

I

LITTLE SHORT WORDS

My husband, John, has many novel and original ideas, which he attempts to translate into action as far and as fast as possible. Some of his undertakings have met with marked success while others have proved costly. All of them involve a lot of hard work and co-operation on the part of his assistants. So people like me, who like to jog along familiar well-worn paths, often try to dismiss sudden proposals of his that strike us as extreme or entailing unusual difficulties. This is hard to do.

One morning early in December, I stopped at our White Street office on my way shopping. Light-hearted and carefree, all I had intended to do was say a friendly "hello," pick up my check, and be off.

A wife who drops in and out of her husband's office at odd times cannot expect her welcome to be consistently enthusiastic, but John was glad to see me. Very pleased he seemed as he elbow-steered me toward an area of greater privacy.

“You know,” he said, “before I went upstairs last night I was reading that book by a couple who ran a cucumber farm on Long Island. It was pretty good and I said to myself, ‘If people like to read such stuff as that, why can’t you and I write a book about the Fair?’”

“It was the wife who did the writing,” I recalled.

“Yes, but she said, ‘Without him this story would never have been told.’”

“That I am ready to believe.”

“Now, a person doesn’t have to be very smart to write a book like that,” John persisted, “It’s just a straight-forward story of what happened, told in a light, amusing way—all little short words.”

He grinned as he began to help me off with my scarf.

“That’s very encouraging,” said I, clinging stubbornly to my coat, “but can’t we wait until after the holidays? Couldn’t we talk it over at home evenings? Christmas will be here in a few days and I’m late this year, as usual, getting started.”

John is accustomed to some measure of resistance. Sometimes, in fact, it seems to act as a stimulant. On the other hand, he hates to have brakes applied as he roars enthusiastically along on the first fine rapture of a “new idea.”

“What day is New Years?” he wanted to know.

“Sunday, January 1.”

He pulled out his memo pad.

“We’ll start it Monday, the second. Monday is a good day to start. You see this big envelope. I’ll put all my clippings and any material I pick up right in here, and you can find it in the top drawer of the tall metal file in the corner. Now do you need some money?”

I admitted that a few extra dollars were exactly what it would take to cushion the shock that my nervous system had sustained, and then cheerfully went my way, not actually surprised or disturbed, but musing rather, that perhaps between us we could concoct some short history of the Fair.

This wasn’t so bad. What if he had decided I ought to learn to play the clavichord? I have a friend whose husband, all unsolicited, brought home an Irish harp for her birthday.

Christmas came and went, and this conversation completely slipped my mind, but John has a memory system all his own. He keeps lots of little white notepads lying around the house and the office. To these he confides his plans and projects, each on a separate slip. These scraps of paper go into an envelope on which he has marked the date when he expects to give them detailed attention.

It works this way—John was in the office when he opened the envelope marked January 2 and found the following notations:

Pipe up new tank
Electricians wire pump

Paint over billboard
 Take down Christmas decorations
 Phone Mrs. Lotsatalk
 Gladys-book

Whereupon he telephoned me.

“Hello,” he purred, “Just called up to see how you’re feeling this morning. Everything all right?”

“Oh yes, I’m fine. And you?”

“I’m fine, too. Are you going to be very busy today?”

“Not especially. Just housework and a few errands. Want me to go somewhere with you?”

“Well, not exactly. This is the day we were going to start the book about the Fair, remember?”

“Why, so it is,” I promptly acknowledged. Then I tossed the ball back at him, thinking how pleased the radio show *Quick as a Flash* ought to be to get me on its program.

“Where do you want to work, John? All the information and newspaper clippings are down there in your office.”

“That’s all right. You don’t need notes to begin with. You can make a start without those. Just a little background stuff about the Fair, and Danbury and maybe Connecticut in general.”

“Perhaps I’d better begin with Connecticut and work the other way,” I suggested.

“Well, the principal thing is to get going. Just write the first chapter today. I’ll bring it down with me tomorrow and get it typed and we’ll see what it looks like.”

It looked like this:

A LITTLE BACKGROUND STUFF

Connecticut is called the “Nutmeg State,” but the title was not pridefully self-bestowed.

There must be a lot of school children and others who believe that nutmegs are raised here, just as pine trees grown in Maine and peaches are a product of Georgia.

But, no! The truth is that early in our state’s history, a few enterprising Yankee peddlers with time on their hands during the long winter evenings, whittled out of wood some specious imitations of nutmegs. When the frost had passed in the spring and the traveling got started again, they set out in their horse-drawn carts and peddled these nutmegs for the genuine article,

along with their regular wares, to housewives far and near outside the state, and probably inside too, since these salesmen were not overscrupulous and had no notions of building up the territory or making repeat sales. All that came later.

As time went on, people about the country became suspicious of strangers from Connecticut and any native of that state was referred to as a “Nutmegger.” Far from resentment, the recipients of the appellation must have thought this shady trick was pretty cute, for they adopted the title and they like to tell the story, as you can see.

Nowadays, peddlers have to have licenses and if they misrepresent the smallest item, some furious householder will call up the state police. As a result, wooden nutmegs are no longer sold, so far as I know. There are salesmen of certain securities, however, who ply their trade openly and make a good living, so that the most important difference between then and now is the classic one—the automobile has taken the place of the horse.

This indifference of Connecticut people to Puritanic standards is not in the tradition of a New England that looks to Boston as its leader in cultural and spiritual matters, but is probably due to the infiltration of New Yorkers, who do not retain a fast dollar long enough to ask it where it came from.

New York State is adjacent to Danbury’s western boundary, and only sixty miles to the south is New York City, where many persons from this locality carry on businesses from sometime Monday morning until the Berkshire Express leaves the Grand Central on Friday afternoon.

If basketball players are being bribed in New York, we can scare up a couple who have been “approached.” If torch sweaters go on sale in New York, the Danbury police quickly discover six or eight of them in our city.

Furthermore, in the summertime, cars pour out of the city into Connecticut all day long on Fridays, over that expensive and beautifully manicured highway, the Merritt Parkway. On Sundays, back they go at 50 to 60 mph, fender to fender and head to tail, like Hudson River shad in April. Their occupants love the quiet countryside, but as my Grandfather Cole used to say, “To make money you have to go where there is money,” in spite of which bit of worldly wisdom, he kept right on raising apples on a Maine hillside till the day he died.

It is even getting hard in this locality to distinguish at first glance between the New Yorkers and the native-born. I can't do it, but there are subtle matters of grooming that furnish clues, I'm told, by friends who specialize in that sort of thing.

Many a New Yorker, whose house once stood within a convenient distance of the Connecticut border, has hired a heavy-hauler to move it down the road a piece into our state; from Brewster into Danbury, for example, or from North Salem to Ridgefield.

