

GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

W. F. Lee Of Castleconnell

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

CASTLECONNELL and Ahane are joint parishes, occupying the north-east by north corner of County Limerick—stretching from O'Brien's Bridge on one side to within three miles of Murroe on the other, and separated from Clare by the lordly River Shannon.

To the follower of our Gaelic games, Castleconnell or Ahane does not need further introduction, as from the foundation of the G.A.A. the men from this district made hurling history not only in their native Limerick, but throughout the length and breadth of Ireland.

Tradition has a strong hold on our Irish people, and we may thank tradition for favouring us with the knowledge that the game called "Hurling Home" was carried on in the parish of Castleconnell more than a hundred years ago.

Three-quarters of a century ago, when alien games were being propagated in our midst, the present hurling game was introduced by the Rev. P. M. O'Kelly, C.C., ably supported by Anthony Mackey and Pat Lee.

FIRST CLUB CAPTAIN

The latter was father of our subject. He had a boot business in Castleconnell and made the first hurling ball. His son, Dan Lee, was first club captain—a position later occupied by Mike Mackey, father of the great "Tyler" Mackey of after years, and grandfather of that other very colourful son of Castleconnell, Mick Mackey. Maud Johnson of the Kincora Hurling Club, Killaloe, and Mick Sammon of Annaholty (the end of the parish at the Birdhill side, where the hurling tradition was always very strong) were the first trainers.

Interest mounted quickly in the hurling code in Castleconnell; great numbers of the young men of the parish participated and many great matches were played by local teams selected by Messrs. Mackey and Lee. These were played in the once famous High Field for prizes subscribed by the parishioners.

Mike Mackey and Dan Lee in turns captained the team. These were the days when 21 players aside took part in the contests.

THE CASTLECONNELL CUP

One of the earliest hurling competitions established in Sarsfield County was for the Castleconnell Cup. This drew teams from every quarter and some great games were the result. They attracted big crowds, for Castleconnell was a popular rendezvous at the period, particularly for city people.

The competition ended unsatisfactorily, however, and the then famous Garrenboy team, near Killaloe, always maintained they won the Cup. They never got it, anyway, and I never did succeed in discovering what happened the storied trophy.

The idea of the cup was a good one and the name most appropriate. I often thought since that local tournament committees, particularly those running annual events, could not do better than follow the Castleconnell example by naming the cup after the name of their parish. It would make it distinctive and always indicate where it was won.

MEMORABLE OCCASION

An echo of the Castleconnell Cup dispute was the great rivalry that sprang up between Castleconnell and Garranboy, and when the teams met on a memorable occasion outside O'Brien's Bridge, a great hosting turned up for the play. Castleconnell won a decisive victory on the occasion, which caused great joy in the parish.

Castleconnell boasted a very good team at the period, and in the

early hurling years they were not often beaten. They participated in the great Kilmurry Tournament, and had two strenuous games at Caherconlish, in which they defeated Dromkeen and Pallas.

Their opponents in the final were South Liberties—one of the outstanding teams of the early hurling days by the Shannon. This contest drew a huge attendance and the greatest enthusiasm prevailed. Castleconnell sent a large contingent, headed by a band. Good, fast hurling was the order and the game was very evenly contested—South Liberties running out deserving winners, following a great struggle, chiefly due to the hurling prowess of a famous athlete—Johnny Coll, of Liberties, who was a native of Castleconnell Parish.

ANOTHER GREAT GAME

Another great game of the early days was that between Castleconnell and Caherline, played in the Grocers' Field, situated where Lansdowne Park now stands. This was a most exciting struggle, but ended abruptly because of the intervention of outside parties, and for reasons not connected with the game.

It appears that a party from portion of the city had been in Castleconnell the previous Sunday on a "Long Car" excursion. They imbibed a bit too freely and when they got troublesome they were forced to leave the town earlier apparently than they intended.

When they found the Castleconnell lads were visiting Limerick they decided to have their own back, and so they gathered in force at the Grocers' Field, and from an early stage in the game hurled abuse at the players. This was ignored and the match was nearing its end when they actually assaulted some of the Castleconnell men and an ugly scene developed. In the end both teams had to fight their way out of the field so aggressive were the attackers, who were not connected with any G.A.A. body but came there with the avowed intention of having their own back for the events of the previous Sunday evening.

WILLIE LEE

Willie F. Lee was only a schoolboy at this period but with his father and elder brother tied up with the Castleconnell hurlers and taking a leading part in the organisation of the team, he had little hope in escaping the contagious enthusiasm associated with the doings of the hurlers, and which had the whole neighbourhood entirely in its grip.

As a mere youth, he spent most of his free time in the training field watching the boys perfecting their hurling and preparing for the games that were then such a regular feature for them. He did little more than retrieve the balls at the start, but this gave him plenty to do, as there were often upwards of sixty players in the field at the one time, and they sometimes had three or four balls in action.

Whilst still a little more than halfway through his 'teens, Willie got his place with the men, and had the great distinction of being selected to play between the posts in the famed Castleconnell colours.

Thus opened a great association with the games of the Gael that was to continue a lifetime.

PART I

GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

W. F. Lee Of Castleconnell

(CONTINUED)

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

THE G.A.A. in its infancy had to fight a desperate double battle for survival. From the very beginning, it had to contend with the open hostility of the ascendancy classes and all who sought their patronage. In this, however, they knew their enemies and the methods they were using in their efforts to smash the new Association. A greater threat grew inside the organisation as the Association advanced in membership and power. Political differences were acute at the period and both the leaders of the physical force and constitutional parties determined to gain control of the new body, realising full well the wonderful work it could accomplish in moulding the youth of Ireland.

Rivalry between the groups came to a head at the famous "stormy" All-Ireland G.A.A. Congress of 1887, and quickly transmitted itself to Limerick—on the occasion of the County Convention, called a short time later as part of the efforts to reconstruct the Association.

FIGHT FOR CHAIRMANSHIP

The fight for the Limerick chairmanship was determined on political lines and when Paddy O'Brien ("Twenty"), the outgoing Chairman and well-known member of the I.R.B. (who were secretly behind the G.A.A.), defeated the nominee of the Constitutional Party—the well-known athlete, Bob Coll, of Dromin—by 71 votes to 59, the minority group broke away and formed a rival County Board, electing as its Chairman the well-known Very Rev Eugene Sheehy, P.P., of Bruree.

Castleconnell remained true to the O'Brien Board as the properly constituted authority, but a complication arose concerning their participation in the very next round of the county championship, in that their opponents, Murroe, who were holders of the county crown, went over to the Father Sheehy Board.

BITTERNESS DEVELOPED

This action caused a serious gulf between the near-neighbours and much bitterness developed. Matters came to a head shortly afterwards for, with the announcement of the first All-Ireland Championships, a call went out to the counties to send forth their leading club teams to represent them in the two codes—hurling and football.

Castleconnell were selected by the O'Brien Board to represent Limerick, who were drawn against Kilkenny in the opening round of the hurling, the match to be played in Dublin.

Murroe disputed Castleconnell's right to play and had the backing of the rival board in their stand.

The matter was raised with the Central Council, who ruled that the issue should be decided by the teams meeting at the Cross of Lought, Ahane, on the Friday previous to the Dublin game and playing off for the right to meet Kilkenny.

