

MICHEAL O'hANNRACHAIN



Michael O'Hanrahan

With Shamrocks in his lapel for St. Patrick's Day and his birthday

Politically aware from his early youth, O'Hanrahan became involved in some of the more radical nationalist campaigns of the day.

His writings brought him to the attention of Maude Gonne and Arthur Griffith and in 1903 he became involved with them in their campaign against the visit of King Edward VII to Ireland. His friendship with Griffith led him to join the newly-formed Sinn Féin political party founded by Griffith in 1905 to provide a focus for Irish nationalism. He also became a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. In November 1913 he was among the first to join the new Irish Volunteers, a military organization established by Irish nationalists. It included members of the Gaelic League, Ancient Order of Hibernians and Sinn Féin, and, secretly, the IRB who had organized the formation meeting. The Volunteers would be the main force to fight for Irish independence in the 1916 Easter Rising and, with the Irish Citizen Army, Cumann na mBan and Fianna Éireann, they formed the Irish Republican Army. The Volunteers were formed on 25 November, with their first public meeting and enrollment rally at the Rotunda in Dublin and O'Hanrahan was there. The stewards, who handed out application blanks, wore in their lapel a small silken bow the center of which was white, while on one side was green and on the other side orange and had long been recognized as the colors which the Irish Republican Brotherhood had adopted as the Irish national banner. Speaking at the rally was IRB member Patrick Pearse.

While expanding his nationalist activities and writings, O'Hanrahan authored two novels *A Swordsman of the Brigade* (1914) and *When the Normans Came* (published posthumously in 1918). He became an administrator on the Volunteers headquarters staff, was made quartermaster general of the Volunteers' 2nd Battalion where he and the 2nd Battalion Commandant, Thomas MacDonagh became close friends. It was as second in command of Dublin's 2nd battalion under Commandant MacDonagh and later third in command under Major John MacBride, that he fought at Jacob's Biscuit Factory throughout Easter week. Unfortunately, O'Hanrahan had a nasty accident in Jacobs when he tumbled down a flight of stone steps and received a concussion. Fearing that MacDonagh might send him to hospital, he played the incident down. His brother Henry O'Hanrahan also fought in Jacobs.

Over the following week the Rising continued until a general surrender was issued on April 30th. As a result many of the rebels were taken into custody by the Brits. In a memorandum sent by General Sir John Maxwell to British Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, the following description was provided for Michael O'Hanrahan: *This man was employed at the office of the Headquarters of the Irish Volunteers. He was one of the most active members of that body, took part in all their parades and was a constant associate with the leaders of the rebellion. He was arrested in uniform and armed, and there had been heavy fighting and casualties amongst the British troops in the neighborhood of the place where this man with others surrendered. He was an officer in the rebel army.*

March 17 is known the world over as St. Patrick's Day, but there are many other things that March 17th should be remembered for beside being the day that our patron saint died. For example, it is the date in 1776 that the Brits evacuated Boston during the American Revolution. Also, on that date in 1858, James Stephens and Thomas Luby founded the Irish Republican Brotherhood; in 1897, Bob Fitzsimmons defeated Jim Corbett to become Heavyweight Champion; in 1899, the first issue of *An Claidheamh Soluis* (*Sword of Light*), the nationalist newspaper edited by Padraic Pearse, was published; in 1900, the Montreal Shamrocks won the Stanley Cup; and in 1963, Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton was beatified. Most people are familiar with those events, but as much as any of them, there is one that also deserves to be remembered: March 17, 1877 was the birth date of Michael O'Hanrahan – probably the least known of all the 1916 Martyrs.

He was born in New Ross, Co. Wexford, to Mary and Richard O'Hanrahan, a veteran of the 1867 Fenian Rising. The family moved to Carlow where Michael was educated at Carlow Christian Brothers' School and Carlow College Academy. On leaving school he worked alongside his father in a cork-cutting business where he received a nationalist slant to his education. Immensely proud of his heritage, he joined the Gaelic League in 1898 and within a year founded the League's first branch in Carlow and became its secretary. He also taught Irish at the Catholic Institute and began to use the Irish form of his name – Micheál Ó hAnnracháin. By 1903 he was working in Dublin as a proof-reader for a Gaelic League publisher. He wrote articles in several nationalist newspapers, including *Sinn Féin* and the *Irish Volunteer*.

Michael O'Hanrahan was tried by General Courts Martial on 3 May 1916. To the charge that he *'did take part in an armed rebellion and in the waging of war against His Majesty the King,'* the witness, Major J.A. Armstrong, stated: *'I was present at St. Patrick's Park on 30 April. The British troops were fired upon and there were several casualties. The fire came from the neighborhood of Jacob's Factory. The same day a surrender was arranged. I saw the surrender being arranged by Mr. MacDonagh. Over 100 men arrived from Jacob's Factory as a result of the surrender and another large body arrived from the same direction as a result of the surrender. The accused belonged to one of the parties. He was in uniform and armed. After his removal to Richmond Barracks, he said that he was an officer.'* O'Hanrahan did not call any witnesses in his defense but stated: *As a soldier of the Republican army acting under the orders of the Provisional Government of that Republic duly constituted, I acted under the orders of my superiors.* O'Hanrahan was found guilty and sentenced to death.

The leaders of the Rising were all sentenced to death. Between 4:00 and 4:30 am on 4 May 1916, 39-year old Michael O'Hanrahan was murdered by firing squad in the stonebreaker's yard at Kilmainham Prison on the same day as Joseph Plunkett, who had married Grace Gifford just hours before; Willy Pearse, brother of Padraic Pearse and Ned Daly, brother-in-law of Tom Clarke. Their remains were buried in Arbour Hill Cemetery. A public outcry against the severity of the sentences for men whose only crime was love of country, turned to revulsion as sixteen of the sentences were hastily and brutally carried out. World opinion weighed in against the executions as well with the result that they were halted and converted to penal servitude for life. Many were sent to concentration camps in both England and Wales. Michael's brother, Henry, was sentenced to penal servitude for life, but became seriously ill requiring medical care and was let out of prison to die. His sisters Aine (Ciss), Maire and Eily remained involved in Cuman na mBan, the Ladies Auxiliary to the IRA.

The Co. Carlow museum has a section dedicated to their adopted son and in 1919 a Carlow Town based GAA club was founded taking Michael's name in honour of his role in 1916, while at his birthplace, the Wexford railway station is named in commemoration of O'Hanrahan, as is the road bridge over the River Barrow at New Ross.