



# Orleans County Historical Association



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--- also pictures

1903 - 1986



# Orleans County Historical Association

## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT INTERVIEW

Paul J. Britt  
Lakewood Village  
Medina, New York

Paul J. Britt was born July 6, 1903.  
Interviewed by Don Cook of Medina, New York.



Paul J. Britt



# 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.

Paul J. Brubaker  
Signed

March 13 1982  
Date

Understood and agreed to:

Don Cook  
INTERVIEWER

MARCH 13 1982  
Date

For the Orleans County Historical Association today is March, 13, 1982, this is Don Cook of Medina, New York, interviewing Paul J. Britt at his home in Lakewood Village Mobile Home Park just outside of Medina, N.Y.

---

C Paul, the first thing I have to ask you is where you were born and when?

B I was born July 6, 1903 on Bates Road. The last farm on the left hand side going down on the Bates Road before you get to the Ridge Road. And its a funny thing, my father was born there, too.

C Same house?

B Same house. (Grandfather) came up from down around Canastota and his father (Grandfather) was living there and he was born there and then his father (Grandfather) bought a farm around on the Ridge, just around the corner. And dad was born, though, where I was born.

C That'd be on the east side or the west side?

B On the west side.

C And your dad was a farmer?

B Dad was a farmer and his father was a farmer. He farmed it there, 'till he sold the farm and moved into town. Then he went into the coal business. He run the coal business on Gwinn Street there for a number of years. He bought it off Meade, I think it was owned it and then he sold it to ...

C Would that be Barrone? On the north side of the (railroad) tracks?

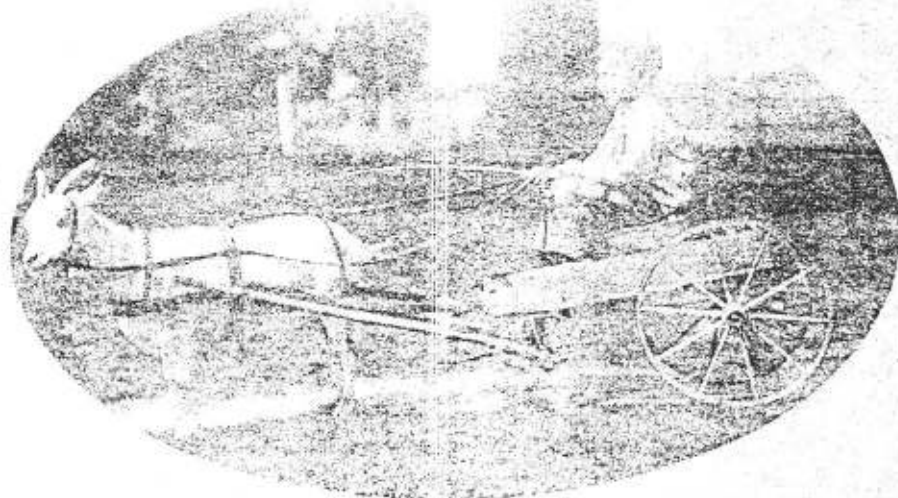
B Yeah. And they used to have... Belden was in there and Allan Ayrault was there running the food. And they used to pick beans in there. Handle beans and ripe... and that.

Britt

1/2



Paul J. Britt



Paul J. Britt in Kidgeway Parade.. 5 years old  
1908

C So you went to school in Medina?

B I went to school in Medina on Oak Orchard Street.

C The old Medina sandstone school?

B Yep! Mrs. Prudem was my kindergarten teacher.

C Would you remember Billy Gill?

B No, I don't remember him,

C He had her too (as a teacher) because he speaks of her in his (Orleans County Oral History). OK, go ahead.

B And I went through that school and then I went over to the high school. Used to walk it over. But it was handy for me. I lived on Hedley Street right back of the school and all I had to do was wait for the bell to ring and I'd still get into school in time.

C Great!

B That was handy. Then I went to high school for two years and told my father, "I guess I'm not going back to school." He said, "You can't quit school now." "Well," I said, "I'm not getting anywhere over at the high school." Of course they didn't have what they got there today. It was just writing, arithmetic and English and so on and so forth. But anyway, he said, "Would you go to business school?" And I said, "Yeah." So I ~~went~~ to Lockport to Bettinger's Business School. It was right on Main Street there. All I took was one year business course. I learned more there in one year than I did in two years I was in high school, and it helped me through because after that I worked... well, when I started to work...I worked all summers on my brother-in-laws. That was Charley Martin up on the Martin Road. I used to go up there and work summers for him every summer. I earned

enough so I could buy my clothes.

C When you were going to school?

B Yes.

C Didn't you say once...not to interrupt you here, but...I kind of thought this was interesting because I work at the Journal (Medina Daily Journal-Register newspaper). Didn't you say at one time you delivered Journals?

B Yes.

C When they were on East Center Street?

B Yes sir! East Center Street?

C Do you know when this was? That's going back.

B That's going way back!

C They've been on Main Street for years.

B A long while. Yeah, I delivered... and I used to go up to the...Boots. That was the other side of the (Oak Orchard) creek where that farm... the first farm on the right (south), up here on Maple Ridge. We had to walk up there to get our milk.

C Yeah?

B Sure. And then I'd bring some for another neighbor and I'd get a little money that way.

C Now I kind of interrupt you here, but I'm just curious. Can you remember the first cars coming in ?Or were they kind of here by then?

B They was here.

C Few of them?

B Wasn't many, but they was up on West Center Street there. They had chauffers. My brothers,both Edwin and Orren, was chauffers. And they



had housemaids, and all that, up there. They was really in the money up in there. But that is all gone now. There's nobody has any chauffeurs anymore.

C I'm a little behind you in years, Paul, but the big thing when you were a kid going to school, you wanted to get out and get a job so you could buy a car.

B That's right! I bought my first car in Albion. It was a used Model T car, and I learned more on that thing than I ever learned in my life about automobiles.

C Yeah? Well you were a mechanic for years.

B Well, I liked it. I bought that car and when I got home, of course I was about 18 then, well my dad says, "You got a car now," and he says, "long as you got the car, you can afford to run it; you've got to have insurance." He says, "you're not going to run it until you get insurance." So I have carried insurance all my life on an automobile. I've never had a serious accident. I've had little minor, fender-bender, a little bump here, somebody back in to me or I'd back into them, something, nothing serious. Never had to report nothing.

C Okay, I interrupted you on that because I kind of wanted to get that newspaper bit in there. Go back when you were now just out of school and got to working.

