

Seattle's Genuine "Bit o' the Ould Sod"



The Headstone today on the graves of Maria and Terence O'Brien in Seattle's Calvary Cemetery



Terence O'Brien

In 1862, Terence O'Brien from Co. Tipperary, and his wife Maria from Co. Clare, left Ireland for America and sailed with their young family for almost five months around Cape Horn en route to America's Pacific Northwest. When Maria took seriously ill on board ship, she extracted a promise from Terence that if she died he would bury her on Irish soil. Maria died on November 17, 1862, at the age of 33, just a day before the ship docked at Victoria on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada. Distraught over his wife's death, and not wanting to send her remains back to Ireland, Terence arranged for her interment at the Hudson's Bay Company's burial ground in Esquimalt near Victoria. However, to keep his promise to his wife, he arranged for a load of soil to be shipped from Ireland to Victoria and had his wife's grave filled with the Irish soil, thus keeping his promise to have her buried "on Irish soil."

In 1868, Terence moved his family to the White River Valley area just south of Seattle, a farming area later named O'Brien. When Terence Sr. died on April 11, 1888, his sons Morgan and Terence Jr. buried their father in Seattle's Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery. Terence Jr. also arranged to have his mother's remains, including the Irish soil in her grave, dug up and moved from Victoria to Seattle. He then re-buried his mother in the Irish soil next to his father in Holy Cross Cemetery. He also paid \$1,400, a huge sum in 1888, to have a 15-ft tall marble headstone erected over their graves.

In 1893, Holy Cross was deemed by city authorities to have been located on unsuitable ground for a cemetery, and it was ordered vacated. The Catholic Diocese of Nisqually (now Seattle) started the gradual process of moving all the remains from Holy Cross to Seattle's new Catholic cemetery, Calvary Cemetery. However, Terence O'Brien was adamant that his mother's remains should not be moved again and he also did not want to have the Irish soil disturbed. He even camped out with his rifle at Holy Cross to make sure that nobody would touch his parents' graves!

Catholic Bishop Edward O'Dea, who himself was a son of Irish immigrants, went down to Holy Cross Cemetery and reasoned with O'Brien. He finally was able to convince him to permit the transfer of his parents' remains to Calvary by agreeing that the Irish soil and the \$1,400 monument would also be transferred to Calvary with them. In November 1898, the bodies of Terence Sr. and Maria, along with their small part of Ireland and the marble headstone, were finally moved to Lot 79 of the St. Joseph Section of Calvary Cemetery where they remain today, Seattle's genuine "Bit o' the Ould Sod".