

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 295

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 295

**Witness**

Mrs. M. Hyland Lalor,  
47 Elmwood Avenue,  
Ranelagh, Dublin.

**Identity**

Organiser; Director of Training and  
Member of National Executive of Cumann na mBan.

**Subject**

- (a) Activities of Inghini na hEireann 1900 -
- (b) Foundation of Fianna Eireann 1909 and  
its growth.
- (c) Events leading to formation of Cumann  
na mBan.

**Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness**

Nil

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STATEMENT BY MRS. M. HYLAND-LALOR,  
47, Elmwood Avenue, Ranelagh, Dublin.

With the formation of Inghinide na h-Eireann on Easter Sunday, 1900, at 32 Lower Abbey Street a new phase in the National movement may be said to have commenced. It can justly be claimed for this organisation that it was the forerunner of Cumann na mBan.

The founder members had been most active in the Literary Historical Societies and in the furtherance of the Irish Language and its rules now sought to be a composite of such activities.

The principal objects of the Daughters of Erin, to give it its English title, were to encourage the study of the Irish Language, of Irish Literature, History, Music and Art, especially amongst the young by the organising and teaching of classes for the above subjects; to support and popularise Irish manufacture, to discourage the reading and circulation of low English literature, singing English songs and to combat in every way English influence which was doing so much harm to the artistic taste and refinement of the Irish people; to form a Fund called the National Purposes Fund for the furtherance of the above objects, and its members, all of whom adopted Gaelic names, were pledged to mutual help and support, and to work for the cause of Irish independence.

Miss Maud Gonne was elected first President of the Society.

The Society early directed its efforts to the education of the rising generation, and classes were held twice a week at Headquarters for the teaching of the Irish language, History and dancing.

In response to a suggestion made by William Rooney in the columns of the United Irishman, the Daughters organised a Patriotic Children's treat at Clonturk Park. Having got subscriptions and all the varieties of provisions suitable for such an occasion, they had as guests no fewer than 30,000 children. Marching in procession at a quick pace, the children took over one hour and a half to pass through the gates. The hosting gave great heart to its organisers and served to show all and sundry the zeal and ability of its members.

To encourage a love of literature and historical research, the members were required to write papers on national subjects which were read at monthly meetings.

At Easter, 1901, Gaelic tableaux were presented at the Ancient Concert Rooms, Great Brunswick Street (now Palace Cinema, Pearse Street). Miss Alice Milligan and "Ethna Carbery", the poetess, had much to do with the success of that venture. Dr. Douglas Hyde and Seamus McManus were amongst the performers, the whole cast numbering more than one hundred persons.

In August of 1901 a similar series was put on and this time one of the Tableaux, "The Deliverance of Red Hugh O'Donnell" was bi-lingual, but P.T. McGinley's little play, "Ely agus and Bean Deirce", also produced, made history as the first production in Irish ever to be staged in the capital - the beginning of the Irish Literary Theatre.

In April of the following year "A.E." (George Russell) and W.B. Yeats gave their plays, "Deirdre" and "Kathleen-ni-Houlihan", to the Iniginide for first production. Miss Maud Gonne played Kathleen-ni-Houlihan and received the highest praise from the dramatic critics of the day, one saying that "her remarkable dramatic powers were quite a revelation to her audience".

The organisation went on steadily, and in November, 1908, they decided to bring out a paper which they called Bean na h-Eireann. In the columns of their paper, it was advocated that women should set about raising their present position in the social and political life of the country, and labour to make their environment compatible with their moral and intellectual advancement, which incidentally means the development of the nation and of the race.

A strong campaign for the support of Irish manufacture was urged as a means to relieve the poverty of the towns, and women were asked to give preference to those Irish firms who pay their workers honestly for their labour and give them opportunities to live

decent healthy lives.

Book reviews were a feature of the paper, and the January number, 1909, gave a detailed description of the Aonach held in the Rotunda. Tom Clarke's display was described as "one of the most imposing stalls".

Bean na h-Éireann, apart from being a hard hitting propagandist journal, was a publication of outstanding literary tone, having among its contributors such prominent writers and poets as "A.E." (George Russell), James Stephens, Susan Mitchell, Katherine Tynan, M. Barry O'Delaney, Maeve Kavanagh and that prolific journalist, the lady whose pen name is John Brennan.

An interesting column on current events described the pageant, "The Coming of Cuchulainn", performed by Pearse's pupils at Scoil Eanna in June, 1909; as "true nation building which will help to turn out true Irishmen and true scholars, not mere tape-machines for information".

During the same year the Inghinide published a lecture, "Women, Ideals And The Nation", which Madame Markievicz had given to the Students' National Literary Society. In this, Madame counselled the women of Ireland to regard themselves as Irish, as units of a nation, distinct from England, determined to gain deliverance; to arm themselves to fight the nation's cause with noble and free ideas; to arm their minds with the history and memories of the country and if,

in their day the call should come for the body to arm, not to shirk that either.

Fianna Éireann, which was organised in 1909, got great encouragement from the members of Inghinide who gave them space in Bean na hÉireann to further the boys' organisation which they hoped would have branches of Na Fianna in every part of Ireland, so that the next generation of Irishmen would know their country and be prepared to assert her independence. Great prominence was given to the first Fianna Convention held in August, 1910, at which Madame Markievicz presided, and at the election of officers was elected President. Among the Sluaghite that were affiliated were Waterford and Glasgow.

Bean na h-Éireann, in all its issues, preached militant action, devoting articles to The Art of Street Fighting and Physical Force. It asked as a first step to try and prevent boys joining England's army, navy and police, to encourage fixity of purpose and courage for the struggle that is waiting for Ireland in the womb of time. The concluding paragraph of the articles asked every Irishman and woman to learn to discipline and be disciplined, to learn to shoot, to learn to march, to learn to scout, to learn to give up all for Ireland - "Twenty years would not be too long to prepare in, and God alone knows shall we have twenty years".

It will be seen then, from this necessarily outline story of the first women's movement in modern

times, that the way was already paved for the full-blooded militant organisation later to be formed and known as Cumann na mBan.

SIGNED: M. H. Lalor  
DATE: 16/9/49

WITNESS: Seán Bunn  
DATE: 16. 9. 49

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