

# Bill Sheehan Of Rathkeale

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

IT is doubtful if any man covered in his own lifetime the history of a movement to the same extent as Bill Sheehan of Rathkeale.

Vice-captain of the Rathkeale team that contested the first Limerick County Senior Hurling Championship away back in 1887, he was still a G.A.A. official when he died, in the fullness of years, exactly seventy years later.

Bill was with the G.A.A. from the very beginning, and even had memories of a few of the great matches played before the Association came into existence.

Some years ago he related for me his memories of the Gaelic Field, a story that embraced many events and men notable in the sporting life of the County, and covering a period when Limerick boasted athletes, footballers, handballers and hurlers that were without peer.

## RUBBED SHOULDERS WITH GREAT MEN OF HIS DAY.

Bill rubbed shoulders with all the great men of his long day, and his recollection of them throws an interesting sidelight on the story of their time.

In this Jubilee year of the founding of the G.A.A., some highlights from that story must prove of absorbing interest to those who still take pride in the great deeds of our glorious past, and be an inspiration to the youth and an encouragement to follow in the grand footfalls of as fine a body of men as could be found anywhere.

Bill had a great love for Rathkeale, and at the commencement of his story he stressed the fact that no district in Limerick county could boast as long a standing in the realms of the G.A.A. as that pleasant town nestling on the banks of the rippling Deel.

Long before the great revival by Cusack, Davin and the famed Archbishop Croke, the old form of "goaling," as it was then termed, was carried on all over the town and neighbouring districts.

## THE BALL AND CAMAN THEN USED.

The ball used in those far-off days was an ordinary twine heart, covered with sheepskin. The form of caman used was an ordinary branch of ash, hazel or white thorn, something similar to a hockey stick, and called by all the old Gaels a "graffawn." It was so named from its resemblance to a "graffawn," which was a bent or hooked stick for the grubbing of furze, brushwood, etc., then largely used all over Ireland by the peasantry for the reclaiming of their lands.

Bill told how the back streets and alley ways of the town used to be, in the early days of G.A.A. organisation, the practice grounds for the young lads of the town. And he held that this tradition never really died, for in the long summer and autumn evenings, units of the minor, junior and even senior teams were to be encountered having a "puck" on these historic pitches, perpetuating, as he said, through all time a pastime that was recognised as the national and athletic soul of the country, whose traditions should be upheld as long as any remnant of Irish nationhood remained.

## SPREAD LIKE A PRAIRIE FIRE.

The G.A.A. spread like a prairie fire from the commencement, but Bill held that in Limerick and other districts of the South and West the ground had been well prepared by men of the Fenian Brotherhood, who were driven underground following the failure of their "Rising" and then conceived the idea of the allegiance of the youth to things national directing through the medium of an athletic association, whose object should be the revival of the national games and pastimes of the land.

It was late in 1884 that Croke,

Cusack and Davin sent their clarion call ringing throughout the land. It announced the formation of a national athletic association and called for a great gathering of the clans of all the goaling clubs of Ireland so as rules and regulations might be drafted, in order to make Gaelic games and pastimes as modern and as up-to-date as those in other counties were.

It is safe to say that no other call was ever more earnestly responded to and the echoes of the trumpet had hardly faded when Rathkeale enrolled under the banner of the newly-formed Gaelic Athletic Association.

## INFLUENTIAL LOCAL COMMITTEE.

An influential local Committee was formed to further the project—five good men and true, who did the early spade work, digging for posterity the foundations on which others were able to build the fine edifice that the Rathkeale Club of later days became. First President was James Blackwell, the Secretary was Harry Blackwell and the other members were J. M. O'Grady, John Ambrose and William Ward.

Teams were entered for the first County Championships, but with little success. The lads who had taken to the caman were handicapped through lack of practice and for want of games with worthwhile opposition. It was not so in the city area, where a number of teams had actually anticipated the founding and had played both hurling and football from the summer of 1883 onwards.

The Rathkeale lads were very keen and tried every means of improving their play. They participated in many tournaments and sent teams to many parts of West Limerick to help in the spread of the games and to aid worthy causes.

## HAD JUNIOR AND SENIOR CLUBS.

By 1888 the Association had grown so strong in Rathkeale that junior and senior clubs were in existence there, and both figured in the final of a great Tournament played at Askeaton.

In the senior contest, for which the trophy was a set of beautiful gold medals, South Liberties proved the winner but only after a stiff and closely fought encounter, at which the excitement was terrific.

Rathkeale had compensation in the junior final and annexed a silver cup—the first Gaelic trophy to be secured by the parish.

## THE TEAM.

Leading the Rathkeale men in that dual bid for hurling honours was Mickey ("Austin") Quin, and the members of the team who figured so well against "Liberties" were: Jimmy Kelly (captain), Bill Sheehan (vice-captain), Jeremiah Sheehan, Denis Kelly, John McKnight, Con Donoghue, Tom Donoghue, Danny Hayes, James Markham, William Dowling, Thomas Glenny, Paddy Fitzgerald, William Heffernan, Michael Hanrahan, John Hanrahan, John Keating, Dick Keating, Johnny Connors, Thomas Condon, Thomas Markham, Michael Guirey and Thomas Costelloe.

For nine years Rathkeale continued one of the leading teams of the West, and had some notable successes. Bill will tell of those, and of the growth of the G.A.A. elsewhere, in the next instalment of his story.

PART I

# GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

## Bill Sheehan Of Rathkeale

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

**B**ILL Sheehan remembered the founding of the Gaelic Athletic Association. He was a teenager at the time but he came of good national and Gaelic stock and the efforts to revive the native games of the land were followed with much interest in his home.

One of his longest memories was to hear read from the "Cork Examiner" a very flowery description of the initial meeting, which conveyed to his young mind that a great gathering of all the Gaelic clans had assembled at Thurles for the occasion.

Actually the total attendance was only seven, but the Press report written by one of them—John McKay, a member of the "Examiner" staff, by adding a few "extras" gave the impression of a much larger attendance.

By the home fireside that winter the pros and cons of the new movement were debated, as the opposition mounted to it, particularly from the ascendancy classes. The controversy in the newspapers was followed with keen interest, and this, more than anything else, in Bill's opinion, helped to establish the G.A.A. in the country districts.

### FLOCKED TO ITS STANDARD.

The plain people flocked to its standard and from that day the G.A.A. never looked back. In its earlier years, it had to surmount many and serious difficulties and it was subjected to every wave of public vicissitude. At times, things were so bad that its dissolution appeared inevitable.

Bill always maintained that it was something in the nature of a miracle the manner in which it continued to exist through all the trials and tribulations it was forced to undergo. It continued its existence despite being at a very low ebb on a few occasions and made steady progress despite all obstacles to become, in Bill's lifetime, the greatest amateur sporting organisation in the world. Bill often spoke of the old days, and of the conditions under which players played. It was a mere pipe dream then to even suggest a grounds the property of the association. Yet he lived to see it with grounds of its own in every corner of the Country, infinite resources at its command and Gaelic pastimes played in every parish in Ireland, and in other lands scattered the world over where ever an Irishman has found a home.

### FIRST TO RALLY TO NEW ASSOCIATION.

The Southern counties were amongst the first to rally to the new association, and Limerick was in exceptionally early. This was quite appropriate, for in older times famous aonachs were held at Clogher, near Bruree, Manister, Knockaney, and elsewhere, and it was only in the order of things that another generation should perpetuate the pastimes and national characteristics of their forbears.

The aonachs of ancient times differed in many respects from the events usually associated with the big Gaelic gatherings of to-day, although the revived Tailteann games, held in 1924, 1928, and 1932, combined most of the features found in the older arena.

The birth of the G.A.A. found hurling and other national pastimes in decay. There was a final response to the call for revival for the roots were sound and deeply laid in Irish soil, and they very soon made headway, teams springing up everywhere.

A very special feature of the initial years was the attention given to athletics, and some great sports meetings were organised at many centres. Limerick kept more than pace with the progress in other counties and the athletic doings of the sons of Shannonside often gained world headlines through

the sheer brilliance of the performer.

### BIG CHANGES IN RULES A SNAG.

To hear Bill describing the big changes made in the rules in his time was a treat in itself. He saw in his very young days the "hurling home" in which all the able bodied men of the parish participated and which often ranged over half a countryside, with play sometimes continuing from early morning until darkness fell.

He actually played in some of the first games under recognised rules, when twenty-one players were the number on a team and standard dimensions were laid down for the playing field.

Goals were the only scores allowed at first, but shortly afterwards a ball going over the crossbar was recognised as a point.

In addition, what was known as a forfeit point was allowed under circumstances in which at present a fifty yards free in football or a seventy yards free in hurling would be given. If instead of crossing the end line the ball went over the bar, three forfeit points would be allowed against the defending side.

Forfeit points were abolished in 1888. Side point posts were provided in 1886 and continued in use for a number of years. At an earlier period five "overs" counted a point. This must have been a paradise for the wild driver (who always seems to be with us) for he got some compensation for his efforts.

### A SNAG.

There was a snag, however, for until 1892 a goal had no equivalent in points, with the result that a team might score any number of points and still be defeated by their opponents, who had only a goal to their credit.

In 1892 five points and in 1896 the present amount of three points were declared equal to a goal.

In 1892 the number of players was also changed. It was twenty-one then, when the number was reduced to seventeen. The present number of fifteen did not come until 1913.

Many types of hurleys were used in the old days and most of the counties had their own distinctive pattern. The big Wexford one was popular in many parts, whilst the Kilkennymen who figured in the 1897 All-Ireland final against Kilfinane used a caman that was more like a present day hockey stick. Limerick favoured a hurley narrow at the handle and a little over three inches at the curve, which was nothing like as pronounced as it is nowadays. It was cut straight at the nose, but was weighty at the butt—an ideal instrument for effective ground play, which was all the vogue by Shannonside at the time.

### "TERRIFIC GROUND DRIVE."

Some of the leading Limerick players had a terrific ground drive and could send a ball seventy or eighty yards with ease, oftentimes getting much longer distance with a favouring wind.

This was all the more remarkable when we remember that the hurling ball of the period was something like a present day small football, and well over twice the weight of the sliotar in use now. It had not anything like the hardness of the ball of to-day, but a good welt from one of the powerful hurleys of the time and it could certainly travel a very respectable distance.

Rathkeale was one of the participants in the first football game played in County Limerick and this will be amongst the matters dealt with in the next article of this series.

GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

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By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

IN April, 1885, the first football game in Limerick County under G.A.A. rules was played between Rathkeale and Kilmeedy.

The rules had only been formulated a short time earlier, and this proved a most exciting game and one that aroused much interest in football in Rathkeale and district.

Speaking of those early games in general, Bill told how they often led to exciting scenes, in which not only players but spectators frequently became participants.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE.

Physical violence between members of teams was not unknown; the encroachment of spectators on the playing field often caused the abrupt termination of play, whilst the referee enjoyed no particular immunity from rough handling. His person was by no means sacrosanct. The occasions, however, on which he was subjected to physical violence were rare. He was sometimes more patriotic than efficient, and the umpires were not always free from the suspicion of bias.

It is no harm to explain that some of the earliest referees had little or no practical experience of the game, and many of them found a copy of the first rules almost impossible to secure.

...They did their best under trying circumstances because they were anxious to see the games of the Gael triumph, and gradually succeeded in establishing some sort of order and respect for authority.

Bill recalled the many occasions he saw teams leave the field because of dissatisfaction with a referee's ruling, and matches were often replayed for no other reason than that they had not been finished owing to the fault of the players themselves or their enthusiastic followers.

Those opposed to the Association—and they were many and very vocal—raised the cry that the Sabbath was being desecrated, that publicans were arranging games for their own ends and making fortunes out of them and that faction fighting was being revived. In fact, they predicted all types of horrors and calamities if the plain people of Ireland were not prevented from the practice of their own games.

Notwithstanding all this, however, the games were played with real enthusiasm and in time the impetuous Celtic temperament began to respect the laws which were made by themselves and framed to prevent violence, to teach self-restraint and coolness and to develop hurling and football on scientific lines.

TIME OF PLAY NOT LIMITED.

The duration of play was not limited to an hour in the early days and games continued much longer in many instances. Another extraordinary feature of olden play was that wrestling was permitted in both hurling and football. When two players came into collision they generally got into handgrips. One fall, however, was only permitted. If the players attempted a second fall on the same occasion the referee intervened.

Play continued, of course, during this interlude. When asked what became of the ball whilst the two men were wrestling, Bill rather dryly replied that there were forty other players to take care of it.

It was Bill's opinion that they had a more sensible rule than in after years regarding misconduct by a player on the field. The referee was empowered to order the offender to the sideline for any period of the game he thought fit and he might permit him resume when he considered he had "cooled his heels," and was likely to be of good behaviour for the balance of play.

Rathkeale was one of the earliest clubs affiliated to the G.A.A., and it was represented at the second annual Congress of the Association, held at Thurles in February, 1886.

The organisation in Limerick was rent asunder by the split which divided the ninety clubs into opposing camps, and resulted in two County Boards claiming to function at the same period—each claiming jurisdiction and the right to speak for the Gaels of the County.

HELD CLUB INTACT.

The Rathkeale Gaels took no active part in the dispute, and they held their club intact by concentrating on local tournaments in many of which they participated.

Mention of these reminded Bill

of a famous hurling club that functioned in Foynes just prior to the big upset caused by the "Parnellite Split."

Known as the "Father Murphy's," the Foynes lads competed in four great tournaments around two.

One mid-summer's day in 1891 they played no less than three games during the same afternoon at Curragh to win outright a silver cup. Rathkeale were their opponents in the final and a great decider it proved.

Shortly afterwards the "Father Murphy's" won a second cup, which was put up for competition that period and were successful in at Shanagolden. In this final they defeated another fine team of that time—Ardagh.

I don't know if the trophies are still in Foynes, but Bill saw them there more than forty years after the actual games in which they figured were played.

The defeats the "Father Murphy's" suffered during their brief existence were against South Liberties in the Askeaton Tournament and Adare Faughs in the Kildimo Tournament.

They had a very distinctive dress of green and gold, and the team members wore caps of the same hue. A tragedy occurred in connection with one of their games. Whilst proceeding to the venue a restive horse caused one of the cars to upset, and Patrick Madigan received injuries from which he died three days later.

BULK OF THE MEMBERS.

The old veteran remembered the bulk of the members of that splendid team—Mick Kirivan, founder and captain; Ned and Stephen Jackson, Ned Barron, Dan Sheehan, Ned O'Connor, Tim and Jack Savage, Johnny Hartnett, Jim Healy, Jack Enright, Jim Kirivan, Jack O'Connor, Paddy and Jim McNamara, Mick Sullivan, Ned Walsh, Jim and Mickey Shanahan and Dan O'Sullivan.

Another player well known to the Rathkeale lads was Thomas Naughton of Castleroberts, Adare, and a member of the Adare Desmonds team of the early Gaelic days. Tom later emigrated to America and captained the Innis-falls in a great hurling contest at Chicago in the autumn of 1893. Later he captained Chicago in a game in which they defeated New York by seven points to three. Around the same period, D. H. Liddy, who before leaving Ireland, was Secretary of the Limerick Commercials Club, got the high honour of election as President of the G.A.A. in America.

Also prominent in the American scene was W. J. Spain, Ireland's first All-Ireland dual champion, winner of the first All-Ireland senior football crown, as a member of Limerick Commercials in 1887; and later to capture an All-Ireland senior hurling medal as a member of Dublin Kickhams in 1889.

Shortly after his arrival in New York "W. J." scored 2 goals and 5 points for his team—New York Gaelic. Figuring in the same game was Jack Connery of Kilfinane, who remained in America following the 1888 "Gaelic Invasion."

PART 3

# Bill Sheahan Of Rathkeale

(CONTINUED)

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

**F**OOTBALL in the West was very strong in the early and mid 'nineties, and a combination of which Bill Sheahan often spoke in feeling terms was that of the Newbridge footballers.

Situated in that flat and fertile plain which lies between Rathkeale and Askeaton, the district of Newbridge came to the fore in the decade before the turn of the century as possessor of a very noted football combination.

The uprise of football in the area, so early in the life of the G.A.A., was a natural development, for Newbridge and the adjoining districts of Coolcappa and Riddles-town were old strongholds of the code long before organised competition was thought of.

It fact, it is in this district, amongst others, that we find traces of the very early work of the members of the Fenian Brotherhood, who turned to the cult of athletics and native forms of sports as an occupation and training ground for the youth of the country following the failure of the armed revolt of 1867.

## THE OLD GAME OF "GOALING"

Bill Sheahan often told of the meetings he had as a youth with old stalwarts like Mick ("Pad") Mulcahy, Michael Slattery and James Downey, who regularly spoke of the great sport they enjoyed through practice of the old game of "goaling," at a time when recognised rules were just not there, and this simple rural pastime provided a valuable break from the monotony of the then country way of life.

