

TROUBLE ON THE BORDER

The Fenian Raids of 1866-1871

In February 1866, as elements of the self-proclaimed Irish Republican Army mustered in northern New York State at Malone, Potsdam, Ogdensburg, Cape Vincent, Oswego, and Rochester, the *Perth Courier* published a warning to those who might dare to challenge Perth's Volunteer Militia Companies.¹

*Should any Fenians dare appear,
They'll meet a warm reception here,
From many a loyal Volunteer.
Two Companies we now possess;
And 'may their shadows ne'er grow less',*

*As to the van they bravely press!
May they defend their country's cause,
Uphold her Liberty and Laws;
For Truth and Freedom nobly stand,
And be an honour to our land.*

Act 1 - 1866

In the small hours of Wednesday, March 7, 1866 the telegraph receiver at the Perth terminus of the Brockville and Ottawa (B&O) Railway clattered to life². The priority incoming cable, from Colonel Patrick Leonard MacDougall (1819-1894), Adjutant-General of Canadian Militia, ordered local Militia Captains Edmund Spillman (c1841-1924) and Thomas Scott (1841-1915) to mobilize their Companies. The call-up was part of a general order activating 10,000 volunteers from across the United Province of Canada³ in anticipation of an invasion from the United States.

The American Republic had made two prior attempts to seize Britain's North American colonies by force of arms. In December 1775, their Continental Army was stopped at the walls of Quebec City by a motley assortment of regular troops and pressed militia. Between 1812 and 1814 American armies invaded Upper and Lower Canada (Ontario and Quebec) on multiple occasions but were narrowly defeated by British regiments unreliably supported by a reluctant colonial militia. As Canada stood on the cusp of nationhood in 1866, however, the third American effort to realize their imagined 'manifest destiny'⁴, through the proxy army of the Fenian⁵ Brotherhood, was met by an unprecedented wave of patriotism and a rush to the colors by militia volunteers.

¹ *Perth Courier*, February 16, 1866. Credited only to a 'Poetical Friend', the poem was almost certainly the work of Robert Jamieson (1848-1932), a Drummond Township school teacher in 1866 and later Division Court Clerk.

² The B&O Railway had reached Perth in 1859 but the telegraph connection only dated from 1864.

³ In 1841 Upper and Lower Canada had been combined into a single colony with a single parliament - the United Province of Canada.

⁴ A term most frequently credited to John O'Sullivan (1813-1895), when editor of the *Democratic Review* in 1845, to express the widely held American belief that the United States was destined to become a 'continental nation', occupying all of North America, through the special virtues of the American people and their institutions.

⁵ Named for the 'Fianna', groups of legendary warrior-bands associated with Fionn mac Cumhail, a hunter-warrior of Irish mythology.

In 1865 two seemingly unconnected events collided to create a real and present danger to the Province of Canada. After five years of blood-letting, General Robert E. Lee (1807-1870) surrendered the remains of his Confederate Army at Appomattox, Virginia, in April and in September Britain crushed a nascent rebellion in Ireland. The failed rising in Ireland was led by the Irish Republican Brotherhood but made possible by arms and funding provided by the Fenian Brotherhood in the United States. With hopes of independence for their homeland dashed yet again, 10,000 battle-hardened former Union and Confederate soldiers⁶ of Irish descent responded to a call from the Fenian Brotherhood to help free their homeland by seizing Canada and holding it ransom for Irish independence.

To many, the idea of invading and occupying Canada, or at least parts of it, and trading it for Irish self-government, seemed at first little more than another Irish pub dream. But, with American government connivance, by the spring of 1866 the threat had become very real.

During the American Civil War, although stopping short of diplomatic recognition of the Confederate States, the British government had followed a pro-Southern policy. British factories sold war materiel to the South, purchased southern cotton when they could get it and allowed the Confederate Navy to build and service commerce raiding vessels in British ports. In Canada Confederate procurement agents used false bills-of-lading to ship horses, grain and other war materiel to the South, Toronto and Niagara-on-the-Lake were nests of Confederate spies and attorney (and soon-to-be Prime Minister) John A. Macdonald was the retained legal counsel of Confederate agent John W. Headley (1841-1930)⁷ who directed a terrorist campaign of fire bombings in the Northern States from Toronto.

As a result, in 1865 much of the American press was fiercely anti-British and doing all it could to encourage Fenian designs on Canada. Moreover, the President of the United States (1865-1869), the deplorable Andrew Johnson (1808-1875)⁸, ensured that U.S. authorities turned a blind eye to the arming and drilling of thousands of Fenian recruits along the border from New Brunswick to Niagara. While making no public announcements of support, Johnson, and his Secretary of State William Seward (1801-1872), privately told the Fenian leadership that the United States government would “*acknowledge accomplished facts*”.

⁶ More than 150,000 Irish-Americans fought in the Union ranks and another 20,000 fought for the Confederacy.

⁷ Later American Secretary of State 1895-1896.

⁸ A native of North Carolina, Andrew Johnson never attended school, but apprenticed to a tailor. He nevertheless made his way through local politics to become Governor of Tennessee and then a U.S. Senator. As the only Southern Senator not to resign his seat on the outbreak of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln chose Johnson as his Vice President and he came to the Presidency due to Lincoln's assassination. Johnson vetoed all legislation extending rights to the recently freed slaves and was impeached for misconduct but escaped conviction by a single vote. Johnson is regarded by most historians as possibly the worst Presidents in American history.



Fenian Bond, 1865

an opposing group, supporting another uprising in Ireland itself, was led by John Francis O'Mahony (1815-1877). There was also a small group of Canadian Fenians, led by Michael Murphy (1826-1868) of Toronto, who opposed Roberts' invasion plan and supported O'Mahony's Irish insurrection.

As the winter of 1865-1866 turned to spring, between three and four thousand armed Fenians gathered at border mustering centres in anticipation of a three-pronged campaign into Canada planned for St. Patrick's Day, March 17th. One force was to invade at Fort Erie and cut canal and railway communications. Another was to advance on Montreal through the Eastern Townships of Quebec. The third was tasked with crossing the St. Lawrence River at Prescott, seizing rail and river communications, and marching on to Ottawa.

