

Orleans County Historical Association

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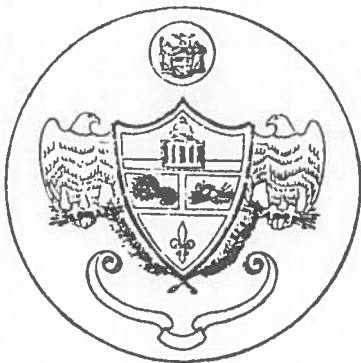
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Italians, Poles, Irish, English, German, Black migrants, Puerto Rico
Swan Library

4 N. Main St.

Albion. N. Y. 14411



Orleans County Historical Association

INTERVIEW

Mr. Chester A. Broughton
% Timmy's Adult Home
238 West Center Street
Medina, New York



Interviewed by:

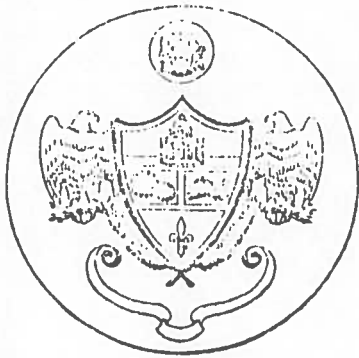
Arden R. McAllister, County Historian

Helen M. McAllister

November 13, 1978

B Chester Broughton (born 1891)

Mc McAllister, Arden/Helen



Orleans County Historical Association

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The purpose of this project is to collect information about the historical development of Orleans County by means of tape-recorded conversations with people whose experiences reflect the county's growth.

These tapes and transcriptions will be preserved as educational resources and possible publication (all or in part).

I hereby release this tape and transcription to the Orleans County Historical Association.

Chester A. Broughton

Signed

Nov. 13, 1978

Date

Understood and agreed to:

Heleen M. McAllister
Orden R. McAllister

INTERVIEWER

Nov. 13, 1978

Date

B I was born in Medina, October 6, 1891 on Catherine Street, the second house north of Eagle Street on the east side, counting the corner house.

Mc Who was the doctor?

B Dr. Emily Swett, I believe. We had two women doctors in Medina: Dr. Swett and Dr. Myra Gillett; none since that I know of. Well now wait a minute! We've got one now. What's her name? Birdsong?

Mc Dr. Singson.

B Singson. Well, Birdsong, Singson! What's the difference in a singson and a birdsong? (laughs). My father was born in Canada just west of Niagara Falls, Ontario. His mother belonged on this side of the lake. His father was a Canadian citizen and he was born on the 4th day of July in 1862. He was very proud of being born on the 4th of July. His parents moved over here when he was six weeks old. Father's name was Albert Strawn Broughton. Now the old Scottish spelling was Straghan. Now the Straghn's were Quakers. They were in Pennsylvania under William Penn and they were persecuted because they wouldn't fight in the Revolution. They hiked for Canada, to Novia Scotia I believe. Then they wandered around and some of them got over west of Niagara Falls, Ontario. Mother's name was Helen Flecher and she came over (I can't think of the little town near Geneseo). They tell me that the New England states are so full of Flechers you can't count 'em! Her mother came from the old country, England. Her maiden name was Eliza Pitt and she was I believe, a niece of the younger William Pitt. That's a family story!

Mc Did you have brothers or sisters?

B I had one brother who died before I was born, of Scarlet Fever, which was a killer in those days. I had two sisters in between us and the older sister was six years older than I and the younger sister was three, I guess. The younger sister died of T.B. at the age of 19

Mc You were born here in Medina and went to what school?

B I've lived here all of my life. I went to what used to be the Medina Free Academy, which they tore down and built the present high school. The high school that I went to was on the same plot on South Academy Street. It was Medina sandstone. They moved it and later tore it down.

Mc Do you remember when the high school was moved?

B I lived right across the street from it at 409 South Academy St., and I disapproved of their moving it because I felt there wasn't any use. They might as well have tore it down right then. Just the same as they tore down Oak Orchard Street school, which was a good building, brown Medina sandstone.

Mc You worked a good part of your life in the Swett Iron Works?

B I worked for the A.L.Swett Iron Works for about fifty years. I never earned a dollar anyplace else.

Mc You began working a bit young in life?

