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Sara Bethany Bornemann

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<https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/2940>

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POLITICAL RESISTANCE AND ACTIVISM IN IRISH AMERICA:  
THE CLAN NA GAEL 1912-1916

By

Sara Bethany Bornemann  
B.A., Bridgewater State University, 2015

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Master of Arts  
In History

Department of History  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2018



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Sara Bornemann  
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A Thesis Approved On

4/11/2018

By the following Thesis Committee

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Dr. Theresa M. Keeley, Thesis Director

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Dr. John E. McLeod

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Dr. David T. Buckley

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Dr. Theresa M. Keeley, advisor extraordinaire.

### To The Fianna

A message of cheer from the land of the West  
I speed o'er the wave from an Irishman's breast  
To the Feain of Erin, the hope of the Gael  
The children of Finn from the North to the Pale  
To the valleys of Munster a message I send  
To her faithful battalions who stand to defend  
Her borders as Finn did in days that are past  
When he swept on the foe like a hurricane blast  
His spirit's abroad in the country today  
Tho' youthful and few you are leading the way,  
May you stand in the path with your rifle and spears  
And hold it for Finn and the New Volunteers.

Joseph McGarrity, 1915

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Theresa M.Keeley, for keeping me out of rabbit holes, and away from congressional hearing records. I was a daunting task for her, and this thesis would still be conceptual were it not for her ability and talent at managing me and my research. I would also like to thank my other committee members, Dr. John E. McLeod and Dr. David E. Buckley for their comments and suggestions. They were insightful and helpful equally. Lastly, I'd like to thank my girl gang- in my village, on the soccer fields, and at home. You all made me believe I could do it. Thank you to my mother, my first and best cheerleader. Thank you to my daughter Lila, who thinks everyone writes a thesis. And final thanks to my sister, Caitlin, without whom there is no twin win.

## ABSTRACT

### POLITICAL RESISTANCE AND ACTIVISM IN IRISH AMERICA: THE CLAN NA GAEL 1912-1916

Sara Bethany Bornemann

April 11, 2018

This thesis is a historical examination of a group of male Irish Americans, the *Clan na Gael*, that sought Ireland's independence from Britain during the years 1912-1916. This is a chronological study of the four years leading up to the Irish rebellion known as the Easter Rising, but it is examined from the American side of the Atlantic. The *Clan na Gael* was not successful politically, but had outsized influence financially on the efforts to gain Ireland's independence.

Analysis of primary source material makes the compelling argument that in focusing on elite political actors, maintaining a vociferous public relations campaign, and most importantly fundraising locally and regionally, the *Clan* exerted outsized influence on the "Irish Question" in the years 1912-1916.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE “SHIFTING CURRENTS (1912)”.....	17
CHAPTER TWO “SWIFT WINDS AND A FOLLOWING SEA (1913-1914).....	33
CHAPTER THREE “AN INCOMING TIDE (1915).....	46
CONCLUSION “TIDAL WAVE (1916).....	60
REFERENCES.....	72
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	74



## INTRODUCTION

From 1866-1871, John Devoy was incarcerated in British jails for his part in plotting an Irish rebellion against the British. In January of 1871, he was granted an early release with four other Irish rebels, on condition of exile. Devoy and his compatriots all chose America for their new home, but none ever stopped looking across the Atlantic towards Ireland. Devoy was 29, he had a fine mind and compelling journalistic abilities. But his best talent was organizing and mobilizing on behalf of Irish independence. His past efforts on its behalf were hardly set aside, for just as soon as Devoy landed in New York City, he immediately set about reestablishing and renewing a badly demoralized Irish nationalist movement in America. Devoy had no idea that he would live in America until his death in 1929. Devoy's legacy stretched from the Fenian past of the Victorian Age to a twentieth century resurgent rebel movement that culminated in the Easter Rebellion in Dublin 1916. Devoy was the heart, soul, motor, brains and brawn of the Irish independence movement in America.

The Fenian Brotherhood was an Irish and Irish American republican group that operated through the middle part of the nineteenth century in America and in Ireland. The *Clan na Gael*, an Irish American nationalist group, came into existence with the demise of the Fenians in the late 1870s. The *Clan na Gael* was ultimately more successful than the Fenian Brotherhood for a number of reasons, chief among them steady leadership, better organizational apparatus, and a commitment to Ireland's independence that did

promote terror tactics. In fact, the *Clan na Gael* initiative that failed most spectacularly was its one foray into terrorism: the “Dynamite Wars” of the 1880s targeted British infrastructure, and military and political leaders. A faction of *Clan* leadership supported “any means necessary” to secure Irish independence, including the use of dynamite at civilian institutions. Current historians argue that the “Dynamite Wars” conducted by the *Clan* were the first modern examples of terrorism.<sup>1</sup> The schism that developed as a result of this policy illuminated the *Clan* membership’s general distrust of terrorist tactics to further Irish nationalist hopes, and the *Clan na Gael* weeded out the members responsible for the policy. Emerging from the split stronger, *Clan na Gael* leadership ushered in the twentieth century with new strategies: to continue to fund Ireland’s domestic nationalist efforts like the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the *Clan*’s sister organization in Ireland. The Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) also reconstituted itself from Fenian remnants. The IRB was also a secret, oath-bound organization dedicated to an independent, democratic Ireland. The *Clan na Gael* in America sought to promote Irish national pride groups like the Gaelic League, and to center their activism around head of state actors who could influence Anglo-American foreign policy to better effect Irish independence. The second decade of the twentieth century was momentous for Irish nationalist hopes, and the *Clan na Gael* rode a rising tide of international support for the hopes of a free and independent Ireland. In particular, the years from 1912-1916 illuminate the highs and

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<sup>1</sup> See Lindsay Clutterbuck, “The Progenitors of Terrorism: Russian Revolutionaries or Extreme Irish Republicans?” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Volume 16, Issue 1 (2004) and Niall Whehelan, *The Dynamiters: Irish Nationalism and Political Violence in the Wider World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012) and Joseph McKenna, *The Irish American Dynamite Campaign: a history, 1881-1896*, (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2012)

The *Clan na Gael*, risen from the Fenian Brotherhood's ashes, assumed the mantle of activism for Irish nationalist efforts in America. While the *Clan na Gael* is underrepresented in the current historiography, one can weave together tangential characters and narratives to discover a faithful representation of its activities and motivations. Irish American history is a popular and fruitful topic for historians. Whatever the cause for the abundance of examinations of Irish history, this study joins the ranks, with one crucial departure. This is not a study of an evolving Irish American nationalism, nor is it a study of British perfidy and Irish martyrdom. This examination looks at a specific group of Irish Americans, and their actions in the four-year period leading up to the Easter Rising of 1916. The *Clan*'s actions in this four-year period is neglected in the historiography. Thus, this research project focuses exclusively on the *Clan na Gael*, a secret, oath-bound group of male Irish Americans who aggressively sought Ireland's independence from Britain. For this research project, I ask: how did the *Clan na Gael* affect Irish American public opinion in the years 1912-1916? The *Clan na Gael*'s focus on moving the dial of Irish American public opinion ultimately led to greater success in attaining their goal of Irish independence. Although world events proved to be the crucial tipping point, I argue that the ground game that *Clan na Gael* leadership pursued in 1912-1916 created more pressure for Irish independence efforts. From 1912-1916, the *Clan na Gael* maintained this pressure, and at the end of World War I, a fundamentally altered international scene joined Irish nationalists in agitating for Irish independence. Although Irish independence was far from assured, it was clear that the *Clan na Gael*'s participation financially and politically contributed to the epochal shift in public opinion. By focusing on elite political actors, maintaining a vociferous

public relations campaign, and most importantly fundraising locally and regionally, the *Clan* exerted outsized influence on the “Irish Question” in the years 1912-1916. Through the efforts of John Devoy and the *Clan na Gael* in those years, Irish American opinion and the Irish American Roman Catholic hierarchy were persuaded that only an independent, republican Ireland was an acceptable political solution to the “Irish question.”

Ireland was formally bound to Britain in the Acts of Union (1801). The creation of the United Kingdom was determined by the wholesale practice of patronage and peerage in Ireland. In order to pass the legislation, Irish legislators agreed to vote themselves out of existence: 83 Irish boroughs were disenfranchised, and the remaining 33 were reduced to one-member seats.<sup>1</sup> Financial disbursements of over one million pounds were distributed throughout the disenfranchised boroughs, and peerages were created on a grand scale. With the new parliamentary set-up, Ireland was formally a junior partner in the relationship with Britain. This could be seen clearly in Britain’s economic relationship with Ireland. Industrialization replaced the foundering cotton-spinning industry in Northern Ireland, and new industries like ship-building and shirt-making helped to propel the North into a more integrated economic position with Britain.<sup>2</sup> The agricultural Southern Irish counties were less fortunate, and relied on small lots and subsistence crops to maintain a bleak existence. Cash crops were raised and exported to Britain to create the necessary hard currency to pay the rack rents extorted by

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<sup>1</sup> [www.historyofparliamentonline.org](http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org), “The Union with Ireland, 1800,” accessed 7 January 2018,

<sup>2</sup> Charles Callan Tansill, *America and the Fight For Irish Freedom, 1866-1922: An Old Story Based On New Data*, (New York: The Devon-Adair Company, 1957), 9

landlords. By the mid-1800s, Ireland was ripe for economic disaster. The Potato Famine of the 1840s provided it.

Devastation stalked the Irish countryside. Insufficient British relief efforts indicate that there was a willful indifference to the Irish dying by the millions. One incontrovertibly successful relief measure, releasing Ireland from her exports to Britain, was deemed “economic interference.”<sup>3</sup> Had Ireland been able to keep her cash crops and use them for feeding her people throughout the failed potato crop years, Ireland would not have suffered the catastrophic loss of life through starvation and emigration. Yet even as the Irish starved, a new nationalism was being born.

Rebellious Irishmen like Thomas Francis Meager, Gavan Duffy, and John Mitchel were not content with a passive voice in Parliament, for they believed “the Irish people have a first and indefeasible right to this island and to all moral and material wealth and resources thereof, to possess and govern the same for their own use, maintenance and comfort and honour as a sovereign state.”<sup>4</sup> Such rhetoric was deemed high treason by the British government, and those Irish nationalists who professed such beliefs were tried and sentenced to serve hard terms. Those who escaped prosecution often fled to America, where they nursed and fed their resistance to English rule through the creation of societies like the Irish Republican Brotherhood and the Fenian Brotherhood.

In Dublin March 1858, James Stephens founded the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) at the behest of Irish republicans now exiled in America. Stephens’ IRB was reliant on funds raised by Irish agitators in America- a continuum of financial dependence that

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<sup>3</sup> Tansill, *America and the Fight For Irish Freedom, 1866-1922*, 20

<sup>4</sup> John Mitchel, *The United Irishman*, in Tansill, *American and the Fight For Irish Freedom, 1866-1922*, 23

was never ameliorated during the years of the fight for Irish independence. The American wing of the IRB, called the Fenian Brotherhood, began operations in April 1859. Both the IRB and Fenians were republican organizations- they believed in a sovereign Irish state. However, another breed of Irish nationalism was actually more dominant throughout the middle and late 1800s: a more moderate ideology that recognized the Irish language and culture as distinct yet equal to Anglo culture, but did not see total separation from the United Kingdom as immediately necessary. The conflict between republicanism and nationalism in Ireland and in Irish America remained a theme well into the twentieth century.

The Fenian Brotherhood in America suffered from a variety of ills: although it was a secret organization, it was littered with informers. The military endeavors of the Fenians were all failures, and even Irish American opinion soon soured on the organization. But the Fenian Brotherhood was staffed and led by some very able Irish republicans, and they kept the flame of Irish independence alive even as the Fenian Brotherhood subsided into ashes. The remnants of the Fenians were incorporated into a new organization aimed at securing Irish independence: the *Clan na Gael*.

The *Clan na Gael (Clan)* was led by former Fenians John Devoy and Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, and younger men such as Daniel Cohalan and Joseph McGarrity. A split in the *Clan* leadership in the 1880s over the use of dynamite as a terror tactic in Britain and Dublin was reconciled by 1900, and the newly recoupled *Clan* pledged “the complete independence of the Irish people, and the establishment of an Irish republic.”<sup>5</sup> It must be noted, however, that the *Clan* did not abhor physical force; the leadership just

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<sup>5</sup> Tansill, *America and the Fight For Irish Freedom, 1866-1922*, 121

did not believe in the use of terror tactics that resulted in civilian casualties. Thus, the *Clan* also vowed “physical force is the only engine a revolutionary organization can consistently and successfully use to realize the hopes of lovers of freedoms in lands subject to the bonds of oppression.”

The first decade of the twentieth century laid the groundwork for the political and financial exertions the *Clan* undertook in the years of this study. In particular, the campaign to fight Home Rule in Ireland assumed massive importance for the *Clan*. Home Rule in Ireland meant the devolution of local affairs into local management, and would grant an Irish parliament to manage and legislate for the Irish. It was a federal solution, and Home Rule “permitted the accommodation of local, distinct groups within the context of a broader political framework. In this condition, groups could maintain their identity while retaining the political and economic benefits of a larger political unit- in this case, the British Empire.”<sup>6</sup> Needless to say, any political association with Britain and the Empire that did not recognize Ireland’s total autonomy was anathema to the *Clan na Gael*. Home Rule Bill 3 passed Parliament in 1912, but the implementation of the bill stalled under the weight of the opposition to it. Ironically, the most strenuous opposition to Home Rule came from within Ireland: the Ulster Unionist Party flatly rejected any form of political separation from Britain. The Ulster Unionists proposed an “exclusion” of four northern Irish counties from the proposed Home Rule parliament. Political separation from Britain was an abomination to the Ulster Unionists, but exclusion of any part of Ireland was equally abhorrent to John Redmond’s Irish Party. For Redmond and

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph P. Finnan, *John Redmond and Irish Unity, 1912-1918*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 38

the Irish Party, Home Rule meant all of Ireland. For the *Clan*, Home Rule was a bandage when amputation was necessary. The *Clan* exploited the interim between passage and implementation of Home Rule, and were aided and abetted by the advent of World War I.

