



THE COOLEY CONNECTION PROJECT

By Pádraig Mac Aodhgáin & Nicola Uí Aodhgáin

This sound installation trail features 13 playlists highlighting educational and entertaining excerpts from interviews and archival recordings with Joe Cooley's family & friends, famous musicians & ordinary people - for your enjoyment.



About The Project

Over the past year, we set out to explore, **How did Joe Cooley from the village of Peterswell navigate the world throughout his life, and become so well known?**

We have collected many new stories - from interviews, archival recordings, and published documents that feature the words of Joe Cooley and those of the people who knew him.

As a result, we have sourced, identified, and selected over 130 stories. These audio clips have been edited, recombined, engineered, and presented in a series of playlists that reflect themes that emerged during the course of our research.

Our hope is that visitors to the festival will be as surprised and delighted listening to these playlists as we have been while gathering them.

If you find in this collection a good story to tell, what was special about Joe Cooley and the people who knew him, or maybe even if you get a glimpse into Joe and the world that he lived in, we will have done our small bit. Joe Cooley has brought us into contact with people all over the world who remember his wonderful ways, and the lift in his music. Long may we keep these memories alive.

We are grateful for the time, generosity, and spirit of everyone that helped us along the way. This project would not have happened without the support of the Arts Council of Ireland, who have generously supported us to undertake a music history project and sound installation to mark the 40th anniversary of the Cooley/Collins Trad Festival in Gort Inse Guaire, Galway.

Le meas,
Nicola & Pádraig Mac Aodhgáin

Featured Interviews

We would like to sincerely thank all our interviewees for taking part in this project, it has been an absolute pleasure to hear your stories.

Cathie Whitesides - Seattle, 2024

Cathie speaks about getting to know Joe Cooley and playing in the Gráinneog Céilidhe Band with him in San Francisco between 1969-1973.

Liz Carroll - Chicago, 2024

Liz recounts stories of Joe Cooley from her childhood, growing up learning to play Irish music in Chicago during the 1960s-70s.

Nancy Neary - Chicago, 2024

Nancy shares stories about Joe, who she got to know when she immigrated to Chicago in 1961. Seamus and Joe were close friends of the Neary family.

Richie Piggott - Chicago, 2024

In conversation with Nancy Neary, Richie shares Ó Sé family stories and from his extensive research on Irish music in Chicago - see his book Cry of a People Gone.

Ollie Murray - Galway, 2024

Ollie recalls the first time that he met Joe at age 8, at Castleboy, near Peterswell.

Gerry Hanley - Galway, 2024

Gerry remembers meeting Joe Cooley as a young man playing music at the Kincora Ballroom in Lisdoonvarna, October 1973.

Eric Thompson - Berkeley, 2024

Eric speaks about playing music with Joe as part of his group of friends in San Francisco and forming the Gráinneog Céilidhe Band.

Jody Stecher - Berkeley, 2024

Jody recalls details about Joe's playing and getting to know him at sessions and house parties in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Joe & Maureen Murtagh - CA, 2024

Joe and Maureen share stories about work and music with Joe; they immigrated to San Francisco from West Clare around the same time.

Tom Mac Conmara - Galway, 2018

Tom worked with Joe Cooley on building sites in Galway and Clare prior to his emigration. He recalls Joe's description of hurling in Boston!

Des Mulkere - Galway, 2024

Des was a great friend and a collaborator with Joe Cooley. He speaks about his father teaching Joe fiddle and shares some unusual stories from Joe himself.

Maura O'Leary - Birmingham, 2024

Maura shares some fond memories about Joe.

Archival & published recordings

We are grateful to the following for making the below archival audio recordings available as part of The Cooley Connection project.

Mick Flanagan

National Library of Australia - 2010

Mick recounts growing up in Peterswell with the Cooley family. Living in Peterswell was clearly a lot of fun sometimes!

Kevin Doyle

National Library of Australia - 2006

Kevin was a close friend of Joe's growing up. They lived, worked, and played hurling together in Galway, Dublin and London.

