



Ruth Brown

At Home in a Man's World

By Sally Bair
Feature Writer

Lancaster Stock Yards is pretty much a man's world, but Mrs. Ruth Brown feels right at home there.

She's a weighmaster at the Stock Yards, and has been working around the Yards for nearly 20 years. You can tell when she talks that working with cattle comes as naturally for her as baking a cake for other women.

There are many benefits to her job, the way she tells it, and one of the biggest is that she gets to see her husband, Robert, occasionally during the day because he's a weighmaster there too.

In fact, Ruth's whole involvement at the Stock Yards began as a family affair. Her husband worked for the Reliable Truck Company which was founded by his father, George, in 1933. After his father's death, he continued to manage the trucking company for his mother. Loading cattle at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning is not exactly exciting business to most people, and getting reliable help was always a problem, according to Ruth. So she just began to pitch in. "Sometimes," she says, "I'd get his drivers out of bed and drive them to work. Occasionally when you called them and thought they were up, they still wouldn't show."

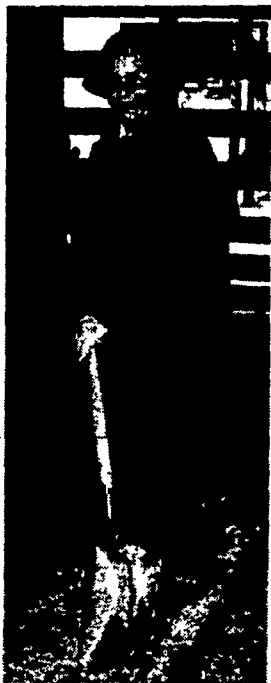
Since the cattle needed to be trucked regardless of the help available, she would help "gather up animals." She recalls the day she loaded 500 head of butcher cattle alone. She makes it sound easy, but it must take some doing to round them up and get them through the myriad of passageways that make up the Stock Yards and onto the right trucks.

When the trucking company was sold in 1968 she worked in the office for a while, and then as a clerk at the auction, and finally became a weighmaster during the past year. She enjoys her job a lot, but would like to be outside even more. "I would like to help to load again. They won't let me because they say they don't want me to get hurt. But I won't get hurt any quicker than any man," she says with a confident laugh.

When pressed, she said, "I've had a couple of close calls, but I've never been hurt." She then related how she was being cornered by a bull once and she figured if she ran and fell he'd run right over her. So she decided to stand firm and he wedged her against a fence. She said, "I just kept looking at him and pushing until someone distracted him. It's good he didn't have horns."

A weighmaster, of course, weighs cattle as needed and writes up the tickets. But Ruth also keeps the weigh area and scale yard clean. When traffic is slow, as happens often the course of a day, she reads or prepares the tickets for the next day's auction.

Mrs. Brown's job may be a little unusual, but so is her attitude. She says, "I like to work and be kept busy." And so, she doesn't just do her job, but she often does a little extra. She pooh-poohs the idea that she is out of the ordinary, but she can fix a fence as easily as write her name, and when she grabs a shovel you can tell she knows what she's doing. As she cleaned out the scale yard, she pointed to a repaired slat on the floor and said, "I did fix the floor. I asked the



Scraping up the scale yard is just part of Ruth's work every day as weighmaster at the Stock Yards.

carpenters to do it, but they never seemed to get around to it, so I just did it."

Around her home she's just as handy, admitting to having painted the exterior of their home. She also does "electrical work and carpentry because my husband never has time - and it saves a lot of money."

Monday, Wednesday and Fridays are auction days at the Stock Yards and then Ruth becomes a clerk and dials the weight of the animals to be posted for the buyers. Ruth is one of the few women present during the spirited auctioning, and is certainly one of the most informed. She said, "On auction days I work until I'm finished," adding that it could be 6 or 7 in the evening. Her days begin at the Yards at 6:30 a.m., 5:30 a.m. on Mondays. She admits she doesn't particularly like getting up so early.

While Sundays may be her day of rest, Ruth doesn't stay away from the Stock Yards. One of the great joys in her work is feeding the stray cats, and of course they must be fed on Sundays too. She says there are "about 20 cats I feed - I've been feeding them for years." It's no small matter either, because she says she buys about 5 to 6 pounds of cat food weekly and about 3 to 4 quarts of milk daily. The cats look well fed and contented!

