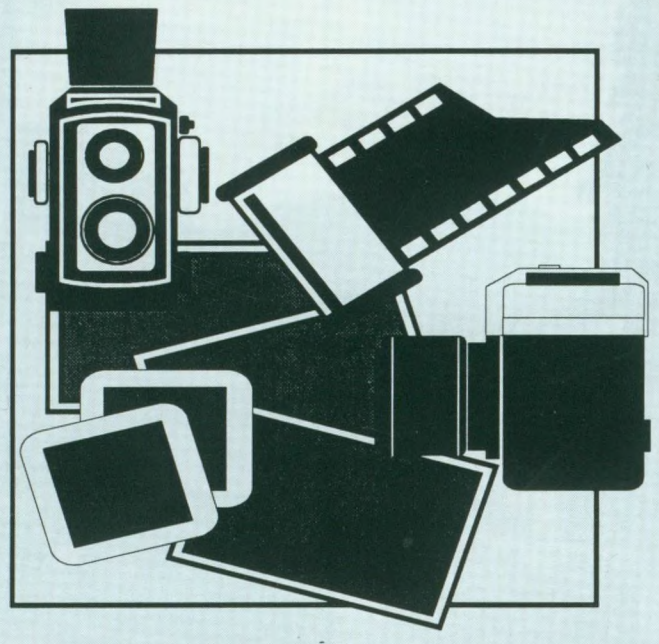
AN INTERESTING COLLECTION OF LEITRIM PHOTOGRAPHS



Thirteen different towns and villages in Co. Leitrim feature in a unique national collection of old photographs depicting street scenes and Irish life as it was about 100 years ago.

Dominic Rooney reports



The market Place Manorhamilton

The Irish Historical Picture Company is located at 5 Lower Ormond Quay, Dublin 1, (phone 01-8720144), and houses a collection of over 10,000 prints of old Irish photographs. It's founder and Managing Director, Peter Holder, came to Ireland in 1965, and after spending five years in Trinity College, Dublin, moved into the film industry, eventually becoming a leading film location manager. The photos, initially collected for the purposes of historic references in order to 'sell' Ireland as a prime film location to producers, directors and production designers, are now located at his gallery in Lower Ormond Quay. Here one can see the fruits of thirty years of painstaking acquisition of the photos from glass plates, family albums, old postcards, cigarette cards and old books and calendars.



MANY COLOUR PRINTS

The collection is extremely broad in scope, and includes the work of more than 100 identified photographers both national and local. These include Robert French of the Lawrence Collection, Eason Collection photographers, Robert J. Welch of Belfast, John Valentine of Scotland, as well as Kilgannon of Sligo and J. J. Downes of Drumshambo. Over half of the collection's prints are in colour - delicately hand-tinted by artists shortly after the photographs were taken. Colour of course added enormously to the popularity of the prints when first produced. One amusing little trick of the artist's trade was to use the same cloud stencil when colouring in the sky in many different photos - as in the case of the Benbo Mountain, Manorhamilton and Lurganboy photos in the Leitrim section. Artists were also used to update photos from one decade to the next, by modernising the clothes of the people in the photos or by obliterating tram lines etc.

Many of the prints were used as postcards which became very popular from the 1890s onwards, when the Post Office allowed postcards to be sent without envelopes. The golden age of postcards followed in the decade after 1902 when one full side of the postcard could be devoted to a picture. People used postcards as frequently as we use the telephone today, and the message on one card: "Please meet me on the train tomorrow," indicates the speed of postal delivery.





LEITRIM PHOTOS

There are 57 Leitrim photos in the collection. The following is a breakdown of prints according to each area. An asterisk indicates that the photo is in colour.

Ballinamore (5) chapel; *High Street; Main Street; *R.C. Chapel; Town from Bridge End.
Carrick-on-Shannon (11) *Bridge and Town; *Bridge Street; *Distance view of town; *McCann Memorial Clock; * Main St. from outside Bush Hotel, (LM 12); *Main St. including Memorial Clock; *Main St. from outside Town Hall; *Marist Convent; *Market Square; *River Shannon; *Upr. Main St. from outside R.C. Church.
Carrigallen (3) Gannion Lake, Carrigallen; *Main St. looking away from church; Main St. looking towards church.

Dromahair (8) *Abbey Hotel, Dromahair; Dromahair Village; *Dromahair Abbey; Lough Gill from Shriff, Dromahair; *Main St. Dromahair; O'Rourke's Old Castle, Lough Gill, Dromahair; *Shriff Bay and Lough Gill.

Drumkeeran (1) Main Street.
Drumshanbo (8) *Cemetery Gates, Franciscan Convent; *Distant view of town; Drumshanbo from Curriyard; *Franciscan Convent Church; Lough Allen from Black Rock; Lough Allen from Dowra Road; Main St. Drumshanbo; Railway Station, Drumshanbo.

Drumsna (1) *Drumsna.
Glencar (5) *Ben Bulben and Glencar Lough; *Glencar SL56; *Glencar Waterfall; Glencar Waterfall from main road; Swiss Valley, Glencar.
Jamestown (2) Archway; *Jamestown.

Manorhamilton (6) *Benbo Mountain; Castle Street; *Glenade Road and Lake; *Lurganboy; Market Place; New Line.

Mohill (5) Circus in Mohill; Lough Rynn Castle; *Main Street; Mohill on Market Day; Upper Main Street.

Newtowngore (1) Church Street.
Tullaghan (1) Old Cross.

Postcards were often commissioned and published by local businessmen. Some of the present collection of Leitrim photos were published by Ward & Co., General Merchants, Manorhamilton; Christopher Meehan, Stationer, Mohill; K.R. Kernan, Post Office, Newtowngore; D.W. Little, Carrick-on-Shannon; Knott & Co., Ballinamore; R.J. Lynn and J.J. Downes, Drumshambo.

ANOTHER LEITRIM CONNECTION

The entire collection of 10,000 photos of the Irish Historical Picture Company has been cross-referenced with the aid of a computer, thus producing over 300 categories of Irish Life - from accidents to zoos. The gallery's latest acquisition is of a mountain poteen still, with the police being active accessories. Prints are instantly available from £9.50. They can also be framed on the spot or enlarged up to 5 feet x 4 feet. Peter Holder and his colleague Liam Manning are always in attendance.

Of all of the counties represented in the collection, Leitrim is nearly the smallest. (This is still true even when one allows for the fact that 5 Leitrim Glencar photos and also one of Shriff Bay and Lough Gill, are included in the Sligo section). Peter says that any topographical photos of Leitrim, in whatever format, would be a welcome addition through barter or purchase. It's not really surprising that Peter has a particular interest in the county - his wife Helen (nee Cunningham) comes from Mohill.