

AN UNDEVELOPED PICTURE COMES INTO FOCUS  
THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN IRISH NATIONALISM, SUFFRAGE, AND THE EASTER  
RISING

by

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## ABSTRACT

TERESA A. LOWENSTEIN. An Undeveloped Picture Comes into Focus  
The Role of Women in Irish Nationalism, Suffrage, and the Easter Rising  
(Under the direction of DR. PETER THORSHEIM).

This thesis draws attention to the role of women in Ireland during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the suffrage movement, Irish nationalism, and the Easter Rising. It contributes to historiography with the inclusion of new information in connection to how the women viewed their roles and the factors that resulted in their increased participation in the public sphere. Moreover, it brings added insight into elements that influenced the choices they made. These include the role of religiosity, the influence of culture, and the emergence of feminism. Finally, it brings to light women absent from the pages of history and delves into reasons for their omission. This adds to an understanding of the time and contributes to an increased awareness of the neglected history on women, gender issues, and the global connections found in these.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband Joel, for his unwavering support and encouragement with my education and in particular this thesis. He listened through countless revisions and edits as I read aloud the pages that compile this document. Truthfully without his support and help with the running of our household this paper would not have been completed.

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## **Ireland, An Annotated Timeline:**

**300 BC** Celts settle in Ireland.

**5-6<sup>th</sup> Centuries** St. Brigid (hints that early Christian church developed from an originally female structure).

**8-9<sup>th</sup> Century** *Book of Kells* written.

**12<sup>th</sup> Century** Anglo-Norman Invasion, initiated by Henry II in 1171.

**1348** Black Death.

**16<sup>th</sup> century** Political Irish Nationalism erupts in response to the plantation of Ireland by Protestant settlers.

**1791** United Irishmen founded by Wolfe Tone.

**1798** United Irishmen Rebellion (supported by the French the failure of the revolt resulted in the suicide of Wolfe Tone after his capture by the British).

**19<sup>th</sup> Century** largest emigration of Irish citizens takes place Over eight million Irish leave their homeland to settle throughout the English-speaking world.

**1801** Act of Union. This law united England, Scotland, and Ireland under the name of The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

**1838** Poor Law Act.

**1845** Potato blight begins in Ireland

**1846-1852** Irish Potato Famine.

**1850** Tenant League founded.

**1879** Irish National Land League.

**Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century** Irish Revival “movement that sought to create, promote, and sustain Irish art.”

**1893** Gaelic League founded to promote the use of the Irish language.

**1896** *Shan Van Vocht* published for first time.

**1899** *Shan Van Vocht* ceases publication.

**1900** Inghinidhe na hÉireann founded by Maud Gonne.

**1905** Sinn Fein founded.

**1908** First issue of *Bean na-h-Eireann*.

**1909** Irish Transport and General Workers Union.

**1910** Soldiers of Ireland founded (Irish boy scouts).



**1911** Irish Women's Workers Union founded.

**1911** Last issue of the *Bean na hÉireann* published.

**1913** Irish Volunteer founded; Irish Volunteers founded soon after.

**1913** Dublin Lockout.

**1913** Cat and Mouse Act passed.

1913 Ulster Volunteers founded.

**1914** Cumann na mBan founded.

**1915** Irish Women's Catholic Society founded by Mrs. Stephen Gwyn and Professor Mary Hayden.

**1916** Easter Rising.

**1917** Amnesty Act Issued.

**1919-1921** Anglo-Irish War (War of Independence).

**Abbreviations and Acronyms Used:**

**AOH** Ancient Order of Hibernians

**BMH** Bureau of Military History

**GPO** General Post Office

**ICA** Irish Citizen's Army

**IRB** Irish Republican Brotherhood

**IWFL** Irishwomen's Franchise League

**WSPU** Women's Social and Political Union

## Introduction

January 1896 ushered in more than just a new year. In that month, the first Irish women's monthly magazine, *Shan Van Vocht* (in English, *The Poor Old Woman*), appeared in Belfast. Published by two women, a Catholic and a Protestant, it sought to promote both Irish culture and political nationalism. This alliance between individuals from two different faiths demonstrates one of many instances in which Irish women laid aside differences in beliefs to unite for a common cause. Other publications soon followed, and the voices of women who demanded changes in Ireland echoed in the pages of periodicals, in demonstrations, and speeches. Indeed, late nineteenth-century Ireland witnessed the actions of women who sought to break the shackles of domesticity to become active in the nationalist cause. The Irish suffrage movement and the role of women in the Easter Rising illustrate two examples of the growing involvement of women in the political sphere. Their journey faced obstacles from many quarters, including family members, the clergy, and politicians. This proved true not just in Ireland, but in the United States and in India. Breaking free meant danger. The women involved suffered physically and mentally because they challenged the system and demanded change. Those who opposed women's suffrage often used similar arguments in Britain, the United States, and India.

I argue laws of culture, religion, and social class became shackles, forged over centuries in male-dominated society contributed to the resistance the women encountered. I posit further that knowledge of how the women saw their role in politics helps in understanding their involvement. Questions addressed include: How did the suffrage movement in Ireland contribute to women challenging their roles at the time? Who were these women? What prompted the paths they took for change? Did other suffrage movements inspire them? How did religion influence them? Finally, what new evidence exists today to aid in understanding how these women viewed

their roles? My research builds on arguments of many historians including Catherine Lynette Innes, Cliona Murphy, Karen Steele, Senia Pašeta, and Margaret Ward. Utilizing primary documents, they describe conditions of Ireland and the attitudes of women of the time in connection to their roles. My work helps us to understand how these women viewed their actions and the roles they held. This contributes to a greater understanding of the women and the time through the identification of the various aspects of the nationalist movement in connection with Irish women. Their participation in the suffrage struggle mirrored that of suffrage movements around the world.

Finally, the availability of digitalized material aided in my research during days of quarantine because of the pandemic. I particularly want to thank the Bureau of Military History in Ireland for permission to include their files in my thesis. These primary documents support my argument on the women in Ireland in connection with how they viewed their roles during the early days of Irish nationalism and the fight for suffrage.

### **Ireland Under British Rule**

Among the earliest studies of the Irish experience under British rule is Gustave De Beaumont's *Ireland Social, Political, and Religious*, published in 1839.<sup>1</sup> De Beaumont's work exposed injustices the Irish endured under English rule; these included laws and policies that prevented the use of the Irish language and restricted religious practice. De Beaumont demonstrated how the environment, class, and religion created boundaries for the Irish under British rule. His book was also notable for the attention it paid to women's lives, and it laid the foundation for later studies.

### **Religiosity's Influence on the Irish**

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<sup>1</sup> Gustave De Beaumont, *Ireland Social, Political, and Religious* (1839), ed. And trans by W. C. Taylor. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

The influence of Catholicism on the Irish aids in understanding the role of women in Ireland. Father Donal A. Kerr's book - *A Nation of Beggars"? Priests, People, and Politics in Famine Ireland 1846-1852* brings to the historiography the influence of religiosity on the Irish.<sup>2</sup> The belief that the famine was a punishment from God resulted in a return to devotions for Irish Catholics. The cult of Mary that dates from the onset of Christianity in Ireland in the fifth century illustrates one devotion that resurged; evidence of this shows up in the return to recitations of the rosary by devout Irish in the middle and late nineteenth century. This devotion came during a global revival of Catholic faith that Popes Pius IX and Leo XIII backed. They encouraged it by publicizing devotions, raising the status of feast days, offering special indulgences for their practice, and blessings for their sodalities. These prayers offered to the Virgin Mary reminded Catholics of their vocations. This coupled with the rise in devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus further limited the role of women in Catholic households.<sup>3</sup> These religious practices emphasized the proper role of women in the family. Devotion to the Sacred Heart meant recognizing the importance of family and acting in a way that demonstrated evidence of faith in the display of womanly virtues. Kerr touched on these devotions by using information gleaned from diocesan records in Dublin and various other documents to depict how laws against Catholicism influenced the population. This details the religious environment that women of the time grew up in. Despite this, Kerr seldom speaks to the role of women in the quest for Irish nationalism; instead, he addresses church supported male groups in existence during the time.

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<sup>2</sup> Father Donal A. Kerr. *A Nation of Beggars"? Priests, People, and Politics in Famine Ireland 1846-1852*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> "The Devotional Revolution of the Nineteenth Century" in Catholic University of American Digital Exhibits. <American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives.>

The Sacred Heart of Jesus devotion consecrates the household to Jesus through a series of prayers. Those practicing this devotion strive to maintain a household pleasing to the Lord.

This demonstrates the frequent practice of writing women out of history, a practice perpetuated by male historians for much of history, even well into the late twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

### **Irish Nationalism**

Kerby A. Miller's *Emigrants and Exiles*, observes that "the traditional family was authoritarian and patriarchal . . . women in general had limited public personalities; child rearing practices seem to have been designed to inculcate a sense of duty and emotional dependence rather than individuality or self-reliance; outward shame and internalized guilt seem to have been the primary control mechanisms."<sup>5</sup> Miller's book speaks to the influence of society of the time but fails to speak on the role women played outside of the confines of societal bondage. He does briefly mention the role of women in helping to feed the family by working in factories but does not elaborate on their role.

### **The Concept of Ahistory**

Ashis Nandy's concept of ahistory identifies the section of history dismissed by those in power due to its roots. Nandy's concept resonates in other scenarios; it shows up in Britain's actions towards not just their colonies around the globe, but in their relations with Ireland. Myths of the Irish past and other elements of their culture became objects of scorn by the conquering British. Thus, not surprisingly British rule in Ireland resulted in continual revolts and efforts by the Irish to regain control of their culture. In Nandy's words, "The modern world has a plurality of people who have been uprooted --from their pasts, from their cultures, and from less impersonal communities that often ensure the continuity of traditions."<sup>6</sup> Irish nationalist women

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<sup>4</sup> Scholarly analysis undertaken by Margaret Ward, Karen Steele, prove this. Indeed, an examination of early historiography point to this. Examples in the introduction illustrate this.

<sup>5</sup> Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles, Ireland, and the Irish Exodus to North America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> Ashis Nandy, "History's Forgotten Doubles" in *History and Theory* (1995), 55.

exhibit one example of this and looked at through the lens of ahistory helps to explain the roles they took on. These roles went against the societal perception of their place in society in modern society, but not in the tales of old Ireland. Examples of these come up in the colonial relationships between England and India. It is evident in Britain's actions towards not just their colonies around the globe, but in their relations with Ireland. British rule in Ireland resulted in continual revolts and efforts by the Irish to regain control of their culture. In Nandy's words, "The modern world has a plurality of people who have been uprooted --from their pasts, from their cultures, and from less impersonal communities that often ensure the continuity of traditions."<sup>7</sup> Irish nationalist women exhibit one example of this, as the roles they took on went against the societal perception of their place in society. The intent to maintain societal order encouraged the elimination of their voice from history. This shows up in the Easter Rising booklet published in 1916. Within its pages one glimpses the rebellion through the eyes of the British Empire. Public documents emphasize the societal views of the British. Indeed, further evidence of the prejudicial stance of the British towards the Irish appears in the book *Six Days of the Irish Republic: A Narrative and Critical Account of the Latest Phase of Irish Politics*.<sup>8</sup> Also written in 1916 it adds to documentation illustrating the attitudes that this thesis addresses. Notably, the imagined community that comprised Ireland continued to resist British rule in the centuries that followed.

Kathleen Clarke, wife of the executed first president of the Irish Republic, later recalled that her husband had spoken of battles fought by previous generations when he commented on the possibility of war between Britain and Germany.<sup>9</sup> She noted that, "I could see that this talk of

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<sup>7</sup> Ashis Nandy, "History's Forgotten Doubles" in *History and Theory* (1995), 55.

<sup>8</sup> Louis G. Redmond-Howard, *Six Days of the Irish Republic: A Narrative and Critical Account of the Latest Phase of Irish Politics* (Boston: John W. Luce & Company, 1916).

<sup>9</sup> Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities*. (London: Verso, 1983).

England being engaged in war in the near future was having an unsettling effect on Tom. Night after night, sitting down when his work was done, he would revert to it, and the tragedy if Ireland failed to avail herself of such an opportunity to make a bid for freedom. If she failed to do so, it would break the tradition of generations and might end in Ireland being resigned to her fate as part of the British Empire.”<sup>10</sup> Tom’s attitude mirrored that of many and led to the Easter Rising. After the Easter Rising Kathleen shared a similar sentiment when asked by a British soldier why the Irish continued to rebel against England. Kathleen used the war with Germany to dramatize the feelings of the Irish. She asked him to imagine a future in which Germany had won the war. “Then in conquering England and ruling her, they reduced her from a prosperous country, an educated people, to a poverty-stricken one, education ruthlessly stamped out, the German language substituted by law for the English; her population reduced to a third of what it had been; her people driven out to make for the Germans; her people starved while the Germans were well-fed. Don’t you think, as an Englishman, you would rebel?” The soldier replied, “I’m damn sure I would.” “Well now you have our point of view.”” The Soldier thanked her and said he understood their position now for the first time.<sup>11</sup> This conversation represents one example of how Kathleen Clarke and nationalist Irish women of the time fought for Irish freedom. Some even traveled to the United States to aid in the fight. Certainly, it bears noting that for many Irish the promises of freedom that beckoned from the United States inspired revolt and emigration. Indeed, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century saw an unparalleled exodus of the Irish population to the United

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The term “imagined community” comes from Benedict Anderson’s book *Imagined Communities* which addresses the origins of national consciousness.

<sup>10</sup> Kathleen Clarke. *Revolutionary Woman*, ed. Helen Litton. (Dublin: The O’Brien Press, 2008), 6, 48.

Kathleen Clarke’s memoir written in the 1940’s was given to her grandniece and is now with the Daly Collection in the University of Limerick.

<sup>11</sup> Kathleen Clarke, 144.



States; about 4 million emigrated from Ireland to the United States.<sup>12</sup> Nandy addresses this global phenomenon of migration by writing , “This massive uprooting has produced a cultural psychology of exile that in turn has led to an unending search for roots, on the one hand, and angry, sometimes self-destructive, assertion of nationality and ethnicity on the other.”<sup>13</sup> The imagined community that resulted from this idea of an independent Ireland led to rebellion.

Consider too how lessons learned from the successful American revolution fueled hope. Despite failures of past attempts to break the yoke of British rule, rebellions to break Britain’s control of Ireland and to restore Ireland to the Irish increased. Expatriates in countries around the world contributed to the cause for a free Ireland. This proved especially true in the United States. Funds from the United States helped to purchase arms for the coming rebellion. Those who lost their lives in these fights became martyrs for a cause. Nationalism grew not just because of a desire for Irish independence from British rule, but the potential to own Irish history and to reclaim their culture. In brief, Nandy observes that, “History not only exhausts our idea of the past, it also defines our relationship with our past selves.”<sup>14</sup> For the Irish, independence meant a reconnection to the culture denied them by the British and an opportunity to fight against the prejudice of the British.

The editorial cartoons Michael de Nie examines in his book highlight the derogatory opinions of the Irish that predominated British thought. He argues that “British reporting on Ireland was crucially informed by the enduring stereotypes that constituted Irish identity . . . stereotypes of race, religion, and class.”<sup>15</sup> de Nie also highlights how domesticity and the duties

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<sup>12</sup> Kevin Kenny and Thomas Bartlett. “Irish Emigration, C.1845–1900.” Chapter. In *The Cambridge History of Ireland*, edited by James Kelly, 3:666–87. The Cambridge History of Ireland. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. doi:10.1017/9781316335680.028.

<sup>13</sup> Nandy, 55.

<sup>14</sup> Nandy, 54.

<sup>15</sup> Michael de Nie. *The Eternal Paddy: Irish Identity, and the British Press. 1798-1882*, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 242.

associated with it discouraged women who sought a position in revivalism and nationalism. Yet a call for help changed this.

### **The Ladies Land League**

Imprisonment of male leaders resulted in the need for outside help. Thus, the Ladies Land League came into existence through the efforts of the all-male Irish National Land League in January 1881. The women accepted the work of male run Land League because of the imprisonment of its members, imprisoned because of meetings they attended (laws passed restricted large group meetings). Following in the footsteps of the men, the Ladies Land League sought to aid those evicted from their homes in Ireland, to provide funds for the families of those jailed, and to look after the men of the Land League who were in prison.<sup>16</sup> Notably, Anna Parnell, sister of the Land League founder, Charles Parnell, became the president of the newly formed group. At first, the women's efforts meet with applause. Their increasing public role soon brought criticism and increased scrutiny when the same men who requested the women's help sought to shut them down. This included Anna Parnell's brother, who soon viewed them as too radical. In time both the Catholic church and the government also opposed the Ladies Land League. Crowds that once applauded them turned against them. The manipulation of both laws and funds available for the Ladies Land Leagues led to their demise. Indeed, de Nie notes the government strangled the Ladies Land League by seizing its funds. The group voted to disband in January 1882.

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de Nie's evaluation of over ninety national and local newspapers published in England, Wales, and Scotland covers four periods that include 1798-1800, 1845-52, 1867-70, and 1879-82.

<sup>16</sup> Anna Parnell. *The Tale of the Great Sham*. (Dublin: University College Dublin, 2020). 62, 125-27.

It bears noting that Parnell gave the original manuscript of *The Tale* written in 1907 to Helena Mahony in 1909. Years later in 1959 Mahoney gave the manuscript to T.W. Moody. Margaret Ward discloses that publication of the manuscript finally took place in 1986 (prior to this date it could only be read in the manuscript room of the National Library in Ireland)." Margaret Ward. "Historical Overview," in *The Tale of the Great Sham*. (Dublin: University College Dublin, 2020). xxxi-xxxii.