B I worked down to Albion, driving, chauffeured myself for Elmer Porter, (he had the Armors Fertilizer, he had all of Western New York here). I worked for him driving and then I also drew his fruit. He had one fruit farm in Barker, two over on the Bates Road and where the Steak House is over there, he owned that. There was fruit in there and I worked



for him, and then I went to work for Louie Sands, and then I worked for Allen Ayrault down in Knowlesville. Drew apples into Buffalo.

C Ship mostly by canal?

B No, not then. We had a truck but it was one of the first trucks that come out had pneumatic tires on; they was singles, there wasn't no doubles on them and they was about eight inches high and when one of them would go down, you'd think the truck was going to tip over! But we got along all right with that, we drove them in there. Charlie Dye was associated with Allen Ayrault at that time and they was buying apples and trucking them into Buffalo. But I didn't truck them all in; they hired Ray Parker and he had a couple of trucks and then they had a couple of trucks from out of Buffalo drawing. We drawed a lot. Beck's Brewery it was because they pulled it up and they had a place to store them in there. There wasn't room enough year around here (in Medina).

C Was Beck's Brewery the one over on the corner of Orient Street and East Oak Orchard?

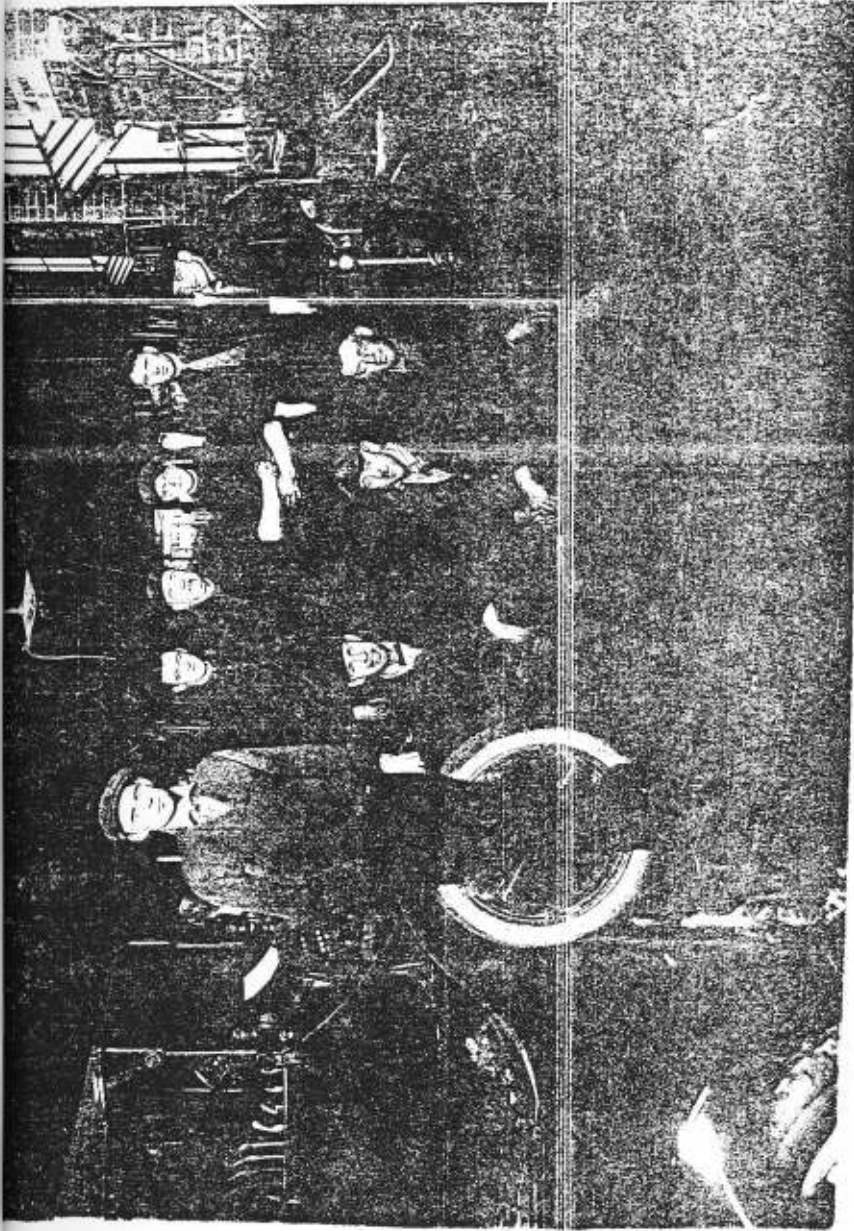
B No, that was Stein's.

C Where was Beck's Brewery?

B Buffalo.

C I see. Okay.

B I had to draw 'em into Buffalo, took eight hours and I ate my lunch, up and back, it took me eight hours to go up and back. Wouldn't go over eighteen miles an hour. And I used to eat my lunch while I was driving because I might just as well as to stop somewhere, so I used to eat my lunch and take eight hours. Well I worked for him and then I left there and went to work for the Ford people, driving cars down from Buffalo.



Ford Garage 135 E. Center St., Medina About 1921-'22

Standing, left to right: Wm. Clute (foreman), Clifford Mace, Charles Evans, Paul Britt, Ralph Clute, and Bertie Beals.

Kneeling: John Fidingger, Bart Woodward, and Russell Hendershot.

Britt

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That was "Doc" Walker. Jay Walker.

C Was that the building where Bramer (electric) is now?

B Yeah, he built that. I used to drive 'em down in the trucks, Ford didn't build the bodies for trucks. So I'd have to bring the chassis down. We had a wooden seat set on there and drove down from Buffalo. They used to go up on the trolley and go into the Ford Plant, it was right on Main Street then. Now it's over on the lake there. Trico's in there now.

C Take the trolley right almost to the door, didn't you?

B Yeah, get right off in front of the Ford place.

C And how long did it take you to drive a truck back, about a couple of hours?

B Oh yeah, about that. We wouldn't know whether they wanted a covered body on it, or a flat-deck body on it, or what. So when they got the order, whoever they sold it to, then we had to take it back into Buffalo and have the body mounted on it. That was quite a thing. Well I worked for him for -- then he sold out and (Eugene) Anderson took it over. And I worked for him the rest of the time, until I quit. I had a heart attack.

C When was that?

B Oh, about forty years ago. I was laid up for about six weeks, I didn't go to the hospital. Doc Owens was the doctor and I was home.

C Now at this time you were married and lived on the Salt Road?

