Congratulations Holyoke on your 150th birthday. In 2023, the Holyoke Ancient Order of Hibernians are celebrating our 143rd birthday. The city and AOH have been around for a long, long time.

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

In 1880, the Holyoke Ancient Order of Hibernians was granted a charter to raise a fund to help maintain aged, sick, blind, infirmed members and to provide benefits two widows to these newcomers from the Emerald Isle.

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. Our Ladies also achieve state and national recognition. **Paula Paoli was Massachusetts AOH President in 2018** while, Barbara Twohig and Noreanne Duquette serve as state President and Vice President in 2023.

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. Tom Moriarty, Phil Flanagan, Vin Barrett, Dr. William Dean, P. B. Bresnahan III, Maurice Ferriter, John and Kim Gaughan, 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, Dave Miller, **Paul Paoli,** Shirley Bolduc, Skip Clayton, Tom Dillon, Tim O’Shea, **Helen Paoli,** Cheryl Dupont, Judy and Rose Pratt, Mary K. O’Connor, Jack Scanlon, Paul Mengel, Jim Sheehan, Fran Hennessey, John Carlon, Marty Fullwood, Jerry Sheehan, Mike Moran, Judy Pratt, Tim Allen, Alice Greaney, Esther Meehan, Dan and Cindy Murphy, Susan Sullivan, Paula Lunney, Kit Collamore, Tom and Mary Laura Hohol, Samantha Methot, Kathy Dunn and with so many more to fill pages upon pages.

In 2023, being a Hibernian means celebrating and promoting our Irish heritage. Our Irish Night is one of the largest in Western Mass. It features Irish dancing, Irish music, a corned beef and cabbage dinner (of course) and a side of Danny Curran’s famed epicurean delicacy, corned ribs.

Every March 1, the club hosts Holyoke’s annual Irish flag raising ceremony at City Hall.

The club’s longest running activity is our Communion Breakfast where we recognize Mr. Hibernian, Ms. Hibernian and our Catholic Charity award recipients. The event is hosted by maestro emcee, Attorney John Driscoll and Nora McMahon,. Our Catholic identity is integral to our Irishness. At St. Jerome Church we participate in the yearly novena to St. Patrick.

The AOH has been involved with the Holyoke Saint Patrick’s Parade since its inception. The 1940 AOH Junior President, a HHS Senior, Michael Donohue, later an attorney in 1952 incorporated the Holyoke Parade Committee. Our contingent of dignitaries, floats, marchers and Irish dancers stretches 3 city blocks long. Our floats designed by Peter Hogan and hand crafted by JD Watson have won numerous prestigious trophies from the Parade Committee.

Our commitment to the poor in Holyoke, shines throughout the year and includes our involvement with Providence Ministries for the Needy. Each month we prepare a Sunday lunch of PB&J sandwiches and collect non-perishable food items.

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 2023 Maurice A. Donahue Memorial Scholarships are presented our summer picnic with Gavin Sullivan, Patrick Sweeney and Caroline Taylor each receiving $1,000 toward school expenses.

Holyoke and the Ancient Order of Hibernians have thrived in boom times, survived World Wars and depression, and yet it is our commitment to Ho’yokers that we look forward to the tercentenary ( Holyoke’s 300th birthday).

Article by David Bligh