B I began at nine years, on Saturdays and holidays and vacations. We worked all holidays except Christmas and Labor Day, and the 4th of July.

Mc What kind of a job did you do as a young boy?

B I sorted the stamped pieces of hinges that went to the head stay-rollers, so that the rough edge of the stamping would all be alike so that when they put them in the press for the next stamping, they would be on the inside. Anybody could do it but I could do it just as fast as a man could.

Mc How much did you get an hour?

B I don't believe I should mention it! People won't believe it!! I got two and a half cents per hour for an eight hour day. A regular day was ten hours for years afterwards. Being a kid I just worked the eight hours.

Mc You father worked there also?

B My father was Superintendent of the plant; had been for years and was, up until just before his death... about '62 or '63. Can't remember too good.

Mc Swett Iron Works was located just where, at that time?

B At that time it was on the west side of Glenwood Avenue, but I prefer the name of Rock Street which it always used to be. They built the plant, increased it in size anumber of times. Really it was very progressive and it made some good money. I won't tell you what percentage they paid for one year on their stock because maybe they wouldn't like for me to tell it! You wouldn't believe it!!

Mc They did real well?

B They made a lot of money! They made enough money for A.L.Swett to venture into the electric business, which wasn't very strenous

at the time. When he first started in, there was a dam right in back of where the Central Foundry was, which was also Swett Iron Works before they sold out to the Central Foundry. They got their power from that dam. The Bignal Foundry was farther along the canal towards the center of town and they had a dam across Oak Orchard where they got their power. The Weldon Hill Flour Mill got their power from Medina Falls, and most people in Medina don't know there is such a place!! There is! Disregarding Niagara Falls, I think it is probably the biggest falls in western New York. I don't know of any bigger. Today as I understand it, it isn't doing anything. Thats too bad. The Weldon Hill Mill was a flour mill and A.L.Swett, when he wanted to increase his power plant, bought it. They ^{were} rebuilding it when it caught fire. After the fire they rebuilt some of it, and built ^{here} and there into their power plant for produce total electricity, for ten or a dozen years. Then that wasn't enough and he went down and built the dam and power plant at Glenwood Lake. Oak Orchard Creek down thru there was beautiful; a deep gully, well wooded, nice trees on each side and it was beautiful! They put the dam down where they did and I distinctly remember them building it. I went down there often to watch it, where there's an earthware dam and a concrete core. It was during WW I that they put the Waterport Dam in. I went down there one night. I left here about dark with another man to help me repair a pump down there and we didn't get home 'til about 2-3 o'clock in the morning. Thought nothin' of that you know. It had to be done.

Mc Where was that mill located in relation to the Medina Falls?

B The Falls face the west, and they was this side to the west, on the south bank of the Oak Orchard Creek, below the dam. I'm pretty sure that it was big enough and wide enough so one of the upper stories, I don't know whether it was the 2nd or 3rd, came out on the tow path of the canal so they could load from there. That's my impression as a kid. I wasn't only 8-9 years old when it burned down. We lived on the corner of Catherine and Eagle then. That was a new house that father built when I was five. I remember standing in the back yard and watching that fire!

The heat was so intense, boards went up in the heat! Flaming boards! I saw it!!

Mc What kind of Fire Department did they have?

B Volunteer. Totally. I'm pretty sure back in those days they didn't have anything but a man-pulled hose cart to fight fire.

Mc That must have been before the last widening of the canal?

B I might have been 10, and that would be 1901 or so. Now, when they widened the canal they put a new arch in, over Oak Orchard Creek. Concrete, one piece. When they started pouring it they never stopped, day or night. I don't know how many tons of concrete went in there but there were a number of days that they were pouring it. It's one chunk. Now, one thing I never could understand: when they made the canal into the Barge Canal why they didn't have to do something with the culvert? It's the same culvert that was there in the old canal! It must have been deep enough and wide enough to take care of the Barge Canal.

Mc You probably remember them working on the canal?

B Oh I was a grown, married man. Lots of times coming home from work, especially in the winter when the bridges were out and they were working that way, we had to go down the stairs, cross over the bottom of the canal and go up the stairs onto the other side to get across the canal! There used to be a bridge right at the foot of West Avenue crossing over to Glenwood. They widened that curve so much; they didn't want to bridge it, so they put the bridge down towards Main Street farther. There was no lift bridge. It was a high bridge over the canal.