The Newbridge lads were ready for the call to football action when it came from the newly formed Gaelic Athletic Association, and they took part in some of the earliest games played in their part of the country as soon as the discipline of the new rules accustomed the veterans, more used to the free and easy style of the open country, to the altered order of things.

Bill maintained their team was one of the best to be found anywhere right from the commencement but the lads themselves were never fully fired with the spirit of conquest and were content to play in the limited circle within easy walking range. That is the reason they were not included in the line up for the initial championship, which was won by the famed Limerick Commercial, and that such little news of their prowess penetrated the other portions of the County.

## THE GREAT CON FITZGERALD

However, when Commercial were preparing for their second great assault on the All-Ireland citadel, their captain, the great Con Fitzgerald, who hailed from Glin of course, and had heard during his youthful days there of the football mastery of the Newbridge lads, determined to join issue with them.

Con, a trojan for training and a stickler for proper preparation for any game, always stoutly maintained that the best training of all was to get as many matches as possible. That was a sound idea and one which many trainers of the present day are enthusiastically subscribing.

In the height of their work to get ready for the All-Ireland bid, Con arranged a game with Newbridge, and the venue decided upon was Rathkeale. It proved a very exciting match watched by a big crowd, who, in their excitement flowed over the side lines more than once during the course of a thrill-thronged hour.

Commercial freely admitted afterwards that it was one of the hardest games they ever played. Tim Ryan, one of the most spectacular players of the City side, said after the match "we have played against lads all over the country but the toughest and most tenacious lads we ever encountered were the bunch that comprised the Newbridge team."

## UNFORGETTABLE DAY.

Years afterwards, the great Tom McNamara of Shelbourne, when in conversation with Bill Sheahan, said: "Give my kindest regards to any of the Newbridge old timers you meet. I played in many great games in my day—club and county, but there is one which stands out in my memory and that is the unforgettable day we travelled to Rathkeale to play Newbridge. They had me in bed for the best part of a week—and that did not often happen me. They were not foul players by any manner of means but their style was the rough and tumble tactics so typical of the olden arena. In football of this class they stood out on their own."

Bill maintained this style of play came natural to the lads of Newbridge, for it was ingrained in them from the earliest days of the code. The story tellers of the district had many tales to tell of the olden days, and faction fighting was not unknown in the times of the old "goaling." In fact, the shadow of faction was still there when the Gaelic Athletic Association saw the light, and it is one of the big things to the credit of the movement that it was stamped out right from the start.

Previous to that, it regularly showed itself wherever a political gathering, fair or race meeting was held, and few of these wound up without some melee. Needless to say, the Newbridge boys, in their various encounters, were often called upon to hold their own, and it is on record that this they were well capable of doing, even on occasions when heavily outnumbered, when long distant venues took them to their various contests.

## THE NEWBRIDGE TEAM.

Maurice Wall was captain of the Newbridge lads and the other members of the team, as far as Bill could remember them were:—Will and Bob Mulcahy, Paddy Reidy, Tom Walsh, Ned Ward, Con Magnér, Dick Wall, Willie Walsh, Jimmy O'Connor, Dan Cusack, Tommy Wall, Maurice and John O'Shaughnessy, John Barry, John Egan, Jack Frawley, Jimmy Enright and Davy Hennessy.

Maurice Wall was a great captain and one of the most respected men in the locality. A public representative for many years, wisdom and coolness were the twin factors that expressed his honest and unassuming character. It was said of him that he never made an enemy in either his sporting or public life.

If a row took place on the playing field he never interfered. His motto was: "Take no notice of them. Like the two goats pulling this way and that way, when they get tired they'll stop."

## AS A PEACEMAKER.

Only once, on the occasion of a particularly distasteful scene, was he known to interfere. That day he went into the midst of the fighters, put up his two hands and said: "Boys, listen to me for a minute. What is all the fighting and arguing about? What will the people say only we are all a pack of blackguards. By the way ye are going on one would think the freedom of Ireland was at stake. Here, in the name of God, let us all line up again and shake hands with each other and finish the game. What is the whole thing only a mere bit of fun that none of us will gain anything by, whether we win or lose."

That is a sentiment and advice that is as true to-day as when Maurice Wall uttered it over sixty years ago. The games of the Gael are intended as a means of friendly rivalry, over which no one should ever lose control of temper or make of an opponent on the field of play an enemy. The games are there to build discipline and self-control, to provide healthy amusement, and to cement friendships, like those that now so happily bind the older generations, who laid the foundations of the great G.A.A. of to-day.

# Bill Sheehan Of Rathkeale

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

ONE of the first friends Bill Sheehan made on the football field was Pat Doherty, who was one of the founder members of the St. John's Club and one of its best players. His untimely death early in 1894 was very much regretted all over the county, as he was one of the most popular lads ever to boot the leather in Limerick.

Another lad who was very well liked in Rathkeale at this period was Larry Roche of Domin—a very fine athlete, who proved his versatility by lining out with Commercials and helping them win the All-Ireland senior football title of 1896.

Bill often told us of the description Frank Dinnen gave afterwards in "Sport" of Roche's play that memorable day.

## SPEEDY AND FEARLESS CHARGE

Figuring at half-back, Larry broke from his place time and again, cut through his opponents both at midfield and half-line of defence, where all opposition failed before his speedy and fearless charge, before feeding the ball to his forwards, who made the proper use of it.

Dinneen likened the Dromin lad's play that day to the dash in the old days of horses of the Dublin Fire Brigade before the introduction of motors, when everyone cleared the way for the horses, and all stood in admiration at their splendid gallop.

Roche was a man apart on the football field, as was Malachie O'Brien in the first year of Limerick football glory, and these two players shared with Mick Mackey a special niche in the memory of the old Rathkeale veteran.

Bill had a vivid recollection of some of the earliest tournaments that rallied the West to the great football heritage later established there.

## EXCITING GAME

Con Magner's field at Killeedy was the venue for a most exciting game in the summer of 1894, where the Castlemahon Deel Rangers beat St. Ita's of Ashford, 1.2 to 0.3, after a terrific tussle. The prominent Castlemahon players that hectic day included their captain, a lad named Matthews; Baggott, Hickey, Cussen, O'Callaghan, O'Donnell, Moore, Normoyle, Sheehy, Brown and Fitzmaurice. O'Donnell, the Ashford captain, with Casey, Herlihy, the McInerney brothers, Collins, Dere, Roche, Body and Twomey were most in the picture for the losers.

Around the same period the Rathkeale lads journeyed to Newcastle West to join issue with the local lads, and they were beaten unexpectedly, three points to nil. Tom Ambrose (skipper), J. Murphy, J. Leahy, C. O'Donoghue, M. Nix, F. Kelly, P. Coughlan and P. Byrnes were the best of the winning side that day, with Rathkeale well served by J. O'Donoghue (captain), J. Sheehan, J. Horan and P. Skehan.

## A REAL THRILLER

Castlemahon and Ashford had another set to, this time at Camas, and it proved a real thriller, which the former won by the narrowest of margins, the winning score coming as referee Scanlan of Rathcahill was just blowing for full time.

Castlemahon were again in action on the following Sunday, when they met the famed Commercials in the Croom Football Cup Tournament in which they were beaten six points to two.

Commercials next journey into West Limerick was to meet Rathkeale, at home, for a valuable set of medals. Much interest centered in this game and a huge crowd turned up to see the play. They got great value, for the teams were together all the hour, and Rathkeale were leading by the odd point in three nearing the end. The huge throng of spectators got so excited that they overflowed on to the pitch and play had to be abandoned a few minutes from time. This was one of the greatest football games ever fought in Rathkeale and the display of the local

lads against the mighty city men was the talk of the West for many a day.

## ANOTHER TERRIFIC TUSSLE

Castlemahon and Ashford had another meeting before the year was out and the great rivalry between the pair was demonstrated in another terrific tussle which left the question of supremacy more up in the air than ever for the verdict was a draw. In the same occasion the Castlemahon juniors beat the Lord Edwards of Newcastle West, 1-2 to 0-1.

The Limerick Senior Championships were restarted in 1895, following the break caused by the Parnellite split. Rathkeale participated, and their hurlers were beaten by Caherline at Croom after a hard-fought struggle. The County Board, however, were not satisfied with the manner of the Caherline success, and they ordered a replay, which took place at the St. Michael's Club Grounds, at Corkanree, where Rathkeale won, 2-5 to 1-1.

Rathkeale were back at Corkanree a month later to play Robert Emmets of Kilfinane. The latter had most of the lads who won for Limerick its first All-Ireland senior hurling crown two years afterwards, and they won, 5.3 to 0.3.

In the following championships Rathkeale also bit the dust, going out to Kilfinny, at Ballingarry, 2.6 to 1.5, after a hard-fought game.

## A WESTERN "DERBY"

A western "derby" in that championship was the meeting of Ballingarry and Kilfinny, which produced fireworks galore before the "garden town" boys earned the verdict of 4.10 to 2.8 in their favour.

In an old scrap book Bill turned up the names of the players in that toughly fought encounter. They were:—

**Ballingarry** — C. O'Keeffe (captain), J. Cahill, T. Callaghan, H. McDonnell, M. Dunworth, J. T. O'Keeffe, J. Power, W. Clifford, P. Cronin, P. Noonan, E. Fitzgibbon, Jim Catherell, Jack Reidy, D. O'Keeffe, E. Reidy, P. Lawlor, P. Noonan.

**Kilfinny** — T. Hickey (Captain), M. Lynch (goal), W. Hannon, P. Toomey, W. O'Donoghue, Tim Hickey, M. Kelly, M. O'Donoghue, J. Hickey, D. Hartigan, M. Burke, J. Fitzgibbon, W. O'Donnell, E. Burke, J. Morrissey, T. O'Dea, D. Aherne, Mangan.

## HURLING v. SHINTY

Three Manister hurlers who had emigrated to England and were working on a big construction job in the English capital participated in what must have been the first hurling v. shinty game ever played. They were W. McNamara, M. Byrne and J. O'Donnell. On the same occasion — St. Stephen's Day, 1896 — John Flanagan of Kilmallock gave an exhibition throw with the hammer of 145 ft. 11 ins. He crossed to London for a competition with this missile, but no opponent could be found for him, so he had to be content with an exhibition effort.

Limerick's winning of the All-Ireland senior football crown in 1896 and the hurling success of the following year will be dealt with in the next article of this series.

PART 5

# GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

## Bill Sheahan Of Rathkeale

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

**B**ILL SHEAHAN saw Limerick win seven All-Ireland Senior titles — six in hurling and one in football. The only one he missed was that first great senior football final, away back in 1887, when Commercial's put the name of Limerick where it stands for ever as first holders of the All-Ireland football crown.

He witnessed all the great games, however, of the successful 1896 campaign by the Commercial's, which was again crowned with an All-Ireland victory.

The first match in that quest for the laurels was against another famed football club of the period—the renowned Arravale Rovers of Tipperary. It took place at Mallow, where the Limerick lads won 2-4 to 0-6 after a stirring struggle.

Six weeks later Commercial's, and a big band of supporters, were back at Mallow to play the Erin's Hope of Dungarvan in the Munster final.

### THE MATCH.

The Waterford lads opened in strong fashion and had placed a point between the uprights in the first minute of play. They were back again almost immediately and a low punt netwards was saved by Denis Birrane in capital fashion. The Oola lad had to save his posts again a moment later, his response to this challenge gaining rounds of applause.

This fine save seemed to inspire the Limerick lads, for they got going from his long clearance, and after a few brief sallies in Waterford ground Albie Quillinan levelled up with a well-taken point. The Limerick machine got into gear now, and with Bill Murphy, Jim Riordan, Con Fitzgerald and Pat Griffin hitting the high spots the second quarter was very much in Limerick favour, and the score at the turnover was three points to one to their credit.

### SECOND MOIETY.

The second moiety was stubbornly contested, and twenty minutes had elapsed without a flag at either end when Limerick got through for a great point. Erin's Hope hotly disputed this score and left the field as a protest when the referee, Tom Dooley of Cork, one of the best of the early officials, ruled the score valid.

Bill was very favourably placed to see what happened on the occasion, and he holds it was undoubtedly a point. The side posts were in operation at the time and the ball certainly passed between them, but it rebounded off a spectator back into the field of play.

### GENEROUS OFFER.

When Erin's Hope refused to continue the game, Commercial's generously offered to forego the score, but this the referee refused to sanction, and when the Waterford lads would not return and finish the hour he awarded the match to Commercial's on the score 0-4 to 0-1—a decision which the Central Council subsequently upheld.

Limerick were Munster champions, and to no man more than Con Fitzgerald of Glin should the credit go for putting the Commercial's back on the All-Ireland trail. He set his heart on that objective early in the season and it can be safely said that no team before or since ever trained so earnestly for any prize.

Con put his lads through a rigorous course. For twelve months they played Sunday after Sunday, and in addition to a hard hour's football they walked to and from the venue, sometimes covering a distance of many miles for an engagement with a well-known team.

They had to be a fit team to win that title, for both the Munster and All-Ireland finals were played in the heart of winter, with weather conditions very severe.

### REMARKABLE FEATURE.

A most remarkable feature about the All-Ireland final was the fact that for the only time in the history of the G.A.A. the two main positions of President and Secretary were held by the same person—a Limerick man, Frank B. Dinneen of Ballylanders.

The first All-Ireland finals played at Jones's Road (now Croke Park) were for the 1895 titles, when Tipperary won the dual honours—hurling and football.

Arravale Rovers represented them in the latter, and when Commercial's beat them in the opening round for the following championships the Limerick lads were quickly installed favourites to take the crown.

This changed, however, when Dublin qualified as their opponents, for the Metropolitan's were All-Ireland champions in 1891, 1892 and 1894, and were regarded by many sound judges as the greatest football combination yet to grace the Gaelic stage. That there were some grounds for this assertion was demonstrated in after years, when Dublin performed the remarkable feat of winning again in 1897, 1898, 1899, 1901 and 1902.

The 1896 final was not played until February 6th, 1898, and the referee was again Tom Dooley of Cork.

### THRILL-PACKED GAME.

The game was a thrill-packed one, and the great Dublin combination went down because they were confronted by a well-trained team capable of joining issue with them in every sector and at all points of the game.

Dublin got away to a great start and had a point before ten seconds had elapsed. This they soon supplemented by two other minors, to gain what looked a commanding lead.

Limerick, however, responded in thrilling fashion from a great burst by Nash that put Campion in possession. Good combination between the latter and Dalton brought play deep into Dublin territory, where Bill Murphy was waiting. He cleverly side-stepped his opponent, and with terrific speed banged through a Limerick goal amidst the wildest excitement.

Limerick maintained the pressure after this and some dour bouts followed. Roche fed his forwards well but a few balls went wide before Nash cut from forty yards to register a grand point. The visitors finished the half-hour in great style, and had points by Buttimer, Campion and Bill Murphy, to leave the tally at the interval: Limerick, 1-4; Dublin, 0-3.

### METROPOLITANS WERE STILL CONFIDENT.

The Metropolitan's were still confident of victory for they had played against a stiff breeze, which Limerick had to face on the turn over. The Shannonsiders had an earl- uplift when Larry Roche broke a hot Dublin raid, drove the ball half a field's length for Campion to notch a most valuable point.

Dublin pressed for almost the remainder of the game and were rewarded with four points, which narrowed the gap very materially. The Limerick defence was superb in that last exciting quarter and although Dublin tried everything they knew in an effort to bring about the downfall of the visitors' net, Denis Birrane was never beaten. There were scenes of great excitement when the final whistle blew, and Limerick were winners 1-5 to 0-7.

### SHANNONSIDERS FULLY DESERVED THEIR SUCCESS.

The Shannonsiders fully deserved their success for they contested every inch of the ground with consummate skill and proved their superiority in no uncertain way. They were the heavier team, and though not so clever at footwork as their opponents were, they were much the faster combination. Con Fitzgerald was by far the swiftest man on the field, and did great work in all departments. Larry Roche, too, despite his sixteen stone avordupois, displayed great dash and gave a splendid exhibition.

### THE LIMERICK TEAM.

The full Commercial's selection deserve to be remembered; Con Fitzgerald (captain), Denis Birrane (goal), W. Guirey, John O'Riordan, M. Ryan, Larry Roche, Jim O'Riordan, Larry Sheehan, P. Roche, Albie Quillinan, J. Buttimer, Tom Campion, James Dalton, J. Murphy, W. McNamara, Jack Murphy and J. Nash.

Bill Sheahan travelled back on the train with the Limerick team, and the reception they got at Limerick railway station made a deep impression on his then youthful mind. A huge crowd, accompanied by the St. Mary's Band, met the train and the utmost enthusiasm was displayed.

# GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

## Bill Sheahan Of Rathkeale

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

THE annual Congress of the G.A.A., held at Thurles on May 22nd, 1898, was a great triumph for Limerickmen, who were appointed to all the main posts. Two Shannonsiders fought for the Chair, and Michael Deering, who was domiciled in Cork at the time, defeated Denis "Spencer" Lyons of Croom Castle on a vote. J. F. Halvey of Croom was appointed Vice-President, and the post of Secretary went to Frank B. Dinneen of Ballylanders.

