

Fenian Roots in Cleveland

The Irish Catholics of Cleveland have with pride and pleasure looked upon you as the type of the patriotic "soggarth aroon" of their own desolate Isle of the ocean, of those shepherds of the people who flung themselves between the persecuted and the persecutor, the tyrant and his victim, and sealed their devotion to their flocks with their blood.

Your removal, Rev. Sir, has left a void in the Catholic hearts of Cleveland that will not be soon filled up, and the sentiment of all is, that it will be long ere "we shall look upon yuro like again."

FENIAN BROTHERHOOD.—The following ladies and gentlemen are the authorized collectors for the Tara Circle of the Fenian Brotherhood. P. O. NEIL, Centre.

Where this large body of men has kept itself to-day, nobody knows. Every thing in connection with them is veiled in mystery. A few have been seen lounging about town, and occasionally have been questioned by curious persons. They invariably declare that they know nothing regarding their destination. The men are probably quartered, by squads, upon our Irish citizens.

Plain Dealer newspaper items: Portion of the address made by known Cleveland Fenians deploring the removal of the then-Rev. T.P. Thorpe to Norwalk OH (5/27/1864); A Fenian fundraising notice (10/5/1865); Report of Fenians passing through and billeting in Cleveland in May 1866 (5/29/1866).

Being Irish in America has always involved a tension between the "old country" and the new. Pride in heritage has often been expressed as support for the cause of Irish nationalism but has just as often been shaped by circumstances in the United States. The first large public demonstration of Irish pride in Cleveland—a parade and banquet on St. Patrick's Day in 1842—was organized by a priest eager to show the Cleveland community that the Irish laborers who were paid with whiskey to dig the Ohio and Erie Canal could be temperate citizens. Irish-centered Temperance Societies went on to organize many of the early St. Patrick's Day celebrations in Cleveland—with the same goal in mind.

The rise of anti-immigrant sentiment in American politics, as a million souls fled Ireland during the Great Famine from 1845-1852, also certainly influenced the formation in Cleveland of the Hibernian Guards, a local militia of Irish-born men who also made a point of parading proudly through the streets of Cleveland on St. Patrick's Day from about 1848 through the beginning of the Civil War. It is not known if the Hibernian Guards were also inspired by the Young Ireland Rebellion of 1848 or the American exile of prominent Young Irelanders after the rebellion's collapse. Yet out of the Hibernian Guards came the earliest direct evidence for support in Cleveland for the cause of Irish nationalism.

Two Young Ireland exiles formed the Fenian Brotherhood in 1858 in New York, with the aim of stirring up American support for overthrowing British rule in Ireland. The U.S. Civil War intervened from 1861-1865. In Cleveland, many of the Hibernian Guards hastened to enlist in the American war effort, forming Company B of the 8th Ohio regiment, which was captained first by **William Kinney** and subsequently by **James K. O'Reilly**. Many Irish-born veterans returned from the American war with a renewed determination to assist the Irish cause. In Cleveland, **Captain Patrick Kearns Walsh**—a

Young Ireland exile, shoemaker, Hibernian Guard, and Civil War officer who had arrived in Cleveland by 1856--spearheaded the formation of Fenian circles in this city after the Civil War. Enthusiastic support came from some of the Irish immigrant community's most successful businessmen—from **Patrick Smith**, owner of the city's largest tugboat and dredging operation; from clothier **Michael Mooney**; and from **Thomas Manning**, an iron foundry owner.

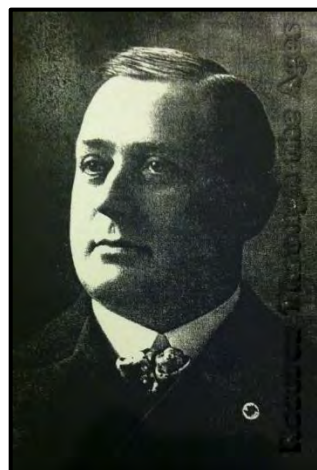
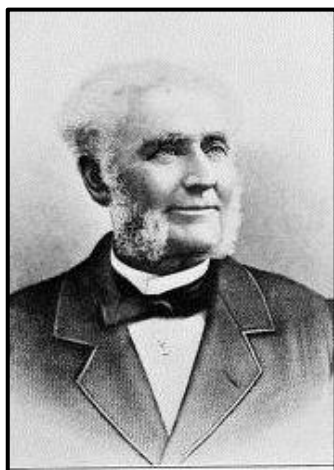
By October 1865, fundraising for the Fenian cause was in full swing in Cleveland; several Fenian "circles," a Fenian Hall, and visits to the city by national Fenian leaders and, from Ireland, by Fenian founder James Stephens were reported in the city's newspapers. Divisions arose within the Fenian movement both locally and nationally 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. The idea of invading Canada began to win the day.

