

Finding Aid for the Joseph L. Heffernan Papers, 1922-1940



Collection Number: RG 77/7
Archives & Special Collections
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Descriptive Summary

Title: Joseph L. Heffernan Papers, 1922-1940

Record No.: RG 77/7

Accession No.: MSS 2006.12

Creator: Joseph L. Heffernan

Extent: 1 box, .3 cubic feet

Abstract: Joseph L. Heffernan of Youngstown, Ohio served as Municipal Court judge and then mayor of Youngstown from 1928 to 1932. He also worked as a writer for several local and national newspapers including the Stars & Stripes and a paper for the Bonus Army in Washington, D.C.

Administrative Information

Provenance: Joseph L. Heffernan

Preferred Citation: Joseph L. Heffernan Papers, 1922-1940, RG 77/7, Archives & Special Collections, William F. Maag, Jr. Library, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, Ohio.

Restrictions: None

Processing Information: Processed by S. Victor Fleischer, August 2006

Biographical Sketch

Joseph L. Heffernan was born in Youngstown, one of eight children of Mr. and Mrs. John Heffernan, an Irish-Catholic family.¹ He attended the McGuffey Street School in Youngstown in addition to the Coitsville Center School, Hillman, St. Columba's and Covington. Some of his earliest influences in life were his elementary school teachers, particularly his first teacher, Carrie Kirk, and later Anna Thomas. He also learned a great deal from his Irish grandmother, Mrs. Jane Flynn, who ran a grocery store on the east side of Youngstown. She not only taught him to be thrifty, but also encouraged him to

¹ Information for this biography was taken from the following sources found in the vertical file of the Public Library of Youngstown & Mahoning County. Main Branch: "Heffernan Urges Laws on Wealth," *The Youngstown Vindicator*, 13 January 1933; "Heffernan. 'Boy From Over Tracks.' Made Good in law, Politics and in Journalism." *The Youngstown Telegram*, 31 October 1933; "Mayor Heffernan and His Aides," *The Youngstown Vindicator*, 2 July 1931; "Heffernan Starts on March to Ask Bonus." *The Youngstown Telegram*, 11 June 1932; "'Mayor Joe' Issues 'The B. E. F. News,'" *The Youngstown Telegram*, 30 June 1932; "Heffernan, Scholar, Prints Pink Sheet for Bonus Boys." *The Youngstown Vindicator*, 19 July 1932. 3

read and study, passions he would pursue for the rest of his life. As a child he lived in Smoky Hollow; however, during the panic of 1893 his father moved the family to a farm. While there Joseph learned to perform all the jobs of a farm hand.

At age 14 he went into the rolling mill at the Ohio Works to help contribute to his struggling family. He saved enough to attend business college at night. For three years he worked in the converting mills and continued his studies with Tom McNamara, Jr., a leading Youngstown lawyer. He studied for a time at Valparaiso University until he decided to travel the world. When he was 19 he left his studies to roam America for three years working in construction camps, oil fields, western farms, and on the Los Angeles aqueduct in the Mojave Desert, finally ending up on the waterfront in San Francisco.

At 21 he returned home and Frank Herrick gave him a job on the newspaper Youngstown Telegram where he worked until 1913. Not finding the American newspaper business particularly lucrative, he secured \$100 and traveled to Europe living in Cheapside, London, where he worked for Pomroy Burton, former Youngstownner and then publisher of the London Daily Mail. Then he went to Paris and lived a year and wrote fashion articles for Bernard McManus to pay for his lodging and to finance a trip through Germany. He was in Paris when World War I erupted and he returned home to marry Katharine O'Connor, a newspaperwoman, who died while giving birth to their son. In 1916 he passed the state bar examination and was second in the state. He then established a very successful law practice.

When America declared war on Germany in 1917 he enlisted and was sent to France where he was transferred to the editorial staff of the Stars and Stripes and spent 11 days in the Argonne for the paper. He went into Luxembourg with General John J. "Blackjack" Pershing and saw the German army in retreat. He was the first correspondent to reach Coblenz and was jailed as a suspicious character. At Beaune, France, he taught a class in journalism.

In 1919 he returned to America and started a publishing house in Washington, DC, printing war books. In 1920 he married Beatrice Mary Jones whom he met in London during the war. They had two children, Martha and David.

He returned to Youngstown Christmas 1920 and resumed his law practice. In 1922 he handled the Mahoning County campaign for Governor Vic Donahey and was appointed by him to fill out an unexpired term on the municipal judge bench. Then he was elected to a four-year term as judge and became widely known as "Judge Joe."

In 1928 he was elected mayor of Youngstown, only the second charter mayor of the city. Remembered as a model administration, his tenure was mostly known for its efficiency, fairness, honesty and fiscal responsibility. He faced many difficult decisions and numerous corrupt politicians and was most proud of being able to resist those persons who came to him with "vicious proposals." Eventually, his resistance to them ended his political career.

