



Anton Reymann - *Philanthropy*

Still remembered as one of Wheeling's major brewers, Anton Reymann also shared his talents and wealth with his adopted city and state. His most lasting philanthropies were Altenheim in Wheeling and the Reymann Memorial Farm in Hardy County.

Anton Reymann was born in Gaubickelheim, Germany, on September 15, 1837 and immigrated to Wheeling in 1853. At about age 17, he began an apprenticeship at a brewery founded by his father and Peter Paul Beck. He later took charge of the business upon his father's retirement and Beck's death. He married Thusnelda Beck, a daughter of P.P. Beck, in 1862. By the late 1800s, the brewery was the largest in the state, with a capacity of 100,000 barrels per year. By 1904, it was said to be producing 150,000 barrels per year.

Reymann's other business interests included the Elm Grove Railroad. When he acquired it, the narrow gauge, horse-drawn railroad was in bad financial condition. He added steam engines and later electrified the system. During this time period, he also bought Wheeling Park and turned it into a popular amusement area for local residents.

The Reymann family also owned a 962-acre farm and had a summer home in Hardy County. After his son Lawrence died at age 33 in 1911, Anton Reymann donated the farm in his memory to the West Virginia Agricultural Experimental Station with the goal of breeding Ayrshire cattle there. Although the herd was later moved to a farm near Morgantown, WVU continues to use the Reymann Memorial Farm for livestock, poultry, and crop research and recently as an experimental fish hatchery.

In addition to supporting numerous other local charities, Reymann was largely responsible for the creation of Altenheim. He is said to have been concerned about the welfare of immigrant women who had come to this country as domestic servants, worked during their productive lives in the homes of Wheeling's wealthy, and had nowhere to live out their declining years. Whether or not his concern was specifically for this group of women, he was certainly the founder of Altenheim, called in his day the "Home for Aged and Friendless Women." In 1891, he purchased the Mt. Belleview Hotel, an out-the-pike hotel used by Wheeling's wealthy citizens as a summer residence. He proceeded to undertake extensive remodeling and renovation, making the 40-room, 1878 hotel "practically a new building, as well fitted for the uses of a home for aged women as if the architect had in the beginning had this in view."

In addition to purchasing and renovating the hotel, Reymann offered to bear all of the expenses of the home for a year. And, he included in his will \$25,000 (now worth over \$280,000) in a trust, the income from which was to be paid to Altenheim until the institution became self-sustaining.

An editorial appearing after his death in 1924 stated, "He was generous to every good cause; to the churches, to the hospitals, to the various relief funds for the needy, and to the humane institutions. The splendid Altenheim Home which he established and maintained as an individual charity for many years was typical of his kindness of heart and his wish to serve his fellow men."