

# The Case for Éamon de Valera's Birth and Baptismal Records Being Forgeries

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St. Agnes Church at 143 E. 43rd Street in New York City is historically famous as the baptismal site of Éamon de Valera because that's where it took place, *allegedly*. The baptism log signed by Father Henry MacDowall on December 3, 1882 states that a boy named Edward De Valeros was the child of Vivian De Valeros and Kate Coll. Vivian with an *a* instead of an *o* and *De Valeros* instead of *de Valera* have been chalked up as forgivable misspellings from a literacy-challenged era of yore but they haven't escaped notice since these details were potentially a matter of life and death for de Valera in 1916.



Figure 1 – de Valera in New York City, March 1919

That's because those seeking to spare de Valera from the firing squad in the aftermath of the Easter Rising sought to use his presumed American citizenship as leverage over the British authorities. Whether or not his being American ultimately played a factor in his being spared has been the subject of some debate but what is not debatable is that de Valera's birth and baptismal records became the subject of great interest at the time, and as certain events unfolded in Ireland one of those documents had to be officially amended. That is to say that when Sir Roger Casement was found guilty of treason on June 29, 1916, de Valera's birth certificate in New York was officially amended the following day on June 30. That

de Valera's original birth certificate contained enough serious typos (his name was listed as *George* and his last name as *De Valero*) to warrant an amendment in the first place is a well-known mysterious detail of his legacy. But what isn't known is the much wider picture and the truth that has remained a secret for more than a century. Éamon de Valera's original birth certificate and baptismal record are utter forgeries.

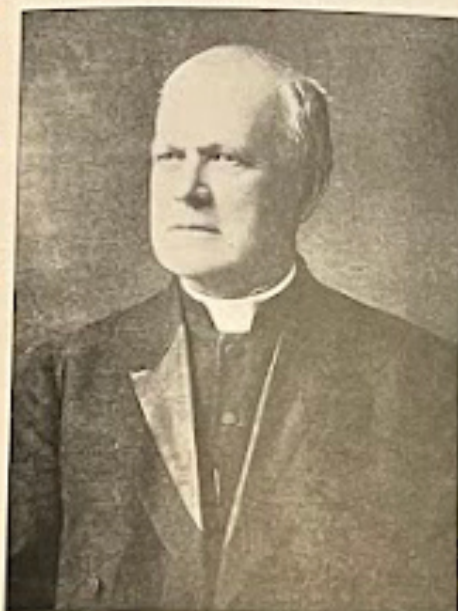
It all starts with St. Agnes Church. At the time of the Rising it was not just a house of worship for Catholics but also a central headquarters for Clan-na-Gael, the

American counterpart of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. The pastor in 1916, who figures as a central protagonist in an upcoming book, was Monsignor Henry Athanasius Brann, a Parkstown, County-Meath-born priest who was among the most important figures in Clan-na-Gael. Brann was extremely close with the Irish republican John Devoy and Devoy referred to him as "one of the most sterling Irish nationalists in America [that was] ever an advocate for Ireland's independence."<sup>1</sup> Brann was also close to Clan-na-Gael president John Kenny and they were publicly known to be cousins.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Brann commanded the respect of Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa who penned in his newspaper that Brann supported the dynamiting campaign on British

soil during the 1880s.<sup>3</sup> Brann is also known for giving a memorable speech at the Clan-na-Gael-organized Irish Race Convention of March 2, 1916 in New York where he called upon God to punish Ireland's enemies in the runup to the secretly planned Easter Rising.<sup>4</sup> There is even evidence to suggest that Brann was one of the four men in America that John Devoy claimed knew of the Rising in advance.<sup>5</sup> Coincidentally, the word "Brann" was even one of the two code words that Casement was given to identify friends upon his landing in Ireland to carry out his role in the Rising.<sup>6</sup>

While the extent of Brann's nationalist credentials, roles, and relationships will be its own subject for another time, that he was the arbiter of de Valera's baptismal evidence in 1916 when the American birth records were being sought to save his life is an extraordinarily overlooked detail.

Figure 2 - Monsignor Henry Athanasius Brann



But first, the birth certificate. There are varying accounts as to when the original copy was introduced into the discourse, including one account that says that de Valera's wife Sinéad had it readily available and immediately produced it for the US Consul in Dublin.<sup>7</sup> The Consul, however, Edwards Adams, who was notoriously unreliable with his paperwork, wrote in a memorandum he likely backdated (May 5, 1916) that he received a baptismal record from her, not a birth certificate.<sup>8</sup> But the details don't add up because he claimed the baptismal record had been signed by the Rev. Thomas J. Donlon, Assistant Rector of St. Agnes Church in New York City. Donlon, however, had not worked at St. Agnes in over a decade. He was only assistant rector there from 1891 - 1903 and was then serving

22 miles away in Irvington Parish (in Westchester County) at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in 1916. The exchange of any legitimate birth documents between Sinéad and Adams is unlikely as having happened at all during this time in face of a more reliable account given by an attorney in Philadelphia named Michael Francis Doyle. Doyle said that de Valera's family believed de Valera he had been born in Brooklyn, "but there was not a scrap of paper to prove this."<sup>9</sup> According to Doyle, Clan-na-Gael had searched through public records in New York immediately following de Valera's arrest to prove his American birth but came up with nothing. There was in fact no birth certificate available, nor any records available at all.

