

## • SPORTS FEATURE •

have to be asked twice, and within a few months, sponsorship was arranged by Jerry Egan in Oregon to bring Jack over to work on his ranch (which numbered 2,000 head of sheep). At the age of 29 Jack left Ré na hAbhainn and set sail for the shores of America.

On the day he left for the US, his brother Dave (RIP), an insurance broker in Cork city, dropped Jack to Cobh to get on board a ship to New York. The day before he emigrated, he left his bicycle to a friend at a pub in Dromcollogher—he recalls that he “never again saw the friend or the bike!” Jack traveled on to New York alone, where he was met off the boat by one of his cousins. He spent his first weekend in Vermont (at the home of a person who owned a large publishing house in New York) as his cousin was the caretaker of his country estate.

And so it was on to Portland, Oregon, after a few days rest, via train. During a stop over in Chicago's Union Station he met a police officer who by chance was a cousin of Ned Barrett—a neighbor of his from home (now residing in Sonoma, CA and formerly Broadford, Co. Limerick). Jack had little money on him, but the cop gave him a meal and locker for the day—so he could see a little bit of Chicago, before the second leg of his transcontinental trip which took him across the American heartland, and on through the Rocky Mts to Oregon. Shortly after he arrived in Portland's Grand Central station, he took a puddle jumper plane to Klamath Falls, Oregon, to begin his new life in America. It's hard to imagine what young men from Ireland at this time thought about the vast open spaces and rangeland in southern Oregon and northern California—where the Irish expats controlled the cattle and sheep industries.

It was a bright Sunday morning, the day he arrived in Lakeview, but there were few people around the town—as everyone was at mass at the local Catholic church. After mass he met with John Cusack (RIP) (formerly Meelin, and late of Sonoma, CA) who immediately recognized him from the old country. He was also introduced to Jim Kenneally from Glenlara—who had been in Lakeview since 1948. Jim's younger brothers Dave who arrived in 1953, and Brendan in 1956 would become close friends and hurling teammates later on in San Francisco.

The morning after he arrived it was down to business—at least the business of sheep for which he was brought to Oregon. Jack remembers being given a horse and thrown a sleeping bag and was asked “to repair fences” on the perimeter of the sprawling sheep ranch for his sponsor Jerry Egan. He had never seen a sleeping bag before but was glad to have it on the nights he had to spend underneath the stars, on the range. A good cowboy or shepherd could command \$300 a month (\$2,300 in today's money) from their employer at the time.



Lakeview, Oregon, Gaelic Football Team 1950.

Front Row left to right: Con O'Keeffe (Cork), John Mockler, (Broadford, Limerick), Johnny Collins (Banteer, Cork), Dan McCarthy, Capt. (Millstreet, Cork), Bill Verling, Hugh McCarthy, Jim Kenneally, (Glenlara, Cork), Jerry Singleton.

Back Row left to right: Toby O'Keeffe, Jim Tobin, Jack Murphy, Billy Verling, John Christy O'Leary, Con Sullivan, Pat W. Fitzgerald, Wilfred Duval, Dan Collins, Fr John Phelan, Dick Quinlan and Pat McCarty.

When he was not busy sheep-herding he worked in the local plywood factory or logging trees. Jack worked alongside lifelong friends Gerry and Mike Moynihan, formerly Newmarket, still living in San Francisco.

Recreational opportunities were few and far between for cattle and sheep men in Oregon, as it was 24-hour job. Although the men played hurling and football (and a lot of soccer)—hurleys and sliothars were hard to come by, and shipping them from Ireland took time. There were two football teams in the area, Lakeview and Plush, and Jack lined out for Lakeview on Sundays when they played matches.

Like many men before him, who had started out as ranch hands in Oregon, Jack made his way south to San Francisco. The year was 1955. Once in the city he lived for a while with Con O'Sullivan from Dromtariffe (Cork), who showed him around town. Not long after afterwards Jack married Mary Anne Grant in 1956 (an Irish-American from the Portland area) and they had one son Sean (who graduated from UC Berkeley). Sean currently lives in Concord in the East Bay, with his wife Mary Beth, and sons Dan and Patrick.

Jack first tried to get a job with a Dairy in Marin and San Mateo counties—these were choice jobs for anyone with a farming background at the time, and there was much competition for them. However, Jack got his start “digging ditches for sewer lines, and these were the days before JCB's were commonplace” he recalled. He eventually got a job as a gardener at the US Army Golf course at the Presidio (which is now a US National Park). Co-workers at Presidio Golf course included Dan Culloty (RIP) (Danny the Yank's father) (Newmarket), John Buckley (Knocknagree), and Jim Kerrigan (Millstreet). To get a highly prized secure job with the city of San Francisco, he needed to get his high school diploma. And so Jack went back to school, got his diploma, and later passed the city test to get hired as a gardener by the Park and Recreation in San Francisco. During his time at the Park and Rec, Jack worked at the world famous Tea Garden and

Bandstand area in Golden Gate Park. He also had stints at Ocean View and Balboa Park—where he got to watch his son, Sean, play soccer as a student at St Ignatius High school.

On weekends, when he was not playing hurling with the Cork club, he did side jobs with his friend Tim Burke, cleaning yards and general landscaping jobs. Tim was a Gardener with the Jewish cemetery in Daly City at the time. On the GAA scene Tim and Jack were both selected on the San Francisco hurling team in 1957, but Jack missed out on a North American senior hurling title in 1959, as he had retired from competitive hurling. That 1959 team included his life long friends Tim Burke (Knockgloss), Pat Burke

(Kanturk), Brendan and David Kenneally (Glenlara), Tom Hayes (Ballingarry), and Louis Roche, (Tullylease). Jack did however come out of retirement to tog out for a Life magazine photographer in 1961, as part of story on Irish-Americans in San Francisco.

According to Jack, the best hurlers he saw play hurling locally were Mick Mortell formerly Charleville, Cork (who later went on to become President of UCC) and Brendan McDonagh, Galway. The best exponents of the big ball in San Francisco according to Jack were Séan Spiers and Charlie Downey. He kept active in the Irish community, after his retirement from hurling. During the All-Star Hurling and Football trips to San Francisco

in the 1970s, Frank Murphy and Seanie O'Leary always stayed in the Mockler house near 37th and Judah Street. “It was handy knowing Frank Murphy,” Jack says as, “when it came to getting tickets for Munster hurling of football matches when I was on vacation Ireland, all I had to do was call Frank and he sorted me out.”

Jack retired from job with the Park and Rec. in 1983 and moved from the city north to the wine country to Kenwood. During his retirement he was kept busy around his house, with his two Morgan riding horses, flower and vegetable garden. His wife Mary-Anne passed away in 2000.

During the course of my chat with him, Jack shared his thoughts on America and said: “it was the greatest country of them all!” His advice to the young people, is to “work hard, get an education and do the right thing.”

When it came time to leave, and head home on Highway 101 back to the city, I asked him if I should tell anyone in particular that you were asking for them upon my return to the city or Broadford. He shouted at me: “Tell them all I was asking for them!”

Jack's grandson, Dan, is one of the new crop of young Gaelic footballers coming through the expanding youth GAA program here in San Francisco at the moment which will ensure the Mockler name will live on in local GAA folklore for a few more years.

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