There is a surprising lack of focus on what Irish American groups did to maintain a spotlight on their homeland from the safety of the western side of the Atlantic. Studies that do focus on Irish American nationalist efforts have emphasized the Fenian Brotherhood's role. As well, the narrative of the Irish immigrant experience has been thoroughly examined in Kerby Miller's *Emigrants and Exiles*,<sup>7</sup> and Thomas N. Brown's *Irish-American Nationalism, 1870-1890*.<sup>8</sup> These two benchmark studies have provided a base for future scholarship in Irish American histories. Allusions to the activities of the *Clan* abound in histories of Irish American nationalism, and many scholars utilize the memoirs of the main actors, but no one has scrutinized only the *Clan* during these years. There exists no extended treatment of the *Clan*, no scholarly examination, and no studies of the specific years mentioned. In order to understand the Irish American opposition to entrance into World War One, and hostility towards Home Rule in Ireland, an investigation into the *Clan na Gael's* leadership, rank and file, and activism during the years of 1912-1916 is crucial.

John Devoy's autobiography provides the meta-narrative for the *Clan*, but ends with the Easter Rising of 1916; also, the stopping point for this project.<sup>9</sup> The official

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<sup>7</sup> Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*, (New York: Oxford University Press) 1988

<sup>8</sup> Thomas N. Brown, *Irish American Nationalism, 1870-1890*, (New York: J.B. Lippincott) 1966

<sup>9</sup> John Devoy, *Recollections of an Irish Rebel: The Fenian Movement. It's Origins and Progress. Methods of Work in Ireland and in the British Army. Why It Failed To Achieve Its Main Object, But Exercised Great Influence on Ireland's Future. Personalities of the*



record of events closely aligns with Devoy's. Every scholar has utilized Devoy's autobiography as a source: either directly through his "Recollections," or indirectly via his editorial voice in the pages of the *Gaelic American*, the Irish nationalist periodical in New York City. Devoy's *Recollections* are an obvious starting point for research on the *Clan na Gael*: as the acknowledged leader of the group, Devoy's perspective is critical in understanding the "hows" and "whys" of the *Clan*'s objectives and how they pursued them.

Terry Golway's *Irish Rebel: John Devoy and America's Fight For Ireland's Freedom* biography is the only current scholarly examination of John Devoy, and therefore becomes a primer of Irish American nationalism and specifically the *Clan na Gael*.<sup>10</sup> It reads like a novel, but is nonetheless carefully researched. This monograph traces the whole arc of Devoy's life, and his unflagging activism on behalf of Irish independence. Less hagiographical and more critical, Sean Cronin's *The McGarrity Papers- Revelations of the Irish Revolutionary Movement in Ireland and America 1900-1940* provides a complementary narrative.<sup>11</sup> Joseph McGarrity was also part of the *Clan na Gael*'s Executive Council- and worked in tandem with Devoy to agitate for Irish independence. Both McGarrity and Devoy were inexhaustible correspondents, and much of the primary source material in this research project comes from their communications. Cronin does not hesitate to highlight McGarrity's divergences with Devoy- specifically

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*Organization. The Clan-na-Gael and the Rising of Easter Week, 1916. A Personal Narrative by John Devoy.* (New York City: Charles P. Young) 1929

<sup>10</sup> Terry Golway, *Irish Rebel: John Devoy and America's Fight For Ireland's Freedom*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998)

<sup>11</sup> Sean Cronin, *The McGarrity Papers-Revelations of the Irish Revolutionary Movement in Ireland and America 1900-1940*, (Tralee: Anvil Press, 1972)

McGarrity's faith in Sir Roger Casement, a knight of the British Empire who became one of the Irish nationalists' most famous champions. Overall, McGarrity and Devoy were remarkably unified in their leadership of the *Clan na Gael*- but the small differences between them serve to underscore the complexities of the organization's management.

David Sim's *A Union Forever* details the conflicts and resolutions in Anglo-American diplomatic relations in the Victorian age, arguing that Irish American nationalists inadvertently knitted England and America's diplomatic relationship closer together, rather than tearing them apart.<sup>12</sup> This theme of unintended consequences replayed again in the early twentieth century, but this time the Irish American nationalists benefitted: as I argue in this thesis. To read Sim's study is to learn of early failures for Irish American nationalists, but most importantly, it introduces the cast of what became the future *Clan na Gael*: many of the early *Clan na Gael* leaders were the original Fenians featured in Sims' monograph.

William D'Arcy's *The Fenian Movement in the U.S., 1858-1886* traces the Fenian Brotherhood from its inception until its final gasp in 1886.<sup>13</sup> Because so many members of the *Clan na Gael* were initially either members or at least contributors to the Fenian Brotherhood, it is useful to examine the Fenians more closely for insights into the future *Clan*. D'Arcy encompasses all the Fenian activities during its existence, and his monograph illuminates the scope of the group's actions in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> David Sim, *A Union Forever: The Irish Question and U.S. Foreign Relations in The Victorian Age*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013)

<sup>13</sup> William D'Arcy, *The Fenian Movement in The U.S., 1858-1886*, (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Of America Press, 1947)

century. D'Arcy's monograph answers the question of "who" the *Clan* members were, at least in its first years.

Charles C. Tansill's monograph *America and the Fight For Irish Freedom 1866-1922: An Old Story Based Upon New Data* directly responds to my research question because it examines the *Clan*'s effectiveness in my research period.<sup>14</sup>

Ultimately, Tansill argues the *Clan na Gael* was not more successful because of specific objectives or strategic policies; rather, world events (particularly World War I) played into the dismantling of the British Empire. Irish nationalist groups' constant resistance to a constitutional solution (i.e. Home Rule) made any alternative to total autonomy a non-starter. Tansill argues that from the British side of affairs, a combination of poor policy decisions all served to ally world opinion against the British. Tansill continues his analysis on the American side, contending that as Wilson's Anglophilia became more apparent, Irish Americans became more vocally nationalist. The cause of Irish independence developed global sympathy. The Irish American nationalists in the *Clan na Gael* used the British preoccupation with World War I for their own purposes, and actively championed United States' neutrality. Britain's failure to act quickly during the first readings of the Home Rule bill, combined with allowing the Ulster Unionists unlimited posturing and rhetoric, created a perfect opportunity for the Irish nationalist groups to reassert themselves.

Francis M. Carroll's *American Opinion on the Irish Question, 1910-1923: A Study in Opinion and Policy* is useful for its measured assessment of the state actors and

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<sup>14</sup> Tansill, *America and the Fight For Irish Freedom, 1866-1922*

*Clan na Gael* members involved in the debate over the “Irish Question.” This study argues that a constitutional solution to Irish independence had broad public support for the first years of the 1910s.<sup>15</sup> However, the build-up to World War I, the war and its aftermath, created a more militant Irish American public. These Irish Americans were no longer content with a gradual constitutional approach, and now supported a more radical answer to the “Irish question.” Carroll traces the apex of the Home Rule movement and John Redmond’s role as a constitutionalist to its dramatic drop off after the Rising. The monograph’s focus on “American opinion” means that the British side of affairs is not so deeply examined. Nonetheless, Carroll concludes that Home Rule would have been implemented as a semi-satisfactory conclusion if World War I not changed the situation’s dynamic. Carroll’s tight focus on 13 years of the “Irish question” is indispensable for any project on 20<sup>th</sup> century Irish American nationalism.

Joseph P. Finnan’s *John Redmond and Irish Unity, 1912-1918* was invaluable in creating a multi-dimensional understanding of the *Clan*’s opposition stance.<sup>16</sup> This monograph was crucial in understanding the *Clan na Gael*’s opposition and activism against Home Rule.

Finnan’s research period makes for an extremely tight study of Irish politics in that time frame. The parliamentary Irish Party, led by John Redmond, sought a) the passage of a Home Rule Bill and b) its implementation. The *Clan* did not support this position, arguing for Ireland’s complete independence. The author traces the challenges

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<sup>15</sup> Francis M. Carroll, *American Opinion on the Irish Question, 1910-1923: A Study in Opinion and Policy*, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1978)

<sup>16</sup> Joseph P. Finnan, *John Redmond and Irish Unity, 1912-1918*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004)

of Irish Party hegemony over the Irish nationalists, Redmond's course in navigating Parliament, Prime Ministers Asquith and Lloyd George, and his own constituents. The outbreak of World War One condemned the Irish Party to maneuvering within a domestic political scene intrinsically focused on patriotic duty and winning a war, not on separatist questions of dominion status during an all-out war effort. Where the Irish Party once commanded widespread, majority public support, by 1916 ( the end of this research project's time frame), the same was decisively untrue. The *Clan* used this to their advantage, and worked assiduously to undermine the Home Rulers and Redmond.

Other scholars have also shed light on pieces of the *Clan na Gael* puzzle. Patricia Jalland and John Stubb's journal article, "The Irish Question After the Outbreak of War in 1914: Some Unfinished Party Business," thoroughly explains the legislative components of the Home Rule Bill of 1912, and how the Liberal Party responded to the outbreak of World War I.<sup>17</sup> It provides a clear picture of the two months after the outbreak of World War One from the British perspective. Although these seemed to be domestic British affairs, and thus outside the purview of this thesis, nonetheless this journal article makes clear the heavy weight of Irish American opinion in regards to public policy formation in Britain.

In the United States, the *Clan na Gael* was starting to carry significant social and cultural weight. M. Alison Kibler's study of "the Practical Censorships of *McFadden's Row of Flats...*" traces the *Clan na Gael*-organized protests based on the play's

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<sup>17</sup> Patricia Jalland and John Stubbs, "The Irish Question After the Outbreak of War in 1914: Some Unfinished Party Business," *The English Historical Review*, Volume 96, Number 381 (October 1981) pp. 778-807

characterization of the Irish as lowly beasts/drunken slatterns. Ultimately, the Irish American community forced the producers of the play to edit out particularly offensive characteristics and props, leading the Irish Americans to boast they “had practically censored” *McFadden’s Row of Flats* out of existence.<sup>18</sup> The maturity and organization of these protests is significant because it means that the *Clan na Gael* was an effective social force by this time.

The budding acceptance of the American Catholic hierarchy (overwhelmingly Irish) towards Irish nationalist hopes highlighted the increasing cooperation of the *Clan na Gael* with the Church. No longer outright antagonists, the clergy was becoming more vocal about their support of the Irish independence. The détente between Catholic Church and Irish American nationalists was enormously helpful to mainstream Catholics support of Irish independence efforts because prior Irish nationalist groups were castigated and expelled by the Church. Charles T. Strauss’ journal article “God Save the Boer: Irish American Catholics and the South African War, 1899-1902,” reflects a more recent trend in studies of Irish American nationalism: how specific conflicts aided or failed Irish American nationalist hopes.<sup>19</sup> This emphasis is necessary because it points to the growing political exertions of Irish Americans, particularly the *Clan na Gael*, on behalf of Ireland

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<sup>18</sup> M. Alison Kibler, “Pigs, Green Whiskers, and Drunken Widows: Irish Nationalists and the ‘Practical Censorships’ of ‘McFadden’s Row of Flats’ in 1902 and 1903,” *Journal of American Studies*, Volume 42, Number 3 Film and Popular Culture (December 2008), pp. 489-514

<sup>19</sup> Charles T. Strauss, “God Save the Boer: Irish American Catholics and the South African War, 1899-1902,” *U.S. Catholic Historian*, Volume 26, Number 4 Politics (Fall 2008), pp. 1-28

in America. Where this journal succeeds is in illuminating the wealth of anti-Anglo sentiment and how the *Clan na Gael* capitalized on the ready parallel between their own “British subjugation” and the plight of the Boers in South Africa. Taken as a whole, the maturation of the *Clan na Gael* was reflected in the more extensive social and cultural roles they assumed. By 1912, the *Clan* was poised to marshal and to mobilize their social, cultural and political capital in a final push for Irish independence.

Thomas J. Rowland’s “Irish-American Catholics and the Quest For Respectability in the Coming of the Great War, 1900-1917” provided a more current example of assimilationist theory. Rowland joins notable Irish historian Thomas Brown in his assessment of an Irish Catholic immigrant driven by “a quest for respectability.”<sup>20</sup> This article was most helpful for its analysis of Catholicism not as an impediment, but as a means to supercharge one’s patriotism. This argument can also be used to examine Irish American attitudes towards neutrality, formed by Irish American weeklies such as the *Gaelic American*, in the years directly preceding American entrance into World War One.

Recent scholarship trends have emphasized the religious aspect of Irish-American nationalism, or the Irish American labor history, or explored micro-communities via statistical data.<sup>21</sup> These studies have all contributed to a deeper understanding of the Irish American experience at turn of the twentieth century. However, a gap in the scholarship

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas J. Rowland, “Irish-American Catholics and the Quest for Respectability in the Coming of the Great War, 1900-1917,” *Journal of Ethnic History*, Volume 15, Number 2 (Winter 1996) p. 3-31

<sup>21</sup> See David M. Emmons, *The Butte Irish: Class and Ethnicity in an American Mining Town, 1875-1925*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990). Also Michael L. Mullan, *Opposition, Discipline and Culture: The Civic World of the Irish and Italians in Philadelphia, 1880-1920*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009). Also Timothy J. Meagher, *Inventing Irish America: Generation, Class, and Ethnic Identity in a New England City, 1880-1928*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001)

exists. There is still no extended examination of just the *Clan na Gael* in the same time frame. As the primary resistance group of Irish American nationalists in this period, their influence must be analyzed to further the conversation surrounding opposition voices and agitation. The current political environment makes such studies even more timely. This project contributes to the historical dialogue surrounding Irish American nationalism, activism, and resistance.



