

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Seán Kearns
Date of Interview	8 th Aug 2009
Location	Gaelic Park, The Bronx, New York, USA
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Seamus Dooley
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1950 Home County: Monaghan
Education	Primary: Ballymacanee NS Secondary: Carrickmacross CBS Third Level: St Patrick's College, Drumcondra (2 years)
Family	Siblings: 5 Sisters, 6 Brothers Current Family if Different: Widower – One daughter
Club(s)	Killany [Monaghan] Monaghan in New York [America]
Occupation	Elevator Mechanic
Parents' Occupation	Train Driver [Father]; Teacher [Mother]
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	N/A

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Date of Report	15 th Aug 2009
Period Covered	1950s- 2009
Counties/Countries Covered	Monaghan, New York, Americas
Key Themes Covered	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Managing, Officials, Administration, Religion, Media, Emigration, Involvement in GAA abroad, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of Women, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, GAA Abroad, Identity, Rivalries, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Career, Politics, Northern Ireland, The Troubles, Ban on Foreign Games and Dances, Opening of Croke Park, Relationship with the Association, Professionalism
Interview Summary	<p>Seamus is one of the best-known figures in New York GAA circles and is a fixture at Gaelic Park, which he does a lot of work. The GAA was an integral part of his family and work life. He was a player in Monaghan to U-21 level, but moved to New York in the early 1970s. He was asked to come over to play football for the summer and set up with a job. He later returned permanently. He played for Monaghan in NY, and later was central to the organisation of the Monaghan club. He was on the NY GAA board for many years and was a delegate to Central Council, and President of the NY Board. He had a key role in bringing about the recent redevelopment in Gaelic Park. He feels strongly that bringing players from Ireland to NY was bad for the game in NY, and that Croke Park should not have been made open to soccer etc</p> <p>0.0 Introduction</p> <p>0.25 Earliest GAA memory is a trip, aged 7, to see 1957 All-Ireland final between Louth and Cork. Taken on Great Northern railroad train by father who was a GNR employee, so family travelled for free.</p> <p>1.00 Parents and siblings were involved in GAA as were uncles.</p> <p>1.30 Describes one of his earliest memories of playing football – playing for his school in a Monaghan national schools competition – he was sent off after ten minutes for saying something to an umpire.</p> <p>1.50 Killanny was his local club – mainly football but with a</p>

	<p>camogie team. Describes his early days playing football:</p> <p>“We used to train because we’d nothing else to do. We’d train three nights a week – there was no such thing that time as going to bars. At night you’d go up to the football field and we’d train two or three hours kicking a ball...”</p> <p>2.30 Lack of facilities for the club in the fifties and sixties:</p> <p>“One Sunday we could be playing in one field and the next Sunday we could be playing in a different field. It was nothing new to go to Mass on a Sunday and see six guys carrying the posts down the road to set them up in another field and that happened many times.”</p> <p>3.00 Footballs were not always affordable and sometimes kicked pig’s bladder around.</p> <p>3.25 Teachers didn’t take as much interest in GAA in schools in his day. Parents organised the school teams.</p> <p>3.50 His childhood heroes were actually hurlers –and especially the Wexford hurling team:</p> <p>“I had two favourite guys I used to admire – a guy who played full-back for Wexford by the name of Nick O’Donnell. He was one of my favourites and don’t ask me why. I had more photographs of that man than I had of some of my own family.” The other was Christy Ring.</p> <p>4.35 Played Minor football for Monaghan for two years, and then later one year at U-21 level although this was shortened by school pressure and a lack of commitment.</p> <p>5.05 Although he played for the county at minor and U-21 and won a Minor championship in Monaghan, he never really classes himself as a special player – just someone who went out to play the game hard.</p> <p>5.45 From age 16 was involved in coaching younger teams and was very successful.</p> <p>6.0 Stayed involved with club after leaving for Dublin to attend St Pat’s teacher Training College in Drumcondra – travelling up and down on train or bus to train.</p> <p>6.30 Describes how he originally came to New York in 1973 for the summer to play football for Monaghan, having being</p>
