

Collection #
M 0401

**CORNELIUS O'BRIEN
FAMILY PAPERS, 1813–1972 (BULK 1813–1935)**

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 2 manuscript boxes, 9 photograph folders

COLLECTION DATES: Inclusive, 1813-1972; bulk 1813-1935

PROVENANCE: John T. Gibson, Washington, D.C., November 1982

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Holman-O'Brien Papers (M 368) and William D.H. Hunter Papers (SC 0805)

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1982.0706; 1982.1108

NOTES: "Life and Times of the O'Brien Family" (Box 1, Folder 29) was added into the collection 30 October 1992

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

William Steele Holman (1822-1897) was born in Aurora, Indiana. His political career began as a probate judge in Dearborn County in 1843. In 1850 he became a Senatorial Delegate to the Constitutional Convention. He was a Representative in the Indiana General Assembly in 1851-1852, and in 1858 was elected to the United States House of Representatives where he served sixteen terms (1859-1865, 1867-1877, 1881-1895, 1897). Holman served as chairman of the committees for Appropriations, Public Buildings and Grounds, and the Inquiry into Indiana affairs. He was a Democrat who began speaking out against slavery as early as 1850, and he supported Lincoln during the Civil War. Holman's attention to thrift and economy earned him the reputation of "The Watchdog of the Treasury." He strongly supported appropriations for improvements of navigation on the Ohio and lower Mississippi Rivers. He favored building levees as an aid to navigation, but opposed their construction to build land alone. He also opposed all class legislation or any subsidy system from public resources in bonds, lands, or money to promote private enterprise.

Holman remained in close contact with friends and newspapers in the Lawrenceburgh area and in communities nearby. He frequently wrote to an old friend and political ally, Cornelius O'Brien, to O'Brien's son William, and to Dr. William D.H. Hunter.

Cornelius O'Brien (1818-1869) was born in Ireland and moved to Dearborn County about 1835. He was elected Dearborn County Treasurer in 1847 and Clerk in 1850 and 1852. In 1856, he was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention. He then served as an Indiana State Senator in 1859 and 1861. O'Brien was a successful lawyer in Lawrenceburgh, and speculated in land in the area. He married Harriet J. Hunter, sister of Dr. W.D.H. Hunter, in 1852. They had two sons.

William H. O'Brien was born in Lawrenceburgh, Indiana, in 1855. He became co-owner of the Lawrenceburgh Register in 1877 with his uncle and father-in-law, Dr. William D.H. Hunter. O'Brien served first as junior editor and then as senior editor and publisher until 1894, when he became active in banking. The Register was the voice of the Democratic Party, and always supported Mr. Holman. O'Brien was the frequent recipient of "confidential" and "private" letters from Holman.

Dr. William D.H. Hunter (1830-1898) was born in Lawrenceburgh, Indiana, but moved to Missouri in 1851. There he studied medicine, published a newspaper, served in the Missouri legislature, and, in 1868, was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention. Dr. Hunter returned to Lawrenceburgh in 1877. He and his son-in-law became co-owners of the Lawrenceburgh Register. From 1880 to 1882, he served as a member of the Democratic State Central Committee. He was also instrumental in organizing the Indiana Democratic Editorial Association during the same period. President Cleveland appointed him collector of internal revenue for the sixth district of Indiana, and he held that post from 1885 to 1889. He always supported W.S. Holman and corresponded with him during Holman's terms in office. He and the O'Briens worked

among local political leaders of Dearborn and surrounding counties to keep support for Holman strong.

Isaac Dunn (1785-1870) was a merchant, served as a territorial judge from 1812 to 1817, as speaker of the Indiana territorial legislature in 1813-1814, as president of the Lawrenceburgh branch of the Indiana State Bank in 1824, and as an associate judge in Dearborn County from 1831 to 1837.

His son, John P. Dunn (1805-1868) lived in Dearborn County until 1847. He was a member of the state constitutional convention in 1850, and was state auditor from 1853 to 1855.

Strange S. Dunn was city collector of Lawrenceburgh in 1846 and county prosecuting attorney from 1850 to 1854.

Isaac W. Hunter (1821-1861) was born in Lawrenceburgh. He made his living as a river trader, livestock trader, and farmer. From 1852 to 1854 he served as sheriff of Marion County.

Stephen Ludlow, listed in 1813 as a principal citizen of Lawrenceburgh and owner of one of five frame houses in town, was a member of the commission appointed in 1820 to locate a new state capital. He lived until at least 1851.

Robert Emmett O'Brien, son of Cornelius and Harriet J. O'Brien, lived in Lawrenceburgh and died as a young man, shortly after 1881. He owned land in several Indiana counties and in Manteno, Illinois.

