

'Men who could catch horses and rabbits
by running after them': the Schools' Collection
Rosita Boland

Ciste óir i bfolac

Deirear go bfuil ciste óir i
bfolac i ngárdaín beag i
glnocán. Tuisear Fárdín
Druide air agus deirear go
mbionn dá caife glasanó dubhá
cosainn

Oidice amáin, nuair a bí tuine
ag dul iairis tuise sé ar an
mbóiar agus tris sé a ceann agus
a érom.

Bí na sídeoga ag damsa
air agus é min marb. Pádraig
Ó Drádaig an r-ainm a bí air.

Dionn eagla ar gaic uile
tuine dul iairis iairis a dó deag
actoy san oidice riam ósain.

Tá sé ráidre go bfuil ceann
eile faoi ceann beag ar a druigá
ceann Saibéir. Deirear go bfuil
míle mílín píne i bfolac ann.

Dionn trí madraí bána á
cosainn. Is le na sídeoga é.

Tá ceann eile i bfolac i
lár páirce móire agus tá ceann
mór sgeice ar a báire. Tuisear

Cránn Nuála ar an zekann agus
 deirear gur le sean bean a bí
 in a codlad ar fead ríe mbhád-
 ain é.

Máire Ní Chiaráin,
 Cnocán,

Cluain Mhonda,
 Caisleán Riabáic,

20.1.1938

Fuarreas ó :-

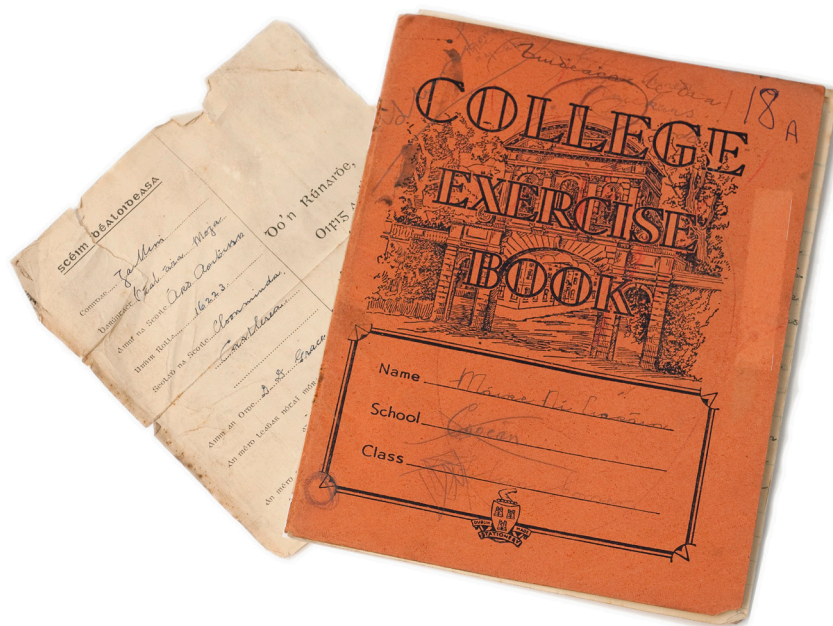
Seán Ó Chiaráin,
 Cnocán,

Cluain Mhonda,
 Caisleán Riabáic.

The schools' folklore collection, or Schools' Scheme, was carried out during the academic year of 1937-38, and then extended to run for a further four months, to December of 1938. It was a simple, but brilliant idea organised by the then Irish Folklore Commission. The idea was to encourage children to collect and record both true and hearsay stories from older family members and neighbours, under a number of topics.

Children were instructed to collect stories, based on the list of topics, from family members and neighbours. They first wrote up the material into their school copies. The best were then chosen by their teacher to be formally written by each selected child into the large manuscript book supplied by the Folklore Commission: books which were later bound with two or three others from neighbouring parishes. All the school copy-books, including those from children whose work was not written into the book, together with the special manuscript book, was to be returned to the Folklore Commission by the teacher.