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	<p>approached in a bar by a man home from NY on a holiday.</p> <p>6.50 Parents opposed to his going to New York, but he jumped on idea. Returned home after that Summer but came out again for good in 1974.</p> <p>7.20 More details on how he originally came to New York to play football for Monaghan.</p> <p>7.40 For his first summer in NY he was set up with a job bar tending and a place to stay:</p> <p>“You left Ireland that time you were lucky to have ... a pound or two in your pocket. When I came out here I couldn’t believe it - you could work the weekend and be going around with 400 dollars. It was a mighty big change”</p> <p>8.10 Gaelic Park then was in a poor state with little grass on it, but there were a lot of very good players. A New York team from that time could probably beat most of the County sides back in Ireland with training.</p> <p>9.05 Play in New York in the early 1970s was rough and he was not physically big. The heat – sometimes 110 degrees Fahrenheit was also a challenge.</p> <p>9.45 A lot of inter-county players came out from Ireland in the 1970s and stayed for the summer:</p> <p>“Frank McGuigan spent the best football years of his career out here.”</p> <p>10.10 Negative effect in the long-term of players coming from Ireland just to play football:</p> <p>“You’d have a good base team, and when you’d get to a semi-final, the pressure would heat up and there’d be 6 or 7 fellas left sitting on the line and 6 or 7 fellas brought over from Ireland. And then those young fellows would lose interest in it – and that’s what happened hurling in New York.”</p> <p>10.57 Before NY GAA was affiliated with Central Council it was a free for all in terms of attracting players out from Ireland “a cowboy league – an open free highest bidder.”</p> <p>11.20 Clubs raised money to finance bringing players over from Ireland. He saw a NY final played with 13 Kerry men on the field. Mentions that Pat Spillane nearly built a house with</p>
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	<p>all the trips he made to New York.</p> <p>11.50 Bringing players out could cause dissent within a club in NY. Different rules were put in place to control the way teams were bringing players out just for the weekend. Limited to three after affiliation with Central Council when John Dowling was President of the GAA.</p> <p>13.15 The main thing now is that some teams bring over students from Ireland for the summer on an inter-county transfer. One club has 14 inter-county transfers this year. This limits bringing on the Irish-Americans here. It's what went wrong in Chicago.</p> <p>"It's not a New York Championship now – It's an Irish student Championship."</p> <p>14.15 Describes his playing days in NY. Mentions Alan Clancy, as a mainstay in the Monaghan club. Struggled after he stepped down but survived to be the oldest club in NY</p> <p>15.20 Describes difficulty in keeping a club going – getting work for players, and places stay plus hassle with weekend players and providing them with airfare and maybe 3 or 4 hundred dollars.</p> <p>15.50 Fundraising through raffles and dances. Not much politics within the club.</p> <p>16.30 Talks about changes in numbers coming to NY over the year and effect on GAA there.</p> <p>"9-11 ruined the GAA here in New York, like everything else it ruined."</p> <p>16.50 Describes difficulties since Sept 11 in terms of visas etc but says that redeveloping of Gaelic Park has helped the GAA overcome it.</p> <p>17.40 Describes Gaelic Park in the 1970s – "It was like the beach" but says there were still great games despite this.</p> <p>18.20 Describes how lease for Gaelic Park came up having been controlled by the "Kerry" O'Donnells for many years. Some in GAA wouldn't compete with O'Donnell's for lease, but MTA (Metropolitan Transport Authority) who own the land unhappy with O'Donnell's not doing repairs so they closed the</p>
