

FRATER JOHN MICHAEL MCDONALD, 1865-1939

By the Rev Anthony Dressel, O.Carm.

The Sword, January 1940

ON WEDNESDAY, September 6, 1939, word was received from the House of Providence, Buffalo, New York, that Frater John Michael McDonald, brother of the late Rev. Ignatius McDonald, had died early in that morning from a stroke of paralysis. To many of our Province Frater John was not known. His unfortunate sickness made his life in every respect of the term just a mere shadow.

He was born of Patrick McDonald and Anna Delany in Anamult, Kilkenny County, Ireland, on December 11, 1865. He came to this country with the intention of joining the Carmelites in the fall of 1886. Both he and his brother, Father Ignatius, had already finished their college courses before coming to America. Hence each of them was admitted to the novitiate shortly after arrival. Frater John entered the novitiate in February, 1887, and made his profession on February 29, 1888; and on the day, when Frater John was professed, Father Ignatius entered the novitiate. A third brother who had also intended to join the Order was denied entrance to the country at the Port of New York because of physical unfitness. The McDonalds were nephews of the old Father Theodore McDonald.

Soon after his solemn profession Frater John was overtaken by a serious nervous disorder; and in 1891, during the priorship of Father Louis Guenther, becoming totally deranged in mind he was placed in an institution for mental cases. For almost fifty years — a lifetime for most people — he remained corporally sound but mentally a child with no notion of responsibility. It stands as a tribute to the Carmelite Order that throughout these long years he was supported and maintained although many did not know him any more and most of the brethren had never seen him. In fact, when the first break came about a year ago, the Prior of Niagara Falls did not even know that there was such a man and had to get the details from the Sisters at the hospital.

Frater John made his novitiate under the late Very Rev. Anastasius Smits at the Falls and was also professed there. While he was himself, he was docile and good.

His body was brought to Mount Carmel College, Niagara Falls, on the same day on which he died, and there it was waked in religious manner until the funeral the next day, September 7, 1939, when a Solemn Requiem was sung by the Very Rev. Richard Haag, the Prior. He was assisted by Rev. Regis Donehue and Rev. Donald Costello. Frater John was then buried in the little plot beside the Church of Our Lady of Peace and next to the late Father Telesphorus Zazza. The whole community and the student body took part in the funeral services. Thus was laid to rest one who, at the time of his profession, gave promise of much, but God in His goodness clouded the brilliant mind and for fifty years the Order, as a kind mother, supported her unfortunate son.