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Fr. Fahy with his tall hat (c.1860s)
(*Sinsinawa Dominican Archives, Wisconsin, USA,*
Cloran/Fahy Papers, DS8000, Box No.4A, F15)

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(11 January 1805 - 20 February 1871)*

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Fr. Anthony Fahy O.P.^[1]

By Edward Walsh

But true hearts will treasure the name of him, [2]
And God's self will measure the fame of him,
When Old Ireland will never hear shame of him,
On the day of all days.

Apostle prized from Patrick's land
From Domnick's order sprung,
He came – our father's guide and chief
When this free land was young.

He came to bear their faith afield
To shed its light around,
That hope and love of Patrick's God
In Gaelic hearts abound.

Nor power nor wealth until his death
Did Father Fahy win,
But humble mien and simple faith
And duty daily done.

Down to the last grim sacrifice
When Plague shut out the sky,
He laid his life – as Dom'nick's son
Knew how to dare and die.

Our pride it is he took his stand
On Obligado's [3] day
To head our Father for the land!
(*iViva Rosas! iViva Rosas!*) [4]
With Fr. Fahy say.

His heart was large his means were small
To do a giant's toil,
He dug the garden, built the wall
And tilled the prairies soil.

He gave us name and nation here
And made this home our own,
We love him, sing him, keep his tryst
To reap the seed he's sown.

Conor Mac Nessa [5]



P. Fahy street in Capilla del Señor.

In any field of endeavour few reach the greatest heights of achievement. Fewer still transcend even that fame to touch the renown possessed by Canon Anthony Fahy O.P. Between 1850 and the 1870's everybody in Buenos Aires knew who he was. He had ease of access to bishops, presidents, politicians, newspaper proprietors and editors, bankers, ship owners, merchants and farmers. And if he had the entree to the great of society, then Irish immigrants and the many not so greats of society had access to their chaplain. He was famous, but totally unaffected by fame. Both catholic and non-catholic alike respected his integrity, honesty and total lack of humbug. Direct of speech, almost gruff when he enquired of all who came to see him "who are you and what do you want", he was not much given to idle chit chat or gossip. He was a man of God, ever practical and always assiduous in caring for his far flung flock. And they in turn loved and revered the humble friar who was everybody's priest – Irish and Argentine alike. Today he is still remembered in Argentina, two hundred years after his birth on 11 January 1805, by the Instituto Fahy, Moreno, which bears his name and a street in the Federal Capital named in his honour.

His extraordinary work and shining priestly zeal had not gone unnoticed and in recognition of his long service to the Irish Community he was named an Honorary Canon of the Cathedral of Buenos Aires by President Bartolomé Mitre. A totally unique honour for a foreigner and Dominican friar.

Anthony Fahy wrote no poetry, and this somewhat forgotten item (written by Conor Mac Nessa, alias Patrick McManus, [6]) may not be the greatest of verse, but it does highlight the virtues of a very remarkable priest who is an emblematic figure of Irish emigration and settlement in Argentina.

There are many myths and legends concerning Anthony Fahy and as a Hollywood scriptwriter wrote "when the truth becomes legend print the legend." But what are the facts about Fahy's death as this is a fascinating example of how historical myth is fabricated. Anthony Fahy died of heart attack on 20 February 1871, and the newspapers reported that he died of yellow fever owing to his attending a sick Italian woman. This was widely reported as fact and most people accepted that he died of yellow fever. But the death certificate signed by two doctors, unequivocally states that "...he died from heart disease." [7] This writer had often heard and read that Anthony Fahy always wore a top hat, but never saw any evidence until finding one such photograph. [8]

Edward Walsh

Notes

[1] This poem, published in a six page A5 format booklet entitled *A Tribute to Father Fahy* was printed by Talleres Peuser and contains a 3¼" x 4½" photograph of Anthony Fahy O.P. dressed in black, holding a small open book in his right hand which is positioned just above his left hand. St Brigid's. Gaona, 1482 Flores, 31 August 1919.

[2] This four line verse is printed on the fronts-piece below the booklet title.

[3] Pastor Obligado (1818-1870) b.Buenos Aires, the son of Manuel Alejandro Obligado. A lawyer and first constitutional governor of Buenos Aires, he belonged to a prominent Porteño family and played an important role during the separation of Buenos Aires from the other provinces.

[4] Juan Manuel de Rosas (1783-1877) military and political leader of Argentina. Governor of Buenos Aires (1835-52) with dictatorial powers. His spies and secret police intimidated all opposition so that by 1840 few dared to oppose him. Overthrown at the battle of Caseros by Justo José de Urquiza, Rosas fled to England where he ended his days farming near Southampton (see John Lynch, *Argentine Dictator Juan Manuel Rosas 1829-52*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1981).