Murroe made no appearance for this game, so the Castleconnell lads made their arrangements for the trip to the metropolis.

Imagine their surprise when they boarded the train the following evening at Castleconnell and found that the Murroe lads were already on it.

Willie Lee was a very young lad at the time and it was his first trip to the metropolis, so he was very excited at the prospect of playing there.

THE CENTRAL COUNCIL

The Central Council were meeting that Saturday night and they were acquainted of the presence of both Limerick teams. They decided against debating the claims of the rival Limerick Boards and insisted that Castleconnell and Murroe decide the question of representation by repaying for it.

Castleconnell agreed to this solution, but Murroe insisted they were the county champions and declined to play any other Limerick team, maintaining they were entitled to represent the county.

Matters were further complicated when Kilkenny intimated they would only play Murroe. As a compromise, the Central Council sug-

gested that Limerick should be allowed field a team half from Murroe and half from Castleconnell, but this was not acceptable to the Murroe lads and in the end Kilkenny got a walk-over.

This was a big disappointment to the Castleconnell lads, who were very enthusiastic about their hurling at the time, and almost resulted in the breaking of the game in the parish. The younger generation, however, led by Willie Lee, kept pegging away and when the games revived, following the healing of the divisions caused by the "Par-nell split," they were again to the fore on the playing fields.

THEIR NEXT CHAMPIONSHIP ESSAY

Their next championship essay, withal, did not take place until 1895 and it was a disastrous one, for they were badly beaten by Boher. They got the verdict all the same, following an objection, for Boher had included players not belonging to their parish at a time when a strict parish rule was in operation in the county.

Castleconnell then encountered South Liberties and a terrific game it proved, fought at a desperately hard pace. Liberties eventually won, 2-2 to 1-1.

The Castleconnell lads also participated in the Senior Football Championship, and reached the semi-final, in which they lost to the Castlemahon Deel Rangers, who later put up a great fight against the renowned Limerick Commercial in the county final. Willie Lee was also in goal for the big ball team and was regarded locally as an able exponent of the code.

An interesting hurling game of the period resulted from the visit of Castleconnell to Bridgetown, where they beat Oatfield, 2-11 to 2-2, after a very lively tussle.

A GREAT HURLING ENTHUSIAST

By this time, Willie Lee had qualified as a teacher and was appointed to Ahane School. A great hurling enthusiast all his life, he immediately introduced the game into the school and many later-year hurlers owe their skill with the caman to his tuition.

In this respect, Willie Lee often told a good story against himself, which is worth recording here.

Waiting his turn in a city barber's establishment, Willie struck up a conversation with a fellow-occupant of the same bench, whom he afterwards learned hailed from the Croom side.

The Western man, discovering that his new-found friend came from the Castleconnell district, brought the conversation around to hurling and, on Willie admitting that he "knew something about the game," his companion asked him if he had ever heard the secret of Ahane's hurling supremacy. Willie said "no," whereupon the other explained: "Well, the reason Ahane are such fine hurlers is because there was an old daft schoolmaster in Ahane School for years who had the boys always hurling when they should be learning their lessons."

Willie had a hearty laugh, but the Croom man got the surprise of his life when he discovered that the "old schoolmaster" was none other than his benchmate.

PART 2

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(CONTINUED)

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

THE big part Castleconnell played in shaping the destiny of the Gaelic Athletic Association can be judged from the fact that two leading members of the parish club were members of the Central Council at the one time—Pat Hassett of Ahane as Treasurer of the Association, and Anthony Mackey as Limerick representative on the Council.

They served together at a historic but critical period in the affairs of the G.A.A., and played no mean part in moulding that organisation along the national lines it has followed since.

The Castleconnell lads were playing under the name of Sallymount, when they hit the County headlines for the first time in the Senior Hurling Championship.

The present century was very young when that famous combination made its bow to the Gaelic public, introducing as one of its leading and most colourful figures John ("Tyler") Mackey, son of the renowned captain of the early Castleconnell days.

TERRIFIC TUSSLE.

The first team they met in their championship march was a well-known senior combination of the time—Riversmount, who hailed from the Ferrybridge. Played at the Markets Field, the pair had a terrific tussle, which Sallymount won, 2-9 to 2-5.

Willie Lee preserved a record of those early games, and the Ferrybridge team will be recalled with nostalgic interest by some of the old timers of that district: D. O'Brien, the captain; P. Bourke, M. Byrnes, E. Naughton, T. Byrnes, P. Guerin, J. Clohessy, E. Clohessy, T. O'Rourke, M. O'Rourke, J. Foley, T. O'Brien, Joe Foley, J. Murray, T. Naughton, M. Kennelly, B. O'Rourke.

Sallymount's next match was against the well known Shamrocks team, Limerick County Champions at the period, and the meeting attracted a large and enthusiastic crowd to the Markets Field, who were treated to an exciting and hard fought game that the city lads won, 2-9 to 3-3.

STARS IN ACTION.

The Shamrocks had all their stars in action—Patrick O'Reilly, captain; P. Moloney, goal; Patrick Dwyer, Thomas Raels, Jim Flanagan, Mick Hogan, Johnny Sweeney, M. Slattery, W. Brennan, J. Braddish, J. Howard, C. Kelly, Jack Murphy, Andy Kelly, J. Slattery, J. McMahon, J. O'Dea.

The following Sunday the Sallymount lads were visitors to Newport, to play the local Kickhams. This might be regarded the starting off point of the extraordinary rivalry that has existed ever since between the hurlers of the neighbouring parishes — a rivalry that has produced its share of power-packed hurling and a shock result on more than a few occasions. The Kickhams won that first great game, refereed by Thomas Coffey of Sallymount.

MUNGRET CREATES A REAL SURPRISE.

Mungret created a real surprise when they beat Sallymount in a tough tournament tussle at the Markets Field. Willie Lee always rated that side one of the best produced by Mungret parish. It was: James O'Donoghue, goal; M. O'Shaughnessy, capt.; J. Toomey, M. McGann, J. Hoar, M. Fitzgerald, M. Galvin, M. Fennell, S. McNamara, J. O'Grady, M. Duggan, W. Fitzgibbon, Denis Casey, J. Kennedy, John Normile, Dan O'Brien, M. Mulcahy.

Rathkeale beat the Sallymount lads in a thrill thronged County Final, 2-4 to 2-3—an unforgettable encounter in which lead changed several times, and which, despite unfavourable weather conditions, produced plenty of top class hurling.

The issue was later disputed in the Council Chamber, owing to some irregularity on the occasion of the game, and Sallymount won

the re-play in fairly convincing fashion.

THE TEAMS.

The teams that day were:—

Sallymount — Denis ("Colonel"), Dillon, captain; Michael Kett, Willie Galligan, Dave Galligan, Jim Herbert, Joe Herbert, Mike Sweeney, Sean Carroll, Jim Lee, John ("Tyler") Mackey, John McMahon (Gow), Paddy Tierney, Michael Regan, William Bourke, Simon Scully, Martin Carty, Jack Kearney.

The subs. were Davy Conway and Pat Herbert.

Rathkeale — Bill Sheahan, (captain), Paddy Flaherty, Ned Kennedy, G. Scully, N. Flaherty, W. Costelloe, M. Madigan, Joe Connors, J. Kirby, W. Hanrahan, P. Gilburn, M. Keating, J. Griffin, T. Quin, D. Naughton, M. Keyes, J. Connors.

