

Ancient Order of Hibernians Division

By Owen Donohue

In 1880, seven years after Holyoke's founding, the Ancient Order of Hibernians Division 1 was granted its charter. Established in 1836 in New York, the AOH, the oldest Irish Catholic organization in America was formed to combat discrimination and religious bigotry towards Irish immigrants. The Ladies AOH was founded in 1897.

In Holyoke, the first planned industrial city and previously referred to as Ireland Parish, was built on the backs of Irish immigrants who hand dug the city's three levels of canals and Holyoke to Westfield railroad.

The Holyoke charter was allowed to raise a fund to help maintain aged, sick, blind, infirmed members and to provide benefit to widows. With the large number of people arriving from the Emerald Isle, at one time, the area had 11 AOH divisions in both Hampden & Hampshire Counties.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, the club purchased a burial plot at St. Jerome Cemetery where friendless brothers can be interred.

Celebrating our 50th anniversary in 1930, it was proclaimed, "The Ancient Order of Hibernians has been successful from the start. Many are the acts of benevolence and charity that has marked its years of service".

Today, the AOH continues to follow its motto, Friendship, Unity and Christian Charity both remembering and promoting our Irish heritage.

In 2010 and our chapter was renamed in honor of late steadfast member/benefactor/champion/do-it-all/ curator, James A. Curran. The late Paul F. Hogan Jr. often referred to as the AOH Division 1 President for Life, served as Massachusetts State President in 2016.

Officers for the 2023 year include: President – Joseph O'Connor; Vice-President – Patrick Hogan; Treasurer – Jay Whelihan; Recording Secretary – Owen Donohue; Financial Secretary – Peter Hogan and Sentinel – Steve Suprenant. The LAOH is led by President – Paula Paoli; Vice President – Rosalie Pratt, Treasurer – Janet Dwyer, Recording Secretary – Barbara Twohig; Financial Secretary – Mary Pat Murphy; Sentinel – Patti



Clayton; and Mistress at Arms – Patricia Pluta.

Past and present luminaries in the AOH and LAOH include, Monsignor David Joyce, John "Banker" Kennedy, Ned Dean, Dr. William Dean, P. B. Bresnahan III, Maurice Ferriter, Attorney Thomas Griffin, Elroy Barber, Jim Cannon, Ed Welch, Bill Geraghty, Ed Moriarty, John Cuniff, David K. Bartley, Bobby Cameron, Patty Meon, Dan and Cindy Murphy, Charlie Haller, Charlie Kelly, Charlie Popp, Dr. John J. Driscoll, Ed Nugent,

TOP LEFT: Hibernians' 1980 Irish Night with Tommy Makem, Paul Mengel, Fran Hennessey and Liam Clancy. PHOTO COURTESY OF JACK SCANLON.

TOP RIGHT: Hibernians - 2023 float builders- Peter Hogan and grandchildren, Ausbury and Augustine Bean. PHOTO BY PETER HOGAN.

CENTER LEFT: Hibernians Celebrate Holyoke's 150th at picnic (L to R) Nilka Ortiz and Stephen Fay. PHOTO BY PETER HOGAN.

CENTER RIGHT: Hibernian State 2016 Pres. Paula Paoli with 2023 State Pres. Barb Twohig, and 2023 State VP Noreanne Duquette. PHOTO BY PETER HOGAN.

BOTTOM: Hibernians provide sleeping bags for Providence Ministries at summer picnic, 2023. PHOTO BY PETER HOGAN.



Dave Miller, Paul Paoli, Shirley Bolduc, Skip Clayton, Tom Dillon, Tim O'Shea, Helen Paoli, Jack Scanlon, John Carlon, Marty Fullwood, Jerry Sheehan, Mike Moran, Judy Pratt, Tim Allen, Alice Greaney, Esther Meehan, Susan Sullivan, Paula Lunney, Kit Collamore, Mary Laura Hohol, Samantha Methot, Kathy Dunn and with so many more to fill pages and pages.

*What's it like to be a Hibernian in 2023?
Here's a snapshot of what we have accomplished.*

To kick off 2023 in January planning commenced for Danny Curran's Irish Nite. The February gala features Irish music, a corned beef and cabbage dinner with Danny's famed corned ribs. AOH President Joseph O'Connor and Fran Hennessey are co-chairs. Irish Night benefits the Maurice A. Donahue Memorial Scholarship Fund and where the club recognizes its Hibernian and Ms. Hibernian of the year. The 2023 recipients were Jay Whelihan and Mary Kate O'Connor.