Financial control over assets of women allowed the authorities to limit the activities of Irish nationalist and suffrage women (in both Ireland and Britain). In addition, the British response resulted in further actions taken against them. Exemplifying this is the treatment women endured from the British during the suffrage and Irish nationalist movements. As de Nie states, “These women were held under laws designed to combat prostitution rather than political protest.”<sup>17</sup> This action portrayed the women as morally corrupt and mentally challenged. de Nie goes on to expound that this is how newspapers depicted any political organizations formed by women and the actions of women political activists.<sup>18</sup> He uses the example of the Ladies Land League to depict this:

British reporting on the Ladies Land League was not qualitatively different from that on any women political activists in the late nineteenth century. . . it was mocking, scornful and disdainful. Most newspapers . . . made every effort to demean the Ladies Land League . . . newspapers spoke of the women’s “shrieks, prattle, and hysterical ravings as well as their petticoats.” The public and political role of women undercut or denied by associating their actions with hysteria and “feminine maladies.”<sup>19</sup>

de Nie argues that women’s protests became viewed as evidence of emotional instability. In fact, de Nie suggests that the authorities and members of the clergy viewed political protests by women as unwomanly and acting against nature; much of the male population agreed. Leaders of the time emphasized domesticity and the duties associated with it to discourage women who sought more vocal roles in revisionism and nationalism. The religions of the day played a role in this perception.

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<sup>17</sup> de Nie, 242.

<sup>18</sup> de Nie, 243.

<sup>19</sup> Donal A. Kerr, “*A Nation of Beggars?*” *Priests, People, and Politics in Famine Ireland, 1846-1852* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 243.

## Daily Life in Ireland

Scholarship in the late twentieth century adds details in connection with daily life, illiteracy, and the depths of poverty that impacted generations. Improving these became a target for women. One Irish woman who illustrates this is Maud Gonne. She shared how the impact of clearances affected her father when he witnessed them.<sup>20</sup> His horror at the injustices the Irish endured made him disdain the uniform he wore for the British army. In *The Great Irish Potato Famine* (2001), James S. Donnelly, Jr. contributes information on the clearances and adds to the historiography with his use of documents and imagery.<sup>21</sup> The paintings included in his book characterize women at the time that range from bucolic to haunting. His investigation into the historiography that came into print immediately after the famine and in the decades after, fills gaps in information and exposes misinformation. Indeed, the study of the famine's effect on the Irish population continues to fuel research. Yet, the myopic nature of the research in connection with women draws attention to my argument that much of the historiography has failed women due to its lack of attention to them.

## The Exclusion of Women

Historian Cormac O'Gráda's *The Great Irish Famine* in 1999 exemplifies the lack of attention to women.<sup>22</sup> O'Gráda states that "Neither O'Connellite nor Fenian brands of nationalism did anything to foster Irish."<sup>23</sup> I contend, his failure to reference the women that aided in the return of the Irish language, denotes a dismissal of important content in connection with the women.<sup>24</sup> This changed in 1995, when feminist historian Margaret Ward delved into the

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<sup>20</sup> Clearances are the forced evictions of Irish families from their homes.

<sup>21</sup> James S. Donnelly. *The Great Irish Potato Famine*. England: Sutton Publishing Ltd. 2001.

<sup>22</sup> Cormac O'Gráda, *Black '47 and Beyond*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> Cormac O'Gráda, *Black '47*. 67.

<sup>24</sup> The organization, Daughters of Erin sought to revise the use of Irish and taught it to the youth of Ireland. The absence of this fact confirms yet again, the lack of historiographical content connected to women of the time and the prevailing habit to dismiss invitations for research that echoed in the catacombs of forgotten women.

role of women in the years before and during the Easter Rising.<sup>25</sup> Her work became a foundation for historians to build on. Yet, at the time she lamented the fifty-year embargo placed on documents in the possession of the Bureau of Military History that limited her research. Gradually, however, the records became public. The files in the Bureau of Military History in Ireland contain the testimonies of Irish men and women both preceding, during, and after the years of the rebellions that resulted in a free Ireland.<sup>26</sup> The files unveil not just activities in Ireland by women nationalists in Ireland, but also those in other parts of the British Empire. Karen Steele references these in a book published in 2007, which details the increased role of women in the press.<sup>27</sup> Steele lists fifteen newspapers and journals published by women during the time. She contributes findings from the journals and includes illustrations obtained from the National Library of Ireland. Notably, her listing of the publications themselves open additional avenues of approach and chart new paths to navigate.

### **Irish Women and Nationalism**

Senia Pašeta is another historian who has delved deeply into the archives. Her book, *Irish Nationalist Women, 1900–1918*, details the birth pangs of feminism and the road to nationalism.<sup>28</sup> Her research confirms “that women’s involvement with Irish nationalism was intensely bound up with the suffrage movement as feminism offered an important framework for women’s political activity.”<sup>29</sup> For it points to primary sources that characterize the women in

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<sup>25</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism*. (London: Pluto Press, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> Guide to the Collection. <https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/bureau-of-military-history-1913-1921/about/guide-to-the-collection/>

The Bureau of Military History began work on the testimonies in 1947 and continued collecting these until 1957. As noted at the Bureau of Military History website, “The Bureau was locked away in the Department of An Taoiseach for some forty-five years after the last statement was collected. In 2001, it was decided to transfer the Bureau to Military Archives and prepare it for release into the public domain.”

<sup>27</sup> Karen Steele, *Women, Press, and Politics During the Irish Revival* 1st ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> Senia Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women, 1900–1918*. (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Senia Pašeta, Introduction.

much greater detail. Various articles, laws, newspaper reports, and documents allow a more detailed picture of the women to emerge and with it the progress they realized (and setbacks).

Literary scholars have also made important contributions. C. L. Innes's *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society* explores the involvement of women in both nationalism and suffrage from 1880 to 1935 and examines the obstacles women encountered during the time. Among these was the idea that women lacked the intelligence of men. Innes notes that the British similarly assumed an attitude of intellectual superiority over the Irish.<sup>30</sup> The belief that the people of Ireland did not possess the intelligence needed for self-rule can be seen not only in language, but also in imagery that depicted the country as a woman. Notably, England is associated with male symbolism (thus supporting the viewpoint that England needed to look after Ireland because of its feminine nature).<sup>31</sup> Historian C. L. Hines notes this in her discussion of "The Feminine Idiosyncrasy." Here she draws attention to the perception of England toward Ireland, "The depiction of an abstract terms in female terms is not of course, restricted to Ireland alone--witness Britannia and France--but what is peculiar is . . . Ireland's helplessness and passivity. Britannia is most frequently depicted as a warrior woman, often wearing a helmet and armor, and linked to the figure of the charioted Boadicea. France often becomes merged with the image of Liberty and so appears active and triumphant rather than passive and despondent."<sup>32</sup> Yet, Innes notes that it was not only Britain that depicted Ireland in this manner. "Irish nationalists and unionists even more frequently depicted Ireland as a lady in distress."<sup>33</sup> Clearly

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<sup>30</sup> Catherine Lynette Innes, *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society, 1880-1935* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993).

<sup>31</sup> C.L. Innes. 12-13.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> C.L. Innes. 15.

according to these women then needed to be protected, kept safe within the confines of home.

Notably, the presumed intellectual superiority of men over women appears in comments Irish men expressed; surprisingly, a few Irish women also believed this. One example of this was the Antis group, which sought to stop the suffrage movement on these grounds.<sup>34</sup> Cliona Murphy draws attention to society of the time and the influences it brought with it. These included factors exhibited in class, education, religion, perception of self, interpretations of feminism, and the rights that women fought for.<sup>35</sup>

Likewise, Frawley's book *Women and the Decade of Commemorations* (2021) is filled with essays from historians on how the women involved in the nationalist and suffrage movements have been remembered. An important part of the dialogue of the historians expressed within its pages is how the women themselves acted in connection with the depiction of their roles in history. It considers whether they pushed for recognition or preferred the shadows of obscurity. Notably, "In the time following Easter Week, only nationalist women remained free to generate a new movement . . . it was left to Cumann na mBan, the Irish women's parliamentary organization, to wage effective propaganda campaigns."<sup>36</sup> This "masculine cult" spread by the women removed their involvement from the limelight and with it their role in the history of the time.<sup>37</sup> For this reason, the role women played in the years that followed differed from earlier times, and the quest for equality began to fade. So too did the history of their involvement. I argue this void in historiography merits renewed research. Indeed, McAuliffe notes that, "later

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<sup>34</sup> Murphy, 131-32.

<sup>35</sup> Murphy, 23.

<sup>36</sup> Murphy, 23.

<sup>37</sup> Mary McAuliffe. "Remembered for Being Forgotten," in *Women and the Decade of Commemorations*, edited by Oona Frawley. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2021), 23.

male writers, historians, and commentators usefully positioned women within a framework acceptable to a masculinist, conservative state . . . these narratives continue as a dominant memory trope.”<sup>38</sup>

### **Examples of Research on Nationalist Women**

Scholarship into the role of women during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contains a small list of names. The list includes Maud Gonne and Countess Constance Gore-Booth Markievicz. Yet frequently accounts provide blurred pictures of these women; this is demonstrated in a search of recent secondary sources that further identifies the limits of scholarship on the subject. Indeed, most information on Maud Gonne, relates to her relationship to the poet Yeats; her role in the organization- Inghini na hEireann remains unexplored.<sup>39</sup> Exemplifying the gap in scholarship even further is the scant attention paid to the group’s growing membership. Fifteen women comprised the original group of women in Inghinidhe na hÉireann in 1900. When it’s newspaper first came out, membership included twenty-nine women; this number grew even more with the passage of time.<sup>40</sup>

### **The Bureau of Military History**

Testimonies by these women, held in the archives of the Bureau of Military History in Ireland and released to the public in 2003, disclose a wealth of material that remains untapped by historians. A substantial portion of the files are now available via the internet.

These documents shed light on the women, their struggles, and the dangers they encountered, knowledge obscured for over a century due to concerns over national security. The files include the testimonies of women involved in the nationalist and suffrage movements and

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Maud Gonne founded the organization that afforded women opportunities for greater involvement in nationalism. Chapter two elaborates on the organization and the activities members participate.



the Easter Rising. The sheer volume of the collection bears noting. This bears witness to how many women of the time played active roles in the path to Irish independence and how their involvement grew with the passage of time.

Notably, a few male nationalists applauded the women's efforts, but these were the exception. Interviews confirm most families of the time held this same attitude; they believed that women belonged at home tending to duties there. Notably, the British military did not welcome the women's involvement nor initially did the Irish Revolutionary groups. With the passage of time several women connected to Inghinidhe na hÉireann grew involved in the volatile environment. Their participation in the events of 1916-1922 is detailed in the military archives. These demonstrate their desire to aid Ireland in this time of need. Photographs from the era portray women of the group acting as nurses and wielding weapons. Furthermore, the treatment and subsequent imprisonment they received at the hands of the British government is documented.<sup>41</sup>

Primary sources show an abundance of material not utilized. These include narratives in the form of correspondence, additional government files, and military testimonies. The abundance of newspapers published at the turn of the twentieth century attest to the involvement of women in journalistic venues and their support of the growing nationalist movement. These documents exemplify unexplored areas and in so doing allow the curious to seek out other information. Consider governmental files and diplomatic correspondence merely glanced over previously due to prejudice. Looking into these with an eye focused on women of the time may yield surprises and add to the historiography of the time.

### **Unexplored Areas**

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<sup>41</sup> BMH/CD/ Military Archives, Ireland.

The collective historiography on women in the Irish nationalist and suffrage movements highlights how much awaits exploration. Thus, this thesis looks to information exhumed to shed light on the role of Irish nationalist women and how they perceived their role. Photos from the time illustrate societal standards and prejudice imposed on women. New historiography and untapped primary sources demonstrate how society sought to limit the role of women. In conclusion, the recent movie *Seven Women*, highlights seven women involved in the Easter Rising and draws attention to the role of women in the Easter Rising. This thesis draws attention to the over two hundred women that participated in the Easter Rising. Historiography needs to note the roles they played, how they felt about these roles, their experiences, and the contributions they made.

## Chapter One: Women Who Sought Suffrage

I am woman, hear me roar  
 In numbers too big to ignore  
 And I know too much to go back and pretend  
 'Cause I've heard it all before  
 And I've been down there on the floor  
 No one's ever going to keep me down again

Whoa, yes, I am wise  
 But it's wisdom born of pain  
 Yes, I've paid the price  
 But look how much I gained.

--Helen Reddy and Ray Burton, 1972 <sup>1</sup>

Late nineteenth-century Ireland witnessed the actions of a unique group of women who sought to break the shackles of domesticity. Two movements stand out in Ireland that demonstrate this: the women's suffrage movement and the role of women glimpsed through the lens of nationalism that led to their participation in the Easter Rising. This chapter address the Irish suffrage movement and contributes information on the measures Irish women undertook and the various avenues they traversed for a greater role in the public sphere. They did this even though at the start of the movement a united front confronted them. Denial of full citizenship and the privileges it entailed, exemplifies just one obstruction on a road littered with obstacles. For powerful misogynist men in the realms of politics and religion remained determined to undermine their efforts. So too did a portion of the female population for it bears noting the women lobbying for enfranchisement and equality did not represent most women in Ireland; at

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Reddy and Ray Burton. "I Am Woman," from *I Don't Know How to Love Him*. Capital Records, 1972.

the beginning only a small number of women sought change. This number grew dramatically in just a few short years.

### **Who Were These Women?**

The women who sought change varied in age, education, marital status, religion, and social class. Some filled positions in academia, others worked at unskilled jobs, and a few came from upper-class society. Eva Gore Booth was one who came from a privileged background. Active in rallies and demonstrations, this frequent speaker at events supporting feminism and suffrage influenced many. Historian Cliona Murphy notes that “she has been credited with inspiring the young Christabel Pankhurst who took one of the courses Gore Booth was giving to mill girls in Manchester.”<sup>2</sup> Additionally, Maud Gonne is another who stands out. Her early work in France for women’s rights laid the foundation for her involvement in Irish nationalism and the role other women sought to play in it. Doctors Kathleen Clarke and Kathleen Lynn exemplify two of the many educated women who played a key role in the fight for equality. Another upper-class individual who played a significant role in Ireland was Margaret Cousins, who counted among her friends and fellow suffragettes Hanna Sheehy Skeffington. Murphy notes that Cousins inspired other women and “went on to support the women’s rights movement in India.”<sup>3</sup>

Notably, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington worked tirelessly for equality with her husband.<sup>4</sup> Also active in raising funds in Ireland was the actor, Marie Nic Shiublaigh; her involvement in the developing theatrical scene drew attention to these causes with plays presented to the Irish public. The avenues these women utilized differed, and so did their personalities. Not all women enjoyed speaking at gatherings, in fact, many women found the courage to speak out due to

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<sup>2</sup> Cliona Murphy, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement, and Irish Society in the Early Twentieth Century*. 52. Eva Gore Booth is the sister of another prominent feminist, Countess Constance Gore-Booth Markievicz.

<sup>3</sup> Murphy. 52.

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Ward. *Fearless Woman, Hannah Sheehy Skeffington, Feminism, and the Irish Revolution*.

activities they engaged in. So too, the participation of women grew with added experience. For a few, these experiences resulted in an evolution of personality.

Consider how at the start peaceful protests defined the suffrage movements; in time these gave way to a militant approach. Heckling and speeches evolved into outbursts of rock-throwing and damage to property. The women involved at first caught authorities off guard and thus actions against them included only warnings. This changed and far too soon the women suffered physically and mentally because they challenged the world and demanded change. The authorities sought to stop their activities by incarcerating the women in jails and later in prisons. For the women prison became both a badge of honor and an opportunity for education. They sought treatment as political prisoners and protested when their incarceration placed them with prostitutes and other criminals. The relationships formed through the various organizations they belonged to provided moral support and at the time even supplemented the meager prison food. Newspapers during these years reported on their treatment and became vehicles for drawing attention to the women's plight. Over the course of decades their actions faded from memory and their deeds became buried in archives of the past. In fact, lines describing their involvement in suffrage and the growing nationalist movement remain limited. This includes the contribution the publications (the women created) made to the growing nationalist movement and the nascent suffragist movement.

### **Fighting for the Franchise. Two Early Movements**

Cliona Murphy draws attention to two early movements in the goal for women to obtain suffrage in the late nineteenth century. She notes that "one of the suffrage organizations was founded by the Haslams, a Quaker couple in 1867. . . They founded the Dublin Suffrage Society later Irish Woman's Suffrage and Local Government Association; [Murphy adds], the Haslams

devoted their life to the promotion of women in local and national government. They told Irish women their rights in local Government and advised them how to participate in local Elections.”<sup>5</sup> In time they joined their efforts with the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies, based in England, yet as Murphy notes, “The very nature of their movement meant that the younger or more eager women of the early twentieth century found the need to form a totally different organization.”<sup>6</sup> With the growth in nationalism this undoubtedly played a role in other women seeking membership elsewhere.

The other early movement took place in Belfast, where Isabella Todd founded the North of Ireland Women’s Suffrage Society in 1873. Murphy noted that, “Todd told her audience that they had to prevail against the greatest monopoly ever known - the monopoly which men held over educational and political rights.”<sup>7</sup> Todd worked tirelessly towards this aim, and her work “provided a solid basis for a strong northern Ireland suffrage movement in the early twentieth century.”<sup>8</sup> However, the movement like others around the world remained restricted to an elite group of women. These women stood out because of their wealth and social status and the university educations they achieved. In fact, Helena Moloney stated that “the women’s movement . . . which aroused such a deep feeling of social consciousness and revolt among Irish women of a more favored class, passed over the head of Irish working women and left her [sic] untouched.”<sup>9</sup> Notably the embryonic development of the movement took place in the urban areas of Ireland; those in the rural sections for the most part remained isolated from the suffrage cause.

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<sup>5</sup> Cliona Murphy, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Murphy, 18.

<sup>9</sup> Murphy, 21.

Proof of this echoes in late nineteenth-century publications that promoted the right to vote and their limited areas of distribution.

### Other Early Voices for Change



Figure 1 - Image of first women's publication in Belfast. Part of items listed as public domain at University College Dublin.