B No, I was married. I'm getting ahead, I should of told you when I got married.

C Yeah. We missed your marriage and your kids. We got to get that in.

- B Well, I'll tell you about that. I got married when I was working to-- about, oh gosh --
- C 1930, something like that?
- B Well, it was -- I was, let's see, 21 I think when I was married. So that would be 21 from 78.
- C That would be 57 years ago.
- B Pretty near 60 years. And we had three children, three daughters: Kathleen, she married a fellow from Rochester, Hotelling's his name; that's kind of an odd name, Hotelling. I never heard it before and they're living in Pennsylvania now and she's a nurse and they got two children, two boys. And they're married and so they're growing up out there now but I go out every couple times a year. When I used to go to Florida (I went to Florida for nine years) we stopped there on the way down and on the way back. Just a day's drive from here over there, where they live in Pennsylvania.
- C Now your middle daughter?
- B My middle daughter's Virginia, she married Donald Myhill, "Pete."
- C "Pete" works for the telephone company.
- B Yeah, and they got two boys and a girl. They're all here in town now, the oldest boy, grandson there, Larry, he was out in the west there for awhile, then he finally come back here. And they've got two kids now. So that's great-grandchildren.
- C Okay now, your youngest daughter?
- B Youngest daughter is Iloia Iolman. She's a nurse and they've had two children, a boy and a girl. They're going to school here.
- C Todd's a senior this year isn't he?

- B Yeah, right! He's going to graduate this year. And so that takes care of them.
- C And now your wife's maiden name?
- B My wife's name was Mildred Russell. Her own father got drowned when she was a baby; he drowned in the Mohawk River down there. After work they used to jump in and swim, and he jumped in and didn't come up.
- C I'll be darned. Where did you meet her? Was she living in Medina then?
- B Yeah, I met her in Medina. Her step-father is Jack Russell. He worked for S.A. Cook, he was an engineer over there, down in the furniture factory. I'm getting way back.
- C Yeah, this is what it's for, to get way back. Now back to the cars. Now, when you had your heart attack, that's where we left off. Okay and you come back pretty good.
- B Yeah, I come forty years.
- C Then you went to work. Did you go to work then as a dog warden, or the bus driving?
- B No, I thought well it was kinda nerve-racking, you had three to please, I don't know whether anybody realized that. I had three to please there in the business. First one was the customer, then the next one was the help. You had to get along with them. Then I had my boss. So everyday there was a little bit of something going on somewhere, that you had to fight for. So I says well, I figured after I'd been in there all that time I'd try a gas station to ease up on me. So I run a gas station over on South Main there, did you know that?
- C No - -
- B Right across, you know where the Kentucky Fried Chicken is? Right on

the (northeast) corner of Main and Rt. 31A. Saunders owned the property, there wasn't no building there then, it burned down. There used to be a dryer on the corner there. And I went to see Mr. Saunders and I says - - "Would you sell that lot to me over there?" "Why," he says, "I'll think about it." So a few days afterwards he come around and said to me, "Paul what are you going to do with the lot?" I says, "I'm going to put up a garage, a service station." "Well," he says, "I just sold my coal business." "And," he says, "I don't know what to do with the money." He said, "why don't you let me put up the garage and I'll rent it to you and then if everything goes along all right and you want it, why some-day you can have it, buy it." "Well," I says, "that's a good idea." Because if it didn't work out, I wouldn't have nothing invested.

C Nothing invested, just your monthly rent?

B Yeah, so I went in there and run that for a couple of years and I had a beautiful business, more than I wanted. I had three or four men at one time working for me in that garage. And the more men I had, the more trouble I got into! Ralph Holman, he used to run a garage and then he went into the service and then when he come back out, that's when I hired him and he worked there for me for quite awhile. He was looking around to see if he couldn't buy a garage and I was getting kind of - - it was too much for me then. I had too many people call and too much going on, so one morning I decided I would sell out. My wife talked me into it too. She said, "You better get out of it. It's too much for you." So I says to Ralph, "you want to buy the place?" He says, "You wouldn't sell it, would you?" And I said, "yeah, I'll sell it." He knew what it was doing there. I was doing good, real good! So he bought it. So I



left there and then that's when I think I done a little work over to the home there, odd jobs, repairing, fixed up the barn on the Salt Works Road.

C So you lived on the Salt Works Road?

B Right. And then I got the job, dog warden, first one they ever had in the county.

C Do you know about when that was? Probably in the late '40s or early '50s wasn't it?

B Yeah.

C Somewheres along there. Of course I knew you by then - - I knew who you were for years but I think I really got to know you was in the late '40s. We didn't have many deer here and my Uncle Roy (Cook) and you and Harry Sharman and all those guys used to go to the Adirondacks, and that's when I first really got to know you, Paul.

B Yeah, we used to have some really good times up there.

C Oh, yeah. Harry Wilber's cabin near Speculator.

B Yeah. Yeah. His wife Myrtle done the cooking.

C Those were good days! Well we didn't have the deer then. Have you been out to see the deer lately? Roy there's a lot of them up there. (Wildlife areas south of Medina).

B There's a lot of them up around the swamps now, there's more around here than there is up there (Adirondacks) now. But it was fun going - - just for the companionship of, getting away from it all.

C Okay now, you're dog warden; now how long were you there?

B I was there 'til my wife died. She died about 25-30 years ago. My first wife. I was married again. I had Nola home with me. The other two girls was married.



- C Nola was about what, a freshman, sophomore in high school, wasn't she?
- B No, she - -
- C Junior, somewhere along in there?
- B She had to go to Oak Orchard School there for awhile.
- C Oh - - she was still in elementary?
- B Yeah. Dog warden, I kept that until my wife died, so - - nobody around to answer the phone. I couldn't do a job for them so I says, they didn't want me to quit. Harold Hill was my boss. He was one of the Supervisors, and he says, "you don't have to quit - - you can get by." I says, "No, Harold, there ain't nobody there" so that's when I went into driving school bus. The first school buses they had here were from Weeks and I worked for him.
- C Where was Weeks out of Newfane or Lockport?
- B Lockport.
- C Medina didn't own their own buses then, right?
- B They rented them. They only had three or four.
- C They weren't centralized yet were they?
- B No, not at all.
- C So you saw that come in too?
- B Yeah, I drove for them and then they started buying their own buses. They bought a Ford bus from where I used to work. Mr. Anderson sold it to them and we had to go down to East Rochester to get it. It was some dealer had it, they bought this afterwards and then they needed another bus so that's the only one they could find. It was already, somebody had ordered that bus and they didn't take it and he got wind of it and got it and sold it to the School Board. So then I drove that for awhile. They wanted somebody to take care of the buses and they asked me if I

would, and I said, "yes if the price is right."

