

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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L. Monacelli Photo Copy
JOHN D. BRUSH 1897 - 1981
Our Benefactor and
Inspiration in the

Preservation and Restoration
of this Cobblestone Landmark

So reads a new bronze historical tablet which will be dedicated on Sunday, September 26 at the second Annual Universalist Reunion in the Cobblestone Church at Childs. This tablet will be permanently mounted in the lobby of the Cobblestone Church as a tribute to one of the Cobblestone Society's most outstanding members. Here now is the story behind it all.

John D. Brush was born at Ablon, N.Y. to Eva and Dwight Brush in 1897. The Senior Mr. Brush ran a saloon in Ablon before the days of Prohibition. It is remembered that from the early age of nine John bought all his own clothes. He attended the Pullman Memorial Universalist Church and graduated from Ablon High School in the Class of 1916. He then studied at St. Lawrence University from which he graduated in 1922. During his college years he supported himself with a variety of jobs including: snow shoveling, tending furnaces, working as a lumberjack, bell hop, fisherman and construction on the ATO Fraternity House in Canton.

In 1918 he enlisted in the Armed Forces but never saw service as World War I ended. In 1923 John graduated from the Theological School of St. Lawrence University. He then became minister of the Church of Good Tidings-Universalist in North Weymouth, Mass. until 1926. From there he served the First Universalist Church of Norwood, Mass. until 1931. It was during his ministry there, that he met and encouraged Warren B. Lovejoy to go into the ministry. Rev. Lovejoy ironically became minister of the Pullman Church in Ablon during the early 1960's. As a minister John was especially liked by young people and was in great demand as a speaker all over the state of Massachusetts.

In 1925 he married Edna Jeanne, also a graduate of St. Lawrence University and their three sons are John, Jr., Richard and Robert.

In 1930, for reasons of health, the Rev. John Brush was advised to give up the ministry. After casting about for another occupation, he decided to go into business with his brother-in-law Mr. Willard Punnett of Rochester. Mr. Punnett had designed a production type safe that could be stamped out thus eliminating a major portion of labor costs. Early in 1931 the necessary machinery, suitable building and a die-maker were procured. A corporation was set up known as Brush-Punnett Co. and Mr. and Mrs. Brush and Mr. and Mrs. Punnett each put in \$4,000. By the time the plant was ready to go nearly all the capital was depleted. Both Mr. Brush and Mr. Punnett agreed to take no salary until the business was making an income. This of course, was during the great depression and business did not materialize as expected, so John Brush went out on the road selling his product. He got a few orders but not enough to maintain his staff. By the end of the year 1932 he and Mr. Punnett were doing everything themselves. In 1933 Mr. Punnett had given up all hope of the business amounting to anything and he turned his stock back to the company. It then meant that everything was the responsibility of Mr. Brush. During 1933 he made a total of 120 safes and took in \$3,000 which was just enough to keep the place open. The following year began to show a little more promise as he grossed \$5,000. John and his family lived on a bare minimum and had it not been for Mrs. Brush who made many sacrifices, the business would have closed. By 1937 John was finally able to pay himself \$50 a week, almost as much as his salary had been in the ministry seven years earlier. There were still many ups and downs until late in 1943 when the Eastman Kodak Company gave him a sizable order. It then became necessary to enlarge and by the end of World War II his production had quadrupled. We know this company today as Sentry Safes Inc. John, Jr., Richard and Robert continue to operate this business which is located in Penfield with another office in California.

In 1961 when the Cobblestone Society was in its infancy John D. Brush became immensely interested in the preservation of the Cobblestone Universalist Church at Childs. Through his generous support many dreams of the Cobblestone Society became realities. In 1966 he paid for the restoration of the church tower in memory of his mother and procured the 1590 pound bell to put in it. It was also through his financial support that the position of curator was established for the Cobblestone Museum. Not only did he give generously and frequently to the Cobblestone Society but also to St. Lawrence University and the First Universalist Church in Rochester.

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