Also in February, JD Watson, Peter Hogan and many members begin preparing two floats for the Parade. One is for the popular Irish dancers from the Cassin Academy of Irish Dance and a second traveling float.

As you might expect, March welcomes the "High Holy Days" leading to the Saint Patrick's Parade. Before we march, the club hosts a ceremonial raising of the Irish flag in front of Holyoke City Hall. We participate in a novena to St. Patrick at St. Jerome Church. Our Communion Breakfast, the longest running event for the AOH continues the connection to our Catholic faith. The breakfast is organized by Attorney John Driscoll. At this event we recognize the Christian Charity Award recipient, in 2023 Brenda Lamagdeleine, manager of Margaret's Pantry at Providence Ministries was honored.

Providence Ministries was established by the Sisters of Providence who arrived in Holyoke in 1873 to serve the poor and needy in Holyoke. The AOH and LAOH hold fundraisers in addition to many food and clothing drives. Since COVID, the club has been monthly making peanut butter and jelly

sandwiches to feed the needy at Kate's Kitchen. It is a charity dear to our heart and mission.

The club holds a close relationship with the Holyoke Saint Patrick's Parade Committee. In 1950 the Parade Committee was incorporated with the assistance of the former 1940 Junior AOH president, Judge Michael J. Donohue. Today, many members volunteer with the distribution of bibs and t-shirts at the road race.

We have marched in the Holyoke Saint Patrick's Parade since its founding. St. Patrick and St. Brigid (John and Kim Gaughan) lead our contingent. While Parading through the city streets, people often confuse our name calling us "Hibernarians" like we are sleeping bears, but when we pass displaying the green, white and orange tricolor flag, the largest in North America, and the Irish dancers high step in unison, cheers rise along the route. And by the way our two floats, won 2nd and 3rd place in the Patriotic Division in 2023.

The LAOH is integral to our success. For the past 23 years, the Ladies hand stitch a large quilt celebrating Irish culture and history. Panels have included Ireland Parish's historical locations, the Lisdisfarne Gospels and for 2024, Irish wildflowers. The quilt, organized by LAOH President Paula Paoli, becomes an instant family heirloom and is raffled after the Parade.

Throughout the year, the Ladies organize and coordinate ceremonies with AOH rituals at wakes and memorial services. They support Bethlehem House and Womanshelter/Companeras, and send Christmas cards to veterans at the Holyoke Soldiers Home. Masses are also requested celebrating the LAOH Patron, Saint Brigid and commemorating the disgrace of An Gorta Mor, The Great Hunger, the Irish Famine.

In 2023, Barb Twohig and Noreanne Duquette were elected LAOH Massachusetts State President and Vice President. Barbara joins Paula Paoli, past state president in 2016.

Our year doesn't end in March, no, no, no as we sponsor CYO basketball teams, participate in the Daly Halligan Memorial in Northampton. The traveling float makes a yearly appearance at the Watertown, MA Memorial Day Parade. The club

sponsors Irish Essay Writing contests in local schools and donate to the PanMass Challenge.

In August, our summer picnic referred to as the Hennessey-Hoe Down is a chance to gather, to bask in friendship and to recognize the Maurice A. Donahue Memorial Scholarship recipients. In 2023 Gavin Sullivan, Patrick Sweeney and Caroline Taylor were awarded \$1,000 towards college expenses. Paul Mengel chairs this committee and is assisted by Fran Hennessey, Rose Pratt, Janet Dwyer and Owen Donohue.

With the help of Cheryl Dupont and in coordination with AOH member, Jim Kelly of the Polish National Credit Union, the ladies collected over 2 dozen sleeping bags for Providence Ministries at the picnic.

Hibernians are involved in our community. Peter Tallman, a City Councilor, was recently recognized with the Council of Human Understanding's prestigious Human Relations Award. Jordan Lemieux is our veterans liaison.

Reaching out to promote our good works in social media is important in this digital age. Janet Dwyer, our webmaster, controls the internet while Fran Hennessey coordinates with local legacy news outlets.

October brings the LAOH Par 3 golf tournament at the Holyoke Country Club and a fall foliage train ride coordinated by Charlie O'Connell and Patrick Hogan. At our November monthly meeting, Peter Hogan begins organizing the March Saint Patrick's calendar raffle fundraising.

In December we finish the year with a Children's Christmas Party at The Warehouse? Later in the month we recognize our many accomplishments at our members Christmas Party. As 2023 closes the AOH and LAOH will be ready for 2024.

Congratulations to the City of Holyoke on your 150th anniversary! We've been around for only 143 years of those and plan to celebrate your 200th and our 193rd in 2023.