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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

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Witness

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Identity.

Member of
"The Celtic Literary Society", 1900- .

Subject.

- (a) Irish national Clubs, 1900-1907;
- (b) Biographical note on Arthur. Griffith.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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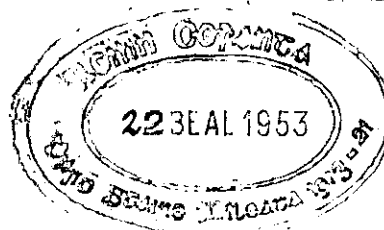
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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
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April 29, 1953

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A Chara,

As promised, I am sending you herewith, my "Notes on Personal Contacts in Dublin" during the period 1900 to 1907. These are enclosed in duplicate.

I hope my "Notes" will prove of some help to you in your work.

If I can be of any further assistance to you in this connection, please do not hesitate to write to me.

Miss. le meas.

Harry C. Phibbs
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NOTES ON PERSONAL CONTACTS IN DUBLINPERIOD: 1900 TO 1907

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

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The observations and contacts of the writer are necessarily confined to the period before the formation of the Irish Volunteers. Generally, they took place between 1900, when I first became conscious of the Irish Movement, and 1907, when I left Ireland to travel about the world.

Instead of trying to write a consecutive story, I am noting down meeting places which I attended, and some of the people I met there.

As I have written the Secretary, a valuable means of getting names and dates would be the two visitors' books which were kept in McGarvey's Tobacco Shop. It was a habit, not only to have visitors write their names in Gaelic or some other language (not English) in these books, but the habitues continually made comment on current events in the Ireland of that time.

These books were illustrated with random sketches and cartoons by George Fagan, an artist who is now dead; the writer, and others.

While in Dublin some time ago, I made inquiries about them with the thought in mind that if they were located I would make a presentation of them to the National

Museum to be kept in the Easter Week room. The nearest I could come to locating them was through the mention of a man by the name of "Lawless" in Howth, who had them.

I think it would be very valuable to your mission to locate and secure these books. They should be part of the National Archive. If they could be found, the minute books of the following clubs would also be factual material:

The Celtic Literary Society

The Confederate Club

The Cuchullain Club

In my naming of various clubs and the members who I met there, you may uncover people who would know where such old records were kept.

The Celtic Literary Society

This society met in some rooms on the second floor of a house on Lower Abbey Street, on the same side of the street where the Abbey Theatre stood and about a block west of the old Abbey. This house was supposed to be owned by Harrington, who was then Lord Mayor of Dublin.

The meetings were held in the front and back rooms; these rooms being used by several other clubs, notably The Confederate Club, of which more anon.

William Rooney was a member of this club and did a great deal of his writing there. He had just died about the first time I visited the club. Members told me that he had written his poems "Ballyellis" and "Dear Dark Head" in this room. He had also written several articles and editorials for Arthur Griffith's "United Irishman".

In my time in the club, people who frequently attended and were active in its affairs, were: Arthur Griffith, Maude Gonne, Mary Quinn -- who afterwards married another member, Dudley Digges. A South American named "Bulfin" -- who wrote "Rambles in Eireann", and Alice Mulligan, also frequently attended the club and were active in its affairs.

The Society had a choir which was conducted by a man

named "Lawless". I believe he was a relative of Frank Lawless of Swords.

A frequent visitor to the rooms, though I do not think he was a member, was Sean McDermott. Sean used to visit many of these societies, evidently keeping contact with people who were "in the Movement". Afterwards, in New York, I received a telephone message to go to a certain address and meet a man whom I was not supposed to recognize. When I went to this address, I found John Devoy, Peter Golden, Judge Cohalan, Larry Rice, and other people whom I knew to be connected with the Clan na Gael. The mysterious visitor was introduced as Mr. O'Brien of San Francisco. It was Sean McDermott.

In the Celtic Literary Society there was evidently a focus point for protest meetings, such as protesting the Dublin Corporation giving an address to visiting British Royalty.

