



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MUSEUM OF NEWPORT IRISH HISTORY

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THE IRISH LAND LEAGUE, THE AMERICAN LAND LEAGUE AND THE NEWPORT CONTRIBUTION

The Irish National Land League was founded in 1879 by Michael Davitt. Davitt was born in 1846 to a cottier family driven from the land at the end of the famine. His family went to England, and as a young man Michael returned to Ireland to work with the Fenian movement. He was jailed by the English from 1870 to 1877 for his 'illegal' activities.

Working with other Fenians, such as John Devoy and Mathew Harris, Davitt developed plans to organize the farmers, tenant farmers and cottiers of Ireland to resist the governments' policy of allowing the absentee English landowners free rein to raise rents, refuse to pay for land improvements, and evict tenants without cause. In fact, thousands of farmers and cottiers were evicted following the famine years, all through the 1850s and 1860s. Those evicted became destitute, homeless and were basically left to starve, as the government had no real social network to assist them. From the 1850s, through the 1870s, several million Irish were forced to emigrate. Michael Davitt came to America in 1877 and met with Devoy, who was then head of the United Brotherhood Nationalist

Organization, and Patrick Ford, the Irish-American publisher. Together they developed plans to organize the Irish Agrarian and Home Rule movements to resist landlordism and forced evictions.

Davitt returned to Ireland and founded, first, the Mayo Land League, then in October 1879, the Irish National Land League. The purpose of the League was to unite the farmers and tenants to fight evictions, demand fair rents, provide means for Irish farmers to purchase land at reasonable prices, and, finally, to end landlordism. (At that time, over 70 percent of farms were owned by absentee English landlords.)

Davitt, also, worked with the relatively new, rising star of the Irish political scene, Charles



Evicted families petitioning before the landlord's gate at Castlebar, Co. Mayo, possibly communicating through the housemaid in the background. (From the Wynne Collection, courtesy of the Council of Trustees, National Library of Ireland)

above: Photo showing evicted families about 1870, from the National Library of Ireland.

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SEVERAL ACQUISITIONS FOR THE LIBRARY

We have been fortunate to have several items donated to the Library over the past few months:

Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*, Oxford University Press, 1985. .Donated by Rita Brady Clarke. This is probably one of the best volumes on Irish immigration to America. Miller has a great compilation of data on times, dates, counties of origin, etc. A great reference, and very readable.

Maire & Connor Cruise O'Brien, *A Concise History of Ireland*, Beekman Press, NY, 1972. Concise, written by one of Ireland's premiere writers, and his wife. Many excellent illustrations.

Journal of the Wexford Historical Society, No. 19, 2002-03. This volume contains a listing of the men who marched with the Wexford army into Meath in July 1798, among other interesting articles.

A transcription of the talk given to the Irish Heritage Association on March 8, 1984 at Redwood Library by John J. Slocum. Donated by Eileen O'Reilly. John J. Slocum began collecting the works of James Joyce in the 1930s and 40s. The talk describes his search for manuscripts of Joyce's works and the many friends he made in Ireland in doing so. To quote his introduction: "Ireland and James Joyce are inseparable. What you will hear tonight is how I became involved with Joyce in the first place, about collecting his books and manuscripts in the 1930s and 40s, and about a few of the people I met in Ireland and elsewhere who assisted me in putting together a collection of all his printed works and many manuscripts and several hundred letters, now in Yale University."

Stewart Parnell, a member of Parliament and head of the Home Rule Party. His assessment was that the Agrarian Movement and the Home Rule Movement could join forces to form a powerful entity that would eventually force the British government to come to terms with them.

Davitt's Land League was organized and supported enthusiastically by farmers, tenants and most factions of Irish society. Fortunately, the organization came together just in time to prevent another famine and disaster as the country experienced extreme weather conditions and widespread crop failures in 1879. The Land League was able to provide funds to enable farmers to pay their rents and survive.

Funds for the Irish Land League were coming from America, where the American Land League, organized by Patrick Ford, sent thousands of dollars from Irish American immigrants. Patrick Ford, an immigrant himself, was editor and publisher of *The Irish Industrial World* in New York.

American Irish Land League branches were organized throughout America and quickly provided funding needed to support the Irish Land League. In Newport, the branch was organized in 1880, with Michael Butler as President, and Michael Driscoll as Financial Secretary.

