## GAA Oral History Project

# **Interview Report Form**

Name of	Noel Byrne
Interviewer	
Date of Interview	14 <sup>th</sup> July 2009
Location	CRC FM Castlebar
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Martin Carney
	Biographical Summary of Interviewee
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1951
	Home County: Donegal
Education	Primary: De la Salle Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal
	Secondary: St Eunan's College, Letterkenny
	Third Level: University College Galway
Family	Siblings: 4 siblings
Club(s)	Ballyshannon GAA [Donegal]; St Joseph's GAA [Donegal]; UCG GAA Club [Galway]; Islandeady GAA [Mayo]; Castlebar Mitchel's [Mayo]
Occupation	Teacher
Parents' Occupation	Electrician [Father]; Teacher [Mother]
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	N/A
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	N/A

Date of Report	25 <sup>th</sup> July 2012
Period Covered	1950s – 2009
Counties/Countries Covered	Donegal, Mayo, Americas, Galway, Kerry, Roscommon, Tyrone, Dublin
Key Themes Covered	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Managing, Coaching, Officials, Administration, Celebrations, Fundraising, Sponsorship, Material Culture, Education, Religion, Media, Emigration, Involvement in GAA abroad, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, GAA Abroad, Rivalries, Irish Language, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Career, Alcohol, Politics, The Troubles, Professionalism, Retirement, Food and Drink, Socialising, Relationships
Interview Summary	The interview opens with Martin Carney discussing his family roots in Mayo and his links to Mayo's All-Ireland success in the 1930s. As a child, he attended big GAA matches in Croke Park including the 1959 All-Ireland semi-final between Dublin and Kerry. It was in Donegal that Carney was reared and he discusses the role that football played in a childhood where alternative recreational outlets were few. The informality of his Gaelic football experience in primary school is mentioned, as is the enthusiasm for the game in the secondary school in St. Eunan's, Letterkenny, run by the De La Salle brothers who displayed a serious commitment to all things Irish. Carney discusses the peculiarities of the Donegal club scene up to and including the creation of an amalgamated team, St. Joseph's, drawn from clubs in Bundoran and Ballyshannon. The men behind the St. Joseph's initiative are described as visionaries and are credited with the rise in Donegal's GAA fortunes in the 1970s. Carney charts his own sporting progression with school, club, university, county and province through the 1970s, shedding light on such issues as media coverage of Gaelic games, the influence of the Down footballers of the 1960s; the Irish language, the divide between soccer and Gaelic football in Donegal; hurling and the reasons for its difficulties in Donegal and elsewhere; the value of the colleges to player development. While playing for Donegal in the Ulster championship in the early 1970s, Carney spent a number of summers in New York and he recalls his experiences along with observations on the social make-up of various Irish teams in the city, the quality or otherwise of the football and hurling played and the impact of

more recent developments on the GAA and the wider Irish community in New York.
Carney moved to Mayo to teach in 1975, but continued to play with Donegal until 1979. Changing his club and county allegiances, he offers particular insights into the differences between the GAA scene in Mayo and Donegal. He also compares and contrasts his GAA experiences at various clubs within Mayo: Islandeady, Castlebar Mitchels and Breaffy. Although he played much of his club career in Mayo with Castlebar and enjoyed much success with the club, he maintains that the club has a very limited impact on the local community. He contrasts this with the situation in Breaffy where his children and where he identifies a strong sense of community activism and GAA commitment. Carney discusses the progression of his playing career with Castlebar Mitchels and with Mayo through the 1980s and the challenge to overcome the 'drink culture' and instil a greater seriousness into players. In addition, he recalls memorable games and players he has played both with and against.
Since retiring from football, Carney has been a club secretary with Castlebar Mitchels and a media pundit with RTE. He reflects on the GAA's relationship with the media and how it has changed over the years. The interview concludes with Carney selecting standout Gaelic footballers and reflecting on the place the GAA has occupied in his life.
00:01 Interview being conducted in the studio of CRC FM, Castlebar.
00:10 Martin Carney, interviewee, born in 1951.
00:30 Earliest memories of GAA in Donegal: talks about the influence of his father, a Mayo-man, whose brother won an All-Ireland with Mayo in 1936.
00:55 As eldest boy being taken to games from an early age by his father.
01:00 Recall being taken to a challenge match in 1957 between Dublin and Kildare in Croke Park. Also being taken to 1959 All-Ireland semi-final in 1959 between Dublin and Kerry – reference to performance of Mick O'Connell and to Mick O'Dwyer.
01:30 Attending national school and the passion for Gaelic football among the De La Salle Brothers. Mentions Brothers Raphael (from Castlebar) and Kieran. Also mentions Brother Aban from Cahersiveen.