Mc Where was the "tin bridge" that you were telling about earlier?

B The "tin bridge" was a wooden timber bridge carrying the railroad over Oak Orchard River. When I was a dozen or 14 years old or so, they replaced the wooden bridge with concrete arches. Later they filled it in with dirt, except over the creek, and made an embankment there. But when it was a timber bridge we had nothing in those days but coal-fired-steam locomotives and they would drop hot ashes! The tin was over the parts of the bridge that the ashes might strike on. They called it the "tin bridge", even tho some people wouldn't believe me!!

Mc How many times a day did the train come thru Medina?

B The New York Central had trains each way 6-7 times and the fare from

Medina to Buffalo, round trip, was \$1.20. Saturday, Sunday and holidays it was 85¢. Yes sir!

Mc You could get around pretty well that way.

B Well gee whiz, you could go down there most any time, get on the train and go to Buffalo, do what you had to do, get another train and be back in the middle of the afternoon.

Mc If you didn't go on the train, could you take the trolley?

B Well, later. I can't remember the exact year but I would say about 1908 or '07, somewhere along there. Now, do you know the route of the trolley thru Medina? It came down parallel to the railroad, to the Salt Works Road, then parallel to the Salt Works Road to nearly down to the canal, and then down Commercial Street, and then up Main Street, then turn down East Center Street. Now, why didn't they come right down Center Street? I can tell you but I'm not going to! We had a man in Medina who lived on this street (West Center Street), and I can almost spit on his house from here, and he had influence enough to make the trolley company cover a good big mile farther to get around. He didn't want them to go past his house!

Mc Is he still living?

B No. He's been dead a good many years. I don't want some of his relatives punching my nose! (laughs). All I know is heresay. I never got it from him... but that was the talk: that he persuaded that trolley company to go around Commercial Street!!

Mc Did the trolley run all day long? How much did it cost to ride?

B You could get one pretty near every hour all day, up until late evening, each way. I don't remember how much it cost but they competed with the railroad and the railroad was \$1.20 round trip and 85¢ Saturdays and holidays. They moved the trolley depot several times, different places. It was on Main Street at one time. I can't tell you just which store they used. Then they went down East Center Street; then it seems as tho they built a little building. Those days I was working and too busy to know just what was going on.

Now, if you've got time, I want to shoot my mouth off! They've told a lot of things about Medina, and the thing that makes me the maddest is that tale of "It's me, Dinah!" (laughs). That's silly!

Now that tale: "Rastus came home drunk one night and he couldn't get in and so he pounded on the door. His wife said, 'Who is it?' and he said, 'It's Me-dinah'!" Now if you will get yourself a big map of England and you will have to go over to the library to get it, (they've got a big one) and you look down the southern coast of England... is practically an east and west line and in the middle is the Isle of Wight, and you go inland a ways from the Isle of Wight and you'll find (I forgot the name of the city) but you look around just north of that and you'll see MEDINA. Now, when they built the first canal, they brought over a lot of English stone-masons to build bridge approaches and gulleys and culverts and what-not. I understand those Englishmen were the ones who built the cobblestone houses in 1820-1850, and Albion. Do you know what ALBION means? It was the old name for England. Well, if they would name Albion an English name, why not MEDINA? So, I say that Me-Dinah stuff is horse-feathers and I don't like it!! It irritates me!

Mc Do you remember the other immigrants that came in besides the English?

B I don't remember any except the Italians. Well, the Poles were coming, and the Italians. The Irish had come before my time, and there were some English but most of them came into the eastern part of the state.

Mc There were quite a few German people too.

B Buffalo, years ago, used to be one of the biggest German cities in the United States. We had two Italian families, way back. Joe Garbarino and (he ran a store, "K.D. and what-not-store right on the corner of Church Street and East Center Street. He also had a store and a built-on "jigger" where Penny's store is, facing Center Street, like the one over on the other side, that they didn't tear down.). Quite a few Italians came when they built the Glenwood Lake Dam.

Mc When did they start bringing the black migrants in to work?

