

# Patrick O'Day and the Fenian Invasion of Canada 1866

Edward J. O'Day

O'Dea Clan Gathering, Niagara Falls, NY, July 25, 2016

## Prologue

In the early stages of planning for this Clan Gathering, I stumbled upon some items in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century newspaper *Irish American* about Patrick O'Day of Buffalo, an active supporter of the Fenian Brotherhood in the 1860's. I thought that O'Day might be of interest to the Gathering, so I sent my findings to Jim O'Dea, one of the organizers. The rest is history. Jim prevailed on me to give a talk about the Fenian Invasion of Canada launched from Black Rock north of Buffalo in the wee hours of June 1, 1866.

Why I agreed, I'll never know, because I knew more about Patrick O'Day from a few on-line newspaper notices than I did about the Fenians, my knowledge of which I could have written on the proverbial head of a pin. I can't remember hearing about the Fenian movement in parochial high school history class, perhaps because most clergy and bishops at the time had condemned the Fenians, including Bishop John Timon of Buffalo.<sup>1</sup>

## The Fenians (Irish Republican Brotherhood)

"Fenian" is an umbrella term for the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), and Fenian Brotherhood (FB) parallel organizations founded in Ireland and the United States in 1858. Both were dedicated to the establishment of an Irish Republic independent of British rule. James Stephens in Dublin and John O'Mahony in New York, one time active "48ers" who had spent their next years in exile in Paris, were the movement's cofounders. The original organization was paramilitary, and members were oath bound to secrecy and absolute obedience to Stephens. In the United States the Fenian Brotherhood took its name from the *Fianna*, Gaelic warrior clans of the pre-Christian era, who according to legend spent their time in war, the chase, and the cultivation of poetry. In a more recent historical dimension, the Fenianism of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century incorporated elements of groups like the

Whiteboys and Defenders (peasant self-defense associations of the 1700's) and of the Ribbonmen of early 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland.<sup>2</sup>

The Brotherhood had established circles (cells) in most major American cities before the Civil War. During that war its agents operated freely within Union ranks, recruiting soldier-followers not only in the celebrated "Irish Brigade," but among Irish immigrants and Irish-Americans from small towns and farms throughout the United States. As the war ended, scholars today estimate that there were about 50,000 Fenian Brotherhood members, though some leaders at the time boasted of numbers six times that large. The many circles in Manhattan adopted names from Irish history to identify themselves. Brian Boru, Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmet were popular names, while other circles identified with military victories like Clontarf and Fontenoy. There were active circles in smaller cities like Buffalo, in small Massachusetts mill towns and in rural regions throughout the Midwest.<sup>3</sup> Author Peter Vronsky calls the Fenians "the first modern transcontinental national insurgent group in the western world with operational cells in Ireland, England, Canada, United States, South America, New Zealand and Australia and a banking centre in Paris."<sup>4</sup>

Despite this international scope (or perhaps because of it) the dual organizations founded in 1858 were wracked with factionalism by 1865. Stephens seemed to value the United States only as a cash cow to support an uprising in Ireland. During the war, O'Mahony issued bonds of the Irish Republic to willing American buyers.

Adorned with lithographs of Ulsterman Wolfe Tone of 1798 fame and Young Irelander Thomas Osborne Davis, they were also used as bonuses to soldiers who joined the Irish Republican Army after America's civil conflict was over.<sup>5</sup> But a significant body of Fenian Brotherhood



leaders thought O'Mahony timid and not the man of action they wished. Stephens' attempt to liberate Ireland in the autumn 1865 ended with the arrest and imprisonment of most of the IRB leaders as well

as the editors of *The Irish People*, the voice of Irish republicanism. Stephens himself was in hidings and some IRB volunteers from the United States were in British prisons.<sup>6</sup>

There were only a few score delegates at the First Fenian Brotherhood Congress in Chicago in 1863, but a few “Men of Action” then resurrected the idea of an attack on Canada as a means of striking a blow for Irish freedom. New York businessman William Randall Roberts, a newcomer to the



**William Randall Roberts**

Brotherhood and supporter of the Canadian action plan, left Chicago as elected head of the Fenian Brotherhood Executive Committee.<sup>7</sup> When some 600 delegates assembled in Cincinnati for the Second National Congress in February 1865, Roberts and what came to be known as the “Senate faction” won the day. They revised the Fenian Constitution, added a preamble modeled on the Declaration of Independence, and introduced the idea of checks and balances which effectively stripped O’Mahony of most of his power. In October O’Mahony, vigorously supported by Stephens, called a Third FB Congress in Philadelphia which only deepened the split. He may have thought it a show of strength to appoint a Secretary of War to his staff but he apparently did not

know that his appointee, Thomas W. Sweeny, a veteran of the Mexican War, and like Roberts a native of County Cork, was itching to turn an Irish Republican Army upon Canada, thought to be a weak link in the vast holdings of the British Empire.

The time to strike a blow at Canada seemed propitious. The administration of Andrew Johnson was pressing England for compensation because Britain had helped equip the Confederacy with a navy that had done great damage to Union merchant shipping during the late war. The Army had been more than willing to sell the Fenians large quantities of surplus guns, ammunition and other military supplies. Perhaps they could even purchase some streamer-gunboats for use on the Great Lakes. Brotherhood emissaries sent to confer with Johnson and his Secretary of State returned with a message that the United States would “recognize established facts” if the Fenians could create an Irish Republic on Canadian soil, so Roberts and Sweeny assumed they had the support of Washington.