C Like a mechanic?

B Right, but I had to drive too. They didn't have no spare buses. They didn't have a garage down at the Oak Orchard School; we parked the buses that we had out there. I think we only had three, four, I guess then.

C That's probably right where the front yard of the Oak Orchard School is now, isn't it?

B On the parking lot, the elementary.

C Oak Orchard Street, just about the end of Genesee Street. Didn't Bill Boyd sell a big hunk of land to them and they had that tenant house of his that they made into a kindergarten for awhile? Was that still there then?

B No, they tore that down. They had the whole new school built and a big parking lot.

C So you had to work outside, right?

B I worked outside for the first year or so 'til they built the garage. So I worked for the school taking care of the buses and driving. If a bus broke down, we had to wait until one of the buses come in to go out and get the bus. Not only that, but to deliver what kids was left in the bus!

C Or pick up if you were coming in?

B Right.

C I can just visualize you working out in this kind of weather, with this winter we've had where you don't have any --(protection).

B We had a time I'm telling you! We got along good. We got the kids there and got them back. And so I worked there until I retired then

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B We had a time I'm telling you! We got along good. We got the kids there and got them back. And so I worked there until I retired then

and then I went to work for Lindsay-Gregory.

C Now to classify them you'd say they were electric motors and all that?

B Electric motors they repaired.

C Back in Cook's Alley?

B Yup - - well not Cooks - -

C Well it's the one right there behind Main Street? (west side).

B What do they call that? (Proctor Place). Yeah, back of Murphy's (G.C. Murphy Co.) there, but anyway that's where they were down there. I liked that, I didn't mind. Lindsay seen me one day and he says, "We need somebody over there to - - would you come over?" He says, "You can do it; you worked on generators and starters, haven't you?" I says, "why yeah." "Well," he says, "this is on the same order." So I went over and worked in there for quite awhile. In the winter there wasn't too much goin' on so I'd take a couple three months off and go to Florida.

C So that's where you met Grace?

B Right.

C Grace (Caleb) was your second wife.

B Yeah, I married her after I sold the place over there. Nola and I, see she had to have somebody. I knew I couldn't do the job so Grace was very good.

C Now this time when you sold on the Salt Works Road you moved over next to (Bill) "Pooch" Ames on Gwinn Street?

B No, when I came down it was over on South Avenue, about the middle of the block. I had a lower apartment and I was there a year or better and then I married Grace and then I lived there.

C Now we're at Lakewood Village. Is that the name of it -- Lakewood Village Mobile Homes?

B Right!

C It's been an interesting career; now this was the last job that you really worked at, Lindsay-Gregory?

B No - -

C I didn't think so.

B I worked for H.J.Heinz Co. I was a night watchman. I never felt better in my life! I had to walk, punch clock and had to do a lot of walking. Walk about 15 minutes and then you could sit down for 10 minutes, but it was kind of tough in the winter there getting around and through the Vinegar Building there they had was cold and was wet. You had to walk on a plank through there. It wasn't lit up too good in there. What I didn't realize, they should never let a man in there alone. In the wintertime, I had a man down there in the boiler room, he was firing for the heat and I used to go in there and he used to know when I was coming around. But when there wasn't any heat on, I was the only one in the whole darn building there. Sylvania had a lot of TVs piled up in there, if they ever fell on me they wouldn't have found me 'til morning. They should never let a man be alone.

C They were probably only seasonal work so most of the year they only worked daytimes, right? They only had people around there during the day and nobody on the weekends except the watchman?

B Right!

C Now this is what we call Fisher-Price complex today?

B Right.

- C Now how long did you work at Heinz's?
- B I worked there on a shift, I took ~~relief~~, relief man, when they took their vacations, then I was working. So I done that through the summer and then I'd go to Florida after they'd come back to work, why I'd be done and I'd go down to Florida again.
- C Was that your last job?
- B That was really my last job.
- C But you're still keeping busy, you keep puttering around here and there.
- B Yeah. I done work over to the Carriage House on Gwinn Street there. I guess I painted every room there was in it. And I painted the outside too. That's two stories and a good hard building but I told him -- he wanted me to paint it and I says, "if my grandson will help me I'll do it, but," I says "I'm not going to climb that high." My grandson says, " why I'll help you Grandpa." That was Kirk, Virginia's boy. He helped me paint it, he painted all the upper part for me and I took the lower part. So I worked for him for two or three years and he still wanted me to come, she did too, to work. Then they had the one -- he lived over on the one there by Club 31. He owned that one too.
- C Right across the road there? Where Ray Perry used to be?
- B Yeah, right.
- C That's not quite so bad. It's a smaller building.
- B It was smaller, I put a new roof on there and I done painting there and different jobs I done for him that he wanted me to do.
- C Well, see, you're handy; you can do it.
- B He had a broken toilet there and he says, " you got to put a toilet on." I says, "I don't know nothing" -- he says, " you can do it," and I did it!

- C And you're not a plumber either ?
- B No, I wasn't a plumber either; Jack of all trades, Master of none.
- C Oh, I wouldn't say that! If anybody was a mechanic, I would say that's probably your big thing; you know, you can do a lot of things. That's one of the things you excel at because I can remember you when I was a kid, working in a garage.
- B They always called me when they bought a new car and at night it wouldn't start or something and they'd call me and I'd have to go and get them and help them out. I was the one they'd call. Maybe they'd call the boss first, but he wouldn't do nothing for them. He'd say, "call Paul."
- C He didn't know anyway, he just run the books and business and you were the mechanic ?
- B Yeah. Bill Clute was the boss when I went there; I wasn't the foreman all the time.
- C Well you got to start at the bottom and work up.
- B I'd like to mention the times, how they've changed. When I was a boy I worked up there for my brother-in-law Charlie martin, on the farm. He didn't have any tractors then in them days. I think he had 12 or 14 horses, he had a man by the year, sometimes two men. One on one end of the farm, he had 300 acres up there.
- C Oh -- that's big! The average farm in those days was what -- about 60, 70 acres ? 80 acres?
- B Yeah, right! He had 300 acres there and I used to like horses. I always did. I used to drive all of them that he had there. I wasn't afraid of them.
- C Now these were just the regular work horses ?



