

ORIGINAL

M. S. 1.1.184

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1184

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,184

Witness

Mrs. Eileen Costello,
Bishop Street,
Tuam,
Co. Galway.

Identity.

Member of Gaelic League
and Irish Literary Society, London, 1896 - .

Subject.

- (a) Irish national activities, London and Co. Galway, 1904-1921;
- (b) Gresham Hotel, Dublin, Easter Week 1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY MRS. EILEEN COSTELLO,

Bishop St., Tuam, Co. Galway.

I was born in London on the 27th June, 1870. My father was a native of County Limerick and my mother was Welsh. I was educated in London and became a teacher under the London Educational Department. Later I became Head of St. Michael's Church of England School in Buckingham Palace Road. My sympathies always were with Ireland in her struggle for independence although I cannot now recall how I first came to learn of Ireland. I joined the London Gaelic League and the Irish Literary Society in the year 1896, and worked in those societies with men and women like the Misses Yeats, W.B. their brother, Miss Gleeson and Mrs. MacCormack. The two latter came with me to Ireland in 1903 and started the Dun Emer Industries.

Fionán MacColum of Kerry was the inspiration of the Gaelic Movement in London at that time. He was an untiring worker. I was the only woman on the Committee of the London Gaelic League. The other members I remember were:

President: Francis Fahy, Poet and author of the "Old Plaid Shawl", "Galway Bay" and "The Wild Hills of Clare".

Secretary: Art. Ó Briain, afterwards Representative in Paris.

Paid Secretary: Micheal Breathnach, Author of "Seilg imeag na nAlp", afterwards Árd Ollamh, Tourmakeady Irish College, Professor of Irish, St. Jarlath's College, Tuam.

Committee: Dr. Atteridge; W.P. Ryan, Writer, father of Desmond Ryan; Johnny Sheehan, Announcer Irish Hospitals' Sweepstakes and singer; Maurice Dodd, a native of

Killorglin; Rev. Fr. Moloney, great friend of Edward Martin of Tullira; Seán Ó Catháin, Irish Writer, particularly of Irish grammar; Dr. P. MacEnri, Eye Specialist and writer of lessons in Irish; Rev. Fr. Crowley from South of Ireland; Maurice Joy of Kerry; Art Ó Caoimh, native of Cork; and myself (Miss Drury).

This committee did splendid work and was very business-like. I was also on the committee of the Irish Literary Society, the President of which was Alfred Percival Graves, the author of "Fr. O'Flynn" and other poems. He was then an Inspector of Schools in London.

When I decided to join the Catholic Church I was obliged to resign my position as Head Teacher in St. Michael's Church of England School and I came to Ireland. I was invited to Tuam, Co. Galway, by Sir Joseph Glynn, afterwards Head of the National Health Insurance Society, and through him was invited by the Presentation Nuns to teach in their convent in Tuam. There I met Dr. Thomas Bodkin Costello and we were married in November, 1903. Our honeymoon was spent in Rome, where we received a special blessing from Pope Pius X.

My husband and I were very keenly interested in all things Irish and especially in Irish Folk Music and songs. In the year 1904 I commenced collecting folk songs from the country people. My husband assisted me greatly in this work. He was the local Medical Officer and I went with him on his rounds amongst the country people, whom he knew very well. They sang the songs and I wrote down the words and music. I did this work in my spare time, which was not easy - being a doctor's wife having to deal with many calls by day and night.

Fr. Malachi Eaton, afterwards Dean of Studies at Maynooth College, encouraged me in the work and suggested the publication of the songs. I often visited him at Maynooth and he gave me generous assistance in connection with the words. I felt competent to do the music part. The collection was completed and published in 1919 under the title "Amhráin Mhuighe Seola - Traditional Songs from Galway and Mayo collected and edited by Mrs. Costello, Tuam. I was also indebted to Colm O'Loughlin for his valuable assistance.

