

## **“THIS IS CLOONAGH CALLING!”** By Ray McGrath.

“This is Cloonagh calling!” So would go the greeting of my late grandfather, Raymond McGrath RIP, to his late sister, Mrs. Delia Connolly (nee McGrath) RIP of Boston, U.S.A. whenever he spoke with her by telephone. Perhaps therefore, it is an appropriate title for this personal collection of information gathered by and relayed to me, by previous and present residents of Cloonagh, to whom I am very grateful. It offers some glimpse into the history associated with the place I call home, namely Cloonagh. Cloonagh, Milltown that is, lest there be any confusion between it and nearby, - Cloonagh, Dunmore. Cloonaghgarve is of course, its correct townland name, although the name Cloonagh is properly recognised also, deriving its roots from ‘the heart’ of the village. Cloonaghgarve would be regarded locally as the broader townland area. Many readers of this article will have their own memories associated with Cloonagh, holding as it did, close links with the general Garrafrauns area. Some readers may recall families from previous Cloonagh generations, attending Mass in Garrafrauns and perhaps frequenting Garrafrauns for grocery provisions and/or social occasions etc.

Comprising of 191 acres, 2 roods and 18 perches in imperial measurement, that’s 77.3 hectares, (although other sources state 191 acres and 26 perches), it included, according to available online references from the 1850’s, about 38 acres of bog and 25 acres of rough, pasture land. This bogland, would have existed as a large cross section, moving east to west, from Lurgan, through south Cloonaghgarve and onwards into Rosmearan. Other field boundaries towards the north of the townland came into being much later and indeed have seen various changes since then. Cloonaghgarve is bounded on the north by the Sinking River which flows westwards, to the east are the townlands of Carrowntomush and Carrowntootagh and to the west, Russelstown. On the south, are Rosmearan and a small part of Lurgan (West). There is a children’s burial ground located in Cloonaghgarve on a small hill at the north eastern side of the townland - (Nicholson’s field) and there is part of a double banked, probable pathway to this, running east to west along fields, ‘the bottoms’ from Carrowntootagh.

The name Cloonaghgarve comes from the Irish, ‘cluain - each - garbh’ meaning, ‘meadow of the wild horse/(steed)’ or, ‘clunach - garbh’ meaning ‘rough lawn’ or ‘rough meadow’. It was once the property of the landlord Mr. Richard Skerritt Golding or (Goulding), of Shrule, Co. Mayo. He also owned in the vicinity, the neighbouring townlands of Lurgan and Rosmearan and this land ‘parcel’ formed just part of his vast estate. Another branch of the same Goulding family lived at Carnaun, Tuam. With just a few people and very little housing once existing in Cloonaghgarve, (only two families), Goulding is reputed to have used Cloonaghgarve as an outlying ‘farm’ for horse grazing as the demand for older equines especially for use in British wars was greater then. This indeed may in part be the reason of how Cloonaghgarve got its name.

According to information gathered for this article, once, only one house existed in Cloonaghgarve. It was located at the rear of ‘the poursh’ that currently leads into the farms of Mrs. Maureen Steed and Raymond McGrath. The outer structure is still in existence. Two families are believed to have lived in this house, their names unfortunately, unknown. Subsequently, it became the residence of the Flaherty family. According to Maureen Steed, her father was Peter (‘Sin’) Flaherty and his father was Patrick (‘Datch’) Flaherty. Patrick’s wife was Honor (Nell) Healy from Russelstown and she was an aunt of Mrs. Ellen Coen, Rosmearan. Ellen Coen was the wife of Pat Coen, the appointed ‘herdsman’ of Goulding. This description of family lineage, may explain in part, the close connection between Rosmearan and Cloonaghgarve townlands and the one single original house that existed.

