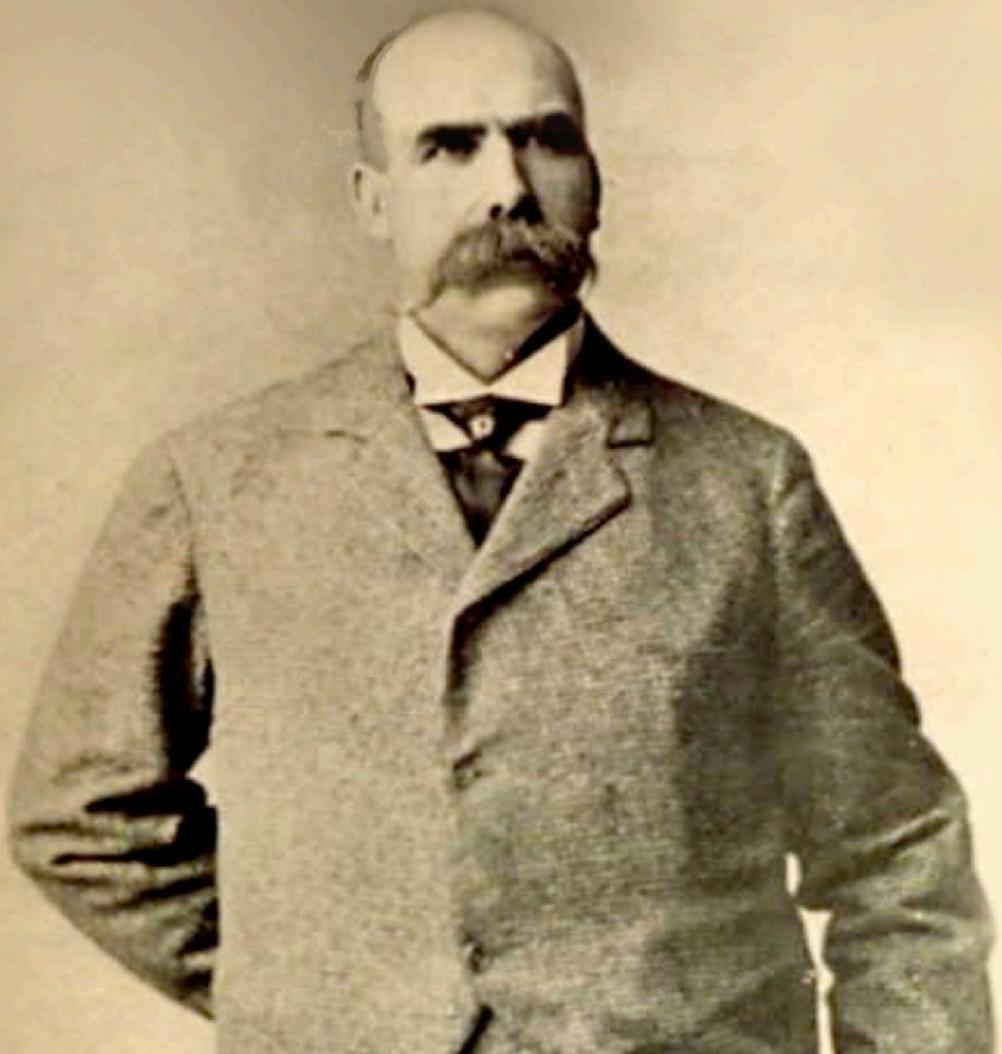




Rocky Mountain O'Brien



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Patrick O'Brien (1848–1919) was born in Dromore area a few short miles from Bantry town. He says he was forced to leave Ireland at the age of seventeen “owing to the despotic and tyrannical English laws” that prevailed in Ireland during his upbringing. He emigrated to America from Bantry Bay in 1868.

In his early days in America he was a big game hunter and had the contract to supply meat to the mining camps of the Rocky Mountains. It was here he got the nick-name “Rocky Mountain” – a name he was proud of, and by which he became known throughout his life. He was a Fenian and closely associated with the famous Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa who also emigrated to America, but whose remains were brought back to Ireland and buried in Glasnevin Cemetery Dublin in 1915, amid the passionate graveside oration by Padraig Pearse.

