



The Fenian Invasion of Canada

By Warren F. Glover

The Irish (Fenian) raid into Canada on June of 1866 was organized by the Fenian Brotherhood in America, as part of other attacks by this group from 1866 to 1871, into what was then British North America, later becoming Canada, hoping to seize and hold hostage territory. The purpose was to bring pressure on Britain to withdraw from ruling Ireland, then allowing the Fenians to leave Canada.

Catholic Irish-Canadians were divided; many torn between loyalty to their new home and sympathy with Fenian aims. The Protestant Irish were mostly loyal to Britain and fought with the Orange Order against the Fenians. It is speculated the American government initially ignored Fenian invasion preparations, angered by memories of British assistance to the Confederate States during our Civil War.

The Fenians were split into two factions. The original group was led by Fenian founders James Stephens and John O'Mahony, who focused more on fundraising for rebels in Ireland. The more militant "senate faction" led by William R. Roberts, believed even a marginally successful invasion of Canada would provide them with leverage in their efforts to free Ireland from British rule. Their plan was drafted by "Secretary of War" Gen. T. W. Sweeny, a distinguished former Union Army officer in the Civil War. Key to their plan was an attack on Fort Erie from Buffalo, meant to draw British troops away from Toronto in a feigned strike at the nearby Welland Canal system.

About 1,300 Fenians crossed the Niagara River in the early dawn of June 1, 1866, under Col. John O'Neill. Sabotaged



*The Battle of Ridgeway,
Library Archives of Canada*

not begin intercepting Fenian reinforcements until 2:15 PM, 14 hours after Owen Starr's advance party had crossed the Niagara River, ahead of O'Neill's main force. Once the "Michigan" was re-deployed, O'Neill's forces were cut off from further supplies and reinforcements.

After assembling with other provincial units and traveling all night, Canadian troops advanced into a well laid ambush, at the Battle of Ridgeway, as sprung by about 700 Fenians on the morning of June 2, 1866, north of Ridgeway, a small hamlet west of Fort Erie. The Canadian militia consisted of inexperienced volunteers, with no more than rudimentary basic training. They were armed with Enfield musket rifles, equal to the Fenian's armaments. A single company of the Queens Own Rifles of Toronto had been armed the day before during their ferry crossing of Lake Ontario from Toronto with state of the art 7 shot Spencer repeating rifles. However, they did not have the chance to practice with them and were given only 28 rounds per man. The Fenians were mostly battle hardened Civil War veterans, armed with weapons from surplus Civil War supplies, consisting of either Enfield rifled muskets or the comparable Springfield rifle.

The opposing forces exchanged volleys for about two hours, before a series of disjointed command orders threw the Canadian forces into confusion.

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The Fenians took advantage by launching a bayonet charge, breaking and scattering the Canadian ranks. Canadians killed on the battlefield: 7; died of their wounds later: 2. Fenians killed: 8; and wounded: 16.

After the battle, the Canadians retreated to Port Colborne at the Lake Erie end of the Welland Canal. The Fenians rested briefly at Ridgeway, then returned to Fort Erie. Another encounter led to a surrender of Canadian militia, who had attempted to move into the Fenian's rear guard.

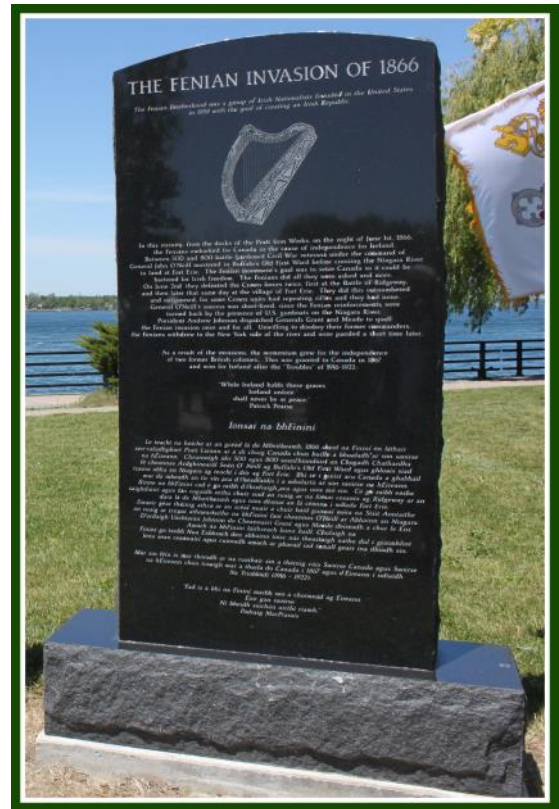
After realizing more reinforcements were not coming and the approach of large numbers of both Canadian militia and British regulars, the Fenians released their Canadian prisoners and returned to Buffalo early on June 3, 1866. In the process, they were intercepted by the patrolling gunboat "Michigan" and surrendered to the U. S. Navy.