Such action was not taken to improve the view from the front porch, nor to ensure a bountiful water supply, but because up to now Connecticut has not levied a state income tax. However, indications are that our state government needs more money to pay more employees to inspect more things to protect the interests of more of us citizens. The protectors we have now are frequently individuals of high principle and standing in their communities, but they have families to support and most of them drive around in automobiles provided and maintained by the State. This runs into money and so, on the basis of present information, I doubt if our population will continue to be increased by this kind of immigration.

The citizens of Danbury are a decidedly chauvinistic people whose young are early instructed in these two essential facts:

#1 Danbury is a fine modern city offering unusual advantages and possessing superior public buildings and educational facilities.

#2 Every man, woman and child should wear a hat at all times and with every costume, excepting possibly pajamas.

A salesman who tries a house-to-house canvas without a hat is likely to lose confidence both in himself and his product.

One such unfortunate specimen knocked one hot summer afternoon at the door of a house where four ladies, all friends from way back, sat with their hats on playing bridge.

One of them rose briskly and confronted him through the screen. She glanced at his sample case, sized up his mission, and then before he had a chance to open his mouth...

"Young man," said she, "if you think you are going to sell anything in Danbury, calling around at people's houses without a hat on your head, you are very much mistaken. Don't you know that Danbury is the Hat Capital of the nation?"

He did after that, and the chances are he bought a hat in Danbury. At least he understood why, with the thermometer



John and Gladys Leahy on their honeymoon at Virginia Beach, October, 1935.

pushing 90°F, he had encountered at various front doors such a chilly atmosphere.

As for the Danbury Fair, I can say from personal experience that it is a cherished institution.

Twenty-two years ago,¹ John and I were married on Friday of Fair Week. John chose the date. It was none of my doing. He had been busy all summer building oil tanks in Norwalk and was anxious to get the ordeal over with before cold weather set in and his customers began calling up for oil deliveries. I am not native-born and so I supposed that he had just overlooked the Fair when he selected October 11.

Friday of Fair Week is Danbury Day, when old friends meet and

those unfortunate exiles who have married out-of-town return to greet their fellows and to hoist a glass or some glasses to the days of yore.

Our wedding day was a perfect fair day. We were married at ten o'clock in St. Joseph's and when we emerged from the church into the mellow brilliance of sunshine and autumn leaves, there burst upon our eyes a sight that would have gladdened the heart of P.T. Barnum.

There were all of John's white tank trucks washed and polished by their drivers to a refulgence never before beheld in the annals of oil delivery, and decorated with crepe paper streamers. They stood lined up at the curb in order of size and importance, with two ten-wheelers at the head of the procession and three pickups bringing up the rear.

Their horns proclaimed us with strident, raucous uproar as we inched along up Main Street. This was a little too much for John's composure, which had just been sorely tried. He urged Charlie,

¹ John and Gladys were married on October 11, 1935.

our cab driver, to speed up – then he tried to get him to detour via Elm Street, but it was no use. Charlie had other instructions.

In hilarious mood, the caravan followed us the whole length of Main and up West to Division, where they circled around the park and headed back with many a farewell blast.

John's face was very red for he felt sure people would think this was an advertising stunt. I was grateful and flattered and felt a surge of tender emotion toward the lightsome lads who had bothered to give us this noble send-off. To me, the parade was pure pleasure.

As we drove slowly past the fairgrounds on the way to New York, John watched the crowds lining up at the gates for tickets. I sensed his unspoken yearning.

"Too bad," I condoled, "we have to miss Danbury Day. We could have been married next week just as well."

"No," replied my brand-new husband. "I thought of that. Next week, the carpenters are coming to build a new loading rack for the bulk-yard on Pahquioque Avenue."

Since we had reservations for an afternoon sailing waiting for us at the pier of the Old Dominion Line, there was nothing for it but to continue on our course to Virginia Beach with our matron of honor and best man for company in case we didn't run into any fun-loving couples on the way. Like most of John's undertakings, the honeymoon was a success, but neither one of us, try as we may, can remember the name of that steamship.

“**H**ow do you like it?” I inquired of John as he finished a second careful reading.

“Some of the words are too long. Now that word ‘chauvinistic’—I want people to be able to understand this.”

“Very well. I shall try to limit myself to words of three syllables, but at times I may run over. I have to do it my own way.”

“Then what you say about New Yorkers may offend them. We want to please everybody and have them like us.”

“A fine thing!” I protested. “You ought to know better by this time. I have in mind a whole chapter calculated to displease certain obnoxious characters, the writing of which I was going to enjoy thoroughly.”

“No, no.” he said.

“John,” I appealed to him, “do you think anybody is going to take this seriously?”

“You’re always running into people who take things seriously. Now tomorrow we will write the second chapter.”

“We will,” I faltered, “out of what? Thin air?”

THIN AIR

Two weeks after we were married, we moved hastily one evening into our present home on White Street, taking with us the contents of our respective small apartments.

John had purchased the house some months earlier when it happened to be for sale because it was handy to the office. The walking distance is five minutes or less, but of course we never walk.

We moved in the evening to save time. John and two helpers with a pickup truck transferred our belongings in a couple of hours. The efficiency of their performance was somewhat marred to my way of thinking by the loss en route of a box into which I had packed our table linens and some embroidered pillowcases. My best trousseau nightgown was on top, I recall.

They brought my sewing machine on the first load so that I could be shortening some curtains in order to give the front of the house, at least, a more lived-in appearance against the time when the sun would rise and the neighbors would awaken to find that we had stolen up on them. I never heard how they reacted to my efforts, but John approved them.

There really isn’t much the matter with the house. It is sort of Dutch Colonial, white with green shutters and window boxes. Everybody says it is a “cute” little house. It is composed of six rooms, a sun-porch and a minimum of closet space. It does contain,



The Leahys’ first home at 205 White Street in Danbury, Connecticut.

thank goodness, a cellar and an attic, both somewhat difficult to access, into which we have managed over twenty years to cram the overflow of discards that we haven’t sense enough to throw away.

John bought the place, as I have said, with an eye to convenience, but with both ears apparently obstructed.

Day and night, the flow of traffic past our front door is constant and tremendous. Early in the game, I took to using earplugs, but John can sleep through all but the most jarring of rear-end collisions. It takes the ambulance siren at close range to disturb him.

In the middle distance extend the tracks of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad with plenty of long freights and a yard where switchers make up a train of eighty or more cars every night. The only complaint I have ever heard from John was uttered when the New Haven changed over from steam locomotives to the diesels, whose monotonous blast compared unfavorably in his ears to the old-fashioned train whistles.

“That’s a hell of a noise,” he would exclaim angrily as a fast freight stridently acknowledged one grade crossing after another, but he was only resenting being grown-up, and not the noise as such. He has lately even adopted the terminology of a neighbor of ours, who refers affectionately to the new diesel switcher as “Little Toot” because the sound it emits is less ear-splitting than that of the through locomotive, which passes as “Big Toot.” “Big Blat” is a better name for it in my opinion.

