

Cleveland Women and Irish Nationalism



Throughout the 19th century, the cause of Irish nationalism found ready supporters in Cleveland. Just as the United Irishmen of 1798 were inspired in part by the French Revolution, the so-called Young Irelanders of 1848 were in part inspired by a surge in revolutionary fervor that was sweeping across the European continent that year. The Young Irelanders were also incensed at the British government's callous reaction to the Irish Famine.

But like so many nationalist movements before it, the Young Irelander Rebellion of 1848 was quickly snuffed out and its leaders imprisoned or exiled. Several of the leaders of the Young Ireland movement made their way to the United States, where they set about rallying support for the cause of Irish nationalism. In 1852, as reported in the *Plain Dealer* newspaper, a group of Clevelanders invited one of the heroes of the Young Ireland movement to come to Cleveland to speak--Thomas Francis Meagher, a future Civil War general. In 1858, two of the Young Irelander exiles in New York formed the Fenian Brotherhood to stir up American support for the cause of overthrowing British rule in Ireland.

Cleveland was one of many American cities that embraced Fenian ideals and set about organizing "circles" of support. Brief news items throughout 1865 and 1866 refer to the existence of a Fenian Sisterhood group in Cleveland, alongside several Fenian Brotherhood "circles." Not surprisingly for the times, when women are mentioned in connection with Fenian banquets, picnics, and other events, they are usually only mentioned—and not by individual name--as presenting banners, singing songs, and managing the refreshment tables. However, the *Plain Dealer* of October 5, 1865, contained a list of people who were authorized to collect money on behalf of the Fenian Brotherhood. And the list included almost as many women as men. Unfortunately, the women are identified by "Miss" or "Mrs.," rather than by first and last name, so it's difficult to find out more about them.

Divisions arose within the Fenian movement about whether or not the American-based group should be supporting revolutionary activity in Ireland or should be taking action against the British government in neighboring Canada. After the Civil War ended on April 9, 1865, and Irish-born Civil War veterans began to return from battle, the idea of invading Canada began to gain adherents. A target date of June 1, 1866, was set for attacking Fort Erie, across the Niagara River from Buffalo. As *Plain Dealer* articles on May 29 and 30 indicate, Cleveland was designated as a transfer and collection point for Fenian "freedom fighters"—most of them Civil War veterans--coming from places west and south. Although the Fenians did capture Fort Erie in the Battle of Ridgeway, the US government cut off the Fenian supply routes and blocked reinforcements from joining the small advance force. The Fenian moment was short-lived.

FENIAN BROTHERHOOD.—The following ladies and gentlemen are the authorized collectors for the Tara Circle of the Fenian Brotherhood.

P. O. NEIL, Centre.

James Walsh and Miss Bird.
P. H. Carroll and Miss Walsh.
Michael Burke and Miss Burke.
Michael Murphy and Miss Searcy.
W. H. Mathews and Miss Glady,
Thos. Jordan and Miss Martin.
Wm. McCauley.
John Murray and Miss Purcell.
Patrick Monks and Miss Rooney.
T. M. Farrell and Miss Moan.
Thos. Lavan and Mrs. Lee.
Wm. Callaghan and Miss Lantry.
T. J. Quinlan and Miss Kearns.
Mathew Meade and Miss Burns.
James McGue and Miss Long,
Michael Mooney.
Henry Tucker.
Michael McMahon and Miss McGovern.
Mr. and Mrs. Oadden.
J. P. Goff and Miss McLaughlin.
Brian Bray and Miss Negle.
John Lastrange.
Peter Goldrick.
Patrick McGullion.
Peter Connelly.
Michael Doyle.
J. D. Keegan.
P. M. Smith and Miss Downs.
Thos. Barry.
James Crow.

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THE IRISH REPUBLIC AGAIN.

Departure of a Large Body of Fenians for Buffalo, Last Evening.

ARRIVAL OF ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY MORE THIS MORNING.

We know that our readers are eager to know all about the large bodies of Fenians, that are arriving and departing from this place; whither they goest, what they "goest" for, by whom they are commanded, &c. And we are equally certain that our reporter would be more than glad to post them thoroughly; but he can't do it. Our reporter opened his eyes very widely this morning, when he discovered how little he knew about the true state of Fenian affairs here.

IMAGES: An 1867 Currier and Ives print of the spirit of Irish nationalism as a woman; a list of Fenian fundraisers, *Plain Dealer* (October 5, 1865); *Plain Dealer* report of Fenians passing through Cleveland (May 30, 1866); 1869 painting of the Battle of Ridgeway.



The Ladies Land League in Cleveland

After the Fenian invasion of Canada was halted by the US government, the Fenian movement began to crumble. The many Irish Americans who were still passionately committed to advancing the cause of Irish nationalism tended to focus their energies on two fronts. One was the clandestine Clan na Gael, a secret organization that emerged in America in the 1870s to support the work of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in Ireland. The second was the more visible Land League movement.

The Land League movement gathered steam in the late 1870s and early 1880s, in response to the pressures of the world-wide “Long Depression” of 1873-1879 and several seasons of bad weather and growing conditions, particularly in the west of Ireland. Most Irish householders were tenants, not landowners, and the Land League was focused overtly on obtaining fairer rents for tenant farmers. But the motto of the more radical wing of the movement, led by Michael Davitt, had nationalist overtones: "The land of Ireland for the people of Ireland.” In practice the tactics used against the landlords often involved intimidation and the destruction of property.

Irish-born Clevelanders and Clevelanders of Irish descent committed quickly to the Land League cause. Michael Davitt spoke in Cleveland in October of 1878, and Charles Stewart Parnell, leader of the constitutional wing of the movement, visited Cleveland in 1880. Some of the Cleveland Land Leaguers had been active Fenians—most notably Patrick Smith, owner of a dredging and tugboat operation; Patrick K. Walsh, a shoe store owner and Civil War veteran; Martin A. Foran, a one-time cooper, lawyer and future judge and congressman; and William J. Gleason, a newspaper man and promoter of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument on Public Square. Swelling their ranks were many recent immigrants who arrived in Cleveland in the early 1880s, fleeing the very conditions that prompted the movement. Another former Fenian and Land Leaguer in Cleveland may have escaped notice in the newspapers of the day—were it not for a run-in with Bishop Richard Gilmour, head of the Diocese of Cleveland.

Her name was Mary Rowland; she was elected President of the Ladies Land League in Cleveland in May of 1882. The Scottish-born Bishop Gilmour was not as aggressive about Americanizing his flock as some bishops in other American cities were at the time. But he wanted his Irish Catholic parishioners to prioritize being Catholic over being Irish. While Gilmour sparred with the male Land Leaguers—attempting to block the non-denominational group from marching in the annual St. Patrick’s Day Parade, for instance—he seized on the Ladies Land League for condemnation. Bishop Gilmour believed that political agitation was unwomanly; the women of the Ladies Land League rejected his arguments. The conflict escalated to the extent that Gilmour excommunicated any woman who persisted in participating in the Ladies Land League. While Cleveland Land League supporters, both men and women, insisted that they would not back down, energy began to shift toward a new organization called the Irish National League, which advocated Home Rule for Ireland through the ballot box.

Rowland	Mary	22	F	W	Living house			Ireland
"	Gerah	21	F	W				Ireland
"	Robert	26	M	W	Garrier on deck	✓		Ireland
"	John	24	M	W	" " "	✓		Ireland
"	Mary	22	F	W				Ireland
"	Charles	20	M	W	Garrier on deck	✓		Ireland
"	Benjamin	20	M	W	" " "	✓		Ireland
"	Thomas	17	M	W	Works with a family	✓		Ireland

IMAGES: (Above) 1870 Census in Cleveland for Mary Rowland, age 22, living with her widowed mother and young adult siblings—all born in Ireland during the Famine years; (Left) Bishop Richard Gilmour



