

Chapter I

University of Toronto
1915-1919



Because Bill Browne became a well-known lawyer, judge and politician in Newfoundland, people assumed that he came from a wealthy family. In fact, my grandfather grew up in a working-class area of St. John's at 89 Casey Street. His parents were Brigid

(O'Reilly) and Liberius Browne, both from Placentia Bay, Newfoundland. When Brigid and Liberius moved to St. John's in 1886 they lived in first one, and then a second, house built by Liberius on Casey Street. Bill was born there in 1897. Brigid kept a small store in the house, took in sewing and, in later years, bought some neighbourhood homes which she rented. Liberius worked as a fisherman and a carpenter.

As was the case in many other Newfoundland families of the time, Bill's father had a serious drinking problem. While Liberius had long periods of time sober, his drinking would resume unexpectedly. His father's drinking caused considerable hardship at home and no doubt explains Bill's great interest in Prohibition.

While Brigid placed a high value upon her son's education and pushed him to study, there was certainly no money for university education. The cost was especially high as Memorial University did not exist at that time and students had to leave the country to attend university.

In 1915 Bill won the Jubilee Scholarship, awarded to the top Newfoundland student writing the Matriculation exams of the University of London, and this made it possible for him to go to the University of Toronto to study engineering. Throughout his life he remained grateful to the Brothers of St. Bonaventure's College for the education which had prepared him so well for these exams.

My grandfather wrote these letters to his parents during the years of World War I when he was a student at the University of Toronto and they begin when he is eighteen years old. Some of these letters were written during the summer months when he worked: one summer on a Great Lakes steamer, another at a munitions factory and the final summer as a surveyor on Bell Island. He did not fight in the war as his poor eyesight made him ineligible for overseas duty.

The "Mike" he speaks of visiting at the seminary is his lifelong friend Mike Kennedy¹ from St. John's. Bill Browne was an only child who greatly enjoyed visiting the large Kennedy family on Hutchings Street.² He and Mike Kennedy developed a strong friendship

¹Michael James Kennedy, the son of James and Anastasia Kennedy, was born in St. John's, Nfld. in 1896. He attended Holy Cross School, then St. Bonaventure's College. He studied for the priesthood at St. Augustine's Seminary in Toronto and was ordained a priest in St. John's on June 29, 1921. Father Kennedy was the first parish priest in Cape Broyle and served there from 1934 until his death in 1968. Father Kennedy and Bill Browne first met in 1912 and remained close friends throughout their lives. For about twenty years the two fished for salmon together in Trepassey, Newfoundland. See W. J. Browne, *Eighty-Four Years A Newfoundlander* (St. John's Nfld.: Published by the author, 1981) and Larry Dohey, Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. John's, letter to the author, 3 August 2000 and "Cape Broyle Priest Dies," *Evening Telegram* [St. John's, Nfld.] 21 March 1968: 31.

²For more information on the Kennedy family see Browne, *Eighty-Four Years* 20, 21.

that lasted until Mike's death in 1968. Father Mike Kennedy will be remembered by many Newfoundlanders for his years of service as a priest in Cape Broyle.

While he was in Toronto the Catholic university students' club - Newman Club - became almost a second home to him. He had the greatest respect for the club's rector, Father John Burke³, and Bill participated fully in all the club's activities.

Bill Browne's Catholicism was clearly an important part of his life then, as it was throughout his life. The Newfoundland of these years was sharply divided along religious lines and some of Bill's views reflect the prevailing religious intolerance of the times. In later years he was to develop a greater appreciation for, and acceptance of, other religious faiths.

[Letter to his mother]
Sydney, Nova Scotia
October, 1915

I only saw one chap drunk since I left St. John's and he just passed my window here. South Sydney is much better, you know than here, and the people are or seem better off.

Give my love to Father telling him to be good, sober, and industrious, which is the password to success.

Remember me to Jim, Ott⁴, and all my friends. Am also writing Mrs. Kennedy this

³John Edmund Burke (1881-1958) was a Paulist priest. He graduated from the University of Ottawa and was ordained a priest in Baltimore, Md. in 1910 having joined the Missionary Society of St. Paul the Apostle. Father Burke was rector of Newman Club at the University of Toronto in 1915 and he played an important role in the early years of this Catholic university student organization. He had many other assignments in both Canada and the U.S. including pastor of St. Peter's Parish in Toronto in the 1920's and pastor of St. Paul the Apostle Church in New York City (1936-1939). Father Burke was considered a talented public speaker and he lectured at missions and retreats throughout North America. In 1919 Father Burke preached the English eulogy at the funeral of his friend Sir Wilfrid Laurier. See Rev. John E. Lynch, CSP, Archivist, Office of Paulist History and Archives, Washington, D.C., letter to the author, 29 June 2000 and *Eighty-Four Years* 35 and "Sur les funérailles de sir Wilfrid," *Le Devoir* [Montreal] 24 Fevrier 1919: 1.

⁴Ott was Oughterson Whiteway (c.1893-1968), the son of Mary (Stranger) and Jesse Whiteway. Jesse (1863-1940) operated his own dry goods business in St. John's and was also a politician. The family of Mary, Jesse and children Ott, Donald, Alma, Ina and Gladys lived at "Musgrave" on Hamilton Avenue, St. John's.

Ott and Bill Browne were life-long friends. In later years Ott attended all Bill's Federal nominations. See Browne, *Eighty-Seven Years*, 349 and "Died," *Evening Telegram* [St. John's, Nfld.] 18 May 1940:16 and R. Hibbs, ed., *Who's Who In and From Newfoundland 1930*, 2nd ed., (St.

mail. Address any letters to St. Michael's College, St. Joseph Street.

I remain, dear Mother, your loving Son
Will

Truro, N. S.
October, 1915

Dear Mother,

To-day is Friday and I am in Truro waiting 4 hours for the train to Montreal.

I just finished breakfast Porridge 3 spoonfuls and Bacon & Eggs. I remembered the time before I had finished so I left half the bacon untouched⁵.

I am sorry to say but Newfoundland is really and truly 100, at least, years behind the times. The difference is indescribable although I pretend to have travelled here before.

Father Browne⁶ was with us from St. John's to Sydney.

Your loving Son

Will

Remember me to Pop

40 Dundonald St.
Toronto
Oct 18, 1915

Dear Mother,

As you see I am rooming at a different address than on my last letter. I am not staying at St. Michael's.

I was very busy to-day and I registered at the University in Applied Science and Engineering. I visited Newman Hall and registered as one of the members of the Club. Very nice chaps in it.

I pay \$4.00 to enter the University. I pay \$2.00 per week for one large furnished

John's: R. Hibbs, 1930) 214 and "Deaths," *Evening Telegram* [St. John's, Nfld.] 23 Sept. 1968: 20.

⁵Catholics were prohibited from eating meat on Friday at that time.

⁶Patrick W. Browne (1864-1937) was a Newfoundland priest and academic. He wrote many articles and books, perhaps the best known of which is *Where the Fishers Go: the Story of Labrador*. In 1915 Father Browne was a professor of History and French at Maryknoll Seminary, N.Y. See *Eighty-Four Years*, 22 and "Browne, Rev. Patrick W.," *Encyclopaedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, vol. 1, 1967.

room. I shall pay \$3.25 for twenty-one meals per week at the University Dining Hall.

It is awfully hard on the feet walking on the pavement of the streets. My feet are paining.

I saw Mike and the boys Sunday, and you may depend it was the shortest hour I ever saw. It costs 30 cents to get out there and return. They are looking finer than ever they looked. Mike is like a bear, and they have a splendid building - all marble and miles and miles of grounds. The street car passes directly in front of the gate. Paddy Kennedy⁷ is looking splendid. As Pop says "he never looked better." Tell you, I enjoyed Sunday.

I have got my timetable and my card as a non-matriculated student. I have to get 40% in Mathematics & Physics (and evidence of my standing in History by Christmas) in my 1st year. I shall easily do that, I hope. The other subjects will probably be new. I shall let you know in my next letter how they are.

The University buildings are too numerous to mention and I have lost almost my way, several times. It takes time, you know.

The weather is very close and warm here. I can't wear the same clothes I wore at St. John's. Some ladies wear a blouse only here.

I was out to see Archbishop McNeil⁸ to-day, but could not see him as he was engaged.

Well, it's 10:15 p.m. and I have to write Mrs. Kennedy a letter before 10:30 and, as

⁷Patrick Kennedy (1897-March 17, 1983), the son of Patrick Joseph Kennedy and Catherine Channing, of St. John's, Nfld. was ordained to the priesthood June 29, 1921 (with Michael Kennedy and William McGrath) by Archbishop Roche in St. John's. His father had been a tailor and did not live to see his son become a priest. Father Kennedy (later Monsignor) was secretary to Archbishop Roche for five years, chancellor of the archdiocese for seventeen years, was chaplain of St. Clare's Mercy Hospital and Belvedere Convent, and served in parishes in Bell Island, Placentia and St. John's. See "Ordination Services", *Evening Telegram* [St. John's, Nfld.] 29 June 1921: 6 and "R C Priest Dies," *Evening Telegram* [St. John's, Nfld.] 21 March 1983: 4.

⁸Neil McNeil (1851-1934) was the Catholic Archbishop of Toronto. He had previously served in St. George's, Newfoundland. Neil McNeil had exceptional talents which he brought to this position of leadership in the Catholic Church. Born in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, he was always proud of his roots as the son of a blacksmith. Archbishop McNeil was very intelligent, spoke several languages, had considerable education in mathematics, was knowledgeable about astronomy, and had tremendous ability as a planner and organizer especially in the construction of churches and educational institutions. He had earlier played an important role in the construction of St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia. Archbishop McNeil lived simply and was concerned about the needs of the poor. Although he was a strong advocate for Catholics' taxes for Catholic schools, he also taught tolerance in religious matters. See "Short Illness is Fatal to Beloved Archbishop," *Toronto Daily Star* 26 May 1934: 1 and "McNeil, Neil," *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, vol. 3., 1991.

I was up at 6 o'clock, I must knock off wearying you. Give my love to Pop.

I had to say my father's occupation when I registered. L. Browne - Builder. What do you think of that?

With best of love, dearest Mother

Your Son

Will

40 Dundonald St.

Toronto

Nov 9th, 1915

Dearest Mother,

I received your letter the 3rd inst. but did not answer as I had written the day before. I received the letters from St. Michael's but wonder if you received my letters from Montreal. I wrote you from there.

Have seen no fresh eggs here except those that are scrambled. I can get lots of milk though at the Dining Hall. I have not had a cough nor a cold since I left Newfoundland, thank God. The climate is too fine here to be sick. No, they did not think I was too delicate. Because I am not more delicate than some of the chaps here. There were no rooms at the University. Besides there are only 150 out of 1500 Boarding there. The other colleges are Protestant. There are only 250 Catholics out of 5000 at the Varsity.

