

RESEARCH NOTES ON TIMOTHY O'BRIEN

Diane Geanuleas June 14, 2025

Probate Court

Estate of Timothy O'Brien **Send Letter Order to John Ryan Argentine**

In the matter of Timothy O'Brien Deceased, know all men by these presents, that we, Mary O'Brien and John Ryan _____ [definition of some kind that I cannot read the handwriting], within the state of Michigan are holden and stand firmly bound and obliged unto ____ Esq. Judge of Probate in and for said county of Genesee in the full sum of **fifteen hundred dollars** lawful money of the United States of America to be paid unto the said Geo. R. Gold, his successors in the said office, or assigns, to the true payment thereof we do bind ourselves, and each of us, our and each of our heirs, executors and administrators, jointly and severally for the whole, and in the whole, firmly by these presents. Sealed with our seals: Dated the **25th** day of **Sept** Anno Domini one thousand eight hundred and **seventy one**.

Whereas the above bounden **Mary O'Brien** has been appointed by the Probate Court of said county, **administrative** of the estate of **Timothy O'Brien**, late of said county _____ [left blank] deceased: NOW THE CONDITION OF THIS PRESENT OBLIGATION IS SUCH, that if the above bounden **Mary O'Brien** shall well and truly perform, observe and keep the conditions following, to wit:

1st. That **she** shall make and return to the Probate Court aforesaid, within three months, a true and perfect inventory of all the goods, chattels, rights, credits and estate of the said deceased, which shall come to **her** possssion or knowledge, or the possession of any other person for **her**

2d. That **she** shall administer according to law, _____ [left blank] all the goods, chattels, rights, credits and estate of the said deceased, which shall, at all time, come to **her** possession, or to the possession of any othr person for **her** and out of the same pay and discharge all debts _____ [left blank] and charges chargeable on the same, or such dividends thereon as shall be ordered and decreed by the Probate Court aforesaid

3d. That **she** shall render a true and just account of **her** administration to the Probate Court aforesaid, within one year, and at any other time when required by such Court: And _____ [left blank]

4th. That **she** shall perform all orders and decrees of the Probate Court aforesaid, by the aforesaid **Mary O'Brien** to be performed in the premises: Then the afore written obligation to be void and of none effect, or else to abide and remain in full force and virtue.

Signed Sealed and Delivered in the Presence of **Geo R Gold**

Mary O'Brien her mark X

John Ryan

Genesee County ss

At the session of the Probate Court in and for said County, holden at City of **Flint**, on _____, the **25th** day of **Sept** A.D. **1871**/

I have examined and do approve of the foregoing bond, and order the same to be filed and recorded in the Probate office of said county.

Geo R Gold Judge of Probaate

Newspaper Articles

Article #1

Lake Shore Commercial Saugatuck, Saturday, March 4, 1871 Vol III No. 33

E. Perry, Editor Independent

[Commercial Record 3 /4 / 1871 page 3 *citation*] charted 4-3-2025

Col 1

On Tuesday night or Wednesday morning last, a deserted railroad shanty standing a few rods north of the river at Richmond, and a few feet from the track, was burned. No alarm was made. In the morning the body of a man was found among the ashes, surrounded by hard-wood coals, ashes, and partly burned sticks. The legs were burned off to the body, the arms were burned off above the elbow, the skull and the breastbone were bare and so burned as to crumble at a touch. The remains were on the windward side of the light pine shanty, so that the flames would be blown away from the body, therefore it appears that fuel must have been piled on the body and kept burning a long time before the shanty was fired. Near the body were found pieces apparently belonging to a watch chain. No traces of a watch could be found. Dr. H.H. Stimson made the postmortem examination, but could not find the cause of death owing to the badly burned state of the remains. A blade from a pocket knife, found near the body, has been identified as belonging to one O'Brien, keeper of a railroad boarding house near Fenn's Mill. O'Brien had been to Holland to collect money, and, it is supposed, was walking along the track on his way home when he was killed, plundered and an attempt was made to hide the crime by burning the body. Several men have been arrested and their examination is going on as we go to press.

Article #2

Detroit Free Press (Tuesday) March 7, 1871 pg 4

Murder in Allegan County.

