.S. how much of a business did he have?

Skamania Boat and Machine Works

ROSS E. HUMPHREYS, Proprietor

NORTH BONNEVILLE, WASHINGTON

June 17th 1943

Dear Mr. Leizear

I must apologize for not answering your letter sooner, but you see the logging season has started and we not only work all day, but part of the night each day trying to keep equipment rolling so don't have much time for writing at this time of year.

I shall to the best of my ability, try to answer some of the questions as set forth in your recent letter. First, let me state that I followed the sea for a good many years as an engineering officer and while following that vocation, I spent considerable time around Baltimore, Maryland, and have made many trips between there and Washington, D.C. by bus, train and in my own car, so have possibly been very close to Mr. Robinson's old home, and so our reminiscences over these trips offered a common bond of conversation between us. We were both sportsmen and the old gentleman and I often hunted birds together, so I became one of his closest friends.

However, he never did give a chronological account of his travels and to my knowledge, no one ever inquired too deeply into his private affairs, so all that I can set forth is the result of his conversations with myself and others and we can piece them together. Apparently after leaving his old home in Maryland, he visited his brother in the Carolinas, and then probably went to Muscle Shoals, Alabama, where he spent some 7 years. He was also close to St. Louis for some 2 or 3 years on a bridge construction project, and it is assumed that he come from there to North Bonneville, arriving late in 1933 or early 1934 when construction work started on the Bonneville Dam.

He bought a couple of lots here and erected a ramshackle shack among the fir trees using some of the live trees to support his building. For a period of several years he lived in the attic above his shop. Later, I helped him raise the roof about 5 feet so that he had room to make a fair sized living room, kitchen and bedroom combined. There he lives with his dog, cat and the smaller miscellaneous pipe fittings and supplies. He did considerable plumbing in this community and surrounding territory. He was well like by nearly every one, tended his own business and was a great friend of the boys of early teen age, loaned them his guns for their hunting trips or played croquet with them in the evenings. He was reasonable in his charge for services and materials, in fact so reasonable that a man with family responsibilities could not have met his competition. To the casual observer he should have been independently well off, and it was quite a surprise to most people that he left no more property or money than he did. He lived rather frugally, except that he went pretty strong for chicken dinners, and often gave almost as much of the chicken to his dog as he himself ate.

He became quite a figure or character in the community. But he failed in health quite rapidly the last two years, and a large part of this was due to his willingness to go down into his shop at all times of day or night regardless of weather conditions, to

make the most trivial sale of service for those who thru their staggered working hours needed make their repairs at night. The result of this unnecessary exposure figured largely in his rapid decline in health.

During his illness, partly thru his inability to get into Portland, and partly thru the priority system, his stock became pretty well run down to where most his stock was used materials.

It would be hard to place a value on the stock in it's present condition. But off hand I would say that to sell it in its entirety would be worth at the most about \$250.00 or \$300.00, but if it could be retailed out, it might bring possibly \$1,000.00. There are perhaps \$100.00 to \$150.00 worth of tools. The buildings are not worth much, especially with Bonneville Dam completed and property prices on the decline. I would say off hand that the lots and buildings are worth perhaps \$250.00 or \$300.00, no more. The grounds are either 25 or 50 feet wide and about 150 feet long, running entirely thru the block from one street to the other. He has some \$300.00 in the bank of Stevenson, Wash. To date no will has been found, tho it is quite certain that he had made one out. Several persons connected with this are in service and scattered around the world, increasing the difficulty of checking on what or where they are deposited (his will and other papers).

A young man by the name of Clyde Wiles had been doing his work during his illness and is still carrying on the work (which is quite essential to this community) under a court order (temporary). He is perhaps as trustworthy as any one that would be got at this time. He is a Guard on the Bonneville Dam and is doing the work in his spare time.

I have had many dinners at Tyrells, which is on the Oregon side of the Columbia River and about 20 miles West of the Dam. But at the time you were there, there was no North Bonneville, as this is a boom town, and was known at that time, and still appears on most of the maps as Cascades, and which should not be confused with Cascade Locks, which is about 4 miles to the east and on the Oregon side of the river.