[5] Conor Mac Neassa (also spelt Mac Neasa) was one of a number of pen names used by Patrick MacManus.

[6] Patrick McManus (1864-1929) see Helen Meehan *The McManus Brothers, Patrick : (1864-1929), Seamus : 1868-1960* in *The Donegal Annual, Journal of the Donegal Historical Society*, No.46, 1994, pp.5-18; *Patrick McManus (1864-1929)* in *Sinsear*, No.8, 1995 pp.147-155; *The McManus Family of Rossylongan* in *Donegal Association Yearbook*, Dublin, 1998, pp.52-53.

[7] ThomasMurray, *TheStory Of The Irish In Argentina*, P.J.Kennedy & Sons, New York, 1919, Ch.XX, p.344.

[8] I am indebted to Pauline Ingram O.P. and Marjorie Buttner O.P. for giving me access to the Cloran/Fahy Papers at the Sinsinawa Dominican Archives, Sinsinawa, Wisconsin, USA.

* Edward Walsh is an independent scholar who lives in London. He wrote *An Irish Catholic Association Pilgrimage to Lujan, Province of Buenos Aires (1918?)* in: 'Collectanea Hibernica, Sources For Irish History' Vol. 42 (Killiney, Co. Dublin, 2000), pp. 242-244, and *The Irish in the Argentine Republic: John Cullen's 1888 Report*, in: 'Collectanea Hibernica, Sources For Irish History' Vol. 43 (Killiney, Co. Dublin, 2001), pp. 239-246.

Anthony Fahy of Loughrea
Irish Missionary in Argentina

By Michael Fahy *



Memorial bust of Fr. Fahy in St. Brigid's School,
Buenos Aires

The Irish community in Argentina glows in the memory of its first Chaplain, Fr. Anthony Fahy O.P. (1805-1871). Fr. Fahy was born in Loughrea, Co. Galway, where his family were proprietors of an extensive brewery on Barrack Street. He was ordained at St. Clement's College in Rome in 1831.

Having finished his theological studies, he left for the Dominican mission in Ohio, U.S.A, whence through broken health he was obliged to return to Ireland where he was appointed Prior of Black Abbey Convent in Kilkenny. In 1844 he was appointed by the Archbishop of Dublin to the Chaplaincy of the Irish in Argentina. He arrived there on his thirty-ninth birthday, 11 January 1844, aboard the *British Packet*.

From January 1844 until his death during the Yellow Fever epidemic of 1871, in Buenos Aires, Fr. Fahy ministered in the Argentine. In addition to acting as Chaplain to the large number of people - mostly from the Midlands - arriving during and after the famine, Fr. Fahy, as he himself wrote, acted as consul, postmaster, financial adviser, marriage counsellor, judge, interpreter and employment agent [1].

He strongly encouraged the newly arrived Irish whom he considered fit for the task, to move out onto the vast Pampas along the River Plate and set up as ranchers. In one letter home to Ireland, Fr. Fahy wrote:

'Would to God that Irish emigrants would come to this country, instead of going to the United States. Here they would feel at home, they would have plenty employment and experience a sympathy from the natives very different from what now drives too many of them from the States back to Ireland. There is not a finer country in the world for a poor man to come to, especially with a family. Vast plains lying idle for want of hands to cultivate them and where the government offers every protection and encouragement to the foreigner' [2].

He travelled hundreds of miles on horseback visiting his folk on the Pampas. They were far away, at long distance from each other, disseminated over a stretch of country along the rivers Plate and Paraná, two hundred and fifty kilometres in length and one hundred in breadth, out towards the "Guardia de Luján". This field of his labours is similar in some aspects to what he found ten years earlier in the Cincinnati

bishopric, but very different in language, customs and native population. He found suitable spouses and life partners for many of the young Irish men he met on these travels, by introducing them to marriageable young ladies from Ireland living in Buenos Aires.

Local folklore has it that when the supply of marriageable young ladies reaching the Argentine was not sufficient to meet the needs of his ever expanding flock, Fr. Fahy took the extraordinary step of having a large number of girls from his native Loughrea area and mostly from the parish of Killeenadeema, emigrate to the Argentine.

In 1848, Fr. Fahy secured a large house in Buenos Aires and set up the “Irish Immigrant Infirmary” to help finance victims arriving after a tiresome voyage of six weeks to three months. He then applied to the Sisters of Mercy, Baggot St., Dublin for help in running the hospital. On 24 February 1856 eight Sisters of Mercy arrived safely to a very cordial welcome [3]. When economic conditions improved this hospital building transformed into the charitable educational establishment known as “Saint Brigid’s College” under the direction of Mother McAuley’s Sisters of Mercy.

