

April, 2006

University of Limerick, Certificate in Women's Studies

Assignment: Class Presentation: Win Harrington

Tutor: Lorna Moloney

Topic: Mrs. Kathleen Clarke, Revolutionary Woman

The reasons I have chosen to talk about Mrs Kathleen Daly Clarke are as follows:

We have just commemorated the 90th anniversary of The Easter Rising of 1916 and I wish to draw attention to the pivotal role this woman played in these events and to give her her rightful place in the history of Revolutionary Ireland;

she is a Limerickwoman, and whether you agree with her beliefs is not the issue, her commitment is what I wish to acknowledge; and

as a student of Women's Studies at the University of Limerick to share with my tutor and fellow students the price she paid for her espousal of a United Irish Republic, in which there was to be religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities for all its citizens.

My primary source is: Revolutionary Woman, Kathleen Clarke, 1878 - 1972, an Autobiography, edited by her niece Helen Litton.

Kathleen Clarke's Background

Tom Daly, having been a participant in the failed 1798 Rebellion led by Theobald Wolfe Tone, came to Limerick, where he settled. He brought with him the ideals behind the Rebellion that of an inclusive Irish Republic where religious and civil liberty, and equal rights for all its citizens, men, women and children, were to be guaranteed. He handed down these ideals to his children, who in turn handed them onto future generations of the Daly family.

Kathleen's father, Edward Daly, as a young man had been imprisoned suspected of fenian activity. On his release he returned to Limerick where he married Catherine O'Mara and they had ten children, nine girls and one boy. Kathleen was the third eldest and Ned, the only boy, was born after his father's early death at the age of forty.

Kathleen's uncle John Daly, a noted fenian was jailed in Portland Prison for his beliefs where he met Tom Clarke, jailed for his fenian activity. After serving 15 years Tom was released, and John Daly, released earlier, invited him to Limerick to the Daly family home, where Tom and Kathleen met and fell deeply in love. In the meantime Tom unable to get work in Ireland emigrated to America and Kathleen followed shortly after, and it is where they married and where their first son Daly was born. Whilst in America Tom had become a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. The Irish Republican Brotherhood was founded by James Stephens in Ireland and John O'Mahony in New York.

Tom was deeply anxious to return to Ireland to play a part in the fight for a united Ireland, founded on the principles proclaimed by Theobald Wolfe Tone. They returned in 1907.

Political Life

Tom as a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, played a leading role in the formation of the Irish Volunteers in 1913 (The Irish Volunteers were the forerunners of

the current I.R.A.). The following year Cumann na mBan was formed. It was the women's division of the Irish Volunteers, and like the Volunteers it had no class, or religious barriers. Kathleen was a founder member and elected Vice President.

In 1915 the Cumann na mBan Constitution was published and reads as follows:

Cumann na mBan is an independent body of Irish women pledged to work for the establishment of an Irish Republic, by organising and training the women of Ireland to take their place by the side of those working for Ireland.

2004: Ryan and Ward, 133 & 134.

I would like to draw your attention to the words "by the side of" which meant they were to be wholly involved in all aspects of the fight for a united Republic of Ireland.

Kathleen and Mrs. Ceannt were delegated to start the Central Branch of Cumann na mBan. They decided as the papers calling for Irish Freedom from under the yoke of England were banned, they would print pamphlets celebrating the work of revolutionary characters. Their first was on Theobald Wolfe Tone, and very well received.

At the same time the Central Branch also ran classes in first aid, lectures, signalling, rifle practise, lessons in cleaning and loading rifles and small arms.

2001: Kathleen Clarke, 50.

This was again a very clear indication that the woman would fight alongside the men. June 1915 O'Donovan Rossa died in New York. "He was the epitome of the history of Fenianism" (2001, Clarke, 56). Tom Clarke decided O'Donovan Rossa should be buried in Ireland, and that he should use this funeral to rouse the country. It took place on the 1st of August 1915 and was most impressive. Subsequently the planning for the 1916 Rising commenced.

According to Kathleen in her biography she was selected by the Secret Military Council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood to be privy to all their decisions - her husband Tom was already a member of the Brotherhood. In the event they were arrested she could then pass on this information to the next in command. In addition, she was given the task of setting up the Irish Republican Pensioners Dependant Fund, which was to be responsible

for taking care of the financial needs of the dependants of those arrested and those who would die. Immediately after the executions of the leaders, she set about establishing the fund.

