

# **A Brief History of the Ancient Order of Hibernians In Akron, Ohio as of 1978.**

The first A.O.H. Division was founded in Akron about the year 1864 at a home that stood on E. Thornton St. close to Camp St., near the railroad tracks. The name and records of this Division have been lost.

Akron St. Mary's Church then located on S. Main St., between Bartges and Thornton Streets, had an A.O.H. Division as early as 1903. Although we lack the name of the A.O.H. Division at Akron St. Mary's Parish, we do have a record of officers of a Men's Division, and a Ladies Auxiliary in 1911.

## Division Officers

Michael O'Connor – President  
Michael Conway – Vice President  
Joseph J. Walsh – Financial Secretary  
Daniel Sullivan – Treasurer  
Harry F. Baker – Recording Secretary

## Ladies Auxiliary

Mrs. James Hamilin – County President  
Mrs. Edward Crow – President  
Mrs. John Connors – Vice President  
Mary Martin – Recording Secretary  
Gertrude Crawford – Financial Secretary  
Anna J. Gillooly – Treasurer  
Margaret Kennan – Sentinel

The fact the Ladies Auxiliary lists County President indicates there must have been other A.O.H. Divisions in Summit County at this time. The St. Mary's A.O.H. held their meetings above a drug store at the corner of S. Main and Bartges Streets during this period.

It seems the written history of the A.O.H. in Akron gradually disappeared during and for a time after World War I. It is reasonable to assume even though the young Irish fought with distinction on the side of the Allies during the First World War, many of the older Irish were reluctant to vocally side against the Germans, who had helped the Irish cause during their many aborted attempts in gaining independence for Ireland.

Anyone familiar with the history of Akron is aware of the difficulties encountered around Akron during the 1920s and 1930s for Catholics, let alone Irish Catholics. It has been proven that at this time, the Ku Klux Klan had a stronghold on the Akron Board of Education. Even the attached 1972 newspaper article from the Akron Beacon Journal mentions how difficult it was for an Irishman to get a job in the Akron Public School System during this period. But as the Great Depression became more severe and the Klan ran short of money, they gradually lost their political clout in the Akron area.

Early in 1953, Joseph Fenton, an employee of the Akron Beacon Journal began to contact a number of Irish in the Akron area for the purpose of forming a division of the Ancient Order of Hibernians. Mr. Fenton was originally from County Kerry, the Republic of Ireland. With the help of such Irishmen as Mark Heffernan, James Flanagan, Captain Steve McGowan, Will Maloy, William Shaughnessy, Joe Aylward, Bill Quigley, Mike Conway, and others, the preliminary work was started. A number of meetings were held at St. Bernard's Church and the Mayflower Hotel in order to obtain an A.O.H. Charter for Summit County. After checking with the State Headquarters of the A.O.H. of Ohio, it was discovered a Summit County Division Charter had been issued some time during the 1940s.

To the surprise of all, this charter was found being used in a Bartges St. Club in order to carry their liquor license. There are many good Irish stories how this charter was removed from the Bartges St. Club, but the problem was soon legally resolved to the satisfaction of the local Irish. This Division #1 Charter was changed to the Dublin Division #2 Ancient Order of Hibernians of Summit County, Ohio on September 18, 1954, and all State and National A.O.H. records were confirmed. In 1969 the name was changed to the Mark Heffernan Division, Ancient Order of Hibernians, Summit County, Ohio. This was done in honor of Mark Heffernan, who died December 1, 1968 at the age of 57, the first president of the Division formed in 1953.

On May 18, 1954, the Ladies Auxiliary of the Akron A.O.H. received their charter. Mrs. Sarah Flynn, Mrs. Bessie Conway, assisted by a number of other women in the Akron area too numerous to identify without missing someone, shared in this achievement. All are in agreement; the success of the Ancient Order of Hibernians in Akron has been due to the activities and support given by the Ladies Auxiliary.

On May 9, 1959, the Junior Division of the A.O.H. in Akron was organized by the special efforts of Mrs. Margaret Judge of Akron. Mrs. Judge served as a National A.O.H., Auxiliary Director, and then the National A.O.H. Auxiliary Secretary from 1971 to 1974. Starting in 1960, and up to the present time, the highlights of the Junior Division has been the Irish Dancers. Their Irish Feis awards indicate they were among the finest in North America.

We have been unable to obtain the name of all the Irish men and women who have contributed to the success of the A.O.H. in Akron. The present members salute the memory of all those, both past and present who have given so much of their time and effort to have made the A.O.H. Division in Akron number one in the State of Ohio.

The research and advice regarding the history of the Ancient Order of Hibernians in Akron was the result of the efforts of the following members:

Bob Finn, Tom Jeffers, Bill Quigley, Francis McDonald, Dick Conway, John Charles, Walt Carmedy, Alexander Hamilton, Will Maloy, Dave Clark, Larry Purdy, Ernie Hider, Jim Lavery, Ed Callahan, John Eagon, Dan Carter, John Doyle, Robert McKee, and William J. O'Brien.

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