01:57 Reference to the absence of organised football, except annual challenge matches against the Marist school in School and De La Salle school in Manorhamilton. Mentions lack of organisation and playing football among themselves. References also the absence of television or alternative recreational outlets.
02:48 Mentions being born in Bundoran and moving to Ballyshannon at an early age. Talks about Ballyshannon being a 'strange town, split by the River Erne'. Says the town has two parishes, two dioceses and one club.
03:30 Mentions subsequent merger of Ballyshannon and Bundoran to create St. Joseph's and the 'huge' success that followed in football.
03:33 Reflects on the social life of Bundoran and Ballyshannon. Remarks on how Bundoran came alive for three months a year, when people worked to maximise revenue.
04:00 Refers to army camp in Finner and playing seven a side – players included the Cogan brothers from Cork. Playing tournaments in the north in places like Belcoo or Drumran in Tyrone.
04:20 Talks about bringing people in to play from army camp as players in Bundoran having to work.
04:30 Remarks again on the lack of recreational outlets – 'football filled the void'.
04:40 Discusses the facilities at Fr. Tierney Park in Ballyshannon. Opened in 1954, he talks about the dressing- rooms that were built with voluntary labour. Mentions the work of men like Hugh Daly, John McDermott, Phil McLoone.
05:58 Discusses the 'ordinary standard' of football played. Remarks however that Ballyshannon always had 'good footballers'. Refers to his hero growing up, Mickey McLoone and the reasons for his early retirement. Jackie McDermott is also mentioned.
06:30 Refers to interest in football among young men in the town.
06:45 Recalls lack of organisation of football and the division of Donegal into four divisions – south, north, east and west – for underage football. Contrasts the lack of underage football available to him with that which subsequently prevailed.

07:00 Suggests the lack of competitive football from an early age helped nurture a love of the game.
07:20 Recalls the GAA heroes of his youth: discusses the Down team of the 1960s with Seán O'Neill and Paddy Doherty; talks also of Mick O'Connell and getting to know him as a 'god' through Michael O'Hehir's radio commentaries.
08:00 Heroes came from outside Donegal as the county had never reached a senior Ulster final until 1963. Reaching second Ulster final in 1966, 'first ever televised Ulster final' on BBC. Talks about attending 1963 final with father in Cavan, an 'awful hot day' and how wonderful and big an event it was.
09:00 Talks about the Down team on the 1960s, the 'black togs', seeing them television at a time when few games were televised.
09:26 Travelling to games by hackney car. Recalls John Joe Shearon, 'the Bishop Shearon' taking 6 or 7 people to matches all over Ulster.
09:50 Comments on the difficulty of travelling in late 1960s, early 1970s because of the Troubles.
10:10 Mentions that 'pillars of the community' were also key people in the GAA. Says they also gave a lot of time to other voluntary groups in town such as St. Vincent de Paul and the Credit Union.
10:58 St. Joseph's NS, De La Salle brothers, Ballyshannon. Discusses the quality of team in the secondary school when he was in the primary. Refers to individual players: Declan O'Carroll, Pauric McShea, Matt McNulty (later chief of Bord Failte), Charlie Murphy (later a doctor and father of Offaly hurler, Brendan).
11:30 Remarks that many on the school team later became influential in Irish life.
11:40 Mention influence of mother, a Glenties woman, in the decision to send him to St. Eunan's. Refers to family ties to Eunan's and to his lack of enjoyment of school. 'It was a grim spot', he says. 'Football was the thing that saved us and kept us sane.'
12:15 Remarks that they togged out every day for football for the five years he was in the school. Refers to school leagues, to half-days on Wednesdays, half-days on Saturdays. Playing in MacLarnon and MacRory cups.

