

2017 WALKS OF LIFE HONOREES Norris Brothers Company

(Norris, Weir, and McBride
Families)

In 2017, the fourth and fifth generations of the family-owned Norris Brothers Company celebrate the 150th anniversary of the business that their great-grandfather

started in 1867, just two years after the end of the Civil War. It was then that Thomas Norris, who 20 years earlier had immigrated with his family to Cleveland from Galbally in County Limerick, started a drayage business using horse-drawn wagons to haul freight from railroad cars and boats anchored along the Cuyahoga River to warehouses, retail stores and small manufacturing plants. At the time, Cleveland, with a population of 43,417, was becoming a major transportation center. In the following decade, Norris added house moving to his list of services.

In 1883, the company became Thomas Norris and Son after Thomas's youngest son, William J., joined his father in running the business. They advertised themselves as "Movers of Safes, Machinery, and Heavy Weights a Specialty." After his father retired, William Norris moved the company in 1913 from West 9th Street to its present location on Davenport Ave. overlooking Lake Erie. Three years later, following the deaths of both Thomas and William, the latter's wife, Jennie, took over the business.

Over time, all of William and Jennie's 10 children worked in the family business, with the men handling the day to day operations and the women doing the bookkeeping, record keeping, and correspondence. Although the company was renamed "The Norris Brothers Co," as Jennie's granddaughter Catherine Weir McBride would later recall, "Grandma was the boss." At one point, the company's officers were all women, including two of Jennie's daughters, two daughters-in-law, and a granddaughter. The fourth generation to run the company included siblings Catherine Weir McBride (along with her husband Ken McBride), Bernard Weir, Jack Weir, Francis Weir, and J. Michael Weir, and their first cousin Maurice "Moe" Norris. A fifth generation has joined Catherine and Ken McBride and Francis Weir, who are still active in the business.

Highpoints in the company's history range from the delivery of structural steel for the construction of Public Hall in the 1920s to providing moving and rigging equipment for the installation of the Johnny Kilbane sculpture in 2014. In recent years Norris Brothers Co. has expanded to many different segments of business, including heavy transportation, rigging, and moving and assembling machinery, along with the many facets of concrete work. Whether it's hauling a 420,000 pound crown for a 50,000 ton press for Alcoa, 140-ton machinery for General Motors, or 110-footlong high-pressure tanks for NASA, or removing and replacing 1,000,000 square feet of concrete floor and foundations for Ford Motor, the company prides itself on meeting challenges with the help of loyal employees from at least a half dozen local unions. *Above: William & Jennie Norris and their ten children.*