The beginnings of the Abbey Theatre took place in meetings of this club. The members got together at the suggestion of Arthur Griffith to celebrate Samhain. For this, Alice Milligan wrote a play called "The Deliverance of Red Hugh", and the members got up some tableaux. This affair was held in the Antient Concert Rooms, and it was after this meeting that William Butler Yeats declared that these Dublin boys and girls provided him with the acting talent he desired for his

Irish Theatre. Members of the cast were: Dudley Digges as Red Hugh; W. G. Fay, Frank Fay, and Thomas Cuffe.

While this club was supposed to be a literary and dramatic club, it was generally known that there was some inner organization devoted to the cause of freedom and providing the spark for activities. I was not a member of this inner organization, which undoubtedly was the I.R.B.

Cathal McGarvey's Tobacco Shop "an Stad"

This tobacco shop was located across the street from Findlater's Church. McGarvey operated it more as a pastime than as a means of livelihood. In the daytime, he worked for Findlater, the wine merchant.

By way of passing, it should be mentioned that many of the meeting places in the Dublin of that day were tobacco shops. McGarvey's place was truly a stopping place for anyone interested in the Irish Revival Movement to drop in, meet some other people, know what was going on. It was conveniently located to Rutland Square where many of the societies and branches of the Gaelic League had meeting places.

The poet, Tadgh O'Donoghue, was almost a nightly visitor. Others who had been habitues were: Scellig, Dick Foley -- who I believe was the Dublin agent for the Remington Typewriter Co., and who had a typewriter made with Irish characters; Seamus Clandillon, the singer and author of Irish folk music (a distant relative of the writer); a man named Hayes, who wrote a play called "Sean Na Scuab"; the Honorable William Gibson, who is now Lord Ashburn (He was then a leading advocate of wearing the Irish national costume and wore the kilts all the time); James Joyce; Doctor Oliver St. John Gogarty; Sean T. O'Kelly; Padraic Pearse, who at that time was editor of the Gaelic

League paper "an Claidheam"; and Art O'Keefe, who with another man wrote a handbook on Irish step and figure dancing. This was actually written in the back room of an Stad.

McGarvey, himself, was something of a poet and frequently recited poetry at Irish meetings. One of the people who would occasionally wander in was "old man Cusack", a bearded old stalwart who called himself "Citizen Cusack". He always carried a green muffler around his neck and wielded a heavy blackthorn stick. It was said that he was the founder of the Gaelic Athletic Association. George Clancy was a frequent visitor. He is mentioned in the personnel of The Confederate Club, about which I will write later.

The Confederate Club

This club met in the same rooms as did the Celtic Literary Society. While it was supposedly an athletic and social club, it evidently had national objectives. The leading spirit in this club was George Clancy, who was then a student at the University. Afterwards, he became Mayor of Limerick and was shot by the Black and Tans. George was the captain of the hurling team of this club and sometimes organized the members on overnight hikes into the Dublin and Wicklow Mountains. The idea was to practice marching, study map reading, learn how to live out in the hills. Generally, the boys stopped for the night in the old ruined building of the Hellfire Club.

Another member of this society was Sean T. O'Kelly, now President of Eire. I believe at one time he was secretary of the club. Other members were Thomas Cuffe, Dennis Healy, and a man named "Buggy".

Walker's Tobacco Shop on High Street

This was run by a printer named Walker; his daughter, Daisy, took care of the shop. Another daughter, Maire, became a famous actress with the Abbey Theatre. A character who used to come here was Pat Shortall, who was a teacher in the Synge Street Christian Brothers' schools. He was a student of Gaelic and took delight in making literal translations of English names into Gaelic. He translated the name Walker by using the Gaelic word "suil" (to walk), so the name became "Mac Suilbhag". The daughter took the feminine form, substituting "ni" for "Mac" and thus the name became "Maire Ni Suilbhag". A younger sister of hers also joined the Abbey troupe under a different name.

A red-haired school teacher named "Jinny O'Flanagan" was a friend of the Walkers, and I met her at their home. She afterwards became Mrs. Eamon de Valera.

Back of the tobacco shop there was a small hall. It was supposed to abut on the old city wall and it was close to where there is a sunken ruin of an old church. In this hall at the back of the tobacco shop a society met. It was not a branch of the Gaelic League but a branch of the nationalist organization which I believe was called "Cumann na nGael".

