

MUSIC IN THE GLENS

THE MEN WHO MAKE MUSIC

Traditional music is becoming increasingly popular throughout the country and to-day many young musicians are joining the older players to play the old jigs, reels and hornpipes. Even when people said that traditional music was dead, and the country resounded to jazz and pop, there were dedicated men who carried on the traditional music of their fathers and grandfathers. North Leitrim had her share of such men, but, in the absence of television, radio and tape recorders, their music was rarely heard outside the locality, and so they were not widely known. Many of the tunes they played were lost when they passed away. I'd like to remind you of some of these great men of music.

The Kiltyclogher area always seems to have had a predominance of fiddlers and, in the days before the "Border" was such a burning issue, it had a close connection with the music and musicians of County Fermanagh. Before the turn of the century, one of the best-known fiddlers in the area was Jimmy Farrell who was tragically drowned on Lough Erne as he was returning from a wedding on one of the islands. John Eddie Gordon who came from the border area was another well-known Fermanagh fiddler and his son John Gordon carried on the tradition.

John Quinn is one of the best-remembered Kilty fiddlers and many are the stories that are told about him. One such story tells of John returning from Manorhamilton late one night. He saw a light in a house by the road and he called in to rest. Times were troubled, and the man of the house was anxious to know the identity of his visitor. John told his name, and though the people of the house had heard of the great fiddler John Quinn, they did not know him by sight, so they decided to "try him out". John was handed a fiddle and asked to play a tune which he did without delay. Still not convinced, they asked him to put the fiddle behind his back and play a reel, which John speedily did. Next the man of the house took two plates from the dresser and inserted a plate under each of John's arms. "Now" says he, "play the Swallow's Tail". Once again John obliged. "Begob" says the man of the house, when John was finished, "you must be John Quinn, for no other man in Ireland could do that".

Ned Gilmartin from Dooard, John James Gallagher and Jack Bartley Rooney made many a rafter ring with their fiddles while Francis John McGovern, who was not content with



Traditional music is safe in the Melvin Country as is obvious from this all-age group of players. Standing l. to r. are: Maurice Lennon, Rossinver, Ben Lennon, Rossinver, Thomas Feeley, Kinlough, Brian Lennon, Rossinver, Michael Rooney, Glack, Mary Rooney, Kinlough, Patrick McGoey, Glenade, Brian McGovern, Bundoran. Seated l. to r. are: Peter McGloin, Glenade, Kevin O'Loughlin, Belleek, Phil Rooney, Kinlough,

playing the fiddle alone, also played flute and tin whistle. John McGuinness from Glenaniff was another great fiddler, and so it is little wonder that his son Frank is one of Leitrim's top accordion players to-day. However, let no one think that from Kiltyclogher to Rossinver there was only fiddle music to be heard. There were many accordion players too, one of the best-known being Michael John O'Hara.

Two men who introduced many new tunes to the area were Henry Ferguson and Johnny Sweeney. Henry, who is known as Henry Pat Harry, worked in Scotland for a number of years, and, being a good fiddler himself, learned and brought back with him many strathpeys and other Scottish tunes. Johnny brought many records of the famous Sligo fiddler Michael Coleman home from America, and these introduced the local musicians to many new tunes.

In Rossinver there was one house which was truly a "Ceili House". This was the home of Phil Rooney in Glack. With Phil on the flute and sons Jimmy on flute, Paddy on fiddle and Phil and Michael on accordions, many a night was spent on music and dancing. From Aughavohill there was Pat Hernan, another great accordion player.

If Kiltyclogher had plenty of fiddles,

then Kinlough had plenty of accordions. Paddy McGowan from Monien and Dan Gallagher from Laughta were well known players of the "melodeon" in their youth, as was James Feely, also from Laughta. Peter Clancy from Aharow played the flute and his son Bartley, with Jim Connolly played the accordion at many a session and dance. Indeed Bartley commanded the same respect from the musicians of his day as do Joe Burke and Finbar Dwyer to-day. Eddie John Gallagher from Parke played both fiddle and whistle and his son Charlie still plays the fiddle. One of the few mouth organ players in the area was John Foley senior from Kinlough.

