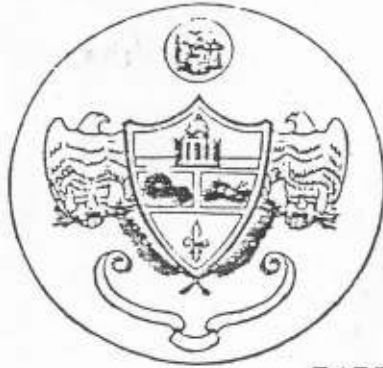




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Orleans County Historical Association

TABLE OF CONTENTS: William Gill Interview

SUBJECTS

fur trapping
fur buying
fur selling
silver-fox-farm
M. Mautner and Sons

Depression (1929)
Medina Central Bank
Middleport Bank

homestead, present site of BOCES

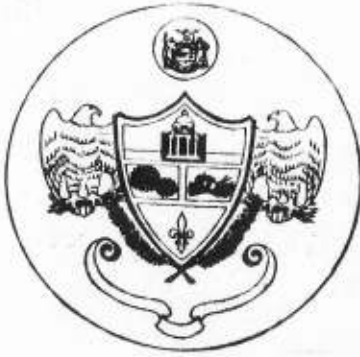
Medina high school
Oakfield high school
Cornell University

NAMES

Harriet Duen, aunt
Charlott Gill, mother
Fred McFaul, 2nd husband of C.G.
Mabel Sheldon Hill, wife
Ruth Gill Wickens, daughter
(Mrs. Valance Wickens)
Barbara Gill Hichar, daughter
(Mrs. Joseph Hichar)
Riley Sheldon, Senior

Miss Prudem, Medina teacher

1888-1986



Orleans County Historical Association

Oral History Interview

William J. Gill
Orleans County Infirmary
Albion, New York

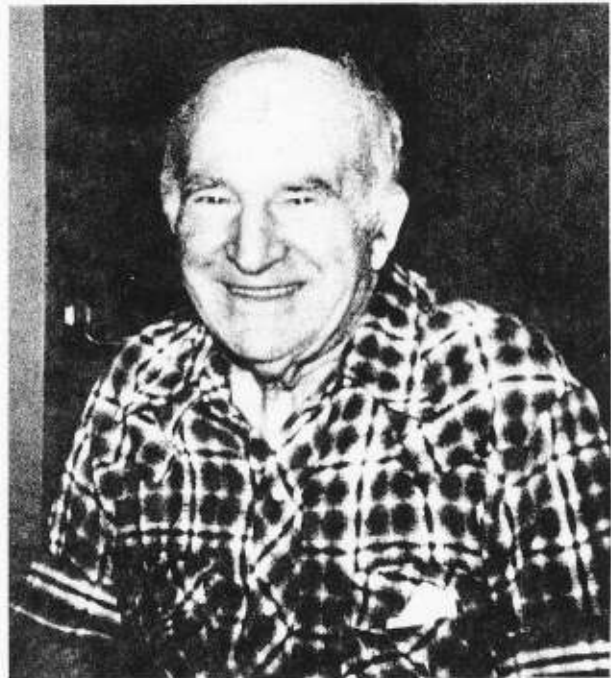
Interviewed by:

Robert L. Pask, Medina

Helen M. McAllister, Medina

February 14, 1978

Gill William Gill (1888-)
Pask Mr. Pask
Mc Mrs. McAllister





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.

William J. Gill

Signed

Feb. 14, 1978

Date

Understood and agreed to:

Robert L. Park / Helen McAllister

INTERVIEWER

Feb. 14, 1978

Date

Gill I was born April 15, 1888 at North Stockton on the River Tees, between England and Scotland.

Mc When did you come to America?

Gill I came to America when I was about two years of age. My aunt Harriet Duen's husband had died and she was lonesome, of course. She came to England to see her brother. (She and two cousins had come to America previously. The cousins went on to Michigan). My father had been killed a few months before I was born. He was a brakeman on the railroad in England. My aunt brought Charlott Gill (my mother) and me to Medina, 1024 Elm Street. There was no work in Medina, so my mother went to Buffalo and got a job. She married Fred McFaul. They had four boys and one girl, but I remained in Medina with my aunt.

When I was about six years of age, I went to school to Miss Prudem on Oak Orchard Street. Everybody knew her! I think she lived on Shelby Road. She taught for years and years...

Mc How far did you go in that school?

Gill We stayed there until I was about eight years of age, and then we moved on Hemlock Ridge up in the town of West Barre. I went to school there in the Crane District and passed the subjects for eight grades. I entered Medina in the first year of high school.

