

## GAA Oral History Project

## Interview Report Form

<b>Name of Interviewer</b>	Regina Fitzpatrick
<b>Date of Interview</b>	5 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2009
<b>Location</b>	Phone interview – Greenshill, Kilkenny and Merrillville, Indiana
<b>Name of Interviewee</b> (Maiden name / Nickname)	Pat Hennessy
<b><u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u></b>	
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Born</b>	<b>Year Born:</b> 1920 <b>Home County:</b> Kilkenny
<b>Education</b>	<b>Primary:</b> Christian Brothers Kilkenny <b>Secondary:</b> Visitation Secondary School, Chicago
<b>Family</b>	<b>Siblings:</b> Youngest of 12 <b>Current Family if Different:</b> Eileen (wife)
<b>Club(s)</b>	Eire Óg GAA [Kilkenny]; Dunmore GAA [Kilkenny]; James Stephens GAA [Kilkenny]; Nottingham GAA [Great Britain]; Harry Bolands GAA, Chicago [Americas]
<b>Occupation</b>	Retired Chicago Mayor's Office of Information and Public Relations
<b>Parents' Occupation</b>	Coal Merchant [Father]; Housewife [Mother]
<b>Religion</b>	Roman Catholic
<b>Political Affiliation / Membership</b>	Democrat

**REFERENCE NO. (OFFICE USE ONLY): KK/1/7**

<b>Date of Report</b>	24 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2009
<b>Period Covered</b>	1920-2009
<b>Counties/Countries Covered</b>	Kilkenny, Great Britain, Americas
<b>Key Themes Covered</b>	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Managing, Refereeing, Administration, Celebrations, Commiserations, Fundraising, Education, 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, Irish Language, Culture, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Irish History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Politics, The Troubles, Relationship with the Association
<b>Interview Summary</b>	<p>0:00 Introduction</p> <p>:17 Born in Greenshill – Twelve born in the family - eight emigrated to America – growing up at Greenshill – drawing water from the River Nore.</p> <p>1:05 Kilkenny in the 1920s- recovering from the Civil War – Role of the GAA after the Civil War – everyone out together on the field – Catholic Church also instrumental in the recovery – Civil War in Kilkenny – recovery took until the end of the 1920s – the GAA’s role in restoring peace after the Civil War one of the reasons why he became involved in it.</p> <p>2:43 – His parents were from Kilkenny – Hennessy clan migrated from Offaly and ended up in Cork – village in Cork called Ballyhennessy – Father from Clogh outside Castlecomer, was a coal merchant – worked in the mines in Castlecomer – would bring coal home and would box and bag it at home and sell it around town – Pat also sold it.</p> <p>4:05 Working in the Colliery considered a good job at the time – eight out of the twelve children went to America – no jobs and so forced to emigrate. Father died in 1932 – Pat the youngest in the family – going to visit America with his mother to visit the family – stayed for three years – going to secondary school in America – got scholarship to continue his education but his mother decided that they would return to Ireland – Twelve years old when he went.</p> <p>5:50 Going to Chicago in 1932 – only knew two or three of his family; had never seen his older brother – he was a police man there, eventually became captain – landed at Ellis Island</p>

where all the emigrants lived until someone came to claim them – description of Ellis Island – claimed by Mrs Holland – she lived in the Bronx – got the train to outside Chicago and met his brother – meeting his brother for the first time – got the train to Chicago and all the family where there to meet them – meeting his family – starting school – being in a co-ed school for the first time – playing football and baseball in school – no GAA in Chicago in the 1930s.

10:14 Going by boat to America – landed in Boston first – then sailed down to New York – smooth sailing – lovely trip – eight days on the boat – big adventure.

11:02 Getting the train from grand Central Station New York to Chicago – it took about fourteen hours – mother anxious to see the family again – stayed with sister.

12:21 Getting married to Paddy Grace's sister.

12:34 Returning from America – his sister had taken care of the house – went to the Christian Brothers when he returned – first remembers playing hurling when he was 8 or 9 with the Christian brothers – training after school everyday at 3pm for an hour – all hurling, no football.

14:12 Story about Nicky Rackard arriving at St Kieran's with a football and leaving as a hurler.

