

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Ann-Marie Smith
Date of Interview	21 st Nov. 2008
Location	Magherafelt, Derry
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Jim McKeever
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1930 Home County: Derry
Education	Primary: St. Therese Primary School Secondary: Grammar School in Magherafelt and St. Malachy's College Third Level: St. Mary's Training College
Family	Siblings: 4 brothers and 4 sisters. Jim is the second oldest Current Family if Different: Married with children
Club(s)	Ballymaguigan
Occupation	Retired lecturer
Parents' Occupation	Farmer [Father]
Religion	N/A
Political Affiliation / Membership	N/A

REFERENCE NO. DY/1/2

Date of Report	8 th April 2009
Period Covered	1930-2008
Counties/Countries Covered	Derry, Dublin, Antrim, Meath, Cavan, Kerry, USA
Key Themes Covered	Childhood, All-Ireland, Travel, Celebrations, Managing, Challenges
Interview Summary	<p>In this interview Jim McKeever talks about his childhood, playing Gaelic Football at St. Malachy's College and St. Mary's Training College. He talks about playing for Derry for the first time. He recalls the build up to the All Ireland Football Final in 1958. It was Derry's first time to play in the All Ireland Final and there was great hype in the county. He talks about travelling to the final and stopping off in Drogheda for a reception. He talks about the final itself and trying to lift the spirit of the team after their defeat to Dublin. He recalls being picked to represent Ulster at the Cushing Games in the USA. Jim discusses his job lecturing PE for 35 years in St. Mary's Training College and training the college team for the same length of time. He talks about also managing the Derry senior county team twice and his time spent as a delegate on the Central Council. The interview concludes with Jim talking about the challenges facing the GAA and he also states that it is a great organisation.</p> <p>Start: Introduction to interview. Name of interviewee.</p> <p>0.30: Jim was born in 1930 in Ballymaguigan, Derry.</p> <p>0.49: There were nine children in the family, 5 boys and 4 girls. Jim is the second eldest.</p> <p>1.02: Jim's father was a farmer all his life. His mother grew up on a farm and she grew up in a house where the first meeting of the GAA in Derry took place. Her father bought land from a man who was an associate of Michael Cusack.</p> <p>2.46: Jim's father's family and his mother's family were interested in the GAA.</p> <p>3.25: Jim's father played soccer.</p> <p>4.10: The county pitch was three miles from Jim's family home. As a young boy, he would travel with his father on the handlebars of his father's bicycle to watch matches in the</p>

