

Nelson Evans Sears (1876 – 1948)

Just 14 days after Colorado was admitted to the Union, Nelson Evans Sears was born on 15 Aug 1876 in Plano, Little Rock Township, Kendall County, Illinois, to Charles Madison Sears and Katherine Evans. In his journal¹ dated 1895 he said he was born "of English and Welsh parentage".

Indeed, Sears is an English name traceable back to Nelson's ancestor, Richard Sares, who immigrated to Plymouth Colony before 1632. However, while Evans is a common Welsh name, Katherine Evans' ancestor William Evans was born in Delgany Parish, Co. Wicklow, Ireland immigrating to Ontario, Canada in 1871. Thus, Nelson's journal should have read "of English and Irish parentage".

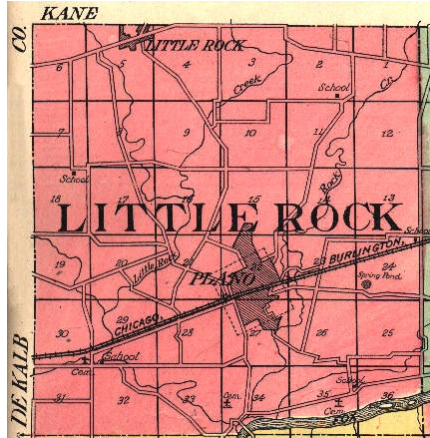


Fig 1. Little Rock Township, Kendall County, Illinois

Tragically, Nelson's mother, Katherine Evans, died one day after he was born. About three years later Nelson's father, Charles Madison, was married to Celia Chambers on 19 Nov 1879 in Plano. A few months later the family of three moved to Scranton, Iowa in 1880² living at- and working on the old John Henning farm two miles from town.

After just two years in Scranton, Nelson returned to his home state of Illinois where he made his home with his grandparents, Archibald Sears and Rachel Maria Carver in Sandwich (just 5 miles west of his hometown, Plano).

In 1899 he went to Aurora Nebraska where he began farming 80 acres of land that his grandmother had bought for him in 1897 for \$2600. Nelson farmed that land for about three years whereupon he sold it early in 1901 for \$7200. Subsequently he traveled to Colorado in an emigrant car³ chartered by a David Tittler⁴ arriving in Akron in March of that year.

He landed in the harvest fields southwest of Akron, Washington County, Colorado where he for Ira M. Barnhouse (After harvest he went on a brief trip to California then returned to his father's farm in Aurora, Nebraska in the fall of 1901.

Two years later he returned to Washington County Colorado in 1903 where he resumed work with Ira M Barnhouse.

Marriage and Family

On 20 Sep 1907 Nelson was united in marriage to Ira Morgan Barnhouse's daughter, Edna Maude.⁵



Fig 2. Edna Maude Barnhouse and Nelson Evans Sears

Move to Akron

Although remaining active in farming and land transactions in the western part of Washington County, in 1909 Nelson and his wife Edna moved to the town of Akron, Washington County, Colorado where he purchased Lots 1, 2, & 3 facing Golden St. (present Date Ave.) and Lots 10, 11, & 12 facing Gunnison St (present E 5th St), Block 11, Original Town of Akron.⁶



Fig 3. The Nelson Sears's house at Golden and Gunnison (present 5th & Date) about 1939

On 22 Mar 1910 Nelson and Edna's first child, Alva Raymond Sears, was born in Akron. Their second, Margaret May Sears, was born 23 May 1912, and their third and last child, Faye Eleanor Sears, was born 8 Aug 1914. See [Appendix I](#) for a complete family group sheet.



Fig 4. Nelson Evans Sears, unidentified young man, Alva (in shadow), Maude Barnhouse, Faye and Margaret (year est 1916)



Fig 5 Nelson Evans Sears, Alva Raymond Sears, Margaret May Sears, Edna Maude Barnhouse, and Faye Eleanor Sears
Time of picture about 1941 just before Alva was conscripted for duty in World War II (served in England).