Ruth shows a natural affection for animals, and not just those that pass through the Stock Yards—she had a few that stayed for a while. It seems people gave her animals - calves and

goats - to care for. At one point she had collected a herd of 20 goats which she finally had to sell - twice. The first purchaser, a York Countian, wasn't pleased when the goats destroyed a neighbor's garden, so he gave them back and she sold them again. One of her goats had triplets which she gave away, and she talks fondly about two goats called "Chocolate" and "Vanilla," who "would follow you anywhere if you had a bottle in your hand."

Her soft spot for animals shows, and her comment on the recent 4-H Baby Beef Round-Up was, "I couldn't raise those animals and sell them."

In her office at the Stock Yards, she had built a pen which occasionally houses her two Cocker Spaniel puppies who keep her company during the day. The puppies, Smokey and Inky, are four months old and clearly bring her great pleasure. She gets tears in her eyes as she talks about the two dogs they replaced. They both were named Inky and one had been with the Browns for 15 years and one for 11 years.

When it was pointed out that she is a true women's libber - before it became fashionable to hold a man's job - Mrs. Brown scoffed and said, "I don't think anything of it. I just do my job. I think those women are crazy - why don't they mind their own business? What some people will do to be in the paper!" She adds, "If they do their work I don't know how they have time to picket."

When asked about the effect of the shortage of beef on her work last summer she said, "I don't think there was a shortage of beef. I don't think there's a shortage of gasoline either." She did say, however, that she thinks the Stock Yards will not be affected by any possible rationing, noting that during World War II they had plenty of gas for their trucking needs.

Some changes have taken place in the years Ruth has been around the Stock Yards. Things have slowed down for one thing. She said, "Heavens no, there is not nearly as much activity as there once was. A lot of cattle go directly to the farms from the South, without going through the Stock Yards." She added, "There used to be a lot shipped by train, but not anymore."

The Stock Yards have a "short leg" division which



Reading the scales accurately is what it's all about for Mrs. Ruth Brown.

includes hogs, sheep and calves, and last summer they even hosted 100 horses from the New Holland auction. The horses were brought to the Stock Yards during the height of the controversy over horses being sold for human consumption. These horses were eventually sold to Italy, and although their ultimate destination was not clear, Ruth said the buyers told her they were not supposed to be eaten.

For all her ability and enjoyment of her job at the Stock Yards, Ruth is not even a farm girl. She says she was born and raised "in the country" on the Old Philadelphia Pike, but not on a farm. Her family eventually moved to Lancaster, on Ranck Avenue, and it was there that she met her husband - who was the boy next door. Another myth she sets to rest is that of shaky teenage marriages. The Browns were married when she was 16, and they've been happily wed for 44 years.

Before she began hanging around the Stock Yards with her husband, Ruth worked for C. S. Conrad, in interior decorating. She put up the rods and hung drapes, commenting that in those days you had to "string the cord," and custom cut the rods. She had cleaned house for Mrs. Conrad one day a week for 15 years, and then worked for Mr. Conrad for 15 years.

In their few moments of spare time, the Browns enjoy fishing and golfing, but they don't have time for much of either any more, according to Ruth. She said they used to play 3 or 4 rounds in one day. Now they travel to Newmanstown once

or twice a year to fish for trout.

Mrs. Brown is cheerfully at home in her man's world, and it's quite evident that the men who work with her look at her not as a woman, but simply as a competent weighmaster. About the men she says, "They all treat me nice. I haven't any complaints in all the years I've been here."

Farm Women Calendar

Wednesday, January 16
10:00 a.m. - Farm Women Society 14 meeting at the home of Mrs. Leon Thomas, 217 Willow Street Pike.

Thursday, January 17
Farm Women Societies 2 and 3 entertain guests at Conestoga View.
Farm Women Society 31 visit Conestoga View.

Saturday, January 19
1:30 p.m. - Farm Women Society 3 meeting at the home of Mrs. Earl Stauffer, Ephrata RD1.
2:00 p.m. - Farm Women Society 8 meeting at the home of Mrs. Martin Musser, 327 S. Market Ave., Mount Joy.
7:00 p.m. - Farm Women Society 31 and husbands meet at Strasburg Bowling Alley.

Take Soil Samples Now
Avoid the February, March, and April rush by taking your soil samples now, remind Extension agronomists at The Pennsylvania State University. Soil samples can be taken anytime the ground is not frozen.



Ruth Brown is writing up the ticket on some newly arrived animals at the Stock Yards.