The landlord, Richard Goulding appointed Mr. Pat Coen from Mountbellew into a ‘herd’s cottage’ in Rosmearan, as his overseeing ‘agent’ for the immediate area (Rosmearan, Cloonaghgarve and Lurgan). Wanting to gain further from his actions, Goulding, via Pat Coen ‘planted’ existing residents of the area, especially from Rosmearan, into this ‘new village’ of Cloonagh (within Cloonaghgarve townland). Over time, other families from elsewhere made the townland their new home. As most of these newly ‘planted’ individuals were unable to read and write in those times, and communicating primarily through the Irish language, an interesting, albeit harsh practice, occurred them concerning rent payments. If unable to directly pay the rent to Goulding via Pat Coen, they would instead, be obliged to pay by means of extra physical labour, such as road making and digging of drains. Sometimes, they would get a can of oaten meal for their labour. The men and women would have to show a record of their manual work by the wearing of pieces of small timber sticks around their necks. For each day worked in lieu of the payment due, a notch would be cut into the stick indicating to themselves, that part of the overall payment was now complete. When the correct number of notches was complied with, they would then present their sticks at Coen’s house to indicate that the full ‘payment’ had now been made by way of all their strenuous efforts. The total value of Cloonaghgarve in the 1850’s when Goulding was still in ownership, is stated as 71 pounds, 10 schillings and 4 pence! As the years progressed, the tenant farmers gradually gained full title on different ‘parcels of land’. It is understood from available resources online, that this process began in about 1905. Many men from Cloonagh were involved in the discovery and transportation to Milltown railway station of the famous Lurgan Log-boat, discovered during draining work/road building in 1901.

According to the 1901 Census of Ireland, Cloonaghgarve is listed as having 22 occupied houses, a slight increase in the 1835 figure of 18. Upwards of 24 or 25 houses however, once stood in Cloonaghgarve with population figures (as given) for the year 1851 showing 139 individuals! In light of the fact that these were the years of the Great Famine in Ireland, it would seem that Cloonaghgarve fared more favourably than other areas, in terms of hunger, disease and population decrease. The tenant ‘occupiers’ listed in the 1835 Griffiths Valuation are: John Corley; Patrick Kenny; Thomas Kenny; Bryan Flaherty; Peter McGrath; Patrick Loughlin; John Kane; Edmund Connolly; James Flaherty; Thomas McLoughlin; Patrick McGay; Thomas McGay-(McGagh); John McGrath; William Higgins; Martin McGrath; Patrick Nicholson; Peter Flaherty and Michael Mullowney.

Households from the 1901 Census:

| <u>(House Number)</u> | <u>(Surname)</u> | <u>(Family )</u>  |
|-----------------------|------------------|---|
| 1                     | Corley -----     | Patrick (76) with wife Margaret (60) and sons,<br>John (29); Thomas (20).<br>-----  |
| 2                     | Corley -----     | William (78) with wife Catherine (60) and sons James (24), Thomas (22).<br>-----  |
| 3                     | Kenny -----      | John (73) with son John (30); daughter Sarah (30)<br>and daughter in law Ellen (26).<br>-----   |
| 4                     | Larkin -----     | John (23) with wife Mary (27) and brother James (15)<br>-----   |
| 5                     | Nicholson ----   | Martin (40) with wife Bridget (28) and son Patrick (5) and daughters<br>Mary Kate (4); Margaret (3) and Honor (1).<br>-----   |
| 6                     | Commons ----     | Mark (55) with wife Honor (50), sons, Martin (15); Peter (6)<br>and daughters Mary (19); Bridget (13); Honor (12); Maggie (11);<br>Winifred (9) and Catherine (3).<br>----- |