My husband and I also made collections of Waterford cut-glass, of which, I believe, we have one of the biggest collections in Ireland. Some of the pieces in the collection belonged at one time to Archbishop MacHale. We also collected "Spanish" beads. They are Rosary beads with tubular crosses, often with the figure of the Virgin at the back. ~~The beads are big and globular and mostly amber in colour.~~ We have some one-decade beads with rings for removal from finger to finger as the decade is finished. These beads are ^{mainly} peculiar to County Galway and are due to Spanish influence. My husband has been particularly fond of collecting specimens of arms used in various Irish Risings.

In the year 1904 I received an invitation from Arthur Griffith, whom I knew in London, to attend a meeting of Sinn Féin in the Rotunda, Dublin. I accepted his invitation and attended his meeting. The number of people who attended in a sparsely-furnished room at the back of the building was between twenty

and thirty. Those I knew were few and included Mrs. Wyse-Power and Dr. Gogarty. Griffith expounded his plan of Sinn Féin. What I felt was that he himself knew what he wanted but that he was not so well able to put it across. He was not an eloquent speaker but was very sincere. I felt that every word he spoke meant something. I remember that Dr. Gogarty spoke and that is all I can recollect.

In the year 1904 also I went with Rev. Fr. Healy, Parish Priest of Kilmaine, to Ballinrobe in an endeavour to find a suitable site for Coláiste Connacht. We took a car and drove round Lough Mask. We found a disused house at Tourmakeady not far from Partry. It belonged to the Catholic Curate of Partry but it was thought to be too far from the Parish Church. There was a little land and we considered it suited our purpose. We asked Dr. Healy, Archbishop of Tuam, for the necessary permission, which he graciously gave. Dr. Healy also gave us the house and land free of rent. The P.P. of Partry at that time was Fr. Corbett, an *uncle* ~~nephew~~ of the famous boxer, Gentleman Jim Corbett. We went ahead with the scheme and the Curate's house became Coláiste Connacht, better known as Tourmakeady Irish College. It was a great success from the outset.

The patron of the College was Dr. Healy, Archbishop of Tuam. He presided at meetings but was sceptical of our ultimate success. The Secretary was Rev. Bernard Creehan, now Canon Creehan, Creggs. The committee included:

Douglas Hyde
 Edward Martin of Tullira
 Col. Maurice Moore
 Rev. Canon Macken
 Fr. Malachi Brennan, Ahascragh.
 Tomás Bán Concannon
 Dr. MacEnri
 Dr. Conor Maguire, Claremorris
 and
 Myself.

Micheál Breathnach was Árd Ollamh. The College became such a success that later on we were able to purchase a house and good piece of ground in Spiddal from Lynch-Coleman and established Spiddal Irish College.

Meetings of representatives from the various Irish Colleges were periodically held in Dublin, and it so happened that one of these meeting was called for Easter Saturday, 1916. Fr. Creehan, as Secretary of Coláiste Connacht, was to attend the meeting. He came to me and told me that he could not possibly be absent from his parish at such a busy time and asked me to go in his place. I agreed, and, as there were no trains on Good Friday, I travelled to Dublin on Holy Thursday. I always stayed at the Gresham Hotel when in Dublin and stayed there on that occasion as usual. The meeting was held in a room in the Rotunda on Easter Saturday and the business of the meeting, which was not concluded that day, was to be resumed on the following Tuesday. The Chairman of the meeting was Mr. Seán Nunan. Miss Agness^óFarrelly, who was my greatest friend in the Gaelic League Movement, was a delegate. The Hon. Miss O'Brien represented Carrigaholt Irish College. I think the meeting was purposely convened for Easter Saturday to have Mr. Nunan and Miss O'Brien in Dublin for the Rising.