Nelson Sears Property Acquisitions in western Washington County

Image	Accession	Names [†]	Date	Doc #	State	Meridian	Twp - Rng	Aliquots	Sec. #	County
	277460	SEARS, NELSON E	6/18/1912	015094	CO	6th PM	001S - 055W	E½NE¼	10	Washington
	62645	SEARS, NELSON E	5/17/1909	0585	CO	6th PM	001S - 055W	S½SE¼	3	Washington
							001S - 055W	W½NE¼	10	Washington
	439514	SEARS, NELSON F	10/30/1914	01224	CO	6th PM	001S - 054W	E½SW¼	7	Washington
							001S - 054W	Lot/Trct 3	7	Washington
							001S - 054W	Lot/Trct 4	7	Washington

Fig 6 BLM Records showing Nelson Sears' Land Acquisitions in Washington County⁷

On 17 May 1909 Nelson proved up on the south one-half of the southeast quarter of Section 3, and the west half of the northeast quarter of Section 10 both in Township 1S of Range 55W, Washington County, Colorado. He was issued Homestead Certificate No. 0585 from the Register of the Land Office at Sterling, Colorado.

On 18 Jun 1912 Nelson purchased the eastern half of the NW quarter of Sec 10, Twp 1S, Range 55W. By 1912 he owned the northeast quarter of Section 10 and the adjacent north half of the southeast quarter section. All of Nelson's land was a stone's throw from the land purchased by Ira M. Barnhouse, his father-in-law.

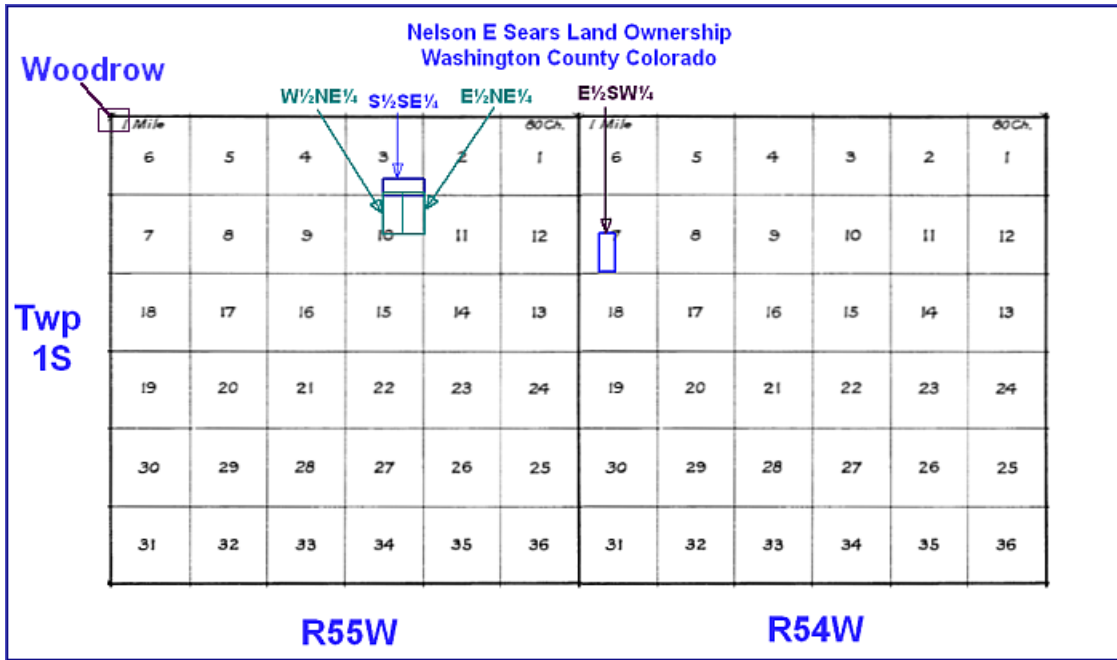


Fig 7. Nelson E Sears land ownership in the far western part of Washington County

Rural Free Delivery (RFD)

In 1914 Nelson hired on to the Rural Free Delivery (RFD-[Appendix II](#)) system of the U.S. Post Office and began carrying mail on **11 Sep 1914** on Rural Route 1 northwest out of the Akron.⁸

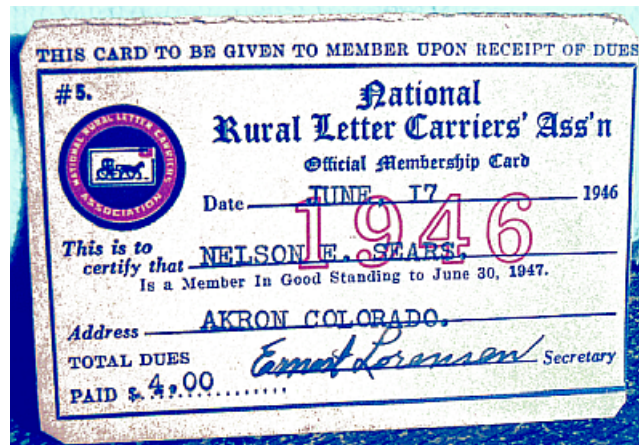


Fig 8. Nelson E Sears National Rural Letter Carriers' Assn
His membership extended after he had quit

