



The story behind the Grotto stone Commemorating

Fr. Michael Edgar Evelyn Shawe

And the dedication of our first church on May 1, 1853

Fr. Shawe was on his way to the dedication of our first church when he was thrown from his carriage and suffered serious injuries which caused his death. There is a large stone in the Grotto commemorating Fr. Shawe. After Fr. Gabriel Richard, no other Catholic priest was more loved and respected in Detroit than Fr. Shawe, whose history was romance and who was of noble blood.

At one point in his life after his mother's death he was elected in the noble military order of the Teutonic Knights of Germany. In order to become a Teutonic knight the postulant had to show his right to sixteen distinct quarterings of nobility in the heraldry of his country.

While commander of a squadron at Waterloo, before the battle ended he was found on the bloody field with the dead and wounded piled upon him three deep. Rescued with a faint spark of life, he was soon joined by his mother who spent three years nursing him back to health before she died.

Fr. Shawe buried his mother in their family vault in Devonshire, England. He retired from Military life determined to leave the world and become a priest. He entered the seminary in Paris where he remained until he received minor orders.

Invited by Bishop Brute to the missions of Indiana he was ordained on March 12th 1837. At the invitation of Fr. Sorin, founder of Notre Dame University, he became an English professor for a time at the fledgling university. Fr. Shawe spoke English, French and German. Later, with Fr. Sorin's blessing, Fr. Shawe came to Detroit to resume the duties of the priesthood in a city where his language abilities were sorely needed. He was received into the Diocese of Detroit on February 1, 1848 and served for a few months in Trinity parish where he ministered to the English speaking Catholics who were mostly Irish. When the first Cathedral of Detroit, St. Peter and Paul, was completed he was assigned there as assistant with Fr. Farnan. With his background in education, Fr. Shawe was best equipped to help Bishop Lefevere in a period of stress and trial for the Catholics in Detroit. The Native American Party had just broken down only to prepare the way for the vicious Know Nothing movement in 1852. The Catholics of Detroit and Michigan were calumniated and abused in the daily press and were desperately in need of defense. Despite the turmoil, Bishop Peter Paul Lefevere was launching his campaign to secure state aid for the parochial schools. Out of this crisis was born the Detroit Catholic Vindicator, whose first issue was on April 30, 1853, under the editorial guidance of Fr. Shawe. It was on this very day that Fr. Shawe suffered the serious injuries from which he died ten days later. The issue of Saturday May 14th would carry his obituary with the details on the accident that caused his death. Pare's History pg. 684- 686

Note: Fr Shawe after his arrival in Detroit in 1848 likely met and influenced Daniel Corby while at Trinity Parish. Trinity Parish was Fr. Shawe's first assignment after he was incardinated into the Detroit diocese. Daniel Corby was a founding member of our parish, who contributed to the construction of the 1852 church. After Fr. Shawe's accidental death in the spring of 1853, Daniel was immediately moved to send three of his sons to Notre Dame in the Fall of that year. Fr. Sorin, the founder of Notre Dame, soon noticed a priestly vocation in Daniel's son William. He encouraged him to enter the order of the Holy Cross. William continued on to the priesthood and was appointed a chaplain in the Civil War. He would become well known for the general absolution he gave before the Battle at Gettysburg. After the Civil War Daniel would become president of Notre Dame University for two terms. The Corby family also helped Fr. Vandendriessche to build the Grotto. There are three stones in the Grotto purchased by members of the Corby family. Lrd/2007

The Detroit Catholic Vindicator, May 14, 1853

"In the discharge of the sad and melancholy duty, we have to announce to our readers this week, the death of the Rev. Michael Edgar Evelyn Shawe, the well known and respected Pastor of the Cathedral of this city, and which occurred a few minutes past nine o'clock on the evening of Tuesday, at the hospital of the Sisters of Charity.

On the 30th of April last, Fr. Shaw left this city in a carriage, to attend the opening of the new church at Connor's Creek where he was to have officiated; but he had not gone beyond the limits of the city, before the horse, alarmed at some object, took fright and ran off, breaking the carriage and throwing the Reverend gentleman violently out on the road. At the time he was not considered dangerously hurt; but it put a termination to his eventful and well spent life.

Fr. Shawe was about sixty years of age. He was born in England, of a highly respectable family, and in early life received a commission in the British army and served with marked distinction in many of the sanguinary engagements that marked the Continental war. He was wounded at the battle of Berge-op-zoom, and afterwards at Waterloo. Returning home after the peace, he entered the Catholic College of Oscott, to prepare for the duties of a more Godlike calling-that of a Catholic priest.

He came to this country with the late Bishop Brute, and for many years officiated throughout Indiana, and proved a zealous and ardent missionary in the advancement of religion in those, then thinly populated regions. In many of the log-huts of the forest he had offered up the great sacrifice of propitiation, where Mass had never been celebrated before. And along the swamps of Wabash, he had brought the consolations of religion to many who had not seen the face of a clergyman for years.

Fr. Shawe came to Detroit a number of years ago, and to his untiring zeal and energy for the advancement of religion and the welfare of his people, many of the present religious associations owe their origins and existence. To his paternal care, the Guild of St. Peter and Paul, and the Guild of the Holy Trinity are indebted for formation and adoption of their order; and had it been the will of God that he should have lived, this paper, which was commenced under his editorial management, would have received the benefit of his highly cultivated mind and extensive erudition.

During Fr. Shawe's residence in this city he became endeared to all classes of the community, and while his burning eloquence will long echo in our ears, the recollection of his untiring zeal for our welfare calls us, between sorrow for our loss and glad hope of his great gain, to utter the last prayer for the faithful departed—"May He Rest in Peace."

Rev. Michael Edgar Evelyn Shawe is buried in Mt. Elliot Cemetery, Detroit. His tombstone bears a long inscription highlighting his life story.

Pare's History pg. 686- 687

Note: Fr. Shawe was also one of 3 examiners who approved of the ordination of Fr. Vandendriessche on December 21, 1850.

Grotto Archives #Ch010-1850