Template cover sheet which much be included at the front of all projects

Title of Project:

Máire Ní Shíthe

Category for which you wish to be entered (i.e. Revolution in Ireland, Ireland and World War I, Women’s History or a Local/Regional category):

Local / Regional Category

Name(s) of class / group of students / individual student submitting the project:

6th class

School Roll Number:

12456M

School Type:

Primary

School name and address (this must be provided even for projects submitted by a group of pupils or an individual pupil):

Timoleague National School, Timoleague, Bandon, Co. Cork, P72Y058

Class teacher’s name (this must be provided both for projects submitted by a group of pupils or an individual pupil):

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Máire Ní Shíthe

Introduction

We are extremely fortunate to live in an area of the country so steeped in history. Our history books are full of the wonderful events of Ireland in the years 1912 – 1922. When we began our 1916 Commemoration journey back in 2015, we delved into our local history. Our school is in the shadow of a magnificent Franciscan Abbey and we learned that there was an unmarked grave within the Abbey walls that was of a woman who had a close literary relationship with Pádraig Mac Piarais. Together with the Timoleague Centenary Commemoration Committee and local history group, we set about researching the life of Máire Ní Shíthe and pieced together the life of this wonderful lady. Little did we know that this project would take us a year to complete with a fitting ending for this wonderful lady.

The Life of Máire Ní Shíthe

Máire Ní Shíthe was born in Ballymacown, Killnagross, Clonakilty, Co. Cork in 1868. Her father was Edward (Ned) Sheehy from Ballintemple and her mother was Ann Deasy from Lehanagh. Máire was a native Irish speaker as her mother was from an area in Barryroe, where Irish was widely spoken at the time. She attended Darrara National School and then the Convent of Mercy, Clonakilty from 1883 – 1887. Her aptitude in the study of languages soon became apparent. She played an active role in the Gaelic Revival and was a regular contributor to An Claidheamh.
Soluis from 1901 - 1922. She wrote under the pseudonym Dul Amu (Going Astray). Letters and cards written by Pearse to Máire are preserved in the archives of the Convent of Mercy, Clonakilty.

14ú Márta 1907

Máire, a chara,

Bhéinn buidheach dhíot dá guirfeá alt nó scéal gear chugam le haghaidh an Claidhidh anois ’s arís.

Máire married her wonderful linguistic skills with drama. She won first prize with Suipéar Dhiarmada Mhic Phaidín at the Oireachtais in 1901. She translated the French Moliere piece, Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme into Irish in 1907 and named it An Geogach Duine Uasal. Máire also translated from German and this work was frequently published in An Claidheamh Soluis and Irisleabhar na Gaeile. In 1902 she travelled from Clonakilty to Belfast to play the part of Nora in a play she co-wrote with Eilís Ní Mhurchadha called Beart Nótaí. The following review was written in An Claidheamh Soluis in October 1902;

“Dul Amú herself travelled specially from Clonakilty to Belfast to take the part of “Nora, which she acted with great spirit and animation. .. The play was a revelation to the native speakers and more serious students who had the good fortune to be present. ... They saw in it the first real attempt to create a National Theatre. Miss Sheehy’s play furnishes us with a new standard to work up to.”

Figure 3- An Claidheamh Soluis
We approached our parish priest, Fr. Patrick Hickey, and he allowed us access to the parish records. We discovered that Máire married Denis Leary in 1915 in Timoleague. It was interesting to see that Máire was referred to as “Minnie” in the register. They got a Land Commission farm in Ardmore. They remained in Ardmore for some time before selling and buying another farm in Ballinamona, Courtmacsherry where they remained for the remainder of their lives. Máire died on the 13th July 1955. She was buried in Timoleague Abbey.