## Britt 17

- B Regular work horses -- well he had driving horses for the hired man.
- C Well that was for the Sunday-go-to-meeting deal and all that ?
- B Yeah, but they used to put it in and work it too. But anyway I'd like to tell you how things changed. He had chickens and pigs and cattle. At that time, that was what he had there. If I had a boy that's where I'd like to have him go in the summer because I learned a lot on the farm, how stuff would grow, how things were raised.
- C The time and effort to do it.
- B Yes, but how it's changed! He finally didn't have a living thing on the farm, and he was working it all by himself. He had all machinery, he never even had a cat or dog, he was buying milk, buying butter and that stuff they bought for the house.
- C Probably working three or four times the amount of land, too; with a tractor you could do it.
- B Yeah!
- C With a eight or ten-bottom plow, you could plow in one day what you could plow in a month with a team.
- B Yeah, he'd combine it, and I draw it, and he'd put it in the barn. I know I helped him out after that when he done that, I'd draw the wheat. It was over south of Alabama.
- C He worked the farm right up until he was 80 years old when he finally passed away? Close to that, older than that ?
- B He was a little older, in his eighties. I don't know just how old. My sister's still alive and she's the oldest and I'm the youngest, that's funny. She's alive and she's in pretty good health. She's 91. (Ethel B. Martin. See her transcript in the Public Library).

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- C She still lives on the Martin Road ?
- B Yeah. (Just east of) Rolland's home.
- C Rolland's on the farm that you're talking? That's where Charlie was, where Rolland (Martin) is now ?
- B That's right. Yeah, that's how things have changed.
- C Used to churn your own butter and now you go to the store and buy it.
- B Yeah, I used to churn the darn butter and carry in the wood. That was my job when I was up there, fill the wood box.
- C Did you ever cut wood in the winter in the woods ?
- B Yeah, Rollie Soules and I once went up in the swamps. We cut wood up there but they was props for the mine. Didn't earn too much but it was something to do. There wasn't no welfare then or nothing that you could go and get any help from. If you wanted any money you got out and earned it. I done nearly everything I guess.
- C You've done a good job of it too, what everybody tells me. You didn't take a back seat to anybody.
- B No, I stick up for my rights. I try to do what's right. I try to treat everybody good.
- C Your reputation is well known in Medina; that's a good feeling. Do you remember much about World War 1; you were a little young ?
- B Yeah, I remember my brothers going. Orrin -- well they all went but me and I was going to high school then. I had to go over to the Armory, they'd started that, training over there an hour a week. I think it was an hour, I had to go over there, that was kind of - -
- C Like a home National Guard they call it ?
- B Yeah, they trained us so I expected to go.

- C Do you remember when the Armistice was signed ? Didn't have radios and all that in those days.
- B No, but they say the first Armistice was false, wasn't it? They reported it and then --
- C Boy, you're not talking to a Historian! I don't remember that; it could be.
- B I think the first was a false report on it, but was a day or so after that the real Armistice come through true. My brother, Claude was the only one that went across. He went across and when he come home he brought one of them German helmets home and it had a hole in it. He said when he picked it up the guys brains was in there; he said he had to wash it out. He brought that home, for a souvenir. Orrin was in the Navy, and Edwin was stationed down around New York there somewhere. He was working on the railroad at that time when he was drafted and they got him off for, oh, I guess six months, the railroad did, out of the Army. Then he had to go back finally.
- C Now today you hear something about seven seconds after it happens with radio and television. Do you remember when the first radios came in ?
- B Oh yeah. I had one; it had earphones. A crystal set. By God, I thought that was wonderful! They used to come set with me. I was married and lived in there in the Cole house, that's where Albert Cole -- you know where (Doctor) Ken Clark lives now , up on the hill. (1023 West Ave.) Irv Rowley used to live in there, owned it then.
- C THat's on West Avenue ?
- B Yeah, West Avenue. My dad owned the house and then he made the upstairs into an apartment for me, when I first got married. I was there for a

- couple years.
- C Now today they got television - -
- B Well it's something, I said to different ones, your television isn't new, your radio isn't new, we've always had TV. Look it, you can look out and see now, you can look out and see things, see a car go by, that's TV. And hearing is your radio.
- C Well, yeah, that's true. I never looked at it that way. I was just thinking it in terms of like you were saying here, the end of World War I you found out probably two or three days later where with your modern radio and TV you pick it right up. But yeah, you're right, I never looked at it that way.
- B Well yeah it's real, we've always had it in a way, if you stop and think of it. No, I remember the first one I had to put the earphones on.
- C KDKA, Pittsburgh ?
- B Yeah.
- C Okay now, what about prohibition? You must have been right about the age where you could remember that coming in ?
- B Yeah, I was in Shelby then. I used to put a barrel of cider in every year and I'd drink it. Between me and brother Orrin, he was over on the farm then.
- C Let it set for awhile and let it get hard ?
- B Oh yes, and it was good! Better than what you can buy today for drinking. I think it was better than anything you could drink. It was, they claim it was good for arthritis, I don't know whether it was or not.
- C Well it was a good excuse for drinking.

- B Yeah, good excuse for drinking it. Then I used to make ale too. I go up, there was a store up to West Shelby, go up there and buy it in a five-gallon can, all you had to do is put the yeast in it. Bring it home, dump it in, put the yeast in and it was just as clear and nice as ale you ever drank.
- C Now what did you do, put it down in the cistern or basement or somewhere to keep it cool, "cause you didn't have a refrigerator ?
- B Yeah, in the cellar. Didn't have a refrigerator, I used to have to bring ice. About every other day through the summer you'd stop at the store and get a chunk of ice and bring it up and put it in the icebox. That was a nice job all the time doing that but finally then we got a electric one, when they come out more.
- C That was probably in the '30s, somewhere along in there.
- B Yeah, that was nice.
- C Did you ever make your own ale from scratch ?
- B Beer I did. With the hops and - - - - -
- C Were you doing this when it wasn't legal ?
- B Oh yeah, everybody did, wherever you went. Ya' know they said "Ya' want a beer;" we all tried to make it a little better than the other fellow. People that never drank before was drinking then.
- C Because it was illegal, right ?
- B I guess so, yeah!
- C Do you remember, you know there was quite a lot of hooch going across - - of course it was legal in Canada and they'd bring it into this country. Do you remember anything about that ?
- B Yeah, I never got into it, but I heard different ones saying - - then



