

— THE SOCIETY OF —
THE FRIENDLY SONS OF ST. PATRICK
— FOR THE RELIEF OF EMIGRANTS FROM IRELAND —

A look back in History: The Friendly Sons of St. Patrick – Philadelphia

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“The graphic on the membership scroll of The Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick”

The graphic on the membership scroll of The Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick depicts many images that are symbolic. The harp is shown flying on the top of the main mast of the ship as well as nestled next to the female figure holding a bag of coins welcoming a female immigrant figure. This symbolizes the Society's charity and commitment to benevolence toward the Irish people crossing the ocean to come to America. The standard symbol of Ireland in the eighteenth century was the harp in its winged-maiden form. The harp was increasingly personified as a female symbol of Ireland and her struggle for political independence.

Positioned just above the two female figures greeting each other is a bare breasted woman seated with her right hand extended in a warm, gracious and welcoming manner. Her open right hand is offering an invitation not only to the individual female immigrant figure, but also to the passenger-filled ship in the background. This woman holds an olive branch in her left hand symbolizing peace. A shield of America depicting the eagle, a clipper ship, a plow, and sheaves of wheat is also being held by the woman; images that reflect the democratic and economic strength of America. The Bald Eagle is the National Symbol, which represents freedom.

America was frequently depicted as a woman appearing well before the 1776 Revolutionary War as a fierce bare-breasted Indian queen. This is modified in the graphic on the membership scroll to present a woman of European background or perhaps a more universal female image. For example, the Greek Goddess of peace, Eirene, carried an olive branch.

The National Symbol of the Bald Eagle is boldly placed at the top of the graphic. Below the eagle is the nation's motto, “E PLURIBUS UNUM” meaning “OUT OF MANY, ONE.” The traditional understanding of the phrase was that out of many states (or colonies) emerges a single nation. Our nation became unified when thirteen original states signed the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.

Shamrocks are shown on one side of the eagle. The shamrock is a symbol of Ireland. Saint Patrick, Ireland's patron saint is said to have used the shamrock as a metaphor for the Christian Trinity.

Oak leaves are shown on the other side of the eagle. Oak leaves can symbolize many things, including age, strength, endurance, longevity, eternity, good fortune, honor, liberty, hospitality, faith, and virtue. These elements combine to make the oak a symbol of Christian faith even in times of adversity. The oak is America's National Tree and is said to have been the tree from which Jesus Christ's cross was made.