Shortly after the championship success a big senior hurling tournament was organised for Sallymount, and was played in Herbert's Field. Run on the lines of the famed Castleconnell Cup of earlier days, it attracted a big entry of teams from Limerick, Tipperary and Clare, and was an unqualified success.

Meanwhile, Sallymount were seeking wider fields of conquest, and they beat a very prominent Dublin team of the period—the Rapparees, 6-13 to 1-3; and the Cork Sarsfields, 3-13 to 2-10.

A MAJOR SHOCK.

A big surprise, however, was on the way; Sallymount were drawn against the then newly established Young Ireland in the opening round of the 1902 championship. The fixture attracted widespread interest and an immense gathering were at the Markets Field to see them play. It was a pulse stirring struggle, and Young Ireland created a major shock by defeating the champions, 2-14 to 3-7.

The Young Ireland players on that occasion were:—

Jim Flanagan (captan), T. O'Brien, P. Moloney, T. Casey, T. Flynn, J. O'Connell, J. Creamer, M. Slattery, M. Kelly, C. Kelly, A. Kelly, P. O'Dea, J. Fitzgerald, M. Real, T. Brazil, M. Hogan, J. Sweeney.

That defeat might be said to have closed another era for the Castleconnell lads, for although many of the team continued together for several years, and some were to figure in the real glory spell of 1910 and 1911, which will be dealt with in the next article, the team that gained renown as Sallymount passed out of the picture.

A GREAT TEAM.

They were a great team and deserve an honoured place in Limerick hurling annals. Their outstanding player, of course, was John ("Tyler") Mackey, then starting his magnificent hurling career. Anybody who heard of hurling in the old days heard of "Tyler." With Jim Kelleher of Dungourney, Tom Semple of Thurles, and the Doyles of Mooncoin, his name was inseparably linked with the hurling code. One of the pluckiest and most aggressive hurlers ever to grace the midfield, he captained the Limerick lads to victory in the Munster Finals of 1910 and 1911.

Others that figured largely in the side of 1900 or thereabouts were Sean Carroll and brothers, the Herberts, Jim, Joe and Pat; the Galligans, Bill and Dave; Jim Lee, Martin Carty, Mick Sweeney, Denny Dillon, Barney O'Connor, Mick Kett, Dave Conway, the Vaughans and Mick Danaher of Ahane; Tom Griffin, Jacky Ryan, Tom Brennan, Willie Bourke and Tim Scully of Clare; Tommy Benn, Martin Doherty, the Collinses of Ahane, T. Coffey, Joe Curtin, Tom Eresnihan, Paddy Tierney, Mick Ryan, Jack Kearney, Paddy Bourke, John McMahon, Simon Scully, the Dalys, Bill and Mick; and many more, as Willie often put it, "whose names have slipped the old memory in the intervening years."

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(CONTINUED)

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

AFTER being absent from the arena for a few years Castleconnell made a hurling come-back in 1908, and reached the final of the East Limerick Senior Championship, in which they were defeated by a great Caherline side, the names of which Willie Lee preserved in his records as follows:— Jim Flood, captain; J. Burke, M. Burke, M. Kiely, T. Kiely, W. Ryan, J. Leonard, J. Keogh, T. Ward, M. O'Neill, D. Riordan, P. Daly, J. Lynch, R. Burke, J. Kiely.

This defeat did not dishearten the Castleconnell lads, and we soon find hurling enthusiasm very pronounced in the parish, so much so that Willie Lee responded to the call of a number of his ex-pupils and held a meeting at Ahane School, at which the first Ahane Hurling Club came into existence. The meeting took place on May 20th, 1909, and the officers elected were—Charman, J. Butler; Treasurer, E. Vaughan; Secretary, J. Richardson.

It was agreed to affiliate a junior hurling team and E. Lalor was appointed captain of this, with R. Richardson the vice-captain.

DOUBLE CHAMPIONSHIP WIN

That this move had no adverse effect on the Castleconnell come-back was demonstrated a short time later, when the Castleconnell lads registered a double championship win over Caherline at the Markets Field, taking senior honours, 6-11 to 1-3, and the junior event, 4-10 to 2-2.

This was but the beginning, for both teams went on to complete the championship hat-trick, and collect the senior and junior titles—a magnificent achievement.

In taking the senior crown, Castleconnell beat the title holders, Croom, 9-12 to 3-10, to prove their superiority in no uncertain way. The teams on the occasion were:—

Castleconnell — J. ("Tyler") Mackey, captain; Jacky Ryan, goal; M. Rainsford, P. Herbert, J. Leonard, M. McCarthy, M. Danaher, J. Fenton, M. Carroll, C. O'Connor, M. Sweeney, T. Benn, J. Carroll, D. Conway, T. Brennan, J. Herbert, P. Vaughan, W. Gallagher.

Croom—P. Mangan, captain; T. Mangan, M. Mangan, T. Griffin, J. Kennedy, M. Kennedy, G. Lyons, E. T. Halvey, M. Lyons, P. Buskin, T. Hayes, J. Mullane, M. Burns, T. Bourke, M. Feely, J. Lane, L. Rael.

In the County junior hurling semi-final, Castleconnell beat Loughgur, 2-9 to 2-5, and they took the title when they beat Kilmallock, 7-3 to 2-1, in the County final.

IN AID OF RING IRISH COLLEGE

* One of Castleconnell's first acts as County champions was to participate as representing Limerick in a great senior hurling tournament in aid of Ring Irish College, the trophy for which was a magnificent silver shield weighing 56 lbs., the gift of Captain the Hon. Otway Cuffe. They hurled a terrific game, but were beaten by Tipperary, 2-14 to 2-12.

A few weeks later they were at Waterford to play the crack Kilkenny team, Erin's Own, then in the heyday of its power and influence, and it was a feather in the Limerickmen's cap when they came through victorious against such sterling opponents.

Another distinction came to Castleconnell a fortnight later when Mick Danaher was the winner of a most exciting long puck competition, his drive reaching 94 yards 1 ft. 5 ins.

ONE OF HIS PROUDEST DAYS

One of the proudest days of Willie's early life was the occasion of the 1910 Munster senior hurling final, arranged for Tralee, and which attracted some two thousand spectators, who paid 15s to see one of the great games of the Munster hurling championship.

Cork were firm favourites and

few expected Limerick to even make the game an attractive one. That's where they were wrong, however. The Limerick men were in rare form, they fought with great determination, their hurling was wholehearted and aggressive, their combination excellent, their swiftness in getting possession of the ball and their long and well-delivered shots were a revelation.

In the first half Limerick set a fast pace and at half-time they were leading by three goals. The Rebel County lads re-opened the play in sparkling fashion and it looked for a while as if they would triumph. Limerick hardened, however, in the final quarter, the players kept up the pace and with the tussle for victory neck and neck the Shannonside defence was superb, with Paddy Flaherty of Rathkeale and the Young Ireland pair, Timmie O'Brien and Tom Hayes, really outstanding in a final purple patch of exciting and nerve wrecking hurling.

LIMERICK SUCCESS WHOLLY UNEXPECTED

The Limerick success was wholly unexpected, for Cork were cocksure of victory and had their sights set for the "All-Ireland." Leaving the Tralee pitch that evening Willie Mackassy expressed the disappointment of his colleagues when he said: "We left the All-Ireland fall off our hurleys."

The same might be said of Limerick, in relation to the All-Ireland Final. Pitted against Wexford they looked all set for victory, but caught a real tartar to lose one of the most controversial of hurling finals by a single point.

It was a most unsatisfactory game from the Limerick viewpoint, with disputed goals providing plenty of topic for discussion for years after. The ifs and ands of the day were debated at crossroads and firesides, and there is no doubt it was Limerick's most disappointing hurling occasion—one that should have been a triumph, but ended up a tragedy—a day that many who were there would like to forget, but could never succeed in erasing from the memory.

A BAD BLOW

It was a bad blow to Castleconnell, and the effects of the defeat were reflected in a considerable drop in the morale of the players, with the result that when they met Fedamore in the storied Lyons Memorial final they were unable to muster the scoring power to match the four goals and a point their opponents marked on the slate. That Fedamore team proved itself, however, in after years. In goals for them that day was Willie Clifford, who in later years was to be honoured with the Presidency of the G.A.A. He had as teammates: Con Scanlan, who skippered the side; Stephen Gleeson, Mick Bourke, Mick Harrington, P. Shinnors, P. Cavanagh, M. Whelan, Ned Treacy, J. Quinlan, J. Ryan, Egan Clancy, J. Clancy, John Casey and P. Keane.

Castleconnell took revenge in the championship six weeks later, but were not out of the woods by any means, as they were to discover when they encountered Young Ireland in the County final. A decade earlier, the blue and gold clad city lads had robbed them of their only previous County crown, and Castleconnell were determined that such a thing was not going to happen the second time.

NECK AND NECK STRUGGLE

On the other hand, Young Ireland were as equally primed to the feeling that what had been accomplished before was possible again and they prepared for the final all set, and fit to fight for a king's ransom. A neck and neck struggle for supremacy it proved between two great teams, who were level as often as they were otherwise throughout a hectic hour. In fact, a draw looked almost a certainty as the last minutes ticked away but right on the stroke of time Young Ireland were awarded a free, far out on the wing, and that prince of hurlers on a placed ball, Tom Hayes, put between the uprights for the last effort of the unforgettable hour—and Young Ireland victory.

The new champions were—Tom Hayes, captain; P. Scanlan, goal; J. Gubbins, M. Halvey, J. Flanagan, J. McNamara, A. Kelly, C. McGill, J. Hayes, F. Murphy, J. Ryan, P. Frawley, T. McMahon, J. Sweeney and J. Brennan.

Sportsmen to the core, the Young Ireland Club decided that although they were entitled to the selection of the County team they would leave it to Castleconnell, in tribute to the splendid way they brought the County back to the hurling limelight the previous season.

THE 1911 MUNSTER FINAL

Limerick won the 1911 Munster final in rousing style, in a sensational game with Tipperary, played at Cork Athletic Grounds. The Premier County boys looked "home and dried" as they led by seven points, with ten minutes hurling remaining, and the crowd already leaving the grounds.

They turned in their tracks, however, when Mick Feely shot a marvellous goal from midfield to spark off a Limerick onslaught that swept all before it and in a hurricane finish Shannonside scores came rapidly, and Limerick were three points ahead when the final whistle went.

Pitted against Noresides greatest ever combination in the All-Ireland final, the stage seemed set for a glorious encounter but the fates decreed otherwise, and all the bright hopes of a Blue Riband evaporated on the sodden sod of Cork Athletic Ground—and a game that was never played!

Castleconnell glory was over, so we jump fifteen years for the next great period in our story—the coming into being of the fabulous Ahane, makers of Limerick hurling history.

GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

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By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

BEFORE passing from the last great glory period of the old Castleconnell Club, I quote from an article in the "Limerick Leader" of December, 1933, recalling the return of that club to the Gaelic fold in 1908, to win both the County senior and junior titles, and lead Limerick to a pair of All-Ireland senior hurling finals.

"A meeting of the local Gaels was held at the Gaelic League Rooms, Castleconnell, this week in December twenty, five years ago, to revive the once famous hurling club—the Emmets. The following were elected: W. F. Lee, Chairman; S. Lyons, Treasurer; Joe Herbert, Secretary; with John Carroll and Pat Hynes, and two members to be co-opted from the Ahane district.

"There is no necessity to refer to Messrs. Carroll, Lee and Herbert, as they are still actively working in the Irish Ireland movement. On inquiries I learned that S. Lyons (now of Tralee) and P. Hynes of the City, are still active supporters of both the G.A.A. and the Gaelic League. S. Lyons is a brother-in-law of David Conway, one-time member of the Castleconnell famed hurling team, and at present Vice-Chairman of the Ahane Hurling Club."

JUNIOR WINNERS OF 1910 HONOURS.

The members of the junior team that won the 1910 honours were: Robert Richardson, Captain; John Richardson (Ardvarna), Ned Vaughan, John Vaughan, Paddy Vaughan (Killeengariff), Pat Ryan (Coolnahila), Denis Callinan, Patrick Collins, John Collins (Laught), John Gleeson (Raheen), James Ryan (Sallymount), William Fenton (Mount Shannon), William Carroll, Con Mackey, Tim Daly (Castleconnell).

The Ahane Hurling Club was re-organised after a lapse of a number of years, at a meeting held on November 22nd, 1926. The chairman appointed was Rev. P. O'Reilly, with T. Fitzpatrick, N.T., as vice-chairman. The treasurer was Denis Ryan, and the secretary, Pat O'Reilly, now Chairman of the County Board, G.A.A. The members of that first revived committee were: D. Conway, M. Ryan, S. Carroll, P. Scanlan, Pk. Ryan, J. McGrath and M. McDonagh.

On the 12th Decembre the Club played its first match against old parish rivals, Newport, and by the narrowest of margins, a point the youthful Ahane team were beaten. This was their only game in 1926.

A WISE DECISION.

Ahane caused quite a surprise in Gaelic circles when they decided on entering both senior and junior teams for the 1927 County Championships. This step, though much discussed at the time, proved a very wise one, as it kept the players of senior status resident in the parish (who had helped city clubs in their championship matches), from playing with outside clubs, and consequently made them interested in the local club.

Ahane's interest in the 1927 county titles did not last long. The seniors went out before Treaty in the first round. The juniors also made a first round exit, but on a replay. They drew with Fedamore at the first meeting, but were beaten at the second attempt—no mean achievement as was afterwards proved, for Fedamore won out the Junior Championship. 1927 was a lean year for the Ahane Club, but the members kept active through the aid of friendly games arranged from time to time.

At the 1928 annual meeting the committee was re-constituted as follows:—

Chairman, Rev. Father O'Reilly; Vice-Chairman, T. Fitzpatrick, N.T.; Treasurer, Pat O'Reilly; Secretary, J. Moynihan; with D. Conway, Garrett O'Meara, P. O'Brien, Timmy Ryan, M. McDonagh, D. Lawlor, P. Carroll, M. Ryan, D. Forde and D. Ryan.

Ahane were again drawn to meet Fedamore in the 1928 junior championship, and the pair had the distinction of playing on the opening day of the then newly acquired Limerick Gaelic Grounds.

