

Evictions! What Major O'Shaughnessy Saw!

BY ED O'SHAUGHNESSY

“It was on the ‘ever glorious Fourth’ that we first struck Ireland via Dublin, and, as the latter was our first stopping place, we naturally called upon Colonel McCaskill, the American Consul.”¹ So began an account published in *True Witness and Catholic Chronicle* written by Major E. J. O’Shaughnessy about a visit to Ireland during a European trip in the summer of 1888. This account, and an interview published at the same time in the *Catholic Union and Times* served not only as travelogues but as the only known American witness account of the infamous evictions on the Vandeleur Estate in County Clare.² By design or by happenstance, “the Major,” as he was called by friends and family, was among a handful of American and British tourists present for the wholesale evictions of twenty-four families near the town of Kilrush, one of the more sensational and certainly the most photographed of the late-Victorian era Irish evictions.

Who was this Major E. J. O’Shaughnessy who saw it a natural thing to make a July 4th office call on the American Consul while visiting Ireland? According to one contemporary publication “Major E. J. O’Shaughnessy, of this city, is well known in Irish Nationalist circles, and has been prominent in Irish political movements this side of the water during many years past.” So stated the newspaper’s introduction to its interview with him.³ The Major was indeed a well-known Irish nationalist, and also was a prosperous New York City merchant supplying wholesale cloth to the Garment District. Despite the title of Major he so publicly carried, E. J. O’Shaughnessy had never served in uniform.⁴ Born in Montreal in 1848, he arrived in New York City in 1865 “only one step ahead of the law” his son would say with a smile. The Major claimed to have been a member of a Montreal Fenian group, plotting revolution-



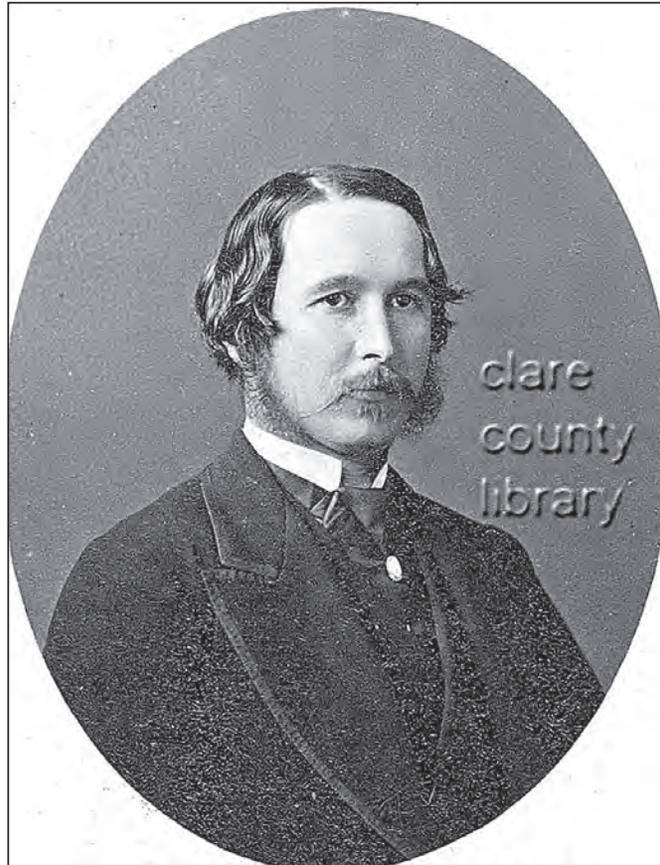
Photo: Major E. J. O’Shaughnessy in a picture taken around 1920. He was a former Canadian Fenian, a member of numerous New York City Irish nationalist societies (some semi-secret), a wholesale cloth merchant and, when this photograph was taken, a deputy collector for the U.S. Treasury with duty at the Customs House, New York City. Courtesy of Edward J. O’Shaughnessy.

ary activities. When his group was revealed by an informer he ran for the border. No proof of this is likely ever to be found, but if the company one keeps is truly an indication of one’s character, his claim has the ring of truth. The contemporary press frequently reported him in the company of Fenians, several of them of the “physical force” persuasion.⁵

The Major starts to appear regularly in the New York press in the wake of Charles Stewart Parnell’s January 1880 visit to the city. He becomes an actor in the organizations that subsequently formed seeking land reform in Ireland, relief of the Irish poor, financial support of the Irish Parliamentary Party, and advancement of Home Rule. He was not unique in this. Parnell’s visit to the

Ed O’Shaughnessy was surprised to discover that his great grandparents were present at the famous Vandeleur Estate evictions in County Clare during 1888. Since the discovery Ed has researched these evictions, searched for and found forgotten photographs, communicated with descendants, and published his work in Ireland. Ed holds an undergraduate degree in history and graduate degrees in political science and executive management. ©2018. Printed with permission of Edward J. O’Shaughnessy.

Photo:
 Captain Hector
 S. Vandeleur, the
 absentee landlord of
 the Vandeleur Estate,
 Kilrush, Ireland.
 Captain Vandeleur
 inherited the Kilrush
 estate upon the
 death of his father,
 Colonel Crofton
 Vandeleur, in 1881.
 Rarely visiting the
 Estate, Captain
 Vandeleur lived
 with his English wife
 variously in London
 or on the Continent.
 Courtesy of the Clare
 County Library.