*Shan Van Vocht*'s title bore witness to the publication's cultural and national identity. Translated to English the title becomes *Poor Old Woman* and touched on "the long tradition of imagining Ireland, as a colonized hag who promised to transform into a girl with the walk of queen."<sup>10</sup> Alice Milligan and Anna Johnston provided the inspiration that fueled the publication.

<sup>10</sup> Karen Steele, *Women, Press, and Politics During the Irish Revival* 1st ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007). 27-28.

It bears noting, the two women came from different religious backgrounds Protestant and Catholic. The masthead of their magazine heralded the lofty goals of its publishers:

“Yes, Ireland Shall Be Free  
From the centre to the sea,  
And hurrah for liberty,  
says the Shan Van Vocht.”<sup>11</sup>

Though its run proved short-lived (it only ran until 1899), the journal influenced growing trend towards Irish nationalism and feminism. The magazine attracted a small group of readers that in the words of Historian Karen Steele represented “middle-class revisionists (both men and women) in Belfast, Dublin, New York, and London.” In time, the magazine attracted an even larger audience that included “nationalist expatriates such as John MacBride in Johannesburg, Thomas Concannon in Mexico, and Patrick McManus in India.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, the importance of a publication by women showed up even in the appreciative comments of male readers. Notably, though the magazine “took pains to advocate the traditional role of women as peacemakers, Milligan did not espouse feminine passivity . . . she challenged the idea of women as the weaker sex.”<sup>13</sup> Milligan herself drew on her own personal background to emphasize the importance of physical fitness, she related her earlier experiences in school and the encouragement then given to keep physically fit. She argued further that doing this allowed “both men and women to prepare for the physical rigors of rebellion.”<sup>14</sup> She called men and women to join forces for a

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<sup>11</sup> Alice Milligan and Anna MacManus, *Shan Van Vocht*. Belfast: J.W. Boyd, 1896.  
doi:10.7925/drs1.ucdlib\_43117 <http://libucd-dev01.ucd.ie/?view=ucdlib:43117>

<sup>12</sup> Steele, *Women, Press, and Politics*. 33.

<sup>13</sup> Steele, *Women, Press, and Politics*. 36.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



united Ireland despite the divisions of gender, religion, and sectionalism. Coming from Ulster, her words spoke of the experience of living in an area of unrest.

Even before the period of unrest known as The Troubles, Ulster experienced unrest in the form of organized violence from those who wanted to remain part of Britain. These men organized acts of violence against the Irish that sought a free and united Ireland. Diane Urquhart expounds on those who, “With a heightened sense of political crisis, en masse mobilization, and a waning faith in Westminster’s ability and at times, desire to defeat home rule, Ulster unionism became more introspective, militant, and militaristic.”<sup>15</sup> Despite this environment Milligan brought to the table her experiences of social unrest, position, and education. She became an inspiration for other women, including a familiar name, Maud Gonne.

Maud Gonne declared that she envied Milligan’s voice and the vehicle that promulgated it; thus, Milligan’s magazine became an inspiration to others; moreover, due to the influence of her magazine another organization arose, Inghinidhe na hÉireann. In 1908, Inghinidhe na hÉireann began publishing a monthly newspaper, *Bean na-h-Eireann*, Ireland’s first women’s newspaper.



Figure 2 - Masthead of *Bean na hÉireann*. National Library of Ireland

<sup>15</sup> Diane Urquhart, “Unity or Unionism” in *Women and the Decade of Commemorations*. Indiana University Press (2021), 45.

Notably, Mrs. M. Hyland-Laylor revealed that the paper - “advocated that woman should set about raising their present position in the social and political life of the country, and labor to make their environment compatible with their moral and intellectual advancement, which incidentally means the development of the nation and of the race.”<sup>16</sup>

Another member, Helen Moleny, remarked “that the group did not agree with social ideals of Sinn Fein and wanted to express their own views.”<sup>17</sup> She noted further, “There was at that date no paper expressing the view of complete separation from England, or the achievement of National freedom by force of arms, if necessary, and of course no woman's paper at all, except the British Home Chat- variety of sheet.”<sup>18</sup> Short on funds, the group sought out subscribers and funding. Soon, articles followed and actions by the organization proved the determination of the women to bring about much needed change. Ironically, though numerous copies of *Shan Van Vocht* are available digitally (both in English and Irish), this is not true in connection with copies of the *Bean na-h-Eireann*, the publication begun by Inghinidhe na hÉireann. Most copies of these remain only available in print versions at the various libraries in Ireland.<sup>19</sup>

The paper, *Bean na hÉireann*, published monthly for three years, only ceased publication because, as Margaret Ward explained , “nationalists were no longer solely dependent on it . . . the emergence of another newspaper-*Irish Freedom*-owned and controlled by the Irish Republican Brotherhood began publication that November (1911) and there was now insufficient demand for it.”<sup>20</sup> It bears noting this did not end the role the women played nor did it deter them

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<sup>16</sup> BMH/CD/295/03,21, Military Archives, Ireland.

<sup>17</sup> BMH/CD/391/02,07, Military Archives, Ireland

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Despite this a large volume of information on the women associated with the organization (including letters and various manuscripts) are available online. Maud Gonne, Helena Malony, Louise Gavan Duffy, Nancy Wyse-Power, Mrs. M. Highland-Lalor illustrate a small sample of the names of women in the organization that left behind testimonies that shed light on the group, the period and the restrictions imposed.

<sup>20</sup> Margaret Ward, 74.

from being active in the changing world around them. Suffrage and the demand for it fueled further actions of Irish women and their growing contribution to periodicals and newspapers of the time.

*The Irish Citizen* exemplifies another publication that offered women an opportunity to express their thoughts. Its pages reveal the rising influence of women through their writing, but it also displays differences that divided them. Unionist and separatist beliefs demonstrate two examples of perspectives that challenged the limits placed on women. So too, did the differing pacifist and militant views of the women. Religion also proved divisive. The sensitivities of women towards those entering the public sphere proved equally controversial, since many believed a woman's role in the domestic sphere took prominence. In fact, only a few women sought participation in the public sphere; the majority preferred to work within the confines of their homes. This did not mean they opposed feminism; they simply glimpsed it through a different lens. So too did the quest for enfranchisement, for not all felt it merited a dedication that detracted from nationalism.

### **Inghinidhe na hÉireann**

The restrictions against women joining literary groups in Dublin became part of the impetus for the creation of the woman's literary organization Inghinidhe na hÉireann.<sup>21</sup> In fact, the desire to converse on literary topics and encourage a greater appreciation for Irish history provided the inspiration for the women to initially meet and later form the organization. Maud Gonne, Helena Malony, Louise Gavan Duffy, Nancy Wyse-Power, and Mrs. M. Highland-Lalor are five of the fifteen women who made up the group at its beginning. The group conducted classes for children to promote the Irish language, organized parades, put on theatrical

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<sup>21</sup> Chapter two elaborates on Inghinidhe na hÉireann.

productions, and supported the economy of the area by encouraging the support of Irish manufacturers and merchants. In this setting the earliest roots for Irish suffrage found genesis in the meetings and gatherings the women organized. Often these took place at literary events.

Literature and the influence of poets and writers in Ireland played a leading role in the development of the Irish Suffrage movement. One example to illustrate this is the names Inghinidhe na hÉireann members chose in Irish to use while in the group; for many this provided another path towards equality.<sup>22</sup> These small steps began a journey that allowed for the navigation of change and the creation of a map of sorts. The journalistic publication that owed its roots to Inghinidhe na hÉireann became a pivotal guide in charting the emergence of a more active women's role in the political environment that followed. Though the organization and the publication it printed survived for just a brief time, its impact proved revolutionary. It remains remarkable that this took place in a country that suffered from the effects of devastating poverty, disease, and illiteracy. Then, the culture of the land, the language of the people, the traditions, and religion that defined the Irish remained shackled to British influence. The determination to gain independence and the rising fervor of nationalism inspired others in Ireland to fight again. The organizations that these women led rallied others to join in the struggle.

It bears noting feminist ideas espoused by a small group of women influenced members of Inghinidhe na hÉireann, for their discussions centered around these and socialist beliefs. Anna Wheeler, George Egerton (aka Chavelita Dunne), Margaret Cousins, and Eva Gore Booth were among those prominent women active in the Irish suffragist movement. Historian Cliona Murphy notes that these women did not live in a vacuum. For proof she elaborates on the influence of

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<sup>22</sup> Senia Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women 1900-1918*. (U.K. Cambridge University Press, 2013), Inghinidhe na hÉireann translates to Daughters of Erin in English. Note the original twenty-nine women are listed at the military archives.

writings and plays prominent during their time. For these influenced the women and provided the foundation and questions the women sought answers to, chief among these, how to gain an increased role in the public sphere.

These women particularly valued the writing of Mary Wollstonecraft, Carrie Chapman Catt, and Olive Schreiner.<sup>23</sup> Murphy notes that although women during this time did not always agree with the content of these works, they nonetheless engaged with them. She goes on to cite examples using the words of Irish suffragettes of the time; she quotes from “Louie Bennett, leader of the Irishwomen’s Suffrage Federation and trade unionist, [that] her sisterhood with women was realized through reading Richardson, Fielding, Miss Burney, Jane Austin, the Brontës, Eliot and Ibsen.”<sup>24</sup>

Periodicals directed towards the suffrage movement found an audience among those desiring change in Ireland and influenced other publications of the time. *The Irish Citizen* illustrates one example. Margaret Ward’s *Fearless Woman Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, Feminism and the Irish Revolution* notes an article that demonstrates the *Irish Citizen*’s support of suffrage, “Duty of Suffragette,” in *Irish Citizen*, from 15 August 1914.<sup>25</sup> Sheehy-Skeffington wrote of the importance of continuing the fight for suffrage even amid World War I. Its publisher Frank Sheehy Skeffington spoke frequently at public events and encouraged women in their fight for equality. His wife, Hanna Skeffington-Sheehy, campaigned for suffrage. She contributed to Inghinidhe’s *Bean na hÉireann*.<sup>26</sup> This newspaper provides another illustration of women that wielded their pens in pursuit of the rights of full citizenship and offers an explanation as to why this mattered to them, illustrated in this quote utilized by Innes: “Our desire to have a voice in

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<sup>23</sup> Murphy, 56.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

directing the affairs of Ireland is not based on the failure of men to do so properly but is the inherent right of women as loyal citizens and intelligent human souls.”<sup>27</sup>

Notably, Inness’s investigations detail the beliefs of women in respect to feminism and suffrage. Further she enunciates the prevailing attitudes among the women toward equality. The clarification that a quest for equality did not propel the women toward suffrage, adds to the discussion and offers insight into the definition attributed to feminism in its earliest forms.

### **Religions’ Influence Revealed in a Surprising Way**

Though religious groups frequently opposed Irish women’s quest for suffrage, exceptions to this existed. The Irish Catholic Women’s Suffrage Society, founded in 1915, illustrates this.<sup>28</sup> Murphy writes that “the women involved in its establishment were concerned that an organization appealing specifically to Catholic women was necessary.”<sup>29</sup> Not surprisingly, those involved in its formation included convinced suffragettes Mrs. Stephen Gwyn and Professor Mary Hayden.<sup>30</sup> Most of the clergy of Catholic and Protestant churches opposed the women’s suffrage movement. The exceptions bear examination because of the uniqueness of their position. In fact, they reconciled their support because of the feelings they espoused that giving women the vote offered opportunity for redemption for society.

Murphy addresses this in her book and speaks to the fact that this belief echoed thoughts of men who felt a woman’s soul and her character provided a contrast to the militaristic male. These views became called into question with the emergence of the militant suffrage movement and later female support for the Great War, but at the onset of the movement, militancy did not

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<sup>27</sup> C.L. Innes, *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society*. Opening quote from Editorial in *Bean na h-Eireann*.

<sup>28</sup> Murphy, 141.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

A recent addition to historiography of the time that offers additional information on Professor Mary Hayden is Joyce Padbury’s book- *Mary Hayden, Irish Historian and Feminist 1862-1942*.

play a role. Women worked within the confines of society and bartered for change through cooperation with various groups. Their demand for greater involvement in aiding the poor coalesced with the emergence of a new goal, the right to vote. In time this brought about a division among members, but in the beginning the fractures remained hidden and the appearance of unity percolated amongst them.

Unity showed too in their collaboration with suffragist organizers in Britain. Then the two groups sought to exercise political pressure through the British Parliament to enact change. In fact, records establish Irish women modeled their early activities on those that began in Britain. Historian Donna Gilligan notes in ``*Commemorating a Missing History*'' that "Irish Suffragettes participated in acts of militancy that mimicked forms of British suffragettes acts. Reports record postbox attacks, militant acts that originated with the suffragettes in Britain."<sup>31</sup> In addition, windows and storefronts suffered damage from hammers and on one occasion umbrellas. These too drew their inspiration from British suffragettes. The lessons they learned resulted from their participation in coordinated activities and through perusal of the writings and newspaper reports of the protests organized by the women. In fact, on occasion Irish suffragettes traveled to England to join their sisters in protest. This group consisted of those in the middle- and upper-class sections of society. Thus, their social class afforded them the funds to travel.

### **Ways Irish Suffragettes Stood Out**

In England, Irish suffragettes stood out because they chose to wear green instead of white and carried banners representing Ireland.<sup>32</sup> Their desire for a free Ireland separated them from English suffragettes. In time, allegiance to Ireland brought about a dissolution of camaraderie when meetings they organized focused on home rule and opposition to the British monarchy.

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<sup>31</sup> Donna Gilligan. 153-158.

<sup>32</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries Women, and Irish Nationalism*. (London, 1989), 81.

Consider how women in Ireland organized their efforts during the visit of Queen Victoria, whom they derided as the “Famine Queen.”<sup>33</sup> They refused to participate in the British celebration, refused to cheer the Queen or fly the British flag. They also resisted offers of food and amusements set up to celebrate the Queen’s visit, boycotting these and instead served foods that celebrated Irish culture.<sup>34</sup>

Historians credit the women’s group Inghinidhe na hÉireann as an important vehicle for the women’s suffrage movement and the rise of feminism. This group sought other opportunities to aid nationalism. Through membership women sharpened skills in public speaking and writing. During meetings conversation percolated in connection with conditions in Ireland. Aid for the poor became one area for women to help the community and to protest political events. These became a staple of the Daughters of Ireland in their quest to foster feminism and to bring to light the nationalism at its core.

Siena Pašeta notes “The school menu program was important for a number of reasons not least because it was the first occasion on which the Inghinidhe and the IWFL worked together. It contributed to discourses about the relationship between philanthropy and state intervention, and moreover, the relationship of both to nationalist and socialist political activism.”<sup>35</sup> For example, Maud Gonne spoke out against the obstacles that prevented women from providing food for the children. Her outrage, combined with the outcries of other women, resulted in the program’s establishment and the return of the oversight of the school menu program to women. Yet once the program became established its oversight by women came into question. It took the outcry of

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<sup>33</sup> Margaret Ward. 80.

Historians state that multiple groups combined to provide the treat for the children. The foods given offered the children more than just nourishment. Entertainment also brightened the day in the form of plays. Debate on the timing of this in relation to the organization’s involvement bears mention. Historian Senia Pašeta draws attention to this in her book.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Senia Pašeta. *Irish Nationalist Women 1900-1918*. 121.



many to return the overseeing of the project to women.<sup>36</sup> This incident caused women to look closely at the roles allocated to them during the time. Desirous of more than just “helper roles” the women sought organizations that offered opportunities for involvement in both nationalism and achieving the vote. Women belonged to several groups and Inghinidhe na hEireann became the foundation for many of them. Among these Cumann na mBan stands out since it adapted a militaristic approach. Of course, at the onset the group looked far different from the uniform wearing group it became.

### **United for a Time**

The work dedicated to the suffrage movement for a time united women in Ireland and England. This is especially true in connection to their joint opposition to the Cat and Mouse Act of 1913. Murphy notes further, that “Irish women joined the Irish branch of the IWFL and the ISF when they saw their countrywomen coming to London. . . [and] they also went to lobby Irish MPs in London.”<sup>37</sup> These visits provided Irish women with an insight into how to organize protests and influenced their work. Murphy notes further, “the suffrage movement in the United States was also observed by Irish Suffragists.”<sup>38</sup> For this reason, Irish suffragists traveled to the United States for financial support. Eventually, camaraderie between the British and Irish groups splintered over the issue of conscription and nationalism.

These points of disagreement resulted in the formation of more groups in Ireland. For some Irishwomen this meant taking on roles subservient to men to achieve their goals. This type

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<sup>36</sup> Margaret Ward, 80-3.

<sup>37</sup> Murphy, 70.

IWFL is the acronym for Irishwomen’s Franchise League.

ISF is the acronym for Irishwomen’s Suffrage Federation.

Irish MP is an Irish member of the British Parliament.

<sup>38</sup> Murphy, 71.

of role went against the concept of equality held by many nationalist women, arguments that splintered organizations. Cuman na mBan illustrates one example of this.

### **Cumann na mBan**

On 5 April 1914, the women's group Cumann na mBan formed. On that day, "A provisional executive was elected, many of whom were relatives of leading figures in the Volunteers: Agnes MacNeil, Nancy O'Rahilly, Louise Gavan Duffy, Mrs. Touhy, Mary Colum, Nurse McCoy, Elizabeth Bloxham, and Margaret Dobbs."<sup>39</sup> Although the organization's formation received coverage in the suffrage paper, *The Irish Citizen*, the newspaper did not praise the group, but wondered at the role of the women in it. The *Irish Citizen* considered Cumann na mBan subservient to the all-male Volunteers. Articles followed that debated the role of the women, but the activities of the women and the fact their funds fell under the control of the men indicated the women did not possess the autonomy hoped for. In the beginning the women in the group filled roles like those held by women in other groups. They led efforts at fundraising, organized dances, and provided food. Historian Margaret Ward adds that "the initial appeal of the organizers was not to ordinary women- the shop assistant, clerical worker, or mother with young children-but to those with time to devote to the establishment of the organization. In other, words, women who did not need to work."<sup>40</sup> The initial turnout for the organization resulted in the attendance of one hundred women. At this gathering they declared their goals:

1. To advance the cause of Irish liberty.
2. To organize Irishwomen in furtherance of this object.

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<sup>39</sup> Margaret Ward. *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*. 93-4.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

3. To assist in arming and equipping a body of Irishmen for the defense of Ireland.
4. To form a fund for these purposes to be called the - Defense of Ireland Fund.<sup>41</sup>

The women in attendance sought greater involvement in the growing Nationalist movement and thus took part in the limited positions open to them. For this reason, women joined additional organizations in the hopes of finding other opportunities. For instance, Inghinidhe members joined Cumann na mBan due to an increased desire for nationalist involvement. This resulted because of the negotiations of Markievicz and the compromises she negotiated. Yet, even under Markievicz's direction the group's activities only filled roles allocated by men. Efforts for a greater role met continued male resistance. Still, the woman's determination did not yield to the barriers imposed on them, but instead worked at positions while continuing to argue for a greater inclusion in nationalistic activities.