As dawn lightened the sky at Perth on Thursday March 8th, Captains Spillman and Scott sent their Sergeants door to door across town and the neighboring townships, calling the local Rifle Company and Light Infantry Company to action. By late afternoon more than 100 men were assembled in the market square.

They were headquartered in the town hall and while there were visited and addressed by several of the most prominent gentlemen of this place who exhorted them to "rally round the flag" and do their duty to their Queen and country as worthy descendants of the stock from which they sprang⁹ ...

Before night both companies were ready ... so anxious were some of the gentlemen to go that in several instances they induced the captains to take them in place of the more youthful members of their respective companies ...¹⁰

The call-up of March 1866 not only brought active militia members rushing to the colors, in such numbers that every company in the colony was overstrength, but it drew back to their old units men who had long since left their hometowns for new opportunities elsewhere.

⁹ The vast majority of the Perth volunteers were the grandsons or great-grandsons of men who had fought under the British flag in the Peninsular Campaigns and in Canada during the Napoleonic Wars.

¹⁰ *Perth Courier*, March 16, 1866.

John McIntosh and Thomas Farmer, formerly of Perth, but lately resident in the United States, arrived from 'the land of the free' in order to re-enter the Volunteer ranks and lend a hand in repelling, if necessary, the piratical Fenian bands that boastfully threaten to devastate and conquer our country.

They manfully determined, as soon as they heard of the Perth Companies being called to the front, to return in the time of danger, and shed their blood, should it be required, for the defense of their native land. So, acting up to this patriotic idea, they threw up the lucrative situations they held where they happened to be located, and steered their course straight for home, where they safely arrived, ready for the worst. Such conduct is worthy of the greatest praise.¹¹

The Militia Department's official call-up had been for 10,000 men to support the 10,000 British regulars already garrisoned in Canada. The response of the Volunteers was so overwhelming, however, that 14,000 men flooded the ranks and, in the face of their passion for the cause, the government found itself with little choice but to accept them all.

In keeping with that long standing military tradition of 'hurry-up-and-wait', Perth's citizen soldiers restlessly occupied the Town Hall through Thursday afternoon and all of Friday until, at 4:00 a.m. Saturday March 10th, they were at last marched to the railway station and put aboard a special train bound for Brockville.

A number of people assembled at the station to see them off, among whom were the daughters of the Hon. Roderick Matheson¹² who treated each man to sandwiches, tea and cake ... highly appreciated by the men, all of whom were greatly fatigued from the loss of rest for the two nights previous and who certainly were much benefited by the thoughtful quietness of their fair entertainers ... rushed down to Brockville with a rapidity rarely attained by the trains on the B&O Railway¹³ and arrived about 8 o'clock.¹⁴

A week later the *Perth Courier* published a first-person account of life on active service as provided by its editor, James Murray Walker (1845-1938), then serving as a Sergeant in the Perth Light Infantry Company.¹⁵

Both companies were marched up to the old [Brockville] Town Hall ... and a list of the men to be billeted at the different hotels, saloons, and boarding houses, handed to the Captains. Nearly every public house – good, bad, and very indifferent – from the 'St. Lawrence Hall' down to 'Willson House' and 'Mullaney's Saloon' – are represented, some of them rather fully, by the red and green coats. There is scanty hotel accommodation in Brockville for travelers or "any other man", until the Volunteers shall have been sent home or a large hole made in their number by the bullets or bayonets of the 'Finnigans'.

¹¹ *Perth Courier*, April 6, 1866. McIntosh rejoined the Rifle Company and Farmer rejoined the Infantry Company.

¹² Roderick Matheson (1793-1873), War of 1812 veteran, businessman and politician, member of the Legislative Council from 1847 until his appointment to the Canadian Senate in 1867. If all of his unmarried daughters were present, refreshments were served by Isabella (1834-1911), Anna (1840-1919), Eliza (1841-1929), Joanna (1842-1916) and Rose (1815-1895).

¹³ Brockville & Ottawa Railroad.

¹⁴ *Perth Courier*, March 16, 1866.

¹⁵ *Perth Courier* editor James M. Walker was serving at the rank of Sergeant under the command of Captain Thomas Scott, publisher/editor of the competing *Perth Expositor*.

Some of 'mine hosts' act very unpatriotically, in providing insufficient accommodation for their 'protectors', and one house in particular ... is said to weigh out the rations to every uniformed boarder in the establishment. Another, out of pure ill-nature, will not allow enough beds to accommodate half the lodgers who are unfortunate enough to wear uniforms; and those who remain outside the beds are compelled to take the soft side of the floor to lie awake all night. To avoid the latter unpleasant alternative, some of the men are sent down to the armory, where beds are furnished by the courtesy of the Brockville Volunteers.

Though taverns are plenty enough, I have heard of no one of the Volunteers being on the 'spree', or put under guard for being drunk; and am confident that the Perth Volunteers will not disgrace the good old town of Perth and themselves by being put under arrest for any of these offenses.

On Monday last the usual warning was given by a bugler and sergeant, to the hotel keepers and others, against giving credit to the Volunteers, as the debts incurred after that notice, could not be collected.¹⁶

At Brockville, the Perth Rifle Company was merged with Rifle Companies from Brockville, Carleton Place, Gananoque, Merrickville and Pakenham to create the 41st Battalion Brockville Rifles, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel James D. Crawford (1816-1878), businessman, canal contractor and politician. The Perth Light Infantry Company was merged with Infantry Companies from Almonte, Brockville, Fitzroy, Lansdowne and Smiths Falls to create the 42nd Battalion Brockville Infantry, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Jacob Dockstader Buell (1827-1894), lawyer and politician.¹⁷ The following week the *Perth Courier* reported,

We are pleased to learn from several participants who witnessed the turnout of the several companies at Brockville on Saturday that the Perth companies bore away the palm, both in appearance and drill. They were universally admitted to be the most soldierly looking companies in the place and we have no doubt should their services be required for anything more formidable than a parade they will do their duty ...¹⁸

The Province of Canada Militia Act of 1855 had, for the first time, created a 'Permanent Active Militia' in the form of local volunteer companies replacing the usually untrained and unarmed sedentary militia that had represented local defence since 1651.

