



Orleans County Historical Association

TABLE OF CONTENTS Maurice ("Lank") O'Brien

SUBJECTS

playing baseball
 playing softball
 playing basketball
 semi-pro football
 la crosse, Indians
 Citizen of the Year Award!!
 Hall of Fame, W.N.Y. softball
 N.Y. State Conservation Dept.
 wildlife reguge areas: Alabama,
 Tonawanda & Montezuma
 Martin Schmitt Estate
 Oak Orchard Overlook
 waterfowl migration
 White's Game Farm
 German-American Bund
 deer jackers during W.W. II
 Co.F National Guard, 108th Reg.
 New York National Guard
 Medina Armory (YMCA)
 All Lockport Team
 Pennsylvania League
 Middleport Independents
 Kodak Park Team
 World's Championship Team
 St. Anne's Team
 German Orioles Team
 German Opticals Team
 Adirondack All-Stars
 Rochester Centrals
 69th Regiment, N.Y. City
 Niagara Falls Internationals
 Edgerton Park Team
 North End Team

NAMES, CONTINUED

"Ollie" Meddaugh
 Jack Denny
 Harold Mitchell
 Bill Blew
 Harold & Robert Gray
 Merrill Callaghan
 Dave White
 Henry Morganthal, inspector

NAMES

Arlene Tuttle O'Brien, wife
 Don ("Cookie") Cook
 Babe Ruth in Medina
 Stan Barron, WBEN radio
 "Skinny" Boyle
 "Little Crab" & "Big Crab" Montgomery
 Eddie Cotriss and Senior
 "Hiker" Real
 George Butts
 George Selkrirk
 Jeff Passerau
 "Red" Whalen
 "Punks" Kronenberg
 "Blinks" O'Hearn
 Ed Hare
 "Gob" O'Brien
 Bill Smith
 Carl Fisher
 Louis & Joe Raymondjack
 "Bub" (Walter) Tuohey
 "Honey" Morgott
 "Shifty" Gears
 Tommy Thompson
 Joe Morien
 "Joker" Clark
 "Dip" Murray
 "Hash" McNeil
 "Clip" Hagedorn
 "Legs" Hohorst
 Harry Topple
 Joe Menke
 Everett Hart
 Steve Champlin Sr.
 "Pooch" Palmer
 Hopper Redmond
 Pete Lester
 "Dolly" Bennett
 Bill Redmond
 Sheldon Hecker
 "Ghost" Gallaway
 Dan Mulvey
 "Red" Collone
 Carl Kleindienst
 Henry Paffenfoot

Joe Menke
 Martin Schmitt/ Joe
 Wm. (Billy) Gill
 Roy Hill
 Bob Perry
 Bill Tillman
 Bill Goodman
 Paul Benoit
 Harry Twist
 Jim Madison
 Ralph Whiting
 Russell & Frank Wald
 Jan Banazwski
 Ayrault/Heather/Perr
 Ingersoll/Schorndors
 Standish/Alexander
 Oberhauer/Woodcock
 Zwetch/Nichols



Orleans County Historical Association

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT : INTERVIEW

Mr. Maurice (Lank) O'Brien
1002 West Avenue
Medina, New York

Maurice O'Brien, born April 9, 1907.

Interviewed by Don Cook, Medina, New York.

O = O'Brien

C = Cook





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.

Maurice E. O'Brien
Signed

Jan 3, 1980
Date

Understood and agreed to:

Jon Cook
INTERVIEWER

Jan 3, 1980
Date

For the Orleans County Historical Association, today is January 3, 1980. Don Cook of Medina, New York is interviewing Maurice "Lank" O'Brien of Medina, New York.

C Now Lank, the first thing they want me to ask you is when and where you were born?

O I was born in Medina, New York, April 9, 1907.

C Okay. And a little bit of your early life - you went through schools here in Medina and lived in Medina most of your life ?

O Yes. As I say I was born in Medina and I went to St. Mary's parochial school, and after the eight grade I immediately went to Medina High School where I graduated in the early 1920s. At that time I immediately obtained a job at the S.A.Cook factory, Medina, N.Y. as a furniture packer. I stayed there until 1930. During that time I had the good fortune of playing baseball with an industrial team of which S.A.Cook was entered. I played left field, and had the very good satisfaction of running across men like (Frank) "Skinny" Boyle, "Little Crab" and "Big Crab" Montgomery, Eddie Cotriss, Hiker Real, George Butts and others. They were the best.

C And you had the honor of playing in Vets Park against Babe Ruth, didn't you?

O In the nineteen twenties we went ahead -- and I also had the good fortune of playing with our great friend and collaborator, Babe Ruth. And he was one of the greatest. George Selkirk and Jeff Passerau

both of the (New York) Yanks also played on that date. As I say, the place was packed. And I'll never forget the ovation that Babe Ruth got when he came to the plate for the first time.

C You had another good fellow by the name of Darb Whalen, didn't you.

O Darb Whalen...I'm going to mention that.

C Okay. Go ahead.

