

AMBROSE LAVERY



To no one, more than to Ambrose, is due the present status of Clann Eireann. For exactly 50 years, as player, as official, as consultant, as general provider, as "boss", he has given the club a devotion and a service that has never been - and probably never will be - surpassed.

In 1939, as a curly-haired 16 year old, he came on to a Clann Eireann Minor team and ' for 20 years, till he retired in 1959, he was a part of all the triumphs, and the disappointments, that the club achieved.

Ambrose did leave the club once. While he worked in Omagh he played - without a transfer, of course - with Omagh St. Enda's and was on their team in the Tyrone Senior Championship Final in 1941, while still a Minor. He has the very rare distinction of having been selected on two different county Minor teams - Armagh and Tyrone - for the same match and his name appeared on both teams in the same paper for the Armagh v Tyrone Minor Championship game. Some secret negotiations saved his hide, that time, when both counties agreed to leave him off both teams in the first round, on the understanding that he would play for the winners - legally or illegally - in subsequent rounds. Tyrone won, and Ambrose finished up starring for Tyrone in an Ulster Minor Final in Corrigan Park against Antrim who, despite Ambrose, took the Minor title.

He played a major part in all Clann Eireann's local triumphs - O'Connor Cup, Green Cross Tournaments and local Leagues and had his first Championship medal when they won the Junior Championship in 1944. He added to that a Senior Championship medal with Clann Eireann in 1953 when they bee' Clan na Gael in the Senior Championship Final in Davitt Park. But in between those two, he added on two other Senior Championship medals - legally, this time - with a St. Peter's Selection when they won the County Final in Dundalk against Crossmaglen in 1944 and with a Wolfe Tone Selection when they beat Rangers in the County Final of 1943 in Armagh.

That record, as a player, would have been a sufficient contribution to any club but it was, and is, as a club official that Ambrose excelled. He became Secretary of Clann Eireann in 1940 and Secretary/Treasurer in 1941 and held both positions till Pat McMahon became Treasurer in 1960 and Liam McStay became Secretary in 1956.

He was instrumental in buying the three-acre site in Lake Street for Club Headquarters in 1947 and was the chief negotiator with Building Control and with the Ministry of Education to get the project started. I remember accompanying him to the Northern Ireland Sports Council where he impressed the whole Council with his vision of Hall and

Youth Club and Community Project. When they asked him what kind of grant he'd expect for all this, I can still see the smiles when he answered, "Well, what's the maximum? We'll not ask for more than that."

It took six or seven years to complete all the negotiations and gather the finance and materials before the Hall was completed in 1954 by voluntary labour and opened with a flourish and a whole week's activities. There are some who say, unkindly, that Ambrose didn't actually acquire any blisters in the voluntary labouring but he was always there especially for the common wages of tea and buns.

There was no stopping him. He established the Youth Club and became its first Leader, to found a Youth Service that has not ceased, for 40 years, to cater for the boys and girls of the area. Then he organised the levelling of the Practice Pitch in Lake Street and the building of the three Handball Alleys. Next came the building of a two-storey Minor Hall as an addition to the Main Hall and Ambrose, as usual, was in the thick of it. The purchase of 4.5 acres for a new full-sized playing pitch came next and he negotiated the purchase from the Soye family. His expertise, his plant and machinery, his driving power and his unceasing "push" resulted in the Kilwilke Ground being opened - with another week's activities - in 1970.

Next came the Social Club beside the Main Hall on Lake Street. It started off as a single storey building, with provision for a second storey, and Ambrose, with brothers Donal and Desy, put their weight and facilities and experience behind a host of voluntary workers who didn't rest till the present two-storey Social Club for adults was completed. And then in 1990, the second full-size pitch - the Hurling Ground. Small wonder that when Clann Eireann had its greatest triumph in 1982 and won the A.I.B. Club of the Year awards and County, Provincial and All-Ireland trophies - along with a First Prize of £4,000 - Ambrose was unanimously selected to receive the honours for us.

We had reason to be proud of the speech he made at a Dinner in Bank Centre in Dublin before an audience of 500 when he accepted the trophies. Pan Fanning, ex-President from Waterford, congratulated him on saying "exactly the right things in the right order" and another ex-President, Con Murphy of Cork, whose Bishopstown club had been beaten by a hair's breadth by Clann Eireann in the final stage of the All-Ireland Trophy, remarked that it eased the losing to hear Ambrose say what needed to be said.

Ambrose collected other trophies too. One of the most appreciated was his recognition by the Armagh G.A.A. in the Centenary Year of 1984 as "Club Official of the Year."