Pask That school house was on the Crane Road, wasn't it? I think that school still stands there but it is in pretty bad repair.

Gill I being a farmer, had to stay out (of school) so much that my chemistry teacher wouldn't sign, and they wouldn't give me the affidavit that I was qualified to take the examination. (That's just telling you how I happened to leave the Medina school). They let me continue school until April, then they got the State's money. Then they told me that I couldn't try the exam! One day during the summer, I was over to Oakfield. It was just an accident. The Lord must have been with me all these years, because I met the principal on the street in Oakfield. I've forgotten his name now, but I told him my problem. He said, "You come over here and we'll try and get you thru so you can graduate!" So I graduated from Oakfield in 1910. I was married (I was 21) in 1910, the

same year. My wife and I entered Cornell that fall. She took a course in Domestic Science. Her maiden name was Mabel S. Hill. Her mother was a Sheldon...

Mc How many children did you have?

Gill We have two daughters: Ruth and Barbara. (Ruth Gill Wickens; Mrs. Valance Wickens. and Barbara Gill Hichar; Mrs. Joseph Hichar).

Mc Do you remember when you got married? Will you tell us ?

Gill Yep! (laughter). Well, Willard Dodge stood up with me and Mildred Paine was bridesmaid. We got married at her father's farm in West Barre. His name was Fred Hill.

Mc Did you have a honeymoon?

Gill I don't think so because I didn't have any money. She had taught school and had \$1,500. After we went to Cornell and came to Medina, she bought the farm (1911), paid what there was down. We started housekeeping on the \$1,500.

Mc Where was your farm, Mr. Gill?

Gill It's on route 31-A, about two miles west of Medina. It was about 67 acres. ... (later sold to New York State and is the present site of BOCES)...

Pask You had mostly fruit on the farm, didn't you Bill?

Gill When I went there, there were just some pear trees. My wife had bought the farm from Sidney Shaw and Mr. Shaw had set out a pear orchard. I planted all the apple trees. I didn't have any capital to work with and I couldn't take care of the trees nor hire the people to take care of the stuff. So, they were neglected. I didn't make as much as I should have done on the farm. You see, I set out these small trees and I had to grow them up. Apples didn't pay. I learned at Cornell that in fruit trees you have to get a good bud. First you have to get a good leaf and the leaf makes the bud and the bud bears the fruit. So, I put a lot of nitrate on my trees. I said to the man who was working with me (he was just sprinkling a little bit around), "You probably think that you are making me money by just sprinkling a little nitrate under this tree. I want you to put a whole bag of nitrate under two trees!!" (chuckles) Then my neighbors wondered why I got a crop of pears every year! That was the

reason.

Mc What did you do with your pears when they were harvested?

Gill I stored them down to Medina Cold Storage (Posson and Grinnell) and they had men come from Buffalo after they were in storage. Roland Soul ("Rolly") sold them for me... One day I was taking out a load of fruit. (A man) from H.J. Heinz Company says, "Why don't you sell those pears to us?" I said, " 'Cause you wouldn't pay enough money!" Bill Blackburn told me, "Your land is suitable for pears." But I think it was the nitrate. We made some money in pears but I lost money in apples. We grew Bartlett pears.

Mc Did you use spray?

Gill Yes, we had to spray. That's one thing I did do. I had a crop, I took care of it.

Mc When you harvested the pears did you have extra help? And where did you get the "help" from?

Gill Oh my yes! (chuckles). My wife!

Mc Just you and your wife? That was all?

Gill Mrs. Albert Ferris was a friend and lived near us. She was more than a friend. My aunt's farm was 50 acres. My aunt took care of Robert Flowers and me. He worked the farm on shares. I stayed there until I was about 12 years of age. I remember working for Dan Grey. He'd send me up to the top of a 25 foot ladder in the wind, for 50 cents a day. I got \$3.00 a week and board; but I enjoyed it.... Rob Flowers left and my aunt had not very much money. We bought some tools of Frank Clark for \$250., and gave him a note. A chissel-tooth-drag, and I borrowed a drill. I didn't have a drill. Of course I hired local people, neighbors, to cut the grain.

Pask What were some of your neighbor's names, that lived around you there?

