

St. John Fisher Irish Studies Program

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MEMBER OF IRISH PARLIAMENT TO TAKE PART IN ROCHESTER EVENT MARKING 1916 EASTER RISING

A leading member of Ireland's Dail (parliament) who is a descendant of one of the Irish Republic's founders will be a featured participant in the Rochester Irish-American community's 100th anniversary commemoration of the 1916 Easter Rising.

Éamon Ó Cuív, a deputy of the Dail from County Galway, is scheduled to visit Rochester for the event at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery on April 24.

Deputy Ó Cuív is the grandson of Eamon de Valera, who fought in the 1916 Easter Rising and went on to be taoiseach (prime minister) of the first Dail that declared itself as the legitimate government of Ireland in the wake of the Rising. De Valera was a leading figure in Irish politics from the 1920s, when the state was formed, through the 1960s when he retired. He served as taoiseach for much of that time.

Deputy Ó Cuív has served in the Dail since 1992, representing the Fianna Fail political party that his grandfather founded. He held several leading ministerial positions when Fianna Fail last held control of the Dail from 2007-2011 and also served briefly as the party's deputy leader in 2011-12.

The connection both have to Rochester is that's de Valera's mother Catherine Coll Wheelwright – Ó Cuív's great-grandmother -- is buried in Holy Sepulchre Cemetery. Wheelwright (December 21, 1856-June 15, 1932), played an important role in saving her son's life from execution, as she made an emergency visit trip from Rochester to New York City to produce his birth certificate to prove that he was born in the United States. Along with his fellow leaders of the Rising he had been sentenced to death, but this was commuted to life imprisonment by the British authorities, who arguably did not want to execute an American citizen. Further emphasis will be placed on how Wheelwright came to live in Rochester, the role she played there in promoting the cause of Irish freedom, and de Valera's visit to her after his escape from prison when he came to the United States to raise funds for Irish independence.

Her funeral in 1932, shortly after her son became the Prime Minister of the Irish Free State, will also be emphasized. The April 24 ceremony will take place near her gravesite in the cemetery.

The commemoration, to be held 100 years to the date from when the Rising began, will begin with Mass at the Holy Sepulchre chapel celebrated by former Bishop of Rochester Matthew Clark.

The ceremony is supported in part by a generous grant from the Consulate General of Ireland. It has been put together in a collaboration between the St. John Fisher College Irish Studies Program, the Rochester branch of the Irish American Cultural Institute, the Colonel Patrick O'Rorke Memorial Society, and the Rochester branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann.

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