



VICTORIA

Kent

Victoria Kent Siano

First lawyer in Madrid, deputy and director general of Prisons

Málaga, 1892 - New York, 1987

The professional and political life of Victoria Kent Siano was quite interesting. In 1906 she joined the Escuela Normal de Maestras, a teaching school, and earned her degree in 1911. From there she went to the Instituto Cardenal Cisneros of Madrid, where intellectuals like Jiménez Fraud and Bergamín taught. She moved into the Ladies' Residence run by María de Maeztu, who had a considerable influence on her. In 1920 she entered the Faculty of Law at the Universidad Central de Madrid, where her professors included prestigious names like Jiménez de Asúa and Felipe Sánchez-Román. She graduated in June 1924, earning her doctorate with a thesis on prison reform.

In January 1925 she joined the Bar Association and began to appear in court. She was the first woman lawyer in Madrid. During the Republic she was one of the three women deputies in the Constituent Courts. She was also the director general of Prisons, albeit only for a brief period, but long enough to resume the humanising work of Concepción Arenal and improve prisoners' living conditions by instating freedom of worship, permits for family matters, a ban on shackles and chains (one moving story is that she ordered a bust made in memory of Concepción Arenal with these smelted shackles and chains, which is at the Secretary of State of Penitentiary Affairs) and the creation of the female corps of prison workers.

A series of prison conflicts, coupled with a constant campaign against her in the press, led her to submit her resignation.

After the war, she went into exile, first in Paris. There she met the woman who would become her sentimental companion, Louise Crane. They set out for Mexico together and ultimately reached New York, where she worked in the UN. She and Crane founded the magazine *Ibérica por la Libertad*, which became a mouthpiece for exiles between 1954 and 1974. She

managed to return to Spain in 1977, like some other exiles, although she did go back to her residence in New York.

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