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"The rise of the Native American Party, or Know Nothings as they were called, ushered in an era of unparalleled bigotry in major American cities," observes the AOH's official history, which was written by Mike McCormack. "Not only were 'No Irish Need Apply' signs evident in major American cities, but legislation, reminiscent of the penal laws was sought against the immigrant population who, it was stated, diluted American principles, and professed loyalty to a foreign prince, the pope."

McCormack noted that the AOH was formed by Irish Catholics in America to protect both their own property and that of the Catholic Church. AOH members often stood vigil throughout the night to protect Catholic churches, he wrote, while during the day it assisted immigrants with monetary stipends and with finding them jobs and social services.

The AOH also played a pivotal role in the creation of one of the most popular traditions in American ethnic history: the numerous St. Patrick's Day parades that take place around the nation each March.

In *The Wearing of the Green: A History of St. Patrick's Day*, authors Mike Cronin and Daryl Adair pointed out that the 1850s saw the New York City AOH first participate in the St. Patrick's Day parade, a role that eventually grew into that of organizing it. The parades, in which the AOH encouraged as many Irish groups as possible to march, were the Hibernians' and the Irish community's way of showing they had arrived on the American scene, Cronin and Adair wrote.

"The amalgamated Irish parade, in the face of nativist concerns about the Irish presence, meant that the parade became an 'oppositional event meant to demonstrate not only the strength and unity of Irish Catholics, but also the determination of Irish Catholics to be accepted as American,'" they wrote.

IRISH AND CATHOLIC

The Chemung County Hibernians are among three divisions that exist in the Diocese of Rochester, along with the Col. Patrick O'Rorke

Division No. 7 in Rochester (which now includes members from a Clifton Springs division that disbanded last year) and the John F. Kennedy Division No. 1 in Auburn.

Women affiliated with the Hibernians have their own divisions in the Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians, which maintains a national Web site at www.laoh.com. Beth Vetter, president of the LAOH in Elmira, said her division was formed in 1959 and has about 210 members. Boys and girls also belong to Junior Divisions, including a newly formed boys' division in Elmira, according to Dalton.

To join a men's division like the one in Elmira, one must be at least 16, a practicing Catholic, and of Irish descent or birth. One must also be an American citizen, or intend to become one, according to information from the national organization. At one time, according to Lynn "Chico" Rice, past president of the Chemung County Hibernians, members had to be at least half-Irish and able to prove it. But the Hibernians generally accept anyone with some Irish blood now, and a fair number of Hibernians have surnames that end in vowels these days, he and the other members noted.

Activities Chairman Bob Briley said the Elmira Hibernians are holding several events throughout the year to commemorate their anniversary, including an April 25 party with the cast of the famed Irish musical "Riverdance."



Meanwhile in March, the Elmira AOH is taking part in the national organization's Hibernian Hunger Project, which is planned to become an annual event, Dooley said.

The AOH is encouraging anti-hunger efforts in remembrance of the scattering of Irish people throughout the world, a result of widespread emigration from Ireland in the late 1840s to escape a famine that killed one million people. As part of the project, Dooley said members are being encouraged to donate cash or cans of food to the Food Bank of the Southern Tier, which supplies area food pantries.

Also taking place this month is the favorite event of members: the Hibernians' annual March and Corporate Communion on March 16 at 7:15 a.m. at Elmira City Hall. The Corporate Communion, or Mass, is the year's only mandatory event for members, Dalton noted, and other Hibernians said members would rather give up partying on St. Patrick's Day than give up Corporate Communion. That's because — all joking aside — the Hibernians are religious men, according to Hibernian Brother Tony Fitzpatrick. Indeed, several members pointed out that the wake and funeral of every brother is well attended, and that no one is afraid to pray at a meeting.

"You have an adult organization whose members are proud to display their religion," Fitzpatrick said. "You're not a sissy because you profess your religion."

GENERAL

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