O Also during the 1920s we ran across a team from Lockport and they were considered one of the best in western New York. It was an "All-Lockport" team and run and managed by Darb "Red" Whalen who also played second base. He had men like "Punks" Kronenberg, "Blinks" O'Hearn and Ed Hare. Also I will mention a namesake of mine, "Gob" O'Brien who caught, and Bill Smith who was also one of the greatest. They made up one of the best teams, I think, that ever came out of western New York, Other than, naturally, Medina. We played them a total of six times. We had the good fortune of defeating them five times and we lost one. And guess who they beat. Carl Fisher, one of the greatest. Carl Fisher came to our team in the nineteen -- I would say about 1925 or '26 and he sure was a fine pitcher. The same year that he pitched for us, I brought him to Newark and also to Scranton where he signed up for the Pennsylvania League. Later he went to the big leagues himself. Also I want to mention several of my friends such as Louis Raymondjack and Joe Raymondjack and Eddie Cotriss Sr. We had men like (Walter) "Bub" Tuohey. We had men like "Honey" Morgott. We had - naturally George Butts played right up to the end. We had, lets see, "Red" Whalen came down and played with us one game. As I say, he was always a friend of ours. He managed the Middleport Independents. And he

also brought them to Medina where we had some wonderful games. The last time he came to Medina he brought an International hurler with him by the name of Tommy Thompson from Toronto. And we defeated -- I'll never forget this -- we defeated this boy, and he was a good pitcher, two to one. Later as we sort of broke up, we had the good satisfaction of playing a little softball. When I say softball of course that's a great sport, especially in Medina. And we were first to play under lights at Arnold's (Restaurant). Arnold's is in the Town of Shelby on which would be Route 63. We surely packed them in. We had the satisfaction of playing against a man who was probably one of the world's best, "Shifty" Gears. And he was opposed by, what's his name over there....

C Joe Morien?

O Joe Morien. And Joey was one of the best. We played Kodak Park (team) in 1935 at Arnold's field and were defeated by this team, Kodak Park, two and one. Later that year they went to St. Louis and won the World's championship! So we did not do too bad.

C That was big in the thirties under the lights. Remember the dryer down there?

O Under the lights. We always packed them in at Arnold's for the simple reason it was nothing to have fifteen hundred or two thousand people there. And that's a lot of people for small localities. We later went on and played under another name at the dryer north of Medina. (A **dry-house on State Street**).

C Right. On State Street?

O State Street.

C Anything else on baseball or do you want to go to Armory basketball? you had

a great career in there too.

O Oh yeah. I had a great career. I'd like to shift over a little. Shall I call you by name?

C Sure...Cookie.

O Don, I'd like to shift over to a great team in the Armory. As I say when I got out of school I immediately went to work at Cooks and also joined Company F in the National Guard. That was the 108th. At that time we probably had one of the greatest, and I mean greatest. We had men like "Joker" Clark, we had "Dip" Murray, we had Heather. We had the Ayraults, we had Ingersoll, we had Hash McNeil, "Clip" Hagedorn. And we played some of the greatest and best teams not only in western New York, but in New York. That first year we had the satisfaction of playing the German Orioles who were the champs of the world at that time. They came out of Buffalo and later they had gone to St. Louis and became champs. We were defeated by two points.

C Was a basket two points at that time ?

O Yeah.

C One basket ?

O And our total points those days were not as they are of today. But maybe ten to eight; or twenty to fifteen or something. They were very small scores. I would like to mention there were two teams I'll never forget. The old St. Annes. The St. Annes were a member club in Buffalo and they had the greatest. They played over on the south side and most of them were considered Irish, but they did not have Irish names. I jumped

against a man I'll never forget who is a Catholic priest at the present time, whose name was "Legs" Hohorst. One of the very best. And he could jump. They had Schorndorst. They had several well-named stars, and as I say, they come down with about a hundred and seventy-five straight games in the Municipal League and we defeated them thirteen to nine in the Armory. And the Armory was packed that night, I'll never forget it. Of course we always had dancing after the games which attracted a lot of the younger set. But the old standbys were always there. It wouldn't make a bit of difference if we were playing Shelby. They would be right there rooting for us. We played the Adirondack All-Stars, the Germany Opticals. We played Harry Toppie and his team out of Rochester which would be the Rochester Centrals, one of the greatest. And then we went to New York City and played the 69th Regiment and we defeated them ten to nine. I'll never forget it. It was one of the finest games. I'll never forget they played both amateur and professional (rules). We defeated the 69th in professional and they beat us at our play, which would be amateur. I never got over that, but as I say we had one of the greatest. One of the very best. Later "Dip" Murray went to the German Orioles, and "Joker" Clark went to the Niagara Falls Internationals.

C Do you know how many years you played ? Maybe ten, Lank? Eight or ten?

O I played baseball and I started naturally when I went to S.A.Cooks. I mean that was when we had an organized team. I was there and played baseball on and off for about fourteen or fifteen years.

C And basketball maybe about ten or twelve ?

O About that. Call it twelve, maybe fifteen years. No more than that. And of

course during that time, as I say, I met a lot of good boys. And of course coming up. And I know that a lot of them did not play but they were still my friends. Whenever they wanted a favor or I wanted a favor of them, they were always there to give it to me. Men like Joe Menke and Everett Hart and Steve Champlin (Sr.) and men like that. Always in my corner, always waiting. "Can I help you, Lank, can I help you?" That's the kind of friends that you want. They never let you down.

- C (You're into the conservation part of your life and I'd rather wait just a minute, we'll get to that in a minute.) But I'd like to -- didn't -- you played quite a little of semi-pro football with (Anthony) "Pooch" Palmer and some of those fellows. We haven't touched on that yet. You might be...
- O Well, I started (football) in high school, naturally. And when I got out "All-Medina" had one of the best (teams). Not the best, but one of the best. And we had some like the Ayraults and Bill Redmond, which....
- C "Hopper" Redmond ?
- O There will never be another "Hopper" Redmond as long as anybody lives. He was one of the finest. And as nice a guy as ever lived. And of course you can't let down Standish or Perry, or even Lester. I'll never forget Pete Lester in the early twenties. We played the St. Agathas out of Buffalo and they had a very fine team. "Dolly" Bennett was the coach at that time and we went ahead and we defeated this team by one point. And then they tried to get their money. And of course Bennett, they couldn't find "Dollie"... "Dollie" had gone somewhere with the money, see. Not that he had taken it, but it was just the idea that they were still looking for their token for

coming to Medina to play football. (Laughter). So we ended up getting all the proceeds just the same, see. I would like to say this. One of the finest teams that I ever played with... Bill Redmond and I went down to Rochester and played with "All-Lockport". We played Edgerton Park and they were considered as good a team possibly... they were all coaches. And I played against a fellow... I'll never forget him. He was from Niagara by the name of Sheldon Hecker. And he was my opponet and a very, very good man. Well, they defeated us seventeen to nothing but we figured we won because men like "Ghost" Gallaway and Alexander and Obenhauer. They were very good men. All of them were coaches. And they all stayed on that one team and then they played several games and then they disbaned. But we had the honor and the distinction of playing that one team. I don't know exactly whether they had a name or not but will say that it was a real team.

