

## **BRIEF HISTORY OF THE AOH**

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"Friendship, Unity, and Christian Charity". This is the motto of the Ancient order of Hibernians.

As this is my first time as historian I thought it would only be proper to give a brief history of the AOH.

As you know, The Ancient Order of Hibernians is a Catholic, Irish American Fraternal Organization founded in New York City 4 May, 1836. The Order can trace its roots back to a parent organization, of the same name, which has existed in Ireland for over 300 years. However, while the organizations share a common thread, the North American A.O.H. is a separate and much larger organization.

The Order evolved from a need in the early sixteen hundreds to protect the lives of priests who risked immediate death to keep the

Catholic Faith alive in occupied Ireland after the reign of England's King Henry VIII. When England Implemented its dreaded Penal Laws in Ireland, various secret social societies were formed across the country. These groups worked to aid and comfort the people by whatever means available. Similarly, the Ancient Order of Hibernians in America was founded May 4th, 1836 at New York's St. James Church, to protect the clergy, and church Property from the "Know Nothings" and their followers. At the same time the vast influx of Irish Immigrants fleeing famine issues in Ireland in the late 1840's, prompted a growth of various social societies in the USA - the largest of which was, and continues to be, the Ancient Order of Hibernians.

One of the main reasons why the order was set up was to aid the newly arrived Irish, both socially, politically. The many Divisions and club facilities located throughout the U.S. traditionally have been among the first to welcome new Irish Americans. Here, the Irish culture -- art, dance, music, and sports are fostered and

preserved. The newcomers can meet some of "their own" and are introduced to the social atmosphere of the Irish-American community. the AOH has been at the political forefront for issues concerning the Irish, such as; Immigration Reform; economic Incentives both here and in Ireland; the human rights issues addressed in the MacBride Legislation; Right-To-Life; and a peaceful and just solution to the issues that divide Ireland.

The Order has also provided a continuing bridge with Ireland for those who are generations removed from our country. The AOH sponsors many of the programs associated with promoting our Irish Heritage such as the IRISH WAY PROGRAM.

Two interesting statistics I across.

- The AOH is the oldest ethnic organization still operating in the United States.

- The Hibernians represent the most broadly based Irish-American organization with over 80,000 members in 46 States, Canada and Ireland.