VERY INTERESTING GAME.

A very interesting game it proved but Ahane were decisive winners in the end. This date, August 12, 1928, marks the turning point in the fortunes of the Ahane Club. It was their first victory for championship honours. Their next championship engagement was not, however, until March 3rd, 1929, when, at the Gaelic Grounds, they had a very closely contested game with Bohermore, which they won by a solitary point, 2-1 to 2-0.

They beat Treaty, 21 points to 8, on May 19th to qualify for the County final, in which they had Kilmeedy as opponents. This match was played at Adare on June 16th and Ahane won by double scores, 16 points to 8, to notch the first championship crown to their name.

Writing later on that success, Willie Lee said:—

"These Shannonsiders, now so popular and famous throughout the whole country, in their infancy, while engaged in local games, did not show much promise. Their material was raw and young. Still they persevered. Their grit and determination at this stage was certainly most admirable. The old Castleconnell and Ahane tradition helped them on, and when the youngsters—sons and relatives—of the famous old hurlers between the Shannon and the Mulcaire came on, many of us recalled the famous clashes with Fedamore, Young Ireland, Cloughaun, Croom, etc., in the never to be forgotten dear old Markets Field of the old days. Man of us like to live in the past, and no matter how advanced and finished our premier hurlers are to-day, or what great honours are won for our city and county, the memories of the men of the past, who kept the G.A.A. flag flying in hard and bitter times, shall always be fondly cherished.

AHANE ON THE UP GRADE.

"In 1929 the Kilmeedy team was considered an outstanding and unbeatable junior combination. When we arrived at that picturesque spot on the Maigne these western lads were promenading the grounds in hurling attire, strongly confident of victory. The Ahane lads were on the up grade. I do not think that they anticipated being so superior of their opponents, but as transpired afterwards, Kilmeedy was not in the picture in speed, cleverness and the finer points of the game.

"I am not reflecting on the Western lads as having previously seen Ahane in some clashes I was more than surprised myself at the brilliant exhibition they gave us that day. They became seniors as a result of that game and never looked back. Like other teams, they met with a few reverses but they were very few. Every Limerick Gael, no matter how hot the opposition or how keen the rivalry, will concede those Shannonsiders the honour and credit of helping much to bring Sharsfield's County to the honoured position it occupies to-day in our hurling history. Fedamore, Croom, Young Ireland, Cloughaun, Newcastle West, Kilfinane, Murroe, Cappamore and Kildimo, have nobly co-operated, and, similar to my experience of over a quarter of a century ago, the band of Limerick hurlers travelling together these late years is as fine a circle of Ireland's youth as ever crossed camans. A distinct credit to their county and country. I miss dear old Pallas, Rathkeale and Caherline, the homes of the Kennedy's, Ryans, Flaherty, Tim Lloyd, Cremear, Flood and company."

A KILMEEDY VICTORY.

Kilmeedy, beaten in the junior final, had the unique satisfaction of capturing the Intermediate Co. hurling crown the very next Sunday, when they defeated Pallas in the final, 2-6 to 2-1. The victorious Kilmeedy fifteen were: M. Flynn, Captain; J. Wall, J. Donovan, M. O'Brien, P. Culhane, W. Irwin, J. Neenan, O. Cronin, R. Cronin, R. McKeown, T. Dunworth, J. Ryan, T. Chawke, P. Fitzgibbon, P. McCarthy.

The Ahane successes, which opened what may truthfully be described as the golden era of Limerick hurling, will be dealt with in the next article.

GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

W. F. Lee Of Castleconnell
(CONTINUED)

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

IT was in 1930 that the great Ahane team really made its name. The officers appointed at the annual general meeting were: Rev. Fr. O'Reilly, Chairman; David Conway, Vice-Chairman; Treasurer, Pat O'Reilly; Secretary, Liam Cummins, N.F. Committee—Garrett O'Meara, Paddy Scanlan, Timmy Ryan, J. Doyle, Paddy O'Brien, D. Forde, J. Moynihan and E. McDonagh. The Club entered four teams for the County hurling championship—senior, intermediate, junior and minor.

The Club's first important outing of that season was on June 1st when they carried a team to Clonmel to play the great Waterford team of the period—Erin's Own. This match marked the official opening of the present Clonmel Sportsfield.

The following Sunday, Ahane had a decisive victory over Treaty, at Cappamore, in the opening round of the senior hurling championship. Treaty objected to the award, however, on technical grounds and won their case at the County Board. An appeal to the Munster Council failed to alter the verdict, so Ahane were out of the premier championship competition.

SPORTING OFFER OF RE-PLAY ACCEPTED.

Not exactly, however, for Treaty sportingly came back with the offer of a re-play, and this was agreed to for Limerick Gaelic Grounds on August 17th. This turned out a day not easily forgotten by the participating teams as the match was played in a continuous downpour. And after a lapse of thirty years I can still see plainly pictured before me referee Denny Lanigan out on the then rugged pitch holding an umbrella with one hand as he tried to manage the task of entering scores, etc., with the other. It was the only occasion I ever saw a referee use an umbrella during a Gaelic game, but the weather that day certainly justified the departure from established custom.

Ahane again won, thus qualifying to meet Cloughaun in the next round. This match took place at Cappamore and with both sides scoring ten points the result was a draw. The re-play took place on October 5th, at Croom, Ahane winning by 23 points to 4.

The lads from the north-east corner thus qualified to meet Young Ireland in the East Limerick final and this was arranged for Limerick Gaelic Grounds on October 19th. This turned out another very wet day but this time the referee declared the pitch unplayable. The match was re-fixed for Croom a fortnight later and a right royal tussle it proved. John Mackey gave a particularly noteworthy display on that occasion, but Young Ireland won a hectic game by 19 points to 17.

UNIQUE EXPERIENCE.

Ahane, however, will not readily forget 1930, for they had the unique experience of having to travel twice for each match in the senior championship.

The Ahane lads had revenge over Young Irelands when the pair met in the 1930 County Junior Hurling Championship and they defeated the city men 9-4 to 3-1. The following Sunday they beat St. Patricks

in the same competition, and captured the East Limerick crown with a victory over Caherline, 8-4 to 5-0.

They continued their winning way when they defeated Templeglantine, 11-1 to 3-0, to qualify for the county final, in which their opponents were Bruree, whom they beat, 8-5 to 1-3. The teams in that decider will be of interest:

Ahane — P. O'Shea, P. Hilliard, M. McDonagh, J. Ryan, M. Ryan, M. Quinlivan, E. McDonagh, J. Mackey, P. Joyce, J. Burns, P. O'Brien, T. Ryan, M. Hourigan, E. Delaney, M. Hickey.

Bruree—P. Potter, J. Potter, D. Lawlor, P. Lawlor, J. Callaghan, P. Gallagher, J. Shea, J. Cussen, W. Murphy, J. Harold, M. Enright, D. Kirwin, M. Sexton, C. Cahill.

ANOTHER BIG SUCCESS.

Another big championship success came the Ahane way that year, when they won the belated 1929 County minor hurling final, and became first holders of that title. In the decider, they met Doon at Cappamore, and won, 4-7 to 3-5, in one of the best and most gruelling games witnessed for many a day.

In tournaments, too, Ahane had many successes, and particularly prized were the set of medals they won in the tournament organised by the Benedictine Fathers of Glenstal Castle.

