

One Self-made Business Man

JJ Rudden

IN THE DYING YEARS of the 19th century a baby boy was born to Ann McManus of Beagmore, Carrigallen, popularly known as 'The Widow Mac'. Sadly, however, this child never knew his father who died some months before his birth. This didn't stop the young James Francis McManus from growing into an honest and hard working young man who provided employment to many local people in the years to follow.

At the tender age of 14 years he became an apprentice in the egg and poultry business to a man who shared his own name, one James Francis McManus of Killeshandra, a friend of the family.

Young James was a keen student who loved his work. Soon after completing his apprenticeship he was to meet a young girl name Brigid McKiernan. She carried on a drapery business from a single storey house in Church Street, Carrigallen.

When James was nineteen he left Beagmore to marry Brigid and to set up home and business in Church Street.

Now the ground in this part of Carrigallen was solid rock but it did not deter this determined young man who cut through it, by hand, to a depth of ten feet. He had not the benefit in those days of diggers or drills, but he succeeded in building a store for himself and so the story of his egg and poultry business began. The work was hard but his efforts soon reaped the reward of a very successful little business.

The needs of the newly wed couple

together with the requirement of the fledgling business dictated that the single storey house be converted into a two storey. This enabled James and Brigid to extend their business by getting into grocery and hardware, as well as catering. With the many Kiernan and McManus relations and numerous friends, they were assured a successful business.

The couple were blessed with a girl, Christina (Chrissie) and three boys Sean, Michael and James (Jim).

The youngest boy Jim joined the priesthood and went on to serve in the English Missions where he carved a great legacy for himself, building new schools and churches, which he fitted with pews made in Carrigallen in the 'Workshop' of McManus and Gormley' (no relation).

The only daughter Chrissie helped her mother in the running of the shop in Church Street. The two boys Sean and Michael joined their father in the egg and poultry business, which became known as McManus & Sons.

Sean qualified as an egg-tester which today might seem a strange occupation. However eggs had to be certified as fit for the export market in England.

Sean's younger brother Michael took charge of the lorry and collected the eggs from the country people as well as from a large number of country shops.

In a time when money was scarce, the little hen became queen of the land. Eggs were reaching a half-crown to 3/-, (that is 3 shillings) a dozen, which was

a lot of money at that time. The locals also grasped the opportunity to increase their feathered stock. This provided much needed extra cash for many families at a time when things were tough.

The grading of the eggs in order of size was done by hand at first, but the volume became such as to merit the purchase of a new grading machine. This service was regarded as cutting edge technology at the time. As a result of the increase in business extra egg testers were hired, giving employment to people from the locality, as well as some from far flung places like Clare, Cork, and Galway. Michael transported the eggs twice weekly to the North Wall in Dublin for export to England. This trade endured until the early 1960's.

At the beginning of December the Turkey season was on when thousands of turkeys were bought, plucked and also exported. This operation gave more employment as pluckers had to be recruited.

James Francis died in 1959, and his wife Brigid passed away in 1969. The house that he literally carved out of stone, is occupied today by his grandson, Michael James (Hackett) and family. The house he left in Beagmore, just about a century ago no longer exists. However, as if to close the circle, practically on the same site, stands a home built by a distant relation of his own, one James Francis McManus and his wife Bridie, and family.