

The Story of GORE VII - February 2019

The Fenian Raids of 1866 and the Gore volunteers

The last installment of the Story of Gore appeared in the July and August 2015 issues of the Gore Express. We apologize sincerely for this long delay.

In the articles of 2015 we looked at the relationship between Gore and the neighbouring community of St. Columban. Despite their shared history of poverty, disease and starvation in Ireland and their common desires for a better life here in Canada, the Irish Protestants of Gore and the Irish Catholics of St. Columban were sometimes at odds with one another. The Gore Loyal Volunteers gained some notoriety during the Rebellion of 1837 for their actions in St. Benoit. Thirty years later in 1866, the Gore companies were called into action once again—this time as part of the Argenteuil Rangers—to repel an invasion by the American-based Fenian Brotherhood.

In 1862 the militia companies across Argenteuil joined together to form the 11th Infantry Battalion or, as more famously known, the Argenteuil Rangers. Sir John Abbott initiated this reorganization and served as the Lieutenant Colonel. The four existing companies in Gore were folded into the new structure. In fact, these Gore companies made up half of all the companies in the Rangers and half of all the men who served as well. All able-bodied men were required to serve in the militia to support the regular troops in the defense of the colony.

Company No. 2, Gore West, Captain William Smith

Company No. 3, Gore West, Captain George McKnight

Company No. 5, Gore, Captain Samuel Rogers

Company No. 6, Gore, Captain George Sherritt

The Fenians—named, it is said, after a legendary group of heroic Irish warriors of the second and third centuries AD—were made up of Irish Roman Catholic immigrants to the United States who fought in the civil war and who, in 1865 at the end of that war, were intent on securing the independence of Ireland from British rule. They planned to invade and capture Canada and once accomplished, would trade this country for Ireland's freedom. The Fenians were purported to be 10,000 strong and Canadian intelligence reports indicated they were made up of experienced officers and soldiers who were well funded and well armed.

On March 4, 1866 the Fenians held a rally in New York and announced their plan. Alarmed by the news of an imminent invasion, Canada acted to protect the frontier with the United States and on March 8, all eight companies of the Argenteuil Rangers were called up for active duty. Gore companies 2 & 5 were sent to Lacolle, while 3 & 6 remained in readiness at St. Andrews and Gore. Rumours of a Fenian attack on March 17 (St. Patrick's Day) came to naught and a few days later Gore companies 3, 5 & 6 were ordered to step down. No. 2 company remained in Lacolle.

In April a planned Fenian raid on Campobello Island, New Brunswick was thwarted. By late May new intelligence reports indicated more invasions were on the horizon and the Canadian government once again mustered volunteers in both Quebec and Ontario. On June 1, 1,000 Fenians struck at Fort Erie and Ridgeway, Ontario and successfully defeated the Canadians forces. Ten Canadians were killed and 38 were wounded. Thirty-nine Fenians were killed and 16 wounded.

The victory was short lived, but in light of this bold attack the government moved to strengthen Canadian defences all along the St. Lawrence River and at Lake Champlain. On June 2 the four companies from Gore, along with the rest of the Argenteuil Rangers, were called up again and assigned the military posts at Cornwall. According to the pay lists for June 2-18, a total of 176 men served in the Gore companies during this period.

Troops on the move

Meanwhile, on June 7 the Fenians carried out another strike, this time in the Eastern Townships near the American border. A party of 1,000 men invaded and occupied Pigeon Hill. On Monday, June 11 the Rangers were sent to St. Jean-sur-Richelieu, then called St. Johns. An unnamed journalist from Montreal who travelled with them wrote:

"I learned on Sunday afternoon that troops were to be sent to St. Johns by special train; and managed to procure permission to come out with them.... The troops sent forward were a part of the force recently garrisoning Cornwall—a portion of the 25th Regt. Under Col. Fan, and the Argenteuil Rangers under Lieut. Col. The Hon. J.J.C. Abbott...."

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The two battalions filled 18 railway cars which were drawn by two or three engines, wrote the correspondent. The Rangers and the 25th arrived at St. Johns, but because the barracks were already full, they were "compelled... to encamp upon ground somewhat damp after the heavy recent rains, and their officers could procure no straw for them at the late hour of their arrival." Even so, they apparently had a good night's rest.

The Fenians were once again repelled and the Gore companies appeared to have been in the thick of the action. Several men—Privates Thomas Dixon, John Hicks and James Parker—said they were on "guards, pickets and outposts", a military phrase meaning they were on the front lines and were even advance troops. Ensign John McKnight was, according to his medal citation, in Pigeon Hill at the time the Fenians occupied the area. Private Joshua McDonald, at 19, was likely one of the youngest men serving.