CHAPTER ONE  
SHIFTING CURRENTS (1912)

Ireland's Irish Literary Revival of the earliest twentieth century was spearheaded by a renaissance in Gaelic culture- and William Butler Yeats and J.M. Synge were leading lights of this new force in literature, language, theatre, and sport. When the Abbey Theatre, the newly founded National Theatre of Ireland, toured America in 1911-1912, they presented J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* to American audiences for the first time. Synge's play was set in a pub in County Mayo in modern Ireland, and featured patricide, a love affair, pub brawls, and Synge's faithful capture of Irish dialect and language. But Irish Americans were not as taken with Synge's portrayal of the Irish, and bristled at the stereotypical "stage Irishman" they saw on stage. Rowdy demonstrations accompanied the play wherever it was presented, and police were summoned to provide security for the play's performances. When the play arrived in Philadelphia, the head of the *Clan na Gael's* District Two, Joseph McGarrity, fired the opening salvo. Rising from his theatre seat, McGarrity shouted "I protest against this play which is a libel on Irish character and a gross misrepresentation of Irish peasant life!" In New York City, the *Clan's* protest was commanded by none other than John Devoy, ex-Fenian and now-*Clan na Gael* leader. Despite the strong police presence, Devoy challenged the theatre and all in it. At the closing of the first act, Devoy erupted from his seat and roared, "Son of a bitch, that's not Irish!" At this cue, rotten vegetables strafed

the stage, hurled by complicit *Clan* audience members. Joseph McGarrity summed up the *Clan*'s position towards the play, insisting, "There was nothing in the play that would cause anyone who would witness it to have love or admiration for the people or the country represented in it. If the *Playboy* is art to hell with art and those who create it."<sup>22</sup>

The first decade of the twentieth century revealed a nearly defunct *Clan na Gael*. Fractured deeply in the late 1880s and 1890s by internecine fighting, and charges of treachery and corruption, the *Clan* had recently stitched itself back together through the indefatigable efforts of John Devoy, Daniel Cohalan, Joseph McGarrity, and others. Created to aid and abet revolutionary efforts in Ireland, specifically the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), the *Clan* did not content itself with merely funneling money to the IRB, but chose to pursue an activist path to influence any issue affecting Irish Americans. Whether cultural, social, economic or political- the *Clan na Gael* had an opinion. These opinions were most visible in Devoy's New York City weekly, the *Gaelic American*. Founded in 1903, and edited by Devoy, the weekly was immediately the preferred trumpet of the *Clan*. Devoy biographer Terry Golway illuminated the crucial difference between the *Gaelic American* and other ethnic newspapers, noting that the *Gaelic American* was not a model promoting assimilation, focused on "erudite analyses of European politics and dispatches from various lands struggling under Britain's yoke... written and edited for educated and highly literate leaders of Irish America."<sup>23</sup> Devoy and the *Clan* utilized the *Gaelic American* to influence the upper strata of Irish American society, compatriots who could better operate the levers of power on behalf of Irish

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<sup>22</sup> Terry Golway, *Irish Rebel: John Devoy and America's Fight For Ireland's Freedom*, (New York City: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 186

<sup>23</sup> Golway, *Irish Rebel*, 183

independence. As the *Clan* grew slowly but steadily, its efforts became assured enough to attempt to influence political elites like Congressman William Bourke Cockran, and the presidential election of 1912. While it seemed patently clear that a successful Home Rule bill would kill the organization, the *Clan* fought tooth and nail to defeat it, and had some unlikely allies. In this chapter, I argue 1912 proved to be a critical pivot point for the *Clan* and for the Irish independence movement. Devoy and the *Clan*'s relentless efforts led the Irish American republican resistance by threading together cultural recognition, political activism, and public relations in one massive mobilization effort. In 1912, the tide of moderate Irish-American opinion was incrementally and gradually shifting to a republican vision for Ireland. In four short years, the tide would be running swiftly for an independent Ireland.

The presidential election of 1912 preoccupied the *Clan*'s domestic political activism, and the *Clan* sought to take advantage of the candidates' increasing awareness of Irish American voting power. Irish Americans historically voted Democratic, but the presidential candidates all made efforts to woo the bloc's votes. Incumbent Republican President William Howard Taft attended a 1910 Chicago St. Patrick's Day celebration held by the Irish Fellowship Club. It was the first time a sitting president attended a St. Patrick's Day observance. Two years later, ex-President Theodore Roosevelt, now running as the Bull Moose Party's candidate, attended a lunch held in London's Westminster Palace by Irish Party leader John Redmond and other Irish Members of Parliament. John Redmond and the Irish Party believed in a constitutional, parliamentary solution to the Irish Question, but did not advocate Roosevelt's presence signaled a victory for Irish respectability, and "for the first time since the 1880s, Irish Americans

merited the attention of national figures.”<sup>24</sup> The Roosevelt/Redmond lunch was orchestrated by Irish American nationalist Patrick Egan, a key figure in the United Irish League of America (UIL), Redmond’s American outreach organization. The Democratic Party candidate, Woodrow Wilson, once championed a British federation that would permit the national aspirations of the Irish, Welsh, and Scots. However, the national spotlight forced Wilson into a blander position; while campaigning for president, Wilson made no official statement regarding Ireland’s position within the British Empire.<sup>25</sup> In 1910-1911, the majority of all Americans viewed the Irish question through a pro-Anglo lens, believing that if the Irish question was successfully and peacefully resolved, it would lead to a better diplomatic partnership with Great Britain.<sup>26</sup> Irish American opinion was more nuanced. However, a Home Rule Bill would also serve to defuse the agitations of the Irish American political bloc by “robbing them of their greatest issue.”<sup>27</sup> The *Clan na Gael* mobilized public opinion to agitate for Irish independence, a more radical political step than Home Rule. The presidential election of 1912 allowed the *Clan na Gael* to first, put the Irish Question into the broader political discourse, and second, exert pressure on presidential candidates who best supported the republican Irish position. The *Clan*’s efforts in the 1912 presidential election marked their first assured attempts at political influence on a national level.

Woodrow Wilson’s election in 1912 alarmed the *Clan na Gael* leadership.

Wilson’s “internationalism” troubled Devoy and his deputy, Judge Daniel Cohalan, for it

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<sup>24</sup> Francis M. Carroll, *American Opinion and The Irish Question, 1910-1923*, (New York City: St. Martin’s Press, 1978), 17

<sup>25</sup> Carroll, *American Opinion and The Irish Question, 1910-1923*, 7

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, 18

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*, 20

spoke of greater cooperation with Great Britain at the expense of the nationalist aspirations of Ireland.<sup>28</sup> Wilson's private secretary, Joseph Tumulty, himself an Irish-American, "recorded in his memoirs that Wilson was honestly concerned with Irish self-government."<sup>29</sup> Wilson biographer John Milton Cooper, Jr. endorses this belief, arguing that Wilson was in fact less Anglocentric than is generally believed, despite his "Scottish heritage, English-born mother, Anglophilic literary tastes and long-standing admiration for British political institutions."<sup>30</sup> Wilson's concerns were mainly domestic, however, and he focused on overhauling the Federal Reserve, tariff reform and anti-trust legislation. With the exception of the Mexican intervention in 1912, Wilson was not particularly invested in foreign policy until the outbreak of World War One.

Although scholarship leans to the consensus school of Wilson as irredeemable racist, there was an undeniable undertow of nativism pulsing throughout all of America in the first decades of the twentieth century. In that sense, President Wilson was not alone in his belief in Anglo-Saxon primacy. Assimilation, for Wilson and others, meant subsuming whatever ethnic qualities and loyalties one retained into the greater good of being "American." President-elect Wilson campaigned on "a national policy of exclusion. The whole question is one of assimilation of diverse races. We cannot make a homogenous population of people who do not blend with the Caucasian race."<sup>31</sup> While

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<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth McKillen, "Ethnicity, Class, and Wilsonian Internationalism Reconsidered: The Mexican-American and Irish-American Immigrant Left and U.S. Foreign Relations, 1914-1922," *Diplomatic History*, Volume 25, Number 4 (Fall 2001) p. 553-587

<sup>29</sup> Carroll, *American Opinion and The Irish Question, 1910-1923*, 18

<sup>30</sup> John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography*, (New York City: Vintage Books, 2009), 268

<sup>31</sup> Alexander DeConde, *Ethnicity, Race, and American Foreign Policy: A History*, (Boston: Northeastern Press, 1992), 79

the greatest loathing seemed aimed at non-whites, Irish-Americans and German-Americans were also victims. Nativists decried the ethnic clusters in cities, and also pointed at the influence of the Roman Catholic Church with many of these newer immigrants. It wasn't just point of origin that concerned nativists, for in their estimation a true American was of necessity Protestant. What historian Alexander DeConde termed "hyphenate hysteria" was a reiteration of the nativists' old complaint that immigrants kept themselves aloof, making it more difficult to assimilate. The "hyphenate" referred to groups like the Irish and Germans in particular, who self-identified as "Irish-American" or "German-American," implying that they were unwilling to loosen the ties that bound them to their mother country. And if that were the case, how could these groups ever hope to be considered "Americans?" Perhaps more importantly, the nativists could claim that these groups self-isolated, and thus were responsible for the charges of "divided loyalties." This theme continued and grew more prevalent as the clouds of war gathered in Europe.

The *Clan na Gael*, hardly fans of Wilson's to begin with, chose to pursue an activist agenda that emphasized their Irishness, rather than diminished it. For Devoy and the *Clan*, this took the practical path of pursuing alliances with other maligned ethnic groups, particularly the Germans. As the two largest immigrant groups in America, it was a sensible and pragmatic matter to combine their powers as voting blocs into one super-alliance. Speaking at a joint rally held by German-Americans and Irish-Americans at New York's Cooper Union in 1911, Devoy claimed "We love America more than we hate England, and it is our love for America which governs our actions..."<sup>32</sup> Post

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<sup>32</sup> Golway, *Irish Rebel*, 187

Victorian Age, America and Britain's diplomatic relations grew steadily closer, rejecting the efforts of Irish American nationalists to exploit any conflicts they could for Irish gain. Devoy argued that greater diplomatic cooperation with Britain was inimical to American interests, not just Irish: one of his shrewdest political moves. This served multi-purposes: Devoy could successfully rebut the charges of nativists about "divided loyalties," he could remind Americans of the forefathers' warnings against "foreign entanglements," and he could remind Americans that any European wars should stay in Europe. Had Devoy inserted and promoted Ireland's cause as a primary goal- he would have undoubtedly opened himself up to exactly the same charges that dogged other immigrant groups. For Devoy to hide behind the red, white, and blue of the American flag versus the golden harp of Ireland was not only ironic, but also cunning.

The *Clan na Gael* methodically and carefully maintained public visibility for the Irish nationalist cause through their sustained use of the media and public relations campaigns. However, the *Clan*'s assured political posture in 1912 belied their actual strength. Although the group was steadily gaining grounds in membership and influence, it remained a secret organization with oath-bound members. The men of the *Clan* (no females were permitted) were often also members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, and other "open" Irish American fraternal organizations. "Infiltrating" these public organizations, the *Clan* members facilitated and executed their own resistance strategies on behalf of Irish independence. Similarly, the Irish Republican Brotherhood members "infiltrated" the Irish separatist political party Sinn Féin, giving the party a decidedly more republican cast than Arthur Griffith, the founder, intended. Dual memberships in "open" and "secret" societies allowed the *Clan* and the IRB to

influence public opinion via the press, public rallies, direct lobbying efforts, and fundraising. Unfortunately for the *Clan* and the IRB, however, their necessary “secret” status meant that they never had the funds or operating budget that would have enabled even greater resistance efforts. Nonetheless, the sheer amount of money flowing across the Atlantic to finance Irish republicanism reflected the exertions of Devoy and other *Clan* members, as well as the surprising amount of coordination with their Irish revolutionary counterparts. The *Clan na Gael* attempted to influence the public through their overt activities in the open fraternal societies, and their covert activities within the *Clan*.

Devoy and the *Clan* maintained the drumbeat of Irish nationalism in America through an unremitting public relations campaign carried out in every Irish-American press vehicle. Devoy defended Irish-Americans and the Irish themselves, for he envisioned a vast Anglo conspiracy aimed at demeaning the Irish at any cost.<sup>33</sup> Devoy considered the British capable of any low, especially where the Irish people were concerned, yet carefully cast his rhetoric in the words of a patriot, not an Irish agitator. From the pages of the *Gaelic American*, Devoy advocated his vision of “an Irish-American community still very much at the mercy of an ancient enemy who was perfectly capable of crossing the Atlantic to subvert the American republic in general and Irish-Americans in particular to suit the needs of empire.”<sup>34</sup> Devoy in particular remained ruthless at correcting the prevailing Irish stereotypes: the stage Irishman, the drunk Paddy, the bog farmer. In 1902 and 1903, *McFadden’s Row of Flats*, a play depicting the

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<sup>33</sup> Golway, *Irish Rebel*, 184

<sup>34</sup> *ibid*



campaign for alderman waged by two immigrant saloonkeepers, set off violent protests by Irish nationalists in America. Although the play ran for five years, by 1902 and 1903 the *Clan na Gael* was sufficiently reorganized and reenergized enough to carry out methodical protests within the theatre space itself. Bristling at nearly every aspect of *McFadden's* portrayal of the Irish, the *Clan* encouraged its members to hurl vegetables and eggs on stage. Historians M. Alison Kibler and Lucy McDiarmid's assess the newly resurgent *Clan's* motive for protest as a calculated effort to upset "the control of culture exercised by the dominant class."<sup>35</sup> This analysis is in contrast to the older historiography's emphasis on an Irish-American near obsessive quest for assimilation and respectability.<sup>36</sup> This shift in interpretation emphasizes Irish American agency over accommodation. The response to *McFadden's Row of Flats* foreshadowed the furor one decade later when famed poet William Butler Yeats, a leader in the Irish Literary Revival, brought a fellow Irishman's play to America. J.M. Synge, a co-founder of the Abbey Theatre, wrote *The Playboy of the Western World* in the evocative Anglo-Irish heard and spoken in County Mayo where the play was set. Although such adherence to the colloquial language of Ireland should have pleased Irish nationalists, they instead took umbrage at the play's representations of Irish womanhood, the Catholic Church, and according to Arthur Griffith, it's insufficient politicism. Irish nationalist response to

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<sup>35</sup> Lucy McDiarmid, "The Abbey and the Theatrics of Controversy," in M. Alison Kibler, "Pigs, Green Whiskers, and Drunken Widows: Irish Nationalists and the 'Practical Censorship' of 'McFadden's Row of Flats' in 1902 and 1903," *Journal of American Studies*, Volume 42, Number 3 Film and Popular Culture, (December 2008), 498

<sup>36</sup> Thomas J. Rowland, "Irish American Catholics and the Quest for Respectability in the Coming of the Great War, 1900-1917," *Journal of American History*, Volume 15 (Winter 1996), 7

see also Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 498

“stage Irish” characterizations diverged along their political lines: while moderate groups like the United Irish League of America advocated boycotts, the *Clan* resisted in direct actions like disorderly conduct at the play performances.<sup>37</sup> Competing claims for the mantle of Irish American leadership might have spurred the Irish American nationalists’ response to *The Playboy of the Western World*, but what cannot be disputed is the obvious flowering of nationalism and cultural identity that provoked both groups to act in defense of Irish identity. In terms of press coverage, the *Clan*’s rowdier response merited more ink. Devoy succeeded in pushing the *Clan*’s public relations agenda forward.