It appears, however, he was not the very first carrier on RR-1. The following article appeared in the Akron Pioneer Press on May 29, 1914:

The postmaster requests all patrons of Rural Route No. 1 to have their boxes in place ready for the reception of mail on **Monday, June 1 [1914]**. The carrier will make his initial trip on that day, and thereafter the route will be served on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday of each week. On each Saturday, the carrier will be at the post office and will deliver route mail to patrons calling for it.

In the November 26, 1915 edition of the *Akron Pioneer Press* two notices of interest appeared:

Rural Route Extended. The extension of Rural Route No. 1 a distance of two miles northwest and one mile north will become effective on December 1st [1915].

Petition for Rural Route J. Luster Purdy is busy circulating a petition for another Rural Route from Akron to run east and north. This is a route that is very badly needed.

Nelson Sears carried mail for 25 years until 1941 at which time he retired from the Post Office.

Washington County Justice of the Peace

After Nelson's retirement from the US Post Office he assumed the duties of Justice of the Peace⁹ for Washington County, Colorado, a position he retained until his death, 17 May 1948. His office was in the Washington County Court House; this author remembers that, at one point, his desk was out in the open in Washington County Court House sitting on the staircase landing between the first and second floors.

I.O.O.F

Nelson was very active in the Akron chapter of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF)¹⁰. According to the "30" pin seen in Fig 8 below he was initiated into the order 10 Mar 1910. He was elected Vice Grand Marshall in December of 1912,¹¹ and installed Thursday night, 2 Jan 1913.¹² It appears he rose quickly and steadily through the ranks.

"The Akron I.O.O.F Lodge held a busy session on Thursday evening [1 Jan 1914]. John Burkholtz and Axsel (*sic*) Larsen were taken in as members. The following officers were installed for the present term: Nelson Sears, Past Grand; John Collins, Noble Grand...etc.¹³



Fig 9. Nelson Sears IOOF pin Chapter 30, Akron Colorado

Nelson Sears Death

On 17 May 1948 Nelson E. Sears died of "acute decompensation", that is, acute decompensated heart failure in modern terms.¹⁴ The underlying causes were cardiovascular disease and hypertension.



Fig 10. Nelson E Sears and Edna M Barnhouse gravestone located near Akron Colorado¹⁵





Nelson E Sears IOOF
grave marker

Similar marker in good condition

Appendix I

Family Group Record for Nelson Evans Sears

Husband	Nelson Evans Sears		
Born	15 Aug 1876	Plano, Kendall Co, Illinois	
Christened			
Died	17 May 1948	Akron, Washington Co, Colorado	
Cause of Death	Cardio-vascular disease due to acute decompensation due to hypertension		
Buried	19 May 1948	Akron, Washington Co, Colorado	
Father	Charles Madison Sears (1851-1944)		
Mother	Katherine Evans (1850-1876)		
Marriage	20 Sep 1907	Akron, Washington Co, Colorado	
Wife	Edna Maude Barnhouse		
Born	24 Apr 1879	South Bloomingville, Hocking Co, Ohio	
Christened			
Died	24 Aug 1971	Brush, Morgan Co, Colorado	
Cause of Death	Cardiac Arrest. Other significant condition: Generalized arteriosclerosis		
Buried	24 Aug 1971	Akron Cemetery, Washington Co, Colorado	
Father	Ira Morgan Barnhouse (1848-1914)		
Mother	Mary Francis Albin (1854-1924)		
Children			
1	M	Alva Raymond Sears	
Born	22 Mar 1910	Akron, Washington Co, Colorado	
Christened			
Died	27 Aug 1984	Akron, Washington Co, Colorado	
Cause of Death	Respiratory arrest due to Carcinoma lung		
Buried	28 Aug 1984	Akron Cemetery, Washington Co, Colorado	
Spouse	Ethyl Mary Aitchison (1901-)	13 Nov 1951 - Denver, Denver Co, Colorado	
2	F	*Margaret May Sears	
Born	23 May 1912	Akron, Washington Co, Colorado	
Christened			
Died	18 Jan 1987	Akron, Washington Co, Colorado	
Cause of Death	Respiratory arrest due to pneumonia and lung cancer		
Buried	21 Jan 1987	Akron Cemetery, Washington Co, Colorado	
Spouse	Clifford Coyne Cooley (1912-1979)	21 Jun 1936 - Akron, Washington Co, Colorado	
3	F	Faye Eleanor Sears	
Born	8 Aug 1914	Akron, Washington Co, Colorado	
Christened			
Died	3 Apr 1997	Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz Co, California	
Buried	Abt Apr 1997	Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz Co, California	
Spouse	Luke Homer Covington (1911-1976)	7 Apr 1933 - Sterling, Logan Co, Colorado. (Divorced)	
Spouse	Paul Hunter Johnston (1899-1962)	19 Dec 1937 - Sterling, Logan Co, Colorado. (Divorced)	