By late summer 1865 Sweeny had prepared a careful and elaborate strategic plan for an attack on Canada. Irish Republican Armies were to gather on three fronts - a western flank of 3,000 men from Chicago and Detroit commanded by Fenian Adjutant General Charles Trevis; a central front stretching from Cleveland to Buffalo with 5,000 men who would strike Canada West (Ontario) from the south; and the largest army, some 16,500 strong, tasked with capturing enough territory in East Canada (Quebec) to establish an Irish Government in exile there. Under the command of Brigadier General Samuel Spear, this army would have cavalry support and would move against Canada from upstate New York and northern Vermont. A strike at the Niagara Peninsula from Buffalo was intended as diversionary but it was also strategically important. Capturing the Welland Canal would interrupt British shipping.



Although originally intended as a winter campaign, when Sweeny attempted to put it in motion in the summer of 1866, the plan to conquer Canada collapsed. Volunteers gathered at Chicago and Detroit never got marching orders; at Cleveland, General William F. Lynch could not be located to take command of the force assigned to him; and Sweeney was still waiting for enough Volunteers to arrive at the Quebec frontier when Irish Republican Army troops under the command of Colonel John O'Neill crossed the Niagara River in the dead of night and landed just north of Fort Erie in Canada shortly after 3:00 a.m. on June 1.

### Patrick O'Day

What was the role of Clansman Patrick O'Day in this scenario? O'Day's obituary, published locally and nationally in December 1901, states that he was born in Limerick, Ireland. Several United States censuses give his birthdate as January 1829. There is no reason to dispute those as facts, but no record of his birth has yet been located in sacramental records of Limerick Catholic parishes. The date

and place of his marriage to Bridget Flinn is also not known, but she is thought to have also been from Limerick.<sup>8</sup>

The Buffalo Census of 1900 indicates that they both had arrived in the United States in 1855, but the state census of New York City taken in June 1855 tells a different story. On that record the couple appears together as boarders in an apartment building on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Patrick, a 28 year-old locksmith had been in the city for five years, but Bridget had not arrived until 1852. If that census is correct, Patrick could neither read nor write, but Bridget could read. Within the year they had moved to Buffalo, where their first child Jeremiah was born in 1856. Although still practicing his locksmith skills when the federal census of Buffalo was taken in 1860, Patrick had learned to read and write, and he and Bridget were no longer boarders. On the contrary, they lived in a large building in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward close to the waterfront, earned income from taking in eighteen sailor boarders, and employed a 16 year-old Irish servant girl, probably as nanny for 4 month old Patrick Jr.<sup>9</sup> The young family had moved up the social and economic ladder rather quickly.

Laws passed during the Civil War required O'Day to register for the draft, and also to pay income tax because he earned more than \$800 a year. When he registered for the draft in 1863, his day job as a locksmith had given way to what was most likely a salaried position as Harbor Master for the city of Buffalo. But tax records show that O'Day had other irons in the fire at the time. He paid taxes of \$13.33 for the sale of retail liquors from a site at Water and State Streets in September 1863, and in 1864 he paid \$8.33 on ten months income as a "Substitute Broker." In September 1865 he paid his first taxes on income as an auctioneer. On the eve of the Fenian invasion of Canada his auction business was grossing between \$600 and \$800 a month.<sup>10</sup>

O'Day was clearly a Buffalo entrepreneur on the move in the mid 1860's. He was also an ardent Fenian. His auction house at 20-22 Pearl Street in the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward was by that time one of two Fenian meeting places in Buffalo, the other being the saloon of Hugh Mooney in the heavily Irish 1<sup>st</sup> Ward. Pearl Street was the larger and more commodious of the two locations, with ample room in the basement for indoor drills by Irish Republican Army units and a large stash of arms and ammunition. Patrick O'Day, like many other Fenians, made little effort to hide his allegiance to the cause of

attacking Canada. After mass “secret” strategy meetings of the Brotherhood, one or more of the attendees would often brag about them in the local press the next day. Newspapers were the social media of the day and Fenian leaders were as adept at using it for their own purposes as politicians and interest groups use Twitter today.

Shortly after Roberts and Sweeny had visited Buffalo early in 1866 to win support for their military action plan, the *Buffalo Courier* published a column by Patrick O’Day that stated:

A veteran Irish officer of unsullied honour and a brilliant military reputation, who has spent eighteen years in the military service of the United States has volunteered his services to lead the hosts that are now about to be marshalled under the green flag of Ireland. The time for action has arrived. The plans of action are perfected, and all that is now required is arms in place in the hands of the thousands of brave men who are today ready to take the field and fight for their liberation.<sup>11</sup>

O’Day’s call to arms gave no details of Sweeny’s plan, nor mention where the Fenians intended to “take the field,” so it did not give away any secrets, but it was part of a contemporary war of nerves underway against Canada. It was reprinted in the *Toronto Globe* the following day, a city rife with rumors about an expected strike across the border on St. Patrick’s Day 1866.

