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Senator Martin McAleese
Independent Chairperson
Inter-Departmental Committee
to establish the facts of state involvement with the Magdalen Laundries
Montague Court
Montague Street
Dublin 2

Dear Senator McAleese,

As discussed in a previous email, I have now completed my examination of Department of Health archival "Returns" from Counties Mayo and Galway for "Unmarried Mothers and Children" resident at the Baby Home, Tuam, Co. Galway for the period 1950-1958. This institution served Mayo and Galway public assistance authorities in receiving and providing for unmarried pregnant women and mothers and their "illegitimate" children. The institution closed down in the late 1950s at which time the remaining children were transferred to Sean Ross Abbey, Co. Tipperary. The home was licensed and inspected by the State and funded by both the State and Local Government authorities.

The Department of Local Government and Public Health required the Baby Home to complete a bi-annual (six-monthly) return for all children resident therein at any given time. The form also requested information on the "Whereabouts of the Parents," and in all instances where the child was born "illegitimate" the information provided concerns the mother alone. Some mothers are listed as returning to their home place, some are working in Galway, Castlebar, Ballina or Tuam, etc. Still others are listed as gone to England or the USA.

I am attaching a MSEXcel spreadsheet providing redacted information for twenty four (24) children, seven (7) from Mayo and seventeen (17) from Galway, who were resident at the Baby Home, Tuam between 1950 and 1959-60. I have copied the original forms and can provide you with redacted versions for your examination. Alternatively, you can exam the original files at the Department of Health—I provide archival file numbers in the Excel spreadsheet.

You will notice that many of these children recur across numerous forms, i.e., they are resident for 2-5 years and therefore are listed on multiple forms. In all twenty-four cases these entries include the statement “Mother in Magdalen Home” under the column seeking information on the “Whereabouts of Parents.” In one instance this is modified slightly to state “Mother in Magdalen Convent,” and in another instance states “Mother in Galway Magdalen Home.”

You will note that in some cases, the form provides information for the discharge of the child—some children were resident at Tuam for as much as 5-6 years. If these children were not adopted, it is likely that they were transferred to a junior Industrial School once they reached the age at which the State capitation grant could be availed of. The forms do, in some cases, provide the date of discharge for some of the mothers, but never for the mothers transferred to the “Magdalen Home.”

It would appear that a number of these children were siblings—a number of children have the same surname. If that is the case, then it might signal the continued practice outlined in the Department of Local Government and Public Health Annual Report 1932-33 whereby women seeking public assistance for a second or subsequent pregnancy outside marriage (a “repeat offender” or “hopeless case”) would be sent to the Magdalen Asylum. Again, this would seem to confirm the information contained in JFM’s “A Narrative of State Interaction with the Magdalene Laundries,” pg. 30-31 and Appendix 8.a.iii.

I also point your attention to the two instances whereby children listed with “Mother in the Magdalen Home” are recommended for adoption, i.e., “Recommended for Adoption” and “For Adoption in America.” As with the annual statistical reports from Sean Ross Abbey that I submitted recently, these more explicit references to both domestic and international adoption of children born in Mother-and-Baby Homes that were simultaneously transferring mothers of the same children to Magdalen Laundries irrefutably establishes the interconnections (or dependence) between both sets of institutions and Irish adoption practices at the time. The implications of such practices for adult adoptees searching for their natural/birth mothers are serious and significant, i.e., the child may presume that his/her mother had a second chance to start life over and may never find out that she was transferred to a Magdalen, and even if they accessed that information via these forms there is no indication as to which Magdalen home the Mother was transferred to. Add to this uncertainty the inability to access Magdalen records generally and the search process becomes near impossible.

Finally, I would point to the one instance from 1955 of a child who died when only 10 months old. The child’s mother is listed as “in the Magdalen Home.” Given that the mother would in all likelihood have been nursing her child at ten months, it is difficult to comprehend why the tragedy of losing her child would have been compounded by the additional punitive measure of transferring her to the Magdalen? I also refer to my previous letter, which signaled the very high rates of infant mortality for “illegitimate” children under one year of age, specifically at the Baby Home, Tuam.

Again, please feel free to ask any questions you may have regarding this additional evidence of State interaction with the Magdalene Laundries.

Sincerely,

James M. Smith

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