United States provided direction to many Irish Americans who only needed direction. As participation in Irish nationalist activities gathered momentum, so did interest in visiting the old country. By the mid-1880s travel to Ireland was widely advertised and easily booked. Days after the Major's fortieth birthday, the O'Shaughnessy party of six, three adults and three children, steamed off to adventure.⁶

HIS COMMUNICATIONS FROM IRELAND

At the time of the Major's visit, Ireland was in the throes of the so-called Land War, pitting the formidable might of the landlord class, backed by every element of power the British Crown had at its disposal, against the tenant farmers, backed by the Irish National League, underwritten to a significant degree by contributions from Irish Americans. Wholesale evictions, devastating during the Famine years, were again becoming frequent. Then, in 1887, a terrible tool was added to the paraphernalia of eviction—the battering ram. The Major

would see the monstrous ram in action.⁷

We are able to recreate much of the Major's experiences while visiting Ireland “under coercion,” as Ireland was so described, because of his determination to communicate what he saw. A remonstrative man, he was outraged by much of what he perceived while in Ireland and felt compelled to get his story out. How he did so has uniquely advanced our understanding of this episode of history and gives us hope that more of his communications might be found.

During his six months abroad the Major communicated regularly with colleagues in New York City. He did so through cable and the post. In one report of his communications we read:

...[w]riting later from the handsome watering place known as Kilkee, on the west coast of County Clare, Major O'Shaughnessy proceeds to give us an account of the horrible deeds that have been going on in that landlord-ridden country on the land which the heartless Captain Vandeleur claims to own....⁸

A favorite recipient of the Major's communiques was John M. Wall, a special correspondent for the *New York-Tribune* and a colleague of William O'Brien, the editor of *United Ireland*, the National League's mouthpiece. John Wall, a minor celebrity in the New York Irish community, would ensure that the Major's friends and associates were kept informed while he was abroad.⁹ In the Home News section of the *New-York Tribune*, dated August 1, 1888, it was noted that "Major E.J. O'Shaughnessy, well-known in Irish Nationalist circles, is at present witnessing the horrible eviction scenes on Captain Vandeleur's estate in County Clare, Ireland."¹⁰ The attentive reader may find similarity in the description of Major O'Shaughnessy here and in the introduction to the published interview.

Some months after returning to New York, the Major gathered his notes and composed a lively account of his travels from which we get details of his visit to Ireland, and

he was interviewed, perhaps by special correspondent Wall. His account and a report from the interview were published in the *Catholic Union and Times*. A third publication, in a 1901 edition of *The Gael*, presented not only an account of the evictions he witnessed, it also featured four eviction photographs he provided to illustrate the story. (Those four photographs appear in this article.) We know from family memory that the Major brought home several eviction photographs, one so important that he had it enlarged, framed, and hung prominently in his home.¹¹

ATTENTION TO THE EVICTIONS

Newsworthy in their day, the evictions on the Vandeleur Estate have taken on a new significance in the present century because of the surprising number of photographs that continue to surface, and the resulting exploration of how cleverly they were used. We know now that the evictions witnessed by the Major were the most photographed of the nineteenth-century Irish

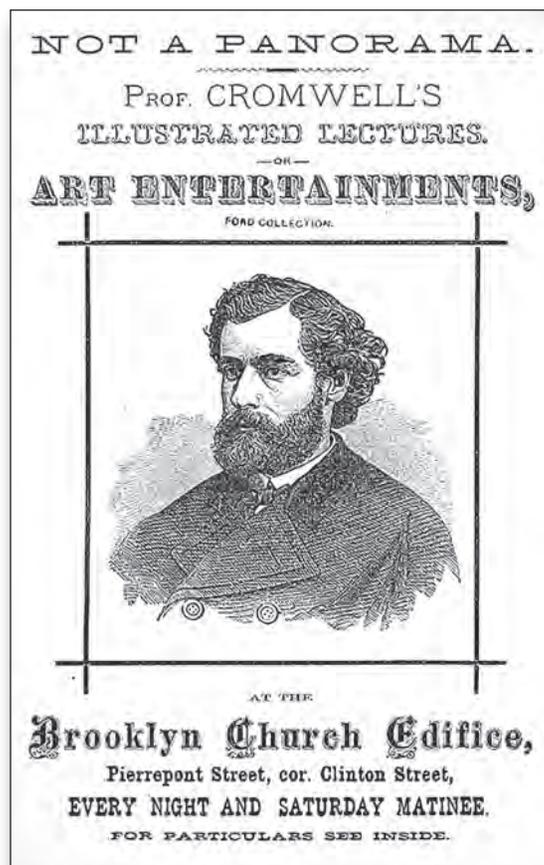


Illustration:

An advertisement for lectures in Brooklyn by Professor George Reed Cromwell, "America's Most Famous Forgotten Magic Lantern Showman." Courtesy of the New York Public Library.