The Sisters of Mercy are a living memorial to the greathearted priest’s labours. He planted the community there and it has developed. The Mercy Sisters, besides conducting the St. Brigid’s College, own and maintain a commodious Irish Girls’ Home; have a large college - Mater Misericordiae Academy; and three other schools in the regional towns.

In 1854, Fr. Fahy sent a large sum of money to the college of All Hallows, Dublin for the education of six young men for his mission. The six newly ordained priests arrived in Buenos Aires in 1860. They included a Loughrea man Michael Connolly, son of Edward Connolly and Jane Monahan. He had been ordained sub-deacon in Dublin in 1859 and was ordained in Buenos Aires on 22 December 1860. He was then sent as a missionary to the Southern district.

Following their arrival, these young clergymen were for some time the guests of Fr. Fahy while getting acclimatized, and until he decided their future destination. In the interim they were learning Spanish, studying their new surroundings and, above all, receiving lessons from his experience and directions for their new ministerial life in Argentina - lessons and directions not to be found in books or in Ireland [4].

In other aspects the most important and praiseworthy memorial of the kindly Chaplain and certainly one of the most beneficial is ‘The Fahy Institute’. Set out in the “camp”, forty kilometres from the city, it is under the direction of the Palottine Fathers. It has a boarding capacity for two hundred students. It was built and is maintained by the St. Joseph’s Society. This institute is a practical realization of the boy’s college Fr. Fahy had anxiously striven to establish. In these two monumental buildings, ‘St. Brigid’s College’ and ‘The Fr. Fahy Institute’ children of Irish ancestry are boarded and receive free education.

Morally and historically all these educational and beneficent institutions are the continuation of the Fr. Fahy’s far-reaching undertakings and perpetual memorials of his burning zeal for the spiritual and temporal welfare of his beloved people.

In the summer of 1871 one of the most disastrous plagues ever experienced in South America, the Yellow Fever, struck the city of Buenos Aires, and it swept over 13,600 to their graves. Among the victims was the greatly beloved Fr. Anthony Fahy.

The leading Spanish language daily in the country at the time, *La Nación*, on the occasion of his funeral, contained a very eulogistic article by General Mitre, ex-president of Argentina. One paragraph reads:

There was in Buenos Aires a venerable priest, whom we may call the patriarch of the Irish colony. He was favourably known to all classes. We allude to Fr. Fahy... He was rightly considered the father and benefactor of his countrymen, to whom he devoted his time, labour and life, with disinterested self-denial enhanced by his admirable modesty. Of each and every one he was the advocate, benefactor, friend, guide and pastor. He won their esteem, love and gratitude by his consummate prudence, deep understanding, moral integrity and supreme self-sacrifice... He was one of those rare examples of complete self-denial devoted exclusively to the welfare of his fellow-creatures. He loved his neighbour better than himself... and finally fell a victim to his sacred calling... To honour the memory of the honourable Father Fahy is to honour the human race in the great and generous ideals that sometimes move it, and of which he was such a high and worthy representative’ [5].

Fr. Fahy is buried in the principal cemetery of the city of Buenos Aires, the Recoleta. The impressive memorial to his memory faces the monument of his countrymen and great friend Admiral William Brown to whom he administered the last rites on his deathbed, 27 January 1857 [6].

In July 1977 grateful past students of 'The Fahy Institute' donated a plaque to be erected in Loughrea Cathedral grounds as a token of their gratitude to Fr. Fahy's great contribution to education in their country. The plaque was taken to Loughrea by Br. Sean Hayes, a native of Powers Cross, Woodford, Co. Galway who was home from Buenos Aires for a chapter of the Irish Christian Brothers.

Michael Fahy
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Notes

- [1] Archives of Tallaght. Letters to Fr. Goodman, 28 December 1860.
- [2] Archives of All Hallows College, Dublin. Letter to the President, 2 July 1855.
- [3] Leaves from the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy, Vol. IV, p 118.
- [4] Archives of Tallaght. Letter to Fr. Goodman, 28 July 1863.
- [5] La Nación, 23 February 1871.
- [6] El Nacional, 29 January 1857.

A Chronology of Fr. Fahy
His Life and Work

This chronology has been written with notes kindly sent by Edward Walsh for the years 1805-1843, and with James M. Ussher's book for the remainder of Fr. Fahy's life (*Father Fahy: a Biography of Anthony Dominic Fahy, O.P., Irish Missionary in Argentina 1805-1871*, Buenos Aires, 1951). Edward Walsh's research is based on documents and letters in the archives of San Clemente, Santa Sabina, and Propaganda Fide, all of them in Rome, Sinsinawa Dominican Archives, Wisconsin, USA, and St. Mary's Tallaght, Dublin 24, Ireland.



1805: born in Loughrea, Co. Galway, son of Patrick a brewer of Barracks Street, Loughrea (11 January).

