

# Shanghaied Legatee

## Frederick C. Dorway

In March of 1906, the *Perth Courier* reported that Lanark Village native Frederick Clifford Dorway had not been heard from since mid-January when he set out for New York City to collect a \$180,000 legacy.

Dorway had told his wife that, during the New York visit, he could be reached through the Fifth Avenue Hotel,<sup>1</sup> but her letters to that address were returned. According to the *Courier*,

*Dorway's relations think he collected the money and then was foully dealt with, but a search of the hospitals, hotels and morgue records has so far failed to bring anything to light.*<sup>2</sup>

Frederick Clifford Dorway was born at Lanark Village in 1875, the son of William Melville Dorway (1845-1917) and Anna Estella Robinson (1855-1930). His father worked as a spinner in the Caldwell textile mill for more than three decades.<sup>3</sup> After attending the village elementary school and Lanark Continuation School, Frederick went to work for the railroad. When he married Margaret Levina Paul (1878-1951) at Sudbury in 1902<sup>4</sup> he was employed as a dispatcher by the Algoma Central and Hudson Bay Railway (AC&HB) at Michipicoten Harbor, on the north shore of Lake Superior.<sup>5</sup> In 1903-1904 he worked for the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) and served as 'Non-Resident Postmaster' at Rush Lake, east of Swift Current, Saskatchewan. By 1905 he was CPR station agent and telegraph operator at Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, and, in 1906, when he set out for his visit to New York City, he was a CPR dispatcher at Sudbury, Ontario.

For nearly two years after leaving Sudbury for New York, Dorway remained unaccounted for. His father-in-law, Alexander 'Sandy' Paul (1849-1931) engaged the Fifth Avenue Hotel's house detective, John Mulholland, to investigate and Mulholland later told *The Evening World* newspaper that,

*Dorway never registered at the hotel [although] he sent letters to his folks postmarked New York, telling them that mail sent to this hotel would reach him [and] he called on Mail Clerk Brown several times and received mail ...*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Fifth Avenue Hotel was a luxury Manhattan hotel operating from 1859 to 1908. It occupied an entire block between 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Streets at the southwest corner of Madison Square.

<sup>2</sup> *Perth Courier*, March 9, 1906.

<sup>3</sup> William M. Dorway was born at Westport, Leeds County, Ontario. Anna E. Robinson-Dorway was a native of Oldham, Lancashire, England. They met and were married when they were working in a textile mill at Nashua, New Hampshire, USA. Dorway worked for the Caldwell mill from 1870 through about 1905 when he retired to Marpole, British Columbia. William and Anna were the parents of nine children – Anne E. (1872-1958), Charles M. (1874-1961), George (b.1874), Frederick C. (b.1875), Laura O. (1877-1970), Blanche B. (b.1879), Daisy E. (1884-1957), Ada V. (1886-1970), Reginald G. (1895-1975).

<sup>4</sup> They became parents of two sons, Kenneth Hugh (1902-1998) and Frederick Walker (1906-1969).

<sup>5</sup> Ten kilometers southeast of Wawa, Ontario.

<sup>6</sup> *The Evening World* (New York), October 5, 1907.

When Frederick C. Dorway re-appeared in October 1907, it was at the Palmer House Hotel in Chicago, Illinois<sup>7</sup>. He was reunited there with his wife and gave interviews to several Chicago newspapers recounting his adventures over the previous 20 months. What he told the press, however, did not always square with the story told by his family at the time of his disappearance and was sometimes contradictory within its own plot lines – or at least versions of his story that soon appeared in newspapers across the United States and Canada were not always consistent.



According to the various accounts, the tale of Frederick Clifford Dorway's legacy and disappearance began on a bitterly cold night in November of 1905,

*The eastbound Canadian Pacific Limited was cut in two and run in two sections. In a blinding snow storm the second section crashed into the first near Moose Jaw.<sup>8</sup>*

*He went to the scene of the wreck, and in the last sleeper he found Mrs. J. H. James who was severely*

*injured. He assisted her in carrying her to the section house, put his fur coat about the unconscious woman and summoned medical attention. Then he carried her to the nearest house [and] paid the attending physician \$25 ...<sup>9</sup>*

*When the relief train arrived, the woman returned his coat, and after thanking him, as she went away, said 'My name is Mrs. James of New York and some day you will hear from me'.<sup>10</sup>*

*Well, I was a young man [Dorway explained], and I had a wife and baby depending on me, so I felt the loss of the \$25. Consequently, I sent a receipted bill to Mrs. James' New York address asking that she repay me.<sup>11</sup> In a month, I received a packet of papers and a letter from her lawyers stating that Mrs. James had died and in her will had bequeathed me \$180,000.<sup>12</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> The Palmer House Hotel, now owned by the Hilton chain, was established in 1873 and claims to be "North America's longest-operating hotel".

