

# Gaelic Football in Cleveland—A Timeline

Notice of a match at an Irish picnic in 1920 is among early references to the sport in local papers in the 1920s. Phil McGovern was a prime mover behind Gaelic football in the 1920s.

several teams known as the Young Ire-lands and the John McBrides, representing the East Side and West Side districts of Cleveland. The two elevens participated in the game in their native language and who wish to perpetuate the game in the United States by engaging in contests under Gaelic rules with teams from their cities. Dates are being booked with teams from Pittsburgh and Detroit to be played perhaps at League Park later in the year. The two Cleveland teams are said to be the only ones in Ohio that play the game.

1920

1934

Henry Cavanagh sought like-minded compatriots and began to promote the organization of a GAA football team soon after his arrival in Cleveland in 1930. By 1934 the Cleveland "all-star" team was playing a full slate of games against clubs from other Midwest cities. However, play was put on hold in 1936, due to the Depression—along with immigration restrictions.



**Gaelic Football Teams Play Today**  
Gaelic football will come into its own this afternoon at Shamrock field when the Cleveland booters take on the Pittsburgh team in the first of a series of games which will continue through the entire summer. Jerry O'Toole, captain and center fullback of the Cleveland team, is one of the best at his position in this district and is expected to give the Pittsburghers a lot of trouble.



1948



## GAELIC FOOTBALL TEAMS TO CLASH

### Cleveland Opposes Chicago at League Park Today

By Tom O'Connell

The Cleveland Gaelic football team, the first in this part of the country to recruit American-born Irish for the sport that has been played almost exclusively by grid-der born on the "Old Sod," meets the Chicago Gaelic team at the League Park turf today at 3:30.

Led by Capt. Mickey Prendergast, the Clevelanders will field five American-born players, each of whom has learned the game in the past year.

Outstanding among these is 17-year-old Gene the Cathedral Latin basketball team will aid considerably since the Gaelic game is a combination of the hardwood sport and soccer. Mullally to Play A former Cathedral Latin cager, Jack Mullally, will also be in the line-up. The other American-born players on the roster are Jimmy McNeiley, Pat Duffy and Marty Kilbane.



Cleveland started reorganizing along GAA lines in 1948. Although immigration restrictions were beginning to loosen after World War II, American-born players were needed to fill the ranks of the four local teams that Henry Cavanagh envisioned. Pat Duffy, who had played on the 1930 GAA teams, began holding practices for young American-born men—such as Eugene O'Donnell, Martin Kilbane, and his own son, Patrick Duffy Jr.—at E. 110th and St. Clair. (Pat Duffy Sr. served as a coach and manager into the 1960s, exemplifying the kind of long-term involvement that kept the GAA alive in Cleveland.)

Cleveland resumed competitive GAA play in 1949. The 1949 all-stars were Midwest divisional champions. **Back row, standing, L to R:** Henry Cavanagh, John Chambers, Edward Murphy, Eugene O'Donnell, Joseph Molloy, Edward Campbell, Patrick Duffy Jr., Jerry Luskin, Michael Cafferkey, Patrick Duffy Sr. **Middle row, kneeling, L to R:** Martin Cooney, Bernard Murphy, John Mullally, Patrick Gaffney, James Corr, James McIntyre; **In front, sitting:** Mickey Prendergast.

1927



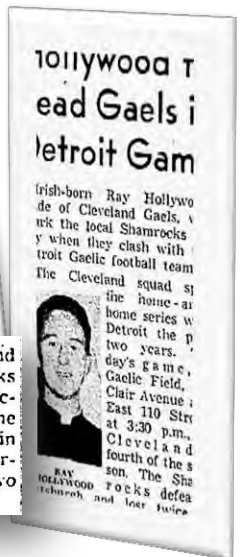
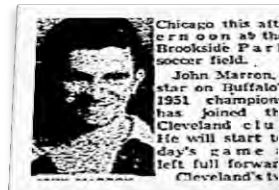
The Shamrock Club formed in the mid-1920s. Managed by Frank Gallagher, they played Gaelic football on an exhibition basis and competed nationally in an amateur soccer league. The soccer team included players of various nationalities. Their home field was at W. 60th and Herman

