

## THE FEIS



Originally a conference of Kings convened for the purpose of governing the land, the Feis is an ancient tradition among the Irish. After necessary legislation was concluded, judgments made, and disputes settled, leisure activities in the form of competitions in sports and fine arts began. Bards and harpists competed for fame in the great hall, which champions battled for honors on the sporting fields, Craftsmen exhibited artifacts which demonstrated their skills, and music filled the air as dancers floated among the throngs who came to enjoy the festivities. Centuries of oppression aimed at changing the Irish into English subjects included an assault on Irish culture, and any caught practicing traditional Irish arts were imprisoned. In spite of this, the culture was preserved in the hills and glens away from the hunting eyes of the stranger. Many traditions disappeared during the persecution, but in the 19th century Gaelic Revival a rebirth in interest saved the culture from total extinction. Many old traditions were revived and among them - the Feis. Feisanna became the focal point for sharing and spreading old songs, dances, music and other customs that had not yet disappeared from living memory, Sounds long heard in secret were once again echoing from the hills in the land that gave them birth. Today, Feisanna carry on the ancient tradition of competition in Irish cultural events, and nowhere is the true heritage of the Gael displayed with more devotion and pride may it forever prosper.