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Comhairle Contae
Dhún na nGall
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European Regional Development Fund

Coiste um Fhorbairt Pobail Aitiúil
Dhún na nGall
Donegal Local Community Development
Committee



Echoes of the Decade – Oral History Strand

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Regina Fitzpatrick
Date(s) of Interview(s)	17 November 2020; 20 November 2020; 27 November 2020.
Location	Phone interview – Jimmy in Co. Donegal; Regina in Co. Kilkenny.
Name of Interviewee	Jimmy McGill
Gender	Male
Year of Birth	1935
Interview Synopsis	<p>Jimmy McGill is from Aighe, Co. Donegal. He is the son of James McGill who was a member of the Irish Volunteers and the IRA from 1917 attached to A Company, 3 Battalion, 3 Donegal Brigade, IRA. In this series of three interviews, Jimmy talks about his father and the local experience of the War of Independence and the Civil War. He also talks about his own life experiences of school, emigration, weaving and farming. Themes and topics featured in this interview also include World War I; twentieth century politics; social, political and economic history of the area; religion, the Irish language and the Northern Irish Troubles.</p>
Time-Coded Interview Summary	<p><i>Interview 1: 17 November 2020</i></p> <p>00:00 Introduction to interview.</p> <p>00:40 Born in 1935 in Aighe. Father was a stonemason.</p> <p>01:27 Father went to America after 'The Troubles', 1923/24 and returned in 1932 during the Great Depression in America. Had married Jimmy's mother in America, she was from Glenties.</p> <p>02:14 Jimmy grew up in Aighe and went to school there. He went over and back to England to work in the 1950s. Long working hours but the pay was better.</p> <p>03:09 Location of townland of Aighe. Father was from Aighe originally and he was</p>

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born in 1893. Times were very bad at that time. Jimmy's grandfather, Charles McGill was also a stonemason who worked on the building of the church in Ardara in 1903. He also built out on Arranmore Island and worked on the buildings in Lough Derg. His father worked with him and they travelled all around Donegal.

05:25 His father's brother John who died in World War I was never spoken about because he fought for England. Those who joined the British Army were never spoken about afterwards. A lot of neighbours around there fought in World War I. John died the first day of the Somme in 1916. Talks about what soldiers were paid and what the miners who went over were paid. Does not know the circumstances of how he enlisted in the army.

08:42 There were ten in his father's family most of whom emigrated to Philadelphia. Names his father's siblings, some of whom died very young.

10:40 Jimmy's father was called James 'the Yank', he had a nickname because there were so many McGill's in the area. The McGill name comes from Antrim.

11:28 His grandfather married into a farm. His grandparents were born in or around the years of the Famine. Hardships of that time. The 1918 flu killed more around that area than the Famine. Talks about soldiers returning from World War I carrying the flu back with them. Chewing tobacco to keep the flu away in the trenches of the War. Talked about men of that generation chewing tobacco and women smoking clay pipes. Taking of snuff at wakes. Clay pipes being bought for wakes. Wake customs in Donegal.

15:05 His mother was from Glenties. No one lives in that townland anymore. Her maiden name was McGlinchey. He remembers her parents. His grandfather died in the 1940s and his grandmother died in 1956 in her 90s. Her brothers were Peter and Johnny, neither of whom married.

16:52 His mother's parents were farmers; it was wild mountain land. His mother left for America to work when she was very young and married Jimmy's father in 1932 before returning home. Talks about the Depression in America. His father spent some time in New York, but they were mostly in Philadelphia. His father worked as a carpenter and a builder there.

19:07 The split in families over the Civil War.

20:18 Believes that many joined the Irish Volunteers in that area as a reaction to Irish people joining the British Army. Some in the area even supported Germany in the War.

21:22 His father James joined the Irish Volunteers and was in a flying column. Talks about safe houses around the Glenties area. Mentions a teacher from the area, Paddy McGill who wrote a lot about the War of Independence, remembers him interviewing his father about the Kilrairie Ambush in the 1940s. Talks about the Ancient Order of Hibernians. Irish Volunteers who were banned sometimes banned from going to mass.

24:07 His father never spoke about his involvement in those years. They would have

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talked among comrades but not to others.

25:07 His house was a card playing house when he was a child. Most of the people who were involved in those times went to America after the Troubles, some during the Civil War. Some people from there joined the Free State Army after the truce, others stayed the IRA.