The 55 set topics were: The Leipreachan or Mermaid; Hidden Treasures; The Care of the Feet; Bird Lore; Strange Animals; Emblems and Objects of Value; A Funny Story; A Collection of Riddles; Weather Lore; Local Heroes; Local Happenings; Severe Weather; Old Schools; Old Crafts; Local Marriage Customs; In the Penal Times; Local Place-Names; Local Cures; Home-Made Toys; Lore of Certain Days; Travelling Folk; 'Fairy Forts'; Local Poets; Famine Times; Games I Play; The Local Roads; My Home District; Our Holy Wells; Herbs; The Potato Crop; Proverbs; Festival Customs; The Care of Our Farm Animals; Churning; The Local Forge; Clothes Made Locally; Stories of the Holy Family; The Local Patron Saint; The Local Fairs; The Landlord; Food in Olden Times; Hurling and Football Matches; An Old Story; Old Irish Tales; A Song; Local Monuments; Bread; Buying and Selling; Old Houses; Stories of Giants and Warriors; Local Ruins; Religious Stories; The Old Graveyards; A Collection of Prayers; Historical Tradition.



Copybook of Máine Ní Chiaráin

Aisce.

Na Tizearnaí Talman.

Tuairim is seachtóid bliadain
ó shin isead a bí na tizearnaí
talman ann.

Sé is tizearna talman ann
ná tizearna a bíonn i bpeidil móran
talman, - parráiste ná ó.

Deanann siad codán den
ialain sin agus feibeann siad
móran ciosa ó n-a dreamónraice.

Bí Desmond Mac Donnell
in a tizearna talman i zlluan
muonda Baile na zllóic, Baile na
Szuice, Clause Rua, agus na
barbe beaga iser iuniceall.

Deireas ná raib tizearna
talman i zlnocán raib agus
creideann na daone ná raib.

Deireas nuair a bí an
tizearna talman ag pázail meisiúir
ar ialain Crocáin zur bier fear
dáró ann dó Miceál Ó Mureziám
an sláicea agus bí óras nóe ar
raone an baile beag seo.

Fuar an tizearna talman bás

leór rudai deasa aca.
 Tagann biaicairlí tuise isreac
 cing teac na bankaise agus
 bíonn siad ag rarróid deoi.

Má geibeann siad í bíonn
 siad go cuim agus dainsann
 siad leis an mbancéite. Muna
 bfuigeann siad í bíonn siad
 go crosta agus briseann siad
 rudai.

Nuair a bíonn na daoine
 ag dul go dtí an bankais tuise
 ann siad cácaí míse nó im léi.
 Tar éis an pósta téigeann
 an bancéite isreac an doras
 ar dtús, téigeann sí ar a glúna
 agus bristear an cáca min
 corce ar a ceann.

An dara Dóinnac tar
 éis an pósta bíonn an
 u-eiríje amac ann. Tar éis
 an ~~x~~ Airéinn castar an
 t-ánamain agus faic uile dhine
 a bí ag an mbankais le nra
 céite agus bíonn deoi agus brad
 de faic uile sóir acu. Bíonn

Although participation was voluntary, there was a huge response. More than 5,000 schools participated in the scheme, which resulted in 1,128 bound manuscript volumes and 1,124 boxes of loose copies. About 50,000 children in total took part. For some years, the material was held at Earlsfort Terrace. During the second World War, fearing possible bomb damage in central Dublin, the manuscript notebooks were moved to a rented room in a house near Rathfarnham and stored in big wooden boxes. In 1949, the manuscript notebooks and copies went to the Irish Folklore Commission's new headquarters at 82 Stephen's Green. They remained there until moving to the newly-created Department of Irish Folklore at UCD in Belfield in the early 1970s. They are still there, in the National Folklore Collection UCD.

My aunt Máine and her sisters, my mother Catherine and my aunt Noreen, who died when I was 13, all attended primary school in Ardeevin National School near Glenamaddy in Co. Galway in the 1930s. Of the three, Máine was the one whose time at school coincided with the project.

The National Folklore Collection at UCD is on the ground floor of the Newman Building. In the grey box file 18A were 37 school copies, including my aunt's. It was a faded orange colour. I handled it with astonishment; excitement; incredulity. How often do you get this chance: to press your face so closely against the window of the past in general and of your family's past in particular?