The Kalamazoo *Telegraph* has the following account of an atrocious murder which was committed near Richmond, in Allegan County, last Tuesday night:

A man who has been for some time past engaged as a laborer on the Chicago & Michigan Lake Shore Railroad, and who also kept at Sherman's Mills (a point on the above named railroad, in Clyde Township, Allegan County, eight miles north of the junction of the railroad with the Kalamazoo & South Haven Railroad) a boarding-house for the gang of men employed on that section, by the name of O'Brien, is doubtless the person who was killed.

It seems that the contractors, whose headquarters for the present are at Holland, owed O'Brien some \$200 for labor and board of men, and O'Brien had gone to draw his pay. The money was paid to him, and he was on his way home on foot through the woods when he arrived at night-fall at Richmond, a little village about ten miles this side of the mouth of the Kalamazoo River, and a station on the Chicago & Lake Michigan Railroad. Here he determined to stay until next morning, and to this end he ordered supper and lodging. Just as he was about to retire for the night, two men, strangers in the place, called at the tavern where O'Brien was and asked to see him. With these two men O'Brien

subsequently went out, and that is the last that is known about him. The next morning an old shanty near Richmond was seen to be smoking and almost burned up. Looking closer the remains of a human being were discovered in the midst of the heap of smouldering [SIC] embers, but so charred, dismembered and disfigured as scarcely to be recognized for what they really were. The news soon spread through the little village, and means were at once taken to rescue the body from its fiery bed. A messenger was sent to a deputy sheriff, and subsequently two men by the name of Hogle and Hayward (one formerly a boarder of O'Brien's) were arrested on suspicion of being concerned in the burning of the body.

The arms and legs of the unfortunate man were burned off, his features destroyed, and nothing left of him that could lead to his recognition. Under one of his arms a little bit of his shirt was found, and near by a piece of a woolen comforter that had belonged to him, also his knife. The remains were taken to Sherman's mills, where his family are, and the knife and woolen comforter were recognized; the knife by a peculiar break in the point of the blade which had often been noticed by members of his family.

It is not known how the murdered man came to his death—whether he was beguiled to a lonely spot and dispatched with few or many blows, and then the body conveyed to _____
...vel we have spoken of; or whether he _____ed therein, and the fire lighted in _____all traces of the
foul deed, as _____al remains of their victim, _____and forever lost. It _____to have fired the _____have felt
how _____them, of so _____such a _____their

[newspaper cut sharply across the last portion of this article.]

Article #3

Transcription from Jackson Citizen Patriot 3-8-1871 pg 2

MICHIGAN NEWS

[several news articles gathered from around the state relaying tragedies and crimes and including the story of Timothy O'Brien as follows:]

Richmond, in the town of Manlius, in Allegan county, must be a paradise of fiends. We gave the particulars of a murder perpetrated in that place last Tuesday night, the murder of Mr. O'Brien. On last Thursday night another murder was perpetrated upon an unknown man by unknown parties. On Friday morning a man, in appearance a laborer, about 35 years of age, was found dead on the snow three miles north of Richmond, with a terrible gash in his right leg at the thigh, the wound extending clear across it and as deep as the bone, cutting an artery, and the ground covered with blood. No clue is yet found to the murderers. We understand from the same authority from whom we gathered the particulars of the murder of O'Brien, that Pat Hogan, who now gives his name as Regan (and he is known to be a desperate character), has been examined and bound over to appear at the next term of the circuit Court. The indignation of the people of Sherman's Mill, where he was examined, is intense, and it was with great difficulty that they were restrained from lynching him. It now turns out that O'Brien drew only \$40 from the company at Holland and that was all the money he had upon his person when his life was taken.

[there follows one final report, of a gang rape, unrelated to O'Brien, but occurring in Richmond as well.]

Article #4

Transcript

3-8-1871 Detroit Free Press, pg 1, reported by Mr. Nathan Hill, Clyde Twp

ALLEGAN COUNTY

The Kalamazoo *Telegraph* of the 6th says:

We learn from Mr. Nathan Hill, of whom we gathered the particulars of the O'Brien murder, published Saturday, that another homicide had been discovered there. Last Friday morning an unknown man was found lying upon the snow, three miles north of Richmond, his right leg cut almost off. The body was brought to Richmond on Friday morning.