14:43 Opening of Nowlan Park in 1928 – Cork and Dublin played – may have been All-Ireland semi-final – description of watching the match – his father teaching him basic hurling skills and fair play.

15:43 The Opening of Nowlan Park – big 'hullabaloo' a band played; a pipers band paraded the teams around the field – huge crowds – may have been James Stephens Band.

16:54 Used to play hurling with the older men in Chicago who talked about the old days in Chicago when hurling was played there – they only had a rented field, the old Gaelic Park.

17:50 Good supporter of the game; played with Éire Óg; played with the Christian Brothers and with the vocational school – marking Jim Langton – starting to play with Éire Óg – delighted because they were winning all the time.

19:25 Being called to play for Kilkenny- putting on the Black and Amber for the first time – 'The dream of my life' – won the championship in 1935 and 1936, he was on the panel those years. In 1937 he played on the team and they won. Playing in Killarney – All-Ireland Senior hurling was on that day too –

	<p>Christy Ring was a sub for Cork that day – played against the team that became the Cork team of the forties that won the four in a row.</p> <p>21:21 Kilkenny senior team lost that day to Tipperary – Minor team consoled by Lory Meagher – told them all they were only beginning and that they would win – a real gentleman.</p> <p>22:15 Hurling heroes – Lory Meagher, Mick Mackey, Johnny Cane, Waterford; Nicky Rackard, a dual player – would agree with most of the team of the century – Paddy Phelan – a great stylist – Martin White – a great full-forward.</p> <p>24:10 Played with Éire Óg – team started out in Dunmore that time on the Bleach Road – Pat moved from Éire Óg to Dunmore, near where he lived and ended up playing for James Stephens – won Northern Final – then emigrated to England – went with John Joe Gilmartin and Bill Phelan – a great character, very unassuming – started a hurling team there – Story about John Joe playing handball with students in Nottingham.</p> <p>27:03 No work in Kilkenny so emigrated to England in 1943 – joining the LVF in Kilkenny before that – learning how to use a gun – a friend of Chunky O'Brien.</p> <p>29:38 Going to Nottingham during the war – rough crossing – finding lodgings – first impressions of Nottingham – rationing – worked in an engineering factory – then got jobs in the office and then got married.</p> <p>31:33 Marrying Eileen and then moving to Chicago together – knew her before he left – waiting to be called to join the Gardaí.</p> <p>34:22 Starting a hurling team in Nottingham – meeting up with other Irish people at mass in Nottingham – Mylo McCabe who played for Kilkenny in 1938 played with them – had a good team – going to dances every Saturday night – got a job for Eileen and she went over also and they stayed there until they got married.</p> <p>37:10 Moving to American with Eileen – late 1940s – getting a visa and passport – Getting ahead in the queue for a visa because Pat had attempted to volunteer for the American army after the bombing Pearl Harbour.</p> <p>41:28 No Gaelic games in Chicago from 1930 until the late 1940s because of the Depression and World War II – restricted immigration laws – long line of Irish people entering</p>
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	<p>the US when it opened up again after the war.</p> <p>42:00 Staying with his sister when they arrived first – getting their own apartment – worked in an office – took civil service exam – Mayor Daly came into office in 1955 – starting to work for the Mayors office of Inquiry and Communication – worked in Public Relations and Information – met lots of different people – meeting Ted Kennedy - Taking Ethel Kennedy (Bobby's wife) around to the Catholic schools on the south side of Chicago.</p> <p>48:36 Presence of the Irish in government at the time – most dominant group – if you carried Chicago, you carried Illinois and Illinois was a very important state – knew Barak Obama – Michelle Obama worked for the Mayors Law Department – he was a neighbourhood organiser – eventually won Chicago with Mayor Daly's help – working for Mayor Daly – a tough man, loved hurling.