

Orleans County Historical Association

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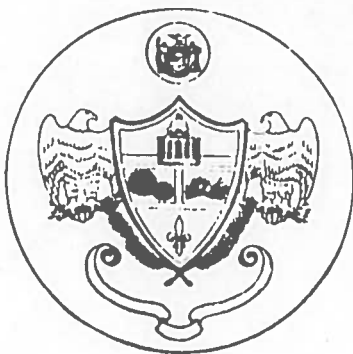
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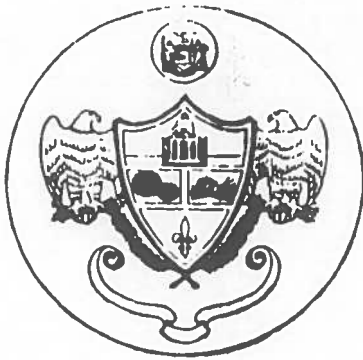
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT INTERVIEW

Mrs. Louise O'Donnell Brownell
821 West Center Street
Medina, New York

Mrs. Louise O. Brownell was born July 10, 1911.
This interview was conducted by Helen M. McAllister.



Louise O'Donnell Brownell



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.

Louis O'Donnell Brownell

Signed

March 21, 1982

Date

Understood and agreed to:

Helen M. McAllister

INTERVIEWER

3 - 22 - 1982

Date

For the Orleans County Historical Association
March 22, 1982, Helen McAllister of Medina, New York
is interviewing Mrs. Louise O'Donnell Brownell of
821 West Center Street, Medina, New York.

Mc Louise, would you please tell us when and where you
were born ?

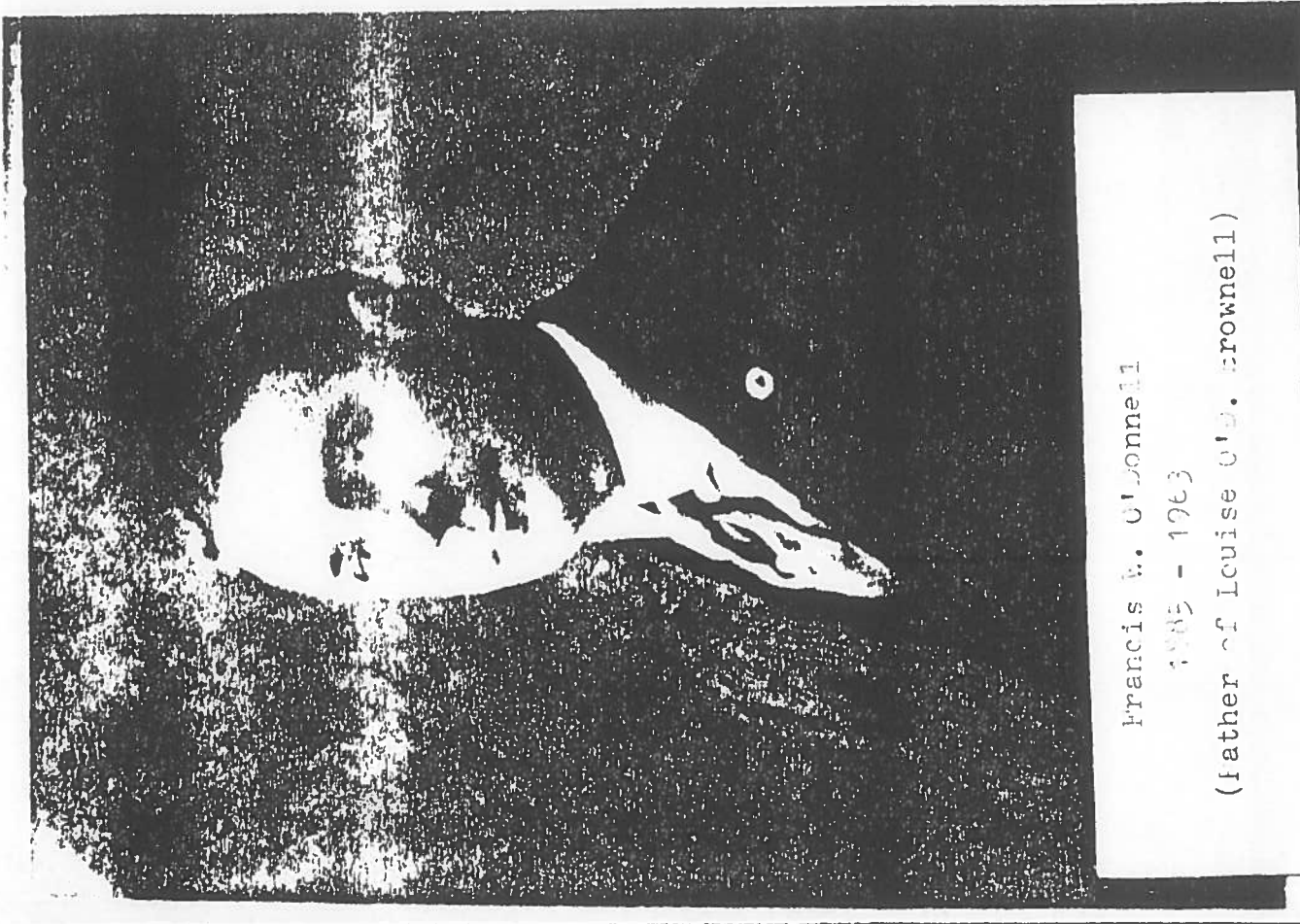
B I was born July 10, 1911 in my grandparent's house
which is at 233 West Center Street. It is a house
between the Mormon Church and the Maple Crest Inn.
It's painted green. It's a double house. It had been
a single house and in 1910 it was made over into a double
house and it is today.

Mc Would you please give us your father's name and your
mother's maiden name ?

B My father was Francis W. O'Donnell. My mother
Louise Britton, was born and brought up in Albion.
They were married in 1910 in Albion.

Mc Would you tell us about your grandparents and where they
came from ?