In the semi-final of a tournament for a set of gold medals and silver cups, presented by Rev. Father Condon, P.P., Newport, the Ahane lads had a great win over Temple-derry, to qualify to meet their old rivals, Newport, for the trophies.

At the first meeting the teams drew at 3 goals each, but Newport created a major surprise when they won the re-play by 19 points to 13.

Ahane took their first step to the winning of the senior County crown when they beat the holders, Young Ireland, 3-5 to 1-2, at Croom, on May 31st, 1931. It was a disappointing game, in which the challengers were clearly superior, and was spoiled by a heavy down-pour of rain.

With victories over Hospital, 4-9 to 2-1, and Treaty, 12-5 to 0-2, Ahane qualified for the 1931 Co. Senior Hurling Final, in which they beat Croom, 5-5 to 1-4.

The teams that day were:—

Ahane: Paddy Scanlan (Captain;), Denis O'Malley, M. McDonagh, P. Hilliard, John Mackey, Mick Mackey, Anthony Mackey, Timmy Ryan, J. Ryan, M. Ryan, E. O'Brien, Mick Hickey, M. Quinlivan, E. McDonagh, P. Joyce.

Croom: T. Breen, M. Horan, Dr. J. J. Stuart (now President of the G.A.A.), J. O'Brien, M. O'Brien, J. McDonnell, P. Kearney, J. Roche, J. O'Dwyer, J. Kennedy, A. Keating, W. Corkery, M. Mahony, J. Griffin, W. Griffin.

It was a proud day for Willie Lee when Ahane brought home the Co. Senior Hurling Cup. For 40 years he taught and encouraged hurling in Ahane School, and no man could claim a greater share than he when Ahane went from triumph to triumph in the ensuing years.

Willie Lee saw them win the bulk of the twenty-five titles of the great glory period of Ahane. It was a memorable spell in the history of the parish and one that must hold a treasured place in the recollections of all those lucky enough to be associated with it.

Space limitations permit me only to list the many successes the Ahane lads won. For the participants and those closely associated with the events of the time, different occasions will have their own special memories.

SIXTEEN SENIOR HURLING TITLES.

Sixteen senior hurling titles were captured in all, to put Ahane away beyond all challengers at the head of the honours roll. The years of success are stamped indelibly on many minds—1931, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1936, 1937, 1938, 1939, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1955.

On five successive occasions Ahane had the unique distinction of winning both the Senior Hurling and Senior Football Championships of Limerick County. The years were: 1935, 1936, 1937, 1938, 1939.

They won the Junior Hurling Crown, as already recorded, in 1928 and 1930; whilst minor hurling county successes graced their standard in 1929 and 1940.

GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

W. F. Lee Of Castleconnell

(CONTINUED)

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

FOR 40 years Willie Lee taught in Ahane School, and many of his old pupils maintain that few teachers anywhere left a greater impression on his pupils and district than did the grand old Ahane schoolmaster—one of the greatest of teachers and one of the kindest of men.

A wonderful Gaelic enthusiast—he loved and lived for hurling—he transmitted this enthusiasm with all the fervour he could muster to all those with whom he came in contact.

Himself a product of the old hurling school—he was with the Castleconnell hurlers in the earliest days of G.A.A. control — it was only natural that he should favour the direct methods in play, to become a consistent advocate of the advantages to be gained from hitting the ball on the ground.

In season and out, Willie Lee sang the praises of hurling to his pupils and all others with whom he came in contact. His Gaelic gospel reached many ears, for his influence was wide-spread. He taught in Ahane and was resident in Castleconnell, so he was in contact with the entire parish. He even extended into Murroe parish, for the lads from Annagh, which runs alongside Ahane, got their schooling at Ahane, and shared the love and respect for the "Master" that was ingrained in every one of his pupils.

HIS PRIDE AND HIS JOY

These self-same pupils were his pride and his joy, and nobody dare say a word against his "boys." The good and the bad, the weak and the strong, the poor and the rich, the brilliant and the dull, all meant the same to him. They were of his great, big family, and like the Supreme Master of all, he knew no difference between them.

Not only did Willie Lee propagate hurling in Ahane School and parish, but he actually supplied the hurleys and balls free to his lads and allowed them take them home, so that they could continue practising the game at their leisure.

His charity did not end in the sports field by any means. A lot of it will never be known, but it is a well recognised fact that he helped many a poor family, whilst the needy boy had never to feel embarrassed through inability to procure the necessary school books. They were always provided for him. Outfits for Confirmation and First Holy Communion were other demands met without question for needy families out of a purse that was never anything but slender. He could ill afford such things—but he made the sacrifices willingly and was never known to complain on that score.

PRESENTATION ON HIS RETIREMENT

Willie Lee retired from teaching in 1932 and the occasion was marked by a presentation from his old pupils. An account of this, from the columns of the Limerick Leader of the period, will be read with interest:—

"Quite outside the hurling pitch, the Ahane and Annagh people can rise to the occasion when and where they consider

services given should be publicly appreciated. The past pupils would not let all the credit go to the present-day pupils in showing their marked esteem for their old schoolmaster, Mr. Willie F. Lee.

"Five of the old students—Paddy Collins, Timmy Ryan, Joe Lawlor, Joe Ryan and Mikey Hourigan—went through the school area collecting subscriptions towards a presentation to Mr. Lee. The collectors put a limit on the amounts they could accept, so in many cases they had to refuse the sums offered, taking only a reduced subscription. Their object was merely to get sufficient to procure suitable presents which would be held by their old teacher as mementoes. They quite easily succeeded in their praiseworthy mission.

COMPLIMENTARY REFERENCES

"The five young Gaels visited Mr. Lee's premises in Castleconnell to make the presentation. Mr. Paddy Collins, the senior member, who, by the way, was a monitor in Ahane School close on a quarter of a century ago, acted as spokesman. As is usual on such occasions, Mr. Collins made some complimentary references to their teacher, conveying the fact that old and young, rich and poor, joined together spontaneously in subscribing the necessary funds to enable them to offer that little testimonial to one whom they considered deserved much more from them.

"He referred in happy terms to the good days they had in the old schoolhouse, emphasising particularly, too, leading traits in their master's character, his kindness and interest in the poor man's son, and the patriotic foundation he gave to every boy who had the advantage of receiving his education from him. He always strove hard to make them mtn in the true sense of the word, and particularly good Irishmen, who should love their country next to their Maker. In conclusion, on behalf of the delegation and every man, woman, boy and girl in Ahane and Annagh, he desired Mr. Lee to accept the little presents as a token of their good wishes for him for many happy years in his retirement.

MR. LEE'S REPLY

"Mr. Lee suitably replied, conveying to his old pupils that he considered both young and old in Ahane and Annagh held too high an appreciation for whatever little help he gave to fit his scholars for the battle of life. It was plainly evident to everyone it was a labour of love, notwithstanding the trials and troubles of a teacher's life.

"It was always a matter of the greatest satisfaction that no matter from what source tryanny or injustice showed its head he had always the good people of Ahane and Annagh behind him. That was a testimonial in itself which he would always treasure.