B ... Right after the Depression. The Puerto Ricans also came. We shouldn't own Puerto Rico anyway. I guess maybe it's to keep the Cubans away a little farther. But I think they are as good as the Puerto Ricans.

I told you about predicting Pearl Harbor? Hobson?

Mc Who was that?

B Lieut. Hobson of Spanish American War fame; lectured at Bent's Opera House and he was lecturing on "Preparedness". He predicted Pearl Harbor, only there was no Pearl Harbor in those days. So he said the Japs would sink our fleet in San Francisco Bay, just as they sunk the Russian fleet prior to the Russo-Japanese War! That was right at the end of the Russo-Japanese War. He was pretty near right 'cause it happened. Even tho it took 35 years for it to happen!

Mc He predicted that the attack would come.. where?

B San Francisco Bay! I attended the lecture at the Bent's Opera House.

Mc Do you think that that was a Chautauqua performance?

B What else would bring a man like that to Medina! It must have been something of that organization.

Mc The Bent Opera House must have been quite an active community center in those days?

B They'd have a show-company come and stay a week, and put on a different show every night. I think it was Lyman Howe who used to come twice a week and show moving pictures. They had traveling companies come here, put on a show and then go on....

(end of side one of tape)

B My great grandmother was born in 1817. That's the year they say (1800) people froze to death. She was born in Albany and her name was Carolyn Secor. The family moved up the canal before the canal was completed. They came by ox team. She must have been a pretty small girl because the canal was completed in '25. I heard her tell that the ox team got stuck in the mud in what was then Rochester's Main Street. When she grew up, she married a man by the name of Ike Bristol. I don't know just where he came from but when she was mad at Ike, he used to call her a "blue-bellied Yankee!" (laughs). So I presume he came from Conn. Maybe Bristol, Conn. I don't know.

Mc I'd like to hear about... your first wedding. Who was your first wife

B Gertrude Albright; home was in Oak Orchard on the Ridge.

Mc What kind of a wedding did you have?

B Well, we were a little bit short of years and we went over to Bridgeburg, Ontario (Canada) and got married because you could get married when she was 18.

Mc What age did you have to be to get married in the United States?

B At 18 she had to have her parent's consent.

Mc Did you have a child?

B Oh yes. One daughter. Her name is Gertrude Albright Crall. She and her husband live in Florida.... My 2nd wife was a Columbus, Ohio girl: Ethel Parish. My uncle married her aunt and they lived here. Aunt May was always anxious for me to marry Ethel... We were married fourteen and a half years. She died on the first day of January, 1928.

Mc Then whom did you marry?

B Josephine Timmerman. We were married on the 29th day of June 1929....

Mc I remember that she liked flowers.

B She was one of these women that could plant a stick and it would grow!

Mc How was she related to the Ellicotts?

B ... I wish I had kept one of those two books that I used to have! Andrew A. Ellicott, "His Life and Letters". He was a brother of Joseph's. He never came up here but his son, who was also Andrew A. Ellicott, came up and helped Joseph. He's the one who left the Ellicotts around here! The senior Joseph, of course, was a "big gun" with the Holland Land Purchase. Andrew was also a surveyor and a professor of mathematics at Philadelphia University during the Revolution. He was the first Superintendent and Professor of mathematics at West Point! He died down there, and his widow came up to Shelby, New York to live... He was a Post Master in Middleport and he had some kind of meeting of the ancient ^{Medina} people and he wondered why she came to Shelby to die. She had people there!! Their home was Ellicott city on Potasko River, Maryland. Her family business was flour mills. They built a flour mill in Shelby Center.

Mc He was a great surveyor too, wasn't he?

B Both of them were, and so was the son! Of course, Joseph was with the Holland Land Company. Joseph Junior helped his uncle. Joseph Ellicott was a bachelor and he had no offspring.

Mc I suppose living in the middle of Medina as you did, you probably didn't need a horse and buggy?

B We did have a horse and buggy when I was young. Disposed of it in 1909 and got one of the early Model-Ts. I think we probably had the 3rd or 4th Model-T (auto) in this section!

Mc Who did you buy it from?

B Louis Keneitz. He was the 13th man that Henry Ford hired but he later came to Medina and had an automobile agency, and lived here until he died! He's buried in the West Ridgeway Cemetary, off Marshall Road.