<sup>8</sup> *The Sun* [Orangeville, Ontario], October 10, 1907.

<sup>9</sup> *Brussels* (Ontario) *Post*, October 24, 1907.

<sup>10</sup> *Perth Courier*, March 9, 1906.

<sup>11</sup> *Willmar Minnesota Tribune*, November 6, 1907.

<sup>12</sup> *Brussels* (Ontario) *Post*, October 24, 1907.

Dorway said that his friends had urged him *“to hurry to New York to collect the money”*<sup>13</sup> and that one of those friends wrote on his behalf to Kansas City lawyer J. J. Dunlop who agreed to represent him. Why a lawyer from Kansas was chosen to handle a probate case in New York City was not explained. Dunlop, however, proceeded to New York and wired Dorway *“to meet him at the Fifth Avenue Hotel at once”*<sup>14</sup>. The soon-to-be-rich inheritor promptly took the train from Sudbury to Montreal where, he said *“I stopped over to change cars and remain overnight ... and there my troubles began”*<sup>15</sup>.

As he checked into his Montreal hotel (or the New York hotel according to other accounts), Dorway said he was *“accosted by a well-dressed man who gave the name of Malcomson”*<sup>16</sup>. The stranger addressed him by name and said he had a letter from attorney J. J. Dunlop in which he was told to get instructions from Dorway. So, Dorway invited the man to his room where *“the first thing he did was ask me to take a drink”*<sup>17</sup>. Dorway said he did not drink, so the man offered him a cigar which, as Dorway was also a non-smoker, was also declined.



*Fifth Avenue Hotel, Manhattan, New York*

*Then he placed a box of candy on my knees, saying that was all that was left to show me sociability. Of course, I ate a piece of the candy and five minutes later, before I could make any outcry, I fell over in a trance.*

*From that moment for many hours, I knew nothing that was going on about me. I faintly remember being carried away on a train, then placed in a boat. When I realized my position, it was to find myself in a dungeon on a boat, a prisoner.*<sup>18</sup>

Dorway told journalists that he was confined in the hold of the boat for *“about 11 months, as nearly as he could gauge, not knowing whither it was bound”*.<sup>19</sup> He said he could indistinctly hear men talking on deck and, from time to time, *“a hatchway would be partially opened and bread and water thrust down to me, and once in a great while a piece of half-cooked meat”*.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> *Brussels (Ontario) Post*, October 24, 1907.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> *Willmar Minnesota Tribune*, November 6, 1907.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> *Brussels (Ontario) Post*.

When, at last, the boat docked, and the hatch was briefly opened to send down food, he “shoved [his] suspenders in the open crack. They kept the hatch from closing tight”,<sup>21</sup> allowing him to climb on deck,



*Illustration published with Dorway's story in the Pemiscot Argus, Caruthersville, Missouri, November 1, 1907*

*I was blind from my long confinement in the ship's hold*<sup>22</sup>. A man seized me, but I knocked him off into the water ... I suppose he drowned. A second man I knocked down with a piece of timber”<sup>23</sup>

When Dorway got ashore, “from the conversation of the natives, who wore black skins”<sup>24</sup>, he discovered he was at Vera Cruz, Mexico. “I was arrested and put in prison, [but] in six weeks, I escaped again ...”<sup>25</sup> From Vera Cruz he claimed to have “walked all night and hid in the fields in the daytime”<sup>26</sup>, making his way 1,700 Km, via Zacatecas, to a Mexican west coast port.<sup>27</sup> From there he “worked his way, penniless”<sup>28</sup> on the ship *Presidio* to San Francisco, California, landing there on August 14, 1906.