Much of his poetry was written in America, generally expressing his hatred for the occupation of Ireland, and those who supported it. He published a book in 1904 - Birth And Adoption A Book of Prose and Poetry. The following is a short extract from his Preface to this 1904 book: *England has murdered and plundered the Irish people for the past seven centuries. She has robbed them of their industries and their language; she has levelled once happy homes to the ground by her merciless crowbar brigade; she has thrown aged fathers and gray-haired, weeping, mothers out on the wayside with nothing but the blue sky of heaven to shelter them. Such acts as these have enkindled a bitter hatred in my heart against England and her accursed laws, and if ever an opportunity presents itself I will be ready to strike that longed-for blow against that “tyrant of tyrants”. I believe the Irish people are justified in resorting to every means to overthrow English misrule.*

Matt Peck, great grandson of Rocky Mountain O'Brien, has contacted Bantry Historical & Archaeological Society, and salutes this project while supplying some data including photo of Rocky Mountain on front cover.

The following few verses are taken from Patrick (Rocky Mountain) O'Brien's book of 1904 mentioned above which he wrote many years after he had sailed from Bantry Bay.

Dear Old Cullomane

When I was but a boy and played upon the village green,
 Where you could hear the bagpipes in happy days I ween,
 The boys and girls would often go to hear the Piper Bawn,
 And many a pleasant day I spent in dear old Cullomane.

From Aughaville we often went on Sunday afternoon
 To hear old Peter play his pipes – he gave us many a tune;
 His wife sat close beside him as gentle as a fawn
 And told them take their partners in dear old Cullomane.

The boys and girls would courting go, and when the day was o'er
 With spirits gay would wend their way from thee to old Dromore;
 Some would remain at Crowley's and take a cruiskeen laun
 And not go home till morning from dear old Cullomane.

“The Croppy Boy” you would hear then, and “Rising of the Moon”,
 Who dare run down old Ireland? – also *An Páistín Fionn*
 I often heard McCarthy sing the “Colleen Bawn”
 And “The Boys Are Coming Home” in dear old Cullomane.

By field and mead and purling stream in youthful days I strayed,
 By hill and dale through wood and vale, through heather and through glade;
 The days I spent in merriment, often until dawn,
 I'll ne'er forget while life is left, in dear old Cullomane.

I fancy I am often there, though in a foreign clime,
 I'll ne'er forget your hills and vales and mountain peaks sublime;
 I'll ne'er forget my early days in meadow, brook and lawn,
 When I, a stripling, went to play in dear old Cullomane.

Alas, alas, in foreign lands six thousand miles from home,
Thinking of my native hills in distant climes to roam,
I left your fertile plains, *a stór*, when I was young in years;
And when I kissed a mother dear, she wiped away her tears –
I left her with a broken heart, was forced to go away;
Heart and brain with care oppressed, I sailed from Bantry Bay.

As I sailed in the little craft that took me out to sea,
'Twas then I prayed to God above my country to set free;
There is no reason she should be in bondage all these years,
Bleeding from her many wounds and shedding bitter tears;
She is as fair as other lands, and trying night and day
To raise the Green above the Red in dear old Bantry Bay.

Leaving Home

Although out in the Great Far West, with plenty all around,
I'd rather live in Ireland, my own dear native ground.
'Tis true there's wealth galore and plenty always there,
But give to me old Erin's Isle, none with her can compare.
I know her fields are fresh and green, though she in bondage lay,
And that's the reason I left home and sailed from Bantry Bay.

Why should the wandering Celt forget his home beyond the sea,
The Liffey and Blackwater, the Shannon and the Lee,
Killarney and Glengarriff, Avoca and Dunloe,
The Pass of Keimaneigh where yeomen were laid low?
These places are all dear to me, though very far away,
Yet still my heart flies back once more to dear old Bantry Bay

Thoughts of the Fenian Days

When I left home in sixty-eight to cross the deep blue sea,
Good men and true were living then who'd fight for liberty;
We had no Land League in those days, though tyrants quaked with
fear, When the manhood of old Erin's Isle to fight would volunteer.
The bone and sinew of our race were ready at the call,
To strike for home and liberty with musket, blade and ball;
Doran brave and Dillon, Murphy and O'Neill,
With their beds upon the heather and brightly shining steel.

