



**International Headquarters**  
**PO Box 1716 • Morristown, NJ 07962**  
**Tel: 973-605-1991**  
**[www.iaci-usa.org](http://www.iaci-usa.org)**

Welcome to the latest edition of the IACI e-news.

Founded in 1962, the IACI is the leading Irish American cultural organization. The IACI is a federally recognized 501(c)(3) not-for-profit national organization devoted to promoting an intelligent appreciation of Ireland and the role and contributions of the Irish in America.

Guest contributors are always welcome! Please note, the IACI is an apolitical, non-sectarian organization and requests that contributors consider that when submitting articles. The IACI reserves the right to refuse or edit submissions. The views and opinions expressed in this newsletter are solely those of the original authors and other contributors. These views and opinions do not necessarily represent those of the IACI or any/all contributors to this site. Please submit articles for consideration to [cbuck@iaci-usa.org](mailto:cbuck@iaci-usa.org).

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# Michael Collins - Founder of the Republic of Ireland

by

Raymond D. Aumack

Michael Collins had a short but exciting life. His birth date in the history books is October 16, 1890. However, the date of birth on his tombstone is October 12<sup>th</sup>. Though his death was tragic and controversial, controversy seemed to follow his life.

His father, Patrick Collins, was part of a large Corkonian clan. He married Collin's mother, Mary Anne O'Brien, age 23 when he was sixty. They were married for 30 years until the elder Collins death. There were eight children in the family. Michael was the third son and the youngest in the family.

The Collins' home was warm and nurturing and filled with spiritual and intellectual stimulation. The elder Collins, though a farmer on a 90 acre spread that his family had farmed for several generations, was a mathematician. He was also a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood and Republican ideals were the constant topic of conversation. The Collins family Republican tradition dated back to the 1798 rebellion.

Michael the younger was a good student in school and was once described in a British communique as being very bright. He sat for the Civil Service exams and worked in the Post Office in London for ten years. As a young adult he worked in banking, including a year with the Guaranty Trust Company in New York, and financial services industries as a stock broker, and finally as an accountant. During this period he also studied Law and Business Administration at Kings College, Dublin. It was during this period of his life that he joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood at the age of 19.

Michael's father was the seventh son of a seventh son. In Irish folklore such a person had "special" powers such as healing and seeing the future. On his deathbed he predicted that one of Michael's sisters would become a nun, and she did. He also told the family to keep an eye on Michael because he was destined for greatness and would achieve wonderful things for Ireland. And so it came to be.

In his short lifetime, Collins was an Irish revolutionary leader, politician, Minister for Finance, Director of Information, and Teachta Dála (TD) for Cork South in the First Dáil of 1919, Adjutant General, Director of [Intelligence](#), and Director of Organization and Arms Procurement for the [IRA](#), President of the [Irish Republican Brotherhood](#) from November 1920 until his death, and member of the Irish [delegation](#) during the Anglo-Irish Treaty negotiations. Subsequently, he was both Chairman of the Provisional Government and Commander-in-chief of the National Army. There was no title of President at the time, but Collins was the de facto President of Ireland.

He fought in the General Post Office during the Rising. Because he was not among the signers of the Proclamation he was spared from the firing squad. He was however imprisoned.

Collins was shot and killed in an ambush on August 22, 1922 during the Irish Civil War. He was on his way to a meeting with a rival, Eamon de Valera, who did not support the treaty that identified the limits of the Irish Republic. Six counties remained under British control.

## **The Rising**

The struggle for Home Rule, along with labor unrest led to the formation in 1913 of two nationalist paramilitary groups who would launch the Easter Rising: the Irish Citizen Army was established by James Connolly and the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU), to protect strikers from the Dublin Metropolitan Police during the 1913 Dublin Lockout. The Irish Volunteers were created in the same year by the IRB and other nationalists in response to the formation of the Ulster Volunteers (UVF), an Ulster loyalist body pledged to oppose Home Rule by force.

Collins had become highly respected in the IRB because of his considerable intelligence and his skills as an organizer. He was appointed financial advisor to Count Plunkett, father of one of the Easter Rising's organizers, Joseph Mary Plunkett. Collins took part in preparing arms and drilling troops for the insurrection.

