

Suffolk University Archives
Early Student Research Project

**James Francis O'Brien
Suffolk Law School 1909**

James Francis O'Brien was born on January 5, 1878, in Fall River, Mass.¹ His parents, Edward and Mary (Doyle) O'Brien, were born in Ireland and came to the United States as children.² His father was employed as an overseer in the textile mills of Fall River.³ He had at least two sisters and two brothers.⁴ He attended both the Fall River public schools and the parish school of Sacred Heart Church in Fall River.⁵

In 1895, at the age of 17, James F. O'Brien enlisted in the Navy, serving during the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Insurrection.⁶ When he was honorably discharged from the Navy, he enrolled at Rogers and Allen Business College.⁷ Prior to enrolling at Suffolk Law School in 1906, Gleason Archer writes that O'Brien had tried to enroll at several other law schools, but was turned away.⁸ Archer decided to give him a chance, and although O'Brien was almost forced to drop out, he ultimately graduated in 1909 as one of five members of the school's first graduating class.⁹ He was able to finance his education by working at Suffolk Law School as a janitor, in Gleason Archer's office and at a restaurant.¹⁰ After passing the bar in 1911, he opened law offices in Fall River and New Bedford, Mass.¹¹

In April of 1917, James F. O'Brien voluntarily enlisted in the Navy upon the United States' entry into World War I.¹² He served in a variety of posts, including gunnery instructor, battalion commander and lieutenant, before being honorably discharged in September of 1919.¹³ In 1922, he ran unsuccessfully as a Democratic candidate for Bristol County district attorney.¹⁴ He served as judge advocate of the Spanish American War Veterans and was a member of many other veterans and fraternal organizations, including the United Spanish War Veterans, American Legion and the Fraternal Order of Eagles.¹⁵

¹Hutt, Frank Walcott, ed., "James F. O'Brien," *A History of Bristol County Massachusetts*, Historical and Biographical Volume III. New York and Chicago: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1924, p.313.

² Hutt, Frank Walcott, Ibid.

³ Hutt, Frank Walcott, Ibid.

⁴ Obituary, *Fall River Globe*, date unknown, 1925.

⁵ Hutt, Frank Walcott, Ibid; Obituary, *Fall River Globe*, Ibid.

⁶ Hutt, Frank Walcott, Ibid; Obituary, *Fall River Globe*, Ibid.

⁷ Obituary, *Fall River Globe*, Ibid.

⁸ Archer, Gleason L., "Sketches from Life" in Suffolk University Historical Pamphlet Series #1, 1919, reprinted 1978 by Suffolk University Law School, p.10.

⁹ Archer, Gleason L, Ibid; Suffolk Law Alumni Directory, 30th Anniversary, 1936, p.15.

¹⁰ Archer, Gleason L., Ibid.

¹¹ Obituary, *Fall River Globe*, Ibid.

¹² Obituary, *Fall River Globe*, Ibid.

¹³ Obituary, *Fall River Globe*, Ibid.

¹⁴ Hutt, Frank Walcott, Ibid., Obituary, *Fall River Globe*, Ibid.

¹⁵ Obituary, *Fall River Globe*, Ibid.

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On July 7, 1923, James F. O'Brien suffered a stroke from which he never fully recovered.¹⁶ He died in 1925 at the age of 47, survived by his wife, Elizabeth V. O'Brien, four daughters and two sons, as well as two sisters, two brothers, and his mother.¹⁷

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¹⁶ Obituary, *Fall River Globe*, Ibid.

¹⁷ Obituary, *Fall River Globe*, Ibid.