On June 6, 1866, U. S. President Andrew Johnson issued a proclamation requiring enforcement of the Neutrality laws, removing any remaining American government support for the Fenians. Civil War U. S. Generals Ulysses S. Grant and George Meade went to Buffalo to investigate. The U. S. Army was instructed to seize all Fenian weaponry and ammunition, with any Fenians discovered, to be arrested.

Although the Fenian invasion did little to immediately advance the cause of Irish independence, the raids and Canada's reaction to a perceived lack of security when others are depended upon, helped galvanize support for the forming of the Canadian Confederacy in 1867.



Irish Republic Fenian Brotherhood Badge, 1866



The Fenian Monument is located in Towpath Park at the foot of Hertel Avenue, Buffalo, NY

150th Anniversary of the Fenian Invasion 1866-2016

Schedule of Events

- **Wednesday, April 6, 6 p.m.** – Panel Discussion, *The Free Ireland Perspective on the Fenian Invasion*, Buffalo History Museum – Timothy Bohan (Historian/Author), James Hill (Niagara Parks Commission), Dr. Timothy Madigan (St. John Fisher College), James O'Brien (Ancient Order of Hibernians, AOH), William Patterson (AOH), Dr. Bridgette Slavin (Medaille College) - Moderators: Douglas Kohler (Erie County Historian), Edward Patton (Buffalo Irish Genealogical Society, BIGS)
- **Wednesday, April 27, 6 p.m.** – Lecture, *Fenianism and the Centennial of the Easter Uprising*, Buffalo History Museum – Edward Patton (BIGS) and Craig Speers (AOH)

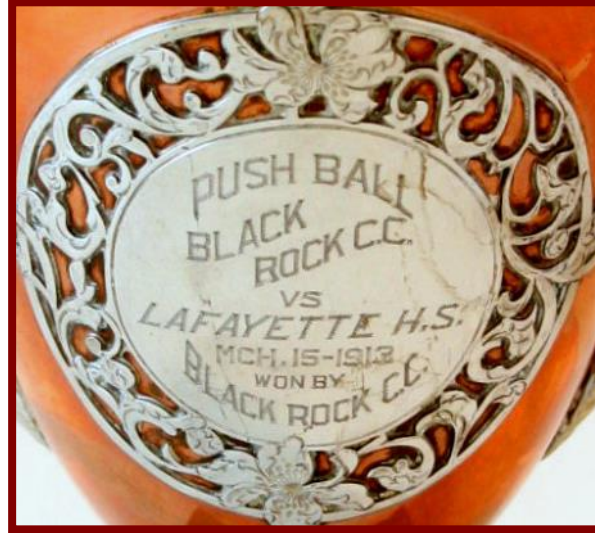
Push Ball: The Forgotten Sport

By Doreen DeBoth

Can you imagine playing a game very similar to football with a leather ball that is six foot in diameter? Not too many sporting enthusiasts today are familiar with the game of Push Ball but back in March of 1913, the Black Rock CC won a very large trophy after playing a game against Lafayette High School. The very attractive trophy that is in our collection is 15.5 inches high and made of silver and copper.