evictions.¹² Furthermore, many of these shocking photographs would rapidly travel great distances and be seen by diverse audiences. In this dissemination the Major played an important part as an analysis of his following statement about the photographs taken on the Estate reveals:

*Thos. [recte Timothy] O'Connor, a photographer of Limerick, was present and took photographs of all the eviction scenes and Professor Cromwell [of New York] reproduced them on his immense canvas in the Grand Opera House in this city last winter, and will show them again....*¹³

In this one sentence we find two strikingly important revelations. Timothy O'Connor of Limerick was named as the photographer who took the eviction photographs.¹⁴ No other witness, reporter or otherwise, bothered to identify the photographer who was ever-present. We learn also that Professor George Reed Cromwell reproduced O'Connor's eviction photographs and projected them onto an immense screen before New York City audiences in the Grand Opera House.¹⁵ Furthermore, we read that

Professor Cromwell had a New York City showing of the photographs provided by the Major during the preceding winter and that more showings would occur. The Major was communicating to his readers what some already

GRAND OPERA HOUSE.		TO-NIGHT.
Lessee and Manager.....		Mr. T. H. FRENCH
ST. PATRICK'S NIGHT.		
Magnificently illustrated lecture		
by		
PROFESSOR CROMWELL.		
with portraits of		
PARNELL AND GLADSTONE.		
EVICION SCENES		
will be portrayed, as well as the charming		
scenery, the beautiful cities and character-		
istics of the people of the		
EMERALD ISLE..		
Admission 25c. Reserved seats 25c. extra.		Commences at 8:15. Box office opens at 1.

knew. He had provided his eviction photographs to Professor Cromwell who copied them and incorporated them into his illustrated lecture on Ireland. If the readers had missed the first showing last winter, they were informed of more opportunities not to be missed. It helps to know that Professor Cromwell was the most famous illustrated lecturer in New York City in his day, using "magic lantern" technology to project images onto a large screen on stage. There was

Illustration:
Advertisement for Professor Cromwell's illustrated lecture on Ireland updated with the inclusion of "Eviction Scenes." The scenes were photographs stated by Major O'Shaughnessy to have been taken by Timothy O'Connor of Limerick. This lecture was for Sunday, March 17, 1889, the second of three mentioned by Major O'Shaughnessy in his published account of the evictions. From the New York Herald, March 17, 1889. Courtesy of Edward J. O'Shaughnessy.

Photo:
This photograph is titled "Demanding Possession. Home of John Connell." For this eviction, the ram was not used because Connell was coaxed out of his home by officials. Officials can be seen clustered near the window through which a constable entered to lead Connell out. This was published in the August 1901 edition of *The Gael* and was provided by Major O'Shaughnessy. Courtesy of Edward J. O'Shaughnessy.





no better source to publicly disseminate the Vandeleur eviction photographs. The first illustrated lecture incorporating the Major's eviction photographs was Sunday evening, December 16, 1888, within three months of the Major's return to New York City. The *New York Times* in announcing this lecture stated the "pictures will include...timely scenes of evictions, showing how the constables turn out the tenants." Two more illustrated lectures were to follow, March 17, 1889, St. Patrick's Day, and one in December, 1889.¹⁶

TO KILKEE AND KILRUSH

When the O'Shaughnessy party arrived in Dublin on the fourth of July they were half-way through their European travels. After several months on the continent they were now visiting the land of their parents for the first time. They did not tarry in Dublin and, according to his account, after a week in Limerick "we took a small tug boat called the *Vandeleur*—some dub it a steamer—to Kilrush, the seat of the infamous Vandeleur evictions against the Plan of Campaign." As it happened, they shared the ride along the

Shannon with a contingent of British troops:

*A detachment of soldiers was packed down on the lower deck among the cattle, and I said to myself that it served them right for donning the hated red coat of English tyranny. They were going to protect the cut-throats and Emergency Men in evicting helpless families from their huts and holdings.*¹⁷

The Major and his family were on their way to the seaside resort of Kilkee. The British soldiers were on their way to a temporary encampment at the Kilrush House, the home of landlord Captain Hector Vandeleur, on the grounds of the Vandeleur estate. The two parties would soon meet again.

Kilkee, a popular tourist location, had several hotels facing the ocean around a crescent-shaped bay. Normally a calming setting, it was now abuzz with those gathered to attend the evictions. The crowd included the press, members of Parliament, and a handful of British and American tourists. We may imagine the extroverted Major O'Shaughnessy working the crowd

Photo:

"First Stroke of the Ram. Michael Cleary's House." This photograph captures the sheriff standing near the back of the ram, the district magistrate, Colonel Turner, to the left with his hand on his hip, members of the Royal Irish Constabulary, plus other officials and observers. This was published in the August 1901 edition of *The Gael*, and was provided by Major O'Shaughnessy. Courtesy of Edward J. O'Shaughnessy.

