



Beecher Connections

Part 2 in the "Beecher Auto Sales" series

by Mathilda Gregory, Editor-in-Chief

There have been rumors for years that Claude Beecher has connections in both high and low places. It is thought that those connections help him, not only to find the stock he sells but to stay in business in spite of numerous complaints.

"I categorically deny any wrongdoing," Mr. Beecher said through his attorney in his last correspondence with *The Hardy Falls Gazette*. "Cease and desist, or I will sue you for harassment."

But is it harassment if the allegations are true? Doesn't the Hardy Falls public have a right to know what's really going on?

Because Mr. Beecher refused to speak on the record with the *Gazette* after it became clear we were demanding real answers, we decided to launch an investigation into his practices. What is the truth about Beecher Auto Sales?

Before Claude Beecher took over from his uncle, Beecher Auto Sales had been the object of a total of twenty complaints with the Better Business Bureau. The company generally had a reputation for excellent stock and fair dealing. In the thirty years since, the number of complaints has averaged about twenty per month, and the business's reputation has fallen dramatically.

Still, one expects complaints about a used car concern.

"Even considering the industry, this number of complaints is really quite high," said Mrs. Viola Winstead of the Better Business Bureau's Scranton office. "We've followed up accordingly with Mr. Beecher. We try to settle as many of the issues as possible.

"People complain," said Claude Beecher just before he stopped speaking to *The Hardy Falls Gazette*. "They buy a used car and expect it to be perfect. Well, it's not. It's *used*. Sometimes things go wrong.

The Hardy Falls Gazette contacted the state licensing board to see if we could find out about complaints that have been lodged there. We did not receive a return phone call. Next, we contacted Mayor Ruffio's office and were directed to Stanton Landis, head of the town council

“I’ve known Claude for years,” said Mr. Landis. “I have no reason to suspect him of wrongdoing.

The next day, this reporter saw Mr. Landis and Mr. Beecher having breakfast together at Mom’s Cafe. The other person at the table was Mayor Ruffio.

Of course, Mr. Beecher is entitled to be friends with whomever he wishes. And, of course, the mayor and the head of the town council are allowed to have breakfast with anyone. But this, presumably impromptu, meeting is an illustration of the connections Mr. Beecher has cultivated in Hardy Falls. He is also one of the most prominent members of the local Rotary chapter, and extremely active in the Hardy Falls Chamber of Commerce. In fact, it is well known that Mr. Beecher suggests most of the activities promoted by the Chamber of Commerce.

So much for the high connections. What about the low?

For quite some time, there have been rumors that Beecher Auto Sales receives vehicles from the less reputable element of Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, East Stroudsburg, and other nearby towns. Our crime correspondent, Tiffany Preston, talked to some people who have links to those communities. For reasons that should be apparent, her sources refused to be identified and would only speak if they remained anonymous

“I used to hang out with some guys who ran a shop in Scranton,” said one young man. “We’d go around town and maybe pick up a few vehicles that weren’t ours. Then the guys would break down the cars for parts and stuff like that. But we sold some of them as is, you know? We knew Beecher, and that’s all I’m going to say about that.

When questioned about whether he and his buddies had ever been caught, the source admitted that they had. “I did my time, and I’m out of that life,” he said. “But I still know some stuff, and I’m still in touch with some people.

Asked if he would ever buy a car from Claude Beecher, he laughed.

“Oh, no way.”

“We are aware of the allegations against Mr. Beecher,” said police chief Jacqueline Kline. “We have heard a lot of rumors, but we can’t prosecute based on hearsay. If and when we receive proof that Mr. Beecher is involved in illicit activity, we will, of course, take the appropriate action.

When Mr. Beecher was asked to respond to these allegations, he refused, called the editor a few choice names, and hung up the phone. Repeated additional phone calls have elicited no response, other than the aforementioned letter from Mr. Beecher’s attorney.

Police Chief Kline is correct in that the authorities have received no proof of wrongdoing. Mr. Beecher is right in that used cars are sometimes a disappointment to their purchasers. And yet the questions persist.

The residents of Hardy Falls will have to decide whether or not they are willing to take a chance on Beecher.

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