I remember I went to visit my mother-in-law at Haddington Road and heard there from her housekeeper that there was fighting at the G.P.O. That was Easter Monday. I left my daughter Nuala and went back to the Gresham, walking by Baggot St. and Stephen's Green. I saw some of the Citizen Army in Stephen's Green guarding the gates and stopping all cars. They were all armed with rifles and they seemed to me to be very young. I remember standing on the steps of the Shelbourne Hotel and seeing a motor car coming from the direction of Vincent's Hospital. I recognised the driver and passenger, who was Dr. Plunkett, the Protestant Bishop of Tuam. The Citizen Army took his car and used it with other cars to make a road blockade on the street. I spoke to the Bishop, whom I knew in Tuam. I heard afterwards that he got back his car and was able to proceed to the North on business.

I saw a man speaking to a crowd of people from the top of an empty tram-car near the O'Connell Monument. It was Sheehy-Skeffington appealing to the people to be quiet and orderly, to go home quietly, to stay in their homes and to keep the peace. I saw people from the slums breaking and looting a shop. It was Laurence's toy shop. I saw the looters inside the shop throwing out toys and cameras to their friends outside. I felt very great disgust. Later on I saw people in the Gresham Hotel with jewellery they had bought from the looters. I saw a woman with a ring and another with a brooch.

I remember that Mr. Doyle, Manager of the Gresham Hotel, lent suits of clothes to some British officers who were on holidays and who were anxious to get out of

their uniforms as quickly as possible. The hotel was full of people for Fairyhouse races and by Tuesday there was a shortage of food in the hotel. The doors were closed and no more guests were admitted. Waiters had to go out at night to collect bread, potatoes, vegetables and milk. The doors were also closed because the British military had commenced to attack and bullets were whizzing past. I saw a man lying dead near the Rotunda and a horse lying dead near the G.P.O. I saw a man in a frock coat and top hat walking up and down Sackville St. I heard afterwards that he was a Mr. O'Duffy, dentist to the Lord Lieutenant.

Staying in the hotel that week was a Miss O'Brien. She was a daughter of the Fenian, J.F.X. O'Brien, who had been sentenced to be hanged, drawn and quartered. Miss O'Brien was then John Redmond's secretary. She was sitting at one of the windows and was wounded in ^{hand} the ~~head~~ by a bullet. The wound was not serious. ^{Q.C.} After that all the windows were barricaded with mattresses, and we lived in the dark. It was a very dismal experience. There were two British Army snipers on the roof of the hotel. They allowed me to go on the roof, from where I could see the Irish flag floating from the General Post Office roof. I saw the two snipers firing in the direction of the G.P.O. whenever they thought they saw anybody at which to fire.

There were many guests in the hotel from the north of Ireland who had come for the races. They were saying that the rebels should all be shot. I am afraid I lost my patience with them. I heard from Miss O'Brien that one of the guests - a man from the

Midlands - was collecting money for the purpose of making a presentation to the two snipers on the roof for "saving the lives of the guests". I met him. He had a pencil and paper writing the names of the subscribers to the presentation. When he approached me for a subscription I said "Are you asking me to reward these Englishmen who are shooting our own men down? Have some sense of proportion. I won't give you a penny. You should be ashamed for asking it". He turned to the other residents and induced them to jeer at my attitude. I became very unpopular as a result of my refusal to be a party to the presentation.

On the Tuesday my husband, accompanied by Sir Joseph Glynn, arrived at the Gresham. I did not go with them as I wanted to see the outcome of the fight. We were put into an underground room in the hotel. I remember that my daughter, Nuala, spent her time writing an account of all she saw. I saw the surrender of the Volunteers at the end of the week - on Saturday. I went out through the window of the first floor on to the porch, from which I had a full view of the street. I saw the Volunteers march out with their arms from the G.P.O. by Henry St. I also saw a couple of nurses and two or three men wearing Red Cross armlets. Many of the Volunteers at the end of the line spread out from the Rotunda were young boys under twenty. I think these belonged to the Citizen Army. They were not all in uniform but all had rifles. I thought the British soldiers spoke to them very brutally, shouting "put down your arms". The Volunteers were spread out from the Rotunda past the Gresham Hotel to Cathedral St.

