Back in 2002, while performing some internet searches using the Irish spelling of my family name: “Luinigh”, I came across an obscure notice that a book was being sent to dead storage at a university library in Oklahoma. The book is titled "SGÉALTA MHUINTIR LÚINIGH – Munterloney Folk-Tales", was written by Professor Éamonn Ó Tuathail of Trinity College Dublin and was published in 1933. I was intrigued... a book of folk-tales bearing my family’s ancient Irish clan name: “Mhuintir Lúinigh”. I arranged, through my local library in Florida to obtain the book on inter-library loan. When it arrived, I was amazed to find that, not only does this book bear my family’s name, it also contains many of our traditional folk-tales in the original, and now lost, Tyrone dialect of the Irish language.

The name "Mhuintir Lúinigh" literally means "land of the O’Lúinigh" and "the O’Lúinigh people". The O’Lúinigh were part, and sometimes chieftains, of the Cenél Moen tribe of the kingdom of Tír Eóghain. The area referred to as the "Mhuintir Lúinigh" and “Munterloney” in Professor Ó Tuathail’s time corresponded generally to the parishes of Termonmaguirk and Upper and Lower Bodoney in County Tyrone. During the 15th and 16th centuries, the area then known as the “Mhuintir Lúinigh” included a much larger area of approximately 100 square miles, corresponding generally to the baronies of Strabane and Clogher. The O’Lúinigh lived in this portion of western Tyrone since the early 1200’s, and before that, in the area surrounding present day Raphoe in County Donegal since the early 800’s.

During the 1920’s and 30’s, the government of Ireland became alarmed at the rapid decline in the number of people who could speak and write the Irish language. The government commissioned the Irish Folklore Institute to send Irish language scholars around Ireland to record, transcribe and preserve the Irish people’s rich heritage of language and oral literature. Between 1929 and 1933, Professor Éamonn Ó Tuathail of Trinity College Dublin travelled throughout the district of County Tyrone in Northern Ireland called the “Munterloney”, to record the oral literature of the few Irish-speaking people still living there.
By the time Professor Ó Tuathail arrived in the Munterloney district in 1929 to record the folk-tales of the area, Irish had ceased to be spoken except by only a small number of elderly people. The dialect being spoken in the Munterloney district was unique, and differed significantly from the dialects spoken in other parts of Ireland.

Even the 1802 "Statistical Survey of County Tyrone", at a time when over one-half of the 250,000 inhabitants of County Tyrone still spoke Irish, noted that "the people of this county in themselves differ as much perhaps as those of separate kingdoms...the inhabitants of [the town of] Strabane and its vicinity seem quite a different race of people from those of Munterloney..." This separation and uniqueness was probably attributable to the fact that the Munterloney district was, and remains, a rather isolated part of Ireland, surrounded by the Munterloney (now called “Sperrin”) Mountains. Its isolation is probably also the reason that this was the last part of Northern Ireland where Irish was still spoken as a first language.
Professor Ó Tuathail spent four years interviewing Irish-speakers and recording and transcribing the folk-tales of the Mhuintir Lúinigh. He transcribed these folk-tales only in the unique Irish dialect of the Munterloney district, along with extensive notes in English on grammar and spelling. His work was published by the Irish Folklore Institute in 1933 as "SGÉALTA MHUINTIR LÚINIGH – Munterloney Folk-Tales".

Unfortunately for modern scholars and for the modern descendants of the Mhuintir Lúinigh, Professor Ó Tuathail’s book was never fully translated into English. Today, Irish language scholars confirm that it is a unique record of a now lost dialect of Irish. In fact, this book is now used as a text for the advanced study of Irish dialects.

Back in 2003, I wrote to the Strabane District Council, the local governing body for this area, and brought the matter of the "SGÉALTA MHUINTIR LÚINIGH – Munterloney Folk-Tales" to the attention of the District Council. I requested that a project be undertaken to translate and republish this book. The District Council kindly approved my request, and formally petitioned the Northern Ireland Assembly to undertake and fund the project. The project was then approved for funding by the N. I. Assembly.

In August 2004, I organized a family trip to Ireland, to visit places where our Irish ancestors once lived. Accompanying me on this trip were my then 78-year-old father, Boyd Lunney from Cape Elizabeth, my then 89-year-old aunt, Alice Lunney Gregory from Westfield, and my cousins, Dennis Lunney from Winthrop and his sister Judith Lunney Merriam from Kentucky, and John Holmes and his wife Teresa from Rhode Island.

