

# **Sister Annie Finlay, from Ireland to Latin America: Two Documents on her travel to Argentina and Chile in the late Nineteenth Century, with annotated introduction.**

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## **Abstract**

Nineteenth century travelogues written by religious sisters are not well known, are a unique *genre* of literature and a very unexplored area of historical research. Two unpublished documents from the pen of Sister Annie Finlay (1854-1934 - a member of the Society of the Sacred Heart) provide vivid accounts of her voyage in 1884 from Bordeaux to Buenos Aires and subsequently in 1896 from Buenos Aires over the Andes to Santiago, Chile.

Nano Nagle, Frances Mary Teresa Ball, Catherine McAuley, Mary Aikenhead and Mary Martin were five significant women of their time and all of them were well known. Each one of these women would found a religious congregation, Nano Nagle the Presentation Sisters, Frances Ball the Loreto Sisters, Catherine McAuley the Mercy Sisters, Mary Aikenhead the Irish Sisters of Charity, Mary Martin the Medical Missionaries of Mary. When vocations to religious life were many, these Congregations prospered and in response to episcopal requests quite rapidly established themselves on a worldwide basis. The sisters founded convents, schools and hospitals and dedicated themselves to the service of the poor with energy and generosity of spirit. However, it was not just the Irish congregations which attracted those who sought and found their vocation in religious life as many Irish women entered other congregations of European origin such as the Ursulines, Dominicans or the Society of the Sacred Heart; the

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latter sometimes referred to as “Sacré Coeur” as members used the suffix “RSCJ” which stands for *Religieuses de Sacré Coeur de Jésus*.

Annie Finlay (1854-1934) was one such Irish woman who entered the Society of the Sacred Heart. Born 1854 at Kilmore, Co. Cavan, she was one of the seven children of Sir William Finlay, a Scottish Presbyterian from Fifeshire and Maria Magan of Killeshee, Co. Longford. William Finlay would convert and become a Catholic. Her father was a government civil engineer employed working on one of the River Shannon schemes. The marriage was produced seven children, two of whom would become well known Jesuit priests (Thomas A. Finlay S.J.<sup>2</sup> and Peter Finlay S.J.<sup>3</sup>) and three who would enter the Society of the Sacred Heart. Annie was described as “perhaps the most academic of a gifted family. She was also fired with enthusiasm for the mission of education, for which she had exceptional gifts: love of study; an extraordinary gift for teaching; a profound commitment; courage in the face of every difficulty; a great love of young people, and an exceptional ability to relate to people of every type. Her soul dwelt in high places, but she never lost touch with the practical.”<sup>4</sup>

Annie Finlay and her sisters went to school with the Clarissian Sisters in Kilmore and subsequently as boarders in the Sacred Heart Convent in Armagh. There she achieved academic success and on completing her education in 1871 would have entered the Society immediately were it not for her mother demanding a delay. A year later Finlay went to undertake her novitiate at Conflans, Paris. Near the end of the second year, she was sent to Roehampton (London) and here together with her elder sister Mary made her first profession on 27 December 1874. According to Joan Stevenson, “On the day when it was announced in the Finlay household that Mary also was to enter the Society of the Sacred Heart an old family servant gave a cry of lament: ‘Sure, it will be a sad day for all when Miss Mary is gone. As for Miss Annie, she might just as well enter a convent. She’s no good for anything – always a book under her arm. MY DARLING MISS MARY!’”<sup>5</sup> She helped and assisted her brothers Tom and Peter with their translations of Caesar and Sallust on the promise of payment of sixpence and more often than not non-payment was the order of the day.

<sup>2</sup> See Thomas J. Morrissey S.J., *Thomas A. Finlay S.J. 1848-1940*, Four Courts Press, Dublin 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Finlay S.J. 1851-1929.

<sup>4</sup> Joan Stevenson, unpublished MS, Mount Anville Archive, I, The People, MAV/487 (9), p.4. Sister Joan Stevenson was a member of the Society of the Sacred Heart and attended boarding school at Mount Anville during the period 1927-31.

<sup>5</sup> Joan Stevenson, unpublished MS, Mount Anville Archive, “The Affair,” SA/4.

Finlay was assigned to Mount Anville Convent, and she was engaged in teaching at the secondary school up to 1884. It was at Mount Anville that she would meet the remarkable Augusta Fitzgerald,<sup>6</sup> with whom she would work in Buenos Aires for eight years before going to Chile. Fitzgerald was described by an Italian religious who knew her as “intelligent, noble hearted, renowned for virtue, with a marvellous harmony of natural ability and supernatural gifts. She had the power to live above self and in her there was a blend of gentleness and energy, a readiness for any sacrifice at the call of duty.”<sup>7</sup>

In 1880, the community at Mount Anville (numbered some 36 sisters) was in some turmoil. There was much debate regarding the status of the four Irish convents as at the time they were part of an English-Irish Vicariate under the authority of a Mother Provincial based at Roehampton. A radical solution was proposed - set up a separate Vicariate directly answerable to the Superior General resident in Paris. Within the Society this became known as the *Affair of 1880*. And there were political overtones – those with Irish nationalist sentiments and feelings, others with English sympathies. Archbishop McCabe undertook a canonical visitation of the community in March 1880 and would become an enthusiastic supporter of the idea of a separate Vicariate. This was followed by a visitation by the superior general Mother Lehon who spoke very little English. The desire of the Irish sisters to have their own Vicariate was regarded as anti-English, a kind of Home Rule Movement within the Society. It would not be allowed, and when archbishop McCabe indicated that he was prepared to take up the matter with Rome, Mother Lehon called his bluff, and indicated her steely determination by declaring her intention to withdraw the Society from Ireland rather than permit an Irish vicariate. The fallout was inevitable. Annie Finlay, exhausted by years of teaching, left for some months rest at Roehampton and in October 1880 went to Paris (with her sister Mary) until 1884 when assigned to Buenos Aires. Augusta Fitzgerald received an obedience to establish a house in Buenos Aires and left Mount Anville on 27 May 1880.

