

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Regina Fitzpatrick
Date of Interview	11 th June 2010
Location	Seamus's home, near Mullingar, Co. Westmeath
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Seamus Whelan
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1947 Home County: Westmeath
Education	Primary: Castletown-Geoghegan NS, Co. Westmeath Secondary: Coláiste Mhuire, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath Third Level: University College Galway, NUI Maynooth
Family	Siblings: 3 sisters & 1 brother Current Family if Different: Wife (Sarah)
Club(s)	Castletown-Geoghegan HC [Westmeath]; St Malachy's GFC [Westmeath]; Ballinagore GFC [Westmeath]
Occupation	Secondary School Teacher
Parents' Occupation	Postman [Father]; Housewife [Mother]
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	None
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	Castletown-Geoghegan Badminton Club; NACA; Glór na nGael; Gradam an Phiarsaigh.

REFERENCE NO. WH/1/8

Date of Report	25 th June 2012
Period Covered	1918 – 2010
Counties/Countries Covered	Westmeath
Key Themes Covered	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Managing, Coaching, Refereeing, Officials, Administration, Celebrations, Commiserations, Fundraising, Sponsorship, Material Culture, Education, 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, Irish Language, Culture, Scór, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Irish, History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Sacrifices, Politics, Ban on Foreign Games and Dances, Opening of Croke Park, Relationship with the Association, Professionalism, Retirement, Food and Drink, Socialising, Purchase of Grounds, Relationships, Economy / Economics
Interview Summary	<p>Séamus recalls his involvement with the GAA in Westmeath over the years. Originally from Castletown Geoghegan, he played both hurling and football and enjoyed going to GAA games as a spectator. He played on school teams and eventually became a teacher himself, training children in schools and managing them through competitions. He became involved in administration with Castletown Geoghegan and was soon a delegate to the county board, before becoming Westmeath County Board Chairman. In this position he set about promoting football within the county by trying to improve structures. He also put a lot of work into encouraging Irish language, culture and Scór. One of the major projects he worked on was the redevelopment of Cusack Park, and he describes this process in detail. When he wasn't busy with that he had to attend other matters such as clubs with grievances, or disciplinary matters. Séamus needed many skills for this position - persuasion, diplomacy, patience, self-belief and a little bit of luck. A GAA man through and through, he has seen how the Association works at all levels and hopes that it continues to be a positive force, although there are certain issues - like player power and a lack of respect for match officials - that he would like to see properly addressed sooner rather than later.</p> <p>00:15 Originally from Castletown Geoghegan and living in Mullingar. Born in 1947.</p>

