

# O'NEILL

Nihill



**A**s has already been remarked under the headings O'Brien and O'Connor, it is impossible to do justice to these great septs within the limits of this work. The following is a very brief summary of the origin and achievements of the O'Neills. First it should be made clear that although the name O'Neill is inseparably associated with Ulster (the Red Hand of Ulster was taken from their arms), there are several other quite distinct septs of O'Neill which may be mentioned before the Ulster septs are dealt with. The O'Neills of Thomond were chiefs of a territory in the modern barony of Bunratty: to-day O'Neill is not a common name in Co.. Clare, but the Nihills and the Creaghs of that county claim to be of Thomond O'Neill is quite

numerous in and around Co. Carlow, where an O'Neill sept was situated in the barony of Rathvilly. Another O'Neill sept was located in the Decises and its present day representatives are found in Co.. Waterford and south Tipperary. The first of the great Ulster sept to bear the surname O'Neill was Donell O'Neill, the eponymous ancestor being his grandfather Niall, King of Ireland, who was killed in a battle with the Norsemen in A.D. 919, not, as might be supposed, the famous Niall of the Nine Hostages, though that somewhat legendary and heroic character was also a remote ancestor. From that time until the end of the seventeenth century, when Ulster ceased to be the leading Gaelic province of Ireland the O'Neills figure prominently among the great men of Irish history. The O'Neills were the chief family of the Cinel Eoghan, their territory being Tir Eoghan. Tir Eoghan (modern Tyrone) in early times comprised not only that county but most of Derry and part of Donegal. Down to the time of Brain Boru, who reigned from 1002 to 1014, the Ui Neill, as those who established themselves in Meath were called. The latter did in fact occupy also part of southern Ulster contiguous with Meath. In the fourteenth century a branch of the Tyrone O'Neills migrated to Antrim where they became known as Clann Aodha Bhuidhe, from Aodh Buidhe 9or Hugh Boy) O'Neill, who was slain in 1283, the term being perpetuated in the territorial name Clannaboy or Clandeboy. The attempts made by the English in the sixteenth century to exterminate them, which were carried out by Essex and others with a ferocity and perfidy seldom equalled even in that violent age, were unsuccessful, and O'Neills are numerous there to-day, as they are also in West Ulster. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries produced the most famous of the O'Neills: among them Con Bacach O'Neill 91484-1559), first Earl of Tyrone; Shane O'Neill (1530-1567); Hugh O'Neill (1540-1616), second Earl of Tyrone; Owen roe O'Neill (1590-1649); Sir Phelim O'Neill (1604-1653); and Hugh O'Neill 9d. 1660) - names too well known in the history of Ireland to require description here. Less famous but worthy of mention, even in so cursory a sketch as this, is Sir Nial O'Neill (1658-1690), whose regiment of dragoons distinguished itself at the battle of the Boyne, where he war mortally wounded. In the century following that disaster many O'Neills were to be found among the outstanding officers of the Irish Brigades in the French army. Arthur O'Neill (1737-1816), the blind wandering harper, may be regarded as the precursor of Bunting in the field of Irish Traditional music; and John O'Neill (1834-1878), was leader of the Fenian invasion in Canada in 1867. all these were Ulstermen. The only man of the other septs, referred to at the beginning of this section, to make much mark was John O'Neill (c. 1777-c 1860), who began life as a shoemaker on Co. Waterford, whence he went to London and became a successful dramatist. Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953), the American dramatist was son of the American actor James O'Neill (1849-1920), who was an Irish emigrant. In that field we may also mention the actress

Peggy O'Neill (1796-1879). It may be remarked in conclusion that O'Neill is one of the very few surnames the spelling of which is identical in both Irish and English languages.. In Irish, however, the E is accented.

*This information was taken from the web.*



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