12:50 Highlight of his GAA involvement in St. Eunan's: playing on Martin O'Neill in 1968/69, describes him as the 'kingpin' of the St. Columb's Derry team.
13:05 Reflects on the strength of football in the north in the late 1960s.
13:30 Talks about occasional reunions with former team- mates. Mentions winning an unofficial club All-Ireland in 1968 as a youngster against Dunmore in Tuam.
13:55 Explains that the St. Joseph's team was an amalgamation of two clubs who 'hated each other's guts'.
14:10 Refers to Jim Gallagher, Brian McEniff in Bundoran, Edward Quinn in Bundoran and Seán Slevin in Ballyshannon. Mentions their far-sightedness and the recognising the need for the two towns to come together to compete. Says basis of that team provided the basis of first Donegal team to win an Ulster title in 1972 – 9 were on the panel.
15:15 Reflects on how the amalgamation worked for Donegal and praises the efforts of Brian McEniff, Jim Gallagher, Dodger McDermott, Edward Quinn and Seán Slevin.
15:13 Contribution of teacher, Michael Cullen, to promoting Gaelic football in St. Eunan's, despite not having a GAA background. 'He trained us every evening'. Says he was 'ahead of his time' and remarks that he had contact with Derry City and knew drills from soccer.
17:05 Talks about the high profile of soccer in Letterkenny and along the 'eastern corridor' of Donegal. Reference to Finn Harps and Derry City. Says that soccer was even strong in Gaeltacht areas like Rosses and Gweedore. Tells of playing midfield for Donegal with Packie Bonnar in 1978/79 and talking with him about his plans after a game. Mentions that he would be Jock Stein's last signing for Celtic.
18:22 Says that Ballyshannon was essentially a 'Gaelic town' despite its history and its army barracks etc.
18:43 Discusses the various positions on the field in which he played. Recalls playing in goals against Pettigo on club junior team, aged 14, and the disapproval of his father.
19:03 Playing in goal in 1967 for St. Eunan's against St. Michael's Enniskillen. It the last time he played in goals.
19:35 Winning MacLarnon cup in 1968, when he played full forward.

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19:50 Recalls other positions played with UCG and Donegal.
20:19 Describes Gaelic football as a 'rougher' game with less emphasis on possession. Talks about the game pioneered in St. Joseph's – a shorter game – and suggests a link with the style of football played by Donegal in 1992.
21:15 Mentions that Gaelic football was more 'catch and kick' and recalls two teams lined up in middle of pitch for throw-in.
21:30 Limited emphasis on fitness or organised training.
21:40 Training when you 'got the chance' and running the beach behind Finner camp. Suggest that St. Joseph's team could have won more had they trained more.
22:15 Remarks on lack of Irish language usage in the GAA and on Ballyshannon's distance from the Gaeltacht areas of Gweedore.
22:40 Lack of consciousness of the importance of the spoken Irish, except for 'drilling' of De La Salle brothers in 'all things Irish.' Recalls Brother Aban having a bottle of Guinness and getting class to sing. Says he was imbued with Irish nationalism.
23:55 Remarks that he was unconscious of politics in the GAA, but claims to have later realised the strength of Fianna Fáil in the county – 'if you put up two monkeys for Fianna Fáil, the two monkeys would have got elected' Mentions that 'lynchpins' in the GAA tended also to be involved with Fianna Fáil.
24:29 Discusses attending UCG and his interest in football. Doing a degree in Maths and English. Recalls his first day in the college and the President of the college, who was the father of a 3 in a row All-Ireland medal winner with Galway.
25:44 Refers to playing soccer as well as Gaelic football in UCG.
25:47 Influence of two people on GAA in UCG: Pauric MacDiarmada and Bobby Curran, Professor of Maths. Suggests that college was less well organised than others and remarks that the captain of the team was responsible for organising training etc. Mentions also the lack of pressure to attend lectures, training twice a week in Renmore, faculty leagues.
27:17 Talks about returning to play with Ballyshannon at weekends. Mentions also playing for UCG and losing county