Nineteenth century travelogues written by religious sisters are not well known, are a unique genre of literature and a very unexplored area of

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<sup>6</sup> August Bridget Fitzgerald (1829-1916) fourth of the six children of St James Fitzgerald of Castle Ishen, Co. Cork and Lady Augusta Henrietta Fremantle. Educated principally in England. Entered the Society of the Sacred Heart in Rome 1852; professed 1861 in Paris. Spent a short time at Roehampton before coming to Roscrea, then to Armagh and in 1878 to Mount Anville, Dublin as Superior. She worked in Argentina from 1880 to 1892 from where she went to Chile before returning to Rome. She left a journal account of her trip from Paris to Argentina in July 1890 kept at the General Archive of the Society of the Sacred Heart, Rome.

<sup>7</sup> Joan Stevenson, Mount Anville Archive, unpublished MS, “The People,” MAV/487 (8), MAV/487 (9), pp. 3-4.

historical research. The six Ursuline sisters who left their convent in Sligo, travelled to Cork and then were accompanied by Dr John Thomas Hynes O.P.<sup>8</sup> to Demerara, Guyana, in 1847, left an account of their journey.<sup>9</sup> The Mercy Sisters left Buenos Aires in 1880 to sail for Adelaide via London. It is known that Evangelista Fitzpatrick<sup>10</sup> wrote poetry – “literary societies were formed by the passengers, and the captain, forgetting that all poets have not the gift of rhyme, insisted that every member should write a poem. Mother M. Evangelista, usually so bright was on that occasion unaccountably depressed, yet her lines were the best received, though she bewails the dreariness of life, and confesses that the companions of her lonely hours are often the faded ghosts of former joys.”<sup>11</sup> *From Dublin to New Orleans* tells the story of two young Kerry women who leave the security of their boarding school at Cabra to begin life in religion as Dominican Sisters in New Orleans.<sup>12</sup>

Annie Finlay would spend twelve years working in Buenos Aires, eight of them under the aegis of August Fitzgerald. In February 1889, Fitzgerald was responsible for Finlay’s involvement with the 1,800 destitute Irish immigrants who arrived from Cobh on the *Dresden* and who would ultimately go to the ill-fated Irish colony at Nepostá near Bahía Blanca. The emigrants (mainly from Limerick city) had been deceived by Emigration Agents into believing that the Argentine was a land *flowing with milk and honey*. Their passage to Buenos Aires was freed. This particular kind of group emigration was loudly condemned by bishop Edward O’Dwyer of Limerick and archbishop Thomas Croke of Cashel.<sup>13</sup>

In 1896, Finlay left Argentina to work in Chile and wrote a unique descriptive account of crossing the Andes. Shortly after arriving in Santiago, she sent to Valparaiso and spent the next fourteen years mostly engaged in teaching. She was recognised as being a superb teacher. But it

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<sup>8</sup> John Thomas Hynes O.P., Apostolic Administrator Diocese of Demerara, Guyana, 1843-1858.

<sup>9</sup> Unpublished MS, Archive of the Ursuline Sisters, Sligo.

<sup>10</sup> Cristina Fitzpatrick known in religious life as María Evangelista (1822-1885). She said of herself “Dublin – Buenos Aires – Adelaide – with many happy happenings between – that’s my story. I enjoyed my school days with the Loreto Sisters and entered Baggot Street in 1845.”

<sup>11</sup> See Mother Austin Carroll, “Twenty Four Years in Buenos Ayres,” *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, Vol.13, 1888, pp.478-492.

<sup>12</sup> See Suellen Hoy and Margaret MacCurtain, *From Dublin to New Orleans, The Journey of Nora and Alice*, Attic Press, Dublin, 1994.

<sup>13</sup> Croke’s letter was published in *The Freeman’s Journal* of 26 January 1889.

was not just in the classroom where she was the recipient of respect. Many children aspired to be in her class and as “her relationships spread to their parents, numbers of whom came to visit this religious of whom their children spoke so enthusiastically. For hundreds of past pupils she remained a lifelong friend. When she travelled, people even managed to meet her for a chat between trains.... When she left Valparaiso in the 1910 the bishop publicly expressed his grief at the departure of so great an apostle.”<sup>14</sup>

Annie Finlay would work in Santiago for the next twenty-four years. In that busy city she took special care of young English and Irish women who came to work as governesses with affluent families. Her biographer notes that “the very prestige of her name covered them with a sort of protection and won them special consideration with the families in which they worked.”

Annie Finlay was possessed of a wonderful equitable temperament. She was open minded and no way a Luddite. According to those who knew her best, her religious sisters, she was always “a good community person.” She celebrated her Golden Jubilee on 27 February 1931 after fifty years in South America and the themed greeting of the day revolved around the four great loves of her life – young people, the poor, books and flowers. The months before the Presidential election of October 1932 were a period of political strife, industrial unrest and economic instability. Such was the preoccupation with the unstable and volatile situation, that her superior thought it best for Annie to live at the home of one of her former pupils until the crisis passed.