Dixon, Hicks, Parker, McDonald and the other privates received 25 cents per day in pay for a total of \$4.00 for the sixteen-day period they were at the frontier. The company captain received 58 cents per day in pay, while sergeants and corporals received 35 and 30 cents a day respectively.

On June 18, once the Fenians had been driven back to Vermont, the Rangers began to return home and, one hopes, were able to stop in Montreal for a welcome address and volunteer troop inspection at the Champ-de-Mars military parade grounds.

Four years later in May, 1870 the Rangers were called to repel yet another Fenian invasion, this one at Eccles Hill, very near the Pigeon Hill invasion of 1866. That raid was ended almost as quickly as it began. Men in the Gore companies served for five days from May 25-30.

Coming up in the March edition of the Gore Express, Part 2 of Gore and the Fenian Raids

<u>List of Gore company volunteers</u>, June 3-18, 1866 at the Frontier

Please note: Some of the men who served in the Gore companies may not have lived in the township. The names of all those who were on the pay lists of the four companies are included here, regardless of their place of residence. Source: Nominal Rolls and Paylists for the Volunteer Militia, 1857-1922, Library and Archives Canada.

- Company No. 2 Gore West, Captain William Smith

Captain William Smith Lieutenant James Smith Ensign James Curren Pay Sergeant John Boyd Sergeant Ebenezer Swails Sergeant James Morrison Sergeant Thomas Curry Corporal John Rowit Corporal Valentine Christie Corporal William Proudlock Corporal Charles Vary Private D. Christie Private R. Curren Private W.J. Curren Private J. Curren Private P. Conlin Private J. Conlin Private J. Creswell

Private H. Morrison Jr. Private S. McMahon Private J. Evans Private R. Matthews Private John McClusky Private D. Simmons Private J. Smyth Private J. Smith Private J. Murphy Private J. Stephenson Private R. Stephenson Private R. McKnight Private F. Davis Private H. Parker Private R. Smyth Private J Neill? Private W.M. Paine Private Alex Boyd Private M. Matthews Private ? McIntyre? Private Joseph McClusky

Private J. Morrison

Private H. Morrison Sr.

- Company No. 3, West Gore, Captain George McKnight

Captain George McKnight Lieutenant William Good Ensign John McKnight Pay Sergeant John Chambers Sergeant Michael Good Sergeant Samuel Rathwell Sergeant Philip Good Corporal Jacob Williams Corporal William Gain Corporal Isaac Jeikle (Jekyll) Corporal Samuel Chambers Bugler John Williams Private Robert Elliott Private Charles Morrow Private Richard Thomson Private John Coplin Private Moses Brown Private Robert Brown Private Dawson Kerr

Private James Morrison Sr.

Private E McClusky

Private Rob. Akins?

Private W. Morrison

Private William Miller

Private William Kerr **Private Mathew Carruthers** Private John Carruthers Private James Day Sr. Private James Day Jr. Private Valentine Swails Private Joshua Thomson Private John Curry Private William McDonald Private Joshua McDonald Private William Morrow Private Isiah Currie Private John Kilpatrick Private Samuel Lister Private John Sutton Private James Morrison Jr **Private Thomas Burns** Private William Thomson **Private James Woods** Private John Day Private Edward McKreth **Private Robert Carruthers** Private John Scarlett 43

- Company No. 5 Lakefield, Captain Samuel Rogers

Captain Samuel Rogers
Lieutenant John Arnott
Ensign George Rogers
Pay Sergeant S. Kerr
Sergeant James Hammond
Sergeant C. Moore
Sergeant M.J. Rogers
Sergeant Robert Scott
Corporal Fred Rogers
Corporal Mathew Rogers
Corporal Colin Arnott
Corporal James Bennett
Bugler Nathaniel Boyd
Private Matthew Boyd
Private Edward Dawson

Private Thomas Dixon Sr. Private Thomas Dixon Jr. Private Robert Dawson Private William Hammond Private John Hammond Private Matthew Hammond Private John Hicks Private Robert Hodge Private James Kerr Private William Lister Private James Lister Private Edward Lister Private William Miller Private James Miller Private George Moore Private Henry McManis Private James Parker Private George Parker Private Edward Parker Private Richard Parker Private Thomas Parker Private Samuel Rogers **Private Thomas Rogers** Private John Robinson Private James Robinson Private M. Scott Private Thomas Scott Private A. Silverson Private Robert Wilson Sergeant John Rogers (Orderly Room Clerk) Private Robert Hammond Private James Rogers Private Thomas Dawson (These three absent due to illness)

- Company No. 6 Gore, Captain George Sherritt

45 (48 total)