The same authority says that Hogan and Hayward, suspected of the murder of O'Brien, had an examination before the Justice of the Peace in Clyde Township, and were held to bail, but not being able to give bonds were committed to jail to await trial.

Article #5

Detroit Advertiser and Tribune Mar 9, 1871

Murder in Allegan County.

A Man Murdered for His Money and His Body Burned.

Correspondence of The Detroit Tribune. Kalamazoo, March 8, 1871.

We learn that a most atrocious murder was committed at Richmond, Allegan county, about 10 miles this side of the mouth of the Kalamazoo river, a point on the Chicago & Lake Michigan Railroad, last Tuesday night. As near as I can learn, the circumstances are as follows: A man named O'Brien, a laborer on the above named Railroad, and who also kept a boarding house at Sherman's mill, for the gang of men who work on that section of the road, started last week to go to Holland to get his pay, some \$200 in money. He had succeeded [SIC] in his mission and returned as far as Richmond, Tuesday evening, where he intended to remain over night and go on the next day to Sherman's mill, which is in Clyde township, some eight miles north of the junction of the Kalamazoo and South Haven Railroad with the above named road. With this purpose, he stopped at a tavern in Richmond, but after he had been there some time, two men came to the tavern and requested to see him. He was called, and finally went out with them and was seen no more. At four o'clock in the morning, an old shanty not far distant from the tavern was discovered to have been fired and was nearly burned up. On investigation the remains of a human being was found in the smouldering [SIC] ruins, the body terribly charred, both

legs and arms burned away, and nothing left of his form or features for identification. Under one arm pit a piece of a shirt was found that had escaped the fire. A knife and a portion of a woolen comforter were also found. Subsequently, these were identified by the wife of O'Brien. The knife, especially, was known to be his by the wife and son, who recognized a peculiar break in the point of it, which they had both frequently noticed. A deputy sheriff brought the remains of poor O'Brien to Sherman's mill, Thursday. It is supposed that two men named Hogle and Hayward were the perpetrators of the act, and they have both been arrested on suspicion. O'Brien was an honest, hard working man of good habits. He leaves a wife and three children, utterly destitute of means and application has been made to the township of Clyde for aid for them.

It is supposed that O'Brien was murdered and then conveyed to the shanty, and that was fired to conceal the evidences of guilt. As yet, however, no trace of blood has been discovered, and the body is so badly mutilated by fire as to conceal all blows, if there were any inflicted.

Article #6

St Joseph Herald pg 1 March 11, 1871 Saturday

Transcription

Atrocious Murder

On Tuesday, the 2d inst., one O'Brien, an employee and boarding-house keeper of the C. & M. Lake Shore R. R., at Sherman's mill, 10 miles south of the mouth of the Kalamazoo river, returned from Holland with \$200 in his possession and stopped at a tavern in Richmond for the night. During the evening he was called out by two men, and never seen again. Before daylight an old shanty, not far distant, was burned, and in the ruins were found the remains of a human being past identification, but with a knife and two remnants of clothing were positively identified by O'Brien's wife as belonging to him. Two men, named Hogle and Hayward, have been arrested on suspicion.

Article #7

Lake Shore Commercial Saugatuck, Saturday, March 11, 1871
Volume III Number 34
E. Perry Editor

[3 / 11 / 1871 Commercial Record.org *citation*]
pg 3 midway in column 2

Various rumors about the murder at Richmond, are afloat, but as we do not have time to sift them, we do not give them space this week.

Article #8

Transcription of part 1 of Article, as part 2 is about a gang rape and not directly applicable

Jackson Citizen 1871 March 14

Richmond, in the town of Manlius, in Allegan county, must be a paradise of fiends. We gave the particulars of a murder perpetrated in that place last Tuesday night, the murder of Mr. O'Brien. On last Thursday night another murder was perpetrated upon an unknown man by unknown parties. On Friday morning a man, in appearance a laborer, about 35 years of age, was found dead on the snow three miles north of Richmond, with a terrible gash in his right leg at the thigh, the wound extending clear across it and as deep as the bone, cutting an artery, and the ground covered with blood. No clue is yet found to the murderers. We understand from the same authority from whom we gathered the particulars of the murder of O'Brien, that Pat Hogan, who now gives his name as Regan (and he is known to be a desperate character), has been examined and bound over to appear at the next term of the Circuit Court. The indignation of the people of Sherman's Mill, where he was examined, is intense, and it was with great difficulty that they were restrained from lynching him. It now turns out that O'Brien drew only \$40 from the company at Holland, and that was all the money he had upon his person when his life was taken.