The two documents which Annie Finlay wrote are unique. Her letter of 30 September 1884 to Mother Angeles Alentado, originally written in French, describes the journey from Bordeaux to Buenos Aires. Her 17 January 1896 account of travelling from Buenos Aires to Mensoza and then over the Andes to Santiago, Chile, is an epic tale written originally in English, of which only a French translation is still extant.

### **Document 1**

Finlay to Mother Angeles Alentado<sup>15</sup>  
30 September 1884

*Maison de Sacré Coeur*  
Riobamba  
(Buenos Aires)

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<sup>14</sup> Joan Stevenson unpublished MS, Mount Anville Archive, “The Affair,” SA/6.

<sup>15</sup> Original document written on A5 size paper (12 pp) in Annie Finlay’s own handwriting is in the General Archives of the Society of the Sacred Heart, Rome.

My Dear Reverend Mother,

I am impatient to write to you our happy arrival<sup>16</sup> after four weeks spent travelling. My Sister Calmette<sup>17</sup> must have told you that we have left the *Valparaiso*<sup>18</sup> for the island of Flores<sup>19</sup> with Mr and Mrs. Serantes both of whom have been so attendant on us during the voyage and also during quarantine and of extreme goodness to your daughters. Mr is Argentine, and the first of his country with whom we had the honour to make acquaintance and one must recognise that he made a very favourable impression. Madame, who is Austrian, has spent most of her life in Paris and comes for the first time to visit her husband's family. When we arrived on the island we found that passengers from the *Béarn*,<sup>20</sup> a French ship hadn't left and we all had to wait in a lounge for three hours before Mr. could find rooms. Finally someone allowed him to go and find us the best room in the Lazaretto. It was on the first floor facing the sea at the end of the corridor, next to that of Mr & Mrs. Serantes. All the other rooms were occupied by friends who came on the *Valparaiso* and who never walked by our door except to offer us some service with the greatest respect. I would like Very Rev. Mother, to have a pen to tell you like I should, of the kindness of which we were the object during the voyage and also during quarantine. There certainly was privation to bear during the three days, what cost us most was the hygiene, but how not accept those joyful prohibitions while we thought what the Rule said about Holy Poverty, our Mother, and especially when we remembered the sufferings of those poor emigrants. They had their meal in the yard even when it rained, and only

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<sup>16</sup> The "Editor's Table" column of *The Standard*, Sunday 19 September 1886 (No.7262) noted that "several Sacred Heart Sisters arrived yesterday from Montevideo and were met among other by E. T. Mulhall and who accompanied them to the Irish Convent in the Calle Río Bamba. The Port Captain very kindly lent his falúa to bring the nuns ashore." A falúa was a small boat used by port and/or maritime officials.

<sup>17</sup> Sr Victoria Calmette (1856-1904) b. Santiago, Chile, of a French father and Chilean mother. She and her sister Ma.Mercedes Avelina were orphaned very young and raised initially by their grandfather and then by an uncle. They completed their education at the Sacred Heart school in Santiago and both entered the Society there. Victoria was a renowned educator who served in Callao and Buenos Aires before returning to Santiago.

<sup>18</sup> *Valparaiso*, 2,284 tons, built 1873 by James Elder & Co., Glasgow, for the Steam Navigation Company of James Street, Liverpool; a screw barque, Liverpool home port. See *Lloyds Register*, 1884, No.30 – V.

<sup>19</sup> Isla de Flores – a small island in the Rio de la Plata, 21 miles SE of Punta Carretas, Montevideo. Construction of a Lazaretto on the island commenced in 1865 and was used a Quarantine Station 1869-1970. Quarantine times could last from a week to forty days.

<sup>20</sup> *Béarn*, 2,616 tons, built 1881 by the Barrow Ship Building Co., Barrow, for the Société Générale de Transport Maritimes a Vapeur of Marseilles; a screw brig. See *Lloyds Register*, 1884 No.161-B.

twice a day. Sometimes we were obliged to go around the tables to enter the living room which always seemed to please them. They salute us with so much respect and there were always those who came to request a scapular for themselves and their family. When leaving the island we had no medals or scapulars left – we had distributed hundreds and were obliged to refuse a lot. The Cook to whom Reverend Mother Alentado<sup>21</sup> had promised one, has come to claim it; we also gave a scapular and a chaplet to the domestic who has been very good to us.

At table we had a small party of seven and Mr Serantes had the pleasure to serve himself. There was Mr Margano, Spanish Consul for Montevideo, Mr Todd<sup>22</sup> a banker from Buenos Aires, Mr Bridgett<sup>23</sup> the new British Consul for this country and Mr & Mrs. Serantes. These last would sometimes get us fruit and eggs, and almost at each meal the other passengers from the *Valparaiso* would send us biscuits or jam or wine that we sometimes had to accept to make them happy. There were three meals a day for first class passengers, but we came down only for lunch and dinner. The domestic would bring black coffee in the morning. The other meals were ordinarily an hour late and often the bell didn't ring. However some good friends warned us after dinner; Mr & Mrs. Serantes would always accompany us to our rooms which were far away. A day before our departure, dinner was very late and we had a laborious morning. During three hours we had to stand on the wet lawn to air the contents of our trunks. Mr Serantes and a Scotsman had them close to them, and they had them mended quickly because the locks had been broken and we also had them wrapped with rope in such a way that Mother Kavanagh<sup>24</sup> and I had nothing to do. The same evening the Scotsman who occupied a room on