27:06 The Black and Tans were very active in that area. Talks about a man he worked in the 1950s with who had been in the Black and Tans. Large Protestant population in that area, especially around Rosstown, mostly Presbyterians. Recalls speaking with Presbyterians about the 1798. Mentions Wolfetone, Robert Emmett and Henry Joy McCracken.

30:15 The Plantation of Ulster. No Protestants up the mountain land. No animosities in the area, good relationship between Catholics and Protestants. Mentions Protestants being cut off from Northern Ireland.

31:40 The main landlords in the area were Mount Stewarts, he had lands rented out to other wealthy men, mentions a Scottish man called Morton who had some of the land and was good to his workers on the farm. He was there until the 1920s when the land was divided out. Local people who got land at that time.

33:40 Talks about the squaring of the land in 1857. Type of farming that area. Mentions sheep farming, division of land and commonage.

37:58 Raised through Irish, did not have English when he started school. Mentions Brackey school which taught both in Irish and English. The location of the Gaeltacht in that area. Irish dying out in the area, especially in the 1950s due to emigration.

39:46 His mother worked as a maid for a rich family in America. Most Irish women did that. She also had aunts over there. Many men went to work in mining areas in Pennsylvania, in the coal regions. Mentions that there were relatives of his in the Molly Maguires. Mentions relatives who went to work in the copper mines of Butte Montana, many of those workers died from cancer having worked with copper. His father's carpentry work.

42:19 His father went to America in 1923/4. Bitterness in the first years of the Free State and the split in the area. Mentions that a lot of the leadership of the Free State Army in the area was from Derry. Mentions Drumboe. His father had a brother and sisters in America which is probably why he went.

45:17 His father would have been against the Treaty. Talks about Michael Collins going over to negotiate the Treaty. Most people in that area were anti-Treaty.

46:23 Talks about the Free State Army and their local knowledge of the area. His father did not speak with him about those times.

47:40 Kilraine Ambush. He remembers the men who were involved in that, McTagues, McGills, Carrs and McHughes. Mentions Joe Gallagher who was in the British Army in World War I and who subsequently fought in the War of Independence. Mentions Tom Galligan who was shell shocked after the war.

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Mentions a McGill cousin who also fought in World War I and worked as a postman in later years. Some of these men joined the IRA.

50:11 His father's involvement in the War of Independence. Burning of RIC barracks in the area. Many of the men in the RIC were also Irish.

51:10 Talks about his father's role in the Kilraine Ambush. McTague went to America after that.

51:59 His father didn't speak about those times. Black and Tans did raid houses in the area but never really found anything.

55:36 End of Interview 1.

Interview 2 – 20 November 2020

0:00 Introduction

01:13 McCauley relations who were in the Molly Maguires in Pennsylvania. His aunt emigrated to the US and married a McCauley from Donegal over there. Mentions film about the 'Molly Maguires', relatives of his were also extras in that. A lot of Donegal relatives emigrated to the coal regions.

03:02 Emigration from that area was mostly to America, further north in the county people went mostly to Scotland working on the buildings and potato digging- Tattie Diggers. Women from Gweedore went over to work on potato harvesting too.

04:25 Unusual for people to return from America as his parents did, they mainly returned because of the Depression, his father was in the carpenter's union. Came home on the Kinard liner to Belfast.

05:35 His father was a weaver when he came home, homespun weaving was a big industry in that area, especially during World War II. Processes involved in weaving. There was a loom in his family's house. Superstitions around weaving. Rural electrification came to that area in 1953.

07:22 Jimmy used to weave for Magee's in the sixties. They were very good to small farmers and employed a lot of weavers. Description of webs, stucks and quality of yarn. Where the wool came from.

10:01 Spinning and carding wool by hand for homespun. Changes when Magee came in. Women did the spinning, filled the bobbins, did embroidery or 'sprigging' as they called it.

11:55 This work was usually done at night in the summertime as everyone was working in the fields, but it could be done during the day in the winter.

12:28 Local superstitions around death. Mentions the Banshee. Ghost stories being told at night. There was a card playing house, different card games that they played - all Irish speaking.

14:52 A lot of fiddlers in that area. They would have card playing dances in that area. All Irish dancing, names highland flings and Shoe the Donkey. These happened right

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up to the 1950s. Then the school dances started to collect money for the schools.