B My mother's father was born in Orleans County. His name
was John Britton and he grew up in Eagle Harbor.
My father's father's name was William David O'Donnell
and he was born in Canada and came to Orleans County
as a small boy with his father whose name was also
William David O'Donnell. They came from Canada to
Shelby. They had lived in Canada, I understand, for
about 100 years. The O'Donnells left Ireland in about
1750 and they came to Canada, the St. Lawrence River,
near the City of Quebec, and they lived there for about
100 years. Eventually they prospered and owned some
property and would have stayed except that there were
several disastrous fires in the City of Quebec. Lloyds
had the insurance on them - - that is Lloyds of London
- - and for several years my great-grandfather paid the



Francis W. O'Donnell

1905 - 1963

(Father of Louise O'D. Brownell)



Louise Eritton O'Donnell

1908 - 1956

(Mother of Louise O'D. Brownell)

premiums. Then the premiums got so high - - I think - I said on the other ^{practice} tape that Lloyds knew what they were doing - - they got so high that he decided to take a chance and for two or three years he won. There were no fires and he wasn't paying those extremely high premiums. Then there was one real disastrous fire that wiped him out completely. He was a man in his 50's but he came with his wife and my grandfather; there were other children in the family and they came to Shelby.

Mc Why did they come to Shelby ?

B I have no idea. I don't know. I think probably a great many people of Irish ancestry immigrated to Boston or to New York but I don't think they knew any of those people you see. This was a new part of the world. This was just settled in 1830 you see. They hadn't gone through those city things and I think possibly they came from a part of Ireland which was not thickly settled. They weren't city people, or politicians, so I think maybe this was the idea that they wanted to come to a place like Orleans County.

Mc When they came to Shelby did they make friends readily ?

B Yes they did. I remember they made friends with the Acers very easily and they played together as boys. Eventually one of my uncles, Pierry, who lived in Medina and was a good friend of Herbert ^{Acer's} and went with Herbert to the University of Illinois, and they lived with someone on the faculty of the University of Illinois who was a relative of theirs. But, we're ahead of the story, I guess that didn't happen until about 1915.

Mc When they came to Shelby what was their business ?

B I know that my grandfather - - I couldn't tell you exactly how my great-grandfather managed at the age of 50, I'd have to look up when he died, or what funds he or his wife had. But I know that my grandfather, William David O'Donnell, who was really not born in this country, was as a young boy a carpenter. I know he worked for Dan Holridge who was a very good carpenter. It was only after he married my grandmother - - and they didn't marry young, I think my grandmother was 30 when they were

married, that he decided that he could get out on his own. I think she had a little money from her father and it was then that they left the Village of Medina where my father was born and went to live in Barre, the Town of Barre, where my grandfather had a sawmill in the winter and a threshing machine in the summer. The other children were born there and that was where my father first went to school.

Mc In Barre ?

B Yes.

Then in 1901 or 1902 when my father was probably 15 years old, my grandfather, William David O'Donnell, had the opportunity to buy a piece of property on East Center Street which at one time had been a lumber yard.

Mc This is in Medina ?

B In Medina. There is a very old stone building on that piece of property which was a mill and when I was a child they were sawing lumber in that mill. At one time it had been water-powered and what was called a race took water from Oak Orchard Creek somewhere south of Medina and brought it along at that level and then it dropped into Oak Orchard Creek which then went into Medina Falls. But in my life-time it was electric-powered.

The Hedley family who had owned that piece of property, had operated a mill and a lumber yard there, I would say in the 1870's. It was the same Mr. Hedley who built the houses in the area of West Avenue and Hedley Street. My father was in high school when his father bought the lumber yard there on East Center Street. His brother & Burt & Pierry, and sister, Anna May, were also going to Medina schools. They increased little by little every year, as they would say plowed their profits back into inventory, and the business grew and they were very happy about it.

Of course, a retail lumber business at that time was a little different than it is today. If a house were being built the carpenter or the builder would make out a list of materials he needed and bring it down to the lumber yard. There would be so much lath, so much shingles,

so much plaster. The O'Donnell Lumber Company was not the only lumber company in town. There was a very, very well established lumber company, Rowley's, over at Prospect and Commercial Street on the canal. The Rowley family were a pioneer family and I think my grandmother and grandfather were just a little bit fearfull when they bought the property from Hedley and started the lumber yard whether or not they would be able to prosper at all when there was already such a well established yard. But Medina was growing and a great many houses were built in the period 1905 to 1910, as the house I am living in now was built in 1910, and if you look at the architecture of these houses there are at least 75 in Medina built with almost the same set of plans. I've kept the front porch here because I use it, but loads of people have changed them. There were some people who continued to do business with Rowley but I remember one time, this must have been 1917 or 1918, my father did get an account that he was very pleased to get. My mother has told me the story. I was probably six or seven years old at the time, my brother two years younger. They were going someplace on the 4th of July in their car, they had an automobile, on a picnic. My mother had us cleaned up and a basket lunch in the car and the telephone rang and my father went to answer it and came out, as my mother said, smiling "like a basket of chips". And he said, "That was A.L. Swett. There has been some problem at the dam and he needs some lumber."

MC Now A.L. Swett; you say there was a problem at the dam, what did he have there ?

B Of course he had many interests, but when I speak of the dam, I mean Glenwood Lake where there was a hydro-electric plant which is in existence today. So my father changed his clothes, went down to the lumber yard, hitched up a horse and wagon and delivered the materials to Mr. Swett's satisfaction and he continued to keep that account. At that particular time my Uncle Burt was in business with my father. Uncle Burt had graduated from Cornell in 1913 but my grandfather had just died, and he came

into O'Donnell and Son Lumber Company at that time. Burt was the age and he was single and he was drafted in World War I. Uncle Pierry, the other brother, had gone into the advertising business as a salesman and he was also in World War I but he was in Pittsburgh when the draft, as they said, "caught up with him." So my father was alone, running the yard at the time of World War I. He had employees by then and they were also beginning to buy trucks and the lumber business was still prospering and knowing my father's temperament, you know that he built up a high inventory. They put almost all their profits into inventory and of course as long as prices were rising that was good.