Uniforms supplied to the force of the 1860s were green for the Rifle Companies and scarlet for the Infantry units. The headgear for both was a high shako bearing a brass plate ornamented with a beaver, the words 'Canadian Militia' and a wreath of maple leaves (although on duty the men wore a more comfortable forage cap).

¹⁶ *Perth Courier*, March 16, 1866.

¹⁷ Buell resigned his command in 1866 and was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Arthur James Matheson (1842-1913) of Perth.

¹⁸ *Perth Courier*, March 16, 1866.



*Rifle Company Uniform*¹⁹



Canadian Militia Hat Badge c1866



Infantry Company Uniform

Designated separately as 'Rifle' and 'Infantry' companies, the only real difference between the units was the color of their coats. Both received exactly the same training and both were equipped with the standard British Army weapon of the day, the 1853 Enfield rifled musket;²⁰ although, when the Perth Rifle Company reached Brockville, a few of their number were re-equipped with breach-loading Spencer repeating rifles.²¹

On the opposite bank of the St. Lawrence many men of the Fenian force still wore all or part of the blue or grey uniform brought with them from service in the Union or Confederate armies, some modified with green facings sewn onto the jacket fronts. Many others were dressed in civilian garb with only a green arm or hat band to signify their allegiance. Most were armed with Enfield and Springfield rifled muskets, acquired from U.S. Army armories left conveniently unguarded and unlocked.

*We are the Fenian Brotherhood, skilled in the arts of war,
And we're going to fight for Ireland, the land we adore,
Many battles we have won, along with the boys in blue,
And we'll go and capture Canada, for we've nothing else to do.*²²

¹⁹ Illustration by R. J. Marrion © Canadian War Museum.

²⁰ Developed at the Royal Small Arms Factory (RSAF), Enfield, England, it was a muzzle-loading percussion model firing a .577 ball and first saw service with the British Army in the Crimean War (1854-1856). It was also widely used by both Union and Confederate troops during the American Civil War (1861-1865).

²¹ The Spencer was the world's first metallic cartridge repeating rifle. Invented in 1859 by American Christopher Spencer (1833-1922), during the American Civil War, its magazine held seven rounds. The Spencer had been adopted by the Union Army, especially the cavalry, but did not generally replace the standard issue muskets.

²² Fenian marching song.



Fenian Banner



Fenian Infantryman²³

The men of the Perth Volunteer Companies came from every walk of life found in small town Canada. Rifles Captain Edmund Spillman was an interior decorator. Infantry Captain Thomas Scott was a newspaper publisher. The men under their command included lawyers, merchants, bankers, architects, innkeepers, printers, office clerks, bakers, blacksmiths, shoemakers, stonemasons, butchers, miners, mill workers, carpenters, laborers, and farmers.



The Willson House, King Street West, Brockville, beside Victoria Hall
(Courtesy Doug Grant Collection)

Officers served their Queen gratis while privates were paid 25 cents per day before deductions for the cost of sheets, laundry, hair cutting, barrack damage, etc. The Militia Department officially met the Volunteer's cost of rations and lodging, but some billet landlords turned profiteer and some men of the Perth Rifle Company found themselves paying for their own meals.

Great dissatisfaction is caused by the miserable manner in which the Riflemen are fed at the 'Willson House'. In fact, all who can afford it prefer to pay for their meals out of their own pockets, at other

²³ Illustration by Christoph Mueller.

*hotels, rather than be compelled to starve at this would-be first-class house. The rest of the men boarding at the St. Lawrence Hall, The International House and other houses of less note get the very best of everything, and we are well satisfied with both rations and lodgings. The Willson House nuisance should be at once enquired into and stopped.*²⁴

Even for the better fed, married men with families left behind faced hardship. At one point lawyer John Deacon (1823-1909)²⁵, representing the Volunteer Relief Committee of Perth Town Council, “*brought quite a sum [\$116] ... for distribution among the members of the two companies*”²⁶, but the families back in Perth, and often the Volunteer’s themselves, were still hard pressed. The local press was soon calling for broader support.

*... it is necessary that some other means of assistance should be provided. There are several municipalities in the County from which no Volunteer Companies have been sent to the front, and as they are all as much interested in the protection of life and property as Perth is, it is no more than right that they should bear their share of the expenditure necessary for that purpose. The County Council meets on Tuesday next, and we hope they will take this matter into consideration and provide some relief for the families of Volunteers out of the County funds.*²⁷



*Brockville c1865*²⁸

Not everyone at Perth regarded the Fenian Brotherhood as a “*piratical band [of] New York ragamuffins*” and “*a reckless horde of robbers and scoundrels*” as they were described by the *Courier* and the *Expositor*. Burton Campbell (1822-c1905), editor of the town’s third newspaper, the *British Standard*, was a great deal more sympathetic to the cause of Irish Republicanism²⁹, prompting the *Courier* to accuse his journal of,

²⁴ *Perth Courier*, March 23, 1866.

²⁵ Later Renfrew County Judge.

²⁶ *Perth Courier*, March 23, 1866.

²⁷ *Perth Courier*, June 15, 1866.

²⁸ Courtesy of the Doug Grant Collection.

²⁹ Unfortunately, very few copies of the *British Standard* have survived.

*... spouting virulent treason. Its editor is a violent Irishman We earnestly call upon the Attorney General to lock him up, or else furnish him with a free pass to the United States.*³⁰

Campbell was not 'locked up', but two months after the *Courier* called for his arrest, he was sacked by *British Standard* publisher Richard Shaw (1822-1872) and left for Ottawa.³¹

In frosty conditions during March and early April, the Perth companies, as part of the 41st and 42nd Battalions, were tasked with defending the river front docks and railway yards at Brockville and securing the line of communications between Prescott and Gananoque.,

*We parade three times a day, at six o'clock in the morning, at ten and four. The men are drilled from one to two hours each time. Guard is mounted at 11 o'clock, and in addition to the regular sentries the town is patrolled during the night. One party goes east, the other west ... There is also a gun boat which cruises up and down the river, so that you see the Fenians can hardly take us unaware.*³²

Across the river the Fenians also drilled, but stuck close to the bars and rooming houses of Massena, Ogdensburg, Potsdam, Canton and Gouverneur. No attempt was made to attack Brockville or Prescott, although they occasionally made their presence known.

