

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913 21  
BURO STAIRÉ MILFATA 1913 21  
NO. W.S. 548

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 548

Witness

Daithí O'Donoghue,  
6 Bushy Park Road,  
Rathgar,  
Dublin.  
Identity.

Member of Sinn Fein 1918 - .

Subject.

Setting up and financing of the Offices  
of the First and Second Dail Eireann.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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Statement of Dáithí Ó Donnchadha,  
6 Bushy Park Road,  
Rathgar, Dublin.

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In endeavouring to furnish information concerning the setting up and the financing of the offices of the First and Second Dáil Éireann, perhaps I should in the first instance explain how I came to be so intimately associated with that work.

Entry into British Civil Service and dismissal on Administration of Oath.

In November, 1898, I was appointed, after open competitive examination, a third class clerk in the Irish Land Commission. Later I was promoted to second class and was in charge of the Sub-division, Sub-letting and Mortgaging Branch.

Shortly after coming to Dublin I became a member of Connradh na Gaeilge, and for some years I was Secretary of Craobh Chaoimhghin. I was also in touch with Sinn Féin, etc. later on.

In the year 1918, before the end of the first World War we learned that an order had come from the British Government that an oath of allegiance should be administered to all Civil Servants. Apart from any other reasons, having regard to the fact that I was brought up in the separatist tradition in my native Wexford, and to the fact that the Republic had been proclaimed in 1916, I, naturally had no hesitation in making up my mind to

refuse to take such oath. I had been acquainted with Pearse, and my son was a pupil in Scoil Éanna prior to 1916. I also knew Micheál Ó hAnnracháin, Éamon Ceannt, and others very well.

One day early in October, 1918, we were summoned in batches into the presence of the head of the Land Commission, Mr. Justice Wylie, and the Secretary, Mr. Green. Mr. Wylie was, I think, an uncle of the present Mr. Justice Wylie. When I was summoned with my staff, after listening to what he had to say I questioned the justice of the proposal. He was rather apologetic and stated that having received instructions to do so, he had no option but to administer the oath to each one of us. I asked Judge Wylie what the alternative was and he replied, "Instant dismissal". I then refused to take the oath when he called on me to do so. Only two other members of the Land Commission staff, viz. Francis X. Thunder and Edward Cleary, refused. I was summoned several times to appear before Judge Wylie, who on each occasion endeavoured in the most friendly manner to wear down my objection. On the 25th November, I was officially notified of my suspension. On the 16th December when I was down in Dundalk at election work, I got the formal notice of my dismissal, with a pay order attached for the balance of salary due to me. I have these notifications still in my possession.

Work for Sinn Féin at General Election, 1918.

When I had been suspended I went to the Sinn Féin Headquarters, No. 6 Harcourt Street, to offer my services, and on the same day I was sent down, I think, by Seán T. O'Kelly, to help Sceilg in his election campaign against Dick Hazleton who was a very strong and very

popular candidate. After a hard and strenuous campaign Sceilg was elected with a majority of 250.

Entry into Service of Dáil Éireann.

Soon after Dáil Éireann's first meeting on 21st January, 1919, it was decided to try to obtain from the subscribers as much as possible of the Anti-Conscription Fund, which was about to be handed back to them, the threat of Conscription having passed. The Sinn Féin organisation agreed to allow its entire machinery - Trustees, Cumainn and organisers - to be utilised for the purpose. Representatives of Sinn Féin Cumainn everywhere were directed to be present outside the Churches on the Sundays on which the subscriptions were to be returned - their business being to solicit for Dáil Éireann the monies so returned (or as much thereof as the subscribers were willing to give up). Incidentally I heard about this time that a loan of £1,000 had been already received from Aine Ní Rathaille and a similar sum from the Sinn Féin Bank to help to organise the administration of Dáil Éireann.

Eoin MacNéill, who in the beginning was Dáil Treasurer, asked me to undertake the work in the interest of Dáil Éireann. We had posters, handbills, etc. printed and distributed throughout the country, and the money began to come in early in March. It was lodged in the Sinn Féin Bank in a special account for the purpose in the names of the Trustees of Sinn Féin. Out of this account monies were transferred to the Dáil Secretary for Finance from time to time as required.