final to Dunmore in 1973. Recalls being in New York and getting a call to come home for county final at weekend, paying their own way. Mentions winning county league in Galway, defeating Ballinasloe in final.
28:40 Discusses the benefits of college football: meeting players from other counties, the insights and confidence it gave. Names Tommy O'Malley, John Tobin, Ger O'Keeffe, Paudie O'Mahony.
29:05 Playing in New York. Mentions Phil Brennan, a 'union boss' in charge of the Donegal team. Went out first in April 1972, and again in 1973 and 1974. Talks of the players he played with - John Purdy, Dave McCarthy – and his enjoyment of the New York experience.
30:00 Discusses winning Ulster championship in 1972 and 1974 and being brought home from New York for games. Talks about the game he flew home for and how he played. Talks also about the generosity of the Donegal county board and the 'kindness' of the Donegal community in New York.
31:12 Reflects on the strength of Gaelic football in New York and the make-up of the teams e.g Sligo was 'built around the carpenter's union', the Kerry team around John Kerry O'Donnell's. Mentions also the Hennessy company, the association between Leitrim and pub business. Refers to Jackie Sammon and the Connemara Gaels, made up of 'hard-working men'.
32:03 Influence of emigration in the 1960s and Troubles in the north on the strength of the GAA in New York in the 1970s.
32:28 Claims that the quality of football at senior level in New York was high, but junior football and hurling were dangerous. 'Hurling was deadly there'.
32:50 Refers to the rivalries between clubs and the intensity of some of the games in New York.
33:05 Talks about the social life around the GAA in New York and mentions a recent visit with the Mayo team for a Connacht championship match.
33:19 Socialising at Gaelic Park on Sunday, trying to get a job. Mentions that Irish community was tightly knit in Woodlawn in the Bronx and in Queens and in Brooklyn, but subsequently became more dispersed. Says the 'sense of community broke up somewhat'

34:20 Considers the importance of continued links with New York in Connacht championship. Comments on the costs involved in taking teams to New York and to the size of the crowds at games. Remarks that the Irish community has 'disappeared to the four winds'
35:18 Breaking into Donegal senior team in 1970 and reflections on early games, including breaking a collarbone. Remarks on being very light and not doing weights etc.
36:40 Enjoyment of Donegal career and it running parallel with a successful period for the club.
37:15 Talks about the influence and contribution of Brian McEniff on Donegal football. Taking over as player/manager at 28 years of age in 1972 and winning two Ulster championships subsequently.
38:00 Success giving rise to greater interest. Mentions Donegal winning two Under 21 titles in 1982 and 1987, building blocks for 1992 team.
38:32 Considers the small jump from club or colleges to inter- county football. Remarks that colleges were 'on a par' if not better than county football. Refers to the strength of the UCD and UCC teams he played against. Recalls marking Moss Keane.
39:49 Remarks that he never celebrated club successes and explains why: school, work, the number of pioneers on team, the fact that club was an amalgamation.
40:30 Standout games: recalls a game against Gweedore with multiple sendings off, including four players for Gweedore in the first half. Recalls Anton Carroll of Gweedore asking referee to forget first half and start game again. Mentions the 'fractious' nature of contests with Gweedore.
41:20 Talks about the pleasure of beating St. Eunan's of Letterkenny, winning a first Ulster club final, beating Castleblaney. Losing to Roscommon Gaels in All-Ireland semi-final and reason for it: 'We didn't rate themwe got what we deserved'
42:00 Tells of playing against Tyrone and marking Frank McGuigan in 1974 and recalls his performance. Talks about his own mobility and the satisfaction of playing well against McGuigan. Tells of working in New York in 1980 and meeting Frank McGuigan on the train. Tells story of McGuigan going to New York on all-stars trip and staying for three years.

