

Eamon de Valera: ‘The Chief’, 18 October 1919

Eamon de Valera Papers, UCD Archives

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Eamon de Valera in Indian Headdress, 18 October 1919

Eamon de Valera Papers, UCD Archives, P150/871¹

In 1919, Eamon de Valera left behind the early stages of the War of Independence and departed Ireland for the United States. He remained there until December 1920. His aim during that time was to secure American recognition of an Irish Republic and to raise funds from the Irish-American community. As a propaganda trip, his efforts proved successful and he raised a significant amount of money for the Irish cause. However, he did not receive recognition from President Woodrow Wilson, who viewed the Irish question as a matter for Anglo-Irish, rather than international, relations.

During his tour, de Valera visited the Chippewa Reservation Reserve in Wisconsin on 18 October 1919. He was made honorary chief of a Chippewa tribe of Indians. He is pictured below wearing Native American ceremonial headdress. Terry de Valera recalled in his memoirs how he and his siblings used their father's headdress in their games as children. Also included below is a colourful newspaper account of the induction ceremony.

¹ **The Eamon de Valera Papers**

Eamon de Valera bequeathed all of his personal non-family papers to the Order of Friars Minor five years before his death. The collection was housed in the Franciscan Library Killiney, County Dublin before its transfer to UCD Archives in July 1997 under the terms of the OFM-UCD Partnership.

The papers provide observers of Irish history and politics an opportunity of examining in detail a long public career ranging from his membership of the Irish Volunteers in 1913 to his time as President of Ireland (1959-73). The papers provide a rich source of information on all aspects of his life ranging from policy documents to speeches, correspondence, confidential memoranda and a large number of photographs.

The content covers such key areas of his career as his role in the Easter Rising, the Treaty split, re-organisaton of Sinn Féin, formation of Fianna Fáil and the drafting of the 1937 Constitution. There are also documents on Ireland's contribution to international organisations, including the League of Nations, the United Nations and the Council of Europe.



Irish World and American Industrial Liberator 25 October 1919

DE VALERA MADE CHIPPEWA CHIEF

3,000 SEE RITE

President of Irish Republic Named 'Nay Nay Ang Abe' After Old Indian Leader

Chappewa Indian reservation, Spooner, Wis., Oct. 18 – Eamonn De Valera, president of the Republic of Ireland, is a Chippewa Indian chieftan.

He was adopted today by the old Indian tribe on their reservation in Northern Wisconsin and was named 'Dressing Feather' or Nay Nay Ong Abe, after the famous Indian chief of that tribe who secured for the Chippewa their rights to the Wisconsin land under the treaty of 1854.

The ceremony took place in an open field in the reservation in the presence of more than 3,000 Indians and white people and was interpolated by a weird series of Indian dances and speech-making.

Dance to Tom Toms

The recipient of the honors sat in the centre of a semi-circle of clergymen and Indian chieftans. In front five Indians beat continuously on a tom tom drum and at intervals a score of tribesmen dressed in the full regalia of paint and feathers of a great occasion danced around the guests.

Chief Billy Boy, resplendent in a head dress of feathers reaching to his ankles, greeted De Valera in Chippewa. Billy Boy was followed by Joe Kingfisher, the headman of the tribe.

Kingfisher, who presented the Irish leader with a handsome

beaded tobacco pouch and moccasins, expressed a poetic sentiment as he tendered the gifts.

'I wish I were able to give you the prettiest blossom of the fairest flower on earth, for you come to us as a representative of one oppressed nation to another'.

The ceremony continued and Chief Billy Boy then invested President De Valera with his new name and informed him of his adoption by the Chippewa nation.

Mr De Valera rose and walked to the center of the ring. He accepted the head dress of a Chippewa chieftain with gravity as the tom toms sounded louder and louder. Signifying he wished to speak, the music ceased and the Irishman then began talking in Gaelic.

'I speak to you in Gaelic,' he said, reverting to English, 'because I want to show you that though I am white I am not of the English race. We, like you, are a people who have suffered and I feel for you with a sympathy that comes only from one who can understand as we Irishmen can.'

'You say you are not free. Neither are we free and I sympathise with you because we are making a similar fight. As a boy I read and understood of your slavery and longed to become one of you.'

Mr De Valera then told the red men how Ireland had been oppressed by England for 750 years.

'I call upon you, the truest of all Americans,' he said, 'to help us win our struggle for freedom.'

The Indians listened to his impassioned address with owl-like gravity, but when Ira Isham, the tribe interpreter, translated Mr De

Valera's words into Chippewa they cheered him wildly.

Mass Precedes Ceremony

The ceremony was preceded by a memorial mass in the reservation church by Father Phillip Gordon, Chippewa priest, for the Indians who died in France.

President De Valera and his party, consisting of J.P. Finnerty of St. Paul, Sean Nunan, secretary to Mr De Valera, and Fathers Phillip Gordon, P.J. O'Mahony, John Harrington, Peter Rice and Floren Gerhardt, left the reservation for the Twin Cities tonight, where he will speak Sunday and Monday on the Irish bond issue soon to be floated in this country. He journeyed to the Indian reservation from Milwaukee Friday night. At every station on the way through Wisconsin delegations were waiting for him at the depot.

At Spooner, Wis., his party left the train and was met by a dozen automobiles, which carried them over forty miles of wild country to the Chippewa reservation on the edge of Lake Court Oreilles.