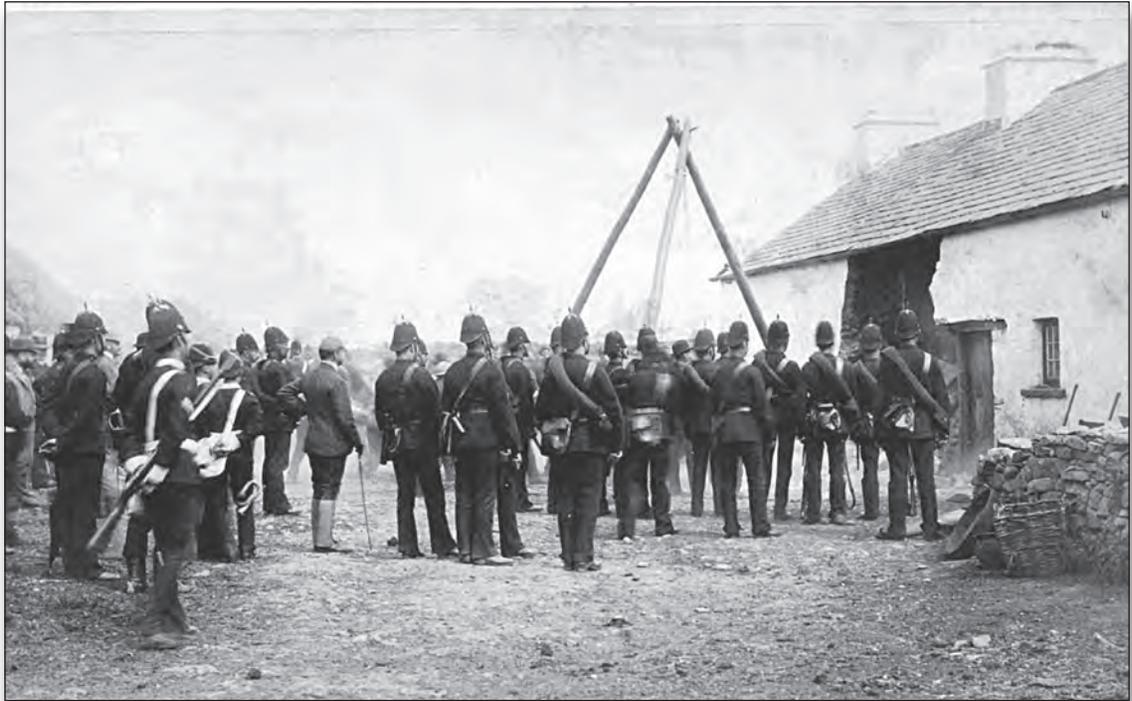


Photo:
*"Attacking the Breach. Michael Cleary's House." The constables are seen here gripping their batons awaiting the word to rush the breach and attack defenders inside. Colonel Turner is the man with leggings and a stick. Men with black equipment belts are the Royal Irish Constabulary. Those with white equipment belts are regular British infantry. This was published in the August 1901 edition of *The Gael* and was provided by Major O'Shaughnessy. Courtesy of Edward J. O'Shaughnessy.*

and insinuating himself into the center of things to come. It was the custom of the times to introduce oneself and hand over a calling card. The family has memory of the Major's calling cards. The cards would prove useful.

Early in the morning on Wednesday, July 18, the Major, his wife and her sister were in a jaunting car, along with a string of others, travelling to Kilrush to meet up with the eviction column. He observed that *"The evictions took place within a radius of ten miles around the town of Kilrush, of all of which property the Vandeleurs and Studderts have been landlords and agents respectively for generations."* It was said in his circles back in New York City that to understand the Land War in Ireland one had to travel to Ireland to see it first-hand. The Major was about to see it first-hand: *"I went to the evictions in company with the representatives of the Dublin newspapers, and I took my wife and her sister along for I knew the sight would make their hair curl, as it did."*¹⁸

The observers from Kilkee would link up with the eviction column shortly after nine o'clock in Kilrush. The eviction party was formidably organized, and consisted of the sub-sheriff, mag-

istrates of various levels, the landlord's agent, 50 mounted Hussars, 120 regular British infantry, and 120 Royal Irish Constabulary men (the RIC was a paramilitary force looking much like the regular infantry), plus the paraphernalia of eviction, including a cart carrying a newly delivered battering ram. The Major stated that *"The battering ram, or 'Balfour's Maiden' as it is now happily called, always accompanied this procession of evictors."*¹⁹ The civilian observers were marshalled into place at the end of this very long column. The Major later observed that what a *"...curious and novel sight it is to a stranger, and particularly an American, to see a whole regiment of Hussars, infantry, constabulary and Emergency Men, comprising over a thousand men marching over the roads and highways of County Clare to evict a family of little children and old people out of their thatched cottages."*²⁰ As the eviction column departed Kilrush for the eviction sites we are told that a

... notable incident occurred during the march of the troops. The bell of the parish church of Kilrush would ring its funeral sound and all the shops and stores would have their shutters up, while the country around would be black with people follow-

*ing in the wake of this ghastly procession of evictors.*²¹

The bell was rung to alert the local population that the eviction party was on the march, the signal to start moving towards the roads along the route of march. The Major reported that *“As the procession moved from one beat to another beat it looked like a huge funeral with its long line of military in front, and outside cars following, with the people on foot bringing up the rear, besides thousands (of other spectators) crossing the fields.”*²²