Gill The farmer to my east, who owned the farm, was Ben Bishop. His son Robert worked the farm. Robert was a good worker only every Saturday he had to come to Medina! His father says, "He's always in a hurry to get to Medina. He stays so long and then he has to get back!" (chuckles). One day he says, "If my wife asks you how I got this black eye you tell her the cow switched her horn!" (laughter). I says,

I ain't going to tell her no such thing!" He'd got the black eye in Medina; they'd always have a fight. He was a very good worker and a very good neighbor. George Posson was the other neighbor. The road runs east and west, and he was on the west side. Ben Bishop was on the east side. Ben Bishop was a man about 60, a good man. He said that one Sunday he stayed home and he worked hard. They had a field of hay all reado to cock-up. They stayed to home and "cocked it up", and there came a wind storm. It blew the hay all over the neighbors, right out of the field. "There wasn't any of the hay left", he says. "Such a terrible wind storm. Never saw such a storm!" When I come home from church he says, "Where you been?" I said, "Been to church". (My aunt saw that I was in church every Sunday). He says, "I want to see you go every Sunday!" So, we had some good neighbors, fine neighbors. Dan Gray was another fine neighbor.

Pask Did you go to church in West Barre?

Gill We went to West Barre church. Everybody went to West Barre; that is, the Catholics and any denomination. That was the only community point. We went there at the end of the week because that was the "newspaper". That was where we got the news!

Mc Your social gathering, right?

Gill Yes. Of course we got our mail at East Shelby grocery store. George Gregory run the store and Sam Whiting used to go to Knowlesville and get the mail and bring it up. The paper came once a week. Our mail came every day but we had to go to the store to get it. We didn't have rural-free-delivery...

Pask When you went to Medina at that time, you probably had to hitch up the horse, didn't you?

Gill That's all we had; or go afoot.

Pask Take you quite awhile to drive to town wouldn't it?

Gill It was eight miles and it took us about an hour and a half. Of course we would come to town only about every Saturday or every-other-Saturday.

Pask In the winter-time you had to use a sleigh?

Gill Well, in the winter-time the snow banks were as high as this building; were across the house and barn! People used to

- come up into our yard to avoid the bank, and take down the fences. They'd take the fences and go thru the fields!
- Pask Drive right out in the fields where the snow wasn't so deep! You had some bad winters back then? And cold ones?
- Gill Oh my yes! And real cold! ... I remember going to school. The neighbor used to take the children. They used to ride with him. He had five or six girls, but we'd all assemble to go down to school. We'd walk home, about four o'clock. Sometimes the father would come after us. I remember the Lovey who worked for Andrew Jackson. He was a farmer. He had two boys: Robert and Edward, and he had two or three girls. They came to school with lard on their bread!
- Mc What did you take to school for your lunch?
- Gill Of course we had no money to buy. We raised our own pork, our own potatoes and our own vegetables. We'd "put down" salt pork in the crocks. When our neighbor butchered a hog, he he would bring over some of the fresh meat for us. Then when we butchered a little later, we'd take some of ours over. We didn't weigh it or anything. We were glad to change off. Yes, a shoulder or whatever it was. I remember that butter was 10-12 cents a pound; eggs were 8 and 10 cents a dozen. I remember selling pork \$4.50 a hundred. Dressed pork!! Took it over to Oakfield. Couldn't only get \$4.00 here and we took it over to Oakfield for \$4.50!!
- Pask Boy! That's cheap, isn't it! Compared to now-a-days!

(end of side one of tape)

- Mc You said that you went to Cornell; for how long?
- Gill Just the first semester. My wife just went for the one semester too.
- Mc Is that where you learned to do trapping and work with furs? How did you get into the fur business?
- Gill I'll tell you: my wife was a real teacher. When she graduated from Monroe high school, they wanted her to go on. She says, "I can't because we haven't any money. I've got to go to work". So she earned the money and when we went back to Cornell her teachers and associates wanted her to teach there, and to go on. She wanted me to get a job, but I had to be "free".

Pask You wanted to come back to your home, to Medina?

Gill I had to come back to Medina because as a "free spirit" I couldn't work for somebody else. That's something about farm life!

Now, you want to know how I got into the fur business? My brother-in-law, Dana Gillette, was in New York City and he'd be trapping muscrats with his brothers (they'd dig them out of the shallow runs with a pitch-fork). He was interested in the fur business, so he bought a book that gave the names and addresses of the buyers in New York. A man who specialized in "rats" (muscrats), he would put down IMP; and the man who specialized in "coon" (raccoon), he'd have that marked. My brother-in-law, Dana Gillette, sold his farm here at Medina and moved to Batavia. In the meantime, he bought some furs, between the time when he'd come home, this time when he was in New York City and he'd married and bought the farm. He lived on Maple Ridge Road, the same road I lived on. He sold the farm for \$20,000., then he moved to Batavia. When he moved away, he gave me THE book. So, when I got the book I wrote to a firm that specialized in muscrats: M. Mautner and Sons. I wrote to Mautner but I didn't hear from him that year. Mr. Mautner had a buyer east of Rochester. (That's the reason he didn't come to see me). That buyer quit buying for him. He came up with him tho, and brought him up to my place. When I started buying, I sold to Roy Hill for about four years.