The Gaelic Revival of the first decade of the twentieth century buttressed this flowering of Irish nationalism. Douglas Hyde’s Gaelic League was founded to promote all things Gaelic, a bid to “de-Anglicize Ireland.” The primary focus of the Gaelic League was linguistic. In 1903, the *Clan* endorsed the efforts of the Gaelic League explicitly, publishing a circular that stated “The work of the Gaelic League is in line with the objects of the *Clan na Gael*. It is preparing the mind of the country for the supreme effort that will lead to the final triumph of the Gael.”<sup>38</sup> The Gaelic League founded a New York City office to support its efforts in America, and *Clan* executive Judge Daniel Cohalan served as its Chairman. The Gaelic League of Ireland sent “missions” led by envoys like Diarmuid Lynch to America regularly between 1900-1915, and the earlier “intellectual public meetings of Douglas Hyde” were eventually replaced by the “music and dancing

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<sup>37</sup> M. Alison Kibler, “Pigs, Green Whiskers, and Drunken Widows: Irish Nationalists and the ‘Practical Censorship’ of ‘McFadden’s Row of Flats’ in 1902 and 1903,” *Journal of American Studies*, Volume 42, Number 3 Film and Popular Culture, (December 2008), 502

<sup>38</sup> Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question, 1866-1922*, 9

[that became] intrinsic parts of the envoys' public meetings."<sup>39</sup> This change reflected the Irish American desire to be entertained, as well as dunned. Unfortunately, the *Clan na Gael*'s initial cooperation with the Gaelic League was soon soured by the demands of its members, and what seemed to be an obvious partnership devolved into an acrid, suspicious truce.

The *Clan na Gael* had one over-arching goal: Irish independence. The Gaelic League was a cultural force, not a political one. In Devoy's mind, the Gaelic League by necessity needed to remain focused on the cultural revolution, not the political one. When Shane Leslie, a Gaelic League envoy in America, gave a speech at a fundraising event in 1911, he inadvertently angered Devoy by referring to the necessity of education in Irish nationalism, a salient point of a Home Rule Bill. Any discussion anywhere of a Home Rule Bill was anathema to the *Clan* and the IRB, and moreover, was a gross overreach of the Gaelic League's purported goals and messaging. Although Devoy qualified his criticism of Leslie by noting that Leslie "is a man of much promise," he hastened to add that "he may or may not develop."<sup>40</sup> Devoy's enmity extended to Douglas Hyde. In a letter to Daniel Cohalan, his deputy in the *Clan*, Devoy acidly remarked "Hyde is making nonsensical speeches about the Irish people having got their land and going to get their nationality. This is politics and the Gaelic League is supposed to be nonpolitical."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Úna Ní Bhroméil, "Chapter 6: Later Gaelic League Missions to America, 1910-1914," in *Building Irish Identity in America: 1870-1915 The Gaelic Revival* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 109

<sup>40</sup> Correspondence from John Devoy to Judge Daniel Cohalan, 29 November 1911, Box 4, Folder 3, "Correspondence John Devoy 1879-1918," Daniel Cohalan Papers, American Irish Historical Society, New York, USA

<sup>41</sup> Letter, John Devoy to Judge Daniel Cohalan, 29 November 1911, Box 4, Folder 3, Daniel Cohalan Papers.

Furthermore, Devoy believed that Hyde and John Redmond were allied, although Redmond “does nothing for him [Hyde] and [his] friends are hostile to the League.” This was an interesting aside for Devoy, for why should he care about favors extended to the Gaelic League if they are a cultural organization, as he insists they remain? Any overt “hostility” to the League, as Devoy suggested, would be counter-productive and counter-intuitive to the aims of the Irish Party, first, and Redmond himself, second. Anything detrimental to Redmond was, by extension, a victory for the *Clan na Gael*’s republican organization. Promotion of the Gaelic culture would benefit the Irish Party, but naturally the IRB and the *Clan na Gael*, as well. A “Gael” spirit did not necessarily mean a republican or rebellious one. It certainly didn’t have to equate the two.

Devoy bristled at Yeats’ assumption of a quasi-imprimatur of the Gaelic League, writing Cohalan “the worst is that Yeats has managed to fill every American editor with the idea that his theatre company is a product of the Gaelic League, has Hyde’s endorsement, and that by inference approves the ‘Playboy.’” Devoy believed that Hyde’s refusal to issue a denial of Yeats’ premise constituted a capitulation, and Devoy was ever-alert to any possible flaws or defects in others’ commitment to the cause.<sup>42</sup> Successful fundraising by the Gaelic League also diverted funds that could have gone to support the *Clan*’s clandestine pipeline to the IRB. Devoy complained that “the time of our men is continually taken up with raising money for the League, to the neglect of our own work.” He continued with resentment: “hardly anyone else does anything, and yet everything is done to please those who are hostile or indifferent and every

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<sup>42</sup> ibid

recommendation made by us or our friends is ignored.”<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the Irish-American network that existed through the *Clan*’s efforts, according to Devoy, was continually tapped for resources by the Gaelic League. Although the goals of both organizations would seem to be complementary, Devoy drew a deep line of demarcation between the two, and took umbrage at the Gaelic League’s demands. For Devoy, complementary aims were insufficient motivations when the *Clan*/ IRB was the only true Irish nationalist group. Devoy felt as if the *Clan* was being marginalized, for he frostily remarked to Cohalan that “it is time we insist on being treated seriously. I don’t believe in attacking the Gaelic League, but I do believe our men ought to mind their own special business until we are treated with greater respect. It [the Gaelic League] has plenty of room to collect funds from the rich Irishmen here without keeping our men running errands for them and being treated as errand boys.”<sup>44</sup> Ultimately, the Gaelic League severed any connection with Yeats and the Abbey Company, for “the reliance of the Gaelic League on the Gaelic societies and on men like Devoy, who controlled the powerful *Clan na Gael* movement [made it obvious that] the money from America was the priority and those who threatened to remove that source of income had to be appeased at all costs.”<sup>45</sup> Devoy and the *Clan* succeeded in pressuring the Gaelic League into following their message, not the inverse.

Although the *Clan* was highly politicized and vocal, its most lasting contribution on behalf of Irish independence was financial, not political. The opposition campaign to

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<sup>43</sup> Letter, John Devoy to Judge Daniel Cohalan, 29 November 1911, Box 4, Folder 3, Daniel Cohalan Papers.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid*

<sup>45</sup> Ní Bhroméil, *Building Irish Identity*, 117

the Root-Bryce Treaty in the Senate provided Devoy and the Clan a high-profile success in foreign relations activism. An entente between Britain and America, clearly evident by the turn of the century, alarmed Irish American nationalists, especially John Devoy and the *Clan na Gael*.<sup>46</sup> In the Senate for ratification in early 1912, Root-Bryce was the legacy of President Taft's efforts to create an arbitration agreement with Great Britain that stemmed from disputes that arose in Canadian/U.S. fisheries. Devoy spearheaded the *Clan*'s opposition to the treaty, characterizing it as an attempt by England to draw the United States into a military alliance to counteract the growing threat posed by imperial Germany.<sup>47</sup> Summoning all his talents as an organizer, Devoy led the Irish- American resistance to Root-Bryce. When Root- Bryce failed to pass the Senate in March of 1912, Devoy was exultant, and considered the political triumph "Irish America's greatest victory over England."<sup>48</sup> Perhaps Devoy was exhilarated because this was one of the very few successful attempts by the *Clan* to intervene in foreign policy. Regardless, Devoy and the *Clan* successfully assisted in the resistance of foreign policy detrimental to the Irish republican strategy. The lobbying effort against Root/Bryce involved a concerted push directed at elite politicians- indicating the assurance with which the Irish American activists operated. Focusing on U.S. Senators directly, without the protective umbrella of party machinery like Tammany Hall in New York City, emphasized the top-down quality of the *Clan*'s activism. The opposition to Home Rule was an even more involved effort.

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<sup>46</sup> David Sim, *A Union Forever: The Irish Question and U.S. Foreign Relations in the Victorian Age*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2013)

<sup>47</sup> Golway, *Irish Rebel*, 186

<sup>48</sup> Golway, *Irish Rebel*, 188

The *Clan na Gael* bitterly rejected the idea of Home Rule, for it provided a “palliative and not a cure for the political ills of Ireland.”<sup>49</sup> Home Rule was introduced in 1912 by British Prime Minister Asquith. The Liberal Party majority was forced to present the Home Rule Bill because they owed their razor-thin edge to the Irish Party. The *Clan*, led by John Devoy and Daniel Cohalan, shifted into overdrive to counter the moderate, constitutional Home Rule proposal. John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Party, believed faithfully in a parliamentary solution to the “Irish Question.” He was supported by the vast majority of Irish voters, as well as Irish-Americans. Nonetheless, the *Clan* spurned Home Rule, insisting as early as 1900 “that members shall abstain from giving support, directly or indirectly, to the Parliamentary movement and from participation in meetings held for the purpose aiding that movement.”<sup>50</sup> A follow up circular in 1901 reminded *Clan* members that “no member of our organization shall become a member of the United Irish League, or in any way aid or support it, or any other constitutional movement, and shall, as far as practicable, in every way oppose such movements.” Clearly, Redmond’s American outreach organization, the United Irish League, had made inroads in the *Clan na Gael* membership rolls, and thus the necessary stern rebuke to *Clan* members. The *Clan* remained vigilant in maintaining their militarist and separatist policy, and Devoy’s *Gaelic American* “portray[ed] Redmond as prepared to sell out the dream of the republic for the unacceptable compromise of Home Rule” with some success.<sup>51</sup> By 1912,

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<sup>49</sup> Tansill, *America and the Fight For Irish Freedom 1866-1922*, 121

<sup>50</sup> Official Statement/ Circular *Clan na Gael*, October 10, 1900, Box 2, Folder 27, *Clan na Gael* Folder, Daniel Cohalan Papers, American Irish Historical Society, New York, USA

<sup>51</sup> Golway, *Irish Rebel*, 184

Redmond could no longer depend on the open pockets of Irish Americans to help fund his party and its support of Home Rule. The currents of Irish nationalism were shifting.

The activities of the *Clan na Gael* in 1912 marked a departure and a critical pivot point for the Irish nationalist cause. The *Clan* mounted a furious political offensive against the Root-Bryce Treaty, and succeeded in its resistance for Senate ratification. In the pages of the *Gaelic American*, John Devoy maintained the excellence and superiority of the Irish race. The *Clan* also executed a highly visible and successful campaign against “stage Irish” characterizations that dealt in stereotypes that were highly offensive, but no more so than those leveled at Germans or any other immigrant group. The Gaelic League stimulated the pride of Irish Americans and capitalized on it through fundraising tours in both decades of the 1900-1910s. And whether it was a case of the chicken or the egg, all these winds of change collided to create a new, more militant republican spirit. Although it would not be apparent for a few more years, in 1912 several crosscurrents in Irish America propelled the cause of Irish independence forward. With some highly unlikely allies, Ireland and Irish America moved into 1913 poised for even greater exertions, but ultimately greater rewards.



## CHAPTER TWO

### SWIFT WINDS AND A FOLLOWING SEA (1913-1914)

Immigration to America experienced one of its periodic surges in the first two decades of the twentieth century. But the new immigrants were predominantly from Eastern and Southern Europe. Nativists, stung by the “threat” posed by these new immigrants, sounded their old battle cry. However, the new nativist rhetoric was modernized, and took aim at “hyphenated Americans.” The term was an epithet, not a description- and it aimed at Americans who were of foreign birth or origin, and displayed an allegiance to a foreign country. On one of his periodic lobbying efforts to legislators, John Devoy, still a leader of the *Clan na Gael* in his seventies, met with Senator John Sharp Williams of Mississippi. When the Senator complained about “hyphenated Americans” to Devoy, Devoy had little use for it. Devoy pointedly asked the Senator “Aren’t the Anglo-Saxons hyphenated?” The Senator assented the point, but rebutted: “Yes, but I’m not Anglo-Saxon. I’m a Welshman. But my people have been here for a hundred and fifty years.” Devoy looked at him with cold eyes and said “Judging by that standard, Sitting Bull has a better record.”<sup>52</sup>

The *Clan na Gael* maintained a diverse strategy of public relations efforts, foreign relations activism, and continued and better coordination with the Irish Republican

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<sup>52</sup>Terry Golway, *Irish Rebel: John Devoy and America’s Fight For Ireland’s Freedom*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 187

Brotherhood. As 1913 moved into 1914, geopolitics and European alliances drew Britain's attention away from the Irish question, and onto the battlefield. Home Rule received the royal assent in 1914, but never implemented, as the guns of World War One opened up. With Britain's attention diverted to the war effort, Devoy and the *Clan* chose to ally themselves with German Americans and Germany to better improve the position of the Irish republican nationalists, at the expense of Redmond and his Irish Party and Home Rule, generally. In a twist of fate, the *Clan's* efforts at obstructing Home Rule were aided by the militant response of the Ulster Unionists, led by Sir Edward Carson. The Catholic Church hierarchy in America posed Catholics as super-patriots, and the Irish in America joined groups such as the Knights of Columbus to rebut the nativist claim of "divided loyalties." John Devoy and the *Clan* fought for Irish American inclusion, not assimilation. They did not believe that subsuming one's ethnicity was necessary for being American. This policy allowed Irish Americans greater confidence in their political involvement as Americans, not hyphenates. This poise was evident as they resisted Home Rule in Ireland, and agitated for continued neutrality in America.

The Great War posed difficult questions for Americans during the period of American neutrality from 1914-1917. Loyalty to one's mother country meant the risk of being branded disloyal or unpatriotic was quite real. Even remaining attached to one's ethnicity via identification as an "Irish-American," or "German-American," became problematic as the push for assimilation at all costs picked up speed. For the Anglophilic elite, "the persistence of ethnic diversity [was] incompatible with national unity." President Woodrow Wilson embodied this principle, and used the presidential pulpit in 191 to reprimand German- and Irish-Americans, saying they "cannot become thorough

Americans if [they] think of [themselves] in groups...America does not consist of groups.”<sup>53</sup> In response, John Devoy and the *Clan* reaffirmed their ethnic allegiance and underscored their anti-British position by promoting the German cause at every opportunity, particularly in the pages of the *Gaelic American*. Devoy made this very public effort “in order to neutralize the undisguised pro-British sentiments of the American ruling class, that bastion of Protestant, Anglo American power...[for] if the combined political clout of the nation’s two largest immigrant groups, the Germans and the Irish, could be massed together, pro- British politicians might think twice before committing U.S. troops to the Western Front.”<sup>54</sup> Devoy was realist enough to know that completely avoiding American activity in the Great War was nearly impossible, but he did hope to agitate enough to make Wilson’s administration consider the ramifications of infuriating the two largest, and best organized voting blocs.