Mc I'll bet the roads have changed quite a bit?

B The only good road outside of the village was route 63. It was a pretty good road 'til you got up as far as the swamp and as far as the Ridge. They put crushed stone in, so the roads were hard. Most anyplace else you didn't drive in the spring of the year because the mud was too deep. Route 31 from here to Middleport, the mud was so deep that you couldn't make it in the spring. You put your car up on stilts. Bad weather came in the fall and your car stayed put until about Decoration Day!

Mc Did you ever belong to the Automobile Club?

B We had one in Medina but I don't think I ever belonged. I was not much of a joiner. "Jinner" I believe the word is! (laughter).

Mc If you were going to go from Medina to Albion, how would you go out of Medina?

B Well, I didn't get that way very much. I can't tell you for the bad weather but you would go down East Center Street, turn on State Street, follow State Street down around along the canal and keep right on going. ...

Mc You said something earlier about the sidewalks being made of wood?

B We had lots of wooden sidewalks. They would lay down three 2 by 4s in a row, one on each side, one in the middle, and then they'd use 1 by 10 inch boards crossways nailed on. That was a sidewalk!

Mc Was that just on the Main streets or up and down all the streets?

B We had a wooden sidewalk on Catherine Street right near our house. The front walk was flag-stone, but when a walk was put in there, it was a wooden walk. There was lots of them around and they weren't too good because they'd be there a year or two. Then one of the boards would get a little rotten and some of the 250 pounders would step on it and it'd break! Then you'd have to put a new board in, or else tear the whole walk up and re-build it.

Mc Yesterday when we visited with you, you showed us the sidewalk out in front (Timmy's Adult Home, 238 West Center Street, Medina). Is that flag-stone? Who put that sidewalk in there?

B Those are what you call "flag-stones". The company that furnished the stone was Kearney, Barrett and Quarry Company. The MacCormick quarry was down towards Bates Road. The quarries were two-thirds licked when I came along, you know. They didn't amount to as much as they had before. You know, there are two kinds of Medina sandstone: there's the grey sandstone, and the brown or red sandstone. You read about New York City and they're always telling about the brownstone fronts. That was Medina sandstone, I'm pretty sure. Took it down the canal to New York City. The Medina Armory and Saint Mary's church are both built of the red sandstone.... I think up this way it was all grey sandstone. East of maybe Knowlesville or down in that section, I think that was red sandstone. Now, I have also read that Medina sandstone occurs in many places around the world but that it is a thousand feet deep except Orleans County! Now, they speak of drilling for oil. They drilled thru Medina sand. Now whether they mean Medina sandstone, I don't know. They wouldn't have to do very much drilling thru sand. I think they mean Medina sandstone...

Mc You have some memories of State Street Park and what that used to look like?

B State Street Park was the front yard of Dr. William Chamberland. During my time my father-in-law, Burt Timmerman, built a house close to State Street.

Mc Was Timmerman's house on the corner there?

B Pretty close to the corner. When the village took it over for a Park the old house was gone. ...

Mc They used to move houses quite a bit.

B They did a lot of it! ... There was a man in Lyndonville who used to move houses. He had all the equipment. I think his name was Dates. They thought nothing of moving houses. Well, my father built the house we lived in. We Moved in the fall that I was five years old. They had moved the house off of there and it's still up on the canal bank and in use.

Mc Before we leave the Park and Dr. William Chamberland's residence, was his house ever used for anything else?

B During my time nobody wanted to; it was almost impossible to heat I guess. It was a big ranch of a house, but at one time they used

it for a small-pox pest house, if I'm not mistaken.

Mc You remember when there were not any hospitals?

E Oh, there was no hospital. Nothing like that! I can't tell you just when it was, but I was 14-15 years old and a woman on Park Avenue, she was a nurse I believe, she had a house and she did a little hospital work in the house.

Mc Her name was Myra Coon.

B I'm afraid you got it! You got it right!!

Mc They called it the Mary Louise House...

B The first hospital was the brick house on the corner of Prospect and Eagle, on the north-west corner. The old A. L. Swett house. He built up on West Center Street and they used the old house as a hospital... It was way up to the early twentys I guess before they built the hospital... They built the original hospital and then added on to that.

