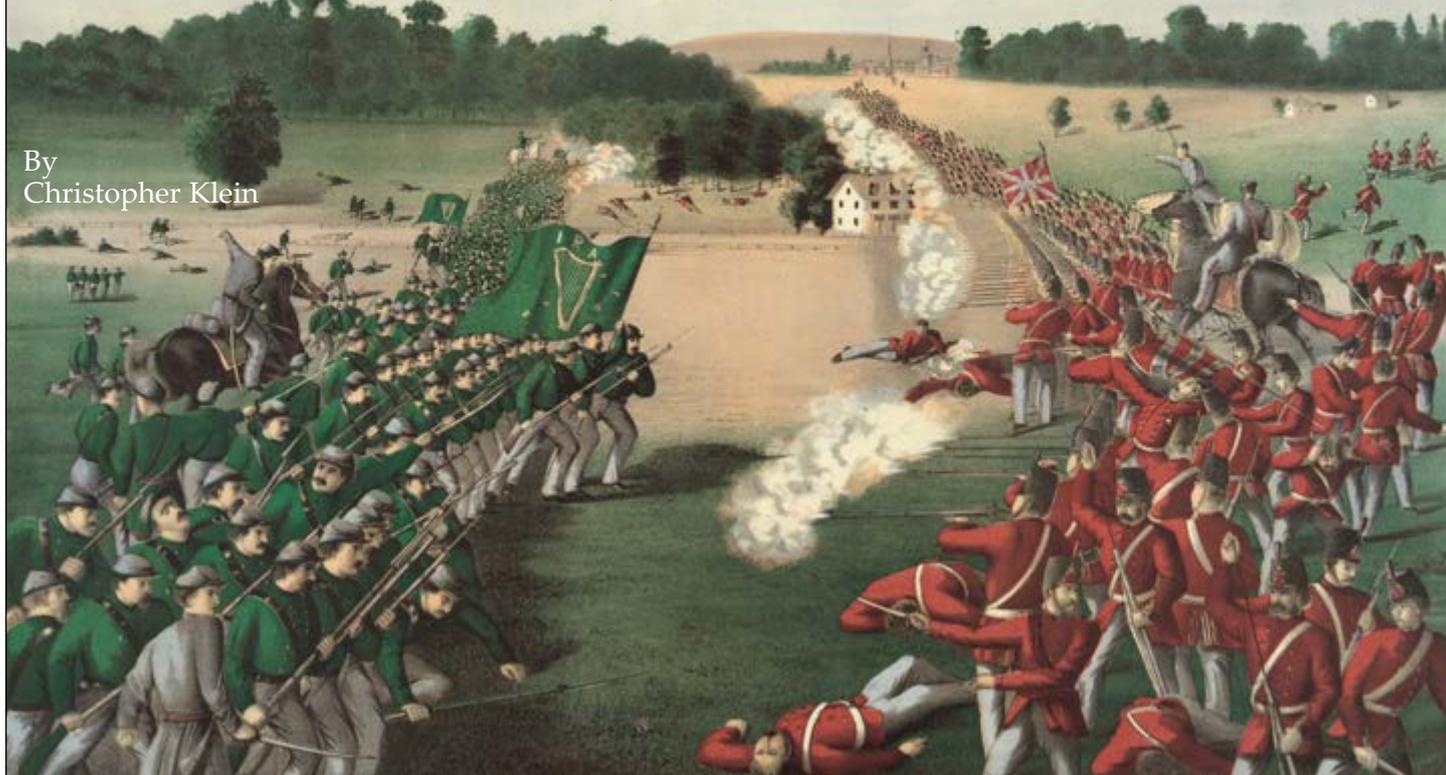


WHEN THE IRISH INVADED CANADA

By
Christopher Klein



Barely a year after General Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House, Virginia, a band of Irish-Americans who fought on both sides of the Civil War united to undertake one of the most fantastical missions in military history—to hold the British province of Canada hostage and ransom it for Ireland's independence. In fact, the self-proclaimed Irish Republican Army attacked Canada not just once, but five times between 1866 and 1871 in what are collectively known as the Fenian Raids

The Irish immigrants who invaded Canada were, to use today's parlance, "radicalized" by their experiences living under British rule. For seven centuries the British attempted to remake the Irish in their own image by extinguishing the island's religion, culture, and language. And when Ireland's potato crop failed in the 1840s and 1850s, many Irish believed the British were attempting to exterminate them altogether by their anemic response to the humanitarian disaster.