Doyle was no small time individual. In addition to being formerly employed by the US State Department he also had a direct line to President Woodrow Wilson. That's why when a birth certificate could not be located after de Valera's arrest it was he that received a call from local Clan-na-Gael leader Joseph McGarrity. McGarrity said to him while screaming into the telephone, "They're going to shoot de Valera! We've got to save that man!"<sup>10</sup>

Doyle responded to McGarrity's desperate pleas by getting on a train to New York to see if he could locate the record himself. "Within minutes Clan na Gael men were fanning out to cover every Catholic church in New York," Doyle said. "Parish priests, contacted by telephone, were getting their records ready for them."<sup>11</sup> Nothing was found, however. At the time, it was believed that de Valera could be executed at any minute. "With some others I went to the Church of St. Agnes, nearby at 43rd Street and Lexington Avenue," Doyle said. "We were looking for anything that might give us hope."<sup>12</sup> And so, in the presence of several members of Clan-na-Gael, a baptismal record was suddenly found.

"The parish priest, on the spot, prepared a certificate of the record and with this I caught the next train to Washington," Doyle stated.<sup>13</sup> Doyle said that within hours official communications were sent to Dublin and London. Whether or not this played any role in de Valera actually being spared is irrelevant. The point is that Doyle and those responsible for the document believed that de Valera had come within

seconds of being executed and that they alone had done whatever was necessary to save his life. For what it's worth Doyle would continue to remain front and center in the saga as he later became the attorney for Casement in Ireland, a job he performed unsuccessfully as readers are aware.



It's worth exploring now that the typos on de Valera's baptismal record appear to be intentional. Vivian, the entered misspelling of his father's name, ironically means *Alive* in Latin.<sup>14</sup> And De Valeros works in Latin as an anagram. *DV rosalee* using all the letters of De Valeros and even keeping consistent with the capitalization<sup>15</sup> means *God willing little rose*. Putting it together then is: Alive God Willing Little Rose, which is quite the name

for a father whose son's life was hanging in the balance. Little Rose calls to mind the Irish nationalist poem *Dark Rosaleen*, a love song in which the dark haired little rose of the poet's desire is a code for Ireland.<sup>16</sup>

De Valera's death sentence was commuted to life in prison on May 9<sup>17</sup>, a comfort that may have emboldened the Clan to go one step further. It is around then that an original birth certificate appears despite Doyle's claim that one didn't exist. It's from an address in Manhattan, a care facility that was popularly known for taking in unwed mothers of newborns, instead of Brooklyn where de Valera was presumed to be from. Aside from the typos with the name on this document, there's an anomaly with the serial number. The original stamped birth certificate is stamped

with the serial number 352243 but it was crossed out and restamped with the number 352241.<sup>18</sup> While errors of this kind happened, they were rare. One also can't help but notice that the serial number starts with 3-5, the third of May, the infamous first day that the British started executing the Rising's leaders. At the time of this birth certificate's circulation, four of the most senior leaders from across the four official battalions that fought in Dublin had been among the executed: MacDonagh from the 2nd Battalion (Commandant), O'Hanrahan from the 2nd Battalion (Vice-Commandant), Ceannt from the 4th Battalion (Commandant), and Daly from the 1st Battalion (Commandant). In other words, what started on 3-5, took out the leaders of 2,2,4,1. 352241 so happens to be that official serial number recorded on de Valera's birth certificate.

But what of the 3rd Battalion? That, of course, was led by de Valera himself, who was the commandant. It's why the serial number ending with a 3 was crossed out because he had avoided death. The falsified serial number is an obviously disguised tribute to the battalion leaders. On its own this pattern could be debated as coincidence, maybe even a divine one, but that becomes impossible once one considers the chronological nature of the additional coincidences that follow as one reads the certificate from top to bottom:

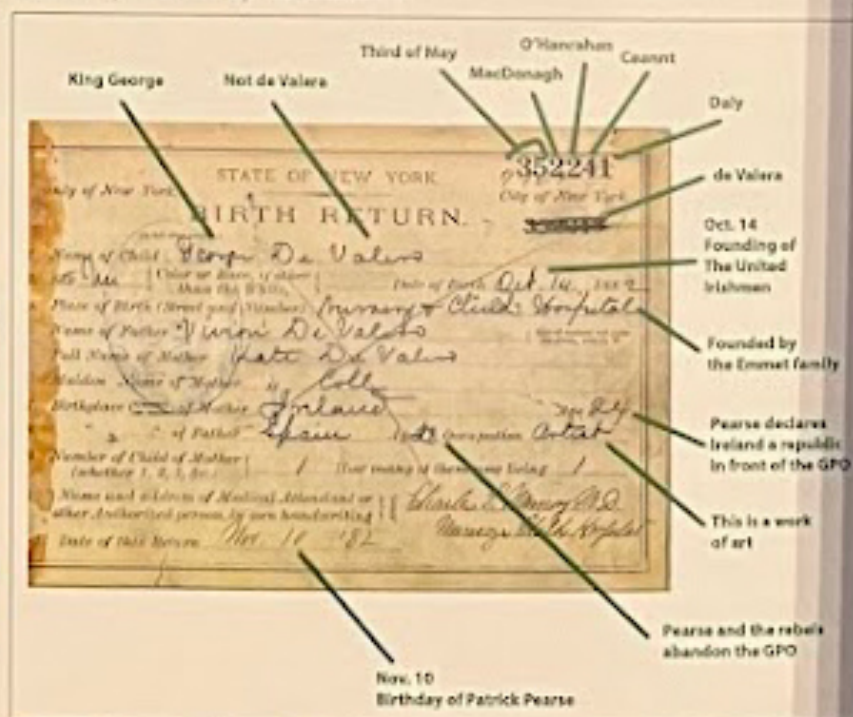


Figure 4 - Original Birth Certificate

1 The name George King George III was the British monarch whose reign started in 1760 and was eventually responsible for the annexation of Ireland into the United Kingdom.

2 The birthdate of October 14 October 14, 1791. This is the birthdate of the founding of the United Irishmen, a group that later set off the Irish Rebellion of 1798 and became the basis of John Mitchel's platform. Mitchel named his newspaper the United Irishman and used it to foment the Irish Rebellion of 1848.

3 Nursery & Child's Hospital Nursery & Child's Hospital was co-founded by the Emmet family through Mrs. Thomas Addis Emmet in 1854. The original Robert Emmet was executed for staging the Irish Rebellion of 1803 and he became Ireland's "First Martyr." This facility was known for taking in unwed mothers of newborns.

4 Mother's Age of 24 April 24, 1916, is the date Patrick Pearse declared Ireland a republic in front of the General Post Office (GPO) that kicked off the Easter Rising. His mother would've actually been 25 years old at the time, not 24. She was born December 21, 1856.

5 Father's Age of 28 April 28, 1916, is the date Pearse and the rebels were forced to abandon the GPO, which ultimately led to their surrender the following day.

6 The date the certificate was signed on November 10 November 10, 1879, was the birthdate of Patrick Pearse, who was among the first executed for his role in the Easter Rising on the third of May, 1916. Pearse was considered the "provisional president of the Irish republic" and was the man whose formal surrender marked the end of the Rising.

APPLICATION APPROVED BY COMMISSIONER OF HEALTH, JUN 30 1910

THE CITY OF NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

STATE OF NEW YORK REGISTER

CERTIFICATE AND RECORD OF BIRTH

CORRECTED CERTIFICATE

Name of Child: *Edward de Valera*

Sex	<i>Male</i>	Father's Name	<i>Francisco de Valera</i>
Color	<i>White</i>	Father's Occupation	<i>Artist</i>
Date of Birth	<i>Oct 14 - 1882</i>	Mother's Name	<i>Patricia de Valera</i>
Place of Birth	<i>Nursery - Child's Hospital</i>	Mother's Occupation	<i>Wife</i>
Father's Residence	<i>Vivion de Valera</i>	Mother's Residence	<i>61 East 4th Street</i>
Father's Birthplace	<i>61 East 4th Street</i>	Mother's Birthplace	<i>Ireland</i>
Father's Age	<i>Spain</i>	Number of Children	<i>24</i>
Father's Age	<i>28</i>	Sex and Color of Child	<i>none, East Child</i>

NO DUPLICATED CERTIFICATE WILL BE RECEIVED.

Signature: *Wm. J. Sullivan*

Date of Report: *18 Brighton St. Roseton, N.Y.*

Figure 5 - Amended Birth Certificate

De Valera's original birth certificate is the story of the Irish resistance; the annexation, the United Irishmen, Emmet, the Easter Rising, Patrick Pearse, it's all there, making it something of a work of art. It's ironic then that Vivion's occupation would be listed as: Artist.