*A few nights ago some mischievous Yankee Fenian sympathizers in Ogdensburg fired off a number of rockets in order to raise some fun at our expense, but the bait did not take as well as they expected as only a few people in Prescott were badly scared, and the fright did not spread to other towns.*³³

According to a regimental history of the Brockville Rifles, the only shot fired at Brockville during the events of 1866 occurred one night when a scow was spotted passing close to shore along the town's waterfront.

*As was the custom it was challenged by a sentry who received no response from the crew. The sentry was ordered to fire by Capt. Poole, the officer in command of the guard. The sentry hesitated and Capt. Poole took his rifle and fired at the scow's lantern. The shot smashed the lantern and cut the halter securing a horse. The horse reared up and fell into the hold breaking a leg. The scow then came to shore and proved to be a smuggler, which is said to account for [its] failure to answer the challenge. In the finest traditions of the service, and as expected of an officer and gentleman, Capt. Poole paid for the horse.*³⁴

³⁰ *Perth Courier*, May 11, 1866.

³¹ Burton Campbell's apparent support for Irish independence and the Fenian Brotherhood in 1866 were probably little more than an example of his bloody-mindedness. His pro-Fenian editorials are at odds with a profile published in the *Perth Courier* of August 3, 1934, where he was described as born in Northern Ireland, a "devoted Anglican, Conservative, staunch Britisher and ardent hater of Uncle Sam". The disconnect is probably explained by the fact that the 1934 profile also described him as "an original and unique character in every way ... when sober or otherwise ... [who] startled the community by his vigorous and reckless editorials; abusive, personal and always interesting ... [and] an active opponent all his days of all the Courier managers stood for". A few years after he was sacked by the *British Standard* in 1866 Campbell was back in Perth, having purchased that newspaper and, when the *Standard* soon went bankrupt, he went to work (briefly) for his former nemesis, the *Perth Courier*.

³² Report by Captain James Condie Poole (1825-1883) of the Carleton Place Rifle Company, published in the *Carleton Place Herald* of June 13, 1866 of which he was editor.

³³ *Perth Courier*, March 23, 1866.

³⁴ *Semper Paratus: An Unofficial History Of The Brockville Rifles*, edited by Lieutenant Colonel W. S. Watson (1966).

On March 28th, the Militia on active service was reduced from 14,000 men to the originally prescribed number of 10,000, and two days later the decision was taken to order a stand-down of all forces not serving at advanced frontier posts. The Perth companies of the 41st and 42nd Battalion, therefore, remained on duty at Brockville.

Although a Fenian band of about 700 did make an unsuccessful effort to occupy Campobello Island, New Brunswick, in mid-April, no attempt had been made to cross the Saint Lawrence River and, on May 16th, the Brockville Battalions were also stood down and the Perth companies returned home.

The only fighting at Brockville occurred when a holiday excursion group from Perth joined celebrations there marking the Queen's birthday on May 24th. A brawl between men of the Perth and Brockville fire departments escalated into a minor riot that had to be put down by the fixed bayonets of Brockville Rifle Company.

The Fenians, however, had not gone away. The men of the Perth companies had been sleeping in their own beds for less than a week when, late on the night of May 31, 1866, a second call to arms was telegraphed from Militia Headquarters.

On Friday evening last the two Volunteer Companies in this place received orders to prepare for duty, which were immediately carried out. All day Saturday they remained under arms, and at night took up their quarters in the Town Hall, where they were visited by nearly every man, woman, and child in this place. At 2:00 o'clock on Sunday morning [June 3rd] they were taken out to Brockville by a special train, at which place they have since remained. The Companies were well filled by men who will do their duty.³⁵

On May 25th, a few days before the second call-up, a Fenian incursion of about 250 men led by John J. Donnelly (1838-1899) had been turned back after briefly seizing the town of Pigeon Hill (Saint-Armand), Quebec. Donnelly was captured but soon escaped. Then, on the same day as the June 1st call-up, about 1,300 Fenians³⁶ crossed into Canada from Buffalo, New York. The following day, after a brief occupation of Fort Erie, they were engaged near the village of Ridgeway by about 850 Canadian militiamen³⁷. In a see-saw battle the Canadian Volunteers eventually drove the Fenians back across the Niagara River.

³⁵ *Perth Courier*, June 8, 1866.

³⁶ The 7th New York, the 18th Ohio, the 13th Tennessee and the 17th Kentucky Fenian Regiments, plus independent companies from Indiana and New Orleans.

³⁷ Men from four battalions; the Queen's Own Rifles, the 13th Hamilton and the Caledonia and York Rifle Companies.



*The Battle of Ridgeway, near Fort Erie, Ontario, June 2, 1866*³⁸

Meanwhile Fenian troops began gathering in force at Malone, New York, with the announced intention of attacking Cornwall, while another Fenian force assembled at Ogdensburg, New York, in preparation for an attack on Prescott and Brockville aimed at seizure of the Grand Trunk Railroad. Despite their strength in up-state New York, however, the Fenians failed to move in the Brockville-Prescott sector. The defeats at Pigeon Hill and Ridgeway sapped morale among the rank and file and then, on June 6th, President Andrew Johnson abandoned the Fenian cause and agreed to enforce U.S. neutrality laws, disarm the Irish Republican Army, and arrest their leaders. Johnson had exchanged his Irish sympathies for a diplomatic deal under which Britain agreed to settle, through arbitration, American claims for the damage British-built commerce raiders had inflicted on the U.S. Merchant Marine.³⁹

American authorities provided railway transportation for several thousand Fenians back to their hometowns from points including Buffalo, Malone, and St. Albans, but in July a resolution passed by the House of Representatives reflected the government's continuing reluctance to fully abandon the Fenian dream of seizing Canada. It recommended suspension of proceedings in United States courts on all charges against Fenians wherever possible. "*The Irish vote was too important to squander on something so minor as an invasion of Canada*".⁴⁰

As the Irish Republican Army border bands broke up, most of the 10,000 Canadian Militiamen were again stood down in late June. Once again, however, the Perth Rifle Company was among the exceptions.

³⁸ Sage Sons & Co. Lithographer – Library and Archives Canada.