In our little house by the side of the road, guests will often pause in mid-sentence to listen as our chrome-footed soap dishes go into their tap dance across the porcelain surface of the washstand upstairs.

“What’s that?” they ask apprehensively as small cracks in the ceiling expand and new ones open up before their eyes.

“There’s a certain amount of vibration here,” John explains soberly. “Might be a vein of quicksand running under the house. I used to hear there was one in this locality.”

For the first few years of our busy married life, I looked upon our residence as temporary shelter, a stopping place from which we would eventually emerge into a well-planned dream home. I postponed buying furniture until John expressed concern that the scarcity of our household goods might give the impression of impermanence, as if we were of two minds about continuing our life together. Even then, I carelessly picked up a few pieces that seemed good enough for as long as we were likely to need them.

I can’t understand now what possessed me to think that we might ever get away. John never encouraged my flights of fancy. Every time I came across a promising site, it was too high or too

swampy or too lonely, or it involved too much grass-cutting or was too difficult to access.

The most valid of his objections was voiced in the plaintive query, “Where would I go to lie down?”

It is true that the office is so near this haven of rest that, when the need arises, he can rush home for a cat-nap.

“Call me in twenty minutes,” he will say as he stretches out luxuriously at the refreshing distance of twenty-five feet from White Street traffic.

I do and he rises invigorated. He can, moreover, in a pinch, dash home to change his clothes or shave—a great advantage, he feels. One thing I can say with conviction for life with John. It has been an interesting experience, but I must add, one for which I was signally unprepared.

Over the course of a few school-teaching years, I had always fancied myself as a homemaker. How blithely, I thought, I would go about my daily chores of cooking and dusting while I planned little surprise celebrations and social evenings for my pampered mate. What fun to make friends who would complete congenial foursomes for golf or bridge! How cozy for just the two of us, sitting by our own fireside, cat on a braided rug, to read and talk away the winter evenings.

The only part of that utopia that has materialized is the useless, necessary cat. Even now, when my erstwhile design for living seems somehow vaguely childish, he is an ideal companion. He has large yellow eyes, a smooth, dark blue coat and long legs that cause him to sit tall like Egyptian statues of cats. We called him “Farouk,” partly for this reason and partly for other similarities to his namesake. He answers better to “Kitty.”

Wintertime turned out to be our busy season with little leisure and phone calls at all hours.

To the oil business that possessed John when we were married and that possessed me for several years thereafter, he shortly proceeded to add a retail propane business, which as we say in our advertising “supplies gas to homes beyond the mains.”

It was foolish for me to squander my energies on housework when I was needed to “chase slippers.” A “slipper” in the parlance of our office is an inactive customer, one who used to buy, but whose record shows no recent order. My first job was to list such accounts, noting the unpaid balance, if any, and any equipment of ours the

customer might have on loan. Later, when I began to post sales and chart deliveries, the deficiencies of my education became more apparent. A nodding acquaintance with bookkeeping and typing, for example, would have been helpful, but I had interest in my work, which John seemed to think would do, at least to start with.

There in the office I learned to hold my tongue. It wouldn't do to disagree with the boss publicly, and so I developed a sissy policy that calls for agreeing and cooperating with my husband.

I may hang back occasionally and I reserve the right to think my own thoughts, but outwardly I am polite. So is John, now I think of it, and we are each fairly tolerant of the other's eccentricities even in the privacy of our own home. No "blessings on the falling out" for us, as Lord Tennyson would have it. We are much too busy.

Very spineless, this sounds, I realize. Either that or we must have been particularly well-suited to each other. I can attest that the latter is certainly wide of the mark.

If commonality of background, tastes and interests are the ingredients of a successful marriage, John and I should have started running in opposite directions at first sight.

He is of Irish-German descent, rather a bizarre combination I still think, but one that has been the subject of considerable experimentation in these parts.

His Irish grandmother used to tell a story of how she left County Clare with her sister on a ship bound for New York with a stop-over in Boston. There the sister went ashore on a little sight-seeing excursion with somebody she met on shipboard. She stopped over too long and the ship sailed away to New York without her. The immigration authorities were more careless then than they are today, it would seem, and communication was not so highly developed. The young girls never heard from each other again.

After a brief sojourn in New York City, John's grandmother made her way to New Rochelle where she repaired her loss, to some degree, by finding and marrying another recent immigrant, whose name by coincidence was also Leahy. Her husband was a professional tooth-puller. He fashioned wooden teeth to take the place of those he extracted, so he must have had some mechanical ability, which he may well have transmitted to his grandson, John, who has that as well.

John and his Irish relatives are Catholics, but his father married into a German family whose members differ among themselves as

much in religion as they do in sundry other ways. The German relatives are a jovial lot of non-eccentrics who follow their natural bent in normal and successful living.

I am more familiar with the quirks of my own people, who arrived in this country many boats earlier. I'm afraid I come from a long line of witch-swingers. I have no knowledge of any specific hag swung by my ancestors, but they had the temperament for it—at least those on my father's side had.

Once as a child of ten I wanted to go with another girl to a Sunday afternoon meeting of a children's group in the parish house of the Episcopal church. My grandmother would have let me go, but Grandpa put his foot down.

"I'd rather see her in her grave than an Episcopal," he announced angrily.

"In her grave" were his words, and I could see myself pathetically ensconced in a small white casket, wearing my best red and white silk dress. On my neck was my new locket and chain, and I bore a lily in my hand.

The matter was dropped right there, but for many years I thought I understood the meaning of the phrase, "a fate worse than death." It was to be anything other than a Methodist.

Now I was the apple of my grandfather's eye and I know he loved me dearly. I'm equally sure that he meant what he said and I hope he can't look down from heaven and see me now.

My mother's family were not such sticklers for doctrine, but more concerned with the moral aspect of religion. They were great believers in the beneficial properties of hard work. The highest praise of a stranger in their community was compressed into three little words, "He's a worker."

Satan could have little truck with a worker. My forebears would be all for John. Taking naps in the daytime or lying abed of a morning they condemned as weakening to both body and spirit, and they were not over-sympathetic with sickness, unless its symptoms were marked and severe. My own mother had recourse to a doctor only in childbirth and during her last illness.

Mainers are great on sins of omission. The most damning criticism of a housewife used to be the statement that she was handy with a can-opener. When I was a child, tearing ones clothes was a moral lapse indicating insufficient respect for the effort involved in obtaining them, and failure to mend them promptly was a mark

of slackness. Not to return what one had borrowed was a disgrace. So was lack of judgment, which Mainers call “common sense.”