The Irish Proclamation of Independence, issued by the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic was addressed to the people of Ireland. It was signed on Holy Thursday 1916, and the equality of all its citizens was enshrined in the Declaration. Students and tutor were all given copies of the Proclamation. All the men who signed the Proclamation were members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

Arrests

As we all know the actual Rising was a failure and those involved, including women, were arrested.

Many of the women sentenced to death went on hunger strike and succeeded in having their sentences commuted to life imprisonment, eventually they were released.

Irish Times, 20th March 2006.

At this stage Kathleen didn't know what had happened to her husband Tom. Immediately after the collapse of the Rising she was taken as a prisoner to Dublin Castle. It was then she was to learn her husband Tom was a prisoner in Kilmainham Jail. As he had asked to see her, she was escorted to Kilmainham, and it was there she was to learn he was to be executed, which sentence was carried out on the 3rd of May, the following day her only brother Ned was to meet the same fate. I will cite below Tom's last letter written just prior to his execution, as it shows the dept of his commitment to a United Ireland, with which Kathleen was in total agreement.

I and my fellow signatories believe we have struck the first successful blow for freedom. The next blow, which we have no doubt Ireland will strike, will win through, in this belief we die happy.

2005, MacDonnacha et al, 51.

Kathleen was pregnant at the time of her last meeting with her husband, but she kept this news from Tom, not wishing to give him new cause for worry. She subsequently lost the child.

By this time Kathleen had three children, and a further worry for her was their well-being during these troubled times. She had great support from her mother and sisters living in Limerick. They too were Fenians, committed to an Irish Republic.

Under the title of Sinn Féin Clubs, the revolutionary elements were organising and educating public opinion. This caused uneasiness to our enemy, so in 1918 they discovered a German plot, possibly in the hope of putting an end to such activities.

2001: Kathleen Clarke: 150

As a known member of Sinn Féin Kathleen was arrested on May 18th 1918, taken to the Bridewell, then to Arbour Hill, and subsequently deported to Holloway Jail in London the same month. Interned at the same time were Countess Markievicz, Mme McBride and later they were joined by Hannah Sheehy Skeffington. At this stage her family had no knowledge of her whereabouts. According to the Limerick Leader May 22nd 1918 it was only on that day that a telegram was received stating she had been arrested and taken into custody.

She was deeply worried about her sons, who had been in her Dublin home and witnessed her arrest. Again her family took the children back down to Limerick.

Mme Markievicz is quoted in the Limerick Leader of October 11th 1918 as saying Kathleen was in very bad health.

Whilst Kathleen was in Holloway, Limerick Corporation decided to bestow on her the Freedom of the City of Limerick, the honour being conferred on the 6th December, 1921. Her late husband, Tom, had previously been conferred with this honour.

Raids

From 1916 right through the Black and Tan Wars, and through the Civil War period which ended in 1923, Kathleen's home in Dublin was continually raided. Indeed, whilst in Kilkee with her mother, the house was raided. Prior to the raid an I.R.A. man sought refuge, looking for somewhere to sleep and he was made welcome. Shortly after there was a knock at the door; it was the prelude to a raid by the Auxiliaries. Consternation, how were they to hide the man? On the first check of the mother's bedroom nothing was found. A second check was made, and again nothing was found, it was only when the Auxiliaries had searched the whole house and left did Kathleen become aware of where the I.R.A. man was hidden. The mother had a duvet and a hair mattress, and he was squashed between the two. By the time they rescued the poor man he had nearly suffocated.

Kathleen's sister Nora Dore lived in Limerick, and the Dore family home was raised to the ground, the furniture burnt. Anybody connected with Sinn Féin and the Republican Movement was a target for this type of raid during the Black and Tan period, and during the Civil War which ended in 1923. It should be noted it was Irish people who terrorised Irish citizens during the Civil War period.

