

“WAR IS WOMEN’S BUSINESS”

Everyday life for the women of Cork 100 years ago
in theatre, newspapers and popular journals



Photographer: Edward Brook Hughes, 28 Patrick Street, Cork.

A Cork City Libraries Programme

IT SEEMS
HISTORY
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Ireland
1913-1923

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“WAR IS WOMEN’S BUSINESS”

War was ever present

WW1 lumbered on in Europe, anti-Government feeling increased in light of the executions and imprisonments after the Easter Rising. Cork was a city of contrasts – A thriving industrial city with a vibrant social scene where theatres, cinemas, concerts and Irish language classes were thriving but where, behind the city’s main thoroughfares existed some of the worst slums in Europe. Families lived in abject poverty, with ‘up to seven in a room’. Alfred J Rahilly: *The Social Problem in Cork (1917)*



Michael O’Leary Collection – www.corkpastandpresent.ie

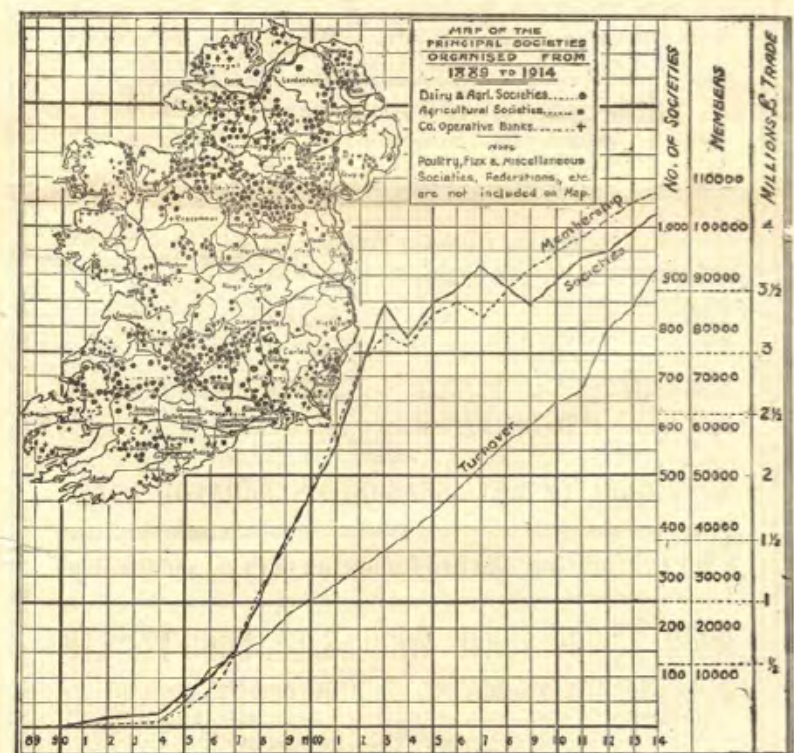
Food was in short supply due to German submarine activity, the reluctance of the British Government to intervene in the free market and the nature of farming practices in Ireland

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PROGRESS OF THE MOVEMENT.



Leaflet from the ‘Irish Homestead’ from 13 January 1917 published to instruct farmers on how to increase their food supply Photo: National Archives of Ireland, CSO RP 1917 3608 3



‘Exceptionally high prices mean practical starvation for the poor ... self-reliance is the most useful as well as the most practical motto’

Cork Examiner 3 November 1917

Poor Law Guardian Marie Lynch demanded action to prevent the poor of the city ‘slowly starving to sickness or to death’

Cork Examiner 23 January 1916

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Between 1913 and 1917 Cork Women Susanne Rouvier Day (1876-1964) writer and suffragist together with Geraldine Cummins (1890-1969)

collaborated on three plays for the Abbey Theatre in Dublin – *Broken Faith* (1913), *The Way of the Word* (1914) and the most successful, the comedy *Fox and Geese* (1917) which played three times in the Abbey during 1917. *Fox and Geese* was staged in the Opera House in Cork in February 1918.



Susanne Day



Geraldine Cummins

Reviewers however differed in their analysis of the play...