In the little booklet of guidelines issued to each school, each topic was allocated a list of suggested approaches.

Local Heroes

Accounts of local men who in former times or even recently won fame in some field of activity. Swift runners. Feats they accomplished. Distances run. Races between human beings and horses. Men who could catch horses and rabbits by running after them.

Severe Weather

Accounts of great storms of former times given by old people. Are any accounts available locally of the Big Wind of 1839. If so tell how it affected your district. Heavy snowfalls. Portents.

The Mermaid

Are stories told about the mermaid in your district? What description is given of her? Has she human faculties such as speech etc? Has one ever been brought ashore? What happened to her? Are any local families connected in any way with mermaids?

Everything my aunt had written was in Irish. My Irish is woeful. I was both ashamed and frustrated. I sent photocopies off in the post to Máine, who had offered to translate them for me. A couple of weeks later, a little green spiral-bound exercise book arrived in my pigeon hole at work, filled with Máine's beautiful copperplate writing, in wide-nibbed black ink.

On the topic of 'Hidden Treasure' Máine had written:

It is said that there is a gold treasure hidden in a small garden in Knockanes. The garden is called St Brigid's garden and it is said that two green or black cats protect it. One night when a person was going past the place he fell on the road and broke his head and his back. The fairies were dancing on top of him and him dead. The man was named as Patrick Brady. Every single person is scared to go past this place after midnight ever since.

It is said that there is another gold treasure under a little tree called The Rich Tree. It is said there is a thousand million pounds hidden in it. Three white dogs defend it. It belongs to the fairies.

She had collected these from John Kirrane, a neighbour who 'was a great man for the stories'. The Comer sisters used to go there on their way home from school to visit and eat rhubarb tart. John Kirrane, Máine thinks, was 'about 70' at the time he gave her the stories.

Marriage Customs

Straw boys come to the wedding house asking for a drink. If they get one they are quiet and they dance with the bride. Should they not get a drink they are cross and break things. When the people are going to the wedding feast they bring sweet cake or butter with them. After the marriage ceremony is over the new wife goes in the door of the house, goes down on her knees and an oaten cake is broken over her head. In olden days when people were poor and money was scarce instead of a wedding ring the man used to have a steel key or an iron key to give to his wife.

Máine got this from a neighbour, Roger Kirrane.

Special Days

Nobody throws a match or a cipín into the fire in New Year's Day. New Year's Eve is the last day of the year, and it is also called the Night of the Big Conflagration. It is also said that if a person ate his fill that night, he would have sufficient to eat to the end of the following year.

In the olden times a fine big cake of bread used to be made and it used to be thrown against the door and during this time the thrower said the following: 'I order Famine or hunger to the land of the Turks for a year from tonight and tonight included'. At the mid hour of night everybody used to be anxious to see how the wind was blowing. If it was blowing from the West, the Irish people would have a prosperous new year; but if it was blowing from the East it is the British people who would have the prosperity.

Máine got this from Luke Comer, my grandfather.

The Landlord

The Landlords were here for approximately 70 years. A Landlord was a person who was in charge of a certain large amount of land – a parish or two. They divide up the land into parcels and receive a large rent from the tenants.

Desmond Mac Donnell was the Landlord of Cloonminda, Stone Town, Bush Town, Classaroe and other small villages around the area. It is said there was never a Landlord in Knickanes and the people believe this. It is said that when the Landlord was measuring the Knickanes land that a man called Michael Morgan broke the chain measure and the people in this small village were delighted. The Landlord died in the 1926 storm because there was a lot of snow. Michael was respected and honoured because of his intervention. He died about 10 years ago (in 1928). Clonlara's Landlord was Tadhg. He was very hard on the people and on account of this they did not like him. They thought up a plan to kill him but he was dead before they were ready.

This too was collected from my grandfather.

My aunt Máine was utterly astonished to receive the photocopies of stories she had written in her childhood. She read the manuscript of what she had written herself as if it had been written by a stranger. And then the stories came back to her; she remembered them; she remembered the people who had told them to her. She asked to keep the photocopied pages.

This is an abridged version of the Dublin chapter from *A Secret Map of Ireland*, published by New Island Books.

