

*A Hanging of a Different Nature*  
*by Frederick Wickert*

In every town it seems, there is always at least one peculiar character. There is always that one guy that everybody else gets a chuckle over, or makes fun of behind his back, even though he is a harmless sort of fellow. Someone who just don't quite fit the mold so to speak. Some towns have more than one of them.

In the town of Conesville, New York in the Catskill Mountains, they had their share of such people. In mid June of 1949, one of those fellows was in for a surprise he never bargained for.

His name was Raymond. Raymond was a pleasant sort of man. He never bothered anybody, but was just a little effeminate, which set him apart in a community full of rugged mountain people. Raymond also had a peculiar car. Some thought it looked more like an overgrown baby carriage than it did a car. The car was an American Bantam. They stopped making them right around that time. I think they were reputed to be the smallest cars in America. They were smaller than a Volkswagen bug. They were similar in size to a Crosley or Fiat, but even a little bit smaller than they were.

Raymond had a bit of a problem knowing when he had more than enough when he had a little nip of the corn squeezin's too, if you know what I mean. On his way home from the Waterfall House where he partook of the corn squeezin's as a rule, Raymond never failed to stop off at George Cook's store in Conesville on his way home.

George Cook and his wife ran a country store with their living quarters on the second floor above the store. They had a gas pump outside next to the loading dock and the area was well lighted. George usually remained open until 9:00 P.M. Raymond was often there by 7:30 or so.

The boys liked to hang around the firehouse, across the road at an angle from the store. Sometimes they played a ball game in a nearby field. Watching Raymond was always a source of amusement, as he was usually in his cups and navigated somewhat precariously when in that condition. On numerous occasions, something to place under the rear axel of Raymond's car was found. Some of the boys lifted the rear of the car enough for someone to shove the block under the axel so that the rear wheel was off the road. Then the boys sat around the firehouse to watch the fun.

Eventually Raymond came out of the store. He got in his car and started the engine. Then as the boys watched, he went through all of the gears with the wheel off the ground spinning faster and faster. It always took several minutes before Raymond realized that he wasn't moving. The longer it took, the greater the merriment of the boys watching from the firehouse.

In 1949, farmers for the most part were just beginning to use hay balers. Only the first few had them. Most continued to put hay in the barn the old fashioned way. It was loose hay, lifted by a grapple fork and hauled into the barn. This operation required a long and heavy rope. It was commonly referred to as a hay rope.

On one evening, the boys had tired of playing the same old trick on Raymond and were looking for something new to try. One of the flat bed farm trucks was parked near the firehouse. It just happened to have a coiled hay rope lying on the bed of the truck. The idea was born.

To the right and the rear of the firehouse ran a stream called the Manor Kill. It was a swift running trout stream. The water at the time was less than a foot deep. The American Bantam car was light enough and the rugged farm boys present enough in number to make the trick work.

A huge Willow tree grew on the bank of the Manor kill. One of the limbs on the mighty tree was as big around as the body of a man, and it reached far out over the bed of the creek. The hay rope was fastened securely around the car in two directions and tied at the center of the top. The car was then picked up by the group of boys, carried across the highway, past the firehouse and out into the creek. The hay rope was thrown over the overhanging tree limb, and the car was hoisted up in the air. The rope was then tied securely to the tree. The car remained suspended over the center of the creek.

That night, when Raymond came out of George Cook's store, he found no car. It had become dark by the time he came out and he never saw it, nor did George, who came out and looked around. George drove Raymond home.

The car, plainly visible from the road, brought forth much laughter the next morning as people drove by and saw it hanging over the center of the creek. By the time the school bus passed by that afternoon, the car was no longer suspended from the tree. No one ever learned just how the car was retrieved or by whom.

Raymond moved elsewhere that summer and was no longer the butt of the local pranks. In November of 1950, a flash flood took out a house and auto repair garage on the other side of the firehouse, removed the huge Willow tree and forever altered the stream itself.

I was driving home from George Cook's store in my father's car when a wall of water from that same flood lifted the car, and wrapped it around a Maple tree. The remains of the huge Willow tree were seen in a field a hundred yards from the streambed and a mile and a half downstream from the firehouse. No one was laughing then.