A month later Limerick started off on the trail that won them All-Ireland hurling honours for the first time.

The County final, in which Kilfinane beat Cappamore 4-9 to 4-8, had been a hotly contested affair, and the losers claimed they were disallowed scores on the occasion which should have been granted.

Kilfinane, when called to represent the county, sought the aid of some of their Cappamore rivals for the game with Clare, but the latter refused to play.

### STIRRING TUSTLE

The South Limerick lads were forced to line out without Cappamore assistance, against Tulla, at Greenpark Racecourse on June 19, 1898, but they won, 2-5 to 2-3, after a stirring tussle that fired Limerick enthusiasm and helped to heal the breach, with the result that Kilfinane were able to call on Cappamore help for the next encounter.

The Cork 'Rockies' were next engaged at Tipperary Town on September 25th, and a Cappamore quartette turned out in the Limerick colours—John Hynes, Pat Mulcahy, Pat Butler and Johnny Condon. Two others, John Mulcahy and Denis Connolly, travelled as reserves. Limerick won this encounter, 4-9 to 1-6, after a game that was much closer and more exciting than the score would indicate.

### COUNTY'S FIRST EVER ALL-IRELAND HURLING FINAL

Tipperary Town on November 20th, 1898, witnessed a great gathering of the Limerick clans, who travelled to see the County contest its first ever All-Ireland hurling final.

Many West Limerick enthusiasts made the journey in open cars, despite the wintry conditions prevailing, and the occasion was a memorable one, the events of which were discussed at firesides for many a long day.

Western interest was heightened by the fact that Ballingarry had two representatives on the side—J. Reidy, who kept a great goal, and J. Catterell, whilst Croom had a worthy delegate in P. Buskin. These, with the Cappamore men already mentioned, and J. Flood of Caherline, were called to the assistance of the Kilfinane contingent, which comprised Denis Grimes, who captained the team; "Sean Og" Hanley, the two Flynns, two Finns, O'Brien, Brazil and Downes.

Every mode of locomotion was pressed into service to get the Kilfinane crowds to the venue, and a touch of glamour was added by the presence of the local brass band, who rendered a choice selection of national airs at the field, and also through the town, both before and after the game.

### GAME "A SMASHER" ALL THE WAY

The game was a smasher all the way, and few worried about the cold, so keen were the exchanges. Kilkenny opened in magnificent fashion. "Fox" Maher was in his prime, and the Nore-siders had other stars in the Graces, Lalors, Walsh, Dalton and Teehan.

Buskin and Hanley battled like giants, with Reidy, Hynes and Brazil also very much to the fore in the early exchanges, when Limerick were trying to find their

feet.

Kilkenny had first blood when they scored a fine point, and they soon followed with a neat goal. Brazil opened the score for Limerick when he shot between the point posts but the Nore-siders were not long in neutralising this. Nearing the end of the half hour Catterell clipped through a fast point, and the teams rested: Kilkenny, 1-2; Limerick, 0-2.

The Kilkenny followers were wild with excitement when their team rushed through a goal shortly after the restart. Limerick rallied, however, and the big drum of the Kilfinane band rent the air as Catterell sent an unstoppable shot to the net. Excitement rose still further when Brazil beat all opposition to add a nice point.

### LIMERICK LADS ROUSED TO GREAT EFFORT

The Limerick lads were roused to great effort now and feeling the blood of victory in their veins they met their opponents man for man in some wonderful hurling. Kilkenny were fighting desperately and their supporters had cause for joy when they put through a pair of minors to leave four points dividing the teams.

It was then Limerick opened up in real earnest. Sean Og Hanley tore through the field, Pat O'Brien hurled like one inspired and then Pat Butler put the match to the fuse when he shook off all opposition and banged home a goal that was the signal for the all-out effort that captured the hurling Blue Riband.

Ash splintered and men fell in shoulder to shoulder bouts as Limerick pressed them hard, and to save their posts the Kilkenny defenders were forced to concede a "fifty." There were no "seventies" then, all "fifties," and an opponent was permitted to stand seven yards away ready to charge.

### "SEAN OG" MISSES VITAL FREE

Sean Og Hanley took this vital free but missed. Pat Mulcahy won the race to it, however, and with a powerful ground drive planted it at the feet of "Fox" Maher, in the Kilkenny net. The goalie had just time to turn it over the line for another "fifty" when a mad charge of Limerick forwards and Kilkenny defenders swept through the posts with such force that several of them finished up in the ditch behind. There were no nets, of course, then, and the field was not enclosed.

With time running fast and Kilkenny still a point ahead, John Hynes was entrusted with this important shot. Sean Og and the great bulk of the Limerick lads swarmed into the Kilkenny goal area as the Cappamore man hit magnificently to end up behind Maher for a glorious goal. Limerick were ahead for the first time with only a few minutes play left.

The goal inspired them to all-out endeavour and it was a rampant Limerick that were back around the Nore-side posts a minute later for John Condon to notch a splendid point, which put Limerick a goal in the clear. The full time whistle came shortly afterwards amidst indescribable scenes of enthusiasm as the gallant Limerickmen received congratulations from all quarters on their unforgettable grit and determination, particularly in that last great spell when they swept all before them.

### ROUGH AND READY CONDITION OF FIELD

It was a treat to hear Bill Sheahan describe the condition of the field for that first great All-Ireland meeting of Nore and Shannon. Rough and ready would be a glamorous description. There was no enclosure, the ground was by no means level, whilst tufts of grass were everywhere. The

crowds made their own sideline and were only kept in order by a few stewards, who made plentiful use of ash plants to maintain some kind of a clear field. The teams stripped by the side of the ditch in the raw November cold and the members of the Kilfinane Band followed their favourites up and down the field as play progressed, individual musicians giving an occasional "bar" as an added encouragement when they felt the needs of the moment demanded it.

It was a great final withal, and one that left an indelible impression. The Limerick supporters celebrated their victory in no uncertain way, and Tipperary Town rang with their merriment until well into the night.

### GREAT CELEBRATIONS IN KILFINANE

Many of those who were at the game, even from other parts of the county, escorted the players back to Kilfinane. There were great celebrations in the hillside town, tar barrels blazed on the surrounding hills and every house in the town was illuminated with candles. When the newly crowned champions arrived they got a rousing reception and festivities were continued all night.

Bill told an interesting sidelight concerning this game. In those days hurling boots were unknown, and most of the players appeared in their bare feet. For the All-Ireland Final, the Kilfinane people decided to procure rubber shoes for their men. Those same shoes nearly proved their undoing and the loss of the Championship.

The day on which the teams met was a dull, misty one, and, needless to say, the ground was slippery. Kilfinane felt they were prepared for this, for would not their barred-soled shoes prevent them from falling. They were quickly disillusioned, however, for no sooner was the play started when it was seen that they were falling all over the place. Kilkenny, on the other hand, were hurling confidently and well.

### SHOES DISCARDED

Before the commencement of the second half, the Kilfinane players and their supporters had a hurried consultation and the spectators were soon amazed to see white shoes flying in all directions. Limerick finished the game in their bare feet and put in a great finish to take the crown.

It is interesting to note that the Kilfinane President at the period was Thomas P. McCarthy, whose son, Tommy, was Limerick's full back during another glorious hurling spell for Shannonside.

PART 7

# Bill Sheahan Of Rathkeale

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

ONE of the great tussles of the Kilfinane period was the double meeting of Kilfinane and Blackrock (Cork) for the Munster final of the Croke Cup hurling competition.

Both games were played at Mal- low. On the first occasion, the sides finished level, four points all, after a most exciting contest. The replay was equally brilliant, with the sides in close company all the hour. Kilfinane won by the minimum margin, 1-7 to 1-6.

The Croke Cup final was played at Thurles on July 9, 1899, and the contestants were again Limerick and Kilkenny. Mr. Pat McGrath, of Tipperary, refereed. There was a fine crowd present, including Most Rev. Dr. Croke, Archbishop of Cashel, and Patron of the G.A.A., to whom the players were presented before the game. Limerick won on this occasion, 3-8 to 1-4, thus gaining—by All-Ireland and Croke Cup honours—a double rarely achieved in hurling.

## LOCAL CLUB RIVALRY

Bill Sheahan often spoke of the great football rivalry between Abbeyfeale and Glin and successive meetings of the pair always brought from him reference to the three great meetings between them for the 1899 championship of the West.

The first clash was at Athea, where the sides finished level—a goal apiece—after a most exciting hour's play.

The second gathering was at Newtownsands, Co. Kerry. Nearing the end, the scores were level at one point each, when Glin scored a minor which their opponents disputed, and left the field in protest. The County Board subsequently upheld the Abbeyfeale viewpoint and ordered a re-play. This took place at Ardagh, where Glin proved successful.

## THE TEAMS

The teams in that marathon decider were:

Glin—P. McCoy (captain), M. J. O'Shaughnessy, J. O'Shaughnessy, R. Fitzgerald, M. Fitzgerald, P. Moore, M. Fuery, E. Dore, M. Dore, P. Lynch, M. O'Donnell, J. Wrenn, S. McGee, P. McNamara, E. Moriarty, J. Dore, M. Lynch.  
Abbeyfeale—J. Cahill (captain), J. Connors, M. Prenderville, J. Healy, P. Lyons, T. Browne, J. Collins, M. Buckley, M. Collins, J. McCarthy, P. McCarthy, P. Histon, J. Hartnett, J. O'Donnell, P. Moloney, T. Danaher, W. Flynn.

Bill Sheahan was selected on the Limerick hurling team to play Kerry in the opening round of the All-Ireland championships, fixed for Tralee on October 13, 1901. He had as colleagues on the occasion three members of the victorious 1897 team—J. Reidy and J. Cathrell, of Ballingarry, and J. Flood, of Caherline. Also on the side was "Tyler" Mackey, who, too, was wearing the Limerick jersey for the first time.

## TERRIFIC TUSSLE

Limerick won the hurling by the narrowest of margins, after a terrific tussle, and Kerry won the football, 2-5 to 0-1.

The Shannonside teams will be of interest:

Hurling—J. Reidy, J. Cathrell, C. Keating (Ballingarry), Bill Sheahan, Paddy Flaherty, P. Kennedy (Rathkeale), P. O'Dea, A. Kelly, W. Brennan (Shamrocks), J. Mackey, D. Dillane, J. Carroll, T. Griffin, M. Galligan (Sallymount), M. O'Shaughnessy (Mungret), T. Buckley (Templeglantine), J. Flood, J. Ryan (Caherline), M. Bourke (Ferrybridge), J. Quilligan (Elton).

Football—A. Quillinan, C. Fitzgerald, J. Riordan, J. Murphy, L. Sheehan, James Riordan (Commercials), M. Moloney, J. Moloney, D. McCarthy, J. McCarthy, W. Flynn, P. Lyons (Abbeyfeale), R. Quinn, J. P. Moloney, J. Moloney, J. O'Mahony (Oola), D. O'Sullivan, T. Murphy (Shamrocks).

## HOME AND HOME MATCHES

Rathkeale hurlers were active during the closing years of the century. Home and home matches were very much in vogue during this period and we find the Rathkeale lads crossing camans with the famous Bruff, Caherline, Ballingarry and Kilfinane Clubs, emerging from the field nearly in all cases victorious.

The year that Kilfinane won the All-Ireland, Rathkeale played them at Ballyagran in the County semi-final and were only beaten by a solitary score. The team on the occasion was captained by Jim Kelly.

Shortly afterwards the tide of emigration began to take a heavy toll in the area and several of Rathkeale stalwarts crossed the Atlantic and made their home in the land of the Stars and Stripes—greatly weakening their team. However, in the year 1899, the dying embers were once more fanned by Bill Sheahan, who in a very short time placed the old team in its original standing. In this work he was ably assisted by other great workers in Mick Madigan, Ned Kennedy, Gerald Scully, Paddy and Eddie Flaherty.

## THE 1900 SENIOR HURLING COUNTY FINAL

Rathkeale reached the County final of 1900 in senior hurling, and which was played at the Markets Field on December 8, 1901. Their opponents were Sallymount, who boasted a very strong team at the period so it was a big surprise when the Rathkeale lads came out on top, 2-4 to 0-3. On the same occasion, Oola beat Abbeyfeale in the football final. Both results were disputed, and much to the general surprise the County Board, at a meeting ten days later, ordered both games to be re-played.

More of the Rathkeale players had left by the time this took place, and they were beaten.

The club faced a lean spell after this, and they went out in the opening round of the following year's championship before Kilfinny, 1-4 to 0-4, at Ballingarry, after a very hard fought encounter.

## THE OLD ABRAHAM TEAM

With that game passed the bulk of the old Abraham team, the fame of which has been handed down in verse, still popular in Rathkeale:

There's none of you but must have heard  
Of the boys of the Abraham team

It's been often told in story,  
It's been sung in poet's theme.  
They have played all Erin over  
By her mountain, dale and stream  
They've won honour, fame and glory  
Did those lads of the Abraham team.

When championships each year came round  
Their title they'd defend,  
You'd hear them cry—yes we will go  
We'll meet them—foe or friend.  
They'd never whine like cowards  
Nor keep up row or spleen,  
They'd strike with might for Rathkeale's right  
Would those lads of the Abraham team.

Their followers were many  
All around the country's side,  
They were grey haired men and women

They were blushing youths and brides;  
Every lad and lass admired them  
From Adare to Ballysteen,  
When ere they'd pass with gallant dash,  
Those sons of the Abraham team.

Their backers were more staunch and true

Than stood on Vinegar Hill,  
They were Tom Markham—  
Labours' Chief

And Dawson—Wilton's King.  
From Reens the Geary's would come in,

They'd loud and madly scream.  
Hold tight—ye'er going to win the day,

Bold lads of the Abraham team.

Our Captain was Bill Sheahan,  
The bravest of the brave;  
Who'd fight our right with lion might,

And never be dismayed.  
He'd give his orders out aloud  
And the line would madly scream,

Three cheers for Bill—to-day he'll win,  
With his boys of the Abraham team.

Ned Kennedy was our forward  
And poor old Scully, too,  
Who'd splash at balls like lightning,

The net to put them through;  
Backed up by Quin and Griffin  
From wings both left and right,  
Who'd stand like stalwarts un-

assailed  
No matter by what might.

In the centre was Jack Kirby  
And big Mick Keating fine,  
Mick Madigan and Paddy Gib-

burns  
Beside them on each line;  
When we would get a loose ball,  
Like deers we'd run you bet,  
We'd nose it up—draw left or right

To land it towards the net.

Bill Costelloe and Bill Hanrahan helped

To charge when we were pressed,  
Assisted by Joe Connors  
Who now plays with the blest;

At their back was Pat and Eddie  
Like a steel or concrete wall,  
In our goals was poor Jack Murray

Who could stop a cannon's ball.

We used have Nolley Casey  
Who would play where ere he liked,

Dick Naughton and Jim Connors

Who came in from famed

Reens Pike;

Big Jim Murray with Tom

Donoghue

Who would flatter all they'd

fall,

And last, but not the least of

us,  
Our right wing back—Dox Wall.

But Scully, Gilburns, Connors,

Jack—all are dead,

Yet their memory is still with

us,  
Though up their souls have fled;

In heaven above we hear them,  
Though it be a transient dream,  
Praying for all Gaels they played

with  
In that good old Abraham team.

What's left of us are old and

grey,  
Our arms no longer strong;

God gives us all a shortened

day,  
The longest is not long.

But we have lads around us,  
Our honours who esteem,  
To score the goals that now

we'd miss  
Old Gaels of the Abraham

team.

Part 8



# Bill Sheahan Of Rathkeale

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

**B**ILL Sheahan was the last surviving member of the group of Gaels that assembled in the autumn of 1902 and formed the West Limerick Divisional Board of the G.A.A. The Chairman elected on that occasion was William Hough, of Monagea, father of the Limerick All-Ireland hurling captain of 1918, who is still doing trojan work for the G.A.A. as Treasurer of the Munster Council. John Collins of Newcastle West was appointed Treasurer, and the post of Secretary went to another great Gaelic worker, in C. C. O'Rourke, of Abbeyfeale.

A hurling game which aroused much interest around this period was the meeting of Monagea and Ballingarry in the final of the Newcastle West Tournament, which the former won, 5-4 to 3-2, after a top notch struggle.

## THE TEAMS.

The teams on that occasion will be recalled with interest:

**Monagea**—D. Begley (captain), T. Sheehan, J. Hogan, W. King, M. Danaher, B. C. Danaher, Moses McCarthy, D. Shanahan, P. Hough, P. Hogan, M. King, M. Shanahan, D. Greene, P. O'Connell, B. J. Danaher, J. Hennessy, B. King.

**Ballingarry**—C. J. Keeffe (captain), E. Reidy, J. Cahill, J. Burke, D. Noonan, P. Noonan, E. Fitzgibbon, J. Conway, J. Cathrell, J. Hourigan, M. Hourigan, J. O'Keeffe, W. Clifford, P. Keating, H. McDonnell, J. O'Grady, C. O'Connor.

