

Category: Personalities

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This man, Francisco Guasch Ferrer, who came to dominate several branches of science: Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Geology, Natural Sciences and Architecture, in addition to seven languages; who excelled in art and various sports, was born in a coffee plantation in Quivicán, on April 6, 1864.

Although it has been said that he is Catalan, perhaps due to the fact that his paternal ancestors are from Catalonia, from the oldest known, Don Grau (Gerardo) Guasch, noble and brave who took part in the conquest of Mallorca to Don Manuel José Guasch and Mascaró (1825) father of Francisco. His mother, Doña Beatriz Ferrer Toledo, belonged to a family from Quivicán, Havana province, Cuba. Francisco had four brothers, Isabel, María Josefa, Cándida and José Emilio. The latter, an outstanding sportsman who lost his life trying to swim across the English Channel.

The martyrology, in 1871, of a member of the family, Eladio González Toledo, the group of eight medical students, vilely shot, causes the family to move to Spain and establish residence in Barcelona, when Francisco was only eight years old. There he studied until he graduated, at the age of 20, from the University of Barcelona with a degree in Medicine and Surgery; he obtained his doctorate in Madrid. Afterwards, he specialized as an obstetrician in Paris with the famous Dr. Ternier. Although he obtains a place in the French capital, neither in this nor in Spain does he manage to practice Medicine.

In 1890, Agustina Udaondo Sabater, from Consolación del Sur in Pinar del Rio, was married to him, and lived Barcelona. Three children were born from his marriage in Spain: José Luis, Enrique and Fernando. The economic position of the family allowed him to develop his artistic and sports hobbies that he alternated with those of collector of stamps, insects, minerals and plants; likewise, he travelled to other countries in Europe, Asia and Africa, places where he obtained great prestige as a mountaineer and fancier; although he also practiced boxing, basquetball, shooting and fencing. He was an enthusiastic student of Natural Sciences and his cabinet was full of embalmed animals and collections of insects, butterflies and coleoptera, mainly.

He entered the Sociedad Colombófila de Cataluña in October 1892, according to the magazine, La Paloma Mensagera,* the official organ of this society. From that date until the end of 1898, he obtained infinity of first competitions, suffice it to name the "PRIMER PRIZE of the Federación Colombófila Española for having obtained the greater number of prizes of honor in the Sociedad Colombófila de Cataluña, this prize was given in Málaga on March 1st, 1895. Likewise, he presided from its creation until 1898, the year in which he decided to

return definitively to Cuba, the Annual Commission of Competitions of Catalonia. Not only was he an outstanding in pigeon breeding and as a contestant, but he also carried out in-depth studies of carrier pigeons, as can be seen in the article: Arthritis of the Wing, Tumour or Eing Disease published in the magazine La Paloma Mensajera. It is said that during his studies in France, he used only carrier pigeons as a means of communication with his girlfriend. For his outstanding work in the pigeon was given his surname to the name of a race of pigeons in Europe.(...)

Already settled in Cuba in 1900, he founded the first Sociedad Colombófila de Pinar del Río and the second in Cuba - there was only one in Havana. He also created the monthly magazine, Sport Colombófilo, made entirely by him, publishing its first issue on January 15, 1901. From what is known to date, it is the first pigeon fancier magazine published in Cuba; of which there is a copy in the National Pigeon Fancier Federation. Don Salvador Castelló attests to the creation of this Pinar del Río Society in the aforementioned book: Colombofilia Tomo II. The Cuban Federation recognizes it as the most outstanding of all times in Cuba, so the most valuable trophy in the country will bear his name.

Now, why did this man who belonged to a family with military and noble privileges in Spain, which even the Coat of Arms possessed, which enjoyed an outstanding social position, decide to abandon everything and settle in a province little developed in Cuba? According to the aforementioned book by Salvador Castelló, it is due to his medical career that he comes to live in America. Could it be that in the numerous trips he made to Cuba at the end of the 80's and in the 90's, he was able to assess the precarious situation of Medicine in Pinar del Río and this motivated him to put his vast knowledge and economic possibilities at the service of this province, where his sister Isabel already resided and where his beloved wife Agustina was born.

Another reason is offered to us by the magazine El Veterano, the Mambí newspaper in 1914, where the journalist expresses: " In addition to being an illustrious doctor and famous gynecologist, he has been accredited as a notable architect, poet at times and patriot all his life, he has been a constant conspirator for his country's freedom, distinguishing himself by his intimate love for what he calls his beloved Cuba. (...)

In August 1898 he announced in the magazine «Sociedad Colombófila de Cataluña», the sale of his famous dovecote for his intention to leave Spain. Already the reason for his stay in Spain had ceased to exist with the cessation of Spanish domination in his homeland. On the back of his medical degree appears to have been registered in Cuba, January

5, 1900, so he must have returned in 1899. He established his residence in Vélez Caviedes Street No. 71, in Pinar del Río city. He is known by testimonies, photos and by having carried his name one of the wards of the Civil Hospital, that worked in the same one; as well as, in Maternity and Childhood Hospital. In addition, an advertisement in the newspaper El Porvenir - 1902 - states that he founded San Rosendo Clinic, the first of its kind in Pinar del Río city. The announcement began as follows: "Polyclinic and operating room of Dr. Guasch, Specialist in childbirth, women's diseases and surgical operations".

It is remarkable that less than five years after the X-Ray equipment was created, it was already installed in this clinic and apparently buried to avoid the least damage from radiation, as it did years later in the consultation in Palacio Guasch. Another important element is the microscopic analysis laboratory which, like the X-Ray service, was the first to exist in Pinar del Río. In addition other services of electric cautery are announced, Apostle and Light, radical cure of the Syphilis with the most modern treatments, as well as comfortable operation rooms. Interesting is the system of subscriptions for 6 or 12 home visits that not only contemplates the family environment but can include neighboring families.