C Good. Anything else in the athletic line ?

O Yes. I played with two teams in Lockport during my career. And that was the North Ends and All-Lockport. And possibly... I had the satisfaction of being a friend of Dan Mulvey who was one of the greatest kickers that I ever see or ever did see. In fact he only died here a few years ago and was buried out of Middleport, New York. Dan Mulvey was a friend of mine. He was a good operator and a good football player. He was used mostly for kicking.

C Okay. You got anything else in your athletic career? You know one thing while we are on this subject is the Armory. It is nice to see that the people here in the village picked it up instead of just letting it sit

idle. And made a YMCA out of it for the kids to still play basketball in there.

O Well, Company F had a softball team in the Armory. And we represented them and we won the championship. There was several teams in it. When I say several, I think there was either four or five. We won the championship there. It's a lot different playing inside than it is outside. In other words you couldn't get the volume there. You got a hit you didn't exactly know what was going to happen. It could hit something and bound back in or something to that effect, see. But it only lasted one year. Then the la crosse was taken over by the Indians. Of course, none of us naturally played la crosse but we attended the games.

C Okay. We've pretty well covered that.

O I think we've covered it very good.

C Okay, the one thing I would like to get in here and of course this is one of the major highlights of your life was your career with the New York State Conservation Department. You told me here you started April 1, 1930 and you retired December 9, 1967. Now that is almost thirty eight years. Now you've got a few precious memories with the department.

O I have some of the best.

C Okay.

O As I say, a friend of mine, and a good friend of mine, Merrill Callaghan was a game protector here for years and years. He decided to go to Syracuse as an inspector, which left this job vacant. He even approached me and said, "Lank, why don't you try for the job?" Well, at once I got on the ball and started to work on it. I would say possibly within a month I had contacted

some of my friends, especially (Lawyer) Dave White in Medina, and Dave said, "I will see what I can do for you." Which he did...and one day I got a call and says you got to go to Lockport to take an examination for a game protector. Which I did. There were several of us there from Orleans County and I tried the examination at the Post Office in Lockport in 1930. Later I received a call from Albany from Henry Morgenthal, who was the inspector there at Albany, the Conservation Department. And he said, "I want to see you right away." Which no doubt I was all excited and I left that same night. I met Mr. Morgenthal. He shook hands with me and he says, "Well, you are big enough to take care of the job." That was about all he said. He said, "I want you to go back to Orleans County and do a good job." And he handed me a gun, badge and so forth, and he said, "You are in."

C You drove to Albany by yourself ?

O I drove to Albany by myself. It surprised me because as a result we didn't have too much conversation, see. I got back to Medina and I started the very next day. I had to go in to see Willard Tillman, who was my boss. And one of the very best. And he says, "You'll have all of Orleans County." And he always used to call me "Obie." The word "Lank" never appealed to him so he called me Obie. So I went down... and naturally I stayed in Orleans County for several years. I met a lot of good folks but one thing I prided myself on and I'll never forget it, I asked...I called him Bill Tillman, I says, "Bill if you ever get a detail let me in on it." I said, "I'd like to meet some of the boys around the state." This he did. And during this time he sent me on details to some of the following territories and I'll never

forget. I see New York State. Especially the first two years, I see a lot of New York State. I met a lot of good game protectors. A lot of them. I went to Long Island, Albany, Delmar, Lake Champlain, St. Lawrence River, Sodus, Rushford, Chautauqua, Niagara River and Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. During that time I met the game protectors and one or two of the bosses. "Red" Collone out of Olean, who turned out to be one of my best friends. They even sent men out with me. Some of their trusted men and I received a lot of good information. That's where I really got all the information I needed to try to become a successful game protector. So things progressed, as I say, pretty good. When, in 1942 the job of Assistant District Game Protector was introduced, I tried for that job and was I lucky. I passed at a percentage of 95.4, but naturally I had all that experience. And I've got to give credit to men like Woodcock and Zwetch, Nichols and guys like that, who really went to town for me, and they helped me at every possible turn.

C They were also game protectors ?

O They were game protectors.

C From different counties ?

O Right.

C I recognize the names.

O Then as I went along in '42 there was a lot of new men appointed and I had the satisfaction of breaking in all the men, the entire thirteen. I had thirteen men under my supervision and not one of them was bad. Not one of them. They all turned out okay and possibly in later years they might have the same job I got. At the same time now, instead of being an assistant it's a Lieutenant. But it's practically the same.