Politics

Kathleen was one of four women elected to the executive of Sinn Féin at their 1917 Convention. At the municipal elections of 1919 she was elected Alderman of two Wards "She worked with fellow councillors to gain formal recognition of the Sinn Féin Government. Dublin Corporation was abolished in 1924 and restored in 1930. She again became a member of the Corporation, from 1930-1939. She was elected first woman Lord Mayor of Dublin 1939-1940. During her mayoralty the first meeting of the Irish Red Cross was held, and she was elected President. She was also President of the

Children's Court and last President of the Court of Conscience, District Justice of Sinn Féin and occasionally Circuit Court Judge until the dissolution of the Republican courts.

The first Dail met 21st January 1919, and was seen by the British as an illegal organisation. Kathleen Clarke was elected to the second Dail with 5 other women and re-elected to the 5th Dail. The Republic of Ireland was established in 1922. The formal declaration of an Irish Republic was made in 1948.

When the Anglo Irish Treaty was being bitterly debated in the Dail, she and all the Cumann na mBan women voted to oppose the Treaty. Kathleen believed that the freedom she and her husband, and countless men and women had lived and died for, was being repudiated, she also believed that it would lead to a divided Ireland. The Treaty was ratified by 64 votes to 57.

Kathleen Clarke's Feminism

Although Kathleen was to say she was not a feminist, I believe it formed part of her core political beliefs.

In nearly every political organisation to which she belonged, there was always a female dimension, i.e. women's equality.

The Proclamation, Cumann na mBan, Sinn Féin all affirmed the equality of women within their organisations.

When the Criminal Law Amendment Bill came before the Dail in 1934 with the aim of banning contraceptive use by women, she voted against the Bill.

The Isolation of Women from Political Life

I believe the first step in isolating the women who fought for an Irish Republic came during the conservative years when:

The Roman Catholic Hierarchy of Ireland issued a pastoral letter in October 1922 urging all women to desist revolutionary activity.

Irish Times 20th March; 2006

This was followed when the Government banned Cumann na mBan in 1923. The next major step was the abolishing of the Senate by deValera in 1936, of which Kathleen was a Fianna Fail member. I believe this action was taken to prevent debate in the Senate on the proposed Constitution, which was to see women's role as exclusively in the home. Article 41.2.1. Kathleen, as ever, fighting for equality of treatment for women, opposed the measure, and as she was no longer a member of the Dail she voiced her opposition through the Press. However, by referendum, the 1937 Constitution was passed and to this day we still feel the effects of a Constitution that placed women outside the decision-making process.

"The Conditions of Employment Bill 1935 gave power to the Minister for Industry to restrict the employment of women in industry. The view that a woman's place was in the home permeated the debate".

2000; McNamara & Mooney; p. 819

This was followed by the introduction of a marriage bar which obliged women to resign from the Civil Service on marriage. This bar was to become effective throughout the Public Sector, and was later followed by the Private Sector. The bar remained in force until 1973. Kathleen retired from political life and as a member of Clann na Poblachta she failed to be elected in 1948.

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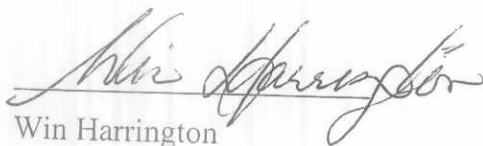
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In Conclusion

The foregoing demonstrates that Kathleen Clarke was one of a band of courageous women who fought for a truly inclusive Republic of Ireland, based on the principles espoused by Wolfe Tone in the 1798 Rebellion, and which formed the core beliefs of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the Irish Volunteers, Cumann na mBan and Sinn Féin.

Kathleen was conferred with an honorary Degree of Laws by the National University of Ireland on the 14th April, 1966. I believe she richly deserved this recognition, and also the Freedom of the City of Limerick, bestowed on her in 1921. I hope you will agree that she deserves our admiration for her relentless pursuit of an Irish Republic in which men, women and children were to have an equality of opportunity. You may not always agree with the position she adopted, but she deserves to be remembered in our history books as a women who held true to her beliefs at enormous cost. Kathleen Clarke died at her son Emmet's home in Liverpool in 1972, aged 94. She was given a state funeral in the Pro Cathedral, *Dublin*

Thank you for listening and I hope I have given you food for thought about women's position in Irish Society, which to this day continues to be dominated by a patriarchal system.


Win Harrington

Bibliography Attached.

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