The group faced criticism. Illustrating this is how Marie nic Shiublaigh detailed the gatherings of the group at its onset; her comments did not offer enthusiastic praise for the work assigned to the women. She wrote that, "Essentially, Cumann na mBan was founded to help in establishing the Volunteers . . . Apart from frequent classes in First Aid, stretcher bearing and occasionally field signaling, a great deal of the time was given to gathering of funds in support of the Volunteer organization."<sup>42</sup> Margaret Ward identified one of the most frequent critics of the newly formed Cumann na mBan, the Irish Citizen's Army's, Helena Moloney.

### **The Irish Citizen's Army**

Helena Moloney was a prominent voice in the Irish Citizen's Army. Eager for a greater role in nationalistic activities and a staunch suffragist, she became increasingly militant in actions she took in the suffragist movement and the fight for nationalism. The Bureau of Military

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ward, 94.

History provides one example of militant behavior attributed to Helena and commented on by historians. This is the instance when in frustration she threw a stone at a window that resulted in her arrest. Pent-up frustrations due to continued restrictions and the denial of suffrage caused her to look to other groups for support. The equality promised in the Irish Citizen's Army offered women an active role and consequently drew Helena Mahoney to its ranks.<sup>43</sup>

Men not threatened by allowing women to participate in this manner remained few and thus stand out. Ward states that, "Lawrence Kettle mentioned that there would be work for women to do, Eoin MacNeil, in his presidential speech, made a reference to women which neatly managed to exclude them from participation: 'there would be work to do for large numbers who would not be in the marching line. There would be work for the women.'"<sup>44</sup> So, the work once again relegated to women meant participating behind the scenes away from active roles. For the women who craved involvement one voice stands out because of his support of women, James Connolly. Padraic Pierce did reference women in a speech at the Rotunda in Dublin in 1913, but he did not include their right to citizenship. Notably, he centered his comments on the fight undertaken by men and the display of strength this illustrated.<sup>45</sup>

### **Numbered Among the Few, Men Who Supported Irish Suffragists**

Connolly proved the most vocal in his support. Historian Murphy observes that, "he often appeared on their platform and was a friend of James Cousins."<sup>46</sup> Appreciating the disadvantages facing women and the limits placed on them, he wrote, "from his standpoint the working class were slaves, and the women were the slaves of the slaves."<sup>47</sup> Notably, Frank Sheehy Skeffington

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Murphy, 90.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Murphy, 120.

Worth noting is yet another fact from Murphy and that is "that in Connolly's book, *The Reconquest of Ireland* Connolly included a chapter on women and looked at their past, present and future situations." 120.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

utilized both the pages of his publication, the *Irish Citizen*, and public gatherings to support the suffrage movement. Murphy includes one of the many occasions that highlight this in noting his address to the WSPU in 1910.<sup>48</sup>

Murray adds to historiography with additional information on Irish male writers who supported the movement for equality in Ireland with the inclusion of references to James Joyce and Bernard Shaw and the way they wove women's struggles into their work. She expands on this with references to "another Irish intellectual A. E. or George Russell. He was a friend of the suffragists. He often attended suffragist meetings in Dublin."<sup>49</sup> In addition, Murphy references the writer Padraic Colum and adds information on his wife, "a journalist in her own right and who was an early practitioner of feminist criticism."<sup>50</sup> Collectively these writers did much to draw attention to the need for equality between the sexes. Men who sought to stop the suffragist movement included prominent voices of the Nationalist movement, these included Parnell and Redmond.

### **A Document Promising Equality**

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<sup>48</sup> Murphy, 68.

WSPU is the acronym for Women's Social and Political Union.

<sup>49</sup> Murphy, 117-18.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

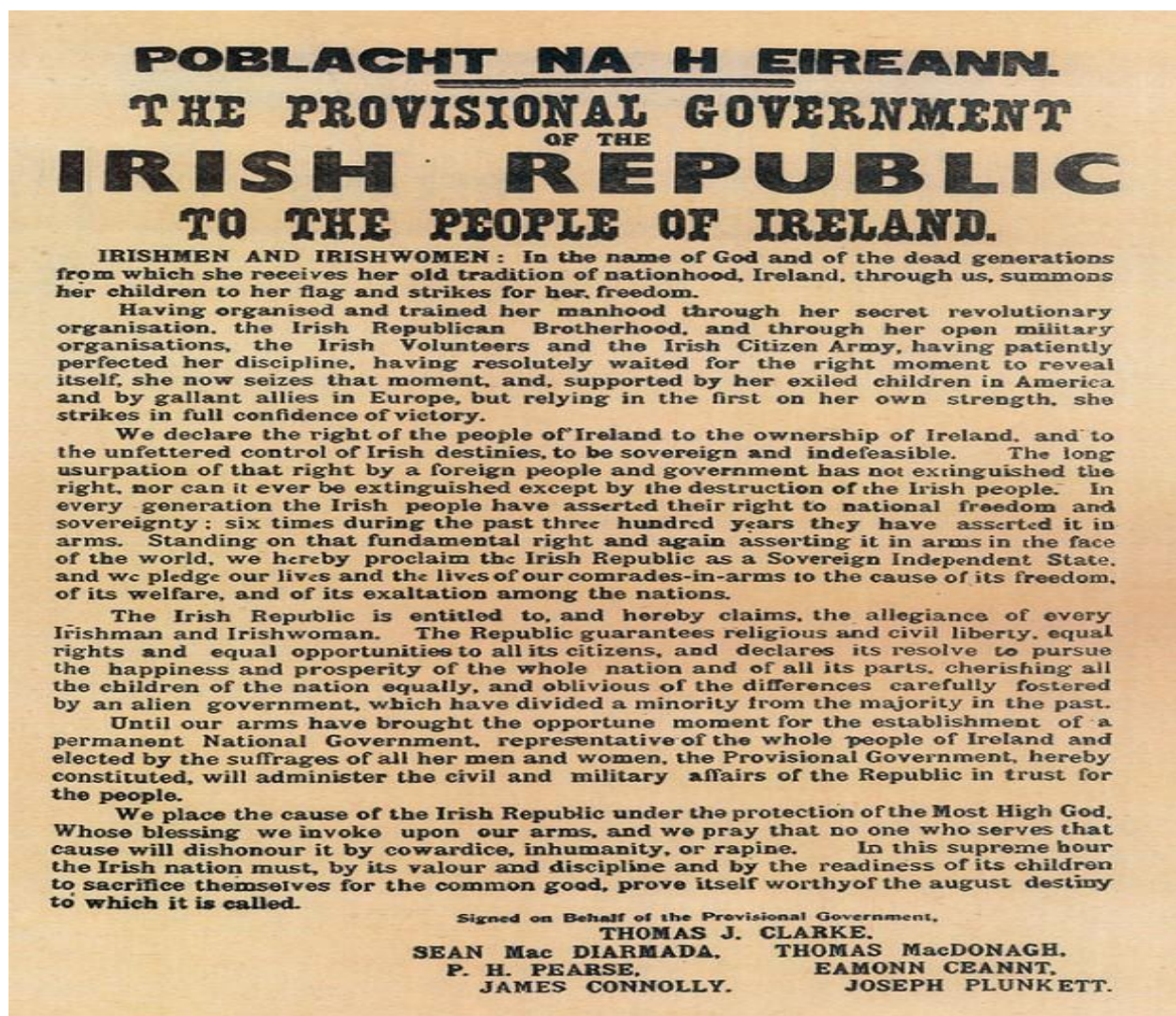


Figure 3 - 1916 Easter Rising Proclamation. <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/signatories-of-the-proclamation-of-the-irish-republic-national-library-of-ireland/LQVhkGjJhbnNJA?hl=en>

The 1916 Proclamation issued at the onset of the Easter Rising promised equality for men and women. This promise fueled the actions of women desirous of a more active role. Thus, with the backing of James Connolly and aware of the need for volunteers, a determined group of women took part in the rebellion.

The Easter Rising Rebellion became the vehicle for women wanting an active role in nationalism. A few of these remained satisfied with the role of nurse and cook, others sought out another path. Their navigation of the unfamiliar charted the course for others to follow.

Historiography buried most of their contributions but now an exhumation of facts uncovers the shroud of denial for too long wrapped around the forgotten. The next chapter addresses these.

## Chapter 2: A Path is Chosen

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.<sup>1</sup>

In the above lines Robert Frost spoke of the choices in life. For most women of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries this meant the domestic sphere. Their shackles of society and religion restricted their actions beyond the home. This proved especially true in Ireland, where male-dominated society enforced hidebound laws. Few women challenged these and thus for those that did, their road was indeed one not traveled by many. This less than traveled path that Irish nationalist women espoused became one that men in power sought to obscure. Historiography reveals just how successful their shrouding of facts became even in the case of one of the more well-known women, Countess Constance Gore-Booth Markievicz.

This chapter examines Markievicz and her role in nationalism and in the Easter rebellion. Questions this chapter addresses include: Did social class or religion influence or inspire her? How did the British government react to her? What prompted the militant role she embraced during the Easter Rising and why did she adopt this change in attitude? Finally, how is she remembered today? I argue that more than gender prevented her from suffering the consequences of her actions. I argue further gaps in her historiography exist and that this demonstrates the continued omission of facts in connection to women's roles in Irish nationalism and during the Easter Rising.

Steele's *Women, Press and Politics During the Irish Revival* reveals just such a scenario. Worth noting too are the citations to Margaret Ward's work within its pages. Margaret Ward's

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Frost, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, edited by Edward Connery Lathem. (New York, New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 1969), 105.



*Unmanageable Revolutionaries, Women and Irish Nationalism* examines this in detail.<sup>2</sup> Recent works divulge the usage of previously sealed military documents, evaluation of these today reveal a source still ripe for harvest.<sup>3</sup> Notably absent is testimony from Markievicz. Her death in 1927 prevented this.<sup>4</sup> Filling this gap are the testimonies from those who knew her. A search of testimonies in the Bureau of Military History in Ireland connected with individuals sharing their experiences with Markievicz revealed over 188 instances of her name mentioned in testimonies from others. In addition, Markievicz left behind a series of diary entries from the years before her marriage and letters from the times of her imprisonments. With such a cadre of resources an expectation arises that an exhaustive historiography on her exists, this is not the case.<sup>5</sup> For those who do not know her, a didactic approach invites an exhumation of facts.

### **Countess Constance Markievicz**

The path Markievicz chose illustrates one of the more well-known examples of women who fought during the Easter Rebellion. Historian Anne Marreco's biography on Markievicz reveals the social class and prerogative opportunities that defined Markievicz's life. She notes that Constance "was born [in 1868] into a family stronghold of the Anglo-Irish world, she was a child by right of the ascendancy."<sup>6</sup> Indulged by her father, disciplined by her mother, and often a

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<sup>2</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries, Women, and Irish Nationalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> These include *Women and the Decade of Commemorations*, edited by Oona Frawley (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2021) and *Women and the Irish Revolution*, edited by Linda Connolly (Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Historians believe that inadequate health care resulted in her death. Markievicz a socialist refused health unavailable to the poor.

<sup>5</sup> A search of various academic sites revealed this brief list of biographies on Countess Constance Markievicz. It is significant that the most recent biography on her dates from 1972, fifty years ago.

Anne Marreco, *The Rebel Countess: The Life and Times of Constance Markievicz*. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967).

Seán O'Faoláin, *Constance Markievicz*. [Rev. ed.]. (London: Sphere Books, 1968).

Jacqueline Van Voris, *Constance de Markievicz* 1st ed. (N.Y: Feminist Press, 1972).

A joint biography featuring both Constance and Casimir also warrants inclusion:

Lauren Arrington, *Revolutionary Lives: Constance and Casimir Markievicz*. (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Anne Marreco, *The Rebel Countess: The Life and Times of Constance Markievicz*. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967), 2.

vexation for her governess, she demonstrated a desire for independence at an early age. A life of advantage resulted in her becoming an excellent equestrian and hunter.<sup>7</sup> Privilege did not shield her from the misfortunes of the impoverished. At an early age she championed them and sought aid for those struggling. Thus, a misanthropic approach also defined her.



Figure 4 - Photo of Lissadell, the childhood home of Constance Gore-Booth Markievicz. County Silgo Website.

At the start of the new year, 1899, she met Count Casimir Dunin-Markowitz.<sup>8</sup>

Constance's attraction to Casimir grew and in September the young Casimir and Constance became engaged. Significantly, she did not change her faith to marry him (her conversion to Catholicism came later). In fact, their marriage brought Constance a taste of the independence she yearned for. She achieved it, through small steps that began with the wedding ceremony. Married in a Protestant Church her vows revealed the different path she intended to traverse. Constance removed the word obey from her vows.<sup>9</sup>

Their union resulted in the birth of a daughter, Maeve. Constance nearly died from complications of childbirth and did not become pregnant again. Motherhood did not alter their social calendar; the couple became more involved in Dublin. They entertained and began to take

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

In fact, her use of a gun became a skill she utilized in the Easter Rising.

<sup>8</sup> At the time, Markievicz was in Paris continuing her art studies. There she met another art student, Count Casimir Dunin-Markowitz.

<sup>9</sup> Anne Marreco, 74.

part in the blossoming theatrical atmosphere. Constance enjoyed plays that drew attention to the Irish and the sufferings endured and enjoyed acting in these. Marreco references *The Memory of the Dead* performed at the Abbey Theater in 1909. “The story is of the effect of the abortive 1898 rising on a country family.”<sup>10</sup> Marreco adds that, “it was an openly propagandist play, well received by the critics and the audience at the time.”<sup>11</sup> Markievicz later embraced the role Nora in *The Memory of the Dead*. This play also focused on 1898 Ireland and demonstrates the influence of politics in her theatrical pursuits.<sup>12</sup>

In 1908 she joined the literary group Inghinidhe na hÉireann after receiving an invitation to attend one of their meetings. In fact, Helena Molony invited Markievicz after reading one of Markievicz’s speeches. Markievicz’s first visit shocked the group for Markievicz arrived “in full evening dress, with a short train, furs around her shoulders, diamonds in her hair . . . straight from the dreaded Castle.”<sup>13</sup> The Castle, the seat of British power in Ireland, frequently held gatherings of the elite. Markievicz attended these because of her prominence in society, this changed after she joined Inghinidhe na hÉireann. Inghinidhe na hÉireann meetings revealed more of the worsening situation in Ireland for those not born to privilege. Thus, the myopic world of privilege gave way to a growing awareness of the need for change in Ireland. Constance

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<sup>10</sup> Marreco, 129.

<sup>11</sup> Marreco, 134.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Anne Marreco, 102.

Maud Gonne founded Inghinidhe na hÉireann (Daughters of Ireland) on Easter Sunday, 15 April 1900. The desire to converse on literary topics and instill a love for all things Irish provided the impetus for the women to initially meet. The principal goals of the Daughters of Ireland listed by them included: “to encourage the study of the Irish language, of Irish literature, history, music and art, especially amongst the young by organizing and teaching of classes for the above subjects; to discourage the reading and circulation of low English literature, singing English songs and to combat in every way English influence . . .” - Maire O’Brolchain, Vice-President Inghini na hÉireann, 1913-21.

In addition, the group provided monetary aid for those in need and organized relief efforts to feed the poor. Later the group published a newspaper, *Bean na-h-Eireann*. The first issue appeared in June 1908 and the last issue appeared in February 1911.

answered the call for help. She began by helping feed the poor and providing funds for causes that soon eclipsed demands of society.

A transformation rooted in a quest for independence now produced seeds of change. The fruit of her labor brought other women to a cause that united more than just a small group of women. Indeed, the roster of the organization *Inghinidhe na hÉireann* identifies the names of other women who sought out ways to aid Ireland, to fight for change, and thus enjoy a more active role in revitalizing Ireland.<sup>14</sup> Documents attest to her active involvement in the group that included a mix of social classes and ages. The course of insurrection against authority took the women beyond the unimportant roles of their contemporaries and began to inspire the women to do more. Boldness took the form of subtle revolts and in the subliminal messages woven into theatrical plays and various writings they produced. *Inghinidhe na hÉireann*, the first literary society for women in Ireland used words to draw others to it.<sup>15</sup>

### **Contributions to Bean na-h-Eireann**

In 1909 Markievicz began writing a series of garden articles for *Bean na-h-Eireann*. In these she subliminally suggests the actions of civil disobedience instead of conformity to British rule. In fact, during her trial after the Easter Rising of 1916 the British government condemned Countess Markievicz for her role in relaying information that led to seditious acts. Markievicz became a modern interpretation of the biblical Eve because of the garden articles penned by her. The forbidden fruit in this case, the knowledge she planted in them. Published monthly, the article used both flowers and various garden pests that plagued Irish gardens to speak against the

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<sup>14</sup> Translation: The daughters of Ireland.

<sup>15</sup> The group conducted classes with children to aid in the proliferation of the Irish language. They organized parades, put on theatrical productions, and supported the economy of the area by encouraging the support of Irish manufacturers and merchants in the area.

British presence in Ireland. Those familiar with her writing and supportive of Irish free rule soon found not just garden advice but suggestions on how to get rid of the blight on Irish soil.