A target date of June 1, 1866, was set for attacking Fort Erie, across the Niagara River from Buffalo. Cleveland folklore insists that the future Monsignor **T. P. Thorpe** allowed the Fenians to stockpile guns at Immaculate Conception Church. Though the parish did not exist as such until 1870, Thorpe was assigned to a precursor Cathedral chapel in the early 1860s. Due apparently to the priest's ardent devotion to the Irish nationalist cause, **Bishop Amadeus Rappe** did banish Thorpe temporarily to Norwalk OH in 1864. Nevertheless, as indicated in *Plain Dealer* articles on May 29 and 30 of that year, Cleveland was designated as a transfer and collection point for Fenian "freedom fighters"—most of them Civil War veterans--coming from points west and south. Ohio Fenian Head **Thomas Lavan** and several other officers were arrested in Cleveland on June 6 for "aiding and abetting violators of the neutrality laws of the United States." 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.

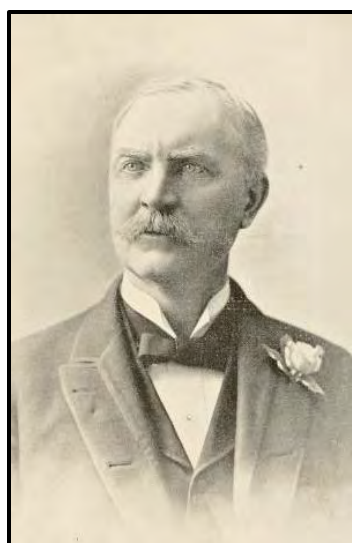
While notices of Fenian activity continued to appear in the Cleveland newspaper into the 1870s, the Fenian moment was fading. Many of the key activists in Cleveland applied their energies to other Irish-American organizations during the 1870s. **Thomas Manning** joined the younger **William J. Gleason** and **Martin A. Foran** in forming the Irish Literary and Benevolent Association, to promote Irish culture and fellowship. **Captain P.K. Walsh** founded and edited a Cleveland newspaper called *Celtic Index* and the *Irish National Magazine*. The Ancient Order of Hibernians--a national fraternal organization founded in New York in 1836 to combat anti-Catholic prejudice--also appeared for the first time in Cleveland in the early 1870s.

Some Cleveland Fenians, L-R: Captain James K. O'Reilly (County Cork, 1838-1900); Patrick Smith (County Cavan, 1822-1900); Michael Mooney (Roscrea, County Tipperary, 1825-1888); and Monsignor T. P. Thorpe (Dublin, 1838-1907)

A collection of correspondence from national Fenian leaders to William Sullivan, the head of a Fenian circle in Tiffin OH, can be found in the Western Reserve Historical Society.



Cleveland Embraces the Land League



Above: Land League antagonists Bishop Richard Gilmour (left) and William J. Gleason (right). **Below:** Funeral monuments for: William J. Gleason (County Clare, 1846-1905) in Calvary Cemetery and Patrick K. Walsh (Dundalk, County Louth, 1818-1886) in St. Joseph Cemetery. Sadly, the bronze sculpture that Walsh's colleagues took such pains to erect is now missing entirely, though the remaining inscription attests to their devotion: "God save Ireland. God bless the memory of Ireland's brave and unflinching patriot!"

The Land League developed in Ireland 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 agitated for fairer rents for tenant farmers. But the motto of the more radical wing of the movement, led by Michael Davitt, sounded a nationalist theme: "The land of Ireland for the people of Ireland."

Irish-born Clevelanders and Clevelanders of Irish descent committed readily to raising funds for the Land League cause. Michael Davitt spoke in Cleveland in October 1878, and Charles Stewart Parnell, leader of the constitutional wing of the movement, visited Cleveland in 1880. Some of the Cleveland Land Leaguers—most notably **Captain P. K. Walsh** and **Patrick Smith**-- had been in the forefront of the Fenian movement in this city. Joining the veterans in spearheading Land League branches was **William J. Gleason**, a newspaper man and promoter of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument on Public Square. **Martin A. Foran**, a one-time cooper and future judge and congressman, also served as a spokesperson. Swelling the ranks were many recent immigrants who arrived in Cleveland in the early 1880s, fleeing the very conditions that prompted the movement in Ireland.

