During the summer of 1998 the McNamara family of Aughavas released one of the most substantive albums of traditional Irish music ever produced. Entitled *Leitrim’s Hidden Treasure* this recording is receiving widespread national and international acclaim for its quality and contribution to the Irish music tradition. Earle Hitchner, music critic with New York’s *Irish Echo* newspaper has described it as “a masterful vanity release” and “a magnificent tribute to the rich musical tradition of South Leitrim”. The eminent *Irish Music Magazine* has described it simply as “a superb CD”.

*Leitrim’s Hidden Treasure* features over seventy minutes of music all of which has strong Leitrim associations. Through each of the seventeen tracks of beautifully played music we get an insight into our traditional Irish music. In the words of Paddy Ryan, National Music Officer of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and Shannonside Radio presenter “the McNamara family display an extraordinary virtuosity and technical brilliance which every traditional musician dreams of, but few of them achieve.” Mr Ryan also praises the manner in which their music “reflects a tremendous sense of place and a great love and deep understanding of the musical heritage of their native place”.

Each of the 17 tracks reflects some significant feature of the origins and development of the musical traditions of south Leitrim. This mould breaking production includes over twenty pages of historical references related to the music recorded. *Leitrim’s Hidden Treasure* thus provides a unique and comprehensive account of the musical tradition of the area and highlights Leitrim’s importance in the annals of Irish music.

A striking feature of the presentation is the inclusion of a full colour booklet with illustrations giving prominence to Leitrim landmarks with which the music is associated. Thus it is no surprise that fellow Leitrim musician and recording artist John Lee has described the album as “one of the milestone recordings in the Irish music tradition”.

The McNamara family, although very widely known musicians throughout Ireland and abroad have chosen to dedicate their first family album to the music of their native South Leitrim. On *Leitrim’s Hidden Treasure* their skilled musicianship, which has brought them widespread acclaim, is focused on their wish to promote the musical significance of their native area. It is a recording which in the words of Harry Bradshaw, RTE Radio music producer, “will introduce new audiences to the music of south Leitrim”. Although widely travelled musicians, the McNamaras have been able to retain a deep appreciation for the music that is so familiar to them. Their musical experiences throughout Ireland and abroad served to further increase their desire to have the music of their native Aughavas and the surrounding parishes to be heard and played countrywide.

Each of Michael & Mary McNamara’s
four sons and daughter feature on
the album. Brian and Ray are pipers
while Ciaran, Enda and Deirdre play
flute, fiddle and concertina respectively, while their father Michael
plays the flute. All have won All-
Ireland titles, and many of them
multiple titles at Fleadh Cheoil na-
nhÉireann over the years.

Following on from these successes,
the McNamara family are constantly
in demand both as performing artists
and teachers at various musical events
both in Ireland and abroad. However,
their involvement in Irish music
stretches far beyond their achieve-
ments in competition or indeed their
previous recordings.

They are a family appreciated for
their active participation as members
of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and
Na Piobairí Uilleann fulfilling the
roles of performing artists, teachers
and adjudicators at Fleadh Cheoil
competition. A number of the family
members have toured extensively
representing The Department of
Foreign Affairs, Bord Fáilte and
Comhaltas. Family members have
also made regular and frequent
appearances on TV and radio both in and
outside Ireland.

This album is also a testament to
the extraordinary wealth of music to
emanate from their native area. The
tunes on this album are taken from
two primary sources, local music
manuscripts and music played by
past South Leitrim musicians. The

The Gier Manuscript

comprehensive sleeve notes tell of
the significant contribution made to
Irish music by Stephen Grier (1824-
1894) who compiled a collection of
approximately one thousand tunes
in 1883 at his home in Gortletteragh.
As Grier’s collection was never
published his work may never have
received its due prominence were it
not for the roles of Fr John Quinn, PP
Gortletteragh, in bringing the collec-
tion to light and the McNamara
family who have now given Grier’s
repertoire its first recording.

Similarly, the contribution made
by Alex Sutherland (1873-1967),
Carrigallen has been highlighted
nationally, once again due to Fr
Quinn’s work and the McNamara’s
new album. Although the bulk of
Sutherland’s collection was acciden-
tally destroyed, fortunately over two
hundred tunes are to be found in
the Folklore Commission in
University College Dublin. These
collections provide an invaluable writ-
ten record of the music played in the
area well over one hundred years
ago, and serve to substantiate the
many other written references to the
music of parishes such as Aughavas,
Cloone, Carrigallen, Drumreilly,
Gortletteragh, Fenagh, Ballinamore
and Mohill.

The sleeve notes accompanying
this unique album in themselves
emphasise the uniqueness of
Leitrim’s musical heritage. We have
indeed good reason to be proud
of our county’s contribution to
the development of our native
traditional Irish music.

The album also provides an
insight into the music played by
numerous south Leitrim musicians
featuring tunes learned from Michael
and John Blessing, Mike and Pee
Fitzpatrick, Jimmie and Bernie
McKiernan, and the Reilly family.
This is music which has been
handed down from generation to
generation, a tradition which is con-
tinued by the McNamara family.
As many of these tunes have never
been written down, we are fortunate
to have this recording to ensure
their preservation for future genera-
tions.

In the words of fellow Leitrim
musician and composer Charlie
Lennon, the McNamara’s album
“makes an important statement
about the strength of our tradition”.
By its very existence this recording
has provided us with a note of
anticipation for the future as we can
look forward to hearing the music
of south Leitrim being played and
heard by people everywhere.

Leitrim’s Hidden Treasure, the
album, provides us with a memo-
rable landmark which facilitates the
passage of south Leitrim’s musical
heritage from the past through
the present and into the next
millennium.

“Leitrim’s Hidden Treasure” in CD and
Cassette format with accompanying book-
let, may be obtained directly from the
McNamara family, Carrickavoher,
Aughavas, Co. Leitrim. Tel: 078-36023 or
from local shops and music outlets
nationwide.

The album is also distributed by Gael Linn,
C Laddagh Records and Chart Records.