

No. 167—SIMON O'RIORDAN of Dromin

(By Seamus O'Ceallaigh)

SIMON O'Riordan was just growing to manhood when the G.A.A. was founded, and immediately threw himself into the work of organisation. In fact, that great chronicler of early Gaelic days, the late Major Larry Roche, has left it on record that Simon O'Riordan brought the first set of hurleys to Dromin.

Anyway, the Dromin hurlers were quick in the field, and one of the first tournaments organised under G.A.A. rules took place at Bruff, where Dromin lost to Fedamore after an exciting game by three forfeit points to nil. The date of that match was September 27th, 1887.

TO THE FORE IN THE COUNCILS

In addition to the prominent part they took in active work on the playing fields, the Dromin lads were to the fore in the Councils of the Association, and the part played by Very Rev. Eugene Sheehy, P.P., Bob Coll and Larry Roche in shaping the early destiny of the G.A.A. by the Shannon was really immense. Bob Coll and Larry Roche were also very much to the fore in the athletic revival, to which another great figure from the parish contributed in no small degree—Dr. J. C. Daly, one of the party on the famed G.A.A. "Invasion" to America in 1888.

In hurling and football the Dromin lads made the welkin ring all through the formative years, and in common with the district around helped to produce their quota of famous figures to illumine the pages of Gaelic history.

Simon worked like a trojan in furthering and advancing the cause of the Gael and was prominent in every move to strengthen and improve the standing of the games in the parish and surrounding areas. In fact, his devotion to native pastimes was a lifelong passion and for more than sixty years he was a well known figure at G.A.A. fixtures over a wide area, always cycling, even when he had passed the eighty years mark—a remarkable illustration of earnestness and enthusiasm.

COUNTY SENIOR HURLING TITLE

In 1893 Simon assisted the South Limerick Hurling Club, which had its headquarters in Bruree, win the County senior hurling title, a remarkable achievement and won in decisive fashion, 8-1 to 0-1—the famous St. Michaels of Limerick providing the opposition. A special feature of this final was that it was played under the auspices of the Central Council, as no County Board was functioning in Limerick at the period. This was due to political dissensions arising out of the Parnell "Split," and to Simon and a few others, particularly Tom Campion, James Birrane and Larry Roche, must go the credit for keeping the South Limerick lads in the Association.

Three years later Larry Roche, Tom Campion, John Flanagan and D. Murphy were members of teams that played at Stamford Bridge, London, on Easter Monday, the first big G.A.A. day in the English metropolis. Larry Roche played with the Irish football team that beat a London selection, whilst Flanagan, Campion and Murphy, with R. A. Gleeson and W. O'Dwyer (St. Michael's) and P. Lee (Cappamore) helped Munster hurlers beat Leinster 5-7 to 2-8. In a sports meeting which followed, John Flanagan broke two world's records, throwing the 16 lbs. hammer—registering 156 ft. 4 ins. with unlimited run and follow, and 147 ft. from the 9 ft. circle.

A GREAT ADMIRER OF JOHN FLANAGAN

Simon was a great admirer of John Flanagan and mighty proud of the wonderful achievements of the Kilmallock man on world athletic fields. I remember one occasion when he spoke with swelling breast of the famous Dowling medal, worth something over

1,500 dollars, when originally presented and the most valuable medal ever contested for in athletics. Simon explained that this splendid trophy was presented to John Flanagan, champion weight thrower of the world, by Judge Dowling of New York, and is emblematic of the championship of the world in weight-throwing. It weighed about four ounces and was made of solid gold, exquisitely modelled.

PADDY RYAN OF PALLAS

It was a source of great joy to Simon that another Limerickman, Paddy Ryan, of Pallas, also achieved world distinction with the weights. I heard him say: "Paddy Ryan threw the 16 lbs. hammer with such ease, and could revolve while doing that triple turn with such speed that it was nothing less than amazing. His worth as a weight thrower was never estimated high enough. I never saw a man in the ring with a hammer in his hand that could use himself to such advantage as he could. Somehow or other he was built differently to any of them. He was my idol of what a perfect specimen of weight thrower should be. While Flanagan was a runner and jumper to be reckoned with in his early days as an athlete, he was built symmetrically as a weight-thrower, yet he lacked the height that Paddy Ryan had, and he could never utilise the space within the seven foot circle as Ryan used to. Flanagan, however, was the hero of epic achievements in his era and will always retain top place in my memory dearest."

IN FIGHT FOR NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE

Like many more G.A.A. men, Simon O'Riordan was ever in the thick of the fight for national independence, associated with every effort to better the conditions of the people he often bore testimony to the wonderful change that came over the country as the

G.A.A. gradually established itself. A new spirit grew up with the organisation and discipline, and the power and influence of the ruling classes diminished accordingly. Hand in hand with the Land League, the hurlers, footballers, and athletes made their contribution to the building of a new Ireland.

The founding of the Irish Volunteers might be said to constitute the opening of another chapter in the history of our nation. Towards the close of 1913 Simon invited a number of kindred spirits to his home one evening and there and then formed a branch of the Volunteers, of which he soon became one of the most active members.

REFUGE OF MANY "WANTED" MEN

The house that witnessed the launching of the Volunteers in Dromin was later the refuge of many much wanted and hunted men during the War of Independence. Simon worked earnestly for Sinn Fein and the Volunteers; visited his home and ment visited his home and from there directed operations over a wide area on many occasions, and later soldiers of the I.R.A. "on the run" spent many a restful night under the hospitable roof of the great Gael and patriot.

Few of the younger generation can have any idea of the risks Simon took in sheltering the fighting men of those unforgettable and glorious days, but he never reckoned the cost, and besides rendering yeoman service himself gave distinguished sons to actively assist in the fight.

British Crown forces raided his house on many occasions but the savagery and brutality only strengthened the will and resolve of a true Irishman, who lived to enjoy for quarter of a century the freedom he helped in no ungenerous measure to win.