Far more specific were reports to Canadian authorities from Alexander McLeod, hired to keep the books at O’Day’s Auction House. “The owner of the premises is Pat O’Day . . . an ignorant little Irishman, pretty well off,” wrote McLeod to his superiors, and went on to say:

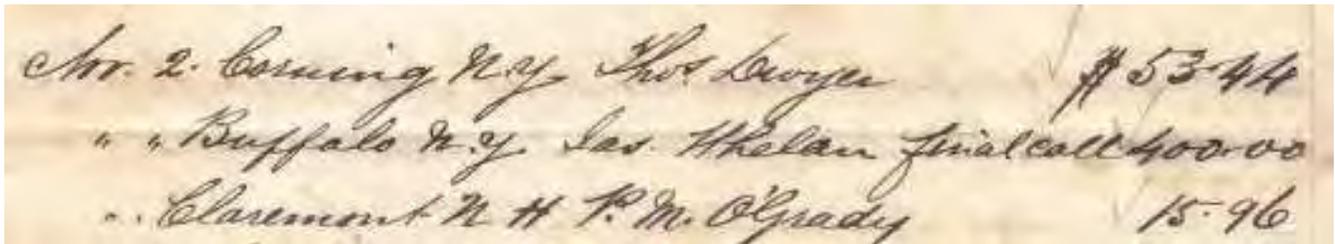
The auction room today is full of Irishmen, a number of officers of the late U.S. Volunteers . . . [The talk] is all about the intended attack on Canada. Their talk is not *soto voce* for I can almost hear them, although my door is shut and they near 50 feet from it.

Another report from McLeod near the end of May identified O’Day as the arms supplier for a Canadian invasion and spoke of an imminent cross border attack. “There are now about 1,000 stand of muskets here . . . [and] they are busy loading arms into the cellar.” In saying that “an invading force of 5,000 men is the contingent to move from Buffalo very soon,” McLeod overstated Fenian manpower which was probably closer to 2,000, but not their resolve. “These people are in earnest,” he concluded.<sup>12</sup>

When, where and why Patrick O’Day joined the Fenians is unknown. He had left New York City for Buffalo before the Brotherhood was founded, but by the mid 1860’s he was “district center” in

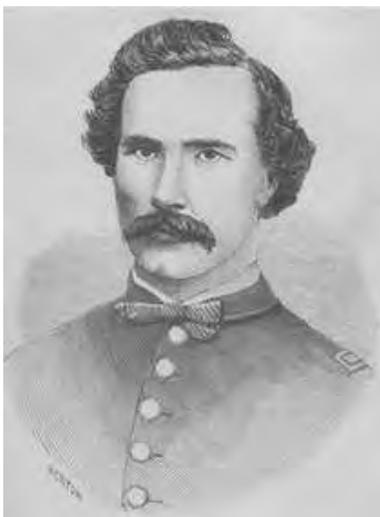
Buffalo and a supporter of the Roberts faction. There were economic reasons why an Irish-born locksmith would choose to move upstate, because Buffalo had several lock-making companies at the time. Was it happy accident or something planned that he settled along the Niagara River docks and became Buffalo harbormaster in 1863? In the absence of a detailed personal narrative, an answer to that question may never be known, because I have found no evidence of O’Day’s Fenian activity before 1866 in either of the two Fenian Archive collections that I have consulted. Patrick Steward and Bryan McGovern, authors of the most recent American study of the Fenians, describe O’Day as “Roberts’ point man in Buffalo,” a description that is right on the mark.<sup>13</sup>

When the New York office of the Brotherhood issued appealed for funds early in 1865 there was no remittance from Buffalo. But in response to a “final call” for funds in November, James Whalen



of the Buffalo circle sent \$400.<sup>14</sup> Whalen, a furniture dealer in the First Ward in 1860, by 1865 had moved to the Eighth Ward and was working as a clerk, probably for Patrick O’Day, whose grocery store was a few doors away.<sup>15</sup>

### The Niagara Campaign and the Battle of Ridgeway



Colonel John O'Neill

Military history is not my strong suite, so my coverage of the Fenian Raid on the Niagara Peninsula in 1866 and the Battle of Ridgeway that ensued on Limestone Ridge there will be very brief. It was the only part of Thomas Sweeny’s grand plan to conquer Canada that had even modest success. Though the raid lasted little more than 48 hours, Fenian soldiers planted the green and gold flag of the Irish Republic on British North American soil and the Canadian units sent to repel the invaders were routed on the battlefield by the “Bold Fenian Men” under the command of Colonel John O’Neill on June 2.

Two groups of Fenian soldiers had landed on the Niagara Peninsula on the morning of June 1. An advance party of the 17th Kentucky Fenian Regiment under command of Colonel Owen Starr reached Canada at about 1:30 AM, some having taken the international ferry which continued to run throughout the morning. O'Neill's main body of some 600 to 700 troops arrived about two hours later on canal boats from Black Rock. Pulled by tugs, the canal boats also held copious supplies of guns and ammunition from storage depots scattered about the city. By dawn, Starr's men had captured six members of The Royal Canadian Rifles stationed in the old Fort Erie, secured the village of Fort Erie, cut telegraph wires, and taken control of the railway yards there. As they marched inland, the Fenian soldiers distributed a proclamation signed by Sweeny. It said in part:

We come among you as the foes of British rule in Ireland. We have taken up the sword to strike down the oppressor's rod, to deliver Ireland from the tyrant, the despoiler, the robber. . . . We have no issue with the people of these Provinces, and wish to have none but the most friendly relations. We are here as the Irish army of Liberation. . . . To Irishmen throughout these Provinces we appeal in the name of seven centuries of British iniquity and Irish misery and suffering . . . to stretch forth the hand of brotherhood. . . and smite the tyrant where we can.<sup>16</sup>

Even critical Canadian accounts of the Raid on West Canada admit that the Fenian soldiers acted with propriety, stealing little except foodstuffs, some gallons of cider and a few horses for their scouts. But the Americans failed to win over the populace. The Irish and Irish-Canadians among the locals, most of whom were Protestants from Ulster and North Tipperary, failed to flock to the colors of the Irish Republic. O'Neill, whose men had been up all night and needed to be fed, decided to make camp on Frenchman's Creek rather than make immediately for the Welland Canal, a delay which in hindsight may have cost him successful conquest of the entire Niagara Peninsula.

But as events played out, O'Neill's tactical instincts were good, and the next morning (June 2) having gained intelligence that Canadian militia from Toronto and Hamilton under the command of Lieutenant Colonel J. Stoughton Dennis might approach from the southwest, he moved his troops into position on the highest ground around – Limestone Ridge. There he ordered his men to build defensive breastworks facing toward the expected attack by the Canadian militiamen. His men, veterans of the War Between the States, needed no instruction. They had built or encountered similar structures, made of fence rails overlaid with turf, during the late war. And what soldier with even a drop of Irish blood in his veins did not know how to cut and stack turf?

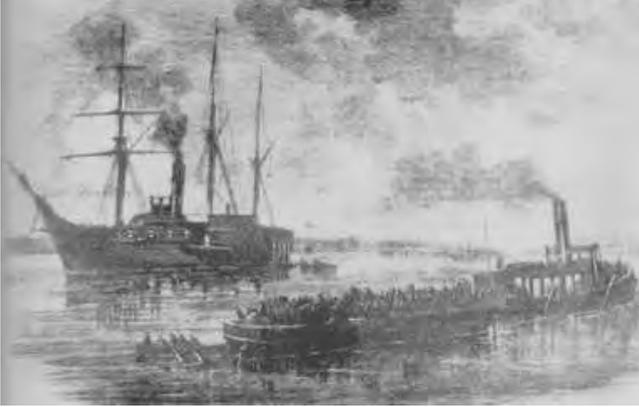
There were no journalists with cameras on scene because still photography was in its infancy (think Matthew Brady) and certainly no television coverage with instant replay. Consequently, historians are still debating exactly what happened on the battlefield that day when Canadian troops clashed with the Irish Republican Army north of the village of Ridgeway.<sup>17</sup> Some things are not in dispute – O’Neill’s troops pulled back to draw Dennis’ men forward, and then charged with bayonets drawn and green battle flags waving. Discipline broke down among the Canadian units, most noticeably in the Queens Own Rifles, youngsters from the Toronto militia who had never trained for nor seen battle. They turned tail and headed back to Ridgeway, O’Neill’s men in victorious hot pursuit.



**1869 Lithograph of the Battle of Ridgeway**

The Irish had won the day, but a sober assessment would have to admit that they had already lost the war. British regulars commanded by Colonel George Peacocke had spent the day of June 2 marching south from Chippawa on the Welland Canal. By nightfall they were encamped only a short distance north of the Lime Ridge battlefield. They never engaged because in the early hours of June 3, knowing that he would be outnumbered 10 to 1 in another battle, O’Neill withdrew his Fenian men to old Fort Erie. Canal boats awaited to return them to American shores. O’Neill later said that he made the decision to withdraw to avoid turning the Niagara Peninsula into a charnel house.<sup>18</sup>

Before evacuating the mini Irish Republic he had created two days before, O’Neill released the Canadian soldiers captured during the campaign, shook their hands and vowed he would return.<sup>19</sup> Within the hour, he and his men were themselves detained by the American Navy, and held under arrest on the Niagara River, their boats tethered to the *USS Michigan*. From aboard the steamer on June 5, O’Neill and Captain William Hynes (Sweeny’s assistant adjutant general) cosigned a letter to



**Steamer Michigan and Fenian Captives**

“Mr. F. B. Gallagher and Mr. O’Day” which began “Please tell our friends that no demonstration towards rescue, or anything of the kind, must be made. . . . Let the law take its course we have no fear for the consequences.”<sup>20</sup> No attempt was made to rescue Hynes and O’Neill, for it was hardly necessary. O’Neill and his men were released from custody on June 6, the day that President Johnson

denounced the “Fenian machinations” and effectively sealed the border by announcing that American Neutrality law would be strictly enforced.<sup>21</sup> Some 1,500 Fenian Volunteers from Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, and Tennessee who had been under O’Neill’s command departed Buffalo on June 15, their passages paid by the government in exchange for oaths that they would in future abide by American Neutrality laws. The charge against O’Neill for violating U.S. neutrality was dropped by year’s end.

### Epilogue

Contrary to the wishes of Hynes and O’Neill, there were some demonstrations in Buffalo while they were being detained on the *Michigan*. Meetings on June 1 and June 5 collected money for the “cause” and a rally one week later asked residents to provide assistance to Fenian soldiers returning from the failed raid on Quebec on June 9.