The Great Hunger claimed one million Irish lives and forced another two million to flee the island. Many of the refugees made new lives in the United States, and few ever forgot the plight of their homeland. Tens of thousands of Irish-Americans joined the Fenian Brotherhood, a revolutionary organization founded in New York City in 1858, and enlisted in both the Union and Confederate armies during the Civil War to receive military training for the real fight they wanted to wage—a war

to free Ireland. County Kilkenny native John O'Keeffe wrote that he enlisted in the Union army to "learn the soldier trade in the hope that the knowledge we acquired might, in the future, be of service to the old land."

By 1866 the Fenian Brotherhood was at the height of its power, establishing its own Irish Republic in exile complete with its own president, constitution, and capitol building in the heart of New York City. While Irish-Americans purchased Fenian war bonds issued in denominations between \$10 and \$500, Irish-born General Thomas William Sweeny, a Union hero at the Battle of Shiloh and Fenian secretary of war, spent months devising a five-pronged amphibious attack to strike the British Empire at its closest point—Canada.

The logic of targeting the British just across the northern border instead of an ocean away in Ireland appealed to many Fenians. "Canada is a province of Great Britain; the English flag floats over it

and English soldiers protect it. Wherever the English flag and English soldiers are found, Irishmen have a right to attack," wrote Fenian leader John O'Neill.

The Fenians hoped that an invasion of Canada could either divert British troops from Ireland and improve the odds of a successful revolution in their homeland, provide them with a base to launch privateers to disrupt British shipping, or spark an Anglo-American war that would result in the United States conquering Canada and giving Ireland its freedom in thanks for Fenian assistance. The most militant Fenians, though, believed they could overrun Canada and trade it back to the British in return for Ireland's independence.

Although an attack would violate American neutrality laws, the Fenian plan had the tacit support of the White House, which sought to pressure Great Britain to pay millions of dollars in reparations for damage caused by Confederate warships that had been

Dating Family Photographs:- 1840s to 1860s

Studying old photographic heirlooms is a wonderful way of discovering more about our family history. Atmospheric black and white (occasionally hand-coloured) photographs are unique and precious keepsakes, fascinating in many ways. As consumer items and domestic objects, photographs were admired, handled, displayed, gifted and treasured by our forebears; as historic images they allow us to picture those we never met or cannot remember; as personal visual records these special portraits even demonstrate the ideas and personal tastes of earlier generations – how they chose to appear before their contemporaries and how they wished to be remembered in the future. Whether formal studio photographs, or casual outdoor snapshots, old family photos bring us face to face with our ancestors and more recent relatives, opening a window in to their world.



The Dawn of Photography

Early photographic pioneers were trialling the first photographic portraits in the late-1830s, the new 'invention' of photography being publicly announced in 1839, in Britain and France simultaneously. Members of affluent households continued to experiment with the expensive, time-consuming pastime, but photographic portraits only become available to the general public from 1841, when the first commercial 'daguerreotype portrait rooms' opened in major cities. During the 1840s and 1850s portrait photographs began to grow fashionable throughout the developed world, from London to India, Dublin to New York, but the new mechanical portrait medium was still in its infancy: only in the 1860s did the first affordable mass-produced card-mounted prints bring photography to a wide population. So, from this time - the mid-Victorian era – onwards, many more of us encounter early photographs of our predecessors.