|    |                           |  |
|----|---------------------------|--|
| 7  | Mc Gagh -----             | Manus (60) with wife Catherine (52), sons Michael (24) and John (21) and daughter Kate (18).<br>-----  |
| 8  | Flaherty -----            | Thady (50) with wife Mary (45) and sons Michael, (18); Martin (16) and Thady (14).<br>-----  |
| 9  | White -----               | Bridget (67) and son Michael (30).<br>-----  |
| 10 | Loughlin -----            | Patrick (79) with wife Mary (72) and son Michael (28).<br>-----  |
| 11 | Flanagan ----             | Mark (55) with wife Mary (32) sons, Patrick (9), John (6) and daughters Catherine (2) and Ellen (1).<br>-----  |
| 12 | Mc Gagh -----             | Thomas (60) with wife Ellen (43) and sons Thomas (14) and Michael (12), John (10), Pat (8), Martin (6) and daughters Maria (16) and Maggie (13).<br>-----                    |
| 13 | Ruane -----               | Catherine (57) with sons, Michael (30), Martin (25) and Pat (22).<br>-----   |
| 14 | Mc Loughlin -             | John (62) with wife Mary (60) and niece Maggie Godfrey (8)<br>-----  |
| 15 | Mc Grath -----            | John (72) with son William (18) and daughter Catherine (20).<br>-----  |
| 16 | Flaherty -----            | Martin (60) with wife Bridget (50) and stepson Michael Higgins (22), sons Bernard Thomas (13), Martin (10), Patrick (8), Thomas Edward (4) and daughter Honor (11).<br>----- |
| 17 | McDonnell (McDonald) ---- | Michael (60) with sons Michael (19), Martin (14) and daughters Bridget (18) and Kate (15).<br>-----  |
| 18 | Connolly -----            | Patrick (54) with wife Mary (50) and sons Edward (15), Michael (13), Patrick (10), John (6), and Thomas (4) and daughters Bridget (8) and Mary (1).<br>-----                 |
| 19 | Mc Donnell (McDonald) --- | Mark (53) with wife Bridget (50), son Michael (22) and Mary (19).<br>-----   |
| 20 | Flaherty -----            | Patrick (62) with wife Mary (52), sons Pat (18), Peter (17) and Thomas (12) and daughter Mary (21).<br>-----   |
| 21 | Maloney -----             | Henry (56) with wife Margaret (46), sons Michael (23), John (17), Patrick (11) and Henry (9) and daughters Margaret (21) and Bridget (19).<br>-----                          |
| 22 | White -----               | Mary (60) and daughter Bridget (20).<br>-----  |

It is astonishing to think that at least half of these houses were positioned along a short distance of the small laneway that links the 'main road' (to Tuam) which runs through Cloonagh and farmland, that lies to the west. This 'lane' was seen as the heart of the village as in forming part of the original area of settlement, a cluster of houses was built close to one another for protection. Another cluster was formed a little further south in the townland, with only a few houses being built on the eastern side of the 'main road'. The 'new houses' of these clusters quickly set about in providing for themselves and so resulted in being completely self-sufficient. A short-cut route used by some people in getting to Milltown, was once via the lane. They passed along it through Russelstown and emerged in Dawros Upper. The route remained in (partial) use up to the 1960's.

DEMOGRAPHY OF CLOONAGHGARVE:

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Total Population</u>                  | <u>No. of Houses</u> |
|-------------|--|----------------------|
| 1841        | 133                                      | 25                   |
| 1851        | 139                                      | 24                   |
| 1861        | 128 (60 males; 68 females)               | 25                   |
| 1901        | 114 (66 males; 48 females)               | 22                   |
| 1911        | 83 (46 males; 37 females)                | 21                   |
| 2011        | (unofficially, 34. 16 males; 18 females) | 17                   |



The photograph on left, taken in June of 1936 shows John McGrath, his father William McGrath (on the donkey), and John Larkin, Cloonagh. On the right, an aerial photograph taken 1960's showing McGrath's 'old house' Cloonagh, built about 1850. .

Not unlike other townlands in the locality, Cloonagh once had a busy blacksmith's forge, which catered for the manufacture and repair of many a farm implement, as well of course for shoeing donkey's, jennets and horses. It was originally run 'in co.' between two brothers, Patrick and William Corley. They were known locally as 'Pat Gow' and 'Billy Gow' - (Gow, a derivative of Gabhail, the Irish word for blacksmith). They are said to have 'served their time' in the Mountbellew area, walking to there on Sunday evenings and returning to Cloonaghgarve the following Friday evenings. The main water supply for Cloonagh was from a spring water well located along a small pathway/'road' made by the original tenant farmers, running west towards Rosmearan, - (it is known locally as 'the well road'). In these earlier times too, a small shop, Mannion's, is said to have existed in the centre of the townland, (behind the late Bernie Flaherty's house). It sold some basic items, (another small shop was also said to have existed close to 'the hill' as you head into the townland, northwards). Cloonagh was also home to a tailor, - John Larkin, who's father was also a tailor before him. It was home to a dressmaker, - Mary Commons, a cobbler/shoemaker, - Sean O' Each (John Steed) and Corley's forge as mentioned, the local midwife/nurse was called 'Peggy Bocht' - (Poor Maggie) and she lived nearby in Carrowntootagh. These 'trades' combined with local farming knowledge such as vegetable growing and pig killing, together with attentive home life where poultry keeping, together with butter churning and bread making were almost daily occurrences, meant that the population of the time were well catered for!