'Fox and Geese... is a comedy in three acts, by Misses Susanne R. Day and G D Cummins (two Cork ladies)... The plot attempts to describe life among the farming classes and the process of matchmaking... If their object was to give anything like a faithful picture of life as it really is...they have sadly missed the mark and evidently know nothing whatever of the habits and customs, language or indeed anything else of those whom they look upon themselves to depict...it is much akin in many respects to what is known as the stage Irishman and in its conception, merit or ideas of any worth are altogether absent. Fox and Geese was a distinct disappointment, and the frequent...use of the Creator's name...chilled the audience

Cork Constitution February 20th 1918

'...Fox and Geese, a light but very laughable three-act comedy by two Cork ladies, Misses Susanne R. Day and G. D. Cummins... Though not possessing much depth of conception, it was very well in the lighter and more inconsequential vein of comedy. The plot encompasses a series of amusing situations in romance of an obdurate and unwilling farmer and introduces diverting incidents around the wily efforts at his capture by a number of neighbouring lady rivals... The Company were very successful and all acted in a manner well calculated to greatly enhance their prestige...

Cork Examiner February 19th 1918

Day later used her experience as Poor Law Guardian in Cork and her experience as a volunteer with the Religious Society of Friends War Victims' Relief in France (late June 1915 – early 1917) in her writing –

- The Amazing Philanthropists* (1916)
- Round About Bar-le-Duc* (1918)
- St. Martin's Cloak* (unpublished) - on display here



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IT SEEMS HISTORY IS TO BLAME
 Ireland 1913-1923
 www.historyoblame.ie

Home grown concerts and theatre

were popular and an important way to express solidarity.

'Writing is a bubbling forth of the revolution of the soul...the plays are nearly all revolts

against something or other, something which we may not like but which a lot of us are not prepared to face. The artist faces it; and eventually the people follow.'

(P.S.O'Hegarty, 'Art and the Nation' Irish Freedom (March 1912))

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21, Academy Street, CO **GRAND Snap-Apple Eve Concert** IN CITY HALL, CORK, On Tuesday, Evg., October 29th, 1918, AT 8 P.M. **CLÁR:** 1. Opening Chorus "Wrap the Green Flag" Messrs. Moloney, Madden, Hefferman, Sherman, O'Leary, Murphy, Whelan, Pollock, O'Neill, and P. Murphy. 2. An t-Éireann "A Spailtín a Ráin" Copín Piopa. 3. Rince "Peptín na h-Éireann" C. C. O'Connell. 4. Song "She is Far from the Land" Mr. J. B. Kennelick. 5. Duet "Molly Bawn" Miss A. McDonnell and Master T. Forbes.

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Ask for **"3 C's" BUTTER.** **DO YOU SUPPORT IRISH INDUSTRY?** IF YOU EAT **CASH BAKERY BREAD** you'll support Cork Industries. A POST CARD WILL BRING OUR VAN. **FACTORY AND DEPOT: 11 SOUTH TERRACE, CORK.** Confectionery, Fruit, Flowers and Vegetables of all kinds delivered to all parts of City. **J. KENNY,** 11 PRINCE'S STREET, CORK.

SAN CEANSA, SAN CIR. NO LANGUAGE, NO NATION. No saying is more familiar to you. You have frequently seen it emblazoned on scroll and banner. You have repeatedly heard it being insisted on by advocates of the Irish Language. In its few short words is compassed a truth. Like all truths it is at once bitter and wholesome. Bitter because so many have persisted in ignoring its literal significance—wholesome because it points out the road along which we must work if we desire to build up and safeguard our Nation. The Irish people have willingly permitted themselves for years to be led along the road to National degeneration and apostasy were started into thought by the Rebellion of 1916. By being granted a view of patriotism in its noblest, purest, and most self-sacrificing form, they were made to realize the criminal negligence and carelessness they had been guilty of with regard to the country that owed their allegiance. The result is that at present there is all over the country a great, whole-hearted wave of enthusiasm—a universal desire to do now what they can to build up their Nation. That wave of enthusiasm is splendid, but only in so far as it furnishes the basis on which they will found their work for Ireland. There is much work to be done. There are many sides of the National fabric which require attention. One of them is the Language. Our appeal to you is to do your part in the work of restoring the Irish Language to its rightful place in the life of our country. What is it you ought to do? IF YOU ARE IN EARNEST. If you know the language use it on every possible occasion; if you do not know it set about acquiring it to-day. The Gaelic League Session is just commencing. The Class Nights in the various Branches are: **Craobh Ceasaige—** SS. Peter & Paul's National School Tuesdays and Fridays—8 p.m. to 9.30 p.m. **Craobh Naomh Fionn Dappa, An Spidéal—** Queen Street Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays—8 p.m. to 9.30 p.m. **Craobh Uí Spidéal—** 111 Old George's Street Tuesdays and Fridays—8 p.m. to 9.30 p.m. **Craobh Naomh Thuaisne—** Eason's Hill National School Wednesdays and Fridays—8 p.m. to 9.30 p.m.