- C Yeah. And also as you were saying before we started here, you are not a game protector today, you are a Conservation Officer.
- O You are a Conservation Officer.
- C Right. But it's the same job you had ?
- O It used to be the old time game protector, see, and then they used to call them game wardens. But now it's Conservation Officer and of course they've got a different list of jobs and duties that they have to perform. Such as checking, you know, checking streams and so forth for pollution and not only work as a law enforcement man. That law enforcement has sort of fallen off, see. Now everything is taken for granted that you got... in order to be a good man, you got to go out and do a good job, see. I feel deep down in my heart, Don, that I did a good job. I tried to be as fair as I possibly could. No doubt I lost a few friends. No doubt I made a few enemies. But at the same time, the kind of people I made friends with, are the people who stuck with me all during the time that I... during my life time. And I appreciate a good friend when I have one.
- C I know you got friends, because you were probably (one of) the first person in Medina picked as the Citizen of the Year when the Journal (newspaper) first started this. I know you were one of the first Citizen of the Year to be picked so I know you have an awful lot of friends here.
- O Well, I appreciate that. It isn't that I deserve it. It was just ^{the idea} that I am proud of the fact that people in Medina took time out to vote for me. And to prove that at least they believe in me.
- C Certainly. Well...
- O That isn't asking too much.
- C No. You've done a good job through the years.

- O I've tried to. I've tried to. And if I went back over the days now, Don, I'd do the same kind of a job. I'd make a few and I'd break a few. That's all there is to it. And that cannot be helped.
- C Everyone realizes this is your job, you know. If you didn't have a game protector you wouldn't have any game to hunt and fish.
- O We have to do that. And of course as I say, sometimes in those days, you know, money was quite hard to get and a heavy penalty would be about twelve dollars and a half. Where now that's only a drop in the bucket. Now it's nothing to be fined from three to five hundred dollars, see. I know that in 1943, that was during the World War, I picked up some German boys down in (the Town of) Murray. And we accepted a twelve hundred and ten dollar fine and it come out in the Associated Press and my gosh, that's a lot of money.
- C They were "jacking" deer ?
- O Deer jackers, yeah. They had three deer.
- C Of course I was overseas then but I remember hearing about it.
- O That was a lot of money and even then Associated (Press) wanted to know if I had a picture. They wanted to put my picture in the paper. And I disallowed that. No, I just picked 'em up and that was all there was to it. But the funny part, I'll never forget, (Carl) Kleindienst, who was Sheriff of the county at that time says to me, "This don't smell right." He says, "Here they send up three or four thousand dollars on a Sunday afternoon. When I go to Rochester and I get over on Joseph Avenue where I was born and brought up, I'll find out about this." And about three or four days after that he called me up and he says, "Lank, I want to see you." I went down to see him.

He said, "You didn't hurt that (Henry) Paffenfoot one bit." And I said "why?" He said, "You know the money you got out of those four boys?" I said, "Yeah." "You took it away from the German-American Bund." "Well; I said, "That's funny," I said, " They weren't represented." "No, but they had dinners every Friday night and Saturday. And they had venison. And they set aside a little money in case any of the boys got in trouble they would go ahead and compensate whatever money was spent." And he said, " You took some of the German-American Bund but at the same time you did a good job." But he said, " You didn't hurt that consern one bit." I said, "That's all right, it's a closed issue. Maybe we can pick them up again." So we closed the matter right there and never heard no more about it.

C Another thing. When you first started, you were talking about Joe Menke and Everett Hart. They were really working hard in those early thirties to get some kind of a (wildlife) refuge^{established} in the Alabama Swamps or the Tonawanda Swamps. Whichever you want to call it. They call it both. But anyway, we were talking about the swamps that straddle Genesee-Orleans Counties. And you knew Everett Hart and Menke real well.

O Another of my great friends up there who was working for the same, although he had land, was Martin Schmitt. He had a large piece of land and water over on the east side. Now Martin Schmitt was from Buffalo. He was a fur dealer. And he was probably one of the best. ^{You speaking about fur dealers...} You've got Roy Hill, Billy Gill. ^(Interviewed by Oral History Project) Probably two of the very best and two of my best friends. They made money. They lost money. But at the ~~same~~ time I don't think they lost too much buying fur. But Steve Champlin (Sr.) who I've known for a good many years and still is one of my best friends, And Steve is a great conservat-

ionist. He's working for that job up there in Alabama and Oakfield. And I'd like to say this about another good friend of mine, possibly a lot of the people don't know him. But one of the boys that used to come and visit me...Bob Perry.

C How would he be your boss over Tillman? Or was he just a branch?

O No. He was just a branch. In other words he was a ...

C He was the Fish and Wildlife Bureau and you were the Game Protector?

O He (Perry) was at the Bureau of Game. In other words, Bill Tillman...his name is Willard Tillman, but I always called him Bill, was the Law Enforcement. And probably one of the finest Law Enforcement that I ever met. That is he was fair. He knew the ropes, Absolutely. There wasn't anything that that boy didn't know. And we had some real good ones. Another fellow that was in my corner...he was out of Albany...was Bill Goodman. And Paul Benoit. They were both chiefs down there. And you could always depend if you did a good job, they would send you a letter of commendation, see. And I appreciated it and I still hear from the two of them at the present time. I understand that Bob Perry has been under the weather all year. I have sent him a card but haven't received any answer. Bob was a good friend of mine.

C He was good. I wrote a feature on the swamp and he was really great, as you were too, at the time and helped me. I met Goodman and Benoit several times at the (NYS Conservation Council) Conventions. When they found out you were from Orleans County they'd say, "Say hello to Obie."

O Another fellow was Harry Twist. Harry was a little fellow and he had several gold teeth. And when he smiled I had to close my eyes or he'd put my eyes out. (Laughter). He was one of the best. He was a great guy.