Irish Catholics in America were steadily growing more confident of their place in the American spectrum. Aided by immigration patterns that stretched back to the founding of the Republic, the Irish in America were the second largest immigrant group behind the Germans. In short, the Irish had firm roots. In the second decade of the twentieth century- Southern and Eastern Europeans were the majority of new immigrants. Wave after wave of Italians, Poles, and Russians arrived in America through 1900-1920. These groups did not have the advantage of being from English-speaking countries, as the Irish did. Clustering in the same ethnic neighborhoods that the Irish had only recently

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<sup>53</sup>Alexander Deconde, *Ethnicity, Race, and American Foreign Policy: A History* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), 83

<sup>54</sup> Golway, *Irish Rebel*, 199

vacated as their circumstances had improved, these new immigrants retained much of their culture, but most particularly, their religion. They were most often Catholic.

In another case of unlikely confederates, the *Clan na Gael's* John Devoy and the Catholic hierarchy forged a tenuous partnership to challenge bigotry in America. The American Catholic hierarchy was overwhelmingly dominated by the Irish, mocked as the “hibernocracy.” Archbishop John Ireland (St. Paul) and James Cardinal Gibbons (Baltimore) led the defense of American Catholicism in the face of rising nativist resentment. The *Clan na Gael* was in no way affiliated with the Catholic Church, in fact, the *Clan's* republicanism was anathema to the old guard both in Ireland and in America. Moreover, the extremism of the Fenian Brotherhood (the *Clan's* precursor) had soured moderate Irish and Irish American opinion towards republicanism. Historian Thomas Rowland argues “a concern for respectability” motivated the American Catholic hierarchy to “suppress the more blatantly radical strains of Irish nationalism.”<sup>55</sup> This conservatism was not only apparent in nationalist causes, but also labor relations, as well. Further, the new breed of nationalists in Ireland and in America were certain that the Catholic Church was responsible for keeping the Irish poor and ignorant, uncultured and uncouth.<sup>56</sup> Nonetheless, Devoy and the *Clan* had to accept an uneasy truce with the “hibernocracy,” because the *Clan* would be dead in the water should there be an official disavowal on either side.

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<sup>55</sup> Thomas J. Rowland, “Irish-American Catholics and the Quest for Respectability in the Coming of the Great War, 1900-1917,” *Journal of Ethnic History*, Volume 15, Number 2 (Winter 1996), 5

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 7

The *Clan* and the Church worked in rare tandem to promote Irish Americans as patriots before World War I, and during it. This self-promotion enabled the Irish Americans to become comfortable in political involvement, and become confident enough to press for inclusion, not merely assimilation. This was a more radical step than merely being on the defensive against nativist claims, for it implies a level of challenge and agency to the nativists' allegations. For the *Clan*, there was no need to subsume one's ethnicity on the altar of patriotism. For Cardinal Gibbons and Archbishop Ireland, the image American Catholics needed to project was one of industriousness, temperance, and patriotism. In that manner, American Catholics could contest the nativist claims of indolence, intemperance, and Papal allegiance over citizenship.<sup>57</sup> However, it must be noted that no one could ever fully satisfy John Devoy- he had his own extreme standards. Devoy and the *Clan* had to maintain cordial relations with the Catholic Church, and press for greater inclusion of Irish Americans in the political and social spheres. The uneasy truce between the *Clan* and the American Catholic hierarchy did not extend to the *Clan's* activities towards John Redmond and Home Rule.

For the *Clan na Gael*, the Home Rule Bill of 1912 was totally unsatisfactory, as it still kept Ireland firmly tied to Britain. Anything short of independence was untenable. The *Clan* by necessity had to resist Home Rule, and by extension, John Redmond and the Irish Party. Redmond's claim to speak for all of the Irish nationalists was invalid. His faith and optimism in a Parliamentary solution to the "Irish question" reflected his commitment to Ireland's place within the Empire- and this alone disqualified him in the

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<sup>57</sup> Thomas J. Rowland, "Irish-American Catholics and the Quest for Respectability in the Coming of the Great War, 1900-1917," *Journal of Ethnic History*, Volume 15, Number 2 (Winter 1996), 6

eyes of the *Clan na Gael*.<sup>58</sup> Redmond's orthodoxy and one-dimensional analysis of the resistance to Home Rule meant that he severely underestimated the hostility of the opposition.

The rise of the Ulster Unionist Party, led by Sir Edward Carson, was the most direct threat to implementation of the Bill. The participation of over 250,000 Unionists at a massive rally in Belfast 1912 should have indicated the sincerity and depth of the opposition to Home Rule, but Redmond and the Irish Party took a "dismissive approach... referring to it as the 'Ulster bogey.'"<sup>59</sup> It would be a fatal flaw in Irish Party tactics. Redmond was also hamstrung because his support came grudgingly from a number of groups who saw no other plausible options, while Carson and the Ulster Unionists were united in common cause, and in a deeply entrenched defensive position. The creation of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), a military organization that drilled and collected weapons openly in defiance of British law, would prove catastrophic for the Irish Party's insistence on fair play and constitutional implementation of Home Rule. The UVF was ostensibly formed to "protect" the Union, when it actually was a paramilitary force that promised to shed blood if Ireland was ever separated from Britain via Home Rule. Redmond's approach seemed overly cautious and conservative in comparison his opponents' willingness to go outside traditional means of opposition.

The Irish Volunteer Force, the Irish nationalist force formed in response to the UVF, was intended to be a nationalist, not republican organization.<sup>60</sup> In the *Gaelic*

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<sup>58</sup> Joseph P. Finnan, *John Redmond and Irish Unity, 1912-1918*, (Ithaca: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 58

<sup>59</sup> Finnan, *John Redmond and Irish Unity, 1912-1918*, 45.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 43.

*American*, Devoy posed the Irish Volunteers a “national army of defense,” and called for Irish Americans to financially support the Volunteers.<sup>61</sup> The *Gaelic American* placed fundraising articles for the Irish Volunteers on the front page of over half their weekly issues in 1914.<sup>62</sup> For Devoy and the *Clan na Gael*, supporting the purchase of arms for the Volunteers was a far cry from the terror tactics of the early *Clan*’s Dynamite Campaign. The Dynamite Campaign of the 1880s split the *Clan* into two- with Devoy and his faction vehemently opposed to the civilian bloodshed associated with it. However, Devoy most assuredly supported a military insurrection against Britain. Devoy urged his readership to support the IVF, in front page article after front page article. The Irish Volunteers pointedly condemned the “‘emasculated representative politics of Home Rule,’ with its delays and compromises.”<sup>63</sup> Had Redmond protested the formation of the Irish Volunteers (as against good order or peaceful due process) with any vehemence, he would have been branded a coward at best, a traitor at worst. Neither boded well for his leadership. Redmond’s only recourse in this circumstance was to simply assume leadership of the Irish Volunteers, and hope to control it through his own political party apparatus. His heavy-handed assertion that “the Volunteer executive committee was not fully representative, and should be enlarged to allow it {for which read-force it} to represent the party.”<sup>64</sup> Redmond forced the executive committee to accept 25 of his

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<sup>61</sup> The *Gaelic American*, Volume XI, Number 23, Whole Number 560, June 6, 1914 in the Joseph McGarrity Papers, Villanova Digital Archives, Falvey Library

<sup>62</sup> The *Gaelic American*, 1914, in the Joseph McGarrity Papers, Villanova Digital Archives, Falvey Library

<sup>63</sup> Travis L. Crosby, *The Unknown Lloyd George: Statesman in Conflict*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013) 154

<sup>64</sup> Charles Townshend, *Easter 1916: The Irish Rebellion*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005) 52.

handpicked men, a concession that further bruised the already tender partnership between Nationalist military and political groups. Two paramilitary forces now existed in Ireland.

The official British policy of non-interference seemed particularly ineffectual given the highly publicized success of the UVF's importation of over 50,000 rifles in April 1914. The *Gaelic American* noted the illegality of the UVF's operation, and argued on its front page "Gun Running Connived At- British government allowed the Carsonites to land their arms and take them safely inland."<sup>65</sup> When Irish Volunteers attempted their own gun-running operation, albeit on a much smaller scale, at Howth, Ireland in July of the same year, they were intercepted by British Metropolitan Police. When the Metropolitan Police attempted to return to Dublin, they were followed by an angry group of civilians, who hurled insults, stones, and bottles indiscriminately. The police formed ranks, and in the confusion, the men misinterpreted an order to fire into the crowd to disperse them. Four civilians died. The "Bachelor's Walk Massacre" was immediately a public relations nightmare for the British, for it directly contradicted the government's official passivity to the same operation by the UVF.<sup>66</sup> Such obvious bias indicated outright preferential treatment, and the nationalists listed increasingly towards a more militarized response, as opposed to the constitutional methods espoused by the Irish Party. The outlines of a potential civil war in Ireland seemed increasingly distinct.

In 1914, the Great War began in Europe, and the three years of American neutrality proved to be critical ones for Irish American nationalists. The *Clan na Gael* balanced on the tightrope of public opinion while remaining patriotic Americans. Now in

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<sup>65</sup> The *Gaelic American*, Volume XI, Number 23, Whole Number 560, June 6, 1914 in the Joseph McGarrity Papers, Villanova Digital Archives, Falvey Library

<sup>66</sup> Finnan, *John Redmond and Irish Unity, 1912-1918*, 75



his seventies, John Devoy remained as vocal and attentive as ever. The Great War drove him to new exertions as Woodrow Wilson's administration slid into a pro-Allied posture. In the pages of the *Gaelic American*, Devoy trumpeted the absolute necessity of neutrality to his predominantly northeastern readership. On February 2<sup>nd</sup>, Devoy rhetorically asked "Is England to Run the United States?" on the front page of the *Gaelic American*, hoping to fan the flames of American independence, not acquiescence to British foreign policy programming.<sup>67</sup> The collaboration of Irish and German Americans, rooted in their common enmity towards Britain, became deeper still. The same collaboration also existed in Europe, where Irish nationalists were involved in delicate negotiations with German envoys, both seeking to wound Britain. In America, John Devoy and a delegation of *Clan* members including Joseph McGarrity formally met with the German consul general in New York. The *Clan* group "formally proposed to align the Irish-American movement with Germany on behalf of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in Dublin."<sup>68</sup>

Any blow to Redmond was a boon to the *Clan*, and the members of the Executive Council of the *Clan* renewed their efforts at resisting Redmond's policies, and reasserted their pro-German program. The beginning of WWI had temporarily shelved the Home Rule bill, but the *Clan* remained opposed to a constitutional solution to the Irish question that did not mean Ireland's independence. Redmond saw Britain's entry in the war as a bright opportunity to demonstrate Ireland's fealty to the Empire, which would allay Unionist fears of Home Rule and thus ensure its peaceful implementation. Redmond

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<sup>67</sup> The *Gaelic American*, Volume XI, Number 7, Whole Number 544, February 14, 1914, in the Joseph McGarrity Papers, Villanova Digital Archives, Falvey Library

<sup>68</sup> Golway, *Irish Rebel*, 198

encouraged the Irish Volunteers to enlist in the British army, a political move that inflamed Irish nationalists. The Irish Volunteers were a domestic defense force created in response to Ulster's arming, not a national guard to be mustered in Britain's war effort. For Redmond to urge the Irish Volunteers to sacrifice themselves for Britain rather than Ireland seemed the height of accommodation, not to mention tone-deaf. Nonetheless, Redmond promised the Volunteers to the Allied manpower effort. This provoked a split between a faction led by Eoin MacNeill and Padraig Pearse (numbering about 12,000 members) and those loyal to Redmond. The *Clan*, anti-Redmond to begin with, vigorously rebutted the suggestion that he and he alone spoke for Irish nationalists. The *Clan* took particular issue with using the Volunteers in a European war, and contended "Ireland had no quarrel with Germany...and the young manhood of Ireland should stay at home and out of His Majesty's bloodied uniforms."<sup>69</sup> Patrick Ford's *Irish World*, once a bastion of support for Redmond, became increasingly hostile towards him. The *Irish World* provided the most widely circulated media for the Home Rule position, and had unwaveringly supported Redmond prior to World War I. However, even the *Irish World* exhibited the shift in public opinion towards Redmond's war-time policies. "Ireland, the paper felt, had no obligation to fight for England and Redmond had no power from the Irish people to act as a British recruiting agent."<sup>70</sup> Going further still, the paper "refused to accept the notion that the war, which it saw as one of continental rivalries, in any way effected Ireland's vital interests."<sup>71</sup> The majority Irish American support for Redmond started waning. In another ominous sign, President Michael Ryan of the United Irish

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<sup>69</sup> Golway *Irish Rebel*, 200

<sup>70</sup> Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question, 1910-1922*, 37

<sup>71</sup> *ibid*

League in America wrote to Redmond telling him that he felt the UIL was no longer necessary, as Home Rule had received royal assent in September of 1914. The UIL and the *Irish World* were two Redmondite stalwarts, and their withdrawal of support was another indication that moderate, mainstream support in Irish America for Redmond was slipping. The volume of the resistance to Redmond and Home Rule was most assuredly noticeable, for Dr. John G. Coyle, replacement president after Michael Ryan's resignation, reported to Redmond that "the noise and clamor made [by the Irish-German groups] were quite capable of making the American public think that all the Irish were pro-German and anti-Redmond."<sup>72</sup> Obviously, the *Clan's* marketing campaign was bearing new fruit.

