

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 690

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 690

Witness

Mrs. James O'Mara (M. A. O'Mara),
The Grove,
Killiney,
Co. Dublin.

Identity.

Widow of James O'Mara, member of first
Dail Eireann.

Subject.

Organisation of Irish Republican Loan in
America, 1919.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. ...S.1999.....

Form B.S.M. 2

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 630

Statement of Mrs. James O'Mara

The Grove, Killiney.

My husband ran the 1918 election and ran it very successfully.

He was a member of the British Parliament at one time for seven years. We lived in London for 20 years. We were married in 1895. He and Winston Churchill were the youngest members when he was elected. He represented South Kilkenny from 1901 to 1907. We stayed in London until May, 1914, when we came back.

He became keenly interested in Sinn Fein after its formation and thats why he resigned his seat. I can't think what started that interest. I dont seem to have that written down in the notes that I have of our lives in London.

He was London representative of the O'Mara firm for 20 years - from the time we married in 1895. He resigned from that because he was always very anxious to come back to Ireland. In spite of his father's opposition, who asked me to plead with him, he came back and took over Donnelly's bacon factory which was not paying, from a cousin who was running it. He reorganised it and put it on a sound basis. At that time we lived in Ely Place, where we rented ^{by M.B.O'M.} Gogarty's house. My husband bought a house, Barfield, at ^{by M.A.O'M.} Salthill, Galway, in 1914, which we sold in 1919, when we bought Cashel House in Connemara. It was in that year(1919) we also bought 43, Fitzwilliam Place, During some of the years we had Barfield we rented a flat in Earlsfort Mansions as a pied-a-terre for my husband and Pat who was studying in Dublin.

Apparently Jim did not take any interest in politics until after the Rising. As a matter of fact he was not in favour of the Rising, not being a physical force man. He always thought that things should be done without fighting. Still after the executions we were brought into the political movement and our lives were greatly changed. I have a clear recollection of the start of the Rising. We were in Ely Place and I was preparing to go out to play golf when we heard the firing.

In the election of 1918 he was elected in his old constituency, South Kilkenny, to the first Dail and he must have remained a member until the Treaty and again under the Free State from 1923 till 1926 but then he sat for South Dublin.

My husband aided the movement financially but the loans he gave were afterwards repaid.

As far as I remember De Valera wired for my husband to go to America to organise the Republican Loan. We came to Dublin on a Saturday night in September, 1919, I think, and he went by himself as a stowaway in some ship. I did not go till a few months later. I could not get a passport either in Dublin or in London where I spent three weeks. I then went to Paris and after another three weeks I succeeded in getting a passport and sailed in the "France" on Easter Sunday 1920, bringing my eldest daughter, Pat, with me.

I was very anxious about my husband sailing as a stowaway. Although he was fond of adventure he was a very nervous man and it must have been a great

trial to him to be shut up in a hold and only able to take exercise late at night. I was not easy in my mind until I heard he had landed. He must have left the boat dressed as a sailor.

Jim opened an office in 5th Avenue, New York, to promote the Loan. He was not long in America when it was clear to him that De Valera could never bring the leaders of the Friends of Irish Freedom to see his point of view and he suggested to De Valera that he should start an independent organisation for the *M.A. O'Connell* ~~re-organisation~~ of the Republic. He realised that those Americans were using the existing organisation as a political machine for their own purpose and Jim had no use for them, and they did not approve of De Valera joining another association because it took over a number of their own supporters. De Valera always hoped to win over his opponents. When he realised that he had failed he yielded to my husband's idea about forming a separate association but that was only before De Valera returned to Ireland.

My husband never appeared on platforms but he started the publicity, organised meetings everywhere and suggested the best states to make collections. The loan was heavily subscribed although I don't now recollect how much it amounted to.

When De Valera came home my husband understood that everything was left to him as regards the organisation of the loan and the offices. Jim had opened an office in Chicago also. They had wonderful success everywhere. But De Valera kept sending him instructions from home about things that my husband knew better than he. So my husband had enough of it and said he was coming home. I was not then in

America. I had come to Paris for Christmas and all my children came over to spend the holidays with me. I returned in January 1921 to America and stayed till June 1921 when I came home.

When De Valera heard that my husband was giving up his work for the Dail in America he was very upset *M.A.O'K. I think was strongly urged* and ~~he came to me and begged me~~ to persuade him to stay *was praised* over there. He ~~praised~~ his ability very highly. *It was* *M.A.O'K. stated* ~~saying~~ that he was not, of course, very easy to get on with. I replied that when two autocrats get together they very seldom get on well. But Jim would not change his mind. I think too that he had had enough of America and wanted to come home anyway.

Jim was very friendly with Harry Boland in America and was very upset later when he was killed. He also liked Liam Mellows very much. He was on his way home when the Truce was signed.

Jim also disagreed with De Valera about the Treaty. He had helped very largely in obtaining that settlement by his work in America especially his propoganda. He organised the movement against England in America. Only for his publicity the proposal to cancel the repayment of the American Loan to Britain would probably have succeeded.