Towards the end of June, 1919, after the Trustees of Dáil Éireann had been formally appointed, they opened an account in the Sinn Féin Bank to which was transferred the

balance remaining in the special account of the Sinn Féin Trustees mentioned above. The fund so raised was called "The Self-Determination Fund", and any further subscriptions received were lodged to credit of the Trustees of Dáil Éireann Account. I cannot recall the total amount received, but I should say it was about £40,000, all of which was not necessarily "Anti-Conscription Money". Further sums were received from outside Ireland for the Self-Determination Fund. From about mid-August (by direction of the Trustees who had by authority of An Dáil, appointed me as their Secretary), I had weekly lists of subscriptions received through Sinn Féin Cumainn, etc. published in "Nationality" (Arthur Griffith's paper).

#### Organisation of First Dáil Éireann Loan.

Towards the end of August, 1919, the Dáil authorised the issue of the First Dáil Éireann Loan (internal) viz. for £250,000. The suggestion of a Loan issue had already been brought forward at an earlier meeting of An Dáil. All available T.Ds. received instructions on the subject personally from M. Ó Coileáin, Minister for Finance. The necessary literature, application forms, etc. were prepared and circulated and the Loan was a great success - £380,000 or more being subscribed. I still have and shall give to the Bureau the receipt for the printing of the handbills in connection with this (Appendix A). Considering the desperate conditions obtaining at the time, the results were wonderful. Not alone were the T.Ds. and those helping them in great personal danger, but even subscribers, should their applications be found in raids, et Newspapers too, that were patriotic enough to publish the

Loan advertisements, risked the shooting up or destruction of their premises. Nevertheless the response was magnificent and something of which to be proud. The Minister for Finance meanwhile had been recruiting a staff to handle the work at Headquarters. I can personally vouch for the fact that a receipt was issued for every application and amount received at Headquarters, although it didn't necessarily follow that every applicant received his official receipt because some may have been lost in transit or may have been destroyed by the couriers or by local officers when raids threatened. The system of communications for this and other such work, e.g. Army, was amazing, thanks to the organising ability and tireless energy of Micheál Ó Coileáin who held both the office of Minister in the Dáil for Finance and the office of Director of Intelligence in the Army.

#### Organisation of various Dáil Departments.

Now that funds were available the time had come for the provision of office accommodation for the various Ministeries set up by Dáil Éireann and, accordingly, premises were obtained in various quarters of the city, some purchased outright and others rented. (The late Mr. Joe Murray, Drumcondra, and Mrs. Woods of Donnybrook (Tony's mother), Michael Noyk, Solicitor, were very helpful in this matter, as well as other persons). No.76 Harcourt Street was taken over, and here were housed the Secretariat and the Department of Finance officials. Diarmuid Ó hÉigeartaigh with Miss Eibhlín Lawless, Mr. Patrick Sheehan and Micheál Ó Loinsigh were in the Secretariat, and Fintan Murphy, Miss *J.* Mason, Miss Kate O'Toole and Mr. Dan J. O'Donovan were Finance. Micheál Ó Coileáin had an office on the top floor and

worked there for some period practically every day. There was a skylight trap-door to the roof, and a short ladder was kept close by for emergencies of which more anon.

Premises were obtained for Mr. Cosgrave's staff (Secretary for Local Government) in Clare Street (?18). Rory O'Connor was loaned (if my memory is not at fault) from the Dublin Corporation to help W.T. Cosgrave to build up a staff. Séamus Caomhánach and Frank Kelly (one of the London-Irish who came over prior to 1916) were two of the first officials in this Department. Later, we got them more commodious accommodation for a bigger staff in Wicklow Street, and in Exchequer Street where part of the Local Government staff worked under Kevin O'Higgins, who had been appointed as deputy to Mr. Cosgrave. The Local Government Department activities were, of course, very extensive and very important. In the course of a conversation with Mr. Cosgrave one day he mentioned to me how handicapped he was without someone who understood Local Government business. I told him about Tomás McArdle, who had been dismissed from the Local Government Department for refusing the oath, and he asked me to see Mr. McArdle on the subject. Result - Mr. McArdle was engaged, and in a short time the Secretary for Local Government had a fine staff and working machinery, Other offices were:

Labour under the Countess, who, I think, was assisted by Mr. Joe McGrath. This office was located in North Frederick Street. The principal officials were Dick Cötter, Eilís Ní Riain and J. Mee. Mee was one of the R. I. C. who mutinied in Listowel.