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<sup>21</sup> Reverend Mother Angeles Alentado (1839-1888) b. Havana, Cuba; entered the Sacred Heart Congregation at "Manhattanville" New York 1857, professed 1860 and returned immediately to Havana. In 1870 called briefly to Paris and then sent to Madrid as Assistant, then Barcelona as Superior and subsequently Zaragoza. In September 1879 arrived in Valparaiso, then to Santiago and finally Talca as Superior. In 1881 she was named Superior Vicar of Chile, Peru and Argentina.

<sup>22</sup> John Todd, Manager of the London & River Plate Bank, Reconquista & Piedad, Buenos Aires. See Mulhall's "1885 City of Buenos Aires Directory" in Jeremy Howat's website [www.argbrit.org](http://www.argbrit.org) accessed 04/06.2012.

<sup>23</sup> Ronald Bridgett (1839-1899). Acting British Consul Bs. As. 1873-74; Vice Consul 1875 and in different capacities up to 1881. Promoted Consul to the State of Texas, to reside in Galveston 1882. Appointed Consul to the Argentine Republic 1884; Acting Consul General at Bs.As. 1885. Retired on pension January 1899 living at Martinez (FCCA); death due to drowning 16 February 1899. RIP 1899. See *Foreign Office List, 1900*, Harrison, London, 1900, p.235c. and Jeremy Howat website [www.argbrit.org](http://www.argbrit.org) "Anglican Burials at the British Cemetery, Chacarita, 1898 to 1900" accessed 24/07/2012.

<sup>24</sup> At the time she arrived in Riobamba with Annie Finlay, Mary Kavanagh had not made her final vows.

the third floor lobby came to our door to ask us to go and have a cup of tea with an American lady, a protestant, who had been good to us. Mr Anderson made us tea himself, and he and the Spanish Consul brought it to us with biscuits. We stayed an hour with Mrs. Peck. She showed us a beautiful collection of photographs [3v] from Rome which she had just visited and with her was one of the Trinité.<sup>25</sup> Again, a small detail that will show you how they have been good to us. The day after our arrival a gentleman came asking for us, and he realised that we only had one chair though there were three beds; he went right away and got his chair and gave it to us. There will be other details of this kind to tell, but we must stop.

Quarantine lasted only forty eight hours and it was decided that we would go to Montevideo this Thursday evening with Mr & Mrs. Serantes, and the Spanish Consul who had the goodness to offer us seats in his little steam boat. But the boat arrived too late and we decided to wait until the following day to leave as Our Lord had desired to keep us. There was a poor old man among the emigrants who was a prisoner during the voyage because he had stolen clothing from other emigrants. He felt very sick, but the doctors on board let him off the ship without saying anything, fearing that if they had declared him, Quarantine would have been prolonged for all; everybody was worried because if the sick man had died they would not have let us go. Fortunately we declared on the second day that the sick man was not contagious. Madame Kavanagh and I wanted to obtain permission to visit the old man, but it was only on the Friday morning that we managed to see the doctor. We were allowed permission as volunteers and we used it. The poor man recognised us straight away and seemed to be happy to see us. Madame Kavanagh talked with him in Spanish and read some prayers to him which he repeated after her with a sign of devotion. Finally, he made a long act of contrition without any help and in a heartfelt manner. We gave him a rosary and Madame Kavanagh made in his favour the sacrifice of the crucifix that his father and mother held with their hands at the time of death. We also gave him some scapulars and medals and before leaving we hung an image of the Sacred Heart on the walls near his bed and another of St Joseph. The [4v] domestic who cared for him told us that he was a member of the Sacred Heart Confraternity, and we offered him a scapular and a medal which he accepted with great recognition.

Several times when speaking with Madame Kavanagh the poor sick man showed compassion and he kissed his rosary and crucifix and promised that if he recovered he would lead a better life. A few hours later, the Lazaretto doctor, again told Madame Kavanagh that she had won a soul for heaven. She at least succeeded in getting him to make a fervent act of

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<sup>25</sup> The L' Église de la Trinité-des-Mons, Piazza di Spagna, Rome.

contrition and this has been a consolation for us which compensated for all our fatigue and all the worries of the voyage.

At one thirty we left Flores in a small steamer with Mr & Mrs. Serantes and three maids. The other passengers numbering 500 left a few hours later and for them there was only one steamer. Madame Peck had left the previous day, and the other ladies and gentlemen who Madame Serantes said would be our companions after Quarantine to our arrival in Buenos Aires. On arrival at Montevideo, Monsieur had our luggage moved on board the *Rividavia* and also gave us the chance to spend a few hours with the Sisters of Charity, one of whom is a religious and a cousin of Madame Kavanagh. The good sisters received us with open arms like their sisters in Rio [de Janeiro]. The Superior had us served a sumptuous meal, to make us forget as she put it, the privation of Flores Island; all the community gathered to say farewell, the Commissionaire also; and students accompanied us to board the steamer *Rividavia* where Mr & Mrs. Serantes were already awaiting us. They had arranged everything for us and we only had to rest. It was difficult to sleep that last night at sea, but nevertheless we went to bed for the whole duration of the trip. By six o'clock in the morning we arrived and one hour later the Port Captain came to fetch us, but before leaving our good friends, Mr & Mrs Serantes promised to come to see us at Riobamba and meet with Mother Augusta. Several friends came to see us when we arrived – Mr Mulhall<sup>26</sup> and his two daughters,<sup>27</sup> old students of ours at Mount Anville;<sup>28</sup> Mrs Galbraith<sup>29</sup> and her niece, her brother and grandfather as well as a great number of cousins of Madame Kavanagh.

Due to the kindness of Mr Mulhall who took us through Customs, we were soon at the door in Riobamba and it was as if all hearts were open to receive us. My Mother and all the community were there, and never in my

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<sup>26</sup> Edward Thomas Mulhall (1832-1899) founder of the first English language newspaper *The Standard*, Buenos Aires, 1861, and co-edited with his brother Michael George Mulhall. See Eduardo Coghlan, *Los Irlandeses en la Argentina – su Actuación y Descendencia*, Buenos Aires, 1987, pp.687-690.

<sup>27</sup> E. T .Mulhall was married to Sarah Eliza 'Eloisa' Eborall Redding a native of Litchfield and they had eleven children – three girls and eight boys; María Beatriz Mulhall Eborall, Elisa Dora Mulhall Eborall (second and third eldest respectively) and Catalina Mulhall Eborall, (b. 1877) ninth eldest. A search of the Mount Anville secondary school registers has found no mention of evidence of any pupils with the surname Mulhall Eborall

<sup>28</sup> Mount Anville secondary school, Goatstown, Dublin 14, established 1853 by sisters of the Society of the Sacred Heart in the former residence of William Dargan a powerful railway tycoon.

<sup>29</sup> Possibly the wife of William G. Galbraith, a lawyer, practising at 36 San Martin, Buenos Aires. See Mulhall's "1885 City of Buenos Aires Directory" in Jeremy Howat website [www.argbrit.org](http://www.argbrit.org) accessed 04/06.2012.

life will I forget that moment of joy and sorrow. It was impossible to talk to each other, but we didn't need to - our hearts understood so well! With her usual courtesy, my Mother had arranged for second Mass to be said at nine o'clock and we arrived on time to attend. The morning went by quickly. Someone had prepared the best room, and there, like in the refectory were bouquets and words of "welcome" – we went from surprise to surprise that all showed that we had arrived at this side of the ocean, to mothers [5r] and sisters as tender and devoted as those that we had left forever by love for the one who is the link of all our hearts. Tonight, a lady who is a great friend of the house came and took us by car to Almagro<sup>30</sup> where we spent time, a great evening, with my Mother Augusta.<sup>31</sup> Our arrival seemed to be a great event for all. Here, like at Riobamba, the greatest happiness was to have news from the Mother House. If we could see our dear Reverend Mother, the joy with which we learned all the smallest details of this dear centre; we are so happy to know that you are in good health, to learn that our Reverend Mothers are doing well and also that Mother Désoudin<sup>32</sup> has been able to visit Nancy. All that concerns the Mother House interests us and it seems that the further we are away the more we are united and the greater we love her, this house where we received nearly all our graces.

My Mother Augusta seemed to have lost weight, but she follows the common life and I often asked myself how could she carry out all the duties that overwhelm her? She doesn't seem to have a moment to rest and despite the added work load she is always serene, and always with a smile on her lips. The Mulhalls told me that it would be difficult to have an idea of her influence because it is so felt so widespread. Protestants as well as Catholics respect and love her and come from everywhere to see and consult her, and with all this she directs everything inside and is the heart and soul of all recreations that are as joyful as possible. What struck me right away on arrival, is the joy, and the unity that is in the house and the entire devotion of each sister.

She becomes your consolation as I would like and hope; I only have to follow the examples that I constantly have under my eyes, and I don't need to tell you my dear Reverend Mother that it is here that I will concentrate. My Mother Augusta told me to rest this week, but next week I hope to

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<sup>30</sup> Almagro - today a mostly middle-class suburb of Buenos Aires. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century it turned from being a centre for dairy farming and became an industrial centre and at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century expanded rapidly with the influx of Basque and Italian immigrants.

<sup>31</sup> Mother Augusta Fitzgerald.

<sup>32</sup> Mother Juliette Desoudin, a French national and one of the Assistants of the Superior General at this time.

begin looking after a class of little ones. I have already started to study Spanish and in my next letter I hope to tell you that I understand the reading in the community and in the refectory. I probably will have some difficulties getting used to the little ones, because they don't resemble Normalists, but I am decided to accept the difficulty and the problem that without a doubt may come, and to immerse myself in that new life, to find and to love everything about my new country and my new children. Yesterday I made the acquaintance of the Angers Congregation<sup>33</sup> and all the companions resembled each other, and it must be said that the 'pensione' motto is one of charming simplicity. It was a day off and they have asked me to see them. We have discussed, together with our houses in England, Ireland and Paris and they have prayed to ask me for a special blessing and for teacher Madame Collins and this is what I happily promised. Also requesting my dear Reverend Mother to bless me and to remember me in front of Our Lord. More than ever I feel like your child and the grand and unique desire of my heart is to show myself humble and entirely devoted to Our Lord and my mothers.

Your obedient and humble child,  
Annie Finlay RSCJ.

