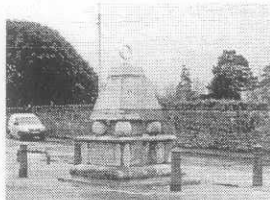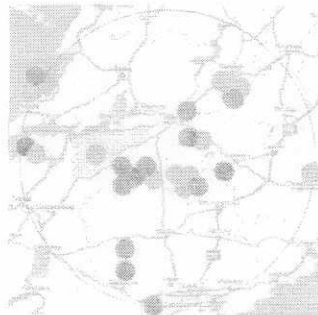# Limerick and the Olympic Games 1896-1924

Kevin McCarthy

The Long Map

Why the Limerick area?

- The Golden Vale
- Emigrants by choice rather than through starvation
- Sporting traditions
- Sporting ecumenism
- No fear of breaking new ground

Sporting Limerick

"I was born in Limerick, Ireland on the 17th of March [1859]. St. Patrick and myself have that date all to ourselves. I came to America when I was twenty years old, but my father and mother are still in the old country. It might be well to say something about the first athletic meet I ever pulled off.

"One Sunday morning myself and half a dozen gossoons cut down a tree and planted it in a field a short distance away from the church. Then we stood at either side of the entrance with our caps in our hand and when the people came out from Mass we took up a collection to buy prizes. That afternoon the field was packed and everybody had a fine time. Athletic contests were the regular Sunday pastime after that."
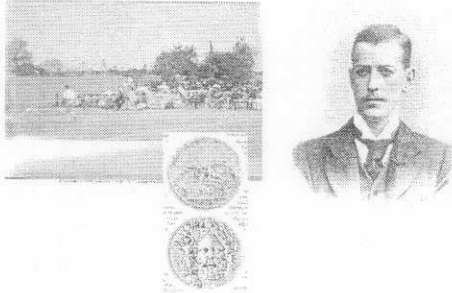
Athens – The first modern Olympic Games 1896

The first Olympic champion in 1896
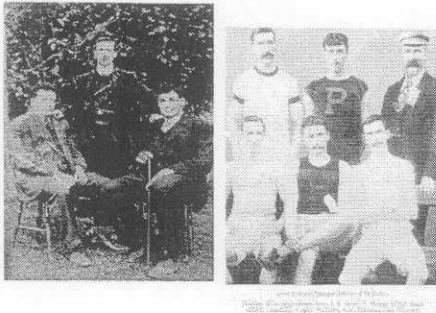
JP Boland: first Irish champion 1896

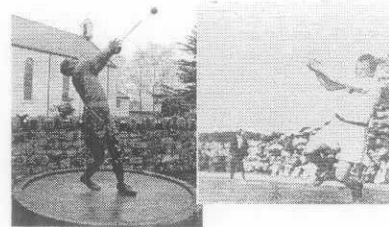## 1900: Limerick's first Olympic medals

Paris 16-17 July

- Pat Leahy (Creggane) won silver in the high jump with 1.78m
- Leahy also won bronze in long jump with a leap of 6.71m
- John Flanagan (Martinstown and USA) won hammer gold with a throw of 51.01m, 4.75m better than anyone else.
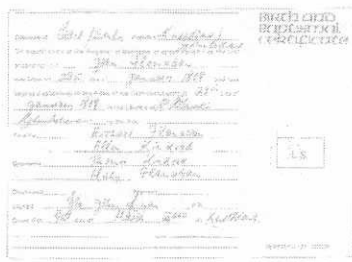
Pat Leahy of Creggane 1900

John Flanagan – Martinstown and USA: 1900, 1904, 1908

Flanagan's birth cert

1904 and St Louis

- Tom Kiely (Tipperary and Ireland) won gold in the All Round Championship
- John James Daly (Galway) won silver in 2,590M steeplechase

- Gaelic Football won by Chicago Fenians
- Hurling won by St. Louis Innisfalls

For Tipperary and Ireland 1904

1904: Irish America to the fore

- John Flanagan wins second hammer title (51.23 m) and a second place in the 56lb throw, 10.16m with Jim Mitchell from Emly third)
- Martin Sheridan (Bohola, Co. Mayo) wins first of nine Olympic medals in the discus
- Irish American Athletic Club top US club – PJ Conway chairman
- Head of US Olympic movement and St. Louis organisers was James Sullivan
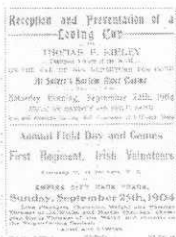- Very important in funding Irish revolution

P.J. Conway – Irish American Athletic Club
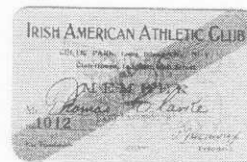

The Irish American connection

Irish American Athletic Club

The Fenians and Irish American athletics

1906 – Irish or British?

