

SUMMARY OF CLOONTIA LIFE

(This summary is extracted from the last section of Thomas Finn's chronicle about Cloontia Families)

Within Cloontia, my estimation is there were about 6 people to every house (father, mother + 4 children). There were 131 homes so that would have been 786 people approx.

Today there are only 60 approx. homes in Cloontia and giving an average of 4 in every house that is 240 people approx. What a decline in population.

In the 1920's the people of Cloontia lived off the produce of the land with help from the emigration earnings. Most men went to England for the summer months after they had sown the potatoes and oats. The wives and children were left to look after the crops and save the turf. It must be said that those woman and children worked extremely hard. The land of Cloontia was a cold and begrudging soil, every crop had to be coaxed from this cold land. Most of this land had been reclaimed from the bog. As there was no machinery in those days all work was done by hand summer and winter. Few people had horses and plough but most houses were lucky to have a donkey and cart. All winter was spent cleaning drains. Young boys between 13 and 16 years of age helped the adults with this work. From 16 on their thoughts turned to the boat for America or England. In the 1920's a lot of the young people went to America and got caught up in the great recession of 1929. Most never returned and as parents died there was nothing to entice them home. Slowly but surely the homes became vacant and never lived in again.

They old people had a saying "From once the fire goes out in a home it is seldom lit again". Indeed in my own experience that saying in all too true.

The houses in those days were all thatched. There were only 4 slatted houses in Cloontia in my young days. They were my own, a two story which was paid for by my aunts in America, the teachers Residence Bob Callaghans in Derryaraune and Michael Bob Finns in the Finn Village.

The houses were all of the same design, 4 stone walls about 30 feet long, 10 to 12 feet wide, two dividing walls giving a room at each end and the living room in the middle. This was where all the work was done, cooking, washing, baking and where the family were fed. Everything was cooked on the open fire. The fire was most important, food for the animals as well as humans was cooked there and it gave warmth and some light on winter nights. In most houses there was a reces built into the kitchen wall where a bed was placed. This was known by many different names, the outchat, oldhag. This was where the man and wife sleep or the old person of the house. Very few houses was without the old person as most of the old were looked after at home.

After the great War (World War 1) times were very hard. Even in England employment was hard to come by. It was around those years up until the 30's that most people went to America. Even there it was hard to find the donors to send home. When we got our Government things began to slowly change but it was not until 1932 that things really began to change. The introduction of the Dole (unemployment assistance) brought slight improvement to the people. A few shillings a week made all the difference to the peoples lives.

In the mid 30's the government started to give grants to the people in order to improve their homes. To build a house you got £40 or a loan and £80 of a grant. This offer was gladly taken up and very soon new houses began to appear in every village. A great change came over the whole area.

In 1939 the second World War broke out and this put a stop to the building process. The War also had a very positive side as employment in England became more and more plentiful. Most men went to England to work where they earned big wages. It is safe to say that from that time poverty in Ireland began to disappear. When War was over building materials became plentiful again. House building beggar and the old thatched homes began to disappear one by one. By the mid fiftys there was

hardly a thatched house in Cloontia. Beautiful slated homes all over the place serviced by that wonderful new element called Electricity. The days of the old lamps and candle were gone forever. To the young generation of women in particular this was a wonder thing. They were now able to have all sorts of gadgets in their homes, washing machine, electric cooker, irons. In fact everything to make life more pleasant, a far cry from their grandmothers day. It's hard to believe that so much could happen in half a lifetime. Great wonders had taken place. One would think there could be no more. Ah, but wait the best had yet to come.

Ireland became a member of the "European Community" now know as the EU. As a poor nation we were granted a special place when the funds were been handed out. These funds were known as grants, cattle rearing grants, sheep and pig grants, grants for slated houses to house the cattle in winter or all year around, calf rearing grants, grants for sending milk to the creamery. The days of the turf cut with the "clean" is over with the introduction of grants for turf machines.

The old way of making hay vanished with the introduction of baled hay, silage pits and silage bales.

So many things have happened since we joined the E.E.C. back in 1972 that we cannot be surprised any more.

To the young generation of Cloontia I say ye do not know the blessings ye have. Give a thought now and then to the hardships of your ancestors, make use of the gifts that has come your way. I hope the in the year 2099 that there will be some one in Cloontia that will record the last 100 years.

My story of the homes and people is now finished. I may have forgotten some things but I have given a true and accurate account as I remember them. I do not wish to offend anyone alive or dead and if I have done so I apologise sincerely as no offence was meant. I thank God for giving me the life I have lived. I would not change any part of it. If God lets me see the year 2000 I will have lived 4/5 of the century. To the dead I say well done and may their memory last forever, they were a great people.