Cuirim Ceoil i halla na Gaeráid, i Scoil na h-Éireann, 23rd Meán Fómhair, 1917. **CLÁR:** 1. Bliain na h-Éireann... 2. An Cúil-pinn... 3. An Capatán... 4. An t-Éireann... **12 WINTHROP STREET CORK.**

Irish language classes were a way to express individual's nationalistic instincts.

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Business thrived at the Lambkin Snuff and Tobacco Factory

The great majority of the workers were girls. The wage for women workers was 15 shillings a week when many employers in Dublin were paying only 6 shillings a week. In the factory in Dublin there was a canteen which served wholesome food which many of the working girls were not accustomed to. The ladies’ committee presiding over the canteen was chaired by the Marchioness of Waterford.

Weekly Irish Times 11 March 1916

The singer sings a rebel song and everyone sings along.
Just one thing I’ll never understand:
Every damn rebel seems to be a man.
For he sings of the Bold Fenian Men and
the Boys of the Old Brigade.
What about the women who stood there too
When history was made....?
Ireland, Mother Ireland, with your freedom loving sons,
did your daughters run and hide at the sound of guns?
Or did they have some part in the fight
and why does everybody try to keep them out of sight?
For they sing of the Men of the West and the Boys of Wexford too.
Were there no women living round those parts?
Tell me, what did they do...?

Brian Moore, *Invisible Women*



Each of these organizations had their own uniforms (Cumann na mBan: ‘a coat and skirt of Volunteer tweed and hat of same. *Four pockets in coat, skirt at least seven inches off the ground, tweed or leather belt, haversack with first aid outfit. A grey or green felt hat and a haversack are recommended where uniform is not possible. Members of Cumann na mBan are in honour bound to give preference, when purchasing, to goods of Irish manufacture*’; Clann na nGael: the girls wore a distinctive uniform comprising a green blouse and green woollen kilt, a brown brath with a Tara brooch attached and the Women’s Citizen Army members wore a uniform like that of Cumann na mBan with the exception that they wore a blue brath.)

During the inaugural meeting of Cumann na mBan, held in Wynn’s Hotel on 5 April 1914, the group’s objectives made this support role very clear: to advance the cause of Irish liberty; to organise Irishwomen in furtherance of this object; to assist in arming and equipping a body of Irish men for the defence of Ireland; and to form a fund for these purposes, to be called the ‘defence of Ireland fund’.

While the majority of members of Cumann na mBan and Clann na nGael were middle class a significant proportion were working class.

In the immediate aftermath, some of the provincial press blamed the Citizen Army alone for the Rising, arguing that the destruction of property was typical of ‘Larkinism’ and ‘syndicalism’. Cumann na mBan activist Mary MacSwiney in Cork similarly bemoaned the fact that Volunteers had apparently been led by the nose by ‘Larkin’s crowd’.

on Merchant’s Quay in Cork during the war years as the mainly female staff worked on mixtures and plug tobaccos from the war office to send to various expeditionary forces. It is said that the women often put love notes inside the tobacco tins.



Early in 1917 Cumann na mBan was declared illegal by the British authorities. At a meeting Mary McSwiney put a vote to membership to determine if they would continue with the danger of arrest and imprisonment. The vast

majority decided to continue as Cumann na mBan, Craobh Corcaigh.

There was a split when Mary McSwiney wanted to hold a ceili on the eve of Passion Sunday. The group voted her down and, with permission from Dublin, she set up Craobh Poblachtach na hÉireann.

In 1917 Clann na nGael was set up in Cork by May Kelly as a junior auxiliary to Cumann na mBan.