Sources

Birth: State of Colorado, Office of the Local Registrar of Vital Statistics, Certified Copy of Death Record; District No. 237, File No. 5

Death: State of Colorado, Office of the Local Registrar of Vital Statistics, Certified Copy of Death Record, District No. 237, File No. 30.

Burial: State of Colorado, Office of the Local Registrar of Vital Statistics, Certified Copy of Death Record, District No. 237, File No. 30.

Sources: Burial observed by and site photographed by Daniel Berton Cooley

Appendix II

Rural Free Delivery

The United States Post Office Rural Free Delivery (RFD) service began in 1896. Prior to this time, people living in the country had to pick up their mail at the post office in town. The RFD system was made permanent in 1902.

Today it is difficult to envision the isolation that was the lot of farm families in early America. In the days before telephones, radios, or televisions were common, the farmer's main links to the outside world were the mail and the newspapers that came by mail to the nearest post office. Since the mail had to be picked up, this meant a trip to the post office, often involving a day's travel, round-trip. The farmer might delay picking up mail for days, weeks, or even months until the trip could be coupled with one for supplies, food, or equipment.

John Wanamaker of Pennsylvania was the first Postmaster General to advocate rural free delivery (RFD). Although funds were appropriated a month before he left office in 1893, subsequent Postmasters General dragged their feet on inaugurating the new service so that it was 1896 before the first experimental rural delivery routes began in West Virginia, with carriers working out of post offices in Charlestown, Halltown, and Uvilla.

Many transportation events in postal history were marked by great demonstrations: the Pony Express, for example, and scheduled airmail service in 1918. The West Virginia experiment with rural free delivery, however, was launched in relative obscurity and in an atmosphere of hostility. Critics of the plan claimed it was impractical and too expensive to have a postal carrier trudge over rutted roads and through forests trying to deliver mail in all kinds of weather.

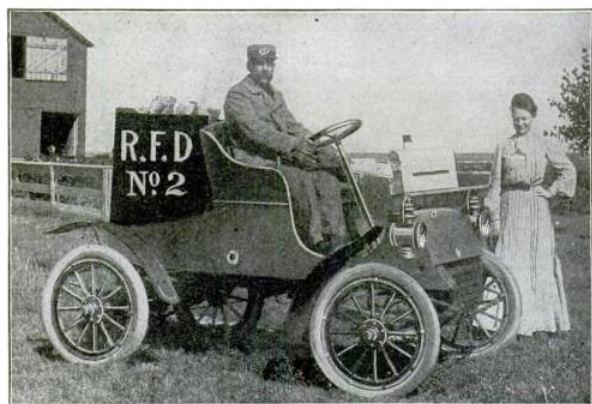
However, the farmers, without exception, were delighted with the new service and the new world open to them. After receiving free delivery for a few months, one observed that it would take away part of life to give it up. A Missouri farmer looked back on his life and calculated that, in 15 years, he had traveled 12,000 miles going to and from his post office to get the mail.

A byproduct of rural free delivery was the stimulation it provided to the development of the great American system of roads and highways. A prerequisite for rural delivery was good roads. After hundreds of petitions for rural delivery were turned down by the Post Office because of unserviceable and inaccessible roads, responsible local governments began to extend and improve existing highways. Between 1897 and 1908, these local governments spent an estimated \$72 million on bridges, culverts, and other improvements. In one county in Indiana, farmers themselves paid over \$2,600 to grade and gravel a road in order to qualify for RFD.

