

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Seán Kearns
Date of Interview	10 th Sept 2009
Location	Interviewee's Home, near the Bronx, New York
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Jimmy Chambers
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1932 Home County: Clare
Education	Primary: Cooraclare NS
Family	Siblings: 7: 2 brothers and 5 sisters Current Family if Different: Married with 3 sons and 2 daughters
Club(s)	Cooraclare [Clare], Clare [America] and Rangers [America]
Occupation	Engraver
Parents' Occupation	Farmers
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	Fianna Fáil

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Date of Report	25 th May 2010
Period Covered	1930s-2009
Counties/Countries Covered	Clare, New York
Key Themes Covered	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Officials, Administration, Material Culture, Education, Religion, Media, Emigration, Involvement in GAA abroad, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, GAA Abroad, Identity, Rivalries, Impact on Life, Food and Drink, Socialising
Interview Summary	<p>Jim Chambers was born in Clare in 1932 and the interview gives an insight into Gaelic football in his native Cooraclare in the 1940s and 1950s, dealing with the style and tactics of football played, equipment and facilities, transport to matches, injuries and medical treatment, local rivalries and the toughness of the game. There are interesting insights into the crowds at matches, the role of the clergy, teachers and schools, and politics in relation to the GAA. There is also mention of the Clare County side at that time. He emigrated to New York in 1956 and the interview discusses the strength of the GAA in New York at that time, the facilities and social life and clothes worn at Gaelic Park, John Kerry O'Donnell, and the style and standard of football and hurling in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. The interview also mentions the closure of Gaelic Park and the New York GAA's move to Rockland for that time. The Clare Club in New York is also discussed and the development of the system of bringing players over from Ireland for the weekend and the benefits of that for spectators. The style and toughness of hurling and football, training places, and the development of the youth game with Irish-Americans are covered. He also discusses keeping in touch with the GAA and the club back home, the importance of getting the local papers and hearing the All-Ireland on the radio, and the changes to the Irish population in New York. He also discusses the importance of Clare's All-Ireland win in 1995.</p> <p>0:00:20 Describes earliest GAA memory as watching Cooraclare winning the Clare championship when he was about 9, but hard to get to the game as there were no cars. Even the pony and trap was full. He usually ran up the road to</p>

