



Collection 3044

**Brehon Law Society
Records**

**1976-1989 (bulk 1983-1986)
5 boxes, 2.25 lin. feet**

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Processing Completed: November 2003

Sponsor: Processing funded through the generosity of
the Phoebe W. Haas Fund

Restrictions: None

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Abstract

The Brehon Law Society is a Philadelphia-based professional association founded in 1976 to promote the profession of law among people of Irish ancestry. Members include lawyers, judges, law students, and “friends.” The society supports legal education by providing professional development programs and offering mentors to law students. It sponsors speakers on current legal issues, and honors successful people, often society members, for their achievements in the field of law. The Brehons promote Irish cultural events such as theater and concerts, and they organize social activities like holiday parties, dinner-dances, and receptions for visiting Irish dignitaries. Society members celebrate their Irish heritage by marching in the annual St. Patrick’s Day parade and they usually hold a post-parade party. There are also some events of a religious nature, such as communion breakfasts. In addition, the Brehons have political interests. Members run for judicial offices and positions in the Philadelphia Bar Association, and the society usually endorses a slate of candidates in those elections. The Brehons are also watchful of political and human rights issues in Ireland.

The collection includes bylaws, Executive Committee and general membership meeting agendas and minutes, membership information, financial records, reports on special events, and correspondence. There is a card file of the members and friends of the society, and one artifact, a corporate seal. Most of the material in this collection is dated from 1983 to 1986.

Background note

The Brehon Law Society was founded in 1976 and it remains an active organization today. The society’s name bespeaks its Irish connection; Brehon Law was used in Ireland from ancient Celtic times to the seventeenth century. “Brehon” is the anglicized form of the Irish word “breitheamh,” which is derived from “breith,” meaning “judgment.” In Ireland, Brehons were judges, although in practice they acted more as mediators.

The purpose of the organization, as stated in the bylaws, is “to foster the profession of law among individuals of Irish ancestry, to encourage scholarship, social activities and

their association for their mutual advancement, to encourage research and practice and to promote closer affiliation between the bench, the bar, the students of law, and the community, and to further a higher standard of legal ethics and culture for the social, civic and commercial welfare of the community.” Membership is open to any person of Irish ancestry who is also a member in good standing of the bar of any jurisdiction. Law school students are eligible for associate membership. Any other person interested in promoting the goals of the society may become a “friend” of the Brehons.

According to a January 30, 1984, letter written by society member Michael J. Stack Jr., the society’s principal founders were two Philadelphia judges, Joseph P. McCabe and Thomas A. White. Judge White was the society’s first president. Officers of the society during the 1980s included Stack, Eugene E.J. Maier, James M. Lynn, Joseph P. Gallagher, William H. Murray, Mary Rose Fante Cunningham, Patricia M. Dugan, William A. Fitzpatrick, and Margaret A. Stein.

There were more than 300 members during the 1980s, and the current membership exceeds 500. There are modest annual dues, and in Irish fashion, the dues year begins on March 17, St. Patrick’s Day. Fees are charged for most special events, but non-paying guests, often judges, are invited to the Brehon’s social affairs such as holiday parties. The society holds an annual meeting on the fourth Wednesday in May of each year, and conducts general membership meetings on a monthly basis, except for the summer months of July and August. The March meeting is scheduled for the second Wednesday so that it occurs close to St. Patrick’s Day. Most general membership meetings during the 1980s were held upstairs at McGillin’s Ale House on Drury Lane in Philadelphia.

Brehon Law Societies also exist in New York City and Nassau County, New York, and at law schools in a number of states, but there is no official connection with the Philadelphia-based organization. The Nassau County society is focused particularly on human rights issues in Northern Ireland.

Scope & content

The records contained in this collection provide a snapshot of the Brehon Law Society from 1983 to 1986. While there are some materials that date before or after that period, the vast majority of the records are from those four years.

Records are organized in five series, as follows: *Administrative*, *Membership*, *Special Events*, *Financial*, and *Correspondence*. The collection does not include documents related to the founding of the society or the early years of its existence. The *Administrative* series, however, includes bylaws that describe its purpose, classes of membership, organizational structure, and operational guidelines. Information from the Executive Committee and general membership meetings provides details of the society’s activities, operations, and leadership. Meetings usually have agendas that are communicated in advance, and the proceedings and decisions are well documented in minutes. The documentation of meetings provides a good view of the organization, and it is the strongest part of the collection.

There is limited information about the Brehon Law Society members. The *Membership* series contains applications for membership, which include the applicant's name, address, law firm name, bar affiliation, as well as an indication of Irish ancestry. Unfortunately, the collection contains only applications submitted during the mid-1980s. The membership lists are more complete, but they provide less information about the members.