I am sorry to hear about poor Dummy Tucker⁹. Let me know all the news about the chaps. I am very interested.

There is no fear of my killing myself at study although I have been doing a bit

⁹Dummy Tucker is likely Walter Tucker, son of Stephen and Lucy Tucker of 116 Springdale Street, St. John's. Twenty-one year old Lance Corporal Walter Tucker of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment died October 25, 1915 as the result of a gunshot wound in the chest received at Gallipoli. He was buried at sea from the hospital ship. Prior to enlisting with the third contingent he had been on the staff of the St. John's branch of the Canadian Bank of Commerce. See *Newfoundland Book of Remembrance* (World War I) 125, 20 Jul. 2000

<<http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/general/sub.cfm?source=collections/books/newf/nflist1>> and The Canadian Virtual War Memorial, Veterans Affairs Canada, 20 Jul. 2000

< [h t t p : / / w w w . v a c - a c c . g c . c a / g e n e r a l / s u b . c f m ? s o u r c e = c o l l e c t i o n s / v i r t u a l m e m / D e t a i l & c a s u a l t y = 7 2 2 6 3 8](http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/general/sub.cfm?source=collections/virtualmem/Detail&casualty=722638) > and "Yesterday's Casualty List," *Daily News* [St. John's, Nfld.] 29 October 1915: 4 and "Deaths," *Daily News* [St. John's, Nfld.] 13 November 1915: 8 and "The Late Lance Corporal Tucker," *Daily News* [St. John's, Nfld.] 16 November 1915: 4 and "Lines on the Death of L. Corpl. Walter Tucker," *Daily News* [St. John's, Nfld.] 19 November 1915: 6.

sometimes. Yet, I have lots of time to spare if I liked. Most of the chaps attend the theatre more regularly than the lectures. I want to get first next April.

I got back my first drawing today. I got 6½ for it. I expected about 6 and I am pleased with that. That's the first drawing I ever did in ink and 6½ out of 10 is 65%. 66% is honours. Honours in drawing at the end of the year counts as 5 subjects.

You need not worry about my feet. I will keep them dry. But I do not see any rain yet. It never rains here, except heavy dew.

I have bought 3 bottles Lemonade for 10 cents and a pound of biscuits for 20 cents at some Jew here. That will last me 3 nights.

I think you must accept Mrs. Kennedy's invitation as soon as you think you are able. She was always good to me and made me take \$3.00 that evening I left. She wanted to give it to me, so I took it.

I never felt better than I do here now. I wish someone would write more letters though. I enclose post cards for Jim, Ott and Pop. I expected letters Monday and Tuesday but did not get any. Tomorrow I guess I shall get something.

I did not go out to the Seminary Sunday. Instead I went to Riverdale Park to see the Zoo. I saw the elephant, lions, tigers, leopards. They are the same as you see in the pictures but do not appear so big alive. The monkeys are quite human. I saw red foxes here. By Jove, I should not be surprised at Pop's not catching them. Why they are no bigger than cats and just as wily.

Yesterday we went out to Glen Road Bridge where we were instructed how to make Construction Notes next summer. We have to write from 20-25 pages of sketches of various kinds. I have Field Work Surveying to-morrow.

Let me know what's doing home. I may strike something there in Engineering next May. However keep me posted to big things.

Today we closed early to see the Parade. For today is King Edward Khaki Day. Everyone had to buy a tag at any price you like. The girls came around to all the rooms. They are not shy. Quite the opposite. I enclose one. I paid a nickel for mine. But at French some of the girls got such a "bill" from the professor that she put tags in all our hats outside. I have another on that account. That's how they get war funds here. We were watching the battalions march past for nearly an hour. The freshmen and sophomores had a little scrape. Nobody hurt. One hat of a soph lost. Freshmen are first year men. I am one. Sophomores are second year men.

My room rent is due today - \$2.00. My dining tickets tomorrow - \$3.25.

I served Mass Sunday at the chapel for Father Burke. It is four or five years since I served last. I did all right. I hope he lets me serve often now.

I feel very comfortable here, though so many household duties are burdensome. I have not worn any of my new underwear or flannels yet. No need yet. I had a bath Saturday night and enjoyed it fine. Did not get cold after it either.

A couple of chats with the fellows in the third year has given me much encouragement. I am going, please God, to lead my class every year. Pray that I am given the health and strength to do that.

With love, I remain your own dear son,

Will

P.S. Remember me to Mrs. Hanly, Mrs. Spencer, Mrs. Dwyer, Mr. and Mrs. Whelan, Mr. and Mrs. Crawford, Mr. and Mrs. Skanes, Mr. and Mrs. Parsons, Mr. Pearce, Burgess and all my other friends. Shall write Florence next chance. Will

40 Dundonald St.

Toronto

Nov 9th, 1915

Dear Father,

In my civil engineering, I find that I have to learn many things that you as a carpenter already know. I have to know the use of the Compass. I have to use my rules dividers, leaves squares just as you do. In the first year we do not do much of this. But in the second year, I will. I hope your back does not trouble you now. Say, Sunday dinner is not so nice as what you used to give me, even if they have ice cream.

Your loving son,

Will

40 Dundonald St.

Toronto

Nov. 13, 1915

Dearest Mother,

Received letter Thursday, I think. Your letter contained a big lot of news and I was awfully delighted with it. I received your first two papers.

I wrote Brother Ryan but he has not answered yet. Was he speaking to you at the Distribution? Did he send you the medals? Who presented them?¹⁰

¹⁰The yearly distribution of prizes for St. Bonaventure's College took place November 5, 1915 at the Casino theatre in St. John's. Brother J. B. Ryan of the Irish Christian Brothers was the president of the school. Bill Browne later recalled Brother Ryan as "very stern and he used the strap too much . . . he was a big man with red hair which earned him the nickname 'Foxy'." See "St. Bon's Prize Day," *Daily News* [St. John's, Nfld.] 6 November 1915: 3 and Browne, *Eighty-Four*

Last night I spoke at the Club for a quarter hour. I told some of Father Cox's¹¹ funny stories.

I don't and can't believe they got Prohibition, but I hope they have. Send me the papers with the counts in them.

I do not want any money yet, thank God. I have \$185 left to spend the year on. I am going to be very careful from this on. You must not forget that you have expenses of your own. I do not want much money yet, you know. But, there seem to be so many things one wants that it is almost impossible to live on less than \$7 a week - 50 cents for laundry every two weeks, \$1.75 for pressing until Christmas.

I was not elected Representative. Too many Protestants. You never saw such bigotry in all your life. I never did. It beats all. The University is only intended, I believe, for them. However the Professors are very nice men.

I was to a Rugby match to-day, until I was nearly frozen. It's the last match of Rugby I'd care to see. 'Twas too cold anyhow.

Love to Father. Remember me to all the neighbours. With best love dear Mother, I remain

Your loving Son

Willie

Send all the news - another letter like the last one. Will

40 Dundonald St.

Toronto

Nov. 23, 1915

Dear Mother,

I received your letter yesterday and since receiving it, I have received my C.O.T.C.¹² uniform and also news (how true I can't say) that you have Prohibition. Thank God, if you have.

There is a strong wave of feeling here against the liquor traffic. Billy Sunday spoke here Sunday night¹³. You should see what he said about the business. If the people of St.

Years, 4.

¹¹Father Cox was a Jesuit Priest who came to St. John's during Lent to preach. He was highly regarded as a speaker. See W. J. Browne, *Eighty-Seven Years a Newfoundlander* (St. John's, Nfld.: Published by the author, 1984) 242.

¹²C.O.T.C. is the Canadian Officers' Training Corps.

¹³Billy Sunday (1862-1935) was a popular American travelling evangelist. He was known for his ability to speak plainly and colourfully which had tremendous appeal with ordinary people.

John's and Newfoundland only saw for an instant how much they waste on liquor annually they would never touch it again. They spend enough to pave every street in St. John's as well as Toronto is paved and yet every man would be rich. Every householder here keeps his house in fine style, and on our street here, every house has a little lawn in front, and then concrete sidewalk and asphalt roadway. It is noiseless, clean, dustless and comfortable. When St. John's is paved like Toronto, then I shall say St. John's is on the way to fame!!!!

You must have pretty rotten weather up in St. John's. Every letter speaks of rain.

I have paid \$1.75 to have my clothes pressed until Christmas. I have three suits - my blue, day suit and khaki suit. Is it not fine to have the latter - a whole outfit?

To-day we had drill and I had charge of a platoon for a while. Thursday we shall have rifles, and I shall be more at home then, at least I hope so.

Sunday I went to see Mike after three weeks. The novelty of visiting the Seminary has worn off, but of course it has not affected my friendship for Mike. He and I will always be the best of chums even if I only see him once a month. I don't think Mike will stay up here this summer, though if he does, it will be more expensive than if he went home. You see, he or I can get a student's return ticket at reduced rates. Oh, I guess, either Mike will go home or Mrs. Kennedy will come up. For she is too fond of him to stay another year without seeing him.

I hope you and she are good friends. Do you see Irene¹⁴ often? I have not had a letter from her for two weeks. That's my fault as I forgot to put a stamp on it and the letter was returned a week later.

You are the most faithful correspondent I have, and you do give me lots of news. When are you going to get your picture taken? If you ever do, send me one.

With love to all and best wishes from Mike,

I remain

Your loving Son

Willie

I missed my first lecture to-day. I worked 11 hours yesterday and slept it out this morning. Did not hear my alarm. W.

[Same date]

He often preached about the evils of alcohol. Billy Sunday spoke in Toronto in November of 1915 to large crowds in the Toronto Arena. See Karen Gullen, ed., *Billy Sunday Speaks* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1970) 5 and "Billy Sunday in Action," *Toronto Daily Star* 23 November 1915: 2.

¹⁴Irene Kennedy was Mike Kennedy's younger sister who died while in her teens. See Browne, *Eighty-Four Years*, 21.

Dear Father,

I hope that this letter finds you in good health and good spirits. I think that my winning the scholarship may have done a little advertising for you with Mr. Pidgeon¹⁵. However he is a good man, so stick to him and Mr. Shortall.

Now, Pop, if you got Prohibition home, you got something that will put Newfoundland on a level with Canada. I have not seen 2 men drunk since I left Newfoundland. St. John's was terrible because of the sailors. Everybody has his house so nice here - brick and wood with a little lawn and verandah, basement to every house, a little concrete path leading to the sidewalk. Dundonald is a very nice street.

