

THE Garrafrauns

Kathleen McWalter, nee Kathleen Boyle from Gortnagoyme, was the Postmistress in Garrafrauns for thirty-one years when she retired in 1990. She recounts some of her memories as she grew up and through her working years when we visited her.

Kathleen came from a family of eight from Gortnagoyme and she remembers going to school in the 1930's when the roads were rough. The workmen broke the stones with hammers before the road was tarred. She remembers that as they went to school, when the tarring machine came along, their clothes were destroyed by the tar. Her mother would remove the tar from their clothes with paraffin oil and butter, it was the only thing that seemed to work then. Her mother made bibs for them to wear. They would be tied in the back and this prevented their clothes from getting soiled. Kathleen also remembers going to the well, as a child, at night with her father. Her father used a lighted coal on a fork, the fire from it helped them to light their way. Bringing a bottle of milk to their teacher, Mrs. Reddington often had her and her brothers and sisters fighting to see which one would bring it. The milk was taken in at lunch time and Mrs. Reddington

would give tea and biscuits to whoever brought the milk. This was a great treat at the time. Mrs. Reddington lived in Castlefarm and cycled to school each day.

Kathleen finished school in Gortnagoyme at the age of fourteen and a half. In order to continue her education she had to cycle to Carrowkeel, Dunmore. Her first bicycle was purchased from Lyons, in Dunmore, when she was fourteen. In Carrowkeel there was a school which was run by a teacher by the name of Mr. Kelly. He taught several subjects including bookkeeping and shorthand which Kathleen undertook to learn. The school had about 50 - 60 pupils and there was a fee that had to be paid to attend the school. However, a deal was done between Kathleen's father and Mr. Kelly whereby Kathleen's brother, who was a builder, would build an extension onto Mr. Kelly's house and that would cover the cost of her education. Kathleen spent two years in Carrowkeel furthering her education.

Kathleen spent her dancing days in Quinaltagh Hall where she was allowed to go with her sister when she was 15. They thought they were in heaven. Pake O'Donnell, from Garrafrauns, violin. Pake Regan, Cloonfad, accordion and Andy Mullarkey supplied the music they danced to. After the dance they would get a lift home from the lads on a bike, one on the front and one on the back. Before going to the dance they would go to their cousin Maine's room where she let them use her powder and mirror. She would tell us to doll up and go out and enjoy ourselves. She had a gramophone and loved music, she was always humming tunes. She would turn on the gramophone and make us dance

a half set before we went to the dance. As we got older we were allowed to go to Paddy Glennon's Hall, in Dunmore, on St. Patrick's night only. We would spend the week before the dance getting ready, swapping dresses and shoes. We walked into Dunmore to the dance and home again around 4a.m.

In 1937 Kathleen moved to Galway to work. Kathleen's brother, the builder, had contacts with some people in Galway. At this time there was a German factory opening in Galway and through her contacts she received a letter of recommendation and arranged to meet with the company director for an interview. The German factory was to manufacture hats and it was based in Bohermore, Galway. It employed 200 girls and they manufactured hats to a very high standard for export to France and Germany.

The first day in Galway, in Kathleen's lifetime, she took a lift from Paddy Rattigan in his lorry. Her mother had given her 10 shillings that morning for her journey to Galway. When she arrived at the factory she met with a German lady. It was a difficult conversation as Kathleen didn't understand German and the lady didn't understand English. Every question was answered by yes, no; yes, no. There was a gentleman close by who turned out to be the porter, a very helpful and nice man who explained to Kathleen what the lady was trying to say to her. As it turned out, Kathleen got the job and was suppose to start work immediately. Kathleen explained that she would start the following week as she was required to produce a reference and birth certificate before taking up employment.

Kathleen's job was to finish off the hats. She explained that

BY ANNE REGAN

they were given a sample or template of the hat and they were to produce replicas from the sample. They went through that process and then they arrived at Kathleen's station for finishing. She had to put coloured feathers and finishing touches to the hats before they were sent to shipping for export. She was on piece work and earned £3 10 shillings per week. If she worked on difficult samples she got paid extra. During this time Kathleen stayed in digs in Woodquay where she paid 25 shillings a week. She usually went home to Dunmore every two or three weeks. The man at the house in Woodquay worked in the Connaught Tribune office and Kathleen was able to get the paper each week. She sent it home to Dunmore on the C.I.E. bus with the driver who would leave the paper in Glynn's in Dunmore. When her father was in town he would collect it there. It was a novelty to get the weekly paper.