I remember gratefully how my Maine grandmother used to guard my health by drying me out before the oven door of the kitchen stove after I had played in the wet snow, but then she would keep me indoors for the rest of the day. That wasn't so bad. I have been taught about colds and how to avoid them, but once I missed a long-awaited performance of “Uncle Tom's Cabin” by complaining of a bellyache and lying around the house most of a morning. Even though I was completely recovered by afternoon and it would be another year before Uncle Tom and his bloodhounds would be back, I had to stay home. It was like being punished for a misfortune.

Now John has common sense enough for an army and he works as if wound up, but his purpose in doing so is obscure. It is not from a sense of duty, I am thankful to state. More likely it's just for the hell of it. I find this attitude very relaxing to the compulsions of my upbringing, which doom me forever to be a mender of underwear and a turner of sheets. It does my heart good to see him pitch a pretty good pair of holey socks into the wastebasket, and the way he rips up his shirts with frayed collars for cleaning rags is a joy to behold.

I can spend a day in bed if I choose nursing an ingrown toenail or a tooth that I fondly, but foolishly, hope is not abscessing. At six o'clock, he will not consider it amiss for me to rise and dine and keep an evening engagement.

“Come on,” he will say, “Get up and dress. You'll have a good time. I don't think there's much the matter with you. If there is, you can resume being sick tomorrow.”

Then we both laugh. It is one of our private pleasantries.

Several years ago, we had bought tickets in February for a short southern cruise. Two days before we were to sail, I came down with what both the doctor and I diagnosed as bronchial pneumonia. Not even John, I felt sure, would allow me out of bed, but the day came and he aided and abetted me in getting packed and bundled into the warm car for the drive to New York.

The sun shone on my face as we bowled along the Henry Hudson Parkway.

“I feel better already,” I croaked. “Only I hate to run out on the doctor like this.”

“The warm air will do you good,” John prescribed. “Anyway, there will be a doctor and a nurse on the ship and you’ll get just as good care in your stateroom as you would at home.”

I was afraid the French Line would not see eye-to-eye with him on this subject, but what with the sun and the car’s heater and a few degrees of fever, I groggily decided that burial at sea might be a pleasantly cooling experience, if only I could stay alive long enough to enjoy it.

Once aboard, I crawled happily into bed and slept for a night and a day, whereupon the balmy southern breezes took over. I got up for dinner the next night and found it unnecessary to resume being sick.

Sometimes it is hard for me to recognize John’s brand of common sense as such, but I have learned from him that the agreeable course may be both healthful and moral, and that was quite a revelation.

Until I knew John, I never cared much for sightseeing. All I know of its joys I learned from him. In a car, he is such a rubber-neck that his eyes are everywhere but on the road. I am therefore always willing to drive and he is willing to let me. The first time I see a sight I am pretty good at enjoying it, but the next time we set out I want to see a new one. John can go on enjoying the same ones interminably.

Every Saturday after Thanksgiving, he boards the Commodore Vanderbilt at Harmon for Chicago to attend the annual convention of the National Association of Fairs. There, he follows a regular routine. He always attends the International Livestock Show, which takes place the same week. He visits the Brookfield and the Lincoln Park Zoo. He goes shopping for long periods at Marshall Field’s without buying much, and he tours the city and environs on a sightseeing bus.

Soon after we were married, John had to go on a short business trip. As he packed hastily, I was eyeing his suitcase with some disapproval, for it looked as if the contents had been stirred with a spoon.

He must have misconstrued my attitude.

“Look here now,” he admonished me. “You don’t ever have to worry when I’m away. I shall be busy every minute of the day and all I ever take to bed with me is a pad and pencil. I haven’t got time to watch you either,” he added as an afterthought, “so let’s get it understood now.”

Not every bride might take kindly to this clear-cut declaration of policy, but what it lacked in sentiment I felt sure it more than made up in kindness of intention. It has made a fine working arrangement, so that now when he comes home from Chicago proudly bearing two large photographs of himself and Sally



Sally Rand and John Leahy at the Sherman House in Chicago.

Rand in a dancing pose at the annual banquet of the Showman's League, I can smile and comment heartily, "What a gorgeous gown."

"She's a gorgeous dame," says John, who is a great admirer of the well-dressed woman and thoroughly enjoys being photographed with all the lively lovelies who show up at the Fair.

Sally, I know, is at the convention to arrange bookings for her act and, besequined as they are, those are her working clothes. My working clothes are plainer, if somewhat more ample, but I am solidly booked for all the years ahead and a great satisfaction it is.

"Not much there about the Fair," was John's comment, although he seemed pleased with my testimonial to his character.

"You are the one who grew up in Danbury," I retorted. "Why don't you write your own reminiscences?"

"After dinner tonight I'll tell you the things I remember about Fair Week when I was a boy. I remember quite a lot," he mused, "it may take more than one evening. After I run dry you can talk with Jarvis.² He can tell you what was what, and after that—why, you've been around here for twenty-odd years, you must have a few ideas of your own."

I had a few all right, but they wouldn't bear mentioning.

² C. Irving Jarvis, longtime Assistant General Manager of the Fair, was in charge of seeing John's ideas through to fruition.

BOY'S EYE VIEW

John loves people and the more the merrier. For the twenty-five years I have known him, he has shown a marked predilection for parades, circuses and carnivals, auctions and town meetings, fires and funerals, and in fact for any goings-on where his fellow creatures may be gathered together.

In the summer of 1949, nearby Bridgeport, where P.T. Barnum lived in Oriental magnificence during his heyday and which was the winter quarters for “The Greatest on Earth,” held a Barnum Centennial to celebrate the organizing of “Barnum’s Great Asiatic Caravan, Museum and Menagerie” in 1849.

Operating expenses were raised by public subscription, principally among the city’s merchants, who gave liberally from civic pride and in the hope that business would be brisk as the crowds flocked into town. There were speeches, parades and a pageant in which young and old took part. In the evening, Seaside Park, many acres of which were given by Barnum to the city, was the scene of free fireworks. Everyone who could stand the heat went to the freight yards to see the circus unload, for its arrival had been planned to coincide with the jubilee.

There have been rumors that the centennial was not a financial success from the viewpoint of those who contributed to this promotion. If this is true, Bridgeport failed to profit by the precepts and



A collection of Mardi Gras heads parading along at the Danbury Fair. *James J. Tessasa*

example of her foster child who is believed to have said, “There’s a sucker born every minute.” Be that as it may, the celebration has become an annual event and is now said to be breaking even, which is still a long way from appropriate recognition of Barnum’s talents.

It is, however, just the sort of thing John would crawl miles to

witness and, in 1952, he participated by entering our Danbury Fair bandwagon in the parade, filling its seats with big boys wearing Mardi Gras heads. Sometime afterward, to his surprise and pleasure, he received by mail from Bridgeport a box containing a shield-shaped trophy, which makes a fine conversation piece for the wall of our reception room at the fairgrounds. "Most Comical" is the inscription.

