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GERMAN & IRISH IMMIGRATION

German and Irish Immigration in the Antebellum Period

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Akron experienced an influx of German and Irish immigration, due particularly to the building and operation of the Ohio & Erie Canal. The immigrants both came directly from Germany, Ireland, and Britain, and migrated from other US cities, such as New York. Both German and Irish immigrants tended to settle in areas/communities with other immigrants from their country.

Germans had immigrated to Northeastern Ohio prior to the 1830s but the largest influx occurred after this time, partially due to the development of the Ohio Erie Canal. Germans left their native land for a combination of reasons, which included political oppression, economic depression (due to crop failures), and religious persecution. The German immigrants took jobs as skilled laborers that included jewelry makers, musical instrument manufacturers, cabinetmakers, and tailors. They also worked in groceries, bakeries, and restaurants.

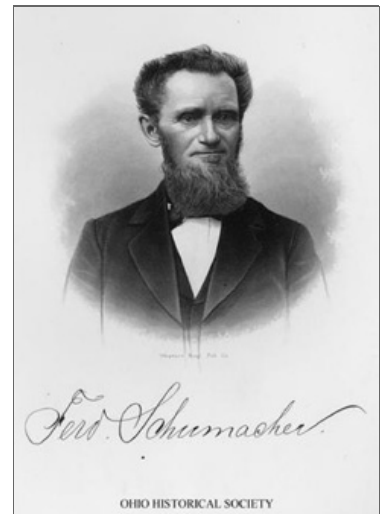
Germans also introduced breweries into the area. The brewing and distilling industry began in Akron in 1865 when German immigrant Frederick Gaessler established the Wolf Ledge Brewery in the center of Akron's German community, the Wolf Ledges area. The plant transitioned half ownership to Wilhelm Burkhardt, who was also a German immigrant, and by 1877 the brewery was known as Burkhardt and Company. After a fire in 1879, which destroyed the brew house, Burkhardt became the full owner. After Wilhelm died of blood poisoning two years later, his wife, Margaretha, took over the company while raising their two small children. She successfully managed the brewery for the next forty years, and by 1908 the brewery was producing over two million bottles of beer. During prohibition, the company produced non alcoholic beverages but resumed brewing after the end of prohibition. The brewery was sold in 1956 and the Burkhardts continued in the realty and insurance businesses after the sale of the plant. In 1991 the Burkhardt name again became associated with brewing when a descendant, Tom Burkhardt opened a brewpub south of Akron.

Another famous Akron German immigrant was Ferdinand Schumacher, who opened a prosperous mill in Akron in the mid 1800s. He is most famous for his success during the Civil War era of pioneering the creation of oat squares and then oat flakes that consumers could eat. Schumacher's business prospered but after his mill caught fire in 1886, the company merged with another Akron oat producer and this then became part of the American Cereal Company, which by 1901 had become the Quaker Oats Company.

German immigrants also helped agriculture in the region by introducing soil-conservation techniques. The immigrants moved to farms that had been abandoned due to soil depletion and revived the soil through methods that were previously not used in the area.

German immigrants maintained their culture and language through schools, social clubs, and cultural organizations. German churches and private

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organizations were the main sponsors of German schools until 1870, because German was then introduced into the curriculum of many public schools. German immigrants also founded several colleges in the Northeastern Ohio area, including John Carroll University, Baldwin-Wallace University, and Notre Dame College of Ohio.

Germans started St. Bernard's, which was Akron's first German Catholic Church, founded in 1861. In the nineteenth century the congregation decided to build a new church, and they specifically instructed their architect to build a larger and grander building than St. Vincent's, the Irish Catholic Church across the city. Unable to raise more than \$2,750, the St. Peter's Bau Verein Society made a plea to King Louis of Bavaria and he sent \$500 which they used to purchase the site on Broadway and Center streets. It was the reported intent of the church's pastor and builders to erect a church "which would excel any other church building in Akron and in the state," spending whatever was necessary to build a church on "the most modern plan," which would be a "monument to Catholicism as well as...to the city of Akron."

The first Irish immigrants arrived in the 1820s but the populations became significantly increased in the 1840s due to the potato famine. The Irish that came to the area were mainly farmers in Ireland, but they became laborers in America taking jobs that were less desirable, which included working on docks and, in the Akron area building the Ohio & Erie Canal. Scots-Irish assimilated easily but Roman Catholic Irish clustered in recognizable communities together. They built churches and along with the Germans formed social organizations. Akron's oldest Catholic parish is St. Vincent's, founded in 1837 with large support from Irish canal workers, although Germans were present there as well until they split off in 1861. As in other areas, Irish faced stereotypes and animosity in the areas where they settled. This hatred spurred the creation of the Know-Nothing (American) Party in the 1850s, which was against new immigration, especially Irish immigration. The Party received its name since it was a secret organization and its members refused to share information about the organization to outsiders. The Know- Nothings were anti-Catholic and feared that Catholics would attempt to take control of the country. Party members attempted to deny Irish jobs in the private sector and representation in politics. The Know-Nothing Party declined by the 1860s due to the party's refusal to take a stance on slavery.

In response to the Know-Nothing Party, Irish immigrants in 1836 in New York started the Ancient Order of Hibernians in American. The organization is a fraternal one that has roots in Ireland and was founded in the 1600 to protect priests who were in danger of persecution. In America, the organization was meant to protect Irish from the Know-Nothing Party but also served and serves as a social club promoting and fostering Irish culture. A chapter was formed in Akron in the 1890s, but the chapter had faded by World War II and was revived in the 1950s. The organization is still active in Akron today and is centered at St. Brendan's Catholic Church.

In contrast to other Irish populations, immigrants in the Northeastern Ohio area did not form into a political "machine" as they did in several other US cities. Also, as with German immigration, Irish immigration slowed after the nineteenth century.

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