- C When we were earlier here getting ready, we were looking at some of the dates there in 1930 with Everett Hart and Joe Menke were busy trying to get the swamp (established as a wildlife refuge) and they got Montezuma at that time. They said they were sorry they turned us down, but we finally made it and we got some nice land.
- O We got the best. In fact you got a better tract of land than Montezuma. Montezuma has got too much water there. It's all right for waterfowl, but over here we have upland game. We have everything. Deer... and the beaver is coming back. We've got a nice show of beaver. The farmers are kind of up against it. They don't like to have beaver in there on account of spoiling the land and flooding it. But this year they had a season on pheasants. And it's pretty nice to go ahead and liberate pheasants but you don't know how many is going to hunt their tracks out. You are apt to have fifty in one acre, and in the next acre, you don't have any. It all levels off to good hunting, that's all.
- C You were here about the time that the deer and fox were coming back here. In the late 1800s we lost our deer, and the wild turkey and the fox. And then they started to come back from the Pennsylvania border when the Southern Tier land was being left by farmers.

(This is the end of side one. Apparently the tape was defective for some of the final portion of this interview is difficult to understand.)

- C You figure when you saw your first deer ?
- O I am not sure of the date. But I would say probably about 1936 or '38, or somewhere in there.
- C Mid-thirties ?
- O Mid-thirties.
- C Everybody says the same thing.
- O I would say they came back about that time, see. And I will never forget there was a female with two young. That was the first two I see. And that was great...come out in the paper. And oh, we had quite a talk about that. Quite a conversation. And naturally it happened in the Alabama Swamp and just into Genesee County.
- C Right. Today they think nothing of it... seeing two or three hundred deer in the spring when it floods over in there.
- O I went up, possibly four or five years ago, east of Alabama on the Lockport, on the Oakfield Road...
- C Lockport - Lewiston Road.
- O Lewiston Road, and we counted over five hundred deer. It was wonderful to see that many. You know at one time it just couldn't be. But when you see a deer come up in a farmer's beanery and eat beans and corn and everything right out of their silos, you say to yourself, I wonder if those poor farmers are going to be compensated. But I don't hardly think they did too much damage. They took a few little nibbles and away they went again.
- C Well, that's what a lot of people can't understand; why you hunt 'em. You'd have so damn many that....
- O You've got to hunt them. You got to keep the population down.

C Keep things down.

O The same way with rabbits. The same way with fox. If somebody doesn't hunt fox, we will be overrun with vermin, see.

C Muskrats ?

O Muskrats and everything else, see. Pheasants of course, pheasants I don't hardly think the pheasants are killed off by the vermin or so forth. I honestly think that possibly some of the material the farmers are using probably

C That. And they are taking away a lot of their hiding places. Fence rows.

O That's right. That's right. We call it fence balks. They're all gone. They... and then on top of that, you've got that certain person. You've got that violater and he'll do more damage because he'll shoot during the time they are nesting, see. So if they would only wait. if they are going to shoot a pheasant out of season, is during the late fall and winter. But they don't do that. They just go ahead and shoot them right off the nest, see. It isn't right. It isn't fair to the good sportsman who tries to, who tries to live up to the law. It's not so good. But our muskrat population, that's coming back pretty good. But I think when I was a boy, many and many a muskrat I caught and stretched out. Homemade stretchers. Sold to Roy Hill for sixty cents. Now a good muskrat, a good prime muskrat is worth ten dollars. I just can't believe it. And a fox last year sold for over a hundred. Well, they're down slightly this year. But last year they got to a hundred dollars. When I look back over the years and think about over there in Wyoming County. Why those guys they got fox, trap fox and they were offered a dollar a piece for them. And eventually sold, see.

C When was this now ? would you...

O I would say probably....

C The thirties ?

O Middle thirties. And Leon Nichols who had over five hundred fox at one time. He was great, of course he made his own lure, but he had a pile of fox. And he got one dollar apiece for 'em.

C Wasn't he a CO ? A Conservation Officer ?

O A Conservation Officer.

C Wyoming County ?

O A man I broke in. A man who stayed here and one of the nicest, nicest men that I ever had the satisfaction of meeting. And the other was a great Conservation Officer by the name of Glenn Zwetch. And let me tell you, there were two game protectors or conservation officers or so on. They were the greatest. If you put them out on a violation, they would stay on that violation until something was...

C Decided ?

O Was decided. That's right. And let me tell you, you can't beat a man like that. Nowadays when it gets dark they are home with their family. They're not anymore. Those old boys are all gone.

C Yeah. Eight hour work day today and a five day week.

O Well, it was nothing. I can remember ^{putting} Glenn Zwetch over on a violation. Well it was deer and trapping both. And he went there early in the morning and I came back at dark and he was still there. And he stayed all night. The next morning he was just getting ready to go when one of the violators came and he picked him up. And he probably was there twenty eight, twenty nine or thirty hours, see.

C That's cold weather too ? Cool ?

O Well, it was cool. It wasn't too bad. But at least it was all night.

C Yeah. Right. That's what I mean....

O He stuck it out. They wouldn't quit. You got to give a man ^{like that} credit when he goes ahead and stays for an infraction of that kind. They don't do it any more for the reason that they got other matters on their mind, see. And still they've got, as I say, Don, they've got different violations to look after. In those days we never paid too much attention to the pollution. Because I didn't think we had it. But now we have. So you've got to specify just about what time you got to be out there. You got to be out there at the time the pollution, you know, is running. Sometimes it's at night and sometimes it's the daytimes and you don't know. And sometimes you might have to spend quite a length of time on that.

C Well, Billy Gill is what kind of started me on this as I read Billy Gill's story and was intrigued by it. So I offered to do Ed Weeks and you. Billy Gill said that when he first started to buy rats, which would be way back in 1910 or something like that, he was paying twenty five cents a rat.

O Twenty five. He used to go down to the Southern Tier and buy on the Indian Reservation. You know where Billy is at the present time ?

C Yes. I have been down to see him in the County home.

O Of course Roy Hill is gone.

C Right. Well that was his brother-in-law. He used to buy around here and Billy would go south.

