

'Hurricane' creator dies

United Press International
NEW ORLEANS—A funeral scheduled Saturday for Pat O'Brien, who became famous for drinks called Hurricanes at a French Quarter bar that bears his name.

O'Brien, co-owner of the landmark French Quarter bar O'Brien's, died Thursday at his Covington home after a long illness. He was 89. Services were scheduled at Schoen Funeral Home in Covington Saturday, with burial following at Pilgrim's Rest Cemetery.

O'Brien opened a package liquor store in the French Quarter Dec. 3, 1983, but soon moved to St. Peter Street to open a bar. Friends said he realized people would rather drink in a bar than carry liquor home.

They made the owner an offer, which he accepted. A mirrored bar and a lounge with twin pianos, where sing-alongs are popular with tourists and locals alike, flank the carriage-way entrance. Another bar is in the rear courtyard, complete with a flaming fountain.

Four years later, Charlie Cantrell became his partner. George Oechsner, the bar's former general manager and now its vice president, said Thursday O'Brien and Cantrell made a perfect pair.

O'Brien was born in Chattanooga, Tenn., and grew up in Birmingham, Ala. He served in the Army's Rainbow Division in World War I and received a Purple Heart.

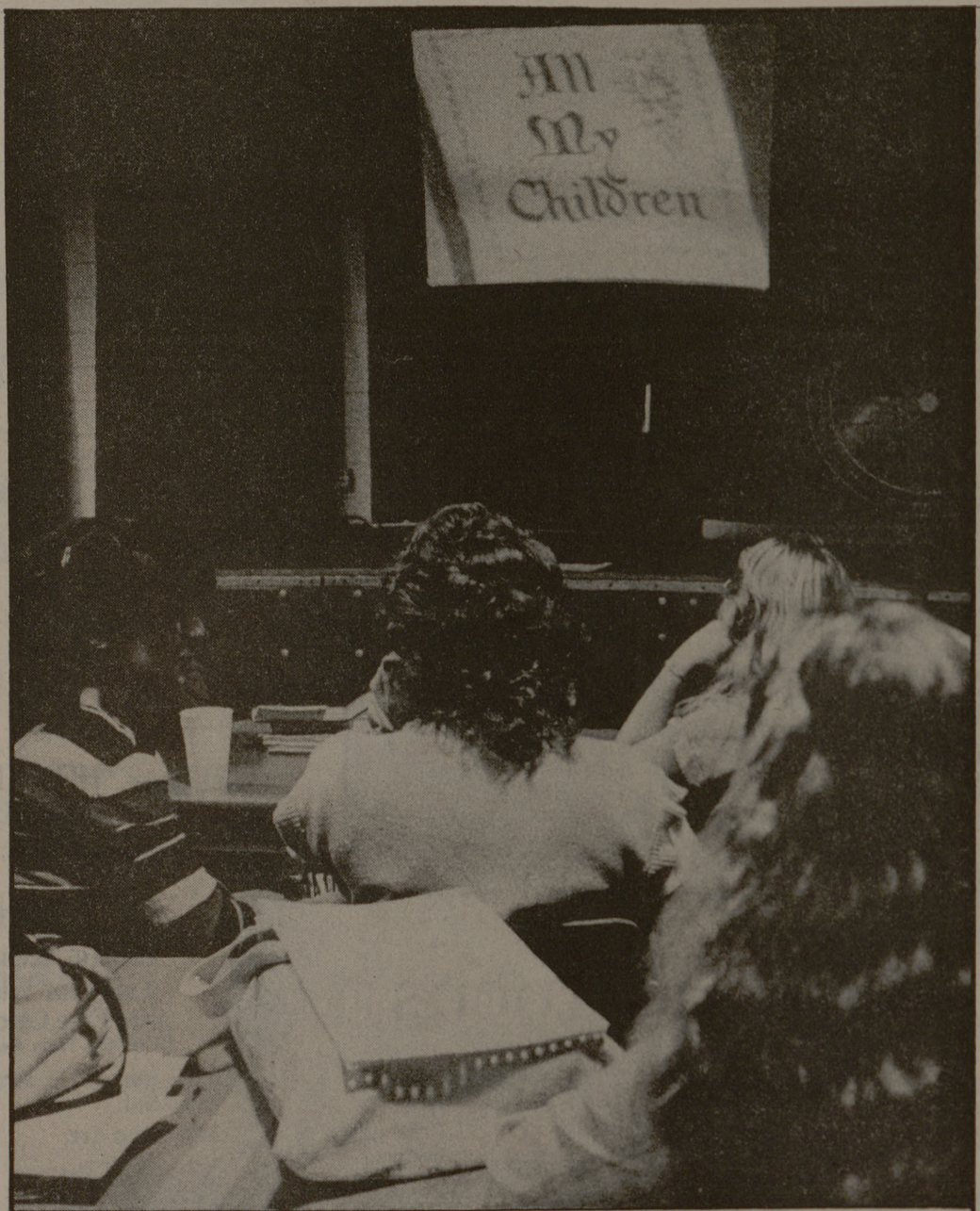
"Charlie was a very shrewd businessman," Oechsner said. "Mr. Pat was a back-slapper, and he didn't want to be bothered with any details."

After the war, he became a tobacco salesman and moved to Houston. In the 1920s he sold stocks and bonds in Texas. But when the stock market crashed in 1929, O'Brien struck out for Los Angeles to try to make his fortune. In 1972, however, that venture failed.

"He wanted to make the customers come in and enjoy themselves. Pat let Charlie run the business, and Charlie let Pat handle the customers," he said. The partners in the late 1930s wanted to move the bar and were interested in a building a block from the original site. That building was erected in 1791 to house the first Spanish theater in the United States.

O'Brien returned to Birmingham, sold his last piece of property and was heading back to Texas when he passed through New Orleans. O'Brien once said some friends convinced him to "hang around for a few days," and he stayed the rest of his life.

But the partners had to buy the building without seeing it, Oechsner said, because the owner would not permit them inside. The partners had to perch on stepladders in a courtyard next door to see what they could.



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Train crash kills aunt

United Press International
MILWAUKEE — After Dorothy Blask stepped on an Amtrak train to Dallas, she told her nephew it would be her last train ride.

It was. Five cars of the Amtrak Eagle derailed Saturday near Marshall, Texas, killing 74-year-old Blask of Milwaukee, and three others.

James Blask, the woman's nephew, took the elder Blask and her sister to the station in Milwaukee Friday afternoon. He couldn't get off in time and ended up riding with them to Glenview, Ill.

"On the way down, Dorothy said, 'Jimmy, this may be my last train ride,'" Blask said.

Blask and her sister, Matti Gigl, 80, were on their way to Dallas to start a new life. They had rented an apartment in North Dallas and planned to live near Gigl's son William, a civil engineer.

Blask said his aunt was caring woman, always happy and gregarious. Her fiancé died in World War II. She never married and devoted herself to her family after his death.

When Gigl's husband became ill with cancer, Blask moved in with her and they stayed together after he died.

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