In 1918 my sister Alice, who is seven years younger than I, was born in November, and I remember my mother's concern about that childbirth because that was the time of the influenza epidemic and would a doctor be able to come to the house? The three of us were born at home. Fortunately we were all healthy enough escape the flu and I don't know how we escaped it but we did. The schools must have been closed. I know my mother sent me to Albion to stay with my grandfather and aunt who had a lovely home on West Bank Street. Actually it's the house where Donna Rodden lives.

Mc What was their name ?

B John Britton was my grandfather. The horse-block out in front, the last time I went along West Bank Street, still says Britton. Of course they came from Eagle Harbor. Those boys, as very young children, worked on the canal and I guess Uncle Martin eventually owned a couple of canal boats but they sold out before the big boom. I was in Albion during the flu epidemic and I remember the False Armistice. We were all outside raking leaves and in those days you were allowed to rake them into the gutters and burn them. And the word came that the war was over and of course I was seven years old and quite thrilled but it wasn't actually over until three or four days later.

Mc What did you do, when you thought it was over ?

B I was just happy. Maybe I said a Hail Mary and an Our Father, or something but I knew that Uncle Burt would be

coming home alive and well, and that Uncle Pierry would.

The husband of a very good friend of our family was killed the very last day before the war, Someone who had grown up with them in Barre Center. So there were tragedies but of course at the age of seven they don't register with you that way.

That is really my only memory of World War I except for working for the Red Cross. We delighted in dressing up as Red Cross Nurses. We used towels, aprons, or what-have-you and we were all very conscious of wanting to do something for the Red Cross. Well I know that on my own idea I sold lemonade on Main Street for the benefit of the Red Cross and I know this is in one of the newspapers somewhere. I and two girls named Knickerbocker who lived in the same block, and a girl named Helen Landauer who lived a block away, the four of us decided to sell lemonade for the benefit of the Red Cross and we simply set up our stand without asking permission of anybody. The oldest of us was probably eight years old; on the Presbyterian Church lawn and we made the lemonade in Knickerbocker's house which was on the corner of West Avenue and Park Avenue and brought everything down. I think we might have made \$10.00 on the thing but the Red Cross although we were not authorized to use their name accepted it and everybody was probably very much amused.

I don't know that I was actually ecumenical minded at that time but it is pretty characteristic of me even at that age when I was in a group it wasn't a homogeneous, chummy group. I was a Catholic with one Jew and two Protestants.

There was a readjustment after World War I. I think it was called a "Panic." O'Donnell Lumber lost money because, as I say, they had always gone ^{on} the principle of building up their inventory, and when prices fell they were selling at a loss sometimes. But they seemed to survive that although I think there are a great many people in Orleans County who didn't;

I think there were some farmers who lost their farms at that time but I'm not too familiar with them. So when times got better in 1921 and 1922 and the country started prospering again, Dad's lumber business prospered and I think that he had eight or ten employees, and three or four trucks. I worked down there at the lumber yard the summer of 1925

when I was a freshman in high school. At that time he was able to expand and go into the sand and gravel business.

Mc Where was that located ?

B That was located on Route #104 where Oak Orchard Creek goes under the road. He bought that piece of property and Bill Reuter , who lived nearby, was manager there, . They knew that the deposit of sand was there. Gravel and stone. And there was a continuous supply of water. What they wanted, of course, was washed sand and gravel. They built it in good times and it was a good thing because it was that money really that was available when the actual Depression came and that was when I was going to college and my brother was going to medical school and my sister. I graduated in 1933, and my brother got his M.D. in 1941, and my sister had her Bachelor's in 1940.

Mc Would you give us your sister's and your brother's names ?

B Yes. My sister was Alice Marie O'Donnell and she married a physician, Dr. George Melcher, and there are four fine children in that family. My brother was Francis W. O'Donnell, Jr. and he went to Georgetown for his premed, Long Island College of Medicine for medical school, he had internships at St. Catherine's & Kings County. That's where he met his wife, Eileen, who is his wife today. They had eight fine children, and he practiced in Buffalo until 1978. He did chest surgery, open heart, he had all the specialty ratings and he practiced mostly at the Millard Fillmore, but also at Deaconess and I believe Mercy and some others. (Francis W. O'Donnell, Jr. did graduate work at the Univ. of Michigan with Dr. John Alexander).

B It was a very vulnerable time for my father. He had been in business since 1902, survived various things, but the Depression really made a great difference in his life. But we were fortunate that we survived as well as we did.

Mc What about the banks closing in this area ?

B I started college in 1929 and actually the banks didn't close until the spring of 1933.

Mc Where did you go ?

B A lovely girl's school in Indiana; St. Mary of the Woods, which is in southern Indiana. I was very happy there.

I had good preparation for college at Medina High School. We not only had four years of high school but we were able to take a post-graduate course; and I had Virgil, and French IV, and solid geometry, and trig before I went to college. So we were all busy getting acquainted with each other and no one really paid much attention to the Stock Market Crash the last week of October in our freshman year, except one girl, who was from Detroit, Her father was an executive at General Motors and she read us

letters from home. The gist of them was her mother writing and saying, "Norma, don't worry. Just continue with your studies. This is serious, the Stock Market Crash, and we know it is, but we have set aside money for your education and what you should do is just continue as you're doing." But then two or three days later she came with another letter from her mother - - "So and so, so and so had been over to the house, another General Motors executive, saying 'Well, I guess you can get so much for this table and I guess that chair would bring something else.'" But this is, as I say, the fall term of 1929 and we really didn't understand just how serious it was. I remember being able to take the train up to Chicago to my Uncle Perry and Aunt Grace's for Thanksgiving vacation and being able to come home and have a Pullman ticket, It was an overnight trip to Buffalo, and we didn't think anything of it. As a matter of fact the Big Four Railroad went passed the school and if enough people petitioned, they would stop the train and take us on.

Mc What do you mean by "the Big Four"?

B It was the railroad but I'd have to go to the encyclopedia and look up what Big Four stood for, I just remembered that off the top of my head. But it was the main line between St. Louis and Buffalo. That was quite a trip. We ate in the dining car and all that sort of thing. We went home for Christmas the Christmas of 1929.