O Yeah. They kind of stuck together. They were good men. They made a buck, but

if they could buy something at a cheaper price more power to them. Now if they could only come back and have to pay ten dollars for a rat, they would wonder what kind of a world we are living in.

C That's what Billy Gill said; "somewhere along here someone is going to get burned." He figures the price of fur is too high.

O Well, I worked with one of the special game protectors who was up in the swamp. Jim Madison. I don't know whether you knew him or not. He was deaf. But I could see Jim now. He had an old black...well we call it...it was like a Pinscher. I couldn't tell. He was an off-colored dog. And it was a mink dog. At least he called it a mink dog. I was with him one day and he was back on Schmitt's, and within an hour he had five mink.

C With that dog ?

O Yeah. He would point through the ice at it. And of course, naturally cut a hole through the ice and get the mink. And at that time mink was selling for thirty five dollars.

C That was big money in those days.

O That was big money. And all of a sudden it quited down and at the present time mink go for only ten or twelve dollars, see. Mostly go for muskrats.

C Right. Raccoon and fox.

O Raccoon is right up to thirty dollars. And fox I hear at the present time is up to seventy. Last year they sold for a hundred. Which just shows that the price of fur is...the gals just have to have their fur coats and they are paying for it, see.

C Right.

- 0 Which is only right.
- C Martin Schmitt... how did you ever meet him? When you were a game protector and when he started to buy all that land ?
- 0 That's right. They had homes. He lived there. He had a couple of homes on the Albion Road and he would always spend, like maybe come down Friday night and spend Saturday and Sunday. And during the hunting season he would take the boys out. He had a lot of his friends come from Buffalo. And of course he was a fur, not a fur buyer but he made coats, see. And these men would come down and spend a day or two with him and naturally he was great friends of these guys, see. And get a few fox. What they was mostly after was ducks. Waterfowl. And I think that Martin had a few down there. And he had a son that took over after Martin died. But he didn't last too long.
- C No. Because this is what I was kind of building up to... is that, Martin bought so much land over there that when, Bob Perry said once, this money became available from the Conservation Department, they grabbed that Martin Schmitt estate. Because it had one great big piece that they could buy without dickering with lawyers and all that stuff..
- 0 They bought that (Oak Orchard Wildlife Management Area) through the son, Joseph Schmitt. Joe needed the money so he got a very good deal on it. I know that Bob Perry told me, "We got some money and I think I can buy it for 'that' amount." And the next time I seen him he says the papers are signed and it's gone in and a short time later, it was taken over by the state. It's a very good piece of property. It's on the Albion Road and it's

almost a lake. I mean, it's flooded.

C Well the Oak Orchard Overlook is on part of it.

O That's right.

C You park right there in that great big parking lot...

O You are parked right down. And they call it Schmitt's Marsh and they call it everything. They call it the pond. And they call it the lake. And they have several names. It all depends on what they wanted to do, you know what I mean. If they wanted to call it a lake, they called it a lake. If they wanted to call it a pond. They called it a pond. But the waterfowl sure piles in there in the spring.

C That's another thing. Have you seen a big change in waterfowl migrating through here? In early years as compared to what these people have done today?

O Yes.

C It has to be a big attracter.

O I would say two or three hundred percent. It's got to be. When I first come on, we had quite a number of geese, ducks...not so many ducks. They were Canada Geese. But during the last, we'll say, during the last ten or twelve years it has surely increased.

C It is awesome in the spring of the year, when you see them get up there, a hundred thousand.

O It's nothing. It's nothing. I talked with Ollie Meddaugh. And of course everybody knows Ollie. And Ollie said that he would just about guarantee that what geese was up there on Lake Ontario and other points, would be

well over a hundred thousand. And that is a lot of Canada Geese.

C It is. It is amazing.

O When I was, as I say, when I first come on, there might be twenty or twenty five thousand, but now it won't stop at a hundred thousand. I think it's well over a hundred thousand. It's got to be. Some times when you look at Schmitt's up there, you can hardly see, it's so black with geese. You wonder where they all come from.

C And wonder how another one can fit on the water.

O That's right. There's a pile of geese in there. And it goes for four or five hundred yards and then you can go ahead on another marsh over in back of Jack Denny's, and you'll probably find thousands more over in there. So you don't know where to look. And then you can go back of the Knowlesville Road... back of the old grounds that they used to have the buildings on and you'll find some geese in there. So if I told you where to go for geese, you might find this one place today. You might find them another place tomorrow. They've got so much to range you just can't keep track of them. It's a wonderful thing. And of course being state land, it is protected, see. The signs are up and the people respect them. You will always have somebody who will make a mistake. In their defense they are going to have a goose or something. But at the same time, I think the boys have done a pretty good job up there.

C Did you ever know Harold Mitchell ?

O I've heard of him but I don't think I ever met him.

C The bird watcher from Buffalo. I think the bird watchers are one group

that probably, of course financially they didn't hand out much towards this because most was through the hunting and fishing buying sportsmen, but I think the bird watchers are about as glad as anybody that we've got all this land because you've got some fine bird habitat.

O I got a fellow. I haven't seen him in some time. A fellow by the name of Rue.

C Sure. Well, I never met him, but either his daughter or sister.

O Well, he used to go up there all the time. But he was, in other words he worked out of Buffalo. Out of the Courier - Express. And I think he had the Buffalo Evening News if I am not mistaken. But he did a good job down there. And you speaking about bird watchers...we got some good bird watchers. They report and it's a hundred percent on the square. There is no prevaricating there. And I got to give them credit. When they see something, they report it as they see it. Which is all right.

C Okay. Anything else here ? That you can think of ?

O Well, there's not much more. All I can say "Cookie," is that I am glad you come down and visited me. I am glad if there is any information that I can give you, or even in the future, if there is any possibility of being any kind of help to you, I will be glad to do it. All you got to do is give me a ring and I'll be glad to see that you get it. If I haven't got it, and can get it for you, I will get it. That's all I can do.

