

Laskowski Conducts Last Rites For Old Grey Mares Of Dallas

Rendering Works Has Operated In Jackson 33 Years; Could Even Handle An Elephant

Not many people are willing to pay anything for dead horses. But Bernard G. Laskowski of Jackson knew of a few who would . . . and that's how it happened that he went into what he calls the "rendering business" some 33 years ago.

To be specific, Mr. Laskowski . . . or "Barney" as most people call him . . . is the husky gentleman who can be seen carting dead horses, cows and other miscellaneous livestock in an interesting state of demise about the Dallas countryside almost any day. What he does with the monstrous cadavers is quaint and fascinating, and takes place in an obscure little building back in the woods of Jackson Township.

Barney calls it rendering. What it amounts to, in a few words, is the process of placing a dead horse . . . or dead anything, for that matter, in the open end of one of Rube Goldberg's better inventions and then waiting for things to happen. After Mr. Laskowski finishes with it, that dead horse may eventually go into Farmer Brown's pig pen . . . or into the cake of scented soap in your bathroom.

The whole business of rendering, as a matter of fact, is very simple. It all begins with an advertisement

in The Post: "Dead stock removed free of charge. Call Dallas 433-R-9. Laskowski Rendering Works." Barney calls that the opening wedge. He used to advertise by means of blotters and cards, but now his weekly ad in The Post, together with the reputation he has been building up over the past thirty years or so, is enough to put his business before the public.

As soon as he gets a call from a grieving farmer, Barney sends his strapping son, Elmer, out to the bearded with the massive Laskowski hearse . . . which is nothing more or less than a large open backed truck . . . to bring the dead animal into the plant.

In the loft on top of the rendering

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No Dallas institution was ever more renowned throughout Pennsylvania than the famous old Raub Hotel. It was founded in 1837 when Jacob Meyers took out a tavern license.

works, the animal is skinned, neatly dissected and quartered and dumped into the top of a large vat . . . three-and-a-half by seven feet in dimensions . . . in which the actual rendering takes place. Steam from an attached boiler is pumped into the vat under 60 pounds pressure, and the mangled remains of the animal are stewed under those conditions for two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half hours . . . or for as long as it takes to create the proper emulsified state. Barney says you learn the proper cooking time by experience; any good rendering man knows just when the process is completed.

When the stewing is done, Mr. Laskowski and Elmer go down into the main department of the rendering works and "draw" the vat. This consists of taking off all excess water . . . a 1,000-pound horse may give off as many as forty bucketsfull . . . and then draining out the fat, which is transferred into two large grease vats hard apart the rendering vessel.

After the drawing of the vat, a vent in its bottom is opened, and the cooked horse or cow meat is pressed out onto the floor with huge plungers welded from the loft. Into the maw of a large press it goes, neatly arrayed on burlap pressing cloths, and all excess moisture is squeezed out.

The pressed material . . . which looks something like caked sawdust and has a rich, full odor which is apt to bother any one but a good rendering man just a trifle . . . is pitchforked into a shed adjoining the rendering works, where it is permitted to sit awhile to ripen.

When it is good and ready for the final process to the discerning eyes of Barney and Elmer, it is dumped into a drier—a huge, squat kettle affair, something like a washing machine and kneaded by an agitator for a good half an hour until it has been pulverized into a fine dust-like preparation.

And then, says Barney, all it needs is a customer. Pigs like it as a tasty side dish, and crops thrive under it. The Laskowskis make it up for farmers in 100-pound bags . . . or any size the purchaser wants . . . and sell it throughout this district.

But the real money in rendering lies not in offal dust, but in the grease and hides, says Barney. The grease is cooked and drained a number of times in order to draw off excess water, and then packed in old 400-pound oil drums. Mr. Laskowski makes two or three shipments of 25 barrels a year to different soap companies in Philadelphia, and among his best customers down that way are the Charles Young Soap Company and Jacob Sterns, a broker in that line. The revenue from the grease sales are the real back-log of his business.

Whenever he has four or five hides prepared a man from Scranton comes and buys them up, and in a year's time that adds up to a pretty good sideline.

Never Rendered An Elephant

Between Mr. Laskowski and his son . . . who is the official manager of the works . . . they render more than 100 dead animals a year, which means that the plant has seen some 4,000 cadavers come and go since it was first opened back in '07. Most of the business is divided between horses and cows, but the Laskowskis have rendered a number of mules, pigs and sheep, too, at one time or another. They have never gone to work on a dead elephant, though, although two have been rendered in this part of the State in recent years. Elephants, explains Barney, come under a special category; because of their size they must be delivered at the rendering plant by their owners, and because their skin is so tough, no self-respecting renderer will take the job without additional recompense.

They average about 12 animals a month, and have already rendered two this week. When the Post reporter made his way out to their plant, one horse had just been made ready for the cooking . . . and the old gray mare weren't what she used to be, as the reporter could easily see by peering down into the rendering vat.

Neither Barney nor his son smoke or drink, and otherwise lead pure and straightforward lives, but whether that is characteristic of renderers, Barney didn't say.