"With reference to Mr. Collins specially mentioning love for the poor man's child and the patriotic foundations, he did not consider that too much credit ought be given to himself personally for those leanings. His people who came before him should get some appreciation for those favours, as

he came from the people, was of the people, and for the people, with the further advantage that he was nurtured and brought up in a national home which was a meeting place for whom were popularly termed the 'boys'—members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Early associations leave imprints for life. Those advantages explain a good deal of the Ahane teaching—democratic and patriotic.

VERY SINCERE THANKS

"Mr. Lee concluded by desiring the delegation to convey to the Ahane and Annagh people his very sincere thanks for their splendid gifts and also for their kindness, support and well wishes, which he always enjoyed during his long teaching career.

"Mrs. Lee kindly entertained the visitors, and this was followed by a very enjoyable musical evening, some of the Ahane hurlers displaying talents in addition to the music of the clash of the ash, of which they gave evidence so well on the playing pitch."

W. F. Lee Of Castleconnell

(CONTINUED)

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

MOST Limerick Gaels remember Willie Lee best for the stirring weekly articles he wrote in the "Limerick Leader" on native games. With his deep and profound knowledge, dating back to the very earliest G.A.A. days, he always had something useful to say, and he said it in a homely and attractive way.

With his wide experience of hurling he had one great plea all the time to the up and coming hurler. It was "Pull on the ground boys, always!" — a plea more urgent and imperative to-day than even then, for if we could get its general acceptance in the County the hurling picture would be far brighter than it is now.

I have been asked by many readers to reproduce some of his writings, as typical of the man, and it is a pleasure to print some few extracts from the many columns that flowed from his pen over the stirring years, when Ahane were at their hurling zenith, and Limerick enjoyed a spell we may not experience again.

A RALLYING CALL IN 1933.

Willie encouraged Limerick to the great events of 1933, when Munster honours were again won and only Johnny Dunne's famous goal deprived the County of a glorious All-Ireland success. There was sound common sense in what he wrote at the commencement of that season:

"This is a time of stocktaking and preparation and it behoves us to examine ourselves and see how we stand. Our strong points and weaknesses ought to be fairly well known by now, and the invaluable experience gained in the inter-county contests must have been of great help, inasmuch as our boys have been up against various contrasting styles—a valuable lesson for the future.

"The question of another centre-field man has been raised; surely we have sufficient material to supply the need. It is always wise to have capable understudies to take their places at all times; it is very bad policy to depend on one man, no matter how invaluable he may be, when one considers illness and injury.

"Every hurler in every club should be ever striving to fit himself for a place on the County selection, and not think that those places are specially reserved for others. A good man who has the interests of his county at heart will be always willing to stand down for a better man—the very best of men often have an off-day.

DAVE CLOHESSY AND PADDY SCANLAN.

"As I write, I see that Dave Clohessy is ranked as one of the best of present day forwards 'whom fate has denied a real opportunity of exhibiting his worth!'

"This is heartening, for although our forwards, on the whole, have shown a much needed improvement, still their shooting has been erratic and that, of course, nullifies any promising movements. This very point should have special attention and training devoted to it, for when all is said and done, it is scores that count.

"Another matter of almost equal importance is that of free pucks. I remember how the great Con Scanlan used to practise putting balls into a pot sunk in a fence. That showed the real artist, ever striving to better himself and it is this striving that wins matches. It would be well worth while to get any who show special ability as sharpshooters specially trained.

"The past year has brought us into the limelight; let us hope the present one will bring us the crown of success too long denied us.

"We must also not forget the element of ill-luck which has so often dogged our footsteps and deprived us of a well-merited victory. Against this we have no remedy—all we can do is to strive by every means in our power to fit ourselves to be worthy champions, to give of our very best in the field and to act as sportsmen and Limerickmen on and off it.

"Let the New Year see the end of petty rivalries—relegate them to their natural oblivion—and let us see once more the grand brotherly spirit of that gallant band of 1910. These are the men to emulate. Make them proud of their successors and the new year will see us upholding the best traditions of our beloved Limerick."

OUR FORWARDS ALWAYS OUR WEAK SPOT.

Writing of an undeserved defeat in the days when Limerick were fighting to get to the top, he had this to say:

"Limerick did three-quarters of the attacking and even when the scores were level they looked certain winners. The Shannon defeat was due solely to their not making use of the chances that came their

way, whilst Cork utilised those they got.

"It is saddening and maddening to have to digest this. A beating by a superior team is no disgrace, but to have to suffer an undeserved one is galling in the extreme.

"All this is nothing new—it is only history repeating itself. When will Limerick learn that it is scores that count, and make preparations accordingly? Our forwards have been always our weak spot, and, accordingly, special attention should have been devoted to them. Brilliant individual hurling is only so much wasted energy when attacks are wasted through want of finish. Then also take frees! How many of these were

turned to account? At the second drawn final last year (1931) Cork could have won if they scored from the frees that came their way, whilst Kilkenny succeeded in drawing the game by converting those they got. Another Con Scanlan seems to be needed.

THE BEST MATERIAL NEEDS TRAINING.

"It is a pity that our hopes have been dashed in this manner. Such a chance may not occur again, and the stimulus of a victory would have been inestimable. Our boys do not deserve defeat. Ahane has raised us to the forefront once again only to meet with the same disappointment. It will be very poor consolation if Cork win All-Ireland laurels to know that we have a better team. 'Might have been' are bitter pills to swallow.

"We have another year to wait and in that time a team of world beaters ought to be moulded out of the glorious material we have. The weak points should be strengthened by search and persistent training and the strong ones brought as near to perfection as is humanly possible.

"Sunday's match showed that we have the best team in Ireland, so it is up to us now to prove by results when we next get the chance that we have learned our lesson and profited by it."

THE PARISH RULE.

Willie could be outspoken in his criticism, as in this extract from his report of a county convention: "Fedamore surprised me by sponsoring the eleventh motion 'That the Parish Rule be abolished,' and I got another shock when the Croom boys seconded it. Now these two areas, Fedamore and Croom, for over forty years have, along with Ahane-Castleconnell, led our county in our leading national pastimes. Nearly all the time they supplied more hurlers to keep Limerick on the map than any other districts. Back to the beginning of this century they always fielded players fit to meet hurlers from any other parishes. Even before the days of Feely, Mangans, Jack Shea by the Maigue; of Ned Treacy, Con Scanlan, Egan Clancy, Mick Harrington and the Gleasons from the Fedamore slopes; of the Mackeys, Carrolls, Herberts, Mick Danagher, B. O'Connor, M. Sweeney, D. Conway, P. Vaughan, Jacky Ryan and Jack Keane between the Mulcair and the Shannon, and down along the years, the Gaels of these parishes never looked for the abolition of the Parish Rule, and surely to-day there is as good material in Fedamore and Croom as in the days gone by. I write with authority on this proposed new change, as outside the hurlers and the officials of their clubs I could claim as close an intimacy with those hurlers as any Gael in the county. Ahane upholds the Parish Rule as the foundation stone of the G.A.A."

THE OLD MARKETS FIELD.

"There is not a Gael in the county but must remember the great clashes in the Markets Field between the Fedamore and the Castleconnell - Ahane teams. They were undoubtedly fine exhibitions of the game, fought out in the most determined, manly and sporting spirit, some of the best hurling contests ever enjoyed in Munster. The speed in those days was not so marked, as there was not such intensive training, but the striking, shooting and clashing were up to present day experiences.