I heard the clatter of the rifles as they fell on the cobbles. I knew some of these men - Patrick and Willie Pearse, MacDonagh, MacDermott and Kent. I had been meeting them continually at Gaelic League functions. I began to think what fate was in store for them and I began to weep. "Turn out your pockets" shouted an English officer. I saw many sets of rosary beads, envelopes and photographs being left on the ground. Then I heard "Take off these armlets. You have no right to them anyhow".

I was gazing down at this sorrowful scene when I felt a tap on my shoulder and a voice saying "Will you retire to your room, Madam". It was one of the two snipers. My daughter Nuala was with me and we retired to our room. "Now", said the sniper, "we know more about you than you think". I was not frightened. "You have been signalling from the back windows" he accused. I told him that if I had been a Sinn Féiner I would have been outside with my friends and not signalling from back windows. "You're a whole-hogger" he said. I said "Yes, I am". "When I see ye weep I thought you was one of them" he said. I told him that I knew many of these young men and that I was anxious about them. "You have a mother's heart" he said. He then inquired my business to Dublin. I told him I was a delegate representing Coláiste Connacht at a meeting. He failed to write Coláiste Connacht and said "I see that you are innocent".

When I rejoined the other guests they showed hostility, especially those from the North. A correspondent from the Manchester Guardian spoke kindly

to me. When he saw the other guests were avoiding me he said: "Don't mind them, Mrs. Costello, I'll stand by you". He was an Englishman and I have forgotten his name.

One of the two snipers hauled down the flag from the G.P.O. and brought it folded into the Gresham. I was thinking to myself how I could secure it. It was lying on the drawing-room table. If I took it how could I hide it and where could I dispose of it? I could think of nothing. It was too big to wrap round me and my courage failed. I am always regretting that I did not attempt to secure the flag. I could have taken it but how to get it away!

On Sunday morning the doors and windows of the hotel were opened. It was said that snipers were still busy and we did not go to Mass on that account. I saw a car coming up the street. It was my husband and Sir Joseph Glynn. It was the first car to appear in O'Connell St. after the Rising. I was the first to leave the hotel for home, loaded with letters for posting to relatives and friends of the people who had treated me so coldly. Before we reached the outskirts of the city on our way home to Tuam we were stopped and examined seventeen times, although Sir Joseph Glynn had a pass issued by Dublin Castle. On the way home we waved our pass when passing groups of R.I.C. outside their barracks. They were stopping all cars. Invariably they said "Never mind the pass but tell us the news".

Everything seemed so dark and hopeless after 1916. I continued my collection of folk songs and had it

published in 1919.

I remember contributing a sum of fifteen pounds to the Dáil Éireann loan. I took the money to Mr. Gabriel Guy at Guy's Hotel, Tuam. He was the principal collector at the time and, as a result, had to go on the run. He afterwards became District Justice at Ballina. He died recently. I remember I asked Mr. Guy not to give me a receipt as I thought it would be dangerous to have in my possession. We got back our money with interest later.

I remember the Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries. The Black and Tans were stationed in the town and the Auxiliaries at Annagh, about six miles from the town of Tuam. The Tans and Auxiliaries drove out to the country every night about 11 p.m. As they were leaving they discharged their rifles to frighten the people. The night of the Gallagher ambush they brought the bodies of the two men that were killed to Tuam. The following morning in the half light about 4 a.m. I heard a disturbance. I went to the window and saw dark figures moving about the Square. They looked like R.I.C. in uniform. They set fire to the Town Hall and broke windows in Browne's licensed premises at the corner of Dublin Road. They used the empty bottles that they got in Browne's as weapons to smash other shop windows. I can remember lorries full of Auxiliaries outside the door of Guy's Hotel. Their leader seemed to be an old man. I saw them help him down from the lorry. I then noticed that he was quite a young man but almost dead drunk.