C Right.

O I know we are going to have a change in the next few years. Everything changes, you know. I can't tell you what next year is going to bring. The following year or anything else. But all I know now is that conservation

up there in the swamp in Orleans County is not too bad. We got, we've got it pretty fair. You know what I mean.

C Quite rural. We are lucky compared with a lot of places here.

O Well, some of them are not so good, see.

C You and Arlene still take a ride out to the swamp and check things out there and look it over ?

O Oh, yeah. We go out and take a look once in a while. We took some pictures. And then on top of that, little things come out where...you know. I got a friend. No doubt you hear him. I send all my information in to Buffalo.

C Yes. How did you...that's another thing. I get on the air quite frequently here. (Laughter). You bugger, how did you ever ^{happen to} start sending...

O Stan Barron (Radio WBEN-Buffalo) says, now let me tell you, you got some friends down there in Orleans County. And he says that guy from the Journal-Register, I shouldn't tell you this because I don't want you to...

C Get a big head ?

O Get a big head. But he says he is one of the state's best...He says, and the last time he says he's going to be right up there in the nation. Well, I told him, when I always write in to him, I said my friend Don Cook always takes care of me. So you are getting this, see.

C Did you tell him you taught me in the early days ? How to take pictures.

O No. No. I didn't tell him that.

C We've done some together.

O But I'll tell you one thing. You won't get a better photographer than Don Cook. And he mentioned that any number of times. And he always comes on at eleven...twenty minutes to eleven you'll hear it, see. The other night he

mentioned it before he went on his retirement...not retirement but vacation. And I think he's coming back Monday. I'm pretty sure. And he'll always say "hello" to my friend Don Cook for me, and "tell him to keep up the good work." Well, what am I going to do? I got to tell you for the ^{simple} reason that it was relayed to me and now I got to relay it to you, see. So to him and to the sportsmen of Western New York, you are doing a good job, Don. I might as well tell you now when you are alive...never mind telling you... you wouldn't be much good to me if I went down to Mr. Tuttle's (the undertaker) and said, "oh Don, you did such a swell job." Now is the time to tell you when you can appreciate it.

C That's right. Anything else that we can kibitz about here? We still have a little more tape. Can you think of anything? We 'll shut this off for a minute and maybe we'll come up with something.

O Yeah, if there is anything. How much more time we got on there? (PAUSE)

C You checked your notes. There's a couple of other people you want to mention.

O That's right. I would like to mention two or three friends of mine. Bill Blew. Probably one of the greatest in the Bureau of Game that we have ever had in this section. Bill was a manager and overseer at the Game Farm, White's Game Farm in the Town of Alabama. He is only recently retired. He was possibly with the state, I would say, probably thirty years. He knew his pheasants and he was probably one of the best. Along side of him was Harold Gray who runs the Flying Feather Shooting Club out of Oakfield, New York. I noticed the other day that he had turned the workings of the farm

over to his son, Robert, and that they have a total of about twenty thousand pheasants. And it showed pheasants being prepared and Mr. Gray said they are worth about four dollars a pound. So in other words...

C To raise them ?

O No. When you sell them, you can go out there and shoot. It costs you fifteen dollars a bird to shoot one of their pheasants on the wing. And of course it is expensive but to those people that really enjoy hunting.

C They can hunt a longer season too.

O That's right. And then there's another real good friend of mine, Ollie (Oliver) Meddaugh. Ollie is the overseer, or the agent, at the Oak Orchard (Wildlife Management) Area, and one of the very best. You'll never get another Ollie. You will never for the simple reason that he knows his business. He is fair. He's made a lot of friends by his honesty and he's not one of those men out there trying to drape you over the fire if you make a mistake. He will tell you in a decent way, "Now you've got to get off and ^{please} don't come back." And there isn't many law enforcement officers that will do that at the present time. They all want to make a "pinch". Not Ollie, 'cause Ollie, I say, is one of the finest.

C Now Bill Blew. You spell his name B-L-E-W ?

O Right.

C Now there is a couple of other things here, Lank, you haven't touched on this, so I am going to have to bring it up. The Red Cross has taken blood for people to help out for years. I would like you to say something in your own words on that.

O Well...

C Do you know how many pints of blood you have donated ?

O Yes. Yes. We've kept track. I don't want to blow my own bugle.

C For the records.

O I started years and years ago (before the Red Cross in this area) before they took them with the needle and your arms were cut. Of course both arms are cut so now that I could never be any good as a blood donor again. But over the years we did keep track and I gave a total of seventy three pints. Seventy three pints of blood. And probably lost out on twenty more. That would be ninety three. I was glad to do it for the simple reason that if a person needed a little of my blood , I would be glad to give it to them. And I also prided myself, I never accepted a dime for all my blood. Everything was a donation. And many a time I think about it. I went into Rochester the time that Cohen, That was C-O-H-E-N would advertise for blood. And he'd always say, Lank... Many a time I'd go to Rochester to give blood. Sometimes they'd want it and sometimes they couldn't use it. I went to Lockport, and I went to Niagara Falls, I don't think I ever give in Buffalo. I went to Niagara Falls, Lockport, Batavia, Medina and Rochester.

C I got another thing here now. You were talking about during the Depression years. We have both gone through these and we know what they were. Now you and Ralph Whiting (former Medina Fire Chief) probably made more kids in Orleans County happy at Christmas time. Now let's have a little on that. The firemen used to...