- British Olympic Association founded late 1905
- Peter O'Connor (Waterford) wins gold in triple jump and silver in long jump
- Con Leahy (Creggane) wins gold in high jump by 2.5cm and silver in triple jump behind O'Connor, 13.98m to O'Connor's 14.075m

- Two gold and three silver for Martin Sheridan (USA)
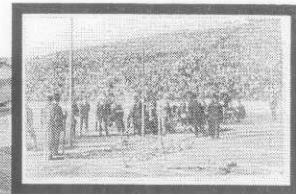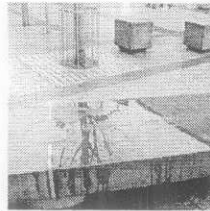- Billy Sherring (Canada) wins Marathon

1906: O'Connor and Daly

1906: Flags and emblems

## Con Leahy of Creggane: guardian of the flag

1908 Limerick Olympic winners

- John Flanagan gold in the hammer, with McGrath (Tipperary) and Walsh (Cork) placed
- Tim Ahearne wins triple jump with 14.92m
- Con Leahy joint second in high jump
- William Russell Lane-Joynt silver in team 'running deer' shooting

- Plus Sheridan, Hayes, Horgan, Barrett, Kerr…
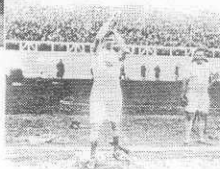
Tim Ahearne of Athea, triple jump champion in 1908
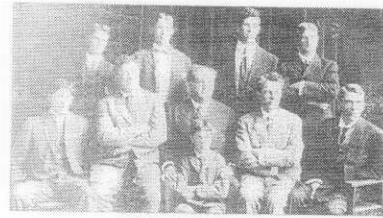
Tim Ahearne's medal and certificate
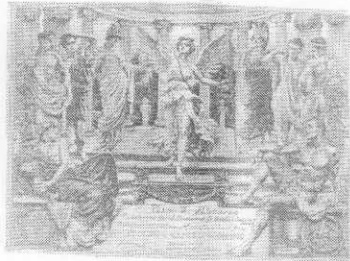
Irish hockey team 1908

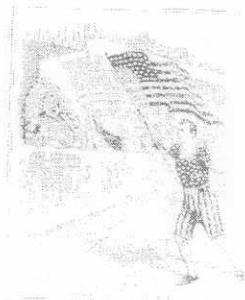## 1908 – Triumph of Irish America

Coach Tom Flanagan and Tom Longboat

Mike Murphy – USA Olympic trainer

American-British hatred in 1908

William Lane-Joynt – one I missed

Hammer one, two and three – Flanagan, McGrath and Walsh
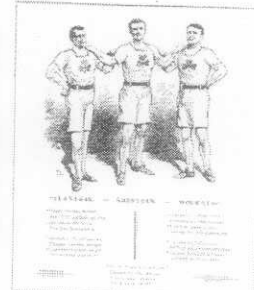
1912 Tradition Continues

- Matt McGrath (Nenagh) wins hammer by over six metres
- Pat McDonald (Doonbeg and Time Square) wins gold in shot (15.34m) and silver in two-handed shot (27.53m
- Kennedy McArthur (Antrim) wins Marathon for South Africa – tallest winner ever
- Denis Carey (John Flanagan's cousin) sixth in hammer

