

Fenian Rising 1867

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The Fenian Rising took place in Ireland 1867. The Fenian brotherhood was an Irish Republican organisation founded in the United States of America, in 1858 by John O'Mahony and Micheal Dohney. They were also known as the Irish Republic Brotherhood or the Fenians. They were set up in Dublin in 1858 after the American Civil War.

Daniel O'Connell had got Catholic Emancipation for Ireland, which means the people had freedom to practice their Catholic religion. But Daniel O'Connell was not successful with getting Ireland our Independence with "The repeal of the Act of Union". This failure is probably some of the reason why the Fenians started the rebellion. It is unclear why the Fenians rebelled because the majority of them came from relatively successful families. None of these men were in poverty as most of them were employed as farmers, carpenters, etc.

The Fenians of Iveragh rose in arms on Shrove Tuesday 12th of February 1867 but it was not a major military plan. The leader of these men was a mysterious figure of John Joseph O'Conner, better known as JJ. He was born on Valentia Island and while still young emigrated to America. There he became a colonel with the Federal army during the American Civil War which left him with an obvious limp as a result of a war wound. On his return to Iveragh at the end of 1865 he took up residence in Cahersiveen where the local police treated him with suspicion, but found no evidence against him even when they raided his lodgings.

Another figure from the American Civil war to return to the area was Mortimer Moriarty also known as Morty O'Shea. He, like JJ had the characteristics common to veterans of the American war. They often had full beards and they usually wore large slouch hats and square toed boots. Moriarty lived in Direen just outside the town and had regular contact with JJ and aided him in recruitment of the Iveragh men.

JJ began training the local men in secrecy in remote areas like Valentia. Many people helped the Fenians to avoid capture by warning them that the police were coming. O'Driscoll from Valentia fled to America after a servant girl helped him escape. Docter Barry warned Paddy Daly of the Dromed Fenians that the Cahersiveen police were coming.

On the evening February 11th JJ O'Conner and Mortimer Moriarty met in Cahersiveen. JJ asked Mortimer to go to Killarney by Bianconi mail car (which was a horse drawn carriage) and to take a letter to Mr Sheehan, the head of the Killarney Fenians. Both Mortimer Moriarty and Mr. Sheehan were captured because spies had told the police.

JJ O'Connor and the other Iveragh Fenians didn't know this had happened. And also there was more very important information that they didn't know. It was that the whole rising had been postponed till March the 5th.

So on the 12th of February which was Shrove Tuesday there was a dance in Cahersiveen. Thomas Griffin was the dance master, but ended the dance early at 7.30pm, to get ready for the rising. For some fun it was tradition on Shrove Tuesday night to pretend to banish the unmarried men to Skellig Rock. But on this night many unmarried men and married men were going on a very dangerous journey.

They had stolen guns from the police station in Cahersiveen and also had pikes to fight with. They had planned to raid and dismantle the Valentia Cable Station, but a week earlier the "HMS Gladiater" navy boat had landed in Valentia harbour. So it was too dangerous to do anything in Valentia.

At 10pm JJ O'Conner and about 30 other men started marching. They march "Over the Water" and took guns from "Barry's big house". They cut telegraph wires so that no messages could come into Cahersiveen. The Valentia Fenians hadn't joined them but they marched on to meet "The boys of Foilmore".

The Foilmore group had about 40 men. At about 1am on Ash Wednesday they raided Kells coastguard station. They took rifles, pistols and gun powder. There was only one coastguard on duty. His name was Thomas Pierce. He ran away and hid in Dingwall's house. The other two coastguards had gone to Ballinskelligs to investigate a ship wreck.

The group got split because JJ was walking so slow with his bad leg. John Golden was one of the main men in the first group. After the coastguard they searched coastguard Mr. Boyd's house and other houses in the area. They were looking for guns etc. They didn't want to hurt anybody and were gentle with the women. Mrs Lizze Goggin recognised John Golden and later testified against him in court.

When coastguard Pierce thought they had left he started running towards Cahersiveen to get the police. He ran into the group walking with JJ O'Conner. They didn't kill him so for the second time that night the Fenians had let him live. They took a horse from Dr. Barry's stables for JJ so that they would be faster.

When they went up by Mountain Stage they looked across to Dingle. They had expected to see bonfires which was the signal that the rising happening. There were no bonfires. So they became very worried.

Then they met Constable Duggan on horseback. They ordered him to stop but he wouldn't. So Conway shot and injured him. They took him to a house and sent for Dr. Spotswood and Fr. Maginn. Fr Maginn gave the Fenians his blessing, although his brother who was parish priest in Valentia was strongly against them.

They found document under Duggan's saddle which made them realise there was panic in Killarney and the rising wasn't happening that night in the rest of Ireland. It is not understood why JJ O'Connor, John Golden and the other Fenians continued marching on why they didn't return home

They by-passed Killorglin to avoid the police and went to Beaufort and into Toomies Wood. Killarney was in panic. All the rich people were scared for their safety and thought their properties and the banks were going to get robbed. The Fenians hid in the woods for some days and then disbanded and made their way home over the mountains. The police were searching but could not find them.

A £500 reward was offered for the capture of JJ and Conway. But JJ and Conway escaped to America. JJ died in America a few years later, but Conway returned to Cahersiveen many years later. 5 months later John Golden, Thomas Griffan and Cornelius O' Brien were arrested at Cork harbour trying to escape to America.

John Golden was sentenced to 5 years penal servitude. He and 59 others were sent to Fremantle in Western Australia. He was "pardoned" in 1869. After being released from prison he lived in New South Wales.

Even though the Iveragh Fenian rising was not a success many people think that the "Land Bill of 1870" and "the church disestablishment Bill" were a direct result of the Fenian rising. But the Fenians had hoped for total independence for Ireland from Britain.