1828: clothed at Esker, receiving the religious name Dominic (4 August).

1829-31: studies in Rome (San Clemente). Receives all sacred orders at Latern Basilica between December 1829 and March 1831.

1831-33: studies in Rome (Minerva) and in Viterbo (La Quercia).

1833-34: at Rome (San Clemente by 30 April 1833) until departure for Ireland on 31 March 1834.

1834-36: in Somerset, Ohio and Kentucky, diocese of Cincinnati. Health already ruined by 11 October 1835.

1836: at Loughrea, recovering his health (September). Rector of pro-cathedral under bishop Coen of Clonfert.

1837: administrator at parish of Kilmoremy (Ballina), diocese of Killala, under Dr Francis O'Finan O.P. (February-April). Signs document as such on 16 February 1837 and O'Finan at Ballina regrets his departure before 27 May.

1837-1838: curate Loughrea parish, diocese of Clonfert.

1839 (June)-1842: prior of Black Abbey, Kilkenny.

1843: left Ireland for Argentina (September).

1844: arrives in Buenos Aires from Liverpool in the brig *Plata* (11 January).

1847: writes to the Archbishop of Dublin to recommend the Irish to emigrate to Argentina. At the same time, heads a committee to launch the Irish Relief Fund, which remits £411-1-10 to Dublin for the victims of the famine in Ireland.

1848: opens the Irish Immigrant Infirmary of Buenos Aires, primarily to provide refuge and nursing to the sickly newcomers. Eventually, the infirmary became a permanent hospital on a small scale for all who needed medical treatment.

1849: a negative article against Buenos Aires Governor Juan Manuel de Rosas is published in the *Dublin Review* (March). Fr. Fahy writes a letter to *La Gaceta Mercantil* to support Rosas and to express his 'gratitude towards this country and its Government.' He is thanked for his intervention by the State Congress.

1850: purchases a property in the outskirts of the city facing the streets now known as Riobamba and Tucumán, with the intention of raising thereon an important Irish Hospital.

1852: having arranged for Capilla San Roque on the corner of Defensa and Alsina streets in Buenos Aires (and immediately adjacent to Convento San Francisco) to be used by the Irish community, Fr. Fahy provides benches, an organ, a confessional and a pulpit. Every six months, he travels to the interior parishes of the province and, during five or ten days, he held stations in different districts to say Mass, administer the sacraments, and preach.

1853: arranges and pays for the expenses of six seminarians of All Hallows in Dublin to be especially prepared to act as Irish chaplains in Argentina.

1856: divides the territory into four chaplaincies, and each one is entrusted to a resident chaplain, with Fr. Fahy as their Dean or Vicare Forane. The Sisters of Mercy arrive in Buenos Aires (24 February). Fr. Kirwan is sent by Fr. Fahy to visit the Catholics residing in Falklands/Malvinas Islands.

1859: the Sisters of Mercy are in charge of the Convent, the School for Girls, the House of Mercy, the public Chapel and the Hospital.

1862: opens a school for boys, which is directed by Fr. Kirwan and Fr. Curran.

1863: All Hallow seminarians sponsored by Fr. Fahy are ordained and travel to Argentina. Fr. Thomas Carolan arrives in 1859 and is appointed later to the western chaplaincy. In 1860 Fr. James Curran lands and remains in the city. Fr. James Kirby arrives in 1860 but dies two years later. Fr. Michael Connolly is ordained in 1860 and is sent to replace Fr. Kavanagh in the southern district. Fr. Lergus Michael Leahy arrives in 1862 and is appointed to Carmen de Areco, and Fr. Patrick J. Dillon arrives in 1863 and is sent to Merlo.

1864: Fr. Fahy and Fr. Eduardo O'Gorman are named Honorary Canons of the Cathedral Church of Buenos Aires by President Bartolomé Mitre (19 May).

1865: a committee of Irish residents and others offer £600 to Fr. Fahy to buy his personal house. He hands to money over to the Sisters of Mercy. The Irish Hospital of Buenos Aires is equipped with an additional wing in Riobamba and Viamonte streets, including a ward, dispensary, kitchen and eight rooms.

1867: six new Irish chaplains are incorporated to the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires, including Fathers Patrick Lynch, Samuel O'Reilly, Thomas Mulleady, Felix O'Callaghan, John Baptist Leahy, and Edmund Flannery (arrived in 1868). Their studies at All Hallows were financed by Fr. Fahy.

1868: directly and through his chaplains and the Sisters of Mercy, Fr. Fahy provides important services to the community during the cholera outbreak.

1871: dies of a heart attack during the yellow fever outbreak (20 February). His remains are buried in the diocesan clergy vault of Recoleta cemetery, and later removed to a monument built by Earley sculptors of Dublin.