## **Document 2**

Santiago, Chile<sup>34</sup>

17 January 1896

Very Reverend Mother,

What ever I wrote lately I dare doing again in the hope that I some details of our journey across the Andes interest you. Five of us left Buenos Aires on Friday evening, the 3 January at half past ten, three religious and two postulants. The [railway] sleeper coaches are like those in Europe – we had two compartments and our co-travellers were good and like us had no complaints. From Buenos Aires to San Luis where we arrived on Saturday evening, the countryside which we crossed was a vast plain without a tree, a hill or even a little bush except in the neighbourhood except vacant houses separated from one another by wire; from time to time we saw large herds of wild horses, cattle and sheep. Men are rarely seen on foot but normally one or two on horseback; nothing else was seen, only the emptiness of uncultivated land and a few lagoons; and not even a piece of cultivated land.

In the other part of the Republic there are vineyards and farms cultivating oats and other grains, but we only saw farms with sheep. In general the

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<sup>33</sup> La Congrégation de Angers – the Good Shepherd Sisters.

<sup>34</sup> The original document written on A5 size paper (32 pp) is in the General Archives of the Society of the Sacred Heart, Rome.

railway stations are small and the houses are single story and in that location a house invariable is a kind of boutique used like a multi functional post office but I didn't see a parish church or chapel. At Mercedes Station we hoped to stay half an hour with four of the sisters coming back from Buenos Aires who had been postulants in our small convent of Santa Fé, but we were an hour late and the two trains stopped only for a few minutes and we looked at each other and reciprocated greetings. When I heard my name behind me, it was Rev. Fr Reverten, a Jesuit and first Rector of Salvador College in Buenos Aires, since he was Rector at Santiago who used to return to the Argentine Republic. He gave us the news of our Mothers and amicably promised to tell Buenos Aires that up until then our journey was going well. From San Luis to Mendoza where we had to stop for 24 hours the landscape is varied, but we were not aware as the five of us were asleep.

We got up at 4.30 the following Sunday morning and started our meditation with the view of the snow covered Andes. The surroundings of Mendoza are occupied with vineyards, wine being the principal commercial business. Due to frequent earthquakes (the town was destroyed in 1861) the houses are all very low, built of adobe brick and one floor high. At the station we met Señor Cornere and a servant of the Good Shepherds<sup>35</sup> who were waiting for us since 4.30. We were at their monastery in twenty minutes and were very affectionately received as if we belonged to their order. The Mother Provincial who lives in Buenos Aires did write to tell them that we would be stopping here and telegraphed to tell the time. Mother Superior was in Buenos Aires, but the old student Mother Assistant of Santiago literally did not know what to do with us. It seems to me as if I was seeing old teachers. Mass was delayed for an hour, we began and we had a touching sermon on the gospel of the day – the Flight into Egypt – then beautiful music was played in our honour, our Sister played the harmonium and another the violin and all sang admirably. I have never before been cloistered or confined with so many grills, the Mother said the office was entirely new for her. The Sisters took us into the choir and gave us their cells because the convent is small and not commodious. Mother Assistant had breakfast and also dined with us while I noticed that the whole community was around to serve us. We visited various categories of penitents, some together, children of 11 to 12 and none older than 20; there are about 80 in total. A class had prepared a celebration which touched us and wished us the blessing of the child Jesus on our journey as well as wishing us a Happy New Year. Some of the children sang admirably but in an instance we recognised those who had been in the convent for some time.

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<sup>35</sup> The Good Shepherd Sisters have had a foundation in Mendoza since 1886; their work has been for the marginalised, and the poor with priority given to the rehabilitation and re-education of women prisoners.

The mother of two previous students, including one Elise Alvarez were brought up in Brighton and at Marmontiers,<sup>36</sup> came to see us, and I received her behind the grill; this seemed so pleasant because I didn't know how to shake her hand. Nothing would describe the beauty of those religious. The day after tomorrow, Epiphany Day, they had the community Mass at five o'clock with music and this was for our intention. Fortified by communion, responsible for the substantial proof of the goodness of those religious, accompanied by Señor Cornere and the servant we left again at six o'clock. The railway station is a good distance from the monastery. The first class coach was like those third class we have at home, except they had padded seats. All the travellers were together but we managed to be at one end and turning our back we were like exactly at home. This contrasted with the scenery of the first part of our journey. It would be impossible to describe the magnificence and grandeur of the panorama that unfolded before our eyes; the snow covered the summits of the mountains, and further down there were rocks of all varied colours. Streams descending from the mountain formed cascades that entered the Mendoza river and displaced the railway track. Enormous layers of rock seem ready to come tumbling down. All this spectacle filled us with admiration for God's sublime creation; one of the travellers told us it is impossible to cross the Andes without having the feeling of God's presence and power. The railway track doesn't go to Punta de Vacas, and it is proposed to dig a tunnel through the mountain; this would remove the necessity of using mules and coaches. The opening of the tunnel is made on each side, but the work is interrupted as none of the Governments seem to want to continue. Chile especially fears losing a lot of Valparaiso commerce. Up until now our journey didn't have any difficulties as our very good friends prepared everything for us from Buenos Aires and it was the same at Mendoza. But here at Punta de Vacas we were entirely alone. This station like all others in the Cordillera consists of two or three refuges with roofs made of zinc to prevent them being destroyed during winter where nobody lives there. On one side there were bedrooms whereas on the other side there was the living room, the kitchen and a few of the poorest apartments. While we were asking ourselves how to get a car, the boss (jefe) came to greet us in an amicable manner and asked us for news of Mother Fitzgerald. I recognised in him the Foreman supervisor who five years ago had arranged our transfer from Rio Bamba to Santa Fé. Reverend Mother had been very good to him as well as the other employees and we benefited of this memory which she left. He gave us orders so that we could sleep in a car – it's a kind of open tank, which I think people call a "break" in Ireland; and he decided that the caravan guide a very handsome Chilean will accompany us. As all the other travellers were men, we were very content with the arrangement. Our Foreman friend

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<sup>36</sup> Marmontier les Tours on the banks of the Loire.

recommended us as well to the employee, so that we could help. The car was pulled by three mules, the track just five metres wide and generally zigzagged on the flank of the mountain, with deep precipices on one side and a wall of rock on the other. I would often close my eyes so that I did not see the horrible things that scared us, which the mules had to go through, but they were very sure footed, going slowly with one foot forward and firmly. Our good guide said the names of the places in front of which we were passing, are Mount Cactus because of the variety of those plants that grow there, and the Mount of Penitents,<sup>37</sup> which from afar looks like a church with some effigies, windows and a porch; all of this being the result of water action. Another hill is shaped like a truncated cone. From some distance, Punta de Vacas is a natural bridge, the Inca bridge<sup>38</sup> forming part of a rock that the water has eroded from below and is covered with stalactites of various colours. Finally we saw the bridge itself even though we were scared after crossing it because there were extra inches to spare. Nearby there were Inca sulphur springs and we were disturbed by the poor surroundings. Our car climbed up for four hours and as we were getting close to the summit of the mountain, all traces of vegetation disappeared. Finally we arrived at the Posada de Las Cuevas<sup>39</sup> where we spent the night. There the landscape had enormous masses of black stone rising up on either side and covered with snow which we could touch by hand. The Argentine postulant had never seen snow. I hadn't seen it for twelve years. The cold was intense, we were wrapped up in our shawls and because our provisions hadn't yet arrived and we had to go to table d'hote, our caravan had seventeen people (excepting us) all men, very polite and respectful. The service certainly wasn't the best, but we were happy to have a cup of hot tea with condensed milk, the one and only we could find in those mountains. We were offered the best room but we preferred the worst in the neighbourhood so we could be entirely alone. The host gave us the key. There was a pious old Chilean woman to sleep in the room next to ours. An earthen floor, four bare walls, a zinc roof with a small hole for light, four steel beds and palliasses and two wash hand basins made from old boxes – such is the entire description of our bedroom, but like we were saying it was better than the stable in Bethlehem. But we were happy to spend the night. Because of the intense cold we stayed half dressed putting on all we had. At three o'clock we heard the muleteers starting to prepare the mules, putting on blinkers, then

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<sup>37</sup> Mt Penitentes (4350m) is near Aconcagua; the name comes from the curious forms which ice on the side of the mountain has and which reminds viewers of "penitents" climbing the mountains or praying on their knees.

<sup>38</sup> The Inca's Bridge is a natural arch that forms a bridge over the Vacas river near Las Cuevas.

<sup>39</sup> Las Cuevas (3,151m) in the Departamento Las Heras, Mendoza is close the Argentine/Chilean border.

they left without a guide and they must know the track very well as they are always on time with the baggage. At four o'clock we got up, washed and it didn't take long. There was a special recommendation - that crossing La Cumbre, it was advisable not to wash your hands or face and to carefully cover your hands. Despite all those precautions one of ours arrived with her face like a ripe apple and all her skin was frozen. Some hot tea was served to us after a short and fervent prayer, then came the terrible moment to mount the mules. Three of my companions were good equestrians. The fourth, before having tried, did not show too much fear; we were told that there was a kind of chair instead of the ordinary saddle and a muleteer guided those so who didn't know how to ride a mule.<sup>40</sup> The mules were as tall as the horses with an ordinary woman's saddle, and each traveller had to ride for herself; it was simply horrendous to take my first riding lesson to cross the Andes at five o'clock in the morning and at my age, and this seems impossible; but obedience makes miracles. I mounted and what is more marvellous is that I kept my seat for five hours during the journey. Our attire was most amusing, and so too was our religious clothing together with all our winter clothes. But how much was added! Like Amazons I had a big quilt wrapped around me and held together with safety pins; our thick blue veils were topped with a large straw hat attached under a coat with black ribbons; we were funny caricatures but nobody made fun of the one next to me. It seemed that we struggled going up along the wall for half an hour, I will never forget this. We had to keep our mule, and I simply held the mule with both hands always looking ahead of me and never stopping for an instant to pray. We halted for a few minutes at La Cumbre and again I was flabbergasted seeing no road in front of us. Now we were entering Chilean territory and someone shouted at us that the position was too critical to show enthusiasm, the descent is considered like the most tiring and the most perilous part of the journey lasting three and a half hours and from time to time there is a marked path but most often there is no trace, and the ground is covered with sand and stones. I didn't see the landscape during that perilous journey except that which was just in front of my mule. I didn't dare look on my right nor to the left especially in the descent because the path zigzagged and there was always a precipitous drop on one side. Near the summit we constantly came across snow cuttings, half frozen streams, torrents, and further down the mules had to cross rivers – there were no precipices and we had less to fear. About eleven o'clock we reached Jumeal Station, very miserable but we were immensely happy because the worst of the journey was finished. And we heard one of those men saying to another what a happy journey we've done! No accident, no falling off and however they knew how to ride a horse; but there was one who evidently didn't know more than me, because he held his mule by both hands as I myself did.