On Day 1 of the eviction operation three families were visited. The first two offered no resistance, but the third family visited, the Cleary family, had prepared for a spirited defense. After the sheriff went through the process of demanding possession, to be refused by the occupants, an attempt was made to force the front door. Finding the door too stoutly barricaded, the ram was brought from its cart and erected facing an exterior wall:

*...[so] they begin at the stone wall near the door to force an entrance, and when they make a break in the cabin, out would come a spray of (supposed to be) hot oatmeal water, and Sheriff Croker (and he is a corker) would be the first to receive it on his wicker shield. Then he and the constables would rush in and club the occupants.*²³

The Crown had learned lessons from previous eviction operations: for example, to include the need for overwhelming force and the need for an effective machine to break into a defended cottage. The use of crowbars and sledge hammers had proven excessively time-consuming and put the men wielding those tools at risk. The idea to procure a massive battering ram was the solution.²⁴

Major O’Shaughnessy brought home two photographs of the Cleary eviction, titled by Timothy O’Connor as “Frist Stroke of the Ram” and “Attacking the Breach.” In both scenes the ram is seen in the center of the photograph. The “Emergency Men” stand on both sides to swing the ram. The RIC are standing close to protect the Emergency

Men, the bailiffs, and magistrates. Those with black equipment belts are the paramilitary RIC and those farther back, wearing white equipment belts, are regular infantry. Though hard to see, the RIC near the ram are gripping their batons in anticipation of attacking the breach.

Major O’Shaughnessy, his wife and her sister, were granted permission to be within the military perimeter. The process to request permission was repeated daily by providing a calling card for consideration by Colonel Turner, the Divisional Magistrate. The Major gave in to some braggadocio: *“No one but the reporters, your humble servant, and my two ladies were allowed within the lines of steel. Even Jeremiah Jordan, the M.P. for that district was summarily ejected by the Magistrate Cecil Roche.”*²⁵ In an environment where military titles abounded Major O’Shaughnessy’s calling card may have helped grant him access over other, civilian, witnesses. The *Limerick Journal* noted that among the witnesses to the evictions was a “Major O’Shaughnessy of the American Army, New York.”²⁶ The Major’s calling card did not state that he was “of the American Army,” but he probably did not see it an advantage to correct a misrepresentation.

Inside the lines of steel the Major was often close to the action and the actors. He described the Emergency Men as *“broken down soldiers, the scum and blacklegs from the North who do the dirty work of the sheriff and the removables.”* The man who bossed the ram crew *“would have his twelve cutthroats on either side of the battering ram, sailor-fashion, so that when they were ready he would say—‘Back away with them—Back away with them’—but whether he meant away with the Irish or away with the stones that fell at every thud of the battering ram the writer is at a loss to discover, but certain it is that one would not like to meet any of these emergency men on a dark road.”*²⁷

When a breach was made, according to the Major, *“...the constables would rush in and club the occupants right and left and, being bruised and bleeding, they would be taken before Cecil Roche, the so-called removable-magistrate, who would plant himself on top of a hedge wall and*

**Photo:**

"Ram at Work. Tom Birmingham's House."

The last eviction of twenty-four removals. Birmingham tenaciously resisted dispossession, and his home was deliberately demolished. The lady in the foreground just might be the famous British women's rights advocate, Lady Margaret Sandhurst. Published in the August 1901 edition of The Gael and provided by Major O'Shaughnessy. Courtesy of Edward J. O'Shaughnessy.

arrogate to himself the powers of judge, court and jury...." Magistrate Cecil Roche was known to be a particularly nasty character, selected over others to be the sentencing official for these evictions. Magistrate Roche "would vent his spleen on these poor victims, with his hat cocked on the side of his head and nearly covering his nose." This characterization was repeated by many who witnessed Roche's harsh treatment of cottage defenders. After sentencing "they would be handcuffed to each other, young and old alike, and marched off under military escort to the bridewell, as they call it, or prison, in Kilrush, a distance of perhaps seven miles from where they were evicted."²⁸

Following evictions, buildings were sometimes demolished. The Major stated that

After they evicted Cleary's family they razed his cabin to the ground, because it was a good substantial farm house, slated roofed and with three chimneys. Their object in demolishing the house completely was so that nobody could re-occupy it again. This was their policy right straight through. An old tumbled down hut, they would only go through the formality of evicting, but where it was a fine house they would tear it to the ground.