The same pair met again a few weeks later at Newcastle West, where another great crowd were treated to a tense and exciting game, which Ballingarry won by the narrowest of margins, 2-4 to 2-3, thus reversing the verdict of the previous meeting.

The early years of the century were idle ones as far as the games of the Gael were concerned in Rathkeale parish, but that did not mean that Bill Sheahan was inactive. Far from it!

## CAREER AS REFEREE.

By this time he had been elected a member of the then local District Council, and in the late autumn of 1903 he opened what proved a very successful career as a referee. On the occasion of his first important engagement he demonstrated his versatility by handling the Senior Hurling Championship game in which Monagea beat Croom by "an excursion," 5-18 to 1-0; and then turned around to take charge in football between Pallaskenry and Feenagh—a match that had to be abandoned a few minutes before full time because of failing light.

Bill had the "Abrahams" back in the hurling lists by the spring of 1904, and in their first match, for the County Senior Hurling Championship, the reconstructed side beat Patrickswell, 2-6 to 0-5.

Larry Roche was the man responsible for one of the most courageous ventures ever undertaken by any county. It was the visit of a team of Limerick hurlers and athletes to London during the Whit of 1904.

The London-Irish were holders of the All-Ireland senior hurling title at the time—the only occasion the crown crossed the seas, and Larry challenged the All-Ireland champions.

## CHALLENGE ACCEPTED.

The challenge was accepted, and the Limerick party arrived in the English metropolis on Whit Sunday morning and remained there until the following Tuesday night. The visit was an outstanding success, the Limerick party being lavishly entertained by Mr. Liam McCarthy, President of the London County Board of the G.A.A., and the members of the Irish National Club.

It is of interest that the Cup, now the trophy for the All-Ireland Senior Hurling, winning county, was presented by the same Liam McCarthy—and Limerick were first to win it, when Bob McConkey carried it in triumph from Croke Park after defeating Dublin in the 1921 All-Ireland Final.

On Whit Monday, May 23rd, 1904, the venture paid off when five thousand spectators were at Elm Park Grounds, Lea Bridge, to see the Limerick lads beat the All-Ireland champions, 3-4 to 3 points.

## THE LIMERICK TEAM.

The Limerick team: Tim Lloyd (captain), W. Ryan, M. Creamer (Caherline); J. Herbert, M. McCarthy (Castleconnell); M. Danaher (Murroe), M. Quinlan (Bruff), Bill Sheahan (Rathkeale), P. J. Kelly, O. D. Coll (Bruree); M. Clifford, M. Barry, E. Gibbons (Ballyagran); P. J. Leahy, L. Roche (Cregane); T. Flynn (goal), J. W. O'Brien (Kilfinane).

Limerick athletes in addition, who competed at the sports which

followed included O. D. Coll, J. O'Regan (Martinstown) and J. J. Leahy. The successes they secured were: 880 yards flat, won by O'Regan; relay race, won by O. D. Coll, J. O'Regan, P. J. and J. J. Leahy; running high jump, won by P. J. Leahy at 6 ft. 1½ ins., with his brother Joe second. Jim Herbert was second in the hurling long puck.

The London lads returned the visit on September 24th of that year. They were met at the Railway Terminus by thousands of citizens accompanied by two bands, and given a rousing reception. They were then escorted to Geary's Hotel, where they were entertained to dinner, at which Larry Roche presided. In attendance were Ald. Michael Joyce, M.P., and Ald. John Daly, and an address of welcome was presented.

## SHANNONSIDE TEAM.

The following day, they crossed camans with Limerick at the Markets Field, and lost to the home side, 4-11 to 2-6. The Shannonside team on this occasion was:—

Tim Lloyd (captain), W. Ryan, P. Creamer (Caherline), M. Flynn, goal (Kilfinane); M. Feely (Croom), M. Whelan (Bruff), J. Mackey, M. McCarthy (Castleconnell), M. Shinnors (Kilteely), Tommy O'Brien, Jim Flanagan (Young Ireland), M. Danaher, M. Horan (Murroe); Bill Sheahan, Paddy Flaherty (Rathkeale); J. Butler (Cappamore), T. Sheehan (Monagea).

The annual Limerick County Convention held at the Town Hall on Wednesday, March 30th, 1904, was one of the liveliest Bill attended, and the contests for the official positions were particularly keen. The patriot parish priest of Abbeyfeale—the famous Father Casey—was in the chair.

The Secretary, Mr. P. J. Hayes, had a very pleasant story for the delegates for the number of clubs had increased from 36 to 50, and they had a credit balance on the year's working—an unusual occurrence at the period.

## HAD TO FIGHT FOR THEIR POSITIONS.

All the officials had to fight for their positions. Larry Roche got the chair by 39 votes to 35 for "Spencer" Lyons of Croom Castle and P. J. Hayes held on to the Secretaryship, the voting in this case being 37 to 32 for Mr. Lundon, and 14 for Mr. Guinane. Jack Murphy was the only unopposed candidate and he got the Treasurership without a fight.

"Spencer" Lyons expressed dissatisfaction with the proceedings, and he lodged an appeal with the Munster Council, which, at a meeting held in the Commercial Hotel, Limerick, ruled the Limerick Convention illegal, and ordered a new one. The Central Council, at a meeting in Killarney on May 22nd, confirmed this ruling.

The new County Convention ordered by the Munster Council assembled at the Town Hall on June 15th. Very Rev. W. Casey, P.P., Abbeyfeale, again presided.

## THE BIG EVENT.

The atmosphere was charged with electricity and it was evident that the fight for the chair was again to be the big event, with the clubs almost evenly divided on the question.

After a heated debate a compromise was arrived at, when Larry Roche and "Spencer" Lyons, the rival candidates, agreed to withdraw if Father Casey accepted the chairmanship. The Abbeyfeale pastor eventually agreed and the crux was resolved.

P. J. Hayes retained the Secretaryship, by 51 votes to 34, cast for Tommy Lundon, and Bill Sheahan got his first official position, outside his local club, when he was elected County Treasurer. Larry Roche was appointed Limerick representative on the Central Council, with "Spencer" Lyons and Tim Lloyd appointed to the Munster Council.

Part 9

# Bill Sheahan Of Rathkeale

(CONTINUED)

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH.

**B**ILL Sheahan often spoke of the part Denis ("Spencer") Lyons of Croom Castle played in the affairs of the G.A.A., and of how his untimely death, towards the end of 1904, caused such a shock in Gaelic circles.

Known throughout Ireland as a very capable administrator and most efficient referee, his magnificent figure was certain of admiration even amidst the flower of Southern manhood. His imposing presence was a familiar one on Gaelic fields, and his work was ever on behalf of the native games, with whose progress his keenest interests were bound up. Bill often said that the history of "Spencer's" connection with G.A.A. affairs would almost be the story of the early days of the Association in Limerick, and more than once its actual existence owed not a little to his exertions and popularity.

A few years before his death he was primarily responsible for its revival, following the bad break caused by the "Parnell Split," and as Chairman of the Co. Board he had been associated with all the vicissitudes of the movement, and despite temporary crises and passing controversies, had always the respect and support of the majority of the Limerick Gaels.

### SURVIVAL OF A PAST AGE.

He was a survival of a past age when a universal desire to participate and encourage sport prevailed amongst our people, and his influence and encouragement were ever exerted to maintain the recreations and pastimes of the Gael intact. Socially and publicly he was highly esteemed, and his generous, kindly disposition and remarkable physique were sadly missed when death claimed him ere even the prime of manhood was reached, leaving a void that was not filled for many a day.

The County Board subsequently marked their appreciation of his services to the games by erecting a memorial to his memory.

### FAMOUS SENIOR FOOTBALL MATCH.

Bill Sheahan was appointed to fill the vacancy as Limerick representative on the Munster Council, caused by the death of "Spencer" Lyons.

Bill Sheahan refereed a famous senior football match in the mid-summer of 1905, in which Abbeyfeale beat Castlemahon, 0-7 to 0-3, in the West Limerick decider. Bill showed me the list of the Abbeyfeale players he got on the occasion. They were: J. Horan, capt.; P. Colbert (goal), J. Horgan, P. Maloney, W. Horan, J. Collins, P. Collins, J. J. Collins, T. Brown, D. Doody, P. Connell, D. McCarthy, J. Cahill, R. Finnerty, W. O'Connor, P. Enright, J. Lyons.

Bill figured in a different capacity the following Sunday at the Markets Field, where he played for Rathkeale against Ballingarry in the West Limerick Senior Hurling final, which the lads from the "Garden Town" won with surprising ease, 4-3 to 0-7. Ballingarry were later beaten by Cappamore, 3-7 to 1-5, in the county final.

### BECAME COUNTY BOARD TREASURER.

Bill Sheahan became Treasurer

of the County Board at the annual county convention held at the Town Hall, Limerick, on October 11th, 1905, and at which Very Rev. W. Casey, P.P., Abbeyfeale, presided. He defeated Albie Quillinan (who afterwards held the position of Treasurer of the Munster Council for many seasons) for the post by 16 votes to 6.

Ballyagran and Rathkeale played a terrific game at the Markets Field on May 13th, 1906, and after some great bouts of tough, hard hurling, the result was a draw at 2-5 each. The referee was Charlie Holland, who was to play such an important role in Limerick Gaelic affairs in after years. The re-play did not take place until August 19th, when Rathkeale won, 1-10 to 1-5. Bill often said that this was one of the hardest games he played in.

### MICHAEL CUSACK.

Michael Cusack, the founder of the G.A.A., died during 1906, and Bill often spoke of the "schoolmaster from Clare," and of a few occasions when he met that great figure, who was a host in himself and a commanding presence in any company.

Photographs of the founder give many the impression that Cusack lived to be a very old man; but that was not the case, for he died at the comparatively early age of 59.

With his passing not only died the founder, but the living embodiment of the G.A.A. Seldom have an institution and the man who conceived it been so absolutely the reflection of each other.

Through many vicissitudes, Cusack saw it grow and saw it attached — from within and without. He exulted in the first and never wavered in the second phases of its existence.

### GREAT CONTRAST.

Between the man of storms confronted with opponents or renegades, and the men of joyous happiness when expanding in the companionship of congenial friends the contrast was great.

Cusack always stressed the fact that it was not merely as an athletic organisation he founded the G.A.A. His ambition was far more patriotic. To found an athletic association to foster native games and imbued with the highest ideals of nationalism was Cusack's desire. He sowed the seed and lived to enjoy the harvest.

He determined on dis-associating Irish pastimes from the games of the English garrison—a factor which appealed to the imagination of the young men of his day, because athleticism and patriotism were inseparably associated in the scheme Cusack put before the historic gathering at Thurles that November day of 1884.

### A STRIKING FIGURE.

Michael Cusack was a striking figure of a man—distinguished looking in any company. Of medium height, his features were handsome, framing dark eyes penetrating and serious looking. His hair was jet black, so also was the flowing, well trimmed beard, topping well proportioned shoulders, carried with majestic grace as he

walked in the self-reliant, even combative, manner of one well destined to lead a great organisation.

The effect was heightened by the large blackthorn he invariably carried, and intensified by the broad brimmed soft hat, long, black coat and knee breeches he always wore.

### BEGAN LIFE AS N.T.

Born at Carron, Co. Clare, he began life as a national teacher in the West of Ireland. In succession, he held appointments as tutor in the family of Lord Gough, English and mathematical master in St. Colman's College, Newry; Professor in Blackrock and Clongowes Wood Colleges, before opening his well known "grinding" establishment at 4 Gardiners Place, Dublin.

His income from the last mentioned quickly mounted to four figures and when he founded the G.A.A. he was earning £1,500 a year—almost a king's ransom in those days.

He was too keenly interested in national affairs to spend his whole time teaching. The unselfish work of the I.R.B. he deeply admired and his sympathies were with the men identified with the '67 movement.

### HIS ANTIDOTE TO ALIEN INFLUENCES.

He was sensible enough, however, to see that the Ireland of that day was not ripe for rebellion and his antidote to the alien influences which were weaning the young men from the cause of Irish independence was the establishment of a national athletic association.

A trenchant writer and a ready and fluent speaker, he used these qualities to the full in the great work of his lifetime—the foundation of the G.A.A.

He died a poor man, as far as worldly goods are concerned, but he left a rich heritage—an organisation of immense value to Ireland and with which his name shall be forever imperishably associated.

Part 10

## GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

## Bill Sheahan Of Rathkeale

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

**B**ILL often said that one of the toughest football games fought in the West was that played at Gouldbourne Bridge for the final of the Divisional Senior Championship of 1906.

It was a terrific struggle all through, fought on a pitch that was hard as iron on a cold, frosty evening in February, 1907. The teams were level nearly all the hour and Abbeyfeale scored the odd point that gave them victory, almost with the last kick of the game, to win 0-4 to 0-3 for their opponents, Templeglantine.

Bill was able to give me the teams that played in that unforgettable decider. They were:—

**Abbeyfeale**—D. McCarthy (Captain), P. Maloney, P. O'Connell, R. Buckley, D. Doody, J. Horgan, W. Horan, J. Downey, D. Hartnett, J. Hartnett, P. Colbert, P. Collins, J. Collins, W. O'Connor, P. Enright, P. Woulfe, D. Sweeney.

**Templeglantine**—M. King (Captain), M. Kelly, Jimmie Donoghue, John Donoghue, W. Dunworth, W. Dee, Mick Dee, Maurice Dee, P. Flynn, D. Riordan, J. Moloney, W. Moloney, D. Sullivan, M. Woulfe, D. Dore, T. Horan, M. Lacey.

When the Gaels gathered for the annual County Convention a few weeks later there was a recurrence of the trouble experienced some years before, and this actually resulted in another "split" between the clubs of the county.

When the election of Chairman was reached at the Convention there was some surprise when Charlie Holland of the city was nominated to oppose the outgoing official, Willie Naughton of Bruff. On a vote, following a heated discussion, the latter won narrowly—

19 votes to 18.

A revote was demanded, on the grounds that some members had temporarily left the room, and this was agreed to. This time the verdict was reversed, and Charlie Holland got the post on a vote of 21 to 19.

Bill Sheahan was re-elected Treasurer, and the other officers elected were: M. Madigan, also of Rathkeale, Vice-Chairman; P. J. Hayes, Secretary; Paddy Leahy, the well-known athlete, representative on the Central Council, and J. A. Collins and P. O'Reilly, delegates to the Munster Council.

**A PROTEST.**

After the elections were completed a protest was made about alleged irregularities in the conduct of same, and when the Convention refused to entertain this a considerable section of delegates left, and proceeded to Finn's Restaurant, William Street, where they held a meeting, presided over by the outgoing County Chairman, Willie Naughton. C. C. O'Rourke of Abbeyfeale acted as Secretary and the others present, according to a subsequent press report, were: W. Horan and J. Downey (Abbeyfeale), M. Whelan (Bruff), O. D. Coll (Bruree), J. D. O'Neill (Caherline), Joseph Herbert (Castleconnell), E. Halvey (Croom), J. J. Clancy and M. Clifford (Fedamore), J. O'Neill (Hospital), W. O'Grady (Kilmallock), M. Kelly (Kilfinane), T. Shanahan (Monagea), Michael Ryan (Pallas) and P. Markham (St. Patrick's).

This meeting was a prolonged one, and it decided not to recognise the Board elected that day. It agreed on calling a new Convention for April 6th to form a new County Board.

**TWENTY CLUBS REPRESENTED.**

This Convention duly assembled at the Town Hall and twenty clubs were represented. They were:—Young Irelands, Kilfinane, Caherline, Cappamore, Bruff, Abbeyfeale, Tournafulla, Croom, Ardagh, Pallas, St. Patrick's, Dromcollogher, Bruree, Kilmallock, Fedamore, Hospital, Castleconnell, Ballingarry, Athea and Elton.

The officers elected at this meeting were: C. C. O'Rourke, Chairman; J. McSweeney, Vice-Chairman; M. Ryan and P. J. Hartnett, Treasurers; W. Naughton, Secretary; C. Halvey, Assistant Secretary; C. C. O'Rourke, Delegate to Central Council; W. Naughton and J. D. O'Neill, representatives on the Munster Council.

The Munster Council stepped in when the rival representatives claimed their seats on that body and they decided that in order to regularise matters another County Convention should be called—the third in three months—forming a rather unique situation.

This duly assembled and proved successful, for the differences were satisfactorily bridged, and the following executive appointed to supersede the two rival ones:—Larry Roche, Chairman; Jim Riordan, Vice-Chairman; Bill Sheahan, Treasurer; P. J. Hayes, Secretary, with Paddy Leahy on the Central Council, and J. F. Collins and L. Roche the Munster delegates.