One of the things I needed was clothes because I hadn't really known what to take with me. I was able to buy what I thought I needed, and I remember my mother getting me a new winter coat and so forth. At the end of the second year, which would have been June of 1931, we still weren't

in any real pain that we thought of on account of the Depression. There was a convention in Niagara Falls of a Catholic Youth Organization. I and three of my classmates were delegates. They came and they stayed at our house. I guess that was because I knew that when my uncles had gone to college they had gone to house parties and so forth and we had the space for it and we enjoyed it. Parties then were in people's houses. I remember we had an orchestra, we had a dance, and the orchestra was four pieces, our own contemporaries, but it was glamorous and it was sort of fun. We were really continuing in about the same way that we always had although we knew that business wasn't good. Then I transferred after two years at the girl's school (I was a Chemistry major) I transferred to Cornell which had a course at that time which was called a Bachelor of Chemistry. It was a very thorough course and I'm glad I got my degree there; I've used it in two jobs. I was at Cornell during my senior year when Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected President. I remember there was a student government meeting the next day and Livingston Farrand was President of the university. I think he had been a personal friend of Herbert Hoover's and a great admirer of Herbert Hoover's and he was very sorry that the 1932 election had turned out the way it did. And the way he phrased it sort of startled some of us students because we really weren't paying that much attention to the national scene. He said, "He was glad that the revolution had been a bloodless revolution." But even so we weren't really aware of what was happening in the great world.

MC You wouldn't have called it a revolution?

B Right. However in the spring of that year, the following year was when the Medina banks closed and that was, I would say, January of my senior year at Cornell. When that happened my father's funds were pretty much tied up but he did have some business. You see the Sand and Gravel Pit was operating and they did produce

a very fine quality of washed sand and gravel. It always met the state inspection. There were roads that were being built and of course the Medina Post Office was built, there (Heinz built and addition) were W.P.A. projects and so forth, so that he did have some income although the building of houses was at an absolute standstill. I remember I always got my monthly allowance check for \$25.00 and that was used for things like a sandwich or something of that sort because the bills were paid for your board and tuition to the university and your lab fees. Although at that time people were beginning to get extensions on their tuition payments. You would simply go up to the proper office there at the university and asked for the forms; everyone had deferred payments.

Everything was paid up, fortunately, for me and I did get my degree in 1933. Most of my friends had trouble getting jobs and people by that time were beginning to talk about how much money they would get back after the bank affairs were settled. That was all in a state of flux for many months. But I'm under the impression that both banks paid off a very large percentage of people's deposits here in Medina. I have heard the figure that they paid off, 90% to 95%, but I'm not in a position to back that up, those figures. At that time we all had curtailed expenses. I remember my father called my mother and me together (not my brother and sister) and said, "Now this Depression is lasting longer than I thought it was going to. I thought it might have been like the Panic of 1920 but it isn't and we don't know who is going to come through it and who isn't. We are going to continue to live in this house. We'll keep the one maid, we'll keep the same two cars and we'll have the same food, but I have to close all the charge accounts." I think he didn't want to worry us. He was glad I had finished my education; my brother was in premed, he was going to Georgetown for premed. He wanted us to get an education and I think he could see his way clear knowing that he had the sand pit and that he had that large inventory at the lumber yard. He knew that he would have enough cash flow for that and he didn't want us worrying or quitting school. It would have been silly to quit school anyway because people didn't get jobs.

During that year after I finished college I didn't really apply for many jobs, there weren't many job openings, I had had 120 hours of college credit and of those 60 were in Chemistry and I really was qualified for a laboratory job. So what did we do doing that year? Two or three of my friends who had taken education courses did get jobs. One friend who had a Bachelor of Arts degree from Syracuse University and was qualified to teach in high school was able to get a job in the elementary schools and her salary for the first year was \$500.00 total. But she loved the work and she stayed in elementary school teaching even after things picked up and there was a shortage of teachers. We went to cooking school. We played Bridge. We had a Study Club. All that sort of thing. And we were happy. We weren't terribly worried about things.

Mc Did you live at home?

B I lived at home; most of us did. There wasn't the pressure on us to be independent and get an apartment. That came later on to another generation. One of the sad things about the retail lumber business in my father's time was that a bank would give a person a certain amount of money as a first mortgage. They would sometimes say, "Francis, I would like a house with so many bedrooms. What can I put up? I have so much money cash, the bank will give me so much. Will you take a second mortgage on the balance?" And that's the way somethings were financed. Then as the Depression got worse they would come to him and say, "Francis, I'm not able to keep up my payments. I would like you to take over the mortgage and be the owner of the house and you'll pay the taxes and I will pay you so much rent." As a matter of fact this house that we are living in was available when Abbott and I were married and we paid \$30.00 a month rent because it had come to my father and aunt on a repossession sort of thing. The result was he had property wished on him, that was his idiom, it was wished on him and he did have huge amounts of taxes to pay. But no one bought any of these things that were advertised for taxes and little by little he paid up all of his taxes and eventually sold them.

I don't think he sold some of these things at very much of a profit but never-the-less he was able to keep his head above water and he came out of it alright.

Mc Your brother and sister were able to continue ?

B They continued. Francis got his M.D. and took all his national boards, and so forth, and his internships. Alice had her bachelor's from the College of New Rochelle. She was qualified to teach but she didn't stay with it. She went to Columbia and got a Bachelor of Science and a R.N. and she has, in her working years, worked as an R.N.

We're getting into the middle 1930's and some of our friends were marrying. Abbott and I didn't marry until 1940. But I remember those years, the last part of the 1930's, when my friends were marrying and the parties that we had for them. The teas that we had. The showers that we had. And of course we had all these things at home.

Mc Did you have caterers ?

B Yes. There was one caterer, her name was Matie Cook and her sister Jennie Remedy. They had done catering in Medina even during the 1920's when things were very, very prosperous and it was fun to have them come. I can remember having a shower, and this was in my mother's and father's house, and when Jennie Remedy would come in the first thing that she would do would be to open one or two cans of beef bouillon and put it on the back of the stove. Of course in our house there was a coal stove and there was also a gas stove. When the coal stove was going things could simmer away. Those women had a wonderful recipe for Parker House rolls and we thought they were really something in those days. Another thing that was nice about having a caterer who would come into your home, she would know what someone else had served. And if you thought, "Well let's have chicken salad." She would know that somebody else had had chicken salad a month before and ^{although} it wasn't exactly the same guest list but she wouldn't really let you make some horrendous mistake like serving that. And of course at that time if you wanted ice cream you didn't go get it until you were ready to serve it because we didn't have the freezers. We had refrigerators with the freezing top but

they were rather small, they just had a few trays of ice cubes. I'm sure that there were people in the United States who had lavish homes and they must have had freezers but I don't know that anybody in Medina had a freezer in those days.