</p> <p>51:18 1959 – Pan-American Games were in the Soldiers Field in Chicago – getting a hurling game into the Games – Mayor Daly organising it so that two hurling teams led in all the Athletes into the Soliders Field on the opening day of the games –Pat found the two best teams - 70,000 people there – Pat commentated on the game – teams got a standing ovation – helped to raise the profile of hurling in Chicago 'a shot in the arm' – New York invited them down after that – Jessie Owens as at the games and went into the hurlers dressing rooms and shook hands with all of the players and tried to play himself – 'I see it's harder to play than to watch'</p> <p>55:35 Teams that were playing in Chicago – The Austin Stacks – St Vincents – Harry Bolands – great players – most players were in the their twenties – he played for a little while – most of the Irish worked in construction – they eventually all moved out to the South West of the city, where Gaelic Park is located – Description of Gaelic Park.</p> <p>57:28 Getting involved in the GAA in Chicago in 1949 – Got card from Mike Kenny (Galway) and John Brennan (Kerry) that they were going to get hurling started in Chicago – was writing for the Irish world at the time – did a story on it – a big crowd there – Mike Mulryan (Galway) Chairman that day – Pat taking notes on the election of officers on his first day down there and he was elected as chairman.</p> <p>59:31 Crowds were small to begin with but determined – wanted to get their own pitch – had to work on a week by week basis before that.</p>
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	<p>1:00:31 Getting a field eventually in 1985 – up to then played in a rented church stadium – in the late 1970s – Liam O’Brien and four or five others started a fundraising drive to raise \$9,000 dollars buy a ground with no assistance from the GAA and they succeed – didn’t want to bother the GAA with it.</p> <p>1:02:17 Started it up to promote hurling and football and to get the Irish together. Promotion of Irish culture.</p> <p>1:03:15 The GAA were involved in organising the first St Patrick’s Day Parade in Chicago – his brother was the police captain for the South Side – they got a group together to organise it – always two parades in Chicago – when Mayor Daly was a clerk of the court in 1953/4 he went to the parade and he decided when he was Mayor that the city would have an official parade in the loop and one in the south side aswell.</p> <p>1:05:03 Organisation of parade – Irish groups, Germans, Swedes – business people had their own floats – motto for each year – eg one year it was the GAA, the next the 1916 Rising – the businesses that to comply to that – now there are problems with the south side parade in Bridgeport.</p> <p>1:06:55 Difficulty of getting ‘new seed’ from Ireland – no Irish people moving over there now – explanation of immigration laws and trying to protect Irish immigration rights through the years.</p> <p>1:10:16 GAA didn’t mean much to Irish people arriving in Chicago unless it meant something to them before they left Ireland – lots of the GAA men in the 1950s became contractors and had their own clubs and recruited from the club and vice-versa.</p> <p>1:12:22 Commitments as Chair of the GAA in Chicago – started writing stories for the newspaper to tell people about the GAA – the secretary was a lady Mary McDonagh.</p> <p>1:13:47 Journalism career – started with a column in the Irish World in 1953 and has been writing since – changes in technology throughout the years – pen and notebook; carbon copy etc.</p> <p>1:15:24 Career as a commentator – Eamonn Kelly PRO for North American Board – creation of the North American Board in 1959.</p> <p>1:16:45 Challenges of being involved in the GAA outside of Ireland.</p> <p>1:17:28 Keeping in touch with the games at home –</p>
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improvements in media coverage – started being able to get the matches on the radio – now they can get live matches but its at 9am in the morning because of the time difference – this year a friend had a disk of the All-Ireland to him an hour after the game finished.

1:18:48 Going back to Ireland every year when Eileen was alive.

1:19:12 Hasn't been in Croke Park in about ten years – Mary McAleese visiting Gaelic Park – said that it was the best park outside of Croke Park – Irish events happening in Gaelic Park every night – when they set it up the intention was to keep the crowd together and keep an interest in the games.

1:20:28 Article he wrote in 1992 about the history of Chicago Gaeldom – now young Irish-Americans are learning to play hurling – 'a dream come true' – if it can be continued it can compensate for the lack of new seed – they started it and passed it one to future generations and it has improved every year.

1:23:03 'Outside of religion, I think it's thee thing. I dream GAA.' – instilled in him from the Christian Brothers that every true Irish man should be a GAA man – you're a better Irish man in every way if you're a GAA man.