1941



The Cleveland Shamrocks played Gaelic football and soccer into the 1940s. The 1941 team, which made it to the Western amateur soccer finals, is pictured here. **Back row, standing, L to R:** Tom Worsley, John McKenny, Art Pilken, Julius Balough, Bill Wodowitz, James Cooney, Frank Gallagher, Martin Cooney, Pete McLaughlin, Blacky Gardner, Frank Newell, John Reiner, ? **Front row, kneeling, L to R:** Jack Gallagher, Mike McLaughlin, Jim Steel, Marty McLaughlin, John Wodowitz, ?, Hugh Gallagher, Tony McGinty. The Cooney and McLaughlin brothers and Jim Steel were among those who also played on GAA teams.

1950s



Two stars of the Cleveland football squad are fullbacks Martin Lowry and Michael McHugh. McHugh played with the Lusk (County Dublin) team in 1947 and 1948 and in 1945 performed with the County Mayo junior champions.

New Irish-born players arrived on the scene throughout the 1950s, as newspaper accounts of the day record. **The 1952 all-star team (right). Back row, standing, L to R:** Eddie Murphy, Marty Kilbane, Jack McDonough, Frank Moran, Tom Maher, John (Stonewall) Chambers, [Fr.] Jim O'Donnell, Jim Ruddy, Eddie Campbell, Owen Lowry. **Front row, kneeling, L to R:** Mickey Prendergast, Brendan Morris, Mickey Cafferkey, Tom Finnegan, John Marron, Martin Lowry, Mike McHugh.



**1958 team (above). Back row, L to R:** Jimmy Malone, ?, Owen Lowry, Jack McGill, Joe Lowry, Fr. Pat McAteer, Eamon Darcy, Ray Hollywood, Pat Dowling, Paddy Millar, Don Green, Paddy Duffy. **Front Row, L to R:** Sean O'Neill, Eddie Coyne, Tommy Moylet, Paddy Mannion, Dennis Harrington, Joe Boyle, Mickey Prendergast, Pat Savage. **In front:** Des Kennedy.



# A GAA Timeline in Cleveland

## 1962

By 1962, the goal of fielding four local football teams had faded, in favor of focusing on one strong team—St. Pat's. Most of the players were recent immigrants. Coached by Fr. Liam Kitt, Cleveland St. Pat's captured five consecutive national titles from 1962-1966. Galway-born Fr. Kitt had played on three Irish national championship teams and instilled the GAA values of discipline and team work.



**1964 St. Pat's Team (above).** Back row, standing, L to R: Fr. Liam Kitt, Mike McHugh, Jimmy Malone, Bill Curran, Pete McNamara, Don Green, Roger Fallon, Vinny Corrigan, Kevin Loftus, Joe Lowry, George O'Malley. **Front row, kneeling, L to R:** Gerry Butterfield, John Duffy, Joe Boyle, Sean Burke, Sean Gannon, Sean Neligan, Joe McCluskey, Chris Moran, Kevin McGinty.

## 1966

**1965 St. Pat's Team (below).** Back row, standing, L to R: Eamon D'Arcy, Don Greene, Sean Burke, Andy Maloney, Pete McNamara, Roger Fallon, Chris Moran, Pat Goggin, Jim Neligan. **Middle Row, kneeling, L to R:** Joe Lowry, John O'Brien, Joe Boyle, George Dunne, Joe McAndrew, Kevin Loftus. **Front row, sitting, L to R:** Kevin McGinty, Kenny Hagerty, Alan Carroll, Sean Gannon, Fr. Ulick Burke



## 1981

By 1983, St. Jarlath's was already playing in the national quarter-finals, the first American-born team to reach that level. Wearing black arms bands, they played an emotional game in honor of teammate Danny Doherty Jr., who had died five days before the game in a construction accident.