Mc Did you ever have ice cream-making-parties where you made your own ?

B Yes I think that's true. My mother said that when my father was courting her they made ice cream and they made sherbet. This was 1910. For fun. But Hofflers made a very good brand of ice cream. They were a Buffalo company. They distributed in Medina. ^{you could} There were two or three places on Main Street where you could buy ice cream. Mother and father didn't care about making it at home, cranking it; they thought that they could go down to the Greeks or whoever else had a ice cream store and get just as good ice cream as that, and we did. Speaking of food, I do remember a Rochester company that made French pastries and over the week ends you could buy an assortment of fresh French pastries at one of the confectionery stores on Main Street. I think we put a little more emphasis on food than we should have probably because my father had grown up in the country where all that was available was grown locally. They were feeding a great many people. You see they were feeding all those people that worked on the threshing machine or the saw mill and they thought the food was important. They said, "What you're eating today is walking and talking tomorrow." And I don't think my father ever thought that thinness was something to work for !

Mc They certainly weren't thinking about French pastries.

B No. But the point was when they were prosperous and when they were available it was a treat and it wasn't something to put down. As somebody today would feel - "oh all that cholesterol."

Mc When did you get your first job ?

B I got my first job in June of 1934. The H.J. Heinz Company came to Medina oh around 1900 to make cider vinegar and then

sometime in the 20's or 30's they started making
 and ketchup.
 Tomato Juice. In the 1930's they decided to expand
 to make baby food here. They put up their new buildings
 and their plants at a good time when they had the capital
 to do it. It didn't cost them what it might have cost
 them. They were going to start making
 baby food, strained food, in June and I took my Cornell
 transcript over and filled out a job application, not
 knowing that it would do me any good. Fortunately
 one day I got a call that the head research man from
 Pittsburgh was there and had seen my transcript and was
 in Quality Control Laboratory.
 I interested in a job. I certainly was! I was
 delighted. He looked over the transcript and told me what
 work would be done. I had learned at Cornell
 to use an analytical balance and that sort of thing and
 burettes and so forth. He said, "Well I'm sure you could
 handle the work if you can work out a salary with Mr.
 Garrett." Well I didn't even argue about what the salary
 was going to be. They said they'd have to put me on at the
 minimum rate but that there was a possibility that I would
 be put on a flat salary. Well the minimum rate was 35¢ an
 hour (My first paycheck was for \$8.17) and I was delighted to get it. I walked from home.
 The equipment was beautiful. You couldn't have asked for
 a nicer analytical balance . weights and so forth. It
 was work I was well qualified to do and I was quite happy
 with it. In due time I was put on a flat salary,
 after about two months. I don't
 know what benefits there were. I remember I was given the
 salary equivalent to a week's vacation plus and I think it
 turned out to be something like \$25.00, at least that's
 what the bonus was that I remember. And with it I bought
 six sterling silver forks to match the set that I was
 collecting. I liked that work and I was employed year
 around. I never regreted not taking the education courses
 for teaching. I know my friends who taught, even when they
 were married, would do substitute teaching. I didn't;
 I worked at Heinz for six years until Abbott and I were
 married. In those days it was not unusual at all for a
 girl to stop work when she was married. If you could live



Louise and Abbott Brownell

Abbott F. Brownell Jr. (1942)

The infant's dress was used by Louise's
father's family. Abbott Jr. was the eighth
child to wear it for Christening.

on your husband's income and if you wanted a family, and we did... (we had four children) I did a lot of volunteer work.

My children have asked me what the Depression was really like and I guess the facts about it I've pretty much given you. But as I think back on it I think it was something else. There was a psychological part. People who had been very affluent, people who had been with the furniture manufacturing business in Medina from 1900 to 1930, they had really a more affluent scale of life than we had when we were building up the lumber business.. I think that they felt very badly, some of them, having a reduced income during those years. But having survived the fire in Quebec of 1860 or whenever it was, and the Panic of 1920, I think we had a little more philosophical view of the whole thing. Either that or my father just did not want us worrying.

Mc I'd like to ask you if you can remember the time when you were first able to cast your first vote ?

B Well of course I was born in 1911 and I should have been able to vote in the presidential election of 1932 when Hoover and Roosevelt were running. But I was away at school and I didn't apply for an absentee ballot so I didn't vote in that first election. I think I've told you of the reactions on the ^{Cornell} campus at that time. I did vote, I would think, in an election in 1934 and then in a presidential election in 1936 and I think that '36 was Landon - Roosevelt. I really don't remember anything about it very much. In the 1940 election, by then I was engaged to Abbott, and he was for Wendell Willkie. Abbott was a Republican and of course was with the Medina Tribune, the newspaper, I remember one of the first things Abbott gave me was a little elephant that was a little pin and that was during the Willkie campaign. I know that we went to a Republican dinner, I remember going with some other girls that I knew to some sort of a planning meeting for it. I remember also that not all the Republicans that we knew - - let me put it this way. We knew people who were Republicans who were closer to the European war than we were who said that if Roosevelt were not re-elected in

1940 it would be a terrible blow to the man in the street in England. They must have known what was really coming and I think that they felt that Roosevelt would understand Britain's plight. I was never really active in politics. I could go around a table of friends, or an organization like the Cotillion Club, and I couldn't tell you which ones were the Republicans and which ones were the Democrats. So for that reason I really probably didn't think too much voting. Although I make it a point to go and vote and I go down here to the Town Hall to vote and I usually say to them, "Well let's see how my signature is holding up." because I've voted in the same place now for 40 years.

Mc Following a pattern I've seemed to develop with these interviews, after I've asked you about your voting for the first time, I'd like to ask you if you can remember when you got your first haircut ?

