



Pittsburgh 1916 Easter Rising Committee, LLC
PittsburghRemembers1916.com

Eirí Amach na Cásca (Part 1)

by Mike McCormack

National Historian, Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH)

The following is abridged from Mr. McCormack's book, "The Road to Rebellion.

John F Kennedy said in a 1962 speech that *"Those who make peaceful revolution impossible, make violent revolution inevitable* which is why we believe that *it's not the rebel that creates the violence, but the violence that creates the rebel*". Early Americans knew that and the American Revolution was the result. The patriots of 1916 also knew that and the Easter Rising was the result. But that rising was different from all others in Irish history.

The desire for independence has always been at the core of the Irish heart, but to understand what made 1916 unique, there are three things to consider and coincidentally, three had always been a special number for the Irish. As far back as the ancient time, the Shamrock was sacred to the Druids because it illustrated why things natural came in threes like sea, earth and sky, and things human like birth, life and death. Saint Patrick even validated that number in the Trinity. Even Irish proverbs came in threes like the three things to be most wary of: the horn of a bull, the bark of a dog and the word of an Englishman! It is significant, therefore, that the Easter Rising would not have happened were it not for three factors; like the three leaves of the Shamrock of Insurrection, you might say.

The first leaf was the political and economic pendulum that swung back and forth from hope to hostility for an entire century from 1816 to 1916. In **1816** the peace of a shared prosperity, created by the Napoleonic War economy, ended and by **1820** post-war selfishness on the part of Parliament provoked the **Rockite Rebellion** which was brutally put down. Then in **1823** a peaceful attempt by Daniel O'Connell's **Catholic Association** renewed hopes of self-reliance. But, by **1830** it was back to violence as Parliament incited a **Tithe War** which was again brutally put down. In **1840** peaceful promise was again tried in the **Repeal Association**, but from **1845** on, official neglect during the **Great Hunger** gave rise to violence again in **1848** when the **Irish Confederation** rose and was defeated. Then in **1852** another peaceful attempt was born in the **Irish Conservative Party** but landlord opposition killed that effort by **1858** at which time the **Irish Republican Brotherhood** was born and that was violently subdued in a failed Rising in **1867**. In the **1880s**, another attempt at peaceful accord was made by Charles Stewart Parnell's **Irish Parliamentary Party**, but by **1891** Westminster-instigated schemes split his Party until Parnell died. Then in **1913**, a peaceful labor movement ended in the **Great Labor Lockout** and official violence against workers drove James Connolly to start the **Irish Citizen Army** to fight back. Then came **1914** and another peaceful promise with the passage of a Home Rule Bill. But that Bill was being undermined by Orange Order opposition, the Curragh Mutiny in which British military refused to enforce it and Parliamentary duplicity in attempting to change the Bill to partition Ireland. History was repeating itself. For 100 years, peaceful attempts had always been frustrated, driving the Irish to violence only to be put down after which a peaceful approach was tried again and the cycle was repeated, over and over. But they never gave up and the goal of every attempt – peaceful or violent, remained the same – self-determination. But that frustration was common to all previous risings. What made this time different was the second leaf of the Shamrock of Insurrection.



Pittsburgh 1916 Easter Rising Committee, LLC
PittsburghRemembers1916.com

The second leaf was that behind the repeated frustration of promise and conflict, a dream was born with the **Gaelic Revival** – a national educational movement that revived a pride in their heritage through history. Indoctrinated by fireside tales in the days before television, few grew up without hearing the seanachie tell of past attempts at eliminating colonial oppression. Those tales were validated by teachers, fathers and grandfathers and a dream took shape with the formation of nationalist-oriented groups. There came literary clubs like the **Ossianic Society**, the **Phoenix Literary Society** and the **Dungannon Clubs**. They formed societies like the **Gaelic League**, the **Gaelic Athletic Ass'n**, the **Hibernian Rifles** and **Irish Volunteers**; Ladies societies like **Inghinidhe na hEireann** and **Cumann na mBan** and youth clubs like **na Fianna hEireann**. And all the while Newspapers like the **Sword of Light**, the **United Irishman** and the **Irish Volunteer** promoted the nationalist gospel of self-determination. The Gaelic Revival stimulated the longing for liberation. Even Pearse recognized that when he said *“the Irish revolution really began when the seven Gaelic League members met in O’Connell Street. The germ of all future Irish history was in that back room”*. But, if it was the Gaelic Revival that put the frustrated Irish on the Road to Rebellion, it was the Irish in America who paved that road for they were the third leaf of the shamrock of insurrection!

The motivation to action came from the Irish who were forced to flee their homeland, but who never fled their heritage. Britain had forced into exile angry Irish rebels like John Devoy, Jeremiah O’Donovan Rossa and Tom Clarke. They had also forced into emigration millions of Ireland’s sons and daughters fleeing hunger and eviction during the Artificial Famine. These displaced Irish formed a desperate Diaspora that I call the **Diasperadoes**. Americanized-Irish like Devoy, Rossa and Clarke joined with Irish-American sons of exiles, like Judge Daniel Cohalan and others, to influence existing organizations like the AOH to form such committees as the **Emmet Monument Association** and they created new societies like the **Napper Tandy Clubs**, **Clan na Gael**, **Friends of Irish Freedom** and more. They organized fund-raisers among the Diasperadoes who had overcome American prejudice to become a community of wage-earners – a community whose memories of the Great Hunger created a mentality that supported retribution. And they provided the weapon that would enable the Irish to topple the crown.

###

To learn more:

<http://www.shamrockandclover.com/product/road-to-rebellion/>