	<p>00:30 Growing up in Castletown Geoghegan. Father a postman. Community reliant on building and horses - Middletown Park Stud Farm. Hurling starting up in 1918. Father a musician and nicknamed 'the whistling postman'. His father telling stories of going to the bog to save turf on his holidays. Helping others with work that needed to be done and getting something back in return. Going to locally produced plays in St Michael's Hall. Role of parish priests in the community. Teachers and Gardaí doing good work for the community.</p> <p>05:45 Father's musical exploits. Father playing on the radio on 2RN. Father's interest in sports. Tony Finn a lodger in their house and his interest in GAA. Séamus being brought to Croke Park and going to a restaurant afterwards. Impressions of Croke Park.</p> <p>08:45 Earliest GAA memories. Castletown Geoghegan hurlers winning a three-in-a-row in the late 1950s. Cycling to Cusack Park to watch games. Football teams in the area included Ballinagore, Loughnavalley and Streamstown. Social aspect of GAA. St Malachy's founded in 1968 and the different clubs coming together to form the football team. Success they had. Ballinagore and Loughnavalley reforming. Hurling club in Dalystown that later became St Brigid's. Hurling teams in Athlone in the past. Hurling team in Drumraney. Southern Gaels formed in later years.</p> <p>12:25 Reasons for Castletown Geoghegan wearing black and amber. Mick Byrne from Kilkenny involved in the formation of the club.</p> <p>12:50 Earliest attempts to play. Schoolmaster Patrick Heraghty influencing Seamus. Level of organisation of underage games at the time. Playing games locally. Practicing in a field known as 'the planton'. Playing against other schools. Trespassing on farmers' fields to play and using jumpers for goalposts. Playing in Hackett's field. Castletown Geoghegan getting a field from the Land Commission.</p> <p>17:25 Doing cross-country running and athletics. Prominence of Scór, which was started in the area in 1973. Being involved in Comhaltas. Teaching traditional music, dancing and drama. Importance of Scór na nÓg. Success in Scór. Talented player Willie Lowry participating in set dancing. Benefits of Scór to clubs. Women getting involved through Scór.</p>
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	<p>23:55 Coaching standards in the area. Success at underage level. New York man involved as underage chairman with the club.</p> <p>25:00 Coursing club in the area when he was young. Helping to round up hares. Point-to-point horse racing. Badminton and camogie in the locality. Camogie club in Dysart Ladies football in Loughnavalley. Benefits of women's involvement in the GAA. Women involved in the higher levels of administration - Noreen Doherty in Donegal, Liz Howard as a PRO.</p> <p>29:15 Need to purchase additional grounds due to the growth in the number of teams at all levels.</p> <p>31:05 Numbers involved in GAA club in Castletown Geoghegan fluctuating over time. Economic hardship and emigration in the 1980s. RTÉ doing a feature on the area in the 1980s. Players going to New York to live and the teams in New York enjoying success on the field.</p> <p>33:30 Rivals included Rickardstown in hurling. The Jobber McGrath played with them. Physicality of games against them. Rivalry with St Brigid's and Cullion. Paddy Daly marking Paddy Power. The Powers a strong hurling family. Nicky Power a hurling board chairman. Going to Paddy Power's funeral.</p> <p>37:50 Seamus' GAA career. Passion for hurling. Going to Gormanstown for hurling immersion courses. Meeting Peter Stephenson and Liam Hannify from Derry, Colin Honan and Jimmy Cullinane from Clare, Seán Ó Síocháin, Michael Kelly from Roscommon. What happened at the courses. Socialising at night. Forming friendships. Playing with Michael O'Brien - who became secretary of Tipperary County Board - from Silvermines there. Going on leadership courses, including one at the Fairways Hotel in Dundalk. Terry Prone training them on coping with the media.</p> <p>42:10 Progressive nature of the GAA. Getting a lecture on public speaking at Croke Park.</p> <p>43:25 Playing club junior hurling and junior football. Playing at intermediate and senior level. Breaking a collarbone. Missing a county final as a result. Playing Portlaoise in a Leinster club competition. Tom Prendergast playing for Portlaoise. Playing as a substitute in the replay. Playing junior football after that.</p>
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	<p>47:35 Playing for Ballinagore when he was at college. Enjoyment he took from it. Getting travel expenses to come from college. Hitching occasionally. Getting a lift in a hearse. Ballinagore breaking up and joining St Malachy's. Playing briefly for the Westmeath junior hurling team against Meath.</p> <p>51:10 Being shy in UCG. Trying to become a primary teacher. Local people organising a loan so that he could go to college. Michael D Higgins lecturing there. Doing Latin with Professor Heavey. Playing GAA casually whilst at college. Getting a job as a teacher and doing a HDip in Maynooth in 1970. Retiring in 2008.</p> <p>56:00 GAA involvement in the school he taught in. Resistance to rugby and soccer there. Beating St Mary's Belfast in an All-Ireland B final in the 1960s and his brother being captain. Managing teams at the school. Successes and failures they had. David Cuddy playing well in a final. Controversial decision in the game. Disappointment he felt. Being gracious in defeat and TD Paul McGrath writing a letter commending them for their behaviour.</p> <p>01:00:25 Role of GAA in the school, Coláiste Mhuire. Friction between teachers due to competing demands - sporting and academic - on pupils. Role in sport impacting on his teaching. Winning a minor All-Ireland in 1995 and making sure not to miss school as a result. GAA involvement helping in his relationship with the students. Nationalist dimension of GAA.</p> <p>01:08:20 Department of Education's support for sport in schools. Need for the department to recognise the contribution of pupils involved in sports. Importance of GAA in national schools. Running hurling courses for national school teachers. Being misquoted in a national newspaper saying that female teachers were a threat to the GAA in national schools. GAA sending people into the schools. Being an unpopular chairman for imposing a levy on clubs.</p> <p>01:16:45 Development of Cusack Park. Becoming chairman in 1996. Inadequacy of draining system in Cusack Park. Man from An Foras Talúntas inspecting the pitch and making recommendations. Deciding to do a major redevelopment of the park. Problems they faced. Lack of finances. Fundraising in 1988. Putting together a committee to raise funds. St Loman's giving 500 pounds. Struggling to raise necessary funds. Making headway eventually. Christy Whelehan cycling to the bank to deposit large amounts of cash. Ian Mullen revamping the pitch and advising Paddy Collins on how to</p>
