

Presentation of historic MS to Lár na Páirce

By Seamus J. King

Lár na Páirce, the museum of Gaelic Games at Thurles, was recently presented with a rare manuscript. It was the handwritten diary of the tour of the United States by the Tipperary senior hurling team in 1926. Written by Tom Kenny of Portroe, one of the party of twenty-three who made the trip, it recounts the social side of the tour.

The diary formed the basis of the book of the tour that was published in 1928 and reprinted once. Published in London by George Roberts I often wondered why it was published there, rather than in Ireland. Apparently, Tom Kenny could find no publisher in Ireland to take on the job and had to go to London. The fact that it took two years after the event for the book to appear would confirm the difficulty he had in getting it into print.

The tour was undertaken by the Tipperary All-Ireland winning team of 1925. It was the first trip by a bunch of hurlers to the U.S. since the Celtic Invasion in 1888 and the first time for a county team to travel across the Atlantic.

The tour lasted eleven weeks. It commenced at Cobh with the party boarding the German liner, *Bremen*, and sailing to New York. Hurling games before substantial crowds were played in New York, Chicago and San Francisco. Travel overland was by train. At the end of the tour there was a big send-off banquet in the Central Opera House, New York and another in Pouldine National School, Moycarkey on their return, which went on until seven in the morning.

The tour was a splendid success. All the games played were won. The crowds were large and enthusiastic and the total number that witnessed the games was about 100,000. Newspaper coverage of the visit was generous. From an Irish standpoint there was a quiet pride that the visitors had excelled themselves on the trip and had done Ireland proud. Frank McGrath gave a glowing report to Central Council and made many worthwhile suggestions for the better organisation of the G.A.A. in the U.S.

Tour Book

Tom Kenny's account of the tour captures some of the flavour of the experience: 'Saturday, May 15th: Not much sleep last night when Nealon and Kennedy called on their rounds with notebook and pencil, asking if we jazzed with the Germans thereby

suspending ourselves from the G.A.A., and if we took the meat sandwiches, thereby excommunicating ourselves from the Catholic Church.'

One of the more colourful members of the tour party was Tom Duffy of Lorrha. He features more often than any other member of the party in the account. There are about twenty references to him. He was the life and the soul of the party. In one place the party plan to take over the ship. In the plan Duffy is to be Captain. In another place "the wit and humour of most of them, especially Duffy, is most enjoyable." The entry for 7 June reads: "Tom Duffy is singing that song 'The next I met was a fair-haired lady, standing at a cottage door'." And on 9 June there is a discussion between Jack Power and Tom on the state of the country: "A crock of a country", says Duffy. "Sure we haven't seen a tram of hay, a ditch, nor a hedge since leaving the old country, but it is a fine country in other ways, Jack- they do everything the big way." Duffy thinks the Yanks made a mistake to set the country dry. "That hooch is rotten stuff, Jack, and if it continues as plentiful as it seems to be it will make mad men, blind men or dead men of all of them that drink it." On 19 June there is a party on the train and Duffy dances a jig. Later Paddy Leahy and Tom try to sing the last verse of the Star-Spangled Banner at the Eucharistic Congress in Chicago. Later still we learn that five hurlers are found in Duffy's Chicago hotel room saying the rosary. On the ship home he is constantly playing his favourite deck game and won 'Chalking the Pig's Eye' in the ship's sports. Truly a man of many sides!

Written in pencil (no biros then and carrying ink bottles was problematic) in neat handwriting, the diary formed the basis of the book, *Tour of the Tipperary Hurling Team in America 1926*. The book is a rare collector's item now and this manuscript, written in a notebook with the front cover missing, is a rare and priceless find. It includes the signatures of all the players on the last page.

Lois Tierney, a grand-daughter of Tom Kenny, found it in a drawer in her late uncle, Billy's, place in London. The find included a cache of Kenny family photographs also. On behalf of the extended Kenny family, she has now presented it on loan to Lár na Páirce for the people of Tipperary as it records the epic journey of that great Tipperary team that captured All-Ireland honours in 1925 and made history as the first county team to visit America and traverse the continent from coast to coast.



Seamus J. King, Lár na Páirce, receiving the diary by Tom Kenny of the trip of the Tipperary senior hurling team to the U.S. in 1926 from his grand-daughter, Lois Tierney, on behalf of the extended Kenny family, with her old school friend, Mary Newman, also present.