**MANY SUCCESSES.**

The Rathkeale Abrahams senior hurling team were going particularly strong around this period, and they had many successes to their credit. Their stoutest opponents at the time were Ballyagran and they met in major contests eight times between 1904 and 1910. Ballyagran played some of Limerick's greatest athletes on their team then, including three of the famous Leahy brothers, Joe, Mick and Tom, with Larry Roche and John Joe Bresnihan. The great Mick Clifford was their captain.

Rathkeale had a notable victory in 1906, when they beat the pick of Kerry for a silver cup at Tralee. This game was in aid of the Catholic church in Listowel, and the organisers included Austin Stack, Dick Fitzgerald and Michael J. Moran, who was Secretary of the Kerry County Board.

The Rathkeale lads were very popular everywhere they went and were kept busy Sunday after Sunday participating in tournament games during the long summer months. It was a proud boast of the team that they won the greatest selection of prizes, notably medals, watches and jerseys, of any team in the West during their heyday.

**BIG AMBITION REALISED.**

They realised a big ambition at Ballyagran on August 4th, 1907, when they again qualified for the County Senior Hurling Final, with a fine win over the Tournafulla Wolfe Tones, 3-7 to 2-4.

In the County decider, played at the Markets Field on September 22nd, they met old rivals in Caherline, then enjoying a great period of hurling supremacy. Captained by Tim Lloyd, they hit top form against the Abrahams, who responded magnificently, and for three-quarters of the hour the teams were neck and neck in as thrilling a hurling tussle as was ever fought in the Field of the Markets—scene of some memorable struggles.

Nine minutes from time the sides were level: Caherline, 1-5; Rathkeale, 2-2; when a Western defender made an unfortunate mistake, as the result of which Caherline got through for a simple goal. The puck out fell short and the Caherline full forward had a pot shot for the net, to complete the most sensational minute in Limerick championship hurling for a long time. The Eastern lads, now two goals in the lead, fell back in defence to meet a fast mounting Rathkeale recovery and succeeded in holding the lines intact in a hectic ending. Caherline won, 3-5 to 2-2, a disastrous result for the Rathkeale men, who did not deserve to be beaten in that manner after the great display they gave.

**COMPENSATION.**

They, however, gained some little compensation when they won out in the Ballingarry Tournament, defeating some fine teams in the course of the competition, and crowned matters a little later by winning their own Tournament, in which all the leading teams of the West were participants.

Bill Sheahan played a prominent part in all these games and his active Gaelic life at the time can best be appreciated when one realises that, in addition to his work as Treasurer of the County Board, he refereed some of the most important games, being engaged at this work on almost every Sunday that he was not in action as a player. And on more than a few occasions he acted the dual role of player and referee in consecutive games, after taking charge of the fixtures on behalf of the County Board, in addition.

Part II

## GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

## Bill Sheahan Of Rathkeale

(CONTINUED)

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH.

TOWARDS the end of 1907, and within a few days of each other, Limerick Diocese lost two of its greatest priests, whilst Gael-dom mourned the passing of a pair who had accomplished trojan work in the cause of the Gael.

Bill Sheahan was a personal friend of both and, in his capacity as an official of the County Board, he represented the G.A.A. at the obsequies.

The heart of many a Gaelic enthusiast was saddened on Christmas Day when the news spread that Rev. Timothy Lee, of Croom, had departed to his Maker.

Father Lee was a great Gael and an ardent worker in the Irish-Ireland movement. Born in 1850, after his ordination at Maynooth in 1879 he went to Limerick City and acted as a teacher in the Diocesan Seminary for two years, after which he went as a Curate to St. John's, where he spent the best part of his priestly life.

As President of St. John's Temperance Society for a lengthy spell, he took a keen interest in the Gaelic Football Club then attached to the Society and which he was mainly instrumental in founding, a short time after the establishment of the G.A.A.

St. John's footballers were a grand combination, and Bill Sheahan first made the acquaintance of Father Lee when he visited him to arrange for a visit of "St. John's" to Rathkeale to participate in one of the big tournaments organised there in the early G.A.A. days.

## HIGHLIGHT OF CAREER.

Highlight of the St. John's career was the occasion they triumphed over the famed Commercials in a much talked of challenge and for which Father Lee presented a set of medals. It was a source of great satisfaction to him when St. John's triumphed, after a magnificent display against a combination that only a few months earlier had won the proud title of All-Ireland champions.

Father Lee ensured that his name would be held for all time in Gaelic remembrance when he was the chief originator of the move, in 1903, that resulted in the establishment of the great Thomond Feis, which was first held in the June of 1904. Father Lee presided at the meeting of Limerick Gaels that set the idea of the Feis in motion, and although he left the city later in 1903, to become Parish Priest of Croom, he never lost his interest in the Feis and was very closely associated with its organisation to the time of his much-lamented

death a few years later.

The Thomond Feis long continued a memorial to the enthusiasm and zeal of a great priest, and in its heyday was one of the biggest Gaelic events of the year. After his death, the committee decided that the best memorial they could raise to his memory was a special scholarship tenable at an Irish college for competition amongst Limerick school children. This, they felt, would serve the double purpose of a memorial to Father Lee, besides propagating the work to which he devoted such energy and enthusiasm—the Irish language and culture.

The Gaels were just recovering from the shock of the unexpected passing of Father Lee when they were stunned with the news that the patriot priest of Abbeyfeale—Very Rev. William Casey, P.P., was no more.

## ONE OF THE GREATEST GAELS.

Father Casey was one of the greatest of Gaels, and certainly the most respected figure connected with the G.A.A. in the county. This was illustrated time and again, and in an especial way on the occasion of the frequent disputes that were a feature of the days when the Association were experiencing the "growing pains" that any organisation has to encounter and weather. Father Casey was a real friend then, and he often proved the bridge that closed the gap and healed the divisions, which could otherwise have destroyed the movement in its infancy.

From his arrival in Abbeyfeale in 1871, the influence of Father Casey was manifest in the parish. For many years the life and soul of the national movement in the county, it was only natural that when the G.A.A. was founded he should be behind that organisation wholeheartedly.

He lost no time in rallying the parish to the games of the Gael, and although football was his own favourite game and the choice of the majority of the Abbeyfeale youth, he did everything in his power to encourage the playing of hurling, which he recognised as the greatest and most distinctive of our national pastimes.

It was soon evident that although the mind of the great pastor was ever labouring for the spiritual, material and social elevation of the people as a whole, his heart, next to the fulfilment of the duties of his sacred office, was with the "young blood" as he used to call them—the Gaels of the parish and county.

His enthusiasm and interest did

not pass unrewarded, for it has been truly said that no man of his time wielded such influence with the youth of Limerick. With them his word and presence were more powerful in critical moments on the hurling and football field than all other influences combined. His support swelled them with justifiable pride and spurred them to all out effort for he left no doubt in any mind concerning the pleasure he derived from a good performance by any of his lads. It was patent for all to see that to be amongst them made him young again; their victories swelled his heart with boyish enthusiasm, but none of his selection ever felt more despondent than he did when fortune smiled the other way.

## FLUENT IRISH SPEAKER.

A fluent Irish speaker, he took a keen interest in the language movement, was Chairman of the West Limerick Coisde Ceanntair of the Gaelic League and the most prominent figure at every Aeridheacht. He directed a thriving branch in Abbeyfeale, which was then the centre of much activity on behalf of the native tongue.

He formed a splendid brass band in the parish, and of this he was very proud. It travelled to all the great national demonstrations of the period and was always accorded an honoured place, particularly at Land League gatherings, in which cause Father Casey was such a powerful advocate. Seeing the homesteads of some of his parishioners burned to the ground made him a relentless opponent thenceforward of tyrannic landlordism.

Father Casey, however, was perhaps at his greatest as an advocate of temperance. The local Temperance Hall was his creation and many humorous tales are recorded of his efforts to capture the erring ones. I remember a particularly pleasant evening many years ago in Abbeyfeale, in company with the late J. D. Hartnett and Bill Sheahan, in which many stories were swapped in this regard.

## A STORY.

One of these relates an occasion he happened on a party of three who, having forgotten the pledge, retired to a private house and were revelling in a high time when his reverence appeared.

There was no escaping the pledge and the defensive arguments drifted to compromise. No, he would not allow them two drinks, nor even one for the morrow.

The party had been imbibing "mulled" stout through the medium of an old tea-pot commandeered for the occasion and, as a last resort, one of them, pointing to the apparently harmless old pot near the fire, asked indifferently: "Would you let us drink what's in the tea-pot itself?" "Oh," replied his reverence, mistaking its contents, "you may drink all you like out of the tea-pot."

After the pledge they did, and were found two days later worse than ever by his reverence carrying out of the letter of the pledge through the teapot. Father Casey became suspicious of "teapot" pledges after that.

Father Casey died penniless. Well known and respected as a great Irishman, it is questionable if his patriotism exceeded his charity, for both have become inseparably connected with his name.

The parishioners erected a worthy monument in the Square at Abbeyfeale to the memory of this great man but, perhaps, the greatest tribute of all was the tear that dropped from the cheek of many a poor old traveller of the roads of West Limerick as he offered a silent prayer for one who so faithfully followed in the footsteps of the Master.

PART 12

## GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

## Bill Sheahan Of Rathkeale

(CONTINUED)

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH.

**B**ILL Sheahan was re-elected Treasurer of the County Board at the annual County Convention held at the Town Hall, Limerick, on March 25th, 1908. With Willie Naughton of Bruff, he was also appointed to represent Limerick on the Munster Council.

Bill was able to present a very satisfactory report to the Convention, in which he stated the board had a very successful season, during which they presented six sets of medals, and carried forward a credit balance of £9 14s. 9d. The other officers elected were: Chairman, Larry Roche; Vice-Chairman, Jim Riordan; Secretary, Charlie Holland; Assistant Secretary, Ned Halvey; with Larry Roche as County representative on the Central Council.

## LIST OF DELEGATES.

Bill preserved a list of the delegates attending that Convention, and it will be read with interest, as showing the men prominent in Gaelic affairs in Limerick City and County half a century ago. They were: Michael Moore, J. Murphy, Murroe H.C.; J. Gleeson, J. McSweeney, Young Ireland H.C.; E. Browne, P. J. Hartnett, Tournafulla H.C.; E. Jackson, C. O'Kelly, Kilmallock F.C.; T. Caulfield, W. Naughton, Bruff H.C.; P. Madden, W. Fitzgerald, Foynes F.C.; John Kirby, Gerald Scully, Rathkeale H.C.; J. A. Collins, Michael Nix, Newcastle West F.C.; P. Markham, Michael Halvey, St. Patrick's H.C.; Michael Fitzgerald, Thomas O'Kelly, Askeaton F.C.; Michael Ryan, D. M. Casey, Pallas F.C.; Richard Wagner, Ardagh F.C.; M.

Dwyer, M. McKnight, Commercials F.C.; D. Drew, Ardagh H.C.; D. Riordan, P. Hartnett, Athea F.C.; P. O'Leary, Ballyagran H.C.; T. Crowley, Michael Lacey, Templeglantine F.C.; M. F. Keating, Cappamore F.C.; Mick Feely, Michael Bourke, Croom H.C.; J. Egan, Dromcollogher H.C.; J. D. O'Neill, P. Riordan, Caherline H.C.; W. O'Brien, E. Aherne, Dromcollogher F.C.; P. J. Herr, T. Hartnett, Tobernagh F.C.

## THE 1907 CHAMPIONSHIP.

The 1907 Western championships in both hurling and football were very toughly contested and some thrilling games were witnessed in the course of the competition. Feeling ran high and when the final stages were reached the Western Board decided that a well-enclosed pitch was essential, so they took the unprecedented step of playing both divisional deciders in the city, at the then popular Markets Field enclosure.

A big crowd travelled in to see the games, which were hot and vigorously contested, Foynes defeating Askeaton in football, 1-8 to 0-3, and Croom triumphing over Rathkeale in hurling, 5-9 to 1-11. These matches were not played until May 10th, 1908.

Some weeks later, Rathkeale travelled to Croagh where they played Ballingarry in the opening round of the 1908 Senior Hurling Championship. This proved a most enjoyable and exciting game, hard fought all the way, which Rathkeale won 1-13 to 1-7.

After that success, Rathkeale fought their way to the Western

final, in which they again met their great Croom rivals, with Croagh the venue on this occasion. It was another terrific tussle with the sides on level terms several times during the hour, and Croom a shade lucky to be ahead at the end, 3-9 to 3-6. Mr. Jim Riordan refereed, and the teams were:—

## TEAMS.

Croom—L. Rael (Captain), J. Mullane, M. Feely, P. Buskin, W. Buskin, M. Mangan, T. Mangan, P. Mangan, J. Griffin, T. Griffin, T. Bourke, T. Hayes, John Lyons (goal), P. Lyons, M. Burns.

Rathkeale — Bill Sheahan (Captain), Paddy Flaherty, E. Flaherty, T. Quinn, G. Scully, Joseph Connors, James Connors, W. Hanrahan, M. Hayes, T. Glenny, J. Nolan, P. McDonnell, M. Casey, P. Gilburn, J. Kirby.

The Western Football Final was fought out between Glin and Newcastle West; and was a dour struggle fought at a hard pace, which Glin won, five points to two.

The decision on the field was, however, challenged in the council chamber, Newcastle West holding that their opponents played four members of the Ballyhahill Club. They proved their case before the Munster Council, and later the Central Council, and were awarded the Western crown. The teams that played in the final were:

Glin—John Dunne (Captain), M. O'Shaughnessy, P. Fitzgerald, J. Sheehy, W. Quaid, Maurice O'Shaughnessy, J. Chandley, M. O'Donnell, P. McCoy, T. Culhane, P. Walshe, E. O'Connell, J. Thompson, J. Cusack, M. Dillane.

Newcastle West — J. Curtin (Captain), T. Reidy, G. Mulcahy, W. Reidy, E. Guina, D. O'Dwyer, T. O'Connell, C. O'Sullivan, M. Nix, T. Scanlon, P. Mulcahy, J. Sheehy, J. Fitton, T. Harte, T. Moore.

## SUDDEN PASSING OF PADDY HAYES.

Gaeldom lost a popular figure and Bill Sheahan one of his best friends, with the sudden passing of Paddy Hayes, of the Commercial Hotel, Limerick, on May 27th, 1909. An enthusiastic Gael and a true lover of native pastimes, Paddy Hayes was a Tipperary man who had come to reside in Limerick some twenty years earlier. He was exceedingly and deservedly popular, not alone in the city but all over the Munster province. An ardent worker, he was for many years Secretary of Limerick County Board, G.A.A., in which capacity Bill Sheahan came to be closely associated with him and to appreciate his worth. Few Gaelic fixtures were held in the southern province at which Paddy did not appear, either in his official capacity as County Secretary or handicapper, or as an enthusiastic spectator. Literally, like Bill Sheahan, he was everywhere with the Gaels, and no gathering of hurlers, footballers or athletes was complete without his presence. To use a colloquialism, his "heart and soul" was in the movement for the revival of native pastimes and he did Trojan work in the years following the Parnell Split to help revive the G.A.A. and get the games back in public favour.

It was no easy task to reconcile the warring sections and it took time and patience to achieve, but Paddy stuck to the job with a tenacity of purpose that had to be admired. He eventually succeeded in welding the pieces together again, restoring the unity in Limerick to such good purpose that the county was able to win its second great All-Ireland Senior Football crown in 1896 and follow-up the following year with its first All-Ireland Senior Hurling success, won by the brilliant band of Kilfinane caman wielders.

Paddy was also in the van of the great Limerick athletic revival and was closely associated with many sons of Garryowen who proved to the world their mastery in some of the distinctive events at which Irishmen always excelled. As a handicapper, he always displayed wonderful judgment and was chosen to officiate at some of the most important gatherings in the south and west.

His untimely passing left a void and old friends like Bill Sheahan mourned one who was a tower of strength and encouragement especially in dark and difficult days.

## GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

## Bill Sheahan Of Rathkeale

(CONTINUED)

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH.

**T**HE Rathkeale Hurling Club suffered a heavy loss in the autumn of 1909 by the death, at the early age of twenty-four, of one of their most promising players. Bill Sheahan always maintained that Paddy Gilburn would have been a Limerick hurling star had God spared him.

Bill lost two other good hurling friends in the early months of 1910. They were both great Co. net minders—Tommy Flynn of Kilfinane, at one time rated one of Ireland's best goalkeepers; and John Reidy of Balingarry, who was goalkeeper of the Limerick team (Kilfinane) selection, which won the 1897 All-Ireland Senior Hurling Championship.

The Gaelic revival was at its height in 1910 and Ring Irish College was established about this time. Limerick participated in a big hurling tournament organised to raise funds for the project, the trophy for which was a beautiful silver shield, weighing 56 lbs., the gift of Captain the Hon. Ottway Caffé, of Kilkenny, who with another popular Kilkenny figure, the Countess of Desart, was prominent in Gaelic League ranks.