Figure 4 - Our findings from the Parish Marriage Register

Figure 5 - Máire’s unmarked grave in Timoleague Abbey
Re-creating Máire’s Life

During our research, we were unable to find photographs of Máire. Her relative Brenda Bean Uí Ríordáin, from whom we received the information, had no photographs. Our class decided to recreate Máire’s life in photo. We researched and dressed in clothing of the time. We went on a fieldtrip around our village and recreated scenes of Máire’s life. We then published our work in a photobook and have made it available to the school and local community.
Maire was a great dramatist and she won 1st prize with Stiúrthóir Dhiarmada Mhic Phaidin at The Oireachtas in 1901.

She excelled at languages and was fluent in Irish, French and German. She worked as a translator.

One of her translated works into Irish was “Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme”. This play was written by one of the greats of French literature, Moliere, in 1670.

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In 1902, she travelled from Clonakilty to Belfast to play the part of Nora in a play she co-wrote with Ellis Ni Mhuirthadha called Beart Nenai.
Maire wrote under the pseudonym Dal. Amh. “Dal Amh” wrote as early as 1899 for Fhuaimh on Lir and continued until 1925.

It is believed that she became editor of The Cork Sun in 1903.

Maire Sheehy and Denis Leary got married in Timoleague in 1915.

Timoleague Marriages Records 1843-1950
Groom: Denis Leary Bride: Minnie Sheehy
Married 17th June 2015 by T. O’Hea

Maire & Denis got a Land Commission farm at Anemoore, Timoleague & remained there for some years before selling this farm and buying another at Ballinscanna, Courtmacsherry.

Witnases - Denis Sullivan & Kate Keohane
The final photographs are particularly moving to us. It was quite lonely standing around her grave that had no visual evidence of her existence. We felt proud that we were honouring this fascinating lady. We publicised our work in our school newsletters and on the school website. The Timoleague Centenary Commemoration Committee approached us and asked us whether they could put
our photobooks on display during their commemorative weekend in April. We were delighted to receive such acknowledgement.

Our story didn’t end there…..

Dúchas Clonakilty had been in contact with Máire Ní Shíthe’s relative, Brenda Ní Ríordáin, to come to Clonakilty to give a lecture. It was suggested that Dúchas Clonakilty could erect a plaque on the grave in Timoleague for her anniversary in July 2016. We were delighted to have been contacted by the Clonakilty branches of Conradh na Gaeilge and Cumann Seanchais together with Dúchas when we returned to school in September 2016. We were invited to take part in an event planned in Timoleague Abbey for Máire Ní Shíthe.

On Friday September 16th 2016 a large crowd gathered at Timoleague Abbey to honour the memory of dramatist, writer and translator Máire Ní Shíthe. Máire’s cousin Brenda Ní Ríordáin was in attendance. Local piper and Dad of someone in our class led the procession into the graveyard. A synopsis of Máire’s career was given and her grave was blessed. We were honoured to be part of the ceremony and joined other students from the other national schools in reading paragraphs in Irish and English inscribed on the plaque resting on her grave. Brenda Úí Riordáin and Máire’s god-daughter, Mrs. Mary O’Donovan, then unfurled the covering on the Celtic headstone and commemorative plaque respectively. We then journeyed to the local hall to hear Brenda give a most informative lecture on Máire.
Conclusion

This project developed into so much more that we had ever anticipated! Timoleague National School came together with the local history groups and organisations to provide recognition for a most remarkable lady who was largely unknown. Our project was on display throughout the commemorative weekend in April. It whet the appetite of the people of Timoleague. When the heritage groups organised the plaque and headstone unveiling, the community came out to honour this lady. She was unheard of in the history classes in Timoleague but due to the Commemorative projects of 2016, she will be taught to the future generations. We would like to mention last year's 6th class who were very much involved in this project. They had moved onto secondary school by the time of the unveiling of the headstone.

It became so much more than a project. It brought history to life not only in our classrooms but in our community and local area!

Bibliography


2. Timoleague Centenary Commemoration publication

3. Timoleague Historical Society

4. The Southern Star

5. www.ainm.ie