It is important to remember that the Major was telling a story. Demolishing a cottage out of sheer cussedness is the story. A dispassionate examination of the historical record indicates that the decision to raze a home to the ground had more to do with the level of resistance encountered than the state of construction.²⁹

As the first eviction to experience the ram, the Cleary family eviction was a shocking thing to see. Several newspaper accounts reported that the American visitors made clear their displeasure and dismay. This dismay can be appreciated in the Major's extensive telling of the Cleary story in his accounts, more so than his recounting of any of the other evictions. The *London Daily News* reported that after the Cleary family's eviction several American "supporters" handed money to the parish priest for the tenants.³⁰ We know the identities of the Americans present for this eviction, and of the priest. The priest was Fr. Thomas O'Meara, a local pastor and a National League man. The Americans were the O'Shaughnessy party of New York and Thomas Fitzpatrick of Boston. Both the Major and Mr. Fitzpatrick were aptly described as supporters, as both were U.S. National League men, supporters of this

cause for years. Though not mentioned by name in this account we may feel confident that the Major gave money to Fr. O'Meara. It would be in keeping with his reputation. The Major's interviewer from the *True Witness* made the point in his introduction that the Major "always subscribed liberally but never wanted anything said about it."³¹

From his written accounts, from other first-hand accounts, and from the photographs he brought home, we may place the Major at many of the evictions that occurred during the nine-day eviction operation. The Major described specific eviction actions for Days 1, 2, 3, and 6; the photographs he provided for use in the 1901 edition of *The Gael* were of evictions on Days 2, 8, and 9. He also described a weekend off-duty encounter with some of the Army officers that took place in Kilkee on the weekend before evictions resumed on Day 7. If he did not attend each day of the evictions, it appears that he remained in the area and was able to obtain photographs developed at the conclusion of the

eviction operation.

When not describing a specific eviction the Major provides a general narrative giving the impression that he was present throughout the operation. He stated that

*Thousands of families on this Vandeleur estate have been kept in suspense for months expecting any day to be evicted, and after they would evict one family, the parade and show of cavalry, battering rams, dragoons, etc. would take up their line of march again and go to some other hut perhaps nine miles away. No one knew whose turn it would be next, but when they did, smoke would be issuing from the chimney, a sure sign that they were preparing to give these emergency men a warm reception, before they would surrender.*³²

Once the eviction party arrived at the next house on the eviction list they would secure the site with a perimeter established by the regular infantry. The sheriff,



Illustration:

Absentee landlordism was a severe burden on Irish people as this drawing, published in 1830, suggests. Growing significantly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it drained wealth from the land away from the Irish and to owners who, like Hector Vandeleur, did not live in Ireland. It gave control of the land to these owners who could evict Irish tenants when they wanted properties for their own purposes. Courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum.



around Kilrush. He was deeply disturbed by the significant presence of British soldiers stationed in major towns. When describing the British soldier in Ireland he commented "...five-sixths of ... [them] are Protestants and have no sympathy for the feelings and aspiration of the Irish people." He adds that these "Scotch-capped and red-coated gravel crushers...are a standing menace to every little town and hamlet throughout Ireland."³⁴

But not all of the officers present at the evictions were happy with the service they were tasked to perform. During one eviction the Major reported that the "...officers remarked to the reporters that this was not the kind of warfare that they had agreed to engage in when they got their commissions. There is no doubt this is true in some circumstances."³⁵

The Major also caught the actions of some officers and eviction party officials during an off-the-record moment:

On Sunday during the eviction times, some of the officers in civilian dress and some of the authorities in command drove from the Kilrush House to Moore's Hotel in Kilkee, and, after making a day of it, returned to the hotel drunk. When asked to settle, they disputed their bill, kicked and squirmed, and finally fought among themselves. Some of these officers in 'Her Majesty's Service' think they can ride rough shod over the poor people of Ireland, (but) when they doff their gorgeous regimentals they look very 'snide' and bum, to say the least.³⁶

It was not just the Scotch-capped and red-coated regulars that the Major mistrusted; most of the officials at every level were either serving or former British officers. The Divisional Magistrate in charge of these evictions was, as we know, Colonel Turner; the majority of the Resident/Removable Magistrates had officer titles. The Sub-Sheriff was Captain Croker, and the landlord (an absentee one) was Captain Hector Vandeleur, son of Colonel Crofton Vandeleur. According to the Major, "Another singular fact is that the majority of the landlords are all officers 'On her Majesty's Service', another reason why brute force and wealth keeps Ireland on the ragged edge."³⁷

magistrates, the Emergency Men, and the RIC would station themselves at the front door of the cottage, and the Major would place himself as close as observers were allowed to be: "When smoke was seen issuing from the chimney these pirates would get a ladder climb up and stuff the chimney with straw, in order to suffocate and smoke the tenants out, but they would never budge until compelled to by superior force."³³

COMMENTS ON CONDITIONS & PEOPLE

The Major's narratives also provide insightful comments about the conditions around Kilrush, landlordism in general, overheard conversations and chance observations which are useful to the researcher and provide authenticity to his reporting. He indicated that "Dotted all over the green isle can be seen the barracks, the workhouse and the prison. This is the triangle that by which the paternal government of England rules poor old Ireland." The Major would have seen all three

Illustration:
A campaign flyer for Benjamin Harrison, the Republican candidate for President in the election of 1888. Major O'Shaughnessy said he would vote for Harrison on election day even though he thought himself a Democrat. Irish support may have been crucial in Harrison's victory. He lost the popular vote but carried the Electoral College, including electors from New York State. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

ON THE LANDLORD & OTHER SUBJECTS

The Major shared in his accounts some tittle-tattle about Captain Hector Vandeleur:

Report[s] had it that the present Captain Vandeleur, married to an English wife... would not live in Ireland, and during the evictions they resided in London....

Knowing that the owner was away, the Major went to see Kilrush House. Speaking with the housekeeper he learned that the custom of the itinerant residents was to "...invite guests from London to visit with them for a month, or six weeks, [in] their demesne in Ireland." Their rural retreat over, all would happily return to urbane London. But the place was not entirely devoid of residents because Kilrush House had been "...converted with its grounds into a camp with barracks." It must have been an interesting sight. The officers and officials of the eviction party were billeted in the very large manor house, and the rank and file were billeted in the stables and outbuildings or under canvas in rows of tents.

While engaging in criticism of Captain Vandeleur's poor stewardship and lack of humanity towards his tenants, the Major made a declarative and intriguing statement: "*It is a fact that thousands of American dollars have gone into the coffers of this same Vandeleur and his father before, to keep 'the wolf' (agent Studdert) from the door.*"³⁸ When the Major stated it to be a fact that thousands of American dollars went to the Vandeleur landlords, he was speaking with some authority. He was an associate of those who collected funds in New York City, an accounting of which was a regular feature in the American press, and with those who knew how funds were distributed in Ireland, down to individual tenants, identified by estate landlord, an accounting of which was a regular feature of *United Ireland*. But how the Major knew how many American dollars went to the Vandeleurs is, at the moment, unknown.³⁹

Speaking disdainfully, the Major opined that "...landlordism has seen its best days... thanks to Davitt, Parnell and William O'Brien, and it sur-

prised me to find that the Land League agitation did not begin a hundred years ago instead of ten, for no matter where you go in Ireland you will see evidence of extreme wealth and extreme poverty."⁴⁰

It was true enough, the landed estates were in trouble, and within two decades the laws would change allowing for divestiture of land and estates.

The evictions on the Vandeleur Estate would prove to be a significant embarrassment to the Crown, and one of the outcomes was that Captain Vandeleur was forced into an arbitration process with his evicted tenants. The Major commented that "... it seems Vandeleur has returned a poorer, if not a wiser, man and he had to finally submit to arbitration, proving that the 'Plan of Campaign' was, after all, successful." It was a pyrrhic victory, for though the tenants were eventually returned to their holdings, there was considerable suffering along the way.⁴¹

Towards the end of the published interview the Major turns from things that were in Ireland to things that were to come in New York. The Major concluded that Ireland was a monumental ruin and that "*the British are responsible for this condition of affairs, and, from what I can gather from their newspapers, Cleveland seems to be their favorite for the Presidency of the American Republic!*"⁴² In a deft move the Major associates the Democratic candidate for President, Grover Cleveland, with the horrid British administration of Ireland. It is true that Cleveland was considered by many Irish American nationalists as pro-British, reason enough to vote for his opponent. But why would an interviewer permit so partisan a statement to be published? Was this a hint of a shift in the political winds?

A POSTSCRIPT

Major O'Shaughnessy was not only an Irish republican he also was an American Republican. On November 1, 1888, when the Major was freshly back from Europe, a *New-York Tribune* reporter engaged him in a discussion of the American general election, only days away. The Major noted that everyone in England talked

about the U.S. election, and they all wanted Cleveland to be re-elected. It was only when talking with an Irishman that he heard a good thing said about Harrison. Asked if these manifestations had any influence upon his political views, the Major replied that they had. He said that while he had always thought of himself as a Democrat, when he went to the polls on November 6, 1888, he was voting for Harrison. Asked why, he replied, “because he is the American candidate and Cleveland is the English candidate.”⁴³

