

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE AOH IN FLORIDA

Written by Brother Patrick Moynihan, a long time Brother of our Order and of Brevard Division 2

Edited by Brother Greg Seán Canning, 2016 and 2018

The first persons to call themselves Hibernians in Florida were the members of the Hibernian Regiment of the Spanish Army under the Command of Colonel Arturo O'Neill of County Tyrone who besieged Fort George, drove the British from Pensacola and established Spanish control of Western Florida on the 9th of [March](#) 1781. For the next 12 years O'Neill governed Western Florida under Spanish Law. Ninety-five years later the Ancient Order of Hibernians established the first division of the Order in the State of Florida when James D. Redmond became the President of the Jacksonville Division on March 30th 1876. A second division was established in Jacksonville in 1894 and a third division was founded in Pensacola in 1898. No two divisions of the Order were in existence simultaneously in this era and by 1900 there were only 85 Hibernians in Florida; within a very short period all divisions within the State became defunct.

There was a long period of almost three quarters of a century of Hibernian hibernation until the Order was reestablished in Fort Lauderdale, Broward County in 1974 under the guidance of Florida's only National President, Tom Gilligan, and former State President and National Director, Jim French. Soon thereafter a division was established in Pinellas County. Notwithstanding the fact that no State Board had been established at the time, Florida Hibernians organized and administered a highly successful National Convention in Miami in 1980. The State Board was established a few years later (circa 1983) and Eddie Kalfleish, formerly of New York, was elected as the first State President. A State banner was designed and produced by Ernie Kees of the then fledgling Brevard 2 Division. This banner has since been replaced with a new design by past State President Greg Seán Canning, who served from 2011-2015.

Past Florida State President Sean Denny (2007-2011) is a native Floridian and the youngest person to hold the office of Florida State President. He was, perhaps, the youngest State President in the nation when he was elected to that office in 2007. He represents an anomaly in that the majority of the membership in Florida is made up of émigrés from the various States drawn to the warmth of the Sunshine State in their retirement years for the full year or as snowbirds for the winter months. Consequently, the attrition and mortality rates are high and divisions of the Order in Florida prosper and wane in accord with the movements and health of its members. Thus, Florida has lost divisions in Brevard, Citrus, Indian River, Palm Bay and St. John's Counties. New divisions, however, have been added over the past few years with the help of our State Organizers and senior members. The current Florida Divisions, in alphabetical order, are listed in the middle back section of this pamphlet.



## CURRENT FLORIDA DIVISIONS

**Brevard Co. Div. 2:** Fulton J. Sheen Division  
Meeting: Fraternal Order of Police, Lodge #37 (3rd Thurs, 7:30pm)  
1049 Julia Dr., Melbourne FL 32935-4210  
Website: <http://aohbrevard.org>

**Broward Co. Div. 2:** Fireman Bill Elliott Division  
Meeting: The Field Irish Pub & Eatery (3rd Mon, 7pm)  
3281 Griffen Road, Dania Beach FL 33312-6952  
Website: <http://aohbrowardcounty2.aohflorida.org/main.html>

**Hernando Co. Div. 1:** Bishop Norbert Dorsey Division  
Meeting: St. Theresa Church Hall (2nd Thursday, 6pm)  
1107 Commercial Way, Spring Hill FL 34606-4517

**Hillsborough Co. Div. 1:** Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich Division  
Meeting: Prince of Peach Church, Conesa Center (3rd Mon, 2pm)  
702 Valley Forge Blvd., Sun City Center FL 33573  
Website: <http://www.aohhillsboroughcounty.net>

**Indian River Co. Div. 2:** Father Aloysius P. McGonigal Div.  
Meeting: Florida Irish-American Society (3rd Wed., 7pm)  
1314 20th Street, Vero Beach FL 32960-0656  
Website:

**Lake Co. Div. 1:** Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta Division  
Meeting: St. Timothy Church Hall (2nd Thurs, 2pm)  
1351 Paige Place, Lady Lake FL 32159 (The Villages)  
Website: <http://aohvillages.org>

**Orange Co. Div. 1:** Blessed Brother Edmund Rice Div.1 Central FL  
Meeting: St. James Cathedral Church Hall (2nd Thursday, 7pm)  
215 N Orange Ave, Orlando FL 32801-1813  
Website:

**Pasco Co. Div. 1:** William G. Hulton Division  
Meeting: Our Lady Queen of Peace Church Hall (2nd Wed, 1pm)  
5340 High Street, New Port Richey FL 34652  
Website: [www.facebook.com/AOHDivision1Pasco](http://www.facebook.com/AOHDivision1Pasco)

**Pasco Co. Div. 2:** James Francis Powers Division  
Meeting: Mulligans Irish Pub (4th Tuesday, 7pm)  
10550 Regents Park Drive, Tampa FL 33647  
Website:

**Pinellas Co. Div. 2:** Pádraic Pearse Division  
Meeting: St. Mary's Church Hall (3rd Wed, 6pm)  
515 Fourth Street South, Saint Petersburg FL 33701-4609  
Website: <http://www.aohpinellas2.org>

**St. Lucie Co. Div. 1:** Brian Boru Division  
Meeting: Shindig Irish Restaurant & Pub (3rd Thurs, 7pm)  
464 SW Port St Lucie Blvd, Port St Lucie, FL 34953-2077



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## THE ANCIENT ORDER OF HIBERNIANS

The Ancient Order of Hibernians is America's oldest **Irish Catholic Fraternal Organization** founded concurrently in the coal-mining region of Pennsylvania and New York City in May, 1836. The **Order** can trace its roots back to a series of similar societies that existed in Ireland for more than 300 years. Today the **AOH** exists in *Ireland, England, Wales, Scotland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand* and 26 of the **United States**. While these organizations share a common thread, the American **AOH** is a separate and much larger organization.