44:30 Discusses memorable games with Donegal: draw and replay against Down in 1974. Mentions the joy of winning and the pleasure of beating Down and Cavan.
46:00 Reflects on the lack of a strong bond among Donegal players and talks about the geographic divisions within the county.
47:07 Talks about his love of hurling and winning a minor hurling medal with Donegal in 1969, before losing All-Ireland semi-final against Kildare.
48:10 Discusses hurling in Burt in Donegal, in Ballyshannon and in Ballybofey. 'Outside that, there wasn't any interest in hurling'
49:10 Considers the difficulty in spreading hurling and remarks upon the hostility of many GAA administrators, the requirement for good land and for plenty of time. Mentions also the absence of a tradition in Mayo.
50:00 Discusses his experience of playing in the inter- provincial competition (Railway Cup) with three different teams: Ulster, Connacht and the Combined Universities. Winning inter-provincial with Combined universities. Talks about the flagging interest in the competition in the 1970s, says it was struggling for 'credibility' and popularity. Talks also of his enjoyment in playing in the competition and meeting players from other counties.
51:20 Considers the future of the Railway cup. 'It's dying a slow death'. Remarks on the official neglect of the competition and its persistence through the sponsorship of MD Donnelly.
52:25 Moving to Mayo in 1975 to teach and continuing to play with Donegal until 1979. Remarks on going to Mayo games because of family connections.
53:15 Explains his decision to play football in Mayo and the difficulty of adapting. Talks about the greater interest levels and the stronger football culture in Mayo in relation to Donegal.
54:00 Says the breakthrough was captaining Mayo in 1981 and winning first Connacht title since 1969.
54:25 Refers to a 'kind of despair about Mayo'. Mentions the sense of entitlement, the talent and the unwillingness to work hard enough.
55:00 Says the responsibility for the above came down to

individual players. Comments on a 'drinking culture' and the greater concern with having a good time.
55:35 Refers to the strength of Mayo club football – names Garrymore and Knockmore. Suggests the focus may have been on the club first and the county second.
56:10 Reflects on drink culture and the damage it has done to players over the years. Suggests the modern player regards himself as a more serious athlete and more professional – believes it may have a detrimental impact on the fun that players get out of it, but that it has helped the game.
57:17 Discusses Mayo club scene. Describes his two years with Islandeady. Explains the role of college friend Mickey Sweeney in bringin him to Islandeady, the rural nature of the club and its spirit.
58:00 Talks about the subsequent move to Castlebar Mitchels and the positive effect this had on his game. Refers to the good and serious players he played alongside: Brian Kilkelly, Henry Galvin, Tom Reilly, John Brennan.
58:40 Reflects on the management of Castlebar Mitchels and the role of Leo Doherty, a 'strong manager'. Mick Ruane also involved. Says Doherty was 'persuasive' in getting players like David O'Halloran or Mickey Feeney who might otherwise have played with Celtic locally.
59:35 Memorable games with Castlebar Mitchels: mentions winning Centenary cup after losing 1981 and 1982 county finals. Describes Centenary cup as important, leading to county championship success in 1986 and 1988.
1:00:00 Says that Castlebar are currently not 'coming with an asses roar of getting to [county] finals.' Mentions that factors that made the club a force in the 1980s and his disappointment at not winning Connacht club title in 1988.
1:01:17 Reflects on the progression in training and coaching methods etc: discusses the influence of Liam O'Neill, who took over as county manager in 1983. Describes him as an 'outstanding coach' and says the skills and drills were brought back to club. Describes the structure of training and the playing schedule for the year.
1:03:10 Impact of sport on family life: talks about getting married in 1982 and having two children by the late 1980s. Mentions that wife was physio with county team, the strain on both of them and the fact it was a 'labour of love'. Says he