Bishop Gilmour Opposes the Ladies Land League.
In his sermon in the Cathedral yesterday Bishop Gilmour preached against ladies identifying themselves with the Land League and subsequently said to a *Herald* reporter that he is decidedly opposed to any such movement on the part of the ladies. Said he: “As far as the Land League itself is concerned, every one knows that the position I occupy on that question is conservative and the result of calm and deliberate judgment. I am opposed to ladies joining such an organization because I am opposed to a woman becoming a politician. I am opposed to all agitations by women. It is with a feeling of painful regret that I see a woman made the subject of public comment. A movement that will so jeopardize a woman as that meets with a most strenuous opposition from me. A woman’s place is her home. There, surrounded by an atmosphere of parental purity, she reigns a queen to whom all must bow. It is at the home and in the home circle that her influence must be wielded. I am opposed to woman giving her time, thoughts and influence to political measures. It destroys her modesty and takes from her that reliance and delicacy of character which are among her greatest charms. The present organization will amount to nothing and will unquestionably be a magnificent failure. I was in hope that Cleveland would escape the humiliation but it has not. When a woman plays the part of man she forgets her sex. I am opposed to those agitations called woman’s rights. In so far as the ladies’ branch so recently organized at Parnell Hall is concerned I am sure that it will have no following. The best and fairest thinking women of this diocese repudiate the present organization

The President of the Ladies’ Branch Makes a Vigorous Speech.
At the meeting of the Ladies’ Branch of the Land League held yesterday afternoon Miss Mary Rowland, the President, said:
LADIES OF THE LAND LEAGUE:—I am pleased to see so many here to-day. Your presence here gives strength to the work we have undertaken. It shows we are determined to make a bold stand, to let the world see we are heart and soul in the cause, in the redemption of our native land. And here allow me to say a few words in regard to Bishop Gilmour’s denunciation last Sunday morning. I am not surprised that he should do so. I do not expect anything else. We must look for such edicts. It is not the first and it will not be the last. He is an admirer of England. “A peculiarly worthless race,” *Blackwood’s*, a Scotch magazine, dubs the Irish. Yes, the Scotch hate us, we are well aware of the fact, more bitterly than the Saxon. We want no interference or advice about Irish affairs. Other countries stand more in need of advice. Bishop Gilmour tells us also that there is no word in the whole English language to express a female president. It is too bad his Lordship has gone to so much trouble to find out the meaning of the word. I would like to know what he means by calling us “inexperienced, unmarried women.” Will he be kind enough to explain? We also have “compromised the modesty and delicacy of woman’s character.” In what manner, pray, have we done so? Knowing the pure, high motives that bring us together every Sunday afternoon, the principles of truth and right, the cause we have at heart—a cause, a work we will never relinquish—we can stand here to-day with a clear conscience and fling all such imputations back. With all respect to Bishop Gilmour, in his clerical capacity we shall obey him but outside of that he holds no jurisdiction over the Irish people whatever. Our country is our country, not his. We are well aware and understand the cause we are engaged in and we want no dictation from our enemies; and I say all who respect England are enemies of Ireland. We ladies of the Land League have been called “unwomanly,” that is, “unbefitting our sex.” “that our proper sphere is home.” “that we are becoming politicians.” I would ask when did our Bishop arrive at this conclusion? If it is unwomanly for us ladies to meet here on Sunday afternoon for the good of Ireland, here in the broad daylight in open council, then I must say it is more unwomanly, aye, a thousand times more so, for ladies to attend church fairs and festivals, coquetting with every man, young and old, who may happen to come along, insisting on them taking chances, promenading up and down in the endeavor to win a few shillings or a dollar, “coercing” them with the sunniest smiles. Then away with such dictation. No alien voice shall intimidate us. We stand forth in the cause of truth and right. The God of justice is on our side. Let those who love England, who worship the mighty power of the latter, crouch before her. We owe her no allegiance.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES: (Left) Bishop Gilmour’s opposition to the Ladies Land League, Plain Dealer, 5/22/1882; (Right) Mary Rowland’s defense, Plain Dealer, 5/29/1882

Cleveland Women Promote the Irish Republic

In the early decades of the 20th century, Ireland's long-held goal of independence was finally within reach. The dramatic events that transpired--the Easter Rising of 1916, the War of Independence, the Anglo-Irish Treaty that was narrowly approved in January 1922 and the two brutal years of Civil War--were covered extensively in Cleveland newspapers of the day. Although the Irish Republic declared independence from Great Britain in January 1919, it took many years for Ireland to establish itself as a fully independent republic. An independent constitution was ratified in 1937, and membership in the British Commonwealth was terminated in 1948. Throughout those decades, Ireland continued to look to America for support for the cause of Irish nationalism.