Captain George Sherritt
Lieutenant Thomas Evans
Ensign Matthew Strong
Pay Sergeant James Boyd
Sergeant William Pollock

Sergeant James Sherritt Sergeant Thomas Sherritt Corporal Thomas Strong Corporal Thomas Nicholson Corporal James McDonald Corporal J. Woods Bugler John Strong Sr. Private John Strong Jr. Private M. Woods Private Richard Bowes Private John Noble Private Thomas Craig Private Charles Moore Private J. Moore Private William Johnston Private James Dixon Private James Scott Sr. Private William Parker Private Jarvis Westgate Private James. Scott Jr. Private Henry McDonald Private J. Armstrong Private John Parker Private D. Parker Private John McMahon Private Archibald Bennett Private Robert Evans Private Thomas Dawson Private J. Miller Private James Montgomery Private James McDonald Sr. Private William Woods Private L? Johnston Private James Noble Private James Sutton Private Thomas Wilson Private William McMullin Private George McMullin

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On March 8, 1866 the Argenteuil Rangers were called to active duty. Companies 2 & 5 were sent to Lacolle while 3 & 6 stood in readiness in Gore.

On March 26, Companies 3, 5, and 6 were ordered to step down. Gore Co. 2 remained in Lacolle. This announcement was placed in the Ottawa Citizen, April 3, 1866.

HEAD-QUARTERS.

Ottawa, 26th March, 1866.

GENERAL ORDER.

VOLUNTEER MILITIA.

The following corps, being in excess of the strength called out for permanent service, are hereby relieved from such duty, viz :-

Volunteer Rifle Company, Princeton.

New Hamburg. Infantry Stratford.

Port Stanley. Marine Troops of Cavalry, Grimsby.

1st Infantry Co.

2nd Clifton.

Field Battery Hamilton.

Naval Company

Simcoe. Ritle

Oakville. Troops of Calavry, Toronto.

Naval Company "Infantry Co., Peterborough.

Rifle Company, Enniskillen. 15. Bat. Volunteer Infantry, Believille.

Volunteer Rifle Company,

Storrington. 1st 2nd

Volunteer Naval Co. Gurden Island.

Carleton Place. Ritle

l'akenham. Infantry Company, Almonte.

Those Companies of the 18th Battalion, not on duty at Cornwall.

3rd Co. 'Argenteuil Rangers,' West Gore.

4th " Lachute.

5th " East Gore. 6th "

8th " .. Mille Isles.

1st Troop Volunteer Cavalry, Montreal. 2nd

Royal Guides, Montreal.

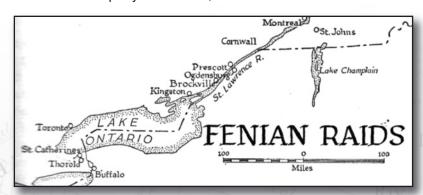
1st Troop Volunteer Cavalry, Quebec.

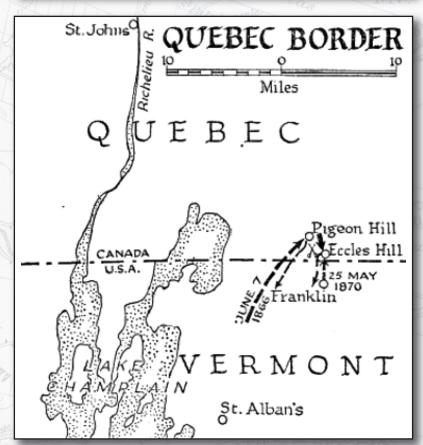
Volunteer Rifle Company, Megantic.

By Command of His Excellency The Right Honorable the Governor General and Commander in-Chief.

P. L. MACDOUGALL,

Colonel. Adjutant General of Mihtia, Canada. The Fenian Raid at Pigeon Hill, Quebec. In June, 1866, the four companies from Gore, along with the other companies of the Argenteuil Rangers, were stationed at St. Johns (St. Jean-sur-Richelieu). Source: G.F.G. Stanley, Canada's Soldiers, The MacMillan Company of Canada, 1960.





Notes and references

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This article has been researched, compiled and written by Louise Johnston. You can contact us at Luc J. Matter, lucmatteria@yahoo.ca or 450-562-8093 and Louise Johnston at louise.johnston@mail.mcgill.ca or 450-562-2594.

The following sources have been used in the research and preparation of these articles:

For a brief history of the Fenian Raids see The Fenian Raids by M. Braham, Research Paper, No. 18. The Friends of the Canadian War Museum, N.D.

Report of an unnamed Montreal correspondent cited in Narrative of the Fenian Invasion of Canada by Alexander Somerville, p. 127. Hamilton, Canada West: Joseph Lyght, booksellers and Stationer, 1866.