**1983 St. Jarlath's Team (below).** Back Row, standing, L to R: Farrell Kilbane, Marty Lowry, John (Big Dawg) Thompson, Sean Doherty, Jay Lowry, Michael Chambers, Jim Buckley, Mike (Sporty) Kilbane, Mike Gumbish, John Gulasey, Jerry Gulasey, Pat Kilbane, Martin Lowry. **Front Row, kneeling, L to R:** Danny Doherty, ? , Joe McAndrew, Jimmy Kilbane, Hugh Carlin, Mike Weir, Kevin Doherty, Brian McNamara, Brian Patton, Bob Krulik, Kevin Lowry, Jimmy Coyne, and Pat Kilbane.



**1981 St. Jarlath's Team (above).** Back row, standing, L to R: Tom Weir, Marty Lowry Jr., John (Big Dawg) Thompson, Mike McMahon, Brian McNamara, Jim Buckley, Jay Lowry, Danny Doherty Sr., Sean Doherty, Martin Lowry Sr., Farrell Kilbane. **Front row, kneeling, L to R:** Pete Kelly, Jimmy Kilbane, Jimmy Coyne, Joe McAndrew, Michael Weir, Danny Doherty Jr., Pat Kilbane, Kevin Lowry.



St. Jarlath's have won the Midwest GAA championship 14 times since 1981, have appeared in the North American championship finals 4 times, and have won two National titles, back to back, in 2005 and 2006.

## 2006

## 2013

Mindful of tradition, members of Cleveland St. Pat's—the team that brought the national games to Cleveland—savor a hard-won victory. Fellowship and family are at the heart of why so many have labored so long to pass on their love of Gaelic football from generation to generation.



**2007 St. Jarlath's Team (above).** Back Row, standing, L to R: Jimmy Coyne, Pat Gallagher, Sean Dowd, Pat Coyne, Danny Pap, Owen Donelon, Chris Pap, Phil Dorn, Mike Pap, Kieran Joyce, Willie Joe, Dan Ziegler, Jay Lowry, Darren Costello, Gerard Kelly. **Front Row, kneeling, L to R:** Justin Lowry, Kevin Pap, Kevin Dever, Sean Carr, John Kernan, Kyle Stokes, Jim Coyne, Steve Pickett, Ryan Caudell, Bob Krulik, Warren Harte, Pat Krulik, Jarred Lowry.

**Back Row, L to R:** Kyle Holtz, Noah Dion, Kyle McIntyre, Sean Quinn, Steve Pepin, Martin Wall, Hannah Wall, Thomas 'Mel' McNamara. **Middle Row, L to R:** Pat Hayes, Chris Weimer, Brian Royer, Robert Delia, Pat 'Larry' Combs, Paul King, Todd Kaufmann, Mark Owens. **Front Row, L to R:** Nick Cobos, Max Laverty, Eamon Owens, Ambrose Beach, Bernadette Beach, Vincent Beach.





# Other Gaelic Sports in Cleveland

## Hurling

There is no evidence for hurling activity in Cleveland before the reorganization of Gaelic sports here in the late 1940s. But at the 1951 Midwest GAA convention, Cleveland reported two hurling teams. Since Detroit, Pittsburgh, Buffalo, and Rochester all confessed that they couldn't field one, Chicago and Syracuse offered the only Midwest competition that year. GAA correspondence from the 1950s suggests one challenge: there was discussion about where to obtain hurling sticks. Newspaper accounts of inter-city games sometimes mention a hurling match taking place before a football match, suggesting that the two teams traveled together. Despite the challenges, Cleveland boasted avid hurlers, who sustained a team until the 1970s.

Among them were John Ryan, Ted Gaffney, and, most notably, Al O'Leary, who also served as the GAA's national board treasurer for a number of years. Raised in Tipperary, the birthplace of the GAA, O'Leary hearkened back to the organization's nationalist origins by naming the Cleveland team after the 19th century Fenian, and Tipperary man, C. J. Kickham.