- there was a fellow here in Medina that made it. Made ale, claimed it was Canadian Ale but he made it right here and sold it. He had it in old burlap bags and stuff and they thought he was bringing it across or it was coming from Canada but it wasn't.
- C He was making it right here ?
- B Yeah.
- C Selling it right out in the open market almost ?
- B Well almost.
- C Kind of so that nobody would really - - it must of kind of spoiled a little of the fun when they took that - -
- B I think they drank more then --
- C If it would have been on the open market.
- B Yeah.
- C I was just going to say, they must have taken a lot of the fun out of it when they finally repealed that 18th Amendment -- or whatever it was. (Ediotrs note: see transcripts of C.Conner, F.Hollenbeck No.2, and W.Heitz No. 2).
- B Yeah.
- C Volstead- Lacey Act wasn't it ?
- B Yeah, they packed a lot of money in on that tax. All this rolling in I don't know where it goes. Like their gasoline tax; you know, when they first put that on it was supposed to be for our roads only. We'd have roads made out of gold.
- C What were you paying for gas when you first started driving ?
- B Ten, maybe ten cents a gallon or eight, nine cents a gallon, it was cheap. And like kerosene was a by-product then almost and now it costs as much as the gasoline today.

## Britt 23

- C I use number two fuel and last bill I got was \$1.259 a gallon;back in those days it was almost free.
- B Yeah, a by-product. But the electricity's a wonderful thing! I don't know what we'd do if you stop and think of what it does for us. I don't know how we could get along without it today.
- C If it's off for two hours, you get all stirred up, I know I am. Do you remember when electricity first came in ?
- B Yeah, oh yeah! It was on Hedley Street; we had lamps when we come in from the farm there, I used to have to carry a little lamp upstairs to bed but finally electric come in and dad had it put in, so we had electric then.
- C And your first telephone ? That wasn't quite an emergency as electricity.
- B No, I don't remember the telephone much but I've heard -- they did that when my dad -- when his father lived over on the Ridge there, they had a wire going across and they had a round, it looked like a picture. With some skin acrossed it and then there was a wire fastened to it and they could tap on that and talk back and forth.
- C How far away were they ?
- B About half a mile or three-quarters of a mile it was across.
- C You could talk to each other, just tap and get their attention ?
- B Yeah, just tap, that's the only way they had to tap and - -
- C Once you got their attention you could talk ?
- B Yeah, you could talk right into that and they could hear.
- C Now how long ago was that ? Back when you were a kid maybe ?
- B That's when I was a kid,yeah. It was before I was born, I say they was telling me.
- C You never saw them do it ?



- B No, I never seen it done but they did have it.
- C I can remember, telling about them rum runners coming across from Canada there; I guess they used to bring a lot of it.
- B A lot of money was made.
- C I've heard of speakeasys, you always see these Al Capone movies or whatever. Did you ever have dances here where they'd sneak it into the dances and all that ?
- B Yeah.
- C They'd have dances in places where you'd --
- B Smith, he used to - -
- C Right up in Shelby ?
- B Yeah.
- C I heard of that but I never got into - -
- B That was up on - - first road after you go down the main road up there, down the Harrison Road, the first road to your right there.
- C Sour Springs ? Well, Edwards Road as far as Fletcher Chapel Road and then it's the Sour Springs Road (south).
- B (William) "Sleepy" Smith they called him. I heard about it and I went up there, I wanted to see. He had dances in the barn.
- C Every Saturday night ? In the summertime ?
- B Yeah, and in the fall. I'm no dancer, never cared for dancing but I heard so much about it so one night I went up. He had a bar there in the house.
- C You had to go in the house to get it and then you go back out, what'd he have, a couple guys playing violins or something for an orchestra ?

- B Yeah, yeah, upstairs.
- C Up in the hay mow like ?
- B Yeah.
- C And the people would dance on the main floor ?
- B No, it was up where they put the hay.
- C Charge admission to people ?
- B Oh yeah! Sure !
- C Yeah, I heard of "Sleepy" Smith. Now how long ago would that be ? That would be like maybe 1930 , or 1920? Somewhere along in there ?
- B Yeah, during the prohibition. He was a comical guy. I got in 'cause he knew me.
- C Were you kind of young ?
- B Yeah, I was married then. I lived in Shelby. But I just wanted to see what was going on. He had a white vest on, pearl buttons, his hair was parted. He looked like one of them real bartenders you'd see on TV. He had a lot of old cars around there, he was a great man to buy cars and never drove them.
- C Did he pedal them off ?
- B No, he'd keep them, he wouldn't sell them.
- C What did he do besides ? Of course he probably made a pretty good buck with that booze trade that was illegal, but he didn't farm it ?
- B He was no farmer. He had a farm but he didn't farm it.
- C More of a promoter, right.
- B Yeah.
- C Okay, anything else you can think of that's of interest from way back ?