Mr. Robinson always spoke with great respect for his relatives in Maryland, and never said a word against them. However, when his health began failing so rapidly, several of us who were his friends, tried to persuade him to dispose of his interests here and spend his declining years in Maryland and the Carolinas where he could hunt ducks & quail. It was then in an unguarded moment that he gave indication that prior to his leaving home in 1924, that there had either been some family misunderstanding in which he felt that he was being unjustly accused or blamed, or else some one whom he has cared a great deal for has disappointed him, with the result that he did not have any great desire to return to Maryland. He did not tell enough to give me and real knowledge of the actual circumstances, so I am in no position to make any comment on it. His reference to matter was rather vague. I tried to tell him that if he would quit his hard work and go back to Maryland and the Carolinas that he should be able to get in a lot of time at squirrel and quail hunting before he died.

That I would much sooner help him to the train to leave and to act as his pallbearer, and that unless he definitely made up his mind to act that I would soon

have to act as that pallbearer. He sat there a long time in seemingly deep meditation and then said over and over, "I just can't make up my mind what to do." I then went and talked to Mrs. Edna Mintzer, a middle aged lady who owns a number of cabins and tourists courts here and for whom Mr. Robinson has done a great deal of work, who incidentally is a good angel to all whom are sick and in trouble. So, she and I both wrote letters to you people. But before mailing them, she tried to persuade him to go back home. We have here the impression that he would sooner that we should not communicate with his relatives. So the letters were not mailed until his condition became hopeless. Perhaps we should have disregard his wishes, but then those are things that are hard to do, especially for people who are not in the habit of interfering in other peoples business.

I believe that it was after leaving his old home, perhaps while at Muscel Shoals that Mr. Robinson lost the sight of his right eye and had it removed, wearing a glass eye thereafter. It caused him some difficulty in his shooting but he eventually over came that and became an expert shot using his left one in unerring accuracy. He even went to the extent of bending the barrel on one of his shot guns so as to offset it and we jollied him a lot about the gun that he shot them on the back side of the tree with.

Mrs. Mintzer, whose husband, before his death was in the plumbing business in I believe Pennsylvania, and who has a very clear idea of the value of plumbing supplies, is I believe trying to get a fair idea of the real value of his stock. And I am sure that any report that she would make to you people would be quite accurate.

It was with great regret that we lost so fine a citizen as Mr. Robinson, and I am only too glad to give you what few sidelights and information on his life as I knew him.

I remain Yours very sincerely
Ross E. Humphreys

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sandy springs, md.

June 21, 1943.

Mr. Ross E. Humphreys,
North Bonneville, Washington.
Dear Mr. Humphreys:

I wish to thank you most sincerely for your letter of the 17th which reached me by air mail this morning. You certainly should not apologize for any apparent delay in complying with my request after writing so completely concerning Hillis Robison. A copy of the letter will be given to other members of the family and I know they will be as appreciative of your courtesy as I am.

Having disappeared so mysteriously for no known reason whatever, it naturally made all of us very curious to know what had happened during the nineteen years of his absence, and your letter clears up the whole affair for us in a remarkably complete way.

Yes, if you recall a town called Laurel on the B. & O. Railroad about midway between Washington and Baltimore, through which the Boulevard passes, you were then just twelve miles East of Hillis's home, and if you should get in this vicinity again you should get in touch with us and endeavor to come and see us.

Mrs. Mintzer wrote in one of her letters that he had lost an eye, and it is, of course, gratifying to know from you some of the circumstances of how it occurred. Mrs. Mintzer impresses us as being a very nice person, and we certainly appreciate her courtesy, as well as yours, in writing to us. If anything else in connection with this affair should come to your mind that you think would be of interest to us, I would be inconsiderate enough to ask you to kindly advise us. Some day it may be that we people here may have occasion to pass on to some other person or persons some of the courtesies that you have extended us.

Again thanking you, and with very best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours,
F. D. LEIZEAR