Mc Were your daughters still at home or in school?

Gill I took Mr. Mautner to Medina, down to the trolley. I had to go and get the two daughters. Mr. Mautner gave each of them a box of candy! (chuckles). You see how one thing leads to another; one good act...

I was working those days and I didn't have time for anything. It kept us a-going. My wife bought the furs around here and I bought from Horace and Walter Balcom. They had a store at Childs. Mr. Hill bought from them too. When Mr. Mautner came to Medina, he saw that we were poor. He knew this section. He didn't have to ask me. He'd been to Childs and over to Batavia. He knew the buyers! He says, "I'll make a fur buyer of you!"

He came there one day and I had a bag of furs. I hadn't dumped them and he was up there alone. He dumped that bag of "rats" out and then he came downstairs. He says, "I found a bag of rats up there and I dumped them out. There isn't one good rat in there! That man is "crooked". You'll have to take those back to him and tell him that you know that he has picked out the good ones and that he will have to put them back or else pay you back the money. Or you will have to tell him that you won't buy any more furs from him!" I didn't want to do it because he was a fellow right near by. I says, "No, I can't." My wife says, "You will, or I'll quit. We will either carry on an honest business or I am thru!" So, I took the furs back. He went into the parlor and got out the good "rats", and Mautner saw that we were honest. One day I saw a "Mr. X" over on the street to Batavia. He says, "Send Mr. Mautner over to my place. I've got some furs to sell." So I told that to Mr. Mautner and he says, "I haven't any use for "Mr. X" or his whole family!" You see what they had done? He had bought the furs..., sorted them, put the poor ones in a certain bag and the number and everything. The good ones, sometimes he'd sold them and sometimes we'd sold them but we had sold them as he had graded them. When Mr. Mautner bought those of "Mr. X", they were not as he had graded them and of course he had to go and he had to make good.

Pask How far did you travel in buying furs, Bill? Did you travel in all of central and western New York State?

Gill Where ever they had "rats".

Pask Did you buy mainly "rats", or anything they had to sell?

Gill I couldn't get enough "rats" for him, so I went to Jay Lampkin, over in Basom. I said, "Jay, I've got a market for "rats" and you get some good ones here. This man wants all the "rats" he can get. You bring 'em over and you can put them in. I'll give you just what we can get." Jay did that and for a few years, then he wanted me to sell to him! (chuckles). Jay thought he could get more money up in Buffalo. But, you see, I would go out, I didn't have any money. You

wonder how I could buy furs without any money? I went to the bank and I borrowed the money. The first time, I went to the Union Bank in Medina to see George Newell. I went there and I wanted to borrow \$500.00. He says, "You go out and get somebody to co-sign, and I'll loan you the money". I says, "Mr. Newell, I don't sign anybody else's notes. How could I ask them to sign mine!" He thought a few minutes then he says, "Come back in ten minutes and I'll give you an answer". I came back in ten minutes and he gave me the money. Then I went to see Roland Clark at the Central Bank in Medina and I would borrow whatever I could: \$1,000. or \$1,500. I would give you a check, sometimes without any money in the bank! Mr. Mautner would be there on Saturday. I could depend on it. I'd get his draft, so the money would be there in the bank on Monday when you presented your check. That's how I operated.

Mc How much would you get for a skin? Did they sell by the skin or by the piece or the pound?

Gill Well, that goes back again. Mr. Mautner told me, "Any fool can buy "rats". It's a wise man who knows when to sell". The market was coming good, so he had a lot of orders. I could go out and buy; if I saw a man with a couple thousand "rats" I might buy half of them or I might buy them all and work, the way I told you. There was plenty of "rats" then. They were mad at Frank Fisher (of Oakfield) because Smith had bought up, and he'd stopped them from trapping. Frank Fisher was a buyer there. He was just over the line from Oakfield, right in the swamp; right where the "rats" and mink were. Smith was a buyer from Buffalo... Smith was buying Frank Fisher's "rats"... Fisher came over to my place on a Thursday and I showed him the "rats". Charlie Wilson was working for me and he says, "You aren't going to sell your rats to Fisher! He's finding rats that came from every different state in the Union. All states!" So, Frank came down and he said, "No, I can't buy them." Well, Smith had called my place before Fisher got there and he said, "When Fisher comes, tell him to call me". I talked it over with my wife and she said, "We will see what he will pay". Of course, he refused to buy them. I told him, "You