In those good old days the landlords sought protection night and day,
For the Fenians were the leaguers then preparing for the fray;
The barracks were made bullet-proof, the Peelers to protect,
For a volley from the I.R.B. they hourly did expect.
Such men as Captain Mackey and Kilclooney, Crowley too,
Rossa and O'Mahoney for tyrants made it blue;
Their preaching and their teaching made Irishmen unite,
For they were willing at that time to fight with all their might.

Alas, the time has changed since then, we have no army now,
The people seem contented and to Land Leaguers do bow;
Do they forget the centuries of torture and of hate,
The murder of our people in good old ninety-eight?
The babes and mothers murdered from morning till sundown,
Their brains bespattered in the streets of Clonakilty town?
The best and bravest of our race were banished far and wide
And forced to leave their happy homes upon the green hillside.

Can Irishmen forget such acts and now contented be,
 And think that agitation will set old Ireland free?
 The sword alone will wrest our rights the Saxon knows full well,
 For he has dealt us blows as foul, aye, blows as black as hell.
 Then why should we give up the cause for which our fathers died?
 Nay! Strike for home with shot and shell, by them we should abide.
 So, Irishmen, get ready, renew once more the fight,
 To strike for home and liberty should be your heart's delight.

All traitors to our sacred cause no quarter should be given,
 But should be hounded night and day and from old Ireland driven.
 Should they refuse to fall in line, like traitors they should die,
 With scarce a minute's warning upon a gallows high.
 I see no reason why our isle in bondage now should be,
 We should unite with all our might and strike for liberty.
 The Leaguers and the Fenians should join with heart and hand
 And deal John Bull that longed-for blow through all the dear old land.

The North and South should now unite and both stand side by side,
 And think of God and country and cast their creeds aside,
 The orange and the green as their emblems should entwine,
 And shake their hands for Ireland's cause once more across the Boyne.
 When England hears of unity the "sponge" she will throw down,
 And give us what she stole from us in valley, hill and town.
 Then the union of the Irish race will ring from shore to shore,
 And then the Orange and the Green be friends for evermore.



*Advertisement for the Fenian's Comfort smoking tobacco,
 circa 1858 (Library of Congress)*

A Shamrock from Ireland

There's a little plant that grows throughout old Erin's Isle,
 'Tis the emblem of our Fatherland and dear to the exile.
 The dearest plant in all this earth, to Irishmen a prize,
 'Twas planted by St. Patrick, the Druids to civilize.
 McCarthy sent it o'er the sea to fair Columbia's shore,
 That pretty little sprig of green, the Shamrock from Dromore.

He sent it in a letter and sealed it with his hand,
 In memory of St. Patrick from dear old Ireland.
 To me it is far dearer than the thistle or the rose,
 For only in old Ireland that little emblem grows.
 When I beheld its precious leaves I kissed it o'er and o'er,
 That pretty little sprig of green, the Shamrock from Dromore.

Oh, how I love that little plant no tongue but mine can tell,
 The emblem of my native land, the shamrock of the dell.
 I wore it on St. Patrick's Day in my brand new caubeen,
 In the city of Los Angeles, in spite of king or queen.
 Although it came six thousand miles, I cherish it the more;
 That pretty little sprig of green, the Shamrock from Dromore.

Crook Haven grows that little plant, and also Skibbereen,
 True men are there to do and dare from Bandon to Goleen;
 McCarthy and Tim Sheehy, Raycroft and Jack Shea,
 Are patiently waiting and ready for the fray,
 And would defend that priceless gem 'gainst any Saxon corps –
 That pretty little sprig of green, the Shamrock from Dromore.

