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For immediate Release

Mary Jane O'Donovan Rossa Campaign to launch in Clonakilty, 5 September 2025

Mary Jane O'Donovan Rossa played a pivotal role in the struggle for Irish freedom before 1916. Though her contributions were overshadowed in the public mind by the exploits of her husband Jeremiah, she nevertheless was a tireless advocate and promoter of the cause.

Her great-grandson, filmmaker **Williams Rossa Cole**, has brought Mary Jane's contributions into focus with his seminal film "**Rebel Wife**". He is actively supporting the placement of a memorial to Mary Jane near her birthplace in Clonakilty, West Cork. On **Friday, 5 September at 3:00 PM**, at the Clonakilty Park Cinema, Mr. Cole will introduce a screening of "Rebel Wife" and discuss the film afterward. [Advance tickets can be purchased here.](#)

Historians and other commentators on the centuries-long drama of Irish independence movements have been slow to recognise the crucial role played by women activists, both in supporting the leadership and in active service, fundraising and more.

At the screening of "Rebel Wife", attendees can sign a **Letter of Support** to encourage the creation of a lasting memorial to Mary Jane. In advance of the screening, an [online Letter of Support is available here.](#)

The presence of a public tribute near her birthplace will afford residents of Clonakilty, as well as historians, students and visitors, the opportunity to reflect on the contributions of **Mary Jane O'Donovan Rossa** and other female activists, to the cause of Irish freedom.

Sign the Letter of Support!

Let's give

**Mary Jane
O'Donovan Rossa**

Activist ~ Poet

Clonakilty Native

Irish Heroine



The recognition she deserves!

**The
Campaign for Mary Jane**

Seeks to place a commemorative sculpture near her birthplace.

Join in our effort to mark the contributions of this courageous advocate for freedom!

Add your name now, and thanks!

**<https://bit.ly/MaryJaneOD>
odonovancan.org**



Mary Jane Irwin was born in 1845 at 2 Main Street in Clonakilty, Co. Cork. This building is now occupied by [Coughlan's Bookshop](#), while the street itself is now aptly named Rossa Street. Mary Jane, the eldest of 10 siblings, was born to Margaret Keohane of Rosscarbery and Clonakilty native Maxwell Irwin. The family later relocated to Strand House (now [An Súcán Guesthouse](#)) on Sand Quay in Clonakilty. The Irwins, as well as being prominent Catholic merchants in the town, were deeply entrenched in nationalist politics.

In 1868, Mary Jane commenced a two-year tour across the United States and Canada, delivering talks and lectures. It was during this time that she earned the title "the prison widow". Her speeches brought widespread attention to the torture endured by O'Donovan Rossa and other incarcerated Irish revolutionaries. These events served multiple purposes: raising funds for herself, her son and her stepchildren, garnering support for the Fenian cause, and collecting donations for the families of other Fenian prisoners.

All the while, she hoped that the extensive coverage of her speeches in the media would lead to her husband's release. And finally, in 1871, O'Donovan Rossa was granted amnesty on the condition that he accept exile in America.

Back in the US, Mary Jane tirelessly juggled her roles as a mother and a wife, often also shouldering the family's financial responsibilities.

On 29 June 1915, after a prolonged illness, Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa passed away on Staten Island. Mary Jane then returned to Ireland with his body, which was laid to rest in [Glasnevin Cemetery](#). It was there that Pádraig Pearse delivered his famous graveside oration.