**The Cleveland Hurling Team in the 1950s. Back Row, standing, L to R:** Henry Cavanagh, Peter Gainford, Aiden McBride, Joe Hynes, Philip McGuire, Joe Burke, Wallace Moreland, John Ryan. **Middle Row, kneeling, L to R:** John Burke, Gerald O'Grady, Pat Kealy, John O'Leary, Desmond O'Leary, William Kelly. **Front Row, sitting, L to R:** James Ruddy, Tom Gallagher, Al O'Leary, Brendan O'Reilly, Tom Carthy, Sean Finucane.

## Camogie

Camogie was developed as a modified form of hurling for women in 1903. Like hurling, camogie was introduced in Cleveland when the GAA reorganized here in the late 1940s. GAA records from the early 1950s contain rosters for two camogie teams, but the sport does not seem to have flourished at that time.

In the mid-1970s, however, interest in camogie revived. In Cleveland a team formed under the auspices of St. Pat's football club, and then organized independently as the Emerald Camogie Club. A North American Camogie Board formed at about the same time. Maire O'Leary Manning, who had watched her father's Al O'Leary's hurling matches from a young age, was a founding member of the Cleveland team and, like her father, a national officer. The women turned to such GAA stalwarts as John O'Brien and Jim Neligan for guidance. Nell Buckley, longtime President of the Cleveland Gaelic Society, had played the game in Ireland and was both a mentor and a player. The team flourished for about ten years.



**Above: Unidentified 1950s Camogie Team. Below: 1970s team. Back Row, standing, L to R:** Eileen O'Donnell, Pat Woods, Pat Coleman, Mary Ann Donegan, Donna Dever, Michele Jenkins, Nell Buckley, Eileen Kilbane, Maire Kilbane. **Front Row, kneeling, L to R:** Maire O'Leary, Maureen Neligan, Kathy Quinn, Maura Pender, Patti DiSiena, Mary Quinn, Colleen O'Connor, and Maureen Grady.

## Ladies Football

The next generation of young women decided that they would rather try their hand at football than be steered toward a game designed for women. Like many of the camogie players before them, these young women had fathers, brothers, or cousins who played Gaelic sports, and games on Sunday afternoons were part of their growing up. In the early 1990s, a group approached Sean Gannon about organizing a woman's team under the auspices of Cleveland St. Pat's. Ladies' teams were forming in Pittsburgh and Detroit at that time as well. When possible, the women's and men's teams traveled together—to save on transportation and the cost of the field and referees. The women's team lasted for about ten or fifteen years, six of them as a registered GAA team.



**St. Pat's Ladies in 2002. Back Row, standing, L to R:** Mark Owens, Maggie Johnson, Amy (Bell) Gannon, Joan French, Maureen Mohney, Tricia (Fox) Gompf, Kristy Edmison, Brigid (Kennedy) Chambers, Sharon (Kuley) Casco, Melissa Barrett. **Front Row, kneeling, L to R:** Nikki Custy, Emma Sadler, Maria Mezera Owens, Amy (Reinshagen) Carr, Liz (Mahler) Monroe, Julie DiGello, Colleen Mohney, Leslie (Hildebrand) Mausear, Anne (Mulloy) Hodge, Cathy (Leneghan) Fox.

**Left:** Maureen Mohney still travels to play on the Detroit team and hopes to reorganize a team in Cleveland soon.



*This display was organized by Margaret Lynch for the Irish American Archives Society with support from the Michael Talty and Helen Talty Charitable Trust. Special thanks to Sally Cavanagh, Catherine Murphy Kearney, Patricia Kearney Behnke, John O'Brien Sr., Joe Boyle, Jim Goggin, Michael "Sporty" Kilbane, Jim Coyne, Mark Owens, Maire O'Leary Manning, Maire Leffel, Maureen Mohney, and Tish Lowry Kilbane. Efforts were made to identify team members and to cross-check dates and the spelling of names. But the sources did not always agree. Send corrections to [iaasadmin@gmail.com](mailto:iaasadmin@gmail.com).*