17:23 Good singers in the area, McGill neighbours were very good singers. Mentions sean-nós singing. Paddy Boyd who was a good singer who used to visit them. Names some of the songs he sang e.g. Eoghan Rua O'Neill and The Thirty-Two Counties of Ireland.

19:51 Farm work at the time, in Jimmy's youth, neighbours helping each other out making Haystacks, going to the bog and turf cutting. People mixed more. Worked together at the sheep also. Fair Day in Ardara. Keeping and killing of pigs for Christmas and hanging of bacon from beams in the house to smoke them. Mentions the pig's crá where the pig was kept. Salting herring in barrels.

24:06 Poitín making around that area. Mentions getting poitín for weddings which were mostly at home. Use of poitín as a cure for various ailments. Secrecy around poitín making. Mentions the use of plant cures in the area eg. nettle soup, chewing herbs like wild mint; buckleberries used for heart trouble.

29:20 Jimmy had three brothers and two sisters. Charlie, the eldest, worked for the Irish Press in Dublin for a while before emigrating to England and marrying a Cork woman there. Died when he was 33. His wife died suddenly 10 years later.

31:22 He had another older brother Pat and a younger brother John who both emigrated to America. His sisters Nancy and Peggy also emigrated to America. Large amount of emigration from the area in the 1950s which 'finished' the Irish language in the area.

33:02 Went to Brackey school, Paddy McGill was the teacher and he was big into Irish. He attended school until he was 14. School was in the Breac-Ghaeltacht so three days Irish speaking and two days of English speaking. History and geography were the two big subjects. Learning place names in Irish in school. Revolutionary period was not taught in school except maybe the names of the 1916 leaders. Would not have been seen as appropriate in school because of the local politics. Religion in schools. Priests recruiting people for the priesthood. Many boys went to colleges and some became priests others became teachers. Many joined the nuns too.

37:24 Canon Byrne was the local parish priest in his childhood. Large congregation in his childhood. Crowds at mass on Sundays.

38:11 The football challenge matches between schools were big. Mentions Ardara and Brackey GAA club. Mentions the Molloys, the Gadigans playing football, some county players. Politics didn't enter into the GAA but the GAA itself was nationalist. Protestants and the GAA.

42:13 World War II was happening when Jimmy was in school. Talks about the Rations and the smuggling, which was profitable locally. Smuggling tobacco, tea etc. Describes how smuggling worked. Talks about ration books. Remembers seeing airplanes passing during the War.

44:15 His first memory of listening to a radio in 1947 listening to Kerry playing Cavan in the All-Ireland Football final played at the Polo Grounds in New York. The radio

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was in his cousin's house. Man called (Columba) McDyer from Glenties was an agricultural advisor and he was playing for Cavan. Mentions Michéal Ó hÉithir

45:28 Rural Electrification in that area in 1953.

46:47 Jimmy went over and back to England working. Describes his first journey to England in 1954. Lots of work there at the time because of the damage done during World War II. Went to London the first time, then to Reading the second time. Hard work at the time.

48:34 Almost all Irish men working on the building sites. Going to dances in Hammersmith with two men from Kilkenny. Getting digs. Landlady from Mayo married to a Cork man. She was a nurse. Description of the digs and conditions.

50:27 Over and back throughout the 1950s. Spent three Christmases over there on his own. Working for an Englishman called 'Big Ben' who was a kind boss. How Irish people were treated in England.

52:12 Interview 2 ends abruptly as battery dies on Jimmy's phone.

Interview 3: 27 November 2020

00:00 Introduction, small pause as there was an issue with the recorder.

00:55 Describes living conditions of Irish people living and working in England in the 1950s.

01:47 Dancehalls in London - the Garryowen and the New Emerald Dancehalls near Hammersmith, the Seamróg, Buffalos Dancehall in Camden Town. Always a row at the end of the night. People arrested for disturbing the peace.

03:12 Mostly people from the Western seaboard of Ireland working on the building sites. People from Kerry, Clare and Mayo mostly. Mentions a man called Mick Cahill with whom he worked.

04:16 Irish people mostly stuck together in England. Spending Christmases in England on his own. Hard on people who did not speak English when they went over. Speaking Irish to people from Connemara on the bus in London. Impact of emigration on the Gaeltacht regions. Mentions people feeling embarrassed speaking Irish in England.