In the wake of O’Neill’s withdrawal from Canada, federal authorities raided Patrick O’Day’s Auction House and seized 15 crates of arms. On November 1, 1866 O’Day travelled to Washington on behalf of the Brotherhood to negotiate the return of his and any other Fenian arms seized after the failed raids on Canada. As he left the New York office he promised to “give Andy [Johnson] h--l if he don’t [sic] give up the arms at once.”<sup>22</sup> Whatever language O’Day used with the President, his negotiations were successful. He wrote to the Fenian Brotherhood Senate from Buffalo on March 20, 1867 saying, “I have the honor to report . . . that the work You laid out for Me I have accomplished, and have succeeded in securing all our Arms etc., that were seized and held by the U.S. Government since June 1866.” Those still in the Buffalo area, he went on, “I have stored in this city,” and those being

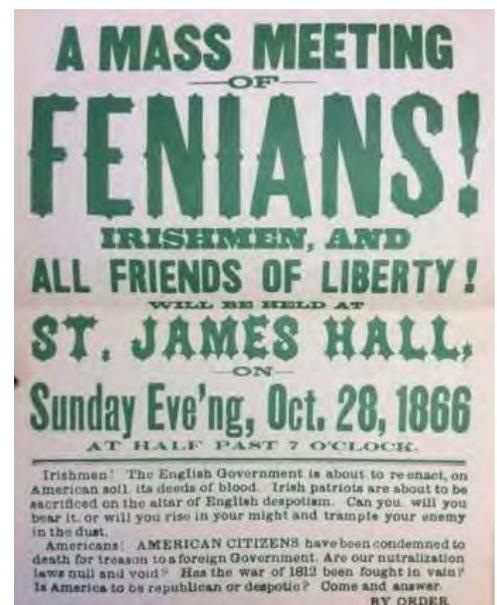
held elsewhere would be shipped wherever the Senate directed.<sup>23</sup> The basement at 20-22 Pearl Street had not stayed empty for long.



O'Day carried on as Buffalo District Center, receiving from Treasurer Frank Gallagher monthly reports about the state of the circle's finances. They were occasionally in the red. He and four other Buffalo Fenians, James Looney, James Whelan, John Corcoran, and John Hoy, in 1867 joined to loan the organization \$500 to erect a proper memorial to the soldiers killed in the Niagara Peninsula Campaign.<sup>24</sup> The design was commissioned in

August 1866 for placement on the Lime Ridge battlefield, but the completed monument eventually found its way to Holy Cross Cemetery to mark the burial place of Edward K. Lonergan, a local ship's carpenter who had fallen during the Battle of Ridgeway on his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. He had been serving as a Lieutenant in "Buffalo's own," the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the I.R.A.<sup>25</sup>

There continued to be mass meeting of Fenians in Buffalo, one in October 1866 to protest the indictment in Toronto of fifty-six Fenian prisoners of war earlier that month. The broadside advertising the meeting appealed to Irishmen to attend because "Irish patriots are about to be sacrificed on the altar of English despotism," and also invited native-born Americans and "All Friends of Liberty," asking them "Has the War of 1812 been fought in vain? Come and answer."<sup>26</sup> On St. Patrick's Day 1867 attendees at the Fenian celebration could view a Ridgeway battle flag and hear Fenian President William R. Roberts call for a new invasion of Canada. As William Jenkins puts it, "the symbolic capital earned by the raiders was flaunted to local audiences."<sup>27</sup>



During the late 1860's O'Day funded publication of two weekly periodicals – the *Fenian Volunteer* and the *United Irishman* – and he and his editor James McCarroll, a well-known journalist from Toronto, became the public voice of Fenianism in western New York. But the semi-successful invasion of the Niagara peninsula had not stilled factionalism within the Fenian Brotherhood leadership. Even as Roberts spoke in Buffalo in March 1867, John Savage, a '48er living in exile in New York and allied with the O'Mahony wing, was challenging his leadership. Late in the year, charged with diverting Fenian moneys to his own use, William R. Roberts resigned the Brotherhood Presidency.

In a letter to “Brother Gallagher” on November 26, O'Day expressed his dismay and confusion about what had happened in Manhattan:

I need not say how much I regret the step Mr. Roberts has seen fit to take. . . . Leave no stone untuned to effect a Union. I have told McCarroll to write a strong article in the forthcoming issue of the *Volunteer* on the absolute necessity of Union . . . . What do you suppose is the cause of the resignation? Write or Telegraph me at your earliest convenience and let me know what to do or how to act as I shall be uneasy until I hear from you again. Your family is alright.

Yours Fraternally,  
P. O'Day<sup>28</sup>

Colonel John O'Neill, hero of the Battle of Ridgeway, was chosen to succeed Roberts, but the Brotherhood remained fractured, and O'Day never developed with O'Neill the warm relationship he had enjoyed with Roberts. Reflecting similar events in other cities, the major Fenian gathering in Buffalo in 1868 was primarily a social one, a “monster picnic” in the summer. It was a sign of the changing times. Most Fenian soldiers had by then returned to civilian life, resuming work on their hardscrabble farms, taking factory jobs, or heading West in search of opportunity.