B In my family the young girls were ^{not} permitted to grow long hair. We wanted to have thick hair and my mother and father said "Your hair would be healthier if you had it cut short when you were under 12 years of age." My mother had very pretty black hair. When bobbed hair came in my father didn't want her to cut it and she didn't for a long time. My father's sister and his mother had beautiful long, long hair. I can tell you one little story about my grandmother. She of course was born in Medina but she had cousins in Rochester and as a young girl she would go visit her cousins in Rochester. This must have been before 1880 because my father was born in 1885 so it was in the 1870 to 1880 period. And they thought it was a great lark to go to a beauty parlor. There must have been beauty parlors of some sort either in people's homes or someone would have a shop to get their hair done. And they would wait for my grandmother to take the artificial pieces out. She had lots of hair, a woman's crowning glory, as it was called, and she'd take out the hair-pins and the combs and they would continue to wait - - I think they called those artificial pieces "rats".

Mc Right, I can remember wearing one during World War II.

B Is that so.

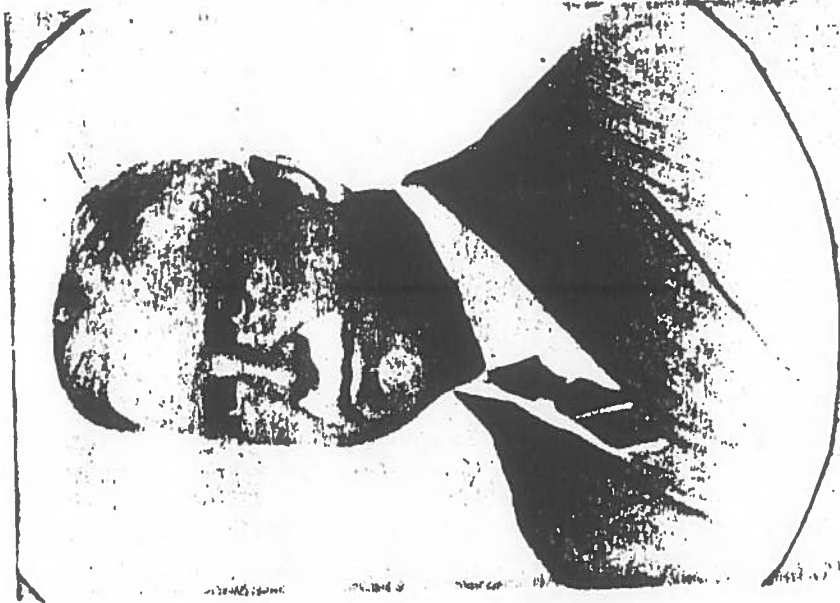
And of course it was all her own hair and she'd let it fall and with the result that we wanted to have thick hair. Well, styles change and when I was a senior in high school people were beginning to get permanent waves and I didn't actually have curly hair. My sister had beautiful curly hair. We used to say to her, "Alice, your hair is so curly, so pretty and so thick you should have been a dog." We loved my sister but you know how people will kid in a family. I was a senior in high school and the whole senior class was going to go on an Easter trip. We were buying clothes for it and it was a very big deal. I thought I'd like to have a permanent and my mother thought it would be nice if I did. She took me to Rochester to get the permanent and it was at the beauty shop in the Sagamore Hotel. This must have been in the spring of 1928. And they thinned my hair because that was the style. My father was furious! He'd say, "It's alright for someone like Irene Castle to have bobbed hair; she couldn't let it grow if she wanted to, it would break off." He thought it was dreadful for a person who had thick hair to get it thinned. I let my hair grow eventually.

I had permanents all that time when I was in college. When I got my first job I was working full time and I didn't make appointments. And another thing, it was less expensive, and at that point in time I did let my hair grow and I wore it parted in the middle with a big knob, and I think I did it once again when my children were small and I couldn't get out for regular appointments.

Mc Speaking of children, would you give us a little run-down on the man that you married and how you met and a little bit about him?

B I met Abbott in 1935 and we were married in 1940.

Abbott had come to Medina as a child with his father and mother because his grandfather was a dentist in Medina, Dr. Samuel Clark Brownell. He came to Medina after the Civil War and he opened his dentist office on Main Street there on the corner of West Center and Main in the block

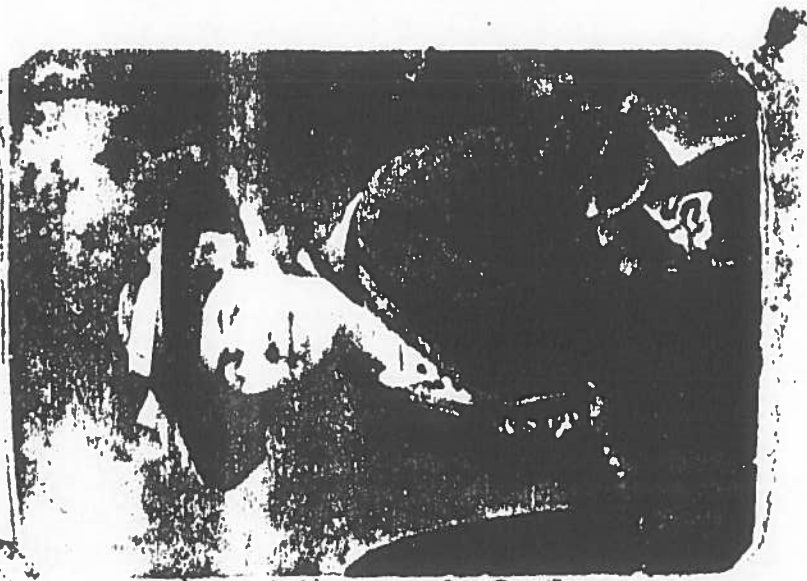


George Francis Brownell

1864 - 1934

Medina Native

Graduate of Medina Free Academy
Graduate of University of Michigan
Vice-President Erie Railroad
(Father of Abbott F. Brownell)



Anne Abbott Brownell

(Mrs. George F. Brownell)

