

## O'Neill Family



O'Neill's Hardware

Joseph H. O'Neill was born in Ireland in 1836. He came to America with his brother William around the 1850s. Stopping first in New York, the two finally settled in Lake Forest. Together they started a tinsmith business in 1868. William soon decided to focus on the tinsmith and heating pipe aspects of the business, while Joseph established and opened O'Neill's Hardware, between Illinois and Vine avenues. Within a year, his booming business forced a move to a larger building, this one located where the Market Square fountain is today. O'Neill's Hardware store has seen four buildings, three major fires, three Joseph's, and a hundred years of prosperity.

The first of the great fires came in 1883, which destroyed much of Western Avenue, and gutted much of O'Neill's. But Mr. O'Neill was hardly subdued; this time he built a brick building—the first in Lake Forest—which was twice as large as before. Half was devoted to a hardware store which Mrs. O'Neill managed and the other half was used as a tin shop. The O'Neill's six children, Annie, Will, Jennie, Sadie, Joe and Walter, made up the sales' personnel. In addition to serving the Lake Forest community during this time, the O'Neill's supplied all of the handmade tinware for the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

Joseph H. O'Neill's son William J. O'Neill established a tinsmith shop on Western Avenue where the Jewel now stands. William was the first Volunteer Fire Chief of Lake Forest. William had five children: Charles, Evelyn, Helen, Elizabeth, and William. William and Charles served in the Lake Forest Fire Department – William Jr. was honored to follow in his father's footsteps as the second Fire Chief. They are pictured on the original motorized fire truck in 1915.

After Joseph H. O'Neill's death in 1894, his son Joseph W. O'Neill took over the running of the hardware store. In 1916 construction began on Market Square, which meant that the O'Neills had to move. Since the family already owned property on Westminster Avenue., a new store was built there at 265 East Westminster. In addition to running the Hardware store, Joseph W. O'Neill developed real estate on North Oakwood Avenue,

and built two houses near Gorton School. The Lantern restaurant now occupies O'Neill Hardware's former building; there is a plaque on the building commemorating this fact.

In 1918, Joseph W. O'Neill died. The hardware store was run by hired managers from 1918 to 1932, at which point his son Joseph O'Neill III (or, Sr.) took over. Two more fires struck the store, in 1921 and in 1946. Though both fires left extensive damages, this did not hinder the O'Neill family. Under Joseph Sr.'s administration of the store following the third fire, the store was once again remodeled and restored.

Joseph O'Neill Sr. (1910–1978), was a lifelong Lake Forest resident, attending Halsey, Gorton and Deerfield Shields High School. As an adult, he was a very civic-minded Lake Forester. He helped raise funds for the Centennial of Lake Forest. He helped fledgling businesses to get their start in town. He was the president of the Illinois Retail Hardware Association in 1954. He also helped to raise funds to fight polio.

Edward O'Neill, born December 10, 1912, was the younger brother of Joseph O'Neill Sr. The two brothers grew up on Oakwood Avenue and later became the principal stewards of O'Neill Hardware on Westminster. Edward served in the Army in World War II, along with his close friends from the Paley and Fitzgerald families of Lake Forest. After returning from the war, Ed and his brother Joe went their separate ways business-wise. Joe, working in Lake Forest, was instrumental in forming Cotter Company, which is now True Value. Ed helped in creating Ace Hardware from the base of his hardware store in Highland Park.

Ed married Marjorie Higgins, whose father was the head groundskeeper for the Cyrus McCormick estate. They had two sons, Robert and Gerry. Robert has been practicing law in Lake Forest since 1976 and lives in Lake Bluff. He is married to Brenda and they have three children, Ed, Dana and Robert, as well as seven grandchildren.

Joseph Sr.'s son Joseph O'Neill Jr. took over the running of the Hardware Store after his father. He has also served as a volunteer fireman. His brother David began a new business, David O'Neill, Inc., in 1977. Located at 204 Wisconsin Avenue in Lake Forest, David's shop offered flowers and antiques to local shoppers. David, Joseph and their sister Susan Jane are also descended from the Swanton family, who are responsible for the early development of Green Bay Road.

Joseph O'Neill IV (Jr.), has five children, one of whom is Joseph O'Neill V. He lives in Lake Bluff with his wife and 3 children, who are the 6<sup>th</sup> generation of O'Neills in the Lake Forest-Lake Bluff area.