

# *Ancient Order of Hibernians in Ohio*

## Finding Your Hibernian Ancestors

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The Ancient Order of Hibernians was once widespread throughout Ohio and other states. In 1894 there were over 101 divisions in Ohio. A question we constantly receive is, “My grandfather or great-grandfather was in the Hibernians, do you have any old membership records?” In many instances our answer is, “No we don’t.” This is because many of the records for these early divisions have been lost or destroyed. We must refer researchers to other source records to find their Hibernian ancestors.

The purpose of this report is to help those who are searching for their relatives who may have been members or officers of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Hibernian Rifles, the Hibernian Cadets or the Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians. Hopefully, this information will also be useful to Hibernian Division Historians who are searching for the history of their local divisions.

To begin the search, there are several sources that I have found useful. These sources are as follows:

### **City Directories:**

Most cities published City Directories beginning in the late 1800s up to the present time. The format for these directories is generally about the same regardless of the city involved. The directory will generally list clubs and organizations separately, usually in the first 20 pages of the directory. The Ancient Order of Hibernians and related organizations are most often found under the category of “Secret Societies.” They also can be found under the categories of “Religious Organizations” or “Catholic Societies” depending on the particular directory. The listing will give the A.O.H. division number, where and when they met, and often the name of one or more of the officers (usually the president and/or recording secretary).

A search through the directories will give you a lot of information, as well as, a rough time frame for the existence of each division. If your ancestor was an officer you may find him listed in the directory. Looking in the main part of the directory will tell you where he lived and his occupation. Whether or not he was an officer, it is important to establish a time frame for the existence of the particular division. Divisions were established in numerical order within the county and when one division became defunct or merged with another division, they generally did not reuse that number for newly formed divisions. For example, it would not be uncommon for a city or county, for a given year, to have divisions #3, #6, and #11.

City directories can be found in most public libraries. The Ohio Historical Society Library also has a large collection of directories for various cities.

## **Newspapers:**

Searching through rolls and rolls of newspaper microfilm can be a very tedious and frustrating exercise, particularly if you have no idea of where to look. It is a good idea to begin your search on the date where most Irish news can be found – *March 17, St. Patrick's Day*. This may sound like common sense, but you would be surprised at how many people overlook this date in their search.

Once you have established a time period by using the City Directories, go to the newspaper microfilm for March 17 for those years. Any community with even a small Irish population will generally have some sort of commemoration of the day. This could be either an assembly or possibly a parade. Sometimes the commemoration will take place the day before or the day after the 17<sup>th</sup>.

Newspapers will list organizers and often participants in these events. For parades, newspapers will sometime list parade marshals, the order of march, specific units, etc. These articles can sometimes lead to other events held during the year. The St. Patrick's Day celebrations in the early 1900s were often major events in a community. The newspapers will often print text of speeches and detailed descriptions of these celebrations. In addition, it is also common to find feature stories about particular Irish-American citizens.

You can also look for Hibernian participation in other community events and parades (4<sup>th</sup> of July, Decoration Day, Columbus Day, etc). The U.S. Centennial Celebration on July 4, 1876 is a good place to check, as well.

During your search, do not overlook the importance of accumulating the names of members or officers of the division who are not related to you. These members may still have relatives in your community who could have the information in their attic about your ancestor. Newspaper microfilm can be found in your local Public Library or the Ohio Historical Society Library.

## **Catholic Churches:**

If you find that a particular division met consistently at a local Catholic church, it may be logical to assume that the division was made up of members of that parish. It was common for divisions to be associated with particular parishes. The church may have some records in their archives or may be able to direct you to someone in the parish who knows about the Hibernian history of the parish.

It also was common for the A.O.H. to donate church windows or other fixtures to their home church. These windows and fixtures can be found in churches throughout Ohio.

You may also want to check the archives of the diocese or archdiocese where the division was located. The A.O.H. is a Catholic organization and members were commonly involved in diocesan activities such as special events or fund raising efforts. If your diocese or archdiocese has a newspaper, it may also be a valuable resource for A.O.H. information. Be sure to contact your diocesan archives in advance. Most are not open to the public. For a small donation they will often do the research for you in order to protect the confidentiality of the sacramental records.

## **City and/or County Histories:**

Published City or county histories often contain histories of organizations such as the A.O.H. As with the city directories, they are often indexed under either secret or Catholic societies (my personal experience, however, is that this resource is not often the most accurate source when dealing with organizations). City and county histories also contain biographical sketches of prominent people in the area. The biographies often will list A.O.H. membership in the biography. The histories also may have descriptions of major special events in the community that could send you back to the microfilmed newspapers.

## **National Hibernian Records:**

Very few records exist on a national level. The Hibernians published registers of state and division officers for all states in the U.S. Those that are available are under the care of the National Archivist, Michael J. Cummings. You may wish to contact him directly with your inquiry. His address is 12 Marion Avenue, Albany, N.Y. 12203-1814 or E-Mail at [Soirse64@hotmail.com](mailto:Soirse64@hotmail.com). He can advise you as to what may be available for your particular area. These listing would only list your ancestor if he was a division or state officer.

### ***The Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians:***

In 1894 the Ladies Auxiliary of the Ancient Order of Hibernians was founded (note: they are now called the Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians). Many cities in Ohio also had L.A.O.H. divisions in addition to A.O.H. divisions. Although not as numerous as the men's divisions, they were generally just as active in community and parish events. Very few records exist for many of these divisions.

### ***The Hibernian Rifles:***

The Hibernian Rifles was a military division of the A.O.H. There were approximately 400 men involved in these units around Ohio. The units were known as Companies, with one Company in each community, beginning around 1900. In 1905 the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment was formed, uniting all of the various units under one regiment. Membership was limited to only members-in-good-standing of the A.O.H. These rifle companies regularly drilled and participated in community events.

### ***The Hibernian Cadets:***

There is some preliminary evidence to suggest possibly several divisions of Hibernian Cadets were established in Ohio in the early 1900s. These divisions were established for High School age young men and may have been affiliated with a particular Catholic high school in the area. We know that one existed in Columbus, Ohio at Aquinas College High School and we are looking for more divisions around the state.

## **Conclusion**

I regret that there is so little information available on the early days of our Order in Ohio. However, myself, and other Hibernian historians, are working to correct this situation. The

A.O.H. often falls victim to what I call the “Junk in the Attic” syndrome. That is, Great-Grandfather’s trunk is found in the attic filled with A.O.H. information and artifacts. The grandkids think it is just junk and throw it out with the trash, thinking that it is meaningless. However meaningless it may be to them, it could be very meaningful to the A.O.H. in helping to document our early history in Ohio. We would appreciate your help in preserving it for future Hibernian generations.

If you have any information, artifacts, or memorabilia relating to the Ancient Order of Hibernians, Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians, Hibernian Rifles, or Hibernian Cadets stored away in your attic, I would like to have a copy of it (should you wish to keep the original). I will gladly reimburse you for any copying costs involved. If you do not wish to keep the material, I will gladly accept it as a donation to the A.O.H. Should you have any of this information available, you may contact me at the following addresses:

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I hope this information has been helpful to you in your search. If I can be of any assistance, please feel free to contact me.

**Thank you for your interest in the Hibernians and in the preservation of its history and traditions.**