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	<p>field down.</p> <p>19.00 GAA had to move to Rocklands to play games and Manhattan College, which is beside Gaelic Park, stepped in and took up the lease, on the condition that they would facilitate the NY GAA.</p> <p>19.30 Negotiated funding to redevelop Gaelic Park with GAA and got \$1 million from Nicky Brennan on the condition that they raise \$750,000. Despite scepticism within NY GAA they raised the money in 3 months - all through donations.</p> <p>20.30 Gives more detail about reluctance of some in NY GAA to go against John Kerry O'Donnell. If they had the whole of the Gaelic Park Lease could have been controlled by the GAA.</p> <p>21.20 Lack of other pitches in NY a big problem though.</p> <p>22.00 Monaghan in NY mainly made up of people actually from Monaghan. Social life of the group is kept going.</p> <p>22.55 "GAA looked after so many young Irish people coming over here." Took good care of their players whether they worked out or not. Lots of guys who are millionaires today got their start here through GAA connections.</p> <p>23.30 Even if there was tough competition on the field people would still look after each other and stick together off the field.</p> <p>24.00 Games were very tough but rarely any bad blood between teams apart from a few fights in bars that were forgotten about when people sobered up.</p> <p>24.40 Politics between the clubs was a feature just like at home.</p> <p>25.20 He kept in close contact with how his club back in Monaghan were doing as well as County Monaghan. He always went home for important matches for club or county.</p> <p>25.50 Radio broadcasts were the only way of following matches back home in the 1970s. Broadcasts were piped into a bar, which would be packed with people listening.</p> <p>26.00 "That was one thing I really missed –not being able to see the games. You'd be sitting in a bar listening to it on the radio and you'd start thinking...I wish I was at home, I wish I</p>
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	<p>was at the game.”</p> <p>26.30 Now you can watch the game on the computer wherever you are. Gives example of watching game on the computer at this Grandson’s baptism in Rochester, NY.</p> <p>27.00 Going to live games far better than watching on TV. More craic on the journey.</p> <p>27.30 Great feature of GAA is that fans all sit and have the craic together – in the stadium and after.</p> <p>27.50 Reluctance in bringing players out from Monaghan if that would weaken clubs or county at home during Championship. This created bad feeling between clubs at home and those in NY.</p> <p>28.30 Gives example of a named player who left his club in Monaghan to play for Cork in NY – “Not loyal to his club”</p> <p>29.20 Mentions good players who came out from Monaghan through the years: Kieran Finnely, Jack McCarver, Nudie Hughes. Also Jim McConville and Jim McLoughlin from Armagh. Only took them for the weekend and not if club at home needed them.</p> <p>29.50 Some players came out from Ireland and didn’t perform, others would die on the field for you.</p> <p>30.40 Eugene Sherry was a back for Monaghan that he would have loved to have playing for him.</p> <p>31.30 Club life has changed a good bit in his time in New York. Players find it harder to commit to training because they have to work longer hours than in the old days.</p> <p>32.25 The Monaghan team had five students over for the Summer and got them jobs and an apartment.</p> <p>33.00 He managed Armagh Juniors in NY for three years and was beaten in 3 finals – in one final he had 13 inter-county men on his team – but was beaten by the great Pat Spillane playing for Donegal.</p> <p>33.25 His management style was to play hard “never be standing back, never be waiting.” He most enjoyed coaching younger players.</p>
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	<p>33.50 Took four years out of the game when his wife was ill with cancer.</p> <p>34.10 Now you sometimes have Irish Americans teaching the next generation how to play.</p> <p>34.40 Difficult in keeping kids involved in NY due to competition from other sports like Basketball, baseball etc.</p> <p>35.05 He himself only played GAA:</p> <p>“I hated soccer with a living passion and still do. If Ireland were playing Italy there I wouldn’t look out the window. That was one of my problems down through the years was I was so prejudiced against soccer, and don’t ask me why”.</p> <p>35.50 Very hard to explain GAA to Americans – especially that it’s so popular but the players don’t get paid.</p> <p>36.50 Experiences as a referee in NY.</p> <p>37.50 Rule differences in NY GAA – Criticisms of use of unlimited substitutions – Problems of using countdown clock with buzzer.</p> <p>39.20 Referees in Ireland often get the injury time wrong. GAA in Ireland should follow ladies football and use the clock.