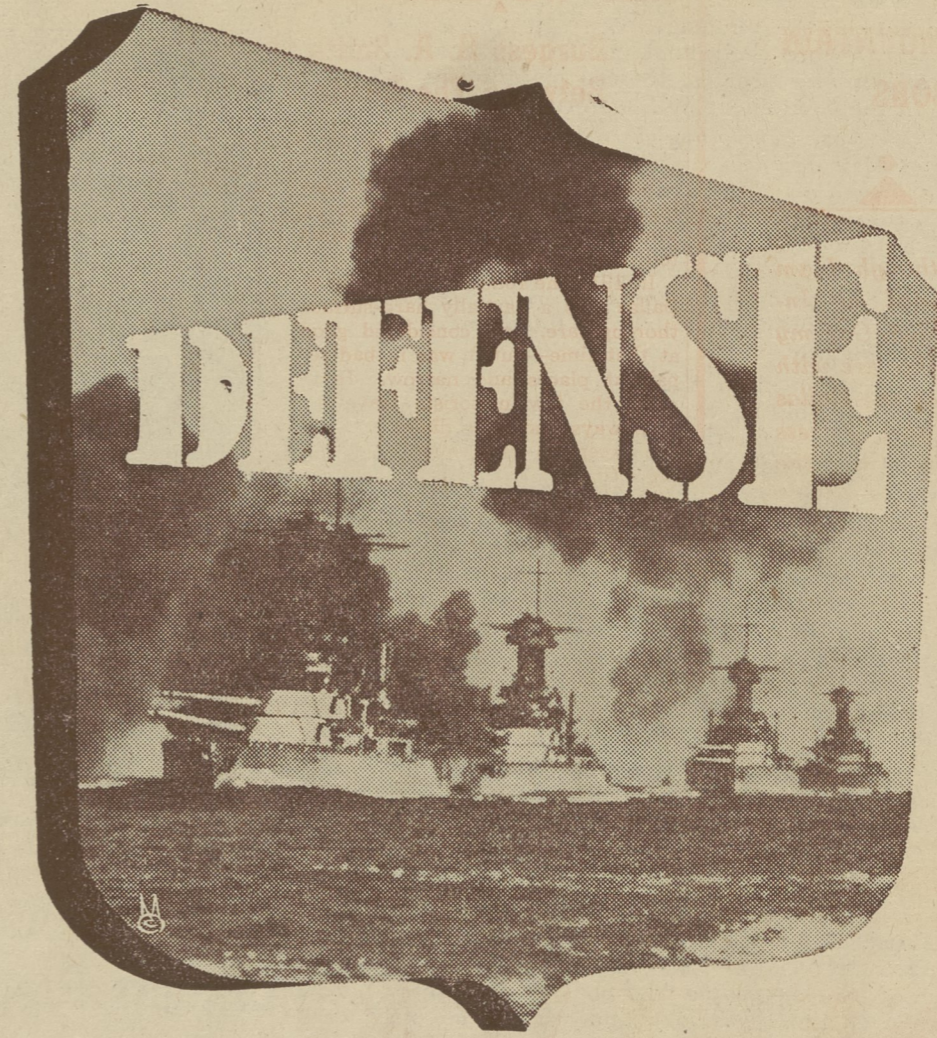
Mr. Laskowski, who was 64 years old last week-end is extremely robust and active . . . he can still render a dead horse as well as he could when he first started, and maybe even better . . . was born and raised in Nanticoke, as was his wife, Johanna. He used to be a butcher by trade, and learned all about rendering from his boss, who dabbled in it on the side. It looked like pleasant and lucrative employment, so when Barney moved out to Jackson Township in 1907 he built and outfitted his rendering works right off the bat and has been at it ever since. He says that the death rate among the livestock hereabout has been very satisfying. Cows die mostly from nail punctures in their stomachs and milk fever, while horses generally succumb from colic or senility . . . but however death over takes them, most of them generally find their way out to Jackson via the Laskowski hearse.

Because his rendering isn't steady enough to keep him busy all the time, Barney has a few other enterprises on the side. For one thing he runs a dance hall during the winter just across the road from his home . . . which is located just off the Nanticoke-Huntsville highway . . . and averages 100 customers Sunday nights. And on his farm . . . "Fairview" by name . . . he raises both veal calves and apples, selling both in season.

He has four children, Theodore, who teaches in the Jackson Township School; Bernard, who is a qualified linoleum layer and works out of McGroarty's in Wilkes-Barre; Elmer, the youngest boy, who manages the plant for his father; and a daughter, Mrs. Olive Skok.

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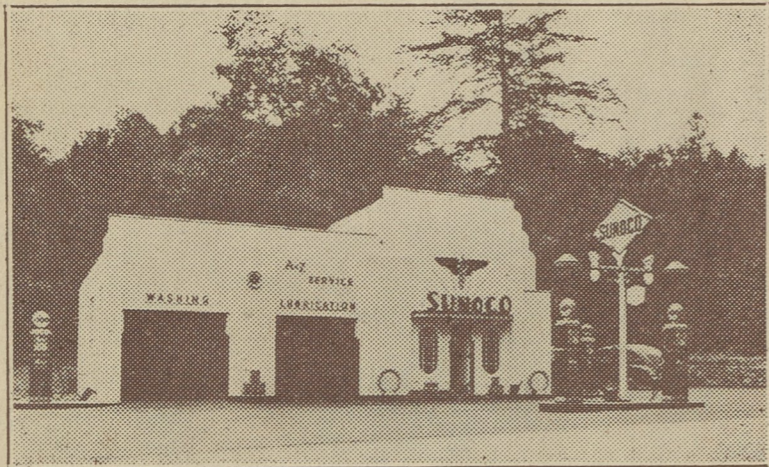
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