

Days of royalty

THEY were the most famous family in the world and attracted such a level of devotion among their followers that w
Yet, at the height of their power, a young Limerick woman played a major role in the life of Russia's last r

Darragh Frawley recalls the fas

WHEN Margaretta Alexander Eagar was born in Limerick on August 12 1863, there was little to indicate that she was destined for a life in the frontline of world history.

Her father, Francis McGillicuddy Eagar, was Governor of Limerick County Gaol and his wife, Frances Margaret Holden, bore him ten children who were raised in the established Church of Ireland faith.

Margaretta, who referred to herself as Margaret, was trained as a medical nurse in Belfast and worked as matron of an orphanage.

She arrived at the Winter Palace in Russia on February 2, 1899 after being appointed as nurse to the daughters of Tsar Nicholas II and Tsarina Alexandra on the recommendation of Emily Loch who knew the Tsarina from her early years.

The four captivating Russian Grand Duchesses—Olga, Tatiana, Maria and Anastasia Romanov—were much admired for their happy dispositions, their looks, the clothes they wore and their privileged lifestyle. The four young girls began learning English and, by 1904 they had developed a slight Limerick accent in their pronunciation.

The Tsar's younger sister, the Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna, later recalled that Margaret had a great love of politics and that as a toddler,

Maria (the third daughter of Tsar Nicholas II) had once escaped from her bath and ran naked up and down the palace corridor while Margaret discussed the Dreyfus Affair with a friend.

She remained with the family until the September 1904 and received a pension from the Russian government for her time as a governess.

In 1906, she wrote a short account of her time in Russia called "Six Years At the Russian Court" in which she stated that she left the Russian Court for personal reasons. However, it may be that she was dismissed due to the tense political situation surrounding the Russo-Japanese War, as Great Britain sided with Japan.

Margaret exchanged letters with the grand duchesses for years after leaving Russia describing her work as a governess for other families, and reminiscing of her time there.

Family members stated that she remained haunted by the brutal execution of the family for the rest of her life.

In later years, she ran a boarding house that proved unsuccessful and left her in debt. She died in a nursing home in 1936, at the age of 73.

Some of the excerpts from her book, reproduced below, give a rare insight into life at the royal court and how Limerick and, more remarkably, Kilkee featured in her Russian adventure.

Commercial traveller caused a royal mix-up with hotel owner

WE went to Denmark that year. There was a great gathering of Royalties there, including the King and Queen of England, Princess Victoria of England, and her sister, Princess Charles of Denmark, the Emperor and two Empresses of Russia, the King of Greece with one of his sons, and many other Royalties.

King Edward VII arrived after we did and the day he was expected Queen Alexandra came into the nurseries and told me he was coming and asked me to make the children look very nice. When we were leaving, the Queen gave me a photograph (signed) of herself, the King and his little grand-children, with such kind and gracious words as she only can speak.

“ I'm sure you are no better than a little commercial traveller yourself

The King frequently spoke to me, too, and called me "My Irish subject." He has very winning manners and great tact. He has a marvellous memory. This year he sent me, in memory of the birth of the Czarovitch, a brooch, in green enamel, because I am Irish. They say he never forgets anything, and I know he never forgets to be kind.

We saw a good deal of the Empress's family that year, as her eldest sister, Princess Louis of Battenberg, her husband, and all her family stayed with us in Peterhoff during the summer.

Princess Louis of Battenberg has four beautiful children. I think her two daughters are about the

handsomest of the young grown-up princesses of Europe. The eldest one, Princess Alice, was married to the Prince Andre of Greece last year; she is very pretty, but I admire the younger sister more. They were both charming young girls, and she has two fine boys.

Some years ago Prince Louis's ship was stationed in the Shannon. He went over to Kilkee to spend one night and see the place. Quite close to the station is a hotel, very nice and comfortable, but not first-class. The Prince took a room in the hotel, left his bag, and went for a stroll. He had observed that the room contained two beds.

When he returned to the hotel he was surprised to find one bed occupied by a commercial traveller.

He sent for the manageress, and asked for a room for himself. She was exceedingly angry and scolded him violently, winding up with, "I'd like to know who you are to object to anyone. I'm sure you are no better than a little commercial traveller yourself."

The Prince replied that all that might be very true, still he would like a room to himself. Whereupon the woman told him he might have a room in a small cottage which she had taken outside the hotel. The Prince accordingly went to the little cottage and slept there.

Prince Louis signed his name in the visitors' book in the morning, and the woman's horror and consternation may better be imagined than described. She was absolutely sure that the Queen would have her arrested for having been impertinent to her son-in-law, as she called him.

I was in Kilkee at the time the incident occurred, but could hardly believe the story, but the Prince himself assured me that it was absolutely true, and was greatly amused at the idea of meeting anyone from that remote spot in the Imperial Palace of Peterhoff.



When the Prince of Siam was fr

On one occasion the Prince of Siam came to visit the Empress, and the children were in the room.

I was interested to see his dusky highness as I had met him before at a little seaside resort in the west of Ireland.

He had been invited to spend the summer holidays with a school-fellow, and Kilkee was chosen by his family for their holiday-resort.

Some of the visitors there got up a little entertainment for the benefit of the poor, and he and his friends were invited to help. The entertainment took the form of tableaux, with a

little music. The young prince was deeply interested in all, and finally begged for a part for himself.

One excuse after another was offered to him, but at last to our consternation he exclaimed, "I know why you will not have me. It is because I am an Eastern. Well, I'll make a tableau all for myself."

He went home and presently re-appeared with an armful of curtains, table-cloths, etc. Throwing these down in a corner of the hall, he went out again, and presently returned with all the false jewellery the village shops could supply, and announced that he intended to personate the Queen of Sheba when she