07:53 Some women emigrated too. His Landlady in London from Mayo was a nurse, he knew some girls who went into nursing and some came back or went America.

08:40 His last trip to work in England was 1957/8. Taking his sister to fly out to America to emigrate in 1958 – story about taking her to get her visa in the US Embassy in Dublin and then on to Shannon and getting home again.

09:57 Emigrants sending money home to their parents. Farming not enough to keep a living at the time.

10:57 When Jimmy returned in 1958, he started weaving for Magee's in Donegal who

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employed a lot of people locally up until the 1970s.

11:28 Outbreak of the Troubles in Northern Ireland at the end of the 1960s. Talks about suspicion locally of English people. People around the area involved in the IRA, informers around and tension around the area at the time. People crossing the border to work. Jimmy did not cross the border very often. Mentions people crossing the border now and the spread of Covid 19.

13:51 People sympathetic to the republican cause in Donegal because of the connections with people from Derry especially and how they came in to fight together during the earlier Troubles. Donegal people have a different relationship with people over the border than the rest of Ireland does. Talks about Ulster and the border Commission, mentions James Craig.

15:13 Partition was the big issue in the Treaty for Donegal people. The Civil War was very bitter locally at that time. Mentions Michael Collins. At election time subsequently you would know which house was Fianna Fáil and which was Fine Gael.

16:36 Father was all Fianna Fáil. The McGills were divided. Those who were in the Ancient Order of Hibernians all supported Fine Gael but they didn't take part in any of the fighting, they were a religious group.

17:37 Tension around elections locally throughout the years. Driving people to polling stations.

18:25 Families were divided locally around the Treaty, that was common around there. In normal times people mixed and didn't keep up the divide but it was felt around election time. Current government coalition. His views on modern politicians and the Seanad.

20:22 His father died in 1968. He used to attend Fianna Fáil meetings. Some of the IRA got small pensions. People who subsequently joined the Free State Army got a much bigger pension.

21:57 His father was in the National Army for a short time. Reasons he left. Mentions Drumboe. A lot of bitterness around that.

22:52 A lot of anti-treaty IRA from the North came into Donegal to fight. Bitterness towards the actions of Michael Collins and Kevin O'Higgins during the Civil War.

25:09 His father never spoke about the Troubles or about his brother's involvement in World War I

25:49 His father's funeral. Local Defence Forces had a gun salute for him at the graveyard when he was being buried

26:19 Legacy of the 1912-1923 period. His views on the North.

27:33 Shame that was felt by his father's generation about people like his brother who fought in World War I – they were never mentioned.

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28:50 How Donegal has fared in the past 100 years.

30:09 Talks about his grandchildren and how Irish is taught in national schools. Local households don't speak Irish now. The emigration of the 1950s really finished Irish in that area. Mentions Irish in Northern Ireland.

32:31 Biggest changes in Jimmy's lifetime – more employment now locally. Changes since joining the EU, especially in farming.

Language	English
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Restricted Information	None
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Field Notes	These interviews were conducted over the telephone over three mornings. It is noteworthy that this interview took place in the context of Level 4 lockdown during the Covid 19 pandemic and this is referred to in the interviews. We re-scheduled an interview here and there when the weather was fine so that Jimmy could go out to the sheep. Jimmy was a modest and generous interviewee and I was delighted to record him. There were two technical issues – Interview 2 ends abruptly when Jimmy's phone battery dies and there is a pause at the beginning of interview 3 due to an issue with my recorder. It is also noteworthy, that this interview took place in the context of the negotiations between the EU and Britain around Britain's exit from the EU and this topic features in the interview.
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Audio File Details

Recording Format: 48kHz 16 bit stereo

Length of Interview(s): Interview 1 (55.37); Interview 2 (52.12); Interview 3 (33:53)

No. of Files: 6

File Types: 3 uncompressed WAV files and 3 corresponding MP3 copies

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Documentation Completed by Interviewee

- ✓ Registration Form
- ✓ Pre-questionnaire Monitoring Form
- ✓ Participation Agreement
- ✓ Post-questionnaire Monitoring Form
- ✓ Recording Agreement
- ✓ Participant Sign-in Sheet
- ✓ Photograph of Interviewee

To be completed by Interviewer:

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Signed: Regina Fitzpatrick

Date: 18 December 2020