The Cooley Family (Edenderry)

Joe's brother Tom lived in Edenderry, Co. Offaly. We are grateful to Bernadette Cooley for sharing these personal family recordings

Billy McComiskey

Shannon Heaton Podcast, 2019

Billy remembers a wonderful moment at a session with Bobby Gardiner in New York when Joe played into a phone booth!

Seán Tyrrell

RTÉ Radio 1 - The Rolling Wave, 2021

Seán remembers a time when he got to perform with Joe at Harringtons of Jones St., and at an old folks home in San Francisco.

Dolly MacMahon

Céilí House - RTÉ Radio 1, 2022

Dolly recalls some fond memories of her first time hearing Joe Cooley, and her ritual every Christmas.

Maidhc Dainín Ó Sé

Muintir Uí Shé - Cló Iar-Chonnachta, 1998

Bhí Maidhc Dainín le Joe i Chicago i rith na 60idí. Is cúntas draíochtúil é seo "An Ceoltóir", dán a bhí cumtha aige ag féachaint siar ar bhóithrín na smaointe.

Joe Cooley

The Joe Lavelle Show (Ciarán MacMathúna), Dublin 1963

When Joe returned to Ireland in 1963, he was interviewed by Ciarán Mac Mathúna about his movements. His Irish language wasn't half bad at all!

Joe Cooley

Cló Iar-Chonnachta, 2004

Joe was often recorded by friends when he lived in California. Here is an excerpt of Joe's voice as captured on the album of his close friend, Kevin Keegan during the late 1960s.

Joe Cooley

Gael Linn, 1975

Joe was in most towns in America.

About Joe Cooley

Joe Cooley was born in Peterswell, County Galway in 1924. He learned to play the button accordion from his mother, who played the concertina, and later from a well known local music teacher, Jack Mulkere. There were twelve children in the Cooley household, most of whom could play music, sing and dance.

For many years, Joe was as much in demand for his hurling - as for his accordion playing. Joe played for Peterswell, Kilbeacanty, Crusheen, Craughwell and Loughrea in Galway. In Dublin he played with St. Brendans and then with Brother Pearse during his time in London.

After moving to the States he initially played for the New York Galway side and in Boston; from 1957 he played with Bolands in Chicago until he retired by 1962.

It would take a book to capture all the bands that Joe played with and led in Ireland, England and America. Joe and his brother Séamus played in the original Tulla Céilí Band when it was founded in 1946.

The Cooleys played with Sonny Mullins, Paddy Burke and Kit O'Connor and many more musicians for house parties all over South Galway and Clare. Newspaper records and archival interviews show that he played at weddings, competitions and events all over the country.

Joe emigrated to England for several years ca. 1948, before returning home



in 1951. As the story goes, he went to America with the Tulla and never came back. He settled in Chicago late 1956 until 1965, marrying Nancy McMahon from Killanena, Co. Clare.

They went on to live in San Francisco for 7 years, where he taught many people to play music, of which Patricia Kennelly was a talented young musician of note.

Due to his ill health, Joe and Nancy returned to Ireland in 1972. For the next 18 months he played music with Des Mulkere (Jack's son), until his untimely death on 20th December 1973 aged 49 years.

A brief film was made for RTÉ on 29th of November 1973 at Lahiff's pub, Peterswell just three weeks before he passed on.



Listening Trail

Humour - **Market Square**

Family - **Hennelly's**

Sport & Spraoi - **Gallery Café**

Reputation - **O'Donnell's**

Legacy - **Harte's**

Dancing - **Hennelly's**

Support - **Keane's**

Community - **Centra**

Gaeilge & Gems - **Gallery Café**

Music - **Mullins'**

America - **Gallery Café**

History - **O'Connor's Bakery**

Listening stations are available around the town of Gort during the 40th anniversary Cooley/Collins festival over the October Bank Holiday weekend in 2024.

All playlists will be available in the Gort Town Hall. Please note that listening stations will only be available during the premises' stated opening hours.