Like many clergymen of the day in Ireland and America, Cleveland's **Bishop Richard Gilmour**—a Scotsman who had succeeded Bishop Rappe in 1872-- was concerned about the Land League's tactics in Ireland of violent intimidation and destruction of property. These were the same tactics that had been used in the 1870s against the mine owners in the coal-fields of Pennsylvania by the so-called Molly Maguires. Many people, including Bishop Gilmour, believed that the Ancient Order of Hibernians had provided

cover for the Molly Maguires in Pennsylvania and feared that the Land League chapters in the U.S. would similarly harbor a more violent form of Irish nationalism. In Cleveland Bishop Gilmour co-existed uneasily with the AOH because it was organized at that time along parish lines with parish priests as chaplains. Gilmour's suspicion of the secular Land League was more overt.

Bishop Gilmour wanted his Irish Catholic parishioners to prioritize being Catholic over being Irish. However, even though Gilmour sparred with the male Land Leaguers—attempting to block the group from marching in the annual St. Patrick's Day Parade, for instance—he saved out-right condemnation for the Ladies Land League. Bishop Gilmour proclaimed that political agitation was unwomanly; led by the Irish-born **Mary Rowland**, 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. Cleveland Land League supporters, both men and women, insisted that they would not back down. Patrick Smith even named a tugboat after Mary Rowland. When Captain P.K. Walsh died in 1886, Bishop Gilmour stopped short of refusing Walsh a church burial, but did forbid the Cathedral choir to sing at his funeral. In response, the Cleveland Land Leaguers immediately began a campaign to erect a monument to Walsh at St. Joseph Cemetery and also publicly thanked the AOH for attending the funeral.

The sparring was still going on in 1889, when Bishop Gilmour ordered the AOH to bar members of the Clan na Gael—a secret nationalist society that advocated the use of "physical force"--from serving as officers. That same year the diocesan paper, *The Catholic Universe Bulletin*, strongly implied that the late P.K. Walsh had traveled the country to recruit for the Clan na Gael under the guise of organizing branches of the Land League. Under pressure from a *Plain Dealer* reporter to respond to the accusations, Patrick Smith and William J. Gleason gave responses that come across as contradictory and obfuscating. But whatever their true commitments might have been, Gleason, Smith, and other Land Leaguers began to shift their public energies toward a new organization called the Irish National League, which advocated Home Rule for Ireland through the ballot box.

Right: Part of Bishop Gilmour's condemnation of the Ladies Land League, *Plain Dealer*, 5/22/1882; **Far Right:** Part of Mary Rowland's defense, *Plain Dealer*, 5/29/1882.

This display was created by Margaret Lynch for the **Irish American Archives Society**, with support from the **Irish Good Fellowship Club** and assistance from Kathleen Brennan. Thanks to Hon. Kenneth Callahan, John Gallagher, William and Pat Homan, Peter J. Corrigan, Pat McNea, Peggy Calvey Patton, Maureen Walsh Khal, the Daull and Prendergast families, the John Patten family, Don MacBride, the Daniel Borovac Family, the Thomas Sweeney family, Kevin M. Mooney, Hugh M. Gallagher, Joan Masterson Gill, Michael Wagner, Dennis Burke.

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 mag-

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

Irish Independence, 1916-1921 and Beyond

The push for “Home Rule” dominated Irish politics in the early 1900s. But the Gaelic Athletic Association and the Gaelic League stirred nationalist sentiment while secret societies—the Irish Republican Brotherhood and, in America, the Clan na Gael—plotted revolt. The faction-riven Clan na Gael was unified anew in 1900. About that time, a young man named **John Gallagher** immigrated to Cleveland from Curraun in Achill Parish in County Mayo and set about to revitalize the Clan na Gael in this city. The local newspapers of the day did not track any support that Clevelanders may have provided as the Clan’s national leaders worked with Sir Roger Casement to provide guns for an armed rebellion.