The Gilligans from Glenaniff are a great musical family, well remembered for their days in the Emerald Valley Ceili Band. Though the band has split up, Peggy continues to sing ballads in her own inimitable style. Willie Gallagher and James Brennan played flutes around Glenade and Sonny Devaney and James Rooney played the fiddle. Sonny played at many a concert in the old creamery in Glenade. From Aughamore came Felix Rooney and Mick Gilmartin, both excellent fiddlers.

With such a wealth of tradition in the area it is little wonder that we have many musicians still playing the old

THE OBSERVATION BOOK

By

Patrick Reynolds, Ex N.T.

The National Schools System was founded in 1831. After that date all children were entitled to free primary education. In these so-called National Schools Irish history was forbidden and the Irish language ignored.

The Parish Priest was the Manager of the schools in his parish, he appointed the Teacher — the best scholar in the parish — the Government paid the Teacher.

The school was supplied with official books, registers, roll book and report book — where attendances were recorded — these to be kept by the teacher, and another, the Observation Book, which the teacher presented to the Inspector whenever he visited the school. There the Inspector recorded his impressions of the teacher, the pupils and the condition of the building itself. These observations may sound strange, outlandish, and perhaps amusing to-day, but then 1831 is a long way back. Here are a few. In a Leitrim school, near the Longford border, an Inspector left this observation or suggestion, "The Teacher should wear boots". In another Leitrim school we find "The school should be thatched, the floor should be made more even and a seat for the teacher must be provided". At a later date in the same school we find, "The cobwebs should be taken from the walls and the school should be whitewashed".

The above suggestion seems to have fallen on deaf ears, as on each subsequent visit he draws attention to the neglected suggestion, and underlined same in coloured pencil. Finally the following appears: "At last the school has been white-washed, but when white-washing the walls there is no necessity for whitewashing the maps". Two years later we find the following observation about the same school, "The interior of the house is a pattern of untidiness".

Most of the observations are too long to quote here, but rarely if ever is an encouraging word for the teacher to be found, unless he took encouragement from the marking of subjects

of dancing has enabled the musicians to play more slow airs and more complicated jigs and reels.

To these musicians past and present, we owe a great debt of gratitude. In this age, when everything, including music, seems to be "canned" or "disposable" they have preserved one of the few remaining links we have with our past. In this time of commercialism they play for the love of music. Long may they continue to open the bellows, warm the bodhran, tune the strings, and rosin the bow.

such as —

"Reading — mechanical

Explanation — poor

Arithmetic — bad

Writing — scarcely tolerable".

Towards the end of the century trained teachers appeared on the scene, and the Teachers' organization was making itself felt, but still the Inspector was a live topic when teachers met in the local town or village, especially if he was a "new fellow".

In the Carrigallen area there was a well-known teacher called Joe. Joe had a visit from the "new fellow", and on his next visit to the village, the teachers, were all around Joe. What sort was he? How long did he stay, etc. etc. Joe assured them he was the grandest man you could meet, and stayed less than an hour. Did he write in the observation book, Joe? Just three short notes; He wrote—

The clock is out of order

The school is out of order

The teacher is out of order;

that's all said Joe.

About this time a new subject was added to the programme, the "Object Lesson" and the older teachers hated it. One day Joe saw an Inspector getting off a side car at the school gate. A hurried look at the time table showed, Object Lesson. What was he to do; his eye fell on horseshoe magnet which he had lately picked up. The Inspector walked in and told Joe to continue. Joe took the magnet from the wall, and explained to his pupils its capabilities. To prove his point he asked for pins, needles, nails, all of which the magnet picked up easily. He talked with the pupils as he worked. Then he took a slate — the school jotter of the time — and this too the magnet picked up. The pupils were delighted. Now he spread the pins, needles, and nails on the desk and placed the slate over them. The magnet picked up the lot, which he held in full view of the pupils. Then he held the slate firmly with his left hand and with his right he twirled the magnet round and round on the back of the slate. Away went the pins, needles and nails round and round after one another on the other side of the slate. The pupils were dumb-founded, suddenly one lad blurted out

"Oh J — — — C — — — —!"

"That will do Mr." said the Inspector, and so the Object Lesson ended without comment, not even an entry in the Observation Book.

Drumany,
Foxfield.