According to an article of that time, after his death, whose author is Dr. José Francisco Vélez - we do not know the advertising source - was one of the best obstetricians in Cuba. Likewise, he states that "his most remarkable technique allowed him to practice in the same way a delicate gynecological plastic that to construct with mathematical precision, the pinions and delicate toothed wheels to transform a clock of 12 hours in another one of 24 hours; still being a chronometer destined to indicate the arrival of the carrier pigeons in which the fractions of seconds have importance "... designed and constructed small flying machines, not yet invented then. The same columnist related that he walked through the countryside accompanied by his inseparable umbrella, which he inverted open under the trees and bushes he shook, in order to collect insects that he kept in jars; to later classify them using those of Linnaeus and Cuvier, up to that of the most modern naturalists.

This love for nature can be seen in the paintings shown in each of the pages of his books of poems, the architectural motifs of the palace and other constructions made by him, the stained-glass window of the house located in José Martí Street and Obispo Street, which he built for the wedding of his daughter Rosa. All of them reflect nature, a rich flora and fauna. In his poems he also describes Cuban nature in detail. Her nativist book Karakugey, with the names more than fifty species of Cuban flora and fauna in Viñales region. Likewise, the

images he uses in his poetry to describe the physical or spiritual beauty of his beloved or the other characters are motifs of nature. (...)

At the same time that he worked as a doctor in Pinar del Río city, he began the artistic dream called by the people as El Palacio de Guasch, a work that has become an architectural symbol of Pinar del Río city.

According to the Chapter Acts, the land on which the building was built belonged to the estate No. 385 Sta. Rosa, alias "Conuco" which was sold to Francisco Guasch Ferrer by the heirs of Juan Manuel Cabada. The purchase was validated on August 20, 1909, the year in which the construction of a 60-metre front by a 40-metre bottom began.

This "palace" differs from the others because its construction was not contracted to any builder as invariably have done, throughout history, those people of wide economic position who have wished to inhabit a sumptuous mansion, but was built by its own owner "with the almost ineffective help of a pawn.... because his pride is that no one takes part in its construction" as stated in the magazine El Veterano, the article also points out that "Both the plans and the management as the factory is related to his exclusive work, as well as the templates that have been used for construction and ornamentation. Regarding the originality of the construction, the quoted article states, "Suffice it to say that, harmonious rhythm are represented in different phases, the most precious orders of architecture..." and continues: "... there is already an Egyptian column, a Doric capital, an Arab warhead, an Hindu portico, etc.". The best qualification that would make of the work an intelligent one would be saying, that it is the harmony of the disorder".

It is known that later there were two bricklayers who worked on the work he designed and built from the foundations to the foundations, columns and capitals with the coffered ceilings, the friezes and relief of the facade, in mosaics of the floor and the leaded stained glass windows, also painted pictures for the walls, built much of the furniture and designed the lamps that were made in Europe.

In the journalistic article El Palacete de Guasch by Fernando Rivero - 1927 - he is described as "a true artist, all the more so because, in this case, he has used in the most peculiar and disinterested way a true fortune, capable of having made, in mercantile hands, a very easy work, profitable multiplies this detail one of the timbres that most legitimize the exceptional merit, being that of his obra", In this case, "su génesis", the intellectual worker did not spare, in many details, the corporal contribution of his own effort to make a beautiful reality, what was in principle and naturally for the

ideological abstraction of the brain...". The work of this Dreamer, among all of them, will endure as a great triumph of True art..." In several articles it is pointed out that he forged, for the first time in Pinar del Río, the cement and the stone for the realization of the walls and in the molds of his decorative figures, toads, marine horses, winged monsters, curious heads that look like gargoyles.(...)

In 1914, when the house was finished, the family began to live in the new residence, which was never finished because it had an upper floor designed. It must be said that on several occasions - from 1909 to 1928 - he mortgaged properties and the residence itself in order to be able to continue its construction. Also, in 1926 the construction of the western part was finished, which counted on a great hall of music.

It is almost impossible to imagine that he was able to practice medicine in the Provincial Hospital, the Maternity Hospital and the Polyclinic, build the Palace building, direct other constructions, develop his artistic, literary and sports hobbies, collect plants, minerals and animals from the province of Pinar del Río in his eagerness to discover mineral deposits, since he demonstrated to have ample geological knowledge. In Bulletin No. 17, Mining Statistics of the Ministry of Agriculture. Direction of Mountains, Mines and Water; edited in 1938 twenty mineral deposits denounced by him are collected; nevertheless, in the Provincial Archive and in documents in possession of the family, these arrive at the number of twenty-seven; many of which have been exploited. In these mineralogical pursuits he maintained relations with other scholars of Geology and fundamentally with his cousin, the eminent ophthalmologist and Commander of the Mambí Army, Dr. Horacio Ferrer Díaz.

On June 16, 1900 was elected Councilman or Councilman and assumes that position along with the Third Deputy Mayor, July 1 of the same year at 12.00 m. In a session of the city hall in 1901, together with two councilmen, he proposed the construction of the surgery room of the San Isidro Hospital with a budget of 310 pesos and 90 cents in U.S. currency.

This brilliant man died in Pinar del Río on August 28, 1928. The press of the time gave graphic evidence of the outstanding funerary honors he received from national and provincial health authorities, professionals and the people in general.

* Page two, second paragraph: La Paloma Mensagera Magazine - spelling is respected.