If there are any unexplained gaps on the certificate it would stand to reason that it's because certain facts were already established. De Valera had already been told that his father was Spanish and that his name was Vivion. De Valera had already named his firstborn son Vivion as a result. But why De Valero instead of de Valera? The message is a clear one, that this is not the birth certificate of who it purports to be. The birth certificate of the imaginary George De Valero was nothing other than a proverbial middle finger to the Crown.

This creativity brings the baptismal record back into further question, whereas one begins to wonder why there was such a long gap between the supposed birth and the baptism (fifty days). As cited before, the baptism was recorded on December 3 or 3-12. Per Doyle's account, the search for a baptismal record was happening either late in the day of May 8 or in the very early morning of May 9 when de Valera's life was on the line. At the time, the British had already carried out 12 executions related to the Rising in Dublin but had yet to execute the leader of the 3rd battalion which as noted was de Valera.

December 3

12 executions, 3rd battalion

The son of Alive God Willing Little Rose  
Discovered in the presence of and  
confirmed by Clan-na-Gael

It is quite likely that the author of the forged baptismal record was also the author of the forged birth certificate, which means it was Brann, who was holding none of his feelings back at the time. "England apparently defies God and his justice," Brann wrote in a letter that was published in *The Gaelic American* on May 20, which was John Devoy's Clan-na-Gael organ.<sup>19</sup> "But in the long run they will assert themselves in her ruin, and when that day comes, the world will rejoice that the dragon of Europe has been killed at last."<sup>20</sup>

On June 3, Devoy made an effort to distance himself from the de Valera birth conspiracy, probably because the symbolism on the documents had Clan-na-Gael's fingerprints all over it. He wrote in *The Gaelic American* that as far as he knew de Valera was just someone "who is probably of Italian parentage."<sup>21</sup> He issued a correction in the following week to say that he had since learned that de Valera was actually born in Mexico.<sup>22</sup> All of this was subterfuge. The problem at the time, of course, was Casement's trial and the implications of it. When Casement was sentenced to death on June 29, all the clever wordplay with the fake records for de Valera now left de Valera incredibly exposed despite his sentence having already been commuted to life in prison. As such they had this birth certificate amended on June 30 to reflect his real name. On July 1, the United States officially inquired about de Valera's status in a communication to the British through the embassy in London.<sup>23</sup> The paper trail, however, would create more than a century of confusion for researchers, historians, and even de Valera himself. Low resolution copies of the amended birth certificate have even led some researchers to mistakenly read the amendment year as 1910 instead of 1916, throwing them wildly off the scent.



Figure 6 - de Valera in Syracuse, NY in 1919

While it might be serendipitous to discover that de Valera's birth and baptismal records were manipulated by fellow Irish nationalists, it does not answer precisely who his father was. There is no concrete record of his father's existence. There is also no marriage certificate establishing that de Valera's mother, Catherine "Kate" Coll, had ever been married to him or even anyone else at that time. According to Kate, they had gotten married at St. Patrick's Church in Jersey City on September 19, 1881<sup>24</sup>, but the church said there was no record of that. If she was really just making it up then she had chosen an oddly specific date. September 19, 1881 was historically famous as the date of the death of United States President James Garfield, who had finally succumbed to an assassin's bullet. The significance of that, if ever there was one, is that Vice President Chester A. Arthur, a half-Irishman who wore a green coat as an 18-year-old to show solidarity with the Fenians<sup>25</sup> was elevated to the presidency of the United States. President Arthur was long bemoaned by the British for allowing O'Donovan Rossa to promote and carry out his dynamite campaign against the British during his time in office.<sup>26</sup> Not to mention that the priest of St. Patrick's at the purported time of the marriage was the Ireland-born Father Patrick Hennessy, who had been an old friend of Monsignor Brann. The alleged date of Kate's wedding and the church it took place in

were in all likelihood details that someone supplied Kate with.

Kate would even forget at times that her husband had been named Vivion. Sometimes she referred to him as Juan and described him as being only 5 feet and 8 inches tall<sup>27</sup>, an unlikely height for a husband that had such a tall son. It's a possibility then if the name Juan she remembered getting all these details from was Juan Devoy, who at 5 feet and 7 and a half inches tall<sup>28</sup> was almost an identical match. If ever there were two characters that could be persuasive enough to make Kate keep secrets from even her own son, the "Greatest of the Fenians"<sup>29</sup> (Devoy) and the "Prince of Pulpit Orators"<sup>30</sup> (Brann) would probably fit the bill. Devoy's later ceremonious embrace of de Valera as Ireland's president was probably magnified by the knowledge of the coverup. Their subsequent falling out was also unusually personal, a family feud in more ways than one.

If one thing can be proved about de Valera's birth, it's that St. Agnes baptized him with the fire of Irish nationalism.

#### ENDNOTES

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- 28 Ancestry.com, John Devoy's passport application, 1924, July 7
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