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	<p>go to games.</p> <p>0:01:00 He lived a couple of miles from the Cooraclare pitch. His parents were involved and encouraged him to play.</p> <p>0:02:30 When he was a kid he'd rather fight than play.</p> <p>0:03:00 You had boots to play but you might have to borrow them from somebody. Sometimes you had no shoes. Footballs were thin on the ground.</p> <p>0:03:30 No hurling then in Cooraclare. East Clare had hurling. West Clare was football. Jim Kearney was a big player.</p> <p>0:04:30 No real training in how to play football. You just picked it up. He played corner back and if he went out of position he'd hear about it. You had to mark your man and clear the ball first time.</p> <p>0:06:00 Describes the style of football as clearing your lines and quite tough. He had a bad knee injury. You didn't want to go to the doctor but they might send a car to take you and the club would pay.</p> <p>0:07:00 There were injuries but no hamstrings. People cycled or walked to training so that helped.</p> <p>0:08:00 No football in school, there was no field at the school. The club promoted the games. Teachers were involved with the club.</p> <p>0:09:00 There was training but mostly running, not like today. You practised by playing in Cooraclare.</p> <p>0:09:50 Cooraclare was a big club. The old players ran the club and there was lots of interest and plenty of interest, but there would be politics within the club and fighting each other, but they forgot soon enough.</p> <p>0:11:00 Tells story about going to Kilkeel for a match in a horse and trap, when he left the fathers trap in Kilkeel and went home to the dance. Cycled back to Kilkeel to get horse.</p> <p>0:12:45 Describes rivalries with other local clubs. Kilrush were main rivals.</p> <p>0:13:25 The whole community came to see the Gaelic</p>
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	<p>Football matches.</p> <p>0:14:00 Tells story about time aged 9 or 10 doing sideline and keeping people outside the wire. Getting in a row with two guys who wouldn't go outside wire. His friend picked them up and threw them out.</p> <p>0:15:40 Describes players who were local heroes in Cooraclare. Michael Chambers, Sean Liddy, Johnny Reidy. Noel Crowley.</p> <p>0:16:45 Describes role of priests in the local GAA club and lack of women in organisation in Cooraclare. They were devoted to GAA though. Girls didn't play then but big supporters.</p> <p>0:18:30 Describes following the Clare county side, going to different parts of Clare Milltown or Ennis maybe. Later they had a great field in Cooraclare and teams came to play there.</p> <p>0:19:45 Talks about facilities at the pitch – no dressing rooms or showers and one set of jerseys and you better mind it.</p> <p>0:20:00 Describes transport to see Clare play in a car or a trap.</p> <p>0:21:00 The Clare county team were big heroes. They never got to Croke Park or any of the other big stadiums.</p> <p>0:22:00 Describes moving new York aged 23 in 1956 and got involved in GAA straight away.</p> <p>0:22:50 Describes Gaelic Park in 1950s – it had a dressing room anyway. But pitch was bad with big rocks in it and dusty.</p> <p>0:23:00 It was tough to play football on that pitch. Kerry O'Donnell didn't do much with pitch, but he was a great man, even if some people didn't like him. He'd help out if your dance wasn't a success. You got in to Gaelic Park for a dollar and O'Donnell wouldn't let them put it up to 3 dollars. And feed of bacon and cabbage for 90c and then dancing till 11pm.</p> <p>0:25:30 Women had to wear a dress to Gaelic Park under O'Donnell. Men wore suits and it was very hot.</p> <p>0:26:30 Describes coping with heat when playing when you</p>
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	<p>came over.</p> <p>0:26:40 Describes crowds in Gaelic Park in 1950s and arrangement of stands there then. You couldn't keep your seat if you moved it was so crowded.</p> <p>0:27:40 Describes Gaelic park as a networking site and for getting jobs. Big social venue for the Irish in New York.</p> <p>0:29:00 People who came to Gaelic Park came mainly for the games and second for the social life. Nearly all of the Irish who came over came to the park and were involved in the GAA in some way.</p> <p>0:29:20 Describes 2-3 year period when Gaelic Park was closed due to disagreement and the GAA were exiled to Rockland which meant a lot of old-timers couldn't go there. They didn't come back when the games came back to Gaelic Park.</p> <p>0:30:00 Talks about standard of football in new York in 1950s, about the same as Ireland. Some great footballers.</p> <p>0:31:00 Game in New York was tough but not dirty. A lot of people wanted the tough football, like him.</p> <p>0:32:00 Describes style of football, not much hand-passing.</p> <p>0:33:00 Talks about the Clare club in new York – members were all from Clare. No-one brought over to play football. Talks about Cork and Kerry, and Offaly and Roscommon as the strong teams when he came over.</p> <p>0:34:20 Rivalry was fairly friendly with some fights.</p> <p>0:35:00 Talks about strength of hurling in New York in the 1960s. Lots of star players over for Clare from Ireland then.</p> <p>0:36:20 The New York team then would have been competitive with any County side, so the Irish teams didn't want to play them.</p> <p>0:37:40 Describes limited training of teams in New York when he played, mainly trained in Van Cortlandt Park. Each team had their own strip of park and they didn't like if you watched them train.</p> <p>0:38:30 Describes American reactions to watching GAA</p>
