

HENRICO COUNTY #1, MARY RYAN DIVISION

During the summer of 2014 several ladies of the now closed Richmond Division, Adele Clark conducted a recruitment at St Michael's Catholic Church in Glen Allen, Virginia. The response was very positive that the new HENRICO COUNTY, #1 DIVISION and with their first Officers were installed October 28, 2014. Then came the challenge to find a name. During that time several different article about the Irish during the Civil War was in the local news.

After much searching and review this new group of Ladies settled on the of THE MARY RYAN DIVISION. This decision was made to honor an Irish immigrant girl who worked at the ammunition depot for the Confederate Army on Browns Island.

"Mary Ryan and the Brown's Island Explosion. Among the workers at the Confederate Laboratory on Brown's Island was 18 year old Mary Ryan. Mary Ryan was born in Ireland, in approximately 1843. Her father's name was Michael Ryan, and she was named after her mother. She was the sixth of seven children that her parents had, and by the 1860 Census they had moved from Ireland and were now located in the Second District of Richmond, at Oregon Hill. There the family stayed into the 1860s and the beginning of the Civil War. Mary went to work at the Confederate Laboratory on Brown's Island.

On Friday, March 13th, 1863, Mary Ryan was at work within the Confederate Laboratory filling friction primers. As Mary was filling the primers with the coarse black powder, she made a terrible and deadly mistake. One of the primers "stuck on the varnishing board and she struck the board three times very hard on the table to drive out the primer."

First there was a small blast, as the individual primer exploded, sending Ryan, "up to the ceiling." And then, as she began to descend to the floor of the one-story structure, a chain reaction began. The explosion of the primer struck sparks about the building and caught the loose grains of powder on fire. Other girls, working at their jobs, could do nothing as rifle cartridges and friction primers were engulfed by the flames and then exploded. As the secondary blasts hit, Mary Ryan was still falling to the ground from the first explosion, and the second, much larger blast forced her to be "again, blown up" tearing down half the building and killing, wounding and throwing in the air or upon the floor the operatives who were engaged in their labors. There were in the building some eighty or a hundred hands, chiefly females, of different ages, from twelve to sixty years."

In the aftermath of the blast, a badly burned and injured Mary Ryan was taken to her father's home at Oregon Hill. There she languished in pain for three days, before dying on March 16th, 1863. Mary Ryan was buried at Hollywood Cemetery, only a couple of blocks away from her father's home on Oregon Hill.

Since the one of the goals of the Ladies AOH at their beginning was to assist Irish immigrant women and children to acquire safe housing and work, this exemplified the need for our endeavors then and now."

In the first months of the division we grew from 15 to 20 plus. As of December 2019 our numbers have grown to 43. Our first President Lori Forbes has also served as Virginia State President.

Mary Ryan Division President 2014-2021

Lori Forbes 2014 - 2017

Sharon Drennan 2018 - 2019

Annie McEntee 2019 - 2021