

**THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO**

**WESTERN ARCHIVES**



**THE DENNIS O'BRIEN FONDS**

**AFC 14**

Inventory prepared by Claire James – January, 2006  
Revised by Theresa Regnier December 2017

**WESTERN ARCHIVES**  
**THE DENNIS O'BRIEN FONDS**  
**AFC 14**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

FONDS DESCRIPTION	4
SERIES DESCRIPTIONS and FILE LISTS	
Series 1 Correspondence	6
Series 2 Legal Documents	7
Series 3 Financial Records	8
Series 4 Miscellaneous	9
Series 5 Restricted Originals	10

**THE DENNIS O'BRIEN FONDS**  
**AFC 14**  
**FONDS DESCRIPTION**

**Dates**

1822 – 1865, predominant 1834 – 1865; added material 1926, 1964

**Extent and Material**

6 cm of textual records  
1 volume

**Biographical Sketch**

Dennis O'Brien was born in County Cork, Ireland in 1792. In 1811, he immigrated to the United States and in 1820 to York, Canada, where he worked as a foot pedlar and sold hardware and tinware.

Settling in London in 1826, O'Brien established a hardware store and became one of the earliest merchants in the city. In opposition to other merchants in the area, he was the first merchant in the area to reduce the prices of his goods to a level deemed a reasonable exchange for farmers' produce. In 1834, O'Brien was one of the incorporators of the London and Gore Railroad, and added to his business holdings by purchasing Blackfriars grist mill in 1835. He later operated a distillery and engaged in land speculation.

In 1837, O'Brien built the first brick business block, and the third brick structure, in London on the corner of Dundas and Ridout. As well as housing his own and other businesses, it served as the temporary barracks of the British garrison stationed in the town after the rebellions of 1837. After the "Great Fire" of 1845, he and his family moved to Westminster Township and had the store remodeled into the Western Hotel.

O'Brien was a staunch supporter of the Roman Catholic Church and by 1831 was London's agent for *Catholic*, Upper Canada's first Catholic newspaper. Active in the community, he was a prominent member of the Irish Benevolent Society and was noted for his works of charity.

On July 22, 1834, Dennis O'Brien married Jane Shotwell of Westminster Township. They had at least one daughter and two sons. O'Brien's daughter Mary married Duncan McMillan, a grain broker in London, and had two children, Charles and Edward.

Dennis O'Brien died on May 17, 1865, at the age of 73.

**Scope and Content**

The fonds consists of materials related to O'Brien's business activities, personal life and family history. Included are legal and financial records, correspondence and miscellaneous documents.

## **Arrangement**

The fonds is arranged into the following series:

- Series 1 Correspondence
- Series 2 Legal Documents
- Series 3 Financial Records
- Series 4 Miscellaneous
- Series 5 Restricted Originals

The fonds has been arranged by the archivist. A Restricted Originals Series has been created by the archivist to accommodate fragile records removed from the files for conservation reasons.

## **Finding Aids**

File lists available.

## **Conditions Governing Access**

Access restrictions apply to Series 5 Restricted Originals.

## **Immediate Source of Acquisition**

A note in the Account Book indicates that this volume was donated to the Lawson Library, at The University of Western Ontario, in June of 1926 by E.G. McMillan, O'Brien's grandson. The remaining materials were acquired by The University of Western Ontario in 1972.

## **Notes**

1. Information for the Biographical Sketch taken from *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography IX 1861-1870* and *The forest city: An illustrated history of London, Canada*.
2. Fragile documents have been photocopied. Originals have been removed from files and placed in the Restricted Originals Series. Some originals have been duplex copied to conserve paper.

**THE DENNIS O'BRIEN FONDS**  
**AFC 14**  
**SERIES DESCRIPTIONS and FILE LISTS**

**Series 1 Correspondence**

**Dates of Creation**

1822 – [1863?]

**Extent and Material**

1 cm textual records

**Scope and Content**

Series consists of the correspondence of Dennis and Jane O'Brien. Included are letters to and from various family and friends, and invitations to dinner and St. Patrick's Day celebrations. Also included is a letter sent to Mary O'Brien after the death of her mother in [1863?].