Earnán de Blaghad, Director of Trade and Commerce, had an office in Lower O'Connell Street where

Darrell Figgis and Colman O'Donovan were working on the Industrial Resources of Ireland enquiry.

Austin Stack, after his escape from prison in October, 1919, took over Home Affairs Department from Arthur Griffith, who was deputising both in the Dáil and as Trustee for the President (De Valera), who had gone to U.S.A. The Republican Courts, etc. were organised by Austin who had his office on Wellington Quay, near where Duffy's book-shop used to be. Madge Clifford was his confidential secretary. Almost opposite, on the North Quay, Gearóid Ó Súilleabháin, the Adjutant General, had his office, where Miss O'Reilly, his Secretary, worked, and not far from him was Cathal Brugha, Minister for Defence. Cathal was in the firm of Lalor's, Candlemakers, and carried on from his own office in that firm's premises. Other members of the Army Headquarters Staff, e.g. Risteárd Ó Maolcatha, Chief of Staff; Eoin O'Duffy, Deputy Chief of Staff, etc. had offices and "hideouts" in various places.

I cannot recall exactly where some other offices were, e.g. Joe MacDonagh, Boycott, Art O'Connor, Lands, Seán Etchingham, Fisheries.

Propaganda: Laurence Ginnell and Desmond Fitzgerald worked, I think, for some time from Sinn Féin at 6 Harcourt Street. Micheál Ua Nuanáin worked in this Department, I think, and Frank Gallagher.

There was also an office for Foreign Affairs Department in which Robert Brennan served.



Raid on Dáil Éireann Headquarters.

On the 11th November, 1919, as I was leaving 76, Harcourt Street, to go to the Sinn Féin Bank, I observed that there was a raid on the Sinn Féin Headquarters at No. 6. I returned immediately with the news, and a warning that it might be advisable to be prepared in case No. 76 were raided. Mícheál Ó Coileáin was on the premises and I sent up word to him. After stowing away some money and accounts in the secret cache, I went into the street and mingled with the crowd outside No. 6. When the raid was over I followed the lorries down St. Stephen's Green, South, until they were out of sight. Whilst the crowd was dispersing I went into University Church and stayed there a few minutes. Then, deciding to avoid No. 6, I was going back to 76 when I met Brian Ua hÉiginn and Fionán Ó Loinsigh at the corner of the Green on their way to meet some other T.Ds. We were just about to enter 76 when some military lorries came speeding towards us and pulled up there, so we passed on, saved by a matter of seconds. Leaving my two friends near Hatch Street, I came back on the other side of the street and joined the crowd which had gathered to look on at the raid.

After some time a few of the staff appeared at the first floor windows, amongst them Paddy Sheehan who held up a large sheet of white paper on which he had printed, probably with a pen handle, "All Hands Arrested". The words were clear enough to be read by the people below. Then I noticed some soldiers on the roof, and hoped sincerely that Mícheál Ó Coileáin had escaped by the trap door. As the prisoners were about to be brought out and put on board the lorries, I was standing on the offside edge of the crowd with my hands behind my back, when I felt

someone tapping my hands and pressing a slip of paper between my fingers. Glancing casually over my shoulder, I saw Joe O'Reilly slipping away on his bicycle. I moved right away through Montague Street into Corrigan's back yard where I opened the paper and read - "Follow them up, send in food, smokes, mattresses and blankets, M.C.". Needless to say, I uttered a fervent buideachas le Dia, knowing from the old familiar handwriting that Mick was safe. I learned afterwards that he had crawled along the roofs from 76 until he reached a skylight of the Standard Hotel. Having managed to open this (by breaking, or otherwise, I cannot remember now), he dropped to the landing, which was somewhat risky having regard to the "well" of the stairs. Some of the staff (probably including "the boots") were friends of ours so that Micheál had no difficulty in making a contact, and was safely away in a few minutes. Joe O'Reilly was never very far from Micheál at any time, and, in this case, was waiting for him. Hence he was able to get in touch with me before the lengthy raid was over.

The prisoners taken were - John O'Mahony, T.D., Frank Lawless, T.D., Séán Hayes, T.D., Dick McKee, O.C. Dublin Brigade, and the following members of the staff: Diarmuid Ó hÉigearthaigh, Micheál Ó Loingsigh, Paddy Sheehan, Dan J. O'Donovan and Fintan Murphy.