³⁹ Finally resolved in 1872, Britain paid the U.S. a \$15.5 million settlement.

⁴⁰ *The Republic of Canada Almost*, by Patrick Richard Carstens & Timothy L Sanford (2013).

On Saturday last the Volunteer Companies detained on the frontier after the disbandment of a few weeks ago, were all sent to their homes, with the exception of four companies at Cornwall and one at Prescott, the latter being detained to man the fort. The Commandant at Prescott, Colonel Jessup⁴¹, had some difficulty determining which of the Perth Companies to retain, as the Captains of both, in the most praiseworthy manner, manifested their willingness to remain all summer, if required. It was finally decided to retain the Rifles, who were at once put into the fort, where, in all probability, they will be kept for some time. The Infantry arrived home on Saturday evening.⁴²

Built during the War of 1812, Fort Wellington⁴³ at Prescott had been abandoned in 1854 but the Fenian threat of 1866 saw it rehabilitated and garrisoned by the Ottawa Field Battery (the Bytown Gunners) supported by rotating detachments of militia.⁴⁴ The Perth Rifles remained on duty at Brockville from March 10th until mid July and were then posted to the fort at Prescott from July through November 20th. Although the Rifle Company remained under command of Captain Edmund Spillman of Perth, in October 46 new men joined his company as replacements from Perth, for men released from service, and as reinforcements sent from militia companies at Almonte, Belleville, Carleton Place, Cornwall, Iroquois, Kemptville, Morrisburg, Prescott, Smiths Falls, etc.



Militia encampment at Fort Wellington, 1866

⁴¹ Lieutenant Colonel Dr. Hamilton Dibble Jessup (1806-1892), 56th Grenville Battalion (Lisgar Rifles).

⁴² *Perth Courier*, July 20, 1866.

⁴³ Now a National Historic Site.

⁴⁴ The fort was abandoned again in 1869.

In his report at the end of that eventful year, Major General James Alexander Lindsay (1815-1874), officer commanding regular British troops in Canada East (Quebec), stated that *“the Battalion in Brockville under Lieutenant Colonel Crawford [i.e. 41st Rifles] is the best in Canada”*.

Act 2 - 1870

As the Fenian cause collapsed in the summer of 1866, among the Brotherhood’s leaders arrested in the United States was John O’Neill (1834-1878), the man who had led the invasion force at the Battle of Ridgeway. However, like most of his cohort, he was soon released on parole and in January 1868 he was elected President of the Fenian Brotherhood. By April 1870 O’Neill had convinced enough followers that the dream of capturing Canada lived on, to mobilize a few hundred fighters at Franklin, Vermont, for renewed action.

O’Neill’s original plan was to march into Canada on May 24th, the Queen’s Birthday, but desertions and disorganization delayed his attack by 24 hours. The Brotherhood had been so thoroughly penetrated by spies that O’Neill’s plan was no secret on either side of the border, and at 2:00 p.m. on May 24th, Lieutenant Colonel F. T. Atcherley (1827-1875), Deputy Adjutant-General of the 4th Military District, mobilized the Canadian militia. The men of the Perth Rifle and Infantry Companies were once again rushed by special train to Brockville.

As the Perth companies reached the river-front city on May 25th, O’Neill led about 400 men out of Franklin, Vermont, toward the towns of St. Jean and Richmond east of Montreal. Before reaching the border, his column was intercepted by a U.S. Marshall and warned that President Ulysses S. Grant (1822-1885), unlike his predecessor, would not tolerate Fenian attacks on Canada. O’Neill was also told that Canadian troops⁴⁵ were waiting for him, but he chose to carry on.

As soon as the Fenians set foot in Canada, near Eccles Hill, Quebec, they were met by a fusillade of rifle fire that killed one man, wounded two others, and set off panic in their ranks. O’Neill and most of his men scampered back to the United States, but a handful held on for a few hours until they too were chased back into Vermont. Before sundown, O’Neill had again been arrested by U.S. authorities.

In anticipation of other attacks, the Perth Light Infantry Company, as part of the 42nd Brockville Battalion, was again assigned to service protecting the railway docks and other landing points at Brockville and patrolling the river shore as far east as Maitland to secure the line of communication with the Prescott garrison.

⁴⁵ About 380 men from the 60th Missisquoi (Quebec) Battalion, the Dunham Volunteers and a local Home Guard armed with Spencer rifles.



Cornwall Locks

Meanwhile, a second group of O'Neill's men had gathered at Malone, New York, under the command of Colonel George Owen Starr (c1837-1897), another veteran of the Battle of Ridgeway. Starr and his men were considered a threat to Cornwall so the Perth Rifle Company, as part of the 41st Brockville Battalion, was transported there by steamboat to reinforce the 59th Stormont & Glengarry Infantry Battalion under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Atcherley. The 41st was deployed to guard the town and the locks, culverts, and bridges of the Cornwall Canal.

Stymied by the troop build-up at Cornwall, on May 27th Starr instead slipped across the border about 15 kilometres west of Eccles Hill at Holbrook's Corners, near Huntington, Quebec, and set up a defensive position. His force of about 250 men was shortly engaged by more than 1,000 Canadian Militia and British Regulars⁴⁶ led by Colonel George Bagot (1824-1889). In the Battle of Trout River, the Fenians were driven back across the border where Starr and many of his men were also promptly arrested by U.S. Marshalls.

During May and June of 1870, the Perth Rifles and Light Infantry Companies responded to several 'scares' at Brockville and Cornwall, but no actual contact with Fenian forces ever materialized.