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<sup>40</sup> The text says "horse" rather than mule which is what is meant.

He seemed worried all the time, and I couldn't stop myself watching all the time as he was the last one and consequently near me. In passing by a valley his colleague asked him why he didn't speak like the others? Each one has his own serious way of answering. At Jumeal we stayed about two hours and we had lunch. There everything was perfectly clean and well served.<sup>41</sup> Our journey from Juncal to Salto del Soldado once again zigzagged around the mountain and close to the Aconcagua River, this was very enjoyable. This time, we were in a covered car pulled by four mules. The landscape is magnificent perhaps less extended, but quite varied, and we saw some very beautiful flowers with vivid colours, after which I thought of Wordsworth and how much botany teachers and natural historians would have been pleased. At the Customs all travellers, except us, had their suitcases opened and examined. All that belonged to us went through and we were the first to arrive at Salto del Soldado. That station takes its name from a deep ravine into which the soldier, it is said, during the War of Independence jumped from the top of the mountain to another and managed to save his life. Then we took the train going through several tunnels but it doesn't change until Rosa de los Andes. From there to Santiago the railway follows the course of the river which crosses a fertile valley bordering the mountains. What is stunning in this landscape, is that each bit of land is cultivated; I was stunned to see fields of corn and barren rock above. The people of Chile seem polite and cordial. We played with two small boys who asked us "Madrecita do you need anything?" "Madrecita please give us a medal?" At Buenos Aires the affectionate form is less used, but here it is prodigious. At the station Lai-Lai we changed for the last time and at half past ten we reached Santiago. The station was lit by electric light, so that it looked as if we were in daylight. The domestics were waiting with two cars and after half an hour we were at home safe and sound and hopefully happy to be there. Our Reverend Mother Vicar who was worried about our journey and wanted to wait for us but fortunately Mother Assistant prevented her and we were glad because otherwise we would have regretted that our Reverend Mother should have seen us so fatigued. We only looked at the good things that had been prepared for us and thanked Mother Assistant for her kindness. We were unable to sleep as we were so tired, but in a few moments we felt perfectly reunited, and I think nevertheless that our journey through the Andes did us good though we didn't have any envy to recount for the moment. As a consolation awaiting us we were on the third day of the Forty Hours Adoration "the Jubilee" we call it here. We were able to attend High Mass and in the evening the Blessed Sacrament procession. The 66 Normalists retreat took place at that time. They were quite edifying and kept a rigorous silence the eight days. The pious Spanish tradition is to wear long black sleeves that cover the head and body is still in use in Santiago. We don't see a hat or bonnet in church.

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<sup>41</sup> Here the calligraphy changes, and the text continues in another hand.

The third day after our arrival our Rev. Mother Vicar had the goodness to invite Rev. Mother Fitzgerald to spend the day with us. It was a great joy for us to see this Rev. Mother, but she was considerably diminished; we found her so tense and so aged, more or less the same way as we saw her previously, except her sanctity was more visible than ever. On the contrary I never saw Rev. Mother Vicar so well. From 5.30 in the morning to 8.30 in the evening she presides over community exercises, never missing a meeting except when we go out; she coughs and moves his right arm with difficulty, but she has eyes on everything, and is the life and soul of our recreations. We can't find a better account of a happier community and where there is an atmosphere of peace and fervour that elevates hearts towards God. I fell like a spoilt child and rejoice to stay here for a few more weeks to make my retreat before going to Valparaiso, my last destination. Counting the postulants there are two in the Novitiate and another will soon come from Buenos Aires. The house is like the community, very simple, enjoyable and very religious. There are nine yards surrounded by houses but do not have more than two stories probably because of earthquakes and it is for the same reason that they are built of wood, and the roof covered in zinc. The ceiling<sup>42</sup> and walls painted in light blue. The doors and windows and gallery columns in white. Instead of curtains to keep out the sun there are quantities of plants covered with leaves that prevent and light rays getting in.

In the vegetable garden there are two small beautiful chapels – one dedicated to St Joseph and the other to Our Lady of Sorrows under which is the crypt. It was a great consolation for me to visit the tomb of our Rev. Mother du Reousier, Rev. Mother Alentado and several other Mothers that I got to know and live in South America. Among them Mother Kavanagh one of my companions on the voyage twelve years ago. The climate here is delightful, never too hot, and always fresh in the evening and in the morning. If sometimes there are few earthquakes there is however no torrential rain, nor flies nor coloured insects, which are nearly invisible and abundant in the Argentine Republic, especially in summer in plants. They introduce themselves under the skin and form a small inflamed lump that becomes a sore. There is only one way for them which is to keep away from the garden and plants. I now understand what a tremendous sacrifice this must be for our Mothers and Chilean sisters to come to Buenos Aires.

My letter has become quite long. I wrote in the hope to interest you and Rev. Mother and perhaps also my dear Mothers and Sisters of England and Ireland that I always remind myself with recognition and affection.

In C[hrist] Jesus my very Rev. Mother.

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<sup>42</sup> The word ceiling is deleted in the text.

I am your humble and obedient daughter  
A. Finlay RSCJ.

*“Traduction del Anglais.”*<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> This note at the end of the text indicates that the original document (no longer extant) was written in English.