When the Rising commenced on Easter Monday 1916, Collins served as Plunkett's aide-de-camp at the rebellion's headquarters at the General Post Office (GPO) in Dublin. There he fought alongside Patrick Pearse, James Connolly, and other members of the Rising leadership. The Rising is generally acknowledged to have been a military disaster, yet the insurgents achieved their goal of holding their positions for the minimum time required to justify a claim to independence under international criteria.

Collins was arrested and subsequently imprisoned at Frongoch internment camp in Wales. He began to emerge as a major figure in the vacuum created by the executions of the 1916 leadership. He began hatching plans for "next time" even before the prison ships left Dublin.

At Frongoch he was one of the organizers of a program of protest and non-cooperation similar to that carried on by Bobby Sands and other IRA prisoners of the 1980s. The camp proved an excellent opportunity for networking with physical-force republicans from all over the country, of which he became a key organizer.

While some celebrated the fact that a rising had happened at all, believing in Pearse's theory of "blood sacrifice," namely that the deaths of the Rising's leaders would inspire others, Collins railed against the military blunders made, such as the seizure of indefensible and very vulnerable positions like St Stephen's Green, from which escape was impossible. Public outcry placed

pressure on the British government to end the internment. In December 1916, the Frongoch prisoners were sent home.

## **Post Rising Developments**

Before his death, Tom Clarke, considered to be the leading planner of the Rising, had given Power of Attorney to his wife, Kathleen Daly Clarke, for all the administrative material of the Rising. Because of his financial acumen and accounting experience she asked Collins to become Secretary to the National Aid and Volunteer's Dependents Fund. Mrs. Clark subsequently passed on to Collins the secret organizational information and contacts which she had held in trust for the independence movement. The first communique that she sent out stated that only the first blow had been struck. Begin planning for the next one. Collins became one of the leading figures in the post-Rising independence movement spearheaded by Arthur Griffith, editor/publisher of the main nationalist newspaper *The United Irishman*. Griffith's organization, Sinn Féin, had been founded in 1905 as an umbrella group to unify all the various factions within the nationalist movement.

Under Griffith's policy, Collins and other advocates of the "physical-force" approach to independence gained the cooperation of non-violent Sinn Féin, while agreeing to disagree with Griffith's moderate ideas of a dual monarchy solution based on the Hungarian model. The British government and mainstream Irish media had wrongly blamed Sinn Féin for the Rising. The publicity motivated Rising participants to join the organization. By October 1917 Collins had risen to become a member of the executive of Sinn Féin and director of organization for the Irish Volunteers. Éamon de Valera, another veteran of 1916, stood for the presidency of Sinn Féin against Griffith, who stepped aside and supported de Valera's presidency.

## **The War for Independence**

The war of independence essentially began on the day the First Dail (The Parliament of the new Republic) on January 21, 1919. On that same day, an ambush party of IRA volunteers from the 3rd Tipperary Brigade attacked a pair of Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) men who were escorting a consignment of gelignite to a quarry in Soloheadbeg, County Tipperary. The two policemen were shot dead during this ambush considered the first action in the Irish War of Independence. The attack was not authorized by the new government. However, Collins in Dáil discussion of the incident implicitly accepted responsibility on behalf of the IRB. The legislature's support for the armed struggle soon after became official.

From that time Collins filled a number of roles in addition to his legislative duties. That summer he was elected president of the IRB (and therefore, in the doctrine of that organization, *de jure* President of the Irish Republic). In September, he was made Director of Intelligence for the Irish Republican Army which now had a mandate to pursue an armed campaign, as the

official military of the Irish nation. With Cathal Brugha as Minister of Defense, Collins became Director of Organization and Adjutant General of the Volunteers.

Collins was determined to avoid the massive destruction, military, and civilian losses for merely symbolic victories that had characterized the 1916 Rising. Instead he directed a guerilla war against the British, suddenly attacking then just as quickly withdrawing, minimizing losses and maximizing effectiveness. Local guerilla units received supplies and training. They were virtually invisible as they would quickly strike and withdraw. They were called the Flying Columns.

The British retaliated by transporting the Black and Tans, the Cairo Gang, and the Auxiliaries who were really thugs rather than professional soldiers. They had a free reign to attack and search homes, arbitrarily shoot innocent citizens, and foment a reign of terror on their own.

