

WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

A series of tributes to hometown heroes who have made a difference.

Jerry Fitzgerald

A native of Kerry County, Ireland, bakery owner and Vigo County Clerk Jeremiah Fitzgerald is best remembered for saving Memorial Hall from condemnation in 1920-21.

Fitzgerald was 19 years old when he migrated to the U.S. in 1892, first locating in Mattoon, Ill. He moved to Vigo County two years later and wed Mary Holland of St. Mary's Village in 1897. Jerry went to work as a deliveryman for Louis Gerhardt's Bakery at 724 S. 12th St. The Fitzgeralds initially resided at 605 S. 13th St., and began raising three children: Margaret, born in 1900; Joseph, born in 1904; and Raymond, born in 1906, the year Jeremiah was naturalized.



Jerry Fitzgerald (third from left) celebrates his 61st birthday with bakery employees in 1934

In 1910, after Gerhardt was elected mayor of Terre Haute, Fitzgerald decided to establish his own bakery. Jerry's Bakery at 209 Ohio St. had a modest beginning but, by adhering to high standards, Fitzgerald soon acquired two adjoining buildings and modern oven equipment. Fitzgerald offered Kew-Bee and Pullman bread, Irish bread, rye bread, Ralston Purina whole wheat bread, raisin bread and a full line of cookies, buns and rolls. Eventually, Fitzgerald was invited to join the Quality Bakers of America, a non-profit organization which tendered memberships only to bakeries long maintaining a reputation for excellence. In 1923 Carl T. Lundstrom, formerly of Sparks Milling Co., joined the business and the two men incorporated as Fitzgerald Baking Co. Meanwhile, Jerry became a community hero by forming a citizens committee in 1920 to "Save Memorial Hall," located next door to his bakery. The building now houses Kesler Law Offices.

Prior to being acquired by the Memorial Hall Association from miniature artist Amalia Kussner Coudert in 1911, the former Second State Bank of Indiana (predecessor of First Financial Bank)—built between 1834 and 1836—was a collectibles shop and fell into disrepair. Though the original structure's tin ceiling dome was replaced by art glass and the exterior received a complete refurbishing, the Indiana State Fire Marshal threatened to condemn it. On Oct. 21, 1921, Fitzgerald's fund-raising efforts reached fruition at the "rededication" of renovated Memorial Hall. The front room was converted into an auditorium and the art glass in the ceiling dome was replaced by 18 tinted portraits of significant Vigo County Civil War soldiers and past bank officers.

Long active in Democratic politics, Fitzgerald was elected Vigo County Clerk in 1932. He did not complete his first term, passing away at the family residence at 1826 Ohio St. on May 27, 1935, at age 62, after a two-month illness. Active in the Knights of Columbus, the Ancient Order of Hibernians and St. Patrick's Church, Jerry is interred at Calvary Cemetery. His widow was named chief deputy clerk by his successor, Catherine S. Fee. The buildings that housed the Ohio Street bakery were sold to Bell Bakeries. The Lundstroms located Fitzgerald Baking Co. at 13th and Crawford streets. It eventually became Ideal-Fitzgerald Baking Co., involving other principals.



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