**Notes**

1. The earliest letter relates to the Shotwell family.
2. One invitation is signed by Henry O'Beirne, president of the Detroit Irish Emigrant Society.
3. Photocopies are available for items in Correspondence as the originals are housed in Series 5: Restricted Originals.

**File List**

Correspondence	1822 - [1863?]	AFC 14 - 1 / 1
Invitations	1834 - [1839?]	AFC 14 - 1 / 2

**THE DENNIS O'BRIEN FONDS**  
**AFC 14**  
**SERIES DESCRIPTIONS and FILE LISTS**

**Series 2 Legal Documents**

**Dates of Creation**

1832 - 1858

**Extent and Material**

1 cm textual records

**Scope and Content**

Series consists of legal documents relating to O'Brien's business activities and his marriage. Included are indentures, deeds, a lease and a bond between O'Brien and several others, and the original certificate of his marriage to Jane Shotwell. Also included is a deed for the sale of land to Alvaro Ladd, his brother-in-law.

**Notes**

1. The marriage certificate has been removed from its original frame for preservation purposes.
2. A photocopy is available for an item in Legal Documents as the original was placed in Series 5: Restricted Originals.

**File and Item List**

Legal Documents	1832 - 1858	AFC 14 - 1 / 3
Marriage Certificate	1834	AFC 14 - 1 / 4
Lease Agreement [item]	1832	AFC 14 - 4 / 1
Bargain and Sale [item]	1835	AFC 14 - 4 / 1
Deed of Bargain and Sale [item]	1847	AFC 14 - 4 / 1

**THE DENNIS O'BRIEN FONDS**  
**AFC 14**  
**SERIES DESCRIPTIONS and FILE LISTS**

**Series 3 Financial Records**

**Dates of Creation**

1836 - 1865

**Extent and Material**

2 cm textual records

1 volume

**Scope and Content**

Series consists of financial records relating to the business activities of Dennis O'Brien.

Included are receipts, invoices, promissory notes, and a ledger of customer accounts.

Invoices include one sent to Mary O'Brien shortly after her father's death.

**File List**

Accounts & Receipts	1859 – 1865	AFC 14 - 1 / 5
Promissory Notes	1836 – 1859	AFC 14 - 1 / 6
Account Book [vol]	1848 – 1856	AFC 14 - 2 / 1



**THE DENNIS O'BRIEN FONDS**  
**AFC 14**  
**SERIES DESCRIPTIONS and FILE LISTS**

**Series 4 Miscellaneous**

**Dates of Accumulation**

[18--] – 1865; added material 1926, 1964

**Extent and Material**

1 cm textual records

**Scope and Content**

Series consists of miscellaneous materials and obituary notices. Miscellaneous items include a genealogy of the Shotwell family, a copy of a newspaper article about the incarceration and court proceedings of Alvaro Ladd for his involvement in the Upper Canada Rebellion of 1837, and a recipe. Obituary notices include a copy and transcript of *The London Free Press and Daily Western Advertiser* notice for Dennis O'Brien, a biography of O'Brien, and copies of the obituary for Mary O'Brien McMillan.

**Notes**

1. Includes items accumulated after the death of Dennis O'Brien.
2. Notations indicate that some items in the Obituary Notices file came from the Solon Woolverton Fonds.

**File List**

Miscellaneous	[18--], 1964	AFC 14 - 1 / 7
Obituary Notices	1865, 1926	AFC 14 - 1 / 8

**THE DENNIS O'BRIEN FONDS**  
**AFC 14**  
**SERIES DESCRIPTIONS and FILE LISTS**

**Series 5 Restricted Originals**

**Dates of Creation**

1822 - 1862

**Extent and Material**

1 cm textual records

**Scope and Content**

Series consists of original documents removed from the files for conservation reasons.

**Conditions Governing Access**

Permission of the University Archivist required.

**File List**

Series 1 Correspondence	1822, 1838, 1862	AFC 14 - 3 / 1
Series 2 Legal Documents	1847	AFC 14 - 3 / 1