The Flying Columns were well trained and regional leaders were responsible for tactics and strategy and along with regional organizers reported directly to Collins. The also had a very deep network of spies in every British organization capable of identifying the vulnerabilities and activities of the British forces. Attacks were planned accordingly.

Meanwhile, de Valera travelled to America on a fund-raising mission. While the effort was financially successful, the de Valera mission was a political disaster. Dev was just not a good “people person.”

Back in Ireland, Collins negotiated a national loan, organized the IRA, effectively led the government, and managed arms-smuggling operations. He also assembled an assassination team called The Squad. In response the British put a price on his head of 10,000 pounds or the equivalent of 360,000 Euros in today’s market. They wanted Collins out of the way, dead or alive. The hit on Collins was ordered by the Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill.

The fighting intensified with attacks in retaliation on “Bloody Sunday” when British forces opened fire at an athletic event at Croke Park killing twelve and wounding sixty-five. The Irish retaliation was so intense that British troops were confined to only the strongest barracks in the larger towns.

Finally, a truce was agreed upon and a cease fire was declared.

## **Treaty Negotiations**

The offer of a truce came from the British. The Dail was not consulted. Several parties intervened to stop the violence including the Pope, the clergy of Britain who reached out to Arthur Griffith, and various other political and social agencies.

Many of the rebel forces on the ground first heard of the truce when it was announced in the newspapers and this gave rise to the first fissures in nationalist unity, which were to have serious consequences later on. They felt they had not been included in consultations regarding its terms.

De Valera was widely acknowledged as the most skillful negotiator on the Dáil government side and he participated in the initial parlays, agreeing to the basis on which talks could begin. The first meetings were held in strict secrecy soon after the Customs House battle, with Andrew Cope representing Dublin Castle's British authorities. Later, de Valera travelled to London for the first official contact with Lloyd George. The two met one-on-one in a private meeting, the proceedings of which have never been revealed.

During this Truce period, de Valera sued for official designation as [President of the Irish Republic](#) and obtained it from the Dáil in August 1921. Not long after, the Cabinet was obliged to select the delegation that would travel to the London peace conference and negotiate a treaty. In an extraordinary departure from his usual role, de Valera adamantly declined to attend, insisting instead that Collins should take his place there, along with Arthur Griffith.

Collins strenuously resisted this appointment, protesting that he was "a soldier, not a politician" and that his exposure to the London authorities would reduce his effectiveness as a guerrilla leader should hostilities resume. (He had kept his public visibility to a minimum during the conduct of the war; up to this time the British still had very few reliable photographs of him)

The Cabinet of seven split on the issue, with de Valera casting the deciding vote. Many of Collins's associates warned him not to go, that he was being set up as a political scapegoat. Following intense soul-searching and all-night consultations with his most trusted advisors, he resolved to attend "in the spirit of a soldier obeying orders." In private correspondence he foresaw the catastrophe ahead: "Let them make a scapegoat or whatever they like of me. Someone must go."

Collins was well aware that the Treaty was a compromise and that he would be vulnerable to charges of "sell-out" from purist Republicans. Throughout the negotiations Collins was aware of the weakness of his negotiating position and determined that he would fight hard for whatever he could get. It did not establish the fully independent republic that Collins himself had shortly before demanded. The "physical force republicans" who made up the bulk of the army which had fought the British to a draw would be loath to accept dominion status within the [British Empire](#) or an [Oath of Allegiance](#) that mentioned the King. Also controversial was the British retention of [Treaty Ports](#) on the south coast of Ireland for the [Royal Navy](#). These factors diminished Irish sovereignty and threatened to allow British interference in Ireland's foreign policy.

Collins and Griffith were well aware of these issues and strove tenaciously, against British resistance, to achieve language which could be accepted by all constituents. They succeeded in

obtaining an oath to the Irish Free State, with a subsidiary oath of fidelity to the King, rather than to the king unilaterally.

It should also be noted that there were at least two documented attempts to assassinate Collins. The first attack was on the steps of a church as he was leaving it after a weekday morning Mass. A devout Catholic, Collins was a daily communicant who attended a different Church every day. One would have to assume that the notice of his whereabouts on that morning had to come from someone very close since only a very few would know where he was.