O Well, of course when it first come out, I'll admit that was years and years

ago it seems. And we had a program come up. It wasn't only the Red Cross, everybody was combined. The churches and individuals and so forth. So we got together down at the (Medina) City Hall and decided that we would give these poor children toys and the families that needed a basket or so, we would see that they got it. And it got to be a big proposition. I know that (Russell) Waldo ^{always used to} go ahead and photograph all the toys. And it was a wonderful thing to see the top of the City Hall, or Village Hall with all those toys. You just couldn't believe it. Thousands and thousands of dollars worth.

C I could believe it because I was a part of it...

O But the tough part of it was, I used to have two boys (Franklin) "Red" Waldo used to help me and Banazwski...

C Jan.

O That's right. And the three of us used to go out, use my car. Of course it was a state car, too, along with everything else. It didn't make a bit of difference...but we took them out. And I would spend about a week. We did that all alone. And let me tell you, just the looks of those kids playing with the few little toys would make your heart ache.

C In your retirement story here in the Journal it says three generations of youngsters remember Lank as the local Santa Clause who helped to distribute welfare toys at Christmas time after the Medina firemen completed their repairs.

O That's right. That's what we did.

C Ralph Whiting...and....

O Ralph was one of the best. Ralph was always looking out for the poor. And he never lost a dime by it. He made a lot of friends. Well, you have made a lot of friends," Cookie." You've did your job right.

C We not one other thing here now. You slipped up in your early years or else you did this on purpose. I don't know. But you got another real great honor there and I'd just like you to dwell on that. Your softball days of playing here in Medina. Go ahead. Come on now...

O Well, another... I just to..if it's proper, I just want to insert this little thing. In 1977 I had the satisfaction of being called and say your name is in the (Western New York Softball) Hall of Fame. Did you know that ? I said what do you mean the Hall of Fame. Now he said you've certainly done your duty in athletics and so forth, especially baseball and softball. And we voted you into the Hall of Fame. And I said it made me feel kind of bad. I never expected to go ahead and given an honor of that kind, see. Which I did. And then they went ahead and returned a plaque to me which I treasure with all my heart. I'll never let it go. It's one of the greatest. And there isn't too many. I know there is only

two or three in Medina that has them. But why do they pick me I don't know. But at least I want to go ahead and thank whoever the causes was and whoever had the opportunity to put my name in, I appreciate it. It's all right.

C That's great, Lank. And I want to thank you very much for this interview.

O That's all right, "Cookie." If there is anything else, I say if there is anything else I can do for you...not only for you, but for anyone else

for that matter. For the good of the county or the town or anything else and I would appreciate it this way. I would like to say this Cookie, and I mean it sincerely, I married one of the best girls that ever lived. (Arlene Tuttle O'Brien).

C Very good.

O The reason for this is, she is a pattern after my own heart. Any thing that anybody wanted, and if she had the money, or she could get the money, or she could see that I paid for the average person or so forth, she'd get it. And let me tell you, boy, it's nice to have a woman who's not cranking you all the time for a few of ^{your} paltry dollars for the poor. She spent her share and I give her credit and I hope she lives a lot longer than I do.

C That's very nice.

O She deserves it.

C Okay, Lank. Thank you very much.

* * * * *

Transcribed by Luther Burroughs of Albion, New York.

Edited and final copy typed by Don Cook of Medina, New York.

* * * * *

Maurice 'Lank' O'Brien Announces Retirement

"We were known as game protectors back in those days, but now the term is - conservation officer."

Thus spoke Maurice "Lank" O'Brien, assistant regional conservation officer, as he announced his retirement from the N.Y.S. Conservation Dept. effective this coming Saturday, after nearly 37 years of service time.

Starting on April 1, 1931, O'Brien replaced the late Merrill Callaghan, who at that time accepted a position in the Syracuse Region as an inspector for the Conservation Dept. For about 25 years, O'Brien was the only protector in Orleans County.

As an assistant conservation officer since 1941, he has seen many developments and made many friendships.

He speaks of such people as Martin Schmitt. "I knew him very well. He started a muskrat farm which was later purchased by the Conservation Department and is now known as the Oak Orchard Game Management Area."

Other major developments he has watched with pride over the years include the Tonawanda Game Management Area and the Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge.

The three combined areas south of Medina comprise about 12,000 acres.

Memories come easily to "Lank". He recalls the establishment of one of the finest pheasant rearing farms in the state under the direct supervision of Bill Blew, "one of the state's finest."

Mr. Blew, the original foreman, is still in charge of the 180-acre John A. White Memorial State Game Farm located at Basom.

O'Brien (also sometimes called O-B) recalls that when he first started with the department there were few bureaus, but the advancing years built it to its highest peak.

He feels that N.Y. State has the finest personnel available in Albany to look after the needs of sportsmen. "It's been an enjoyable 37 years working both with the department and the sportsmen," he observes.

As a graduate of Medina



"Lank", O'Brien

High School, "Lank" looks back on many sports activities with keen enjoyment. He was active in football, basketball and baseball during school years and as a semi-pro player during the 1920s.

He played with the all-Medina football and baseball teams and was also a member of the old Company F basketball squad which boasted some of the best-known performers in W.N.Y. in that era.

"Many old timers still remember Dip Murray, Joker Clark, Hash McNeil and Cliff Heddorn," he says smiling. "For years we played to standing room crowds in the Pearl St. armory."

About three generations of youngsters remember "Lank" as a local Santa Claus who helped welfare officials distribute toys at Christmas time after the Medina firemen completed their repairs.

During his adult years, O'Brien has donated 73 pints of blood to help individuals in need at various hospitals in Buffalo, Rochester, Lockport, Batavia and Medina.

For many years the O'Briens have fished the Rideau Canal near Kingston Mills, Ontario, at the Hughes resort.

His wife is the former Arlene Tuttle of Lyndonville and they live at 1002 West Ave.

19,000

1002 W. Ave