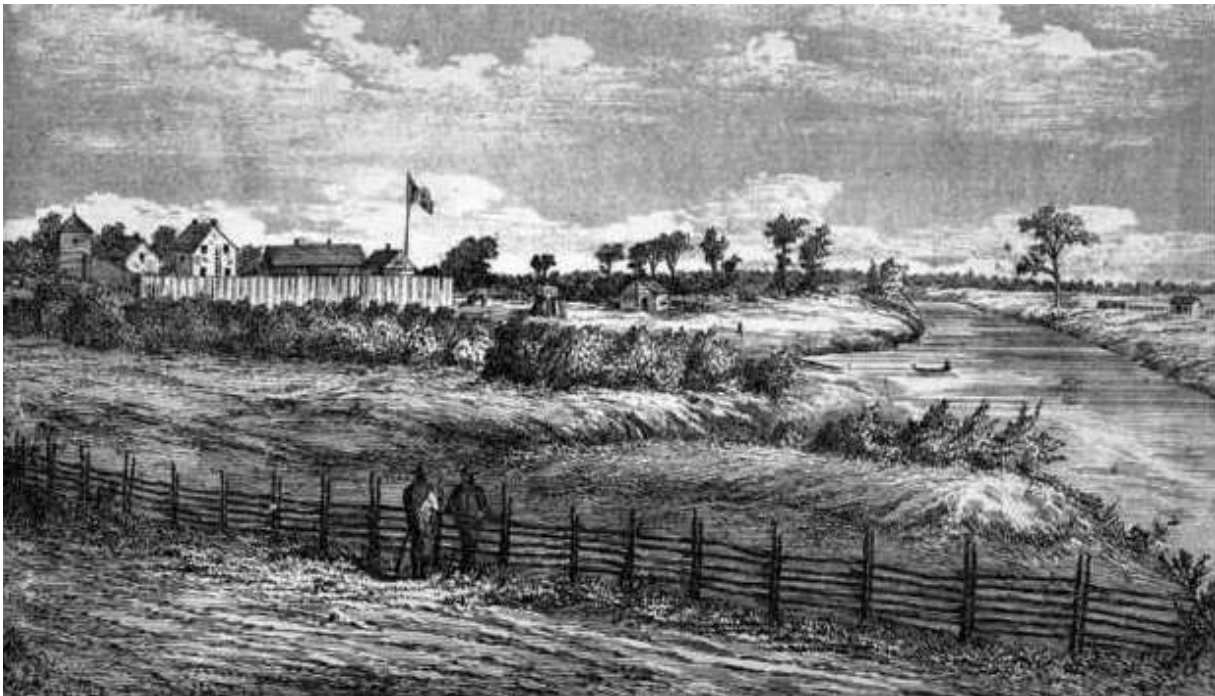
Act 3 - 1871

In spite of the failures of 1866 and 1870, the Fenian threat was not quite over. Released from prison after less than six months, John O'Neill and John J. Donnelly joined a Fenian leader named William Bernard Donoghue (1843-1878) at Saint Paul, Minnesota in 1871. There, they hatched a plan to capture Winnipeg by invading Manitoba through the Dakota Territory. The main body of the Fenian movement refused to support the venture, beyond loaning the Saint Paul plotters some weapons, but O'Neill, Donnelly and Donoghue pressed ahead.

⁴⁶ 50th Canadian Battalion (Huntingdon Borderers), 51st Battalion (Hemmingford Rangers), Montreal Garrison Artillery, Montreal Engineers, 64th Voltigeurs Canadiens and the 69th Regiment of Foot.

As had been the case in 1866 and 1870, spies kept Canadian authorities well informed of developments in the Dakota Territory and, having just put down the Red River Rebellion the year before, the Canadian Militia Department was taking no chances. In the early autumn, a picked force of 200 men, drawn from the Ontario and Quebec Active Militia Corps, was raised to reinforce the 89-man remnant of the army sent to Manitoba the previous year. The reinforcements were promptly sent marching west over the Dawson Trail north of Lake Superior, led by Thomas Scott, who had commanded the Perth Light Infantry Company at Brockville in 1866. Promoted Brevet Lieutenant Colonel, Scott was doubtless the man for the job because he had led 382 men of the 1st Ontario Rifles through the same rock and swamps as part of Colonel Garnet Wolseley's (1833-1914) 1,450 strong 'Red River Expeditionary Force' sent to subdue Louis Riel in 1870.⁴⁷

While Scott and his militiamen struggled through the half-frozen wastes of Northern Ontario, 35 Fenians led by Donoghue proceeded with their 'invasion' across the Dakota Territory border – or so they thought. On October 5, 1871, they captured and sacked a Hudson Bay Company Post and a Canadian customs house at Pembina, only to learn that surveyors had recently determined that the border lay two miles further north⁴⁸. Furthermore, their hopes of joining forces with Louis Riel's Metis and reinvigorating the previous year's rebellion⁴⁹ came to naught; Riel disavowed them and Metis cavalry and volunteers from the Red River Colony turned out against them.



*Hudson Bay Post, Pembina*⁵⁰

⁴⁷ All of the officers of this Second Expedition, with the exception of one, were veterans of the First Expedition who had been discharged and sent home less than a year before.

⁴⁸ In due course the International Boundary Commission restored Pembina to Canada.

⁴⁹ Donoghue had been Treasurer of Louis Riel's Provisional Government of the Red River Colony in 1869-1870 and had fled to the United States with Riel in August 1870.

⁵⁰ Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.

The U.S. cavalry promptly 'liberated' Pembina and the Métis captured Donoghue and Donnelly and turned them over to American authorities. O'Neill made a run for it but was soon arrested by American law officers. None of them, however, were ever convicted of a crime. By the time Perth's Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Scott and his men reached Fort Garry on November 18, 1871 the last attempt, Fenian or otherwise, to invade Canada was already history.

Coda

From a distance of more than a century and a half, the Fenian Raids of 1866-1871 are sometimes seen as a sort of comic-opera conflict of minimal importance in the history of a country that was then not quite yet Canada.⁵¹ While true enough that the threat was often little more than bluff, bravado and posturing on the part of the Fenian Brotherhood, when they did engage, real blood was spilled. British-Canadian losses totalled 35 killed, 53 wounded and 54 taken prisoner, while Fenian casualties amounted 24 killed, 48 wounded and 59 captured⁵².

Those statistics primarily reflect the Battle of Ridgeway, but they also demonstrate how very real the conflict was to the Militia Volunteers of the day who took their fate in hand and responded to the call of 'Queen and country'. None of the men of the Perth Rifle or Light Infantry Companies paid a price in blood, but Perth native Lieutenant Ephraim George Patterson (1846-1925)⁵³, serving with the Queen's Own Rifles, was one of the wounded at the Battle of Ridgeway⁵⁴.

A quarter century after the last Fenian invader surrendered at Pembina the British Government accepted a recommendation from Ottawa that the men who had faced down the Fenian threat should be properly recognized.