had better call Smith before you leave". So, he called Smith but he didn't say anything (to me). He didn't say a word! He went home, and when he got home, he called up and he says, "Can I come back tomorrow and look at those furs?" I says, "No Frank. I spent one day and I can't spend another". He says, "Well, they may look better to me then". This is what Frank Fisher told me after things had cleared up: He says, "Smith told me to buy your "rats". He didn't care what I paid for them but I had to buy them so that when Mautner come up, he would not have any!!" You see? Everybody wanted "rats". New York and everywhere! So, when Mr. Mautner came up we told him everything. He says, "Don't you ever show those "rats" to anyone. They are my "rats". Do you see what I'd a done if I had sold? I'd a been out of the business!

Pask Where would you get your best "rats", when you bought them in the state: from the swamp up here, or where?

Gill I went down to Penn Yan late one night and there was a fellow there. I bought his "rats" and after I'd bought them he said, "What will you pay for some good ones?!" I said, "I thought I'd bought your good ones!" (chuckles). He said, "You didn't". "Well", I says, "How many have you got?" He had a basket-full of them! He brought them in and I says, "How much?" I forget what he said, but it was more than the market price. A big price! When I got home, my wife was very disappointed with me. Mr. Kingsley, from Perry, had gone to New York. (See, this was on the weekend). He'd gone just as soon as he'd heard. See, there was a fellow near New York who was coming up and buying these "rats" in Penn Yan, and then he'd come up to Kingsley and buy Kingsley's, and then go back and thake them to New York. When he went back, he found out that I was paying so much more. Kingsley put on his coat and went down to New York and he says, "We can't buy any "rats" up there. Gill has paid so much for "rats". The man says, "You're the goat; you are the ones. You are paying Gills blunder." But they wanted the "rats", so they took them...

Pask You would just grade the "rats" and let them go? You didn't have to scrape them or anything?

Gill I can see them now: the rats were heavier furred; they were fine, silky and alive. This fellow knew where he got those rats. I learned afterwards. They were from the farmer's ponds. See, the farmer trapped their own ponds, and this fellow paid more money. When they'd take them in to him, he kept 'em separate and would try to get more money. And when he ran across a fool like me, he just got more money!

Pask I'd like to ask you about the coon (raccoon). I can remember that you had a man there, and when you'd bought the coon, you would scrape the hides; scrape the fat off. Could you tell us a little bit about that, Bill? ...

Gill The coons and the muscrats: you have to put them on a board and take that excess fat off. They have to be dried or they will spoil. That stuff has to be taken care of. Usually the market advanced. My wife sold those rats that I had paid so much for. (chuckles). I was gone the next few days and she gave me the "old Harry" for paying it! When they came out to buy the rats, he told her, "We closed your account, Mrs. Gill". "well", she says, "I guess we can keep a-going". He says, "Would you mind showing me those rats?" "Yes", she says. "I'll show them to you". So they looked them over. They were two brothers. One brother says to his brother, "We don't get no rats such as these! Mrs. Gill, will you sell these rats?" She says, "Yes if you pay me enough; pay me a profit". So, she sold them. That's the end of that.

Pask You bought cow-hides too, didn't you Bill, along with the fur? Where did that go? Did you have to ship them in the car, or what did you do with them?

Gill Well, earlier I got "hung-up" on cow hides. I got about twelve-hundred cow hides and then the market broke. So, I bought 'em for 50 cents apiece. Nobody wanted them!

Pask Did you have to salt them?

Gill I had to salt them. I had 1,200 hides there.

Mc What do you mean: 'the market broke' ? What happened?

Gill Out west, they had a dry summer and the farmers had to sell. They had no feed. It flooded the market. Then the government had to step in. I kept on a-buying, but I kinda kept away from them too because my money was slow. Then the