When they were about to move off I hired a car from the hazard in Clonmel Street and, seeing them apparently headed for the city, I told my jarvey to drive down the Green and Grafton Street. After the lorries passed I had not much difficulty in keeping them in sight, and eventually located them at the Bridewell. I arranged with the Four Courts Hotel to supply nine teas right away and nine breakfasts for the morning. I still have the receipt for these. I then went across to the Clarence Hotel and I asked them

to send in nine mattresses and the necessary bed-clothing. The meals were allowed in to the prisoners but not the bedding. Having purchased a supply of pipe tobacco, cigarettes and matches, I determined to seek admission to the prisoners. After some wheedling with the D.M.P. man at the gate, he called the Sergeant-in-charge, who was good enough to pass me as far as the guardroom, where he took charge of the parcels and promised to distribute them among the prisoners, but said that on no account would I be permitted to see any of them. I am glad to record that he kept his promise faithfully. Unfortunately for the prisoners, it turned out to be a very cold night. Paddy Sheehan told me afterwards that he almost cried from the bitter cold in his cell. None of the girls in the office was taken away.

When I reached home I found that Mrs. Ó Donnchadha was absent and the young folk in bed. On coming in later she was astonished to find me there. It appears that someone had called to the house and told her that all the people in 76 had been taken in a raid and brought to the Bridewell. She forthwith set out for the jail, taking an overcoat and rug and some toilet requisites for me. On arrival there she handed the articles over to the D.M.P. man on guard with a request that they be given to Mr. Ó Donnchadha. He very kindly agreed to do so and they found their way to Dan O'Donovan whose name probably sounded most like mine to the policeman. Needless to say Dan was surprised and was very glad to get them. Long afterwards, when the prisoners (who had been sentenced to three months imprisonment for unlawful assembly or some such charge) were released and I got my property back, I found the lining of the overcoat had been ripped open,

presumably in a search for a hidden message or anything contraband.

On the day after the raid I went to Harcourt Street and as soon as I thought it safe to do so I went down the area steps of No.76 and was admitted at once by Seán McCluskey, the caretaker. He had fortunately escaped arrest. He told me that a "G" man, Inspector McFeely, who went down to search the kitchen premises, etc., had whispered to him to stay below out of sight. The first thing I did was to go up to the first floor back where Fintan Murphy and I worked. In this room there was a very large wardrobe with handsome mahogany inlaid doors, built into the wall. The commodious inside had been very effectively camouflaged by Mr. Batt O'Connor, and to my joy I found that the secret recesses had not been discovered. The Account Books were safe, having been put away by Fintan Murphy, and the gold and bank notes, which I had stowed away temporarily, were just as I had hidden them. I found there also a very important book, the discovery of which by the enemy would have been a very serious matter. It was Brigadier Dick McKee's large pocket notebook which contained enough evidence of incidents, such as the Collinstown raid, etc., to hang him, if it had been found.

In going through the various rooms I noticed that the firegrates contained masses of burnt papers - no doubt important stuff which the staff had the presence of mind and sufficient time to destroy before the raiding party was admitted. I was particularly anxious about the loose-leaf Dáil Loan Registers on which Dan O'Donovan was working. There was no trace of them, and I feared they had been captured. However, eventually, I found them all safe and sound under a long counter that Batt O'Connor had erected

for us. The bottom shelf was only a couple of inches above the floor, and in poking with a stick, I felt the papers. Dan J. O'Donovan had not failed. McCluskey and I soon had all the stuff parcelled up and as by that time night had fallen, we carted everything off "to an unknown destination".

McCluskey told me that Collins had actually come back to 76 on the night of the 11th after the raiders had gone, and stayed to complete some work on which he had been engaged.

The search for alternative premises - Further Raids.

It was some time before we secured other suitable premises and extra staff. Meanwhile I had a hectic time trying to keep things going; practically alone.

Mrs. Ó Donnchadha and I worked night after night - sometimes until the morning - in our kitchen, with blankets fixed across the window blinds. By day I worked mostly in a room given to me by Mrs. Pádraig O'Keefe (Cáit Power) over her shop (Irish Farm Produce) in Camden Street. Miss K. O'Toole worked there with me.