Article #9

True Northerner 1871-03-17 pg 4

--A brutal murder was committed at Richmond, Allegan county, Mich., recently. A man named O'Brien was called out of a tavern, murdered, and the body burned, with a shanty, a short distance from the tavern.

--[unrelated news item]

-- Two more murders have been committed at Richmond, Allegan county, Mich., the scene of the horrible murder which occurred there recently. On Thursday night an unknown man was killed by unknown parties, and on Friday night the body of another unknown man, apparently a laborer, was found in the road three miles north of the settlement, a fearful gash in the thigh severing the arteries. There is no clue to his murderers. The town is whisky-cursed, [SIC] which is probably the source of those and other horrors.

Timothy O'Brien

What we know about him through documents

Marriage: Certificate of marriage between **Timotheum O'Brien** and **Margaret Kelly**

More: Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Syracuse NY; 259 East Onondaga Street
obtained record from this church.

Lawfully married 3 Sep 1849 acc to rite of Roman Catholic Church and NYState

Witnesses present: Joanne Kelly and Margarita Ryan

Obtained from the marriage register of this church May 17, 2013.

More: Unable to discover a Margaret Ryan so far, as related to John Ryan of Deerfield, Livingston Co.

More: If their birth years are/were correct on the 1860 census, this marriage would have taken place when they were each 14-15 yrs old. If the 1850 census is correct, Tim would have married at about 27 yrs of age, and Margaret at about 20.

Federal Census Record:

1850 Fed Census: Town of Manlius, County of Onondaga, NY

Timothy O. Brine age 28 [est. birth yr: 1822] laborer, from Ireland, married to

Margaret O. Brine age 21 [est. birth yr: 1829]

More: Manlius is approximately 12 miles from Syracuse by foot travel, and both are in the same county in which a Timothy O'Brien and a Margaret Kelly were married one year before.

Census taken on 22 July 1850, printed pg 13, handwritten pg 25. Dwelling # 187.

Civil War Draft Registrations Records

1863 July Town of Gaines, County of Genesee, Michigan pg 204 line 4

Timothy Obrine age 42 white Farmer, born Ireland [est. birth yr: 1821]

Death: Probate from Genesee Co, Michigan

Death Date: March 1, 1871 in Allegan County from Probate Petition for Appointment of Administrator

QUOTE:

"Petition of Mary O'Brien who is of the age of twenty-one years and upwards, of the County of Genesee, respectfully shows: That Timothy O'Brien late of Gaines in the County of Genesee **departed this life** [*in said is crossed out*] [*in*] **the county of Allegan on the 1st of March** in the year of our Lord one thousand **eight hundred and seventy one** leaving [*a is crossed out*] no last Will and Testament, as your petitioner is informed and verily believes... [SIC]

[blank lines followed by:] That deceased was, at and immediately previous to his death, an inhabitant of said County of Genesee and that **he was possessed of Real & Personal Estate, situate and being in the County of Genesee & elsewhere** to be administered, and that the estimated value thereof is the sum of **One Thousand Dollars** or thereabout as your petitioner is informed and verily believes.

And your petitioner further show... [SIC] that the names and residence of the heirs at law of said deceased, and other persons interested in his estate, are as follows: **Mary O'Brien widow, Elizabeth daughter, Michael son, James son, Mary daughter and Timothy O'Brien son** all residing in Argentine in Genesee Co Mich.

Your petitioner...therefore pray ... that all persons interested in said estate may be duly cited as required by law, and to this Court may seem proper. [blank lines] that administration of said estate may be granted to Mary O'Brien and that such other and further order and proceedings may be had in the premises as may be required by the statutes in such case made and provided

Dated August 15th 1871

[Signature only partially readable on left, possibly a Geo R...]