From San Francisco he made his way to Salt Lake City, Utah, where the telegraph operators being on strike, he worked for Associated Press as a “non-union telegraph operator”<sup>29</sup> (strike breaker). From Salt Lake he telegraphed his wife, asking her to meet him in Chicago on October 4<sup>th</sup>. At the Palmer House Hotel he told the press that he planned,

*... to stay here a while and get money to take me to New York, where I expect to begin a legal fight for the \$180,000. This story sounds like a dream, but it is no dream to me.*<sup>30</sup>

Dorway did not, however, return to New York and “begin a legal fight...”, and he would have been ill-advised to do so. His tale of being shanghaied and then escaping across the Mexico to San Francisco, Salt Lake and Chicago had already been exposed. His father-in-law, Sandy Paul, had travelled to New York in 1906, searched the city Surrogate Court records, and found “absolutely no trace of a Mrs. J. H. James leaving a will”.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> *Brussels (Ontario) Post*.

<sup>23</sup> *Willmar Minnesota Tribune*, November 6, 1907.

<sup>24</sup> *Rensselaer Republican*, Jasper County, Indiana.

<sup>25</sup> *Brussels (Ontario) Post*.

<sup>26</sup> *Willmar Minnesota Tribune*, November 6, 1907.

<sup>27</sup> Probably Puerto Vallarta.

<sup>28</sup> *Willmar Minnesota Tribune*, November 6, 1907.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> *Brussels (Ontario) Post*.

<sup>31</sup> *Evening World (New York)*, October 5, 1907.

Sandy Paul also told a *New York Evening World* reporter that there was “no record of such a [CPR train] wreck” and that he was “satisfied that Dorway wove the myth [of the inheritance] to leave home and come to New York”.<sup>32</sup> He also lamented that,

*On the strength of his son-in-law’s story, he mortgaged his property and sold horses and rigs to get enough money to send the young man to New York. In all, Dorway must have had \$2,500 when he left his Canadian Home.*<sup>33</sup>

Exactly what part Kansas City lawyer J. J. Dunlop played in the story was never explained but the Kansas connection prompted the New York newspaper to search for clues further afield. As reported by the *Fort Scott (Kansas) Tribune*,

*A telegram was received in Fort Scott yesterday, asking its correspondent to look into the matter of Mrs. J. H. James of this city having left \$180,000, at her death, to Frederick Dorway, a young railroad operator.*



*Palmer House Hotel, Chicago*

*The telegram doubtless had reference to the late Mrs. Jesse H. James who recently died in Kansas City, she having lived here until a few months ago. She died, leaving no estate. The story is doubtless a whiff of warm wind ...*<sup>34</sup>

In the end, the *New York Evening World* investigation concluded that “Dorway was in this city, all right, but he came here for some mission other than to collect a fortune”.<sup>35</sup>

Dorway’s version of his travels and travails was first published in Chicago in October 1907 but it was soon reprinted in journals, large and small, across the continent. When it appeared in the *Salina [Kansas] Times*, the editor added a postscript. He pointed out that for at least part of the time Dorway claimed to have been a shanghaied prisoner, he had in fact been a Western Union Telegraph Operator at Salina.<sup>36</sup>

*He pretended to have the contract for putting up the telegraph lines in Panama<sup>37</sup>, being here on vacation for is health. Some people believed him. Dorway claimed to be a church member and took up active church and temperance work while here. He even promised the W.C.T.U.<sup>38</sup> his coming month’s pay cheque but left before it was due.*

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<sup>32</sup> *Evening World* (New York), October 5, 1907.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Fort Scott Daily Tribune & For Scott Daily Monitor*, Fort Scott Kansas, October 7, 1907.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Salina is located west of Kansas City, Missouri and north of Wichita, Kansas.

<sup>37</sup> The Panama Canal was under construction by the United States between 1904 and 1914.

<sup>38</sup> Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU).

*Dorway was a smooth talker and wound several people around his finger with ease. Although admitting he was a married man, he did considerable flirting with some of the female portion of the population. On the night he left he said he was going to Chicago to get his wife and would then go to Panama ...*<sup>39</sup>

Where Dorway was and what he was up to immediately following his visit to Chicago is uncertain, but he lived in California for at least part of 1908-1909. Then, in late 1909 he is documented at Waco, Texas, working, under the name G. W. Bates as a recently appointed Depot Agent of the Houston and Texas Central Railway (H&TC). In December that year, when Wells Fargo shipped \$1,000<sup>40</sup> from Waco to the First Bank of Riesel, at Riesel, McLennan County, a short distance southeast of Waco, Dorway/Bates and the money disappeared,

*... leaving the safe and depot locked. When the money did not show up [at Riesel], officers forced their way into the depot and then the safe was forced open and no money found.*<sup>41</sup>

Wells Fargo agents quickly tracked him to his old home at Sudbury, Ontario. He was taken into custody by local authorities and Waco Sheriff George W. Tilley (1863-1937) sent for. Tilley made the long trip to Canada, via Kansas City, St. Louis, Detroit and Toronto, but avoided a side-trip to Washington, DC, to process an extradition request, when Dorway agreed to returned to Texas voluntarily. The *Waco Tribune* soon reported that,

*Fred Dorway, alias Bates, the Riesel express agent charged with taking \$1,000 belonging to the express company is in jail pending the court's convening ... His wife, a lady of culture and refinement, has left her home in Canada to be with him until the case is decided. They have two children, both boys, aged four and seven years, who are now with their grandparents at Sudbury.*<sup>42</sup>

At his March 1910 trial Dorway pled guilty to a charge of embezzlement over \$50 and was sentenced to a term of two years in the Texas State Penitentiary at Huntsville. The prison's *Convict and Conduct Register* enrolled him under the name "*Fred C. Dorway, alias G. W. Bates, age 33*", and curiously listed his occupation as "*accountant*".<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Salina* [Kansas] *Daily Union*, March 7, 1906

<sup>40</sup> About \$33,000 in 2025 dollars (purchasing power).

<sup>41</sup> *Waco Times Herald*, January 31, 1910.

<sup>42</sup> *Waco Tribune*, March 5, 1910.

<sup>43</sup> Dorway's full *Convict and Conduct Register* entry reads as follows: Fred C. Dorway (aka G. W. Barnes); Age – 33; Height – 5 ft. 8 ½ in.; Weight – 185 pounds; Complexation – Dark; Eyes – Grey; Hair – Black; Married – Yes; Uses Tobacco – No; Marks on Person - #7 shoes, scar on L. arm, cut 1" joint L. thumb, cut outer corner L. eye, cut outer throat; Education – Good; Able to Read – Yes; Able to Write – Yes; Number of Years at School – 13; Date of Birth – 1877; Place of Birth – Canada; Birthplace of Mother – Canada; Occupation – Accountant; Time of Conviction – March 21, 1910; Offense – Embezzlement over \$50; Term of Imprisonment – 2 Years.; County – McLellan; Residence – Waco; Plea – Guilty; When Received – April 3, 1910; Expiration of Sentence – March 21, 1912; Remarks – Discharged January 21, 1912.



State Prison, Huntsville, Texas

While Dorway picked cotton and chopped cane on the Huntsville prison farm, the 1911 Canada census shows that his wife, Margaret, and sons, Kenneth and Walker, were living at Sudbury with Margaret's parents, Alexander Paul and Margaret Crozier-Paul (b.1854).<sup>44</sup> A year or two later she and the boys moved with her parents to Winnipeg, Manitoba.

When Dorway was released from Huntsville on January 21, 1912, he found California Deputy Sheriff George Van Vliet (1873-1918)<sup>45</sup> waiting for him at the prison gate, a California

extradition warrant in hand. Following his 1907 visit to Chicago, and before moving to Texas, Dorway had been living at Tropic, California,<sup>46</sup> employed as an agent of the Southern Pacific Railway and the Wells Fargo Companies. Sheriff Van Vliet returned his prisoner to California to face another embezzlement charge, but within a week Dorway was once more at liberty. The *Los Angeles Morning Tribune* reported that,

*Frederick Dorway ... who was brought back to Los Angeles recently from Texas to stand trial on a charge of embezzlement, was released from the county jail yesterday under \$500 bond.*<sup>47</sup>

The California embezzlement case seems to have gone unresolved. It would appear Dorway promptly jumped bail, fled to a destination and fate unknown. He might have assumed another alias, as the name Frederick C. Dorway does not appear in either the American or Canadian census records for 1920/1921 or 1930/1931, nor does that of a likely-looking G. W. Bates.

Dorway may have died sometime between 1912 and 1916 as, on February 15, 1916, Margaret Paul-Dorway was remarried to Richard Pearse Blake (1874-1946) at Portage La Prairie, Manitoba.<sup>48</sup> That Frederick and Margaret had been divorced is possible, but very unlikely. In the

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<sup>44</sup> Margaret and her parents had been born in Lachute, Argenteuil, Quebec.