We took over Miss Hoey's house in Mespil Road, and Collins went to work there with Miss J. Mason doing his confidential work. We also had premises over Hogg & Robertson's (seed merchants) shop in Mary Street, and at 29 Mary Street close to where Liffey Street joins it. The last mentioned quarters were entered through a hall-door with a stairs leading straight up from the hall. Our rooms were in two adjoining houses. B. O'Connor came to the rescue again by breaking a doorway through from a landing in the house of entry into the adjoining house. A wardrobe was put on the landing with its back to the break-through, and specially fitted so that part of it could be opened

inwards by manipulating a spring catch sufficient to allow a person to pass through to the second house. The backs of the inside panels were sheeted with steel, so that, in case of a raid, if a soldier should prod the inside with a gun or bayonet it would appear to be solid wall. Some articles of clothing were always in the wardrobe for appearance' sake.

One day as I was coming through Liffey Street from the Quays to keep an appointment with Micheál Ó Coileáin for 4 p.m., in the office over Hogg & Robertson's, I noticed a crowd gathered at the Mary Street end. Our place was being raided, so, hoping for the best, I was hanging round the outskirts of the crowd, when I met Miss Alice Lyons of the Finance staff - bareheaded and without her jacket. She told me that she was out of her room when the raiders came. She coolly walked down the stairs and out into the street. She informed me that Micheál Ó Coileáin had not arrived, so I brought her down to 23 Bachelor's Walk, where we had a single room spare office rented from Mr. J. J. O'Healy, North Circular Road, father of Mr. Garth Healy. When I opened the office door, I found Micheál Ó Coileáin and Joe O'Reilly already in possession. Joe O'Reilly had been scouting ahead of Micheál on the way to Mary Street and, finding the raid on, doubled back to inform him. They went to the Bachelor's Walk office to await developments.

Round about this time George McGrath, Alice Lyons and her sister, Éamon Fleming, Frank Thunder, Michael Hoey and Seán McGrath were working on the Finance Branch Staff. Frank, who was occupied mostly on outdoor work, was taken from his home in Drumcondra one evening later and was sentenced to three years imprisonment for being in

possession of notes on military matters. He was imprisoned in Portland and later in Dartmoor, and was released early in 1922. Seán McGrath helped me in carrying funds and messages round to the various departments. I called him "Banc ar siubhal". George, Éamon, Michael and Seán have died since. Solas na bhFlathas, d'á n-annamhaibh. Bob Conlon, an old Fianna boy, was the Finance Department courier. He knew the Dublin streets as only a born Dubliner could know them. His mother kept an 'antique shop' near Mary Street - very central and very useful on occasions. He was taken on the day of this raid. I saw him later the same day seated on a military lorry, but he was released shortly afterwards. Civilians, especially suspects, were occasionally carried round as hostages on the military lorries.

One of the last offices we secured was in No. 3 St. Andrew Street, over the offices of Messrs. Corrigan & Corrigan, Solicitors. It was the late Joe Murray of Drumcondra who got those two rooms on the second floor, and allowed us to have the name "J. Murray, Agent", painted on the office door. Go ndéanaidh Dia trócaire ar a anam. There was a raid here one day, but the raiders devoted their attention entirely to Corrigan's chambers. George McGrath and Éamon Fleming were on the premises overhead at the time. George, taking a big chance, calmly walked downstairs and out through the back hall, and from there got away safely by some passage into Wicklow Street. Éamon stayed put, fortunately unmolested.

A hideaway was offered to me at the back of a house in Upper Fitzwilliam Street. It consisted of two small rooms, ground floor of a little house at the bottom of

the longish garden. The place may have been originally a coach-house or some such building with entrance on to (of all places) Lad Lane, opposite the police station. There were some people living in this building but the two rooms looking on to the garden were completely walled off from the rest. The house in Upper Fitzwilliam Street was occupied by a Doctor whose household and staff were, presumably, friendly. I was given a hall-door key and a key of the garden premises. It had one drawback. Anyone walking down the garden was plainly visible from the upstairs back windows of the neighbouring houses. I got duplicate keys made for Micheál Ó Coileáin so that he could use the place if hard pressed, and I brought him to view it. He said it would be a good place in which to work, and shortly after he put J.K. O'Reilly and Dan J. O'Donovan to work there on the Loan registers, very much against my will. The night before "Bloody Sunday" Joe O'Reilly and I removed all the papers and stored them in Dick Tynan's slaughter house in Wexford Street. (He was a pork butcher). When things calmed down the papers were brought back to Fitzwilliam Street under protest from me. One Sunday shortly after that J.K. O'Reilly arrived in a car at my home to inform me that the place had been raided and everything taken and that Micheál Ó Coileáin wanted me. I found him, naturally, very much distressed over the affair. These papers were not recovered till 1922, when they were returned to me at Dublin Castle.