**A SENSATION.**

Limerick created the sensation of the hurling year when they beat a fancied Cork side, 5-1 to 4-2, in a most exciting Munster Senior Hurling Championship game at Tralee on October 16th, 1910. The contrast with more modern times is illustrated in the "gate" of £58 collected at the venue, but in every other aspect the contest lived up to the highest level the Munster title fight has reached and was a heart throbbing struggle with the issue in the balance throughout an unforgettable last quarter, that remained a irragrant memory with many an old Limerick hurling fan to the end of his days.

Bill often spoke, and with evident relish, of that great day in Tralee. He said that the Limerick lads struck rare form and countered every move of the wily Corkmen in almost inspired manner. They fought with great determination, their hurling was magnificent, their combination excellent, their swiftness in getting possession of the ball and their long and well delivered shots were more than Cork could withstand.

The Shannonsiders got to a whirlwind start and set a terrific fast pace and the half-hour was definitely theirs, so much so that they were not flattered by the three-goal advantage they enjoyed at the interval.

Cork played better after the resumption and pulled every trick out of the bag in an effort to overhaul the leeway. For a time it looked as if they might succeed, and they surely would but for the terrific defence put up by a stone wall trio—Paddy Flaherty of Rathkeale and the brilliant Young Ireland pair—Tom Hayes and Timmie O'Brien. In a pulsating finish, the Limerick players kept up the pace and the tussle for the laurels was neck and neck. Defences prevailed in the last hectic minutes of a hurling epic, and Limerick won, 5-1 to 4-2.

**LIMERICK TEAM.**

The Limerick players on the occasion were:

"Tyler" Mackey, captain (Castleconnell), J. Burke, goal (Boher), Mick Feely Ter Mangan, Mick Mangan (Croom), J. Harrington, Ned Treacy, Egan Clancy, Con Scanlan (Fedamore), Tom Hayes, Timmie O'Brien (Young Ireland), J. Madden (Commercials), Paddy Flaherty (Rathkeale), S. Carroll, M. Danaher, Davy Conway, M. Sweeney (Castleconnell).

After this grand Munster victory came the anti climax—the most controversial All-Ireland Final in G.A.A. annals. Bill had the "Limerick Leader" report of that game carefully preserved, and some extracts from it will serve to illustrate the ill-luck of the Limerickmen.

"At Jones' Road, Dublin, was decided on yesterday one of the most closely contested All-Ireland finals which G.A.A. men have seen for many years. The day was dark and gloomy, the light being extremely bad in the second half of the play. Both teams looked what they were, the finest athletic combination which a country, famed the world over for its athletes, could produce. The Wexford men wore blue jerseys with yellow shoulders, while Limerick took the

field in the green and gold bars of Castleconnell.

"Limerick was first in the field and greeted with the cheers of their followers. They looked well and fit to do splendid battle for their county. Wexford soon arrived and showed well in the practice play which followed. The latter were large men of mighty strength and speed and looked likely to weigh more evenly than the Limerick men.

**A SCORE WITHIN A MINUTE.**

"In a few minutes referee Crowe had his men lined up, and the ball was thrown in, when one of the extraordinary bits of the Wexford good fortune, which stuck to the Leinstermen throughout the play intervened. A Wexfordman sent the ball forward, just into Mick Danaher, who, in the excitement of the opening pass, fumbled for a moment. He turned on the ball just as it was whipped by Cummins to Doyle, and sent home for the first score within a minute of the opening of play.

"The spirits of Wexford followers went up in a great cheer, answered by Limerick cries of 'fluke' and 'no fault, Danaher.' The game was young yet, and Limerick with brilliant dash were away, their powerful centre showing well in the ensuing tussle. Danaher was seen to great advantage, the powerful work between himself and "Tyler" Mackey holding up the Wexford centre to send the Shannonsiders attacking. 'Go on Garryowen,' 'Up Limerick' and matters looked good for the equaliser when Shortal saved magnificently.

"Wexford attacked, coming down the field in even distribution, moving and playing with perfect combination, and ending in a terrible onslaught on the Munster backs who stood well together to be eventually saved by a brilliant piece of hurling per T. Hayes.

"Up to this the power of 'Agin' Clancy had not been called upon but now he was seen outmanoeuvring the Wexford wings to bewilderment and sending the ball high into the Limerick forward line but no score resulted. From the clearance Mick Feely gathered at midfield, where he raised smartly and struck with unerring aim. Click! and away the sphere soared over the land of Wexford and between the upper posts.

**LIMERICK'S SLENDER LEAD.**

"Shortly afterwards Limerick were again in Wexford ground where they swarmed like an angry hive. Clancy, Mangan and Harrington did great work amongst the powerful backs and the green flag was suddenly hoisted, Clancy having scored a major. Limerick were leading by a point at the end of the first quarter and the enthusiasm of their followers knew no bounds.

"Tyler" Mackey secured after the puck out and was seen doing terrible execution around the Wexford centre. From a melee the ball travelled to Harrington and Roche of Wexford made one of the brilliant saves which characterised his play. Limerick emerged from the following centre play with the best of a hard struggle, in which Danaher, Feely and Mackey were prominent—the latter playing with extraordinary virile force. Then Clancy was hurt and while the Limerickmen were gathered round their injured comrade the referee restarted the play, with the result that the Wexford forward in possession, drove in a goal to which there was no defence. Clancy, the best wing player on the team, was replaced by B. O'Connor.

**PERFECT GOAL-KEEPING.**

"Limerick again attacked but Roche's goal keeping was perfection itself. Limerick again came into Wexford territory, fighting every inch of the ground, and were replied to by a charge in force from the Wexfordmen, which Danaher's strength stopped and broke up. The Wexford goal posts were once more the battle pitch but Roche was not to be denied. A 'seventy' to Wexford followed, and Scanlan saved brilliantly, Flaherty later making a splendid show against long odds. Limerick half-backs defended their goalman in grand style for a minute or so, but Cummins and Doyle would not be denied a major for Wexford. Limerick soon replied with a goal from a free, per Feely, to which Wexford replied with another major score. The half-time score stood: Wexford, 6-0; Limerick, 4-1, one of Limerick's

goals being in dispute.

"A Limerick dash opened the second half, but from a long clearance Cummins and Doyle had good fortune and sent in a goal for Wexford. Down travelled the sphere from Hayes' powerful stroke and sailed into the land of Wexford, where Scanlan whipped brilliantly, the ball travelling to Conway, who, in spite of sturdy opposition, raised the green flag for Limerick.

"The boys from Shannon shore then began to give Wexford a lesson in hurling. Wexford attacked but Hayes made a massive defence and cleared time and again. The game was now being played in semi darkness. Scanlan's and Treacy's clever play brought the ball to win and passed to Madden and Mangan, and a point for Limerick resulted.

**PLAYING THE GAME OF THEIR LIVES.**

"Wexford were beginning to feel the pace and fumbled a good deal. Limerick, except for one or two injured men—Feely, for instance, was limping painfully—were fresh and playing the game of their lives. Feely passed to Madden in the next few minutes, who scored the finest goal of the day. Wexford were now leading by four points (official score) and with fifteen minutes to play the Leinster combination looked almost broken.

"Limerick opened another attack but fortune sent back from T. O'Brien's long shot, and shortly Madden was seen among the Wexford backs and up went the green flag for Limerick once more.

"Go on, Garryowen; 'Up Limerick'; 'only a point between you, boys,' came in wild salvos from the side line. One point only remained to be made. Wexford were pumped out. The boys were working as they never worked before. Now, Tyler, the championship is yours. Broken hurleys are the order. 'Go on, boys.' 'Up, Limerick,' and then, 'Tis won,' a goal is driven in by the men of Sarsfield's county. The championship is Limerick's, when, what's that? The goal is disallowed by the goal umpires and left in dispute—number two.

"We settle down again. Limerick dashes down on Wexford's line, and settles there. A minute to go. Wexford clears to centre, the final whistle, charring the teams, Wexford joyous, and Limerick leaves the field—victors in everything except the official score, which stood: Wexford, 7-0; Limerick, 6-2."

**LIMERICK APPEAL.**

Three days later, at a meeting of the Limerick County Board, it was decided to appeal against the decision of the referee in that Limerick were disallowed a goal unfairly, and that Wexford scored a goal while a Limerick player lay injured on the ground.

The objection, through an oversight, was not lodged in duplicate, as required by rule and the Central Council refused to entertain it.

Part 14

# Bill Sheahan Of Rathkeale

(CONTINUED)

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH.

1911 was a year of great hurling enthusiasm in Sarsfield's County, and some magnificent fare was served both in the home arena and in the inter-county sphere.

The season opened on a high note with the Spencer Lyons Memorial Tournament Final, played at the Markets Field on February 12, before a great crowd. It was a terrific match, closely contested all the way and finished up in sensational fashion with Fedamore scoring a surprise but richly deserved win over the County champions, Castleconnell, 4-1 to 3-1.

Mr. Pat Mangan was the referee, and the winning players were: Con Scanlan, capt.; W. Clifford, goal; Stephen Gleeson, M. Bourke, M. Harrington, P. Shinnors, P. Cavanagh, M. Whelan, Ned Treacy, J. Quinlan, J. Ryan, Egan Clancy, J. Clancy, John Casey, P. Keane.

There was another surprise at the same venue a week later, where Young Ireland had a substantial win (5-4 to 1-0) over a fancied Croom side, composed of Pat Mangan, capt.; M. Toomey, goal; M. Mangan, T. Mangan, J. Mangan, J. Mullane, M. Mullane, T. Bourke, T. Hayes, E. Halvey, M. Feely, M. Bray, J. Lane, P. Lyons, J. O'Shea.

Thrills galore were the order in the County Final, played at the Markets Field on March 19, in which Young Ireland proved their worth with an exciting solitary point win over the title holders, Castleconnell, who had led Limerick to the All-Ireland Final the previous season.

A very big crowd enjoyed one of the greatest of Limerick hurling finals—an epic in which two great teams were neck and neck all through a thrill-packed hour, and won almost on time when Tom Hayes availed of a last minute free to notch the point that gave the city lads the crown, 4-2 to 4-1.

Mr. Jim O'Riordan refereed, and the teams were:—

**Young Ireland** — Tom Hayes, capt.; P. Scanlan, goal; J. Flanagan, M. Halvey, J. Creamer, J. McNamara, J. Ryan, P. Frawley, C. McGill, T. McMahon, J. Brennan, J. McSweeney, J. Murphy, T. O'Brien, F. Murphy.

**Castleconnell**—J. ("Tyler") Mackey, capt.; J. Ryan, goal; M. McCarthy, P. Vaughan; P. Herbert, J. Leonard, W. Carroll, C. Mackey, M. Sweeney, J. Benn, J. Vaughn, J. Carroll, B. O'Connor, M. Danaher, T. Brennan.

### GIANT-KILLING ACT

Another sensation was recorded at Adare on May 20 where another great muster saw Ballingarry do the giant-killing act when they ousted the title holders, Young Ireland, in the opening round of the 1911 championship, 3-4 to 2-4, after a hectic game that kept the spectators on their toes all the hour.

Bill always maintained that the Limerick Championship reached its peak of excellence that season, and it was his considered opinion that the quartette — Castleconnell, Yng. Ireland, Fedamore and Ballingarry of that period — were the most evenly balanced in the history of Shannon-side hurling.

And by way of demonstrating the high standard of the caman art in Limerick, contrasted with that of the clubs of other counties, the meeting of Castleconnell with one of the greatest of Munster club combinations — Dungourney, of Cork, at Killarney, on June 4, serves as a fine illustration, for the Limerickmen won, 6-4 to 3-2, having earlier ousted Thurles Blues at the Markets Field, 5-0 to 2-1.

Bill had a magnificent memory of that glorious June day at Killarney. It was of the terrific tussels between Tim Nagle and "Tyler" Mackey — the commencement of a rivalry that was to become the talk of Gaeldom.

"Taid," as they affectionately

called him, Bill told me, was one of the greatest midfielders he ever saw. Recalling the fierce duels and strenuous tussels for possession of the "horseskin" between "Taid" and the famous "Tyler" brought back to mind some unforgettable occasions, and also a note of deep sorrow that the great Corkman passed away in the very heyday of his splendid manhood.

Dealing with the Killarney display of the pair, Bill said the match was organised by the local Feis Committee and was for a special set of ornate gold medals. Before the game both teams were entertained by the Committee in charge, after which Bill and a few other Limerick supporters met the renowned Dungourney hurler, Jim Kelleher, rated by many as the greatest man that ever handled a caman.

Jim drew their attention to a young hurler and said: "That lad there is Timmie Nagle, the lad that's going to spike Tyler's guns to-day. Watch his style. He is very fast and snappy. This is his first inter-county game."

### KELLEHER THE GREAT

Those comments, coming from the lips of such a wonderful hurler as Kelleher, needless to say, caused the Limerick lads to take a great interest in the newcomer, who not only lived up to his captain's expectations in checking Tyler's desperate rushes, but was acclaimed by all sporting writers as the outstanding star in that memorable contest, which Castleconnell won, only to have the decision reversed a few weeks later by Dungourney at the Cork Athletic Grounds for the Ottway Cuffe Shield and gold medals, when the Corkmen won by 6 points to 5. In this terrible struggle for supremacy both teams were 5 points with about four minutes to go. Out of a ruck at midfield Nagle got possession, dribbling at top-speed down the left wing, then striking the leather and with a lovely shot put the winning point between the uprights. It was one of the most spectacular and thrilling passages Bill ever saw in any game. Ever after, when Cork and Limerick met, spectators could hear on all sides along the lines: "Look out for the exchanges between Nagle and Tyler to-day." They were truly worth watching.

Cork people had another opportunity of seeing the pair when Limerick were visitors to Cork Athletic Grounds on June 25th to play Cork in the final of the Brussels Hurling Tournament for the Stopford Green Cup and medals.

Limerick surprise defeat of Cork at Tralee in the previous year's Munster Championship whetted interest in the game, which attracted a great muster. A large contingent, accompanied by a Pipers' Band, travelled from Limerick.

### A HARD GAME

The game, one of the hardest witnessed in a Gaelic field for a long time, was commenced by Rev. Dr. Irwin, U.C.C., who threw in the ball. Despite a very plucky Limerick display, Cork created a surprise by their fine dash and spirit and were worthy if very narrow winners of a low-scoring game that kept the crowd shouting all the hour.

The Limerick players were:—"Tyler" Mackey, capt.; J. Ryan (goal), P. Vaughan, P. Herbert, J. Carroll, B. O'Connor (Castleconnell), C. Scanlan, E. Clancy, J. Clancy, M. Harrington, S. Gleeson (Fedamore), J. Madden, M. Madden (Commercials), T. Mangan, M. Feely (Croom), T. Hayes (Young Irelands), P. Flaherty (Rathkeale).

### VISITED WATERFORD

A few weeks later a Limerick selection visited Waterford to play Wexford, in a game that attracted

wide interest in view of the controversial nature of their 1910 All-Ireland final meeting. Neither team, however, was at full strength, but it proved an entertaining game, which Wexford won — 4-4 to 2-5.

A team of Irish-American hurriers drawn from Chicago and New York, who were on a tour of Ireland, played Limerick at the Markets Field on August 27th before 10,000 spectators. Two bands were present and Mr. G. O'B. Storan, a New York Police Inspector, threw in the ball. It proved a most entertaining game, which Limerick won—5-1 to 3-1.

Mr. Harry Boland, who was afterwards to gain an imperishable place in Irish history as a soldier of Ireland, was the referee, the winning players being: Mick Feely, capt.; M. Mangan, E. Halvey, J. O'Shea, T. Twomey (Croom), J. Madden (Commercials), P. Flaherty (Rathkeale), P. Treacy, M. Harrington, M. Bourke, C. Scanlan, E. Clancy, S. Gleeson (Fedamore), J. O'Donnell (Bruff), T. Hayes, M. Hayes (South Liberties).

Part 15

## GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

## Bill Sheahan Of Rathkeale

(CONTINUED)

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH.

**T**HE match between the Irish-American hurlers and Limerick, played at the Markets Field on August 27, 1911, introduced to the Limerick hurling public a great new county star, in the person of Jack Shea—a player who was highly respected in Rathkeale for a very sporting action, typical of the grand character he was.

Croom were playing Rathkeale in a vital championship test and the Deelside parish introduced a youth then coming to the fore as a hurling stylist, and who happened to be playing on Jack Shea — then coming into his heyday as a big hurling figure.

The Rathkeale lad was light and still of tender years. After a few minutes hurling it was obvious to Jack Shea that his opponent was fighting shy of a clash with him. Then Jack said: "Sonny, come into me, I won't hurt you." The lad took him at his word and gave Jack a few hard "roots" in the subsequent exchanges, but the great Croom man proved as good as his word, earning a respect in Rathkeale that old timers remembered to the end of his days.

## SIM WALTON.

Another veteran of those hectic days—John Madden, of the Commercials — reminded me of an incident in that game against the Irish-American lads. Playing with the visitors that memorable day at the Markets Field was the one and only Sim Walton, one of the greatest forwards hurling has known, and proud winner of seven All-Ireland medals in the black and amber jersey. Sim was at the peak of his hurling career at the period and "mad for the game," hence his appearance with the American side, although he never set foot on yankee soil. He swore John Madden (who was to go to America shortly afterwards) to secrecy when the latter recognised him.