market kind of picked up, six cents a pound and that let me out. There was a fellow from Boston. He was a broker. He came up and he offered me six cents a pound and I sold them. They went down. The cow hides laid on the tracks for about three days. The railroad company notified me. They says, "Your car of hides is down here. Where do you want it shipped to?" I had no place, no money. I called the broker. He says, "The man who bought them is trying to borrow the money now, today. Wait until four o'clock. If he gets the money we will call back and we'll let you know". The hide market went up that day (chuckles). See how the Lord worked with me? (pauses). He got his money. The dealer in Rochester had three carloads down in Indianapolis, Indiana at the same time. He had to go down there and pay freight back to Rochester. It broke him!! Groves was his name. During that time, I had some money in the bank up to Middleport. That was the year that the Central Bank in Medina closed its doors because they got low on money. Rowland Clark says to me, "You should have \$20,000. here and leave it here and borrow on the \$20,000. I didn't have \$20,000. so I had to quit and go to Middleport and borrow some money. That fall I went up to see Mr. Comfort at the Middleport Bank. He says, "Come back Monday morning". But I was there on Saturday night. I met him on the street and I says, "Mr. Comfort, no sense of me coming back here tomorrow. Can you loan me the money?" (I had borrowed \$6,000. on some collateral I had). "No", he said. "I've been out all day today." (end of side two of tape #1) Then he notified me that he would give me six days to raise \$6,000. to pay the loan that I had in his bank. Of course I didn't have the money. My wife said that I ought to go up and see my uncle, DeForrest Hill. "Yes", he says. "I'll loan you the money". He loaned me \$4,000. and I borrowed \$2,000. more from her step-mother from the Albion Bank. That made the \$6,000. so it kept me a-going. I got my securities out. I didn't loose them. I've got them yet. That's what happened!... You see it's like everything else. I tell you, if you are making money, the banks know it!! ... When things were going good the man in the Central Bank says, "I've got a

little money of my own. I don't mean the Bank's money. So if you need a partner, if you don't have enough capital, I'd like to come in as a partner". But this Mr. Mautner, you see, he wanted the "rats". His people was clammering for the "rats" and he told me: this is what he said. "Your wife is partner enough. Don't ever go in with anyone because they'll want to sell, and you'll want to hold. It won't work."... Gardner Berry met me on the street one day. He says, "Don't you want a helper to come in and help you with the fur business?"

Pask He wanted to invest a little money?

Gill Yeah, he wanted to invest some money!

Mc The period of time that you are talking about, the big Depression came and many of the banks closed. You didn't lose money thru all of that?

Gill No, I pulled my money out of Medina Bank and went to Middleport. Dave White was the fellow that had charge of the bank up in Middleport. I had some checks out and I said to Mr. Cumfort when I paid him the \$6,000., "What about those checks that I've got out?" He says, "If you pay the \$6,000. ... "we will agree to pay those". So I went up to Dave and says, "Well what about it? I had an agreement with Mr. Cumfort that if I paid him the \$6,000., he would turn over my securities and pay what checks were out." "Well", he says, "An agreement is an agreement. There is no use in having any more than one (agreement). They should pay them then." So, he gave me 100 per cent of the ... I was to school with Dave. Dave was alright; he was honest with me.

Mc Did you work with lamb, deer, sheep or rabbits?

Gill Lamb, no not in any quantity. Deer, no quantities. No, I couldn't get enough. I bought them just the same as you; if you are buying, you buy what the man brings you. If he brings you a dozen eggs, you take that with his butter.

Mc Did you deal in foxes? I understand that they had fox farms around here.

Gill Foxes? That another story! Foxes were alright. This story involves Irv Weet... Irv Weet had no children. You see, there's several classes of men. Some men are smart, they

are bright; they know they could put a deal over and they do it!... Floyd Austin wanted to go into bankruptcy; Irv Weet wouldn't. Irv was very clever. Well, I'll show you how clever he was. He'd brought up a horse-hide up there and he'd already brought up his foxes. Mr. Mautner had bought the foxes. I had paid him \$5.00 for the horse-hide. There was one fox that Mautner had thrown out for \$5.00. So here's two "sharpies" together. Irv says to me, "I'll trade you the horse-hide for the fox"... My wife shook her head, so when we settled up, I paid Weet \$5.00 for the horse-hide, but Mautner put the fox in for \$25.00!!

Mc Did you have other foxes? Did you deal in foxes, and what kind?

Gill That was a silver fox. They were silver foxes that everybody owned. They hired Weet to take care of the foxes and to give them part of the profits. But there weren't any profits!

Mc What do you mean: 'take care of the foxes' ?

Gill He hired men to feed them and keep them.

Mc You mean you would keep them, like on a ranch?

Gill Yes.

Pask Where was that, Bill?

Gill By Albion, on the bend of the road, on the south side of the road. They had to have sand and light soil. They raised foxes.

Pask It was really kind of a "racket" wasn't it? The people that put the money into it never got anything back; did they?