Through the generosity of Fifth Warder Leo Downey, the Museum has a number of copies of letters written by Patrick Ford and his sister regarding events held in Newport to raise funds for the Irish Land League. One such event was held at the Opera House on February 5, 1881 to a capacity crowd. The event was written up in the *Providence Star* newspaper, which related that one of the speakers was Mrs. Parnell, mother of Charles Stewart Parnell, who had recently been arrested by the British for "antigovernment activities." (A January 28 letter from Patrick Ford's sister to Michael Driscoll indicated that Mrs. Parnell was in her hotel in New York feeling ill, but Driscoll was assured that she would be able to attend the February 5th, 1881 event).

In Ireland, the absentee landlords continued to attempt evictions, but the well organized Land Leaguers fought these both in the courts and with great crowds to support those about to be dispossessed. It was during these times that the famous "boycott" case occurred, in which the landlord, a Captain Boycott, was, in fact, cut off from the neighboring society for his treatment of his tenants. In the end, the English had to resort to providing an entire regiment of soldiers to assist in bringing his farm products to market. The word "boycott" was born.

The Irish Land League continued to apply pressure on absentee landlords, and the English government slowly began to pass laws to prevent unacceptable rent increases and to provide legal and financial support for Irish farmers so that eventually, by the early 1900s, many Irish farmers had gained land ownership.

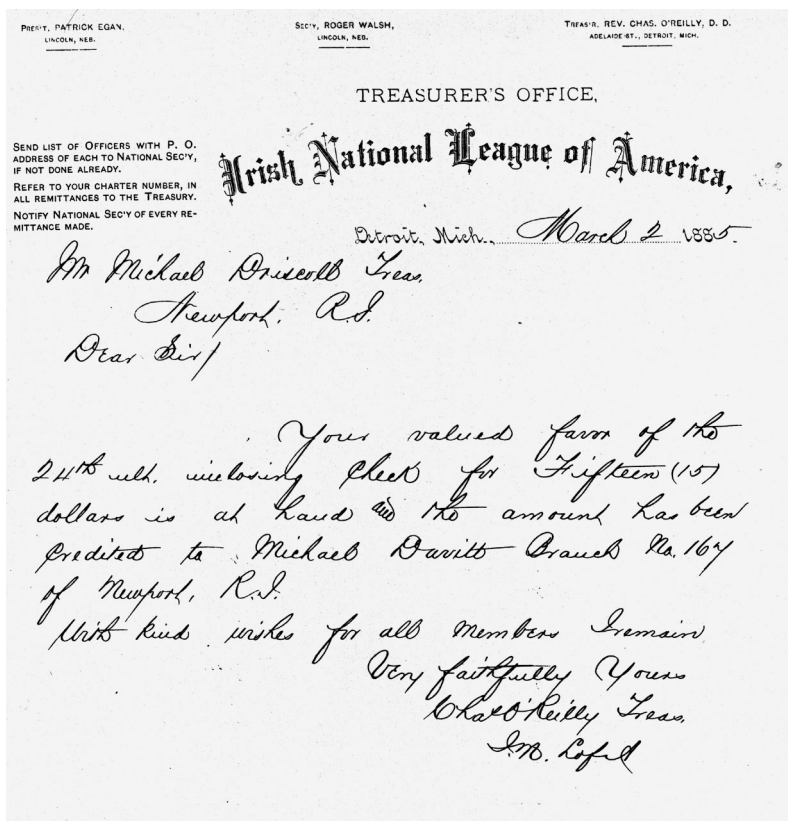
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The Land League was no doubt the most successful political organization in Irish history, and, although the organization itself was disbanded because of pressure from the English Government, its successors, the Irish National League and the Irish Parliamentary Party, were eventually successful in bringing the issues of Home Rule and Irish independence to the forefront of Irish-British relations.

NOTES: In this very brief article, it is not possible to describe all of the various individuals and factions who comprise the history of the Irish drive for fair treatment of the farmers and tenants, for the Home Rule movement, and eventually, the founding of the Republic. References used in this article include: *Emigrants and Exiles*, by Kerby A. Miller;; *The Course of Irish History*, by T.W. Moody; *Modern Ireland*, by R. F. Foster; and letters from Patrick Ford and his sister to Newporter Michael Driscoll, 1881/1882.

Michael Driscoll, the Newport Land Leagues' Financial Secretary, was born in Ireland in 1841. He came to Newport with his family as a youngster, was married in 1873 at St. Mary's Church to Margaret Goggins, and, according to Museum Director Pat Murphy's records, was a stonemason. He died in 1921.



above: Letter to Michael Driscoll, Newport Land League Financial Secretary, acknowledging the receipt of \$15.

