

In Our Opinion

Mr. Fitz, thorough thoroughbred

James E. Fitzsimmons of Sheepshead Bay and Saratoga is gone. He leaves behind a rich legacy for all who knew him.

He was called "Sunny Jim" for many of his days as a trainer and "Mr. Fitz" as the years rolled on into the 90s. Either name catches a good part of his character, for he was always of sunny mien to those who would approach him and the "Mr. Fitz" was a token of affectionate respect, he had earned well.

His link with Saratoga Racing was of very long duration, for he had first come our way back in the 1890s and had continued to come here each year. In latter years, he and his large and delightfully vigorous family had their own colony up on Lake Desolation, which was hardly a desolate place when the family was in tenancy in "Fitzsimmonsville."

But his link with Saratoga was more than one of duration, for Mr. Fitz and racing in Saratoga had another characteristic in common. Quality is the term for both—right out of the top drawer.

Mr. Fitz was a great gentleman. He was of never-failing courtesy and patience. He embodied the race-track philosophy which the real people have, an ability to take the bad with the good and the good with the bad, knowing that life wasn't always going to be stakes winners and champions; that there will be black days of beaten favorites and frail horses.

Mr. Fitz was an admirer of courage; heart, he knew, had a lot to do with success, both on the race-track and off of it.

We remember him in many times and many places, including his seat outside the green barn at Oklahoma where his charges were stabled, and his favorite bench under the elms in the racecourse paddock..

But we remember him best on an extremely hot and humid day in 1963, the day of the Centennial parade.

He had consented to be honorary grand marshal and sat patiently on a folding chair waiting for the parade to come. There was a sudden shower, but it didn't bother him.

Neither did two hours in the reviewing stand under a hot, hot sun with the sweat pouring off. Young people faltered, but he rose each time the flag passed by, impatiently brushed off those solicitous of his welfare and said "Thank you," as he left with his son, John.

He was honored that day and again a short time later when he attended the Centennial gala. We are glad Saratoga saluted him in his lifetime. We will miss his hunched over figure, his high-pitched voice and his gentleness. But we won't forget them.