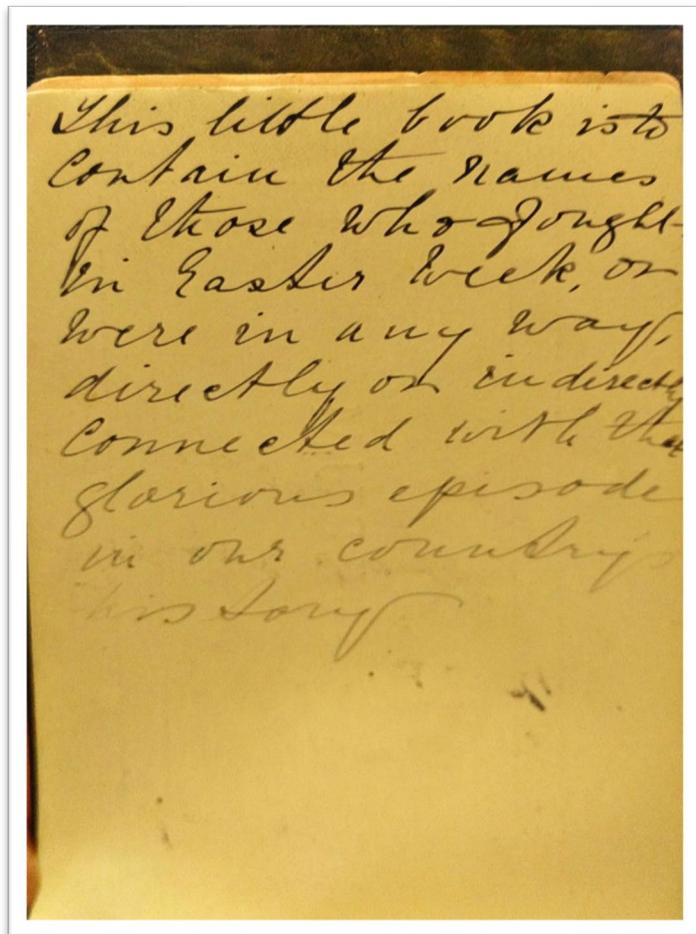


History Hub  
From the Archives  
2019



Autograph book  
containing signatures of  
those involved in the  
republican movement,  
1916-1918

National Library of Ireland  
Ms. 50,135

**Autograph book containing signatures of Michael Collins, W. T. Cosgrave, Thomas Ashe, Harry Boland, Eamon De Valera, Countess Markievicz, Arthur Griffith, and others involved in the republican movement, 1916-1918**  
National Library of Ireland, Ms. 50,135

Prison  
As shines the lamp the bright through the night  
So glows my soul amid the meaner things  
‘Tis when the Wrong would trample down the Right  
We rise from broken men to stately Kings.  
- George A. Lyons

This poem, written in an autograph book that can be found in the Department of Manuscripts of the National Library of Ireland, was written by Irish revolutionary George A. Lyons. The autograph book, purchased by the library in 2016 at a Whytes’ auction, contains the autographs of over 150 leading republicans during the period after the 1916 Rising and before the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922. Although the original owner of the book is not known, its contents show that it was someone close to leading figures of the Irish Revolution including Thomas Ashe, Michael Collins, Countess Markievicz and Éamon de Valera. There is an index written on Sinn Féin headed notepaper that goes with the book but, unfortunately, there are no clues as to who the original owner might have been.

The autograph book itself is small. An inscription inside the front cover reads, ‘This little book is to contain the names of those who fought in Easter Week, or were in any way directly or indirectly connected with that glorious episode in our country’s history.’ The person who collected these signatures, however, did not sign their name under this inscription. It is interesting to think that someone was collecting the signatures of so many republican leaders at a time when many of them were imprisoned by the British authorities for their attempts to rid Ireland of British rule. It also shows that those involved in the revolutionary period were very much aware of the legacy they were creating and were conscious of how they would be thought of by future generations of Irish people. Pierre Nora, in his book on generation and the commemorative memory writes, ‘the emergence of a “generation” in its pure, intransitive state revealed the sovereignty of the notion’s retrospective explanatory power, thereby constituting it... as a lieu de mémoire.’<sup>1</sup> Nora’s concept of a lieu de mémoire relates to an object, place, or concept which holds a symbolic place in the memorial heritage of a

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Nora, ‘Generation’ in *Realms of memory: Conflicts and divisions*, ed. Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York 1996), p. 500.

community. For an independent Ireland, the members of the revolution occupy this place of cultural significance. While they may not have had the foresight to know what would become of Ireland's relationship to Britain, the rebels were well aware that the Easter Rising and this revolutionary period would have an impact on Ireland, and that as a result they would be immortalized in history.