It those early years sharing between neighbours was commonplace and remained so but of course, if some items as deemed necessary were required then they could be easily be located locally, providing that (scarce) money was at hand to pay for them. Whether it be, tea, sugar, flour, tobacco, paraffin oil etc. that was needed, then a quick walk, or in later years, by bicycle or trip by donkey/horse and cart to, Lurgan - (Monaghan's), Dalgin - (Feeney's) and (Kernan's), or indeed to Garrafrauns or to the Milltown shops, meant that households wanted for little more especially in terms of food items.

'The bashteeys' was a name given to the fields in the north western area of Cloonaghgarve, those adjacent to the road that runs west into Russelstown. This name perhaps came about from the Irish word 'baisteach' meaning rain. The most likely reason that these fields were named so, was that the Sinking River, (prior to the new bridge being built as part of the main drainage scheme of the Corrib in the 1960's) would frequently burst it's banks and water would lie in these fields (and the road) for many days at a time! When the 'flood was up' it was a welcome excuse for schoolchildren of the townland and those who used that route, in attending Dalgin national school(s), to miss a day or two! Other local field names include 'Garrai Mhaire' - (Mary's Garden), which was towards Russeslstown and 'Cloon-schan-ley' - (Scanlon's meadow), in Rosmearan.

Part of the lives of the inhabitants of Cloonagh in olden times, were of course their pastimes. Sunday afternoon fishing along the 'bottoms' of neighbouring fields was a favourite of some of the men. Using an improvised fishing rod made from a tree twig with perhaps a frog as bait, many fine fish: perch, eels and the occasional pike, could be caught (and eaten too!). It is also said that the road through Cloonagh hosted many a game of road bowling in the past. Other gatherings also took place on the Cloonagh road, especially at 'the hill' (as mentioned), particularly on bonfire night, June 23<sup>rd</sup>. 'Pitching' was a common occurrence here too and at the Cloonagh Bridge as well. Of course, many of the houses in the immediate locality were also venues for visiting, storytelling, for card playing and for music and chat. Tea with bread and jam and perhaps a 'mug o' sops' or cocoa, or a glass of whiskey or stout would be enjoyed at these frequent gatherings and tobacco and cigarettes smoked there also. A particular practice at the time of funeral wakes in earlier years was to place a large dish-plate of loose tobacco on a table along with several clay pipes around the outside of the dish for those who wished to avail of a smoke. At Halloween, heads of cabbage would be kicked along the road as a children's game, only to leave a feast for the village pigs afterwards who enjoyed savouring the discarded cabbage leaves! A Willie Shannon who lived down 'the lane' allegedly had the first radio in Cloonagh. He is said to have attached an aerial wire onto the top of a pole that supported a sheep-cock of hay (in front of McGagh's) and attached it onto the early type radio that could only be listened to by holding it close to one's ear.

Many 'characters' occupied the houses of the busy townland of Cloonaghgarve, each with their own 'nickname' as was the practice at the time. These nicknames as was the practice in many surrounding villages, most probably came from peoples personal characteristics, mannerisms, physical appearances and life experiences through their work or family circumstance. They were also generated probably because Cloonagh was once part of the many 'breac - gaeltachts' - (semi Irish language areas, where the Irish language was prominent). While at the time of their use they may have seemed quite common or lowly, they offer today, a pleasant view of each of the individual's personality. Of particular interest in gathering information for this article is the following: "THE YANKS OF CLOONAGH!", a song which was 'composed' by the late Michael Healy of Corohan, Dunmore, circa the 1920's/30's approximately, about the people who lived in Cloonagh, who were to a large part, returned American emigrants or 'yanks'. Most if not all the households located in Cloonagh at that time were mentioned in the song, are several of their nicknames utilized. Written in a style similar to a 'Limerick', it contained several verses. Here are just some of the words and lines:

*"Oh yes, the yanks of Cloonagh, they are a jolly lot, the first is Delia Boyle, she came from Kiltimagh! She married John Corley you know ..."*

*"And second then is Mary Molloy, she came from Sylau-more, she married old John Larkin, and had acres by the score"*

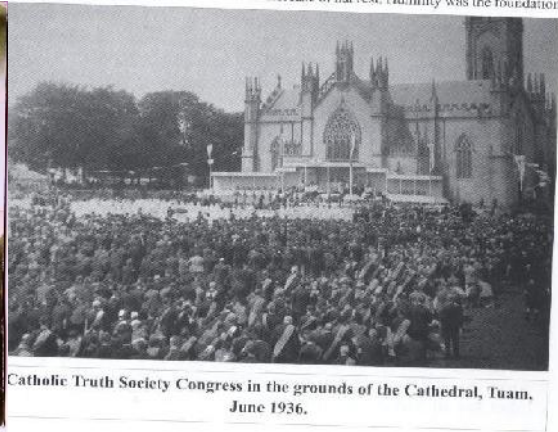
*"..., and then poor Nellie Kenny, she went into 'Loughlin cryin'..."*

*"...now 'Mary plank', she's a yank..."*

*"There's lots of yanks in Cloonagh and they're all in a row, but the nicest of them all is me darlin' Nellie Crowe!"*

*"His name is \_\_\_? \_\_\_, and he is not too tall, he said he'd join the civic guards but he thought the pay t'was small, he lately takes the notion that he doesn't like the town, and it's down in lovely, Cloonagh, that he now has settled down!"*

Perhaps some readers will recall that an area on the edge of Cloonaghgarve, was once in earlier years, a regular stop-off point for members of the travelling community. With a safe place for their horses to graze, they would set up their camp where the small 'lane-way' currently exits onto the border with Russelstown, - (across from the current townland name plaque). It is reputed that many holy medals could once be uncovered at this location due to the travellers' piety and also due to the fact that one of their family died at the site. After this sad event, they never returned to camp there again.



The photograph (on the left) was taken by the late Mrs. Delia Connolly (nee McGrath) formerly of Cloonagh and Boston U.S.A. It was taken at the Catholic Truth Society's Congress, which took place in Tuam in June of 1936. It shows a group of young men who attended, most of whom were from Cloonagh. They are sitting on the steps of the main altar area, which was located (as can be seen from the second photo) at the rear of The Cathedral of the Assumption, Tuam. From left to right (at back): Michael Noonan, behind him - unknown, Raymond McGrath, Michael (Towrey) Kenny, Patrick Larkin, Bill McGrath, next to him - unknown, and Cyril Lavelle - (glasses). (In front): Paddy O' Donnell - (Knock, Milltown) Michael Flaherty and Thomas (Murty) Corley.

Some tales concerning Cloonagh make for fascinating wonderment and show loyalty and courage as well as friendship and fun. Take for example the following: 'Pulling tricks' of one kind or another in the course of a day's work can serve to break the monotony and provide laughter and fun. During the building of the current Cloonagh Bridge, as part of a Board of Works scheme, many men of the locality were glad to be employed on the overall drainage scheme project. With picks and shovels, they shared the work somewhat evenly. As a lunchtime game, a worker would be chosen to see if he had the 'best aim' of the gang. His task would be to strike a coin while blindfolded, using a pickaxe, and if successful, he would then have the 'honour' of being the best aim and presumably get to keep the coin also! To prepare for this 'mighty feat' a certain Cloonagh resident was chosen, (Patrick Larkin). His jacket (and cap!) were removed for ease of movement and accuracy of strike. Blindfolded, he was turned around for good measure also. Sure of his aim and encouraged by onlookers he made to strike. However, instead of a coin waiting to receive the heavy blow from the pick-axe, it had been replaced by his cap! All ran, laughing, before the blindfold could be lifted, to the shouts of 'Did I hit it? Did I hit it?' from Patrick.