

Great Limerick Athletes

No. 71—JAMES F. HALVEY of Limerick City

(By SEAMUS O CEALLAIGH)

THE Leahy family provide the classical example of devotion to the cause of athletics, yet they are not the only big Limerick family to give all its manfolk to the work of reviving our national sports, in days when it was not by any means as popular as it is nowadays but connected with the G.A.A. and its activities.

In recalling the work of the Halveys of Croom, it is well to say at the outset that five brothers in all represented their native parish on the hurling field, whilst four of them figured as well-known and popular cyclists at sports meetings throughout Munster in the halcyon days of Limerick athletic glory.

I set out to record the doings of James F. Halvey, but in the course of the narrative I hope also to touch, however inadequately, on some of the performances of his brothers—John, Paddy, Ned and Con.

The Halveys came of good old Gaelic stock and it is on record that their father was a member of the first Croom hurling team, which was formed shortly after the foundation of the G.A.A.

John was the first of the present family to hit the Gaelic headlines, when he figured with the Croom hurlers, led by "Spencer" Lyons, in the years around the turn of the century.

LEFT FOR AMERICA.

The Leahy suffered a big loss when he left for America, in 1902, and in this connection say of his old team mates who still survive will be glad to learn that he is now living at Newburg, New York, and as interested as ever in the doings of the homeland, which he has not seen since his departure over half a century ago.

John kept contact, too, with the hurling, and was a leading member for many years of the all-Limerick hurling team of New York, which appropriately enough was named the "John Dahys."

When his brother, Ned, visited America shortly afterwards, and where he remained for half a dozen years or so, he also played with the "John Dahys," bringing Croom representation on the side to four—John and Ned Halvey, with Paddy O'Neill ("Bantam") and Jack O'Connell. The captain at the time was Tom Carter of Padanora, and their outstanding achievement was the defeat of the holders—the "Makers" of Tipperary—for the Championship of New York. The games of those days were played in the old home of New York Gaelic, Celtic Park, for long only a happy memory.

Jim Halvey was captain of the third Croom hurling team in his young days, and it was only when he left to live in Limerick City in early 1894 that his interest turned to cycling.

FIRST RECORDS SUCCESS.

His first recorded success came later that year, when he won the mile cycle confined event at the L.A.A. and B.C. sports, with E. G. Stokes runner-up, and finished second in the open race over the same distance to J. Eggleston.

The following season he won the one mile novice race from scratch at the Garryowen Fete sports on June 14th, J. D. Cusack being second. A fortnight later he appeared in top class at Kilmallock

sports, and was runner-up to the great J. J. Condon in the one mile scratch.

Placed third in the mile at Nenagh on July 17th, he also had two seconds on that occasion over two and four miles. His longest race was at Tipperary on October 30th, when he finished third in a ten miles contest—J. N. Browne winning, with J. Eggleston second.

Second in the one mile cycle at Limerick Commercial sports on August 23rd, 1896, he figured in a different sphere the following St. Patrick's Day, when the County G.A.A. Convention elected him Treasurer of the County Board, yet was at the County Board, Denis Spencer was the Chairman.

LIMERICK MEN AND ALL-IRELAND CONGRESS.

The All-Ireland Congress of the Association held at Thurles on July 4th, 1897, was remarkable for the number of Limerickers elected to office. They were: Frank B. Dinneen, President; Larry Roche and Michael Deering, Vice-Presidents; R. A. Gleeson, Treasurer, and James F. Halvey, Auditor.

Twelve months later Michael Deering became President of the G.A.A. Jim Halvey was elected Vice-President, and Frank Dinneen took over the Secretaryship.

Third in the mile at the Police sports in the Markets Field on July 18th, 1898, Jim Halvey disproved the theory that a person could not be a good secretary and a good cyclist at the same time, when on July 24th, assisted by Maurice Frewen, he organised, under the auspices of the famed Commercial sports ever held in Limerick. Several records were broken and P. J. Leahy cleared 6ft. 6ins. in the high jump, a then world's record but denied recognition.

Jim also competed at the meeting and brought home a prize, as well as the plaudits of the sporting public for a wonderful triumph of organisation, the full extent of which can be judged by the fact that almost £100 was collected in sixpences at the Garryowen side alone that day.

ANOTHER GREAT YEAR.

Jim had another great year in 1899, recorded events in which he participated resulting:—

May 25th, L.A.A. and B.C.—Thirteen mile cycle road race, T. G. Wilson (38m.) won, T. G. Kenne (38m. 1s.), second; J. F. Halvey (38m. 15s.), third.

May 30th, Limerick Police sports—One mile cycle, J. F. Halvey won, T. G. Wilson, third. Three mile cycle, J. F. Halvey won, T. H. Browne, second.