Upon the recommendation of Sir Richard Cartwright⁵⁵, Minister of Trade and Commerce, the British authorities have consented to order an issue of medals to those Canadian volunteers who took part in the suppression of the Fenian uprising or invasion in 1866 and subsequent years. Lord Lansdowne⁵⁶, our former Governor General, and now Imperial Secretary, a few days ago cabled the Canadian Minister of Militia⁵⁷ that he has recommended such a medal be struck. To those who participated in two or more engagements they will be awarded a clasp.⁵⁸

⁵¹ The Fenian raids of 1866 are often credited with helping bring about Canadian Confederation in 1867, but in reality, that deal was well on its way to completion before any Fenians threatened invasion.

⁵² Forty Fenian prisoners taken at Ridgeway were later tried at Toronto before Justice John Wilson (1807-1869), survivor of Upper Canada's 'Last Fatal Duel', fought at Perth in 1833. Twenty one of those were convicted of various charges and Wilson sentenced six British Subjects among them to death for treason (although the death sentences were later commuted).

⁵³ Son of James Patterson and Bresaya Jane Pounder.

⁵⁴ Private George Arthur Radenhurst (1850-1921) of Perth, son of Thomas Mabon Radenhurst and Edith Lucy Ridout, also fought with the Queen's Own Rifles at the Battle of Ridgeway.

⁵⁵ Sir Richard John Cartwright (1835-1912), Minister of Commerce 1896-1911 in the Liberal Government of Sir Wilfred Laurier (1841-1919).

⁵⁶ Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice (1845-1927), 5th Marquess of Lansdowne, Governor General of Canada 1883-1888, British Secretary of State for War 1895-1910, and British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs 1900-1905.

⁵⁷ Frederick William Borden (1847-1917), Minister of Militia and Defense 1896-1911.

⁵⁸ *Perth Courier*, October 29, 1897

The 'Canada General Service Medal 1866-1870' was, however, only issued to those who were still alive and who applied for the award. By 1898, when the medal became available, a militiaman who had been 20 years of age in 1866 was 52 years old and many of the men who had been in their 30s and 40s were dead. Nevertheless 38 of the 91 men⁵⁹ who served with the Perth Rifle Company and 45 of the 68 who served in the Perth Infantry Company collected their medals. (See muster rolls and medal list below).

Three years later the Ontario Provincial Government passed an act to provide 160 acres of land to those veterans who,

while resident or domiciled in Ontario had enlisted for active military service in the ... Volunteer Militia of Canada in Ontario and had been engaged in active service ... in the South African war in the years 1899 and 1900 ... and against the Fenians in 1865, 1866 and 1870 ...

Ontario appeared to be more generous than the Imperial Government because, if a veteran was deceased, the land grant was still available to their next of kin. That 1901 'Act to Provide for the Appropriation of Certain Lands for the Volunteers ...' was, however, more about efforts to populate Northern Ontario than about honoring the men who had defended Canada in 1866-1870 or fought the Boers. The land grants were only available in the Districts of Timiskaming, Thunder Bay, Sudbury and Kenora.

A decade further along, and a half-century after the event, the Federal Government decided that those who participated in the defence of Canada during the Fenian raids should be further recognized. The 'Fenian Raid Volunteer Bounty Act' of 1912 offered a grant or bounty of \$100 to the militiamen of 1866-1870; but once again it was only available to surviving veterans and those who made application for the grant. The gesture cost the government very little as, by 1912, even the youngest militiamen of 1866 were in their late 60s and the majority had long since died.



⁵⁹ Including 14 Perth reinforcements sent to Fort Wellington.

Perth Rifle Company

Officers

Spillman, Edmund - Captain (Decorator)
Moffatt, Thomas – Lieutenant
Douglas, John W. – Ensign (Lawyer)

Sergeants

Fraser, William (County Treasurer)
Kellock, William L. (Painter)
Kippen, John (Builder) – Color Sergeant
McCormick, Joseph (Shoemaker)
Sinclair, A. C. Registry (Office Clerk)
Templeton, James (Tanner)
Watson, William (Farmer)

Corporals

Cox, John (Tay Canal Lock Master)
Fraser, William
Larivee, George H. (Merchant)
Mathieson, John (Lawyer)
Mitchell, David G. (Moulder)

Buglers

Atcheson, T.
Bell, Charles N. (Merchant Clerk)

Privates

Bell, Andrew (Surveyor/Architect)
Berford, W. W. (Lawyer)
Bourke, T. (Blacksmith)
Cameron, Benjamin
Campbell, James
Campbell, John M. 'Jack' (Printer)
Campbell, Donald (Blacksmith)
Cavanaugh, William H.
Cherry, George
Cumming, Thomas
Davies, W. (Marble Cutter)
Dennison, John W. (Cattle Dealer)
Donnelly, James
Dunlop, Peter (Dyer, Code Mill)

Farmer, William (Shoemaker)
Fisher, Samuel (Pedder)
Flett, Thomas (Blacksmith)
Foster, William (Farmer)
Fraser, John (CPR Station Agent)
Harrington, William (Shoemaker)
Hudson, John (Mill Worker)
James, William (Waggon Builder)
Judson, Lorenzo H. (Printer)
Kelly, Robert
Kippen, Alexander (Builder)
Labron, J. (Blacksmith)
Lake, Reid
Lavergne, Peter (Gardner)
Lawson, William (Harness Maker)
Lee, John (Jailer)
Lillie, Robert (Foundryman)
Lister, Allan (Carpenter)
McMartin, Malcolm M. (Lawyer)
McIntosh, John B. (Moulder)
McLaren, John (Carpenter)
Moore, James R. (Stonemason)
Myers, Henry (Stone Mason)
O'Brien, Robert (Riverman)
Patterson, George (Hotelier)
Patterson, Manasseh (Druggist)
Patterson, Richard (Printer)
Robertson, James W.
Sample, Andrew (Shoemaker)
Scott, William (Farmer)
Semple, Andrew
Smith, John (Carriage Maker)
Stanley, Peter (Butcher)
Steele, George (Carpenter)
Storey, Samuel
Sullivan, Patrick (Tailor)
Templeton, John
Templeton William (Tanner)
Thornton, John (Clerk)
Tomlinson Norman (Cabinet Maker)
Warren, Benjamin (Merchant)
Watson, James (Shoemaker)
Watson, William (Mill Worker)
Watson, Charles (Merchant Clerk)
Wylie, William H. (Bank Clerk)