The *Buffalo Express* announced a general meeting of local Fenians at the “hall on Pearl Street” in September 1869. No minutes of the meeting have been found, but this was most likely the last such meeting that O'Day hosted at his auction house. It is not known whether he resigned or was removed as district center, but he quietly left Buffalo soon thereafter. By June 1870 he and his family were living on a 40 acre farm in West Seneca, a market garden town southeast of downtown Buffalo.<sup>29</sup>

Farming apparently did not suit O'Day, because he was back in the city two years later, his auction business at a new location on Pearl Street. He may have also had a second auction house on West Seneca during the 1870's, but the last mention of his auction business in city directories was in 1879. During the early 1870's the Fenian organization had essentially disintegrated, its members gravitating to the-newer *Clan na Gael*, or like Patrick O'Day, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, an older and respected fraternal order.<sup>30</sup> By 1881 O'Day had returned to one of his earliest ventures in Buffalo, a boarding house like the one he and his wife had kept for sailors on the docks in 1860. This time the location was on Main Street. Though primarily a saloon and boarding house, it was briefly listed in the city directory as "O'Day's Hotel," a family affair in which sons Jeremiah, Patrick and William were listed as partners. The location on Main changed several times over the decades that followed, eventually ending up at 96 Main, a stone's throw from the original auction house.

Patrick O'Day is known to have also invested in Great Lakes shipping in the 1880's. He was owner of the barge R. N. Rice, wrecked on the east shore of Lake Michigan after the ship towing it cut it loose in a storm. The crew was saved, but the cargo of lumber was lost, and O'Day filed suit for damages, claiming negligence on the part of the owner of the mother ship.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps it was those shipping interests that he had in mind when he identified himself as a "Merchant" on the state census of 1892.<sup>32</sup> As the 19<sup>th</sup> century closed, city directories indicated that his income was derived from real estate. When the Census of 1900 was compiled he and Bridget were living in a home they owned on Jersey Street. Although his occupation was then listed as saloon keeper, other evidence indicates that his sons were running the saloon-hotel by that time.<sup>33</sup>

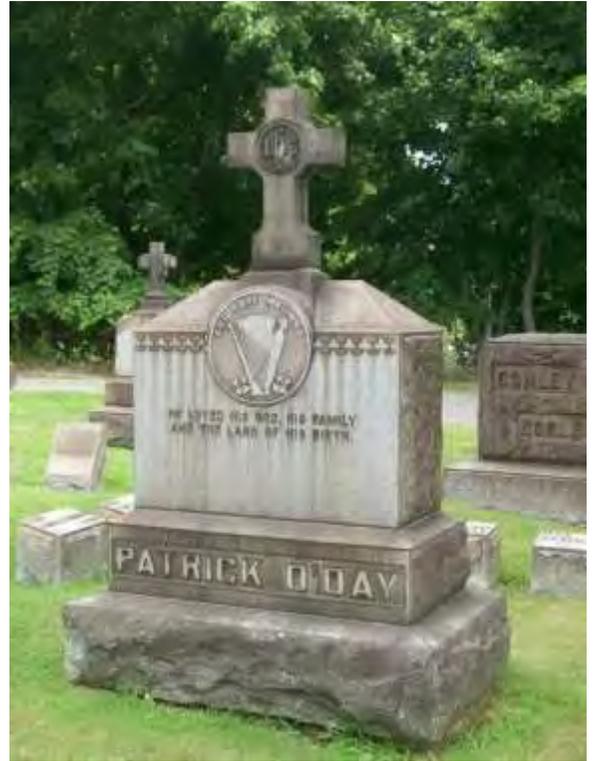
Patrick Steward and Bryan McGovern, reflecting on their extensive research into the Fenian Movement from 1858 to 1876 on both sides of the Atlantic write:

The failure of Fenianism is . . . intriguing because it had relatively broad sociocultural appeal. The typical Fenian was a literate, semiskilled laborer with aspirations for social advancement. . . . Fenians tended to attract Irish and Irish Americans from the province of Munster in the southwestern part of Ireland, an area of the country significantly affected by modernization during the nineteenth century.

Direct exposure to sweeping economic changes and British bureaucracy seemed to motivate restless young men and women to embrace radical nationalism, whether in Ireland or in the United States. . . . Fenianism was as much a recreational diversion for individuals with a keen

sense of adventure as it was a subversive endeavor, but this should not detract from the sincerity and optimism of those involved.<sup>34</sup>

Although the authors mention Patrick O'Day only twice in their study, their generic analysis of people who were attracted to Fenianism fits well with the image and persona that emerged from studying his life and times as district center of the Fenian Brotherhood in Buffalo. Without access to a will or estate settlement it is uncertain whether Limerick-born Patrick O'Day achieved financial success from his various business ventures, but the monument on his grave in Holy Cross Cemetery makes its evident that he did not die penniless. The stone is lavishly decorated with shamrocks, an Irish harp, and the motto "God Save Ireland." The simple but moving inscription, "He loved his God, his family and the land of his birth" suggests that his dream of an Irish republic free from British rule lived on.<sup>35</sup> Years after his death a surviving veteran of the Battle of Ridgeway remembered O'Day as wearing an embroidered green harp on the left sleeve of his jackets long after the Niagara Peninsula campaign had ended.<sup>36</sup>



### Suggested Readings and Reference

Major scholarly works on the Fenian Movement in the United States and the military raids on Canada by William D'Arcy (1947), W. S. Neidhardt (1975), Jack Morgan (on the role of Thomas Sweeny, 2006), William Jenkins (2013) and Patrick Steward (2013) are cited in the endnotes. Not cited is *Against the Grain* (Buffalo: Bohane Books, 2012), a history of Buffalo's Irish First Ward. The book is engaging for its local interest, use of memoir material, and a section on the Fenians which mentions Patrick O'Day. That section is published on line at <http://buffaloah.com/h/bohen/fenian.html>.