Although the whole autograph book is, as the original owner intended, an interesting piece of Irish history, this entry by George Lyons is particularly striking. He was the only one to include a poem alongside his signature. George Lyons, as indicated next to his signature on page 17, was a member of the Dublin Brigade of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). However, he was also a long-standing member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), having joined in 1898. Lyons was a close friend of Arthur Griffith's, and defended him when an attempt was made to oust Griffith from the IRB because he refused to have his articles reviewed and censored by an IRB board. Certain IRB men accused Griffith of insubordination because of this but Lyons helped in arguing against this claim. Lyons would even write a biography of Griffith titled *Some Recollections of Griffith and his Times in 1923*. Lyons was one of the founding members of the Irish Volunteers and was instrumental in training the men who would ultimately go on to take part in the 1916 Easter Rising. He would later become a member of the Dublin Corporation from 1919 until 1923. Described as a 'romantic' in his obituary, Lyons was also an ardent supporter of music and the opera, perhaps providing some insight as to why Lyons chose to include a poem with his signature. When Lyons died in December of 1950 his funeral was attended by notable members of the Revolution including Éamon de Valera, W.T. Cosgrave, Michael Hayes, and Joseph McGrath, attesting to the longstanding friendships formed during 1916.

This autograph book and Lyons' contribution to it are significant in that it reminds us that this group of men and women were part of a 'generation' that occupy an incredibly significant role in the history of Ireland. In building their own legacies they also built a cultural foundation for an independent Ireland. The 1916 Rising and subsequent War of Independence could not have taken place without the help of all those whose names are recorded in this book, and in a small way this autograph book helps us to remember those that risked it all for a chance at freedom.

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**Further Reading:**

Witness Statement of George Lyons, Bureau of Military History. Accessible here:  
<http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0104.pdf#page=1>

Diarmaid Ferriter. *A Nation and Not a Rabble*. (London, 2015).

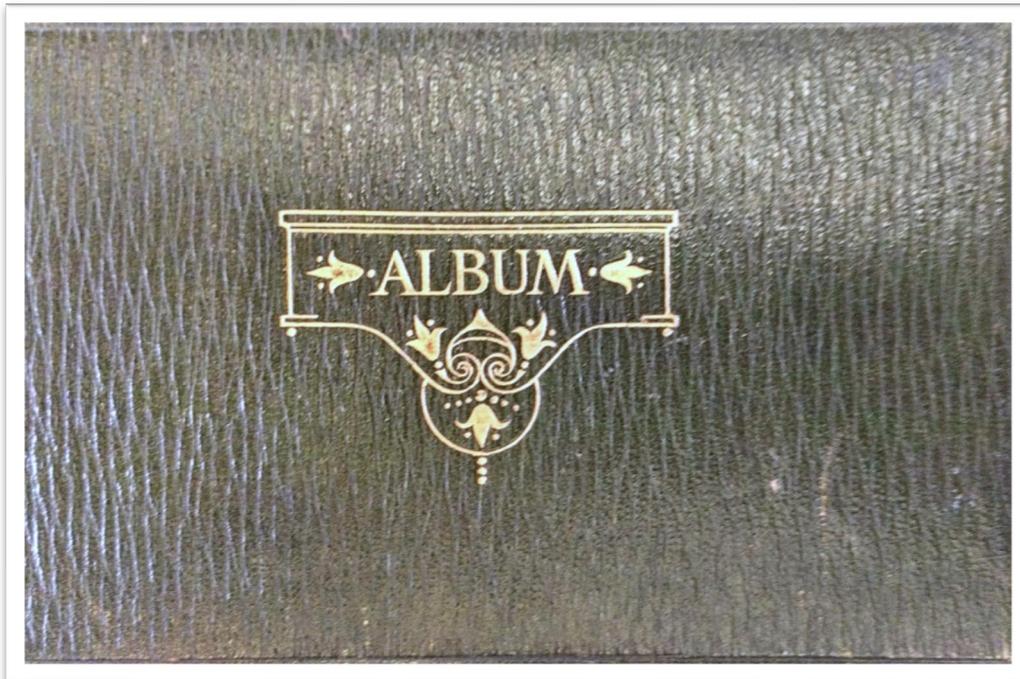
Benedict R. Anderson. *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. (London, 1991).