Also in 1917 the Misses Wallace of Brunswick Street (later 4 St. Augustine St.) set up the Cork branch of the Women’s Citizen Army. James Connolly visited the Wallace sisters on his visit to Cork when he spoke about military tactics at a meeting organised by Tadhg Barry in January 1916. They were friendly with Constance Markievicz of the Irish Citizen Army and both the sisters were members of the I.C.A.



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Women who received the Separation Allowance

because their husbands were in the army and were away on active duty were called ‘Separation Women’. During the war these women often paraded behind the Union Jack but their loyalties were essentially familial rather than unionist.



Irish Volunteers and Citizen Army members paid monthly dues (as well as providing their own uniform and weapons) indicating that they had disposable income.

Evidence suggests that the majority of Irish soldiers fighting in the war came from the poorest of society. Separation money meant that they contributed close to a labourer’s pay. “A survey of 169 recruits from Dublin Corporation workers shows just 9, ‘salaried professional’ workers joining up compared to 113 unskilled labourers.” (Padraig Yeates, Dublin 1914-1918, A City in Wartime) suggesting that economics played a major part in answering the Redmondite call.

One of the last Cork Volunteers of the Rising was released and recalled, ‘The arrival of the train with the prisoners was greeted with cheers. A procession was formed, at the station and, headed by the prisoners, marched into town. On the way, the “Separation Women” did not forget to express their views and needless to say their remarks were not complimentary’.

**Michael Sheehy, Bureau of Military History (BMH)
Witness Statement 989**

SOLDIERS’ SEPARATION ALLOWANCES

INCREASED RATES from MARCH 1, 1915

Increased Separation Allowances for the War are now given to the wives and children of married soldiers and to the dependants of unmarried men and widowers.

WIVES AND CHILDREN OF MARRIED MEN.

The New Weekly Rates are as follows:

	Privates and Corporals	Sergeants	Clt.-Sergants	Quarter-Master Sergeants	Wt. Officer (Lt. Colon.)
Wife - - - - -	12s. 6d.	15s. 0d.	16s. 6d.	22s. 0d.	25s. 0d.
Wife and child - -	17s. 6d.	20s. 0d.	21s. 6d.	27s. 0d.	28s. 0d.
Wife and 2 children	21s. 0d.	23s. 6d.	25s. 0d.	30s. 6d.	31s. 6d.

With 2s. extra for each additional child.

These rates include the usual allotment of 2s. 6d. a week for privates and corporals, and 6s. 10d. for other ranks. Adopted children are admitted. The ordinary limit of age for children is now 16, and the allowance is continued up to 21 in certain cases (for higher education, apprenticeship on a nominal wage, or physical or mental infirmity). Soldiers marrying AFTER enlistment are now eligible. An extra 2s. 6d. a week is paid in the case of soldiers living in the London postal area at the time of enlistment if the families continue to live there.

MOTHERLESS CHILDREN.
5s. a week clear for each child.

Of course these marginalized women wanted to maintain their state funded income and there were many instances of conflict between them and volunteer women.

There were suggestions of drunkenness but figures show that while 50,000 women received Separation Allowance in Dublin the number of such women charged with drunkenness did not exceed half-a-dozen per week. Middle class women formed patrols to make sure they were not ‘behaving improperly’ by drinking too much or ‘consorting’ with soldiers other than their husbands.

Between 1914 and 1917 food, rent, clothing, fuel and light costs rose with devastating consequences for the weekly incomes of households. In 1918 conscription was introduced in Ireland. “In Cork city the Separation women were noted to have taken part in the anti-conscription rallies.”- Borgonovo, Dynamics of War and Revolution

The traditional song *Salonika* puts it very succinctly

My husband’s in Salonika
And I wonder if he’s dead
I wonder if he knows he has
A kid with a foxy head
Now when the war is over
What will the slackers do
They’ll be all around the soldiers
For the loan of a bob or two
But when the war is over
What will the soldiers do
They’ll be walking around with a leg-
and-a-half
And the slackers will have two
And they tax their pound o’ butter
They tax their halfpenny bun

But still with all their taxes
They can’t beat the bloody Hun
But when the war is over
What will the slackers do
For every kid in Americay
In Cork there will be two
For they takes us out to Blarney
They lays us on the grass
They puts us in the family way
And leaves us on our arse
And never marry a soldier
A sailor or a Marine
But keep your eye on the Sinn Fein boy
With his yellow, white and green

(as sung by Jimmy Crowley)

