

KILCLARE SCHOOL HISTORY & REUNION 2014

Marie Donohoe

NESTLED IN a scenic valley between the historic hills of Sheebeg, Sheemore, and the purple clad Sliabh an Iarainn mountain, is an area of Leitrim rich in local history and natural beauty. Known today as Kilclare, its townlands of Kilclaremore and Kilclarebeg, were recorded in the Tithe Applotments as Kilclareking and Kilclare Whitelaw. We presume that they were named after the then landlords.

Travelling from Carrick on Shannon to Balinamore and vice versa, one observes a beautiful building of natural stone, tastefully restored by its present owners, Christine and Padraig Lynch; used today as a retail paint store, it was the old Kilclare National School

This landmark building, close to the "Sheemore Inn" Kilclare, was the new state of the art school, officially opened on Oct 10th 1894. It was the replacement for an even older school, which first opened in 1853. It was built on Faughnans land and was close to Drumbrannad Crossroads. A thatched one roomed building of 28ft long, had 149 pupils on the rolls. It too was a replacement for three hedge schools in the locality. There was one each in the townlands of Edenmore, Kilclaremore and Newbrook. Extracts from the "Folklore Essays" of 1936-38, reveal that the standard of education in the Kilclare area was very high. The teachers were well educated and dedicated. Their pupils were known to be capable of reading a lesson in Latin and translating it in French. Irish, French, Latin and Greek were taught in these schools.

In 1884 the roof of the old school at Drumbrannad was blown away in the big storm. While it was being replaced the pupils were accommodated in a house across the road. In 1892 an application was made, for a new school to be built.

The reasons being as follows:

- Present building not fit for purpose.
- Impediment of the Canal for school children

crossing it, on way to Drumkeelamore School.

Eight years had passed since the old school was damaged by storm when the "Go Ahead" for a new school was given. "Some things never change". The land was acquired for the site of the new building by Very Rev Fr H Brennan, Kiltubrid. The owner being John Gilbert King, Ferbane, Co Offaly, (Landlord), and the tenant being Thomas Doherty (Dougherty) Kilclare. A 99 year lease was drawn up, and the school was built by the Board of Works at a cost of £381 stg. It was to be enclosed by a stone wall, iron gate etc at a cost of £65/19s/6d. On the 10th Oct 1894 the school opened its doors for the first time to receive pupils, and it was to accommodate 120 children.

And so to new beginnings for Kilclare and the history of National School Education

Reunion

It had been long talked about having a reunion for Kilclare School. After all most other schools in the county had theirs, and they were very memorable events. In the spring of 2013 I received information, from Dermot McNabb (Carrick Historical Society) that the 120th Anniversary of Kilclare School was in 2014. I immediately rang my one time neighbour and school pal, Bridie Foley-Gill. We both decided to arrange a meeting in the Sheemore Inn for the following week. This was to test the waters, and see what interest was in a reunion. We were delighted with the response. A good attendance showed great enthusiasm, a show of hands from all present in the house, ensured us of the help and support needed to see this event through.

The next meeting saw the election of a committee:

Chairman: Noel Farrell,
Secretary: Marie Donohoe
Joint Treasurers: Padraig Lynch, Kevin Foley.

Members took responsibility for organising fundraising events etc. A banner and plaque was to be sourced for the occasion.

A date was set for the reunion, August 15th 2014 to coincide with the very important date in Kilcare's sporting calendar of decades past. The very popular Kilclare Races/Sports was held on Aug 15th. Horse Racing/Jumping,

Greyhound Races, Donkey derbies, and Kiltubrid Pipe Band added to the atmosphere. Magicians, fortune tellers and conjurors were also in attendance. Stalls selling candy floss, Peggy's leg, red lemonade and biscuits, added to the enjoyment of the races. An end of Sports, dance was held either in Leitrim Hall, or Mollaghan's Barn at Keonbrook.

And so our school reunion was planned for that date. A commemorative book for the occasion was suggested and Marie Donohoe offered to research material for it. As the months passed and old photographs, memorabilia, and past pupils own memories, began to reach us, we were confident that we could produce a worthwhile history, not only of the school but also of Kilclare and its environs.

Letters of invitations were posted off and long lost past pupils were traced and invited. Ladders and hammers, drills and screwdrivers were much in demand and anything that moved or didn't got a slap of a paint brush, as the community came together to have everything looking its best on the day. The sense of "Pride of Place" was very evident.