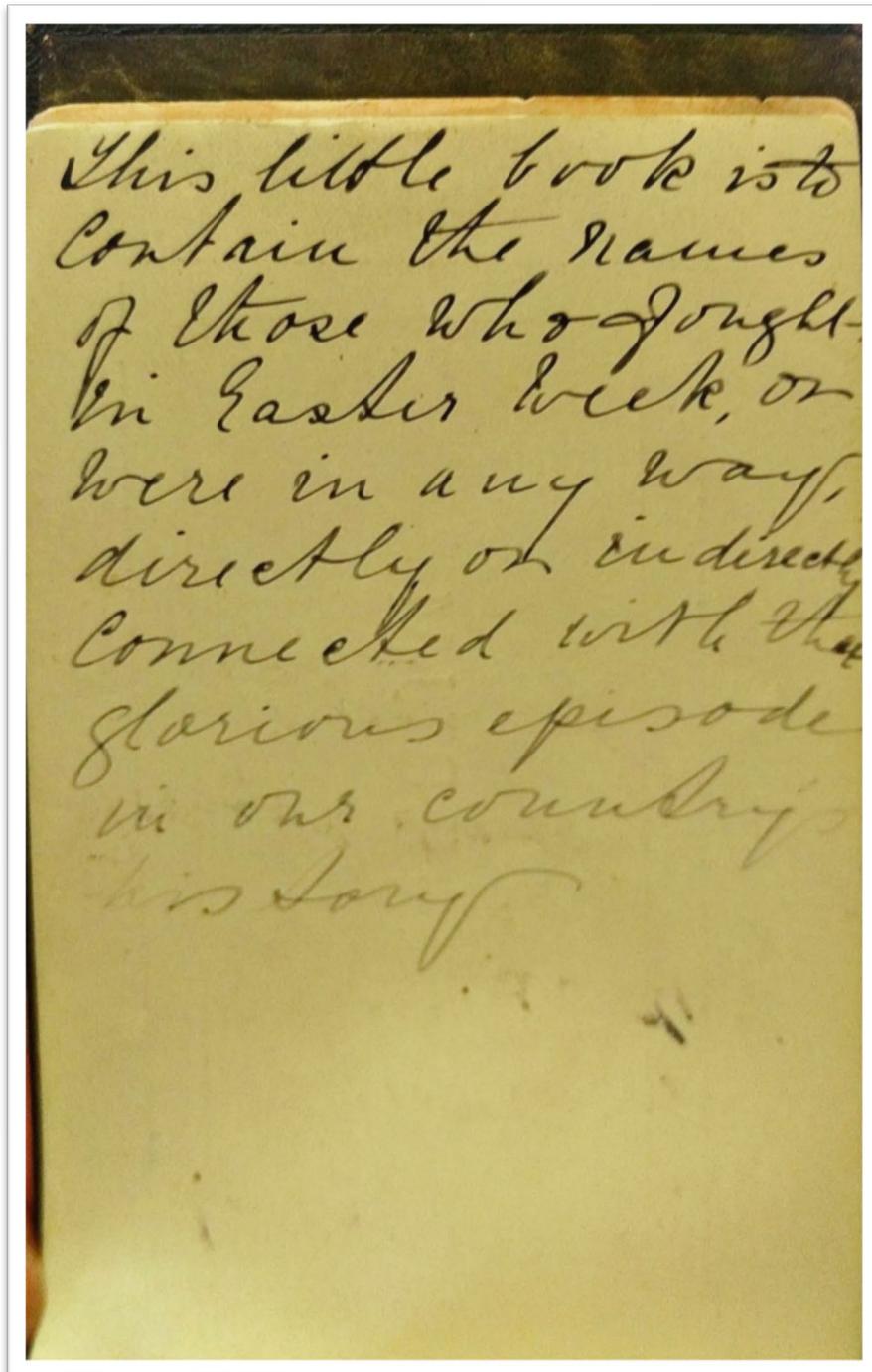
Owen McGee. *The IRB: The Irish Republican Brotherhood, from the Land League to Sinn Féin*. (Dublin, 2007).

