GEORGINA FROST (1879-1939)

BIRTH/DEATH: Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare

POSITION: Petty Sessions Clerk

NOTABLE: First woman to hold public office in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

PORTRAIT BY MARIE CONNOLE

Based on a studio photograph of Georgina against 1920s Snow Drop Wallpaper. Georgina's life during Ireland's Revolutionary Years (1913-1923) is represented by her bicycle, Newmarket-on-Fergus Courthouse, items used as a Petty Sessions Clerk, a rugby ball, tweed material, her stolen satchel, a photograph of her and her sister, her home village of Sixmilebridge.

BIO: Georgina Frost lived with her five sisters in Garna House, Sixmilebridge. When she was 30 years old she started assisting her father Thomas in his role as Petty Sessions Clerk for Sixmilebridge and Newmarket-on-Fergus Courthouse. She was a recognisable figure travelling to the courthouse by bicycle.

The Petty Sessions Courts had been in place since 1827 and legislation in 1857 had laid out the rules governing the role of the Clerks or Recorders and the registers they had to maintain. A Clerk had to be between twenty-one and forty years of age on appointment and live close to the Court. They were responsible for all books and documents, recorded all circulars from Dublin and the opinions handed down by the Justices. They also had to fill out all Forms of Procedure, which included warrants, summonses and dog licences.

Georgina was appointed as Petty Sesssions Clerk by Clare magistrates upon her father's retirement. However, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland rejected this citing British law that claimed, as a woman, she was 'not a proper person'. With the support of Clare magistrates, Lord Inchiquin and many prominent women and men, Georgina brought her case to the courts twice, where it was dismissed.

The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act (1919) was passed a few months before Georgina's case was heard for the third time. On this occasion her case was heard before the House of Lords and she was finally appointed as a Petty Sessions Clerk - a remarkable achievement for the Clare woman.

However, the Petty Courts in Ireland were disliked and the newer Irish Dáil Courts were proving more popular. The unrest caused by the War of Independence led to the burning of the Newmarket-on-Fergus Courthouse alongside raids on the local RIC barracks by the IRA. On one occasion, in 1921, Georgina was held at gunpoint by the IRA when she was cycling home. They stole her satchel and its' contents.

After the Civil War and the establishment of the Irish Free State the Petty Courts, and Georgina's job, were abolished. She was given no role in the newly formed Irish governance system.

IRREPRESSIBLE WOMEN, A REFLECTIVE AND NON-PARTISAN ART PROJECT

'Irrepressible Women of Clare' are portraits exploring the perspectives of five women who lived during Ireland's Revolutionary Years (1913-1923). Artist Marie Connole worked with historian Brian Spring, military archives, newspaper reports, books and where possible, relatives of the women.

The project is accompanied by the online video 'Irrepressible Women of Clare'.

Commissioned in 2021 for the Decade of Centenaries Arts Projects by Clare County Council with the support of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media under the Community Strand of the Decade of Centenaries Programme.

For more about the project visit:
www.marieconnole.com

ARTIST

Marie Connole is an award-winning Artist and Teacher whose research-based art explores folklore, history and storytelling. She has exhibited at the Irish Arts Center New York, NUI Galway, Trinity College Dublin, Eva International Limerick and Tulca.

FURTHER READING/VIEWING:

'Irrepressible Women of Clare,' Video available on YouTube and www.marieconnole.com

de Bhaldraithe, Pádraig, 'Sixmilebridge Clerks of Petty Sessions', The Other Clare, Vol 11, 1987

Ellis, Lucille, 'Women of Clare', p.51- p.54, Clare Roots Society, 2017

Mooney Eichacker, Joanne, 'Not a Proper Person', 2014

ARTIST: MARIE CONNOLE

HISTORIAN: BRIAN SPRING

GRAPHIC DESIGN: EDEL BUTLER

clarearts.ie/projects/decade-of-centenaries-commissions

An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir, Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán
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