In 1914, Sir Roger Casement, an Anglo-Irish knight of the British Empire, became a high-profile, vocal state actor for Irish nationalism. A "trophy convert," Casement was famous for his humanitarian work in the Belgian Congo.<sup>73</sup> In 1913, Casement published an anonymous article in Thomas MacDonough's *Irish Review* that received critical praise from Irish nationalists. His Irish nationalism was of the revolutionary sort, and he was one of the founders of the Irish Volunteers. His relationship with the *Clan na Gael* began in July of 1914 as a result of his mission to raise money to buy arms for the Volunteers. The Irish Volunteers lacked weapons, particularly in comparison to the well-armed Ulster Volunteer Force. After the split over Redmond's coup, the remaining minority Volunteer group led by Pearse and MacNeill was desperately dependent on American money to purchase guns. The Irish Republican

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<sup>72</sup> Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question, 1910-1922*, 40

<sup>73</sup> Golway, *Irish Rebel*, 203

Brotherhood and *Clan na Gael* stepped into the breach and publicized fundraising efforts for the Volunteers. In October, Casement returned to the United States, this time on a much more delicate exercise. He proposed to go “to Berlin and act as the Irish movement’s ambassador and lobbyist, and to raise a brigade made up of Irish prisoners-of-war in German camps.”<sup>74</sup> The sinews binding the German and Irish and American conspiracy grew tighter.

In 1913 and 1914 the *Clan na Gael* faced the awesome task of marshalling resistance to the third Home Rule Bill read in Parliament. This Home Rule Bill was massively popular within the moderate Irish American community, as well as the majority of the Irish populace. The Catholic Church also supported Home Rule as it aligned with their political conservatism in Ireland. In a strange twist of fate, the *Clan na Gael* was joined in opposition by a most unlikely ally: the Ulster Unionists. It was a case of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” Ulster Unionists, led by Sir Edward Carson, flatly refused the premise of Home Rule, demanding that Ireland remain a part of the Union. Although there could obviously be no collaboration, both the *Clan* and the Ulster Unionists were both wholly engaged in defeating the Home Rule Bill from their respective positions.

The *Clan na Gael* also had to combat the anti-Catholic bias still prevalent in the earliest twentieth century, without revealing their ambivalence, if not outright hostility, towards the official Catholic Church and its hierarchy. The *Clan na Gael* championed a policy of inclusion, not assimilation, to galvanize Irish American resistance to John Redmond, Home Rule and American participation in World War I. The Clan’s insistence

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<sup>74</sup> Golway, *Irish Rebel*, 203

on an equal Irish American claim to being “patriotic Americans” undoubtedly created more animated, involved ethnic activists. In 1915, these new winds of patriotism, identity, participation, and resistance would all assemble into one great movement.

## CHAPTER THREE

### AN INCOMING TIDE (1915)

At 73, John Devoy was struggling to keep up with his own murderous pace. He was one of the last living Fenians. His prolific correspondence with dozens of people necessitated switching to a typewriter as he grew older. His eyesight weakened, and his hearing was nearly gone. In 1915, his Fenian blood brother, Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, died a feeble death. Recently reconciled after decades of bitter estrangement, the Rossa and Devoy reconnection was forged by Rossa's wife, who reminded Devoy of their shared past: "I think if you would come and talk of your earlier hopes and labours together... it would do him a world of good. He has a simple and loving heart, and you were very dear to it long ago." The reunion of Devoy and Rossa was mirrored in the rapprochement in the Irish Volunteers for Rossa's funeral. Irish past and present was being forged into one vital movement. Devoy was now the last of the old breed.

In America, the continued exertions of the *Clan na Gael* in three distinct segments continued to pressure American opinion on the Irish question. A fiery public relations campaign fed with constant pro-German publications, demonstrations, and fundraisers galvanized Irish Americans. The *Clan* took advantage of the growing Irish republican fervor that was quickly replacing the moderate, Home Rule nationalists through activism aimed at opposition to Redmond and his dedication to the Allies, and continued collaboration with the IRB. John Redmond's pro-Empire activities put him at direct odds

with a growing number of Irish, and Irish Americans. For the first three years of World War I, America's neutrality was a hot-button issue in a nation of so many immigrants who hailed from the participating countries. To counteract a pro-Allied bias in the media, John Devoy and the *Gaelic American* argued that Germany was actually Ireland's best hope for independence. Former Fenian Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa's funeral in the summer of 1915 provided the rousing symbolism and rhetoric that emboldened this revolutionary undertaking, and awakened a complacent Irish American middle class. The massive demonstration at Madison Square Garden in the same summer showed the depth of a new mobilization for the Irish independence movement. The events of 1912-1914 provided the current for a militant Irish nationalism. 1915 developed the current into a tide. The *Clan na Gael* capitalized on the collision of several outside forces to create the best possible situation for the Irish republican movement to exploit.

The *Clan na Gael* sustained its public relations onslaught on the Irish American public to counteract a pro-Anglo bias in American media in 1915. Primarily utilizing the *Gaelic American* and now joined by the *Irish World*, the *Clan* promoted a radical pro-German position, not just neutrality. They also blasted the "pecuniary" motivations of the defense manufacturers who profited from war, and the big banking houses that provided the loans to float the war effort for the Allies.<sup>75</sup> The *Gaelic American* highlighted the Kaiser's Catholic chaplains as exemplars to better contrast the Protestant Allies. The *Clan's* campaign was aided by the publication of many pamphlets and short monographs, such as Frank Koester's *The Lies of the Allies*,<sup>76</sup> Sir Roger Casement's *The Crime*

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<sup>75</sup> *Gaelic American*, Volume XII, Number 5, January 30, 1915, Joseph McGarrity Collection, Villanova Digital Archives, Falvey Library

<sup>76</sup> Frank Koester, *The Lies of the Allies*, (New York: Issues and Events Co, Inc., 1915)

*Against Europe: A Possible Outcome of the War of 1914*,<sup>77</sup> and Edward Steiner's *The Confession of a Hyphenated American*.<sup>78</sup> Former Syracuse, New York mayor James K. McGuire contributed two widely read books: *What Could Germany Do For Ireland?*<sup>79</sup> and *The King, The Kaiser, and Irish Freedom*<sup>80</sup>. Headlines from the *Gaelic American* in January 1915 trumpet the anti-Allied position, blaring: "Illegal Recruiting Done in the British Consulate,"<sup>81</sup> and "England and Her Allies Are Supplied With Munitions of War and American Maritime Commerce Severely Affected."<sup>82</sup>

Augmenting the media blitz, the *Clan* focused on impressive demonstrations to resist pro-Allied sympathies. By early 1915, President Wilson's approval of vast loans to fund the Allies drew America ever closer to the Allied side, no matter his official proclamations of neutrality. Most frequently working in tandem with German groups, a massive public pro-neutrality rally was held on June 24, 1915 at Madison Square Garden. A jubilant John Devoy claimed attendance numbers inside and outside the Garden at 100,000, while the New York Police Department put the gate closer to 75,000.<sup>83</sup> Either way, it was a highly effective gathering. The German American/ Irish American coalition had successfully courted William Jennings Bryan as their featured speaker, a coup for

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<sup>77</sup> Sir Roger Casement, *The Crime Against Europe: A Possible Outcome of the War of 1914*, (Philadelphia, Celtic Press, 1915)

<sup>78</sup> Edward Steiner, *The Confession of A Hyphenated American*, (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co, c.1916)

<sup>79</sup> James K. McGuire, *What Could German Do For Ireland?*, (New York: Wolfe Tone Company, 1916)

<sup>80</sup> James K. McGuire, *The King, The Kaiser, and Irish Freedom*, (New York: Devin-Adair Company, 1915)

<sup>81</sup> *Gaelic American*, January 9, 1915, Volume XII, Number 2, Whole Number 591, Joseph McGarrity Papers, Villanova Digital Archives, Falvey Library

<sup>82</sup> *Gaelic American*, January 30, 1915, Volume XII, Number 5, Whole Number 594, Joseph McGarrity Papers, Villanova Digital Archives, Falvey Library

<sup>83</sup> Golway, *Irish Rebel*, 206



their demonstration. Recently resigned as Secretary of State for Woodrow Wilson, Bryan's passionate pacifism was no longer in tandem with Wilson's foreign policy. The day after his resignation was made public, Bryan remained hopeful of his influence, saying, "I believe I can do more on the outside to prevent war than I can do on the inside... I can work to direct public opinion so it will not exert pressure for extreme action."<sup>84</sup> Bryan quickly followed through on his promise to "direct public opinion," for the Madison Square Garden rally was less than one month from his resignation. Bryan reminded the crowd gathered:

There is no reason why any citizen of this country should desire war, and I am sure the number of those who actually do desire it is infinitesimally small.

This class is made up of those who have a pecuniary interest in war and of those who regard war as a moral stimulant. Outside of the class actually desiring war, there is a somewhat larger class whose members, while opposing war as a general proposition and desiring peace in the abstract, magnify international differences. They believe that a nation's prestige requires it to constantly reiterate its willingness and readiness to resort to force.<sup>85</sup>

Bryan's remarks revealed his perception of American public opinion. He neatly drew a line between the majority of Americans who did not desire war, and those who saw America's global position as an imperative to intervention. For John Devoy and the *Clan*, as well as the German-American interest groups, netting a high-profile, elite politician like William Jennings Bryan was a public relations victory guaranteed to get heavy press coverage outside the realm of the ethnic weeklies and media. Five days after

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<sup>84</sup> Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson*,

<sup>85</sup> *The Gaelic American*, Vol. XII. No. 26, June 26, 1915, Joseph McGarrity Papers, Villanova Digital Archives, Falvey Library

the Madison Square Garden rally, another public relations opportunity presented itself with the death of Fenian Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa. O'Donovan Rossa's funeral provided all the symbolism and spirituality that fed the new revolutionary spirit.

O'Donovan Rossa spent his final years an incoherent, raving, feeble man. Once the closest of conspirators, he and Devoy were bitterly estranged over the *Clan's* Dynamite Campaign of the 1880s.<sup>86</sup> They had not spoken since, until Rossa's wife pleaded with Devoy to visit him as his senility advanced. Devoy relented, and was a regular visitor at his bedside until his death on June 29, 1915. He was 83. Devoy, ever the pragmatist, cabled Thomas Clarke in Dublin: "Rossa dead. What shall we do?"

"Send his body home at once," came the reply.<sup>87</sup>

The *Clan* moved swiftly to capitalize on the publicity surrounding O'Donovan Rossa's death: the most significant practical indication of the new martial spirit in Ireland was the rapprochement of the Irish Volunteers into one body for O'Donovan Rossa's funeral. As a former Fenian, Rossa's funeral was guaranteed a good turnout by the Irish and Irish American republican groups. His endorsement of the "Dynamite Campaign" lost him many of his tightest circle in the late 1880s, but in death all was forgiven- even Rossa's tepid endorsement of Redmond. Ultimately, Rossa was embraced by all Irish nationalists, not just republican ones. It was the first time that the Irish Volunteers and the National Volunteers operated in tandem since their acrimonious split in 1914. They

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<sup>86</sup> The "Dynamite Campaign" split the *Clan na Gael* into two factions: those who supported the terror campaign against British officials and those who believed in a traditional uprising/rebellion. O'Donovan Rossa was one of the chief proponents of the Dynamite Campaign, while John Devoy led the 'traditional' physical-force men.

<sup>87</sup> Golway, *Irish Rebel*, 207

bridged their differences to honor a shared hero of Irish nationalism. The grave-side oration by Padraig Pearse, commander of the Irish Volunteers, became a defining proclamation of the revolutionaries in Ireland and in America. Rossa's unrepentant Fenian past, the thousands who honored his passing, all were fodder for the *Clan's* unrelenting public relations campaign. It was nearly a benediction for the Irish revolutionary nationalists.

No strangers to symbolism, the Irish Americans held a funeral mass in St. Peter's Church on Staten Island before shipping Rossa to his final resting place in Dublin's Glasnevin Cemetery. According to the *Irish Times* report the following day, the Dublin funeral procession was lengthy, somber, and well-organized. Pearse's revolutionary nationalism exalted both O'Donovan Rossa and the Irish nationalist cause. His words would provide the clarion call for a coming revolution:

I may be taken as speaking on behalf of a new generation that has been re-baptised in the Fenian faith, and that has accepted the responsibility of carrying out the Fenian programme... We of the Irish Volunteers, and you others who are associated with us in to-day's task and duty, are bound together and must stand together henceforth in brotherly union for the achievement of the freedom of Ireland... we pledge to Ireland our love, and we pledge to English rule in Ireland our hate... The Defenders of this Realm have worked well in secret and in the open. They think that they have pacified Ireland. They think that they have purchased half of us and intimidated the other half. They think that they have foreseen everything, think that they have provided against everything; but the fools, the fools, the fools!— they have left us our Fenian dead; and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace.<sup>88</sup>

The *Clan's* promise to help arm the Irish Volunteers resulted in fundraising efforts publicized in the *Gaelic American*. Much of 1914's *Gaelic American* front pages

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<sup>88</sup> "O'Donovan Rossa's Funeral Oration," by Padraig Pearse, August 1, 1915, Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin, Ireland.

kept the call for dollars forefront in Irish American consciousness. By 1915, the *Gaelic American* made their anti-Redmond rhetoric front-page news just as often as their fundraising for the Volunteers. The first issue of 1915's *Gaelic American* set the tone: "TRAITORS AND INFORMERS HELP THE ENGLISH," with the sub-heading "Redmond Lost To Even A Sense of Shame."<sup>89</sup> While resistance to Home Rule was a particular focus of the *Clan na Gael*, Redmond's efforts on behalf of British recruitment were also deemed a priority for resistance. Irish blood should not be shed in a European war. The *Gaelic American* emphasized the senseless loss of life in a British army for Irish enlistees, promising readers "Regiments Wiped Out, Reinforced by Drafts From Home and Then Slaughtered Again..."<sup>90</sup> Ireland's nationalists did not enlist in the British army, however, a decided disavowal of John Redmond's earnest recruiting efforts. Redmond and the Irish Party realized that much of their war policy centered on the enlistment issue. If Ireland's nationalists refused to enlist, it would smack of disloyalty to the war effort, and point to a further divergence from the Empire. These were twin pillars of Redmond's optimistic war policy, because patriotic support of the war was supposed to ensure the good faith necessary for implementation of Home Rule. When the Irish Volunteers split in 1914, the National Volunteers (Redmond's vastly larger majority group) suffered from Redmond's decision to keep them a political wing of his Irish Party, whereas the Irish Volunteers were militarily minded, deeply influenced by their IRB infiltration, and more

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<sup>89</sup> The *Gaelic American*, Vol. XII. No. 1, January 2, 1915, Whole Number 590, Joseph McGarrity Papers, Villanova Digital Archives, Falvey Library

<sup>90</sup> The *Gaelic American*, Vol. XII. No. 5, January 30, 1915, Whole Number 594, Joseph McGarrity Papers, Villanova Digital Archives, Falvey Library

radicalized by Redmond's continued fealty to British war policy. To be sure, it was not just Irish Volunteers who were disillusioned by Redmond's war-time strategy.