1870 - 1945

(Mother of Abbott F. Brownell)

which is now occupied by Penny's. He died in the 1890's and he sold his practice to Dr. Agnew, who eventually sold it to Dr. John Shoemaker, Sr. Abbott's father had one sister. Her name was Catherine Brownell and she married Charles Hurd and they lived on Pearl Street at 234 and occasionally during the summertime Abbott and his mother and father came to Medina to visit. Abbott came to Medina to live in 1935. He was with the Medina Tribune, the weekly newspaper, that had been founded by Frank Hurd. Abbott enjoyed the newspaper from 1935 until World War II came along. Some of his help went into the service, and the price of news print went up. But he made many, many good friends during the years that he was at the paper and I think they were good years. He eventually lost money on it and it isn't really good business to continue something as a hobby if you are continually losing money. We were in about the same age group although Abbott was 12 years older than I. He was friendly with my brother. In those days you would go to a large party, not necessarily on a date. But if there were 20 or 30 people, a few would be couples, a few would be married couples, and a few would be single people. As time went on we got more and more interested in each other and we were engaged and we were married in 1940. We were married in St. Mary's Rectory and we asked my aunt's brother, Monsignor Sullivan, to perform the ceremony. He wasn't our pastor then. He was the pastor at Depew, but he came. We had lots of parties. People for whom I had given showers had parties for us, the same sort of things that I talked about. We were married and I didn't continue to work. I don't know whether I've said that or not.

Mc No. You said that after you had children you did stay home, and you said that you did nurse you babies.

B Oh yes. Mostly because the first one turned out to be allergic to cow's milk and you don't know that right in the beginning. We had the four children and we continued to live in Medina and I've always continued a residence here.

(Abbott's father, George F. Brownell, grew up in Medina, graduated from Medina Academy. He became a lawyer and had a distinguished career - becoming V.P. & General Counsel for Erie Railroad).



Children of Abbott and Louise Brownell (1956)
Teresa E. Brownell, Abbott F. Brownell Jr., William O'D. Brownell, and
George A. Brownell II. Photo taken at their home: 821 W. Center St., Medina.

Medina

MC Would you give me the names of your four children ?

B Yes. Abbott, Jr. was born in September of 1942; and William (Bill) whom we named after my grandfather O'Donnell was born in 1943; and George, who is named after his grandfather and his uncle on the Brownell side, was born in 1946, and our daughter Teresa. We named her Teresa Britton, that was my mother's maiden name, was born in 1948. We have lived in this house - - Abbott was restless sometimes, he had traveled a great deal with his father who was a lawyer and a vice-president of the Erie Railroad, and had been to Europe many times as a child. They used to go to Carlsbad a great deal. So we were looking for someplace that would be a change and in 1948 we decided to go in with Abbott's brother who owned a piece of property on the coast of Maine. We shared that house which was built and first opened in 1949. My children had most of their childhood summers there. Abbott liked that New England atmosphere, he had gone to Phillips Exeter and Williams College and of course Abbott is a New England name. Our son, Abbott, Jr., was delighted to find it on schools and so forth. I learned to sail there. I had never handled a boat before. The children grew up and Abbott, Jr. had college in Lester, Massachusetts and then four years in the Navy. Then our son, Bill, graduated from Phillips Exeter and had sometime at Cornell but wanted some European travel and went to the University of Madrid. Abbott and I had a beautiful trip to Europe together in 1962. I'd like to show you some of my pictures of that sometime. He took movies and slides. Although Bill, although he had honors at the University of Paris, didn't want college at that point. He eventually did graduate from Cornell and he had his time in the United States Army, including a year in Vietnam which was a very difficult time for me. I had done loads of volunteer work. I had been a Den Mother and a Girl Scout leader, but you cannot do volunteer work if you are not at ease with yourself. Nobody is going to pay any attention to you. And at that point when he was in Vietnam during the Tet Offensive, I decided I had better get into



Mr. and Mrs. Francis W. O'Donnell on their 45th Wedding Anniversary
with their grandchildren (1955)

something tangible and I was fortunate that I could pick up my Chemistry. I got a job with the Pathologists at Batavia, Genesee County Lab, who were also at the Medina Hospital at that time. Eventually the opening came into Medina and I was able to work in the Medina Lab and use the education that my father had helped me get at such expense to himself. I had several years there. I retired from the hospital lab when I was 65. Abbott was glad for me to do it. He had been opposed to my taking a paid job for many, many years and I'm glad I did the volunteer work. One day we wanted to know where something was, and it was time for me to go (to work). I said, "Abbott, I'll come home at noon and we will find it". When I came home at noon, he had found it and I asked him, "All right if I go back to the lab?" And he said, "Louise, I'm glad that you've got that job". And I did enjoy it!

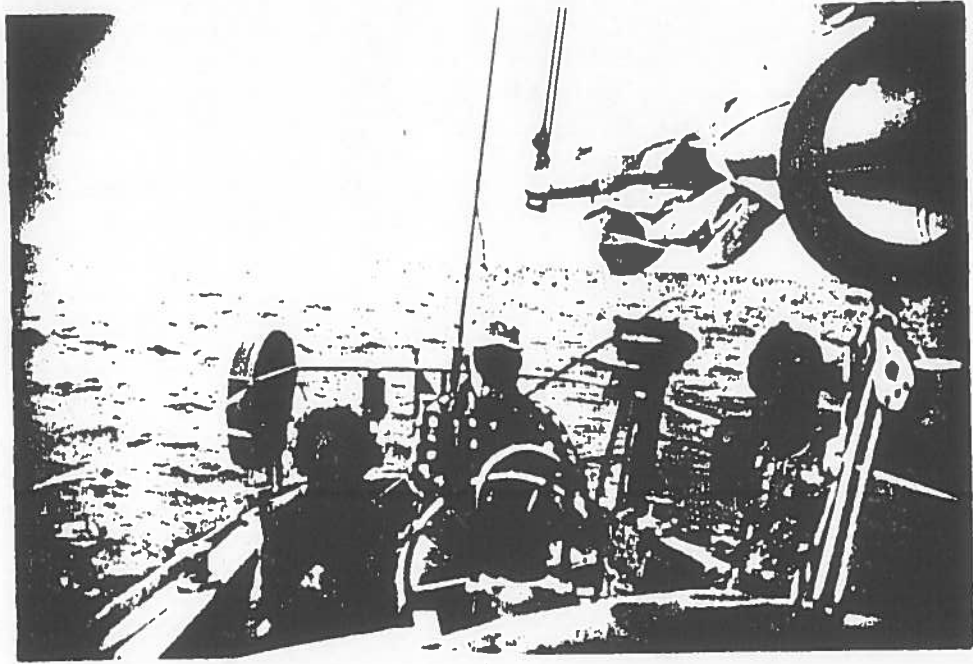
Mc And your son Bill did come back from the war, Louise?