As the reunion date fast approached, a marquee was erected in the school yard, decorated with ribbons, bunting and fresh flowers in the colours of Kilclare. The roll and registration books were available for viewing at the school. At this point I must mention, the late Maura Lynch who found the books, long after the school had closed. With the help of a hairdryer she carefully restored the books to a readable condition from being damp and wet. We are very indebted to Maura for this as any school reunion is not complete without the registration books. May she Rest in Peace.

A banner designed by Cormac Rogers (Bridie Gill's son-in-law) was erected on the gable wall, and a commemorative plaque, sourced and erected by Liam Shanley was in place. The book had gone to print, and was now ready for collection. On time, may I add!

Memorabilia and articles of local interest from the *Leitrim Observer* Archives were placed around the school room amid tins of paint and rolls of wallpaper. Flags, bunting and balloons adorned the exterior and the

place looked magnificent.

Friday night Aug 15th a meet and greet session was held in the Sheemore Inn and also at Gertie's Keshcarrigan, owner, and past pupil Dessie Foley. Past pupils coming from San Francisco, Chicago, New York and London, Tipperary and Donegal and many other places in between, met old school friends for the first time in many years, some becoming reacquainted, not having met since they left school. Hesitant handshakes and inquisitive looks, of is it "So and so" or not, ended in the enthusiastic handshake, and embrace. Musical entertainment at both venues set the atmosphere for a weekend of great enjoyment.

On Saturday Aug 16th the official opening took place at 3pm. A group of 200 past pupils, family and friends attended. Pdraig Lynch welcomed everyone, on behalf of the Lynch family, and as owner of the old school. Noel Farrell, Chairman, delivered a well-researched and impressive speech. Welcoming everyone, he spoke of what Kilclare was like in 1894, relying on the 1891 census of Ireland. Leitrim's population was 78,000 in the 1890's compared to 31,600 in the 2001 census.

Marie Donohoe, Secretary of the Committee, and editor of the *Reunion Book*, in her address acknowledged the great interest, support and help in the reunion preparations, by the people of Kilclare. She launched the book by employing the symbolic gesture, of one generation passing on knowledge and history to a younger generation. Emphasizing the fact that all children who attended the school were celebrities in their own right, three past pupils were asked to present a copy of the book as follows. These past pupils were selected to represent all past pupils, and present a copy of the book as follows:

- Patsy Foley-McGloin New York to her granddaughter Jenna.
 - Eileen Doran/Kennedy-Sheffield to Daire McNulty, Drumliffin
 - Tyler Gilmartin received a copy from his grandfather John James Gilmartin.
- Marie declared the book officially launched.

Noel Doherty unveiled a lovely commemorative

plaque, while Bridie Gill made a presentation to Marie Donohoe for her contribution to the event. The crowd mingled and mixed, viewed the roll books, chatted and reminisced, while Willie Donlon photographer caught all on camera.

Rita McWeeney, Maureen McDonagh and Ann McKeon, took care of registration, handing out name badges, selling admission tickets to meal, and copies of the commemorative book.

A delicious meal, provided by Eilish Cardiff Drumcong was served up in the marquee to 150 people while a slide show of times past, and farming practices in Kilclare (Brian Duignan, Carrick on Shannon) was shown. Set to the music of Sheebeg Sheemore, it was a great topic of conversation.

The weekend concluded with a Mass of Celebration in St Brigid's Church Drumcong celebrated by Rev Fr Tomas Flynn and Rev Fr Sean Burke past pupil. Many past pupils took part, bringing up symbols, offertory gifts, readers of the word, prayers of the faithful, and end of Mass reflection. A beautiful rendition of hymns and sacred music by Noel Farrell (past pupil) added to the celebration, making it very memorable and special.

A wonderful weekend and school reunion had come to an end. What a great example of a Community coming together, to work in peace and harmony to do something special for their own place.

Noel Farrell's summing up was, it was a wonderful gathering celebrating the unbreakable bond between people and place, and the bonds of friendship and family.

Kilclare take a Bow. Well Done!



■ **Standing under the newly unveiled Commemorative Plaque. The Committee:** Pdraig Lynch (Treasurer), Noel Doherty, Bridie Gill, Jim Doran, Marie Donohoe (Secretary & Editor), Noel Farrell (Chairman), John James Gilmartin, Maureen McDonagh, Rita McWeeney, Anne McKeon, Liam Shanley, Kevin Foley (Assist Treasurer) & Dessie Foley.



■ **Willie Keane, Margaret Foley, Dorothy Coursey (USA), Violet McDermott (USA) & Tessie McDermott**



■ **Noel Farrell, Chairman of School Reunion speaking to the assembled crowd at the Reunion. Aug 2014**



■ **Kiltbrid Pipe Band, entertains the crowd at Kilclare School Reunion**