There is a remarkable amount of other good material on the internet about the Fenians and the Battle of Ridgeway, from [Wikipedia](#) articles to specialized websites like [Fenians.org](#). There is a detailed essay by Benedict Maryniak on the Fenian Raid on the [University of Buffalo](#) website, with added photos of reenactments of the Battle. A well-written popular article by Dan Murphy, “The Day the Irish Invaded Canada,” appeared in the March/April 2012 issue of [Irish America](#).

For light reading on the events, I suggest *The Rising of the Moon* (London & New York 1987), a well-researched historical novel by British author Peter Beresford Ellis that even a non-historian can enjoy. It gives a good account of the interaction between Fenians and the Canadian civilians whom they encountered as well as of the military conflict. Beresford gives Patrick O’Day his due on multiple pages of the narrative, which otherwise focuses on the role of an imaginary Irish-American veteran of the Civil War, Gavin Devlin and his younger brother John Joe.<sup>37</sup>

Basic data on Patrick O’Day is freely available on digitized census images at [familysearch.org](#), and from Buffalo City Directories on line (for a fee) from [Ancestry.com](#). Two major documentary collections of Fenian Archives, at the Catholic University of America and the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, have been digitized in their entirety and may be consulted on line. The Collection at Catholic University (<http://cuislandora.wrlc.org/islandora>) is useful for insight into the national workings of the Fenian Brotherhood, while that digitized by Villanova University’s Falvey Memorial Library at on behalf of the Philadelphia Archdiocese contains more specific information about the Buffalo Circle and Patrick O’Day (<https://digital.library.villanova.edu/Item/vudl:247376>).

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Timon was particularly critical of the Fenian Sisterhood, whom he referred to as a “plague.” The Brotherhood vigorously and publically defended the work of their female counterparts. Patrick Stewart and Bryan McGovern, *The Fenians: Irish Rebellion in the North Atlantic World 1858-1876* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 93.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Vronsky, “From Rebels to Revolutionaries : A Brief History of the founding of the Fenians and the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood (IRB) in the United States March 17, 1858” <http://www.fenians.org/fenianbrotherhood.htm>

<sup>3</sup> The Catholic University of America, Fenian Brotherhood Collection (digitized), “Official Monthly Circular of Dues Collected 10 May-10 June 1865” <http://cuislandora.wrlc.org/islandora/object/achc-fenian%3A757> Hereafter cited as CUA, Fenian Brotherhood Collection.

<sup>4</sup> Vronsky, Ibid.

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<sup>5</sup>CUA ,Fenian Brotherhood Collection, Fifty dollar bond of The Irish Republic, no. 709, signed by John O'Mahony <http://cuislandora.wrlc.org/islandora/object/achc-fenian%3A219> and, "Roster of Military Officers of the Fenian Brotherhood, New York" <http://cuislandora.wrlc.org/islandora/object/achc-fenian%3A1171>

<sup>6</sup> Jack Morgan, *Through American and Irish Wars: The Life and Times of General Thomas W. Sweeny* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006), 128.

<sup>7</sup> Steward and McGovern, *The Fenians*, 64

<sup>8</sup> Bridget, daughter of Bartholomew Flinn and Mary Tool, baptized on 14 February 1839 at St. John's Limerick may have been the future Bridget O'Day.

<sup>9</sup> New York State Census 1855, New York City, Third Election District, First Ward; 1, District 3; Federal Census of New York 1860, City of Buffalo, 8<sup>th</sup> Ward, p. 104.

<sup>10</sup> Ancestry.com. *U.S. IRS Tax Assessment Lists, 1862-1918* [database] 2008. Original data: *Records of the Internal Revenue Service*. Record Group 58. The National Archives .Washington, DC. The tax rate for liquor sales was high, but the tax for acting as a broker was much lower, so the tax amounts for 1863 and 1864 are not really comparable. Auction sales were \$844 in April 1866 and \$686 in May. At a tax rate of ¼% O'Day paid \$3.82 for the two months.

<sup>11</sup> W. S. Neidhardt, *Fenianism in North America* (University Park & London: Pennsylvania University Press, 1975, 34-35, citing the reprint in the *Toronto Globe* on the following day (6 February 1866).

<sup>12</sup> Morgan, *Sweeny*, 126-127, citing William D'Arcy, *The Fenian Movement*, 148-149

<sup>13</sup> Steward and McGovern, *The Fenians*, 226.

<sup>14</sup> CUA, Fenian Brotherhood Collection, "Dues May –June 1865", <http://cuislandora.wrlc.org/islandora/object/achc-fenian%3A757> and "Payment Ledger 28 October -29 November (Undated manuscript, probably 1865). <http://cuislandora.wrlc.org/islandora/object/achc-fenian%3A274#page/6/>

<sup>15</sup> New York State Census, 1865, Buffalo, Ward 08, E.D. 02, p. 47, database with images, *FamilySearch.org*. Whelan later obtained a law degree and became a judge.