The impact of RFD as a cultural and social agent for millions of Americans was even more striking, and, in this respect, rural delivery still is a vital link between industrial and rural America.



Typical early RFD horse-drawn vehicle. The man is not Nelson Sears. – Courtesy USPS

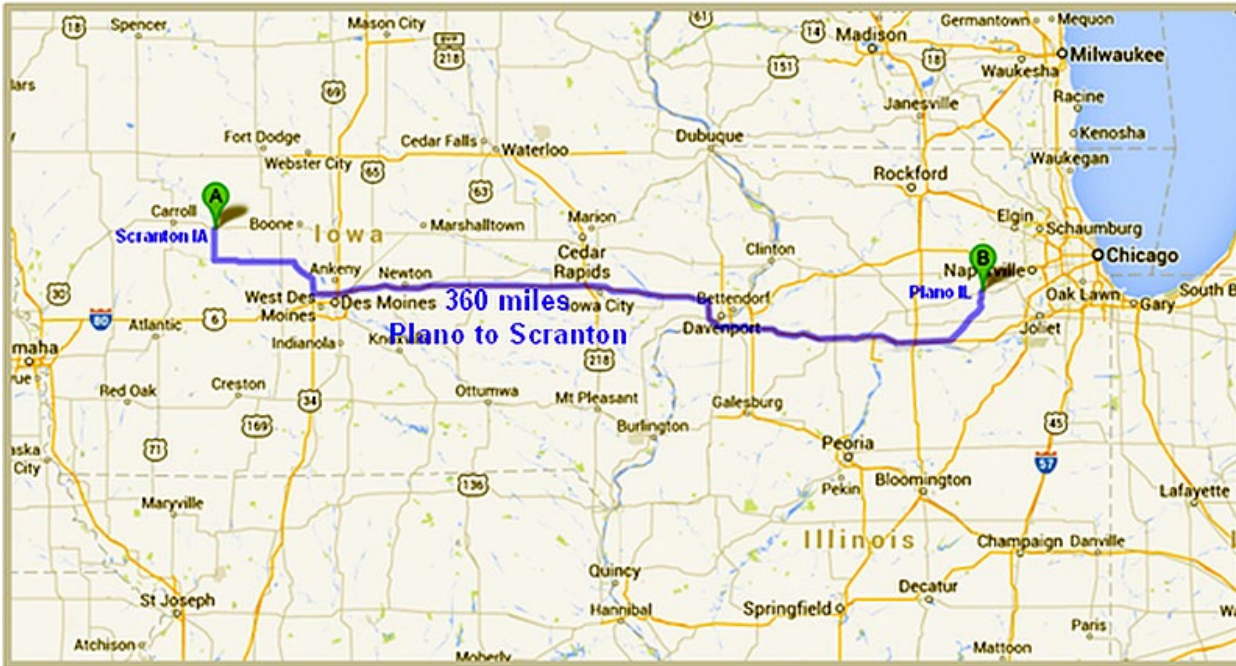


Typical early RFD motor-driven vehicle. The man is not Nelson Sears and the woman is not Edna Barnhouse

Endnotes

¹ "Genealogy of the Sears Family" in a journal written by Nelson Sears dated 1895. The following quote was added at a later time in different ink: "From Bible records, memory records of depicted generation, and writer's memory"

² Plano Illinois to Scranton Iowa, almost due west



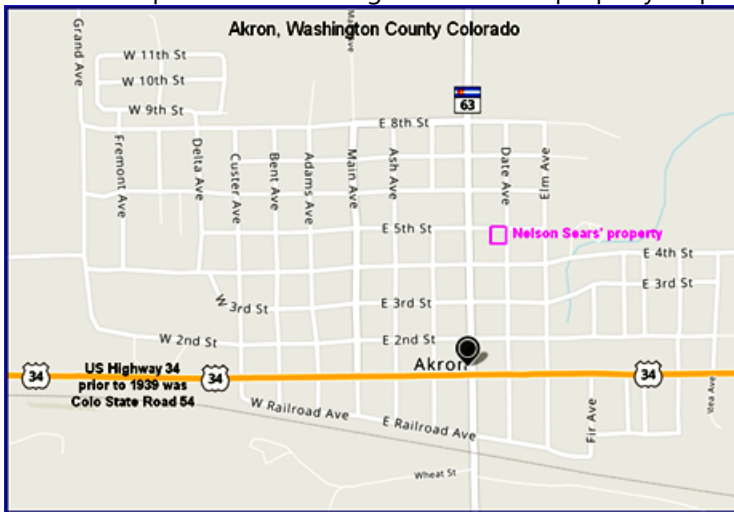
³ "Exploring Diversity in Pennsylvania History; Public Space on the Rails; 19th Century Life on the Rails: A Microcosm of American Society". An emigrant car was a railway car set aside for transporting emigrants, usually at special rates, where an emigrant, in early days, was an American who left the East or South to settle on the western frontier. Besides first and second class railroad cars, there was a "3rd class", the emigrant cars whose accommodations were quite basic consisting of wooden bench seating in an otherwise barren boxcar. Travel in these rudimentary conditions was definitely not conducive to long distance or overnight travel. By the 1880s improvements were made on some railroad lines with the installation of a common cooking stove and a toilet. Generally, baggage, mail, and emigrant cars were placed at the front of the train. The term for these cars was "head-end" the position of which created a safety buffer for the 1st and 2nd-class rear cars.