Redmond's efforts on behalf of enlistment repelled more and more moderate Irish Americans, the exact demographic Redmond relied on. For the Irish at home, and the Irish in America, Redmond's endeavors on behalf of British recruiting were folly at best, and treachery at worst. The enlistment crisis also forced Prime Minister Asquith's hand, for the manpower demands of World War I forced a reckoning with the "Irish Question." The Irish viewed enlistment with scorn, for why serve for a government that refused to implement any measure of self-rule? World War I was regarded as Britain's fight, not Ireland's- a further step towards a republicanism. Worse yet, if voluntary enlistments failed to keep pace with the manpower demands of wartime, conscription would be enacted. Travis Crosby, a Lloyd George biographer, notes that Asquith's reaction to the enlistment/ conscription crisis was tortuous, even for Asquith, explaining "he appointed committee after committee during the conscription debate, perhaps as a delaying tactic to introduce conscription slowly. Or perhaps it was a device to keep him in the game with the hope the conscriptionist chorus would slowly die down."<sup>91</sup> His "wait-and-see" approach failed miserably again, and he was forced to fashion a partial conscription bill in January 1916. It passed overwhelmingly, though the Irish Nationalists provided more than one-half the opposing votes. The Liberals had to accept that winning the war was the ultimate goal, not Liberal principles.<sup>92</sup> Tellingly, recruitment in Ireland stalled all across

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<sup>91</sup> Travis L. Crosby, *The Unknown Lloyd George: A Statesman in Conflict*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 201

<sup>92</sup> Joseph P. Finnan, *John Redmond and Irish Unity, 1912-1918*, (Ithaca: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 111

the board by 1916, with Ireland ultimately contributing less than 6% of its male population- the lowest number in the British Empire.<sup>93</sup> The formation of the war-time coalition British government hastened this process.

The pressures of war, the unrelenting bloodbath on the Western Front, the disastrous Dardanelles campaign, all combined with a severe munitions shortage forced a reshuffling of the British government. Asquith's coalition government, formed in May 1915, was staffed with Home Rule's staunchest opponents. Asquith remained prime minister, and the majority of his cabinet were avowed enemies of Home Rule. The position of attorney-general went to Sir Edward Carson, a nod to his importance within the Conservative Party. John Redmond was offered a post, but it was a non-political one: postmaster-general. Redmond rejected the offer, because it was a) bad politics to accept any British offer while Home Rule was still hanging in the balance, and b) as he reminded Asquith, "from the Irish point of view [inclusion of Carson in the Cabinet] would do infinite harm and make our efforts to help [with the war] far more difficult."<sup>94</sup> The new cabinet reflected a resurgent Conservative Party in Britain, but the real issue for the Irish was the importance of the posts: Carson's post was by far the more influential. The incongruity of offering Redmond postmaster-general, and Carson attorney-general did not bother Asquith. For Irish Americans, the coalition government was yet another example of British perfidy- for where was the representative nationalist Irish if Sir Edward Carson, the face of the Ulster Unionists, was Cabinet level? Were both positions

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<sup>93</sup> *ibid*, 112

<sup>94</sup> Redmond correspondence to Asquith, dated May 19, 1915, quoted in Finnan, *John Redmond*, 106.

not equally deserving of representation? Padraig Pearse wrote Joseph McGarrity, updating him of the situation in Ireland:

You have seen by this that we have what is termed a coalition war ministry and Redmond will not be in a position to make Asquith toe the line and it is very likely we might say goodbye to the Home Rule Bill. Conscription will be the next and the Lord knows what its consequences will be as I am inclined to think many of the Irish will resist at the very outset.<sup>95</sup>

The creation of the coalition government served to emphasize the ever-greater disparity in treatment between the Unionists and the Irish nationalists, and Redmond increasingly became the target of disdain, even amongst his once-ardent supporters in Ireland and in Irish America. From their safe haven across the Atlantic, more radical Irish American voices started to outstrip the moderate, constitutional Home Rulers in Ireland and in America. The *Clan* actually had to join the fray in order to direct protests that were now evident all over the Irish American spectrum, not merely in radical republican Irish American circles.<sup>96</sup>

At Woodenbridge, County Wicklow- Redmond spoke to a group of Volunteers and exhorted them to fight for the Allied cause:

...It would be a disgrace forever to our country, and a reproach to her manhood, and a denial of the lessons of our history, if young Ireland confined her efforts to remaining at home to defend the shores of Ireland from an unlikely invasion and to shrink from the duty of approval on the field of battle.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Sean Cronin, *The McGarrity Papers-Revelations of the Irish Revolutionary Movement in Ireland and America 1900-1940*, (Tralee: Anvil Press, 1972), 59-60

<sup>96</sup> Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question, 1910-1922*, 31

<sup>97</sup> Finnan, *John Redmond and Irish Unity, 1912-1918*, 88

Redmond's war-time policy of accommodation to the British at the expense of Home Rule, exemplified by his speech at Woodenbridge, disappointed many Irish Americans. The "defection" of New York City's *Irish World* right after Redmond's Woodenbridge speech further marginalized the moderate Irish American nationalist position to the Irish question. The *Irish World* was one of Redmond's staunchest supporters, and was counted on to be the voice for Redmond's policy in America. Post-Woodenbridge speech, the United Irish League in America (UILA), a Redmond outreach group, also defected from its pro-Redmond/ Home Rule position. Michael Ryan, the UILA president, "refused to endorse the Allied cause," and by 1915 the League's treasurer reported to Redmond "there is no money whatever coming in."<sup>98</sup> In the absence of a highly circulated media vehicle to support its position, the moderate Irish nationalist position suffered further. Redmond's Irish Party would have no dedicated voice in Irish America throughout the whole of 1915. Irish American public opinion was now being even more heavily influenced by the revolutionary Irish nationalists and the *Clan na Gael*.

As the *Clan* utilized their near monopoly of the Irish American press in 1915, Sir Roger Casement (the trophy convert to the Irish nationalists) was in Berlin trying to raise an Irish brigade from captured Irish soldiers in German POW camps. The covert collaboration between the German government and the *Clan na Gael*/IRB intensified. As part of Casement's efforts for Irish nationalism, he extracted a statement from the German under-secretary in the Foreign Office outlining the official German attitude towards Ireland, which stated:

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<sup>98</sup> Finnan, *John Redmond and Irish Unity*, 1912-1918, 176-177



The Imperial Government formally declares that under no circumstances would Germany invade Ireland with a view to its conquest or the overthrow of native institutions in that country. [This] government...is inspired by goodwill towards a country and a people for whom Germany desires only national prosperity and national freedom.<sup>99</sup>

Unfortunately for Sir Roger Casement, this statement would be his greatest success on behalf of revolutionary Irish nationalism. His other goal would not be actualized, for the Irish Brigade was dead in the water from the outset. He naïvely believed he could get non-commissioned officers- many who served with their regiment for ten years or more- to desert their regiments to fight against the British in Ireland.<sup>100</sup> Sir Roger Casement's subsequent involvement with the IRB and the *Clan na Gael* would be further degraded by John Devoy's distrust of Casement. While Casement's mission to Germany was ultimately a failure, Casement's publicity value to the Irish nationalist cause was not yet depleted. The *Clan's* policy and program to agitate for Irish independence from America would not have been nearly as publicized without the involvement of Sir Roger Casement.

The failing gasps of the Irish parliamentary position in America created a void that the *Clan* rushed to fill. The disenchantment with a moderate, constitutional solution to the Irish question grew more pronounced. To profit from this entirely new demographic that joined the cause, the *Clan* needed to create a new organization that operated publicly, in order to combat the political elites' belief that the majority of the Irish in America still supported John Redmond and Home Rule. Accordingly, the *Clan* began planning a convention that would bring together prominent Irish Americans from

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<sup>99</sup> Tansill, *America and the Fight for Irish Freedom*, 180

<sup>100</sup> Tansill, *America and the Fight For Irish Freedom*, 185

all over the United States. This planning would occupy the last quarter of 1915, even as plans for a future rebellion moved from rhetoric to reality.

Devoy and the *Clan* sought to influence elite state officials such as the German Foreign Office to facilitate a collaboration between the German government and their own *Clan na Gael*/ IRB. With the help of the prestigious convert, Sir Roger Casement, the *Clan* and the Irish Republican Brotherhood cooperated with Germany to agitate for Irish independence. Although the alliance was covert, Devoy kept the *Gaelic American* decidedly pro-German, consistently keeping British faults and failures before his reading public. The *Clan*'s mission was deeply indebted to the failures of John Redmond's war-time policy of utmost cooperation with the British government. The failure of implementation of Home Rule, and its indefinite postponement aligned these failures squarely with Redmond and his Irish Party. The war's duration further exacerbated Redmond's woes, for recruiting amongst the Irish was already fraught with political quagmires. Redmond's recruiting activities further strained his tenuous grasp on the moderate Irish and Irish American majorities. The defections from the Redmondite position can be traced to his war-time program of accommodation, and the *Clan* was quick to capitalize. The stagnation of the United Irish League in America also contributed to Redmond's faltering appeal to Irish Americans, and by 1915 the organization was essentially shuttered.

The *Clan* and Irish Republican Brotherhood maintained their coordination throughout 1915, in fact, their partnership became even more productive with the greater funds being collected via *Clan* dues. Devoy was able to send regular amounts to fund the

IRB, and couriers carried it across the Atlantic to fund arms for the IRB.<sup>101</sup> The split in the Irish Volunteers actually created a tighter, more cohesive group that was not sympathetic to Redmond, and this brand of loyalty was crucial as the Irish Party lost ground, and the revolutionaries gained it. Plus, the Irish Volunteers were deeply infiltrated at all levels by the IRB, so they were most assuredly quasi-rebels, whether they realized it or not.<sup>102</sup>

1915 activated several currents that pulsed steadily below the surface in Irish nationalism, but now emerged full-tide. In 1915, the *Clan* maintained its steadfast opposition to anything short of Irish independence, but they were aided by outside world events that actually increased its effectiveness: the continuing World War, the lack of an effective Home Rule/ Redmond voice in the Irish American press, public relations symbolism such as O'Donovan Rossa's funeral, and John Redmond's blind allegiance to his own war-time policy. The *Clan* looked ahead to 1916 with greater resources, stronger allies, and a forthcoming rebellion. In 1916, the revolutionaries in Ireland would rise.

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<sup>101</sup> Terry Golway, *Irish Rebel: John Devoy and America's Fight For Ireland's Freedom*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) 204, 211

<sup>102</sup> *ibid* 207

## CONCLUSION

### TIDAL WAVE (1916)

Coinciding with the newer, more republican Irish American sentiment, the *Clan na Gael* issued a call for the leaders of Irish America to join together in New York City in March of 1915 for an “Irish Race Convention.” Lest this convention’s goals be misunderstood, the *Gaelic American* trumpeted its purpose clearly on its front page: “No Man Not in Favor of Complete Irish Freedom Need Apply For Admission.” When Devoy rose to speak, he quieted the crowd, but only spoke blandly of “imprudent speech.” But a quick perusal of the slightly buried article in the *Gaelic American* on the establishment of the Friends of Irish Freedom, a new public group dedicated to Irish independence, illuminates Devoy’s greater accomplishment: the officers, directors, and executives of the Friends of Irish Freedom were nearly all *Clan na Gael* men. Perhaps Devoy’s rare reserve was because he knew what the gathered conventioners did not: a rebellion in Ireland was less than six weeks away.

The moderate Irish position gradually ebbed away, giving way to a flooding current of Irish republicanism. In 1916, the *Clan* channeled the newly republican sentiment into one great movement for Irish independence. The *Clan*’s vigorous public relations effort in Irish America’s media, combined with foreign relations interventions at the state level, and intimate collaboration with the Irish Republican Brotherhood marked the great final thrust for Irish independence. The most direct contribution the *Clan* made

to the Easter Rising in Dublin, April 24, 1916 was their unwavering fundraising efforts. The political revolution could not have commenced without the economic support of the hard currency provided by the *Clan*. The sustained cost of the resistance over the previous twenty years of activism was possible only through the *Clan*'s dues, and fundraising appeals made directly to the upwardly mobile Irish Americans that made up the *Gaelic American*'s readership. The Easter Rising was the culmination of the *Clan*'s financial work for the previous twenty years.

Through the coordination of the *Clan na Gael* and the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the previous four years witnessed greater success in recruitment and fundraising for both organizations. The IRB leadership was well-known to their counterparts- many of the Irishmen travelled extensively to America on fundraising trips for various organizations. Padraig Pearse had a personal relationship with Devoy and Cohalan, Thomas Clarke was Devoy's personal secretary in New York several years earlier.<sup>103</sup> The close relationships on both sides of the Atlantic helped foster the trust that allowed the two organizations to operate and function nearly independently, but with the same goal. The collaboration between the two groups was nearly flawless, particularly considering the Atlantic that separated them. Both groups learned from the prior mistakes of the Fenians, and operated as cells, with very little overlap between them. Such operational security was obligatory, for the IRB was a separatist movement the British government suppressed ruthlessly. Even more, the British were adept at infiltrating the Irish independence groups, and Irish republican history was rife with examples of traitors, and double agents.

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<sup>103</sup> Golway, *Irish Rebel*, 193-194

For the IRB and the *Clan* to get this close to a rebellion without an internal leak was a near miracle. To protect this conspiracy, the two groups only communicated via ciphers in telegrams, and personal trans-Atlantic couriers. One such courier, Tommy O'Connor, arrived at Devoy's offices at the *Gaelic American* on February 5, 1916. O'Connor was a frequent courier between the IRB and the *Clan*; he was a steward on a Cunard liner, and thus travelled between the United States and Ireland without suspicion. O'Connor handed a sealed envelope to Devoy. The enclosed ciphered message was from the Supreme Council of the IRB. It read:

We have decided to begin action on Easter Sunday. We must have your arms and munitions in Limerick between Good Friday and Easter Saturday. We expect German help immediately after beginning action. We might be compelled to begin earlier.<sup>104</sup>

It was less than three months away. The IRB completely infiltrated the Irish Volunteers, but they still lacked adequate arms. Although Devoy sent over \$100,000 to Ireland and the IRB in the last six months, it was still not enough to fund a successful gun-running operation beneath British noses. There was much work to be done. This work required the German conspirators.