John Madden is anxious to procure a photograph of the Limerick team that contested the controversial All-Ireland Final of 1910 with Wexford. He was a member of that Shannonside team and remembers a photograph being taken, but cannot recollect ever having seen it afterwards. He is anxious now to discover whether any old Limerick or Wexford enthusiast would have a copy of that historic photograph.

## HERO OF MUCH DISCUSSED MATCH.

Incidentally, John Madden was the hero of that much-discussed match and he had three great Limerick goals in the hectic closing stages, only to have the final one disallowed — a hotly disputed decision of the umpires that was the final culmination to a most unsatisfactory game in which Limerick were victims of some extraordinary decisions on the part of the umpires.

That this was easily Limerick's most unlucky hurling spell was illustrated even with greater emphasis in the 1911 Championship—the year of real Limerick hurling tragedy, Bill Sheahan always maintained.

Limerick had a rather uneventful road to the Munster Final that season. They beat Kerry at Lis-towel in the opening round, 6-5 to 1-2, and in the semi-final triumphed over Clare, at Tipperary Town, 10-5 to 6-1.

Tipperary created the sensation of the season by defeating a much fancied Cork side, 5-2 to 0-3, in the second semi-final, played at Dungarvan.

## LIMERICK-TIPPERARY FINAL

This left the road open for a Limerick-Tipperary final, and this was fixed for Cork Athletic Grounds on November 19.

It proved a most exciting decider. Around the third quarter Tipperary shot into what seemed a commanding lead, and were ahead by seven points ten minutes from time with many spectators surging through the exits convinced that the Premier County lads were Munster champions.

They reckoned, however, without a gallant Limerick side who, led by "Tyler" Mackey, staged a rousing recovery. From a terrific mid-field duel, Mick Feely got possession and the great Croom score-getter put everything behind the drive that beat the famed "Hawk" O'Brien for a spectacular goal.

Pandemonium broke loose as Limerick fought back again with commendable enthusiasm and zeal. Tom Hayes lobbed a great shot almost in the goalmouth and from a terrific tussle the Shannonsiders goaled. With only a point now separating the sides a real hurling hell was unloosed, and with the excitement terrific the vital minutes ticked away.

## STORMING FINISH.

From 40 yards Tom Hayes brought the sides level in a storming finish, and when it looked that another day would be necessary to decide the issue, Limerick broke away in dramatic fashion and like a lightning flash were through for the goal that mattered — a fast ground shot (the scorer nobody knows) — that was smothered in wild excitement as the whistle sounded almost immediately, with Limerick again Munster champions — the score, 5-3 to 4-3.

## THE TEAMS.

The teams that unforgettable day were:—

**Limerick** — J. ("Tyler") Mackey, capt.; J. Ryan, goal; P. Naughton, J. Carroll, B. O'Connor, M. Sweeney (Castleconnell), C. Scanlon, S. Gleeson, E. Treacy, E. Clancy, M. Bourke, M. Harrington (Fedomore), J. Shea, M. Feely (Croom), T. Hayes (South Liberties), T. Hayes (Young Ireland), P. Flaherty (Rathkeale).

**Tipperary** — Hugh Skelly, capt.; J. ("Hawk") O'Brien, goal; Andy Carew, Tom Kedwick, Martin O'Brien, Joe McLoughney, Paddy Brolan, Jack Mooney, Andy Callanan, Jerry Fogarty (Thurles), Bob Mockler, J. Mockler, J. Fitzpatrick, Jim Bourke (Twomileborres), Tim Gleeson (Drombane), Johnny Leahy (Boherlahan), J. Kennedy (Toomevara).

## ALL-IRELAND FINAL.

On the last day of 1911, at Portlaoighis, Limerick beat Galway, 7-4 to 2-6, in the semi-final of the All-Ireland Senior Hurling Championship and qualified to meet Kilkenny in the final, which was fixed for Cork Athletic Grounds on February 18, 1912.

Once more in a Blue Riband decider and determined to avenge the ill luck of the 1910 final, Limerick prepared earnestly for the meeting with Kilkenny.

Enthusiasm in the county was

at fever pitch and a great crowd made the journey to Cork to see the game.

A big disappointment, however, was in store. Heavy rains turned the pitch into a quagmire and the members of the Central Council present, after a consultation, declared the field unplayable and postponed the match. The Limerick officials and team captain protested against the decision and demanded that the game be played, but to no avail.

The Central Council, at meeting on March 2, refixed the game for Thurles on April 3, with Cork's Tom Irwin as referee.

Limerick refused to play at Thurles and demanded Cork again as a venue. The county tabled a motion for All-Ireland Congress on Easter Sunday seeking a change of venue. This, however, was defeated by 53 votes to 17, after a lengthy discussion marked with rather stormy passages.

The match was again refixed, the new date being May 18, but Limerick persisted in their refusal to play at Thurles. This was a tragic mistake which resulted in Kilkenny being awarded the "All-Ireland" and Limerick being suspended for their failure to play.

When the Munster Council were subsequently asked to nominate another team to represent Munster, Tipperary agreed to do so, and lined out against Kilkenny at Dungarvan on July 28 in a game in lieu of the abortive final, which the Noresiders won, 3-3 to 2-1.

## A TRAGIC MISTAKE.

The Central Council later called a convention of the Limerick clubs and formed a new County Board. The chance of the Blue Riband, however, had been thrown away, and this, coming so quickly after the 1910 disappointment, could not but put a damper on the enthusiasm of the hurling men of Limerick.

PART 16



## GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

## Bill Sheahan Of Rathkeale

(CONTINUED)

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH.

LIMERICK hurling lost a fine figure with the passing in the early days of 1912, in New York, of Danny O'Keeffe, who, before emigrating, was a leading member of the Ballingarry Club. Bill Sheahan often spoke of the great era for the "Garden Town" in which lads like Danny played such a leading part and it was his firm conviction that the hurlers of Ballingarry did not get anything like what they deserved in the line of honours, despite the fact that they boasted in their heyday one of the best club teams in the history of the Limerick Senior Hurling Championships. The County Board, too, were remiss in the recognition they gave the hurling men of Ballingarry, a few of whom would have graced the best county team in Ireland at the period.

Danny O'Keeffe was one of the stars of Ballingarry when the team was at its zenith, and it was a real tragedy for the parish that the call of the emigrant ships should have proved so alluring when the hurling promise and potential were so great.

## 1912 COUNTY CONVENTION.

The 1912 Annual County Convention, coming shortly before the suspension of the County Board for its failure to play Kilkenny in the 1911 All-Ireland final, was a well-attended meeting. Bill Sheahan retained the list of delegates present on the occasion, and it is of considerable interest now, giving as it does an indication of the men who were keeping the Gaelic flag afloat throughout the County at the time.

Here are the names: W. Phelan, C. O'Donnell, Castlemahon H.C.; J. Murphy, S. Frost, Young Ireland H.C.; E. O'Brien, P. Scanlan, Galbally F.C.; E. Jackson, J. P. Cahill, Kilmallock F.C.; J. Mackey, P. Vaughan, Castleconnell H.C.; M. McElligott, J. Murphy, Doon H.C.; J. O'Neill, J. Buckley, Caherline H.C.; J. Guerin, Owen O'Brien, Bruff H.C.; P. O'Brien, M. Kelly, Kilfinane H.C.; P. Halvey, M. Kelly, South Liberties H.C.; W. McCann, J. Wilson, Knockaderry H.C.; J. Ryan, J. J. Griffin, Commercials H.C.; M. Casey, D. Breen, Ballingarry H.C.; T. A. Crowley, C. Kiely, Ballylanders F.C.; J. Purcell, J. Larkin, Commercials F.C.; J. McGann, M. O'Donoghue, Mungret H.C.; J. J. Dunne, M. Dillane, Glin F.C.; P. Bray, J. Lane, Manister F.C.; M. Heffernan, J. A. Collins, Newcastle West F.C.; J. Sheahan, W. Sheahan, Rathkeale H.C.; J. Manley, Killeedy H.C.; P. Lynch, P. Moloney, Dromcollogher H.C.; M. Purtill, M. Bourke, Croagh H.C.; M. Clifford, T. Treacy, Grange (Fedamore) H.C.; T. Mangan, M. Carroll, Croom H.C.; J. McMahon, M. Morrissey, Adare H.C.; N. O'Connor, St. Patrick's H.C.; and T. Foley, Ballybrown.

## INTERESTING EVENT.

An interesting event occurred a few weeks later when the medals won by Commercials F.C. in the first All-Ireland final—that for 1887, were presented almost a quarter of a century after they were won. This was a gala occasion in the history of the Commercials, and the Chairman, Mr. E.J. Long, recalled the golden days of that famed club and dealt in glowing terms with the careers of the great men that figured with such distinction in the early G.A.A. days.

The Rathkeale hurlers qualified for the 1911 Intermediate Hurling

final—a competition that had a chequered career and never gained in Limerick the popular appeal it enjoys elsewhere.

It proved a marathon decider, and the teams, Rathkeale and South Liberties, had to meet three times before reaching a decision. All three games were played at the Markets Field. On the first occasion the sides finished level—Rathkeale 1-6, South Liberties, 2-3, after a thrill-packed tussle in which some great hurling was witnessed. Patrons that day got tremendous value for their "tanner," for the County Senior Football final was also "on the bill" and it proved an unforgettable game in which Commercials just got the verdict from a great Glin side, 1-1 to 1-0.

## ANOTHER THRILLER.

It was two months later when Rathkeale and South Liberties met for the second time. This game was another thriller, but was not finished. A South Liberties player was ordered off by the referee (Mr. P. O'Reilly) but refused to leave. Rathkeale declined to continue and protested to the County Board, who declared the match void and ordered another re-play. The score at the termination of play was: South Liberties, 3-1; Rathkeale, 3-0.

Limerick County Board was suspended around this period, and it was several months before the third meeting took place. It proved another hard fought and exciting game from which South Liberties emerged winners on the score, 2-3 to 2-1 for Rathkeale.

## MEMORIAL TO SPENCER LYONS.

An event that gave Bill Sheahan much pleasure was a visit to Croom to present on behalf of the County Board a substantial cheque to the parish priest towards the erection of an altar in the church as a memorial to his great friend, the late Spencer Lyons.

The impasse created by Limerick's refusal to play the 1911 All-Ireland Senior Hurling Final at any other venue except Cork had a serious effect on the Association in Munster, and 1912 was well advanced before matters were straightened out.

The Southern Championships were late in consequence. Nevertheless, when they eventually got under way, the Limerick lads entered the fray with their accustomed zest, and secured a good win over Waterford in the opening round, 4-5 to 1-0.

The Shannonsiders were then nominated to represent Munster against Ulster (Antrim) in the All-Ireland semi-final at Jones's Road, Dublin, on August 25th and won, 11-4 to 2-0.

## STUBBORNLY CONTESTED GAME.

They travelled to Waterford the following Sunday, where a great crowd (the gate receipts at £260 were a Munster record at the time) saw them face Cork in the Southern semi-final, a meeting that proved one of the toughest and most stubbornly contested games ever hurled for the Munster crown.

Limerick, led by "Tyler" Mackey, had a glorious side. They whipped, slashed and pulled on everything in that game of games and set a lightning pace from the beginning.

The Corkmen gave as good as they got. "Tyler" and Dungourney's Jim Ronayne ("the tall sweeping menace") had the spectators on tip toe with their repeated flashing fireworks around midfield. At half time the scores were level at 1-2 each.

## SECOND HALF.

The second half, in speed and desperate hurling, excelled the first. For Limerick, Barney Connors, Vaughan and Jack Carroll were in their element. Closer grew the tackling and swifter sailed the ball. Then Limerick pointed. That score inspired them and the minutes kept ticking away as they surged around Connie Sheehan; one of the finest full-backs of all time, the peerless Jim Kelleher, and the mighty Andy Fitzgerald in goal.

The Shannonsiders kept up a terrific barrage, and on the point of time "Tyler" shot from midfield a shoulder high ball at Andy Fitzgerald, playing the game of his career.

Andy met it with a fierce sweep and shot to the wing, where Mick Byrne collected almost on the touchline. With time fast ticking away the Sarsfields man, with a master's wrist work, crossed the ball to Paddy Mahony, unmarked on the other wing. The latter, with crisp, accurate drive, sent to Dan Kenefick of St. Mary's, who met the ball in its flight and directed goalwards, "Major" Kennedy connecting almost on the square, to put behind Jacky Ryan for the sensational goal that gave Cork victory, 2-2 to 1-3. The puck out was long and high but the final whistle sounded before it touched the ground.

## CORK WENT WILD WITH JOY.

The joy of the Cork supporters was described in the newspaper reports of the following day: "when Cork secured the winning goal, men seemed to have taken leave of their senses, hats, coats and umbrellas were thrown into the air. Cork went mad for joy—the impossible had been accomplished."

Cork were to figure in another close and exciting game a short time later, that followed almost the same pattern as the Southern semi-final, but on this occasion no last minute score came to their rescue, and Kilkenny won a magnificent victory, and a hard earned All-Ireland crown.

Part 17

# GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

## Bill Sheahan Of Rathkeale

(CONTINUED)

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH.

**A**N event that gave Bill Sheahan much pleasure was the presentation made by the Gaels of Limerick to John ("Tyler") Mackey, in January, 1913, in "recognition of his services on the Gaelic field."

Bill was always a great admirer of the Castleconnell man and he often recalled the noble part "Tyler" played in rallying the hurling men of Limerick and bringing the county to the highest pinnacle of hurling fame. His only regret was that this great hurler was denied the ambition of all G.A.A. men—an All-Ireland medal, an honour which also eluded some other noted Limerick caman wielders

At the annual Limerick County Convention held a short time later the famous county colours of green and white were adopted and have been used ever since. This same season the number of players on a team was reduced to the present figure of fifteen. Seventeen was the number for some years previously, but it will be remembered that teams were twenty-one aside in the very early days, and it was a twenty-one man selection that won for Limerick its first All-Ireland Senior Football crown.

### NOTABLE TRIUMPH.

Limerick hurling gained a notable triumph when the county won the very valuable and ornate Thomond Feis Shield in the first year of the competition for this historic trophy, which inaugurated the Thomond Tournament.

Limerick beat Clare, 5-2 to 2-2, in the opening round and ten thousand people, who paid £245 in gate receipts (a great gathering for those days), saw the Shannonsiders oust Tipperary, 4-0 to 3-1, in a great final played at the Markets Field on May 18th, 1913. This was a terrific tussle, fought at a fast pace all the hour and with the issue in doubt right up to the final whistle.

The Limerick players on that notable occasion were: P. Herbert, capt.; J. Ryan, goal; P. Vaughan, J. Keane, M. Doherty, M. Keane (Castleconnell), E. Treacy, E. Clancy, M. Harrington, T. Hayes, M. Hayes, S. Gleeson (Fedamore), M. Feely, J. Shea, T. Mangan (Croom), P. Flaherty (Rathkeale), T. Hayes (Young Ireland).

Limerick had another great hurling triumph shortly afterwards when they won out the keenly-contested tournament organised in aid of the Father Matthew Hall in Cork.

### "CARDINAL'S MEDALS."

This hard-won success is best remembered as the fight for the "Cardinal's medals," and old-timers regard it as one of the sweetest wins that ever came the way of Limerick hurling. The reason for that is probably the fact that it was the first meeting of the old rivals, Limerick and Kilkenny, following the abortive 1911 All-Ireland final, and it resulted in a well-earned victory over the Nore-siders, who were without any doubt Ireland's greatest hurling combination at the period and a side that won seven All-Ireland titles in the years from 1904 to 1913—a performance that no other county ever succeeded in squalling and which may never be surpassed.

The title "Cardinal's Medals," too, gripped the imagination of Gaelic followers. These were a magnificent set of gold medals presented by His Eminence Cardinal Agliardi, inscribed in Latin and bearing his personal coat of arms.

### THRILL-PACKED FINAL.

The final was a thrill-packed one that attracted a great crowd to

the Jones's Road venue, and the got full value in a game that was exceptionally fast and closely-fought all the way, with the hurling of a very high standard. Limerick won, 5-2 to 4-4, in a tearaway finish that roused the crowd to a high pitch of excitement. The Shannonside players in this success were: Mick Feely, capt.; J. O'Shea, T. Mangan (Croom), J. Ryan, goal; John ("Tyler") Mackey, P. Vaughan, J. Carroll (Castleconnell), Ned Treacy, S. Gleeson, E. Clancy, M. Harrington, T. Hayes (Fedamore), Tom Hayes (Young Ireland), P. Flaherty (Rathkeale), J. O'Donnell (Bruff).

Bill Sheahan had a happy re-union at this game when he met an old friend and hurling opponent of the early G.A.A. days—P. J. Conway of Kilfinny, who was in Ireland on a visit from New York, to where he had emigrated some years earlier.