	<p>county pitch.</p> <p>5.06: Jim went to the local primary school, St. Therese. "We played at lunch time when we had a ball and when we could find a pitch." There were no organised school teams at the time.</p> <p>6.14: Jim's GAA heroes growing up were the Newbridge players. There was no GAA team in Ballymaguigan.</p> <p>6.54: Jim attended the Grammar School in Magherafelt for 1 year. Rugby was the game played there and Jim played it for the year.</p> <p>7.25: He attended St. Malachy's College and was a border there. While he was there he played Gaelic football and hurling. There were no inter college competitions at that time.</p> <p>7.57: In his second last year in the college, a teacher joined the staff, Fr. McHugh and he started competitions in the school and also involved the school in the McRory Cup. In their first year, the team made it to the final.</p> <p>9.19: The final was unbelievable. They played Cavan in Cavan.</p> <p>10.48: They travelled by bus from Belfast. They stayed over night in Cavan. Cavan won the final.</p> <p>11.11: They got to the final the following year and were beaten again this time by Violet Hill.</p> <p>11.36: In addition to playing for the school team, Jim was also playing for the Ulster colleges' team.</p> <p>13.14: Jim recalls that they trained very hard for both St. Malachy's and the Ulster colleges' team. They had a manager. It was the first time that Jim received any formal GAA training.</p> <p>14.33: Jim attended St. Mary's Training College and played for the team. They had no trainer there, they looked after themselves. They were unable to compete in the Higher Education competitions as it was confined to the 5 universities.</p> <p>15.12: There was an annual fixture between St. Mary's Training College and St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin.</p> <p>15.50: Jim's first game for Derry was a challenge match with</p>
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	<p>Antrim when he was 17 years of age.</p> <p>16.42: Jim had already played for the Antrim Minors; so his first county jersey was the Antrim jersey. He also played for the Derry Minors.</p> <p>17.10: The year he started in St. Mary's Training College he was picked for the Derry Senior team.</p> <p>17.20: He recalls that he was very anxious when he put on the Derry jersey for the first time. He recalls togging out and playing with and against players that he had looked up to.</p> <p>17.50: "To be quite honest I don't remember any training for the senior team. The team was picked by the full county committee, probably 16 picked the team. The team appeared in the paper. Some local would arrange the transport for you. You travel with some local guy in the car who got taxi expenses. I don't remember training in the early days at all."</p> <p>18.47: Jim says that his first big game he played for Derry was the National League semi final against Meath in Lurgan.</p> <p>19.26: Meath had gone 20 matches without losing a game including the All Ireland Final. Derry was defeated by Meath.</p> <p>20.22: Jim was one of the youngest players on the Derry team at this time.</p> <p>20.55: Derry won the Lagan Cup and the Dr. McKenna Cup and in 1955 they reached their first Ulster Final. They played Cavan. Cavan won.</p> <p>21.40: In 1957 Derry got to the Ulster Final but were beaten by Tyrone.</p> <p>21.50: In 1958 Derry beat Cavan in the Ulster semi final and then went on to beat Down in the final. They beat Kerry in the semi final and faced Dublin in the All Ireland Football Final.</p> <p>22.27: After the All Ireland Final in 1958, Derry won the Lagan Cup. They beat Mayo in the semi final of the National League in 1959 and faced Kerry in the final of the league.</p> <p>22.48: Jim says that the league final in 1959 was a ding dong of a match and the game was of a very high standard. Derry were beaten by a goal. Jim says that was a great Kerry team.</p> <p>23.18: After the league final in 1959, Derry were still contesting but were not winning. One of the stars of the</p>
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	<p>team; Seán O’Connell was suspended because he played soccer.</p> <p>23.58: The Derry team were deflated by the suspension. “We didn’t believe in the rule. It was stupid, it achieved nothing. It was just an opportunity for dishonesty. Plenty of people all over Ireland could have been suspended but weren’t.</p> <p>25.10: Derry got to the National League Final in 1961 and were defeated by Kerry again.</p> <p>25.35: Jim quit playing football around 1963.</p> <p>25.47: Jim says there was a great build up to the 1958 All Ireland Football Final.</p> <p>26.14: “We trained down in the Newbridge club. Not every team had a pitch of its own. The dressing room was a hut which had been purchased from the local airfield after the war. It was quite comfortable, benches and all that, no showers. And after the match, the local man, Henry Murphy would bring a bucket of clean water in and a mug and that was our after training subsistence.”</p> <p>28.23: Jim says that people would turn up to watch them train which they thought was unusual.</p> <p>31.53: Jim was captain of the team in 1958.</p> <p>33.00: Jim says that the Derry team were sensible enough not pay too much attention to the hype in the build up to the final.</p> <p>34.17: “We travelled to Dublin the Saturday before the All Ireland. Someone from the Drogheda City Council had contacted one of the county board saying that they would like to give us a civic reception on our way to the match. We heard about this on the way. The bus was stopped somewhere in Drogheda, we were lined up behind the band and marched for about a mile into the centre of the Drogheda, there was a platform arranged there. There were speeches from the civic dignitaries welcoming us, three or four speeches and I was asked to reply on behalf of the team.</p>
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This was the day before, you know you are supposed to isolate yourself in a bubble and forget about the outside world. We were then packed again into the bus and off to a hotel in Dublin. If any manager, if that proposal was made to him now, he would hit the roof. I suppose it shows you the kind of the inexperience we had about the big time.”

36.09: And the bus was allowed to let us out at the entrance of St. Joseph’s Avenue. The changing rooms were underneath the old Cusack stand. The only way in was in through the normal stiles entry. There was a wedge of people trying to get in and I remember having to elbow my way and my wife was being jostled and I remember she was in front of me and I was trying to keep people from pushing us and that’s how we got in. You emerged from the turnstiles like a pea in a pod. Things were different.”

38.27: Jim recalls the start of the final, “Dr. Stewart came out onto the field with Bishop Farren which was a bit of a surprise because Bishop Farren was anti-Gaelic, well known, he had not approved of it in anyway. He was the Bishop of Derry and was not at all in favour; he saw the GAA as a threat to his authority. He was invited to throw the ball in and he accepted, he was bit of a vain man. He had no idea how to throw the ball in and he threw the ball up. Kevin Heffernan who was left corner forward and therefore front of the row; the old times it was like a rugby line-out, that’s how matches used to start. Kevin jumped up in the usual way and blocked the ball. The bishop was about to be surrounded by hefty players looking for this ball. The referee, Simon Duignan blew the whistle, stopped the match, let the bishop get off and then threw the ball in again. It would have been funny but you hadn’t got the time to enjoy it.”

40.56: The team received a warm reception when they arrived back from the final.