They employed their time in the evenings searching various houses in the town. People told me that they were very rude in their behaviour and not above picking up "any unconsidered trifle" such as a brooch, money or any valuable left about. I was in terror because I had a boy staying in the house who was on the run. I arranged to have a ladder handy to help him escape if necessary. I remember seeing a lorry load of the Tans with one of the men hanging loosely over the side with a pistol in his hand which he discharged every now and then. I heard that a boy passing the street got a bullet in his foot. They went about the place firing at random.

One Saturday morning I opened the door to an old man who stood holding his arm which was dripping blood. "I was going home" said he, "and these fellows came along and made a cock-shot out of me". He came to my husband for treatment. One Sunday morning I was preparing to go to Mass when I heard a man crying loudly in the street. I learned that he was looking for a coffin to bury his son. The son had been spreading manure the previous Saturday afternoon with his horse and cart. The Auxiliaries passed by and fired at him, killing himself and the horse. I cannot remember the name. We were shocked to hear of the shooting of the woman in Kiltartan and the two Loughnan brothers.

One morning I was told that two ladies wished to see me. They told me they were from Birmingham Municipal Body, County Council, I think. They wished to know what was happening in Ireland and who the

Auxiliaries were and something of their conduct. They said they hoped I could help them. I took them from my house through the town. We saw a lorry of Auxiliaries outside Mrs. Carroll's bakery shop. They were asking Mrs. Carroll for bread, which she was refusing to give them. They threatened her with rifles and eventually she had to give them the bread. The three of us were witnesses to this. The only remark they made was: "Definitely men of the officer class". I was Chairman of the Tuam Town Commissioners at the time and these ladies expressed sympathy with me. One of them wrote to me afterwards. I will try to find her letter.

I was also a member of the Rural District Council, North Galway, at the time. The council consisted of about seventy members but all we could gather for meetings at that time was only four or five. As the Workhouse, where meetings of the Council should have been held, was occupied by British military, Mr. Patrick Murphy of Shop St. lent us a room in his shop. The Clerk of the District Council, Mr. Joseph MacDonough, got orders from the Dáil Éireann Department of Local Government. He could not attend the meetings himself for fear of arrest but sent the correspondence to me, which I committed to memory and then burned. We discussed the instructions from Dublin at our meetings and carried them out as well as possible in the circumstances. The Master of the Workhouse, Mr. Nohilly, looked after the sending of the minutes of our meetings to Dublin.

The reason I took the position of Chairman of Tuam Town Commissioners was that men in such positions

at that time were liable to be ill-treated or even murdered. I thought they would hardly shoot a woman and in that way I could do my bit to help. My house was searched several times by the Black and Tans and regular military. On the occasions that the British military searched they were very polite in their behaviour. They were the Highland Light Infantry and Lord Linlithgow was their Colonel. I never saw him. I was always followed around by a plain-clothes policeman and on three occasions that I heard I was going to be arrested I had a bag packed ready to go to jail. I was always expecting and ready for jail if necessary.

I remember a woman telling me to be careful about light in a spare bedroom in my house where boys on the run occasionally slept. They had to go to bed in the dark after that.

I remember talking to a Mr. Walsh who came to Tuam and held a public meeting in the town. He was one of three delegates from America who investigated conditions in Ireland.

One morning my husband received an anonymous letter which began "If you don't keep your wife quiet you will be shot". I took the letter to Dr. Gilmartin, Archbishop of Tuam, and he suggested that I should take a little holiday. I said "I can't run away" and he said "Of course you cannot". Divisional Commissioner Cruise of the R.I.C. was here in Tuam once and attended the Mission which was being held in the Cathedral. He was interested in the collection of Claddagh rings. Dillon, the Jeweller in Galway, told me he had shown Cruise an early specimen of a ring and told him that

Dr. Costello of Tuam was interested in it. Cruise said "That Mrs. Costello is an awful woman". I dare say the remark was based on information he received while on his visit to Tuam. Later on, after Cruise had left Ireland, my husband bought the ring from the auctioneer in London to whom Cruise had sold it.