⁴ David L Tittler was Washington County Assessor from 1906-1910

⁵ Nelson E. Sears and Miss Edna M. Barnhouse joined in holy matrimony 20th day of Sept in the year of our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and Seven



⁶ Current map of Akron showing Nelson Sears' property acquisitions



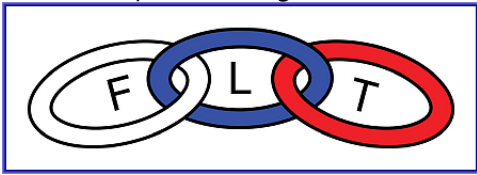
⁷ U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, General Land Office Records
<http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov/default.aspx>

⁸ Route One past Fremont Buttes



⁹ Wikipedia - A justice of the peace (JP) is a judicial officer of a lower court who is elected or appointed by means of a commission (letters patent) to keep the peace. In past centuries the term commissioner of the peace was often used with the same meaning. Depending on the jurisdiction, such justices dispense summary justice or merely deal with local administrative applications in common law jurisdictions. Justices of the peace are appointed or elected from the citizens of the jurisdiction in which they serve, and are (or were) usually not required to have any formal legal education in order to qualify for the office. Some jurisdictions have varying forms of training for JPs. In the United States, the justice of the peace typically presides over a court that hears misdemeanor cases, traffic violations, and other petty criminal infractions. The justice of the peace may also have authority over cases involving small debts, landlord and tenant disputes, or other small claims court proceedings. Proceedings before justices of the peace are often faster and less formal than the proceedings in other courts. In some jurisdictions a party convicted or found liable before a justice of the peace may have the right to a trial de novo before the judge of a higher court rather than an appeal strictly considered. A justice of the peace also performs civil marriages.

¹⁰ The Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) is a fraternal organization derived from the British Odd Fellows service organizations of the 18th century. The North American order was founded Baltimore, Maryland, on April 26, 1819 when Thomas Wildey and four members of the Order from England instituted Washington Lodge #1 which received its charter from Manchester Unity of Odd Fellows in England. The Order is also known as "The Three Link Fraternity", referring to the Order's "Triple Links" logo – three links contain the letters F, L and T, (Friendship, Love and Truth).



In 1971 the IOOF changed its constitution, removing its whites only clause. In 1979 the Order had 243,000 members.

¹¹ *Akron Weekly Pioneer Press*, Dec. 13, 1912.

¹² *Ibid*, Jan 10, 1913. "After the installation a banquet was served at the City Restaurant by John M. Collins. The roast, turkey, and other good things disappeared as if by magic. The I.O.O.F in Akron is in a flourishing condition, new members coming in nearly [every] meeting".

¹³ *Ibid*, Jan 9, 1914. "Akron Lodge has had a good growth during the past year and the prospects are said to be good for growth of the order during the present year".

¹⁴ Wikipedia - Acute decompensated heart failure (ADHF) is a sudden worsening of the signs and symptoms of heart failure, which typically includes difficulty breathing (dyspnea), leg or feet swelling, and fatigue.[1] ADHF is a common and potentially serious cause of acute respiratory distress. The condition is caused by severe congestion of multiple organs by fluid that is inadequately circulated by the failing heart. An attack of decompensation can be caused by underlying medical illness, such as myocardial infarction, an abnormal heart rhythm, infection, or thyroid disease.

¹⁵ Akron Cemetery is located one mile west on US 34 and 1/2 mile north of Akron, Washington County, Colorado