Photography in Ireland followed global trends, yet local conditions prevailed. In the mid-1800s elite Irish country house photography grew significantly among the landowning aristocracy and gentry, while most poor inhabitants never dreamed of visiting a studio. Some landscape and topographical photographers captured ordinary people working outdoors, standing outside their cottages or in the street, while the rising urban middle classes enjoyed displaying their success and fine clothes in elegant photographs. Nevertheless, proportionately few 19th century photos of Irish origins survive in today's family collections, reflecting the

island's complex history, especially the massive population decline from the 1840s - precisely when photography was becoming established. The tragic deaths and diaspora of millions through famine and economic poverty means that while early photographs belonging to families with Irish ancestry may have originated at home, many others were taken wherever the Irish travelled: perhaps England, Scotland, Europe, the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, even Africa, Asia and the Far East.

Dating Family Photographs

As family historians, we don't always recognise the subjects of old photographs passed down to us through the generations and often don't know when they were taken. So, this new series explains how to date family photographs from different eras – an essential tool when trying to establish unknown ancestors' identities. Broadly speaking, the chief photo dating methods are: identifying the photographic format; researching photographers/studios (where known); dating card mount styles (where relevant); and dating the visual image, especially the evidence of dress. Beginning here with early photos from the 1840s to 1860s, identifying the format or *type* of photograph is especially useful, for each decade brought new technology, as well as novel fashions.

Daguerreotype Photographs:- 1840s & 1850s

The earliest commercially available photographs were expensive *daguerreotype* portraits that initially cost around one guinea each (like a



modest miniature painting). Mainly only wealthy ancestors commissioned these luxury pictures, but we should know of them, in case one occurs in a collection – or perhaps to rule them out! One-off photographs, solid objects but irreplaceable if lost or damaged, daguerreotype photographs are elegant images on a silvered copper plate, layered under protective glass. They have a highly-polished, mirror-like surface and when tilted tend to fluctuate between a negative and positive image.

Usually daguerreotypes were set into a gold-coloured (usually brass) surround or 'mat'/'matte' and presented in a hinged padded case. Occasionally a photographer's name/address were

What's New?

Review

Claire Santry has the details on why a long-awaited consignment of record releases has left many genealogists underwhelmed, but thankfully she has some good news to share too, which is bound to lift the spirits of researchers!



It arrived. A long-awaited and hugely overdue instalment of register images that linked to the civil registration indexes finally plopped into the IrishGenealogy.ie database and caused a little ripple. Genealogists were a tad underwhelmed.

Admittedly, state officials responsible for IrishGenealogy.ie hadn't actually promised a mega bundle of material. But it was easy for family historians to translate the not inconsiderable delay in delivery of the package ('late-summer 2018' became 'pre-Christmas 2018' became 'early 2019' became 'early-summer 2019') into expectations that the hold-up meant an improved and bigger upload of most, if not all, of the outstanding records was on its way.

Instead, the consignment was merely late. While an additional two years' worth of birth, marriage and death registration indexes and register images had joined the site (births, 1917+1918, marriages, 1942+1943, and deaths, 1967+1968), the more

historical 'end' of the collection saw only the register images for marriages from 1864–1869 added. Older marriage records (1845–1863) and death records (1864–1878)... nada. They have yet to be linked to register images. (Birth indexes and register images are complete from 1864 to 1918, as per the 100-75-50-year data protection 'rule'.)



At this rate, if the powers-that-be continue to prioritise the more recent BMDs, we'll be waiting for the last of the historical records to make their way online as we approach the year 2030. Sorry.

While the late delivery of the civil registration records failed to over-excite the Irish genealogical community, an announcement from the Property Registration Authority (PRA) certainly did. Out of the blue came news that the PRA is at the earliest stages of a project to digitise its Registry of Deeds collection. This was music, indeed, to the ears of family historians, because the Registry of Deeds collection – with its five million records of wills, land and property transactions and marriage settlements dating from 1708 – is a rich source of genealogical information. It, and the Church of Ireland's Parish Registers collection, which is already some way along the process of digitisation, are the last two major national collections still unindexed and difficult to access. And now they are on their way.

There is no point trying to guess how long digitisation of the Registry of Deeds collection will take. The project is only at 'steering committee' stage, and the logistics will take some working out. There are preservation issues; there are several different categories of records; there may be physical challenges if imaging is to be done from the original