"Here is one of many interesting incidents: Fedamore go a free just opposite the old stand. Con Scanlan took it and scored a point. A fine shot. Score disallowed, as the ball was struck before the referee whistled. Ball brought back. The loud, humorous and pleasant voice of the late M. P. O'Shaughnessy, Bruff, one of our best supporters. His challenge was £10 Con will do it again; not taken up —

remarkable, Scanlan did do it again. He scored the point even in the second attempt at that angle and distance.

"Coming back to the Convention I was glad to see that the great majority of the delegates still upheld the Parish Rule. We want more senior teams, East, West and South. I did not like to see Newcastle West going junior. What about the great parishes, Caherline, Cappamore, Pallas, Kilmallock, Knockaney, Bruree, Kilfinane, etc., coming back into the senior fold? It could not be done with a diocesan pick."

In the next, and concluding article, Willie Lee will recall some memories of the great hurlers he knew, with particular reference to

In the next, and concluding article, Willie Lee will recall some memories of the great hurlers he knew, with particular reference to

ding it, uses of the golden thirties.

Willie F. Lee Of Castleconnell

(CONCLUDED)

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

IT was truly said of Willie Lee that he was one of the best-known men in Munster. Associated with the G.A.A. for over half a century, first as a player and later as an administrator and sporting writer, he took an abiding interest in the welfare of the organisation, which he saw rise from a very small beginning to the great sporting body we know to-day.

He was a very popular writer on Gaelic topics and his weekly contributions in the Limerick Leader under the pen-name of "Thomond" were read with much interest in a very wide area.

Principal of the Ahane National School for a long spell, he was intimately associated with many of the great hurlers of the parish and took a fatherly interest in their growth and development. Several of them were his pupils and most of these got their first lessons in hurling from him.

The work he put into the fostering of hurling can never be adequately described or appreciated, but the results of his labours are recorded in the annals of the G.A.A.—written in letters of gold proclaiming the magnificent part the boys from Ahane played in one of the most glorious chapters in the great story of the G.A.A. by Shannonside.

GREAT ADMIRER OF PADDY SCANLAN.

He wrote of his old pupils and of all the Ahane lads with deep sincerity. A great admirer of that superb goal-minder, Paddy Scanlan, nephew of old Glin star footballer, Paddy McCoy, he wrote this concerning him after one great game in which Paddy figured:

"It seemed as if no normal goalie could cover the shots that came from long range and short, right, left and centre. Maybe the hurling fairies of Lough Gur peopled Limerick's goal around Scanlan. Not one hurley he faced but half a score of them, shooting at all angles. His ash, however, was a magnet, saving scorching balls that shivered wood and palm. With an eye like old denizens of eagles nest, he brought down sharp shots from all angles in a tense atmosphere. Cool as a cucumber, he pulled on falling balls, stonewalled hot shots, stopped all with charming ease."

Willie Lee gloried in the deeds of Mick Mackey, and I well remember how proud he was one evening in Thurles when Ned Maher, the old Tubberadora goal-keeper, told us "Mick Mackey is the greatest hurler ever, and I saw them all." In a grand hurling company that opinion was well endorsed, and another All-Ireland medal three-timer, Father Dan Grace, of Tullaroan, said: "I believe Jack Rochford to be the best hurler ever, but it would be hard to beat Mick Mackey and an all-rounder. He has wonderful ability, magnificent strength and the courage of a lion."

GREATEST HURLER OF ALL TIME.

Veteran Limerick sportsman, Tony O'Donovan, endorsed the high opinion concerning Mick Mackey. "I witnessed all the great players of 50 years, and I believe the smallest man of the 42 in the first All-Ireland Senior Football Final, Malachy O'Brien, to be the best footballer I ever saw. I am much more emphatic that Mick Mackey is the greatest hurler of all time."

An old Cork hurling lover added his voice: "Jim Kelleher, of Dungleary, was a magnificent hurler, and I saw him play great games in every position from goal-keeper to full forward. As a scoring man, however, I would put Mick Mackey number one in the hurling world. His success lies, apart from a powerful physique, expert control, quick eye and keenness of anticipation, in what might be termed 'scoring mentality.' Other forwards try to score, Mick means to—and does."

A Dublin journalist and sports colleague of Willie's backed up Mick as the greatest ever, with the Cork wizard, Christy Ring, a close second. He said: "During Mackey's time we had some magnificent hurling defenders, but having seen Mick perform against them I could not conceive there ever having been a greater hurler. The name of John Maher will always be recalled with pride in Tipperary. Yet, one day in Thurles I saw the Ahane idol score 4 goals and 6 pts. off his own hurley in an hour of magnificent achievement by many players. Strong as an ox and a genius to his finger tips, Mackey was in truth the terror of his time. The manner in which he could career through a defence, oblivious of swinging hurleys, was almost frightening in its daring."

In another great gathering of hurling giants, an old hurler jokingly remarked: "Where's this Ahane place that 'Thomond' is always talking about?" Willie answered: "A part of famed Castleconnell parish; beyond its church and school it has few mansions, but boasts all the big noises of the hurling world."

OTHER GREAT HURLING FIGURES.

That was large talk, but it contained a lot of truth at the time. Space does not permit extended reference just now to more of them, particularly that doyen of midfielders, Timmy Ryan, the great Limerick captain of the 1934 All-Ireland and of the American tour, and into whose career I hope to go in detail at a later date; Mick Hickey, nephew of Mick Danaher, the dashing forward who played great games on the Castleconnell selection in 1910-'11 ("how blood tells," Willie more than once remarked when recalling relationship with the hurlers of earlier days); Paddy Kelly, that staunch club man who hurled some magnificent games for Ahane (nephew of old Tipperary hurler, Paddy Nagle); Mick and Con Hynes, of the Bog Road, whose uncles, Paddy and Jack Collins, from Laught, hurled with the old Castleconnells; Tom Conway, son of the great Dave, both of them pupils of Willie at Ahane School; Dick and Sean Leonard, sons of another old caman wielder, John Leonard; Donal Brennan, son of the popular old player, Tom Brennan, of Annacotty; Pat and Brianie Connors, nephews of Barney Connors—their mother a sister of the great "Tyler" Mackey. I could go on, and on, and on, but must call a halt.

ONE OF THE KINDEST OF MEN.

Willie Lee was one of the kindest of men—good humoured, sincere and upright. As a companion, he had few equals, for his wit was racy of the soil. Great to take a joke against himself, he often told of the occasion when Caherline and Ahane were engaged in a tough junior hurling championship tussle. Denny Lanigan, the referee, who enjoyed a hard-hitting game, was standing stern-looking at mid-field with the teams ready to re-start. Willie, moving towards the sideline, had a "dig" at the ref. with the remark: "Wouldn't he remind you of an old country school-master," and quick as a flash came the retort: "Don't be dragging me down so low."

In the pioneer days of the I.N.T.O., Willie Lee spared neither time nor money in placing that organisation on a solid foundation. In that connection he never lost an opportunity, even after his retirement, to advocate the interest of the teaching profession, of which he was himself such a distinguished member.

One of the grand old nobility of the Gael, his memory will be long revered. It could not be otherwise, for Willie Lee was a man of many sterling qualities, his chief quality perhaps being simplicity—a trait that overshadows all others.