Fenians on the Farm: Irish Nationalism, Rurality, and the Trans-Atlantic Revolutionary Moment in Rural Ontario, 1865-1871

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1. The title is a single line and written as a phrase.
2. The writer includes her name and the name of the instructor.
3. The date is included on the title/cover page.
Annotated Literature Review

Fenians on the Farm

While there has been a recent decline in studies related to the Fenians in Canada, much scholarship was conducted in the 1960s and 1970s as a result of the Fenian Raids’ centennial anniversary. Two clear patterns emerge when examining the scholarly discussion surrounding Canadian Fenians. First, until the 1980s, the Fenians were discussed in very general terms and mostly from an American perspective. Second, after the 1980s, the Fenians in Canada began to be studied independently. This shift in focus was most likely the result of wider scholarly interest in conducting geographic-specific microstudies that led to a more comprehensive understanding of Canada’s Irish-Catholic history, including the Fenians. Historical interpretations of the Fenians can thus be understood as changing in accordance with researchers’ geographic scope.

The first scholarly trend in research surrounding Canadian Fenians began in the 1930s, when C.P. Stacey wrote his article “Fenianism and the Rise of National Feeling in Canada at the Time of Confederation.” In this work, he placed Fenianism as the cause of an increasing sense of Canadian nationalism and argued that “Fenianism provided a most beneficial influence upon the immediate and ultimate fortunes of [Confederation]…by engendering an atmosphere of patriotic enthusiasm eminently favourable to the success of an experiment in nation-building.” The trend of examining Canadian Fenians escalated in 1975, when W.S. Neidhardt published Fenianism in North America. In it, he showed that mid-nineteenth century Canadians took the Fenians extremely seriously and that their Canadian invasion attempt should not be regarded as, “a revolutionary movement of little or no consequence,” thereby prioritizing Canadians’ reactions to the Fenians over the Brotherhood’s failed invasion attempts. By contrast, Hereward Senior published The Fenians and Canada in 1978, where

he was primarily concerned with how Canada was to be appropriated to suit the Fenians’ plans and how Canadian Fenians and their sympathizers were more broadly connected to the pan-Atlantic movement. Senior helped direct attention to Canada’s relationship with the movement, but ultimately failed to mention how active the Fenians actually were within the country.

Indeed, Neidhardt and Senior did not investigate Canadian Fenianism as its own separate branch of the organization and instead studied it from an American perspective. Moreover, despite their respective titles, neither work gave much attention to Canadian Fenians, rather devoting much of their focus to the interaction between American and Canadian Fenians or the American branch’s intentions within Canada. This model was followed for quite some time, with many historians treating Canadian Fenians as an inferior faction of the much more active American wing.

Peter Toner began to break the trend of examining Canadian Fenians from an American perspective. In the 1970s and 1980s, Toner looked beyond the traditional historical periodization of Canadian Fenian studies by examining the movement from 1874 to 1884, well after the failed raids of 1866, 1870, and 1871. In addition, Toner explored the Brotherhood’s success within Canada, thereby removing the emphasis from the American division and presenting a more balanced Canadian-American relationship. Toner challenged the accepted interpretation of Irish Catholics as loyal if they refused to rise when the Fenians attempted their raid on Ridgeway and instead suggested that “the Fenians were beginning to become the main lay political force amongst the Canadian Irish, in spite of the efforts of the government, the church, and the moderates to prevent this.” Of more importance was Toner’s approach to the Canadian Fenians. He recognized that “[i]n the British provinces there were few


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urban centres of any size, and none to match the leading cities in the United States. More importantly, whereas most of the American Irish were urban dwellers, their counterparts to the north were overwhelmingly rural\(^1\) and suggested that the movement in Canada would necessarily differ from that in America and Ireland because of its demography. While never exploring the movement in rural Ontario in any great detail, Toner helped define the Fenians as they existed within Canada.

The second scholarly trend, which began in the late 1980s, was the result of Donald Akenson’s works and led to more interest in Irish activity in specific areas. Akenson’s 1984 microstudy *The Irish in Ontario* focused on the Irish in Leeds and Lansdowne Township and provided later historians with a model of how to conduct research on a specific town. Moreover, Akenson disproved many commonly held stereotypes about the Irish, most notably their propensity to settle in cities. By establishing a new way to look at Irish-Canadians, Akenson provided a different framework for examining Fenianism, as it no longer necessarily had to conform to preconceived notions of Canadian Irish Catholics. Scholars such as Bruce Elliot also aided in this shift of focus by concentrating on the immigration experience of nineteenth century Irish Catholics.

Similarly, George Sheppard’s article “‘God Save the Green’: Fenianism and Fellowship in Victorian Ontario” and David Wilson’s “Fenianism in Montreal, 1862-68” each examined Fenian circles in one Canadian location. Conducting such microstudies allowed for Sheppard and Wilson to connect the movement to Canadians in a much more direct way because they were better able to examine the social context in which Canadian Fenians operated. In his discussion on the importance of examining Canadian Fenians at all, Sheppard goes so far as to say that, “Fenianism in Canada West was not merely a product of Irish nationalism but

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The writer uses evidence to support their thesis by analyzing its significance.

1. The writer uses topic sentences that contribute to the thesis statement and indicate the contents of the paragraph.

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also a response to the social conditions of Victorian Ontario’s urban areas,” linking the movement to specific and unique Canadian attributes8. Brian P. Clark also used this approach in his 1993 book *Piety and Nationalism: Lay Voluntary Associations and the Creation of an Irish-Catholic Community in Toronto 1850-1895*, which investigated the evolution of various Irish Catholic nationalist organizations and how they were related9.

While all three authors approached Fenianism from a different perspective, they predominantly investigated Fenianism as it existed within urban centres. This urban focus is typical of much scholarship on the Fenians, contributing to the belief that Fenianism was an inherently urban movement10. As addressed by Akenson, Irish Catholics were not prone to settling in cities after they immigrated. As a result, the Fenians, while more numerous in urban centres, lived and were active in rural areas too.

Many publications examine Fenianism from a trans-Atlantic and cultural perspective; even though they focus on one aspect or area of Fenianism, they still mention related activities that were occurring around the world. Oliver P. Rafferty’s *The Church, the State and the Fenian Threat, 1861-75*, published in 1999, is perhaps the best example of this change in focus because, despite centering his investigation on the Fenians’ relationship with the Catholic Church in Ireland, Rafferty frequently mentioned the Fenians in Canada and the United States, using the pan-Atlantic nature of the organization to prove his argument. Similarly, many historians connect the Fenians to other nineteenth century issues. For example, works such as Donald Power’s 1988 article “The Paddy Image: The Stereotype of the Irishman in Cartoon and Comic” examined the negative portrayal of the Irish in predominantly nineteenth century cartoons and even deconstructed how the Fenians were used to further this

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The writer addresses the relationship between multiple sources rather than treating them individually.

The writer provides a summary of the findings and main patterns.

The writer identifies the gap in the literature their research will fill.

The writer explains the importance of future research and how it will address the gap in the current knowledge on the topic. Because an embedded literature review is placed within a research paper, the identified gap should be the topic of the wider paper.
Sections outlining the writer’s research follow the literature review.

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The bibliography is on a separate page and includes references from the literature review and writer’s research paper.

The Chicago Manual of Style is used to format the bibliographic entries.
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1978.


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