The execution of the leaders of the 1916 rising, the Conscription Crisis of 1918, and the introduction of the “Black and Tan” British auxiliary troops in 1919 all fanned the flames of rebellion. Many who would immigrate to Cleveland at a later date* came of age during the struggle for independence. Some joined the Brigades and guerilla-style “Flying Columns” organized regionally by the Irish Republican Army. **Thomas Burke**, who grew up near Carnacon in the vicinity of Lough Mask in County Mayo, joined the South Mayo Brigade, which made a celebrated ambush on a Royal Irish Constabulary force in Tourmakeady.

Some took the war to England. Several young Achill men were involved in a plot to burn warehouses on the Liverpool docks in November 1921. Two were sent to Dartmoor Prison in England. When released in January 1922, after the Anglo-Irish treaty was signed, they were forced to eat a last meal and became violently ill on the train home. One, **Michael Moran** died almost immediately, of suspected arsenic poisoning. Cleveland’s Clan na Gael raised funds for a commemorative gravestone for Lieutenant Moran on Achill Island. The second man, **Thomas Lynchehaun**, brother of Pat Lynch, the longtime president of Cleveland’s West Side Irish American Club, never regained his health and died, still an IRA Lieutenant, on Achill in 1926.

Members of the Flying Columns slept and ate on the run. Clevelander **Dan Harrington** recalled a hideout in a cave atop a mountain in County Cork. Years later **John Patten** of Dooega showed his children the hiding spot he had dug for himself on a hillside in Achill, while **Johnny McNea** of the Newport area found his gun where he hid it decades earlier while escaping capture. Families assisted the soldiers however they could. In Upper Skirdagh, above Newport, **Patrick McManamon** loaned horses to the men. **John Walsh** of Rosmuc, County Galway, was only a teenager when he was arrested for passing messages. **John Stokes**--who lived on the Castlebar Road heading into Newport and traveled the countryside peddling pans--gathered information about the movements of the British troops and shared it with the IRA men when they came down from the hills for a meal at night. Stokes also used his metalworking skills to put a tin facing on the inside front walls of the houses along the roadside to protect the inhabitants when the Black and Tans sprayed bullets from their lorries. .

Ordinary people were faced with tough dilemmas during those times. Dan Harrington saw a neighbor boy killed for protecting the names of his friends. **John Corcoran** was ordered to assassinate a British soldier who had arranged a rendezvous with an Irish girl. John Walsh’s father and brother were RIC constabularies. John Patten decided to join the Irish Free State Army when many of his peers chose to fight on against the treaty. Circumstances forced many to immigrate in the 1920s; some put their names on a “foreign reserve” list, promising to “return to Ireland if needed. Some of the veterans who came to Cleveland found fellowship in the Clan na Gael, which was operating more openly in Cleveland by the 1930s out of a space at West 65th and Detroit that was shared with the fledgling West Side Irish American Club. Achill man **Patrick O’Malley** became one of the city’s most powerful labor leaders, serving as regional head of the United Auto Workers and president of the Cleveland Federation of Labor. But others couldn’t find their place. Michael Moran’s younger brother, **Joseph Moran**, was out of work in Cleveland during the Depression and drifted out west. Many, such as **Michael Prendergast**, never spoke to their families at all about what they had done.

Those who were in Cleveland throughout those years of struggle had continued to find ways to support the cause from afar. Eamon De Valera, who became president of the Republic in 1919, visited Cleveland in 1919 and again in 1928 and 1930. De Valera promoted the Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic (AARIR) as a vehicle for support. Clevelander **Adelia Christy** was one of the national founders of the AARIR, but she was readily backed on a state and local level by a new generation of leaders, such as **Mary Kay Duffy**, **Mary Ellen Murphy**, and **Thomas “Coal Oil” Masterson** of this city. While differences undoubtedly existed, membership in the AARIR and Clan na Gael overlapped in Cleveland, and the AARIR helped with the fundraising for the Moran monument on Achill. Many Clevelanders made contributions over the decades, and the work continues through this day.



*Top: Bust in Westport of native son Major John MacBride, who was executed in 1916 and was the great-uncle of Clevelander Aidan MacBride.; and Achill gravestone commissioned for Lieutenant Michael Moran by the Cleveland Clan na Gael. Below: The West Mayo Brigade. *Aside from the name of Eamon De Valera, all names mentioned on this panel are either Clevelanders or people with relatives in Cleveland. Many others could certainly be added. This display is a work in progress.*