E He came back, God bless him, yes! Both boys had honorable discharges. Bill has the Army Commendation Medal, and Abbott Jr's ship, the whole ship U.S.S. Lowe, got a Commendation Medal.

(NOTE: This note has been added by L.O. Brownell; not on tape). Our third son, George - named after his Uncle and Grandfather - graduated from the Devereux School, Glen Moore, Pennsylvania and works in Medina for Fisher Price. He married Linda Albone of Medina in 1963. Their children are David Paul and Brenda Lynn.

Our daughter Teresa graduated from Medina High School, and Niagara Orleans SOCES. She is a licensed Practical Nurse at St. Mary's Hospital in Rochester, and owns her own home near Hilton, New York.) (End of written, not-taped, material).

When you came in this morning to do the interview, Helen, you asked about the piano. It belonged to Abbott's mother and is a lovely Steinway. She said it was one of the nicest pianos she had ever used. My husband played a little every day of his life. He had gone to the opera many times as a boy growing up in New York. I think some of the happiest times Abbott and I had together were when we were visiting in New York and would go to the Opera.



Aboard "Pogo", off the Florida Keys 1976
Louise O'D. Brownell, Dr. Francis W. O'Donnell
and Mrs. F. O'Donnell (Eileen Sager)

THE JOURNAL-REGISTER
Medina, N.Y., Thursday, May 7, 1981



TALENTED LOCAL ARTISTS--The Ridgeway Town Hall is now decorated with several fine paintings thanks to the efforts of the members of the Senior Citizens Painting Club. Ridgeway Town Historian Evelyn Allen, left, and Town Supervisor Robert Winters, right, are shown here accepting the donated works

of art. The painters are from left to right Louise Brownell, Sophie Raisner, Alberta Kibler who is the instructor, Edna Farnum, Helen Webber and Nettie Pettit. The paintings will be displayed in the hall along with two earlier works donated by Pearl Blackmer and Daniel Caleb. (J-R Photo)

I have more space here (in the house) than I actually need, but Abbott and I had 34 years together. He died at the age of 75, which was just a few years ago. I've kept the house and I've kept these momentos and pieces of furniture, and the paintings, some of which his father had bought in the early 1900's. As you can see, I have more space than I need but I love it when my children come home. I have two grandchildren living in Medina and they were over here the other day.

I have traveled. I have been to Europe three or four times, and the Middle East; but I love to get back to Orleans County. This is my home.

Mc These are your roots!

B That's right. I still see friends in organizations, church work, the University Women and really - whenever I'm downtown I see someone that I worked with at the hospital. It's just like seeing family.

Mc And you have interesting hobbies, Louise. One of them is painting

B That's recent. I'm going to the Senior Citizens (building) this afternoon for painting, and I have taken workshops. I have taken workshops in Florida and in Maine. I've gotten some few things into juried shows. I never felt the need for it while Abbott was living because we had some beautiful paintings. I'll show some of them to you before you go.

Mc Do you paint in oil, Louise?

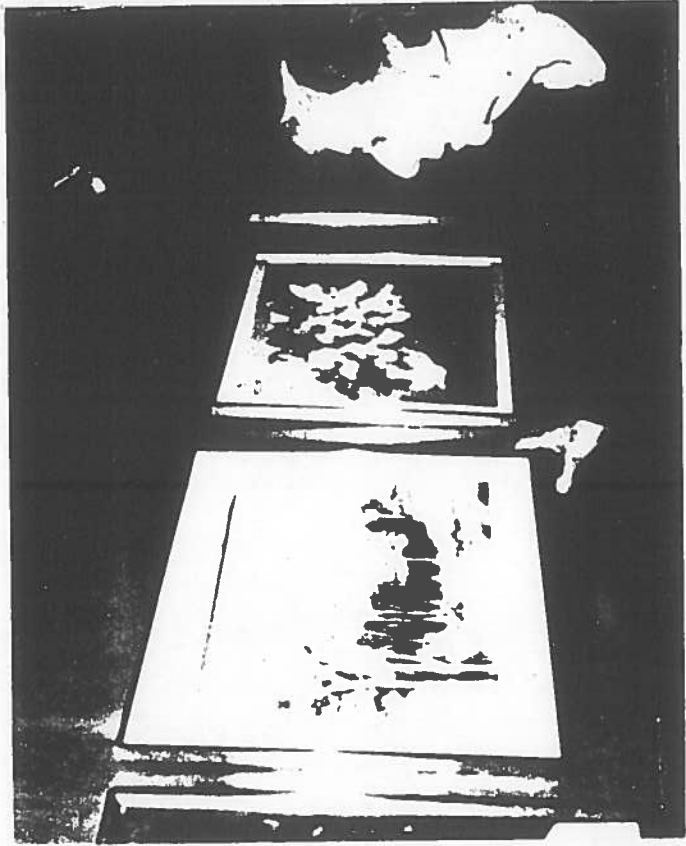
B Oil and watercolor. I've gone to both kinds of workshops. My children are very supportive and I think that's because it lets me have a hobby and lets me let them live their own lives.

Mc Thank you ever so much, Louise, for this most interesting interview.

B I really think that you are doing a great job! You are picking up information from so many different kinds of people and places, and it is all good. I've read some of the transcripts.

Mc They are all available in the four Public Libraries in the County and, hopefully, they will be in book form someday. Thank you very much Louise.

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Interview conducted at the Brownell home by Helen McAllister of Medina, N.Y. Photos thru courtesy of Mrs. Brownell. The taped interview was transcribed by Lysbeth Hoffman of Waterport, N.Y. Compilation by Helen McAllister.



Louise Brownell

artist