The *Special Events* series offers insight into some of the society's significant social activities. The information often includes correspondence and financial reports. Researchers, however, will usually find additional documentation related to these events, and many others, in both the *Financial* and *Correspondence* series, as well as in meeting minutes.

The *Financial* series includes details about receipts and disbursements. The disbursement records show the people and organizations that were paid for services rendered, indicate where meetings and events were held, and document other business relationships. The *Bank statements* subseries contains a complete run of statements, cancelled checks, and deposit records from 1983 through May 1986 for the society's account with Industrial Valley Bank. The records of the *Bills paid* subseries also provide disbursement details, and these records usually include copies of cover letters to the payees. Summarized information on receipts and disbursements is in monthly *Treasurer's reports*. Many of the documents in the *Correspondence* series are also evidence of business relationships, but the majority of the correspondence is the routine internal communication of the society's officers.

Overview of arrangement

| | | |
|------------|---|-----------|
| Series I | Administrative, 1982-1989, n.d. a. Bylaws, 1986, n.d. b. Meetings and minutes, 1982-1989 c. Miscellaneous, 1984-1986, n.d. | Box 1-2 |
| Series II | Membership, 1976-1986, n.d. a. Applications, 1980-1986, n.d. b. Dues, 1982-1986 c. Member lists, 1981-1983, n.d. d. Charter member certificate, 1976 | Boxes 1-3 |
| Series III | Special Events, 1983-1986, n.d. | Box 3 |
| Series IV | Financial, 1981-1986, n.d. a. Bank statements, 1981-1986, n.d. b. Bills paid, 1983-1986 c. Treasurer's reports, 1983-1986 d. Miscellaneous, 1982-1985, n.d. | Box 4 |
| Series V | Correspondence, 1981-1989, n.d. | Box 5 |

Series description

Series 1. Administrative, 1982-1989, n.d. (Boxes 1-2)

a. Bylaws, 1986, n.d.

This subseries consists of three versions of the Brehon Law Society's bylaws. Two undated versions are the same except that one is annotated with changes. The third version is labeled "amended as of February 3, 1986," and it includes the previously mentioned annotated revisions.

b. Meetings and minutes, 1983-1989

The *Meetings and minutes* subseries includes notices of meetings, agendas, and meeting minutes. The notices of meetings of the Executive Committee usually contain a proposed agenda. Notices for general membership meetings often include information about the purpose of the meeting, but not complete agendas. The agendas for the general membership meetings are separate documents, and were probably distributed at the meetings.

The meeting minutes include information about all Brehon Law Society activities. The society was often involved in events for visiting Irish dignitaries. It helped support a visit to Philadelphia by Bryan McMahon the dean of the Cork Law School in Ireland. It sponsored a reception to honor Irish Nobel laureate Sean MacBride. In 1985, the Brehon's organized a trip to Ireland that included a three-day lawyers' seminar at the University College in Cork, as well as ten days of sightseeing. In 1986, they arranged a Brehon Day at the Supreme Court. There are minutes of a single January 10, 1984, meeting of the Ad Hoc Financial Advisory Committee, as well as several years of meetings of the Executive Committee and the general membership. Meeting records seem reasonably complete from mid-1984 through mid-1986, with fewer records both before and after that period.

c. Miscellaneous, 1984-1986, n.d.

This subseries contains a copy of an advertisement entitled "A Salute to the Irish Edition," purchased by the Brehon Law Society in 1986. There is a copy of a 1984 resolution authorizing a "Sister City" relationship between Philadelphia and the City of Derry, Northern Ireland; meeting minutes from 1984 cite the Brehons as sponsors of the proposal for that resolution. There is also an undated resolution of concern for the treatment of Yuriy Shukhevych, a political prisoner in the Soviet Union. This resolution was from the Lawyer's Association of Philadelphia, and was signed by the president of the Brehon Law Society. This subseries includes a notice of the 1984 Philadelphia Bar Association election, with endorsements. Additional information regarding the society's endorsement of candidates for election may be found in the *Correspondence* series.

The *Miscellaneous* subseries also contains sixteen telephone call lists, which were set up to provide emergency telephone communication within the membership. Leaders of the society were to telephone five other members. The lists are undated, but meeting minutes indicate that they were established in September 1984. There are also samples of the society's stationery and some administrative notes.

Series 2. Membership, 1976-1986, n.d. (Boxes 1-3)

a. Applications, 1980-1986, n.d.