Mrs. Gifford Wilson and Bill Murray (one of the Sinn Féin officers at No. 6 Harcourt Street) did quite a lot of this registering work in their homes without interference.



How the Funds were Safeguarded.

When the receipts from the Self-Determination Fund and from the Loan were reaching large figures it was recognised that a great deal of the money would not be required for immediate use, and ought, therefore, to be put into safe keeping. Accordingly, some fairly large sums were handed over to trusted friends, on the understanding that they (the holders) would not be required to hand back those amounts without ample notice. It was also understood that the holders would be liable for interest in the same way as Banks for monies placed on deposit.

Those who acted in that capacity were: Mr. and Mrs. Erskine Childers, Alderman P.W. Corrigan, Liam Devlin, Mrs. Davin and George Nesbitt. Messrs. Corrigan & Corrigan, Solicitors, also acted as a sort of Clearing House by agreeing to receive particularly heavy cheques that came ex U.S.A., External Loan. The cheque would arrive, perhaps, from a firm of Solicitors in U.S.A. as part of a legacy, etc. Messrs. Corrigan would carry out any formalities that might be necessary, and afterwards transfer the money to the Trustees.

As well as the sums above-mentioned, various amounts, some very large, were placed on deposit in certain banks, viz. Munster & Leinster, Dame Street, O'Connell Street and Phibsboro Branches; Hibernian, College Green and Camden Street Branches; National, College Green Branch and the National Land Bank, Leeson Street, Lower. Further, £203,000 was utilised as Paid Up Capital to found and finance the National Land Bank. Apart from the ordinary deposits, one or two banks held other large sums, which they

agreed to pay on demand or at very short notice - for emergencies, as distinct from other pretty large current accounts required to meet the regular outgoings of the Departments. Some of the Departments opened their own Bank Accounts with the money transferred to them from the Funds. Some of those accounts were banked under fictitious names.

Sovereigns and half-sovereigns were still at that time in circulation (moderate) and some of the subscriptions to the Dáil Loan were paid in gold. A large quantity of gold was also received in exchange for paper currency; and from Cork even some small bars of gold were received. It is very desirable at this stage to put on record how the gold was safeguarded. The gold coins were securely sealed in small tobacco tins, each flat tin containing £500 or £250 according to the size of the box. Those boxes <sup>when</sup> ~~were~~ made up, were handed over to Mr. Peter A. Corrigan, who 'at dead of night' buried them in their (Corrigan's) undertaking premises in Camden Street. (This reads like a boy's story-book). The only persons who knew of this were Peter (and possibly his brother, William), Mícheál Ó Coileáin and myself. Upwards of £25,500 was disposed of in this way, a fact which ought to indicate the generosity and courage of Mr. Corrigan in taking on such a tremendous job.

Advantage was taken during the Truce in 1921 to have the gold taken out and counted. Dónal Ó Conchubhair, C.A., with two of his staff, who were also members of his family, carried out the count in my presence on Sunday and Tuesday, 16th and 18th October, 1921. (This is taken from a note in my diary). The gold was then put into large wooden boxes (butter boxes and a baby's coffin, so far as I can recall), which were securely bound and sealed and signed by the

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 Auditor, D. Ó Conchubhair, whose receipt for payment for <sup>work</sup> this ~~box~~ I still hold and will hand over to the Bureau. <sup>Appendix B</sup> <sub>3rd C</sub>

By mistake he put the date as September instead of October. Acting on instructions from M. Ó Coileáin, I conveyed the boxes of gold, under armed escort to Mr. Batt O'Connor's house in Donnybrook and left them in his care.

I was rather perturbed about removing the gold from the place where it had been so safely hidden for over a year, but M. Ó Coileáin said in reply to my protest "There will be more gold coming in from the second Dáil Loan and you can put that in Corrigans".