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	<p>keep it in order. Jack Taafe approaching Ulster Bank about debts owed. Going to Leinster Council with a business plan. Frank Tierney in Croke Park helping them. Albert Fallon, chairman of Leinster Council, calling to Castletown Geoghegan. Taoiseach John Bruton visiting Cusack Park. Contacting TDs Willie Penrose, Mary O'Rourke, Paul McGrath about the redevelopment. Some clubs refusing to contribute to the redevelopment and dealing with that. Approaching Minister for Sport Jim McDaid. Visit of Fianna Fáil and then Taoiseach Bertie Ahern.</p> <p>01:36:15 Being asked by builders to sell Cusack Park. Considering selling it. How the redevelopment turned out. Recession happening shortly after completion of redevelopment.</p> <p>01:39:00 Getting involved in administration. Acting as treasurer at Castletown Geoghegan. Being elected to the county board in 1973. Serving under Fr Macken and Fr Troy on the county board. Becoming chairman in 1986. Disappointment at fortunes of county side. Peter Geraghty in Ballymore wondering why Westmeath never win anything.</p> <p>01:44:40 Using County Down as a role model for football development. Improving coaching set-up. Training in national schools. Introducing group football and bringing smaller clubs together. All-Ireland minor winning side of 1995 featuring players from group teams - Damien Gavin, Aidan Lennon.</p> <p>01:47:40 Gaining confidence as a chairman. Comórtas na mBunscol contributing to 1995 success.</p> <p>01:49:30 Difficult decisions as chairman. Suspending players. Insisting on clubs paying their levy. Clubs resisting having to pay for coaching. Working well with Paddy Collins. Brendan Lowry managing the county team and having a dislike for county boards.</p> <p>01:51:25 Losing heavily to Offaly in Moate in the League. Matty Kerrigan coming in and making a League semi-final. Brendan Lowry requesting that club games be called off in the run-up to a Westmeath game in Croke Park. Lowry threatening to resign. How this was dealt with at county board level. Arranging to meet Brendan in Clara with Denis Coyne. Making a decision and informing Paddy Collins. How he felt afterwards.</p> <p>01:56:05 Refusing to call off a match when Raharney</p>
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	<p>requested it. Facing opposition to that.</p> <p>01:57:50 Opening of Croke Park. Nemo Rangers allowing rugby players to use their facilities. Instructing clubs on Rule 42. Tony O'Donoghue and RTÉ visiting to record a meeting on Rule 42. Principled people objecting to the opening of Croke Park.</p> <p>02:00:50 Pat Fanning and the removal of the Ban. Other rules being tinkered with.</p> <p>02:01:50 Organisational structure of GAA. Relationships between players and county boards. The GPA. Perceived media bias against county boards. Lack of respect for match officials. Incident where a player grabbed a referee by the neck and the suspension was reduced by Leinster Council.</p> <p>02:06:55 Former GAA President Paddy Buggy calling him about becoming chairman of the Culture Committee. Jimmy Smith as his servicing officer. Joe McDonagh on the committee. Replacing Tony Gilligan on a committee to promote hurling.</p> <p>02:10:15 Promoting GAA overseas. Importance of GAA to Irish abroad.</p> <p>02:11:40 Promotion of Irish language and culture. Working with Liam Mulvihill and Jack Bootman. Man objecting to him starting a speech in Irish and continuing in English.</p> <p>02:18:15 Irish language and culture in the GAA in the future.</p> <p>02:19:35 Hopes for the future of the GAA.</p> <p>02:21:05 Benefits of his GAA involvement. Enjoying his playing days. Confidence building. Being selected for a debating competition and not wanting to do it. Having to speak at GAA meetings later in life. Exhilaration of Westmeath's minor win in 1995 and beating Kerry in 1999. Winning Leinster in 2004. Winning the Christy Ring Cup in Croke Park in 2005. His nephew Ronan Whelan playing. David Kilcoyne, Rory O'Connell, John Keane and Gary Connaughton getting All Stars. Paddy Collins refereeing an All-Ireland final. Watching the progress of Barry Kelly as he made his way to refereeing an All-Ireland final.</p> <p>02:28:55 Sacrifices he made. Meeting the woman who later became his wife. Being a Central Council delegate for</p>
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	<p>Westmeath.</p> <p>02:31:45 What the GAA means to him. Good points and bad points of the Association.</p>
Involvement in GAA	<p>✓ Supporter ✓ Player ✓ Manager ✓ Coach <input type="checkbox"/> Steward</p> <p>✓ Chairperson ✓ Committee Member <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person</p> <p>✓ Caterer <input type="checkbox"/> Jersey Washer ✓ Referee <input type="checkbox"/> None</p> <p>✓ Other (please specify): Match announcer</p>
Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played)	<p>St Malachy's: Played until he was 40 yrs. Won Westmeath Junior Football Championship, 1970; Won Westmeath Intermediate Football Championship, 1975; Won Feis Cup medals also.</p> <p>Castletown Geoghegan: Played Junior hurling with them for many years.</p>
Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)	<p>Castletown Geoghegan: Held many committee positions down through the years including treasurer (5 years); Delegate to Westmeath county board.</p> <p>Westmeath: Held many positions including, Registrar (1973); Youth Officer; Irish Language Officer; County Chairman (1986 0 2007); Chairperson of Coiste Scór; Coiste Cultúrtha.</p> <p>National: Leinster Hurling Representative on Central Council; Member of Overseas committee.</p>
Format	<p>✓ Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual</p>
Duration	<p>Length of Interview: 02:34:21</p>
Language	<p>English and Irish</p>

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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: 25th June 2012