He lost re-election for mayor in 1932 to Mark E. Moore. While this ended his political aspirations, it did not end his civic duty. In 1932 he headed a group of about 90 local veterans on a march to Washington to demand the soldiers' bonuses that were promised to them after World War I. Once in Washington, he started "The B. E. F. News," the Bonus Expeditionary Forces newspaper and served as editor in chief. The paper, which he hoped would have the

potential of becoming the organ of a new political movement dedicated to “Democratic rule,” achieved much success selling about 50,000 copies of the first issue and the second 100,000. However, he was criticized by the press for his running of the newspaper; it claimed he sought only private gain in connection with the publication and questions arose to his handling of the revenue generated by the sale of the paper (all of which were successfully defended by him and many of his friends and aides).

Heffernan later became legal counsel of the Federal Communications Commission in Washington, D.C. It was at this time that he wrote articles for various publications and delivered speeches and addresses at numerous venues. He was known in his time as a great speaker, great writer and a “lean and austere scholar of erudite magazines.”

Scope and Content Note

This collection was created and compiled by Joseph L. Heffernan. It contains numerous items documenting his life and career from 1922-1940. According to a note that was originally stored with the collection, the materials were probably given by Martha Heffernan Doyle, Joseph Heffernan’s daughter, to one of the professors at Youngstown State University who was interested in his career. The organization imposed on the materials by the creator, donor, or the professor were maintained as much as possible when they were processed.

The bulk of the collection contains correspondence between Heffernan and Ohio Governor Vic Donahey. Alvin Victor Donahey (1873-1946) served as County Auditor from 1905-1909, State Auditor from 1913-1921, the 50th Governor of Ohio serving three terms from 1923-1929, and a United States Senator from 1935-1941. The correspondence covers various political matters of the time, including Donahey’s re-election as Governor and then Senator, the fate of the Democratic Party, the effects of the Great Depression and Prohibition, the Ku Klux Klan, and the Niles, Ohio Riot. The November 1, 1924 riot, which is considered to be “one of the state’s most famous riots,” was characterized by beatings, overturned automobiles, and shootings involving the Ohio Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and their opposition, the Knights of the Flaming Circle.² Bands of armed men freely roamed the streets of Niles, meeting little or no opposition from law enforcement agencies. Ohio state government refused to involve itself in what it felt to be a local problem, which is documented in Donahey’s correspondence with Heffernan who was pleading for action.

Correspondence also exists from 1922-1937 between Heffernan and Newton Diehl Baker (1871-1937). Baker served as the 37th mayor of Cleveland, Ohio from 1912 to 1915 and as Secretary of War from 1916 to 1921. After stepping down as Secretary of War in 1921, Baker moved back to Cleveland to practice law, and never again served in a public office (although he was considered as a candidate for the Democratic nomination for President in 1924, 1928, and 1932). The correspondence dates from this time period.

² The information for the Niles Riot was taken from Robert L. Daugherty, “Problems in Peacekeeping: The 1924 Niles Riot.” in *Ohio History: The Scholarly Journal of the Ohio Historical Society*, Vol. 85. p. 280.

Also included are political speeches made by Heffernan while he was campaigning for mayor, addresses he made while judge, and articles he published in the late 1930s on topics regarding history and politics. Of particular interest to the researcher is an unpublished draft where Heffernan candidly discusses not only his early life, but also his political career including discussions of corrupt politicians and underhanded dealings in city politics at the time that eventually led to his downfall.

While the collection is strong in materials from Heffernan's mayoral years, it is lacking in materials from Heffernan's childhood, early career as a newspaperman, the time he served as judge, and his later career.

Series Description

Series I: Correspondence
Series II: Speeches
Series III: Printed Works
Series IV: Writings
Series V: Financial Papers

Related Materials

None

Index Terms

Joseph L. Heffernan
Judge Joe
Vic Donahey
Newton Diehl Baker
Carl Armstrong
Great Depression
Prohibition
Stars & Stripes
Bonus March
Bonus Army
President Franklin D. Roosevelt
Youngstown Politics
Youngstown Mayors
Ohio Politics
Ohio Governors
Niles, Ohio, Riot
Democratic Party

BOX 1

SERIES I: CORRESPONDENCE

Folder Content

- 1 Correspondence, Incoming, from Vic Donahey, 1923-1940, n.d.
- 2 Correspondence, Incoming, from Newton D. Baker, 1922-1936
- 3 Correspondence, Incoming, from Carl Armstrong, 1929
- 4 Correspondence, Outgoing, to Vic Donahey, 1924-1939
- 5 Correspondence, Outgoing, to Newton D. Baker, 1926-1937

SERIES II: SPEECHES

Folder Content

- 6 Political Speeches, n.d.
- 7 Public Addresses, 1923, 1924, n.d.

SERIES III: PRINTED WORKS

Folder Content

- 8 Published Writings about Joseph L. Heffernan, n.d.

SERIES IV: WRITINGS

Folder Content

- 9 Unpublished draft, n.d.
- 10 Published Works, 1936, 1937

SERIES V: FINANCIAL PAPERS

Folder Content

- 11 Survey of Bonds, 1930