Gill It was a racket like this: a fellow came to me. Controlled data was selling for \$150. a share. He knew I had some stock and he wanted me to turn the stock over to him and pay him \$150. for the Controlled data. My stock was paying dividends; his wasn't paying any. The Control data is down to about 25. My stock... keeps right on paying dividends. As a "sharpie" you figure out someone who has some money to spend. Then he camps out on his trail until he sets a trap and wins. You have to watch out for a "sharpie".

Pask I remember when the red fox came into this area maybe around the time of the deer or a little bit before; probably in the late 30s or early 40s. Would that be about when you started to buy red fox? Or were they getting them over south?

- Gill We've always had foxes over south.
- Pask Yeah, and then they moved into this area too.
- Gill Yeah, Jamestown and all thru there. Irv Weet had a lot of culls (poor grade foxes). This I never knew. Weet knew that I had a good market for good foxes, up to Buffalo. I took the furs just as I bought them, if there was one or two poor ones; but there was a lot of good ones. He treated me alright. I told Irv what I was getting. He says, "Go up with me..." I'd never do that again because ... I never could sell that fellow (in Buffalo) any more foxes. And Irv didn't even sell them! Irv thought he was smarter than anybody else but when he ran across a man that knew the business, he couldn't put one over on him! See what I mean?
- Pask They knew the quality of the furs.
- Gill They knew the quality of the furs and they knew what they were buying. Weet depended on somebody who didn't know what they were buying. That was the same with the brokers. They know what they are selling and you don't know what they are selling!
- Pask Were there quite a few local people that lost money on that silver-fox deal?
- Gill Oh yes! Of course, my wife being in Rochester and went to high school there, some of her school friends bought. Of course, they were wealthy and they didn't lose all their money. But it was foolish. They (had) relied on Irv's brother on not leading them in... but you take a man like Irv; he'd use anybody! Just like he did me! He'd get me to go up with some culled foxes. Well, I lost my customers.... That was years ago. They had one fox-farm here. I guess they must have had 200 foxes.
- Mc Was Irv Weet the owner of the fox-farm?
- Gill Irv Weet and Floyd Austin.
- Pask Did you buy squirrel hides?
- Gill No. There isn't enough (fur). I understand that over in Germany they don't throw away any fur. All the small animals, they are all skinned and cared for and bagged up. They save everything. Here (in America) we are the ones that throw away everything!
- Pask A little more wasteful when it comes to that!

- Mc You said something earlier about the Quakers going to Rhode Island, and the to Canandaigua? What was that all about?
- Gill That shows you how they came up here; that is Riley Sheldon, Senior, as a trapper... He was the one that started Frank Fisher. But they all started as Quakers who came up from Rhode Island, from those New England states... They came from Canandaigua to here and they settled in Barre Center. That's where it started. From Barre Center and Oakfield. They just spread out. That's it.

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

Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin • County Historian



VOL. II

SILVER FOX FARMING

NO. 2

About 1925 Irving W. Weet of Shelby Center started the business of raising silver foxes for their pelts. The farm was located on the north side of Route 31 west of Albion, just east of the Eagle Harbor - West Barre Road. A stucco house there served as the business office and the fenced yard in which the pens were located was situated immediately behind the office. On the back of the property and facing on the Phipps Roas was another house owned by the company and occupied by Ross Wilson and family. Mr. Wilson worked at the ranch for Mr. Weet from 1925-33 when the business failed. Dr. H.L. VanVolkenburg was the veterinarian and he occupied the house west of the office. A building called "the tower" was located at the end of the enclosed yard where feed was mixed. This was three stories high and the glassed in top floor served as a lookout where the foxes could be surveyed without knowing that they were being watched. They produced three or four puppies a year and were fed a diet of horsemeat, cod liver oil, skimmed milk and some cereal.

Mr. Weet not only owned breeding foxes but sold breeders to other people at \$3000 per pair. These were boarded at the ranch where their off-spring were pelted. A good silver fox skin would bring as much as \$175 • \$250 before tanning. Skins were taken to Rochester where they were tanned and made up into scarfs by Crosby-Frisian Fur Company. The skin of the silver fox however, is tissue thin and delicate and was not a long-wearing fur. The fad for silver fox scarfs didn't last long and the business ceased to exist.

Pictured here in 1931 is Ross Wilson at the left with Irving Weet standing on the porch as they display some of their seasons pelts with an unknown employee.

J-R

Sportsman's Column

By DON COOK



William J. Gill

Today's column is taken from a two-part interview with William J. Gill.