N. H. Torbet was treasurer of Dearborn County from 1845 to 1847, preceding Cornelius O'Brien in that office.

Sources: Materials in collection

D.J. Lake and B.N. Griffing, *Atlas of Dearborn County*, 1871

Albert T. Gridley, *Atlas of Dearborn County*, 1899

Encyclopaedia of Biography of Indiana, 1895

Biographical Directory of Indiana General Assembly, 1980

J.P. Dunn, *Indiana and Indianians*, Vol. 1

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists mainly of correspondence, along with deeds, receipts, and a few printed items. It is arranged by correspondent, and chronologically within correspondent. It fills two manuscript boxes.

Box 1 contains material from the O'Brien family and correspondence of individuals outside the O'Brien family. The correspondence of Cornelius O'Brien (8 folders) deals mainly with his legal and business affairs. One correspondent from whom he heard frequently in the 1840s was J.H. Pepper of Rising Sun. Two letters of 1852 deal with Indiana Democratic politics. Several documents date from the Civil War, when O'Brien was acting as agent for veterans or their widows. The correspondence of Harriet J. O'Brien (Folder 9) and Robert Emmett O'Brien (Folders 10-12) deals largely with taxes and leases on land owned by them in Indiana and Illinois. An 1893 letter-press letter from William H. O'Brien to W.S. Holman (Folder 13) deals with Democratic politics in Dearborn County.

Folders 14-28 contain correspondence of individuals outside the O'Brien family. The largest collection concerns Stephen Ludlow (Folder 22). This includes, in addition to several early deeds, an 1832 petition against the reelection of President Andrew Jackson, and a complaint concerning Dearborn College. Most of the material concerning W.S. Holman deals with taxes and real estate, but an 1890 letter from Holman to [William H.] O'Brien discusses the future of the Lawrenceburgh Register after O'Brien and Dr. Hunter relinquish their control, and the importance of keeping the Register under conservative Democratic control; Holman also asks for O'Brien's impression of the Farmers' Alliances which have been formed in that area.

Folder 29 contains a transcript of a special presentation of Hillforest Historical Foundation "Life and Times of the O'Brien Family" at their Annual Meeting on 16 November 1972. The presentation consisted of four speakers discussing the O'Brien family and Cornelius O'Brien.

Box 2 contains mainly ledgers and diaries. Cornelius O'Brien is represented by two tax lists for townships in Dearborn County dating from his work as county treasurer in 1847-1850. Diaries of Robert Emmett O'Brien for 1868, 1870, and 1871 are brief and deal mainly with weather and with family visits and activities. A ledger of 1879-1880 shows expenses of a European trip in 1879 and household expenses in 1880, and a diary of the same years gives some details of travels in the United States and a voyage to Europe. A notebook kept by William H. O'Brien contains drafts of letters home from England to friends and the Register, giving impressions of London, and accounts of the death of his brother Emmett. This box also contains two newspapers, one with a full-page eulogy of W. S. Holman, and the patent for a well strainer.

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Cornelius O'Brien

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Harriet J. O'Brien 1870-1879

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To Harriet J. O'Brien 1874, n.d.

Box 1, Folder 11

From Peter Brosseau, Manteno, Ill.

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S.S. Dunn, city collector 1846	Box 1, Folder 16
W.S. Holman 1846, 1890	Box 1, Folder 17

I.W. Hunter

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Sheriff of Marion County 1853-1854	Box 1, Folder 19
John S.S. Hunter deed, 1852	Box 1, Folder 20
William D.H. Hunter 1881-1883	Box 1, Folder 21
Stephen Ludlow 1813-1851	Box 1, Folder 22
N.H. Torbet 1844-1846	Box 1, Folder 23
John B. Vail 1857-1858	Box 1, Folder 24
Miscellaneous deeds	Box 1, Folder 25
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Life and Times of The O'Brien Family, 1972	Box 1, Folder 29

BOX 2: Diaries and Ledgers

Cornelius O'Brien

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New York Sun 9-17-1883 (page on W.S. Holman)

Lawrenceburgh Democrat Register 7-8-1859

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Patent

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H.F. Cook, strainer for wells 4-23-1890

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Box 2, Folder 9

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Portraits

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CONTAINER

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Summer, 1898 Snapshots

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Photographs, Folder 4

Moore's Hill, 1900

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Photographs, Folder 5

A.D. Cook Plant, after fire, 1900

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Photographs, Folder 6

1884, 1937 Flood, Lawrenceburg, Indiana

Visual Collection:
Photographs, Folder 7

Scene at Deputy Camp Meeting, August 1901

Visual Collection:
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Home of William H. O'Brien and Birthplace of Anna
Cook (O'Brien)

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Photographs, Folder 9