The game was invented in the 1890's by Moses G. Crane of Newton, MA who thought that if a large enough ball was used and the player on one side could not see the player other, it would make for a more interesting game. In 1894 the first ball was produced using four of the largest hides in NY and small steel belt hooks (1,768) with a bladder made of rubber and then inflated. The game became very



popular on college campuses in the US and in England.

The object of Push Ball is to push the ball and keep it in action until you cross your opponent's goal. It is played on a level field, 140 yards in length and 50 yards in width. A team is composed of eleven players on a side, divided by: 5 forwards, 2 left wings, 2 right wings and 2 goal-keepers. If a team shoves the ball under the cross bar and between the goal posts they score 5 points; lifting or throwing the ball over the cross bar scores 8 points. The players may obstruct their opponents by body tackling or holding but are penalized, as in football, for tripping, kicking, or tackling below the knees.



Push Ball on Yale Field from Yale Alumni Weekly

The official ball used wasn't cheap. The Spaulding Official Push Ball was priced at \$200.00 in 1907 in Spaulding's Athletic Library catalogue titled *Push Ball: History and Description of the Game*.

Source: *Push Ball: History and Description of the Game*, 1907 by American Sports Publishing Company, NY.



Black Rock Historical Society
1902 Niagara Street
Buffalo, New York 14207

Museum Hours of Operation:

Friday 10:00am-4:00pm
New: Saturday 11:00am-3:00pm

For any inquiries please contact us at
info@blackrockhistoricalsociety.com

Find us online!

www.blackrockhistoricalsociety.com

[Facebook.com/Blackrockhistorical](https://www.facebook.com/Blackrockhistorical)



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Schedule of Events *(Continued from Pg. 2)*

- **Friday, June 3, 6 p.m. - Bike Ride** (Buffalo Irish Center to Irish Famine Memorial and return). **Post-ride Hooley** featuring music by *Rush the Growler*
- **Saturday, June 4, 10:00 a.m. - Living History** with the “*Buffalo 7th Regiment*” at Market Square, corner Niagara and Amherst Streets
10:30 a.m. - Tour of the Religious Arts Center (\$10.00), 157 East Street at Amherst Street
11:30 a.m. - Parade begins at the Buffalo Religious Arts Center, along Niagara Street to the **Fenian Monument and Ceremony** (foot of Hertel Avenue). **Reception** following at the Black Rock Historical Society (1902 Niagara Street)

Call for Artifacts of Our Industrial Past

Now that Spring is here and thoughts of downsizing and cleaning out closets, basements and attics are on the minds of many, please give us a call if you think you may have something that tells the story of our area. If there is something you can't bring into the museum, we will gladly pick it up (call 716-510-4007) Or, if you aren't sure about the historical value of an object, we will be glad to help you out. And don't forget about those old photos!

The Black Rock Historical Society is trying to build the museum with items from our industrial past. If you have anything from Pratt & Letchworth, Pratt & Lambert, Buffalo Weaving and Belting, Sikes Furniture Factory, Curtiss Wright, American Standard, J.H. Williams, Western Electric, Buffalo Robe Co., Markel Electric, or Anaconda Brass, give us a call or email:

info@blackrockhistoricalsociety.com

Recent Acquisitions

The Black Rock Historical Society recently acquired seven hand made dolls from Poland. made of various fabrics, ribbon and laces. The donation was made by Linda Ann (Dietrich) Wojick who inherited them from her grandmother who had had them in her possession for eighty years.

Labels on the bottom reveal they were from the Krakow region. The green rooster trademark logo indicates that they are high quality folk products.



These artifacts reflect the rich Polish Heritage that is found in the Grant Amherst and surrounding areas and are a great asset to our collection.

The Black Rock

Historical Society seeks Volunteers

Your expertise, interest and/or love of history are good reasons to volunteer. Students, seniors and everyone in-between are welcome to volunteer in various areas of interest: office/computer, education, outreach, maintenance, etc. You can strengthen your community, learn or develop skills about preservation, and meet new people. We are asking you to commit to only four hours per month but you are welcome to sign up for more. Every volunteer can make a difference. To volunteer, contact us via email on our website or call 716-510-4007.