1:24:08 Involvement of women - Irish American children playing camogie – remembers camogie in Kilkenny in the 1930s – his sister in law Kitty Grace used to play out in Palmerstown – has photograph of old camogie team – Kitty in the picture and the Grogan sisters – women playing camogie not really approved of in his day – he saw some good camogie matches there.

1:26:08 Was in Palmerstown the last time he was home – at Tullerone v Dicksboro – Pat presented the cup – Graces were from Palmerstown.

1:26:24 Camogie only came into Chicago in the last five or six years – mainly Irish Americans.

1:26:58 Only had one child – a daughter – family reunion coming up and working on a family tree – still goes to Gaelic Park nearly every Sunday, Eileen buried nearby.

1:28:13 Positions he held in the GAA down through the years – included chairman of the immigration committee and chairman of JFK Park in Wexford.

1:28:50 Maureen O'Looney started camogie there in the

	<p>1950s; Jim McCormack and Mike Kenny would be good people to talk to – Irish in Chicago all group together when someone is in need – fundraising etc. – the GAA getting people together.</p> <p>1:30:36 Strong Irish community in Chicago – stronger than New York.</p> <p>1:30:57 Pat currently living about fifty miles outside of Chicago in Merrillville – playing golf.</p> <p>1:31:49 Changes in American society in his times there- has met all of the Kennedy's.</p> <p>1:32:37 Sent letter to Mayor Daly and Pauric Duffy saying that hurling should be included in the Olympics in the Chicago bid for the Olympics in Chicago 1916 – reads reply from Mayor Daly. .</p> <p>1:33:59 Outstanding memory – first All-Ireland he played in in Killarney – going in the train – meeting Lory Meagher – the fear of going out on to the pitch.</p> <p>1:35:17 Greatest players that he has seen play – Mick Mackey and Lory Meagher, Paddy Phelan also good. Story about Jack Rochford, a neighbour of Pats – Jack was interviewed by a journalists to ask if players were as good when he was playing as they are now, his response 'They were all good, we made them look bad.'</p> <p>1:37:20 Never negative feeling towards the Irish in Chicago – negativity towards the IRA during the troubles.</p> <p>1:38:58 Reading from article he wrote on 1991 on the history of the Irish in Chicago – including a history of the GAA in Chicago dating from 1890.</p> <p>1:46:20 Inter-county teams touring in Chicago – Had Kilkenny hurlers in the 1960s; had Mayo Footballers in the 1970s and Down Footballers also. Players stayed with different families in Chicago – Paddy Grace, Tommy Walsh and Séamus Ó Riain all stayed with them during different tours – concern about the Tommy Walsh currently playing for Kilkenny in light of All-Ireland injury – and another Tommy Walsh who lost his eye in a game.</p> <p>1:48:00 Watching the All-Ireland in 2009.</p> <p>1:48:35 The story of the capture of John Dillinger in Chicago – his brother a sergeant on the case.</p>
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**REFERENCE NO. KK/1/7**

<p><b>Involvement in GAA</b></p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Player <input type="checkbox"/> Manager <input type="checkbox"/> Coach <input type="checkbox"/> Steward</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Chairperson <input type="checkbox"/> Committee Member <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Caterer <input type="checkbox"/> Jersey Washer <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Referee <input type="checkbox"/> None</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____</p>
<p><b>Record as a Player</b> (Titles won; Length of time played)</p>	<p>Won 3 Kilkenny championships with Éire Óg 1936,67,68. Kilkenny Minor 1936,37, captained Minor in 1938 – Played junior with Dunmore and also played with Nottingham</p>
<p><b>Record as an Administrator</b> (Positions held; how long for)</p>	<p>Chairman of Chicago GAA – Chair of GAA immigration committee</p>
<p><b>Format</b></p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual</p>
<p><b>Duration</b></p>	<p>Length of Interview: 1:53:44</p>
<p><b>Language</b></p>	<p>English</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: 24<sup>th</sup> November 2009

## Pat Hennessey Remembers

Twenty years ago, 1985, Chicago Gaelic Park was officially opened, blessed and dedicated by the Most Rev. Bishop John Durkin, since gone to his Eternal Reward. This historical event was the culmination of great work by dedicated Gaels over the years, since the beginning of the last century. And it certainly was Chicago's Gaeldom "Finest Hour."