### ATTAINED GREAT PROMINENCE IN U.S.A.

Mr. Conway attained great prominence in the land of his adoption. One of the founders of the famed Irish-American Athletic Club, which included some of the most representative men in New York, he was President of that great organisation at the time of his visit. The club was then in control of the storied Celtic Park, the scene of some great Gaelic gatherings, that witnessed the triumph of not a few Limerick athletes who graced the American athletic stage at the time. Old-timers in New York, unfortunately getting fewer and fewer with the passing years, speak reverently and in nostalgic tones of the great men and stirring events that graced old Celtic Park in the days of its glory. With its passing, the American Gaelic scene lost something that was never adequately replaced.

### JUNIOR HURLING.

The Junior Hurling Championship was still in its infancy in 1913 when Limerick were unlucky to be defeated by the All-Ireland title-holders, Cork, 1-3 to 1-1, after an exciting tussle at Tipperary. The lads from the Shannon were: D. Dwyer, capt. (Ballybricken), J. Cleary, J. Savage, D. McCarthy, J. Moloney, M. Fitzgerald (Kilmallock), E. Carroll (Castleconnell), J. Foley, R. Hynes, T. McCarthy (Commercials), P. Feely, W. Gleeson (Fedamore), T. O'Sullivan (Manister), J. Moloney (Bruff), J. Hickey (Croom).

Towards the end of 1913 an event that created much interest in Limerick was the purchase by the G.A.A. of the Sportsfield at Jones's Road, which is now Croke Park.

### ORIGINALLY A MARKET GARDEN.

Originally a market garden and orchard, in the days when Clonturk Park was the principal venue for Gaelic inter-county contests, many old Gaels maintain that it was one of the greatest blunders of the Association that this natural arena, superior to the Jones's Road expanse in every respect, was lost. It could have been purchased for the proverbial song and equipped for the price of the chorus. Gaelic affairs were badly mismanaged in those years and Clonturk passed out of reach.

The old market garden, lying between the Canal and Clonliffe Road, was converted into the "City and Suburban Sports Ground" by its original owner, Mr. Maurice Butterly. The low-lying land had been raised to road-level by the dumping of rubbish, the heterogeneous character of which

was long apparent at the surface. For quite a time the centre of the half-mile centre remained a gaping eyesore.

It was projected as an all-sports enclosure, but there was not a great variety of pastimes pursued in Dublin then. Trotting was popular at the time and many famous races with high-steppers and sulkies took place there. Amateur sports meetings, professional foot contests and pony racing all figured in the course of its original control. All descriptions of football were seen on its playing pitch, all sorts of entertainments took place in its pavilion.

The first All-Ireland finals decided there were on March 15th, 1896, when Tipperary beat Kilkenny in hurling and Meath in football, to record one of the few "doubles" in the history of the championships.

### FRANK B. DINNEEN.

It had fallen into disrepair when Frank B. Dinneen, of Ballylanders, the only man to hold the two chief executive positions in the G.A.A.—President and Secretary—bought it in 1908. He effected improvements and catered specially for Gaelic games and athletics and cycling—then also under G.A.A. control.

Many famed games were played there during the period of Dinneen's ownership, including the first Croke Cup contests and games for the Leinster Cups and Railway Shields.

Prior to disposing of the property to the G.A.A., Mr. Dinneen had leased a large quadrangle in the south-east corner to Belvedere College as a playing field for its students. This was a most unfortunate transaction, but the Association had to accept the situation, which has determined the limit of operations on the far side of the ground. The building of the Loop railway line also entailed a curtailment of the original area.

### FIELD SOLD TO G.A.A.

Frank Dinneen, however, saved the field from complete destruction, for but for his intervention it would almost certainly have followed Clonturk into the discard. He sold it to the G.A.A. for £3,641-8-5.

The Ballylanders man played no small part in giving Croke Park to the G.A.A.—a fact Bill Sheahan often stressed. It was a vital part which should not be forgotten—and deserves recognition in the new Croke Park. The dedication of the corner stand to his memory would be a tribute long overdue.

Part 18

7-11-59

# GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

## Bill Sheahan Of Rathkeale

(CONTINUED)

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH.

Hurling rivalry between Cork and Limerick reached its climax at Thurles on July 18th, 1915, in a hard, fierce struggle for the Munster semi-final.

Partisan feeling was at fever pitch, intensified by the fact that betting was indulged in openly—both before the game all over the province, and at the actual venue itself. This, in Bill Sheahan's opinion, was mainly responsible for the unhappy and untimely ending to what was a dour and determined clash—remarkable for its number of disallowed scores.

The first half was scoreless, demonstrating the closeness of the exchanges. The Corkmen asserted themselves in the second period and looked likely winners when they put through three scores—two of them major scores, without reply from their opponents.

The match terminated abruptly seven minutes from the end, when two opposing players came into handgrips, after which large numbers of spectators invaded the pitch. The rest was confusion, an unfortunate finish up to a game that was the talk of Munster for weeks previous. Twelve special trains brought a huge concourse of spectators to the venue, and the gate receipts were £330.

### REFEREE'S REPORT

Tim Ryan, the Chairman of the Tipperary County Board, was the referee, and in his report of the game he said:—"I had to declare the match off when some minutes from full time J. Mackey (Limerick) and T. Nagle (Cork) came to blows, I sounded the whistle, and ran to put both players off. The other players now joined in the row, and the spectators rushed on to the field. After some time I got the captains of both teams together, and the Cork captain was satisfied to continue the match, but the Limerick captain said he would continue only if I allowed the goal they claimed was scored. The outsiders and followers of the Limerick team meantime refused to leave the field and I declared the match off."

### HEATED DISCUSSION

Bill Sheahan was one of the Limerick delegates to the Munster Council meeting that considered the matter at Mallow on July 23rd. After a rather heated and acrimonious discussion they ordered a re-play which they fixed for Dungarvan on August 15th, with Willie Walsh of Waterford as referee. The two players reported by the referee were each suspended for 12 months.

Cork appealed to the Central Council and at a meeting of that body on August 1st, got the match by the odd vote in nine. Limerick were very sore at this turn of events, but the subsequent defeat of Cork in the All-Ireland final at the hands of Laoighis was one of the most surprising results in the long history of the championship.

Bill Sheahan shortly afterwards retired from the County Board, and severed a connection with the Association of almost thirty years standing as either player or official. He continued, however, for two score years more one of the great supporters of the games, and was to play a leading role in the establishment of the West Limerick Board about which he will have something to say in the next and concluding chapter of the story of his life-long associa-

tion with the G.A.A.

### FATHER EUGENE SHEEHY

Meanwhile, the passing of many old friends of the early Gaelic days saddened Bill, particularly the death of the great Father Sheehy "The Land League Priest" — who had played a leading part in the stormy early years of the Association's existence but had always retained the respect and admiration of even those who differed a lot from him in the hectic days.

Broadford-born Father Sheehy grew up in terrible times. He witnessed the horrors of the Famine, saw the mud walled cabins crumbling under the blows of the crowbar brigades, saw his friends and neighbours flying hapless and hungry from the countryside, many of them to join the coffin ships, which often led them to watery graves, or, at best, a niggardly existence in some strange land without hope of ever seeing their native shores again.

That background to his early years, set a pattern for a life dedicated to the smashing of the system responsible for such misery and suffering.

### THE LAND WAR

The Land War was at its height when Father Sheehy took up his first curacy at Kilmallock, and it was very natural that he should immediately associate himself with the movement that was eventually to smash the despotic power of the landlords.

He quickly incurred the wrath of the British authorities, and through the instigation of a notorious removable magistrate named Clifford Lloyd, a warrant was issued for the arrest of the patriotic priest.

At dawn one May morning, the priest's house was surrounded by police and soldiers, Father Sheehy was taken into custody, and removed to the local barracks escorted by an imposing array of British military might. The parishioners quickly got to know of the arrest, and led by Father Downes, P.P., were present when he left the barracks for Naas Jail. Clifford Lloyd afterwards described the occasion in his memoirs: "I shall never forget the scene as he proceeded up the street. The people fell upon their knees as he passed and seized his hands and the skirts of his clothes, while begging his blessing before he left them."

### IN JAIL FOR FOUR MONTHS

The British held him for four months, along with Parnell, Davitt, Dillon and other "suspects," and on his release the following September great demonstrations took place all over the country at which he attended, sharing the honours with Parnell on several occasions.

A great supporter of the "Chief," when the split came in 1890, he, however, declared himself opposed to Parnell's leadership.

In the early G.A.A. days he stoutly opposed the Physical Force men and strongly upheld the Constitutional party, but in after years he became a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood and served for a time on its Executive. A close friend of both Tom Clarke and Sean McDermott, he had resigned his pastoral charge at Bruree through ill health and gone to reside in Dublin at the time of the 1916 Insurrection, and it is on record that the great old priest made his way to the G.P.O. to administer "spiritual consolation," as

he said himself, and he remained there all through those terrible but glorious days, and only left when the building was crashing in flames around him.

The kindly old sagart was proud of the part he played in Easter Week, and prouder still that the last Commandant to surrender was the man who as a boy had served his Mass in Bruree—Eamonn de Valera—now President of Ireland.

### TOOK GREAT INTEREST IN G.A.A.

Father Sheehy took a great interest in the G.A.A. from the beginning, and was a close friend of the Founders. There is a historic photograph of one of the earlier Executives of the infant Association, in which he is included with leading figures of the pioneer days—Davin, Cusack, Wyse Power and McKay.

He organised a branch of the Association in Bruree and soon had a fine hurling team there. From the start he was deeply interested in the organisation of the County Championship games in both hurling and football, and was a familiar and respected figure at most of the important games of the early Gaelic days, always using his influence to maintain order and inculcate discipline.

Another old friend whom Bill Sheahan had a deep respect for was Johnny Sweeney of the Young Ireland Club, and with whom Bill was closely associated for many years on the County Board. About Johnny, Bill had this to say: "Ireland produced many fine sons whose lives shed lustre on the Gael, but none had a deeper love for the land that begot him than this unassuming but warm hearted man. The date of our first meeting dates back a goodly stretch, and in all the years of our acquaintance I know him to stand for nothing but manhood and independence—honest, fearless, manly, generous and true. To him principle was everything, and having convinced himself of the justice of a cause, it mattered not how many enemies he made for himself in working to bring that cause to a successful issue. Hard hitter that he could be in a fight, yet he was thoroughly incapable of harbouring hate or envy against any man, and I have met few more free from the tinge of malice, for there was nothing suggestive of meanness or the little mind in his word or action. By his passing Gaeldom lost one of its brightest spirits and most unselfish workers."

PART 19

# Bill Sheahan Of Rathkeale

(CONTINUED)

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH.

**B**ILL Sheahan took much pride in the fact that West Limerick was the first area to form a Divisional Board—a matter he referred to on several occasions, when, as Honorary President of the Board, he addressed successive conventions of the G.A.A. in the West.

Bill was present at the initial convention, called to bring into existence the first West Limerick Board. This was held on August 24th, 1902, and the officers elected included that great Gael—William Hough of Monagea, who became first chairman. He was father of the present popular Treasurer of the Munster Council. Willie Hough, who captained the Limerick team that won the 1918 All-Ireland Senior Hurling Blue Riband.

John Collins of Newcastle West was first Western Treasurer, whilst the post of Secretary went to another great Gaelic worker of the period—the well-known C.C. O'Rourke of Abbeyfeale.

## SENIOR CHAMPIONSHIPS.

This Board immediately set about the organisation of championships in both senior hurling and football, and great competitions they turned out. Played right through the "off" season some terrific tussles were the order and much interest was aroused.

The finals were played on successive Sundays in March, 1903, the football first, at Monagea, where Abbeyfeale beat Templeglantine 0-7 to 0-5, after a thrill-packed struggle; and the hurling, at Ballygran, where Monagea beat Kilfinny, 1-4 to 0-3.

The remarkable success of the experiment of playing these competitions right through the winter months was often mentioned by Bill Sheahan, who maintained that the secret of this triumph was the fact that the teams were kept on the go all the time, with the result that enthusiasm and public interest were very marked.

When it was agreed some years ago that the senior county championships should be decided on an open draw for the entire county, Bill advocated a return to that old system in the West—playing of Divisional Championships during the winter months in the senior grades. This arrangement, he maintained, would have the double value of preserving the Western competitions, then in a very healthy state, and of providing a welcome training ground for the senior teams of the division, thus preparing them for the County Championship ties.

## SUCH A PLAN DOUBLY NECESSARY NOW

If such a plan was, in Bill's view, necessary then, it is doubly necessary now, when Western senior play has declined to an alarming extent, with the result that teams from the Division have not won a County senior crown for ever so long. It will be a shock to many that Croom have not won the hurling crown since 1941, whilst Newcastle West, have

to go back to 1925 for their last glory year. In football, with the exception of the Western Gaels' collective success in 1953, we have to return to 1947 for the last Abbeyfeale success, whilst Glin won the last of their seven titles in 1934.

A Western senior resurgence is long overdue—and in this aspect we must remember that Western strength is necessary if we are to get anywhere in the inter-county arena. Even if only for that selfish reason, all Limerick must hope that the Western challenge for county honours would grow in power and effectiveness.

There may have been obstacles to the carrying through of Bill's plan when suggested some years ago, but most of them must have dissolved by now.

It has not been found possible in recent years to play off the attractive Egan Cup competition during the busy summer season. Maybe a very good solution might be found by commencing this series right away, and playing it on alternate Sundays, with a senior football competition, from this until spring.

Many players must be anxious for an outing during the dreary winter months; the playing fields are there in plenty now, and that spectators, in ample measure, will be found to patronise worthwhile fare can be judged from the numbers that travel into the city so frequently on Sundays for sport under another code—presumably because G.A.A. Boards are not giving them the fare to keep them at home.

## LISTS OF DIVISIONAL FINALISTS.

The variety of competition in the West in the early years of the Board's existence can be judged by studying the lists of divisional finalists in both codes during the period.

1904—Senior Hurling: Ballygarry, 4-3; Rathkeale, 0-7. \*Senior Football: Abbeyfeale, 0-7; Castlemahon, 0-3.

1905—Senior Hurling: Rathkeale, 3-7; Tournafulla, 2-4. Senior Football: Abbeyfeale, 0-4; Templeglantine, 0-3.

1906—Senior Hurling: Ballygran, 2-6; Croom, 2-4. Senior Football: Foynes, 0-7; Templeglantine, 0-6.

1907—Senior Hurling: Croom, 5-9; Rathkeale, 1-11; Senior Football: Foynes, 1-8; Askeaton, 0-3.

1908—Senior Hurling: Croom, 3-9; Rathkeale, 3-6. Senior Football, Newcastle West, 0-5; Glin, 0-2.

For some unaccountable reason, the Board went out of existence shortly after this, and it was eleven years later—in 1919, before a revival was attempted.

This period—the dangerous years of the War of Independence—was probably Gaeldom's greatest spell. Sincerity was the dominant feature and members of the G.A.A. stood four square as never before for the Gaelic ideal. Old veterans like Bill Sheahan experienced a new spirit in the movement for

the advancement of Gaelic games, whilst the language revival movement also had a great fillip.

## CIVIL WAR BROUGHT DISASTER AND DESPAIR.

The Civil War and its aftermath brought disaster and despair, following the high hopes of the golden years, and it was the opinion of the old Rathkeale Captain that although the G.A.A. proved the one great binding link that helped materially to restore sanity and eventual unity, it never fully recaptured the spirit that carried it triumphantly through the difficult days.

It may have been the longings of an old warrior for the long lost pleasures of youth, but Bill was ever mindful of the glamour of the old days and maintained that the circumstances prevailing then, when playing the games of the Gael, was not by any means a "fashionable" occupation, was yet accompanied by pleasures that the men of later days never fully experienced.

Walking many miles to a venue, stripping under a bush by the side of a ditch, playing on an uneven field maybe only mown that morning, had its own compensation, and left memories that could never be erased.

Bill took a great interest in G.A.A. affairs all through his long life. He felt keenly the passing of the friends of boyhood years, and the one great pleasure of his declining years was his association with the young Gaels, through the honour conferred on him when the West Limerick Board created him the first Life Honorary President of the Board.

## AN HONOUR HE DEEPLY APPRECIATED.

This honour he deeply appreciated, and he was never more happy and proud than when receiving the teams and starting some of the more important games of the Western year.

With the G.A.A. from the commencement of that great organisation, he lived to see it grow to the powerful force we know today. From the youthful player—the teenager of the first great Rathkeale team—he advanced along with the G.A.A. until he could claim to be the last remaining link with the stirring days, and "Father" of the Association in Limerick.

His lifetime covered a span almost unique in Gaelic history, and it has been a pleasure to recapture some of the highlights in the imperfect study of his career I have put before my readers. To have gone more deeply, would involve a recital of almost the entire history of the G.A.A. in Limerick—of which he was ever a distinguished and staunch pillar.

Part 20  
(final part)