The second came on the boat train as they crossed the Irish Sea to Ireland. The lack of success was due only to the ineptitude of the assassins.

It is now generally believed that had the nationalist leadership united in support of the Treaty, there would have been no split in the army such as to precipitate civil war. However immediately on the delegation's return from London, de Valera led a vocal charge against the delegates, whom he called "traitors".

It was de Valera who had met with the British to outline the parameters for negotiations. This was despite the fact that de Valera, the nationalists' most able negotiator, had refused strenuous pleas from Collins, Griffith, and others to lead the London negotiations in person. He had been fully informed of the process at each stage. He had also refused the delegates' continual requests for instruction, and in fact had been at the center of the original decision to enter negotiations without the possibility of an independent republic on the table. It was imbedded in the history of his political life that de Valera avoided anything that would make him look bad. The outcome was predetermined and de Valera knew it from the beginning. Collins was seen as a rival and de Valera set him up to take the blame.

In opposition to this thought there remains a school of thought which considers de Valera's protests to have been reasonable and motivated by deep moral objections, and which sees Collins in a negative light, as having irresponsibly signed away the nation's interests due to incompetence or a self-serving agenda. The Treaty controversy split the entire nationalist movement. Sinn Féin, the Dáil, the IRB and the army each divided into pro- and anti-Treaty factions. The Supreme Council of the IRB had been informed in detail about every facet of the Treaty negotiations and had approved many of its provisions, and they voted unanimously to accept the Treaty with the single notable exception of [Liam Lynch](#), later COS of the anti-Treaty IRA.

The Dáil debated the Treaty bitterly for ten days until it was approved by a vote of 64 to 57. Having lost this vote, de Valera announced his intent to withdraw his participation from the Dáil and called on all deputies who had voted against the Treaty to follow him. A substantial number did so, officially splitting the government. This set the stage for civil war.

A large part of the Irish Republican Army opposed the Treaty. Some followed the political lead of anti-Treaty TDs, others acted on their own convictions, with more or less equal suspicion of politicians in general. Anti-Treaty IRA units began to seize buildings and take other guerrilla actions against the Provisional Government. On April 14, 1922, a group of 200 anti-Treaty IRA men occupied the Four Courts in Dublin under [Rory O'Connor](#), a hero of the War of Independence. The [Four Courts](#) was the center of the Irish courts system, originally under the British and then the Free State. Collins was charged by his Free State colleagues with putting down these insurgents, however he resisted firing on former comrades and staved off a shooting war throughout this period.

While the country teetered on the edge of civil war, continuous meetings were carried on among the various factions from January to June 1922. In these discussions the nationalists strove to resolve the issue without armed conflict. Collins and his close associate, TD [Harry Boland](#) were among those who worked desperately to heal the rift.

To foster military unity, Collins and the IRB established an "army re-unification committee", including delegates from pro- and anti-Treaty factions. The still-secret Irish Republican Brotherhood continued to meet, fostering dialogue between pro- and anti-Treaty IRA officers. In the IRB's stormy debates on the subject, Collins held out the Constitution of the new Free State as a possible solution. Collins was then in the process of co-writing that document and was striving to make it a republican constitution that included provisions that would allow anti-Treaty TDs to take their seats in good conscience, without any oath concerning the Crown.

Meanwhile the situation in the North deteriorated. Loyalists took the initiative to disrupt the lives of republicans which generated appropriate retaliation. The mandates of the Treaty were violated by both parties with the loyalist activities publicly supported by Sir Winston Churchill.

## **The Civil War**

On June 22, 1922, the Civil War broke out with the assassination of Sir Harry Wilson. Wilson has been assassinated by gunfire on the steps of his home in London. He had recently resigned his field marshal position with the British Army to become the Prime Minister for Northern Ireland.

No one knows who ordered the assassination. The presumption was that Collins was responsible but he insisted that he did not. Collins' position in this conflict was extraordinary indeed. "A majority perhaps" of the army he'd led in the War of Independence were now ranged against the Free State, which he represented. In addition the force which by the will of the electorate he was obliged to lead had been reorganized since the Truce. Formed from a nucleus of the pro-Treaty IRA, it had evolved into a more formal, structured, uniformed [National Army](#) that was armed and funded by the British. Many of the new members were Irish WW1 veterans and others who had not fought on the nationalist side before. It was now ten times the size of the force which had



won independence, yet heavily populated with former British Army personnel. Collins's profoundly mixed feelings about this situation are recorded in his private and official correspondence. The Civil War generated the ugliest of situations with those who had fought side by side in the war of independence now fighting each other.