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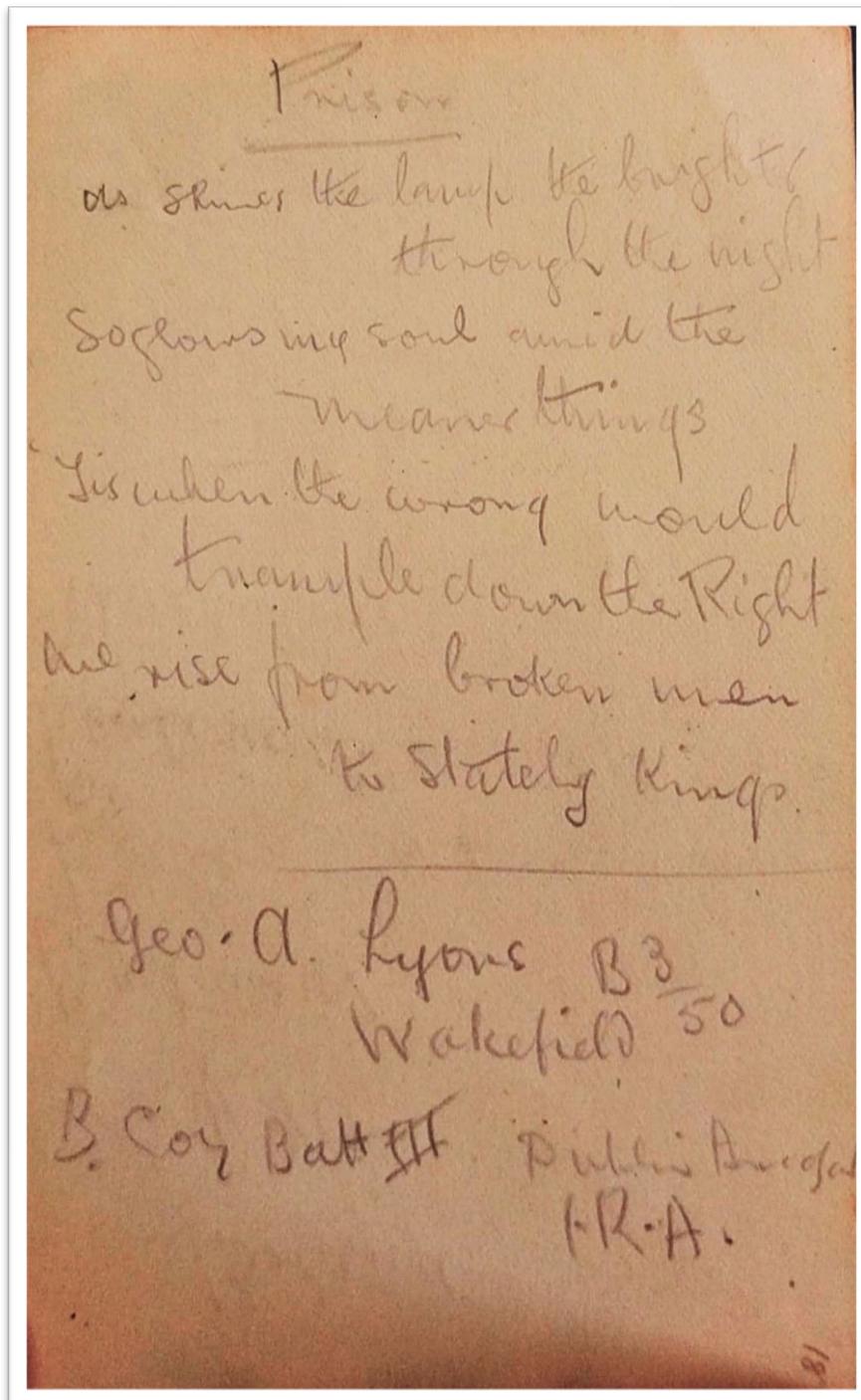
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