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	<p>training in the park and fear of hurling. Wondering how people don't get killed.</p> <p>0:39:30 Tells story of training in Van Cortlandt park and scaring off cricket team by hitting balls through them to get more space.</p> <p>0:39:40 Describes it as easy to keep club going in early years with dances and card games.</p> <p>0:40:00 Talks about origins of bringing players over to play from Ireland in 1970s. There was a tit for tat element to it. One good player from Ireland could make a big difference, but it escalated. Mentions finances behind bringing players over and changes to what players expected for coming.</p> <p>0:43:00 Describes 1970s as a good time for the GAA in New York. Great competition and star players from Ireland.</p> <p>0:43:30 Talks about great players who played in New York in his lifetime. Sean Custy, Pat Kirby, Joe Carey and other players.</p> <p>0:45:00 Talks about players who came over from Ireland and how it affected crowd at Gaelic Park top see the stars from Ireland.</p> <p>0:45:40 Describes staying in touch with club back in Clare through the <i>Clare Champion</i> which you could buy in New York. You got news from people coming out from Ireland as well.</p> <p>0:47:00 You could listen to All-Ireland on the radio and see it at Lehman College on a big screen. Now they go to bars to see it on television.</p> <p>0:48:20 Describes going home on holiday and going to club games of Cooraclare.</p> <p>0:49:40 He missed the big games in the Polo Grounds.</p> <p>0:50:00 Thinks GAA is much the same as when he was young, although his old club has better facilities and fields, and lights that would light the whole parish.</p> <p>0:51:00 Talks about how common cars are in Ireland now – you'd have a car in a gap to stop the cattle now. The only time you saw cars in Cooraclare when he was young was an</p>
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	<p>election.</p> <p>0:51:30 Talks about role of politics in local club when he was young – mainly Fianna Fáil. They used to say: “If the Lord Jesus Christ came down, Fianna Fáil would beat him”</p> <p>0:53:00 No real link between GAA and politics in New York. No big fallings-out in the club over politics though.</p> <p>0:54:40 Describes pulling down Fine Gael signs back in Clare because he was Fianna Fáil. He once brought in 90 voters in a pony and trap, but half of them didn’t vote right.</p> <p>0:56:00 Talks about managing underage teams of Rangers - Irish Americans in New York with Joe Carey. They were interested, which was the main thing. Talks about not getting to manage the Minors despite their success with the other underage teams.</p> <p>0:59:00 Talks about growth of underage teams and growth of involvement of Irish Americans in game</p> <p>0:59:30 Talks about being at Gaelic Park every Sunday for the last 40 years even the day his daughter was baptised.</p> <p>1:00:30 He enjoyed all the time he put into GAA, no regrets and made lots of friends.</p> <p>1:01:00 Talks about changes in New York GAA – the kids coming over now are Americanised before they come over. His generation were greenhorns when they came. They needed Gaelic Park more and the other Irish dances and so on.</p> <p>1:02:20 Describes his best GAA memory as Clare winning the All-Ireland hurling in 1995. People would always you about Clare not having won. “Just to win the one.”</p> <p>1:04:30 No real worst memory</p> <p>1:05:00 Describes best game he ever saw as some of the Corraclare versus Quilty in around 1945 – the first big game he saw. John Crowe had a bandage around his head the whole match.</p> <p>1:06:00 Describes best team in his lifetime as Kerry all the time. Their heart and soul is just in football. Like Kilkenny in</p>
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	<p>hurling.</p> <p>1:07:10 Describes his GAA hero as Marty (Martin) Queally of Cooraclare. One of the best footballers he ever saw – played for lots of colleges.</p> <p>1:08:00 Says everything about the GAA makes him proud. “I couldn’t name one thing – I love the GAA...It’s a great place to go and have something in common with people...”</p> <p>1:09:00 Talks about Irish players playing handball in new York and Pat Kirby, who was world champion. There were a few alleys.</p> <p>1:10:20 What does the GAA mean to you?</p> <p>“What does it mean to me? It means everything to be honest with you. Only for it, I don’t know where I’d be. The GAA is the last thing to me. I love the GAA...It has something inside you that won’t come out unless you see it.”</p>
<p>Involvement in GAA</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Player <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Manager <input type="checkbox"/> Coach <input type="checkbox"/> Steward</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Chairperson <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Committee Member <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Caterer <input type="checkbox"/> Jersey Washer <input type="checkbox"/> 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>Played football in Ireland and in New York</p>
<p>Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)</p>	<p>Coached Rangers under-age teams at all levels up to Under-16</p>

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Format	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
Duration	Length of Interview: 1:11:00
Language	English

To be filled in by Interviewer:

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Signed: Seán Kearns

Date: 1st July 2010