1912 – McArthur (Antrim and South Africa) wins Stockholm Marathon

## Two very different characters: Frank Dinneen and Boss Croker

1920 Antwerp

- Paddy Ryan (Pallasgreen) wins hammer with 52.875m and second to McDonald in 56lb weight
- Silver for Pat Flynn (Bandon) in 3,000m steeplechase and for Anton Hegarty (Derry) in team cross country
- Gold in polo for FW Barrett (Cork) and in water polo for Noel Purcell (Dublin)
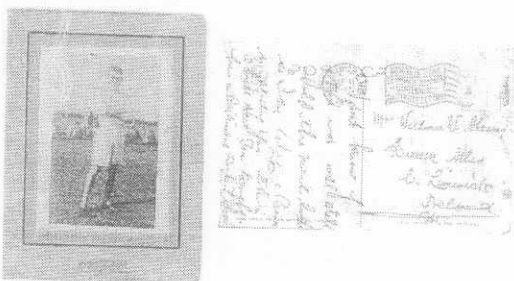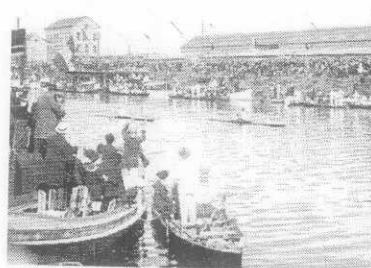
Paddy Ryan – Nicker & Pallasgreen
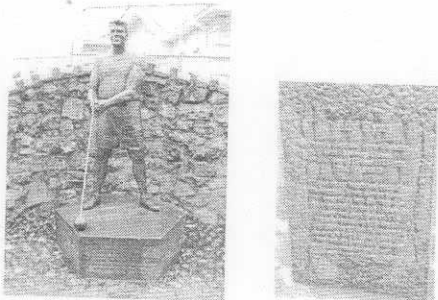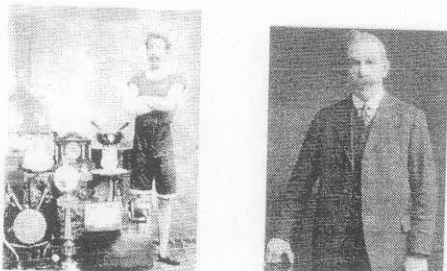

Ryan and McDonald
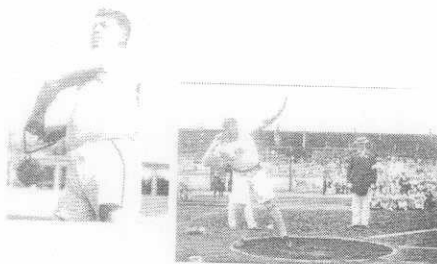
Dan Ahearn of Athea – no medal in 1920 but world record holder in triple jump

1920 – 24: Jack Kelly – three golds

JJ Keane – Anglesborough and IOC

Ireland's Olympic Council

- Founded in 1920 – Keane, Griffith and Collins
- 'The formation of an Irish Olympic Council that is completely and influentially representative of the Irish nation… At the first meeting of the newly formed Council the movement was discussed in all its aspects and, while the difficulties were fully acknowledged, it was unanimously agreed that the time was opportune and the necessity urgent for formulating Ireland's right to participate as a distinct national entity in such world competitions as the Olympic Games...' *Limerick Leader*, 23 August 1920.
- Battle for acceptance at Lausanne 1920-22 – Keane Ireland's first IOC Member

Keane and the IOC

I have the honour of asking you again on behalf of Ireland, to be recognized in the coming Olympic Games, as an independent nation. After our meeting in Antwerp, you told us that the Irish demand would be recognized as soon as political autonomy had been granted…I have great pleasure in telling you that my country is now a 'Free State', and that it holds, on a common footing, the same rights as an autonomous state in the British Empire as Canada, Australia, south Africa, etc. The condition laid down by your committee as essential for acceptance of Ireland's application is thus complied with.

Letter from J.J. Keane on behalf of the Irish Olympic Council to de Coubertin 10 April 1922 *Correspondence JJ Keane.*

Sophie Peirce – Women's Olympic pioneer

The Map does not lie
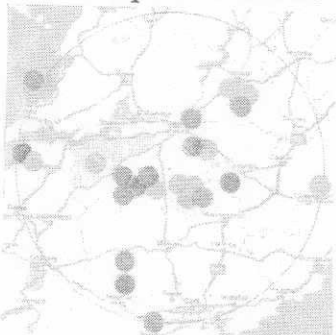
Thank you for your attention

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