

Hugo Oconór (1734-1779)

Founder of Tucson

Hugh O'Connor, later known as Hugo Oconór, was born in Dublin, Ireland, in December 1734. He was the second son of Daniel O'Connor and Margaret Ryan. Daniel (1694-1769) was head of the O'Connor Don branch of the family, established at Clonalis House in Castlerea, County Roscommon, and descended from the high kings of Ireland and kings of Connaught. His wife Margaret was the eldest daughter of Captain Dominick Ryan of Dublin.

Hugh had three brothers: Dominick, the eldest, who inherited the estate of Clonalis, and two younger, Alexander and Thomas. He had two sisters, Elizabeth, and Jane, who was educated in a 'boarding school for young ladies' in Dublin.

Aged 16 Hugh O'Connor followed the family tradition and went into foreign service, enlisting in the armies of Spain. His great grandfather Daniel (1612-1689) had served in Spain in the 1650s, and his uncle Thomas had achieved the rank of brigadier général in an Irish brigade in France. Thomas obtained an audience for Hugh with another relative, his older cousin Alexander O'Reilly, who was serving in Spain. Hugh left Roscommon at the end of November 1751. He never returned to Ireland.



The Seven Years War was drawing to an end, with the British defeating the French, notably in North America, and attacking the Spanish empire, seizing Havana in 1762. Through the peace of Paris of February 1763, Spain recovered Havana. Spain sent forces to Cuba to oversee the transfer, reorganize the troops and reinforce the defences. O'Connor was sent in April 1763. After his stint in Cuba, he was dispatched to Mexico City, in New Spain, sailing there in March 1765.



O'Connor joined the regimiento de infanteria de Hibernia as a cadet, and steadily raised through the ranks. Over the next 6 years he served in various regions of Spain. The Hibernia regiment was formed in 1709, and its officers were to be exclusively Irish, so as to give young Catholic noblemen an opportunity to have a military career.

The Seven Years War broke out in 1756. Frederick the great of Prussia and George II of Great Britain joined arms against Austria, Russia, France, Saxony, and Sweden. In 1759 Spain joined the coalition against Great Britain and its allies and invaded Portugal in 1762. O'Connor took part in the invasion. In January 1763 he applied to become a knight of the order of Calatrava, and was sponsored by two Irish captains, priests, and the archbishop of Dublin. The king approved it in August 1763.