No St. Patrick's Day parade on Fifth Avenue ever roused John to such enthusiasm as the Barnum Centennial. It carried him back to the happy mornings over forty years ago when he had been up and going at five o'clock to meet the circus train.

There is always something that bends the twig. One glimpse of romance and a boy runs away to sea or a girl is stage-struck. It must have been the circus that inclined John to select as his personal hero our favorite native son, the famous P.T. Barnum. Emulation at the age of eight, which took the form of holding pet shows in the backyard, is one thing. Reverence at 54 for the same idol will bear looking into.

Was the profitable exhibition of Tom Thumb and the Cardiff Giant the measure of Barnum's greatness? I wondered.

It was enlightening to discover that, while many of his exploits have become legendary, his achievements as a solid citizen are less well-remembered. A giant in the nutmeg tradition was Phineas Taylor Barnum, who was born in 1810 in the adjoining town of Bethel when that village was a portion of Danbury still, which it had remained until 1855. Each community claims him as its own and reasonably so I should think without any need for further debate or research.

His name and those of his prodigies are in use today to glamorize many a business enterprise and city street, but Barnum left his mark on more than the landscape in these western reaches of Connecticut.



John Leahy as a boy, enjoying his dog.

In addition to carrying on the activities for which he is more widely known, he was the Mayor of Bridgeport, President of the Pequonnock National Bank of Bridgeport, President of the Bridgeport Hospital and of the Bridgeport Water Company, and a member of the state legislature for four terms.

The genius and originality of his advertising methods started, for better or worse, a new trend in that whole field, making him the acknowledged father of modern publicity. In his early days, he published his own newspaper and later in life found time in his odd moments at home to write a book for boys entitled “The Adventures of Lion Jack,” as well as to complete a lengthy autobiography, which sold half a million copies.

Along the way, he contrived to entertain his friends and associates often and with profuse liberality at his palatial Bridgeport home, Iranistan. One close friend and a frequent visitor was Mark Twain, who might well have repaid his host’s hospitality by writing a piece about the circus, but who, in spite of repeated urgings, never did.

For several years, Barnum was also President of the Fairfield County Agricultural Society and managed the fairs it held. This organization was established as far back as 1821 “for the improvement and encouragement of agriculture, domestic manufactures, industry and economy, and the holding of annual cattle shows and fairs in some town in Fairfield County during the month of October.”³ The fair was to be held in whichever town offered the largest cash inducement.

“It was held in Danbury in the years 1857, 1858, 1860 and 1863, in Bridgeport in 1861, in Stamford in 1853 and 1854. In all other years from 1855 to 1866, it was held in Norwalk. In 1867, the society purchased and fitted up grounds at Norwalk where its annual fair was held until 1888, when it was discontinued and the grounds sold.”⁴

Thus in his veneration of Barnum, John was unwittingly paying homage not only to a great Nutmegger, but to the resident and promoter of the agricultural society that must be regarded as the progenitor of the Danbury Fair.

Since Barnum went to his reward in 1891, John was destined never to know his hero, but by the turn of the century the

3 *History of Danbury*, J. M. Bailey

4 Ibid.

Danbury Fair was in its prime and ideally designed to sustain a boy's interest in showmanship.

John sticks to it that he was 21 before he slept in a bed during Fair Week. This sounds like an exaggerated claim, but it may be true.

It seems that his mother had six sisters and three brothers who were scattered by reason of marriage and similar exigencies all over Westchester, eastern New Jersey and the Bronx, and that most of these contrived to take their vacations the week of the Danbury Fair. People still do this and for the same reasons.

For many years, the first week in October has borne a good reputation locally for weather. In fact, after the September gales and occasional hurricanes, there is usually a period of sunny days and cloudless skies that we call "Fair" weather.

The nights, however, are likely to be chilly, and regularly each year there arose in the home of John's parents the problem of whether or not to set up the parlor stove.

This efficient heater was known as "the Round Oak." Almost every family had one. It was truly useful and the makers had meant it to be decorative as well, for it wore two encircling frills of nickel-plated cast iron, a narrow one at its shoulder line and a wider one about the abdomen. It also bore a crown of the same, surmounted by a handsome bronze Indian, tomahawk in hand.

The stove, which had rested dismantled in the woodshed throughout the summer months, would have to be set up soon anyway, but there were two good reasons for postponement.

The first objection was on aesthetic grounds. Since the stove-pipe had to travel the length of the room to reach the chimney, and the lengths of pipe and elbows were suspended by wires from hooks in the ceiling, John's mother thought her parlor appeared to better advantage without these practical touches.

Secondly, the absence of the stove made for more sleeping space, for in its place the Larkin soap Morris chair⁵ could be extended to accommodate one more visiting relative.

This burning question was settled in a hurry one Wednesday night when the weather turned suddenly cold. The guests turned to, bringing in the pieces of Round Oak and sections of stovepipe, and by dint of earnest striving completed the assembly, pipes, wires,

5 Purchases of Larkin Soap were rewarded with premiums, which could include chairs, desks and sundry other items. The Morris chair is a style of chair with a reclining back that could also be used as a bed.

hooks and all by 11:15 p.m. They were well-blackened with soot by that time, one uncle had jammed a finger, and a few harsh words had been spoken, but after a fire had been kindled and some hot toddies consumed, they became once more a happy and united family.

In homes all over town, hospitality was the watchword. For days in advance, women bustled about the house, husbands raked and spruced up outside with touches of fresh paint here and there, and October's breath was sweet with scents of pies baking and leaves burning.

It is a great thing for a whole community, be it large or small, to have a traditional annual festival in anticipation of which the womenfolk can plan costumes, trim hats and save recipes for months ahead, while the men groom livestock for blue ribbons and cash prizes. The Danbury Fair has always combined the best features of a race meet, a stock show, a Mardi Gras and Old Home Week, just as the first light frost has touched the maples and elms, the beech, birch and sumac, as if the countryside is simultaneously running a pageant of its own.

Born and raised on Balmforth Avenue hard by the New York, New Haven and Hartford railroad station, in the days when everything moved by rail, John had a box seat for seeing the sights as they proceeded from train to platform.

Many of the shows and rides with their equipment and personnel came from New York City, but excursion trains from Bridgeport, New Haven, Waterbury, Stamford and Norwalk pulled into the White Street station as well. From this point, a shuttle train operated every quarter hour over the two miles between Danbury and the fairgrounds.

Furthermore, Balmforth Avenue was the main artery for New Fairfield traffic heading to the Fair. On a Saturday, came the dairy cattle and teams of oxen, the draft horses pulling carts full of sheep and goats, poultry and rabbits, the wagons and buggies from the Hatch Carriage Factory—all passing the house in delightful preview.

