

# Patrick Roger Cleary

## General Secretary G.A.A. 1889-1890

By Seamus J. King

Patrick Roger Cleary was born in Lagganstown, in the Parish of New Inn and Knockgraffoin the youngest of the five children of Roger Cleary and his wife Hanora (Ryan), and baptised in New Inn Church on March 14, 1857.

One account has him educated in Mungret College, but this is unlikely as Mungret was an agricultural school at the time and it is doubtful if Cleary's parents, who farmed a small holding, would be able to afford the fees of a boarding school. The nearby Rockwell College was founded in 1864 and was initially a seminary for the education of priests for the Scottish Mission. Maybe Patrick Roger had early intentions of the priesthood? Another possibility is that he was educated by the Christian Brothers in Tipperary Town. At any rate P. R. Cleary was fluent in the Irish language and knew Latin. There were still hedge schoolmasters in the area and he may have received his education from them.

However he was educated, he qualified as a teacher and was appointed Principal of Inch St. Lawrence National School in Caherconlish, a single-roomed school of the type that was common in rural Ireland at the time, with eighty pupils. He married a local girl, Minnie Dooley, whose father was a member of the R.I.C., in the Augustinian Church in Limerick on January 19, 1888. They had a son, Roger, who was born towards the end of the same year, and died at the age of six, and three daughters, Minnie, Nan and Kitty. There was a second son, Michael Patrick, who was born in Limerick and died at the age of three months.

### Involvement with the G.A.A.

The fact that P. R. Cleary and Minnie Dooley were married in the Augustinian Church in Limerick rather than in the Church in Caherconlish may reveal something of his relationship with the Parish Priest, Fr. William Cooney. A native of Coleman, Clerihan, Cooney was appointed P.P. of Caherconlish in 1869 and resigned from there in 1889. It seems that he didn't get on well with Cleary, possibly more to do with Cleary's involvement with the G.A.A. than his politics. Cooney was no lover of Archbishop Croke and the dislike was mutual. The Archbishop described him as 'rough, big and uncivilized, though strange to say, conscientious, sober and correct.' He was a staunch patriot and was prominent in the Tenant Right Movement, when he was curate in Moycarkey. It would appear that his issue with Cleary may have been his involvement in the G.A.A. more than anything else.

At any rate Fr. Cooney sacked Cleary from his job as principal of Inch St. Lawrence N.S., Caherconlish. After losing his job, Cleary was employed as an agent to the Prudential Assurance Company, which worked well as a cover for his secret job as a travelling I.R.B. organiser. His involvement in the I.R.B. helped his spectacular rise through the ranks of the G.A.A.

The G.A.A. was rent by divisions at the time, which had their origins in the political situation that existed. The 'New Departure', a move to bring about an alliance between the parliamentary agitators and the advocates of physical force, for a common national approach, was not fully accepted by the latter group and the conflicting views found their supporters within the G.A.A. The physical force group of Fenians gained dominance on the Central Council and some counties, including Limerick, had two county boards representing the different viewpoints, an official one and a breakaway band of people not prepared to accept the Fenian policy.

### Elected General Secretary of G.A.A.

At the convention of the 'official' county board in Limerick, in 1888, P. R. Cleary was elected secretary of the board, which indicated that his sympathies were with the Fenian side. He was a delegate to the Annual Congress of 1888, held in Thurles in January 1899, and was

elected general secretary of the Association. His fellow Limerick delegate, Anthony Mackey, was elected treasurer. At the following Annual Congress in November, Patrick Cleary was elected for a second term. He served until the next convention, when he was succeeded by Maurice Moynihan of Kerry.

His two years in office were beset with difficulties. A number of counties refused to recognise the Central Council and would not take part in the All-Ireland championships. However, Cleary succeeded in completing the intercounty championships although with reduced participation by counties, eight in both hurling and football. He organised the games and refereed some of them himself. Dublin beat Clare in the hurling final and Tipperary beat Laois in the football in 1899.

Cleary's refereeing achievements included being in charge of the Munster semi-final at Mallow on July 27, 1889, in which Cork defeated Kerry by 0-2 to 0-1. In the same year he refereed the two semi-finals of the Munster hurling championship in which Tipperary defeated Clare by 3-0 to 2-2 but lost the match on an objection, and Kerry beat Cork.

All in all Patrick Cleary proved to be an active secretary and, considering the limiting circumstance in which he was operating, his performance was satisfactory.

He continued to take an active interest in the G.A.A. in Tipperary and was acting chairman of the county board for a time in 1902. According to his obituary notice in the *Tipperary Star* 'His interest in the fortunes of the G.A.A. was maintained all through his life and until comparatively lately when the weight of years was telling on his splendid physique. He travelled to all the principal hurling and football events in the southern area and was a familiar figure at Croke Park.'

### Knew Tom Clarke

He was a member of the old Irish Republican Brotherhood and was on terms of warm personal intimacy with Tom Clarke and John Daly. He was no less ardent in the later phases of the National struggle and in 1920-1921. His house was raided several times by the Crown Forces. A man of fine personality and of no ordinary intellectual attainments, he was a most interesting conversationalist, while his warm good nature won for him the affectionate regard of everybody who knew him.

In May 1891 the Cleary family were living at Kilmallock and by mid-1892 were settled in Killarney, where it was noted by the Dublin Castle authorities that 'he was received by the leading suspects of the place.' When O'Donovan Rossa visited Kerry, P. R. Cleary took a prominent part in organising reception committees. Tragedy hit the family in April 1895 in Killarney, when his eldest child, Michael Patrick, died from valvular disease of the heart.

By 1895 the family were back in Limerick, living in Thomondgate, where his youngest son, Michael Patrick Cleary, was born. The move back to Limerick was seemingly dictated by his new job as an agent for a Bordeaux wine firm, in which capacity he was enabled to travel all over Ireland promoting the I.R.B. cause.

His wife, Mary Anne Dooley, died in St. John's Hospital, Limerick in September 1896 at the age of twenty-nine years, apparently of cancer, and he was left to bring up the three young girls by himself.

By 1901 he was back in Tipperary, living in the village of Bansha with his three young daughters and continued to move around the country as an agent for the French Wine Firm.

By 1911, he and his family had moved into Tipperary town, to Emmett Street, where he was now employed as a County Council land surveyor.

He designed the Maid of Erin statue, which was unveiled on March 10, 1907. He died at Emmett Street on July 8, 1933 and was interred in Kilfeacle Cemetery. A plaque to his memory was unveiled there by former G.A.A. president, Seamus Ó Riain, on August 15, 1990.