Membership applications are contained in this subseries. Most of the applications are photocopies, not originals. The forms include name, address, telephone number, and law firm information. They also indicate membership in good standing before the bar of some jurisdiction, and most include a statement of Irish ancestry. The statement is usually the name and relationship of at least one ancestor born in Ireland or of Irish nationality. Many applications simply note relatives with Irish names. The applications are filed alphabetically by the name of the applicant, and almost all are dated from 1982 to 1986.

b. Dues, 1982-1986

This subseries consists of dues reply forms, and covering letters or business cards, sent with annual dues payments. The dues reply form includes only the member's name and address. The forms are filed alphabetically within year. The 1982 folder also includes a list of delinquent members.

c. Member lists, 1981-1983, n.d.

There are several typed member lists plus a card file. Most of the lists and the card file are undated. One list has a handwritten notation, "1-13-83." Some of the lists are annotated with revisions. Two lists are labeled "Brehon Bar Members," and another is labeled "old list." The card file seems to be a mailing list since the format of the cards differs from other cards found with correspondence regarding former members. The cards found with correspondence include membership information such as the original membership date, and they have a dues record on the reverse side. They seem to have been removed from the active file when the member terminated. The set of active member cards is not in the collection.

d. Charter member certificate, 1976

This subseries contains one 1976 charter membership certificate for Joseph P. Gallagher.

Series 3. Special Events, 1983-1986, n.d. (Box 3)

This series consists of records of several Brehon Law Society events, including the Barley Bree Concert in 1984; a reception in 1982 honoring Tadhg O'Sullivan, the Irish ambassador to the U.S.; Christmas parties from 1982 through 1985; and St. Patrick's Day parades and parties from 1983 through 1986. The records include tickets, attendance lists, correspondence, and financial summaries. Separate folders existed for these events when the records were received. Researchers may find additional information regarding these events in the *Meetings and Minutes* subseries and the *Correspondence* series.

Series 4. Financial, 1981-1986, n.d. (Box 4)

a. Bank statements, 1981-1986, n.d.

Most of this subseries consists of monthly statements with the related cancelled checks and deposit slips for the society's account with Industrial Valley Bank (IVB).

The records for this account run from January 1983 through May 1986. In addition, there are statements and related documents for a Delaware Cash Reserve account from 1981 to 1984.

b. Bills paid, 1983-1986

The *Bills paid* subseries includes copies of bills and the cover letters sent with the payments from April 1983 through May 1986. Most bills have handwritten notes of the date paid and check number. The records are arranged chronologically.

c. Treasurer's reports, 1983-1986

The treasurer's reports summarize the receipts and disbursements for the society, and state the funds available. Reports were usually prepared monthly, and this subseries consists of the reports from March 1983 to May 1986.

d. Miscellaneous, 1982-1985, n.d.

The *Miscellaneous* subseries includes a petty cash record, some tax forms, and undated notes from one treasurer to a successor's assistant explaining his procedures.

Series 5. Correspondence, 1981-1989, n.d. (Box 5)

This subseries includes both incoming and outgoing correspondence organized chronologically. Some correspondence relates to Brehon Law Society meetings, activities, or special events. Communications to members about bar association and judicial elections, usually with the society's endorsements, are in this subseries. There is also correspondence with some other organizations with Irish interests, such as the Free Michael O'Rourke Committee and the Irish American Unity Conference. A September 7, 1983, letter covers a report protesting the practice of strip searches in Irish prisons. Much of the subseries, however, especially the correspondence from 1985 and 1986, is internal communication between the Society's officers, or their assistants, on routine matters, such as requests for membership applications, notices of member address changes, and forwarding bills or dues payments to the treasurer.

Reference

Brehon Law Society. <http://www.brehonlawsociety.org/html> (accessed November, 2003)

Subjects

Concerts—Pennsylvania—Philadelphia—20th Century
Derry (Northern Ireland)
Ethnic groups—Pennsylvania—Philadelphia—20th Century
Human rights advocacy—20th Century
Ireland Politics and government—20th Century
Irish Americans Societies, etc.—Pennsylvania—20th Century
Judges—Pennsylvania—20th Century
Language and culture
Law firms—Pennsylvania—Philadelphia—20th Century
Law schools—Ireland—20th Century
Law schools—Pennsylvania—20th Century
Lawyers—Pennsylvania—Philadelphia—20th Century
Parades—Pennsylvania—Philadelphia—20th Century
Professional associations—Pennsylvania—Philadelphia—20th Century
Saint Patrick's Day
Sister cities—20th Century
University College, Cork—20th Century
Women lawyers—Pennsylvania—Philadelphia—20th Century

Cunningham, Mary Rose Fante
Dugan, Patricia M.
Fitzpatrick, William A.
Fumo, Vincent J.
Gallagher, Joseph P.
Lynn, James M.
MacBride, Sean
Maier, Eugene Edward J.
McCabe, Joseph P.
McMahon, Bryan M. E.
Murray, William H.
O'Rourke, Michael, 1951 or 2-
O'Sullivan, T. F. (Tadhg F.)
Shukhevych, Yuriy
Stack, Michael J. Jr.
Stein, Margaret A.
Thompson, Sarah M.

