

UNVEILING OF MONUMENT

... of the ... and ITO ... against it ...
... **GENERAL JOHN O'NEILL** ...
... **THE HERO OR RIDGEWAY AND LIMESTONE RIDGE** ...
... **OMAHA, NEBRASKA, OCT. 28, 1919** ...
(Presence of President De Valera of the Irish Republic)

Address by E. H. Whelan, Chairman.

...
Mr. President of the Republic of Ireland ...
and Fellow Americans: ...
...
... assembled here to unveil was a distinguished American soldier. He was also a great-hearted Irishman. He was more than that-- he was one of God's own nobility.

...
... He had the good fortune to live in the good old days of Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War, when hyphens were not as unpopular as they are now. He lived in a period of the history of this country when ever citizen above the Mason and Dixon line knew that a man might be a 100% American and a 100% Irishman at one and the same time. Why? Because in those days every American was aware that the enemies of the United States were aided and abetted by the enemies of Ireland.

... Ready at a moment's notice to fight for the freedom of his native land, equally ready to fight for the freedom of the black man, and for the honor of his adopted flag, 100% Irish and 100% American, such as General John O'Neill, the hero of Ridgeway and of Limestone Ridge. ...
... General John O'Neill was by birth and ancestry an Ulster Irishman. There is something significant, something to make one think, in that fact. People that are not well informed about Irish affairs talk now-a-days as if Ulster were not a part of Ireland at all. But O'Neill was born in the parish of Drumgallin in the County of Armagh, in the very heart of Ulster; and his ancestral estate was across the line in the adjoining Ulster County of Monaghan. It is very probable that royal blood flowed in his veins, for as every student of Irish, or even of English history must know, the O'Neills or HY-Niall were the kings of Ulster from the time of Christ to the Times of Elizabeth, from Niall of the Nine Hostages to the "Dauntless Red Hugh". What Irishman, worthy of the name, has not heard of the Red Hand of Ulster, the royal crest of the O'Neills? ...
... Every man yet so strong is the breed of the invader in what illustrious province that Armagh is one of the four out of the nine counties of Ulster and out of the thirty-two counties in all Ireland

which in the plebiscite voted against the party of his Excellency here, President De Valera and Irish independence. The vote of twenty-eight counties for and four against it proves conclusively to the British press agent that the Irish cannot agree among themselves. And Armagh is one of the proofs, yet they tell us that St. Patrick's bones lie buried in Armagh, and General John O'Neill was born there. I don't know, the majority may have been against you there, Mr. President, but I am willing to make a small wager that it was not a large one; for I'm sure there are many thousands of the same blood and spirit and principle as General O'Neill in the historic county of Armagh.

John O'Neill came honestly by his warm heart and generosity. An epidemic, something like the late influenza, swept over Ireland in the year of 1843. A neighbor of the O'Neills, the head of a large family, was stricken with this plague, and the father of young O'Neill volunteered to take care of them. As a result he himself fell a victim to the disease, and John O'Neill was left an orphan at the age of fourteen.

Two years later he came with his mother to Elizabethtown, New Jersey, where he grew to manhood. The spirit of the soldier was in him, and when he became of age he joined the United States Army, for the Civil War was then raging. We learn of his first notable promotion as a lieutenant of cavalry in a regiment raised at Indianapolis. With a squadron of his regiment in capturing the notorious Confederate raider, Colonel Morgan, whose name is familiar to every American schoolboy; although with our usual American impartiality, the name of his captor is not mentioned in the books.

At the battle of Cumberland Gap, O'Neill was severely wounded and thereby incapacitated for further service in the cavalry, to his great regret. But if he could not fight on horseback, he determined that he would fight on foot, so he immediately applied for service with the doughboys, and was commissioned a captain in the 17th U. S. Infantry, the colonel of which regiment was the late General Shafter of Spanish-American War fame. With this regiment receiving honor and promotion, O'Neill served until the close of the war, when he was discharged with the rank of Colonel.

With his brilliant mind and magnetic personality he soon made a small fortune in business, and in a perfectly Irish way he invested it all in the cause of Irish independence. Patriots in those days belonged to what was called the Irish Republican Brotherhood. The outside world called them Fenians. Thoughts, opinions and methods were different then. Passive resistance--moral force was now known; physical force was everything. It remained for the Sinn Fein party and his Excellency President De Valera to teach the Irish and the world the value of moral force. The Fenians were a physical force party. In fact they are a physical force army. Every Fenian was a soldier ready to fight and die for Ireland. At the close of the Civil War thousands upon thousands of Irish-American soldiers were sworn into the Fenian ranks. They had helped to defeat the South (Senator John Sharp Williams to the contrary

notwithstanding); they had freed the colored slave --why should they not free Ireland? In the Civil War the Irish were on the side of the North--the United States, while England was aligned on the side of the South--the Benighted States. Is it any wonder, then, that die-hard Southerners, like John Sharp Williams and his breed, to not like Irishmen?

During the war, England had built and fitted out ships known as blockade runners and privateers to ration and munition the South and prey upon the shipping of the North, of which the most notorious was the Alabama; and America had a very serious claim to settle against England. It was afterwards settled by the international commission at Geneva; but before that happened, many good American patriots wanted to settle it in the good old way. There were hundreds of thousands of American Citizens that had not one drop of Irish blood in their veins, who were yearning to strike a blow at England. So the Fenian movement in this country was warmly encouraged. It was, therefore, determined that the blow should be dealt through Canada, which was to be freed from British rule.

Colonel O'Neill was made a General in the Fenian army and because of his dashing bravery he was given command of the advance. Buffalo, New York, was the place of mobilization; and from this city on June 2nd, 1866, he led a division of 4,000 men in boats across Lake Erie. The crossing was made at night, and a safe landing was effected upon the opposite shore. We can imagine the joy that pulsed in the heart of this brilliant young Irish commander, when at the head of his loyal troops he set foot upon British soil, the soil of the age-long enemies of himself, his ancestors and his race. It was, of course, impossible to keep so formidable a movement a secret, and word was soon carried to the nearest British garrison. We hear a lot of Buncombe now-a-days about the length of the Canadian line 'unguarded by a single soldier' as the pro-English orators tell us. Believe me, my friends, the soldiers are not very far behind the line and they never have been. It was so in O'Neill's day. He was soon confronted by a British force, of which the most noted unit was a regiment called the Queen's own. They were commanded by Colonel Booker. The place of meeting was at Ridgeway, where a sharp battle was fought and short work was made of the British enemy. He chased them for seven miles to a place called Limestone Ridge, where they were strongly reinforced, but O'Neill defeated them again. He now prepared to consolidate his position, establish his line of communication with Lake Erie, and await, before proceeding further inland, the main body of the Fenian army, which as he expected, was preparing to advance from Buffalo.

But here Fate, which has a bad habit of interfering in Irish affairs, intervened at the eleventh hour. The news of the invasion was flashed to Washington; diplomats got busy, ministers worked overtime; and President Andrew Johnson became overawed by their threats of an international catastrophe. Immediately he issued a

proclamation calling upon the Fenian soldiers, as American citizens, to abandon their project and to disperse to their homes at the expense of this government. The proclamation was entrusted to the hero of Gettysburg, General George G. Meade, who presented it to the Commander of the Irish. Like loyal Americans that they were, although sorely disappointed, they obeyed the command of their president; and it was thus that General O'Neill was compelled to relinquish the material fruits of his brilliant exploit; but he won undying admiration in the hearts of his countrymen.

A man of persistence and determination, he was slow to give up hope. And the English knew it. Thenceforward he was a marked and a watched man. So, four years later when he was planning a second invasion of Canadian soil from Malone, New York, his movements were well known to the British spies, and he was arrested by United States marshals before the fruition of his plans.

He then turned his attention to the material welfare of his race, leading his countrymen from the congested districts of Boston, Philadelphia and St. Louis, and the squalor of the mining zones in Scranton and Wilkesbarre, Pa., and Calumet, Mich., and guiding them out upon the broad, fertile prairies of Nebraska. Here he founded in 1874 the prosperous colonies of O'Neill and Atkinson in Holt County and cooperated with those of Greeley, O'Connor and Spalding in Greeley County. The men who followed him to the prairies of central Nebraska, with one or two exceptions, were not the class of Irishmen who followed him at Ridgeway. But the majority of them though unused to farming, followed his wise advice and clung to the land; and those who are still alive, to-day ride in their high-powered automobiles over trails where some forty years ago they trudged footsore and penniless; their sons are now wealthy farmers and stockmen, bankers, lawyers and capitalists.

The man to whom the chief credit is due lies here—here where he fell in February 1878, at the comparatively early age of 44, exhausted in his long struggle for the betterment of his race. Why is he here, and not in the town of O'Neill, which bears his name? Because I believe he would prefer to be here; for he lies here among comrades and kindred spirits of the I. R. B. men like Major McMahon, Thomas Tallant, Jeremiah Riordan and that noble Protestant Irish patriot, John Groves. I have had the honor of knowing these men personally, and of shaking them by the hand as brothers, as many of you know; and I am sure that they are fit and congenial company for the gallant hero that lies among them. They it was who stood by him when a friend was a friend indeed. They cared for him in his last illness, interred him with honors as a soldier of the Republican army, and erected this magnificent token to his memory.

The name of O'Neill will be long remembered in Nebraska as the name of a small town, but it will be only a name suggesting

some indefinite Irish origin. The men who will remember General John O'Neill the longest will not think of him as of a man that founded a colony. Any average man could do that. But only heroes do what O'Neill did on June 2nd., 1866, at Ridgeway. Only heroes lead forlorn hopes--heroes like Pearse, Plunkett, McDonough, McBride, Ashe and De Valera--men who freely offer up their lives just to make the world think about the wrong of their country--men who believe in the words of Thomas Davis:

Far sweeter the grave or the prison, illum'ed by one
patriot's name,
Than the trophies of all who have risen on Liberty's
ruin to fame.