

**TWO HALF-PENNIES STARTED TRAIL**

# "SHAKE" McNALLY DIED LUNATIC ASYLUM

## RECALLS HORROR OF DRUMLISH WEEK'S MANHUNT OVER HILL, DALE, MORASS

### *Longford, Leitrim Held In Grip Of Fear*

**P**EARLY THIS WEEK THE FINAL CURTAIN WENT DOWN ON A DRAMA OF TRAGEDY, TENSION AND TERROR THAT OPENED NEAR DRUMLISH IN AUGUST, 1908. "SHAKE" McNALLY DIED IN DUNDRUM LUNATIC ASYLUM AT THE AGE OF EIGHTY. HE SPENT FORTY-FOUR YEARS OF HIS LIFE THERE. HE WAS THIRTY-SIX WHEN ADMITTED.

Forty-four years ago he stood in the dock in Green-street Courthouse and was sent to Dundrum because he was found unfit to plead to a charge of murdering Michael McKenna, Bawn, a highly respected, industrious boy, who was held in the warmest esteem and regard by everybody who knew him. He was brother of the late Mr. Charles McKenna, Longford. Dangerously wounded in the affray was another young man, Frank Farrelly.

How many people remember the horror that was

appeared to understand how the thing occurred and who the author of the horrible tragedy was.

"It is unnecessary to attempt a description of the scenes that ensued as the remains of the victim were conveyed homewards and all through that weary night in the home of the McKenna's—the heartrending anguish of aged father and mother, when the remains were brought into the house. . . . Happily such scenes are rare in Ireland, and we hope none such shall ever again be witnessed in Co. Longford."

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associated with the name of "Shake" McNally, a horror that spread through Counties Longford, Leitrim and Rosecommon? How many recall the tension that gripped the countryside as McNally held police at bay for seven days? How many of the fantastic stories centred around a fantastic manhunt are remembered to-day?

From newspapers of the day, from conversations with people who remember, **MICK SHANLEY** has pieced together the dramatic story:

**TWO** half-pennies started it all . . . .

It was on a quiet Sunday evening forty-four years ago that the curtain went up on the dreadful drama, a peace-laden evening in autumn that gave no hint of the terror that was about to be loosed on the countryside.

The sunny evening in August, 1908. A group of young men crouched around a pitch and toss school on the roadside near Drumlish. One of the lads was "Shake" McNally. Another was Michael McKenna. The newspapers of the day described the "Shake" as "a big burly fellow, of powerful build and rough manner, who was long a terror in the neighbourhood."

The game proceeded peacefully until a dispute flared up over the tossing of two half-pence. McNally expressed strong views; McKenna ventured to disagree. There were a few sharp exchanges, then the incident died down. Little did anybody dream that it was to be the prelude to tragedy. The boys drifted home at dusk.

The next scene opened on Tuesday evening to the sound of music

### "Brooding"

**O**N the way, McKenna was silent, brooding. When they reached Mrs. Moore's gate in Bawn, he spoke for the first time, heaved a sigh of relief: "Well, thank God, we are near home at last." Hardly had he uttered the words when a tall figure—the tall, burly figure of McNally—loomed up in front of them out of the darkness. He carried a double-barrelled breech-loading gun. He raised the gun, pointed it at McKenna and fired, but missed his mark. McKenna exclaimed, "What do you mean, John?" McNally replied, "I mean to shoot you dead," and thereupon fired again, striking McKenna on the lower side of the right jaw and blowing portion of the right side of his skull and brains completely away. He coolly re-charged the gun, and a third time he fired at the now lifeless form of his victim.

After the first shot young Farrelly jumped off the cart, and he also shouted, "What are you doing, John?" and McNally replied, "I'm going to shoot you, too." Farrelly dodged behind the cart

Farrelly was attended to by Mrs. Moore, who summoned Father Conefrey, P.P., and Dr. Gray, of Drumlish. Next day he was taken to the Co. Infirmary, where he lay for a considerable time in a precarious condition. He made a "dying statement," telling of the tragedy enacted on the road from Drumlish.

Meantime, in the midst of the hub-bub everybody seemed to have lost sight of "Shake" McNally. When the initial numbness had passed away, however, the terror of the "Shake" spread through the vicinity. His name sent a shudder of horror through the countryside. People remained in their houses after dark; doors were barred and windows shuttered. But, in the confusion McNally had made his escape. The towering, sinister figure vanished into thin air.

### Police Invasion

**P**OLICE poured into the district and the manhunt was on. The wildest rumours went into circulation, and the more improbable the story the more readily it was believed. One story that got into a Dublin paper was that McNally was entrenched in a field on the hill of Esker, and, armed with his gun and a dagger, held the police force of the county at bay. . . . The only hope of the police was to starve him into submission!

The fantastic rumours followed one another like waves. Given widespread credence was the story that McNally was naked in a garden on the side of Cairn Hill a gun in his hands, ready for the approach of the enemy.

Wednesday and Thursday passed with the killer still at large. For

and dancing, at an "American wake" in the home of James Farrelly at Bawn crossroads. The neighbours had gathered at a "spree" to say farewell to some members of the family who were starting next morning on their journey to the States. Fiddles screeched; the boys and girls joined in the crush of the half-sets, voices rose in song. But the jollity was shadowed by the sadness of family parting.