Endnotes

- 1 *True Witness and Catholic Chronicle*, September 4, 1889, p. 2.
- 2 The two accounts were printed in the *Catholic Union and Times*, a New York weekly. They were reprinted in the *True Witness and Catholic Chronicle*, a Montreal weekly, September 4 and October 9, 1889. The latter can be read online. The third account appeared in *The Gael* during August, 1901, also available online. If readers are interested in another account of Major O’Shaughnessy at these evictions, see “Photographing the Evictions on the Vandeleur Estate, Kilrush, July 1888” at http://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/history/photographing_evictions_vandeleur.htm.
- 3 *True Witness and Catholic Chronicle*, October 9, 1889, page 2.
- 4 The title “Major” seems to be a social application, perhaps in reference to the popular pulp fiction character Major O’Shaughnessy featured in Charles O’Malley’s novel, *The Irish Dragoon*, and on stage in *Better Late Than Never* performed in 1869. A review of this play noted that “The Major is a rollicking, frank, generous Irish officer, with a good deal of native humor...”
- 5 The Major was frequently found in a rogues gallery of Fenians and *Clan na Gael* members, to include General Michael Kerwin, his “spoils system” patron, Alexander Sullivan of *Clan na Gael* “Triangle” fame, John Breslin, Colonel Denis Burke, and Patrick Ford, to name a few. When Michael Davitt was invited to speak in New York City in 1887 the Major was seated on the stage with other prominent activists.
- 6 They sailed from New York to Le Havre on the *La Champagne*. *Courrier des Etats Unis*, April 7, 1888.
- 7 The size of the ram was intimidating. The legs of the tripod to support the ram may be estimated to be 16 feet high. The battering ram itself may be estimated to be 24 feet long. The ram was suspended from the tripod by a chain and hooks.
- 8 *True Witness*, October 9, 1889, p. 2.
- 9 In October, 1881, John Wall, then a young newspaper correspondent and member of the Land League in Ireland, was imprisoned in Kilmainham jail along with Charles Stewart Parnell, William O’Brien, and other prominent Land League activists. They were released in May, 1882, through an agreement made between Parnell and the liberal Prime Minister William Gladstone, an agreement sometimes referred to as the “Kilmainham Treaty.” In December, 1883, Wall emigrated to the U.S., resumed work as a correspondent for the *New-York Tribune*, and continued his activities in support of the Land League and Home Rule.
- 10 *New-York Tribune*, August 1, 1888, Home News section.
- 11 Family memory recalls that the Major brought home photographs of the evictions. Four can still be seen in the August, 1901, edition of *The Gael*, pp. 252–254. The Major’s eviction collection was last seen by the author’s father in the early 1930s. The story of the enlarged photograph was passed down within the family. We do not know why this, now lost, photograph was important to the Major.
- 12 It had been thought for a century or so that only twenty-one Vandeleur Estate eviction photographs had survived the years, and survived because they were commercialized by the William Lawrence firm of Dublin. Continued interest in these evictions, however, has uncovered a score of additional photographs, scattered about in private collections, archived files, and in early twentieth-century publications.
- 13 *True Witness*, September 4, 1889, p. 2.
- 14 It has since been verified that Timothy O’Connor of Limerick was one of two photographers present, and that O’Connor took at least twenty photographs and, likely, more. The Major guessed O’Connor’s first name incorrectly. O’Connor’s *carte de visite* photographs are identified on the obverse side as from the photographic studio of T. O’Connor, 20 George St, Limerick.
- 15 Professor George Reed Cromwell, said to be “America’s Most Famous Forgotten Magic Lantern Showman,” gave illustrated travel-themed lectures to New York audiences in large auditoriums on Sunday evenings.

- Professor Cromwell's lectures were accompanied by dramatic changing lights and by carefully selected music played on a piano on stage often by Cromwell himself.
- 16 *New York Times*, December 14, 1888. Notes of the Stage, page 4.
- 17 *True Witness*, September 4, 1889, p. 2.
- 18 *True Witness*, October 9, 1889, p. 2.
- 19 Arthur "Bloody" Balfour became the Chief Secretary for Ireland in 1887. A nephew of the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, he was an implacable foe of Home Rule. Much hated by the Irish then, he is much hated by many in the Arab world today for his role in the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. The Balfour Declaration was his work as the Foreign Secretary.
- 20 *True Witness*, September 4, 1889, p. 2.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 *True Witness*, October 9, 1889.
- 23 *True Witness*, September 4, 1889, p. 2.
- 24 When exactly the idea of a battering ram was accepted for use in wholesale eviction operations is an open question. It is thought by some that the idea originated with a member of the Royal Irish Constabulary. Others think it originated with Arthur Balfour, the Secretary for Ireland. One or two rams were put to use in 1887. The ram used in the Vandeleur Evictions was reported to be new, delivered to Sub-Sherriff Croker at his home in Ennis about two weeks before the evictions began. *Clare Journal*, July 5, 1888.
- 25 *True Witness*, October 9, 1889, p. 2.
- 26 *Limerick Journal*, July 21, 1888.
- 27 *True Witness*, September 4, 1889, p. 2.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 The Major witnessed the Cleary and the Magrath family homes razed to the ground. Both had been rigorously defended by the children of the tenants. The total destruction of these cottages was intended to intimidate, but it backfired. These two demolished cottages became, in effect, pilgrimage sites for the stream of visitors who continued to visit months after the evictions. The two demolished cottages were repeatedly photographed and served the propaganda purposes for the National League.
- 30 *Daily News*, London, July 18, 1888.
- 31 *True Witness*, October 9, 1889.
- 32 *True Witness*, September 4, 1889, p. 2.
- 33 *True Witness*, October 9, 1889, p. 2.
- 34 *True Witness*, September 4, 1889, p. 2.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Hundreds of thousands of American dollars went to Ireland in the decade after Parnell's 1880 visit to the US, most of it eventually going to the National League. There were, as expected, frequent criticisms of expenditures. The author once read a contemporary report in the Irish press that if the Americans knew exactly how their dollars were spent their generosity would cease.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Unlike the evictions during the Famine period, evictions in the 1880s were not an immediate death sentence. None-the-less they were brutal and disrupted terribly the lives of those who stuck with the Plan of Campaign. The adult males who resisted were sentenced to several months of hard labor. The evicted families were helped by the Land League and grants were made available to them. The National League built wooden cabins on a neighboring estate, but it took several months for the construction of these to begin, and although families eventually were allowed access to attend their fields, their activities and occupations had been severely impacted. It was a brave thing to stand up to the abuses of landlordism and the crushing weight of state coercion.
- 42 *True Witness*, October 9, 1889, p. 2.
- 43 *New-York Tribune*, November 1, 1888. "Major O'Shaughnessy's Conversion."