John would go with his father to meet the New York Express that chugged into Danbury at 8:15 p.m. on Sunday evening, laden with home-comers and out-of-towners, equally irrepressible, commingling with giants, midgets, glass blowers, sword-swallowers and sideshow freaks. It always took them some time to pick out their relatives and escort them home, where a great unpacking took place and sleeping arrangements were gone over lightly.

Very little boys fit pretty well into a couple of armchairs pulled up to face each other. The next size can be accommodated if an ironing board is used as a sort of extender to bridge a gap between the chair seats, and a twelve-year-old likes nothing better than a mattress on the floor. If he does object, he makes no moan. Vacationing guests are often slightly conscience-stricken at putting the son of the house out of his bed, especially aunts, and loose change frequently makes its way from their pockets to the poor boy who was ousted.

A nickel was important money in those days. It would buy a hot dog, a bottle of soda pop, a red candy apple, an ice cream cone, a merry-go-round ride, admission to many of the side shows or three hoops to ring a cane.

In spite of the magnificent purchasing power of small change, quite a lot of townspeople didn't have enough of it to enjoy the week properly. This was not always due to circumstances beyond their control either, for Danburians are a fun-loving lot.

John tells a story of a certain neighbor family who took a drastic step one year in order to go to the Fair. They had run out of spending money so that even the 75¢ admission price was beyond their means, not an alarming situation ordinarily, but one that posed a bit of a problem.



Get your ticket! It's only 10¢ to see Mickey Mouse's Smallest Living Circus on Earth, 1931. Or check out Singer's Congress of Human Freaks instead, with Madam Naomi, Mentalist Supreme, and The Lobster Boy, 1933.

Frank Baisley

The weather was mild that fall and there was the prospect of work in the hat shops a little later. They knew, moreover, where they could get \$15 for the Glenwood kitchen range. They quickly hunted up the prospect, closed the sale, took the \$15 and had fun all that week.

“What came of this piece of recklessness?” I asked John, hoping to hear that Providence had rescued the improvident and that such fine spirits had not been chastened, but he seemed to consider the question irrelevant.

“Why, after the Fair was over, they didn’t have anything to cook their meals on, the half-wits,” replied my realist husband.

And that was all I could find out about that!

Once it starts, however, John’s flow of reminiscence usually swells to a broader tide. Those were the happy days. A question or two to show interest in the subject and I can sit back.

“When I was sixteen,” he recalled, “I worked for Randall Harrington.”

“You mean Mr. Harrington, the hat manufacturer?” I queried. Mr. Harrington is strictly gentry.

“The same. It was while he was living on Park Avenue.”

“In Danbury?”

“Of course, in Danbury where else would he live?”

“Never mind me. The Harrington’s are a fine old family.”

“Well, Randall had a fine fiery temper. I can’t remember how many times he fired me and then sent for me to come back—half a dozen, at least. After the first couple of times, I could tell when he was getting ready to blow off steam and if there was time I would make myself scarce before he popped.”

“And you kept coming back for more? You really liked the job?”

“I needed the job. Now if you want to stop asking questions and listen, I’ll tell you about Randall’s rooster.”

And he did.

It seems that Mr. Harrington was grooming a pen full of white Wyandottes⁶ for first prize in the poultry show 1912.

About the 1st of September, Snowball, the big boss of the Wyandotte seraglio,⁷ suddenly began to molt some of his tail feathers. He was still blessed with tail enough to rejoice the average rooster, but Mr. Harrington preferred to take no chances. He

6 A breed of chicken that are a docile, dual-purpose breed kept for their brown eggs and for meat.

7 A harem’s living quarters.

rushed a letter enclosing \$25 cash with the order for a replacement to some rooster grower in Ohio.

A period of anxiety ensued, then came an acknowledgement of the order. A fine cock would be shipped in ample time to pinch hit for Snowball. It would arrive the week before the Fair opened.

More days passed, again the tension mounted. Telegrams were exchanged between Danbury and Ohio. The express office was alerted and standing by to announce the arrival of the prize bird.

In late afternoon the Saturday before the Fair, when hope had reached its lowest ebb, the express office phoned to say that Mr. Harrington's shipment had arrived.

John was dispatched in the two-cylinder red Maxwell runabout. On the station platform, he found a crate in which apathetically sat a very tired-looking rooster. His comb was nicked and bloody, his plumage dirty and tattered. The tail feathers he had were not worth counting.

John hunted up the express agent and they stood together looking into the crate.

"What do you think happened to him," John asked.

"Dunno. Looks like he got run over. Perhaps he was too long on the way. Wanna file a claim?"

John distastefully took the rooster aboard and drove the Maxwell slowly back to the stable, where his boss was waiting impatiently.

"How is he?" Mr. Harrington demanded.

"You look at him," replied John heaving the crate to the barn floor.

Then seeing that hope deferred had rendered his employer touchy, he slipped out the back door and went home.

The next morning, he thought it was safe to report for work.

He found Mr. Harrington and the gardener engaged in loading a pen of poultry on a small truck.

"Get hold of that pen," Mr. Harrington shouted and John got hold fast, omitting to ask any questions on the way to the fairgrounds. When the chickens were being transferred to the exhibition pens, he saw it was Snowball that had been chosen for the competition, and never had his tail feathers appeared more luxuriant.

Later in the day after the judges had made their rounds John peeked in again. There strutted Snowball, still cock-of-the-walk, with a blue ribbon tacked to his cage, before which his beaming

owner was holding court, explaining to an admiring coterie⁸ the secret of raising Wyandottes.

Surprisingly enough, however, the molting process seemed to have set in again, as evidenced by long white tail feathers all over the floor of the cage. It looked mightily as if Snowball was coming unstuck.

John says that the local entertainment attractions during his boyhood were drinking, baseball, the Taylor Opera House, Lake Kenosia and the Danbury Fair, in that order.

Of these, drinking and baseball have endured with some modifications in ground rules and conventions, but with a more or less specialized following.

The Taylor Opera House, a large wooden structure that stood at the corner of Main and West Streets where the Pershing Building is now located, once saw year-round service as theatre, concert hall and auditorium, but it burned to the ground one cold winter's night and was never rebuilt.

Gone, too, and almost forgotten, is the park at Lake Kenosia.

Lots of young people who have lived here all their lives have no idea that this pleasant little pond just west of the fairgrounds was once a popular resort complete with hotel, outdoor theatre, dancing pavilion and bathing beach.

I certainly had no inkling of it until I went to a party with John. As the evening wore on and inhibitions wore off, the event developed into an amateur talent show. At the close of a song and dance act by our hostess, John, pad and pencil in hand, scurried to congratulate her.

"Great!" he exclaimed as the applause slackened, "you've got the stuff, Betty. I'll book you for six weeks at Lake Kenosia."

Since most of the natives present were old enough to have known the lake in its heyday, this piece of waggery struck them as excruciatingly funny.