Mary x O'Brien her mark [placed on right of document at the bottom]

Property: *All 120 Acres owned first by O'Brien, then 40 adjacent acres sold to Michael Kelley 1862 for \$200*

Owned: Initially **120 Acres Gaines Twp Sect 28 Township 6 Range 5**

More: 1860-Tim O'Brien acquired this land from VanFleet [SIC] in Sec 28 Twp 6 Range 5

This land was immediately adjacent to a large parcel owned by other bro-in-law James Downey and sister-in-law Mary [Kelley] Downey

More: 1862-Tim O'B sold 40 of the 120 acres in 28-6-5 to bro-in-law Michael Kelley for \$200

More: 1866-Michael Kelley sold same parcel in 28-6-5 back for \$200

More: 1869 Tim and new wife Mary O'Brien sold entire parcel to Andrew Fosdick 28-6-5 for \$1000 in hand minus mortgage repayment to ____ for \$____

More: Proceeds from the Sale of this property two years before his death may have made up a good portion of the initial estimate of \$1000 in Tim O'Brien's probated estate.

Federal Census Records: 1860 and 1870 re Family whereabouts

1860 Fed Census: Town of Gaines, County of Genesee, Michigan 23 Aug 1860

Timothy O'Brien 25 Farmer Real Estate Value 800 Pers Estate 270 b. Ireland, Cannot Read or Write

Margaret O'Brien 25 b. Ireland Cannot Read or Write

Betsey [Elizabeth] 7 b. New York, attends school

Michael 3 yrs b. Michigan

Mary 10/12 [a twin] b. Michigan

James 10/12 [a twin] b. Michigan

[as yet unborn Timothy b. 1862 in Michigan]

1870 Federal Census Record: Deerfield, Livingston Co, and Argentine & Gaines, Genesee Co

Betsey Obrion 18 yr-- in Fed Census living with **John Ryan** 60 **Ann** Ryan 51, sons Andrew and John, in Deerfield, Livingston Co. [Betsey soon to marry Michael Halpin in

1871]

James Obrion 11 yr-- in Fed Census living with **John & Ann Ryan**, sons Andrew 21 & John 17

Michael Obrian 14 yr Farm Laborer -- in Fed Census, Argentine, Genesee Co., living with **Patrick Ryan** 64 yr, b abt 1806 Ireland & Mary A. Allen 15 yr b. Michigan

Mary [Ann] O'Brien 13 yr at school -- in Fed Census, Gaines, Genesee Co, living with **Pat Halpin** 60 & **Ellen** 60, son Michael 22 all born Ireland, farming.

1871 Circuit Court for Allegan County

1871 March 24 entry on pp. 19-20 of the Allegan County Circuit Court Journal 1871-1875 Vol 2

[Bar Code]: 3 1141 02305 1498 A-280 L 11 Quoted in full:

"In the matter of expenses incurred, in and about the inquest upon and burial of the body of Timothy O'Brien [SIC] a stranger not belonging to the State of Michigan. On this matter it appearing to the court now here that the body of the said Timothy O'Brien was on the 1st day of March AD 1871 found

lying dead in the township of Manlius in said county, and it further appearing that an inquest was taken upon the body of said Timothy O'Brian before Gustarus Myers Esq. a Justice of the Peace in and for said Township of Manlius on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th days of March AD 1871. And it further appearing to the court by the certificate of the said Gustavus Myers, Esq. as such Justice of the Peace that said Timothy O'Brien [SIC] was, at the time he was found lying dead as aforesaid, a stranger not belonging to this State, and that said Justice of the Peace caused the body of said Timothy O'Brien to be decently buried [SIC] and it further appearing by the Certificate of said Justice of the Peace and by the vouchers accompanying the same that the fees of the said Justice of the Peace, expenses of said inquisition, and of the burial of the said Timothy O'Brian [SIC] amount to the sum of \$149.53. Whereupon it is ordered that the said sum of \$149.53 be and the same hereby is allowed in pursuance of § 6099 of the Compiled Laws. Charles R. Brown [Circuit Judge]"