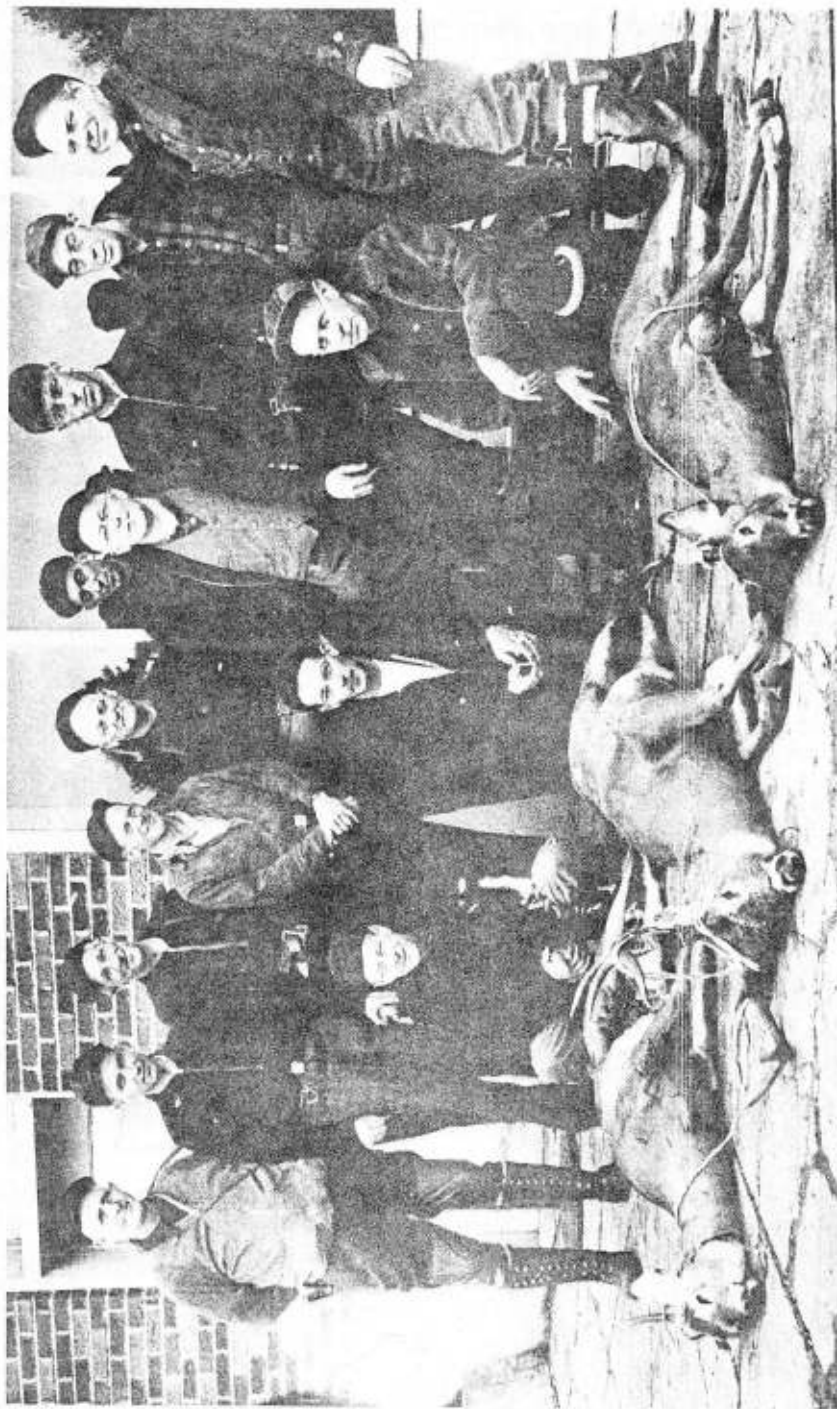
- B Okay! Let's go back to the Depression, you don't know nothing about that, do you ?
- C Yeah. I grew up in it so I know a little but I didn't have the headaches; but I can remember my parents, Paul.
- B The banks closed. They closed down and I was working at the Ford then. Mr. Anderson come out, I don't know what day it was, but anyways. he says, "well I haven't any money to pay you fellows but what I'll do, if you want to come back and come in we'll pick up what we can and we'll divide equally amongst us all." So I said might as well do that as set to home or run around, and I think the first week I got \$2.50 for the week. And then the next week it kept climbing up a little more and more and, oh I guess it was about a month before everybody got back on regular salary.
- C Of course regular salary back tn them days wasn't like - -
- B No, we worked there six days a week, ten hours a day. Saturday and all.
- C Probably making about 30 cents an hour ?
- B Probably about that. That was good money.
- C Sure, you could buy a loaf of bread for about a nickel and today it's a buck. Okay, go ahead. Anymore about the Depression there ?
- B Well that's about all, it was tough for people. That shows you they can get along if they have to. You didn't have everything but you could get along. We got along. we didn't starve. But it was a lot different in them days, we used to have enough in the house to last a week anyway but today 90 % of them live from one day to the next. They got to go to the grocery store almost everyday. They don't cook, they don't bake up nothing, they got to get their bread and they got to get their milk and

they got to get this and they got to get that and almost everyday they got to go get something. But we used to put in enough so you'd have enough so it'd be a week before we'd run short.

- C You probably had your dirt cellar where you had potatoes and onion all winter long ?
- B Well, yeah. We always had a nice big garden; I had a garden 'til I moved in here.
- C Johnny Loughlin (neighbor on Gwinn St.) says, "Paul Britt's got the best garden in Medina." He liked that 'cause you used to bring him over stuff.
- B I used to have raspberries and rhubarb and strawberries. I wasn't too good on strawberries. I don't know why. Never could raise good strawberries. If I had enough to eat, I was doing well and I'd have a bunch and I'd put paper around them and I done everything.
- C The hay and the straw and the whole bit ?
- B Yeah, but they just wouldn't - -
- C Might have the wrong soil or something - -
- B Well I never did have any -- couldn't been all wrong, where I was up to Shelby, I didn't have - -
- C Oh, I thought you meant on Gwinn Street.
- B No, on Salt Works Road I tried it and - -
- C Popcorn, did you raise your own popcorn ?
- B Yes! I raised my own popcorn.
- C You still do your own cooking here don't you ?
- B Oh yes, I'd rather eat home, if I want another slice of bread it's right here and I cook what I want and I eat what I want. If I don't want to eat it all, I put it in the refrigerator and get out, eat it up. I eat good.

- C You're probably a good cook. I can remember you helping us cook up in the Adirondacks there.
- B Yeah, I could cook anything.
- C Still like to play cards ?
- B Oh yeah, I do that almost all the while now. That's about my hobby. I go down to the Senior Citizens in the morning, three mornings I go down there. Three or four of us go together, one will drive one day and one the other. Go down and play there in the morning and then I go down in the afternoon, down to the Vet's Club (VFW) and I play cards down there in the afternoon. It's a pasttime.
- C You always liked to play cards. I can remember going to the Adirondacks, I think my Uncle Roy would rather plays cards with you than he would to hunt deer.
- B Yeah, that was something up there! When I was up there once Roy was lost because he didn't come out right. We gathered there and Roy was missing, so Harry Sharman says, "well I'll go get him." Then Harry ahppened to be the first one to run onto Roy. We was taught to stay put if we didn't know, stay put because we'd pick them up in no time but it they started going you wouldn't know where they was. You probably remember that. Maybe you were there that year ?
- C No, it was a year or two before I came up.
- B Harry seen Roy and he says, "Roy, my God, I wouldn't have come after you if it wasn't for playing poker tonight." He says, "we want you there to play poker with!"
- C That was my Uncle Roy Cook from Lyndonville. He loved to play cards.
- B Oh yeah, he loved to play cards and he had more luck up there in the





Medina area sportsmen deer-hunting in the Adirondack Mountains  
near Speculator, N.Y. early in November 1944.

Kneeling, left to right: Glenn Allchin, Olin Caleb, and George A. Carpenter.

Standing, left to right: Earl S. Ross, Herbert F. Hinrich, Harry E. Sharman,

Roy A. Cook, Louie R. Neal, Clifford Hillyard, Clarence D. Vail, Lawrence Caleb,  
Merle Scott, and Paul J. Britt.

Adirondacks hunting.

C He was a good hunter.

B Good hunter and a good shot too.