One of the places that we stayed in Ireland was the Glenelly Valley of County Tyrone, at the very heart of the Munterloney District. The Glenelly Valley is a spectacular treasure-trove of Irish scenic riches, and is protected by the government of Northern Ireland as a national scenic resource.
We stayed there for one week in rented cottages, next door to the Sperrin Heritage Center. These well-appointed cottages are a traditional Irish “clachan”, or family compound of houses. The four cottages have a total of nine bedrooms, and are ideal for accommodating a large family group.
During our stay in the Glenelly, the Sperrin Heritage Centre and the Strabane District Council’s tourism office offered us their assistance and the free use of the Heritage Centre facilities to host a lecture about, and reading of, the "SGÉALTA MHUINTIR LÚINIGH – Munterloney Folk-Tales". Professor Donal O’Baoill of Queens University Belfast, a leading Irish language scholar, kindly agreed to prepare and deliver the lecture and reading. Prior to the lecture, Professor O’Baoill shared a "home-cooked" dinner with me and my family at our rental cottage next to the Sperrin Heritage Centre. The dinner was prepared from locally-grown produce and chicken by my Aunt Alice. Professor O’Baoill chuckled often during the dinner, remarking that my large and very noisy Irish-American family reminded him of his own family in rural County Donegal.
Professor O'Baoill’s lecture and reading at the Heritage Centre was a success, and was well-attended by several Irish-speaking local residents and scholars, in spite of a terrible thunderstorm that evening. One amazing part of the lecture was when Professor O'Baoill played some of the original tape recordings made by Professor Éamonn Ó Tuathail in the 1930's of the folk-tales being recited by the elderly residents of the Munterloney. Hearing these tales spoken in the musical language of my ancestors was a very moving experience for me and my family. After the lecture, we all gathered in the tea room of the Heritage Center for refreshments, where my family and I were very pleased to meet and speak with several residents of the surrounding area.

Relatively few Irish-American families know exactly where in Ireland their ancestors once lived. Fewer still are fortunate enough to visit the beautiful land of their ancestors. Perhaps only a small handful have ever heard their family folk-tales. Thanks to the incomparable hospitality of the people of the Glenelly Valley of County Tyrone, and its District Council, my family and I shared an undoubtedly unique experience.

Here is one of the actual folk-tales from the "SGÉALTA MHUINTIR LÚINIGH – Munterloney Folk-Tales". Its title is “Siomus Ó Luinin”, or “James Lunney” in English. First is a short summary of the folk-tale in English, and then the entire tale in the Tyrone dialect of Irish:

Siomus Ó Luinin, a prosperous but childless farmer, is told by a voice which calls to him from a graveyard by which he is passing that he will shortly have an heir. A year later, as he is at work in the field near his house, news is brought to him of the birth of a son. He drops dead through excess of joy. A tree grows on the spot where he died.

When her son reaches the age of twenty-one the widow cuts a stick for him from the tree, and he sets off to seek his fortune. As suitor for the hand of a gentleman’s daughter he must (a) thresh three stacks of corn, (b) drain a lake, and (c) empty and clean a deep well. The gentleman throws a quern-stone, which serves as the cover of the well, on top of the lad, but the latter accomplishes his task and emerges from the well wearing the quern-stone around his neck. He marries the gentleman’s daughter, and brings her home. He breaks the quern-stone into four pieces, and uses them as the corner-stones of a fine castle which he builds for his bride.
XI. SÍOMUS Ó LUINÍN

Bhí fear 'na chónuis aig an Chraoibh a dtóirfi Síomus Ó Luinín air, agus bhí dóigh mhóir air hín agus air a mhraoi, agus cha roibh a'n duine conlain ionn.

Bhí se a' teacht 'na mbaile aige Teâpall na Craoibhe a'n aoche amháin, agus bhí áit *vaute* réitiste amach ionn, agus chaith siad amach a lán cinn agus crámha as áit a' tsean-*vaute* i gclúid na roilice. Bhí se ag amharc orthu seo agus é go mall san aoche, agus é a' smaoiniú air hín. Labhair glór amach as a' *vaute*, agus dúirt se leis:

"A Shíomuis, tá tú ag írí aosta, agus tá me baertha amach nach bhfuil éire aghad do do áit mhaith."

"Is cuma sin," adeir Síomus. "Tá me ag írí aosta, agus 'air nach bhfuil siad ionn faoi seo, is cuma liom ciacu."

"Beidh siad ionn go se, a Shíomuis."

"Is cuma liom," adeir Síomus.

Bliain ón lá sin bhí Síomus ag obair amuigh sa ghárradh, agus thainic sgéal amach 'uige go robh mac óg aig a' mhraoi, agus sgáruigh se e, agus thuit se marbh, agus cha dtainic se 'uige hín na b' ó. Agus d'fhás crann ins an áit ar thuit se marbh.

Cuireadh Síomus, agus bhí an bhean agus a' mac innsin go dtí go robh se bliain agus fiche a dh'aois. Agus thainic se isteach a'n lá amháin, agus dúirt se le n-a mháthir:

"Tá mise bliain agus fiche a dh'aois inniú, agus rinn tusa graithe maith i gcónúf dó."

Agus thug a' mac amach tuaghl leis fa choinne bata a ghearradh don chrann a bheadh leis. Dá mbead se a' bualadh ó shoin, cha ghearrfadh an tuagh an
crann. Thainic se isteach agus d'ársaigh se dá mháthir
go rohb se réidh 'un imeacht, ach go robh se ag iarraidh
bata a ghearradh don chrann a bhí sa ghárradh agus
nach ndeanfadh an tuagh dó e.

"Fan," adeir sí, "agus fiachfa mise e."

Fuaidh sí amach agus thóg sí an tuagh agus bhuaíl
sí buille don tuaigh air bhun a’ bhata bí sí a ghearradh.
Gheárr sí an bata leis a’ chéad bhuille.

Chóirigh se suas e n’air a bhí se gearrtha aici-se, agus
bhrí se deich slat air fad agus naoi slat air leat!

Shiúil se leis leis a’ bhata go dtí go robh se aige
áit mhór fir a rohb a lán talaimh aige agus airgead
agus muilte agus áthantú dá chuid hín aige.

"Goidé thug innseá thú?" arsa’n fear uasal seo.

"Thainic me a dh’iarraidh do níne. Ní’l agad ach a’n
ní anam mháin agus bheadh se an t-am aici duine inleacht
a bheith aici."

"Well, tá a lán saebhrs agham-sa do mo nín, agus
ghéó tú í hín agus mála óir agus a’ dúf, má ghean tú
na trí ní iarrfas mise ort."

"Gheanfa me trí ní air bith ’a dtiocfa liom," arsa
seisean.

"Té amach ’un a’ sgioboil," arsa’n fear uasal, "agus
ghéó tú súiste ’na luighe air an urlar, agus buail
na trí cruacha arbhair atá sa sgiobol, agus mur ndeanfa
tú sin taobh astuigh do uair, liom-sa do chionn, fora
crochfa me thú."

"Gheanfa me mo dhicheallt," adeir se.

Fuaidh se amach ’un a’ sgioboil agus thóg se cipín
beag súiste nach rohb thaire le fad do bhróige, agus
der sé leis hín : "Bhéinn tamallt maith a’ bualadh cibé
arbh ar a’s atá insa sgiobol leis seo." Thóg se an
súiste agus bhuaíl se cupla sopog de. Tháirnn se a
bhata air innsin agus thug se su’a’dh air cibé arborhar
a’s bhí sa sgiobol ina seal ghoirid. Agus bhí gárradh móir cruach taobh thuas don toigh, agus fuaidh se amach leis a’ bhata, agus bheartadh se tionntá anonn agus tionntá anall don bhata do cach a’n chruach.

Bhí an fear uasal i gcónú agh amharc air, agus dúirt se leis a’ nín:

“Is fhéarr ddu ghoil amach agus a iarradh air gan nas mó a bhualadh, na cuirfe se an fiodar uilig amó. ’N fhuil fhios agham goidé gheanfas me leis.”

Thainc se isteach ’uig an nín innsin, agus dúirt se nach robh fhios aige goidé chuirstead se anois ’uige.

“Té ’uige cailleach na gcearc,” arsa sise, “agus fiafraigh duithe.”

Fuaidh se síos go bun a’ bhóthair, an áit a robh cailleach na gcearc ’na cónú.

“Goide,” adeir se, “a gcuirfe me anois ’uige?”

“Well,” adeir sí “tá loch mhóir aghad, agus tá gleann taobh thios duí, agus órduigh dó cibé uisge agus cibé éis agus cibé clábar is atá insa loch fhól mhú síos insa ghleann agus a’ loch fhágaiti co sguabthaí go dtiocfadh leat a ghoil isteach a chónú innti.”

Fuaidh se ’n a’ mbaile, agus bhí an groom óg seo a’ fheitheamh go dtí go bhfeicfeadh se goide bhí aige le teanamh, agus d’iarr se air a ghoil amach agus a’ loch seo a ghlanadh isteach síos insa ghleann, agus a’ loch fhágaiti co glan sguabthaí i n-éis a’ t-iasg agus a’ t-uiosg agus a’ clábar a chuir uilig aisti—a fágaiti co glan is go dtiocfadh leat a ghoil isteach a chónú innti.

“Mur ndeanfa tú sin taobh astuigh do leath-uair, liom-sa do chionn.”

“’Fiachfa me c, air dhóigh air bith,” arsa seisean.

Fuaidh se síos, agus bhí a’ bata seo leis, agus cha robh nach tu’irim air throigh air leat eadra’n gleann agus a’ loch. Bhí an bata leis, agus thiomóil se fríd a’
troigh talaimh e a bhí eadra’n loch agus a’ gleann, agus chrom se agus chuir se a bhéal aig an luír a rinn se leis a’ bhata, agus tháirinn se cibé uisge, éisg, agus clábar a bhí insa loch isteach in a bhéal agus chaith se amach síos insa ghleann e mar a chaithfeá seile.

Fuaidh se isteach innsin insa loch agus sguab se agus nígh se 'fochtar na locha co deas agus go bhféadfadh an duine uasaigh ghoil isteach a chónuí ionn, dárbh’s é a thóil e.

"’Nois,'” arsa seisean, “is liom do nísan agus a’ t-airgead.”

"Fan,” arsa seisean. “Tá ní eile aghad le teanamh go seadh.”

Fuaidh se ’uige cailleach na gcearc aríst agus d’ársuigh se duí goidé rinn a’ buachaill.

"Well,” adeir sí, “nach bhfuil tobar domhain aghadh, co domhain a’s go dtiocfadh leis sasamh thíos ionn, agus abair leis a’ tobar a ghlanadh go glan agus a sguabadh amach i bhfad nas gláine ná an loch, agus n’air a bhéas se réidh aige, go dtóirfe tú a mhargan dó agus bearad úr ; agus tá cloch bhrón in a clár agad air a’ tobar, agus n’air a bhéas se glan amach aige, tóir air a ghoil isteach aríst ionn agus a ghlanadh amach go maith ; agus ’air a gheós tú astuigh sa tobar e, tiontnuigh anonn a’ clár air a’ tobar agus beidh tú réidh leis.

Chuir se isteach insa tobar e, a sguabadh nas fheárr. Agus ’air a fuair se astuigh sa tobar e a sguabadh nas fheárr, thionnta’ se a’ chloch bhrón isteach air bhéal a’ tobar. D’amhairc se [i. an buachaill] suas agus chainic se an poll air a’ chloich bhrón, agus dúirt se leis hín : “Seo a’ bearad úr a gheall se dì agus a’ tobar a ghlanadh dó.”
N'air a bhí se réidh le sguabadh an tobair, d'irigh se suas agus chuir se a chionn insa pholl a bhí air a chloich bhrón, agus shiúil se leis suas 'un a' chaisleain, agus dúir' se leis an rí:

"Mo mhargan anois nó do chionn-sa."

D'amhairc a' rí air.

"Well, gheall me mala óir duid," arsa seisean, "agus nil a' t-ór agam duid. Agus sin a' bhean agad agus nár theana sí maith duid! Ni'l a' t-ór agham, ach bhearna me dhá mhála airgid duid—lán i n'áit."

"Gheanfa sin graithe," adeir se, "agus coinnigh do níon. Ni'l féim agham-sa urthi."

Lion se an dá mhála airgid dó, agus chuir se an bata seo trasna air a ghualaim, agus chuir se mala air cach a' chionn de, agus thóg se an bearad 'na láimh, agus thug se 'n a' mbaile e 'uige caislean na máthara.

N'air a chainic a' mháthir e, rinn sí féasta lá agus blianna réidh, agus adeir sí, n'air a bhí an fhéasta réidh: "Ni'l toigh agham anois [le] haghdhaigh na daoine uilig a choinnealt." Agus thug sí amach a' chloich bhrón, agus bhris sí 'na ceithre caethrú f, agus chuir sí 'na shasamh caethrú aird cach a' n chóirneal, agus chuir sí 'na caislean a b'fhearr a bhi insa tdir uilig air na ceithre caethrúna don chloich bhrón.

'Air a bhí an fhéasta thart, bhi na bóithri dubh le tiarnaí, sagairt; agus ministirí, agus cach a'n seórt a roibh airgead acu le cathamh a' tiomaith thart a dh'amarhic air chaislean na baintrige. Thug siad uilig go léir suas nach roibh a'n chaislean air a' tsaol ionchurtha leis.

D'fhag mise an tdir san am sin. Cha dtiocfadh liom bheith ag amharic air amaideacht na ndaoiní a' teacht a dh'amarhic a' chloich bhrón a bhí faoi gheasa.