The monies referred to above are the Funds which were in the custody of the Trustees. For the greater part of the time covered, two of the Trustees - Messrs. De Valera and O'Mara - were in the U.S.A., and the third, Most Rev. Dr. Fogarty was only occasionally in Dublin. Arthur Griffith was acting President and acting Trustee in De Valera's absence. Griffith was not at all keen on having responsibility in finance matters, and, in fact the responsibility fell on Micheál Ó Coileáin and on myself. Of course, in the absence of the Trustees I never parted with nor moved any of the funds without the authority of Micheál Ó Coileáin, nor did I make any banking arrangements without first consulting him. I furnished a weekly statement to Griffith and to Collins, and I kept Dr. Fogarty acquainted with the financial position by means of our own Post Office service. I am also handing to the Bureau the drafts of a couple of those statements. Copies of all of them must be already in Government custody.

On the Bishop's visits to Dublin I had frequent interviews (with sometimes M. Ó Coileáin or Griffith present) with him, and gave him detailed accounts. Incidentally,

before Mícheál took the Finance Post I had to deal with Eoin Mac Néill (it was for a brief period only), and I found him like Arthur Griffith, very shy of going into finance matters.

#### The National Land Bank.

The founding of the National Land Bank was Robert Barton's idea. The object was to provide funds to enable farmers, by way of loans, to purchase their holdings, and to carry out improvements, and perhaps, also to take over lands for resale to landless men or to small farmers whose holdings were below average acreage. The monies would, of course, be provided by Dáil Éireann.

By way of camouflage a fictitious company was formed, bearing the name of Natland, Limited, whose members were, mar dh'eadh, to put up the cash required to establish the bank. I can recall the names of only some of those connected with this project, viz. R. Barton, T.D., L. Smith Gordon, D. Ó Conchubhair, C.A., and P.J. McGilligan, T.D. I do not think that this body held more than one or two meetings, having fictitious minutes, etc.

Premises were obtained in Lower Leeson Street, and the Bank was duly opened. Smith Gordon was appointed Manager and Timothy Caffrey, Assistant Manager. One of the first members of the staff was Mícheál Mac Amhlaoibh (M. Cowley) who, I should say, would be able to give quite a lot of information on the subject, as would also Seán McCluskey who was caretaker. I presume the early records are still preserved in the National City Bank.

The capital subscribed was £406,018, of which £203,018 was paid up (i.e. £1 shares; 10/- paid up). The

£18 was, I believe, subscribed by a privileged individual.

The bank was open to the public in the ordinary way, with current and deposit accounts, and the usual type of cheque book. Some time after it began operations we learned that the bank's cheques were not being accepted by the other banks, and through our 'Secret Service' it was found that the Bankers' Committee had had the matter up for discussion, and had decided against having any dealings with the National Land Bank. On Mícheál Ó Coileáin's instructions I visited certain banks and interviewed officials who, we had ascertained, were members of the Banks Standing Committee. The message I had to deliver was a serious one for those gentlemen. I shall not enlarge on it, but the result of the interviews - which, I remember, took place on a Friday - was the recognition and acceptance of Land Bank cheques everywhere from the following week.

I fear that the Bank never had an opportunity of functioning for the purposes for which it was established. After the setting up of the Provisional Government and the "Free State" it was incorporated as a subsidiary of the Bank of Ireland. The Head Office had some time previously been transferred to 10, College Green. I, of course, do not know anything about how the transaction was effected, but the capital is held by the Bank of Ireland. The gold also was handed over. Rather ignominious fate considering the work done and the hopes raised!

#### Raid on Munster and Leinster Bank.

One Saturday morning as I approached the Munster and Leinster Bank Head Branch at the Castle Gate, Dame Street, I was astonished to see a big crowd gathered there. The

bank was being raided.

It appears from what I learned afterwards that in a raid on some of the Army Offices at the end of 1920, a cheque book had been found, thereby affording a clue to where republican funds might be banked. Whatever the cause that led up to it, sums amounting to at least £20,000 were seized. There was a balance of £8,700 in a current account and £10,000 on deposit. These monies were in the name of Daithí Ó Donnchadha and another, and on further search, the auxies discovered that they had been transferred from a previous account under the name of Micheál Ó Coileáin and another (myself). The auxies had expert bookkeepers with them and they made a thorough search of the ledgers.