doesn't regret it.
1:03:50 Denies that Castlebar Mitchels were a major part of community. 'It was always a small group of people running the clubnever seemed to grab the attention of the public at large.' Tells anecdote to illustrate his point. Remarks that they didn't have same affiliation to club team that they had to county team.
1:04:50 Discusses his administrative role as secretary of club, the job of redeveloping McHale Park, the works undertaken and the time it took up.
1:05:55 Reflects on the club's rough relationship with the county board. 'We held what they wantedMcHale Park.'
1:06:30 Mentions that his children, 3 girls and a boy, play football with Breaffy. Remarks on the active involvement of the community in Breaffy GAA affairs and contrasts the situation with Castlebar. Stresses the greater sense of community and 'togetherness' in Breaffy and says that Castlebar is 'too big', catering for 'too big an area.'
1:07:40 Discusses volunteerism in Castlebar and Breaffy. Recalls the difficulty getting stewards for big match days in McHale Park, with players being the worst. Says there were always the 'old reliables' and he names: Philip Heneghan, Mick Ruane, Paddy Kerrigan, John Doherty. Remarks on the greater sense of community and volunteerism in Breaffy.
1:08:50 Memories of Mayo career: playing Monaghan in 1981 in 'appalling' conditions; winning Connacht title in 1981; 1985 All-Ireland semi-final against Dublin in Croke Park; Connacht final in 1988 against Roscommon. Mentions the sense of achievement of those years, playing under Liam O'Neill and John O'Mahony.
1:10:25 Representing a 'tribe' and the connection between players and supporters.
1:11:13 Reflects on players he played against: Meath full- back Mick Lyons; Mickey Hughes of Tyrone; Tony McManus of Roscommon; Val Daly in Galway.
1:13:00 Explains the background to becoming a media pundit in 1996, receiving a call from Bill Lalor in RTE. Doing the analysis of the 1996 All-Ireland final with Colm O'Rourke. Discusses his relationship with RTE and his enjoyment of co- commentary over the analysis because of the time involved.
1:15:50 Discusses the relationship between the GAA and

Administrator (Positions held; how	Secretary of Castlebar Mitchel's
Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played) Record as an	4 Connaught SFC; 2 Ulster SFC; 1 MHC; 1 Railway Cup; 8 County STC; New York Championships; North American Championship. Played from 1968 – 91.
	□ Other (please specify):
	🗸 Caterer 🗸 Jersey Washer 🗆 Referee 🗆 None
	$\Box$ Chairperson 🗸 Committee Member 🗸 Grounds-person
Involvement in GAA	✓ Supporter ✓ Player ✓ Manager ✓ Coach ✓ Steward
	1:22:10 Improvements he would like to see in the GAA: the expansion of hurling and a greater sense of responsibility to the game among players and mentors. Focus on improvement of skills and discipline.
	1:21:20 Reflects on what the GAA means to him. Describes as the 'central activity in my lifetime that I have had an interest in.' Says it means everything to him outside his family and professional life.
	1:21:10 Refers to players such as Mick O'Connell, Maurice Fitzgerald and Peter Canavan 'who inspire' young people to play football.
	1:20:55 Mentions the quality of Peter Canavan.
	1:20:10 Talks about the exceptionality of the Kerry team in the 1970s, which emerged out of a beaten Minor team.
	1:19:40 Recalls the experience of playing, of releasing stress, of expressing himself etc.
	1:18:45 Stresses the need to highlight 'unsavoury' incidents in Gaelic games.
	1:18:35 Benefits the media has brought to the GAA.
	1:17:25 Perceptions of the media among GAA supporters, young and old. Suggests the younger supporters prefers a 'more confrontational' media approach. Mentions the need to be reasoned and responsible in commentating on the GAA.
	media. Talks about the GAA's former sense that media should be a 'propaganda' vehicle. Refers to the GAA's 'suspicion' of media and their co-dependence.

### REFERENCE NO. DL/1/3

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Format	✓ Audio □ Audio-Visual
Duration	Length of Interview: 01:23:34
Language	English

### To be filled in by Interviewer:

I hereby assign the copyright of the content of the above to the GAA Oral History Project on the understanding that the content will not be used in a derogatory manner. I understand that I am giving the GAA Oral History Project the right to use and make available to the public the content of this interview.

Signed: Regina Fitzpatrick

Date: 25<sup>th</sup> July 2012