41.30: Jim says as captain it was difficult to lift the spirits of

	<p>the team.</p> <p>42.26: “In my teens, Magherafelt Club bought a permanent pitch down in Milltown. It became known as the county ground. The county ground became the venue for all important club matches. Between my home in Ballymaguigan and the county ground is a very Protestant area. The team in Ballymaguigan or the team in Newbridge, their nearest to play matched would be through this Protestant area but they never did go because there was a tendency for maybe that to be taken as maybe aggressive territory if the GAA bus or GAA traffic went through. There were one or two times when stones were thrown. They used to do this round about trip of extra three or four miles. I never on a personal level had anyone insult me or attack me.”</p> <p>46.00: Jim says that he never had anyone insult or abuse him because he played Gaelic games.</p> <p>46.53: Jim says it was getting more difficult to devote so much time to the GAA because he was living in Belfast and he had 3 or 4 of a family.</p> <p>47.48: Jim says “while I enjoyed playing. I didn’t enjoy travelling to matches and training.”</p> <p>48.20: Even though he had retired from the county team he continued to play for the club for another 6 years, but only during the summer time.</p> <p>49.00: In 1965 Jim was picked to represent Ulster at the Cushing Games in the USA. Two players were picked from each province and Jim was one of the players chosen from Ulster.</p> <p>50.23: Jim was in the USA for 14 days. The Northern Government wouldn’t pay his wages for the 14 days.</p> <p>50.48: During his visit to the USA, Jim met Bobby Kennedy and he played in Gaelic Park.</p>
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	<p>51.45: He played a match in Hertford Park (USA) and the game was played under floodlights, it was the only occasion that he played under floodlights.</p> <p>54.20: Jim lectured on PE in St. Mary's Training College and he also managed the college team for 35 years.</p> <p>54.58: The college managed to get involved in Higher Education Colleges competition. They won the Ryan Cup 6 times.</p> <p>56.05: The college won the Sigerson Cup in 1990.</p> <p>56.25: When Jim finished his football career, he became a Central Council delegate for Derry. He says he was only involved for a couple of years because he disliked the political nature of it. He says that congress is like a political party or convention with too many speeches.</p> <p>57.57: In 1970 Jim was asked to manage the county team which he did for 3 years. He says it was terrible pressure because he was also managing the college team and working in Belfast.</p> <p>58.20: He was asked to train the county team again with a few others in the late 80s. He stayed with them for 3 years and during his time with them, Derry won the Ulster Championship.</p> <p>1.00.24: Jim says that today there is more time given over to fitness. He believes that they should concentrate more on kicking the ball over the bar.</p> <p>1.01.06: Jim says that cold baths provide no real benefit to the players, they don't affect their fitness.</p> <p>1.03.11: Jim believes that the next 10 to 15 years will be crucial for the GAA.</p> <p>1.06.28: "I don't think they realise how important it is to be in communication with the lowest level. The lowest level should</p>
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	<p>feel that they know what is happening right through. That is the only way an organisation stays strong. So I am disappointed in some ways about that. I have some small experience of this, when you question it, you're hammered down."</p> <p>1.07.58: "I am against pay for play. The association is right to resist it. We cannot afford to pay players."</p> <p>1.12.45: Jim also believes that the GPA (Gaelic Players' Association) should be brought into the association. He believes they should have a voice because they are at the centre of it.</p> <p>1.14.48: Jim says he did make sacrifices because of his involvement in the GAA, but he has no regrets. He says it has been a great experience and has made great friends because of it.</p> <p>1.17.38: Jim says that players get a lot from the GAA and from the game. He says they play and are involved because they like it.</p> <p>1.18.05: Jim concludes by saying that the GAA is a great organisation. He says it is a great achievement that it has brought itself up to where it is. He says that it has a great influence on people.</p>
<p>Involvement in GAA</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Player <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Manager <input checked="" 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</p>	<p>Jim played in the McRory Cup Final twice when he was in</p>

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(Titles won; Length of time played)	college. He played for the Ulster Colleges Team, played for St. Mary's Training Centre. He played for the Antrim Minors and Derry Minors. He was the youngest player at the time on the Derry senior team. With Derry he played in 2 National League Finals, was on the team that won the Lagan Cup and Dr. McKenna Cup. He was on the Derry team that were in the Ulster Championship Final in 1955 and 1957. They won the Ulster title in 1958 and reached the All Ireland Football Final that year. He was one of two players chosen from Ulster to play in the Cushing Games in the USA.
Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)	Jim represented Derry as a delegate at Central Council for a couple of years.
Format	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
Duration	Length of Interview: 1.22.23
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: ___Ann-Marie Smith_____

Date: ___9th April 2009_____