In 1895, many years before the Connecticut Light and Power Company flooded the valley to the north of Danbury to make what is now Candlewood Lake, an older company, The Danbury Horse Railway, undertook the development of Lake Kenosia as an amusement park. It began by purchasing a few acres at one end of the lake and laying tracks for the new electric trolley cars a distance of about three miles from the center of town. These tracks paralleled the south side of the fairgrounds.

On the shorefront, a pavilion and summer theatre were built, which were leased for operation since the company's interest was in the revenue from fares on its new line.

8 An exclusive community or clique, who has similar interests or tastes.

The investment proved profitable. Trolley cars making the run from Wooster Square did a steady weekday business and were jam-packed on Sundays. There was swimming and fishing with picnics in the grove. There were boats for hire, a big rickety roller coaster and a merry-go-round with brass rings to catch for a free ride. The popcorn business was terrific and a bar in the pavilion did pretty well, too.

Patrons of the theatre eagerly awaited the weekly offering of the resident stock company. Pre-curtain time was murmurous, John tells me, with conjecture among the ladies touching which of her five gowns the heroine would elect for that performance, while the first appearance of the villain drew prolonged appropriate hisses from the whole audience. The private lives of the actors became as interesting to their following as anything they did on the stage. In that pre-cocktail era, they were depended upon by many a hostess to stimulate the flow of table talk.

In 1915 came the blight of World War I, which shriveled the park's profits. Its popularity was further diminished by the development of the automobile to such a point of perfection that it was no longer necessary to include a mechanic when readying the family car for the rough twenty-mile trip to Norwalk.



Visitors enjoy picnicking, boating and other activities at Lake Kenosia. *Danbury Museum and Historical Society.*

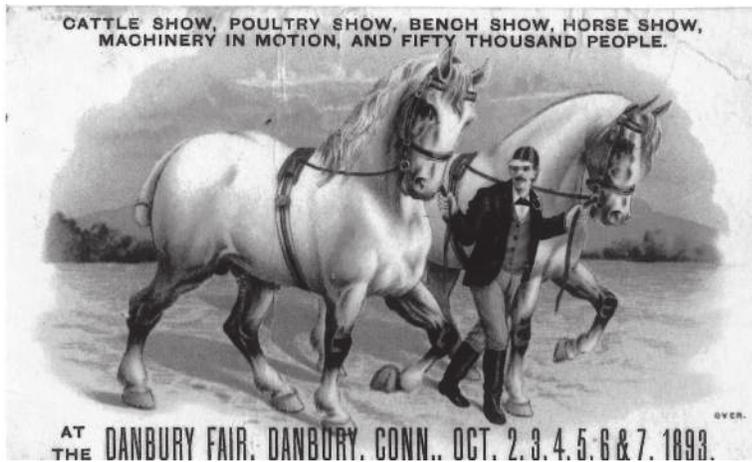
Finally, Henry Ford came out with his \$350 Model T and in five more years most of Lake Kenosia's patrons had converted themselves into Sunday drivers.

The park's decease in 1922 left the trolley line that ran past the fairgrounds available during Fair Week, and the Fair, in another more important way, became its beneficiary.

Irving Jarvis, the present assistant manager of the Danbury Fair, grew up in the amusement business at Kenosia. His father, William Jarvis, and his uncle, Leo Lesieur, were the lessees and operators of the park in its heyday. There young Irv alternately rented boats, sold tickets, ran the merry-go-round and swept up. He learned to repair electrical circuits and to tinker with sound systems. He also found out a great deal about human nature.

The Jarvis family owned property adjoining the park and continued to live there after the business closed. William Jarvis became associated with the Fair as assistant to the vice president, C. S. McLean, who was in charge of selling concession space and booking acts.

Irv worked with his father accumulating the experience and know-how that have made him a crack man among fair men. Not long after his father's death, he joined the management of the Danbury Fair on a full-time basis.



Last on the list local entertainment attractions, the Danbury Fair has survived four great fires and two World Wars. Constant, if not changeless, it has held its ground, improved its facilities and extended its run to nine days.⁹ Its durability is no accident.

DOWN TO BUSINESS

“Have you started on the history stuff yet?” John demanded as he opened the front door one day in February and found me with books and writing materials spread out north, south, east and west.

Actually, I was deep in *The Cruel Sea* and had been fighting submarines for an hour or two, but I am gradually sloughing off that Puritanic sense of guilt that used to make me drop a book at the sound of an approaching footfall and so I didn't drop it. I just let it mingle gently with the debris about me and tried to look as unconcerned as a chameleon on a rubber plant.

“No, but I have some books here from the library,” I replied truthfully, “and I've sharpened a lot of pencils.”

“Here's something I saved for you.”

I glanced at the clipping.

DON'T FORGET
THE DATES OF
THE DANBURY FAIR
—AT—
DANBURY, CONN.,
October 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7, 1893.

One of the largest Fairs in New England, the attendance annually exceeding the aggregate attendance of any other three Fairs in the State.

TRAINS OF THE
New York & New England Railroad
RUN DIRECT TO THE GROUNDS.

TROTTING ENTRIES CLOSE SEPT. 25th.

CATTLE SHOW ON TUESDAY.
RACES EACH SUCCEEDING DAY.

Premium lists mailed on application.

S. H. RUNDLE, Prest. G. M. RUNDLE, Secy.
J. W. BACON, Treas.

⁹ When the federal government declared, in the early 1970s, that Columbus Day would be celebrated on the second Monday of October, the Fair was extended to ten days to include that holiday.

John is devoted to Americana—and ice cream. “April 23, 1951,” it read, “marked the 100th anniversary of the ice cream soda.”

“That will help a lot,” I commented dourly. “And had you heard that the earmuff was invented by Chester Greenwood of Farmington, Maine, in 1877?”

“All right, smarty, but you’d better start producing.”

“I always despised history.” I said—to myself.

The truth was that my present assignment reminded me of a defeat I once sustained by a history instructor who prefaced an examination with the encouraging announcement that it would contain only one question.

The question as advertised read: “Outline the principal events that took place during the Hundred Years’ War and fill in the outline.”

“That lazy joker,” I said to myself. “History teachers have been working that one with variations since before the Hundred Years’ War.”

A persistent rumor that this individual never corrected papers anyway, but rather threw them upstairs, grading them in the order in which they came down, moved me. In a shameless display of light-mindedness, I just filled the pages of my blue book with nonsense rhymes for which, by contrast with history, I had a remarkable memory. Starting off with “Beware the Jabberwock, my son,”¹⁰ I ended with “Waste,”¹¹ a favorite of my girlhood, to wit:

Our governess—would you believe it?
Drowned herself on Christmas Eve.
This was a waste, as, anyway,
It would have been a holiday.