My son Stephen was a Republican always. After the 1916 Rising while he was attending the Georgetown University he asked the Jesuits to let him home to Ireland to take part in the National Movement but they refused. However he left the place, went to Washington to interview the President's Secretary who gave him a passport and he returned to Ireland, but the Rising was then over of course. When the Civil

War broke out in 1922 he joined in on the Republican side. He was arrested in September that year but after a week in Portobello Barracks he escaped with several others and considering the war among ourselves both wrong and hopeless he took no further part in it, although he was never reconciled to the Free State Government.

We are living in our present house, The Grove, Killiney, since 1924 when we sold the house in Fitzwilliam Place. My husband had an office in Chicago as well as in New York. I was with him in Chicago in the spring of 1921 when the first Convention of the Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic was held.

I have the following notes in my diary, written as far as I can now judge, at the time.

" Mary McSwiney arrived in town (Chicago) for the convention. Mrs. Rossa Downing and myself taxied in to see her. Numbers of people who were arriving for the Convention of the Association for the Recognition of the Republic visited her rooms. Jim came in later and would have liked to remain on in town but eventually he came out to Beach Hotel with myself and Downing where we were staying. It was unfortunate as that night trouble was hatched in the Association. There was a combination to oust Hearn and E. Doheny and to make Harrigan of Massachusetts President. O'Leary and his crowd were making an attempt to run the Association.

On learning this the following day Jim and Harry Boland were disturbed but in the evening they believed things were straightened out. There was a great parade of about 30,000 people through the

streets. There were about 5,000 delegates at the Convention which started about 12 on the 18th April, 1921.

Rossa Downing opened the proceedings and introduced Judge Goff of the Supreme Court who was permanent Chairman. The judge read his address and then introduced Fr. Yorke of California who made a brilliant but rather long speech.

We had lunch with Judge Goff and Major Kincaid at Blackstone Hotel. At the afternoon session Fr. Yorke spoke again after the naming of the Committees. While we were at tea at La Salle (Hotel?) Jim came over and told us that trouble had been going on again all day due to the same cabal Fr. Cahill had gone home after ~~at 6 o'clock~~ *M.P.O.M.* announcing his resignation as State President.

Donal O'Sullivan and Min McSwiney spoke at the evening session. Min McSwiney cleverly brought forward the plea of Doheny's usefulness. People again assembled in her rooms and stayed till 2 a.m. They wanted their Chairman, Judge Goff, as President or at least Vice-President. Min McSwiney also explained Doheny's case to them. On the following day - Tuesday - peace was arranged with Fr. Cahill and Mrs. McWhorter during the morning session. Anna Walsh, a sister-in-law of Lord Mayor McCurtain spoke and made a great impression. Then there were different Americans. I did not attend the afternoon session at which Scott of Los Angeles spoke. Mrs. McWhorter came out with him to me for tea.

The elections took place during the evening All went splendidly. Fr. Cahill and Harrington

nominating and seconding Doheny for President of the Association. Six Vice-Presidents were elected, Kincaid, Scott, Moran, Murray (Butte), Dunn (Iowa) and Mrs. McWhorter. Then there were votes of thanks and the Convention had a successful ending. This splendid success was due mainly to Harry Boland and Jim who averted dangerous influences.

Harry gave lunch to the Irish Mission.

The first National Directorate of the Association met. Peter Golden was appointed National Secretary with Lyons Assistant Secretary and Quinn Director of Organisation (I dont know who these were) The offices were to be in Andrews Building."

Miss McSwiney produced a marvellous effect throughout America. Of course the manner of her brother's death helped this. The idea that a man could undergo such a prolonged martyrdom by hunger for his country converted a lot of Americans and others to sympathy with the nation that produced him. Americans always thought of the Irish as poor, un-educated, ignorant peasants, judging them by those that went out as emigrants. But when they heard Min McSwiney and the Misses Walsh (McCurtain's Sisters-in-law) pleading the cause of Ireland so elequently and so effectively the eyes of the Americans were opened and people who never thought of Ireland before or thought of it with contempt took up the cause with enthusiasm and worked heart and soul for the movement. Of course De Valera had produced a great effect wherever he went.

I was present when Min McSwiney addressed both Houses of the State Government at Springfield, Illinois, and no words of mine could describe the

wonderful impression she made on the members. She was a most effective speaker and was able to convert her audience to enthusiastic support of the cause of Ireland wherever she went.

My husband left all his papers to my eldest daughter Pat. who is married to Dr. Richard Lavelle, the dispensary doctor in Castleknock. Jim was a great man for filing and keeping papers and the whole history of the American Loan can be got from those papers and lots of other things too. You should ask her to show them to you. She intends to write a book about her father and is making use of those papers for that purpose.

I would also like Pat to read the statement I have given you to see if it is all right. My memory is not very good and only for the few notes I had written down I would not have been able to tell you anything of any use.

Signed: M. A. O'Mara.
(M. A. O'Mara)

Date: 23rd June 1952
23rd June 1952.

Witness: S. Ni Chiosain
(S. Ni Chiosain)