Historian Karen Steele contributes examples of these in her book, drawing attention to how censors did not suspect the double meanings found in Markievicz's articles. Steele writes when "Markievicz began her "Woman with a Garden" feature in February 1909, she appears to have aimed at little more than guileless gardening advice about turning 'a little sod of dirt' into a flourishing garden."<sup>16</sup> Steele notes further that, 'the garden's enemies-slugs, snails, wasps, flies-were viewed as British soldiers, invaders that destroyed the flowers and fruits of the land (April-June 1909, August 1909).' Destructive 'forces of the earth' such as heavy frost, cruel blights, bitter gales and blinding snow, were predictably associated with the British Empire or its symbolic presence in Dublin Castle (February 1909) ." In May of 1909, Markievicz used the timing of the column to write of the Wexford Rebellion, "And then reminded her readers that 'hardy annuals may now be picked off' and to 'watch for slugs' sound gardening suggestions as sapient coded counsel for maintaining a strong army (May 1909)."<sup>17</sup> With the progression of the year her contributions to the gardening column utilized symbolism to encourage defiance against British rule. Other examples include, "Her sympathy towards the enthusiastic pruner whose fingers, 'itch to hold her knife.'" <sup>18</sup> Worthy of note too, is that years later during her prison confinement Markievicz shared her response to the prison official's query if she needed anything. She responded she needed manure for her garden within the prison walls, the request

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<sup>16</sup> Karen Steele, 432.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

granted, she heaped manure on the soil. The meaning implied in the action no doubt resonated with the recipient of her letter.<sup>19</sup>

Her education in gardening and knowledge of the symbolism in flowers came from her position in society. For such activities bore societies' seal of approval in connection with actions befitting a lady. Under the guise of gardening advice Countess Markiewicz influenced women just in the organization, but with the growth in readership among those not included on the membership rolls. Thus, hidden in gardening advice articles, a crop of messages useful to the rebels remained undetected. Class, clothes, and demeanor in public provided concealment for those who fought behind the scenes and contributed to the ongoing belief that women belonged to the weaker sex a role the women adopted deliberately. This perception rooted in tradition and class consciousness influenced early decisions made in connection with women revolutionaries. These decisions illustrate the way society influenced the women themselves and how the women viewed their roles. Markiewicz sought ways to change this perception and help influence the youth of the country.

### **Soldiers of Ireland**

In 1910, two years after joining Inghinidhe na hÉireann, Countess Constance Markiewicz founded the Soldiers of Ireland, an action which the London *Times* attributed to their joining the Fenian ranks.<sup>20</sup> Notably, the group allowed both boys and girls to join. The group modeled on the boy scouts differed in the training received. One example that illustrates this is the training in marksmanship offered by the Countess and the fact that she used her land to train the boys on

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<sup>19</sup> Constance de Markiewicz, Eva Gore-Booth, and Esther Roper. *Prison Letters of Countess Markiewicz (Constance Gore-Booth). Also, Poems and Articles Relating to Easter Week by Eva Gore-Booth, and a Biographical Sketch by Esther Roper*. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934).

<sup>20</sup> *Sinn Féin Rebellion Handbook, Easter 1916*. (Dublin, Ireland: Dublin: *Dublin: Irish Times Ltd.*, 1916 Available through: Adam Matthew, Marlborough, The First World War), 59.

(this allowed a work around against laws that prohibited such training because this training took place on private property). Countess Markievicz viewed Soldiers of Ireland as vital to the future of Ireland.<sup>21</sup>

Yet militancy still waited for the fuse to ignite it; in Ireland pent-up frustrations over grievances finally triggered rebellion. England's preoccupation with its war against Germany provided an opportunity for Irish nationalists. That spark of revolt in Dublin in 1916 produced a rebellion that shocked many when the Easter Rising exploded on the scene. Equally shocking for others, the fact that women played roles in it, that included Markievicz.

### **The Conflagration**

The *Sinn Fein Rebellion Handbook, Easter 1916* dated the start of the conflagration to Easter Monday, 24 April 1916, when "A declaration of the Irish Republic was made. The provisional government was composed of seven men whose signatures appeared on the proclamation poster."<sup>22</sup> Yet, it must be remembered that the small band of determined Irish did not glean the approval of most of Dublin's population. Many weary of resistance no longer supported those who fought for independence. This changed with the British reaction to the rebels. Photos from newspapers of the time reveal a landscape devastated by the British military response to the insurrection. It bears noting the British responded quickly. The British War

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<sup>21</sup> The truth of this statement shows up in the fact that six years later many of these did fight in the Easter Rising. Their enrollment in the Soldiers of Ireland prepared them for this. A statement from a former member, Seamus Pouch confirms this, he stated that "Each boy on joining had, to make the following declaration: "I promise to work for the independence of Ireland; never to join England's forces, and to obey my superior officers." -Seamus Pouch. BMH/CD/267/ Military Archives, Ireland.

<sup>22</sup> *Sinn Fein Rebellion Handbook, Easter 1916*. (Dublin, Ireland: *Dublin: Irish Times Ltd.*, 1916 Available through: Adam Matthew, Marlborough, The First World War), 59.

The booklet published 8 of August 1916 offered its readers detailed information in connection with the Easter Rising in Dublin and how it impacted the rest of Ireland. The pro-British paper published the booklet and may explain why the number of women involved in the rebellion it listed showed only a portion of the numbers prosecuted for participation. Certainly, it is possible the number given exemplifies a deliberate action to remove the spotlight from the women and instead center it on the male rebels.

Museum states, “It took the better part of a day to organize a response . . . There were few troops in Dublin, so soldiers were rushed there from elsewhere in Ireland . . . and from across the sea in Britain.” Indeed, records reveal that on April 26, “There was now a complete cordon of troops around the centre of the town on the north side of the river.”<sup>23</sup> The report added, as more troops arrived, a proclamation of martial law soon followed, first for Dublin (on Tuesday 25 April) and then for all of Ireland (on Wednesday, 26 April). This number grew to 16,000 British troops in Dublin with additional troops stationed throughout Ireland.<sup>24</sup>

### **Surrender and Imprisonment**

The eventual surrender of the Irish rebels resulted in martial law and execution, imprisonment, and exile.<sup>25</sup> Captured women suffered both poor living conditions and abuse.<sup>26</sup> These included women revolutionaries and among those listed, Countess Constance Markievicz. In fact, Countess Constance Markievicz stands out as one of the most well-known women fighters of the time; a wealth of information on her experiences in prison shows up in the letters she penned and in the reports of those that visited her. The cold stone walls of the prison and the hard labor she endured in her first prison experience echoes reports from others of the ordeal’s confinement brought with it. Yet her response to prison reveals hints of the impact of social status even within its walls. For even within prison, appearances mattered. Historian Lucy

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<sup>23</sup> National Army Museum website. <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/easter-rising>.

<sup>24</sup> *Sinn Féin Rebellion Handbook, Easter 1916*, 30.

<sup>25</sup> Boston College Website.

<https://www.rte.ie/centuryireland/index.php/articles/suppressing-the-rebellion-the-british-forces-in-1916>.

<sup>26</sup> The Mountjoy prison in Ireland stands out because of its design which kept the women isolated from each other, thus in solitary confinement. Contact with others including prison matrons remained severely limited. Food delivery for the prisoners consisted of placing the food through a small opening in the door. A peephole in the door allowed the guards to keep an eye on the incarcerated.

*Richmond Barracks 1916 We were There 77 Women of the Easter Rising*, edited by Mary McAuliffe and Liz Gillis (Dublin: Dublin City Council, 2016) focuses on seventy-seven women caught up in the snare that seized suspicious women during the aftermath of the Easter Rebellion. This number does not include the additional women imprisoned in other cities, for arrests took place not just in Dublin, the site of the genesis of the rebellion, but in various cities across Ireland. This suggests an even greater number and invites research.



McDiarmid argues that this created a delicate balance of social class in the relationships between nationalist women in, “Comradeship: Feminists and Revolutionaries in Holloway Prison, 1918-1919.”<sup>27</sup> She injects interactions between Maud Gonne MacBride, Constance Gore-Booth Markievicz, and Kathleen Clarke recorded by Kathleen Clarke during her confinement in Holloway Prison. Clarke wrote of the arguments between Markievicz and Gonne over social status and the way Markievicz reminded Clarke of her being beneath them, “Madam Markievicz claimed she was far above Madame MacBride; she belonged to the inner circle of the Vice-Regal Lodge set while MacBride was only on the fringe of it. [Clarke added] . . . Madam Markievicz took pains to make me aware of the social gulf between us; it didn’t worry me.”<sup>28</sup> Clarke notes further, that the arguments continued until Maud Gonne MacBride’s release. Then conflict between Markievicz and Clarke developed. Clarke wrote that “When Madame Markievicz did talk to me in those early days, I sensed a certain amount of patronage in her tone . . . It worried her that such an insignificant little person as myself was put in prison with her. . . ‘Why on earth did they arrest such a quiet insignificant person as you?’”<sup>29</sup> Markievicz’s comments revealed how height played a role in perception. Indeed, women of a taller stature received additional respect due to their height. This influenced the type of treatment they received from others.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, McDiarmid argues that the opinions the women held in connection with themselves reveals that “it was 1918 when these three women were locked up and the hierarchies of the society they were trying to displace still persisted in their minds.”<sup>31</sup> Effects of the Gilded Age

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<sup>27</sup> Lucy McDiarmid, “Comradeship: Feminists and Revolutionaries in Holloway Prison, 1918-1919.” In *Women and the Irish Revolution*, edited by Linda Connolly (Ireland, Irish Academic Press, 2020).

<sup>28</sup> Lucy McDiarmid, 39.

<sup>29</sup> Lucy McDiarmid, 41.

Clarke proved far from insignificant in the changes she brought about during her confinement that better conditions for the women in prison.

<sup>30</sup> The height of Gonne and Markievicz inspired both reverence and awe and features in the poetry of Yeats.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

resonated in other ways too. This, much like her involvement in the Easter Rising, defined her. Indeed, her prominence and popularity among the “rebel Irish” resulted in her transfer from prison in Ireland to prison in England due to fears that her proximity may both inspire and produce further aggression from the populace.<sup>32</sup> She stood out in other ways too.

First, her increased role in militant actions and her appointment to an important leadership position in advance of the Easter Rising showed this. Further, her promotion during the fighting at the Royal College of Surgeons by the male-dominated Citizen Army demonstrated the respect of the men. She commanded the group and fought with them wielding weapons alongside them.<sup>33</sup> Historian Margaret Ó hÓgartaigh contributes that, “the ICA permitted women to bear arms, then considered very radical. In effect they were fighting soldiers.”<sup>34</sup> Indeed, primary documents from the Bureau of Military History prove recognition of her role as both a commander and a fellow soldier by the nationalist men of the Easter Rising. Moreover, the *Sinn Féin Rebellion Handbook, Easter 1916* published by the *London Times* stated that Countess Markievicz “commanded the insurgents in St. Stephen’s Green and afterwards inside the Royal College of Surgeons.”<sup>35</sup> Her position resulted in a military trial, which made her the only woman tried by the military. On 6 May 1916, the tribunal sentenced her to death, later reduced to life in prison. Her conviction came from the charge of taking part in an armed rebellion and attempts to

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<sup>32</sup> Castle File #84. Dublin, Ireland.

<sup>33</sup> Constance de Markievicz, Eva Gore-Booth, and Esther Roper, *Prison Letters of Countess Markievicz (Constance Gore-Booth). Also, Poems and Articles Relating to Easter Week by Eva Gore-Booth, and a Biographical Sketch by Esther Roper*. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934).

Markievicz received her original commission in the Citizen Army in 1915 by James Connolly, the leader of the group.

Notably, Marreco shared further evidence of this in the biography of Markowitz.

<sup>34</sup> Margaret Ó hÓgartaigh, *Kathleen Lynn-Irishwoman, Patriot, Doctor*. (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006), 24.

<sup>35</sup> The booklet compiled by Dublin office of the London Times contains copies of documents, military records, photos, and trial information passed on to it by the British government and other sources in Dublin.

cause dissatisfaction among the civilian population of his Majesty. Even worse, according to some, was the fact that she had “wrecked young girls’ lives.”



Figure 5 - Headline *The Daily Mirror* May 8, 1918

In the eyes of the British, Countess Markiewicz’s impact blighted the future of the girls by placing them outside the “protection” of the British because of the example she set. Though not elaborated on in the headline, the role Countess Markiewicz played in the women’s organization, Daughter of Ireland, brought her into contact with young girls. Her political thoughts woven into the lessons taught through the group, influenced the girls, and consequently grew more nationalist in their attitudes. They were in effect turned out of the Imperial garden through the whisperings of a biblical Eve. Gender thus became the tool of excuse for actions taken by the government, but beneath the surface other factors merited consideration.

### **New Revelations**

Today scholarship argues that fearful of public reaction because of Countess Constance Markiewicz’s sex and wary of more unwelcome press, the military court changed the death sentence to life in prison.<sup>36</sup> I argue that the changing of her sentence involved more than just her gender. Perusal of diplomatic correspondence of the time reveals information in connection with

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<sup>36</sup> Constance de Markievicz, Eva Gore-Booth, and Esther Roper, *Prison Letters of Countess Markievicz (Constance Gore-Booth)*. Also, *Poems and Articles Relating to Easter Week by Eva Gore-Booth, and a Biographical Sketch by Esther Roper*. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934).

She only served a year of that sentence because of the General Amnesty Act. This resulted in the release of Countess Constance Markievicz from Aylesbury Prison on 18 June 1917. Yet. Her political activities eventually resulted in four additional prison confinements.

her release not previously touched on by scholarship. The impact of an execution of a woman from a prominent family also gave the British government another reason to overturn the sentence of death. Her family's position in society and relation to the government due to her activities resulted in embarrassment and hurt to the family. Thus, a proposal suggested by a prominent individual in government and filed under top secret documentation related to Markievicz, argues that to avoid further harm to her family a lesser sentence afforded a measure of compassion. This discussion and the details found in governmental documents lay buried beneath the belief that gender alone resulted in a reduced sentence. In light of this the commutation from the death penalty merits consideration. Did social status affect the verdict? I argue it did. Status, not gender prevented her execution. The status of class mattered then, and societal connections often determined consequences. Thus, documents that prove behind the scenes negotiations warrant inclusion.<sup>37</sup>

All of this does not diminish the role of Markievicz; instead, it emphasizes the uniqueness of her character. This caused her to stand out to the press also, in fact, "The Paris-based *Le Petit Journal* ran sixty-five pieces on the Rising (including thirteen illustrations, three maps and two cartoons)."<sup>38</sup> This identifies the importance the newspaper placed both on the Easter Rising Rebellion in Dublin and the involvement of Countess Markievicz.

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<sup>37</sup> Castle File #84. Dublin, Ireland.

<sup>38</sup> *Century Newspaper*. Boston College. <https://www.rte.ie/centuryireland/index.php/articles/reporting-the-rising>



Figure 6 - Evidence of International Press Coverage on Countess Markievicz. Le Miroir, Paris. 1916

The very fact that they placed a full-page photo of Markievicz on her way to prison on the front page of the paper attests to this also. A woman's involvement resulted in headlines. Worth noting too, news of the executions that took place soon after the rebel surrender resulted in further public outcry both in Ireland and around the globe. This generated further newspaper coverage and led to the Amnesty Act of 1917. Proof of this shows up in newspaper articles in Ireland, France, and the United States. The "Chicago Tribune spoke of the 'romantic futility' of the uprising.... and the British newspaper the Freeman's Journal and Manchester Guardian issued

pleas for restraint.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, in response to outcries such as these the British government changed tactics and offered amnesty.

The amnesty granted Constance also granted amnesty to over one hundred rebels convicted at the same time. Release of these resulted in celebration. It did not end their activities, nor did it stop the Countess, for Markievicz’s role did not end with the Easter Rising, but it marked a new phase in her quest for home rule. Other arrests and four additional imprisonments followed, but these did not stop her.<sup>40</sup> Her life and the extraordinary experiences that defined it resulted in publicity that left a trail for historians and illustrates her role and her perception of that role in encouraging others to fight for Ireland. Her conversion to Catholicism and baptism after release from prison reveals further the way Markievicz viewed her involvement in Irish nationalism.

### **Hidden Truths Buried in An Absence of Words, The Path to Conversion**

Countess Constance Gore-Booth Markievicz’s conversion to Catholicism is significant because it demonstrates further both how she viewed her role and her commitment to Ireland. Certainly, her conversion added to her credibility yet her reason for it came from her belief in a religion that already defined Ireland. The fact that her epiphany took place during an intense political moment offers a probable explanation for her decision to join the Catholic church. Yet, one wonders if prior to this if the actions of her fellow rebels also influenced her, for many revolutionaries exhibited a strong belief in the religion for so long outlawed by the British. The Cult of Mary which encouraged prayers to the Virgin Mother and the use of the rosary in

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<sup>39</sup> *Century Newspaper*. Boston College. <https://www.rte.ie/centuryireland/index.php/articles/reporting-the-rising>

<sup>40</sup>Constance de Markievicz, Eva Gore-Booth, and Esther Roper. *Prison Letters of Countess Markievicz (Constance Gore-Booth). Also, Poems and Articles Relating to Easter Week by Eva Gore-Booth, and a Biographical Sketch by Esther Roper*. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934).

prayers illustrate two religious practices she noticed on more than one occasion. Moreover, her attendance at the funerals of martyred revolutionaries exemplifies another instance of religiosity she observed. Her contacts with practicing Catholics grew with her involvement in various organizations that supported a free Ireland. Undoubtedly, those priests that encouraged women to move beyond the role of domesticity and join in the symbolic and real battles stood out to her also and impacted her view of her role. Whatever the reason for conversion, she never abandoned her new faith, but clung to it even at death, a fact rarely mentioned in the historiography

Archdeacon MacMahon officiated at the mass that welcomed Markievicz into the church. This is important because it shows the support of the church in connection with the activities of rebels and offers an example of how the church supported them during their imprisonment and after. Constance's acceptance into the Catholic Church took place on 24 June 1917.<sup>41</sup> The confirmation name she chose-Anastasia offers further insight into her beliefs and the role she felt called to fill.