June 8th, L.A.A. and B.C. sports—One mile cycle (combined), J. F. Halvey won, One mile cycle (open), (Rose Cup), J. F. Halvey (2m. 30 2/5s) won. Two mile roadster, T. G. Wilson won, J. F. Halvey, second.

June 26th, Nenagh Police sports—Won the one, three and five mile cycle events.

July 30th, Limerick Commercial sports at the Markets Field—Second to J. J. Condon in the one mile.

Jim Halvey was again Secretary of the latter meeting, sharing the burden with Abbie Quillman, and experiencing another remarkable success, special trains bringing large crowds to the venue, which

was packed.

LIMERICK DRAPERS' SPORTS.

I can find only one reference to him in the Press reports of the 1900 meetings. It concerns the Limerick Drapers' sports held on May 24th, the cycling returns being: One mile, R. Legear, Adare, won; B. A. King, Limerick Bicycle Club, second. Three miles, J. O'Mara (310 yards) won, J. F. Halvey (290 yards), second. Two mile invitation, J. F. Halvey won, J. O'Mara (320 yards) second.

Several years later he ran his last race on the track, a "come-back" race that was remarkably successful and gave him ownership of the splendid Deimege Challenge Cup, which he had won on two previous occasions at meetings of the old L.A.A. and B.C. When the latter were discontinued the trophies went into "cold storage" for some years, but the Deimege Cup again eventually went up for competition, this time at a police meeting. Jim determined to win it out, realised his ambition, Ned Caulfield being second, and another of the Halvey brothers, Ned, third.

Jim Halvey also figured in a number of road races, on one occasion riding in the fifty miles event over the Phoenix Park course, Dublin, being favourably placed at the finish.

GOT A BAD FALL.

A regular rider over the Rosbrien course, a distance of twenty-five miles, he had won the principal event one year, and was all out in the defence of his title the following season when he got a bad fall just as he pulled out to win. As a result he was three weeks incapacitated in the County Infirmary, and was advised by his doctors never to ride again, not to speak of competing. It just shows the mentality of the man that he turned out again the following season and not alone regained his title but secured a special gold medal for the fastest time recorded over the course.

He won hundreds of prizes during his active years, including clocks and cutlery galors. When he got married he nearly furnished his house with the trophies of his cycling days, foremost of which was the massive Deimege Cup which he prized very dearly.

An athlete is judged as much by his company as by his deeds, and it suffices to say that Jim encountered during his time on the track such notables as Tom Cullen, now President of the N.A. and C.A.; J. J. Condon, Ned Caulfield, Paddy O'Donnell, J. G. Kenne, Dick Matthews, Wm. B. Smith, E. G. Stokes, A. E. Kenneally, M. A. O'Callaghan, J. Ray, T. G. Wilson and J. McElroy.

FINE ACHIEVEMENT.

Jim mostly travelled by train to his away meetings, but often cycled to Kilmallock and other like places in order to compete. On one occasion he missed the train to Nenagh, so he immediately mounted his bicycle, arriving at the Sports Ground, just as the five mile race was about to start. He immediately turned out and won it.

Manager, and later proprietor, of the Revolution Cycle Stores in Patrick Street, he once rode a revolution cycle in an obstacle race at the Markets Field.

For training he often cycled to Rathkeale or Tipperary before commencing his day's work. He also kept fit by running, on their trial spins, with the Limerick Harriers, but never represented them in competition.

A keen and enthusiastic member of the Commercial, he often put in a spot of training with them at Corkanree, and erected a special showerbath at his home on the Dock Road for the benefit of its members.

Strangely enough, it was Mungrat Jim represented on the County Board before being elected Treasurer of that body in 1897.

PADDY HALVEY'S PERFORMANCES.

Paddy Halvey succeeded his brother as representative of the Mungrat Club. He hurried with Mungrat after originally figuring with Croom, to whom he returned when Mungrat disbanded. Paddy was appointed assistant secretary of the County Board on 6th April, 1907.

A useful cyclist, although mainly interested in hurling, his track successes included: June 30th, 1901, Bruff sports—One mile cycle, J. J. Condon (30 yards) won, P. Halvey (150 yards), third. Three mile cycle open handicap, J. J. Condon (80 yards) won; P. Halvey (330 yards), second.

August 27th, 1901, Kilkee sports—Won the one mile cycle and second in the three mile.

September 15th, 1901, Tuilla G.A.A. sports—One mile cycle, P. Halvey (140 yards) second. Two mile cycle, P. Halvey (280 yards) second. Three mile cycle, P. Halvey won.

July 20th, 1902, Tuilla G.A.A. sports—Two mile cycle, P. Halvey (235 yards) second.

August 17th, 1902, Kinacra (Limerick) G.A.A. sports—One mile cycle, P. Halvey (185 yards) second.