One of the leading spirits in this club was a Gaelic

speaker, a man from the Isle of Aran, named "Michael Mullen". I believe he later became a member of the Citizens' Army. Michael worked at odd jobs when he came to Dublin. I remember that he helped Father Dineen in the compilation of his Irish-English dictionary.

Liam Mellows was a quiet, fair-haired young fellow who would sometimes attend the meetings. He was a clerk in Goodbody's Feed Store which was located close by on High Street.

These people had a manuscript journal to which various of the members contributed articles, generally on national subjects. Occasionally they would have poetry written by Peter Carney, one of the young fellows with a talent for verse. I believe afterwards, he wrote "The Soldier's Song", the present national anthem.

Sean Barlow was also a member. He later became stage manager of the Abbey Theatre, and when I last heard of him, he was still the stage manager.

A young man named "George Lyons" who also wrote poetry, would sometimes attend the meetings.

It was in this tobacco shop that I first met the O'Hanrahan brothers -- Michael and Henry. They were friends of the Walkers. At that time they had a cork-

cutting business in Carlow. They also had a tobacco shop there, which their sisters took care of. The whole family moved to Dublin -- the father, mother, two boys and three girls. They started the cork-cutting business in a small premises south of the river. It was somewhere back of the Bank of Ireland. Shortly afterwards, they moved to the north side of the city, up near Phibsboro. Henry went into the bill-poster business, opening a small shop on the quays, west of Bachelor's Walk. He called his company the "Express Advertising Co."

Michael took other employment, which was not mentioned publicly, but it was understood he was acting as some kind of a secretary or official with one of the secret organizations. I remember seeing him acting as secretary at a meeting which was held in the Rotunda to celebrate the independence of Norway from Sweden. He also had ideas at that time of writing an Irish romantic novel and spend some time in the National Museum studying the uniforms of the Irish Brigade. Later, he wrote his novel, "A Swordsman of the Brigade."

Might I mention in passing that the members of these nationalist clubs while thoroughly approving the revival of the Irish language, were never very enthusiastic about learning it. They left this to the Gaelic League branches.

One day, some of the organizations got up an excursion to the Hill of Tara. Michael O'Hanrahan was either the secretary or one of the other officials of this excursion; and because he and his brother, Henry, had to settle the accounts in connection with the trip, they missed the return train to Dublin. They went to a hotel in Tara where they were refused accommodations because the proprietor didn't approve of the meeting. Later on, Michael and Henry entered suit against this hotel. I recall seeing the answer to this suit on the part of the hotel owner, in which he stated: "They were persons of no means and no consequence." The records of the courts should give the date of this meeting. I do not think the suit was ever brought to trial.

In this and other clubs, Sean McDermott could frequently be seen as a visitor.

Rutland Square was a favorite location for meeting places. There were many of the fine old houses on this Square which had available large rooms. On the east side of the Square was located the meeting place of the Keating branch of the Gaelic League. This was known largely as the Munster Men's branch, and Tadgh O'Donaghue was a leading spirit here, as were Scellig and others of the lads who claimed that Ballyvourney was the Capitol of Gaelic Ireland. They were enthusiastic about the Munster accent and the place of Munster's poets and writers in the Gaelic movement.

A Miss Kennedy was a member of this branch. I remember her because in my time she got her degree of Bachelor of Arts at University College.

Might I mention in passing that further down from the Keating branch was located the meeting place of the Orange Lodge, of which my uncle, a man named "McLean", was an enthusiastic member and official.

On the west side of the Square were meeting halls where such organizations as the McHale branch of the Gaelic League met. This was known as the Connacht Men's branch. A prominent member and frequent attender at the meetings was Dr. Douglas Hyde. Also prominent here was Dr. Tuohy, whose son, Pat, a one-armed boy, attained prominence as an artist. Gerald Griffin was

was an official and prominent member, and Miss O'Flanagan used to attend sometimes. I believe she conducted a singing class there, which made an effort to teach some of the boys and girls to sing choruses in Gaelic. They also had dancing classes which took place after the language classes.