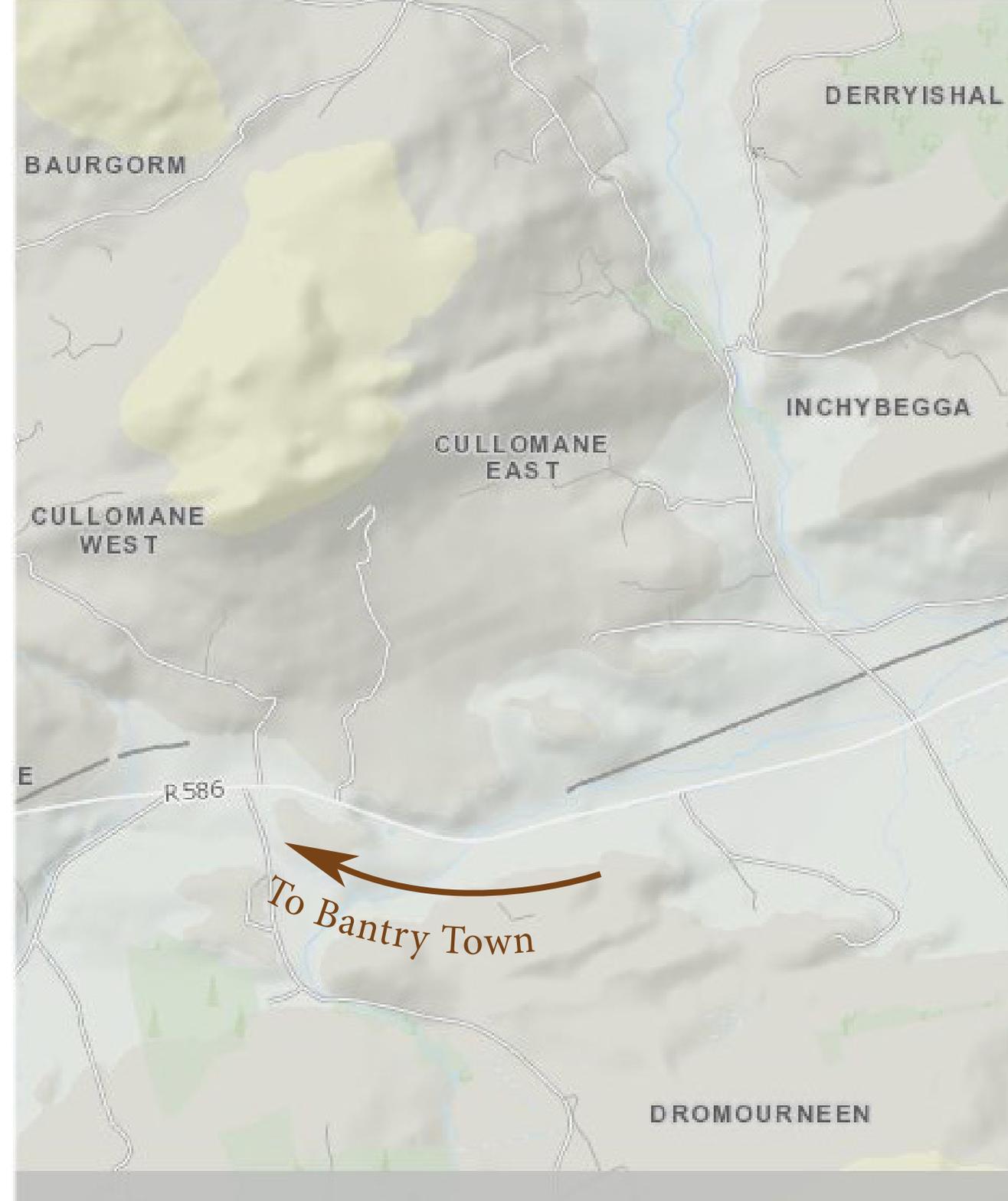
That sacred little emblem from me will never part,
 In memory of St. Patrick's Day I'll wear it next my heart.
 Its three leaves will remind me of Faith and Fatherland,
 Any why St. Patrick planted it despite a pagan band
 He planted it 'mong Irishmen where heathens were galore,
 That pretty little sprig of green, the Shamrock from Dromore.

The daughters of old Erin that emblem too doth love,
 They wear it on St. Patrick's Day, and red with green above
 In their silken, wavy hair, entwined with it is seen,
 In memory of their patron saint and Erin, their loved green.
 They love their native country, and all of them adore
 That pretty little sprig of green, the Shamrock from Dromore.

Bantry Bay

I'm thinking now of ninety-eight, and sadly do bewail
The fate of those who left their homes for Bantry to set sail.
There was one among them, to Irishmen well known,
Whose memory soon we'll celebrate – the martyred, brave Wolfe Tone.
'Tis sad to think of those dear scenes in distant climes away,
Where first I played upon the green at dear old Bantry Bay.

Now in a foreign country, 'mid scenes and faces new,
My heart flies back to you, dear town, so gentle, kind and true.
How well do I remember your Main street and your Quay,
Your public Square and Cove so grand and Saxon Battery;
Your illustrious sons and daughters, I can for them proudly say
That they never feared a redcoat at dear old Bantry Bay.





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2017–2022



Cover image: Matt Peck