C Yeah, good hunter and good and steady. You guys had a lot of fun up there. That's where I really got to know you. You all growing up, you know, everybody knows everybody in Medina just about -- but I didn't know you personally until that.

B And your brother, Clarence lived right across from me there on Gwinn Street, kitty corner.

C Yeah. The good ole days!

B Yup, the good ole days! We had our ups and downs, you got to have them up and down in order to appreciate the good days. If they was good days always you wouldn't appreciate them.

C You look back and the good days always outnumber the bad.

B Yeah.

C Well, Paul, this has been great. Anything else - - probably we can think of a lot of things after we shut this interview down. I think we've got a lot of your past history there. You lived in Medina area all your life ?

B All my life.

C That's good. I want to thank you for this interview.

(End of Tape one )-



Paul J. Britt  
(Second tape - side one)

For the Orleans County Historical Association today is April 4, 1982,  
this is Don Cook back with Paul Britt for another resume on our tape.

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C Paul, when we were talking about the "speakeasy," so to speak, at (William) "Sleepy" Smith's, I kind of stepped on you (talked) and changed the subject and we would like to -- the Historical Assoc., would like to get a little back on that what you can remember, you know, about the whole setup there, so do you want to take it from here?

B Yes. There was quite a story about what he was having up there and so I got curious and so one Saturday night, that's when the big nights was up there, and so I went up alone. I says I'm going up and see what its all about. I lived in Shelby Center then and so it was only a short ways up there. And I got up there and there were quite a few cars around there and I went in where there was a big barn, there was two floors, and they was dancing up on the second floor. And I was up there and they had a nice crowd, It was orderly and they had good music and, I don't dance, of course I didn't take a partner but I don't dance anyway. But I was just curious to see what it was like up there. So I knew that he was selling a little on the side to drink. So if I hadn't been known -- that wasn't sold in the barn. You had to go to the house. He had a bar set up in the back of the house there, and I went in -- or tried the door and finally the fellow come and he knew me and he let me in. So I had a couple of drinks and talked with them there awhile and that was about it. But they had a good turnout and I couldn't see too much wrong with it back in them days.

You see people had to go somewhere and as long as they was orderly, why I approved of it. I could see it was pretty well run.

C Now would this be a lot of the younger people, or was there a few older people too?

B There were a few older ones in there, but it was mostly the younger ones. They had to have a place to go.

C To dance?

B Dance. They danced.

C Now did they have regular seats or bales of straw to set on or what? Can you remember that -- what they sat on ?

B No. I can't remember that.

C Did they have, like a couple of guys playing violins, fiddles or whatever? Yeah. Didn't have a piano, though?

B No. Er--yeah! I think they did have a piano. I think I remember them having a piano there. It was a nice thing to see. They were enjoying themselves. They was never bothered. It was known around, but he never got arrested or anything like that.

C Ran a good ship then?

B Yeah. He ran a good ship up there.

C They had electricity so you don't worry about anybody --

B No. You didn't have to worry about the barn burning up or nothing like that.

C Would that barn still be there? Thats where Jim (and Pat) Fuller lives today. (Edwards Road).

B No. I think the bigger barn went.

C Smaller barn still there?

- B The smaller barn is still there.
- C Looked like a frame for the bigger barn out back?
- B Yeah. Over to the right.
- C To the south?
- B South. Thats right. Talk about that -- there is another thing I remember. I see it too. At one time there was a white deer up there.
- C Oh yeah?
- B Yeah. Around his place up there. I saw it once.
- C This would be years later?
- B Oh yes.
- C Because the deer didn't come in here very early.
- B No. But it was a white one.
- C Now when did this (Smith's) kind of hang in there until maybe about when prohibition passed?
- B Yes.
- C Phased out and people could go to regular bars and dance?
- B Yes. He picked up quite a little money and he bought some pretty good looking cars and if you had them today they'd be worth a fortune. He never licensed them, he just kept them there.
- C Stored them on the main floor because he didn't farm very much, did he?
- B He didn't farm at all. He rented some of the land and I think at one time, but he never farmed it.
- C Thats kind of interesting. I say I sidetracked us earlier ( on the other tape) so we wanted to get this on tape. Not too many people have spoken about this (Prohibition). It was worth coming back here

and check you out on it.

B Well that's good. I'm glad to help you out, Don.

C Anything else you can think of, Paul? As long as we got this tape going.

B Yes. For spring weather this isn't too good.

C No. (Laughter).

B You know its blowing and snowing and there is a little snow on the ground. We had a week there, of about three or four days of beautiful weather, and now look what we got!!!

C 65 (degrees) Wednesday, and 20 today.

B Twenty today! (Laughter).

C Four days later.

B That's right.

C You said you are related to J. Howard Pratt?

B Yes. First cousin of mine.

C I'll be darned. He's 90-some-years-old and writing another book.

B Yes. Writing another book (memoirs of the Ridge Road). He's done a lot of caning chairs down there. He had a lot of them. He'd pick them up around at auctions, refinish them, re-cane them, and he done real good at it and he was real good at it, too.

C I saw him last summer at the Orleans (County) Fair and he was doing it there. Demonstrating it to the public.

B Sure.

C Got (took) a picture of him doing it.

B Yeah. Well every once in a while I see him.

C Uh-huh. Boy he come along, you know, for a guy his age falling off the (house) roof it's a wonder he made it.

B I took my sister, she's 91, Ethel Martin, and we went over to visit some other cousins over to Barre Center on a Sunday. I took her out for a ride, and I says well, we'll go down and see Florence Pratt. That was Howard Pratt's sister. She lives in Albion. I says we'll stop and see her a minute and then we will go down and see Howard and make kind of a round call on them. Well we was lucky when we got down to Florence's, she lives in Albion, and he was there. So that shortened up our trip and we had a good visit.

C Got to see everybody.

B Yeah.

C Very good. Great! Well anything else here you can think of? Sometimes after this is all over with, you think I wish I'd of said this or that.

B Yes, I know. Well, that is about all. I, don't know. I do think the country is in bad shape.

C Yeah.

B A lot of unemployment. We got to get people back to work. Get things back rolling again. They got to get back to work.

C What did they say -- 14 percent (unemployment) in Western New York? Or in Orleans County? I saw it somewhere.

B It's not good.

C O.K. Well if there is nothing else, Paul, we will shut this off and we will tack this in the tail end of your other tape.

B O.K.

C Very good. And thank you again, Paul.

B You are entirely welcome.

Transcribed by Nancy Lauta of Middleport, New York.

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