

ANCIENT ORDER OF HIBERNIANS IN AMERICA, INC.



New Jersey State Board
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Ná habair é, dean é . . . “don’t say it, do it”.

Don Jay Smith, *Executive Director*
New Jersey Hall of Fame
c/o Charles Edison Fund
1037 Raymond Boulevard, Suite 340
Newark, NJ 071020

November 1, 2011

Mr. Smith,

I am the current New Jersey President of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH). The AOH is the largest Irish American group in New Jersey and the US. We have members in twenty two divisions throughout New Jersey. I would like to review with you an urgent matter pertaining to the NJ Hall of Fame the AOH and the larger Irish Catholic community of New Jersey.

It came as a great surprise to me when I learned that Thomas Nast was a nominee for induction into the NJ Hall of Fame. While Nast, as detailed in his biography on your website; “*can be credited with creating the iconic drawings of Santa Claus, Uncle Sam, the Republican Party elephant, the Democratic Party donkey and Columbia, the image of America as a woman*”, Mr. Nast was also very prejudiced towards Irish Catholics. His cartoons portrayed them in the most stereotypical and unflattering of ways. It is hard to believe that anyone with such a prejudice towards a specific nationality and faith would be singled out for praise. Mr. Nast made no bones about his disrespect and contempt towards the Irish Catholics of the late nineteenth century. What is further hard to believe is that the procedure that your organization employs to review nominations did not come across this. According to your website:

nominations are reviewed by our Expert Panelists. A group of more than 30 of the most prominent individuals in their selected fields, from historians to journalists. The experts approve a list which is then submitted to Hall of Fame Voting Academy, a group of more than 100 of the most prominent organizations throughout the state. The Board of Commissioners prepares and votes on a final list for the public vote. The nominees are announced in September of each year.

Mr. Smith how can this many people looking for “*New Jersey high achievers (who) would serve as role models of excellence*”, not realize that Nast was a bigot. One has only to read his Wikipedia biography which reveals:

Nast, a German Protestant, saw the Roman Catholic Church as a threat to American values, and often portrayed the [Irish Catholics](#) and Catholic Church leaders in very hostile terms. In 1871, one of his works, titled "The American River Ganges," infamously portrayed Catholic bishops as crocodiles

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waiting to attack American school children. Nast's [anti-Irish sentiment](#) is clearly apparent in his characteristic depiction of the Irish as violent drunks.

In the event you are not familiar with Nast's prejudicial cartoons I have included three with this correspondence:

- The aforementioned "The American River Ganges".
- "The Usual Irish Way of Doing Things", which depicts a drunken Irishman lighting a [powder keg](#) and swinging a bottle.
- "St Patrick's Day 1867" subtitled Rum and Blood which portray the Irish as violent and ape like brawling drunkenly in the streets.

Mr. Smith there is no room for such bigoted, hate mongers in the New Jersey Hall of Fame. Nast's contributions to Americana cannot overshadow his prejudice. The NJ Hall of Fame is sullied by his inclusion as a nominee. I am sure that by bringing this matter to your attention you will agree with me that the following steps must be taken:

1. The nomination of Thomas Nast is immediately removed from consideration for induction into this year's NJ Hall of Fame.
2. Thomas Nast is removed from all future consideration as a nominee.
3. A statement is issued by your office acknowledging that an error was made here and an apology issued to all the citizens of New Jersey particularly the Irish. This statement should be released to the Newark Star Ledger, The Irish Echo and the Hibernian Digest.

I have reached out to the governor's office, our Senators and Congressmen and our friends in the NJ Senate and Assembly to ask that they also contact your office to voice their concern over this issue.

Mr. Smith I believe that if your organization did a better job reviewing nominees and following procedures this admission of a known prejudiced bigot would not have happened. Are you aware that our organization, the AOH is listed on your website as a member of the New Jersey Hall of Fame voting academy? Yet we have not received any correspondence for the last several years. The AOH would be honored to resume a presence on the academy, if the above mentioned steps are taken. The NJ Hall of Fame states as a goal to be a: "source of learning, inspiration and hope for all New Jersey children". This is the type of important project the AOH would be proud to support; providing that we can be certain that the NJ Hall of Fame will be a testament to the great citizens of New Jersey who made the world a better place and not a disreputable hall of shame that would promote bigots and their prejudiced views.

I look forward to your reply.

Sean Pender
NJ AOH President

cc. Irish Echo Editorial board, Editor - Hibernian Digest, Editor - Newark Star Ledger, Editor - Bergen Record, Editor - Asbury Park Press, Office of Governor Chris Christie, Senator Robert Menendez, Senator Frank Lautenberg, NJ State Senator Richard Codey, NJ State Senator Sean Kean, NJ State Senator Linda Greenstein, NJ Assemblyman Joseph Cryan, NJ Assemblyman Tom Giblin, NJ Assemblyman Wayne DeAngelo, NJ Assemblyman David Rible, NJ Congressional Delegation

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