I have met a barber here named McCoubrey, a Newfoundlander from St. John's. I shall find more as time goes on.

Now Pop don't drink any more liquor for your own sake.

You have my best love and wishes.

Your Son

Will

40 Dundonald

Toronto

Dec. 4th (nearly 5th) 1915

Dearest Mother,

I received your letter yesterday of Nov. 27th. I was anxiously awaiting it all week and I also received the papers by the same mail. I only received 3 letters this week. One from Irene, one Mrs. Kennedy and one other from you.

Glad you received the candy. No the C.O.T.C. does not interfere with my studies.

You and father ought to wear the medals now. That silver one or the spoiled one will do for me when I go back.

I thank God that they've Prohibition. It was a good clean fight, and the promoters deserve credit.

To-day we were on Field Day. We left at 11.45 and reached Cedervale at 1.45. We had lunch - coffee and beans. Had a sham attack. Had some bread and cheese and coffee and returned at 5.45. Very enjoyable day. Really cold but did not mind it with uniforms. Feeling very sleepy. There, the clock just struck twelve, and it is Sunday, and I have to go to Communion at 9 o'clock.

Thursday morning I overslept myself and did not wake until 10 o'clock whereas it

¹⁵Mr. James Pidgeon was a St. John's contractor who later built Bill Browne's home at 97 Rennie's Mill Road, St. John's, Nfld. See Browne, *Eighty-Four Years*, 132.

should be 7. I did not lose much by it, as I lost no lectures.

I met a man named Somerville¹⁶ to-night living here in this house who is a very clever hard worker a Journalist and a teacher of Socialism and a Catholic. He lectures at the Seminary. I may go there to-morrow. (I didn't go.)

Say, I only received one letter from you since last Friday and consequently there will be a delay in the receipt of this letter. I did not write Uncle Tom¹⁷ as I forget his number. I was thinking I might go to Boston if I don't get a job at Christmas and stay with them.

(Oh I guess I'll finish this tomorrow as the mail does not close until 5 p.m.)

I stopped rather abruptly last night, as I had to get up at 8 o'clock. I have to do a lot of work for myself to-day. If I were to do only what the course demands I would not have to do much. Engineering is a very poor education, and it won't satisfy me. After this year, I think I had better change to Law. All the chaps consider me as a fine speaker and all try to get me to speak on every possible occasion. Don't let that worry you, for it won't interfere with me at all. I shall strike some job this summer and make a little money to keep me going please God.

We have only two more weeks of school as we have vacation Friday week. I finished my other drawing yesterday. I expect 7½ for it.

Wishing you a happy Christmas season. Remember me to all the boys and give love to Pop.

I am your loving son

¹⁶Henry Somerville (1889-1953) was born in England to a large working-class family, making it necessary for him to begin factory work at the age of 13. He initiated a social study group and worked with the Jesuit priest Charles Plater in the organization of the Catholic Social Guild. Through Father Plater's assistance he obtained a scholarship to Ruskin College, Oxford where he graduated with honours in economics and political science. After lecturing for a short time at St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia, in 1915 Mr. Somerville was invited by Archbishop McNeil to Toronto where he promoted Catholic study, taught at the seminary and worked on the staff of the Catholic newspaper. A few years later he returned to England as Organizing Secretary of the Catholic Social Guild. For the next 10 years he wrote extensively on Catholic social issues and was London correspondent for the *Toronto Daily Star*. He returned to Toronto in 1933 where he worked for many years editing the Catholic newspaper, *The Canadian Register*. Mr. Somerville was considered an important Catholic sociologist and economist and was twice honoured by the Pope.

Henry Somerville and Bill Browne remained friends for almost forty years and corresponded during this time. There is no doubt that Bill Browne was sympathetic to and greatly influenced by Mr. Somerville's views on social issues. See Mathew Hoehn, ed., *Catholic Authors* (Detroit: Gale Research Company, republished 1981) 698, 699 and "Canadian Layman Edited Register, Won Papal Honours," *Globe and Mail* [Toronto] 21 February 1953: 29 and Browne, *Eighty-Four Years*, 68.

¹⁷Tom O'Reilly was Bill's mother's brother from Placentia living on Tremont Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Tom and his wife Polly had no children.

Willie

40 Dundonald St.
Toronto
December 7, 1915

My dear Mother,

Your letter of 30 ultimo reached me Monday and, as I had written Sunday, I postponed the reply until to-night.

We did not get boots. If I told you what the lectures are about you won't understand. We have Chemistry (which is the same as last year's), French (which I know fairly well), Dynamics, Statics, Book-keeping, Surveying, Analytical and Descriptive Geometry, Algebra and Trigonometry. These are the names of the courses of lectures we take.

There are a few Catholics here, but some of the others are all right, you know.

Mrs. Kennedy and you are good friends, eh? I am glad of that. However remember me to Mrs. McCarthy and her family.

Mother you must try and keep in good health. Don't have too big a fire and draughts. There should be no draughts in a room. Have all the seams stogged.¹⁸ I hope you are well. My landlady is in bed sick with a cold to-day.

I have not had a cold, thank God, since I left St. John's. You see there are no fires here, all hot water heating, and consequently one is less liable to catch cold by change of temperature. I find by the paper that it is nearly freezing in St. John's but clear, whilst here it is snowing and cloudy.

I should like you to have my bedroom papered and cleaned if possible. The places are so nice here.

You must not be afraid if the letters are irregular especially at this busy season of the year. Give my love to Pop and regards to all enquirers, especially neighbours.

Am very busy

Your loving Son

Willie

A chap Tom Ryan at the Club and I are good friends. He is a very fine, cautious man.

Will

¹⁸Stog means to insulate a house by filling the cracks, often with moss. See G. M. Story, W. J. Kirwin and J. D. A. Widdowson, eds., *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982) 534.

40 Dundonald
Toronto
December 12, 1915

My dear Mother,

Received your letter of Nov 4 (????) last Thursday. We haven't had any lectures for quite a while at the Club. They are about Current Events, and naturally their importance to Catholics. We sold Year Books at a church, St. Joseph's, today. I was speaking to Monsignor Sears of St. George who is stationed here. He came here for the good of his health.

What shape are the medals? Put them under a piece of tissue paper and rub the paper with a soft pencil. Jim will show you how to make the impression.

Quite a number of little things happened this morning. I did not go to Holy Communion. Father Burke drank the ablutions at the First Mass and could not have another. Miss Defoe, a nice young lady at the club, broke her ankle, and Callahan and I had to take her and her sister home in a taxi. The chap I like most here is Tom Ryan, who belongs to Brantford. He is a very quiet decent chap and he and I are pretty good friends.

I received 7 marks for my fifth drawing and have one and a half to do before Thursday.

I have not seen Bishop Power, nor Mike for three weeks. I could not go to-day.

We have had it very cold for a week, it being freezing all during that period. All the ponds, rivers and rinks are frozen, so that quite a little skating has been done.

Our exams begin Thursday. We don't know what they will be. We have three and our Christmas vacation begins Friday. I don't know what to do during the holidays. I wished my relations lived in Buffalo just across the lake. Boston is about 500 miles or 14 hours run.

I shall write Florence and Uncle Tom as soon as I know Tom's address, which I have forgotten. 93 Tremont St., Cambridge eh?

I have just written Mrs. Kennedy and I guess she will get her letter before you, as I have only one stamp left and I shall have to wait a while after 5.30 (when the post closes) before I get them as I have no coppers on me, nothing smaller than \$1.00.

We had chicken dinner to-day. What do you know about that, is not that a sign of the times? You bet you.

Christmas is coming handy, in fact less than two weeks distant. I hope that you will have a happy one in every sense of the word. Every liquor man will be drunk, because of the success of the election. Father is getting too sensible, I hope, to think of liquor at this time of life. You must find it lonely, Mother, all by yourself in the house. But you must not think about that. You are just as near and dear to me in Toronto as you were in St. John's. I know you are praying for me and your prayers will be heard.

Your loving son
Willie
Love to Pop and regards to all old friends
Will

Newman Hall
Toronto
Jan. 2, 1916

Dear Father,

I received your letter which you wrote on Christmas Day and also one from Mother. I am in good health also. I was invited out to dinner on Christmas Day. Still, I would prefer to have you cut it for me.

You must be getting on fine with the house now. No one is allowed to build a house here unless it is built of stone or concrete and every house has water and sewerage. Quite a number of them have telephones in them.

I intend asking Father Burke here for a little advice as to whether I ought to be a lawyer or what. He told me one day before some of the Club members that I was no more suited for an engineer than he was. But he told me that I was going to land into the priesthood. However that is to be decided later. I guess I shall BE a lawyer after all.

You know Father Burke was away during the vacation on a visit to his people. So he left me in charge here. When he comes I shall go back to my boarding house again. I get on pretty well here with the chaps. They and I are good friends. They had a dance here the other night. Such a crowd was here; they had a great time.

They must be feeling anxious about Earn Chafe¹⁹ now eh. Still I did not know he had gone to the front. I am sorry to hear about those chaps Leo Bennett²⁰ and Jim Mallard²¹. I

¹⁹Private Ernest Leslie Chafe, son of Jacob and Jane Chafe of 140 Casey Street in St. John's, was to die July 1, 1916 in the Battle of Beaumont Hamel. See *Newfoundland Book of Remembrance* (World War I) 24, 5 Aug. 2000

<<http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/general/sub.cfm?source=collections/books/newf/nflist1>> and *The Canadian Virtual War Memorial*, Veterans Affairs Canada, 4 Aug. 2000

< [h t t p : / / w w w . v a c - a c c . g c . c a / g e n e r a l / s u b . c f m ? s o u r c e = c o l l e c t i o n s / v i r t u a l m e m / D e t a i l & c a s u a l t y = 2 7 4 2 8 3 2](http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/general/sub.cfm?source=collections/virtualmem/Detail&casualty=2742832) > and "Our Roll of Honour", *Daily News* [St. John's, Nfld.] 24 November 1916: 3.

²⁰Leonard Joseph Bennett of H.M. Mine-sweeper Lady Ismay of the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve was killed December 21, 1915 at the age of twenty-nine. He was the son of William and Agnes Bennett. See *Newfoundland Book of Remembrance* (World War I) 13, 3 Jul. 2000

wonder how Tom Flynn is getting on. I don't suppose he has gone to the front yet anyhow.

There are quite a number of Newfoundlanders here. I was telephoning to Miss Keegan this morning but she was then on duty. I have met other men who knew something about Newfoundland too, although they were rather scarce.

Some of the people here are pretty mean although I don't have much to do with that class. The shopkeepers here are not so polite as those in St. John's. A good many of the chaps were working during the vacation at Eaton's which is one of the largest stores in the British Empire.

They have a harder job to get volunteers here than they have at home. The people here are too fond of sport and go too often to the theatres. If they gave half that money to the help of the soldiers they would have a fit.

At church everyone is supposed to give ten cents for a seat. Then when he gets inside he is expected to give at least a nickel. The churches here are dark and not half as nice as our own. But I like the services which we have in the Chapel at the Club.

The people of St. John's are just as good if not better than the people of Toronto. There is only a very small percentage of the people Catholic. Wages are good but the living is high.

How are things going at home? I suppose that Herb comes just as often telling all the queer things which he sees during the day. Did you have any visitors the past week? You can give all enquirers my best wishes for a Happy New Year.

I hope Mother is in good health and you are not suffering too much from those pains in the back.

Wishing you a prosperous and happy New Year, I remain dear Father

Your loving Son,

Will

<<http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/general/sub.cfm?source=collections/books/newf/nflist1>> and The Canadian Virtual War Memorial, Veterans Affairs Canada, 3 Jul. 2000

< [h t t p : / / w w w . v a c - acc.gc.ca/general/sub.cfm?source=collections/virtualmem/Detail&casualty=722696](http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/general/sub.cfm?source=collections/virtualmem/Detail&casualty=722696)>

²¹Private James Patrick Mallard of the 2nd Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force died November 5, 1915 at the age of twenty-three. He was the son of Patrick Mallard of Quidi Vidi, St. John's, Newfoundland. See *Newfoundland Book of Remembrance* (World War I) 76, 3 Jul. 2000 <<http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/general/sub.cfm?source=collections/books/newf/nflist1>> and *The Canadian Virtual War Memorial*, Veterans Affairs Canada, 3 Jul. 2000

< [h t t p : / / w w w . v a c - acc.gc.ca/general/sub.cfm?source=collections/virtualmem/Detail&casualty=102510](http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/general/sub.cfm?source=collections/virtualmem/Detail&casualty=102510)> and "How Private Mallard Made the Sacrifice," *Daily News* [St. John's, Nfld.] 2 December 1915: 4.

28 St. Joseph St.
Toronto, Ont.
Jan. 6, 1916

Dear Mother,

Just a line to acknowledge the receipt of the money order for fifty dollars and also the two cards. I received a card from Florence also. We have had very nasty weather lately but now it is fine and cold again.

We go back to school on Tuesday and, as you know, we are having three exams. I shall write after they are over and let you know how I did.

What is the effect of Prohibition at home?

Be sure and give me all the news of the boys. Give my love to Pop and how is Herb?

I must conclude now

With best love

Your only son

Billy

40 Dundonald St.
Toronto
Mar. 1, 1916

Dearest Mother,

It is a week since I wrote you; so, as I received a letter to-day, I am staying up to answer it.

William McGrath²² was in the Hospital here with appendicitis, and is fine after the

²²William Cecil McGrath (1896-1970) was studying for the priesthood at St. Augustine's Seminary in Toronto and he was ordained to the priesthood by Archbishop Roche in St. John's along with Patrick Kennedy and Michael Kennedy on June 29, 1921. William McGrath was the son of Richard T. and Bridgid McGrath of Oderin, Newfoundland. Father McGrath (later Monsignor) became one of the first priests of the Scarboro Foreign Mission Society. He edited *China* magazine, worked as a missionary in Lishui, China, spent five years as vicar-general of the Society, then for twenty years he preached and conducted pilgrimages throughout Canada and the United States on the message of Fatima. One of his sisters, Helena (McGrath) Frecker became the first graduate of Memorial University College; his brother, Richard T., was also a priest and became Bishop of St. George's, Nfld. See "Ordination Services", *Evening Telegram* [St. John's, Nfld.] 29 June 1921: 6 and "Obituaries," *Telegram* [Toronto] 15 July 1970: 16 and "Obituaries," *Toronto Daily Star* 15 July 1970: 42 and "Former Newfoundlander, China Missionary Dies," *Evening Telegram* [St. John's, Nfld.] 14 July 1970: 3 and Rev. Robert Cranley, archivist, Scarboro Foreign Mission Society, letter

operation. I visit him every second day or so.

I was sorry to hear that Martin Furlong was dead. I sent a letter to his son²³.

I received last weeks's papers all right.

Last Friday night, we had a Mock Trial at the Club, and I was the prisoner. We had lots of fun. There were 3 lawyers acting on it. I was charged with spilling cocoa over a table-cloth and was found guilty.

Last week, we had a row between Meds and Science. As there was lots of snow, we fought at snowballs for an hour. However, we parted with good feeling on both sides and any number of windows broken.

Next Tuesday there will be a dance at Newman Hall. I guess I shall try it.

Father Burke is in Ottawa, as his father is ill.

I shall go at something in the vacation never fear. Do not worry about that. I shall start to-morrow to get up at 7 o'clock and study an hour, at least, extra.

It is not dull here, because we are always on the move. Everything is done at a certain time, and one is kept going.

I shall have to visit Billy McGrath tomorrow - I do not know how Mike is.

Everybody was ill last night and this morning with the dessert they had for dinner last night. Lots of chaps had to leave the lecture rooms this morning. It arose from the dried apricots.

If I were to join the Army, I would not always be a trainer. I would like to fight. People here, some of them, are easy about it all. Others are anxiously trying to get commissions. It is rather difficult to get an appointment.

Very probably, I shall go to Halifax next year to study Law - as I find that is what is appealing to me. Do not think I regret coming here; for I don't. It was an excellent thing.

I shall write Uncle by Sunday and shall remember you.

I must write Sunday also to the Brothers.

to the author, 18 August 2000 and "McGrath, Richard T." and "Freckler, Helena Mary," *Dictionary of Newfoundland and Labrador Biography*, 1990.

²³Martin Furlong (1864-1916) was a well-known and respected St. John's lawyer. He was solicitor for the House of Assembly, and provided legal advice to the Government for the 1898 Reid Railway contract and in the Labrador boundary dispute. He became solicitor for the Reid Newfoundland Company and then a director in that company. His one son was Robert Stafford Furlong (1904-1996). Robert also became a lawyer and then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Chief Justice of the Court of Appeals of Newfoundland. Both Martin and Robert were known for their large collection of rare Newfoundland books. See "In Memoriam," *Daily News* [St. John's, Nfld.] 10 February 1916: 5 and "Furlong, Martin Williams" and "Furlong, Robert Stafford," *Dictionary of Newfoundland and Labrador Biography*, 1990 and "Retired Justice Killed in Fire," *Evening Telegram* [St. John's, Nfld.] 10 February 1996: 1.

11:35 p.m. To bed.

From your own son,
Will

P.S. Nobody is allowed to enter the Houses of Legislature in Toronto until after the War. Wish you health. Feeling well. Bill

40 Dundonald
Toronto
April 7, 1916

Dear Mother,

Just a line to tell you I received your letter. Very busy. Exams started to-day. Got three questions of four. Everything good. Have no trouble in getting employment for summer. Love to Pop and soldiers.

Your Will

S.S. Huronic
c/o Northern Navigation Co.
Sarnia, Ontario
June 25, 1916

My dear Mother,

I received your three letters of the 8th, 15th, and 17th instant, on my return to Sarnia.

It was a little surprise to me to hear that Father had gone to New York above all places. Undoubtedly there will be lots of work, and I sincerely hope he gets a suitable job. His roving days are not over yet. You will probably have heard from Father now. He did not need so much money you know; so he ought soon to be able to send you some. How was Father before he left? Never feeling better, I suppose.

Last week I took in about \$60 - \$70. \$50 was cost price and my commission on that would be \$10. What is above the \$50.00 is also mine, or about \$20.00.

We had on a big crowd going to Detroit. The weather after that was cold. We expect better crowds this trip.

I hope you have good clothes now. You have clean underwear, I hope. Try and get a bath now and then. It will freshen you up 100%. Cleanliness is next to godliness.

You will feel a little lonely at first but be sociable. Florence will visit you now and then. You will be OK.

Give my regards to all my friends. I am glad to hear May McCarthy did so well. I

do not forget that she gave me a present when I left. Give her my congratulations when you see her, please.

How is everything at St. Bon's?

I met a lady on the boat yesterday going to St. John's to visit Mrs. Horwood. She taught music at the Toronto Conservatory. The world is a small place.

I hope, please God, that you are well yourself.

From your Loving Son

Willie

Make Mike go up often and tell you the news.

149 President St.
c/o Mrs. Brennan
Brooklyn, New York
August 5, 1916

Dear Mother,

I am writing you this letter for Father, who is sending you the first fruits of his toil here. Enclosed you will find an order for twenty-two dollars. You may expect more soon. Do not be too hard on him, as all is not gold that glitters, and he did not have a good chance at first. We are both well, and last night I made Pop take a bath.

The weather, of course, is always warm here.

To-day I visited Broadway and sent you that book from the top of the fifty-ninth floor of the largest and highest building in the world.

New York is wonderful and almost indescribable. I shall have lots to tell you and so will Pop when we go down.

I shall be able to go to Mass to-morrow once more. I shall probably get a job here Monday for a while. I shall try.

Don't worry about me. I am OK and hope you are the same.

With love and good wishes from Pop I am

Your loving Son

Willie

Safest address is:
Newman Hall
97 St. Joseph St.
Toronto
October 4, 1916

Dear Mother,

I have not yet received any letter from you, but it is hardly time yet.

I am now getting down to work and I like it. I begin my work in Drawing this afternoon. We use watercolours this year. I shall have several new books to get soon. On the whole, I find my work more interesting this year, and I intend to get Honours in my exams.

I am thinking of taking examinations for title of (Junior) Dominion Land Surveyor. I intend making inquiries soon. To pass the exam practically insures one a summer's work at good wages. I will let you know all about it later.

The weather has been warm for the last couple of days although when I first came, I found it quite cold. I have put on my fleece-lined underwear.

I intend buying a pair of boots soon, as those I have are down a-heel and need renewal.

I saw Mike Saturday and we had lunch together here. I saw him again Sunday morning before he left. I was at the station. Remember me to him. Tell him I am only sorry I cannot go with him.

How is Daddy since he returned to his native land? I hope he can secure employment. It is very important. I shall need some help this year, you know. But, I shall make it up in the vacation.

To-morrow we are holding a Reception at Newman Hall.

Hoping you are well and that poor old Daddy is the same, I am always

Your loving Son

Willie

Regards to Mike

I shall drop Jim a line by Eng. Mail leaving Saturday. B.

28 St. Joseph St.

Toronto, Ont.

Nov 29, 1916

Dear Mother,

I received your letter of the 18th instant on Friday or Saturday last, but did not answer, expecting a letter from you to-day. However, it has not come yet.

The last couple of days the weather has been damp although we had 12 degrees of frost Saturday so that the rivers were frozen over here.

I don't think I told you that we had a Mock Trial last Friday night at the Club. It was a case of Breach of Promise between a Miss Corrigan and Mr. McHugh, two members of the Club. I was on the Jury. It was very interesting, and humorous. The judge - Mr.

Donoghue - was excellent in his wit.

To-day we held a School inspection and visited various parts of our buildings, which we did not know very well. But one grows weary of things catalogued in this fashion, and I really did not enjoy it very much. Maybe, it was not for enjoyment, and I did learn something.

Next Friday night, the Club is holding a Formal Dance; I am not going as I have no Dress-suit. That will keep a good many from going, I fear.

The high cost of living, and the scarcity of labour are helping to raise prices in our sphere. We pay \$3.75 for board this year (per week) for which we paid \$3.25 last year. That puts living for me at \$6.00 per week.

I am glad to know you were up to see the Kennedys. It's very funny how Rene's letter got lost. "Nebba mind" as Herb used to say. How is Herb?

Say, I got those books stopped going home and they are coming here now. Every student generally subscribes to some book. He must to keep up with news of the profession.

I hope Jim is alright. I often pray for him.

As for money I have enough for quite a while yet. I shall let you know when I need any more. Experience is a dear school, indeed.

Mother, we must "keep our faces towards the sun, and the shadows will fall behind".

I am enjoying the best of health thank God, although I fear that I have not been out enough lately. You are all well, I hope.

Father Burke is very well, although he has to work very hard. I don't know yet who will take care of the hall.

I shall write Uncle Tom soon, I guess and won't forget to remind him of his promise.

Give Pop my best love and I hope he is well.

Our landlady is a very well educated woman, and is an employee in the Government of Ontario. She is a very nice woman.

Remember me to my old friends. I have been working every night this week and am really busy.

I must conclude now wishing both you and Father all good wishes.

From your loving son

Billy

P. S. Any news of the Volunteers will be very interesting to me. I hope you will be satisfied with the answers to questions. Billy

28 St. Joseph Street
Toronto, Ont.
December 26, 1916

Dear Mother,

I fear that Reid's express must be snow bound or that something is radically wrong. I have not received anything for a week from you. From Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy, I received a printed card wishing me the compliments of the Season. Brother Ryan sent me a Christmas card - a very nice one and asked me, if I had time, to contribute something to the Adelpian. I shan't have time during the short vacation as I have a lot of work to do.

There has never been so wealthy a Christmas here. The stores never did so well. One forgets that, but for a few soldiers in Khaki, the world is at war. Over 200,000 people passed through Union Station on Christmas Eve. One hundred and eighty-three trains left here then. The streets are crowded with people rushing in and out of stores.

I attended midnight mass here, and sat in the Choir. The latter proved, as I expected, to be a great distraction. Almost the entire Chapel went to Communion (600 to be exact).

I enclose a copy of another contribution I wrote to *The Varsity*. It shows signs of being an amateur composition.

Mike was not allowed to come out to the city yesterday, so I went out to see him. He is the same as ever. We played a game of handball. Paddy Kennedy played too. I enjoyed it immensely. However, they let him out to-day and Mike telephoned me to meet him. We went up and saw the University Buildings and then they went back to the Seminary.

Father Burke went to Winnipeg to preach on Christmas Day.

As I have three examinations after I go back, I intend to work hard now.

Remember me to Pop, give him my best love & best wishes for the New Year. I sincerely hope that Prohibition will put as much money in circulation home as it does in Ontario. Weather's fine and cold. I was skating the other night. Enjoyed it immensely.

With best love,

I am

Your only Son,

Billy

28 St. Joseph Street

Toronto Ont.

Dec. 30, 1916

Dear Father,

I received your letter four days ago and was indeed glad to know that both you and Mother are well. We are having quite a spurt of good weather ourselves, but it is very cold, and if the sun shines in the morning, the sky becomes cloudy almost immediately.

Glad to know that you are doing so well. You must have had a very nice time at

Christmas. I had two Christmas dinners and they were very good.

My work agrees very well with me. I find it hard, but that is the only kind of work that brings results. I have three exams when I go back, you see, and that keeps me busy. In my spare time, which is not very much, I do a little extra reading or have a talk with some of the people in the house. They are all very nice and generous. The land-lady is awfully good-natured, and only asked me \$1.75 each for these two weeks, when it should be \$2.25.

I sent Herb a Christmas card which he will have received by now.

Mother tells me that only the wooden steamers can go to the ice this year. But that was to be expected.

Prices are pretty high in Toronto too, but there is lots of money in circulation, as everybody gives good wages here.

I was skating once this winter, which is the second time in two years.

Take care of yourself, during the winter, and don't get wet, or you will be bothered with old aches again.

I must finish now.

Wishing you a Happy New Year,

Your loving son

Will

28 St. Joseph St.

Toronto, Ont.

Mar. 7, 1917

Dear Mother

Yours of the 26th ultimo to hand. This letter took less time to come than the previous one, but if the boats crossing the gulf were delayed, we can't help it.

I was telling you spring was coming. If you were told that over a foot of snow fell during Sunday night, you might hardly credit it. Nevertheless, the snowy mantle still beshrouds all Toronto.

Mike's mark has indeed been left behind; every night the rosary is said since. I (and probably two other fellows) will be going out to see Mike Sunday. I shall give him your message.

I had a letter from Margaret to-day.²⁴ She says she is very busy studying. She told

²⁴Margaret O'Reilly (died 1983) was the daughter of Patrick O'Reilly and Louise M. (Whalen). Patrick O'Reilly, from Placentia, Newfoundland and Bill Browne's mother Brigid were cousins. Like many Newfoundlanders the O'Reillys had moved to the Boston area; this O'Reilly family lived on Tremont Street in Cambridge near Bill's uncle, Tom O'Reilly. Margaret O'Reilly

me Uncle Tom & Aunt Polly got my post-cards Christmas, and that Polly would write soon. Uncle Tom had his ankle broken by a car going over it. He is doing well now. Aunt Polly is also very well. Carrie Fitzpatrick is dead (before Christmas).

I am sorry to hear that Nix²⁵ has been ill, but with his good constitution, he will be alright very quickly.

Lord have mercy on the soul of Mrs. Connors. I hope you saw her before she died.

I am glad to hear Jim is OK.

Since Bill Foley left, I've been rooming alone, but probably before next week, I shall have another roommate.

Our school has resumed operations, opening last Monday. We shall have to work hard the remainder of the term - only a month left.

I have been to Mass several mornings although I have often been unfortunate enough to sleep too late - as Mass is at 8 o'clock. However, I think henceforth I shan't have too much difficulty in doing it.

I sent my laundry to the "New Method". They mended my shirt, but they will want to mend it again because I was wrestling with someone in fun yesterday and the shoulder came apart. Another new feature is that we - Bill Egan and I - have engaged a pint of milk per day for nine days. This costs 50 cents and it is worth it. Just at the right time you know.

We are doing a "Brief", now; that is designing the floor plan of a two story building. It is not hard, and is the beginning of construction design. [This letter is incomplete.]

P. S. "Coming" is right. Your money-order received. Billy

c/o Trudell's
Wallaceburg, Ont.
May 24, 1917

My dear Mother,

I arrived here on Monday having left Toronto on the Sunday before at half-past six. I had a very nice afternoon down at the beach with Norah. The weather was very fine and I hated to leave.

I went to work the next day at the Wallaceburg Brass & Iron Co. on the sockets which fit into the top of the shell. There is no brain work attached to this job and it is tiresome. But I do not mind that.

and Bill Browne continued their correspondence for many years.

²⁵Nix Duchemin was a school friend of Bill Browne who moved to Massachusetts in 1914. He later became vice-president of the U. S. General Electric Company and president of the Canadian General Electric Company. See Browne, *Eighty-Four Years*, 18.

They are bringing in Conscription in Newfoundland I see. Do not worry about that, at all. They do not conscript munition workers, and if they do, why you know that we would receive the same treatment that everyone else gets.

I am staying here at a French family for \$6.50 per week. Very good board indeed. The weather is terribly cold, worse than home as the country is very low and damp. I am about fifteen miles from the coast of Michigan near the St. Clair River where I used to sail last year on board the S. S. Huronic.

When the fine weather comes it ought to be very very nice. That time has not come yet.

I shall finish my essay before Saturday as last night I got together "material" for the last two paragraphs.

On Monday, I visited the priest and his curate (as there is a large percentage of Catholics here) and in the evening attended a dance from which I returned at 1:15 a.m. Latest yet!!!!

I am writing to Mike and the people at St. Joseph St. also to-night. They will forward my mail. I had a card from Bill Foley. I shall write him when I finish my essay.

How are all the boys and Father? Give him my love.

I remain

Your loving Son

Billy

P. S. Get in your supplies. B.

28 St. Joseph St.

Toronto, Ont.

March 17, 1918

My dear Mother,

This is St. Patrick's Day and it is a regular Spring day. The sun is high in the heavens, and the fresh breeze is delightful. Winter is on its last legs here.

For me the week has passed peacefully. The Engineering Elections came off successfully. This year, thank God, I was not vitally interested, and now I am glad I was not. I was nominated as President of the Y.M.C.A. at the University. My duties as President would be entertaining new members; looking after Protestant social service work amongst the poor; inviting clergymen to speak here. I had a hard job to resign. They wanted to force me to take the job.

Last night I attended a hockey game here. De La Salle, a Catholic team (students of the Christian Brothers of the De La Salle order) beat the Barrie team 6-3. It was a wild, dirty game and a large number of the spectators - so many that I was surprised - were yelling for

the visiting team. The next game which will be the last will be played in Barrie about sixty miles away. When I was on the train, two years ago, I passed through there a couple of times.

Coming home I bought a little pot of shamrocks for fifteen cents, and am wearing a sprig this morning. Everyone here, Catholic or Protestant, wears green today.

I am sorry I took up so much of this letter about my affairs. How is Jimmy D?²⁶

How are Pop and Herb? Are the sealers at the ice this year?

I shall probably (please God) be home before they are returned. Our exams start on April 4th and finish April 13th, Saturday. You may expect me to leave around the middle of April or shortly afterwards. I have not written Harbour Grace yet, but shall do it this week.

P. T. McGrath has been given some title or other I hear.²⁷

I have not been to the Seminary for a long while.

Am going over to the Club this afternoon to hear a sermon. Have heard several good speakers recently.

Hoping that my feverish sentences will not annoy you

I am

Your loving Son,

Billy

28 St. Joseph St.

Toronto

Easter Sunday [March 31] 1918

My dear Mother,

I received two letters from you during the past week, and your clippings about the disaster. They were as you told me, very sad, for the event was as terrible a one as the loss

²⁶Jimmy Dwyer was the next door neighbour of the Browne family and was one of the survivors of the wreck of the S.S. Florizel February 23-24, 1918 which resulted in the death of 94 people. See Cassie Brown, *A Winter's Tale - The Wreck of the 'Florizel'* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada Ltd., 1976) and Browne, *Eighty-Four Years* 49.

²⁷Patrick Thomas McGrath (1868-1929) had been awarded an appointment as Knight Commander of the British Empire for his wartime services as President of the Legislative Council, Chairman of the Board of Food Control, and Chairman of the War Pensions and Disabilities Board. See "Order of the British Empire," *Daily News* [St. John's, Nfld.] 15 March 1918: 4 and "McGrath, Patrick Thomas," *Dictionary of Newfoundland and Labrador Biography*, 1990.

of the sealers at the ice-fields in 1914.²⁸

I think your late winter intends to last longer than ours. We have spring here, alright. But the snow is not all gone yet. There are still piles of it on the south side of the street. Has the snow all gone home yet?

I read of the great battle the other day, and learned that the Newfoundland regiment were engaged, and had behaved splendidly. Let me know or send me a paper, if it contains any news about them.

I was out to the Seminary last Sunday and saw all the boys. They all asked for you. I saw Mike on Friday night, too. He was down to the Cathedral here singing Tenebrae. Mike is very popular with the students.

Tom Fortune - "with the lovely disposition" - has been in the Hospital here under operation. I was down to see him several times and he is improving splendidly. We were out for a motor drive the other day for a long time. We enjoyed it immensely. He will be coming out shortly.

Our exams begin on Thursday, and I shall, please God, be in good shape by that time.

Lent is over. I had sugar on my cornflakes this morning. Oh my, delicious! And I am eating chocolate to-day, the first since Christmas.

Last Friday night they had a riot in Quebec about Conscription. Soldiers were called out and thousands of soldiers were sent down from Toronto to Quebec. If there is not more trouble shortly, I am mistaken. The people here would hang every Frenchman if they had their way.

Lewis Murray, who lived here, left us some time ago for the front. Have not heard of him yet. John McElderry is in Khaki too.

We had a good sermon to-day by Father Burke.

I am going down to the Hospital for a little while to see Tom Fortune.

Love to Father,

Your loving Son

Billy

My exams are over April 13. Feeling fine, how are you? B

28 St. Joseph St.

²⁸In the spring of 1914 seventy-eight Newfoundland sealers died and others were injured after being mistakenly left out on the ice in a storm while hunting seals. The public considered Captain Abram Kean to be the man responsible for this tragedy. Although there was great public outcry against Captain Kean, he continued to hunt seals and was later celebrated as the only person to kill one million seals. See Cassie Brown with Harold Horwood, *Death on the Ice - The Great Newfoundland Sealing Disaster of 1914* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada Ltd., 1972).

Toronto, Ont.
April 14, 1918

Dear Mother,

Your letter and the enclosed money order arrived all right after a terrible trip of ten days. I was wondering what was keeping it and was beginning to worry. I was sorry to hear that Uncle Ned had died. He was very quiet and I liked him. Lord have mercy on his soul. When you are reading this letter I shall be well on my way.

My exams are all over. Finished yesterday. I did fairly well, and stand a good chance of getting honours.

The elections were held at Newman Club this morning and the results are as follows:

President	H. J. Burns	Ottawa	Law	Acclamation
1st Vice President	F. J. McNab	Toronto	Arts	St. Michael's College
2nd Vice President	Miss Florence Daley	Toronto		Loretto Abbey
Treasurer	W. J. Browne	St. John's N. F.		S. P. Science
Corresponding Sec.	Miss Marion Allan	Hamilton		St. Joseph's College
Recording Sec.	A. Noonan	Mt. Forest		Medicine

This is the finest and best bunch of representatives we ever had, in my opinion. I voted for every one of them.

I hear "Conscription" is again to the fore. Do not worry about me. I also hear that men between 20-35 are not allowed to leave. That does not matter either.

I heard from Harbour Grace. They just told me to come and see them. I shall stop at Grand Falls and see Mr. Scott²⁹, and what he has to say.

I expect to leave here Wednesday or Thursday - probably Wednesday. I shall stay a day in Montreal. Charlie Fox is there.

I was out for a motor ride with Mike yesterday and Tom Fortune. I am going out to the Seminary now. They do not come home until May some time.

Our results will be out in a couple of weeks. I have made arrangements to have them sent.

I shall write Uncle Tom to-morrow.

Nix Duchemin I hear is in France.

The weather is fine here, now. We put our clocks one hour ahead last night so that

²⁹Mr. Scott was the manager of the Anglo Newfoundland Development Company in Grand Falls, Newfoundland. Bill Browne later visited Mr. Scott in Grand Falls seeking employment. Although Mr. Scott was ill, he did speak with Bill from his bed. There was no engineering work for Bill then as the plant was being remodelled and there was only one machine in operation. See W. J. Browne, unpublished material, 1969.

we may save some daylight. They are copying old Newfoundland.

I shall write you from Montreal and Quebec and Grand Falls.

With best love to Pop and all good wishes,

I am

Your loving son

Billy

Excuse my brief and abrupt style, please. Bill

Grand Falls, N. F.

April 26, 1918

Dear Mother

I am trying to write you a few lines as I bowl along on Reid Newfoundland Company train near Kitty's Brook. We have been off the track twice and now we are off again, which gives us a chance to write a letter. Or else the engine broke away. Something is rotten. I never imagined how bad this railway was before. There is no grade bed at all for the track to be laid on.

I met Daniel Kielly at Port-aux-Basques. He is going to Montreal.

George McDonald is on this train and I am giving him a parcel to give you. It is a little sweater I brought over for you. I have something for Pop, but it is in my trunk. I shall send it later.

I met Mr. Scott on the train from Truro to Sydney. He lost the boat I came across on. He is still in Sydney. However, he was very nice, although he did not have time to say much as we were very near Sydney. I am going to see his wife in Grand Falls, when I get there.

I make a resolve never to have anything to do with Reids. They are a disgrace.³⁰

My money is dwindling fast, but do not send me any till you hear more from me. I shall write from the next train too. All along this country, there is nothing but snow. The hills are covered with it, snow and hundreds of miles of burned woods.

As to Conscription, do not worry about me. I shall probably be unfit for service

³⁰The condition of Newfoundland's railway, operated then by the Reid Newfoundland Company owned by the Reid family, was generally accepted as terrible following World War I. Estimates of the cost to repair the railway at the end of the war ranged from more than two and one-half million to five and one-half million dollars. See A. R. Penney, *A History of the Newfoundland Railway*, vol.1 (St. John's, Nfld.: Harry Cuff Publications Ltd., 1988) 99 and J. K. Hiller, *The Newfoundland Railway 1881-1949* (St. John's, Nfld.: Harry Cuff Publications Ltd., 1981) 22.

anyhow on account of my poor sight, as I was in Canada.

I shall get a paper probably before we reach Grand Falls.

Give my love to Pop, and regards to friends. I may be home soon.

With best love

Billy

P. S. George will bring up parcel - sweater. Billy

Wabana, Newfoundland

July 2, 1918

Dear Mother,

This morning, I happen to have no work in front of me, so that I have a chance to write you.

I received the Registered Letter, the parcel of clothes, and the collars, and I am grateful for the promptitude with which you sent them. I may say here that those old clothes are a blessing.

I have had a very interesting time since I wrote you last week. I do not think I told you I have been down in the "mine". Well I was. I went down the other day, and I liked it swell. We were away out under Conception Bay. The property on which we are now working has been sold to the Dominion Iron & Steel Co. and we went down to the mine to fix the boundary line in the slopes. They are putting a concrete wall 10 feet thick in each slope, where our submarine property joins the Dominion's. Spencer and I had to locate the position of the boundary in one slope when we knew its position in the other. It was a nice job and I pride myself on having done the calculations.

Besides that I have been outside. A couple of fine days we had, I was out helping the boss . . .

[This letter is incomplete.]

Wabana, Newfoundland

September 3, 1918

Dear Mother,

I received my boots and letter O. K. on Saturday but did not reply until now.

First of all we are having beautiful weather as warm as can be. Last night, it was so warm that I had to throw off a blanket.

I have been having a great time since I wrote you last week. We won the Football on Wednesday and I received for my endeavours, a silver medal dipped in gold, and a sore shin.

It is all over now - with Football - for this year. Then we had a very nice dance afterwards and I met a very nice and very pretty girl named Ethel English. Her father, who died last year, used to run the *Bell Island Miner*. Charlie Peddle and I were invited to their house on Friday evening, and we spent an enjoyable few hours. Last night I took her to the Nickel, as that is the only place to go on Bell Island.

We hear reports about the foreigners being arrested and deported.³¹

Our manager and Mr. McDougall of the Dominion Iron & Steel Co. were called to town to-day. The Harbour Grace Company got control of their plans, it seems. I do not know how culpable the Harbour Grace Company is, but personally I do not like them.

I was around the Plant Saturday, and took several pictures. Sunday, I went to see the old No. 1 Mine, or the first place where ore was mined. I took several pictures. Ed Spencer³² was with me and we had a swim in the salt water.

Yesterday I was down in the mine all the way, right down to the bottom, or face as it is called. I learned a great deal about the mines, so that if I write my thesis on this subject I shall have little difficulty in arranging material.

What's the news over in town? I shall be over on the Fourteenth of September.

Have you seen Mike at all? I wrote him but have received no reply.

Billy Siteman is leaving here, and is going to New York on Friday. We will miss him here. He will be employed in Job's office there. The company will miss him here too.

How is Pop getting on? I hope he is doing well. Give my love to Pop.

Pardon my apparent haste, but it is always a rush over here.

Your loving Son

Billy

September 25, 1918

Curling, Nfld.

³¹For newspaper reports of the deportations see "Undesirables Deported," *Daily News* [St. John's, Nfld.] 2 September 1918: 4 and "Deportations," *Daily News* [St. John's, Nfld.] 7 September 1918: 4 and "Deportations," *Daily News* [St. John's, Nfld.] 9 September 1918: 4.

³²Edward Spencer (1893-1973) was at that time a surveyor with the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company on Bell Island. Mr. Spencer also worked in airport construction and operation. Following Confederation Ed Spencer became a Member of the House of Assembly and served as the first Minister of Public Works. He had a long career in Newfoundland politics, serving as both Minister of Public Works and Finance. Although Bill Browne and Ed Spencer were members of different political parties, Bill had considerable respect for "Neddie" Spencer. See "Spencer, Edward S.," *Dictionary of Newfoundland and Labrador Biography*, 1990 and Browne, *Eighty-Seven Years* 419 and Browne, *Eighty-Four Years* 51.

Dear Mother,

Am perfectly all right. Leaving in a few minutes for Port aux Basques. Did not get a scratch in wreck³³ and was able to help a little. Shall write particulars as soon as I get time.

Love to Pop
Billy

September 28, 1918

Dear Mother,

I arrived in Montreal last night after quite an interesting trip. I put up for the night at the Queen's Hotel and went to see Angela Shannahan³⁴ and M. O'Brien. They are well. Mrs. Arnonsen of Harbour Grace, who was a Hanrahan, and her brother came with us.

I am going to Toronto to-night at 11.00 p.m. and shall get there to-morrow morning at 7.00, please God, Sunday.

Give my love to Pop.
Your loving Son
Billy

28 St. Joseph St.
Toronto, Ontario
October 15, 1918

Dear Mother,

I received your letter on Saturday last - this is Tuesday. Your news about another wreck on the line is not a bit surprising to me knowing as I do the condition that it is always in. In my telegram to the *Telegram* I told them how the accident at Mount Moriah happened. The train toppled over a steep fill because the fill was made where there used to be a trestle - and the timbers were all rotten. As I have always said, Reid's railway is a disgrace.

We have now been back to school for two weeks, but during the first week we did not do a tap of work, because everyone was not there. Last week we started to work. I like

³³This train wreck occurred September 24, 1918 at Mount Moriah near Curling, Nfld. Five cars fell over an embankment, killing one woman and injuring twenty-two. See "Serious Railway Accident," *Evening Telegram* [St. John's, Nfld.] 25 September 1918: 4.

³⁴Angela Shannahan and Bill Browne had met in the summer of 1918 when she was visiting at her home on Bell Island. See Browne, *Eighty-Four Years* 53.

the work all right.

And now Spanish Influenza is striking Toronto. It is not as dangerous as you might think. All that is necessary is to avoid against chills. If you get a cold, get a doctor at once because you can't trifle with this disease. You will have to be very careful Mother, over the goods in your store. Keep them well-covered and do not let a fly remain in your house. Keep clean, and use lots of disinfectant. It is the "Grippe".

I phoned the Seminary yesterday. All the boys are well again. You know they were all down with the Flu, but it has passed.

All the schools and dance halls have been closed in Toronto, and I expect that tomorrow will see the closing of theatres and the University.

This is a time for prayer, October - the month of Rosary to Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

You must invite Mrs. Kennedy and Irene up some day. Be sociable, you know.

Remember me to them. Give my love to Pop. We had a pretty good dance at the Club Friday night.

Your loving Son

Billy

28 St. Joseph St.
Toronto, Ontario
November 4, 1918

My dear Mother,

Your letter reached me as usual on Saturday afternoon. I was glad to know that notwithstanding all the sickness, you and Pop are well. You will keep well, too, with the help of God.

The University will reopen to-morrow, and I shall have the pleasure of hearing Lord Charnwood speak.³⁵ He is out here on an educational mission. The war news of the past few days has been wonderful; to-night there is a rumour of Germany's downfall and acceptance of the Allies' terms. Let us hope it is true.

I was out to see the boys at the Seminary yesterday and found that they were all in the

³⁵Lord Charnwood, Godfrey Benson (1864-1945), was an Oxford educated lawyer, writer, editor, Liberal politician and member of the House of Lords. He had many academic and religious interests. He spoke at the University of Toronto November 5, 1918 on a broad range of issues such as relations within the British Empire, the war, and the proposed League of Nations. See "Peace an Idle Vision Unless With Justice," *Globe* [Toronto] 6 November 1918: 9 and "Benson, Godfrey Rathbone," *The Dictionary of National Biography 1941 - 1950*, 1959.

best of health. They have started class again. Paddy Kennedy, I hear, led his class again.

By the way, I met Father Roche from Michigan U.S.A., who belongs to Mitchell's Town, County Cork, Ireland. He was at "All Hallows" with Ed Roche³⁶, our Archbishop. He told me Archbishop Roche was the most brilliant man that ever attended All Hallows. Always first in his class, and a great favourite as well. It made me quite proud to hear that.

Toronto seems to be over the Flu, although I have not read the papers lately.

I have been unable to finish my Thesis yet, although I have to hand it in January 18th.

When I graduate in the Spring, I hope to get a position with the M.J. O'Brien Contracting Company. He is the biggest Catholic contractor in Canada. Father Burke is going to arrange it for me. What do you think of it? I shall not make arrangements until after the New Year.

I have a new suit \$25.00, a new overcoat \$32.50 of Irish frieze (a beauty), a new hat \$6.00 and am a regular swell.

Give my love to Pop and regards to all.

Your loving Son

Billy

28 St. Joseph St.
Toronto, Canada
November 18, 1918

My dear Mother,

I received two letters from you last week. Your action is contrary to mine, for you must have noticed that mine was later than ordinary in coming.

Last Tuesday, the fourth year took a trip to Niagara Falls, as I informed you in last week's letter, to inspect the different Power plants situated there. I have never seen anything grander than that sight. I was there a year ago but I had not seen the best part of the view. The Power Houses there are the largest plants in the world, and it is in their construction and the methods in use there that we are interested. The weather was fine, very fine with just a nip of cold to make your face blush.

³⁶Edward Patrick Roche (1874-1950) was the Catholic Archbishop of St. John's, Nfld. from 1915 until his death in 1950. Archbishop Roche played a very significant role in the religious and political affairs of Newfoundland during his lengthy period as Archbishop. Archbishop Roche became well-known to Bill Browne when he did legal work for the Archdiocese and, later, when Bill married his second wife, Mary Roche, who had a long association with the Archbishop. See "Roche, Edward Patrick," *Dictionary of Newfoundland and Labrador Biography*, 1990 and Browne, *Eighty-Four Years*, 247.

Niagara Falls is unequalled in grandeur. Its beauty has been described ten thousand times and it would take an abler pen than mine to do it half justice. Its majesty, its immensity, its variety impress the sight-seer like nothing else in the world. A mist comes from the Falls and moistens the adjoining road. When the sun shines, a splendid rainbow is to be seen.

There was a meeting held at Newman Club, the same evening, and owing to the fact that I missed my train I was unable to attend it. There were stormy scenes there too. The Newman Club had a big Membership Campaign, which was very successful; and we now embrace nearly all Catholic students. We had a big meeting on Friday Night.

But the war is over. That is perhaps the greatest thing of which I can write. This means that the boys will soon be coming back; and it will mean that there are more men than there are positions to fill with the result that labour will be cheap, and prices will fall. Money will be scarce because goods will be scarce. Be sure you are well-provided for the winter. Get in a good supply, for this is going to be a very severe winter - I mean, times are going to be hard.

The "Flu" is over here; I hope you can say the same.

I heard from Ed Spencer of Bell Island. He wrote me a long letter.

Is there going to be a Rhodes Scholarship this year? Should I enter?

I had a letter from Miss Armored Harris³⁷ to-day, thanking me for sending her photos of the wreck. She was the only person to do that. She was torpedoed on her way to England, but the boat did not sink.

Very, very, very busy

Loving Son

Billy

P.S. Love to Pop, best regards to Ott and all old friends. B.

M. J. O'Brien is a Catholic. Father Burke was speaking to his son, who thinks my chance is good. Will write him in January. Billy

28 St. Joseph St.
Toronto, Ont.
December 16, 1918

Dear Mother,

I did not receive a letter from you to-day as I expected, although one arrived last

³⁷Armored Harris was the daughter of the Governor of Newfoundland and had also been a passenger on the train derailed near Curling, Nfld., September 24, 1918. See "Express Leaves Rails Near Mount Moriah," *Daily News* [St. John's, Nfld.] 25 September 1918: 4.

Monday. Perhaps, you were a day behind in answering my letter as I was in answering yours this time.

The weather has not yet decided to be severe. All the snow has gone, and to-night is a perfect night with a big full moon shining out of a clear sky.

On Friday next school discontinues for the Christmas vacation, during which time, please God, I shall finish my thesis. This is very important and must be handed in on January 18th.

To-day, I received a letter from A. Wilson of the Council of Higher Education, in answer to my letter of two weeks ago. He has no information from London yet, but told me that any he received would be announced in the public press. If you will watch the papers and let me know if anything appears in connection with the Rhodes Scholarship, I shall be obliged.

I sat for a picture on Saturday, but the proofs were so bad that the photographer would not let them out. My graduation pictures were improved a whole lot, and I plan on getting a dozen, since it makes such an important event in my life. The other members of the Club executive were very much better.

On Saturday, I played Basketball and have been stiff ever since. It makes you feel better, though.

I shall go see Mike next Sunday, please God. Give my regards to Pop, and the Kennedys, whom you will see before Christmas.

Everyone is working here, except me. But I am going to start soon.

There soon will be skating, of which exercise I intend to partake this winter.

Hoping you are well, and taking the opportunity to wish you a very happy Christmas - like in pre-war days

I am

Your Loving Son

Billy

28 St. Joseph St.
Toronto, Ont.
January 20, 1919

My dear Mother,

Your letter to hand, as I received it just an hour ago from Father Burke. The new stamp on the letter is quite attractive. Have they a new issue of stamps at home? If they have, put some of the "ones" or one cent & two cent stamps on your next letter.

I was very glad to know that Jimmy Dwyer was landed home safely. He has had some very narrow escapes during his time at sea. He is a good son, as you say, and I should

not like to hear anything has happened to him.

I had a picture of Ott and Jim, but I think it is in that album. No! it might be here, and possibly is.

You have me just worried to death about that article you speak so much of. Please send it to me at once, and I shall see if Miss English is justified in her praise of the contributors to the thing. You know it is a kind of a cheap way to do things; to get people to write articles and not send them a copy of the paper, whilst they collect both the money for the advertising and the sale of the book. I heard from Ethel about Christmas time, but did not answer her letter yet.

Aubrey Maher has returned from overseas, and the number of returned men is increasing steadily. We have seven returned men in our year, in our class of civil engineering now.

Yesterday we sold the "Ontario Catholic Year Book and Directory" at the doors of the various churches in the city. We sold nearly 3000 books, being at 25 cents a book \$750. We have orders for 2000 outside the city, so that the first edition of 5000 is sold out at \$1250. This is clear profit to the Club, and has been obtained at a small amount of energy. I had charge and the responsibility of the sale in the city, but the work was very simple, and needed little organization.

On Saturday morning (after working until 3:00 a.m. after the Friday night dance at the Club), I handed in my thesis. It was about the work that was going on at Bell Island this summer in connection with their new slopes, so that I was familiar with it, and in a position to treat it well.

Jack McGrath³⁸ was in Toronto last Sunday visiting his sister Betty³⁹ at Loretto

³⁸John W. McGrath (c.1892-1924) was the son of James F. McGrath who had been a fisherman, fish dealer, Member of the House of Assembly and Governor of the Penitentiary. Jack was Betty McGrath's older, half-brother. Jack had been an exceptional student at St. Bonaventure's College while he also worked as a shorthand reporter at the House of Assembly. He won the Jubilee Scholarship which permitted him to study at Dalhousie University in Halifax, N.S. and he was also a talented athlete there. Jack then moved to the U.S. and worked for former President Theodore Roosevelt, then George W. Perkins and finally he became president of a fish company and chairman of a fish wholesaler's association. "Johnny" McGrath was also a well-known and respected hockey referee. See "Obituary," *Evening Telegram* [St. John's, Nfld.] 19 February 1924: 4 and "Newfoundlander in Big Job," *Daily News* [St. John's, Nfld.] 17 July 1920: 7 and "The Late John W. McGrath," *Newfoundland Quarterly* 23.4 (1924) : 32.

³⁹Betty McGrath was Newfoundlander Elizabeth McGrath Conroy Mennie (1900-1989). Betty's parents were James McGrath and Min Aylward. Her father - a fisherman, fish dealer, politician, and then Governor of the Penitentiary - died in 1902, shortly after her birth. Betty first married Jim Conroy and he died unexpectedly when their children, Charlie (later Father Conroy who died in Peru in 1966) and Margie (later Sister Conroy of the Religious of the Sacred Heart), were

Abbey. He also went down to see the boys at St. Augustine's Seminary, but I missed him. He was to be here again yesterday, but I do not think he came. He is Secretary to George Perkins, a millionaire in the U.S., since leaving Roosevelt. Father Burke knows him, having met him when he went to see Roosevelt.

[Letter incomplete]

28 St. Joseph St.
Toronto, Ont.
February 19, 1919

My dear Mother,

It is over a week since I wrote you last. From this you will understand that I have been very busy, and although fully intending to write you yesterday, let the thought slip my mind.

The greatest man in the Dominion of Canada, Sir Wilfrid Laurier died on Monday and the whole country is in mourning. I am forwarding you a couple of the newspapers, including the *Varsity*, which gave a sketch of his life and several remarkable tributes to his worth.

Rev. Father Burke will preach the panegyric at the State Funeral to be held Friday or Saturday and he is now busy on its preparation. Even in Newfoundland, the news of his death will cause a feeling of sorrow and dismay.

Next Thursday the School of Science is holding its annual banquet at the Carls-Rite Hotel. This year I am to propose a toast to "The British Empire and our Allies." I have been thinking about it and shall get busy on my little speech right away.

On Friday night last, a very successful entertainment - a Masquerade Ball - was held at the Club.

Newman Club was defeated playing in Hockey on Wednesday and Saturday nights, thus ending their first hockey season, and I sincerely hope, their last. I do not think a hockey team will make the Club members any better unless they can get the very best Catholic

very small. Betty then studied law and replaced her husband in legal practice with her father-in-law, becoming the second woman to practice law in Newfoundland. Betty retired from the practice of law about 1944 when she married a second time and moved to Montreal with her husband, John Mennie. Betty was a good friend of Bill Browne's first wife, Mary Harris, and Mary Harris and Bill Browne first met at Betty's home. See Robin McGrath, "Elizabeth McGrath Conroy Mennie: Barrister and Solicitor," *Newfoundland Quarterly* vol. XCII, no. 3 (1999) 12, 13 and Sister Margie Conroy, telephone interview, 4 July 2000 and Bert Riggs, "All the Way From Oderin," *Telegram* [St. John's, Nfld.] 23 May 2000: 9 and Browne, *Eighty-Four Years*, 107.

players possible.

I heard from Angela Shannahan and she tells me Billy Siteman is doing well. I have not heard from Margaret O'Reilly lately. Give my love to Father, and best wishes to all the boys I know.

We have a little snow on the ground now, and it looks quite a novelty. The air is cooler, too. Altogether, we appreciate its presence, as this is the first winter day we have.

There is a Professor De Wolf from Louvain University at St. Michael's College here. He is a friend of the great Cardinal Mercier.

On Friday night we are having a vaudeville show at the Club.

Your loving son,

Billy

28 St. Joseph St.

Toronto, Ont.

March 3, 1919

My dear Mother,

I received a letter from you yesterday, telling me that the line was blocked etc. Do you know that we have not had any winter this year. Not more than six inches of snow fell altogether. To-day it is damp and mild, whilst we have had a series of extra-ordinary fine days. There has been no frost to hurt, so that the ground is not even frozen. It is very saving on rubbers and saved a lot of trouble too.

To-morrow is Ash Wednesday, so that to-day is Shrove Tuesday. I miss the pancakes tonight; and the only way I can celebrate the coming of the holy season is by going to the theatre for the last time before Easter. Last night, I saw *The Off Chance* - a very fine play in which Ethel Barrymore, a famous actress, was the leading character.

During Lent, there will be evening devotions on Sunday, Wednesday and Friday evenings at the Club. On certain nights we are having lectures, too.

Father Burke wrote to a son of M. J. O'Brien, a big contractor, to ask him about getting me a job.

If I won the Rhodes, I should study Law not Engineering.

Our exams begin on Tuesday, April 8, so that leaves us only 5 weeks of hard work.

I have not heard from Billy Siteman yet, although it must be nearly two weeks since I wrote him.

On Sunday, Jerry Purcell and I were out to dinner at Mrs. McDonnell's, Margaret's mother. Jerry used to be interested in Kathryn, one of Margaret's sisters.

What are the Irishmen thinking of the new Irish Republic? There is a big newspaper

campaign here in Toronto to keep the Irish people in a bad light. We do not know what to believe. But I would not blame the Irish people for acting as they have.

Give my love to Pop and regards to all the boys.

Your loving Son,

Billy

28 St. Joseph St.
Toronto, Ontario
March 24, 1919

Dear Mother,

I received your letter on Friday last after a quick trip of only six days this time.

You told me that the lines were blocked with snow. Do you know that here the robins have been with us for a fortnight; that yesterday afternoon, people crowded the parks and the streets, displaying their new hats, suits and shoes? Yesterday and to-day have been very fine - much different from St. John's climate. We have had no snow for weeks and shall not have any more.

I am very busy working, as our exams begin two weeks from to-day. Last week I got up at six o'clock a couple of times and did a good deal of study. I intend doing the same all this week.

The ladies living in this parish, St. Basil's, and that includes all the ladies of the house, are out to-night making the mission given by the Redemptorists. Rev. Father Coghlan is giving it. Was he at home? The ladies get up at 5 o'clock in the mornings to go to Mass and instruction.

On Wednesday last, the first Toronto troops - the 4th Canadian Mounted Troops - returned from France. Margaret and I missed prayers to get a view at them. They looked mighty glad to be home, but to judge from the number of returned men whom I saw idle on the streets to-day, they will not receive much besides cheers on their return.

Other regiments arrived yesterday and many more are expected soon.

To-morrow night, Phillip Gibbs⁴⁰ will lecture in Massey Hall, under the auspices of Newman Club, on "Canada's Share of Honour". The Club Executive and Returned men will sit on the stage. I shall be there dressed up.

⁴⁰Phillip Gibbs (1877-1962) was a celebrated World War I war correspondent. He was a Catholic who became the first journalist to interview a Pope for publication. After the war he resigned his job at an English newspaper because of its support of the Government's Irish reprisal policy. See E. T. Williams and C. S. Nicholls, eds., *The Dictionary of National Biography 1961-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) 428-429.

I have not seen Mike for a long time.

If there is any talk of the formation of a new political party, send me the papers.

Give my love to Pop and all friends.

Your loving Son

Billy

P.S. Father Burke is ill with a cold. He is run down, considerably, and did not preach yesterday. B.B.

28 St. Joseph St

Toronto, Ont.

March 28, 1919

Dear Mother:

Your letter came on Thursday and found me just as busy as possible preparing for the exams which begin a week from to-morrow.

You will understand why my letters will be short until my exams are over. I had a letter from Margaret O'Reilly in Boston, who sends her love to you. She is a swell girl and writes a wonderful letter.

I have more pictures of myself here than I know what to do with. I should like to send you *Torontonensis* in which my picture appears several times. I shall manage to get them to you later.

To-night I was out to tea to Mrs. Brown's. She is a lovely woman and made me feel perfectly at home. She calls me Bill. But don't worry, she hasn't a daughter.

The nominations for next year's executive take place to-day at the Club. I have not the same interest as I would if I were in the field myself.

I have not heard from the Archbishop since, but Father Burke is on the same route on my behalf.

I have to write to Margaret O'Reilly and Frank McNab now too.

Billy Siteman is in New York with W. & C. Job Co., Inc., and did strike a good thing all right.

I hope you received the paper containing the speech. I had the privilege of shaking hands with Phillip Gibbs several times. He told me he met some Newfoundlanders over in France. He is a Catholic and a convert, and is the greatest war correspondent to-day. I sat on the platform near him, before 3000 people last Tuesday night, and I was all dressed up in a dress suit.

Give my love to Pop and pardon my haste,

Your loving son

Billy

P. S. Father Burke is better after his illness. I had dinner with him last night. B.

28 St. Joseph St.
Toronto, Ont.
April 7, 1919

My dear Mother,

I received your letters of April 2nd, March 27, March 24, - all to-day and in the order named. The one written first and the most important reached me last, but "All's well that ends well". Thank you again for your promptness in sending the money order. I shall not ask for any more, please God.

I have so much news to tell that I heartily wish that my first exam did not start to-day and that I have not one every day this week.

I did pretty well to-day, thank God.

Yesterday, the new executive was elected at Newman Club. Archie Grace, whom I supported, was elected President. His opponent was a returned soldier who has been overseas for four years. He has lost his leg and won the Military Medal.

Bill Foley got back from overseas yesterday. He looks just the same as ever. After my exams I am going down to Ottawa to spend a week with him. They have a lovely home down there, too. His father is a contractor. Bill was over here yesterday. He roomed with me in my second year.

I made the retreat at the Club last week, notwithstanding the closeness of my exams. On Friday night I had to be Chairman at a meeting there. The retreat was well attended but it is generally supposed that people came nearly as much for electioneering purposes as for anything else.

Love to Pop and yourself, your loving son

Billy

P. S. I hope success will not affect May McCarthy's head. Humility is best. B

Bill Browne graduated with honours in Civil Engineering in the spring of 1919.