Currently in Ireland, there are **AOH** divisions in *Donegal, Derry, Antrim, Tyrone, Down, Armagh, Monaghan, Leitrim, Louth, Dublin, Cork* and a few other locations. There are county Boards and a Provincial Board in Ulster as well as the National Board - **The Board of Erin**. The headquarters of the AOH is on Foyle Street in **Derry City**, home of AOH Division No. 1.

The early Irish societies were born of a need in the mid-fifteen hundreds to protect the welfare of fellow Irish Catholics, and especially the clergy who risked immediate death to keep the Catholic Faith alive in occupied Ireland after the Penal Laws of 1691. These various secret societies were formed across the country to aid and comfort their people by whatever means was available. Similarly, the **AOH in America** was founded at New York's St. James Church on May 4, 1836 by men emulating these Irish societies, to protect the clergy and churches from the violent American Nativists ("Know Nothings" and their followers) who attacked Irish Catholic immigrants and Church property. At the same time the vast influx of Irish Immigrants fleeing Ireland's Great Hunger in the late 1840's, prompted a growth in many Irish societies in the USA – the largest of which was, and continues to be, the **AOH**.

Active across the United States, the **Order** seeks to aid the newly arrived Irish, both socially and economically. The many Divisions and club facilities located throughout the United States have traditionally been among the first to welcome new Irish immigrants. Here, the Irish culture — art, dance, music, and sports are fostered and preserved. Newcomers can meet some of 'their own' and are

introduced to the social atmosphere of the Irish-American community.

In addition, the **Order** has provided a continuing bridge with Ireland for those who are generations removed from our ancestral homeland. The **AOH** sponsors many programs associated with promoting our Irish Heritage such as the **IRISH WAY PROGRAM, SCHOLARSHIPS** and **NATIONAL HISTORY DAY** sponsorship.

Annual dances, concerts, and parades sponsored by the Order raise millions for charity, while providing a showcase for the positive contributions of the Irish to every walk of American life. Divisions usually support local charities within their geographic areas.

The **AOH** has also been at the forefront for issues concerning the Irish, such as: Immigration Reform; economic incentives both here and in Ireland; human rights issues addressed in the MacBride Legislation; Right-To-Life; and a peaceful and just solution to the issues that divide Ireland. Hibernians never forget their ancestral homeland and can always be found actively lobbying for, praying for, and working for the total independence of a united 32-county Ireland, as their constitution avows: "By all means constitutional and lawful."

Membership in the **AOH** is confined to men 16 years and older who are practicing Roman Catholics of Irish Birth, Descent or Adoption and are citizens of the United States.

We invite all Catholics of Irish birth, descent, or adoption to seek admittance to the finest Irish Catholic Organization in the World — all we would ask is for you to live our motto of: "**Friendship, Unity, and Christian Charity**".

**Dia's Muire dhuit!** (*God and Mary be with you*)



## FACTS ABOUT THE ANCIENT ORDER OF HIBERNIANS

- The AOH is the oldest lay Catholic ethnic organization operating in the United States.
- The Hibernians represent the most broadly based Irish-American organization with over 80,000 members in 26 States. There are also divisions in Ireland, England, Wales, Scotland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.
- The twin constitutional goals of the Irish and Catholic membership is to assist in the re-unification of Ireland, supporting the Church and its mission, and promoting Irish culture.
- The AOH supports the raising of monuments to famed Irish or Irish-Americans (*Commodore John Barry and Robert Emmett*) and memorials to events like the Great Hunger or the slaughter of abortion. You can find these memorials in every major American city such as: Mobile, AL (*Fr. Abram Ryan*); Washington, DC (*Nuns of the Battlefield*); Valley Forge, PA (*Medal of Honor grove*); and Chicago, IL (*Mt. Olivet Cemetery*).
- The history of the AOH lies not just in big cities but tracks America's expansion west along the Lewis and Clark Trail (*St Anne's, Great Falls, MT*), along the Cherokee trail (*Sacred Heart, Pueblo, CO*), and along side the Central Pacific Railroad from Ogden, UT (*St. Joseph's*) to Sacramento, CA (*Old Cathedral*).
- The march of the AOH across the continent stretches from the first stop on the National Road (*St Patrick's in Cumberland, MD*) to Seattle, WA (*St James Cathedral*), with lesser known stops along the way that have all but vanished (*Hinckletown, IA; Snoddy's Mill, IN; Kalo, IA; Forty Fort, PA; Irwin, GA; and Iron Mountain, MO*).
- Early history and growth of Hibernians is linked to mining for gold (*Yreka, CA*), copper and silver (*Butte & Anaconda, MT*), iron ore (*St. Patrick's, Escanaba, MI and St. Joseph's, Mt. Pleasant, PA*), hard rock mining (*St Peter's, Rutland, VT*) and coal (*Schuylkill Co, PA - where the infamous Molly Maguire trials were held*).
- Hibernians shared meeting halls with other fraternal societies like the Foresters, Odd Fellows, Knights of Columbus, Knights of Pythias, and the GAR. However, the AOH were bitter opponents of the anti-Catholic and anti-Irish Know-Nothings who burned and attacked Catholic churches throughout the country.
- Members of the AOH have included labor leaders Terrence Powderly and John Sweeney; Bishops John Lennon, Fulton Sheen, and John Cardinal O'Connor; astronaut James McDevitt; President John F. Kennedy; insurance industry leader Bill Flynn; actor Pat O'Brien; Civil War General Thomas Francis Meagher; and recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor.