

Memories of 'The 'Pass Fair Day'

By Sara and Minnie Savage

ON the 'Pass fair-day of long ago, the cattle were going down our road from 7.00 a.m. There was a constant stream and about 9 o'clock there was real congestion. The Poyntzpass fair was held every first Saturday. If the month came in on a Saturday, then the fair was held on the second Saturday.

Some farmers would have had maybe two or three 'stirks', another, one cow; somebody else, four or five cattle. Always someone drove the beasts and someone went in front to keep the different lots from getting mixed up. There was a lot of shouting and roaring going on. I remember father sitting ready in the mare and trap waiting for a lull so that our cattle could be got out onto the road. When he reached the 'Pass, he always stabled the mare in Mrs. Mann's yard, here at the head of the town. If he was in a hurry to join his cattle, Aggie Monaghan, Mrs. Mann's granddaughter, unharnessed and stabled the mare, giving her the feed father had brought for her.

Dealers would have come from the 'Pass in jaunting cars, to meet the farmers and their cattle on the road. Many a farmer refusing a bid on the road to the fair didn't get as good an offer in the fair and had to walk his cattle back home again.

We remember some of those dealers names, though not all by any means. There was Willie McSherry, a nice, dapper, little man - he once gave me sixpence, James Magill (or McGuill), Jack Best, Jobie Canavan (a big 'shipper'), Jamie Lennon and Willie Reilly. Willie Reilly bought lambs. He wasn't a local man but stayed in Murphy's Hotel and hired a jaunting car to come up round the farms buying lambs.

On one occasion heavy snow came on and Willie was stranded in the 'Pass for some time. He was standing at the door of Murphy's Hotel one day, watching a little child of the house playing on the footpath in the snow. Suddenly there was a tremendous rumble and a huge slide of snow came off the roof, bringing with it a large ridge tile. With great presence of mind, Willie snatched the child into the hallway and as the "Newry Reporter" stated afterwards, "saved the child's life."

It was said there were certain places better than others for 'showing' the cattle. Some said, "Don't take your stand at the Meeting House gate - there's a hollow there."

The streets and pavements must have been in a dreadful mess when the fair was over. Then the road men came in to clean the streets and the women came out of their houses with pails of water and scrubbing brushes to wash their doorsteps and windows.

THE LATE JOHN JOSEPH SANDS

ON February 2nd, 1992 John Joe Sands died after a relatively short illness. His passing is still widely mourned and his absence has left a gap in the lives of many, for John Joe was friend, adviser and counsellor. He will long be remembered for his sterling qualities as husband, father, teacher, scholar, neighbour and friend.

Our historical society will miss him sadly, not only for his valued membership and scholarly talks, but also for his learned support and genuine friendship to all.

To his wife Avril, his family and wide family circle the members of our society offer deepest sympathy in their sad untimely bereavement.