There is considerable evidence that Collins's journey to Cork in August 1922 was made in order to meet republican leaders with a view to ending the war. If so, it would explain a good deal that remains mysterious about the journey.

The question of his involvement in peace negotiations is hotly debated by historians. It has ramifications for opposing political viewpoints about him and especially about his death. If this was a peace mission, it was without any record of official involvement and sanction from the Provisional Government Cabinet. However this is not necessarily out of keeping with the general nature of peace negotiations in wartime. The first contacts with British negotiators had been "a dead secret," even from many of his associates. Nor was it unknown for Collins to make bold, controversial moves on his own initiative. Private and personal correspondence indicates that there was less than perfect trust and cordiality between Collins and some members of the Dáil. There was considerable friction between ministers on the conduct of the war and the treatment of anti-Treaty combatants.

## **The Assassination of Collins**

Collins felt it was safe to travel in his own County. He was killed by an ambush at the crossroads of Beal nam Blath. That is about the only fact that can be documented. None of the witnesses on either side gave the same story. No one knew the doctor who examined the body or even if a doctor did examine the body. No autopsy was performed. There was no national investigation of his death. His body was returned to Dublin for a funeral with over five hundred thousand participants.

He left behind many friends one of whom was his fiancée, Kitty Kiernan, Ms. Kiernan was the aunt of a priest friend of mine and pastor of my Montclair parish, the late Msgr. Jack Judge.

He was a very complex man. Though he had a background in finance, he lived frugally. Everyone in politics introduces colleagues as "my dear friend." For Collins, though, they were genuine friendships.

He has a very active spiritual life and, as I have already mentioned, was a daily communicant.

His legacy is obvious. That there exists a Republic of Ireland on this day is a direct result of the work of Michael Collins. He deserves a high place in the pantheon of Irish heroes.

## **Important Notes**

There is a large body of literature generated by Michael Collins himself. There are letters between him and his fiancée, Kitty Kiernan that reveal the romantic soul of the man. There are many biographies, the best being, in my opinion, that of Tim Pat Coogan. I have read many articles researching this article and I am so indebted to so many authors each of whom contributed a little snippet that found its way into this article.

His name is not on the Proclamation of Independence but as great as the are signers, Michael Collins is the man who made their dreams a reality. An entire alternative history of Ireland has been lost by his untimely death.

### On This Day in Irish History- January 2016

- 5 January 1922- Ernest Shackleton, polar explorer, died suddenly in South Georgia as he prepared to lead his fourth expedition to the Antarctic.
- 7 January 1922- Dail Eireann approved the Anglo-Irish Treaty by 64 to 57 votes.
- 16 January 1922- Michael Collins, as chairman of the Provisional Government of Southern Ireland, formally accepted the transfer of power from the British at Dublin Castle.
- 20 January 1902- Birth in Dublin of Kevin Barry, first IRA volunteer to be executed during the Anglo-Irish War.
- 23 January 1608- "Plantation of Ulster" begins. James I allows English and Scottish Protestants to settle on land confiscated from the Gaelic Irish.
- 25 January 1627- Robert Boyle, creator of Boyles Law, is born in Co. Waterford.
- 26 January 1904- Birth of Sean McBride to Maude Gonne in Paris.
- 30 January 1845- Birth of Katherine ("Kitty") O'Shea, mistress and later wife of nationalist leader, Charles Stewart Parnell. Their affair caused a huge scandal which ultimately led to Parnell's downfall as leader in December 1890.

## SPORT & IRELAND A HISTORY

By Paul Rouse Oxford University Press ISBN 9780198745907 2015 375 pp.

Was the game of chess really 'invented' by the Irish? Back in the late mid-nineteenth century when Irish nationalists sought to promote the idea that their civilization was of high intellect, the notion that chess was 'invented' by the Irish came into being. Michael Cusack, one of the founders of the GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association) in an editorial, wrote about the history of chess and its Irishness. Chess was the "King of the Intellectual" games, invented in 1430 BC and it was believed that the thirty-two pieces which comprise the set were made to represent the thirty-two counties of Ireland. Rouse refutes this allegation however in his book.