### **The Patron Saint of Martyrs and Why She Mattered**

Saint Anastasia is the patron saint of martyrs.<sup>42</sup> I argue Markievicz deliberately chose this name. Part of the journey of acceptance into the Catholic church involves both research into saints and the choice of a patron saint. Markievicz chose this saint because of what she knew about her. Her conviction to suffer to the point of death mirrored religious beliefs associated with the life of Saint Anastasia. Saint Anastasia died a martyr. The tenets of Countess Markiewicz's faith encouraged her to traverse the biblical narrow path. For Constance that meant continuing

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<sup>41</sup> Anne Marreco, *The Rebel Countess. The Life and Times of Constance Markievicz*. (Pennsylvania: Chilton Company, 1967), 234.

<sup>42</sup> Catholic Online. [https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint\\_id=17](https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=17)

her fight against the evil of British rule even if it meant her death, for she believed her actions indicated the importance of her commitment to Irish independence. Her conversion came because of her faith and not because of her desire for acceptance by Catholics involved in the rebellion.

### **Pursuit of Nationalism instead of Suffrage**

Markievicz advised feminists of the time to fight for Irish freedom instead of suffrage.<sup>43</sup> Her argument stated that suffrage under the yoke of British rule did not bring true freedom. With this aim in mind, she took part in the Easter Rising and proudly wore the uniform of the Irish Volunteers.



Figure 7 - Countess Markievicz in I.C.A. uniform.

Bureau of Military History Website Date of Origin: N/A, Artist/Photographer: Keogh Bros. Ltd., Dublin.,

Artist/Photographer Occupation: N/A, Artist/Photographer Provider: John Joseph Irwin, 13 Valencia Road, Whitehall, Dublin.

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<sup>43</sup> *Sinn Féin Rebellion Handbook*.

It bears noting the jacket of the Irish Volunteer's came from James Connolly during the battle. Countess Constance Markievicz a Sinn Féin and Fianna Fáil politician fought as suffragette and socialist. In December 1918, she became the first woman elected to the British House of Commons, she did not take office to demonstrate her protest against political compromises made with which she did not agree.



Her release from prison in 1917 due to the amnesty act of the time resulted in celebration not just by women, but also by men. In fact, Sinn Fein never forgot her role in the Easter Rising, nor they did not dismiss her as they did other women who once fought beside them.



Figure 8 - Gathering to celebrate release of Countess Markievicz from prison. 18 June 1917.

Her determination to fight for Irish independence never wavered despite facing charges, arrests, and further imprisonments. Fascination with the Countess persisted, and photographs of her continued to appear in countless newspapers. In the years that followed her involvement in Ireland in the quest for independence contributed to her taking on increased responsibilities. Despite this she remained determined to help those in need. Her continued aid to the poor of Ireland engraved her name and memory in their hearts.

The Countess became a rebel because she chose to be involved in a cause that mattered to her. Once committed this role, she remained an activist regardless of the perils involved. Her involvement eventually led to the distance between her and her husband. His passion lay in his writing and artwork. Though for a while, he wrote plays that centered around the Irish cause, his attraction to it dimmed with the passage of time. Constance never wavered in her devotion to Ireland and this contrast contributed to the eventual separation between her and her husband. He left Ireland to pursue interests in Ukraine, Constance Markievicz stayed and continued to fight

for the cause that mattered to her and thus took advantage of opportunities that arose. These included her involvement in politics, her support of the poor and a socialist position. She utilized the soapbox and spoke when asked to.



Figure 9 - Countess delivering a speech. Google Photo Archives.

### **Her Unexpected Death**

The toll of her involvement shows up in photos taken at her arrest and in subsequent photos that define her later years. The years spent in prisons, the hunger strike she undertook, the energy she put into her acts of charity and support for the poor coupled with the fact that since her first arrest until her death she lived a life on the run all caused a deterioration in her health.<sup>44</sup> Perusal of photos show a life in the grasp of age. Time's toil on her health evidenced in the shadows beneath her eyes, the bend in her back, and the fragility of a woman once seemingly immune to exhaustion. Despite this her zeal for Ireland burned with an intensity that the walls of prison never extinguished. Faith and determination fueled a body ravaged by ordeals and thus

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<sup>44</sup> Markievicz spent time in and out of prison between 1916 to 1924. Her prison confinement began in Mountjoy, Ireland in May 1916. In August 1916, she was sent to Aylesbury, in England. In 1918, after a brief year of freedom, she was sent to Holloway Jail in London, along with Kathleen Clarke and Maud Gonne. Her prison stays also include: a four-month stretch in Cork Jail in 1919, then additional time spent in Mountjoy, from October 1920 to June 1921. Her final month in prison took place at the North Dublin Union at Grangegorman at the end of 1923 following the civil war. *Irish Times* Website. <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/constance-markievicz-s-prison-letters-insights-from-inside-1.2826731>

she continued in her work and her care for the poor. Her unexpected death on the morning of 15 July 1927 resulted from an infection following an appendicitis surgery. She did not die alone, by her side stood her husband, Casimir, her stepson, and a priest. The presence of the priest proves once more Constance's commitment to her faith.

At her funeral, the poor she championed gathered in a large crowd to mourn her. Information found at the Lissadell website (her childhood home) reveals, "Three hundred thousand people attended the funeral to pay tribute to "the friend of the toiler, the lover of the poor."<sup>45</sup> On the Friday and Saturday before her funeral, thousands of the poor waited in lines for hours to view her remains on display at the Rotunda and pay their respects. Later hundreds of thousands lined the roadways.



Figure 10 - Photo of funeral procession from the Lissadell Family website.

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<sup>45</sup> Lissadell Family Website. < <http://lissadellhouse.com/countess-markievicz/> >

Today love for her resonates in statues erected to her memory:



Figure 11 - Sculpture of Markievicz and her cocker spaniel, Poppet, on

Townsend Street, Dublin

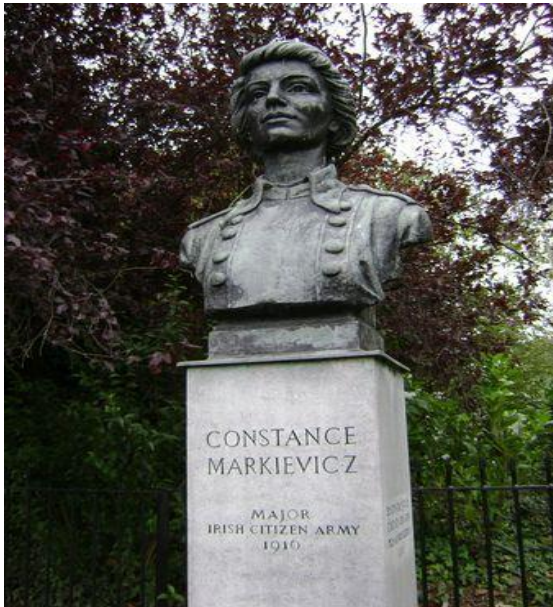


Figure 12 - The bust of Constance Markievicz in St Stephen's

Green in Dublin.

In the end, stone monuments recall stone walls of prisons that sought to extinguish her influence. Though interred beneath the turf of Ireland the shroud of forgotten memory does not

wrap around Countess Constance Gore-Booth Markievicz. It does wrap around others, the silence on the role of other women is deafening. In fact, the disclosure of sixty women captured, imprisoned, and then released supports this.<sup>46</sup> One woman of interest shows up in what suggests an altered picture. The woman in that picture is Elizabeth O'Farrell, and her story brings into focus another woman that played a role in the Easter Rising and the reasons why she chooses to step away from a picture. Chapter three looks at Elizabeth O'Farrell and others. It examines her life and answers what motivated her to step back from the photographer, thus obscuring her presence. It also delves into other nationalist women of the time and looks at their perception of their roles in nationalism.

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<sup>46</sup> *Sinn Fein Rebellion Handbook, Easter 1916*. 80.

### Chapter Three: An Undeveloped Picture Comes into Focus



Figure 13 - Photograph of Surrender. National Museum of Ireland Website.

Today, a myth in connection with a photo from the surrender of the Irish after the Easter Rising continues to feed the belief that airbrushing removed the woman from the photo.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, a close look at the photo seems to suggest this. For one can just make out the shoes of a woman and a nurse's cape. Years later the woman missing from the picture, Elizabeth O'Farrell, shared the truth of why she is absent in an interview. In it, she revealed how she stepped just out of view of the photographer to obscure her role in the surrender. It is an action, that she regretted later; her decision influenced by fears over the public reception of the picture and anger over the

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<sup>1</sup> Photo from National Museum of Ireland Website.  
<https://microsites.museum.ie/1916objectstories/RelatedObject?mUGBJ8H0oPU%3D>

outcome of the Easter Rising influenced her.<sup>2</sup> This small act remained hidden from society as did the role of women in Irish nationalism and the Easter Rising which is the subject of this thesis.<sup>3</sup>

O'Farrell's involvement in nationalist activism predated her participation in the Easter Rising. Indeed, historian Mary McAuliffe notes that "O'Farrell belonged to the Gaelic League, the Inghinidhe na hÉireann cultural organization, and the Irish Women's Franchise League."

<sup>4</sup>McAuliffe adds that in 1913 O'Farrell took part in the Dublin Lockout strike. Her activism grew and so did the organizations she joined, these included Cumann na mBan. While in Cuman na mBan O'Farrell learned first aid, a skill she utilized during the Easter Rising. Prior to this census records reveal her job in a printing house.<sup>5</sup> Notably during this time her political activism began. Literate she spoke both English and Irish. McAuliffe contributes that "O'Farrell and Grenan were among the first women to join the insurgent general's headquarters at the GPO on O'Connell Street. There during the week, they served in several roles, as couriers and message carriers, as arms smugglers between outposts, and as the fighting intensified, performing nursing and caring duties in the GPO."<sup>6</sup> The identification of her as a nurse resulted from her help to men injured during the Easter Rising that testified to her care for them. These are listed in the archives of the Bureau of Military History. O'Farrell's testimony is absent because she refused to contribute.<sup>7</sup> Though adamant about not sharing her story, she did not fail to offer aid when

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<sup>2</sup> The Catholic Bulletin. Vol. VII, pp. 266-270, pp. 329-334, April-May 1917.

<sup>3</sup> The nationalism referenced refers to the renewed attempts to obtain independence from England and thus become a separate nation, a united Ireland. This generated an increased interest in Irish culture.

<sup>4</sup> Mary McAuliffe, "Remembering for Being Forgotten. The Women of 1916, Memory, and Commemoration," in *Women and the Decade of Commemorations*, Frawley, Oona (ed). (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2021), 32.

<sup>5</sup> Mary McAuliffe. 29.

<sup>6</sup> Mary McAuliffe. 32.

<sup>7</sup> Mary McAuliffe. 35.

O'Farrell refused both to contribute to the files of the Bureau of Military History and to request a pension. This stemmed from her displeasure over the treaty, it bears noting that, "she voted against the treaty, sided with the anti-Treaty Republicans during the Civil War, and for the rest of her life, rejected the legitimacy of the State formed in 1922". She received midwife training in 1916 and became a member of Irish Nurses and Midwife Organization.



needed. History notes that O'Farrell and Grenan stayed behind when others left to continue helping the wounded. When surrender no longer remained an option, Pearce chose O'Farrell to join him and a priest to deliver the flag of surrender. They traveled through streets still engaged in battle. Then the flag, a small white handkerchief waved in the air while bullets flew. The sight of it caused the firing to cease. Despite the dangerous atmosphere O'Farrell remained composed and committed to the task. Back at the GPO her friend (and some believe lover), Julia Grenan feared for her safety.<sup>8</sup> Eventually the group made it to General Lowe. *The Irish Independent* notes that General Lowe wrote to Patrick Pearce, commandant of the 1916 rebel forces, dated April 29, 1916, "that a woman has come in and tells me you wish to surrender." The woman was Elizabeth O'Farrell. She is referred to in the narratives of the Rising, and more particularly in those of the surrender, as Nurse O'Farrell. O'Farrell's task continued after the pause for a photo. Margaret Ward contributes that "Elizabeth spent the rest of the day, and the Sunday that followed, touring the varied outposts, under military escort, delivering the signed messages of surrender from Pearce and Connolly to all the commandants."<sup>9</sup>

Later, an observer describing the scene calls O'Farrell, "a tall pretty girl," walking under fire toward the British positions to offer the surrender of the rebel forces, the girl is a woman (twenty-two years old).<sup>10</sup> This "girlish" description downplays the role O'Farrell played. So too,

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<sup>8</sup>Claire Hackett. "Ireland's Hidden Lesbian Figures Who Fought for the Revolution," *The Irish Times*, July 16, 2012.

Historian Claire Hackett contributes that "O'Farrell is buried in the Glasnevin Cemetery next to Grenan - one of the three last women to leave the 'headquarters' during the Easter Rising - in the republican plot, with modern historians considering them romantic partners, due to their "significant closeness" and 30 years of cohabitation."<sup>8</sup> Debates continue in regard to their relationship and if it identifies as Lesbian.

<https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2019/07/16/news/falls-road-lunchtime-talk-to-explore-hidden-history-of-ireland-s-revolution-through-the-lives-of-lesbian-activists-1663502/>

See also Ahmed, Yasmine, Sara Duddy, Claire Hackett, Patricia Lundy, Mary McCallan, Gemma McKeown, Andr  e Murphy, et al. "Developing Gender Principles for Dealing with the Legacy of the Past." *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 10, no. 3 (2016): 527-537.

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Ward, 116.

<sup>10</sup> Mary McAuliffe. 32.



does the photo. It is significant that another photo emerged that sheds light on the role O'Farrell played and reveals her attitude toward participation in the rebellion. McAuliffe notes that, "this image came up for sale at Adam's Auctioneers Salerooms in Dublin (1918). The photographer is Thomas Tyndall, (in Dublin in 1916). In this photo Elizabeth O'Farrell is wearing a military uniform, which was a coat of Volunteer tweed, with four pockets, dark green cuffs, and a leather belt. She is also wearing a slouch hat, more typical of that worn by Irish Citizen Army men. She is wearing the recommended haversack as the leather straps are visible on her shoulders. The Mauser C96 she is holding is what the Irish Volunteers referred to as 'Peter the Painters.' This gun proved lethally effective during Easter Week."<sup>11</sup> It is significant that "in recent years studio photographs and other photographs of Cumann na mBan women, in uniform and holding guns, have surfaced. Self-constructed imagery of militancy was more common than previously thought."<sup>12</sup> This photo reminds one of a similar uniform discussed in chapter two that Countess Constance Gore-Booth Markievicz wore. The women of Cumann na mBan received training in marksmanship. Their view of their role in the Irish Citizen Army resonated in the clothes they wore and the weapons they carried. This photo of Elizabeth O'Farrell emphasizes that. Commitment to the cause resulted in imprisonment for O'Farrell though General Lowe promised leniency because of her demeanor during the surrender process. Though initially arrested and imprisoned General Lowe kept his promise. Released from prison O'Farrell remained a staunch supporter of Irish nationalism. Family records show that O'Farrell despite being an introvert spoke out for a united Ireland. Historian Mary McAuliffe discloses why O'Farrell chose this role, when she wrote that, "For O'Farrell . . . and other women their involvement was as political and as ideologically motivated as that of the men of 1916. They were not there because they followed

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<sup>11</sup> Mary McAuliffe. 39.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

their brothers, husbands, lovers, or fathers into battle. They were committed to the ideal of an Irish Republic in which they had full and equal citizenship as promised in the Proclamation of 1916.”<sup>13</sup> This contrasted with the view of men who saw the women, “as the loyal and courageous girls of Cuman an mBan who rendered heroic service . . . The dominant memory of the women of 1916 and of the War of Independence for Ireland had become, effectively, and quickly, a gendered memory of wives, mothers, widows, nurses, and carers.”<sup>14</sup> This played a role in the collective memory of the role women filled during the time and offers answers to gaps in the history of women’s contributions during this period. This is not unique for too frequently women that fought for independence in other parts of the globe saw a similar depiction of their roles. This gendered narrative removes valuable contributions of women who sought a more active role in Irish Nationalism. I argue that research reveals more about the role of women during the time. Women of the Irish Citizen Army exemplify roles Irish women took on to further the nationalist cause. Building on this the next section provides supplemental information on women from the time and shows the difference a woman from Scotland made in the Easter Rising.

### **Margaret Skinnider**

Margaret Skinnider’s *Doing My Bit for Ireland* (1917) revealed her commitment to both the Irish suffrage movement and the Easter Rising.<sup>15</sup> Yet, this important primary document fell out of print until 2019. Testimonies of those she served with collaborate her words. Skinnider’s autobiography shares details of factors that influenced her and the role she felt compelled to take part in out of loyalty to Ireland. In the introduction of her book, she notes that her Irish parents

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Margaret Skinnider. *Doing My Bit for Ireland*. (New York: The Century Co., 1917, reproduction Alpha Editions, 2019), 7.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

“lived almost all their lives in Scotland and much of that time in Glasgow. She adds that Scotland is my home, but Ireland is my country.”<sup>16</sup> While still a child Margaret read histories of Ireland and viewed the time of William III “as a history of oppression for the Irish.”<sup>17</sup>

Skinnider began her political activism in Scotland with the suffrage movement. She mastered her sharpshooting skills “at one of the rifle practice clubs which the British organized so that women could help in the defense of the Empire.”<sup>18</sup> She planned to utilize her skills for Ireland and her increasingly militant role in the WSPU added to her qualifications. Indeed, an article in the *Irish Times* reported that, “In Glasgow, the WSPU members carried militancy to a new level, as a Glaswegian working class comrade, Jessie Stephen, later admitted: “Our militancy in Scotland took many forms, such as the smashing of plate glass windows, going into art galleries and even attempts to burn down castles and stately homes.”<sup>19</sup> Skinnider “belonged to the Irish Volunteers and Cumann na mBan and Countess Constance Gore-Booth Markievicz heard of her work and wanted to talk to her.” At Markievicz’s invitation Skinnider traveled to Dublin; there she became familiar with the work of rebels in Dublin and their plans. In Dublin she became a valuable spy for the group.