MARCH MUSEUM EVENTS ANNOUNCED

The Museum has three events, scheduled for this March, beginning with a great evening of Irish story-telling and song at the Firehouse Theater—a benefit for the Museum!

AN ALL NEW IRISH PROGRAM, FEATURING SPECIAL GUEST ARTISTS CELEBRATING IRELAND IN STORY AND SONG, will kick off our Irish heritage month on Tuesday, March 16, at 8pm. This benefit for the Museum will feature Tom McGuire, Irish playwright and bodhran player, Marilyn Murphy Meardon, Irish storyteller. Phil Edmonds, from Killaloe, Ireland, plays the tin whistle and button accordion, and Mary King, fiddler and harpist. There will be a reception following the 8-10pm program. Call the Firehouse for tickets at (401) 849-3473.

BUS TOUR

The Museum's annual narrated Bus Tour of Irish Newport is scheduled for Saturday, March 20. The Tour this year will begin at Ft. Adams State Park at 10am, and will last approximately 2 hours. Reservations are required. Call, Maria at (401) 846-8865. Donations.

LECTURE SERIES

The final Michael F. Crowley Lecture for this year will be held on Friday, March 26, at 6pm, in the LaForge Casino Restaurant. Our speaker, Denny Lynch, a photographer and historian from Baltimore, will deliver an audio-visual presentation of interviews gathered during his travels throughout Ireland photographing places and people. Reservations are a must. Call Rita, at 848-7242. Members are free. A donation of \$5 is suggested for non-members.

Office of **IRISH WORLD** *Printed & Published by*

New York, Jan 28 1881

Mr Michael Driscoll

Dr Sir

Your letter and telegram to hand. In answer thereto would say that I regret to state Mrs Parnell is sick at the N.Y. Hotel but I trust she will be well enough to be with you on your date Feb 5th. We are asked for several places on the same date but I find Newport on our list for that date only glad to know you have Rev Geo Keffer, very truly yours
Ellen A Ford

P.S. ask all the ladies and also the clergy - we wish to form a ladies branch. E.A.F.

left: Letter from Patrick Ford's sister, indicating that Mrs. Parnell would be coming to Newport for a February 5th event. Mrs. Parnell was Charles Stewart Parnell's mother.

right: Clipping from the Providence-Morning Star newspaper dated Dec. 21, 1880, showing the organization of the Newport Branch of the Land League.

STAR

NEWPORT. 12-21-80

IRISH LAND LEAGUE.

A branch of the Irish Land League has been organized in this city. The second meeting of the League was held last evening, in St. Mary's Hall. It was largely attended and very enthusiastic. The spirit of the meeting was to perfect the organization and also to raise funds for their suffering brethren in Ireland. After the completion of the business, the meeting was addressed by B. W. Pearce, by invitation. The following are the officers of the League for this city: President—Michael Butler; Vice President—Edward Matthews; Secretary—James Doherty; Treasurer—John Martin; Financial Secretary, Michael Driscoll. The society numbers about eighty members, and fifty dollars were raised for the cause, at the meeting last evening.

GENERAL NEWS ITEMS.

This clipping is from the *Newport Mercury* dated January 7, 1882, indicating that eviction continued well into the late 1800s.

Ireland.

DUBLIN, Jan. 6. The despatch of Guardsmen to Clare and Limerick will liberate many police from extra duty. The Guardsmen will be distributed in parties of five through the country, in small garrisons, to protect the persons and property of landlords and others whose lives are threatened.

The entire tenantry of the town of Lacka, in north Tipperary, were evicted today. The military was present during the proceedings.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

The Museum welcomes recent new members

From Newport

Ann V. Belleville
Eleanor-Geer Patnode
Mike Dory
Deanna & Bill Casey
Eula Curtis
Ruth Dunn
Robert Healy
Sue Leary
Patricia Callahan

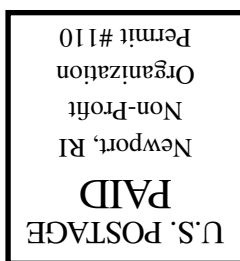
From Middletown:

Bill & Karen Day
Winfred M. Taylor

From Portsmouth:

Deborah McCarthy

WELCOME TO ALL AND THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT!



THE MUSEUM OF NEWPORT IRISH HISTORY
P.O. Box 1378
Newport, RI 02840

JOIN THE MUSEUM OF NEWPORT IRISH HISTORY AND SUPPORT YOUR IRISH HERITAGE

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