Mc Well, that's been quite a change in your life!

B When I was five years old, we moved into the house on the corner of Catherine and Eagle on the north-east corner. They moved the old house off. There was a lot of junk in the old house and they threw it out in the backyard and burned it. Well, as I say, I was five that October. I was out fiddling in the yard and I saw a packet of papers about this wide and about this long (demonstrates) and about this thick, tied with a string. They were smoked a little bit but they hadn't burned. Well, I was tossing them around and my mother caught me at it and she came out to see what I had. She took them away from me and she had me gather up what I could. I got most of them. She kept them 'til I grew up and then gave them back to me. They were warrents for arrest issued in Fairfax County, Virginia! Now, the people that owned that house before my father had it moved off... Sherwin, but the people before that, William Lozier lived there and he was a veteran of the Civil War. Now I can't say he brought the papers; but they were in that house! Now, there used to be a Lozier automobile. I think they were made in Mass. or somewhere. I kept the papers, and maybe fifteen years ago or so, I showed 'em to Cary Lattin (former Orleans County Historian). "Well," "I wished they belonged in Orleans County. You ought to send them back to Fairfax County." Well, I didn't send them. George Callaghan

was the Post Master and I showed them to him one time. (His mother lived next door). "Well if you want to send them back and if you want to know anything about Fairfax, Virginia, you contact the Post Master. If anybody wants to know anything about Medina, they call George Callaghan to find out!" So, I wrote the Post Master in Fairfax a letter and he said to send 'em down and he'd present them to the Historical Society. There were 3-4 of them that were issued prior to the Revolution, then on up to 1850 or something, because it was before the War. So, I sent 'em down to the Post Master and you know what they did?! They didn't even write me a letter and tell me to go to hell!! "Damn Yankees!" My relatives took 'em? But it wasn't so.

Mc I'd like you to repeat what you told us earlier about how we did not descend from the monkey.

B Alright. I don't believe in evolution. You bring Darwin in here and I'll stick my hand right in his nose and defy him to answer my questions! According to the "big bang theory", the whole universe was one big chuck. I don't know how many million miles away, but it was there. That was a lot of material wasn't it?! Now, the evolutionists don't claim that dirt and rocks and so forth evolve; at least I never read it. Who made it?! Due to internal heat, it got hot and so hot that it changed into dust and exploded and blew all over the universe. Now, who laid down the laws of nature whereby a big mass of dirt and rocks left the center of the earth and was red hot; and it must have been hot, probably up to 5,000 degrees. Who laid down the laws of nature to cause that? Well, it went all thru the universe and a big lot of it settled in one chunk and made the earth and the moon. That's the laws of nature. Who laid down the laws of nature? It was too hot for anything to grow on. Well, by and by the surface cooled enough so that little stuff started to grow about this big. Eventually it created trees, grass and flowers, and animals and everything! I defy Darwin or anybody to name one germ of life, either flora or fauna, that would stand 5,000 degrees of temperature! ... Alright, here's another one. Why, if everything was dust, swirling dust, as they claim, why is all the gold in spots? South Africa, California and a few other places. And why are all the diamonds in South Africa and Brazil? Why aren't

they spread all over if it was all just dust? I could think of a few more things if I had the time.

Mc You don't think we descended from monkeys?

B They are nice people! (laughter). Now, if Darwin's got to have an animal let him pick the hog because that's human nature. There is a lot of that in human nature. Yeah, Charles Darwin ought to have had his nose punched in, 'cause people believe it!

Mc Do you have any special memories of the Depression of 1929?

B Well, not exactly. I almost enjoyed it! My wife and I, we only worked part time and we'd drive up to Buffalo. We didn't have money to spend but we'd walk up and down Main Street and look in the windows and then come home. We had a good time.

Mc Your working hours were cut at Swetts ?

B We worked two and sometimes three times a week and the rate was down for everybody. But I heard my father tell that conditions were worse in the Depression of 1873 than they were during the Depression that we knew.

* * * * *

The above interview was transcribed, edited and typed by
Helen M. McAllister of Medina, New York.

Nurse in charge Planned Menus
Share your loved one with us for T.L.C.

Timmy's Adult Home
238 W. Center St.
Medina, N.Y. 14103

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