August 19th, 1906, Kilmallock sports—One mile cycle, P. Halvey (130 yards), second.

Paddy Halvey, long living in West Clare, is the proprietor of a licensed premises situated between Moyasta and Kilkee.

THE OTHER BROTHERS.

Con Halvey, now resident in Dublin, made one of his rare cycling appearances at Croom sports on September 13th, 1906, to finish third in the one mile race, first place going to H. Sherwood, with J. Sperring second.

His main interest, however, was in the hurling, and he played with both Rathkeale and Croom for many seasons.

Ned Halvey, when apprenticed in Bruff, cycled to Limerick on a solid tyred bicycle in 1882 to see Mickey O'Neill and Adare beat the famous cross-Channel runner, Crossland.

There was a novice cycle race on the programme also, and "Spencer" Lyons induced Ned to enter. It was his first time on a grass track and his first time in a race, but with the aid of a pneumatic cycle, which he secured on loan, he won easily—the distance, two miles.

At the Commercial sports shortly afterwards he again tried his luck and repeated the success in the two mile novice event.

His first success in class company was at Kilmallock in 1902, when he won the two mile cycle.

Ned did not cycle a lot, as hurling took up most of his recreational hours, but a few cycling appearances, from the press reports of the period give him as having finished third in the five mile at Limerick sports on June 14th, 1906, R. Matthews being the winner, with E. T. Russell second. At Ennis on July 22nd he was second over the same distance, and at Limerick Commercial meeting on August 12th he won the two mile event.

Ned captained the Croom senior hurling team that won the County Championship, and the Murphy Cup—a great double—in 1908.

When offered the captaincy he was living in the city, and he at first refused the honour. The other players, however, insisted, and he eventually accepted the position on condition that he got full control and was allowed to pick the team himself for all their matches. The others agreed, and by the way did succeed that the Croom boys won the first match under his leadership

after a long spell in the wilderness. And they remained unbeaten for thirty-three matches, a remarkable record rivaled only by the loyalty of the players to their leader.

GREAT FIGURES.

Some great figures came to the fore in that halcyon period. Six Mangans in all wore the Croom jersey—Johnny with the old teams; Ter, Mick, Pat, Tom and Jim in later years. In addition, the Croom lads trained on their lands at Carrane, and many a summer's evening saw forty or more pucking about there. Then Mrs. Mangan would appear and insist on the whole lot going in to the house for tea—a regular occurrence there.

Three Halveys often hurled together on the same team—Paddy, Con and Ned—and then there were the two Mullanes, John and Mick, Jack Shea and Mick Feely.

Paddy Buskin, a member of the Killinane side that won All-Ireland honours in 1887, was a great figure on the side, whilst his brother, Bill, gave valuable assistance also.

Paddy, small but sturdily built, could jump feet up for a ball, and old timers will be delighted to hear that this veteran of 1897 hurling fame is still hale and hearty, farming good acres at Ballylusk, Croom.

Ter Mangan was a great full forward who, with his brothers Mick and Tom, played for Limerick in many a hard-fought contest. The two Mullanes, Jack Shea and Mick Feely also represented their county with distinction.

Mick Feely, "the burly teacher from Crooms," as "Carbery" once described him, often walked to Patrickswell to catch a train for Tralee or Kilarney to play a match. A great forty-yards man and an adept at taking a pass from the mighty "Tyler" Mackey, he was a powerful player on the frees, always hitting with remarkable accuracy.

JACK SHEA.

Jack Shea, regarded by many as the best half-back Limerick ever had, could give Tipperary's Hugh Shelley—rated a ten seconds man in the "hundreds"—half a yard start and still beat him to a ball. A good hard, honest hurler, it took a great man to beat him. A story is told concerning a match in which Croom played Rathkeale. A youth who was coming to the fore as a hurling stylist in Rathkeale was nominated to play on Jack Shea. After a few minutes hurling it was obvious to the latter that his man was fighting shy of a clash with him. Then, Jack said: "Sonny, come into me; he got a few hard 'roots' afterwards from the youth, Jack was as good as his word. That was typical of the man.

In Bourke's long car from Bruff, the Croom lads travelled afar, winning everywhere against the star teams of Limerick and North Cork. A notable achievement was the occasion when, aided only by Paddy Flaherty, they aided a team that beat the pick of the city in a match in aid of a memorial to "Spencer" Lyons.

At the annual County Convention on March 25th, 1908, Ned Halvey was elected Assistant Secretary, a position he held for a number of years. Later he represented Limerick on the Munster Council, along with Paddy Kelly, father of ex-City Board Treasurer, P. Kelly.

Ned still takes a deep interest in the games of the Gael, and rarely misses a hurling game of any importance. Long may he flourish, a worthy representative of one of our greatest Gaelic families.