The *Clan*'s German alliance/conspiracy was the most delicate of their three-pronged campaign for Irish independence. The advent of World War One made any Irish overtures immediately treasonous, therefore Irish Americans would have to take the lead in any advances made to the German government. Sir Roger Casement was supposed to be the personal link between the *Clan* quasi-officially, and the German government.

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<sup>104</sup> Terry Golway, *Irish Rebel: John Devoy and America's Fight For Ireland's Freedom*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) 212

Casement, the trophy convert to Irish republicanism, was in Berlin to raise his “Irish Brigade.” His failure to do so made Casement a liability. Further, Casement’s travelling companion, one Adler Christiansen, hectored Devoy for money constantly from the time of his association with Casement. An exchange between Joseph McGarrity and Devoy reveals Devoy’s suspicions towards Christiansen, whom is referred to as “the nurse.”

Dear Joe,

I have got two reports on the nurse. On the first day he did not turn up at the house at all. On the second he came out late looking very dissipated and went over to NY, where he turned back and forward, evidently to avoid being followed, met very shady looking men, went into barrooms resorted by a gang, stood looking into store windows mostly jewelry- for the evident purpose of seeing if there was any one on the other side of the street watching him, and acted in every way like a professional criminal. Then he returned to Jersey and was lost.

A saloonkeeper from his own country has kept for him a passport under another name three years ago, on which he returned. The places he visited are quiet gambling resorts. The y noted the anchor on his hand.

Everything indicates that he is an old hand at this sort of life. One of the men after him is his countryman....

Yours truly,  
J.D.<sup>105</sup>

Clearly, Devoy felt that using *Clan* resources, i.e. manpower, to follow the “nurse” to establish his guilt was worth the expense. It is also worthwhile to note that Joseph McGarrity believed that Casement was the second coming of Wolfe Tone. For Devoy to so pointedly provide surveillance on Casement’s companion indicates he was desperately

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<sup>105</sup> Correspondence from John Devoy to Joseph McGarrity, 21 January 1916, John Devoy Papers, National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland, digital access on 1/17/2018

trying to establish the unreliability of Casement's judgment via his choice of companion. Particularly so, since Casement was in Germany under the imprimatur of the *Clan*/IRB, and privy to some of the most secret of plans. Devoy's misgivings towards Casement extended to keeping him isolated in Berlin while the most delicate of preparations were being made for the rebellion. In fact, Casement was so disillusioned by the Germans by this point that he decided a rebellion was pure folly and would result in an Irish slaughterhouse. Unfortunately for Devoy and the *Clan*/IRB, Casement's activities were the least of their worries: British intelligence cracked the German diplomatic codes and were fully aware of the conspiracy between German-American-Irish collaborators. Yet again, the Irish and Irish Americans were outmaneuvered at the highest levels.

The *Clan*'s public relations goals and messaging necessitated a broadly supported, public organization to assemble the various Irish American groups that expressed their support for the Irish independence movement. Accordingly, the *Clan* spearheaded a call for an "Irish Race Convention," a gathering of the top Irish American leadership: "Over the signature of 350 well-known Irish American leaders, an invitation was sent out on 8 February inviting some 2,300 reliable Irish Americans to attend."<sup>106</sup> Attendees were expected to march in lockstep with its stated mission: the independence of Ireland. Joseph McLaughlin, national president of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), expressed the new nationalist fervor succinctly in a letter to John Devoy: "Rest assured, I am strongly opposed to admitting any but those whose sentiments are in accord with ours. The Convention will neither be the time nor the place to argue who is right, or who is wrong.

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<sup>106</sup> Francis M. Carroll, *American Opinion on the Irish Question, 1910-1923: A Study in Opinion and Policy*, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1978), 52



We're right, and let the other fellows keep away."<sup>107</sup> The AOH best exemplified the change in middle of the road Irish Americans, for they previously supported Home Rule, and represented the conservative Irish American majority. However, the combination of the world war, John Redmond's mishandling of the Irish political situation, and the Irish American reaction to nativist claims of "dual loyalties" created a decidedly more republican spirit in Irish Americans. The *Gaelic American* publicized the Convention on page one the day of its opening, predicting it would "be a success beyond the most sanguine expectations of its promoters. The question they [the promoters] are trying to solve now is whether the large hall in which the Convention is to be held can hold all who will come."<sup>108</sup> When the convention opened, it was in an "atmosphere of fervid enthusiasm."<sup>109</sup> Temporary Chairman Justice John W. Goff also provided the keynote speech of the Convention.

The *Clan*'s public relations efforts and fundraising were activated and supported by the creation of the new public organization, the Friends of Irish Freedom (FOIF). The FOIF would become the face of the revolutionary Irish American organizations. The FOIF was completely saturated with *Clan* members, and "of the seventeen members of the executive committee, fifteen were members of the *Clan*."<sup>110</sup> While Victor Herbert was elected president of the new organization, the real levers of power were operated by Judge Daniel C. Cohalan, long-time member of the Executive Council of the *Clan na*

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<sup>107</sup> *ibid*

<sup>108</sup> The *Gaelic American*, Vol. XIII, No. 10, March 4, 1916, Whole Number 651, Villanova Digital Archives, Falvey Library

<sup>109</sup> Charles Callan Tansill, *America and the Fight For Irish Freedom, 1866-1922: An Old Story Based On New Data*, (New York, The Devon-Adair Company, 1957), 189

<sup>110</sup> *ibid*

*Gael*. Cohalan was also one of the very few men that John Devoy trusted implicitly, and their partnership spanned the two decades of the *Clan*'s campaign to influence Irish Americans into supporting Ireland's independence. Steeped in *Clan na Gael* ideology and adherents, one finds the FOIF constitution unsurprising:

...Today the alert and masterful enemies of England realize that for the peace of the world England must be deprived of mastery and domination over Ireland... We appeal to the Concert of the Powers, and particularly to America, if she be represented in such Council, to recognize that Ireland is a European and not a British island; to appreciate that its complete independence and its detachment from the British Empire are vital to the freedom of the seas... and we demand in the name of liberty and of the small nationalities that Ireland may be cut off from England and restored to her rightful place among the nations of the earth.<sup>111</sup>

Coverage from the *Gaelic American* and *Irish World* was uniformly ecstatic, but a leavening measure of public opinion can be provided by the *New York Times* coverage of the same event. On the second day of the convention, the *Times* bemoaned the rhetoric of the speakers, taking particular issue with the claim that "Ireland's manhood... was being dragged [into the British Army] by force, starvation, or deceit." The column went further—"the best comment on this theory is the fact that, two months ago, there were nearly 300,000 Irishmen in the British Army, 145,000 who volunteered in Ireland...A fine compliment to those brave men, fighting for liberty and democracy-to say that 'force, starvation or deceit' has made them its victims."<sup>112</sup>

Naturally, John Redmond and the Home Rulers disowned the proceedings in New York City, and their Irish American counterparts denounced the conference, and resolved "...The Irish in Ireland are not contract breakers. Ever since O'Connell's day they have

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<sup>111</sup> *ibid*, 189-190

<sup>112</sup> *New York Times*, March 5, 1916, "The Irish Race' At a Hotel," ProQuest Historical Newspapers p. 20, accessed 11/12/2017

fought for Home Rule (first as ‘Repeal of the Union’). Now that it is granted them, they are keeping their part of the contract. They have sent 142,000 of their sons, voluntarily and without ‘force, starvation, or deceit’ to the front, and are adding to that force at the rate of 1,000 a week.”<sup>113</sup> Yet no matter how the moderate Home Rule position protested, the sheer energy and thunder of the Irish independence movement drowned out the more muted, traditional Home Rule stance. The *Clan* was succeeding, not through the success of their public relations campaign necessarily, but because they were ever alert to advantageous shifts in public opinion, and ever quick to exploit them. The creation of the Friends of Irish Freedom gave the *Clan* a public platform for operations, and most importantly- a fundraising conduit. Less than two weeks after its inception, the FOIF raised sufficient funds to enable Devoy to send \$10,000 to the IRB via trans-Atlantic courier.

Four weeks later, Irish rebels rose in Dublin. The severe constraints on communications created by the reliance on trans-Atlantic couriers between the IRB and the *Clan* led to garbled, incorrect information crossing both directions. The dates of the German infiltration of the weapons so desperately needed for the rebellion were alternately placed between Easter Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The lack of precision in logistics did not just extend to a German distribution of weapons- John Devoy’s own estimate of Irish republican strength was grossly exaggerated by his reliance on the support of the Redmondite faction of the Irish Volunteers, whom Devoy promised would

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<sup>113</sup> *New York Times*, March 2, 1916, “Irish Pledge Aid to the President: Executive Committee of American Societies Denounce Emmett Day Conference.” ProQuest Historical Newspapers, p. 5, accessed 11/12/2017

also rise in rebellion when the time came.<sup>114</sup> Casement did attempt to stop the rebellion: put ashore by German submarine, he was captured on Good Friday. The British navy intercepted the German trawler carrying the arms meant for the rebellion, and the Germans scuttled the boat, sending the weapons to the bottom of the sea. Rather than cancel the rebellion altogether, the Military Council of the IRB decided to go ahead after a twenty-four-hour postponement. The Rising began on Easter Monday, April 24, 1916. It was crushed by the following Sunday.

The *Clan na Gael* held the torch of Irish independence aloft in America for over thirty years. From 1912-1916, the *Clan* activated a tri-segmented campaign to agitate for Irish independence: public relations promotions, collaboration with the IRB, and interventions with head-of-state actors on both sides of the Atlantic. The pages of the *Gaelic American* and *Irish World* highlighted the public relations segment of the campaign. These weeklies also allowed the *Clan na Gael* to promote the massive demonstrations, conventions, and meetings that spurred Irish American donations in support of the Irish independence movement. The Irish Race Convention in 1916 officially repudiated the parliamentary party politics of Home Rule and John Redmond, collected the cream of Irish American leadership to provide a mandate for Irish independence, and created the Friends of Irish Freedom. The FOIF was the leading advocate of Irish independence for the following ten years.

Although the Rising was a political failure in the short term, it ultimately paved the way for an independent Ireland. The Rising would not have been possible without the financial support of the *Clan na Gael*. However, the *Clan's* collaboration with the IRB

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<sup>114</sup> Golway, *Irish Rebel*, 217

was successful. The ability to create a trans-oceanic partnership, given the constraints posed by secrecy and “modern” communications, boded well for future activities. The Irish Republican Brotherhood would outlive the Rising, although the majority of its leadership was executed in British reprisals. But there would be other leaders.

The conspiracy between Germans and Irish and Irish Americans was also ultimately unsuccessful. But it showed the confidence with which Irish Americans were now operating on behalf of Irish independence. The advent of World War One provided a useful banner to gather American dissidents under- the most vocal advocates of American neutrality were the two largest immigrant groups in America: the Germans and Irish. They became natural allies, aligned through their mutual distaste of the British. The *Clan* exploited this organic partnership and extended it further, always maneuvering to give Irish independence the greatest advantage. The apex of the *Clan*'s foreign relations activities, the third segment of their campaign for Irish independence, was the covert agreement between the German government and the IRB, facilitated by the *Clan* as a quasi-neutral go-between.

When the twentieth century began, the *Clan na Gael* was a small, tightly-knit group of oath-bound agitators for Irish independence. Rising from the ashes of the Fenian Brotherhood, the Clan maintained the Fenian commitment to Ireland's complete separation from the British Empire. The first decade of the twentieth century witnessed greater Irish American participation in foreign relations, yet the majority of moderate Irish in America were content with a Home Rule solution to the Irish question. By the 1910's, a new current was sweeping Ireland and America alike, and the *Clan na Gael* worked tirelessly to harness the new spirit of Irish nationalism. The election of Woodrow

Wilson in 1912 invigorated the Irish American opposition, who saw Wilson's Anglophilia as a direct threat. As the winds of war swept over Europe, the Clan seized the opportunity presented by Europe's bloodbath to relentlessly advocate neutrality. By 1915, the Great War entangled America via the huge loans secured by the Allied Powers. Neutrality was becoming a lost hope. Nonetheless, the Clan persisted in their efforts, joining forces with German Americans overtly, and the German government covertly, with the motto "England's loss is Ireland's gain." As long as America remained officially neutral, such agitation could not be labeled treasonous or unpatriotic. The *Clan* was aided in their fight against Home Rule by an unlikely and accidental ally: the Ulster Unionists in Ireland were also virulently opposed to Home Rule, and worked just as assiduously to kill it. When the Unionists formed the Ulster Volunteer Force to "protect the Union," the Irish nationalists felt perfectly justified in forming their own similar organization. Additionally, by 1915, the war-time policies of John Redmond and his Irish Party repelled Irish Americans, who felt that Redmond betrayed Ireland and the Irish by first accepting postponement of Home Rule, and then promoting Irish recruitment for the British Army. The momentum that Redmond marshalled to force the Home Rule bill was squandered primarily by the advent of war, and then by Redmond's constant appeasement to the British government. The politicization of the Irish Volunteers, and Redmond's subsequent takeover of that organization created a further breach in Irish nationalist sentiment. The tide decidedly shifted, and the moderate Irish position gradually ebbed away, giving way to a flooding current of Irish republicanism. In 1916, the *Clan* channeled the newly republican sentiment into one great movement for Irish independence. The *Clan*'s vigorous public relations effort in America's media, combined

with foreign relations interventions at the head-of-state level, and intimate collaboration with the Irish Republican Brotherhood marked the great final thrust for Irish independence.

The Easter Rising on Monday, April 24, 1916 was the culmination of the *Clan's* work for the previous twenty years. The Rising was an abject failure. But the theme of the *Clan's* exploitation of outside events to the benefit of the cause of Irish independence continued. Through the efforts of John Devoy and the *Clan na Gael* in the years 1912-1916, Irish American opinion and the Irish American Roman Catholic hierarchy were persuaded that only an independent, republican Ireland was an acceptable political solution to the "Irish Question." The wake of the Rising and America's entry into the war both advanced the tide of Irish independence. It soon became a tidal wave.

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