Perth Rifle Company
Reinforcements

Corporal

Dunlop, James (Perth, Cabinet Maker)

Privates

Baird, Andrew (Perth)
Barrie, Solomon (Perth, Butcher)
Carpenter, David (Cornwall)
Checkley, John (Perth)
DeWitt, Henry (Perth)
Dorion/Doiron, James
Driskell, Dennis (Prescott)
Dumarce, John
Dunbar, John
Edwards, Henry (Prescott)
Foote, Andrew
Fairbairn, William L. (Perth)
Fraser, Thomas (Prescott)
Hall, Robert⁶⁰ (Perth)
Igoe, James⁶¹ (Perth)
Kerr, James (Perth)
Lowthers, Robert (Perth)
Maiden, Joseph (Bellville)
McAlpin, Henry (Prescott)
McComber, Charles

McDonald, James (Morrisburg)
McFarlane, George (Perth, Farmer)
McGillivray, John (Iroquois)
McNally, Thomas (Prescott)
Milligan/Mulligan, B.
Molloy, George
Molloy, William (Smiths Falls)
Moore, George (Perth)
Moss, Henry (Perth, Shoemaker)
Norton, Thomas (Kemptonville)
Porteous, James (Matilda)
Raymond, Maurice
Roberts, Peter (Perth)
Rourke, Francis, (Perth, Cooper)
Salter, William (Morrisburg)
Shaver, George (Morrisburg)
Sherwood, John (Newboyne)
Smith, Thomas (Perth)
Steele, John (Perth, Farmer)
Sumner, John (Carleton Place)
Thompson, Duncan (Pembroke)
Towsley, Charles (Brockville)
Wilson, Robert (Almonte)
Willis, W. (Perth)
Winegard, Matt

⁶⁰ Assistant Company Cook

⁶¹ Company Cook

Perth Light Infantry Company

Officers

Scott, Thomas – Captain (Publisher/Editor)
Matheson, Arthur J. - Lieutenant (Merchant)
Matheson, Charles - Ensign (Businessman)

Color Sergeants

Walker, James M. (Publisher/Editor)
Jamieson, Archibald (Methodist Minister)

Sergeants

Allen, James (Lawyer)
Farmer, Samuel (Boot Manufacturer)
MacLean, Neil (Bank Clerk)

Corporals

Fields, John - Bugler
Kerr, George (Lawyer)
McCleod, Albert
McLenaghan, James (Store Clerk)
Thompson, John T.

Privates

Argue, John
Best, Henry (Farmer)
Best, John (Farmer)
Binks, Thomas C.
Binks, William J. (Printer)
Burns, John
Byrne/Burns, Patrick (Saloon Keeper)
Campbell, David
Davis/Davies, John
Detterich/Dettrick, J. (Machinist)
Dunlop, S. G.
Farmer, Thomas (Blacksmith)
Field, W.
Fischer, John P.

Glossop, Daniel (Shoemaker)
Glossop, Francis H.
Hayhurst, James
Hendry, John (Blacksmith)
Herichon, F.
Hetherington, Frank/Francis
Hughes, Robert S.
Joynt, Christopher (Laborer)
Jennings, Jamieson
Lee, John (Jailer)
Livingston, Simon (Hotelier)
Manion, E.
Marks, Daniel
McDonald, John
McCann, Peter
McCullough, Christopher (Blacksmith)
McCullough, George Sr.
McCullough, George Jr.
McCullough, John (Carriage Maker)
McLeod, A.
McMaster, R.
McVettie/McViety, Simon (Farmer)
Mitchell, George (Printer)
Moore, George
Oliver, George (Miner)
Riddle, Russell C.
Philip, B.
Scott, R. (Perth, Contractor)
Steele William J.
Steele, John (Barber)
Stephenson, John
Stewart, Robert (Merchant)
Stone, R. (Cooper)
Stone, George (Carpenter)
Stone, R. (Baker)
Smith, James (Grocer)
Walker, Robert H.
Waugh, Samuel
Whyte, F.
Williams, William
Wilson, John (Innkeeper)

Canada General Service Medal 1866-1870

Perth Rifle Company

Baird, Andrew
Bell, Charles N.
Cameron, Benjamin
Campbell, John M.
Cavanagh, William H.
Checkley, John B.
Cherry, George
Dennison, William J.
Douglas, John W.
Dunlop, Peter
Fairbairn, William L.
Fisher, Samuel
Flett, Thomas
James, William
Judson, Lorenzo H.
Kellock, William L.
Kippen, Alexander
Kippen, John
Larivee, George H.

Lavergne, Peter
Lawson, William
Lillie, Robert
McMartin, Malcom M.
McIntosh, John B.
Mitchell, David G.
Moffat, Thomas
Moore, James
Norton, Thomas H.
Patterson, Manasseh
Robertson, James W.
Scott, William
Spillman, Eduard
Steele, George
Storey, Samuel
Thornton, John
Warren, Benjamin
Watson, William
Wylie, William H.

Perth Infantry Company

Best, Henry
Best, John
Binks, Thomas C.
Binks, William J.
Burns, Patrick
Campbell, David
Davis, James
DeWitt, Henry
Dittrich/Dietrich, John
Douglas, Thomas
Farmer, Samuel
Farmer, Thomas
Farmer, William
Fischer, John P.
Glossop, Daniel
Glossop Francis H.
Hayhurst, James D.
Hendry, John
Hetherington, Frank
Hughes, Robert S.
Jamieson, Archibald
Joynt, Christopher
Livingston, Simon

Marks, Dan
Matheson, Charles A.
Matheson, Arthur J.
McCullough, George
McCullough, Christopher
McCullough, John
McLean, Neil
McLenaghan, James
McViety, Simon
Mitchell, George
Moore, George
Oliver, George
Riddell, Russell, C.
Scott, Thomas
Steele, William J.
Stewart, Robert
Stone, George
Thompson, John T.
Walker, James M.
Walker, Robert H.
Williams, William
Wilson, John