</p> <p>40.00 Early involvement in organisation of the GAA in NY. Involved from early on and club delegate to NY Board. Has been a delegate for about 30 years.</p> <p>“I had good fun in the beginning and I always enjoyed it. There used to be great craic at the meetings y’know, screaming and shouting as usual that goes on at most meetings and I got to like it and kept going to the meetings and ended up representing NY all over at GAA meetings – Boston, Chicago, Ireland – I don’t know how many times I was back home in Ireland last year.”</p> <p>40.45 Was Chairman of New York Board 2004-2007. His first priority was to improve the pitch at Gaelic Park.</p> <p>41.45 Also focussed on healing a split between the NY Minor Board and the Main NY Board.</p> <p>42.00 In terms of challenges facing NY GAA down the years he feels they definitely should have affiliated to the GAA back</p>
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	<p>home long before they actually did. Being in the Connacht Championship brought Senior County sides over from Ireland and got big crowds to Gaelic Park.</p> <p>42.45 If they'd have affiliated in the 1970s when Ney York had great teams, NY would have been a match for any Connacht County side.</p> <p>43.15 Relationship with Central Council is much better now and the Council have respect for NY which is great.</p> <p>43.51 He received Overseas Award from GAA in 2006 or 2007 on St Patrick's Day. It was a big award ceremony and when he went up to get the award he said to himself "It was worth it down through the years."</p> <p>44.20 He fitted in his GAA involvement around his job – he works nights. He often comes in to Gaelic Park in the morning on his way home from work to do a few things. Comes back to the park at four or five pm. Then off to work again. "I could do that 7 days a week."</p> <p>45.00 Future plans for redevelopment of Gaelic Park facilities including bar if lease was acquired. Could be a better venue for GAA County Annual Dinner dances, instead of giving that money away to other hotels and venues.</p> <p>46.00 Irish community is changing – the County Associations are hurting for membership and that membership is getting older. The second and third generations aren't interested. The GAA is better off that the County Associations but still has challenges.</p> <p>46.50 People have moved away from the traditional Irish neighbourhoods to Rocklands or Jersey. Harder for them to travel in to meetings.</p> <p>47.20 GAA is doing well in NY by putting effort into Juvenile football. They had a kids camp this summer. He opened the gate to 120 kids every morning at 8am for a week. He thinks that GAA in NY can thrive with this kind of juvenile interest and says current Chair Larry McCarthy is supporting the effort.</p> <p>48.20 Hurling will struggle though because much harder to develop kids here. "Hurling is bred in you...If it's not bred in</p>
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	<p>you, you're not going to be taught it.”</p> <p>49.00 NY probably won't be truly competitive in the Connacht championship, but being in it is still very important to the GAA community in NY and to the players here.</p> <p>50.10 Irish language not used in NY GAA. There is still some Irish music and dancing at GAA dances and Irish dancing classes very big.</p> <p>50.50 His daughter was born in America but never missed a game in Gaelic Park. She travelled to Ireland with him for Central Council meetings and did his paperwork. Thinks this is common enough among many second generation Ireland and many of them are secretaries of clubs.</p> <p>51.35 GAA a huge part of family life back in Monaghan – Mass then football on Sundays The whole family boys and girls went to parish games.</p> <p>52.25 Transport back home was by bicycle – He remembers riding three miles to a game, playing then riding back – maybe with a guy on the bar of the bike.</p> <p>52.40 His family in NY also very involved. His wife was American but very involved in Monaghan club, Daughter also very involved before she went away to college.</p> <p>53.20 GAA followers in NY, especially young wouldn't have same relationship with Church as was back home. Priests not really involved in GAA in NY to same extent.</p> <p>“At home you went to Mass before you went to football, and if you didn't go to Mass, you weren't going to football. That was simple as that.”</p> <p>54.20 GAA in New York was a part of the NY political scene, especially in the heyday of John Kerry O'Donnell. He saw Ted and Bobby Kennedy at Gaelic Park and local politicians like NY Mayors and Governors like Rudi Giuliani and Mike Bloomberg. Less courting of the vote now as lots of people in clubs now aren't citizens.</p> <p>55.30 He and others involved in going down to Washington DC to lobby for undocumented Irish, but no politician really came through. Very sad. He knew one Irish guy here who couldn't go home for brother's funeral for fear of not getting</p>