The Manager at the time was an old gentleman named Collins, and I was told that he was bullied and threatened to make him divulge particulars about the republican accounts. He refused to do so, and only when the guns were jabbed into him did he hand over the keys of the strong rooms. Two of the bank staff, Messrs. <sup>Kiernan</sup> ~~Keenan~~ and Croke, were brought to the Castle and they suffered for refusing information. They were released after a short time.

All the monies confiscated were handed back with accrued interest, after the setting up of the Provisional Government. I had to interview Mr. Cope who gave me a pay order to cover all and at the same time the Loan Registers which had been taken in the raid on the premises in Upper Fitzwilliam Street.

How the Different Departments were Financed.

With regard to the method of financing the various Departments, estimates were passed at Dáil and at Cabinet meetings whenever held, and a list of departments showing the total amount of the estimate in respect of each for a period, was handed to me for the Trustees. I would then receive, perhaps weekly, requisitions for amounts to be paid over forthwith to the departments. Seán McGrath, who was employed in the Finance Department, assisted me in this work, obtaining receipts for the sums handed in to each. The Army Estimate was, of course, large in comparison with others on account of the heavy expenditure on purchases, and, in the nature of things, large sums had to be provided at short notice to meet demands made by the Minister of Defence, Cathal Brugha. In the case of some departments the requisitions would be in great part for official salaries. It may be mentioned here that the Boycott Branch under Joe McDonagh, was a valuable source of revenue from fines imposed on business firms. Large sums were also received from the Department of Justice by way of court revenue.

George McGrath, who had practical experience of accounting and auditing work, was the principal official in the Finance Department. He visited the various branches and helped them to set up proper accounting systems. He also carried out internal audits to ensure that the monies were being properly expended, and kept a set of books of account covering the receipts and outgoings of all branches. The difficulty of keeping proper accounts in the circumstances prevailing can easily be imagined. For my own part, a lot of my work was, in the first instance, done on scraps of paper and in small note books or pocket diaries. Then when I had leisure to do so, I dug out my

books (such as they were) and made the necessary entries. The books I refer to were not big or heavy and were such as could be carried or hidden without much trouble. In anticipation of a possible capture of any of them by the enemy, the notes and records would be more or less unintelligible to anyone but myself and George McGrath. I had a series of accounts under fictitious names, e.g. T. Head = The President's Department; D. Cleary = D. Ó hÉigeartaigh's Office (Clerk to the Dáil and to the Executive); A. Holmes = Austin Stack, Home Affairs; C. Marshall = Cathal Brugha; M. Silver = M. Ó Coileáin, Minister of Finance; J. Salmon = J. Etchingham, Minister of Fisheries; J. MacFarlane = J. McDonagh (Director of Boycott); H. Newson = Propaganda, and so on.

#### Theft of Cash after Treaty.

The office in St. Andrew Street was broken into on the night of 14th or morning of 15th December, 1921, during the Dáil debate on the "Articles of Agreement for a Treaty", and a sum of money, approximately £1,300, was stolen from a cache I had in a large deep press, in which I had a big strong cash box screwed down to a concealed shelf. This detail is taken from a diary I kept at the time. Box and contents were taken. Filing cabinets had been ransacked, and papers strewn about the room. The Republican Police under Simon Donnelly were on the job before I arrived next morning, but the culprit or culprits were never traced, at least so far as I know. It was felt that someone "in the know" had done the job, and all the tossing about of files and hammer marks in the walls were mere camouflage. It left a very uncomfortable feeling, especially as there were then even evidences of an approaching split.



At a meeting in the Mansion House on the 22nd February, 1922, of the Trustees with Collins and some other representatives of the Free State Party, I was directed to call in all outstanding balances held for the Trustees by individuals, as well as those in the various banks, and to lodge all to one account in the National Land Bank which had by that time been transferred from Lower Leeson Street to new premises in College Green.

There was a balance of over £200,000 still on hands in the home funds as well as the very large sums still untouched in the U.S.A. - External Loan, approximately two and a half million dollars equivalent to £525,000.

SIGNED

James O'Donnell

DATE

March 26, 1951

WITNESS

Jim Collins

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILITA 1913-21

No. W.S. 548
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