<sup>16</sup> Neidhardt, 62; Morgan, *Sweeny*,132

<sup>17</sup> Peter Wronski, "Combat, Memory and Remembrance in Confederation Era Canada: The Hidden History of the Battle of Ridgeway" (dissertation abstract), University of Toronto, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2011

<sup>18</sup> It had in fact been an improvised war on both sides. O'Neill's men were the only Fenian units ready for conflict when Sweeny placed his three-army attack on Canada in play for June 1. On May 29, Fenian Volunteers from Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana units commanded by O'Neill had been hastily ordered from Cleveland to Buffalo, where they were joined by the 7<sup>th</sup> New York. They crossed the Niagara River with more than enough arms and ammunition, but no artillery or cavalry support and no provisions. . Canadian soldiers and militia were also poorly outfitted. They had a limited supply of ammunition, wore woolen dress uniforms in summer heat, had no water bottles, and very little food. Neidhardt, 65.

<sup>19</sup> True to his word, O'Neill tried twice more to invade Canada, once from Vermont in 1870, and then from Minnesota in 1871.

<sup>20</sup> John O'Neill and W.J Hynes to Gallagher and O'Day, June 5, 1866, *Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center, Francis B. Gallagher collection of Fenian Brotherhood records* , digitized by Falvey Memorial Library, Villanova University.

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Hereafter cited as *Gallagher Collection*. <https://digital.library.villanova.edu/Item/vudl:249908>. Francis B. Gallagher was one of fifteen Senators of the Fenian Brotherhood, and Treasurer of the Buffalo Circle.

<sup>21</sup> Neidhardt, 71.

<sup>22</sup> Dennis O'Sullivan to Mr. Gallagher November 2, 1866 (on Headquarters the Fenian Brotherhood letterhead), *Gallagher Collection*, <https://digital.library.villanova.edu/Item/vudl:250081>

<sup>23</sup> To the Honorable the Senate of the Fenian Brotherhood from P. O'Day, D.C. FB, March 20 1867, *Gallagher Collection*, <https://digital.library.villanova.edu/Item/vudl:247957>. Return of the arms had not come cheaply. According to O'Day "We had to give security to the Government that they would not be used for any unlawful purpose" and also to post a bond of \$246,000. Rochester had furnished \$74,000 of the bond money; Buffalo had supplied the rest.

<sup>24</sup> Promissory Note for \$500, *Gallagher Collection*, <https://digital.library.villanova.edu/Item/vudl:249823> The first four signers of the note were naturalized American citizens of Irish birth. O'Day, 38, was a grocer/auctioneer; Looney, 45, a cabinet maker/furniture store owner; Corcoran, 42, a baker who employed several apprentices; and Whalen a Justice of the Peace in Ward 9 by 1870. John Hoy, the final signer, was a 36-year-old Irish American ship's carpenter from Albany who operated a fruit store in the First Ward in 1865. A lieutenant in the 179<sup>th</sup> NY Volunteers in the Civil War, Hoy commanded the 7<sup>th</sup> NY Regiment of the IRA at the Battle of Ridgeway.

<sup>25</sup> Lime Hill Monument Contract, August 1866, *Gallagher Collection*, <https://digital.library.villanova.edu/Item/vudl:249798>. Find a Grave ([www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com)) includes a photo of the monument for Edward K. Lonergan in Section A, Holy Cross Cemetery, Lackawanna, NY. It matches the description and sketch filed with the 1866 contract.

<sup>26</sup> Broadside from the collection of the Buffalo Irish Genealogical Society, with thanks to James E. O'Dea for sending me this photo.

<sup>27</sup> William Jenkins, *Between Raid and Rebellion: The Irish in Buffalo and Toronto, 1867–1916*, (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2013), Chapter 6.

<sup>28</sup> Letter from P. O'Day to Brother Gallagher, November 26, 1867, *Gallagher Collection*, <https://digital.library.villanova.edu/Item/vudl:247973>

<sup>29</sup> 1870 Census, Patrick O'Dae [sic], West Seneca, Erie Co., NY, P.O. Gardenville and Agricultural Census of same. On line at FamilSearch.org

<sup>30</sup> On AOH membership, *Buffalo Evening News*, December 13, 1901, Patrick O'Day obituary, p. 7, column 1.

<sup>31</sup> *Muskegon Chronicle*, 5 October 1888, p. 7 and *Cleveland Leader*, 8 October 1888, p.3;

<sup>32</sup> New York State Census, 1892, database with images, *FamilySearch*, Buffalo, Ward 20, E.D. 05, FHL microfilm #825,694;

<sup>33</sup> Buffalo City Directories 1896-1898; "United States Census, 1900," database with images, *FamilySearch*, Patrick and Bridget O Day, E.D. 1 Buffalo Ward 20, Erie, New York, sheet 4B, family 38, NARA microfilm publication T623.

<sup>34</sup> Steward and McGovern, *The Fenians*, xvii.

<sup>35</sup> Holy Cross Cemetery, Lackawanna, Erie County, NY, Section N, [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com). Photo by Edward Toy

<sup>36</sup> Steward and McGovern, *The Fenians*, 228