She became adept at the tricks of disguise and on occasions traveled wearing boy’s clothes. In a Fianna uniform (Irish boy scouts/soldiers) she convinced those around her that she belonged to Glasgow Fianna; in this guise “she joined the disturbances of the Dublin Fianna boys that were part of the campaign of the Irish Nationalists to keep the Irishmen out of World War I (and thus fighting for the British) and ready for their own fight when the time came.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Margaret Skinnider. 24.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Margaret Skinnider. 24.

The various roles Skinnider took on for Irish Independence highlight her belief in the cause she fought for. Her abilities and talents demonstrated Skinnider's determination. Adapt at drawing plans she became even more of an asset when she drew plans of the nearby Portobello Barracks. To accomplish this, she assumed a variety of personas; at one point she convinced a passing boy that "her handkerchief had fallen accidentally over the wall, the boy gallantly offered to get it for me. Being a woman and naturally curious, I found it necessary to pull myself up on tiptoe and watch him as he climbed over the wall."<sup>21</sup> In this way she determined the measurements of the barracks and calculated how best to blow a portion of it up. She shared her idea with Markievicz; Markievicz asked her to write her plan out and conveyed the details to James Connolly. His knowledge of the area confirmed the accuracy of her drawing. As a result, her role in the nationalist movement grew to include greater responsibilities. Skinnider revealed that, "soon she was taken into the confidence of the leaders of the movement for making Ireland a republic."<sup>22</sup>

She did much more than just join discussions and draw maps; Historian Margaret Ward contributes that Skinnider utilized her skills with a rifle to serve "as a sniper during the Easter Rising fighting and devised plans to bomb the Shelbourne Hotel."<sup>23</sup> Notably, Skinnider became one of the two female casualties injured when she sustained bullet wounds during an attack. Ward divulges that "Skinnider was badly wounded during the attack on a house situated behind the Russell Hotel on the Green... a sniper in the house opposite opened fire killing 17 years old Fred Ryan and hitting Margaret three times."<sup>24</sup> Skinnider wrote of her injuries and the hospitalization that resulted from these.

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<sup>21</sup> Margaret Skinnider. 42.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Margaret Skinnider. 178.

She spent five weeks in the hospital and then a detective insisted on her release. The nurses protested but the detective “insisted on his rights,” and made her walk with him to Bridewell Prison; along the way he attempted to interrogate her, but Skinnider refused to answer questions put to her. Placed into a cell she remained there for two hours and then to her surprise the detective returned and told her, “You are free.” On her release she returned to the hospital and remained there for two additional weeks. Her Scottish accent enabled her to receive a special permit to travel to Scotland after her release - (she hid her Republican colors that she usually wore). She finally made it back to Scotland and while there received an Irish Cross for her bravery from the Cumann na mBan girls and the Irish Volunteers of Glasgow.<sup>25</sup>

She remained proud of her role and rejoiced in the knowledge that two hundred Scots fought also for Irish independence. Jailed in England and then Scotland for a brief time. Skinnider disclosed that during the time Scottish suffragettes visited them at Barlinnec Prison in Glasgow. Thus, through this the support of the Scottish suffragettes for the rebellion becomes known. In Ireland though most women that fought during the Easter Rising came from Dublin, a small group came from Belfast. This stands out due to Belfast’s position of loyalty towards Britain. Thus, the fact that Margaret Ward reveals four women from this area that fought in the Easter Rising invites investigation into the women. Ward discloses that perusal of files “reveals that of the 146 female statements, only four are by women active in Belfast-Nora and Ina Connolly, Elizabeth Corr, and Kathleen Murphy.”<sup>26</sup> Perusal of the Bureau of Military files reveals how these women viewed their roles and shares what the uniform of Cumann Na Mban looked like. A picture of the uniform is on the next page. Elizabeth Corr is one woman who wore

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<sup>25</sup> Skinnider. 197.

<sup>26</sup> Margaret Ward. “Gendered Memories and Belfast Cumann na mBan, 1917-1922” in *Women and the Irish Revolution*, Linda Connolly, ed. (Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 2020), 48.

the uniform and fought for Ireland. Information on her role and how she viewed the actions she took during the time are discussed in the following paragraphs.



Figure 14 - Cumann Na mBan uniform from the Bureau of

Military History Newspaper clippings files. dated 1916.

## Elizabeth Corr

Prior to October 1915 Elizabeth Corr did not belong to any Irish organizations, but the growing anti Irish mood in Belfast “made me feel we had to do something about it.”<sup>27</sup> She noted that her brother told her about Cumann na mBan. Soon after learning of the group both her sister and her joined it. The group soon knew how to use a rifle. Lessons in military drills and first aid quickly followed. Elizabeth wrote that both her and her sister learned Gaelic through the group.

<sup>27</sup> BMH/CD/179/, Military Archives, Ireland.

The women of the group ran ceilidhes (Irish dance get-togethers) and helped with fundraising. The coming of Easter week 1916 interrupted their instruction in how to fire at a moving target. Instead, news of the coming rebellion brought with it an opportunity for those that wanted to fight. Elizabeth shared how both her and her sister told Nora Connolly that, “they were prepared to fight.” They readied to join those determined to participate in the Easter Rising. News of cancellation of the rising prompted the two sisters to travel with Nora Connolly and share the news with James Connolly. Furious at the misinformation he entrusted the two sisters (Elizabeth and Nell) to travel to the north of Ireland to deliver the news. The Easter Rising moved forward and with it the gulf in the Corr household for the Corr family fought on both sides. Years later the BBC provided pictures of the young women from Belfast and of the mural in Belfast that illustrates the family’s distinct positions:



Figure 15 - Elizabeth Corr in Cumann na mBan uniform BBC website <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-35862231>



Figure 16 - Mural in Belfast showing the two sisters who fought during the Easter Rising and their brother who fought for the English in WWI <https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/belfast-news/new-south-belfast-mural-tells-11643237>

As in Ireland during the Easter Rising, families found themselves in opposition to each other. Ulster is one example. Nationalist women there tired of the treatment of the Irish felt compelled to join the fight. The Corr sisters demonstrate this, in like manner so too does the witness statement of another Ulster inhabitant, Mrs. Ina Heron.<sup>28</sup> Examination of Ina Heron's statements provides further insight into the ways women involved in the Easter Rising of 1916 viewed their roles. Additionally, it demonstrates that the lens women of the time utilized to view their participation varied.

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<sup>28</sup> BMH/CD/919/89, Military Archives, Ireland.



## Ina Heron

Ina Heron offers a unique perspective on the activities leading up to the founding of Cumann na mBan in Ulster and the Easter Rising because of her relationship with James Connolly. Ina was the youngest of Connolly's five daughters (she had two younger brothers). Nicknamed Molly because of her birth in Ireland (her other sisters were born in Scotland) she described the time the family spent in Ireland and then later of a move to the United States. Notably, she wrote that "to keep alive our own nationality, my father would take us downtown to see the St. Patrick's Day parade and to see the huge numbers of Irish nationalists out marching, carrying banners representing different interests of the homeland and we sporting our bunch of shamrock on our coats together with the green ribbon on our hair."<sup>29</sup>

Thus, due to her father's influence Ina's love of Ireland and thirst for a free Ireland grew. In 1910, the family returned to Ireland once more.<sup>30</sup> She became involved in Cumann na mBan to fight for a free Ireland. Her witness statement is among the largest documents in the Bureau of Military history files; it shares facts about her family and life in the Connolly household. Ina's activity in the time before the Easter Rising frustrated her at first; exemplifying this is when boys and young men aided the cause with the procurement of guns. Longing to be part of the gun running she noted, "had I been a boy I would not have been overlooked."<sup>31</sup> Her wish for chance to do more came. Ina wrote that opportunity came when her group received instructions that, "We were to stay over to attend the funeral of the victim of the shooting and when I heard I was to take guns to Belfast and told of the consequence if stopped, it more than made up for the disappointment that I received earlier. The dear Countess [Markievicz] said: "You are the first

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<sup>29</sup> BMH/CD/919/39, Military Archives, Ireland.

<sup>30</sup> BMH/CD/919/42, Military Archives, Ireland

<sup>31</sup> BMH/CD/919/90, Military Archives, Ireland.

woman to run guns up to the north.”<sup>32</sup> Ina described her feelings in that role when she wrote that, “I was glad and proud to go forth with my instruments of torture to show the people I knew in the north that they could be content and satisfied that the people of the south would guard Ulster's interest even to the extent of bringing in arms and fighting for her.”<sup>33</sup> In the time of the Easter Rising Ina filled many roles, she helped to smuggle guns and medical supplies; she also delivered messages. As plans continued for preparations in the North, Ina aided in these, “During Wednesday, Thursday and Friday I was engaged with some of the Walsh family in moving ammunition and carrying medical and other supplies to the Volunteers. At Ballymacan, we found the Volunteers drilling and preparing their equipment under Eimar O'Duuffy, Pdraig O'Riain. and. Davy Boyd who had come from Dublin.”<sup>34</sup> then with these preparations in place she traveled to Dublin (the Saturday after Easter) to share the news with her father and there heard news of the surrender, “We were very disappointed to learn that the fight was all over and our men all arrested, some in jail here and more sent over to England, the news of the unconditional surrender and that my father had been wounded twice and was in Dublin Castle.”<sup>35</sup> Her father along with other leaders of the Rising died at the hands of a British firing squad. Her mother and siblings tried to escape to the United States and bring her father's papers with them. This did not happen; the government did not allow them to leave.<sup>36</sup> In the time that followed she kept busy noting, “After Easter Week I kept in touch continuously with the Volunteers and Cumann na mBan movements, and while I lived in London from 1918 to 1920, I acted frequently under instructions of Volunteer officers there.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, Ina's role did not end with the Easter Rising;

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> BMH/CD/919/111, Military Archives, Ireland.

<sup>35</sup> BMH/CD/919/112, Military Archives, Ireland.

<sup>36</sup> BMH/CD/919/Addendum,1, Military Archives.

<sup>37</sup> BMH/CD/919/112, Military Archives, Ireland.

she remained involved in the fight for Irish freedom and spoke when the opportunity arose. It bears noting that others did manage to leave Ireland and shared their experiences of the revolt. This fact is explored in the following pages with the introduction of another woman that fought in the Easter Rising, Moira Regan. In 1916, *The New York Times* published the story of her part in the Easter Rising. A review of this establishes further evidence of the way women viewed their roles.

### **From the Pages of the *New York Times***

Moira Regan's account recalled her experiences in the Easter Rising in Dublin prior to her move to New York. These intrigued readers of the newspaper. Moira's experiences in the rebellion, the training she received prior to it, and the orders she received on Easter Monday 1916 offered a different view of the events, a female interpretation of them. Her tale began with her initial orders, which stated that, "we'd be needed for bandaging and other Red Cross work."

<sup>38</sup> To be clear, her help with the rebellion almost did not take place for when she first went to volunteer, she heard that "there would be no street fighting and we were told to go away from the Broad Street Station and do what we could." At the GPO (General Post Office) Moira Regan fought with other rebels (men and women).

Thus, she witnessed the activities of Thomas McDonough, Padraic Pierce, and Joseph Plunkett. Connolly sent her out to others with messages and so like many women of Cumann na MBan (in English the Council of Women) she filled the role of courier. In this position she witnessed the bombing of buildings and the exchange of gunfire between the men of the Easter

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<sup>38</sup> Joyce Kilmer. "1916. Irish Girl Rebel Tells of Dublin Fighting: Moira Regan. Now Here, Served in Post Office, the Headquarters of the Irish Republic, and Carried Dispatches for the Leaders." (New York: *New York Times* August 20, 1916).

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/irish-girl-rebel-tells-dublin-fighting/docview/97838604/se-2?accountid=14605> (accessed March 25, 2022)

Rising and the British soldiers. She also divulged how the British arrived with more than ample supplies and provisions. Moira viewed her role with pride stating that, “one thing that would strike you about the conduct of the rebels was the absolute equality of the men and the women.” Moira then described the work assigned to them, “The women did first aid and cooking, and some of them used their rifles to good advantage.” At the end of the newspaper article Moira shares how she felt in her role:

The greatest result . . . is the complete and amazing revival of Irish nationality. We have been asleep- ready to acquiesce in things as they were, to take jobs under the Castle government [the Castle government refers to the seat of government in Dublin] and to acquiesce in the unnatural state of affairs. But now awakened to the knowledge that there is a great difference between Ireland and England, that we really are a separate nation. . . You cannot understand the joy of this feeling unless you have lived in a nation whose spirit had been crushed and then suddenly revived. I felt that evening when I saw the Irish flag floating over the Post Office in O’Connell street, that this was a thing worth living and dying for. I was absolutely intoxicated and carried away with joy and pride in knowing that I had a nation.<sup>39</sup>

Moira’s attitude towards her role shared the view of many women in Cumann na mBan. This organization proudly wore uniforms and fought for a free Ireland. Yet, conditions after the rebellion forced many women like Moira to flee Ireland. Many came to the United States but chose to remain silent on their roles. On the other side of the globe Australia became another place former rebels came to call home.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Historian S  bhra Aiken argues that the number of nationalist women emigrating from Ireland resulted in missing accounts both because of this and because of governmental failure to include the women in the narrative. She notes that, “levels of emigration prove startling in some rural areas. In Dungloe, County Donegal, Ventry, County Kerry, and Beara, County Cork, between 60 and 70 percent of Cumann na mBan had emigrated by the mid-1930’s.”<sup>40</sup> Aiken argues that “the substantial displacement of people following the Irish Revolution (1916-1921), particularly of women, has little place in the hegemonic state-sanctioned commemorative history of the period.”<sup>41</sup> The evidence found in the private papers of women who left Ireland out of fear for their safety speaks to the grim reality of motivation for both their leaving Ireland and their reluctance to share their stories. Aiken quotes historian Halbwachs and posits that “on a local level, large-scale emigration poses a problem for social remembrance as it disrupts ‘the social framework historian Maurice Halbwachs outlines as essential for supporting collective memory.’”<sup>42</sup> Thankfully, records offer evidence that supports the emigration of these women. Consider that, “between 1871 and 1971 the majority of emigrants who left Ireland were young single women, a demographic trend that went against the grain of general European emigration patterns.” The reasons why nationalist women emigrated varied from fears of personal safety due to the political climate in Ireland to worries over economic situations. Aiken notes that, “a number of sources suggest that women’s political activism may have informed, or at least hastened, emigration.”<sup>43</sup> Among the women Aiken references is Annie Crowley. Crowley

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<sup>40</sup> S  bhra Aiken. “Sick of the Irish Sea, Dancing Across the Atlantic”-(Anti)-nostalgia in Women’s Diasporic Remembrance of the Irish Rebellion,” in *Women and the Decade of Commemorations*, ed. Oona Frawley, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2021), 88-106.

<sup>176</sup> S  bhra Aiken. 88.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> S  bhra Aiken. 93.

<sup>179</sup> S  bhra Aiken. 98.

describes frequent raids on her house. Worth noting too, is that Kathleen Clarke (wife of executed Irish republic president, Tom Clarke), wrote of the continuous raids her family endured from the Black and Tan groups.<sup>44</sup> Sadly, only one full-length autobiography of a female Irish nationalist emigrant exists, Bridget Dirrane's memoir. Bridget dictated it while in St. Francis Community Nursing Unit in Galway at 103 years old. Yet even in consideration of this it added to material of the time and helps to understand the role of women during the Easter Rising. So too does the story of a family from Liverpool and the role one woman played. Notably this story builds on the testimonies of other women with its inclusion and attests further to the fact that not all the women of the Easter Rising came from Ireland.

### **Other Women in the Easter Rising**

The Liverpool's Easter Rising 1916 Centenary Events 2016 website offers information on the memorial in Liverpool England built to commemorate the service of the men and women of the 1916 Easter Rising. These include Kathy Doran, Peggy Downey, Kathleen Fleming, Anastasia MacLoughin, Kathleen Murphy, Rose Ann Murphy, and Nora Thornton. Notably, absent is the name of Elizabeth Kerr. The Military Pension file at the Bureau of Military Records in Dublin notes how Elizabeth, her husband, and their two sons participated in the Easter Rising. Elizabeth states, "that she came across from Bootle with clothes and money for the Volunteers. She arrived on Good Friday 21 April. During the Rising she assisted with first aid, food distribution and carried despatches."<sup>45</sup> Records reveal she helped her husband in his duties for the Volunteers. Her service is recorded in the files of the Bureau of Military History. Located there too, are photos of the devastation. Finally, the National Army Museum in London also

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<sup>45</sup> Bureau of Military History Pension File:  
<https://militarypensions.wordpress.com/2018/09/06/the-kerr-family-of-liverpool-and-their-fight-for-irish-freedom/>

contains images from the Easter Rising and the destruction of buildings that took place. The photo below exemplifies the destruction.



Figure 17 - The GPO (General Post Office), headquarters of the Easter Rising after destruction by British forces. May 1916. <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/easter-rising>

## Conclusion

The women of the Irish nationalist and suffrage movements and the women who took part in the Easter Rising of 1916 sought agency to direct their own movements and participate in nationalism struggles. One year after the defeat of the Easter Rising, these same women remembered battles fought and sacrifices made when according to Helena Molony, “with some help the women managed to get the tricolor up a flagpole at the GPO (General Post Office) the night before the date chosen for commemoration-which was Easter Monday, April 9; rather than the actual anniversary of the Rising April 24.”<sup>46</sup> Notably, “Molony and her comrades also commemorated James Connolly with a major event at Liberty Hall on the first anniversary of his execution, May 12, 1917.”<sup>47</sup> The women created a large scroll with the words “James Connolly murdered, May 12, 1916” and planned to hang it in his memory.<sup>48</sup> The success of their endeavor involved risk and determination. Rose Hackett described the event with these words:

Miss Molony called us together Jinny Shanahan, Brigid Davis and myself [sic] . . . Getting up on the roof, she [Molony] put it high up, across the top parapet. We were on top of the roof for the rest of the time it was there. We barricaded the windows . . . Thousands of people were watching from the quay on the far side of the river. It took the police a good hour or more before they got in, and the script was there until six in the evening before they got it down.

