



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

Senator Kennedy, Buffalo's Irish-American Community Dedicate Monument to the Fenian Invasion of 1866

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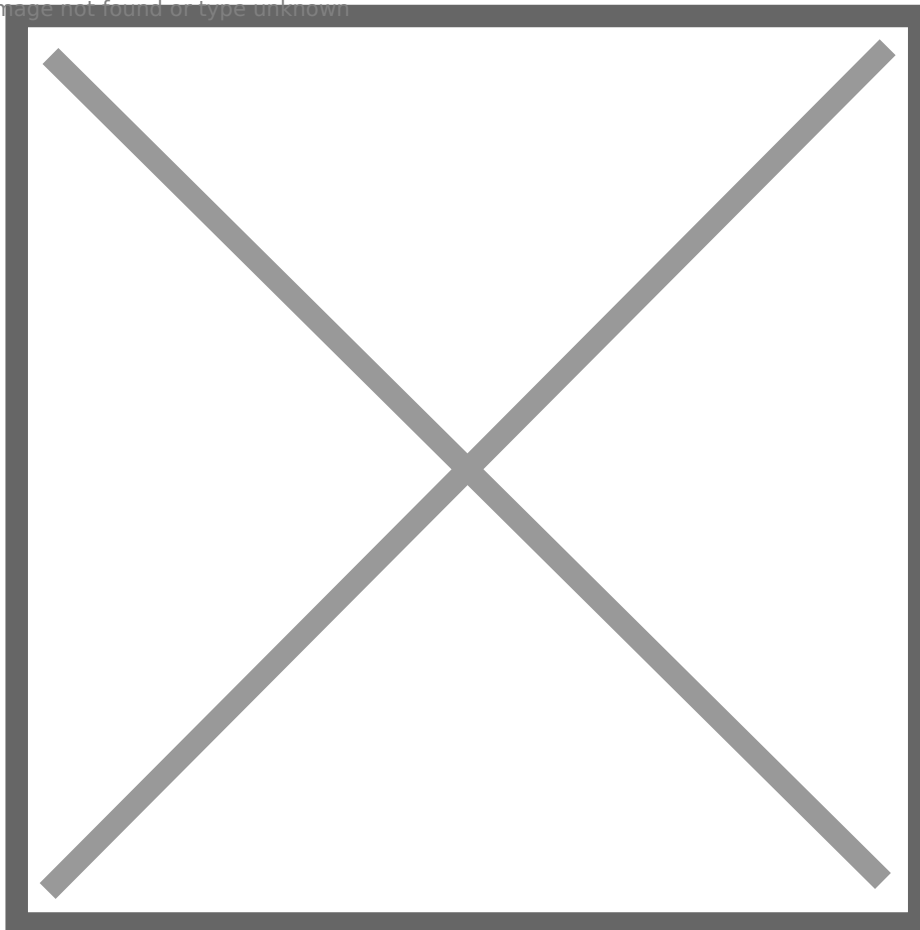
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Monument at Tow Path Park marks point where the Fenian Brotherhood , a group of Irish-Americans, launched an effort to secure Irish independence

by first taking Canada

BUFFALO, N.Y. – From the banks of the Niagara River at what is now Tow Path Park in the City of Buffalo, a group of Irish-Americans known as the Fenian Brotherhood – many of whom were Civil War veterans – embarked on a mission to take Canada from Great Britain in an effort to secure Irish independence in 1866. Their designed operation called for them to invade the British colony to our north, seize it and barter it with Great Britain in exchange for the freedom of their home country, the British colony across the ocean, Ireland.

The Fenian Invasion is an event of international significance, since it helped build momentum toward the independence of both Canada and Ireland. However, there has been no lasting monument marking the historic point where this freedom-seeking operation was launched in Buffalo.

That changed Friday when a monument commemorating the Fenian Invasion of 1866 was dedicated at Tow Path Park. The effort to commemorate the Fenian Invasion and the American veterans who launched the operation began when Senator Timothy M. Kennedy was a member of County Legislature. After forming a committee made up of Irish-American advocates and historians, Kennedy led an effort to spread awareness of the impact the Fenian Invasion had on the histories of Buffalo, Canada and Ireland.

“The Fenian Invasion has a unique place in Buffalo’s history,” said Senator Kennedy. “The Fenian Brotherhood – battle-hardened American veterans – first fought to keep our nation united and strong in the Civil War. Then, by launching this invasion, they significantly contributed to the national independence of Canada and eventually Ireland. The Fenian Invasion demonstrated that freedom and democracy are forces that no amount of oppression can stop. Even outnumbered and outgunned, the Fenians valiantly battled the British Crown forces. They played a pivotal role in Canada’s independence, and they helped inspire Irish freedom.”

Kennedy added, “The monument commemorates more than our region’s Irish-American history. The Fenian Invasion was a global event, and this monument celebrates one of the many contributions Buffalo and Western New York has made to the global community. I thank everyone who helped secure this historical marker, especially the Niagara River Greenway Commission for supporting this project.”

In 1866, between 500-800 members of the Fenian Brotherhood gathered in the Old First Ward, and on June 1, they launched their invasion of Canada from the Pratt Iron Works, which is now known as Tow Path Park. The outnumbered Fenians defeated the Crown forces at the Battle of Ridgeway. However, still reeling from the wounds and hardships of the Civil War, President Andrew Johnson sent Generals Grant and Meade to call the Fenians back from the invasion in order to avoid an international conflict.

Despite its abrupt ending, the Fenian Invasion had a profound and lasting impact on the two British colonies – Canada and Ireland. The momentum for independence grew in Canada and was achieved just one year later, and the Fenian Invasion became a symbol and inspiration for Irish freedom across the ocean, which was achieved in 1922.

Joining Senator Kennedy to dedicate the monument were Congressman Brian Higgins, NYS Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli, Buffalo Comptroller Mark Schroeder, Assemblyman Sean Ryan, County Sheriff Tim Howard and County Historian Douglas Kohler as well as community leaders and members of Irish-American cultural groups.

“Thanks to the tireless work of Senator Kennedy this monument will stand as a lasting tribute to Buffalo’s deep Irish-American roots and once again tie Western New York’s rich history with our future as we rebuild Buffalo’s waterfront,” said Congressman Brian Higgins.

“This monument honors the dedication and resolve of the Irish-Americans who fought bravely for both the Union Army, and on behalf of their motherland of Ireland,” said Comptroller Schroeder. “The Fenian Invasion showed that no matter how far away the Irish are from Ireland, their hearts and minds will always be devoted to the Emerald Isle.”

“The important role that the Fenian Brotherhood played in both American and world history is often overlooked,” said Assemblyman Ryan. “The Fenian Invasion is an important part of Buffalo's heritage, and I thank Senator Kennedy for working so tirelessly to ensure that these veterans get the recognition they deserve.”

This project was supported by the Niagara River Greenway Commission – which annually receives funds from NYPA, as part of a settlement agreement related to the 50-year license received by NYPA for the Niagara Power Project in 2007. During the

term of the license, the Greenway Fund receives \$2 million a year to distribute for beautification and cultural projects along the Niagara River.

Senator Timothy M. Kennedy represents the New York State Senate's 58th District, which is comprised of the towns of Cheektowaga, Eden, Hamburg and West Seneca, the city of Lackawanna and parts of the city of Buffalo. More information is available at <http://kennedy.nysenate.gov>.