

## The Ancient Order of Hibernians & Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians Inc. of Connecticut

...”In the year 1869 in Bridgeport was the first sprig of Hibernianism planted in this state. The soil was good, and though the vast majority of our members come from the humbler walks of life, the grand A. O. H. is slowly attracting the attention of every respectable citizen and is to-day the largest Irish Catholic organization in the world”... This sentiment appeared in the Connecticut Catholic on the eve of the Connecticut State AOH convention of 1894 that was held in Danbury. It was at this Convention that the A. O. H. of Connecticut voted to authorize the creation of the Daughters of Erin Auxiliary, which today we know as the Ladies of the Ancient Order of Hibernians. In 1895 the first Ladies Division was founded at Naugatuck and within a few years the membership on the LAOH of Connecticut numbered in the thousands. The first AOH State Convention in Connecticut was held in Hartford in 1872 and Patrick Daley of the host city was elected as the first State President. In 1880 John D. Cunningham of New Haven was elected State Secretary and would serve in this position until 1904. Cunningham was a printer and for 25 years he wrote and edited the Hibernian Record, which was a bi-monthly newspaper that printed State and National Hibernian news. The LAOH held their first State Convention at Hartford in 1896 and elected Eleanor McCann of South Manchester as their first State President. She would serve as State President until 1908 and would guide the Ladies through their greatest period of growth.

In 1886 a company of the Hibernian Rifles was organized in New London. Eventually ten companies were organized in various Connecticut cities to form the First Regiment Hibernian Rifles under the leadership of Col. T. J. Murphy of Bridgeport who had participated in the Fenian movement in Ireland. No Hibernian parade for the next 30 years would be complete without the participation of the young uniformed men of the military wing of the AOH. The AOH & LAOH, of Connecticut, have always been active organizations that have participated energetically in Hibernian affairs both within and outside the State. It was in 1875 that the people of Connecticut first became truly aware of the Order when over 1,000 Hibernians representing two- dozen Divisions paraded through the street of New Haven to commemorate the centennial of the birth of Daniel O’Connell. In 1890 the city of Hartford hosted the first of two National Conventions to be held in Connecticut. In 1897, State President and National Director John P. Murphy of Norwich participated in the historic Trenton, New Jersey meeting that ended a 20-year schism in the AOH. Murphy had been first elected State President in 1876 at the age of 22 and would finally step down as State President in 1906 having served a total of 12 terms over the previous 30 yea The Men and Women of Connecticut have always supported Hibernian charitable efforts. The Ladies of Connecticut gave generously to help establish the Hibernian Scholarship program at Trinity College in Washington D. C. and have always been donated considerable sums of money to the National LAOH charities such as the Colomban Fathers. The men of the Connecticut AOH contributed \$5,000 in 1896 to help establish the Gaelic Studies Chair at Catholic University.

Connecticut has produced a National President for each organization. Patrick Hogan of Stamford was elected National President of the AOH in 1960 and Sheila Clifford of Waterbury was elected president of the LAOH in 1986. Patrick Hogan would subsequently be honored as a recipient of the John D. Kennedy Medal. In addition Connecticut has produced numerous other National Officers for both the LAOH and the AOH. Mary Carolan of Hartford served as National Vice President of the LAOH from 1941 until 1948 and Cornelius Collins of Waterbury served as National Vice president of the AOH from 1968 until 1970.

Connecticut has also produced three National Secretaries for the AOH: James Bree of New Haven served from 1900-04, Philip Sullivan of Thompsonville served from 1912-1916 and John Henry of Norwalk served from 1980-82. In addition John Henry served as National Treasurer as did Malachy Lyman of Stamford. Numerous Connecticut men have served as National Directors and one of them the Rev. John Kennedy of Danbury also served as National Chaplain from 1906 to 1908. After a lapse of 112 years, the Hibernian men and Women of Connecticut, under the Chairmanship of Frank Kearney Jr. and Sheila Clifford, again hosted a successful National Convention at the Foxwoods Resort Casino in 2002. Connecticut Hibernian membership peaked in 1912 when there were 8,750 AOH members in 76 Divisions and 5,800 members in 44 LAOH Divisions. We shall never see those numbers again but the AOH and LAOH Connecticut are still thriving and vibrant organizations.