The Pipers Club, of which Eamon Kent was a prominent member, and I believe president, also met in these same rooms. Eamon was well known among the lads for his ability to whistle. He could whistle an Irish tune in a peculiar manner, with a full throaty whistle which he laughingly described as traditional Irish whistling. I believe this was one of the very first Irish Piper Clubs started. I also remember that Eamon Kent lived down Clontarf way.

The Cuchullain Club also met in these rooms. This was an athletic and social organization. They had a very good hurling club and members of this club were mostly civil servants. I think they were the first club to start a ladies' hurling club. The only man I remember in this club was Patrick Whalen, who was a very ardent nationalist, and may have played some part in the actual fighting.

Arthur Griffith

I happened to know Arthur Griffith very well. He was a struggling young journalist. I remember the office of "The United Irishman." In this office he had one assistant, a red-haired man named Peter White. He used me to gather and write notices of various club and society meetings. He had some family connection with my mother's people; I believe his wife was a cousin of the McLean family, some of whom are still in Dublin.

Griffith's personality has been described so much that I can't add anything to the description. I think a lot of people have missed the point that underlying his calm, reflective appearance, he had quite a strain of humor, but he did not let this show very much because he knew he was engaged in a very serious job. He lived in digs out Clontarf way, round the North Strand, but later when he was married, some of the secret organizations started a movement to provide him with a home. I know that Arthur had many tempting offers to take journalistic jobs in England, where his flair for pin-pointing the economic aspects of a situation were becoming recognized. At one time I discussed with him the possibilities of drawing a weekly cartoon, but the project fell through because of the expense involved in making engravings.

I think you will find an interesting sketch of Arthur Griffith in one of the volumes of the Stad book to which I have referred before. This sketch was made by George Fagan and was entitled "Throwing Out the Amendment". It had reference to a public meeting in the Rotunda, at which Griffith upset the meeting by offering an amendment to a motion which had been made to serve an address of welcome to some royal person. I always thought this was an excellent likeness of Griffith at the time, and the sketch should be located.

I may be mistaken, but I have an idea that the first published story of James Stephens appeared in "The United Irishman". This was a short story about the Manchester Martyrs. I remember distinctly, that it was signed "James Stephens".

Brian O'Higgins

When I met Brian O'Higgins, he was a young man just up from Meath to take a job as "grocer's curate". Shortly after, he wrote a few excellent satirical songs, one of which was "Shoddy Genteel". He was a neighbor of the O'Growne family, from whom sprung the famous Father O'Growne. I met him when an excursion was made to the O'Growne home in the County Meath, somewhere near Navan. Brian's literary ability was soon recognized, and he married a handsome young Dublin lady named Annie Kenny who was prominent at meetings for her recitations of patriotic poems.

Outside of Dublin, there was in Navan, a very active man and friend of Brian O'Higgins, who was a school teacher. I know he is still living because I have heard from him recently. His name is Sean McNamee.

In the Fingal territory there was a branch of the Gaelic League at St. Margaret's. The active people in this were the McDonald boys, farming people of the neighborhood, and friends of theirs named "Ennis" kept the spark glowing in The Naul. Close to St. Margaret's was Swords, the old historic village, and here the leading spirit was Frank Lawless. The meetings here were held in a blacksmith shop. Frank Lawless was the butcher in the town of Swords. I do not know whether this or-

ganization in Swords was a branch of the Gaelic League or one of the national clubs. The times I generally went there, a ceilidhe was on.

Valuable sources of information for your people should be a publication which appeared after I left Ireland. I saw some copies in New York. I think the name of this publication was "The Irish Volunteer". I contributed an article to this on the use of the American poncho as military equipment.

I must apologize for any inaccuracies which you might find in my spelling of the various Gaelic names. I must also apologize for having lost -- in my various wanderings -- the many sketches which I made of people who were prominent in the movement. I think that now they might be of some interest. An apology is also in order for my faulty memory of names.

Of the period of which I write, I used the "nom de plume" "Mac Breagoir" under which name some of the old timers may remember me.

Harry C. Phibbs

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