Barley Bree (Musical Group)
Brehon Law Society
Industrial Valley Bank (IVB)
Irish Edition

McGillin's Ale House (Philadelphia, Pa.)

Administrative Information

Restrictions

The collection is open for research.

Acquisition information

Gift of the organization.

Accession number: M91-153.

Alternative format

None

Preferred citation

Cite as: [Indicate cited item or series here], *Brehon Law Society Records* (Collection 3044), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Processing note

The processing of this collection was possible by a grant from the Phoebe W. Haas Charitable Trust.

Box and folder listing

Series 1. Administrative. a. Bylaws

| Folder title | Date | Box | Folder |
|--------------|------------|-----|--------|
| Bylaws | 1986, n.d. | 1 | 1 |

Series 1. Administrative. b. Meetings and minutes

| Folder title | Date | Box | Folder |
|--|-------------------------------|-----|--------|
| Notices, Executive Committee Meetings | Sept. 1984-May 1986 | 1 | 2 |
| Notices, General Membership Meetings | Apr. 1982- June 1985 | 1 | 3 |
| Notices, General Membership Meetings | Aug. 1985- May 1986, May 1989 | 1 | 4 |
| Agendas, General Membership Meetings | Apr. 1984- May 1986 | 1 | 5 |
| Minutes, Ad hoc Financial Advisory Committee | Jan. 10, 19894 | 1 | 6 |
| Minutes, Executive Committee | Mar.-May 1984 | 1 | 7 |
| Minutes, Executive Committee | Sept.- Nov. 1984 | 1 | 8 |
| Minutes, Executive Committee | Jan.- Mar. 1985 | 1 | 9 |
| Minutes, Executive Committee | May- Nov. 1985 | 1 | 10 |
| Minutes, Executive Committee | Jan.-May 1986 | 1 | 11 |
| Minutes, General Membership | Nov. 1983- July 1984 | 1 | 12 |
| Minutes, General Membership | Sep.- Dec. 1984 | 1 | 13 |
| Minutes, General Membership | Jan. May 1985 | 1 | 14 |
| Minutes, General Membership | June-Dec. 1985 | 1 | 15 |
| Minutes, General Membership | Jan.- May 1986 | 1 | 16 |

Series 1. Administrative. c. Miscellaneous

| Folder title | Date | Box | Folder |
|---|------|-----|--------|
| Advertisement in the Irish Edition | 1986 | 1 | 17 |
| Bylaws of the Real Property Section of the Philadelphia Bar Association | n.d | 1 | 18 |
| Corporate Seal (artifact) | n.d. | 2 | NA |

| | | | |
|---|------------------|---|----|
| Executive Committee Election Ballot | 1985 | 1 | 19 |
| Notes | 1984, 1986, n.d. | 1 | 20 |
| Notice and Endorsements for Philadelphia Bar Association Election | 1984 | 1 | 21 |
| Resolution authorizing a "Sister City" relationship between Philadelphia and the City of Derry, Ireland | 1984 | 1 | 22 |
| Resolution of concern for the treatment of Yuriy Shukhevych | n.d. | 1 | 23 |
| Stationery samples | n.d. | 1 | 24 |
| Telephone Calling Lists | n.d. | 1 | 25 |

Series 2. Membership. a. Applications

| Folder title | Date | Box | Folder |
|--------------|-----------|-----|--------|
| A-C | 1980-1986 | 1 | 26 |
| D-G | 1982-1986 | 1 | 27 |
| H-K | 1982-1986 | 3 | 1 |
| L-Mc | 1982-1985 | 3 | 2 |
| Me-P | 1982-1986 | 3 | 3 |
| Q-Z | 1982-1986 | 3 | 4 |
| Forms | n.d. | 3 | 5 |