### "For Half Barrel"

AT 8 o'clock it was suggested that somebody be sent to Drumlish to replenish the refreshments, a suggestion that met with general approval. Mike McKenna and Frank Farrelly were soon on the road to Drumlish by donkey and cart in quest of a half barrel of porter and what a journalist of the time described as "other necessaries." Arrived in Drumlish, they entered Mr. Thomas Kiernan's establishment and there met the "Shake," who, in his usual blustering manner, came forward and said to McKenna: "You thought to rogue me the other day at the toss-pit?"

"I did not," replied McKenna, "I never rogued anybody." Thereupon McNally raised his voice and insisted that he was right in his contention. He asked McKenna if he still held the same view, and McKenna replied that he had no reason to change his mind. Sergeant Reidy, of Drumlish, approached and asked: "Who's this that's chawing the fat now?" At the same moment Mr. Kiernan arrived and told McNally to clear out or he would have him removed.

"Shake" left immediately and walked out the road by the old

and got beneath it, but McNally was too good a marksman. Pointing the gun at him, he fired beneath the cart, striking him on the right side, below the shoulder. The charge glanced off, along the ribs, and lodged in the front of his body, just beneath the chest, causing a terrible gaping wound.

Farrelly dragged himself off the road and crawled down the lane to Mrs. Moore's house, where he lay unconscious for a considerable time.

Let us go back for a moment to the dancing and the singing at the "American wake." The guests were beginning to notice that McKenna and Farrelly were a long time away in Drumlish, and some of them went out to see if there was any sign of their return. Three or four of them were at the cross-roads when McNally came running up in his bare feet, carrying his gun in regulation style. He was stated to have pointed the gun at a young fellow named Keenan, who demanded, "What do you mean?" Whereupon McNally stooped down to get a good view of the boy, and then lowered his gun, saying, "Oh, it's none of yours I want." He then ran off in the direction of Drumlish.

Two young men named Newman and Hursan went up the road to see what was the matter. They saw the cart on the road and found the body of Michael McKenna, still warm, blood gushing from his gaping wounds. The alarm was sounded.

### Heart-Rending Scenes

SWIFTLY, the gaiety and the dancing at Farrelly's turned into a picture of harrowing anguish. The fiddles were silenced

with the music soon at large. Fear had struck so deeply that by now people were afraid to venture far from their homes, even in broad daylight.

A reporter wrote: "Everywhere a person went through the whole district from Longford to Ballinacree, round by Cairn Hill and Killoe and into Ballinalee, stories regarding "Shake" McNally and his extraordinary exploits were heard, and many of those were founded on facts, for truly he seems to have always been an extraordinary individual of a reckless disposition and something like a semi-civilised savage.

### Amazing Feats

HE is a man of powerful physique, standing some inches over six feet in his stockings, very athletic in appearance and is credited with having been the best sprinter within miles around. It is said of him that on several occasions he started for Dublin on foot from his home, completing the journey in one day. . . . It is only a matter of some weeks ago since he brought two pigs to the fair of Arva. He sold one for £4, but could not get so much for the other, which failed to seem to rile him. He fetched the pig home again, and when he arrived home, he turned the pig loose in the yard of his house, and taking out his gun, shot it dead there and then. . . . He spent twelve months in jail on one occasion for threatening to shoot his mother, and it is but a week ago since he walked up the streets of Longford, carrying a scythe over his shoulder and swinging it about in such a manner that many people who saw him on the occasion, perceived him down as a lunatic. On the

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chapel, in the direction of his own house. This was about 9.30. McKenna stayed for some time, then put his purchases on the cart.

Had he a presentiment of the horrible fate awaiting him? It was reported that before taking the road, he said: "Well, I was never afraid before in my life, but I'm afraid to face home to-night." Those who were around pooh-poohed his fears, but some advised him to stay the night in Drumlish. This he resolutely refused to do.

Haunted by an undefinable fear, McKenna set out with Farrelly for Bawn. Farrelly was sitting on the right-hand side, driving. McKenna was on the opposite side, carrying a lighted lamp in his hand, to comply with the then newly introduced "Lighting-up Order."

Guests rushed from the celebrations to the scene of the carnage. First on the spot were Edward and Maria McKenna, brother and sister of the dead man.

"The scene that ensued baffles description," a reporter wrote. The heart-rending lamentations of the horrified brother and the agonised shrieking of the almost demented sister, when they found the mangled remains of their beloved brother, were something appalling and never to be forgotten. Nor was the anguish of the others who came on the scene, though not allied so closely by ties of blood relationship, much less keen than that of the brother and sister. Everybody was stunned... horrified... and nobody seemed to know what to do, though everyone

On the occasion he walked into the Midland Warehouse in Main-street, with the scythe on his shoulder, and narrowly escaped dangerous wounding a young man whom I met in the door going out. On a recent fair day in Longford I was in Mr. John Ward's shop, Dublin-street, and, because a young man named Bill Kane, well-known in Longford, touched him in passing by, he struck him a blow of the bridle he carried in his hand, knocking him down and inflicting a nasty wound on his head. When Mr. Ward came on the scene and ventured to expostulate, he struck Mr. Ward a heavy blow on the head... It seems extraordinary that such a man should have been allowed to carry fire arms. . . ."