As this was during the wartime years a lot of German's were killed. Some of those who died were relatives of the directors and supervisors in the factory. They would be listening to the news to hear if any of their relatives were killed. Kathleen remembers they would go outside and throw themselves on the grass crying and lamenting for their friends and relatives. It was very sad and hard to listen to. Eventually the German's went back home and the factory was closed down. By the time the factory closed Kathleen had worked there for five years.

Kathleen returned home to Gortnagoyme for awhile. In January, 1943 she decided to go to Birmingham, England. Her sister had already gone to England to do nursing. There were two good draper shops in

Postmistress

Birmingham, Lucy's and Grey's, and it was known that you would receive very good training. Kathleen went to see the manager of Grey's shop, Mr. Smith. She explained her past employment details and Mr. Smith agreed to give her a one month trial. Grey's was a three story building with grocery items on the ground floor, blankets and bedding on the second floor and millinery on the third floor. Kathleen worked at Grey's for approximately ten months.

One day Kathleen received a letter from home telling her that her father had died. Kathleen was devastated with the news and tried to immediately make arrangements to return home to Ireland. It was during this time a bad storm and extremely bad flooding hit England and Ireland so she telephoned Dunmore and the guard told her that he was at her father's funeral the week before. Kathleen became very unsettled in England and decided to return home to Ireland.

When she came home she went to live with her uncle Tim Boyle in Garrafrauns, where she is presently living. She got electricity installed in the house. Uncle Tim was a carpenter who made horse carts, chairs, stools and furniture. One day her cousin Nellie Rush, who was visiting her from Killiney, Dublin, suggested that Kathleen should set up and start selling ice cream in her front room. Kathleen thought about it and decided she would go to Dublin to see about getting a fridge. She bought it in Killiney and had it delivered. When it arrived, her uncle Tim and Michael Mitchell from Cloonaugh put up shelves for minerals. This was Kathleen's first introduction to being in business on her own. The business grew, especially when the Garrafrauns Carnival

was on. The shop would be full of people for ice cream and minerals, you would get a huge ice cream for 2d. She recalls keeping the shop open into the early hours of the morning during the Carnival. It was a big attraction and there were well known live bands playing and people came from all over to the Carnival dances.

In 1960 she started the Post Office and followed in her aunts footsteps. It was a sub office and was always very busy especially at Christmas with the local people posting fowl to England. Kathleen remembers posting turkeys and geese. She was often asked for an onion and pepper to put inside the fowl to keep them fresh until they reached their destination. The fowl were wrapped in a calico bag and then put into a box. She often had six bags of fowl to post. As Postmistress her duties included taking in the mail, sorting letters, taking out registered mail, Postal Orders, Dog Licence, Radio Licence, Pensions and Dole payments and selling stamps. The postmen came on their bicycles and collected the mail for delivery. At Christmas there were lots of parcels so the postmen had to make a few rounds. In 1960 everybody over 18 years who were unemployed got dole, a payment of approximately £2 or £3 and the pensioners got a payment of £4 or £5 per week. Kathleen remembers that every household had big families and there was very little work and money was scarce.

In 1963, the first telephone in Garrafrauns was installed. In order to make a call you had to go through the Dunmore exchange. As it was the first telephone in the village, any calls you received for somebody in the village you had to go out and find them. It didn't matter if you were busy paying out



Mrs. Kathleen McWalter.

pensions you had to get the person for the phone. Around this time the AI was introduced for farmers and this made the phone very busy. Kathleen decided to expand her business further. She introduced groceries in her shop and when her customers came for their pension or dole they would do their shopping. She did not sell milk at this time as people were very self sufficient.

Kathleen married James McWalter from Cloonfane in 1947, the year of the big snow. He served his time as a joiner for 3 years in Dunmore. When she was going to school she would meet James on the road. She knew him when she was going to the dances in the hall before he went to Manchester. While he was in Manchester, James wrote to Kathleen who at the time was in Birmingham. They arranged

to meet and shortly after James moved to Birmingham. Some time later they decided to come back to Ireland to get married. Kathleen and James had 5 in family, 4 sons and 1 daughter. Her husband James died in 1989 and Kathleen retired from her job as Postmistress on 31st. May 1990. Her son Pat and Monica have the Post Office in Garrafrauns now.

Kathleen is now enjoying her retirement after having served 31 years of dedicated service to the people of Garrafrauns. She is hale and hearty and still well able to bake her fruit cake which she served us with lovely tea. We thank Kathleen for the opportunity of sharing some of her story with us and we wish her many long years of health and happiness for the future.