In 1919 Eamon De Valera, the president of the newly declared Republic, traveled to the United States for an extended 18-month stay in order to drum up support for Irish independence. Before returning to Ireland in October 1920, De Valera pressed for the founding of the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic (AARIR), in an effort to supplant the American-led Friends of Irish Freedom. De Valera visited Cleveland in 1919 and returned here again in 1928 and 1930 to encourage the work of the AARIR. Irish-born and Irish-American Clevelanders were quick to support this new organization, just as Clevelanders of earlier generations had embraced the Fenian and Land League movements. Cleveland women were particularly prominent participants in the AARIR on local, state, and national levels.



Adelia (or Adele) Christy was born Adelia Thompson in New Jersey in 1873 to an American-born father and Irish-born mother. She came to Cleveland by 1896, when she married William J. Christy, a poultry dealer. She was a member of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, and, by 1913, she had risen through the ranks to become national secretary of the LAAOH. The AARIR did not segregate men and women into separate divisions. Christy was part of its founding council and was named as the first state director for Ohio in November 1920. She chaired Ohio's first organizing meeting of 200 representatives from all over the state. She was a prominent speaker at local events in Cleveland that promoted the cause of full independence for Ireland. In 1922 she visited Ireland. Although her passport application states that the purpose of the trip was "travel," it's hard to imagine that she was not traveling in her capacity as an AARIR leader.

Mary Kay Duffy was born Mary K. McGarry in Ballaghaderreen in County Roscommon, Ireland, in about 1882. She immigrated in 1899, joining an uncle in Cleveland. When she first arrived in the city, she served as a maid in the household of Jeremiah Sullivan, a prominent banker. Here she met and married Martin Duffy, another Irish immigrant. An active, energetic woman, she helped her husband launch a real estate business in Collinwood in the 1920s. Dedicated to her native land, she joined the Ladies Auxiliary of the Ancient Order of Hibernians in 1920 and organized an east-side division of the LAAOH. She was recognized as "Hibernian Woman of the Year." Enlisting her fellow Hibernians in the cause, Mary Kay Duffy was the driving force behind the establishment of the Irish Cultural Garden in Cleveland. She also hosted a weekly radio show called Echoes of Erin on the WHK radio station. She joined the American Association for Recognition of the Irish Republic as well, serving as President of the local Benjamin Franklin Council of the AARIR, as First Vice President at the state level, and as a National Vice President.



Mary Ellen Murphy was born in Cleveland in 1908 to Irish-born parents. She did not marry. Like Adelia Christy, she was active in Democratic Party politics in Cleveland. She worked most of her adult life at the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections. She joined the LAAOH and assisted Mary Kay Duffy in the maintenance of the Irish Cultural Garden. She shared many interests and activities with her brother, John G. Murphy, who was a Deputy Clerk at the Board of Elections and was a long-standing National Vice President of the AARIR. Joining the AARIR while still in her early 20s, Mary Ellen soon became a state secretary of the organization and chaired events such as an annual picnic sponsored by the AARIR at Euclid Beach Park featuring sports, music, and dance. The Cleveland AARIR councils, particularly the east-side Benjamin Franklin Council, also spearheaded Irish-American participation in the "Theater of Nations" and other nationality festivals held in Public Auditorium in the 1930s. Members of the Murphy and Duffy families, along with such other prominent Irish-Americans of the day as Thomas "Coal Oil" Masterson, newspaper editor Jim McCoy, and the father of Fr. Thomas Flynn, put on such plays as "Kathleen Mavourneen" to call attention to Irish culture and heritage.



Irish American Archives Society

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