Series 2. Membership. b. Dues

| Folder title | Date | Box | Folder |
|--------------|------|-----|--------|
| 1982 | 1982 | 3 | 6 |
| 1983, A-L | 1983 | 3 | 7 |
| 1983, M-Z | 1983 | 3 | 8 |
| 1984 | 1984 | 3 | 9 |
| 1985, A-E | 1985 | 3 | 10 |
| 1985, F-Ma | 1985 | 3 | 11 |
| 1985, Mc-My | 1985 | 3 | 12 |
| 1985, N-Z | 1985 | 3 | 13 |
| 1986, A-E | 1986 | 3 | 14 |
| 1986, F-K | 1986 | 3 | 15 |
| 1986, L-N | 1986 | 3 | 16 |
| 1986, O-Z | 1986 | 3 | 17 |

Series 2. Membership. c. Member lists

| Folder title | Date | Box | Folder |
|--------------|------------------|-----|--------|
| Lists | 1981, 1983, n.d. | 3 | 18 |
| Card File | n.d. | 2 | NA |

Series 2. Membership. d. Charter member certificate

| Folder title | Date | Box | Folder |
|-----------------------------------|------|-----|--------|
| Certificate (Joseph P. Gallagher) | 1976 | 3 | 19 |

Series 3. Special Events.

| Folder title | Date | Box | Folder |
|---|------------------|-----|--------|
| Barley Bree Concert | 1984 | 3 | 20 |
| Christmas Parties | 1982- 1985 | 3 | 21 |
| Communion Breakfasts | 1984,1985 | 3 | 22 |
| Concert at City Hall | 1986 | 3 | 23 |
| Reception honoring Tadhg O'Sullivan, Irish Ambassador to the US | 1982 | 3 | 24 |
| St. Patrick's Day Parade | 1983, 1986, n.d. | 3 | 25 |
| St. Patrick's Day Parties | 1982- 1986 | 3 | 26 |

Series 4. Financial. a. Bank Statements

| Folder title | Date | Box | Folder |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-----|--------|
| Industrial Valley Bank (IVB) | Jan.-June 1983 | 4 | 1 |
| Industrial Valley Bank (IVB) | July-Dec. 1983 | 4 | 2 |
| Industrial Valley Bank (IVB) | Jan.-June 1984 | 4 | 3 |
| Industrial Valley Bank (IVB) | July-Dec. 1984 | 4 | 4 |
| Industrial Valley Bank (IVB) | Jan.-June 1985 | 4 | 5 |
| Industrial Valley Bank (IVB) | July-Dec. 1985 | 4 | 6 |
| Industrial Valley Bank (IVB) | Jan.-May 1986 | 4 | 7 |
| Delaware Cash Reserve | 1981-1984, n.d. | 4 | 8 |

Series 4. Financial. b. Bills Paid

| Folder title | Date | Box | Folder |
|--------------|------|-----|--------|
| 1983 | 1983 | 4 | 9 |

| | | | |
|------------------------|------|---|----|
| 1984, January-June | 1984 | 4 | 10 |
| 1984, July-December | 1984 | 4 | 11 |
| 1985, January-March | 1985 | 4 | 12 |
| 1985, April-June | 1985 | 4 | 13 |
| 1985, July-December | 1985 | 4 | 14 |
| 1986, January-February | 1986 | 4 | 15 |
| 1986, March | 1986 | 4 | 16 |

Series 4. Financial. c. Treasurer's Reports

| Folder title | Date | Box | Folder |
|--------------|--------------------|-----|--------|
| Reports | Mar. 1983-May 1986 | 4 | 17 |

Series 4. Financial. d. Miscellaneous

| Folder title | Date | Box | Folder |
|-------------------|------------|-----|--------|
| Notes | n.d. | 4 | 18 |
| Petty Cash Record | 1982 | 4 | 19 |
| Tax Papers | 1983, 1985 | 4 | 20 |

Series 5. Correspondence

| Folder title | Date | Box | Folder |
|-------------------------|------------|-----|--------|
| 1981-1982 | 1981-1982 | 4 | 21 |
| 1983, January- March | 1983 | 4 | 22 |
| 1983, April- September | 1983 | 5 | 1 |
| 1983, October- December | 1983 | 5 | 2 |
| 1984, January- May | 1984 | 5 | 3 |
| 1984, June- December | 1984 | 5 | 4 |
| 1985, January | 1985 | 5 | 5 |
| 1985, February | 1985 | 5 | 6 |
| 1985, March | 1985 | 5 | 7 |
| 1985, April-May | 1985 | 5 | 8 |
| 1985, June | 1985 | 5 | 9 |
| 1985, July- September | 1985 | 5 | 10 |
| 1985, October | 1985 | 5 | 11 |
| 1985, November-December | 1985 | 5 | 12 |
| 1986, January- March | 1986 | 5 | 13 |
| 1986, April-September | 1986 | 5 | 14 |
| 1989, undated | 1989, n.d. | 5 | 15 |