<sup>45</sup> In 1918 Van Vliet was shot and killed while attempting to arrest a husband and wife who were wanted in connection with the murders of Chief of Detectives John Rowan, of the Colorado Springs Police Department, Colorado, and Policeman Luther McMahill, of the Denver Police Department, Colorado.

<sup>46</sup> North of Los Angeles and west of Pasadena.

<sup>47</sup> *Los Angeles Morning Tribune*, January 27, 1912.

<sup>48</sup> On the Manitoba Marriage Index 1881-1941 her name is entered as Marjorie vs Margaret Dorway.

early 20<sup>th</sup> century divorce was almost impossible.<sup>49/50</sup> It is more likely that Margaret may have simply claimed to be a widow when she married Blake. Margaret Paul-Dorway-Blake died at Winnipeg in October 1951.

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## Postscript

The Perth *Courier's* March 1906 report of Frederick Dorway's disappearance while in search of a \$180,000 legacy was in keeping with something of an obsession the newspaper had with local inheritance stories in the closing decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>. Herewith are just a few examples.

*Perth Courier*, May 2, 1890

LEGACY.—The late Mr. Thos. Workman, of Montreal, in his will left a legacy to Mrs. John P. Grant, formerly of Perth, of \$2000.

*Perth Courier*, September 19, 1890

LEGACY.—By the death of a brother in Iowa, Mr. Robert Lochhead, of our town, was left a neat little legacy, which will be of material assistance to him in his advancing years. His daughter Tena, was also left a smaller amount.

*Perth Courier*, April 17, 1896

LEGACY.—Mr. James Rawlins, North Elmsley, when he returned home from England last week, brought with him quite a substantial legacy from the estate of a deceased relative. We congratulate him on his good fortune.

*Perth Courier*, March 12, 1897

A BIG LEGACY.—The following item is going the rounds of the newspapers:—Mr. Thomas Farrell, formerly of Perth, but now of Whitewood, Assa., has been notified of a legacy of £230,000 to which he and his brothers are heirs from an Inniskillen Estate. He is between sixty and seventy. His share is \$375,000. We know of no one formerly living in this vicinity who would answer to the lucky man pointed out in the foregoing paragraph.

*Perth Courier*, May 3, 1907

Miss Julia Farrell has received a goodly sized legacy by a relative recently deceased in Ireland.

*Perth Courier*, December 8, 1905

Prof. W. H. Falls, of Smith's Falls, has received a legacy from the estate of his late uncle H. D. Manger, Guernsey, C. I. \$15,000 was bequeathed.

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<sup>49</sup> In Canada, adultery was the only recognized grounds for divorce. Before 1925, a wife had to prove not just adultery, but also aggravated circumstances, such as adultery coupled with cruelty, desertion, bigamy, or other sexual offenses. In Manitoba, there were no divorce courts. Couples had to petition the Parliament of Canada for a private Act of Parliament, which was an expensive process only accessible to the wealthy. In the United States divorce was equally difficult to obtain, requiring proof of specific legal fault such as adultery, cruelty, desertion, or drunkenness. States also demanded long residency, and divorce was costly in time and money.

<sup>50</sup> The New York State 1852-1956 Death Index records a man named Frederick Dorway, who died on June 29, 1937 at Massena, New York, but there is no supporting evidence that this is Fred C. Dorway.

Perth Courier, April 23, 1875

**A LEGACY TO SOME PURPOSE.**—For some time back it has been known in this vicinity that a legacy amounting to a handsome though unknown sum had, by the death of a relative in Scotland, lately deceased, fallen to the lot of Mr. John Armour, of the Scotch Line, North Elmsley

Perth Courier, August 31, 1900

**A \$75,000 LEGACY.**—Some time ago the family of the late Mr. Francis H. Cosatt, Scotch Line, were notified by the proper legal authorities that a legacy was awaiting them in England, and that when the necessary documents were despatched to the solicitors, and the essential forms of law gone through with the money would be forwarded to them in Canada.

Another Perth legacy story, *The Gould Inheritance: Mathew Gould (1764-1852)*, from 1895, can be found elsewhere on this website at <https://www.perthhs.org/documents/gould-inheritance.pdf>

- Ron W. Shaw, with research assistance from Wendy Roberts (2026)