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	<p>back.</p> <p>56.50 Visa requirements much stricter now.</p> <p>57.20 As NY Chairman he was totally opposed to opening up Croke Park to soccer and Rugby and still is. He was mentioned in past-President Seán Kelly's book for making an appeal against the move and he took a lot of slack.</p> <p>58.00 His family were all Republicans. Why didn't FAI use all the money they made to look after their own park.</p> <p>58.25 Remembers going to play in Casement Park in Belfast as a minor during the Troubles. Their coach was stopped and searched by a patrol on way home and they were kept 2 hours</p> <p>"And that was in our own country on our way back from playing our national games. Things like that will never leave your mind."</p> <p>59.10 He feels Irish people in NY and Irish Americans would be very Republican.</p> <p>59.30 He made a statement at the time saying no to the English national anthem at Croke Park. One night when he came home a NI woman had left a message on his answering machine, singing the whole anthem and saying "Isn't that beautiful, Mr Dooley?" He still has the tape.</p> <p>1.00.30 His two favourite GAA memories were going to 1957 All Ireland football final with his dad, and being honoured by the GAA in 2006 for international achievements.</p> <p>1.01.00 His worst memory was missing a penalty in an u-16 match back in Monaghan – will never forget that.</p> <p>1.01.45 Best game he ever saw was a Dublin Kerry semi-final in 1977, reffed by a Monaghan man. Doesn't think they'll ever be a game like it.</p> <p>1.02.20 His favourite team in football were Monaghan but always followed Wexford in hurling. Also followed Down when they came on the scene.</p> <p>1.03.30 His GAA hero would be his father – making sure the entire big family got to matches and had football boots on</p>
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	<p>their feet.</p> <p>1.04.00 He is very proud of all the GAA has achieved down the years – one of the greatest organisations in the world - and hopes that it never goes professional.</p> <p>1.04.45 The theory on payment of players in NY was that you had to give players maybe a week’s wages. Later, even today, there was some players got big money.</p> <p>1.05.50 Tells story of un-named but well-known player and sports writer who he rang to get him to come over to play a game. The player said “What’s in it for me and you’ll have to take my girlfriend too”. Seamus replied “What position does she play?”</p> <p>1.06.40 One GAA disappointment was Croke Park being opened up to soccer etc. “I never thought I’d see the day when the Union Jack flew over the Hogan Stand. Looking back he can see it might have been the right thing, but you can’t forget those people down the years who were harassed for playing GAA.</p> <p>1.08.20 Overall the GAA has meant a lot in his life. He grew up with it and all his life was spent through it and still is. He got great enjoyment out of playing, coaching, watching reffing. Looking back on it, I never regret one minute of it.”</p>
<p>Involvement in GAA</p>	<p>✓ Supporter ✓ Player ✓ Manager ✓ Coach ✓ Steward</p> <p>✓ Chairperson ✓ Committee Member ✓ Grounds-person</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Caterer <input type="checkbox"/> Jersey Washer ✓ Referee <input type="checkbox"/> None</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____</p>
<p>Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played)</p>	<p>Club Minor Football County Title with Killanny.</p> <p>2 Intermediate Football Titles in NY with Monaghan</p>
<p>Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)</p>	<p>Delegate from Monaghan to NY County Board: 1970s – 2009</p> <p>NY Delegate to Central Council</p> <p>Chairman NY GAA Board, 2004-2007</p>

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Format	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
Duration	Length of Interview: 01:08.50
Language	English

To be filled in by Interviewer:

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Signed: Seán Kearns

Date: 28th Oct 2009