But the book is much more than about chess. Rouse covers the full range of Irish sporting life over a period of many hundreds of years. The reader could be a little surprised by the sports included at times- medieval bear baiting and cock-fighting, and the deaths of seven people in a medieval archery 'row' in Durrow, County Offaly. Rouse's book tackles the more well know sports of course, such as hurling. He brings a fresh analysis to the ever-changing nature of hurling by showing how the blurring of myth and history makes it difficult to know how much of the game that is played today resembles the game played in the Middle Ages.

Rouse's research for the book included newspaper archives and he makes an interesting point that the high levels of literacy in late nineteenth century contributed to the huge interest in reading about sports too. Anyone who regularly reads newspapers like The Irish Times or The Irish Independent, for example, can attest to the extensive daily coverage given to sports in general.

Rouse also challenges the traditional notion that cricket, the most popular field game in rural Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century, was destroyed by the rise of hurling.

Sport & Ireland: A History should appeal to both sports fans and students of Irish history. I recommend it highly.



RYAN WELSH THE COAST STAR

Dr. Peter Halas joined Cormac O'Malley, who recently spoke at the Sea Girt Lighthouse during an Irish cultural event.

# Irish speaker comes to Sea Girt Lighthouse

BY CAREN MAY  
THE COAST STAR

**SEA GIRT** — The John Walsh Jersey Shore Chapter of The Irish American Cultural Institute [IACI] recently hosted an Irish cultural evening featuring Cormac O'Malley.

The well-attended event, held Monday, Dec. 14, took place at the Sea Girt Lighthouse.

According to Sea Girt resident Dr. F. Peter Halas, local pediatrician and chairman of the Irish-American Cultural Institute, Mr. O'Malley is an important member of the Irish history and cultural community in both New York City and in Ireland.

Dr. Halas said that Mr. O'Malley was born in County Mayo and came to the United States at age 14 upon the death of his father, the subject of his presentation.

"Educated at Harvard University, then service in the U.

S. Navy, and a Columbia University law degree, Cormac had an extensive career in international business," Dr. Halas said.

"He now devotes his time to the preservation and publication of the works of his mother, artist and art collector, Helen Hooker O'Malley, and his father, Ernie O'Malley."

According to Dr. Halas, Ernie O'Malley's extensive writings foster deep insight into Ireland and her people during the War for Independence and the post-treaty civil war, during which he was severely wounded.

"While writing his memoirs in the United States, his colleagues were the literary giants of the time," Dr. Halas said.

A biography of Ernie O'Malley is entitled "Irish Intellectual." He passed away at age 59 from wound com-

plications with much still to accomplish, Dr. Halas said.

"Cormac's poignant personal description of his dad and the times filled the appreciative audience with a sense of connection to an important era in the history of Ireland," Dr. Halas said.

"The IACI is especially appreciative of Cormac and his family who donated an extensive art collection to the IACI now proudly displayed at the University of Limerick," Dr. Halas continued. "They also endowed a much appreciated IACI, O'Malley monetary art award given annually in Dublin."

Dr. Halas said that those interested in Irish history and culture are welcome to join the IACI each second Monday of the month at 7 p.m. at the Sea Girt Lighthouse, which, he added, generously allows the group to meet in the unique and historic venue.



## IRISH AMERICAN CULTURAL INSTITUTE JOHN WALSH JERSEY SHORE CHAPTER 2016 IRISH CULTURE EVENTS SCHEDULE SEA GIRT LIGHTHOUSE 7 PM

1/11/16	KEVIN WESTLEY	IRISH CHRISTMAS
2/8/16	MICHEAL O'MAILLE	CRASH COURSE IRISH LANGUAGE
3/14/16	MICHEAL O'MAILLE	1916
4/11/16	LEANN SULLIVAN	POET, TOURING FROM IRELAND
5/9/16	HENRY McNALLY	REBELLION TO REPUBLIC 3
6/13/16	HENRY McNALLY	REBELLION TO REPUBLIC 4
7/11/16		
8/8/16		
9/12/16		
10/10/16		
11/14/16		
12/12/16		