

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1,574

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1574

Witness

Seumas Mac a Mulleora,
Mountrath,
Laois.

Identity.

Gaelic League Organiser.

Subject.

History of the Independence Movement in
Laois, prior to 1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness

Nil.

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Form B S M. 2

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREAU STAIRS WIRELESS 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1574

STATEMENT BY SEUMAS MAC A MUILLEORA,

Mountrath, Laois.

History of the Independence Movement in Laois prior to 1916,
6th Battalion area I.R.A.,
Mountrath, Camross, Killanure, Ballyfin & Castletown Companies.

To get a correct picture of the Independence Movement prior to 1916 we have to rely on the stories of the older men. In Laois there was little activity at the time of the Fenians, and there is no record of any men in what was later the 6th Battalion area being sworn members of the Fenian Brotherhood. At the time of the Parnell Split, opinion in the district was divided and there is a recollection of some of the older men being referred to as Parnellites. Many of these used travel to Dublin for Parnell anniversary in October. The United Irish League was strong and it was a land agitation movement. The public representatives on the District and County Councils were all prominent at public meetings at which landlords and landlordism were denounced, but there is no record of a denunciation of England's occupation of the country. There was little interest taken in the Independence Movement, and all wrongs were to be righted in the English Parliament by the members of the Parliamentary Party. There had been no contested election for many years and the two divisions of Leix and Ossory had been represented by P.A. Meehan, who was succeeded by his son, P.J. Meehan, and William Delaney. Nationalists were acting as magistrates and there was a general air of respectability. Here and there in the county there were a few who hearkened to Griffith, but they were classed as cranks and soreheads.

About 1911 the Fianna was founded at a meeting in Portlaoise and Countess. Markievicz addressed a meeting at the start. How far the movement developed is not known, but it was from this meeting that the 1916 activities in the county developed. There were about a dozen members of Sinn Féin in the county. These included Michael Sheridan, P.J. O'Neill, - Ahern, - Casey and Thomas Dunne. To these were added Lar Brady, Tom Brady, Pat Muldowney and Tom Keegan. Tom Dunne resided in this district at the time, and there was a family named Moore who were reputed to be Fenian sympathisers. Jas. Dowling, Castletown, who had been arrested as a suspect at the time of the Plan of Campaign, was a staunch Parnellite.

The Luggacurran evictions awaked Nationalist feelings, and there was an eviction in Knockaroo at which M. Davitt addressed a monster meeting surveyed by a large force of R.I.C. A land disturbance in Rathdowney and a baton charge created a certain amount of hostility to the R.I.C.

Except for these incidents, there was little hostility to the invader. The G.A.A. and the Gaelic League were strong and kept the spirit of freedom alive. The members of the county teams meeting the teams from other areas where the spirit of freedom was strong, developed a national spirit which came alive after 1916 and made the organisation of the county easy. In the same way, the members of the Gaelic League going to feiseanna prepared the ground for the movement.

Father Ramsbottom organised a troupe of players in Ballyfin called "The Mangans". They specialised in Mangan's songs and poetry, and the spirit of Mangan's writings lingered in that district. Fr. Ramsbottom's writings, under

the pen-name of "Thigean Roe", in the Leinster Leader were an inspiration to the youth of the county. Brother Cormac O'Sullivan came to Mountrath as a teacher and instilled into his pupils a love of the language.

Such is a picture of this district up to the founding of the Volunteers in 1914. The Volunteer movement was a Home Rule Movement and large companies were formed and drilled by members of the 6th Leinster Regiment (The Queen's County Militia). Large meetings and parades were held and addressed by the local M.P.s, but there was no talk of independence. Then the split came and large numbers joined the British army at the outbreak of the war. The drill instructors were mostly reserve men and were called up. At the split most members followed Redmond. The company in Mountrath, with three exceptions, voted for Redmond, and, except in Portlaoise, there was no further national activity until after the Rising. About 1915 there was a canvass for the Volunteer Auxiliary and there were two members in Mountrath.

1916 came and there was little activity. The men from Portlaoise went out and cut the railway at Tunduff and were 'on the run' after the surrender. The shooting of the leaders in Dublin and the deportations shocked the country into sympathy and the National Aid Association got a great response. Meetings were well attended to organise collections, and Sinn Féin Clubs were formed from this activity. The Irish Volunteers were organised from the Sinn Féin Clubs and the threat of conscription swelled the companies.

The organisation of the 1918 election aided recruiting and the drive for Dáil Éireann Loan, and the withdrawal of the R.I.C. from the isolated stations made the setting up of the courts under Dáil Éireann necessary. The maintenance of law and order was in the hands of the Volunteers.

Above is a preface of the events in the area of the 6th Laois Battalion and leads up to the history of this battalion already supplied. Taken with the contributions from other areas, it will give a picture of the position in Laois prior to 1916.

Signed: Seumas Mac an tUalláin

Date: 5th July 1957

Witness: Seán Brennan, Lieut.-Col.

(Investigator).

