

no matter how bad things got there were always enough urban Irish to fall back on. In 1910 over 2,100 Irish-born were located in Omaha and South Omaha, or more than 25% of the state figure. The concentration of the Irish here enabled Omaha to survive while smaller cities such as Lincoln, where there were 659 Irish-born in 1910, ultimately lost their divisions.

National organizer Sheehan did some work in this state in 1904, organizing divisions at Jackson and Gretna, and visited an existing division located at Columbus. Just before the turn of the century, a third division was added in Omaha and another at Greeley Center.

The Hibernian decline in both Kansas and Nebraska are remarkably similar. Nebraska had only two divisions in 1916, both in Douglas County (Omaha) with a combined membership of 116. However, these Nebraska divisions held on tenaciously after the war with a combined membership of less than 100 in 1920, of 51 in 1923, of only 18 in 1929, and finally the state sank to just one division of 20 men in 1935. But just as sometimes human beings rally in the darkest hour so did Omaha's AOH. They built their membership up to 69 in 1937 and 86 in 1941. With the return of peace, not only were they still around, but they reported 126 members at the 1946 convention. Nebraska was specially congratulated for being the only state having a single division to have survived the war.

It is a credit to the Irish of Omaha that they struggled through difficult times to preserve the Order in the Midwest with a healthy and active AOH division.

MISSOURI

Irish-born: 54,983 (1870); 48,898 (1880); 31,382 (1900); 9,869 (1930); 4,221 (1950).

Org. date: Before 1873; Largest memb.: 1,338 (1896); Greatest no. divs.: 23 (1896-98).

St. Louis has long been recognized as one of the major Irish centers of the 19th century, and it is a natural assumption that the state as a whole would reflect this fact. But Missouri had an disproportionately high concentration of Irish-born in St. Louis and Kansas City, and the Irish were not in great numbers elsewhere. The total Irish-born in 1880 for the state is very similar to Iowa, a state not especially noted for its Irish settlement. In actual numbers, the Missouri Irish-born numbered 48,898 to Iowa's 44,061 in that year. The similarity remained in the same proportion up until World War I, when Irish immigration to more rural Iowa was sharply curtailed, while the two large cities of Missouri continued to attract some Irish.

The AOH was organized in St. Louis by P. Leonard sometime in 1870 and in two years had 1,000 members. No AOH unit marched in the 1873 St. Louis St. Patrick's Day Parade, but the following year two delegates from the Order in that city and one from the Hibernians in Carondelet were represented at a meeting of the Convention of Irish Societies, the parade sponsor. It was in that year also that the St. Louis AOH held a picnic to benefit the St. Patrick's Parish Schoolhouse, while another division was reportedly organized in St. Michael's Parish. By 1875 St. Louis mustered seven divisions to receive communion in a body at their annual mass.

Kansas City Hibernians marched in their own March 17th Parade in 1873, as did four Hibernian divisions in St. Louis. A division existed at Iron Mountain as early as January 1877.

By 1884 St. Louis had 11 divisions, Kansas City had four, and other divisions were located at DeSoto, Iron Mountain, Rich Hill, and Lexington. Two years later a division at St. Joseph was hosting its own St. Patrick's Day Parade.

For the number of Irish-born in the state, the Order seems never to have been particularly well organized. St. Louis had a heavy German element which outnumbered the Irish there by three to one. The Irish had trouble organizing the March 17th celebration for various reasons and they had to abandon the traditional parade for a time between 1892 and 1898 when only 1,000 turned out in the former year.

At the 1904 national convention much came to light about the condition of the Order in the state. A priest who was a delegate from his division in St. Patrick's Parish in St. Louis reported that his parishioners had sunk from 25,000 Irish Catholics 27 years before to only three or four hundred as a result of the displacement of residential neighborhoods by businesses. National organizer Sheehan reported he had been able to reorganize two divisions in that city over the previous year, but generally the picture was not good. His efforts to reorganize old divisions at Waverly, Marceline and Lexington were failures, despite the cooperation and support of the local clergy. In 1904 divisions existing in Missouri were as follows: St. Joseph (2), Springfield, Kansas City (6), and St. Louis (6).

The years before World War I witnessed the decline of the Order from seven counties in 1902 to three in 1916. The 1916 county membership was as follows: St. Louis, 206; Jackson (Kansas City), 187; and Buchanan (St. Joseph), 101. Those figures appear a bit lopsided when one considers that St. Louis had 14,272 Irish-born in 1910, or more than 50% of the state total. Kansas City had 3,267 and St. Joseph, 760.