

March is Irish-American Heritage Month

Bill Halpin, President Virginia State Board, Ancient Order of Hibernians

U.S. Presidents have proclaimed March to be Irish-American Heritage Month for more than a quarter century. The Governor of Virginia traditionally proclaims March as Irish-American Heritage Month (IAHM). Last year the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian Institution officially recognized March as IAHM.

In the 19th century, during *An Gorta Mor* (The Great Hunger), Irish families able to escape certain starvation emigrated, mostly to America. They were poor, illiterate, mostly Catholic, and not welcome in many cities. A branch of the Ancient Order of Hibernians organized in America helped the Irish assimilate, learn the English language, and find employment. During the U.S. Civil War thousands of Irish heroically fought for their adopted nation. Ultimately, the Irish became inextricably linked to the development of America in fields ranging from literature, education and science, to politics and military leadership.

The theme for the **2019 IAHM** is ***Irish in the Revolutionary War***. Colorful, informative displays and Hibernians able to discuss this year's theme and other topics related to Irish/Irish-American history will be present at:

- ❖ ***Central Rappahannock Regional Library (Fredericksburg): Mar 5, 6, 7 (12-6 PM)***
- ❖ ***Howell Library (English Run): Mar 12, 13, 14 (2-6 PM)***
- ❖ ***Salem Church Library: Mar 19, 20, 21 (12-6 PM)***

The **17th Annual St Patrick Day Parade** honoring the memory of Hibernian and Fredericksburg's trailblazing brewer, Jeff Fitzpatrick, will kick-off at Noon on March 16th and will proceed along Main Street (inside Spotsylvania Business Park on Rt 2). The parade is followed by an Irish festival at the Bowman Distillery.

For more than 30 years, the General Thomas F. Meagher Division has represented AOH in our area. Under the motto "Friendship, Unity, and Christian Charity" the Division has donated about \$100,000 to local charities and for scholastic awards. Funding derives from community support for the annual ***Trip for Two to Ireland Raffle*** and the ***Shamrock Charity Golf Classic***, played a Meadows in April.

Today there are 14 AOH divisions and about 1,000 Hibernians in the Commonwealth. Read more about AOH at: www.virginiaaoh.org and www.aohfredericksburg.org