It bears noting that in both events the women worked together to preserve the memory of male participants in the Rising. The women worked to keep the sacrifices of the men in the forefront

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<sup>46</sup> Mary McAuliffe. 27.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.



and to this end, “it was women who produced and distributed much of the Easter week memorabilia, postcards, posters, and flags that commemorated the executed and imprisoned leaders of 1916; they produced pamphlets that emphasized the loyalty owed by to the successors of the men of 1916, those who were now leading Sinn Féin.”<sup>49</sup> This action explains in part how the roles of women came to be forgotten because of their exclusion from ceremonies. In the years that followed commemorations concentrated on the contributions of men; “women’s part in commemorative events during this era remained marginal and purely symbolic, as did any part they played in 1916.”<sup>50</sup> Indeed, McAuliffe notes that “as the country moved further in time from the Rising, representations of women, as Louise Ryan wrote, were ‘contained within the conventional narratives of grieving mothers or passive, nameless victims.’”<sup>51</sup> In fact, Margaret Ward observes that “when the fiftieth anniversary of the Representation of the Peoples Act occurred in 1968, there was no “reinventing the wheel” because Irish feminism appeared to have neither a past nor a present as the historical focus remained tied to a nationalist narrative.”<sup>52</sup> The centennial celebration thus became notable because of its focus on women. In fact, Ward notes that, “the shift in atmosphere and expectation came about because of an effort named “Waking the Feminists.”<sup>53</sup> This program for the 2016 commemoration resulted from the response of female actors in the Abby Theatre.<sup>54</sup> The women receiving long overdue attention included Hanna Sheehy Skeffington. Skeffington’s granddaughter spearheaded the movement to commemorate her grandmother.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Mary McAuliffe. 23.

<sup>50</sup> Mary McAuliffe. 28.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Margaret Ward. “Irish Suffrage” in *Women and the Decade of Commemorations* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2021), 173.

<sup>53</sup> Oona Frawley. 5

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ward. 174.

It is significant that though the women's actions remained ignored for so long in their native country their actions influenced efforts by women in other areas of the globe. One case that exemplifies this is when the women of India rose to demand suffrage during British government-controlled India.<sup>56</sup> The response of those in power towards the women frequently mirrored that of the British Government towards politically active women. This silenced many and prevented others from knowing about their roles. This thesis highlighted the Irish Nationalist women and argued not just about the importance of their roles, but how they viewed the roles they undertook and what factors influenced them. I argued laws of culture, religion, and social class became shackles, forged over centuries in male-dominated society that contributed to the resistance the women encountered. I posited further that knowledge of how the women saw their roles helps in understanding their involvement.

The 1916 Irish rebellion, though quickly crushed, found support from around the world. The horrors experienced by the inhabitants of Dublin filled newspapers both locally and internationally. This became the impetus that prompted several Irish nationalist women to travel to the United States and speak to crowds to appeal for help. The list of those who traveled to the United States included Countess Constance Gore-Booth Markievicz, Hannah Skeffington, and Maud Gonne to mention a few. These women celebrated the freedoms gleaned in education and the opportunities afforded for a greater participation in government. Among these Countess Constance Gore-Booth Markievicz stands out due to comments she stated. Historian Ruth Taillon quotes Markievicz reflection on her early involvement in the women's suffrage movement when she stated that, "It was one of the things I worked for since I was a young girl.

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<sup>56</sup> The website-Feminism in India includes information on how the Irish Easter Rising and Suffrage movement impacted the women there:  
<https://feminisminindia.com/2019/02/04/7-indian-suffragettes-british/> Include information about women in India.

That was my first bite, you may say at the apple of freedom . . .”<sup>57</sup> Thus the apple of freedom speaks to the role of Markievicz and others like her as biblical Eves desirous of freedom from patriarchal society. Knowledge and the promise of equality offered to them became a seduction too inviting to resist. The thorns of punishment for this taste of freedom did not deter them. Despite this, culture and conservatism undermined their efforts and aborted change.

Ultimately, the work of nationalist women faded to the background, and the gains they made disappeared with the emergence of the new Irish Free State. Women became ruled by laws that favored the male dominated culture of centuries past. Frawley argues that this “perhaps functioned as an enabling fact in the present.”<sup>58</sup> As she points out, “Commemorative activity is always a reflection not of the past, but of the present . . . the ways in which we mark the decade of commemorations similarly reflects our cultural views.”<sup>59</sup> Today these cultural views look through a global lens that seeks to respect women and offer insight into the history that defines them and promotes remembrance. Frawley adds that, “commemorations do not take place in a frame which they reference only each other, but they occur in broad social contexts – and wide, even global, questions concerning women’s rights have had an impact on our commemorative agendas as have had Brexit and the ongoing lack of a sitting government in Northern Ireland.”<sup>60</sup> Today women owe their commitments and passions to the influence of a society becoming increasingly linked globally. Movements such as the MeToo movement illustrate the way women today engage in society and owes much to the actions of those before them. The women of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland exemplify one group of women that stand out because of their activities.

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<sup>57</sup> Ruth Taillon. *When History Was Made The Women of 1916* ( Dublin, Ireland: Colour Books Ltd., 1996), 109.

<sup>58</sup> Frawley. 18.

<sup>59</sup> Frawley. 19.

<sup>60</sup> 16.

My thesis shares how the women of the time viewed their roles and the factors that influenced them. In addition, it demonstrates that class as well as gender played a role in government decisions in connection with the women (especially regarding Countess Constance Gore-Booth Markievicz). Finally, it shows how religiosity influenced the women and their attitudes towards the roles they sought. The words of historian Linda Connolly emphasizes the importance of recognizing the role of women during this time. “The process of remembering the past through the lens of women’s lives has real political currency and human rights in contemporary Ireland.”<sup>61</sup> I posit that the political currency referenced by Connolly extends beyond Ireland because of the growing global focus on gender and equality and thus encourages further research.

### **Opportunities for Further Research**

Today in addition to the Bureau of Military History files, pension statements help to identify many women who did not provide a witness statement and thus their names await inquiry. In addition to these, stories of other women nationalists emerged after their deaths. This unexpected discovery by family members of documents, photos, and diary entries previously hidden offered insight into the women of the time and their feelings about their roles. Finally, the next page shows the Easter 1916 Ribbon issued by the Irish Government in appreciation of those that fought in the Easter Rising in 1916. The pages that follow list two hundred and three women of the Easter Rising that received the medal and where they fought. Their roles in the Easter Rising warrant inclusion because of the contributions they made.

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<sup>61</sup> Linda Connolly. “Honest Commemoration,” in *Women and the Decade of Commemorations (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2021)*, 313.

## Easter Week 1916 Ribbon given to those who served (or to their next of kin if deceased).<sup>62</sup>



OBVERSE



REVERSE



RIBBON

### DATE OF GOVERNMENT DECISION:

24/1/1941

### CONDITIONS OF AWARD:

The medal was awarded to persons with recognised military service during Easter Week 1916.

### DESIGN:

A bronze circular medal approximately 38 millimetres in diameter, fashioned (after the manner of the official Irish Army Crest) in the form of a circle of flame representing the sunburst on which eight points of a star are superimposed.

Within the circle on the obverse is a representation of the death scene of Cúchulainn (a legendary Irish hero), partially surrounded by an ancient warrior's sword belt. On the reverse appears the following inscription: "**SEACTAIN NA CASCAS 1916**", which is translated "Easter Week 1916".

### RIBBON:

Green (to the observer's left) and Orange in two vertical panels.

### SUSPENSION BAR:

The suspension bar from which the ribbon is suspended bears a Celtic interlaced design.

Figure 18 - Easter Week Ribbon. Military History Website.

<sup>62</sup> Pdf file from Bureau of Military History Website. Metal\_1916\_pdf.

## Addendum

### **Sixty-three women received The 1916 Easter Rising Medal for service at the GPO (General Post Office):**

Adrien, Mary (Molly Adrien).

Barry, Leslie Mary.

Brooks, Christina. nee Stafford.

Burke, Elizabeth (Lillie McGinty).

Byrne, Catherine. (Catherine Rooney).

Byrne, Lucy Agnes (nee Smyth).

Carney, Maria Winifred.

Chadwick, Mrs. Mary. (Nee Kelly).

Connolly, Brigid (Brid).

Coogan, Alice (nee Byrne).

Corcoran, Mary Teresa. (Mary O'Reilly).

Cullen, May.

de Paor, Nancy Doctor.

Downie, Margaret. (Margaret Viant, Peggy).

Duffy, Louise Gavan.

English, Maire.

Flood, Josephine nee Neary.

Foley, Nora (Ni Foghludha).

Gahan, Mary (Mary O'Carroll).

Gethings, Lucy (Mrs. Grimley).

Grace, Bridget.

Grenan, Julia.

Hoey, Patricia.

Lambert, Bridget (Bridget Doran).

Lawless, Mary.

MacSharry, Margaret nee Fagan.

Mapother, Máire. Ard.  
 McElroy, Mairéad (Margaret).  
 Mulcahy, Mary Josephine.  
 Murphy, Gertrude (Catherine Gertrude Colley).  
 Murphy, Kathleen (Kathleen Patton).  
 Murphy, Martha (nee Kelly).  
 Murray, Eileen.  
 Murray, May.  
 Ni Ainle, Maire (Hanley Moira).  
 Ni Foghludha, Nora.  
 Noone, Mrs. Ellen.  
 O'Connell, Mary.  
 O'Farrell, Elizabeth.  
 O'Hanrahan, Mary.  
 O'Neill, Maura (Máire). Nee Gibney.  
 O'Reilly, Nora.  
 Price, Leslie. (de Barra Leslie, Barry Mrs. Tom).  
 Quinn, Margaret.  
 Rafferty, Mrs. Mary Josephine nee Walsh.  
 Redmond, Annie.  
 Reynolds, Molly (Mary Catherine).  
 Ni Foghludha, Nora.  
 Riain, Aine (Ryan, Ann, Noreen Ryan, Ni Riain).  
 Ríain, Bheronica.  
 Richards, Bridie.  
 Rogers, Sarah. (Sorcha Bhean Mhic Ruaidhri MacMahon).  
 Rossiter, Cathleen. (Cathleen Mallin).  
 Simpson, Matilda (Tilley).  
 Slater, Birdie (nee Walsh).

Stafford, Brooks Christine.

Stynes, Mrs. Ellin nee Lambert (Nellie).

Tobin, Annie (Mrs. Soalfield).

Toomey, Stasia (Mrs. S. Byrne).

Treston, Catherine.

Ui Faoithe, Brigid Bean.

Walsh, Margaret (nee Jenkinson).

Wisely, Esther. (Mrs. O'Moore, Wiseley May Moore).

### **City Hall Garrison**

#### **Nine women received the 1916 medal:**

Barrett, Mrs. Kathleen nee Connolly.

Brady, Brigid (Married name Brigid Murphy).

Lynn, Kathleen Florence.

Hanratty, Emily (Emily Norgrove).

Kelly, Elizabeth (Elizabeth Lynch, Bessie).

Molony, Helena.

Norgrove, Annie (Annie Grange).

O'Duuffy, Brigid (Brigid Davis).

Shanahan, Jane (Jennie).

### **The Four Courts and Reilly's Fort**

#### **Thirty women received the 1916 medal:**

Allen, Mary (nee Devereux).

Beatty, Katie nee Daly.

Blackburn, Kathleen nee Kenny.

Byrne, Mary.

Byrne, Teresa nee Healy.



Carron, Maire.

Coleton, Elizabeth. (Murnane Lily Murnane).

Costigan, Ellen. (Nellie, Ennis, Ellen).

Duggan, May nee Kavanagh.

Fahy, Anna.

Griffin, Florence (Flossie Meade).

Healy, Cathleen.

Heron Aine.

Keating, Mary Pauline. (Morkan).

Lawlor, Mary. nee O'Carroll. (Dolly).

Ledwith, Emily nee Elliott.

McGuinness, Rose.

McKeon, Brigid nee Murnane.

Morkan, Philomena (Phyllis Lucas, Philomena).

Mulligan, Margaret.

Murnane, Margaret nee Martin.

Murphy, Eileen. nee Walsh.

O'Carroll, Annie nee O'Keeffe.

O'Carroll, Mary nee O'Sullivan.

O'Gorman, Mary Christina nee Hayes.

Parker, Ellen nee O'Flanagan.

Pollard, Louisa nee O'Sullivan.

Thornton, Brigid nee Lyons.

Ui Chonnallan, Peig Bean/ Conlon.

Uí Conaill, Eilís Bean (née Ní Riain).

### **Jacob's Biscuit Factory**

#### **Ten women received the 1916 medal:**

Kealy, Sara.

Kerr Neill.

Lane, Kathleen nee McCarthy.

Magee, Teresa.

Nic Siubhlaigh, Marie (McSiubhlaigh).

O'Hagan, Annie.

O'Hanrahan, Eileen. Married name O'Reilly.

O'Neill, Cecilia nee Conroy.

Pollard, Josephine. nee Daly.

Pollard, Kathleen. Nee McDonald.

### **Marrowbone Lane**

#### **Twenty-one women received the 1916 medal:**

Clince, Maria nee Quigley.

Cooney, Elizabeth (Lillie, Curran).

Cosgrave Marcella.

Doyle, May nee Byrne.

Farrelly, Rose. (Mullally Rosanna).

Greene, Josephine nee Kelly.

Harbourne, Eileen. (Eileen Cooney).

Harmon, Bridget nee Hegarty.

Hendley, Emily nee O'Keeffe.

Kavanagh, Priscilla nee Quigley.

Kennedy, Margaret. (Loo, Agnes).

Lynch. Sheila nee O'Hanlon.

McNamara, Josephine nee O'Keeffe.

McNamara, Rose.

McNamee, Agnes.

Murphy, Kathleen.

O'Brennan, Lily Mary. (Elizabeth, Esther Graham).

O'Brien, Annie (Cooney).

O'Hanlon, Mollie. (Molly, Mary, Maire).

Simmons, Margaret. nee O'Flaherty.

Spicer, Josephine.

### **Saint Stephen's Green.**

#### **Twenty-two received the 1916 medal:**

Allen, Mary. (Devereux, Mary).

Caffrey, Christina (Chris Keeley Caffrey-Keeley).

Devlin, Ann. (Anastasia).

Donnelly, Helen nee Gifford.

Doyle, Christina Mary (Ni Dubhghaill Maire).

Ffrench, Mullen Madeleine.

Fitzgerald, Aine (Aine, Ann and Annie Malone).

Gahan, Mary (May).

Goff, Bridget. Gough.

Hackett Rosie.

Hyland, Mary. (May, Mrs. Michael Kelly).

Joyce, Margaret. (Maggie).

Kelly Annie.

Kelly, Katie.

Kempson, Lily (McAlerney).

Markievicz, Constance (Countess).

McLoughlin, Mary.

Moore, May nee Wisely.

O'Daly, Nora. (Margaret Mary).

O'Daly, Nora Margaret Mary. (nee Murtagh).

Redmond, Cathleen. (Seery).

Skinnider Margaret. (Maighréad Proinnsias Ní Scineadóra).

### **Fingal.**

#### **Seven women received the 1916 medal.**

Lawless, Monica (Dot Fleming).

Adrian, Molly.

Lawless, Eveleen.

McAllister, Kathleen. Nee Lawless AKA Bean Mac Alastair, Caitlin.

Adrian, Molly.

Fleming, Monica.

Lawless, Eileen.

### **Enniscorthy.**

#### **Thirty-Three women received the 1916 medal.**

Breen, Mary. (Mary Cullen, May Breen).

Brennan, Una.

Byrne, Stasia. (Anastasia Byrne, Walsh).

Crosby, Gretta. (Crosbie, Gretta Williams).

Doyle, Brigid. (Brigid Moore).

Doyle, Mary Ellen.

Doyle, Mary Kate.

Ennis, Lily. (Roche Elizabeth).

Fitzpatrick, Maire. (Maire bean Mac Giolla, Padraig Moran).

Forrestal, Margaret.

French, Alicia. (Alicia Shortall).

Gray, Mary.

Hearne, May (Mary Ellen Hearne).

Heneghan, Annie (Annie Cardiff).

Jordan, Sara. (Sara Walsh).

Keegan, Ellen.  
 Keegan, Teresa.  
 Kehoe, Josephine.  
 King, Margaret.  
 Larkin, Ita. (Forrestal).  
 Leacy, Anastasia (Stasia).  
 Lynch, Sheila. (Sheila Moran, Sighle Bean Ui Loingsigh).  
 Moran, Brigid Christina.  
 Murphy, Kitty.  
 Murphy, Winifred. (Winifred Kelly).  
 Noctor, Brigid. (Doyle Noctor).  
 O'Brien, Elizabeth. (Elizabeth Cullen).  
 O'Neill, Annie.  
 Pender, Bella. (Elizabeth Breen).  
 Twomey, Eileen. (Eileen Hegarty, Eibhlín Uí Thuama).  
 Walsh, Margaret (Margaret Doran).  
 Ward, Christina. (Chrissie).  
 Ward, Katie.

### **County Galway.**

#### **Eight women received the 1916 medal.**

Allum, Annie.  
 Armstrong, Kate. (Catherine Glynn).  
 Connor, Mary Kate.  
 Dooley, Ellen (Kelly).  
 Fahy, Margaret. (Margaret Cloonan).  
 McNamara, Mary. (Mary Rooney).  
 Mullins, Gretta. (Walsh, Margaret Mullins).  
 Roche, Julia

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BMH/CD/321/12, Military Archives, Ireland.

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[https://doi.org/10.7925/drs1.ucdlib\\_43149](https://doi.org/10.7925/drs1.ucdlib_43149)  
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