Mrs. Helen McAllister, Medina, of the Orleans County Historical Association, and Robert Pask, an avid outdoorsman from the East Shelby Road, Medina, taped an interview with Mr. Gill on Feb. 14, 1978.

The second interview was by this scribe last Tuesday with Mr. Gill.

Both interviews were conducted in the Orleans County Infirmary at Albion where Mr. Gill currently resides.

Whenever someone mentions the name of Billy Gill,

just about anyone living in Western Orleans County interested in the outdoors will say, "Wasn't he the fur buyer from over on Maple Ridge Road?"

Sure enough!!!

William J. Gill was born April 15, 1888 at North Stockton on the River Tees, England. His father, who was a brakeman on a railroad in England, was killed a few months before he was born. At about the age of two years he came to America.

Gill's Aunt Harriet Duen, living here at the time, brought Gill and his mother to Medina. Her home was at 1024 Elm St.

Since there was no work in

Medina, his mother moved on to Buffalo and remarried. Gill remained in Medina and lived with his aunt. His mother and step-father raised five children in Buffalo.

In 1910 he married Mabel S. Hill, and after attending Cornell University together for a semester, the couple "decided to go to housekeeping." In 1911 they purchased a home on Maple Ridge Road.

"Our first few years was tough sledding," Gill emphasized. "Besides operating our 67-acre farm, I worked around, odd jobs, bought some furs."

As time passed the fur purchasing business increased. His brother-in-law, Dana Gillette, had been in the fur business and when he decided to move to Batavia, he gave his contacts to Gill. It was here our friend started buying and selling — a good way to pick up some ready cash, as he put it.

He stated that his wife really knew fur better than Billy did. "Her father, among other activities, was a trapper and he had taken lots of time with his children. Taught 'em all sorts of things," Gill recalled. "She knew what to look for and taught me how to check out a pelt."

For example, the color of fur down in the center of the skin determines the price of a fox or mink pelt, he pointed out.

In all the years he handled fur, Gill never did get around to trapping. "Too busy," he admitted. "I worked day and night. Picked up the furs, took them home and graded them. Sometimes I drove all the way into Pennsylvania to get furs."

In the early years all of his furs were sold to Mike Mautner of New York. "He was a really fair man to deal with," Billy Gill stressed. "And I'm happy he taught me to deal fair and square. I've done business with an awful lot of folks over the years. Tried to treat 'em right."

Mautner had outlet contacts all the way to England, and no matter how much fur he purchased, he always had a dealer to take it off his hands.

Sometimes other buyers wanted Billy Gill to work for

them. One of them was Martin Schmitt, a furrier from Buffalo.

Schmitt, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, purchased a large block of land on the east end of the Oak Orchard Swamp. (Much of this today is the State owned and operated Oak Orchard Wildlife Management Area that straddles Orleans and Genesee Counties).

Once he gained possession of this prime fur-bearing habitat, Schmitt posted the land so other trappers had to look elsewhere for their activity.

"I stayed with Mautner, and glad I did," he quipped.

Muskrat is the prime fur bearer most trappers concentrate on, although he handled fox, raccoon, mink, skunk, beaver and others, such as deer and cow hides.

The price of rats vary, according to Gill, in the fall of the year because the price of fur is lower and more plentiful.

Gill said he usually sold his pelts immediately but if you wanted to look for a higher price, as many fur buyers did, then the hides would be placed in cold storage and hopefully bring a higher price at a later sale.

His wife died about 15 years ago. Gill has two daughters, Mrs. Ruth Wickens who today lives in Concord, N.H., and Mrs. Barbara Hichar who resides in Snyder, N.Y. There are six grandchildren.

Advancing age finally forced Billy Gill into retirement three years ago. The nonagenarian is appalled at today's escalating fur prices. "Somebody is going to lose. Fur prices are too high," he shook his head. "It's hard to think when you're making money, but it's true. Somebody is going to lose."

Billy Gill survived the great depression of 1929. And he should know.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17, 1978



Silvertip
dye'd raccoon
Was \$1989
Now \$1589

Dyed
Russian sable
Was \$19989
Now \$15991

Natural
Blackglama mink
Was \$3989
Now \$2989

Natural red fox
section with
natural foxtail
tuxedo. Was \$389
Now \$289

Natural
blue fox
Was \$2989
Now \$2289*

Patterned
and dye'd raccoon
section. Was \$789
Now \$389

TRAPPERS and HUNTERS

NEW YORK FUR BUYERS REPRESENTATIVE WILL

BE HERE EVERY THURS.

FROM 6 P.M. TO 10 P.M.

Buy Fox, Coon, Mink, Deer, Beel, etc.