Over the years the clash of the ash and the thud of the big ball (Gaelic football) echoed all over the Chicago area. The heroic pioneers of the birth of the Gaelic Athletic Association in America played their game wherever they could on the wild prairie and even on the ice in Canada, which resulted in the birth of ice-hockey. But always in the back of their minds was the hope and the dream that one day they would have "Our own green sod".

In Chicago in the 20's the promotion of Ireland's national games, hurling and football made great progress, led by a fine hurler himself, named Monsignor James Fielding from the home of the old caman game, Mooncoin Co. Kilkenny. They called it Gaelic Park also, but unfortunately, it was rented,—it was not their own. Never-the-less they kept the game and the songs, dance, and music alive and passed it on to another generation.

In between the 30's and 50's, the games were canceled because of many factors, including a severe economic Depression, World War II and restrictive U.S. Immigration laws. And it was not until 1949 when U.S. Immigration opened up again, that it was reactivated. But, despite the fact that there was an abundance of young men and women now wanting to play the games, sing the songs and dance the traditional Irish dances it was a whole new ball game, and the pioneers had to start at the bottom.

Lack of public parks to play the games was the main difficulty in the promotion. Permits had to be obtained and sometimes were not finalized until the Friday before the games. Never-the-less, despite all the problems a sound foundation was laid and passed on to other generations. "A green sod of our own" was always the dream of those pioneers, but the time had not yet come. The promotion of the games, culture, song, dance, and music of the Gael continued to make progress and then in the late 70's a group of dedicated Gaels, led by Liam O'Brien, John Crean, Johnny Lynch, Joe Ahern, John Barrett and others, tired of being unable to find suitable locations to play the games and as Liam O'Brien of Kilkenny said, we set out on the Herculean task of fund raising to buy, "Our own green sod" at last.

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Never before had Chicago Gaeldom taken on such a challenge. They had to raise enough money to purchase at least 9 acres, in a good southwest area, with room to expand and convenient for transportation. A mighty task indeed. But, the 70's was a little more affluent. The heroic committee knew it was going to be a hard sell, but they were determined to succeed and they did. The long awaited purchase was made and now the work was ready to begin.

The call went out to men and women, Irish builders, contractors, carpenters, electricians, plumbers, and semi-skilled laborers. Never before in any U.S. city, or indeed in any part of the Gaelic world, was the response so readily accepted. These dedicated men and women toiled long and hard on a voluntary basis, even in the evenings after their own work was completed. They brought their own equipment and worked as a group inspired, until "The dream became a reality" - I hesitate to mention names, in case I forget one. But, each and every one of them were magnificent.

Gur a mile mait agat, a cairde Gael and Beannact De ar an oibre. They built, as President Mary McAleese of Ireland, said after a visit, "One of the finest Irish Centers that I have seen, outside of Croke Park in Dublin".

Chicago Gaelic Park is a Not-For-Profit organization, governed by a duly elected President and a 30 member Board of Directors, all on a voluntary basis. Dynamic Presidents who have governed the organization over the years include: Liam O'Brien (Kilkenny), John Barrett (Cork) Tom Boyle (Chicago), John Griffin (Chicago), Mary Riordan (Clare) Secretary, and Marian Ryan (Mayo) Manager. We congratulate all of them for a job well done. We would be remiss if we did not pay a humble tribute to the many fine officers who governed the GAA over the years. These men and women lit the flame and passed on the torch to other generations and each in their own style enhanced the association and made possible, "The dream that became a reality".

Today Chicago Gaelic Park is a bee hive of activity year round, featuring Irish culture and heritage, Irish traditional song and dance, music, concerts with international stars and the best in Irish drama and comedy. It also has one of the most authentic Irish pubs in Chicago, The Carraig. It also offers spacious banquet facilities for celebrations of all kinds. It promotes it's own fine Irish radio program, with Mary Riordan, Harry Costelloe and Mary Hackett, and it can be heard each Sunday evening over station WCEV 1450AM from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. featuring local Irish news, Irish songs, and music and news direct from Ireland.