As it turned out, he must have read some of the papers. At least he came across mine, and we had to have a long serious talk before he would again consider me as a possible contender for history honors. In the course of the interview, he described my attitude with the word “intransigent,” which, upon consultation with a dictionary, I interpreted to indicate that I have great perseverance.

That quality being my strong suit, I abandoned *The Cruel Sea* for the time being and decided to make an honest effort.

As I painfully progressed with my research, I discovered that the custom of holding annual fairs did not originate in Danbury. Neither was it devised by the Russians, who might conceivably claim another first in this field of endeavor, since they used to run a great and famous one at Nizhny-Novgorod, a city located in the very heart of European Russia at the junction of the Oka and Volga Rivers. Well over 100 years ago, this world-famous annual fair reported sales of merchandise in the amount of 150 million rubles, which was a respectable amount

10 Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

11 Harry Graham, aka Col. D. Streamer, *Waste*

of rubles, equivalent to \$112 million at the time. But a lot of water has flowed over the dam at Nizhny-Novgorod since those halcyon days. *Billboard* reports that attendance has fallen and sales have dropped off in recent years. The name of the city is another casualty. I don't suppose the Russians may be said to rechristen a city, but they now call that one Gorky,¹² which certainly is easier to pronounce, if less intriguing.

Actually, fairs seem to have been going on as long as history has been written. I shouldn't be at all surprised if Stone Age men picked up their axes, hammers and mallets and got together every fall to compare progress and steal each other's designs.

By Biblical times, fairs were in full swing. Ezekiel repeatedly mentioned the fairs of Tyre in enumerating the riches and commerce of that port before the wrath of God descended upon it.

Among the Romans, holy days were called "feria," from which our word "fair" is derived. At these religious festivals, great numbers of people gathered for worship, feasting, games and general hilarity. In rural areas where there were no markets, the country folk grew into the habit of bringing and exposing for sale various commodities and products of handicraft. The result was that bartering among the people became a regular adjunct of the holy program.

This routine was continued by the Italians of the middle ages with an important result. The seaports of Italy exerted a powerful influence on commerce. Vessels from many distant countries crowded the port of Venice for its great fairs. The need for a medium of exchange among these different peoples prompted the leading schemers of the day to think up a system of credits to take the place of money and so led to the invention of international banking.

For many centuries, fairs were related to commerce, buyers from rural areas would come to centers of population for an annual shopping spree. Indeed, European fairs are still conducted as businesses.

As country communities grew into towns and villages where it was possible to buy in regular markets, people were less eager to travel long distances to visit big city fairs. Small fairs nearer to home became characteristic of rural areas, particularly those devoid of railroads. The accent was still on buying and selling, but trading with local merchants at their leisure made buyers more quality-conscious.

Probably soon after the first young farmer was persuaded to journey to a fair over the country lanes with his wife behind him on pillion, comparative shopping was instituted. After that, pride of ownership and craftsmanship led to the display of goods not primarily intended for sale. Since farm animals and products were the principal interests of country folk, emphasis at country fairs gradually shifted from business to agriculture.

12 In 1991, this was changed back to Nizhny-Novgorod.

This country had no fairs in its early colonial days, partly due to the sparseness of population and partly because families had all they could do to produce for their own consumption.

There was a society formed in New Haven in 1803 for the promotion of agriculture and in 1804 a fair was held in the District of Columbia. Yet it took a retired merchant from Pittsfield, Massachusetts, to inaugurate our present system of agricultural fairs and cattle shows.

In 1807, a certain Elkanah Watson tied two merino sheep under an elm tree on the village green in Pittsfield and stood by to observe public reaction.

Response was so prompt and the gathering so numerous that Elkanah, who was a man of vision, decided to try to interest the farmers of Berkshire County in holding annual exhibitions of improved breeds of cattle and superior products of the soil in order to show what might be accomplished by proper culture. His undertakings led to the establishment of the earliest American agricultural fairs in New England and in upper New York state.

The foregoing ought to just about take care of fairs in general, I decided, and paved the way for the Danbury Fair in particular.

But then what?

Even from John's deep well of anecdotes little could be dredged up to my purpose for the reason that there were twenty-five years during which he and the Danbury Fair did not run concurrently and probably five more before his powers of observation really began to take hold.

Those thirty years were a problem, since I could find no orderly chronicle of the Fair beyond the account of its founding in the *History of Danbury, Conn., 1864-1896* by J. M. Bailey, known as "The Danbury News Man." As I followed Mr. Bailey's detailed account of the period in question, I did come to the conclusion that in the 19th century printing the news rivaled hatting as a principal industry.

Instead of the one *Danbury News-Times*, which now tops off our after-dinner hour, Mr. Bailey listed seven separate papers that, over those years, were launched upon careers of brief duration, along with four others that were still above ground in his time. Among the survivors were two newspapers, *The Danbury Dispatch* and Mr. Bailey's own *The Danbury News*.

In the columns of the *News* and the *Dispatch*, I felt pretty sure the Fair must have been reported and liberally commented upon.

There was a catch to that, of course. Few copies from so long ago exist intact. Most of them are in the old files of *The Danbury News-Times* or the public library and cannot be removed. By special arrangement, they may likely be inspected on the spot, but I should feel like a bee in a glass hive trying

to read or write by special arrangement on somebody else's premises.

It's not that I'm temperamental.

For one thing, I am so slow and inexpert I'd be forever. I am also sensitive about this matter of being a writer. To myself, it appears presumptuous of me. What must it seem to others?

I confided my diffidence to a friend who instinctively said the right thing.

"Pooh! It's nothing to be ashamed of. Why, in this vicinity writers are a dime a dozen. Anyway, you don't have to be a writer just to write."

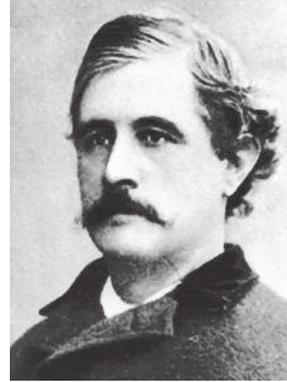
"I'd love to believe that," I said.

Thus emboldened, I should eventually have gone to the library and might be sitting there yet had not manna arrived from heaven to relieve my predicament.

Raven #1 contributed a nearly complete set of premium lists that have been preserved in his family for four generations. These contain accounts of the Fair's yearly expansion and progress.

Raven #2 proffered a voluminous scrapbook of old newspaper clippings obviously compiled by a former fair official. "There," he said, "don't ask me how I came by it. Keep it as long as you need it, but give it back." I seized upon it hungrily. In the silence of my own familiar haunts and in no more critical presence than the cat's, I read newspaper reporting and commentary on fairs of sixty and seventy years ago.

The process marched by slowly at first since I have what educators refer to as "a short attention span." These souvenirs, however, together with the *History of Danbury* proved my salvation.



James Montgomery Bailey