One morning Miss Kirwan of Gardenfield, a few miles from Tuam, came to me with a letter she had received from her cousin, Miss Rosalie Kirwan, Dean of Studies in U.C.G. Miss Rosalie asked her cousin to tell me not to keep any so-called seditious papers in my possession and if I did I would be very comfortable in Galway Jail. This advice was passed on from my friend, Dr. Ada English, Resident Medical Officer Ballinasloe Mental Hospital, who was then in jail for having a Dáil Éireann receipt in her possession.

One morning towards the end of 1920 at about 1 a.m. there was a ring at the halldoor, and my husband, thinking it was a call for him, answered. He found himself face to face with four men with long coats and slouch hats and handkerchiefs over their faces. They had revolvers in their hands and they said they were looking for arms. They roused the man and maid servants and myself. They herded us into the kitchen, leaving one man with a revolver on guard over us. The other three searched the house up and down, and while we were wondering what they were looking for we heard a glass article drop in the hall. I said they must be stealing the glass and then we heard them open the back door and smash a number of glass articles. We guessed it was the Waterford glass. An old Irish spinning-wheel

was standing on the landing and they took it out and smashed it to bits. The old Irish pikeheads belonging to my husband were taken away by them. We found out afterwards that two of the men were Black and Tans and that the other two were regular R.I.C. They smashed nine large bowls of Waterford cut-glass and many smaller pieces. Those pieces could never be replaced. Luckily I had about two-thirds of the glass moved to Miss Kirwan's house in Gardenfield before this.

A few years later I was at a party given by Dr. Gogarty at his house in Ely Place. There I met Tim Healy, first Governor-General. When introduced to Mr. Healy he said: "Are you the Mrs. Costello whose Waterford glass was smashed. On learning I was, he invited me to lunch the next day at the Vice-Regal Lodge to see his collection of Waterford glass. His collection was not large but included some very handsome specimens. He told me that he had given one of his pieces as a wedding present to an English Cabinet Minister, and asked him how he would like to have it smashed as had happened in Tuam. He was endeavouring to show up the wanton destruction by the R.I.C. and Black and Tans in Ireland some few years before. I remember that Lady Lavery was at the lunch also.

I remember that the boycott of Belfast goods' movement was started in Tuam. One of the principal parties to it was Professor Whelahan, then on the teaching staff of St. Jarlath's Diocesan College, Tuam. I have an idea that the boycott was discouraged by headquarters in Dublin.

Professor Whelahan was also a Judge of the Sinn Féin Courts in Tuam and he was the first to be appointed. Later five members were proposed and I understood I was proposed by Austin Stack. At any rate, I became a Judge of the Sinn Féin Courts. Being the only woman, I generally occupied the Chair. I can remember only the names of two other judges, viz. Mr. Finnegan of Dunmore, an old Fenian, and Mr. A.B. O'Connor of Cortoon. Professor Whelahan should be able to supply the other names. The Court heard about four hundred cases altogether, including one case of seduction for which Art Ó Cleirigh came from Dublin with a young student named Burke as his assistant. Mr. Burke is now District Justice in Galway, having succeeded Seán Mac Giollarnath who has retired on reaching the age limit. Art Ó Cleirigh, University Professor, is now deceased. I and the other local judges were thankful that we did not have to deal with the seduction case, but Mr. Ó Cleirigh wanted a woman on the case and so I had to sit on it.

I remember well the day the British Forces handed over to the Volunteers. We were standing on the pavement in absolute silence watching the British soldiers marching to the railway station. I turned to remark something to Mr. Finnegan, the old Fenian from Dunmore who had sat with me on the Bench, and I shall never forget the look of joy on his face to see the British Forces marching out of Ireland.

Signed: Eileen Costello
 (Eileen Costello)
 Date: 9th June 1955

Witness: Con Moynihan
 (Con Moynihan)

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